

2015

# “God will deliver us” : human rights abuses from Guatemala to Iowa and back, 1980-2014

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“GOD WILL DELIVER US”: HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES FROM  
GUATEMALA TO IOWA AND BACK, 1980-2014

An Abstract of a Thesis  
Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

RaeAnn Lillian Swanson  
University of Northern Iowa

July 2015

## ABSTRACT

Guatemala's long internal conflict, the lack of justice, the general poverty, and continued violence since the signing of the 1996 Peace Accords prompt many people to migrate to the United States in search of jobs and opportunities for their family. Since the 1980s, Guatemalans have settled in Postville, Iowa, a small town that is nationally recognized for the ethnically diverse populations that live and work there. In 2008, it was also the site of the largest Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) worksite raid to date and the following criminal trials were unprecedented. Because of the tragedy in Postville, sources that detail immigrants' experiences in Guatemala, the process of coming to Iowa, working and living in Iowa, and the aftermath of the ICE raid are available. This thesis argues for a wider scope of the immigration experience to include not only the individual migrant, but their families and the communities in which they settle. It explores how human rights violations suffered throughout the migration and deportation processes affect people, families, and entire communities in Guatemala and the United States emotionally and economically. I have drawn information for this paper from scholarly research, from two educational delegations to Guatemala, one with the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission (GHRC) in August of 2014 titled, "Women and the Construction of Justice" and the other with the Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA) in March 2015 titled, "Rivers for Life," and from interviews of Postville residents that I conducted through the "Community Voices: Postville Oral History Project."

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Entitled: "God Will Deliver Us": Human Rights Abuses from Guatemala to Iowa and Back, 1980-2014.

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
LIST OF FIGURES .....	v
INTRODUCTION .....	1
Background .....	3
Historiography .....	6
CHAPTER 1. TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITIES: MIGRATION FROM GUATEMALA TO POSTVILLE, IOWA .....	14
The Civil War .....	15
The Aftermath .....	23
Migration .....	26
Postville, Iowa .....	35
CHAPTER 2. THE IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE OF POSTVILLE, IOWA .....	43
Changes in Postville .....	44
Guatemalans in Postville .....	50
Dealing with Diversity in Postville .....	54
Work in Postville .....	59
The Raid .....	63
CHAPTER 3. COMMUNITIES IN FLUX .....	73
Detention and Trials .....	74
Aftermath in Iowa .....	78
Aftermath in Guatemala .....	89

Solidarity Marches .....	93
Changes in the Law and Rebuilding the Community .....	96
CONCLUSION.....	103
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	109



## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE		PAGE
1	Harold Peck and his Hy-Grade Pedal Truck, 1962.....	45

## INTRODUCTION

Years of poverty and government repression lead many Guatemalans to leave their country to search for economic opportunities in the United States and many find their way to Iowa, a state in the heart of the Midwest. Americans are deeply divided over the phenomenon of undocumented immigrants in the United States. Some spew words of condemnation at undocumented immigrants and applaud aggressive actions targeted at them such as immigration raids and barely constitutional laws.<sup>1</sup> Others think of the role the U.S. has played in Latin America since the Cold War and how it is still influencing the economy and politics in Guatemala.<sup>2</sup> Consider the scene at the violent clash of May 23rd, 2014 at the La Puya base near San José del Golfo.

Screams and acrid smoke filled the air. The smell of burning plastic overcame the senses of the peaceful protestors outside of the American owned El Tambor mine. A woman screamed as a teargas can struck her in the chest, eating her flesh, permanently scarring her body. When the dust settled near the La Puya base, the gas cans were collected as evidence of the horror that had occurred. On them, the words printed clearly and proudly: Made In The U.S.A.<sup>3</sup>

In this story are glimpses of human rights violations currently being suffered by Guatemalans, but similar situations and far worse atrocities have been committed in

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<sup>1</sup> Benjy Sarlin, "How America's Harshest Immigration Law Failed," MSNBC [on-line], December 12, 2013, <http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/undocumented-workers-immigration-alabama> (accessed April 15, 2015); and Alfonso Serrano, "Immigration Update: Arizona Police Can Now Ask, 'Papers Please,'" *Times*, September 7, 2012, accessed April 15, 2015, <http://nation.time.com/2012/09/07/immigration-update-arizona-police-can-now-ask-papers-please/>, Alabama, Georgia, Arizona, and South Carolina have all passed harsh laws that target potential undocumented immigrants, some that have led to profiling and severe miscarriages of rights.

<sup>2</sup> Alex Main, "Will Biden's Billion Dollar Plan Help Central America?" North American Congress on Latin America, February 27, 2015 [on-line], <https://nacla.org/news/2015/02/27/will-biden%27s-billion-dollar-plan-help-central-america> (accessed April 15, 2015), many scholars argue that the proposed funding for "security" in Alliance for Prosperity will fund the police but in its wake cause more human rights violations and in turn cause more people to migrate, the exact opposite goal of the plan.

<sup>3</sup> Laurie Cook Heffron and RaeAnn Swanson, "Guatemala Human Rights Commission: Women Constructing Justice in Guatemala, August 2014 Delegation Notes," Unpublished, August 2014.

Guatemala over the last six decades. This thesis will highlight the continuation of violence and repression perpetrated by powerful institutions in Guatemala and in the United States. Powerful entities like the state, the law, gangs, and the police, are able to get away with human rights violations because of the culture of impunity in Guatemala and the use of fear tactics to rationalize dehumanizing behavior in the United States. Although many people who become migrants are often just pursuing happiness, economic stability, and a violence free life, they are at risk of being targeted and punished by powerful social structures.

Recently, unaccompanied child migrants and President Obama's executive action on Immigration have been garnering much media attention.<sup>4</sup> The media attention often fails to contextualize the decades of migration out of Guatemala. They promote quick fixes for the issues like migration and drug trafficking in Central America such as the proposed Alliance for Prosperity that would beef up security in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador in order to protect the United States' southern border.<sup>5</sup> When policies like these are proposed and promoted without historical contextualization, past crimes that have an effect on current social issues are glossed over and already vulnerable populations such as migrants and the poor are left to deal with the brunt of the

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<sup>4</sup> Max Ehrenfreund, "Your Complete Guide to Obama's Immigration Executive Action," *The Washington Post* (November 14, 2014); Ian Gordon, "70,000 Kids Will Show Up Alone at Our Border This Year. What Happens to Them?" *Mother Jones*, July/August 2014, accessed April 15, 2015, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/06/child-migrants-surge-unaccompanied-central-america>; and Haeyoun Park, "Children at the Border," *The New York Times*, October 21, 2014, accessed April 15, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/07/15/us/questions-about-the-border-kids.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/07/15/us/questions-about-the-border-kids.html?_r=0).

<sup>5</sup> Joseph R. Biden, Jr. "Joe Biden: A Plan for Central America," *The New York Times*, January 29, 2015, accessed April 15, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/30/opinion/joe-biden-a-plan-for-central-america.html>.

consequences.<sup>6</sup> Also missing from the media exchange are the reasons for such long term migration out of Guatemala and the effect that migration has on both communities in the United States and in Guatemala.

### Background

The 1980s saw the worst years of Guatemala's internal conflict as hundreds of massacres were carried out by the Guatemalan state on rural indigenous peasants and anyone the state deemed a threat. Mayan indigenous groups were especially targeted during the Guatemalan internal conflict because officials suspected they were helping the guerillas. Armed forces were trained to wipe out counterinsurgency and guerilla support systems in rural areas. People living in rural areas had few economic opportunities and the people there were suffering from great poverty. Ultimately, the internal conflict claimed 200,000 lives, displaced 1.5 million people, and left 45,000 people disappeared. When the Civil War subsided, violence still proliferated across the country. The Civil War was later deemed an act of genocide by the truth commission tasked with investigating the atrocities committed during that time.<sup>7</sup> Many people had fled before, during, and after the Civil War. Many crossed the border into the United States and some made it to Postville, a small town in Northeast Iowa.

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Guatemala 2013 Human Rights Report," February 27, 2014 [on-line], <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/220657.pdf> (accessed April 15, 2015), this report highlights the ongoing corruption and misuse of power in the Guatemalan police and military.

<sup>7</sup> Commission for Historical Clarification, "Guatemala: Memory of Silence," American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1999: 11-86 [on-line], [http://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/migrate/uploads/mos\\_en.pdf](http://www.aaas.org/sites/default/files/migrate/uploads/mos_en.pdf) (accessed March 30, 2014).

Changes had been occurring in Postville, Iowa, far before migrants from Guatemala reached it. Aaron Rubashkin, a butcher and businessman from New York, had reopened the old Hy-Grade meatpacking plant in 1987 as a kosher operation. The influx of Jewish families employed at the newly named Agriprocessors fundamentally changed the makeup of the predominantly German and Norwegian town. In the 1990s people from Israel, Poland, Mexico, Albania, Bosnia, Czech Republic, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Russia, Philippines, and Bangladesh came to work at Agriprocessors. By 2000, the majority of workers were coming from Guatemala and Mexico. It was no surprise in Postville and in other places across the United States that many agricultural workers from Latin America were undocumented. Ironically, as cheap, subsidized corn from the U.S., probably grown in the Midwest, flooded into Central America due to the Central American Free Trade Agreement, CAFTA, many rural peasants unable to compete in the new market left Guatemala for the heartland. Virginia Gibbs and Luz Maria Hernandez, the women who wrote the book *Shattered Dreams: The Story of a Historic ICE Raid in the Words of the Detainees* interviewed Postville residents affected by the raid, interviewed a Guatemalan woman named Julia. She remembers childhood,

I worked on the farm harvesting green beans and peaches, and cleaning *frijoles*. Kids there would start to work at about eight or nine years old. All I did was work in the fields. I didn't go to school because we would start working at 7:00 in the morning and finish at 5:00 in the afternoon... When I started to work I was earning 2.5 *quetzales* an hour. That would be about 35 cents [actually 54 cents] because back then there were 4.5 *quetzales* per dollar.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Virginia Gibbs and Luz Maria Hernandez, *Shattered Dreams: The Story of a Historic ICE Raid in the Words of the Detainees* (Moorpark, California: Floricanto Press, 2014), 33-32.

In Postville, Julia and others working at Agriprocessors could make over six dollars an hour. Although this was lower than the national minimum wage and far less than what they deserved to be paid for working long hours under grueling conditions, it was much more than they could earn for agricultural work in Guatemala. Many of the stories of the Postville workers often show the personal sacrifices they made in order to come to the U.S., put their children through school, and send money to other relatives.

May 12th, 2008 will forever remain a pivotal moment in the lives of current and former Postville residents. At 10 am, helicopters, buses, police cars, and SUV's filled with ICE (Immigration Customs Enforcement) and other government officials entered Postville and surrounded the Agriprocessors meat packing plant where many immigrants worked. As word spread inside that ICE was there, chaos ensued. People tried to hide in any place they could and desperately looked for ways to escape the inevitable arrest. Law enforcement officers rounded up the workers and took them outside to be shipped to a temporary detention center constructed at the National Cattle Congress in Waterloo, Iowa. There, people were detained with little sleep or food and rushed through a judicial process with few translators and no immigration lawyers. Many people were charged as criminals, sent to prison for five months, and deported. Out of the 398 people arrested that day, 290 were Guatemalan.<sup>9</sup> Many of those arrested lived through horrendous

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<sup>9</sup> Mark A. Grey, Michele Devlin, and Aaron Goldsmith, *Postville, U.S.A.: Surviving Diversity in Small-Town America* (Boston: Gemma, 2009),

violence and human rights violations, or heard stories from their parents, in Guatemala during the Civil War before coming to the U.S.

### Historiography

This thesis explores the relationship between migration history and human rights in migration and deportation situations between Iowa and Guatemala. The historical context of this thesis begins with an examination of Cold War era history in Latin America and continues through recent times. It uses oral histories to explain the transnational history between Guatemala and Iowa with a focus on migration and deportation between Postville, Iowa and communities in Guatemala such as El Rosario, San Jose Calderas, and San Miguel Duenas. Many scholars have detailed the Cold War era in Latin America and the political violence that often characterized this time period.<sup>10</sup>

The Cold War era in Guatemala has been well documented as a time of extreme state power and violence.<sup>11</sup> Guatemala experienced a 36-year war from 1960 to 1996 in which the police and military carried out genocide against civilian society in both the

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<sup>10</sup> Marcarena Gomez-Barris, *Where Memory Dwells: Culture and State Violence in Chile* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Jo-Marie Burt, *Political Violence and The Authoritarian State in Peru: Silencing Civil Society* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2007); Leigh Binford, *The El Mozote Massacre: Anthropology and Human Rights* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1996); and Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit: Guatemala Under General Efraín Ríos Montt, 1982-1983* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Linda Green, *Fear as a Way of Life: Mayan Widows in Rural Guatemala* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Greg Grandin, "Chronicles of a Guatemalan Genocide Foretold: Violence, Trauma, and the Limits of Historical Inquiry," *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1, 2 (2000): 391- 412; Kristen Weld, *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala* (Durnham: Duke University Press, 2014); and W. George Lovell, "The Archive that Never Was: State Terror and Historical Memory in Guatemala," *The Geographical Review*, 105, 2 (April 2013).

country and the city, however the brunt of the violence was targeted against indigenous, rural peasants.<sup>12</sup> The violence, remilitarization of the police force, and culture of impunity are factors that continue to contribute to migration out of Guatemala.<sup>13</sup> It is also influenced by factors of globalization like economic insecurity and environmental degradation at the hands of large companies.<sup>14</sup> The physically and mentally harrowing journey from Latin America to the United States has been well documented, as has migration from Guatemala to the United States.<sup>15</sup> Scholars have argued that migrants

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<sup>12</sup> Commission for Historical Clarification, "Guatemala: Memory of Silence;" and Rigoberta Menchú and Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (London: Verso, 1984), in her testimony Menchú describes the organization of Mayan villages and people in Guatemala and says, "My personal experience is the reality of a whole people," and David Stoll, *Rigoberta Menchú and The Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999), While Stoll argues that Menchú's testimony may not be completely true or applicable to all people, he cannot deny the violence the Mayan people experienced at the hands of the military forces.

<sup>13</sup> Alisa Garni, "Mechanisms of Migration: Poverty and Social Instability in the Postwar Expansion of Central American Migration to the United States," *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies* 8, 1 (2010); Timothy J. Smith and Thomas A. Offit, "Confronting Violence in Postwar Guatemala: An Introduction," *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, 15, 1 (2010); Deborah T. Levensen, *Adios Niño: The Gangs of Guatemala City and the Politics of Death* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); and Susan Jonas, "Guatemalan Migration in Times of Civil War and Post-War Challenges," Migration Policy Institute. March 27, 2013 [on-line] <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/guatemalan-migration-times-civil-war-and-post-war-challenges> (accessed May 6, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Guatemalan Human Rights Commission, "Fact Sheet: Neoliberalism," [on-line], [http://www.ghrc-usa.org/Programs/Immigration\\_Trade/factsheet\\_neoliberalism.pdf](http://www.ghrc-usa.org/Programs/Immigration_Trade/factsheet_neoliberalism.pdf) (accessed January 30, 2015); and Manuel Perez-Rocha and Julia Paley, "What 'Free Trade' Has Done to Central America," *Foreign Policy In Focus*, November 21, 2014 [on-line], <http://fpif.org/free-trade-done-central-america/> (accessed December 20, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> For migration from Latin America to the United States see Óscar Martínez, *The Beast: Riding the Rails and Dodging Narcos on the Migrant Trail* (New York: Verso, 2010); Sonia Nazario, *Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2007); and Reyna Grande, *The Distance Between Us: A Memoir* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2012). For specific works on migration from Guatemala to the United States see Norita Vlach, *The Quetzal in Flight: Guatemalan Refugee Families in the United States* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1992); Susanne Jonas and Nestor Rodríguez, *Guatemala-U.S. Migration: Transforming Regions* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014); Cassandra Ogen, "Migration and Human Rights on the Mexico-Guatemala Border," *International Migration* 45, 4 (October 2007): 203-244; Christopher H. Lutz and W. George Lovell, "Survivors on the Move: Maya Migration in Time and Space," in *The Maya Diaspora: Guatemalan Roots, New American Lives*, ed. James Loucky and Marilyn Moors, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000): 11-12 Lutz and Lovell argue that migration is not a choice, but a way to survive and that people in Guatemala have been moving around for hundreds of years.



affect the communities in which they settle and that the community also affects on migrants themselves, but they often highlight larger cities such as Los Angeles or Houston.<sup>16</sup> A few scholars have specifically detailed migration from Latin American and the Midwest and the effects on work and policy.<sup>17</sup> The concept of ‘sister cities,’ places that are connected through migration patterns and the exchange of goods, ideas, and people across state boundaries, is important for this thesis because I argue that a transnational community was formed between Postville and El Rosario, San Jose Calderas, San Miguel Duenas, and other cities from which a significant number of people migrated to Postville.<sup>18</sup> Many scholars have linked migration and deportation situations to human rights, often citing how the change over time in the United States’ immigration system, border patrol, and deportation system are arbitrary and challenge the idea that the United States values human rights.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Cecilia Menjívar, “Liminal Legality: Salvadoran and Guatemalan Immigrants' Lives in the United States,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 111, No. 4 (January 2006): 999-1037, Menjívar focuses on San Francisco, Los Angeles, Washington D.C.; and Phoenix, Allan F. Burns, “Indiantown, Florida: The Maya Diaspora and Applied Anthropology,” in *The Maya Diaspora: Guatemalan Roots, New American Lives*, ed. James Loucky and Marilyn Moors, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000): 152-171; Nestor P. Rodríguez and Jacqueline Maria Hagan, “Maya Urban Villagers in Houston: The Formation of a Migrant Community from San Cristóbal Totonicapán,” in *The Maya Diaspora: Guatemalan Roots, New American Lives*, ed. James Loucky and Marilyn Moors, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000): 197- 209; and James Loucky, “Maya in a Modern Metropolis: Establishing New Lives and Livelihoods in Los Angeles,” in *The Maya Diaspora: Guatemalan Roots, New American Lives*, ed. James Loucky and Marilyn Moors, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000): 214-222.

<sup>17</sup> Ruben Martínez, *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail* (New York: Picador, 2001); and David Bacon, *Communities Without Borders: Images and Voices from the World of Migration* (Ithaca: IRL Press, 2006), both Martínez and Bacon discuss migrants moving into the Midwest, Wisconsin and Nebraska respectively, and the changes to community demographic and the meatpacking industry. J. Celeste Lay, *A Midwestern Mosaic: Immigration and Political Socialization in Rural America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> Mark A. Grey, and Anne C. Woodrick, “Unofficial Sister Cities: Meatpacking Labor Migration Between Villachuato and Marshalltown, Iowa,” *Human Organization* 61, 4 (Winter 2002): 364-375.

<sup>19</sup> Aviva Chomsky, *Undocumented: How Immigration Became Illegal* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014), on page ix of the preface, Chomsky writes, “a key, central issue that is hampering those of us who support

It has been difficult for scholars to define human rights and how to protect and implement them. Many question whether to include economic, social, and cultural rights within the definition of human rights and whether human rights are universal.<sup>20</sup> While some scholars refer to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the guiding light to understanding human rights, others argue that modern human rights were born out of the conflicts in the 1970s and 80s and should be defined in light of the ideological underpinnings of the modern human rights movement.<sup>21</sup>

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immigrant rights is the absence of a basic fundamental ability to say “immigrant rights are human rights.” Immigration simply should not be illegal... There is simply no humanly acceptable reason to define a group of people as different and deny them rights.” Daniel Kanstroom, *Aftermath: Deportation Law and the New American Diaspora* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), on page xi Kanstroom lays out the need for a critical evaluation of the United States’ deportation system, “that has become shockingly large, unnecessarily harsh and, in many ways, dysfunctional.” He goes on to say that the system, “offers a salient example of the deep tension between the best ideals of liberal universalism and human rights and the realities of restricted membership in this nation-state.”

<sup>20</sup> United Nations, “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” accessed December 30, 2015, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>, Richard Thompson Ford, *Universal Human Rights Down to Earth* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011): 6, Ford goes as far as to say, the human rights movement is “diffuse, nondogmatic, and antiprogrammatic,” which may explain why there is rarely a definition of human rights violations and goals. Monica Serrano, “The Human Rights Regime in the Americas: Theory and Reality,” In *Human Rights Regimes in the Americas*, ed. Monica Serrano and Vesselin Popovski (New York: United Nations University Press, 2010), 1-28, Serrano believes that human rights have generally been a western idea projected onto other countries and questions human rights organization’s effectiveness. Ramesh Thakur and Jorge Heine, “Human Rights and the State in Latin America,” In *Human Rights Regimes in the Americas*, ed. Monica Serrano and Vesselin Popovski (New York: United Nations University Press, 2010), 114-132, this article discusses how specific countries in Latin America have dealt with human rights issues and argues that in order for human rights to be implemented state’s needs to have functioning body of law. Winifred Tate, *Counting the Dead: The Culture of Human Rights Activism in Columbia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007) Tate analyzes what the work human rights professionals including public reporting of violations, denunciation of those violations, and promoting transnational legitimacy. Alison Dundes Renteln, “Unanswered Challenge of Relativism and the Consequences for Human Rights,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 7, 4 (November 1985): 514-540, Renteln’s article explores the tension that exists between human rights and relativism as well as the western understanding of human rights that tends to put individual and political rights over family related and economic, social, and cultural rights.

<sup>21</sup> Samuel Moyn, *Human Rights and the Uses of History* (London: Verso, 2014), Moyn also stresses that local, grassroots organizations are far more successful at combating human rights violations and raising awareness than larger, international organizations such as Amnesty International and declarations that have no teeth like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Postville has been written about by numerous scholars and the legal aspects of the Postville raid are often the focus.<sup>22</sup> A few scholars have written human rights violations during and after the ICE raid in Postville.<sup>23</sup> This thesis adds an in depth look into life in small town Iowa and how the community was shaped by incoming Guatemalan migrants and their children as they made Postville their home. I also argue that members of transnational communities, such as Postville and the communities in Guatemala, are particularly vulnerable to human rights abuses because of their typically marginal status in their home country, on the migrant trail, and in the new communities. By analyzing the Postville Story and its relation to Guatemalan history through the creation of transnational communities, the processes of migration and deportation situations, the testimonies of people affected by these situations, and the vulnerability of transnational communities to human rights violations, this thesis will add to the discussion of what constitutes human rights.

In this global world people will continue to look for opportunities in new places if their needs cannot be met where they are. These situations do not just affect those being

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<sup>22</sup> Erik Camayd-Freixas, *US Immigration Reform and Its Global Impact: Lessons from the Postville Raid* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Grey, Devlin, and Goldsmith. *Postville, U.S.A.*; Stephen Bloom, *Postville: A Clash of Cultures in Heartland America* (New York: Harcourt, 2000); Jennifer F. Reynolds, "(Be)laboring Childhoods in Postville, Iowa," *Anthropological Quarterly*, 86, 3 (Summer 2013): 851-889; Peter R. Moyers, "Butchering Statues: The Postville Raid and the Misinterpretation of Federal Criminal Law," *Seattle University Law Review* 32, 3 (2009): 651-687; Cassie L. Peterson, "An Iowa Immigration Raid Leads to Unprecedented Criminal Consequences: Why ICE Should Rethink the Postville Model," *Iowa Law Review*, 95 (2009): 323- 346.

<sup>23</sup> Allison L. McCarthy, "The May 12, 2008 Postville, Iowa Immigration Raid: A Human Rights Perspective," *Transnational Law and Contemporary Problems* 19, 1 (2009): 293-315; and Amalia Greenberg and Shanti Marin, "How Ice Threatens the Ethical Responsibilities of Key Players in Worksite Raids: Postville Study," *Human Rights Brief* 16, 1 (2008): 16-20.

arrested and deported, they also affect family members who had been relying on their income, children whose access to education might be in jeopardy, friends and family that are left behind, and whole communities and towns. Scholars and the general public should begin thinking about immigration as a set of cause and effects, an intricate web of connections. Plucking a person out of the life they are living, jailing them, and shipping them away is not a useful model. This model encourages abuses and racism, which can lead to serious human rights violations. In the current model people are labeled as “illegal” and “terrorist.” This labeling can often be a validation to commit wrongs because they are now classified as the “other.” Racism, privilege, and power are all factors in every phase of migration and deportation situations.

This thesis will draw from scholarly research as well as an ongoing oral history project titled Community Voices: Postville Oral History Project. The Community Voices project is a collection of oral history interviews taken from July 2014 through July 2015. The project is in collaboration with The Postville Project ([www.postvilleproject.org](http://www.postvilleproject.org)) a website that highlights the “Postville Story,” the social context leading up to and after the May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008 ICE raid. Scholars have and continue to use oral histories to gain personal insight into situations that written scholarly work often cannot produce and to highlight the lived experiences of the interviewees.<sup>24</sup> The interviews are from Postville residents of varying social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. These people live and work in Postville and will shed light on the changes that have occurred in Postville over the last

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<sup>24</sup> A great example of this is Mary Palevsky, *Atomic Fragments: A Daughter's Questions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

25 years, how the town has handled diversity, what it was like to experience the raid, and what Postville is like today.<sup>25</sup>

It also draws on my experiences from two educational delegations to Guatemala with grassroots organizations, the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission (GHRC) in August of 2014 titled, “Women and the Construction of Justice,” and the Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA) in March of 2015 titled, “Rivers for Life.” The delegations were eight to ten day experiences led by members of the organizations. Each delegation focused on the extractive industries in Guatemala, primarily the *La Puya* resistance to the *El Tambor* mine in August and the resistance against the Xalalá dam in March. Delegates had the opportunity to hear from defenders of human rights from all sectors of society including environmental activists, lawyers, judges, journalists, transitional justice activists, and women’s rights activist. The information gained on these delegations helped to solidify information learned through scholarly texts and add to my understanding of modern Guatemala.

The first chapter of this thesis covers the history of modern Guatemala and the effects of the Civil War. It argues for an inclusive view of the root causes of migration out of Guatemala, and outlines human rights issues during migration to Iowa. The chapter highlights the formation of transnational communities between Postville and villages in Guatemala. The second chapter argues that as a transnational community, the community of Postville had an immigration experience even though over half the residents were not

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<sup>25</sup> Interviews will be available on the Postville Project Website ([www.postvilleproject.org](http://www.postvilleproject.org)) Fall 2015.

migrants. This chapter also describes the human rights violations experienced by migrants while living and working in Iowa and shows how the 2008 ICE raid caused real, physical and mental, trauma to the men, women, and children involved. The third chapter argues human rights violations were committed throughout the legal proceedings following the raid, the aftermath in Postville, and the aftermath in the Guatemalan villages. The third chapter concludes with the argument that unless the root causes of migration are addressed, migration and deportation situations will continue, people from Guatemala will continue to be subject to human rights violations, and communities like Postville will continue to be permanently affected by social upheaval.

## CHAPTER 1

TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITIES: MIGRATION FROM  
GUATEMALA TO POSTVILLE, IOWA

For migrants, the trek from Guatemala to Iowa is brutal, but many undertake the perilous journey out of necessity. The trend of leaving home for work is not new in Guatemala, but the largest exodus of Guatemalans began in the 1980s at the peak of the civil war when 1.5 million people were displaced.<sup>1</sup> The migrant trail has always been rough, and increased gang violence and narcotics trafficking along with growing border forces on both borders Guatemalans cross to get to the United States has made the trail extremely dangerous. Deciding to risk it all to get north is not a decision lightly made, and some argue that it is not really a decision at all, but a necessity and mechanism for survival.<sup>2</sup>

Migrant workers have been an extremely important part of American agricultural system for over a century. For decades, seasonal workers from mostly Mexico and some from Central America would travel to the United States to work. This system was eventually regulated and the Bracero Program was formed in 1942. Beginning in the 1960s and continuing through modern day, nearly all migrant work was banned without extensive paperwork, but the need for migrant work has not disappeared.<sup>3</sup> This was apparent in the 80s as more and more people from Latin America came to the Midwest to

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<sup>1</sup> The civil war, which shall be described in more detail in this chapter, is also referred to as the internal conflict, the armed confrontation, the struggle, the situation, *la violencia* and goes by many other names. They all refer to the period from roughly 1960 to 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Lutz and Lovell, "Survivors on the Move," 11-12.

<sup>3</sup> Chomsky, *Undocumented*, 55-63.

fill jobs in agricultural factories and processing plants. Many towns had numerous people from the same communities living in them, as friends or family would report home about job opportunities. Between these “sister cities” or transnational communities, people traveled, goods and money were delivered, and culture and ideas influenced both the sending communities in Latin American and the communities in which the people settled.<sup>4</sup>

When Agriprocessors, a kosher meatpacking plant, opened in Postville Iowa, people from all over the world came to work there. Eventually, the majority of people arriving in Postville were from Guatemala. The newcomers to town were not just single men. Single women, mothers, families and children also made the journey. Extensive networks developed between Postville and towns and villages in Guatemala. Modern migration out of Guatemala has been influenced greatly by the Civil War and its aftermath. In order to understand the formation of transnational communities, an understanding of the war, its consequences, and societal issues of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in Guatemala are necessary.

### The Civil War

The Guatemalan Civil War was part of a larger trend in Latin America in which Cold War ideology and rhetoric enabled authoritarian rulers, usually with some help from

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<sup>4</sup> Grey and Woodrick, “Unofficial Sister Cities,” 364-375.



the United States, to wipe out “communists” or “subversives.”<sup>5</sup> In Guatemala the beginning of the trend can be seen with the 1954 US sponsored coup that overthrew president Jacobo Arbenz. Arbenz was a progressive leader, vowing to implement land reforms in favor of rural peasant farmers. The overthrow seemed to be spurred not only by the aforementioned Cold War ideology, but also because of Arbenz’s plan to take land from wealthy landholders such as the United Fruit Company. After the coup, non-democratic presidents and military juntas were established in Guatemala, ushering in nearly four decades of insecurity and repression.<sup>6</sup>

Although the United States did not admit to having a hand in the overthrow until much later, it is clear that people understood what had transpired. Diego Rivera painted “Glorious Victory” in 1954 after the coup. The photograph shows various actors from the United States, such as the Dulles Brothers, Allen Dulles the then director of the CIA, and John Foster Dulles the then United States Secretary of State both of whom had ties to the United Fruit Company, shaking hands with a Guatemalan representative. In the middle of it all is a bomb bearing President Eisenhower’s face. Surrounding the businessmen, diplomats, and military men are slaughtered people and protestors; in the background, people carry bundles of bananas towards an American flag.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For more information about political violence in Latin America during the Cold War see Gomez-Barris, *Where Memory Dwells*, Burt, *Political Violence and The Authoritarian State in Peru*, Binford, *The El Mozote Massacre*, and Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror*.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen C. Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Although Rivera was a member of the communist party and the painting is seen by some as propaganda, it captured popular sentiment at the time. Since speaking out against the newly inaugurated leaders could warrant murder or disappearance, many who thought this way became involved in the “rebel armies” in Guatemala such as the URNG, *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* or Guatemalan National

Today, a reproduction of the painting is hung in *Casa de la Memoria*, The House of Memory, a museum in Guatemala City that documents what happened during the Civil War in an attempt to reclaim social memory from the official narrative that was written by the very people who engineered the war. On the ceiling of the room where the Glorious Victory is located hangs a banner with the words “*persecución, agresión, opresión, muerte, injusticia, corrupción, miedo, violencia.*”<sup>8</sup> A break in the banner that is void of any words represents the Ten Years of Spring, the time from the election of Juan José Arévalo in 1944 through the coup of Arbenz in 1954, a time in which a new constitution was written and optimism reigned. Colorful life-size cutouts of dancing people are the centerpiece of that room. The negative words on the banner extend before and after the break, representing the oppression of the Guatemalan people since the conquest and the through the Civil War. The banner leads to a dimly lit room filled with silhouettes of gunmen chasing down, shooting at, and murdering people. The centerpiece in this room is a circular structure covered with t-shirts, jeans, hats, *cortes*, *huipiles*, and *fajas*.<sup>9</sup> The clothes represent the 45,000 disappeared and the 200,000 people that were murdered during the Civil War.<sup>10</sup>

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Revolution Unity, that was made up of four armies the EGP, *Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres* or the Guerrilla Army of the Poor; ORPA, *Organización Revolucionario del Pueblo en Armas* or the Revolutionary Organization of People in Arms; FAR, *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* or the Rebel Armed Forces; and PGT-NDN, *Núcleo de Dirección Nacional del Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo* or the National Directing Nucleus of the Guatemalan Party of Labor.

<sup>8</sup> The banner is in Spanish. The words are persecution, aggression, oppression, death, corruption, fear, and violence.

<sup>9</sup> *Cortes*, *Huipiles*, and *fajas* are the skirts, shirts, and belts of traditional Mayan dress. They are often hand-woven, intricate in design, and very colorful. Some contain beadwork and can vary in style depending on the region.

<sup>10</sup> Commission for Historical Clarification, “Guatemala: Memory of Silence,” 17.

From 1954 on, repression; state sponsored violence; and impunity, or the lack of bringing police, military, and the wealthy to trial for crimes committed such as murder, disappearances, torture, and extortion grew in Guatemala. Violence targeted at rural indigenous Guatemalans and the armed rebels or *guerillas* escalated in 1980 and continued through the end of General Fernando Romero Lucas' reign and into his successor General Efraín Ríos Montt's rule. During this time, there was pushback from journalists, students, rural peasants, and others who were aware of and displeased by the unfolding events. The *Comité de Unidad Campesina* (CUC), or the Peasant Unity Committee, was formed in 1978 to organize against militarization in indigenous lands and for higher wages for agricultural workers.<sup>11</sup> Among the founders of the CUC was Vicente Menchú, the father of Rigoberta Menchú, winner of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize for her work fighting for indigenous rights.<sup>12</sup> Rigoberta Menchú later described how neighbors, farmers, and students from El Quiché in northern Guatemala, whom she refers to as *compañeros*, were organizing in order to end army occupation and atrocities in their homeland. The *compañeros* decided to occupy the Spanish Embassy believing it would force the government to talk with them. After having occupied the Embassy, the police set the Embassy on fire, burning it to the ground and killing 37 *compañeros* and diplomats.<sup>13</sup> She wrote, "Thousands of people buried the *compañeros* who died. The

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<sup>11</sup> "Quienes Somos," Comité de Unidad Campesina, [http://www.cuc.org.gt/es/index.php?view=article&catid=38%3Acuc&id=53%3AQuienes-somos&option=com\\_content&Itemid=62](http://www.cuc.org.gt/es/index.php?view=article&catid=38%3Acuc&id=53%3AQuienes-somos&option=com_content&Itemid=62) (accessed January 30, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Stoll, *Rigoberta Menchú and The Story of All Poor Guatemalans*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Menchú and Burgos-Debray, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, 214-219. Included among the dead was Rigoberta Menchú's father, Vicente Menchú.

people were moved by resistance to and hatred of the government. People at all levels- poor, middle class, professional- all risked their lives by going to the funeral of the *compañeros* from the Spanish Embassy.”<sup>14</sup>

In an attempt to eradicate those who opposed the military dictatorships, Montt implemented a campaign of “draining the sea to kill the fish.” That is, the State wanted to wipe out anyone against them. *Guerillas* who opposed the State had fled to rural, mountainous areas. Military leaders believed that the indigenous communities in those areas were helping the *guerillas* by providing them food, clothing, or shelter. Because it was extremely hard to wipe out the *guerillas* hidden in the forests, military leaders instructed the counterinsurgency forces to target all indigenous communities. By doing so, they believed they would destroy the *guerillas*’ resource base. Scholars, like Victoria Sanford, cite the use of the phrase “drain the sea” as an admission to genocide, a purposeful annihilation of a religious or cultural group. If Efraín Ríos Montt did not mean to commit acts of genocide, he would have only called for the annihilation of the “fish.”<sup>15</sup>

Montt titled his campaign to drain the sea *frijoles y fusiles*, beans and bullets. During the campaign, the razing of whole communities was not unheard of. Men, women, children, babies, babies still in the womb, and grandparents, were murdered. People were killed in every way imaginable by the counterinsurgency forces; they were

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<sup>14</sup> Menchú and Burgos-Debray, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, 217, the one person who survived the fire was taken to a hospital, but was later kidnaped and his lifeless, tortured body was later found.

<sup>15</sup> Victoria Sanford, *Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 154-155. Sanford uses the phrase, “taking the water away from the fish,” and others use, “when you cannot catch the fish, you have to drain the sea.” Both have the same meaning as “draining the sea to kill the fish.”

hacked to death by machetes, beaten to death, or mowed down by automatic weapons. Others were not just killed, they were tortured, beaten, raped, and mutilated before their death. Some communities were burnt to the ground after the military went through. Bombs destroyed others.<sup>16</sup> When a community was targeted, a few people were able to escape by running into the mountains and hiding from the military forces. Virginia Garrard-Burnett explains that the decreased amount of state sponsored violence after 1983 is a testament to just how well Montt “drained the sea.”<sup>17</sup>

Atrocities committed during the war are legion. With 626 documented massacres, mass graves fill the countryside. Many bodies still rest where they were thrown away during the Civil War.<sup>18</sup> Firsthand testimonies and the work of forensic anthropologists attest to the horrors suffered by many during the war.<sup>19</sup> The Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) completed an extensive report detailing the events that occurred during the war and determined that 93 percent of the human rights violations during the war were committed by the State and the *guerillas* committed three percent of the

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<sup>16</sup> Commission for Historical Clarification, “Guatemala: Memory of Silence,” 34-36, The whole Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) report contains details of the atrocities committed during the Civil War but for a look into how people, particularly indigenous people, were treated begin reading on page 34 with the section titled, “Massacres and devastation of the Mayan people,” and continue through the section titled, “The death squads,” on page 36.

<sup>17</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 86-89.

<sup>18</sup> Commission for Historical Clarification, “Guatemala: Memory of Silence,” 34.

<sup>19</sup> Menchú and Burgos-Debray, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, 1, in her testimony Menchú describes the organization of Mayan villages and people in Guatemala and says, “My personal experience is the reality of a whole people.” Stoll, *Rigoberta Menchú and The Story of All Poor Guatemalans*, 2-3, while Stoll argues that Menchú’s testimony may not be completely true or applicable to all people, he cannot deny the violence the Mayan people experienced at the hands of the military forces, and Grandin, “Chronicles of a Guatemalan Genocide Foretold, 391- 412, Grandin offers a useful overview of the CEH report and the atrocities that happened in Guatemala during the war.

violations.<sup>20</sup> Although arbitrary murders and disappearances, forced kidnappings, were carried out by both the State and its paramilitary forces and the *guerillas*, the State exceeded atrocities committed by *guerillas* exponentially.

Further, the States created populations of people like *Los Kaibiles* who were psychologically trained for killing and conditioned to hate and target indigenous people. Others like the members of the *patrullas de autodefensa civil*, Civil Patrols or PACS, were ripped out of their homes at a young age and forced to comply with army commands or risk being labeled *guerillas* and murdered. The CEH determined that within the 93 percent of human rights violations committed by the state, and that PACs were responsible for 18 percent of them.<sup>21</sup> The report also noted how PACs, many of them indigenous men themselves, further served to deteriorate the social cohesion of indigenous communities.

The CEH is aware of hundreds of cases in which civilians were forced by the Army, at gun point, to rape women, torture, mutilate corpses and kill. This extreme cruelty was used by the State to cause social disintegration. A large proportion of the male population over the age of fifteen, especially in Mayan communities, was forced to participate in the PAC. This deeply affected values and behavioral patterns, as violence became a normal method of confronting conflictive situations and promoted contempt for the lives of others.<sup>22</sup>

When the war was over, the boys and men in these programs were released back into society with no reintegration programs or psychological counseling. It should come as no surprise that many members of these special armed forces, such as the army commandos

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<sup>20</sup> Commission for Historical Clarification, "Guatemala: Memory of Silence," 42.

<sup>21</sup> Commission for Historical Clarification, "Guatemala: Memory of Silence," 34.

<sup>22</sup> Commission for Historical Clarification, "Guatemala: Memory of Silence," 27.

*Los Kaibiles*, have become involved in all levels of narcotics trafficking and gang violence.<sup>23</sup>

During the war, people living in the country often had their crops burnt and their homes destroyed. Many decided to move to nearby towns or cities. Rural, indigenous people were targets and the Civil War was later deemed genocide by the CEH. Many people fled to Mexico, Belize, and the United States.<sup>24</sup> During the worst years of violence in the early 80s, the United States only granted asylum to two percent of applicants.<sup>25</sup> Cold War ideology influenced the Reagan administration to side with Montt and the Guatemalan government during the Civil War. If the United States granted asylum to the fleeing Guatemalans they would have had to admit that the government was committing atrocious human rights violations and end funding to the Guatemalan government.<sup>26</sup> The document that finally ended the Civil War was the Accord for Firm and Lasting Peace. When the war ended, Guatemala had been shattered by years of genocide, police surveillance, and mass flight out of Guatemala.

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<sup>23</sup> Tim Padgett, "Guatemala's Kaibiles: A Notorious Commando Unit Wrapped Up in Central America's Drug War," *Time*, July 14, 2011, this explains how *Los Kaibiles* were formed to wipe out indigenous Guatemalans during the Civil War and how many of these former Guatemalan army commandos are still at large, now working for drug cartels.

<sup>24</sup> James Loucky and Marilyn M. Moors, *The Maya Diaspora: Guatemalan Roots, New American Lives* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000): 74-92 for information about refugees in Mexico, 118-140 for information about refugees in Belize, and 141-222 for information about refugees in the United States and Canada.

<sup>25</sup> Susan Jonas, "Guatemalan Migration in Times of Civil War and Post-War Challenges," Migration Policy Institute, March 27, 2013 [on-line] <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/guatemalan-migration-times-civil-war-and-post-war-challenges> (accessed May 6, 2014).

<sup>26</sup> Susan Gzesh, "Central Americans and Asylum Policy in the Reagan Era," *Migration Policy Institute*, April 2006 [on-line] <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-americans-and-asylum-policy-reagan-era> (accessed April 8, 2015), and Elisabeth Malkin, "Trial on Guatemalan Civil War Carnage Leaves Out U.S. Role," *New York Times*, May 16, 2013, [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/17/world/americas/trial-on-guatemalan-civil-war-carnage-leaves-out-us-role.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/17/world/americas/trial-on-guatemalan-civil-war-carnage-leaves-out-us-role.html?_r=0) (accessed January 15, 2015).

### The Aftermath

The Accord for Firm and Lasting Peace was a compilation of various peace agreements that mandated the formation of the CEH to investigate human rights violations, decreased militarization and the dismantling of the PACS, and a reform of the judicial system in order to make gains against impunity. Although the Civil War officially ended with the signing of the Accords by members of the URNG and members of the peace commission on December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1996, many of the same issues remained in the aftermath including violence, economic insecurity, exploitation of the land, and impunity.<sup>27</sup>

As noted above, around 1.5 million people were either internally or externally displaced during the Civil War and many fled to places like Mexico, Belize, and the United States. When the war began to subside, the government began a push to bring refugees living abroad back to Guatemala. The first large group of refugees returned in 1993 before the signing of the peace accords and by 1990, 30,000 people had returned to Guatemala.<sup>28</sup> The return was not always an easy transition. As one scholar points out, there was tension between returned communities and those who stayed because of the culture of fear contrasted with the culture of learning of the returned. Those who had stayed had been conditioned to follow orders of the military in fear of the repercussions

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<sup>27</sup> Susan Jonas, "The Guatemalan Peace Accords," *North American Congress on Latin America* 30 (May 1997) [on-line] [http://search.opinionarchives.com/Nacla\\_Web/DigitalArchive.aspx](http://search.opinionarchives.com/Nacla_Web/DigitalArchive.aspx) (accessed January 30, 2015), and "Truth Commission: Guatemala," United States Institute of Peace [on-line] <http://www.usip.org/publications/truth-commission-guatemala> (accessed January 30, 2015).

<sup>28</sup> Deborah L. Billings, "Organizing in Exile: The Reconstruction of Community in the Guatemalan Refugee Camps of Southern Mexico," in *The Maya Diaspora: Guatemalan Roots, New American Lives*, ed. James Loucky and Marilyn Moors, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000): 88-89.



of dissent, which led to a culture of fear. Many people who lived in refugee communities were exposed to further education than what they typically received in Guatemala and training in human rights.<sup>29</sup> Returned refugees were also upset that some of the services that were available in refugee camps such as schools and medical facilities were not available to them in Guatemala.<sup>30</sup> To make matters worse for returned refugees, the Guatemalan economy was shifting towards more open policies with international companies that had little benefit for the average person.

As the Civil War progressed through the later decades of the twentieth century, more Central American countries were being influenced by a push for neoliberal policies from the United States. This new opportunity for trade mainly profited big business and allowed for large companies to easily enter Guatemala. More factories were set up, mining projects began, and cheap corn inundated Central America. Because the price of corn has plummeted, people were no longer able to make ends meet by farming and many had to send some members of the family to nearby cities or to places like the United States for wage work. Many women took jobs in *maquiladoras*, factories where cheap goods are assembled and workers are poorly paid, or as domestics in cities such as

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<sup>29</sup> Clark Taylor, "Challenges of Return and Reintegration," in *The Maya Diaspora: Guatemalan Roots, New American Lives*, ed. James Loucky and Marilyn Moors, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000): 95-97, the culture of fear among those that stayed made them want to comply with what the police and military asked of them and the culture of learning provided a basis for organization among the returned and sometimes challenged traditional beliefs and customs such as the place of women in society.

<sup>30</sup> Dan Williams, "Refugees Returning to Guatemala Face a Lack of Food, Shelter, Land," *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 1987, accessed April 15, 2015, [http://articles.latimes.com/1987-03-15/news/mn-10933\\_1\\_refugees](http://articles.latimes.com/1987-03-15/news/mn-10933_1_refugees), and Miriam Sabin, Keith Sabin, Hyoung Yong Kim, Marianela Vergara, and Luis Varse, "The Mental health Status of Mayan Refugees After Repatriation to Guatemala," *Pan American Journal of Public Health* 19, 3 (March 2006): 164.

Guatemala City where the violence against women is horrible.<sup>31</sup> In rural areas where the land contained gold or silver or where strong rivers were located, people found their land and livelihood threatened by development.

Mega-projects like the Chixoy dam that had begun during the Civil War used massacres and war tactics to pacify people in opposition to the dam.<sup>32</sup> After the war, international companies like Goldcorp, Tahoe Resources, and Kappes, Cassidy, and Associates began building mines often in direct opposition to nearby communities. Violent clashes between communities demanding rights and the police protecting the international companies or being paid by the government became a technique for business to get their way.<sup>33</sup> Some of the mining and dam projects in Guatemala have had horrible environmental effects including the poisoning of ground water.<sup>34</sup> Mega projects displaced many families who were unable to support themselves as subsistence farmers

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<sup>31</sup> Gonzalo Fanzul and Arabella Fraser, "Dumping Without Borders: How US Agricultural Policies are Destroying the Livelihoods of Mexican Corn Farmers," Oxfam International, August 01, 2003 [on-line] <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/dumping-without-borders-how-us-agricultural-policies-are-destroying-the-livelihood-114471> (accessed April 02, 2015) although this article focuses on Mexico, Central American farmers face and have faced very similar issues. William I. Robinson, "Latin America in the New Global Capitalism," *North American Congress on Latin America*, 45 (June 2012) [on-line] [http://search.opinionarchives.com/Nacla\\_Web/DigitalArchive.aspx](http://search.opinionarchives.com/Nacla_Web/DigitalArchive.aspx) (accessed January 30, 2015), *Maquiladoras* are similar to factories or assembly plants and are located throughout Latin America.

<sup>32</sup> Nick Dearden, "Guatemala's Chixoy Dam: Where Development and Terror Intersect," *The Guardian*, December 10, 2012, accessed April 15, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2012/dec/10/guatemala-chixoy-dam-development-terror>; and Barbara Rose Johnson, "Chixoy Dam Legacies: The Struggle to Secure Reparation and the Right to Remedy in Guatemala," *Water Alternatives* 3, 2 (2010): 342-344.

<sup>33</sup> Lyuba Zarsky and Leonardo Stanley, "Searching for Gold in the Highlands of Guatemala: Economic Benefits and Environmental Risks of the Marlin Mine," Global Development and Environment Institute, September 2011 [on-line], [http://ase.tufts.edu/gdae/policy\\_research/marlinemine.pdf](http://ase.tufts.edu/gdae/policy_research/marlinemine.pdf) (accessed April 15, 2015), 10-13; and Quimy De León, Santiago Bastos, and Nelton Rivera, "La Puya; El Gobierno Manda Por un Tubo el Diálogo y Desaloja Violentamente," *Presna Comunitaria*, May 24, 2014, accessed April 15, 2015, <https://comunitariapress.wordpress.com/2014/05/24/la-puya-el-gobierno-manda-por-un-tubo-el-dialogo-y-desaloja-violentamente/>.

<sup>34</sup> Guatemalan Human Rights Commission, "Fact Sheet: Neoliberalism."

and in many cases migration out of Guatemala seems like the only viable option for survival.

### Migration

Those that survived the Civil War with their lives were lucky, but with no work, money, or food, something had to give. For many Guatemalans, survival meant migration.<sup>35</sup> It was not a decision so much as a necessity. As Aviva Chomsky points out, Guatemalans have been leaving home to follow work for nearly 500 years, at first people traveled to work as forced labor for the Spanish, then wealthy landowners implemented the *finca* system that required peasants to work the land for little money, and more recently people travel to cities to work as contracted labor or in *maquiladoras*. Migration to the United States is just a logical extension of this tradition.<sup>36</sup>

Violence continued after the war. Gang violence and violence against women became continuous problems in Guatemala.<sup>37</sup> There are many reasons for the proliferation of violence against women including the pervasive machismo culture in Latin America and the psychological ramifications of the Civil War in Guatemala that instilled in some the idea of violence as a way to handle problems. The cultural phenomenon of impunity was cemented in Guatemala as most acts of violence were not investigated or their perpetrators ever punished. Femicide, the killing of a person because they are a woman, and feminicide, the murder of women that holds the perpetrators and

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<sup>35</sup> Christopher H Lutz and W. George Lovell, "Survivors on the Move," 11-12.

<sup>36</sup> Chomsky, *Undocumented*, 64-67.

<sup>37</sup> Smith and Offit, "Confronting Violence in Postwar Guatemala." 1-3.

the state responsible for gendered violence, are both utilized to describe the violence against women in Guatemala. Between the year 2000 and 2008, 4,159 women were murdered in Guatemala and 98 percent of these cases were either not investigated or the investigation was discontinued before persecution, strengthening the idea of impunity in regards to violence against women.<sup>38</sup> Guatemala seemed to be making strides against femicide when in 2009 it became the first country in Latin America to make femicide punishable. Still, the violence remains. Women found murdered in Guatemala often show signs of rape, torture, or bodily mutilation.<sup>39</sup>

Domestic violence was a problem in Guatemala long before the war and continues to be an issue many women face every day. Many women and children cite domestic violence as the reason behind their migration out of Guatemala.<sup>40</sup> In August of 2014, the Board of Immigration Appeals ruled that women who suffer severe domestic violence and receive no protection from the State are eligible for asylum. The test case was a Guatemalan woman who fled her husband in 2005. She said that her husband, “her husband beat her weekly, breaking her nose. He threw burning paint thinner on her and

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<sup>38</sup> Guatemalan Human Rights Commission, “Guatemala’s Femicide Law: Progress Against Impunity?” May 2009 [on-line] <http://www.ghrc-usa.org/resources/publications/other-publications/> (accessed January 30, 2015).

<sup>39</sup> Deborah Hastings, “In Central America, Women Killed ‘with Impunity’ Just Because they are Women,” *New York Daily News*, January 10, 2014, accessed January 30, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/femicide-rise-central-america-article-1.1552233>.

<sup>40</sup> “Children on the Run: Unaccompanied Children Leaving Central America and Mexico and the Need for International Protection,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2014, 9-10 [on-line] <http://unhcrwashington.org/children> (accessed April 5, 2015) of the 100 children from Guatemala interviewed in the study, 23 percent mentioned abuse in the home and 20 percent mentioned violence in society; and Mónica Ramírez and Anne K. Ream, “Migrant Children are Fleeing a Region Rife with Sexual Violence: These Circumstances Should Give Deportation Advocates Serious Pause,” *New Republic*, July 23, 2014, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/118820/sexual-violence-major-cause-immigration-us>.

raped her,” and that once, “when her husband bloodied her face she called the police to their home, but they refused to arrest him.”<sup>41</sup> Children in Guatemala often witness their mothers being beaten by their fathers. Although many mothers try to shield their children from the violence, they fear leaving their husbands will leave them impoverished exposing themselves to more violence, social ostracism, and possibly necessitate further breaking up of the family through migration. Luisa, who later traveled to Postville, was born in Guatemala in 1977 and recalled the abuse her mother suffered at the hands of her father. She said,

My father drank a lot, and sometimes he would hit my mother. She would hide us in the bed and cover us up with a poncho. I would lift up the poncho to see how my mother defended herself. He would hit the wall when she protected herself. Sometimes my mother would try to get him out of the room and leave us there so we wouldn't see him beating her. He also abused her with a lot of foul language. He humiliated her, and he did the same thing to us. Once he tried to hit my *mamá* with a machete. She defended herself and tried to talk with him. It was as if he was looking at someone else, and then he tried to hit himself with the machete like he wanted to cut himself. I got out from under the poncho and started to scream.<sup>42</sup>

Children bear witness to their parents' misery of dealing with financial issues and lack of resources that often leads them to drink or do drugs and resort to violence as a coping mechanism. Violence in the home can and often does lead to the breaking apart of

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<sup>41</sup> Julia Preston, “In First for Court, Woman is Ruled Eligible for Asylum in U.S. on Basis of Domestic Abuse,” *New York Times*, August 29, 2014, accessed February 28, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/30/us/victim-of-domestic-violence-in-guatemala-is-ruled-eligible-for-asylum-in-us.html>

<sup>42</sup> Gibbs and Hernández, *Shattered Dreams*, 37.

families, further weakening the economic viability of that family and adding pressure to migrate.<sup>43</sup>

The Economy in Guatemala is often why people migrate. Jobs in Guatemala were scarce and the Postville workers reported working dangerous jobs or in agriculture for very little money. Some reported being able to go to school until fifth grade, others had no access to schooling.<sup>44</sup> The families that had people sending money to them from the United States fared better than those who did not. The difference between having that income or not could mean being about to afford a meal or sending a child to school. It was estimated in 2006 that 77 per cent of the remittances sent to Central American countries like Guatemala from workers in the U.S. were reported as being used to buy basic goods like food.<sup>45</sup>

Two men, Marvin Danilo Perez-Gomez and Mardoqueo Valle Callejas, who were swept up in the ICE raid on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008 told Erik-Camayd Friexas about working in Guatemala in affidavits to be included in the documents to be seen by the Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009. Perez-Gomez who was 27 at the time of the hearing, recounted his life in Guatemala,

I only went to school up to 5<sup>th</sup> grade. I first worked in agriculture earning some \$4 a day. Lately I went to work for a workshop making fireworks and earning about \$35 a week. But it is the most dangerous job in the country. While I worked there, there were three explosions and two of my workmates died. Because now I have a

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<sup>43</sup> Leah Schmalzbauer, "Migration, Separation and Family Survival," *NCFR Report Magazine*, Fall 2009 [on-line] <https://www.ncfr.org/ncfr-report/focus/immigration-migration> (accessed April 8, 2015) although this article talks about a woman from Mexico, some women in Guatemala similar experiences.

<sup>44</sup> Camayd-Freixas, *US Immigration Reform and Its Global Impact*, 106-8.

<sup>45</sup> Garni, "Mechanisms of Migration, 324.

wife and two small daughters, I could not continue risking myself there, I had to migrate.<sup>46</sup>

Valle-Callejas also worked in agriculture in Guatemala and it too was not enough to keep his family fed and sheltered. He took the risk of starting a business to earn the money that he needed, but that endeavor could not keep him afloat.

In Guatemala I used to work in agriculture for neighbors who had some land. I worked like that since I was 7 years old, because my father died when I was 6 year old. Back there what you ear in a day, you eat as you go along. I had no schooling...Then I started an egg business. I took out a loan to expand the business, but I failed. Then because of the debt I found myself forced to come to the U.S., so I wouldn't lose my house, where I lived with my wife, my mother, and my 5 children.<sup>47</sup>

During and after the Civil War, people fled for their lives out of Guatemala.

Economic insecurity and continued violence left by the Civil War coupled by the continuous need of a cheap labor force in the United States are factors that have propelled and continue to entice migrants to risk the trip. Many migrants have friends or relatives in the United States that encourage them to come. Often though, it is their children's distended or worm filled stomachs, their bare feet, or their inability to obtain an education without a larger income that has propelled migrants north.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Erik Camayd-Freixas, "Brief to the Senate Judiciary Committee Regarding the Nomination of AUSA Stephanie Rose for US Attorney For the Northern District of Iowa and the Inquiry into the Postville Prosecutions of May 12-23, 2008," The Postville Project, November 4, 2009 [on-line], <http://cdm15897.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/post/id/848/rec/4> (accessed March 30, 2014).

<sup>47</sup> Camayd-Freixas, "Brief to the Senate Judiciary."

<sup>48</sup> Nazario, *Enrique's Journey*, 3-9, Enrique's mother Lourdes left Honduras to try to find work in the United States, and Grande, *The Distance Between Us*, 188-191, recounting her life after her mother left her and her two siblings in Mexico to work in the United States, Reyna recounted the harrowing tale of her neighbor, Pablo and the night when her father served spaghetti for dinner. "In Mexico, most of the children I had known had the same body shape: a big, round belly full of roundworms and really skinny legs and arms... But there was one kid, a boy named Pablo, whose abdomen swelled beyond anything we could

Migration has always been a dangerous and costly experience, but recently it has much more so. Because of amped up Border Patrol numbers and an increase in physical coverage along the border by fences, cement walls, and regularly patrolled areas, the migrants, gangs, and narcotics traffickers are congested into smaller areas. This funneling of the border often means the only places that migrants can make it are the most dangerous in terms of terrain, mountainous or desert areas, and in terms of the people they may run into along the way. In 2012, 483 people died in the desert and it is now 30 times more likely that a migrant will die crossing the border than in 1998.<sup>49</sup> It was right around 1998 when the first Guatemalans began trickling into Postville. At that time many of the *coyotes*, a person that helps migrants cross the border, were friends or acquaintances that they knew and trusted. Not only did these initial *coyotes* help migrants get safely across the border, but they also helped find them a job. Guatemalans came from El Rosario, San Jose Calderas, San Antonio Aguas Calientes, San Miguel Duenas, Patzun, and Chimchoy San Andrés Itzapa to settle in Postville. While the first

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imagine...I used to have nightmares of his belly exploding and hundreds of white wiggly worms spilling out...I looked back at my plate of spaghetti and the red sauce. I thought of Pablo again and the surgery he had to get the worms removed. I thought of the scar like a crawling centipede and I just couldn't bring myself to grab my fork and eat...Papi picked up my plate, and I thought he was going to take it away, but the next thing I knew he dumped the spaghetti on my head. I started screaming as the spaghetti slid down my face and over my eyes. All I saw inside my mind was Pablo's belly exploding, and the worms coming to get me."

<sup>49</sup> Chomsky, *Undocumented*, 84 and Frontline World, "Mexico: Crimes At the Border: The Business of Human Smuggling," May 27, 2008 [on-line], <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/mexico704/> (accessed May 6, 2014).



Guatemalans to try their luck in Postville were single males or fathers, eventually, family members and friends began following them to Postville and building a community.<sup>50</sup>

Guatemalans seeking work in the U.S. have to cross two borders in order to reach their destination. Throughout Mexico, checkpoints regularly stop vehicles to check for migrants. Guatemalan migrants are subject to inhumane treatment while traveling. Some are attacked or raped by gangs, corrupt policemen, or the *coyotes*. Some people are murdered or die in the process, for example people hidden in cars and trains for hours can die of heat exhaustion or suffocation.<sup>51</sup> Postville residents were aware of the sacrifices that migrants take to get to the United States. Barbara Herzmann remembered,

At first we knew about coyotes who were hired to transport people... We had heard a story about a relative of one of our students who never made it to Iowa and whose body was found later in the desert in Texas. We knew of that danger, but then we started to catch on, if we looked at a map, that the people coming from Guatemala first had to get out of their own country and had come all the way across Mexico. They were subject to pirates and rape and everything. It hit me of the huge sacrifice that these families were making to come here.<sup>52</sup>

Many migrants borrow money in order to pay *coyotes* to lead the way into the United States. Most people had to borrow against their houses or their land if they owned any or have money wired from relatives in the United States. Marvin Danilo Perez-Gomez recalled how he first borrowed 2,000 dollars to get into the United States with a H2-B visa, but he was denied and sent home with only a fraction of the money. In debt with few options, he decided to go to Iowa. He told Camayd-Frexias, "I was left with

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<sup>50</sup> Jennifer Cooley, interview by author, 21 April 2014, Cedar Falls, Iowa, University of Northern Iowa, and Elver Herrera, *Dispatches from Postville*, translated by Jennifer Cooley, unpublished manuscript.

<sup>51</sup> Ogen, "Migration and Human Rights on the Mexico-Guatemala Border," 218-221.

<sup>52</sup> Barbara Herzmann, interview by author, 27 October 2014, Luana, Iowa. Digital recording.

considerable debt that definitely forced me to migrate. Then, all the way to Iowa, you start accumulating more debt, such that the entire journey from Guatemala ends up costing about \$7,000.”<sup>53</sup> In their pursuit for economic stability, migrants first have to sacrifice their property, personal and familial security, and essentially enter into forced servitude in order to pay back debts and receive a decent pay.

On the migrant trail, migrants do not own their bodies. They sell their safety to a coyote who may or may not take care of them. They risk limbs and life riding the rails, many give both to *La Bestia*'s (the beast's) razor sharp wheels. Migrants are attacked by gangs, police, and vagabonds along the way, some carry machetes; others have guns. Women's bodies are often targeted. Some women pretend they are men or tell people they have AIDS in order to evade sexual assault. Other women migrants, as Óscar Martínez describes, view their bodies as *cuerpomática* (bodymatic) at times. In the context of the migrant trail, women's bodies can act as a credit card, buying safety or ensuring a little money.<sup>54</sup> Exchanges like this are not rare, and many migrant women are raped along the journey north.

The idea of utilizing the *cuerpomática* potential of the body, this 'conscious rape,' still leaves psychological and often physical scars on women. Consider the consequences for those deciding to resist rape on the migrant trail; the migrant has no money, no weapon, no power and the attackers typically have man-power in the form of others who are with them during the attack and the organization backing them (as in a gang), they

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<sup>53</sup> Camayd-Freixas, "Brief to the Senate Judiciary."

<sup>54</sup> Martínez, *The Beast*, 73.

have weapons some as lethal as assault rifles, and they have the power to take what they want. In these cases, resistance to rape can and often does mean death.

Rape was used in the civil war to breakdown society, rape during migration is used to show ownership over an area of the trail or to show membership in a gang, and rape in the workplace once in the United States is used to instill a sense of inconsequentiality in migrants and undocumented workers.<sup>55</sup> Rape was about power and control in all of these situations. Rape is also a gendered act. While men and women, boys and girls are raped on the migrant trail, it is believed that 80 percent of women and girls are sexually assaulted on the migrant trail.<sup>56</sup> Often, rape is not considered a human rights violation, but some scholars argue that rape falls in line with torture, slavery, and genocide, all of which are widely considered violations of human rights. Those same scholars also believe that sexual violence against women denies them the right to life, liberty, security, and dignity, attributes that are typically included in any definition of human rights.<sup>57</sup> If migrants made it across the border safely and unnoticed, they continued on to their destinations whether that was California, Washington D.C., North Carolina, Nebraska, or Iowa. They settle down into towns like Postville and build communities.

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<sup>55</sup> Frontline, "Rape in the Fields," June 25, 2013 [on-line] <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/rape-in-the-fields/> (accessed May 7, 2014).

<sup>56</sup> Eleanor Goldberg, "80% of Central American Women, Girls are Raped Crossing in the U.S." *Huffington Post*, September 9, 2014, accessed March 15, 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/12/central-america-migrants-rape\\_n\\_5806972.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/12/central-america-migrants-rape_n_5806972.html).

<sup>57</sup> Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Americas* (Durnham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010): 5-12.

### Postville, Iowa

Founded by Germans and Norwegians in the mid 1800s, Postville experienced its first wave of growth as the railroad came to town. Construction for St. Paul Lutheran Church began in the 1890s. At St. Paul's community members and immigrants who did not speak English could attend church services in German into the 1940s. The *Iowa Volksblatt*, one of the first newspapers in town, continued to feature articles written in German until 1918 when it became the Postville Herald.<sup>58</sup> Two other churches, Community Presbyterian Church and St. Bridgett's Catholic Church, also served the community. The primarily white, Christian demographic of Postville experienced few changes until the late the 1980s.

A common theme throughout the interviews of long-time Postville residents was how sheltered the town had been while they were growing up. The only diversity in the area seemed to be between German and Norwegian heritage. Dona Peck grew up in Postville and recalled what it was like to live in Postville as a young girl in the 1940s and 50s. She said,

It was a typical little hometown where you'd walk down the streets and you'd say hi to everybody. You knew everybody, you knew where everybody lived. Of course I was a papergirl so naturally I knew where a lot of people lived. If somebody would come into town and ask you directions for someone's house, you would never know the street names because you never thought about it. You never needed to know the street names. You'd say well you go up to Fob's house and turn left and down to Brown's house which wouldn't help the stranger but that's how it is in a small town. You know the people rather than the signs. It was a friendly town but it was definitely not a diverse town at all. We had

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<sup>58</sup> "City of Postville, Iowa: Hometown to the World," City of Postville [on-line] <http://www.cityofpostville.com/index.html> (accessed December 1, 2013).

no diversity here at all. Not even black people or Hispanic or anything as I was growing up so we were kind of sheltered in that way.<sup>59</sup>

Long-time Postville resident, Judy Egeland, remembered what Postville was like when she moved there with her husband in 1970,

It was a very neat looking town. All the lawns were very neat and tidy. We bought our house through Toey Kelley....He said that Postville was the highest price property in the county, higher than the county seat, which is unusual because usually the county seat is the higher priced town. You could tell by the way people kept their lawns and everything that Postville was really an up and coming town at that time. All the stores, there was somebody in just about every store down town, a business. You could get just about anything that you wanted in Postville....It was just an all around nice town.<sup>60</sup>

Postville seemed to be like the quintessential rural Midwest community. With lawns cut short, surrounded by white picket fences, gardens blooming with flowers and the buds of would-be vegetables in the backyard. You could always find boys at the park playing a pickup game of baseball and kids chasing each other around the town on their bikes only to be discarded once they reached the city swimming pool. An ‘apple pie and corn knee high by the fourth of July’ kind of town. A delicious slice of the heartland.

Throughout the interviews with Postville residents emerged a picture of the hardworking men and thrifty, no nonsense women of Postville. Outside of town, if you drove a country mile in any direction it would not be uncommon to see acres upon acres of corn or soybeans, cattle grazing, or a couple of hog farms. Men who did not work on farms, worked at Hy-Grade in Postville, the Alamahee-Clayton Electric Cooperative, or

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<sup>59</sup> Dona Peck, interview by author, 27 October 2014 Postville, Iowa. Digital recording. In transcriptions, when someone says they are “thinking something” to themselves or they are taking about something they or someone else said, the font and font size will change to courier new 10.5 for easy identification.

<sup>60</sup> Judy Egeland, interview by author, 15 October 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

found employment in other industries. Life in Postville seemed to revolve around agriculture and Hy-Grade meatpacking was the main employer in town until the 1980s. Many of the workers at Hy-Grade were part of a union that strove to secure safe working conditions and fair wages for employees. Hy-Grade Food Products produced the famous Ball Park Franks that remains the only line of products still in production from the company. Farmwomen often keep the house, worked on the farm, and held jobs in town that subsidized work of their husbands. Women in town found work as teachers, in the local hospital, or in other industries nearby.

Barbara Herzmann grew up on farm in Iowa at a time when it was uncommon for women to leave the farm to work. About her mother she said,

She worked off the farm part time as I was growing up doing income tax, working for a lawyer in Edgewood. So I grew up with the idea that women worked off the farm. She worked very hard on the farm also, but then in the winter she would go off to this other job. I realize now what she was doing, she was bringing in an income.<sup>61</sup>

Barbara went on to study at Wartburg College and later settled down on a farm six miles outside of Postville with her husband. Here people still held traditional ideas about where the place of farmwomen should be. She always viewed her 30-year teaching career at Postville Schools as a positive in her life, but remembers that not everyone felt that way.

It was kind of rare here in the rural area where I live, there were not a lot of women who worked off the farm. I got a little negative feedback mainly in the form of teasing from some of the men in the neighborhood. My husband got a little bit of teasing from them saying must be nice having a wife that is a

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<sup>61</sup> Barbara Herzmann, interview by author, 27 October 2014, Luana, Iowa. Digital recording.

rich teacher which of course was never true. My income helped us, we bought this farm with a farm loan, so my income helped pay for this farm.<sup>62</sup>

As the twentieth century progressed into its final decades, life in Postville was about to change. According to census data, Postville's population steadily grew until 1980, but various factors including the economic downturn that began the farm crisis and the closing of the major employer in town, the Hy-Grade meatpacking plant, contributed to the decline in population from 1,546 in 1970 to 1,475 in 1980.<sup>63</sup> With the closing of Hy-Grade and the population decrease, Postville seemed to be on the brink of disaster like many other small towns in Iowa. Nearby, towns consolidated their schools and shut down businesses. Families moved away for jobs and easier access to services like hospitals and schools for their children. Gas stations closed. Once bustling towns died.

Postville was not destined to die, but in order to thrive, the town needed to embrace a huge change. It all began in 1987 when Aaron Rubashkin, a butcher, businessman, and Hassidic Jew from New York, purchased the Hy-Grade building and repurposed it into a kosher operation. Rubashkin's decision to enter into the niche market of kosher foods that serve Jewish believers following the strict dietary rules of *kashrut*, sheltered Agriprocessors from the harsh economic conditions of the 1980s. The new plant forever altered the demographic make-up of Postville first by establishing a Jewish

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<sup>62</sup> Barbara Herzmann, interview by author, 27 October 2014, Luana, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>63</sup> "Total Population for Iowa's Incorporated Places: 1850-2000," Iowa Data Center [on-line] <http://data.iowadatacenter.org/datatables/PlacesAll/plpopulation18502000.pdf> (accessed December 1, 2013).

community and later by hiring people from the Ukraine, Russia, Mexico, and Central America to work in the plant.<sup>64</sup>

Business owner and Postville resident Aaron Goldsmith has been a member of Postville's Jewish community since 1997 when he and his family moved to town. He remembered,

Postville was like a hidden secret, a little golden town that had Norman Rockwell values, and all the things that people dream about, a nice beautiful atmosphere, largely friendly people, virtually no crime, and affordable housing...It was a place where you could let your kids run out and play and you didn't have to worry every five minutes is someone going to kidnap them, is someone going to steal your car, or is someone going to break into your house?<sup>65</sup>

Goldsmith saw the Jewish community in Postville grow into what it is now. Goldsmith likened the burgeoning community to that of a company town reminiscent of Pullman Palace Car Company town or the Hershey's Company town. Typically, communities form because of a reliance on each other and the infrastructure of those towns grow with the community.<sup>66</sup> Goldsmith noted,

What happened in Postville is the complete reverse. There was a company that came that needed Jewish workers. They made a company Synagogue then they made a company kosher store so that the people would come... What you ended up with was a cross section of mostly blue-collar Orthodox Jewish people. Even though these are Rabbis working in the kosher plant, these are not rabbis that lead communities, these are rabbis that are expert in the laws of animal slaughter and preparing kosher meats. It's not your rank and file community. Imagine that Chicago was filled with only line workers from General Motors. Chicago would be a funny town.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Stephanie Simon, "In an Insular Town, a Jolt of Worldliness," *Los Angeles Times*, January 26, 1999, accessed November 26, 2014, <http://articles.latimes.com/1999/jan/26/news/mn-1743>.

<sup>65</sup> Aaron Goldsmith, interview by author, 19 November 2014. Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>66</sup> Grey, Devlin, and Goldsmith, *Postville, U.S.A.*, 24-26.

<sup>67</sup> Aaron Goldsmith, interview by author, 19 November 2014. Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.



While at first Rubashkin built the infrastructure to bring in people to Postville to work at the plant like the Synagogue and kosher deli, eventually members of the new community began making improvements and adding to the existing infrastructure. Recently the Synagogue was updated and a new school, the Yeshiva, was formed. As a result of these and other improvements the Jewish community in town is becoming more eclectic.

Barbara Herzmann remembered when Rubashkin bought Agriprocessors and the town began experiencing its first wave of migration. With an aging population, Postville had many widows living in big houses and looking to downsize. Many of the Jewish families had numerous children and were glad to find these large houses on the market.

They started renting or buying from the widows...these ladies then would drive back into town to see what their houses was like and were becoming upset. The lawns weren't being mowed, the flowers that they had left behind weren't being taken care of. If they had left an outside barbeque grill, that had been taken down, because of kosher rules, the families could not use those barbeque grills.<sup>68</sup>

Eventually, as dialog between Postville residents and the Jewish newcomers opened up, long-time residents began to realize that many of the newcomers were used to city living in New York. In the apartments or town houses they had lived in, they never had needed to keep a lawn, many had very little experience driving, and rarely did children ever get to use bicycles.<sup>69</sup> The change to life in rural Iowa must have been as difficult for some of the Jewish population in Postville as it was for the long-time residents.

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<sup>68</sup> Barbara Herzmann, interview by author, 27 October 2014, Luana, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>69</sup> Barbara Herzmann, interview by author, 27 October 2014, Luana, Iowa. Digital recording.

Little disagreements and mishaps between long-time residents and the newcomers did happen, but as time went on, the community settled into its new routine.<sup>70</sup> In a May 2006 issue of Postville Herald-Leader, the mayor Robert Penrod wrote, “A message from the Mayor” that was featured in the Opinion section. He wrote,

The City of Postville is a diverse community and will be for many years to come. As Time changes so does the way of life in Postville and everyone must try to get along as our cultures clash from time to time. The stares and mumblings are a constant day-to-day way of life in our fair city, and as the many long time Postville residents have said, “What Happened to our City?” It has grown and expanded. It is the City of Postville’s responsibility to try and keep things running between cultures and see that everyone gets along together to make Postville a wonderful community to live in.<sup>71</sup>

People grew used to seeing men walking around in large coats and hats, even in blistering heat. Eventually the various languages being spoken around them on the sidewalks, and in the grocery store and gas stations grew less noticeable.

Groups like the Diversity Council were formed around town to welcome the newcomers. The Diversity Council hosted events to inform longtime residents about the lifeways of the new arrivals and also to educate the newcomers of the habits of long time Postville residents.<sup>72</sup> While some people left town, discontented with the changes, others embraced the changes in town and the potential for growth in Postville’s future. For

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<sup>70</sup> “Weekend Fights Prompt Early Morning Council Meeting; Residents Ask for Assistance, Solutions to the Problems,” *Postville Herald-Leader*, August 15, 2007, 1, 6, accessed March 14, 2015, <http://postville.advantage-preservation.com/document/postville-herald-leader-2007-08-15-page-1>, this article talks about a special meeting that was called in Postville to address violence in the city and one person mentioned that residents of Postville may be leaving because of the fights that had been breaking out.

<sup>71</sup> Robert Penrod, “Message from the Mayor,” *Postville Herald-Leader*, May 10, 2006, 10, accessed March 14, 2015, <http://postville.advantage-preservation.com/document/postville-herald-leader-2006-05-10-page-11>.

<sup>72</sup> Pat Zidlicky, interview by author, 28 June 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital Recording.

Postville, welcoming the Jewish population into town also meant welcoming the new employees of Agriprocessors. Shortly after the plant was opened people from countries across the globe began pouring into Postville. Many people from Latin American countries like Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador poured into Postville to work in the plant, some who were fresh off the migrant trail.

In Postville, migrants from Guatemalan, like the Jewish community before them, began building infrastructure. They began holding a Spanish session of church at the Presbyterian Community Church, opened a Guatemalan store, sent their children to school at the Postville Community Schools, and became active members of the Postville Community. At the same time, many ties with communities in Guatemala remained. Phone calls, clothes, toys, money, hopes, dreams, and tears were shared across the two borders separating Postville and Guatemala.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> “New Business in Town,” *The Postville Herald-Leader*, January 25, 2006, 1, accessed November 25, 2014, <http://postville.advantage-preservation.com/document/postville-herald-leader-2006-01-25-page-1>.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE OF POSTVILLE, IOWA

With its chilling winters, blistering summers, and bleak economy, one may wonder why a sleepy town in Northern Iowa would be the destination of a migrant trail. As discussed in the previous chapter, scholars cite forced migration, economic or educational opportunities available at the destination, and the presence of social connections, family or friends, already established in the community as reasons for migration.<sup>1</sup> For Guatemalan migrants who left home in search of the American dream in the 1990's, Postville's new job market and safe community beckoned them north. As people from across the globe settled in Postville, the town found itself thrown into the national debate on immigration and has been living the immigrant experience within the U.S. ever since.<sup>2</sup> This chapter examines the changes in Postville as newcomers arrived, what it was like to live and work in Postville, and examines the experience of the largest worksite ICE (Immigration Customs Enforcement) raid to date in a small town from a community perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> Garni, "Mechanisms of Migration, 317, and Grey and Woodrick. "Unofficial Sister Cities, 364-375.

<sup>2</sup> Martínez, *Crossing Over*, 265, Martínez explores how migrants influence change in the U.S. and in their home towns throughout his book, but the chapter "Princes of Norwalk" follows a family that lives in a small Wisconsin town and work at a meat packing plant. He argues that Norwalk has had an immigration experience within the U.S. That experience runs parallel to the relationship between Kerry, a local girl, and Javier, a migrant from Mexico. Martínez writes, "Like most kids growing up in a small town, she'd dreamed of seeing the world beyond Norwalk. In the end though, the world came to her, in the shape of a man who arrived from Guanajuato." Their union produced a bouncing baby boy named Chance who was the perfect mix of both his parents. The baby is representative of the outcome of the immigration experience in the U.S. as different cultures come together a totally new, blended community arises.

### Changes in Postville

Economically, agriculture has dominated in Iowa. Not just corn and soybean farms, but dairy farms, cattle and hog growers, chicken and egg farms, meatpacking plants, John Deere and other tractor supply businesses, and Monsanto are all components of Iowa's agricultural industry. Postville's economy has long centered around farming, dairy farming, seed supply stores, and processing plants. In the mid 1900s Hy-Grade and the turkey processing plant were the main employer in town. Many of the workers were part of a union that guaranteed safe working conditions and fair wages. Harold Peck, a life long resident of Postville recounted what it was like to work at Hy-Grade during our interview.

It was a very good job at the time. I worked there from 1960 to 1979. I was a salesman and a deliveryman in a truck, pedal truck. I worked on straight commission. It was a very good job for that time. I covered close to 1000 miles a week in Northeast Iowa [delivering] quarters of beef and boneless beef to grocery stores and locker plants.<sup>3</sup>

Although the work was hard, Harold emphasized how good of a job it had been. This emphasis is in line with an idea many people born in America share, that working in a meatpacking plant today is typically not considered a good job because of low wages, long hours, and how dangerous it is. When I asked him if he knew what it was like inside the plant he answered,

Yes, I loaded my own truck every morning so yeah I know what it was like inside. We slaughtered about 600 head of cattle a day. We had a boning room and of course the loading dock. Everything was shipped, in the early years it was shipped

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<sup>3</sup> Harold Peck, interview by author, 28 June 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

by rail most of it, and then later, in the last ten years or so, it went mainly by semi, except for what we delivered locally in pedal trucks.<sup>4</sup>



*Figure 1* Harold Peck in front of his Hy-Grade pedal truck in Postville, Iowa, 1962. He was responsible for loading the truck daily and delivering the products throughout Northeast Iowa.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Harold Peck, interview by author, 28 June 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>5</sup> Dona Peck, Fortepan Iowa [on-line] <http://fortepan.us/#> (accessed April 10, 2015). In the spirit of full disclosure, Harold Peck is also my maternal grandfather. He and his wife Dona, were both born and raised in or very near Postville. They were high school sweethearts who decided to stay in Postville to raise their family. I have spent countless weekends in Postville, and through my grandparents, I have gained access and a trust with the interviewees that would have been difficult to establish if I were a complete outsider with no connections.

Out of economic necessity, Hy-Grade closed its doors in 1980.<sup>6</sup> The town seemed destined to become another casualty of the farm crisis, a midwestern ghost town with no economic prospects. I asked Harold what it was like for the Postville community when the Hy-Grade plant closed and wondered what happened to all the people employed there.

It was very bad for the community. We had about 135 local men working there. A lot of them were young men off of farms. Good, hard working people. It took many, many dollars out of the community that's for sure. A few of the older people were able to retire, but some they just went to different plants around. Some of them went to John Deere or places like that, wherever they could find work. Moved out of town, some of them.<sup>7</sup>

Everything changed in 1987 when Aaron Rubashkin purchased the Hygrade building and repurposed it into a kosher operation. He began hiring people from the Ukraine, Russia, Mexico, and Central America to work in the plant.<sup>8</sup> Because Agriprocessors had no union affiliation, many Iowans did not want the jobs available at the plant. The low wages and long, grueling hours of work, led to a high turnover rates, and managers scrambled to fill vacancies. The workers willing to take on meatpacking jobs tended to be those with few other employment prospects. Recent immigrants to the United States and undocumented workers with few options fit the bill. This primarily white, Christian town began changing quickly. As Pastor Bracket of the Lutheran Church noted,

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<sup>6</sup> Camayd-Freixas, *US Immigration Reform and Its Global Impact*, 18, and Grey, Devlin, and Goldsmith, *Postville, U.S.A.*, 16.

<sup>7</sup> Harold Peck, interview by author, 28 June 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>8</sup> Simon, "In an Insular Town, a Jolt of Worldliness."

Far before a lot of other communities saw this happening, Postville led the way with trying to welcome and trying to incorporate diverse populations into the community. That hasn't always gone smoothly, and for the people who were here already and who grew up here, it was a difficult transition. As happens in other places, people had to make a decision. Do we stay here and make it work with the changes that are happening around us or do we leave and try to find some other place where we are more comfortable? There were some balances that had to be reached. But in the end, for the most part, those that are still around decided that it's worth trying to make our community work...I think the other choice for Postville, if they hadn't opened the plant, if they hadn't embraced some of the diversity that happened, is to just die like a lot of rural communities of this size have done over the past few decades.<sup>9</sup>

As the town adjusted to the demographic change, many community members were proud of the diversity in their small town. One Postville shirt designed for the annual Taste of Postville celebration exhibits a globe with the United States flag at the top. Surrounding the globe are the flags of every country that was represented in Postville at the time, including Germany, Sweden, and Norway, Israel, Poland, Mexico, Albania, Bosnia, Czech Republic, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Russia, Philippines, Bangladesh, and Guatemala.<sup>10</sup>

Over the last quarter century the state of Iowa has seen a demographic shift towards a growing Latino population. The trend continues today as new migrants and Latinos born in Iowa settled down and raise families. Throughout Iowa, the Caucasian population is aging with a death rate larger than the birth rate and an exodus of the young

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<sup>9</sup> Steve Brackett, interview by author, 9 August 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>10</sup> "Taste of Postville: City of Postville 125-Year Anniversary," The Postville Project [on-line], <http://cdm15897.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/post/id/474/rec/2> (accessed October 1, 2014).



and educated out of state.<sup>11</sup> Rural areas and small Iowa towns like Postville have historically had little demographic change and have not experienced the ethnic diversity that characterizes metropolitan areas. Harold Peck explained that Postville was secluded from the demographic change seen at the national level until Agriprocessors opened.

Before the plant opened up there... ever since I have known anything about this town, it has been primarily Norwegian, German nationality. There were no other nationalities or there were no blacks or anything in Postville when I was in high school and if someone like that showed up in town it was very unusual. I know people that lived here thirty years ago that left, my son for one that has been out in Colorado for thirty years, he can't believe it when he does come back here the difference the way the town looks. We've been here all along so we don't necessarily think that much about it. We just kind of think, okay so they dress a little different or whatever the case might be.<sup>12</sup>

This type of experience is not uncommon in rural Iowa, considering that in the 2013 census 92.5 percent of Iowans identified as “White,” while 5.5 percent answered “Hispanic or Latino” and only 3.3 percent answered “Black.”<sup>13</sup> These percentages are exacerbated in small towns whose populations are almost exclusively white. There are a few outliers in Iowa. For example, Postville, West Liberty, and Columbus Junction, who all had populations under 2,500 in 2010, reported Latino population percentages between 32 and 52 percent.<sup>14</sup> These towns exhibit experiences similar to larger cities, however, in small towns the experience is much more personal.

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<sup>11</sup> Norman Waltzer, *The American Midwest: Managing Change in Rural Transition* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Harold Peck, interview by author, 28 June 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>13</sup> “Iowa: State and County QuickFacts,” United States Census Bureau [on-line] <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/19000.html> (accessed November 15, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> “Postville, Iowa: Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics and 2010 Demographic Profile Data,” U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 [on-line], <http://data.iowadatacenter.org/DemographicProfiles/2010DP1/plPostvilleDP12010.pdf> (accessed November 20, 2014), “Columbus Junction, Iowa: Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics and 2010 Demographic Profile Data,” U.S. Census

In towns with less than 2,500 people, it is highly likely that interactions between ethnic groups occur on regular basis. It is probable that people shop at the same local grocery store, attend the same school, and maybe even attend the same church. In big cities it is possible for ethnic groups to maintain enclaves of people from similar backgrounds like barrios, Chinatowns, and little Italy's. This tidy sectioning off of ethnic populations is just not possible in small towns in Iowa where housing is limited, demographic change is more recent, and when a portion of the population is transient. In Postville, many interviewees mentioned how everyone was mixed together in town. Salat Elmi the former Somali translator at the Postville High School related his experience of living in Postville. He said,

If you live in Des Moines you will see this is the Hispanic community, this is the Somali community, we don't have this. If you live in this house, the house next to you could be a Somali or someone from Ukraine, or someone from Russia, someone from anywhere... all these people do not have anything in common, everything is totally different. The only thing they have in common is everyone wants to live peacefully, they respect each other. Before Postville, I used to live in Seattle. It's a big city... if you see all this, it's not going to surprise you. But in a very small town, with 2,000 population... you see all these people from different countries and you are going to be shocked. I have a feeling other towns, other cities like Waterloo, Des Moines, or Iowa City, they wish they had this. They wish.<sup>15</sup>

The interaction between people in small town Iowa creates the possibilities for learning and friendship, but also tension and confrontation. The idea of being neighborly is an

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Bureau, 2010 [on-line], <http://data.iowadatascenter.org/DemographicProfiles/2010DP1/plColumbusJunctionDP12010.pdf> (accessed November 20, 2014), and "West Liberty, Iowa: Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics and 2010 Demographic Profile Data," U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 [on-line], <http://data.iowadatascenter.org/DemographicProfiles/2010DP1/plWestLibertyDP12010.pdf> (accessed November 20, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Salat Elmi, interview by author, 31 August 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

important value everywhere, but especially in small town Iowa where nearly every one knows each other and interaction among residents occurs frequently.

### Guatemalans in Postville

The first Guatemalans began trickling into Postville around 1998, many from the same villages of El Rosario and San Jose Calderas. Many Guatemalans were already established in the Midwest in places like St. Louis, Missouri, Omaha, Nebraska, and Sioux City, Iowa.<sup>16</sup> Although a peace agreement had been brokered in Guatemala in 1996, the social and economic conditions had not improved.<sup>17</sup> Guatemala continued to be plagued by violence and unemployment or underemployment, and a steady stream of people left for the United States. Once the initial wave of Guatemalans settled in Postville, many encouraged their family and friends to join them in Postville.<sup>18</sup> Guatemalans began coming from other towns like San Antonio Aguas Calientes, San Miguel Duenas, Patzun, and Chimchoy San Andrés Itzapa.

Steve Bracket, the current Pastor of the St. Paul Lutheran church remembered what Postville was like when he first came to town.

I came in 2005 and at that time things were kind of settling in. The largest population that we had at that time was Guatemalan. People were starting to buy houses, their kids were going to the school, they were really becoming an

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<sup>16</sup> Mark A. Grey, Anne C. Woodrick, Michele Yehieli, and James Hoelscher, “The New Iowans: A companion Book to the PBS Miniseries *The New Americans*,” University of Northern Iowa New Iowans Program and Iowa Public Television, 2005 [on-line] <http://www.bcs.uni.edu/icili/pdfs/new-iowans-series-text.pdf> (accessed November 25, 2014)

<sup>17</sup> Smith and Offit, “Confronting Violence in Postwar Guatemala,” 2-3.

<sup>18</sup> Jennifer Cooley, interview by author, 21 April 2014, Cedar Falls, Iowa, and Herrera, *Dispatches from Postville*.

important part of our community. There was a Guatemalan grocery store and restaurant.<sup>19</sup>

Cesar Jochola opened Tonita's Express, a Guatemalan store in Postville that sold imported pop, candy, fruits, beer and cigarettes. Jochola would also travel to Guatemala twice a month delivering packages to friends and family of the 300 plus Guatemalans living in Postville at the time.<sup>20</sup> A Guatemalan restaurant, Restaurante Rinconcito Guatemalteco, was opened beside the Tonita's Express. Many Guatemalans began worshipping in Community Presbyterian Church on Friday evenings and Saturday afternoons. Pastor Gary Catterson estimated that usually over 100 people would attend each service.<sup>21</sup>

Postville teachers noticed the increase of Guatemalan students entering the school. Barbara Herzmann, a retired third grade teacher, remembered an encounter with the family of one of her Guatemalan students.

I had a student from Guatemala, this was a year or so before the [2008] raid, who was having learning difficulties. We were trying to get assistance for him... We were working through the steps and one of the final points is to have an interview with the family. I was present with the parents and the little boy. One question was asked of the father, what is your goal for your son. I expected this man was going to say I want my son to get a high paying job. But this man said my son wants to be an artist, I want my son to do in life what makes him happy. That blew my stereotype out of the water. Then the interviewer asked the little boy what is your favorite thing about America? He said shoes. In Guatemala my feet bled. I remember thinking wow, I can't deny this boy anything. I just can't.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Steve Brackett, interview by author, 9 August 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>20</sup> "New Business in Town," *The Postville Herald-Leader*, January 25, 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Gary Catterson, interview by author, 15 October 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>22</sup> Barbara Herzmann, interview by author, 27 October 2014, Luana, Iowa. Digital recording.

Interactions between Postville residents and Guatemalans often shattered stereotypes portrayed by anti immigrant rhetoric in the media, as was the case for Barbara and her student. Judy Egeland, a life-long resident of Northeast Iowa and Vice President of the Postville Diversity Council, shared her feelings about the newcomers to Postville saying, “These people have the same hopes and dreams we do. They want the same things for their family, better things. I always said it was just lucky God put our body and soul together in somebody that was in this country.”<sup>23</sup> Many townspeople recognized that they shared goals in life with the newcomers, an understanding that led to open minded attitude towards the newcomers in some.

Judy noticed another similarity between the newcomers and the longterm Postville residents. Many residents grew up on farms and had experience gardening. She pushed for a community garden to be established in Postville, and in 2000 the city started digging after receiving a grant. People from Mexico, Ukraine, Russia, and Guatemala had garden plots beside long time Postville residents. Judy described how she sold the idea of a community garden,

When we were going to start a community garden I said we need one, because you don't have to know someone's language to say come here, see this is my tomato. You can show them your tomato. Everybody speaks the same language when you are in a garden.<sup>24</sup>

One day while harvesting peaches in the community gardens, Judy noticed a lady deftly balancing on the top rung of a stepladder.

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<sup>23</sup> Judy Egeland, interview by author, 15 October 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>24</sup> Judy Egeland, interview by author, 15 October 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

They were picking peaches and she was picking peaches with both hands. I said she's picked peaches before. Mrs. Timmerson said yes these are the exact peaches they grow in Guatemala on her parents' farm, so she was really happy to see them here.<sup>25</sup>

The gardens and the peaches were a little slice of home in the heartland for migrants from Guatemala and a way for the all of the Postville community to connect through the shared interest of growing food.

As more Guatemalans moved to Postville, the townspeople began to understand what life was like in Guatemala. In 2005, the Postville Herald-Leader ran a story detailing the history of Guatemala. The column was an annual report written by Hall Roberts for the annual Taste of Postville celebration and detailed the history of one of the countries represented by the numerous nationalities in Postville. The article portrayed the violence, social unrest, and economic insecurity that forced many Guatemalans to make their way north to Postville.<sup>26</sup>

As a child, I attended the annual Taste of Postville celebration whenever I could. I can still remember the smell of exotic food that accosted my sheltered senses as we meandered past the booths of vendors. There were games, parades, dances, and singing. People were dressed in a million vibrant colors, calling out to you, hawking their wares. At one Taste of Postville celebration I decided to purchase two beautiful handcrafted dolls. They were five dollars apiece, but the ladies enticed me with a deal, two dolls for

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<sup>25</sup> Judy Egeland, interview by author, 15 October 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>26</sup> Hall Roberts, "History of Countries Postvillians Call Home Displayed at Taste of Postville Each Year," *Postville Herald-Leader*, August 24, 2005, 10, accessed November 26, 2014, <http://postville.advantage-preservation.com/document/postville-herald-leader-2005-08-24-page-10>. The report seems to depict the Civil War as a battle between the government, the "good guys," and the guerillas, the "bad guys," a depiction that probably upset any Guatemalans who read it. Roberts may have framed the history this way because of the way Iowans generally understand government and authority, which is discussed below.

eight dollars! I still have the two Mayan doll ornaments that stand about three inches tall. Nearly a decade and a half later, I realized these dolls came from communities like La Esperanza in Guatemala City that were settled by rural Guatemalans displaced from their homes by the internal conflict. The ladies that made the dolls were members of an organization titled *Unidas Para Vivir Mejor* (UPAVIM), United for a Better Life, and very similar dolls are still for sale today.<sup>27</sup>

### Dealing with Diversity in Postville

Rapid demographic change in small towns like Postville spurred many to form organizations that educated residents about the cultures present in their community. Postville's Diversity Council was formed and held public presentations by residents with varying ethnicities or professors from nearby Luther College or the University of Northern Iowa. They also hosted social events and had movie showings that encouraged public engagement and promoted cultural understanding across ethnic boundaries.

Pat Zidlicky moved to Postville in 1994 and is the current president and joined the Diversity Council shortly afterward. She is currently the president of the Diversity Council. Pat enjoys learning about different cultures and languages, which pushed her to become involved with the Diversity Council and ESL (English as a Second Language), now ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), classes offered through NICC

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<sup>27</sup> "La Esperanza," UPAVIM: *Unidas Para Vivir Mejor*, <http://www.upavim.org/about-us/la-esperanza/> (accessed November 26, 2014), and "Maya Doll Ornaments," UPAVIM: *Unidas Para Vivir Mejor*, [http://www.upavimcrafts.org/Mayan-Doll-Ornament-\\_p\\_225.html](http://www.upavimcrafts.org/Mayan-Doll-Ornament-_p_225.html) (accessed November 26, 2014).

(North Iowa Community College) out of Calmar, Iowa. Pat described some of the activities held by the Diversity Council.

One was the Postville Diversity Gathering that was held at a park. We had people bring food and we had kid's activities. We had sharing of different cultural games, activities, holidays, that sort of thing... We would maybe provide the drink, and just get acquainted. We'd have film festivals at this community center. We did one for the Jewish community... We had one probably for the Hispanics. When they would complete the ESL classes we would have a celebration, like a graduation. That was always good because it was rewarding for them. We wanted to let them know that we were proud of that. They would bring their families, we would have entertainment there and a speaker. We'd let them speak on their experience of taking the classes. It was always a fun time.<sup>28</sup>

Many people were involved in these events and worked hard to support community cohesion. Along with ESOL classes for Russian or Spanish speakers, many Postville English speakers signed up for Spanish classes. Among the residents I interviewed, Pat Zidlicky and Harold and Dona Peck mentioned the classes, but they only remember a few words and phrases. Pat noted,

It was a brief six weeks is all, but it was taught by a woman that was married to a Hispanic man. She probably speaks it fluently. It was good, it was just too short... They really should have that for adults. As much as we have ESL for the immigrants, they should have some of those classes for us. I know they are supposed to learn English, but it wouldn't hurt us to learn their language as well.<sup>29</sup>

This excerpt represents the complexity of navigating the current immigration system for rural Iowans. They are bombarded with conservative rhetoric that claims the official language of the United States should be English and that anyone who comes here legally or "illegally" should learn to speak it. At the same time, the strong commitment to community involvement and the ideology of being neighborly prompts them to do what

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<sup>28</sup> Pat Zidlicky, interview by author, 28 June 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital Recording.

<sup>29</sup> Pat Zidlicky, interview by author, 28 June 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital Recording.



they can to understand newcomers and to try to make the transition to life in Postville easier for them.

The complexities of dealing with the immigration system are further compounded for Iowans who value the idea of being a good citizen which generally means following the law, working hard, giving back to the community, and being nice or neighborly. Many Iowans, especially older, rural Iowans, were raised on farms where they learned to work very hard and respect the authority of their parents, the law, and the bible.<sup>30</sup> The national dialogue surrounding immigration has labeled all undocumented workers “illegals” who threaten national security and are just looking for handouts in the U.S. This dialogue is promoted by some media outlets and politicians has affected the psyche of many Iowans.<sup>31</sup> However, those same Iowans were raised to show respect by their parents and by the proliferation of Christian morals in the Midwest. They are often confronted with a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, immigrants many be breaking the law, therefore disrespecting authority, but on the other hand, the immigrants are their neighbors and deserve respect.

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<sup>30</sup> Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, *Childhood on the Farm: Work, Play, and Coming of Age in the Midwest* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), Mary C. Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University press, 1995), and Carol Bodensteiner, *Growing Up Country: Memories of an Iowa Farm Girl* (Des Moines: Rising Sun Press, 2008).

<sup>31</sup> Chris Moody, “On the Border with Obama’s Immigration Foes,” CNN Politics, November 25, 2014 [online], <http://www.cnn.com/2014/11/25/politics/king-bachmann-travel-to-the-border/> (accessed November 25, 2014), and William Petrowski, “King Breezes into 7<sup>th</sup> Term With Big Win Over Mower,” *Des Moines Register*, November 5, 2014, accessed November 20, 2014, <http://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/elections/2014/11/04/iowa-fourth-congressional-district-jim-mowrer-steve-king-results/18489903/>. A portion of Iowans must share similar viewpoints to Republican Representative Steve King as he was re-elected for his 7<sup>th</sup> term by the 4<sup>th</sup> District of Iowa, a rural northern Iowa district.

Barbara Herzmann described how she dealt with the Iowa values of respecting authority, while also loving your neighbor, that often become conflicting ideologies within the context of the current immigration system.

It was not a secret that this was going on. We knew that there were illegals. At first, at school when I became aware of that, it bothered me, it upset me. I knew it was against the law. I was raised by a family where you did not break the law. It was explained to us that in the state of Iowa you educate every child that is in your school district, so I let go of it. When I saw the faces of those children, there is not one of them that I would have denied an education.<sup>32</sup>

While some in Postville have held on to the belief that all “illegal immigrants” are in the U.S. to steal jobs and benefit from government welfare, others see immigrants in a different light, as people working hard for a better life, people providing an education for their children, people with very few options. For Judy Egeland, vice president of the Diversity Council, her friendship with the newcomers has caused a stir among some of her friends who still harbor ill will toward the new Postville residents who may or may not be ‘illegal.’

I know I have gotten a name with some of my friends that well Judy likes all the foreign people. Well, I like people as long as they are good people no matter where they come from. I don't have to know actually whether they are legal or illegal, I don't ask them that question. That doesn't make any difference to me if they are a good person, but everybody is different with that.<sup>33</sup>

Overall, Iowans are a religious group, and many small towns like Postville have three or more Christian churches.<sup>34</sup> While the legality of the immigrants was a

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<sup>32</sup> Barbara Herzmann, interview by author, 27 October 2014, Luana, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>33</sup> Judy Egeland, interview by author, 15 October 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>34</sup> Postville had three churches in town prior to 1980, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Community Presbyterian Church, and St. Bridget's Catholic Church. The Jewish population founded their Synagogue upon arriving

contentious subject among many Postville residents, the churches in Postville welcomed the newcomers with open arms. St. Bridget's Catholic Church held services in Spanish, and Guatemalans worshipped at Community Presbyterian Church. Harold Peck is very active in the Presbyterian Church and explained,

At our church, the Presbyterian Church, the Guatemalans had been using our church for about five years before the raid... When it first started we had about eight to ten young Guatemalan men. By the time of the raid we were having 75 to 100 families, men women and kids... They would hold their service on Saturday afternoon or Friday evening... It was good that they were able to come in there and have their services and everything.<sup>35</sup>

When church-going residents saw that many of the immigrants shared their zeal for religion, the acceptance among community members increased. While the services catering to English and Spanish speakers were often separate, Pastors and Priests could act as go-betweens for those who could not handily communicate because of a language barrier. Other pursuits like sending their children to the Postville schools, buying houses, and generally supporting the local community and economy spread good will throughout Postville's population. While all the residents of Postville may have bought their gas at the same station and drank their beers at the same bar, the one thing that separated long time Postville residents from the more recent immigrants was work.

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in Postville and today numerous churches dot storefronts downtown where people of Pentecostal and Islamic faith can worship.

<sup>35</sup> Harold Peck, interview by author, 28 June 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording. Pastor Gary Catterson later said over 100 Guatemalans would be present at each service, so the number of families was probably smaller than 75-100, but it is possible that there were many small or single person families worshipping.

### Work in Postville

The majority of immigrants in Postville went to work at Agriprocessors. Getting papers, such as work permits and social security cards, sorted out was the first step in getting hired. This process was usually taken care of by human resource employees and managers and was not made clear to the new hires. The employers took money out of workers' paychecks periodically for new papers, supposedly to keep them legal, and every month for rent and utilities if they lived in an apartment or trailer owned by Agriprocessors.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, income tax and social security was taken out of the workers checks, as well as costs for job related supplies and safety gear.<sup>37</sup> Shifts lasted between 12 and 16 hours a day, six days a week. Workers received between six and seven dollars an hour and they were rarely paid for overtime. Working conditions were horrible.<sup>38</sup>

At first only single men had come to Postville, eventually whole families were arriving. Children of Agriprocessors workers attended Postville schools.<sup>39</sup> One year the principal asked the staff to go on a tour of the plant. He was adamant that they needed to

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<sup>36</sup> Jennifer Ludden, "At Iowa Meatpacking Plant, New Workers Complain," *National Public Radio*, September 2, 2008 [on-line] <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=94203311> (accessed November 26, 2014), although this report is after the raid, one new worker at Agriprocessors explains the condition of the apartment and says, "They treat us like illegal immigrants. You crowd a bunch of people in one house, you know. See, illegal immigrants couldn't complain because they are illegal." Matthew Putney, "Photos: Postville Raid Archive Photos," *Waterloo Cedar Falls Courier*, May 12, 2013, accessed November 27, 2014, [http://wcfcourier.com/photos-postville-raid-archive-photos/collection\\_980b1d42-bafe-11e2-968b-0019bb2963f4.html#1](http://wcfcourier.com/photos-postville-raid-archive-photos/collection_980b1d42-bafe-11e2-968b-0019bb2963f4.html#1), photo number two shows the bedroom of one Agriprocessors owned apartment for workers.

<sup>37</sup> Camayd-Freixas, *US Immigration Reform and Its Global Impact*, 127.

<sup>38</sup> Gibbs and Hernández, *Shattered Dreams*, 95-97, 128-130, 169-183, 210-218, 269-278.

<sup>39</sup> Agri is the slang term used by many people from Postville and workers in the plant and is short for Agriprocessors.

see the work that the students' parents were doing. Barbara Herzmann remembers feeling apprehensive about the trip,

A lot of us didn't really want to go, because it's a slaughter house. Now I am a farm wife, I grew up and my mother butchered chickens, so I understand. I eat meat. But the sheer size of it, I wasn't quite sure of... I wear glasses so I remember we'd go in and out of cool areas into warmer humid areas. I remember my glasses fogged over so I wasn't always clearly seeing things. I remember there being plastic tarps overhead filled with water and water was dripping so it was damp working conditions. I remember we came in a side door, I don't even know if there is a main door. We came in through one of the changing rooms. I remember as we were in there thinking if the lights go I'll never find my way out. I had no idea where the exits are, I couldn't see windows. That was upsetting to me. I remember these overhead lines where chickens were hanging by their feet. I remember one room, an entire room was full of people. The chickens would come in with their feathers and the chicken would come out the other end with head off, feathers off, gutted, just the feet left on. I remember being amazed at how many people were doing that. I know I thought I couldn't work here, I couldn't do that repetitive motion over and over for eight hours. We were aware by then that there is an eight hour day, but many people were working extra hours. We found out later that they were not being paid overtime. I remember standing in one area while the guide was saying something and my glasses were kind of foggy. I looked to my left and there was this rolling rack. I remember thinking why do I see scrub brush handles on this rack? I took my glasses off and looked closer and the rack was full of tongues hanging on hooks. I am grateful that our principal made us do it...It gave me a real appreciation for the sacrifices these moms and dads were making so that their kids could have school, that their kids could have a better life. I am very glad that we did it.<sup>40</sup>

This type of guided tour seems so unusual, but it served to inform the teachers and other community members via word of mouth about what working in the plant was really like.

Barb reiterates that she was grateful and glad that they took the tour. The understanding of working conditions in Agriprocessors undermined the power of anti-immigrant

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<sup>40</sup> Barbara Herzmann, interview by author, 27 October 2014, Luana, Iowa. Digital recording.

rhetoric that ‘immigrants were looking for handouts’ and that ‘they steal our jobs’ for many people in Postville who now knew the truth.

In the book, *Shattered Dreams: The Story of a Historic ICE Raid in the Words of the Detainees*, Virginia Gibbs and Luz Maria Hernández were able to record the testimonies of people who were working in the plant at the time of the raid. Julio was born in 1990 in Guatemala and came to work in Postville in 2007. He was underage at the plant and related how his supervisor saw him as an easy target.

When he would pass by he would hit me on the back of the head. He hit hard enough to make my head jerk forward. I have a very short neck, that’s the way I was born. I can’t hold my head upright. It’s a handicap. The supervisor Carlos would try to straighten my head. “Hold your head up, you stupid ox,” he would say. He would hold my head with his two hands and pull it straight as hard as he could. That made me angry, and I felt ashamed because the men that I worked with her watching.<sup>41</sup>

Many workers were also exposed to this kind of degrading treatment and language.

Throughout the testimonies recorded by Gibbs and Hernández, the feelings of humiliation, shame, pain, and sorrow are prevalent in almost all of the interviews.

Under federal law, meatpacking plants cannot hire workers under the age of 18 because of the risks of the job.<sup>42</sup> Agriprocessors employed underage teenagers like Luisa Lopez who started working at age 17, Yesenia Cordero who dropped out of ninth grade to help her family and her newborn child, and 17-year-old Julio mentioned above. Minors were expected to do the same amount of grueling work as adults, and often worked with

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<sup>41</sup> Gibbs and Hernández, *Shattered Dreams*, 67-68.

<sup>42</sup> Occupational Safety & Health Administration, “Safety and Health Guide for the Meatpacking Industry,” United States Department of Labor [on-line] <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3108/osha3108.html> (accessed November 28, 2014).

sharp knives, dangerous chemicals, and heavy machinery.<sup>43</sup> People in Postville either knew about it or suspected it and the authorities knew about the underage workers too.

Months before the raid, a search warrant was served at our school. I do not remember who served the search warrant, I don't know what government agency it was. I know that they were searching for student records. Specifically that they were looking for records of birth certificates. We assumed that they were investigating underage people working at the plant. Everyone was aware that there were underage kids working at the packing plant. We knew that kids were dropping out of school and working there. I personally know a woman who called a government agency, I don't know if it was OSHA, I don't know it was the Department of Labor, but she called them and said there are underage kids working at the plant and was told we don't have enough investigators to go there. She made another phone call and said there is an underage boy working with knives on the kill line and again was told we don't have enough to investigate it.<sup>44</sup>

Along with underage employment and general mistreatment of the workers, women reported being sexually abused by their bosses who wanted sexual favors for raises or shift changes. Women who resisted their employers were punished at work, physically hurt, or fired.<sup>45</sup> A recent Frontline production titled "Rape in the Fields" followed the stories of immigrant women working in agribusiness. One young woman who wished to remain anonymous recounted her harrowing experiences at

Agriprocessors,

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<sup>43</sup> Henry C. Jackson, "Teens Tell of Perilous Agriprocessors Conditions," *Waterloo Cedar Falls Courier*, August 08, 2008, accessed May 1, 2014, [http://wcfcourier.com/news/local/teens-tell-of-perilous-agriprocessors-conditions/article\\_39419ab6-de17-52c3-a293-7450d2e54384.html](http://wcfcourier.com/news/local/teens-tell-of-perilous-agriprocessors-conditions/article_39419ab6-de17-52c3-a293-7450d2e54384.html), and Jeff Reinitz, "Former Workers Testify to Work Conditions," *Waterloo Cedar Falls Courier*, May 11, 2010, accessed May 1, 2014, [http://wcfcourier.com/news/local/former-agriprocessors-workers-testify-to-work-conditions/article\\_00b6cf4c-5c59-11df-ab26-001cc4c03286.html](http://wcfcourier.com/news/local/former-agriprocessors-workers-testify-to-work-conditions/article_00b6cf4c-5c59-11df-ab26-001cc4c03286.html), and Iowa Department of Labor Services, "Agriprocessors Inc. Criminal Complaint," The Postville Project, 2008 [on-line], <http://www.postvilleproject.org/items/show/463> (accessed May 7, 2014).

<sup>44</sup> Barbara Herzmann, interview by author, 27 October 2014, Luana, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>45</sup> Grant Shulte, "Teenager Alleges Sex Harassment at Agriprocessors," *The Des Moines Register*, December 2, 2009, accessed May 7, 2014, <http://archive.desmoinesregister.com/article/20091203/NEWS/912030368/Teenager-alleges-sex-harassment-Agriprocessors>.

He harassed me all the time. He would try to touch me. He would say ugly things to me. I was afraid to loose my job because we needed money to pay back the coyote, we needed to pay our debts. On one occasion he forced me to do something that I didn't want to do. Intimate things.<sup>46</sup>

This woman was not alone. At least two-dozen workers admitted to being sexually harassed, assaulted, or raped by their supervisors at Agriprocessors. Because of the fast detention, trial, and deportation of the workers after the Agriprocessors raid, other women were unable to tell their stories and the perpetrators who committed the crimes, many of whom were also undocumented workers arrested during the raid, were deported and will never face justice.

### The Raid

For Postville residents, remembering the raid brings feelings of sadness and anger even after a nearly seven year cooling period. On the day of May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008 as ICE stormed into town, the feelings of fear and confusion reigned in the people at work in the plant. The fear and confusion was also felt by people that worked other shifts at Agri, the children at the school, the teachers caring for the children, and the rest of the Postville residents who never saw it coming and didn't know what hit them.

Although people knew that FEMA and some other governmental agencies were transforming the National Cattle Congress in Waterloo, the area used to show and house animals at county and local fairs, into some sort of holding area, they were unsure what it was for. Workers at the site were tight-lipped about what the facility would be used for

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<sup>46</sup> Frontline, "Rape in the Fields."



and would not disclose which governmental agency they were working for. Some people guessed it might be a natural disaster drill or some type of military training. Others remembered the 2006 Swift&Co. raid on Marshalltown and thought about the nearby communities known to have undocumented workers. Meetings were held in Waterloo to inform immigrants about their rights, but the meeting scheduled to take place in Postville was too late.<sup>47</sup> St. Paul's Lutheran Pastor Steve Brackett remembered the time around the raid,

The Sunday before I had a call from pastor Gary Catterson who is the pastor at the Presbyterian Church here in town. He had said he had received a call from a pastor in the Cedar Falls-Waterloo area that they had heard rumor that there was going to be a raid in Postville the next day and that ICE was gathering at the Cattle Congress. I had no doubt that ICE was gathering at the Cattle Congress but we had heard before many times that oh there's going to be a raid, or there might be a raid. You kind of take it with a grain of salt and think well it may be somebody jumping to a conclusion, but still a call was made to the Hispanic ministry at St. Bridget's [Catholic Church] just to say this might be happening<sup>48</sup>

The morning shift began at 6:00 am and the workers who filed into Agriprocessors had no idea that roughly four hours later everything would change. At 10 am, helicopters, buses, police cars, and SUV's filled with ICE (Immigration Customs Enforcement) and other government officials entered Postville. They headed straight to Agriprocessors with

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<sup>47</sup> Grey, Devlin, and Goldsmith, *Postville, U.S.A.*, 53-59, and "Cattle Congress Detention Facility for Postville Raid," *Gazetteonline*, May 13, 2008 [on-line], <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAm-H8B514g> (accessed May 3, 2014) While the facilities shown in this video do not look horrible, testimony from people who were detained there say they were fenced in, crowded, and held under constant supervision. The games, television, and computers shown were not for the detained workers, but for the guards.

<sup>48</sup> Steve Brackett, interview by author, 9 August 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

the intent of arresting as many undocumented workers as they could find.<sup>49</sup> When the raid began, the town sprang to action. Pastor Brackett remembered his first actions,

I jumped in my car right away and drove around...I wanted to get a sense of the activity that was going on. Most of it seemed to be isolated to the plant, it didn't look like they were going through the community at all. I was kind of amazed at the level of response... seeing how armed the police were, I thought *hmm really? Sniper rifles?* From what I could tell it looked like possibly some machine guns... To me it looked like overkill in terms of the amount of police presence and federal officials presence. But I thought they were just trying to keep everybody safe.<sup>50</sup>

Unlike the Iowans' general trust and respect for government and police, the long history of violence in Guatemala along with the clashes with Border Patrol during many of the migrants' journey to the U.S., had imbued within them a deep apprehension of authority figures. Further, because of the degrading treatment they encountered throughout the migration process and the stigma of being labeled "illegal," many of the migrants felt that they had no rights in the U.S. and live clandestinely at the periphery of society.<sup>51</sup> In fact, many of the Guatemalan migrants living in Postville at the time of the raid, had been told over and over again that their lives did not matter. This message was relayed by the Guatemalan military who arbitrarily slaughtered people by the thousands during the internal conflict. It was repeated by the coyotes who abandoned them at any sign of trouble and by the border patrol agents who mistreated them and sent them back

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<sup>49</sup> Maggie Jones, "Postville, Iowa, Is Up For Grabs," *The New York Times*, July 11, 2012, accessed October 20, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/15/magazine/postville-iowa-is-up-for-grabs.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/15/magazine/postville-iowa-is-up-for-grabs.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

<sup>50</sup> Steve Brackett, interview by author, 9 August 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>51</sup> Peter Orner, *Underground America: Narratives of Undocumented Lives* (San Francisco: McSweeney's Publishing, 2008) this book is a collection of oral histories of people from Mexico, Guatemala, Bolivia, China, Africa, and many other places and their experiences of living and working in the U.S. without the necessary documents to be considered "legal."

to violence and poverty without a second thought. It followed migrants to the United States through citizens who spewed anti-immigrant rhetoric and by some Iowans who held onto outdated racist ideas. In Agriprocessors, supervisors' daily verbal and sexual abuse reiterated that point.<sup>52</sup> This may explain why in Postville, as a sense of normalcy settled over the town, nobody openly complained about the treatment at Agriprocessors. Their children were going to school, many had saved enough money for a car or a house, they could afford to buy new clothes or go out to eat in town, and they had a little free time to enjoy some soccer matches. Although they worked long, hard hours in dangerous conditions, the jobs at Agriprocessors seemed stable because they were under the impression that management had paid off the authorities.<sup>53</sup> The raid was unexpected, and could have been viewed as just another struggle in the migrants' journey; however, the raid did not just affect the workers. The raid had physical and psychological ramifications that enveloped the town of Postville and reached many villages in Guatemala.

As ICE surrounded Agriprocessors that morning, chaos ensued inside as people hid anywhere they could, freezers, roof tiles, among animal parts in semi-trailers, desperately looking for ways to escape the inevitable arrest. Many of the workers were absolutely terrified. The helicopters, guns, and shouting used during the raid were reminiscent of military tactics some had experienced during the internal conflict while

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<sup>52</sup> Commission for Historical Clarification, *Guatemala: Memory of Silence*, 34-36, Frontline World, "Mexico: Crimes At the Border," and Ogen, "Migration and Human Rights on the Mexico-Guatemala Border," 218-221.

<sup>53</sup> Gibbs and Hernández, *Shattered Dreams*, 27, shows one example of the belief that Agriprocessors had paid off the government. The excerpt comes from a Guatemalan woman named Julia who said, "I couldn't believe it because people always said that immigration couldn't come in the plant because the owners gave the *migra* a lot of money from us the workers so that they wouldn't come. I was terrified, but I didn't think about running away because the only think I could think about was my children."

growing up in Guatemala. Erik Camayd-Freixas noted in his book *US Immigration Reform and Its Global Impact: Lessons from the Postville Raid* that the ICE raid was traumatizing for many of the workers precisely because of their experiences in Guatemala. Of the 389 people arrested that day, 290 were Guatemalan, ranging in age from 17 to mid-forties. Camayd-Freixas interviewed a man named Rolando who told him that the raid brought back terrible memories of the 1982 massacre and burning of his village when he was six years old. He escaped by fleeing to the mountains.<sup>54</sup>

Inside Agriprocessors, ICE rounded people up, slinging verbal and sometimes physical abuses. Julia, a Guatemalan working at the plant the day of the raid remembered the shock she felt.

My mind just went blank, and I couldn't move from where I was. I could only watch as they took away my friends, how the agents treated them, how they swore and called them filthy names. When two of my friends ran off trying to get away, a woman agent shouted, "Stop, you bitches! Stop, you whores!" They said so many things to us.<sup>55</sup>

ICE held the people they were going to ship to Waterloo outside. Local media stations filmed fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, friends and neighbors being handcuffed and guarded by heavily armed men. Later children and townspeople would view these images with awe and question *what did they do so wrong to warrant helicopters and five point shackles?*<sup>56</sup> Among the confusion and fear, coworkers shared

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<sup>54</sup> Camayd-Freixas, *US Immigration Reform and Its Global Impact*, 94.

<sup>55</sup> Gibbs and Hernández, *Shattered Dreams*, 27.

<sup>56</sup> Gibbs and Hernández, *Shattered Dreams*, 27, Julia said of the raid, "It forever marked the lives of the children because they were in some ways more than anyone else. For example, my children saw how other parents had chains on their hands and feet."

intimate moments of kindness. Mardoqueo Valle-Callejas tried to comfort a sobbing lady by saying, “Don’t cry no more, because God will deliver us.”<sup>57</sup>

Teachers weren’t sure what to do at the school. Unlike a tornado, fire, or active shooter, there was no manual, no pre-arranged set of instructions for this type of disaster. Older children understood what was happening, and the younger children picked up on the atmosphere of fear, shock, and sadness that permeated the school. When I asked Barbara Herzmann what she experienced during the day of the raid, she couldn’t hold back the tears. Nearly seven years after the raid and recalling the painful memories, especially the fear for the children in her classroom, was still too much. She said the day of the raid was seared into her mind and compared to only two other experiences in her life; November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1963 when John F. Kennedy was assassinated and September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 when the Twin Towers were attacked.

I brought my students back to the classroom. One parent showed up at my door, well the office called and said so and so’s parents are coming down, they are taking them out of school today. I just thought it was for the day, so I didn’t send anything with him, any of his school supplies. I just thought it was for the day. Well he never came back. That family left that day and never came back. I left all of his things in his desk and could not touch it until after school was over and I knew he wasn’t coming back, then I finally cleaned out his desk.<sup>58</sup>

Barbara Herzmann had an experience that many of the Guatemalans in Postville could relate to. Her student was swooped up at a moment’s notice and never seen again. In effect, he was disappeared. Later his classmates would question what happened to their missing friend. While she explained to the students that she believed he and his family

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<sup>57</sup> Camayd-Freixas, “Brief to the Senate Judiciary Committee.”

<sup>58</sup> Barbara Herzmann, interview by author, 27 October 2014, Luana, Iowa. Digital recording.

were safe, it was a confusing situation for the children. Some of the third grader's parents, many of whom grew up in Guatemala during the internal conflict and the violence that followed, had to deal with the disappearances of friends and family that were taken by the military and never seen again. Streets in Guatemala are still plastered with posters of the disappeared. Unlike the case with the Postville student, those who were disappeared in Guatemala were assumed to be dead.<sup>59</sup>

Sister Mary McCauley was the pastoral administrator at St. Bridget's Catholic Church in 2008, she remembered driving out to Agriprocessors after getting the call that the plant was being raided.

I then left and went out to the plant to be present to the people. I knew I couldn't do anything, but I thought that if any of them see me I want them to know that the Church is there for them. I think you are probably aware, that when I recognized that I really couldn't do anything standing outside the plant, that's when I left and went back to St. Bridget's knowing that some people would be going to the church and they would need help. That's when this little boy who was in the church came up to me and just said can our friends come too? I said tell anyone to come to St. Bridget's who is alone and afraid. That is when St. Bridget's became what I call command central for all people. Denominations made no difference, we were a town working together. At that time there was marvelous unity and support within the town of Postville trying to assist the Hispanic community and people affected by the raid. By the time I got back to the rectory it was probably about 12:30, one o'clock and people were just pouring in with us not really being too aware of what to do.<sup>60</sup>

As the raid ensued and for hours after, people crowded into St. Bridget's Catholic Church. Many Guatemalans sought refuge in the Community Presbyterian Church.

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<sup>59</sup> "The Death Squad Dossier," The National Security Archive, The George Washington University [online], <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB15/dossier-color.pdf> (accessed October 14, 2014), and

Kate Doyle, "Death Squad Diary: Looking into the Secret Archives of Guatemala's Bureaucracy of Murder," *Harper's Magazine*, June 1999, 50-53.

<sup>60</sup> Mary McCauley, interview by author, 25 February 2015, Dubuque, Iowa. Digital Recording.

Barbara Herzmann did not go to the church that afternoon, but she recalled why others did.

The families were very concerned that ICE would come back again because they only swept up workers from one shift and Agri I think was running two or three shifts... There was a constant thing in the community and a constant talk and that's why families were at the Catholic Church. There was this constant feeling, they'll be back, they'll be back. They're driving up the streets looking for people. So there was a pervasive fear in the community.<sup>61</sup>

Everyone that sought refuge in the churches were worried that ICE would spread out across town, kicking doors in and arresting anyone without the right papers, as had been reported during other raids. By 7 o' clock that night 400 men, women, and children had gathered at St. Bridget's.<sup>62</sup> Once Postville residents caught their collective breath and realized what was happening, people began calling each other and mobilizing the community.

That afternoon we were out actually visiting a friend of ours out in the country and she got a phone call from another person that... people were coming to St. Bridget's and there was no food to feed them... People were going there to prepare things, so I went up and helped that afternoon... and brought things that I had from at home. Everybody did.<sup>63</sup>

Judy Egeland believed that after the raid, even people in the community who were totally against "illegal" immigrants thought the raid was unbelievable. This time it was the government, charged with protecting the people, who shook the Midwesterners' perceptions of authority. The learned respect and trust in authority and belief that the U.S. government were the "good guys," faltered a bit in some Postville residents because of

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<sup>61</sup> Barbara Herzmann, interview by author, 27 October 2014, Luana, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>62</sup> Sister Mary McCauley, "The Postville, Iowa Immigration Raid, May 12, 2008," Archdioceses of Dubuque [on-line] <http://www.arch.pvt.k12.ia.us/postvillrelief/pdf/dayofraid.pdf> (accessed May 8, 2014).

<sup>63</sup> Judy Egeland, interview by author, 15 October 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

what was happening in their town. Pat Zidlicky shook her head as she recounted what happened during the raid,

It is so hard to really understand or comprehend what they were going through, these women with the ankle chains, and what the men went through. The government, their involvement was so questionable, and it didn't seem fair at all... it was inhuman the way they were treated, simply put.<sup>64</sup>

The general consensus in town seemed to be that this type of attack, ripping apart families and displacing hardworking people from their jobs and homes, was not something they supported. People brought food, blankets, clean clothing, children's books and toys to try and ease the pain of those hiding in the churches.

In the small villages of El Rosario and San Jose Calderas, relatives were devastated by the news that Agriprocessors had been raided and that ICE was detaining many of them. William Toj a former worker at Agriprocessors told reporter Greg Brosnan upon his visit to El Rosario, "Twenty minutes after the raid everyone here knew we'd been caught. People here cried as much as in Postville."<sup>65</sup> After the initial contact about the raid, many families in Guatemala were left not knowing where their family members were. The same feelings of confusions and fear experienced in Postville, Iowa were shared by people living 2,700 miles away.

For days and months after the raid people suffered in Postville, in the Guatemalan villages, in the detention center at Waterloo and eventually in jails throughout the state of Iowa. Sadness took over families that were separated, as parents were jailed. Shame filled

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<sup>64</sup> Pat Zidlicky, interview by author, 28 June 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital Recording.

<sup>65</sup> Greg Brosnan, "Like a Great Flood," *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America* (Fall 2010-Winter 2011) accessed November 27, 2014, <http://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/book/postville-immigration-raid>.



the women forced to wear ankle bracelets and ordered not to work. Fear filled the hearts of many children who dreamt of ICE taking them away and awoke with night terrors. Others suffered hunger. In Guatemala families experienced hunger because the remittances had stopped as breadwinners were thrown in jail. Hunger was also felt in Postville because the residents with ankle bracelets could not work and those who were afraid to go back to Agriprocessors strained the local food pantry. It was not designed to deal with such a human tragedy. In fact, the town, the state judicial system, and the communities in Guatemala were not prepared to handle the far-reaching affects of the raid.

## CHAPTER 3

### COMMUNITIES IN FLUX

Postville had never seen such devastation in its community before, however an earlier event, the burning down of the Iowa Turkey Products plant in 2003 had been a test run for disasters in the community. Sister Mary McCauley became the pastoral administrator at St. Bridget's Catholic Church in 2003 and remembered the fire.

The turkey plant fire was in December of 2003 which meant that many of our Hispanics that worked at the plant lost their jobs, had no income, and that interfaith response had to occur... So it was the Lutheran Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Catholic Church, and the Jewish community that was trying to respond to the needs of the people. There was a Rabbi who then was working up in the Decorah area. He came down and really helped us. It was at that point that we got the Food Pantry going, so that was a foundation, we knew how to work with people who were in a desperate situation, how to provide food for them. Little did we know how that would be really foundational to our response at the time of the raid.<sup>1</sup>

Luckily, by the time of the 2008 ICE raid, the Food Pantry was operating as a nonprofit with 501(C)3 designation and could take donations. The churches in the community also took donations and from St. Bridget's Catholic Church, which had become command central during this time, helped people affected by the raid pay rent and utility bills, cover the cost of necessities that were not available through the food bank, and organized rides to doctors' offices and other appointments outside of the community.<sup>2</sup> While the community was organizing and dealing with the chaos left by the raid, the Northern District Court of Iowa was implementing unprecedented legal maneuvers at the National Cattle Congress in Waterloo.

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<sup>1</sup> Mary McCauley, interview by author, 25 February 2015, Dubuque, Iowa. Digital Recording.

<sup>2</sup> Mary McCauley, interview by author, 25 February 2015, Dubuque, Iowa. Digital Recording.

### Detention and Trials

When the buses arrived at the National Cattle Congress on May 12, the detained workers were taken to the McElroy Auditorium where computers and finger print scanners were set up to process them through the makeshift judicial and prison system that the government had manufactured. In order to keep anyone from getting in or out of the National Cattle Congress, ICE agents, FBI, and US marshals patrolled the grounds night and day. They set up trailers and buses around the buildings, allowing them to keep a close watch on the detainees and the gates. The agents did not want anyone to come in or to get out. Judges and clerks used doublewide trailers on the premises for their temporary offices during the proceedings. The Pepsi Pavilion was converted into the ICE command center, and the Electric Park Ballroom became the courtroom. Chain link cages surrounded the holding center set up in Estel Hall for the detainees, but the workers remained shackled at the wrists and ankles.<sup>3</sup> A video released by ICE to pacify the public's discontent over the secretive procedure occurring at the National Cattle Congress showed games, televisions, and phones that the workers supposedly had access to. Only after the trials did the public learn that those amenities were for the guards.<sup>4</sup>

The process at the National Cattle Congress needed to be quick because the detention center had never received official sanction from the Department of Justice and the Board of Prisons as a detention center. Thus, two days were afforded for the arraignment before the workers were sent to jails and prisons throughout Iowa to await

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<sup>3</sup> Camayd-Freixas, *US Immigration Reform and Its Global Impact*, 50-51.

<sup>4</sup> "Cattle Congress Detention Facility for Postville Raid," *Gazetteonline*, May 13, 2008 [on-line], <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAm-H8B514g> (accessed May 3, 2014).

their charges. Before the raid, ICE, the U.S. Attorney's Office, and the Northern Iowa District Court collaboratively prepared a binder for defense attorneys that contained charges, plea bargains, forms for waiving the right to grand jury indictment, and scripts on how to inform their clients and lead them through the process.<sup>5</sup> The defense attorneys contacted were asked to take two weeks off their schedule, but were not informed of specifics until they arrived on site. Rockne Cole, a defense attorney, declined to work on the case because he believed the collaboration and pre-packaged trials were unethical.<sup>6</sup>

The detained workers spent the night of May 12<sup>th</sup> in Estel Hall, but ICE agents would not allow them to sleep. Some workers were deprived of their shoes and sweatshirts upon entering the unheated, concrete building. They were held under constant supervision even while using the bathroom; as if they posed a flight risk in five point shackles. Agents gave the workers meager portions of food and water, but refused to take the shackles off while they ate. They could not get in touch with their family members back in Postville, and ICE agents did not let any members of the public into the National Cattle Congress Grounds.<sup>7</sup>

After keeping the workers awake for nearly 20 hours, and without a lawyer present, Agents presented the workers with an option: sign the form waiving their right to a grand jury indictment or do more time in jail. When one man asked to see a lawyer,

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<sup>5</sup> Greenberg and Marin, "How Ice Threatens the Ethical Responsibilities of Key Players in Worksite Raids," 16-17, and "Government "Manual" Distributed to Iowa Defense Lawyers," American Civil Liberties Union, July 31, 2008 [on-line], <https://www.aclu.org/immigrants-rights/government-manual-distributed-iowa-defense-lawyers> (accessed November 10, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Rockne Cole, letter to Zoe Lofgren, 24 July 2008, in *The New York Times* [on-line] <http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/national/ColeLetter.pdf> (accessed November 11, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Camayd-Freixas, *US Immigration Reform and Its Global Impact*, 50-51.

agents threatened him saying, “If you don’t sign, you’re going to be forgotten in this country.”<sup>8</sup> The next morning arraignment began. Defense attorneys, who had an average of 17 clients apiece, had little or no time to meet with their clients beforehand. Some attorneys met their clients in makeshift rooms but with language barriers and few interpreters, as well as ICE agents listening, the meetings did little to help the clients. The workers, still shackled, were filed through the charging in groups of ten.<sup>9</sup> The workers were then bused to county jails throughout Northern Iowa to await their next orders.

Defense attorneys were finally able to meet with their clients in the county jails. The meetings consisted of trying to explain the charges and giving the workers their options. The court had charged them with aggravated identity theft, but offered the workers an ‘exploding’ plea agreement for a lesser charge that would only be available for seven days. The defense attorneys quickly realized that many of the workers has no idea what a social security number was, yet they were being charged with knowingly using a false social security number.<sup>10</sup> Many of the workers chose to plead guilty over potentially spending more time in jail. The workers were not allowed to see immigration lawyers and their criminal defense lawyers were unaware of the serious immigration consequences to pleading guilty to a criminal charge. Some of the workers who may have qualified for refugee or asylum status in the United States would never be allowed back with a criminal record. Of the 389 people arrested at the Postville Raid, 56 people, mostly women, were sent back to Postville with ankle tracking devices, 27 people received

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<sup>8</sup> Camayd-Freixas, “Brief to the Senate Judiciary Committee.”

<sup>9</sup> Camayd-Freixas, *US Immigration Reform and Its Global Impact*, 53-54.

<sup>10</sup> Camayd-Freixas, *US Immigration Reform and Its Global Impact*, 62.

probation deportation because the social security number they had used did not match an actual person, and 270 people received five months in prison or more.<sup>11</sup>

The period of time between the arrest, the sentencing, the detention, and the deportation was frustrating for families that were separated and could not get a hold of each other. Because of the amount of people arrested, no single jail in Iowa could accept so many people and the workers were spread not just across the state, but across the country. Harold Peck was active in prison ministry at the time of the raid and remembered visiting some of the Postville workers while they served their sentences.

About from the raid to the first of October we went to the Fayette county jail in West Union every Friday morning for an hour service with Hispanic and Guatemalan men that were incarcerated there. We also had a Spanish teacher from North High that came with us almost every Friday and there was a nun from a Catholic Church in New Hampton, she tried to make it every other week. Those two would interpret what they were saying for my friend and I, and they would tell them what we were saying. It was a very emotional time, and of course you are going to have feelings. These guys were, probably most of them were in their twenties, thirties, and maybe forties, but they had wives and kids in Postville or else they still had family back wherever they came from and they were just here trying to make a better life for them... There were a lot of these men that were trying to get messages back to their family because their families didn't even know where they were at because they were moving these men all over. They might be in Milwaukee in prison one week and they'd be in Dubuque another week and then they might be in Fayette, West Union another time. People up here were trying to find where their family members were. It was tough. I know one man had a letter that he had been trying to, or a guy here in Postville had been sending a letter. He'd find out, well he's in Milwaukee, so he'd send the letter there and it would come back, [there was] nobody there with that [name] and he'd send it somewhere else. When we found out this guys' name from one of the guys that was in prison, in the jail down there, I went to talk with him and got this letter. I took it into the jail the next time we went down there and the officer said

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<sup>11</sup> Erik Camayd-Freixas, "Immigrant Rights and American Values: Seeing With New Eyes, Postville: An Interpreter's Experience," (Lecture, St. Stephen the Witness Catholic Student Center, Cedar Falls, Iowa, March 9, 2010) The Postville Project [on-line] <http://postvilleproject.org/stories/items/show/57> (accessed October 15, 2014).

no, no couldn't give it to him, couldn't give it to him, that wouldn't be legal. After we talked a little bit with him he maybe bent the rules a little bit and got this letter to him. We were able to get a letter back out to his relative.<sup>12</sup>

If people in Iowa were having trouble finding and contacting their family members, imagine the confusions of locating husbands, wives, sons, daughters, and parents from a different country. Because of the experience of regular disappearances and subsequent torture and execution at the hands of the military and police during the Civil War, family members in Guatemala were especially concerned when they found out their loved ones had been arrested but could not get a hold of them.<sup>13</sup> While the workers were being taken away to Waterloo and held in the detention center, residents in Postville were dealing with the chaos left by the raid.

#### Aftermath in Iowa

Family separation was a huge problem in the aftermath of the raid. Not only did some families have trouble finding and contacting their loved ones, but also many children were psychologically affected by the traumatic experience of the raid and being separated from one or more family members. Many children were separated from their fathers and some mothers too. Sister Mary McCauley remembers the scene at St. Bridget's Catholic Church the day of the raid,

It was chaotic, there was a terrific amount of fear, there were a lot of tears, there were a lot of hugs... little children were just panic stricken not knowing what had happened to their parents because parents that were arrested at the time of the

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<sup>12</sup> Harold Peck, interview by author, 28 June 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>13</sup> Cindy Juby and Laura E. Kaplan, "Postville: The Effects of an Immigration Raid," *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 92 (2011): 148.

raid, they didn't see them until finally they were able to release some of the women with those ankle bracelets to be present to the children.<sup>14</sup>

From Monday the 12<sup>th</sup> of May through Saturday May 17<sup>th</sup>, the doors of St. Bridget's Catholic Church were open 24 hours per day preparing meals, offering a place for support, and as a place to sleep for people who were too afraid to go home.

The raid occurred on Monday and really from Monday until Saturday people were so frightened they did not want to go back and be alone in their home. We did tell them they could stay sleeping in the pews and we got blankets from all sorts of places and toys came in for the children. Some people felt comfortable to go home and they did and then they came back in the morning. So it was really kind of like a center. We had as many as 400 or 500 people there at a time.<sup>15</sup>

The fear was nearly palpable in town in the days after the raid. Some families fled town with their children and what little possessions they could pack in their car. Parents were very paranoid that ICE would come back in the days and weeks to follow. Harold and Dona Peck volunteered to stay in the walkway of the Presbyterian Church for a couple nights after the raid. On Thursday May 14<sup>th</sup>, they noticed a flurry of activity outside and witnessed the real fear that the ICE raid instilled in the people of the town.

We had about a dozen to fifteen people in our Church basement they were sleeping, we brought sleeping bags in. They were mostly adult women, a few kids, and my wife and I had an air mattress in the entryway to our church upstairs, we just had the doors locked, and everybody had pretty well settled down. At about 11 o'clock that night the cars just started tearing around town people pulling on doors, trying to get in the church. Of course with lack of communication, we didn't speak Spanish and they didn't speak much English, we didn't know what was going on, but we let people in. They were still coming in at two o'clock in the morning. The same thing happened over in the Catholic Church, they had over 300 people in the Catholic Church that night. The next morning the priest from

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<sup>14</sup> Mary McCauley, interview by author, 25 February 2015, Dubuque, Iowa. Digital Recording.

<sup>15</sup> Mary McCauley, interview by author, 25 February 2015, Dubuque, Iowa. Digital Recording.



the Catholic Church... came over about seven o'clock in the morning and he explained to us too what happened and here the railroad is the IC&E railroad came in with one of their trucks in the middle of the night, around 11 o'clock they pulled into town to work on the rail line the next day. The Hispanics or all the people that were worried about being arrested by ICE thought it was an ICE truck coming in to raid them again, they were going to come into the homes. It was very crazy that night, but we got through it. We had women and babies in the church upstairs sleeping in the pews. As we think back on it, it was a pretty traumatic time for them I'm sure.<sup>16</sup>

Dona recalled how even she was scared that night, not knowing what was going on. The real terror that the people felt was contagious.

The one night in particular there was a scare in town when a train car came through town that had the word ICE on it. This is what really scared the people, they thought that they were coming back to get them. All it was actually was just a train car with those words on it. Somebody had seen it and put a scare in, that night was really a scary night. All of a sudden we saw a lot of activity, a lot of cars just zooming up and down the streets, going to the Catholic Church. All of a sudden they were turning into our church. Women would come running in the church holding their kids and the look on their face was just, they were terrified.<sup>17</sup>

The terror was not just about getting caught. The terror that these people experienced was influenced by the experience of war and the role that police and military played in conflicts in their home countries. The violence of the civil war continued after the signing of the peace accords so many Guatemalans grew up seeing or hearing about government agents arresting people or kidnapping them off the street, usually never to be seen again although sometimes a tortured body would be found later.<sup>18</sup> Imagine how frightened the people were when they thought that a group of government agents were back in town with the intention to arrest them. Many Guatemalans, who grew up during the Civil War

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<sup>16</sup> Harold Peck, interview by author, 28 June 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>17</sup> Dona Peck, interview by author, 27 October 2014 Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>18</sup> Lianne Milton, "Life Is Worth Nothing in Guatemala," *Newsweek*, December 2, 2013, accessed March 15, 2015, <http://www.newsweek.com/life-worth-nothing-guatemala-207586>.

when 45,000 people were disappeared in the city and country by the police and military, have those perceptions of government agents.<sup>19</sup> Many were probably also thinking of their families, how they did not want to be separated from them or have to leave the United States where at least they could work to put food on the table.

Some families were scared to send their children in school, but the teachers and administrators at the Postville schools did not want the children to miss anything and also felt that the school could be a place of regularity during the traumatic and insecure time. The school organized a bus route to pick children up and drop them off at the Catholic Church and also went house to house. Chad Wahls, the Elementary Principal of the Postville Community School, remembered the lengths that teachers and staff went through to get children back in school after the raid.

Many people wouldn't send their kids to school. I had a 120 kids kindergarten to eighth grade not show up the next day after the raid. Luckily, again, I knew many of them so we took a smaller bus and basically went house to house, knocking on doors. Once you said who you were, usually the curtain would move first and they would peek out to see if it was you and they would open the door and they would let their kids go to school most of the time. They didn't want them walking home because I think they felt like ICE would just come and grab them off the streets and take them. You had to deliver them home to home or a lot of times they were taking care of things down at the church they would ask that you drop them off there right at 3:30. That was a big challenge, but also a positive outlook to show how much these families believed in the school system here and believed in the people that were working here, and valued and supported it. At the same time how the people that worked here valued the kids to say we don't want

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<sup>19</sup> Cecilia Menjívar and Cynthia L. Bejarano, "Latino Immigrants' Perception of Crime and Police Authorities in the United States: A Case Study from the Phoenix Metropolitan Area," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27, 1 (Jan. 2004): 122-124. Menjívar argues that although Latin American immigrants' perceptions of law enforcement are shaped both by experiences in the sending and receiving countries, due to Guatemala's long history of political violence at the hands of the police and military, immigrants often have strong negative perceptions of law enforcement in the United States that reflect the lived experiences of political violence in Guatemala.

them gone today we want them in our classrooms, we are going to go pick them up.<sup>20</sup>

During the months that followed the raid, the Food Pantry was extremely strained to meet the needs of everyone who needed food and could not work. Judy Egeland is heavily involved with the community gardens in Postville and remembered the time after the raid because vegetables went missing from the gardens, and it spurred the building of a fence with a lock on the gate around them.

We had to lock the gate because things disappeared even after we got a fence around the garden. Before the fence was around the garden after the raid, things really disappeared... You work hard to get peppers because it takes most of the summer before you get peppers and then they disappear on you. Or muskmelon or watermelon and you only get one chance at that for the year. Carrots would go, beats would go, cabbage would go.<sup>21</sup>

For people to resort to stealing food out of the community garden, in such a small town as Postville where everyone probably knows who has a plot in the garden and how much hard work they put in to grow that food, really shows how dire the situation was in Postville after the raid. Many families came to Postville in order to earn enough money to feed their children, and the raid took even the most basic human right away from them, access to food.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Chad Wahls, interview by author, 2 March 2015, Postville, Iowa. Digital Recording.

<sup>21</sup> Judy Egeland, interview by author, 15 October 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>22</sup> United Nations, "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights," [on-line], <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/#atop> (accessed May 3, 2014), Article 25, number 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that, "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control." *Children in No Man's Land*, DVD, directed by Anayansi Prado (Blooming Grove, NY. New Day Films. 2008, Impacto Films Production), This movie followed a mother named Irma who remembered trying to make ends meet after her husband abandoned her and her five children saying, "At times I'd go down with my sisters-in-law to the fields, to grab vegetables that were not ours. We'd pick from other people's fields."

In 2007 the Urban Institute conducted a study on the effects of worksite raids on children titled, “Paying the Price: The Impact of Immigration Raids on America’s Children.” The study found that for every two immigrants that are deported one child is left behind. The study found that children who experience raids are negatively affected in the short term with increased anxiety, psychological distress, and problems being social, among many others. In the long term children have experienced other mental health issues and economic hardship.<sup>23</sup> Separating families is one of the worst human rights violations that people suffer in migration and deportation situations.

Although the women who told ICE agents they had children were released with ankle bracelets, at the time of the raid no one knew that was going to happen and some said they had no children in fear that ICE would deport their children. Pedro and Samantha Lopez spent months without seeing their mother Consuelo who had been so scared ICE would take her children that she told them she was alone in Postville.

My mom said she was here alone. She was not here with anybody else. She said I’m here alone, I don’t have any kids. If you are going to take me, take me, that’s all you are going to get. That’s really what they did. She was just scared. She didn’t know what to do, but she knew that she had a family. There are three of us. My youngest sister is a U.S. citizen, my older sister and I aren’t, so she was worried about us. And rightly so... She was arrested and sent to five different prisons. She was sentenced to five months in jail and was deported on October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2008 which ironically is my dad’s birthday.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> “Paying the Price: The Impact of Immigration Raids on America’s Children,” The Urban Institute and National Council of La Raza, 2007 [on-line], [http://www.urban.org/uploadedPDF/411566\\_immigration\\_raids.pdf](http://www.urban.org/uploadedPDF/411566_immigration_raids.pdf) (accessed May 1, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Pedro Lopez, interview by author, 15 March 2015, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

During the five months that their mother spent in jail, Pedro and his siblings received handwritten letters from their mother. Although they often knew where she was, they never went to visit her in jail.

We took the decision of not going to visit her partly because it would be too much. It would have been nice to see her and nice to know she was okay. I never could see my mother in an orange jumpsuit behind a glass. Thinking of her as oh yeah she is supposed to be a criminal. She's my mother. She has given up so much to give me the opportunity to where I'm at now. She would send us cards, and that's pretty much it... The letters were hard to swallow. She would try to be strong in the letters. She would say I'm fine, I'm doing great, how are you doing? I hope you are doing fine. This is going to be behind us. You are going to be fine. Just keep going, keep looking forward and don't be afraid. It was hard. It was hard, again, you have the half packed house, dad working two jobs, sister uptight with pretty much everything because she is in charge of the house. It was just one more thing, but it was a thing I always looked forward to, it was a thing that gave me strength.<sup>25</sup>

In her family's eyes, Consuelo was not a criminal, and her strength during the horrid situation helped her family get through it. She was a mother, doing whatever she could to provide her children with opportunities for an education and economic security that she did not have while growing up and were not an option while living in Mexico. Sadly, this also meant crossing the American immigration system, a system that at the time of the Postville raid criminalized immigrants for a felony they did not know they had committed.

For Pedro at age thirteen when most kids were worried about sports or going to High School, he had to worry about helping his family make ends meet and how his

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<sup>25</sup> Pedro Lopez, interview by author, 15 March 2015, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

mother was being treated in jail. Pedro remembered the period without his mother after the ICE raid as a very tough time for his family.

Us here at home it was very difficult. My sister was 17 years old going on 18. In a flip of a coin she had to become a mother of two. My dad had to work double as hard because we had half of our income cut. I kind of had to step up. I was at the age where, I was thirteen, so I could do a little bit more, which I did. You kind of had to leave some of your childhood behind... We were in constant fear of ICE coming back, most of the time we had half of our belongings packed.<sup>26</sup>

Like many others in the community, the Lopez family had heard all about previous ICE raids where ICE had went into people's homes and were constantly worried that they would be back in town. Unlike many other families, though, they decided to stay in Postville and speak out about the wrongs they saw committed in Postville and throughout the entire immigration system.

Pedro wrote letters to Barack and Michelle Obama detailing their harrowing situation and asking to allow his mother to come back to Postville for his 8<sup>th</sup> Grade graduation in 2009. He wrote about how the raid affected him and his family saying,

My 9-year old sister Samantha would go into her room and "talk" to my mom while she was actually not there...As for me, instead of my mom waking me up, giving me a kiss, and sending me to school, my sister Juanita has to do it. When I come back from school I don't receive the warm hug that my mom used to give me and when I go to sleep I miss her goodnight kiss and her blessing for the night.<sup>27</sup>

This was one of many instances where Pedro shared his story and although nothing came of this particular letter, Pedro and others from Postville were asked again and again to

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<sup>26</sup> Pedro Lopez, interview by author, 15 March 2015, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>27</sup> Pedro Lopez, letter to Barack Obama, 6 May 2009, in The Postville Project [on-line] <http://cdm15897.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/post/id/863/rec/2> (accessed May 8, 2014).

share the Postville story by journalists, colleges, organizations, and television shows. This national and international attention served to bring in people to help with legal matters and also donations of food and money.

With the word about Postville spreading, Sister Mary McCauley remembered making a call for assistance to meet the needs of Postville residents.

We would indicate that we needed money in order to help, not only to pay for the food that we were giving them, but also they had to pay their rent if they were going to go home, they couldn't work so who was going to pay their medical bills, who was going to buy food for them, all those things. We received many, many donations. In fact, at one time I calculated that we had donations from 49 of our 50 states.<sup>28</sup>

The donations poured in. People from Postville and the surrounding area donated their time, food, and money. The positive feedback from organizations working on similar social justice and immigration reform issues was present as the Postville Story was featured in reports and on television. However, not everyone in America thought that the raid was wrong or that the immigration system was broken. The people involved in responding to the needs of those affected by the raid received negative feedback too. Church leaders were criticized and reporters would ask questions challenging the ethics of what the town was doing. Sister Mary McCauley recalled one particular instance when a reporter began an interview with innocent and easy to answer questions. what happened next shook her:

All of sudden in the midst of asking all those rather simple questions he changed and he said to me do you believe in breaking a law. All I could think was oh my heavens, I'm on public TV, it's national. I'm a women religious and I am supposed to respond to 'do I believe in

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<sup>28</sup> Mary McCauley, interview by author, 25 February 2015, Dubuque, Iowa. Digital Recording.

breaking a law.' The Holy Spirit inspired me and I said I don't believe in breaking a law, but I do believe in looking at a law and changing the law when it is not in accord with the needs of the times and is not meeting the needs of our people and is causing so much harm. It's really that philosophy that has carried me through into continued advocacy work for a change in the law.<sup>29</sup>

Many Postville residents felt the same way after seeing the human suffering caused by the raid and many who had never even given the U.S. immigration system a second thought before, were questioning the laws. What many residents saw in the wake of the raid were broken families, a broken town with a shattered economy, and a broken immigration system.

For nearly all Iowans, 2008 represented a year of tragedies and trials. The Postville raid, the tornado in Parkersburg, and the statewide flooding all caused physical harm and damage to people and their property, to businesses and community institutions, and had negative psychological effects on the people that experienced them. While insurance and government funding helped tornado and flood victims, agencies like FEMA were silent and unsympathetic when it came to the precarious situation in Postville.<sup>30</sup> Postville, in one afternoon, lost nearly one fifth of its population. Businesses closed their doors, properties sat empty, property owners went bankrupt because most of their tenants left, and taxes did not cover the cost of services for the town. Agriprocessors

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<sup>29</sup> Mary McCauley, interview by author, 25 February 2015, Dubuque, Iowa. Digital Recording.

<sup>30</sup> Ron Scherer, "Parkersburg, Iowa, Emerges as Model for Tornado Recovery," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 7, 2011, accessed November 20, 2014, <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2011/0607/Parkersburg-Iowa-emerges-as-model-for-tornado-recovery>, the tornado resulted in nearly seven million dollar cleanup of which FEMA paid nearly six million. Betsy Rubiner, "A Year After the Flood, Cedar Rapids Struggles," *TIME*, June 17, 2009, accessed November 20, 2014, <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1904991,00.html>, the 2008 flooding caused nearly ten billion dollars of damage and Iowa was granted nearly 789 million dollars in federal money.



took a hit in productivity that affected a wide range of economic relationships across the state of Iowa and the country. They eventually filed for bankruptcy. Local farmers who supplied chicken and cattle, farmers who supplied feed for the animals, truck drivers who transported the products, and merchants who sold the products in their stores were hit hard. An estimated seven jobs were lost for every one undocumented worker that was deported after the raid.<sup>31</sup>

Erik Camayd-Freixas estimated that the Postville raid cost taxpayers nearly 10 million dollars in carrying out the raid and removal and the five-month detention. Iowa lost nearly 300 million dollars per year in regional business, and Postville's sister cities lost nearly seven million dollars in remittances.<sup>32</sup> The Postville community and nongovernmental organizations were burdened with paying for food, medical bills, and rent. St. Bridget's Catholic Church was spending nearly 80,000 dollars a month to support its members left unable to work after the raid.<sup>33</sup> When the Postville city council declared an economic and humanitarian disaster in November of 2008, FEMA and state agencies offered very little help.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Camayd-Freixas, *US Immigration Reform and Its Global Impact*, 143.

<sup>32</sup> Erik Camayd-Freixas, "Raids, Rights, Reform: The Postville Case and the Immigration Crisis," *DePaul Journal or Social Justice* 2, 1 (Fall 2008): 3.

<sup>33</sup> Wayne Drash, "Priest: 'Nobody Can Tell Me to Shut Up,'" *CNN*, October 15, 2008, accessed December 10, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/US/10/15/postville.priest/index.html?iref=24hours>.

<sup>34</sup> Cornelia Butler Flora and Jan L. Flora, "Postville, Iowa: Lessons for Immigration Reform," May 19, 2009: 8 [on-line], <http://migrationfiles.ucdavis.edu/uploads/cf/files/2009-may/flora.pdf> (accessed December 11, 2013), and Betsy Rubiner, "Iowa: What Happens When a Town Implodes," *Time*, January 28, 2009, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1874205,00.html>, The article explains that the town was given 700,000 dollars to help people pay their rent and utility bills, but undocumented workers did not have access to the funds and had to rely on charity.

### Aftermath in Guatemala

If the consequences of the raid were bad in Iowa, they were deplorable in Guatemala. In a country where social services are nonexistent and neighbors only have so much to give, losing the main source of income when breadwinners were jailed hit families hard. Remittances from the United States to Guatemala, as a 2006 World Bank study titled, “The U.S.-Guatemala Remittance Corridor,” points out have both positive and negative consequences. Because over half the population of Guatemala lives in poverty and one out of every three households receive remittances from family members that have migrated, the extra money helps people afford basic needs like food. Further, the study states that remittances are often spent on education and housing. Without the remittances families are hardly able to make ends meet and this dependence on remittances has made a bad situation worse.

When situations like the 2008 ICE raid in Postville occur, suddenly families are not able to afford schooling for their oldest children who then must try to find a job in a job market that is inundated with returned migrants. The study also indicates that the noticeable difference in material wealth between families who have migrants sending remittances and those that do not, encourage young adults to stop their schooling and become migrants.<sup>35</sup> In Salcajá, in the middle of town a statue of a migrant stands,

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<sup>35</sup> Hela Cheikhrouhou, Rodrigo Jarque, Raúl Hernández-Coss, and Rdwa El-Swaify, “The U.S.-Guatemala Remittance Corridor: Understanding Better the Drives of Remittances Intermediation,” The World Bank, 2006: 33-36 [on-line] <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTAML/Resources/US-Guatamala.pdf> (accessed April 5, 2015), and “Getting to the Root of Childhood Malnutrition,” *PBS NewsHour*, June 25, 2014, accessed April 4, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87sSConf7Fs>, this report describes how childhood malnutrition in Guatemala is endemic, especially in the countryside. Access to food and access

honoring the men and women who leave in order to secure remittances for their families to help them combat the poverty in town.<sup>36</sup> The dependence on remittances can be extremely dangerous for families, especially when that source of funding is abruptly halted as was the case with the raid. William Toj went to Iowa in order to provide for his family, but the raid took place one day after he started working at Agriprocessors. In 2014, *The Gazette* reported that he was still making 450 dollar monthly payments on his loan.<sup>37</sup>

Many families had begun to build houses in towns like San Jose Calderas and San Miguel Duenas in hopes that after a few more years of working in Iowa they would be able to settle down in Guatemala, maybe run a shop out of their home like Alvaro Ordoñez, a success story from Postville. Ordoñez worked for three years at Agriprocessors, paid off the coyote he hired to help him into the United States, built his family a house with a store, and returned home. Many others were not as fortunate. One man, whose property is located nearby San Jose Calderas, had to put the property as collateral to afford the loan to migrate. His plan to build his family a house was ruined

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to nutritious food is not guaranteed in this country, even while the land is extremely fertile and being cultivated. A lot of nutritious produce leaves for the country as exports.

<sup>36</sup> John Washington, "Guatemala's Deadly Lifeline: Over-Reliance on the United States," *Upside Down World*, Feb. 21, 2013, accessed April 10, 2015, <http://upside-downworld.org/main/guatemala-archives-33/4143-guatemalas-deadly-lifeline-over-reliance-on-the-united-states>.

<sup>37</sup> Kourtney Liepelt, "Trapped in Time: Effects of 2008 Postville Raid Still Resonate in Guatemalan Town," *The Gazette*, July 8, 2014, accessed April 10, 2015, <http://thegazette.com/subject/society/demographics/immigration/trapped-in-time-effects-of-2008-postville-raid-still-resonate-in-guatemalan-town-20140708>.

the day of the raid. “Now, the rusting rods stick out from the top of the walls, which are about 5 feet tall... the unfinished project is a constant reminder of dashed hopes.”<sup>38</sup>

Children of migrant parents are so vulnerable in migration and deportation situations precisely because they are cannot take care of themselves and the fate of their parents is typically theirs as well. Many parents brought their U.S. born children with back to Guatemala after the raid. Peter O’Dowd, a reporter from Arizona, traveled on a plane full of undocumented migrants who were being deported to Guatemala in order to understand what it was like for them after deportation form the United States. He talked to many people who were afraid of the violence and worried about the poor economic state in the country. When he arrived in Guatemala, he traveled to San Jose Calderas where he talked to people who had once lived in Postville and was surprised to see that one had an Iowa birth certificate and a U.S. Passport. Soon mothers of United States Citizens had stacked 16 U.S. Passports in front of him.<sup>39</sup>

Luis Argueta, a Guatemalan film director and producer and documentarian heard of the events occurring in Postville and decided to document what had happened and the aftermath in Postville. During the filming of “AbUSed: The Postville Raid,” a mother was interviewed in Guatemala. She talked about how her young daughter, a U.S. citizen, stopped growing because she could not afford to get her milk, juice, or any of the other

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<sup>38</sup> Tony Leys, “Guatemala: Hope at Any Cost,” *Des Moines Register*, November 26, 2008, accessed April 8, 2015, <http://archive.desmoinesregister.com/article/20081129/NEWS/81126031/Guatemala-Hope-any-cost>.

<sup>39</sup> “What Happens to America’s Deported Immigrants,” Public Radio International, July 29, 2011 [on-line], <http://www.pri.org/stories/2011-07-29/what-happens-americas-deported-immigrants> (accessed April 6, 2015).

food she had access to while she was working in Postville. She said, “For my daughter’s sake, I’d like to return to the U.S.... I want her to grow up in her country.”<sup>40</sup> The scarcity of jobs available in Guatemala and the subsequent inability to pay back debt owed from the journey north, leaves many families vulnerable to eviction from their houses and to intimidation by banks or loan sharks. Many people find it extremely difficult to afford food for their families and an education is often out of the question. This cycle of poverty is often a reason many try to make it to the U.S. once again.<sup>41</sup>

In Guatemala, after five months of incarceration the criminalized and deported workers were able to hug their children and family members they had left behind in the process of migration. Soon it became hard for them to pay off their loans they used to get into the United States, their children could no longer attend school, and they could find no jobs but the most menial of work. In March of 2009, the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission visited San Miguel Dueñas to hear from the deported workers from Postville. The workers shared their experiences of the horror of the raid and detention. They also shared about working the long, brutal hours at Agriprocessors, yet many voiced that migration was the only way to afford to live. Reflecting on the meeting, a GHRC employee wrote,

At the conclusion of the meeting, dozens of deported workers approached us, pushing scraps of paper into our hands. They contained names, dates, paychecks and vacation time owed, photocopies of national ID cards of missing persons who were incarcerated after the raid, and requests for legal work permits to help pay off onerous debts incurred from the trip north. These papers were etched with

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<sup>40</sup> *AbUsed: The Postville Raid*, DVD, directed by Luis Argueta and Vivian Rivas (Maya Media, 2011).

<sup>41</sup> *In the Shadow of the Raid*, DVD, directed by Greg Brosnan and Jennifer Szymaszek (MCO Film Works, 2009).

pain, loss, humiliation, degradation, and criminalization of people living in dire poverty. People who simply want to work so that their children won't be condemned to suffer as they have.<sup>42</sup>

When they asked one little boy what he wanted to be when he grew up, he told them that because there are no jobs in Guatemala he wanted to be an immigrant to the United States. Compare these future plans with the Guatemalan boy in the Postville schools who wanted to be an artist.<sup>43</sup>

### Solidarity Marches

After the raid, the town of Postville and the surrounding community did their best to show solidarity with those incarcerated and deported and the people who remained in town. Donations poured in to Postville and were distributed through St. Bridget's church and the Postville Food Bank. Because the women who remained in town to testify against Agriprocessors were wearing ankle bracelets, they could not work. Others who were not arrested during the raid but were undocumented found themselves out of a job and some had nowhere to go. In the months and years that followed the raid, Postville and the surrounding communities hosted protests of the raid, lectures, and rallies for immigration reform.

The first protest was held shortly after the raid on Sunday, May 18<sup>th</sup> in Waterloo. People from Postville and nearby communities gathered at the Queen of Peace Parish and marched to National Cattle Congress. Sister Mary McCauley remembered taking the

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<sup>42</sup> "The Tragic Cycle of Poverty and Migration: GHRC's March 2009 Delegation to Guatemala," *El Quetzal* (June 2009): 5.

<sup>43</sup> Barbara Herzmann, interview by author, 27 October 2014, Luana, Iowa. Digital recording.

advice of an advocate from California who suggested gathering everyone together and bussing down for the protest in Waterloo.

I always say the first days after the raid the women who had been arrested and who wore the GPS devices on their ankle, they had their slacks on and they made sure no one could see that GPS device on their ankle. When we got down into that march, that is when the women pulled up their slacks and let people see. They carried wonderful signs that said, we are not criminals, we are mothers, we came to feed our families. I could see then that they had been strengthened enough to be able to speak for themselves...<sup>44</sup>

Around 500 people were in attendance at the march. Organizations such as Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement marched with large signs.<sup>45</sup> Pastor Steve Brackett remembered being among the residents from Postville in attendance at the march.

To see armed guards looking at us very suspiciously, and with I think a little bit of concern in their eyes, I'm thinking this is a group of people mostly from Postville but from other areas, that are giving no cause for concern... None of us were holding any weapons or really providing any need for concern. We came up to the fence, nobody touched the fence nobody attempted to enter the Cattle Congress. We just wanted to make it known that there's a problem here and that we were supporting the people who were arrested and who were being detained. We wanted to make it clear that these were members of our community that were taken away. In addition to having the armed guards looking threatening and looking at us like we had no right to be there, there was someone there taking pictures of everyone. I very distinctly remember an ICE agent pointing the camera at me and focusing in and taking a picture...<sup>46</sup>

ICE was very carefully monitoring the crowd even during the peaceful protest. Pastor Brackett later wondered if ICE was creating a file of some sort for all the people in attendance at the march. He was not worried about himself, but he did worry about some

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<sup>44</sup> Mary McCauley, interview by author, 25 February 2015, Dubuque, Iowa. Digital Recording.

<sup>45</sup> Myke Goings, "Immigration Raid- Rally and Protest March," *CNN iReport*, May 19, 2008, accessed April 6, 2015, <http://ireport.cnn.com/docs/DOC-24030>.

<sup>46</sup> Steve Brackett, interview by author, 9 August 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

of the other protestors from Postville who might have been part of the 697 criminal complaints and arrest warrants that ICE had brought to Agriprocessors the day of the raid.<sup>47</sup>

The second and largest march was held in Postville on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2008 and nearly 1,000 people marching in protest of working conditions in Agriprocessors and for immigration reform. The marchers were met with a counter-protest organized by the Federation for American Immigration Reform whose main goals are to strengthen border control and stop illegal immigration.<sup>48</sup> Sister Mary McCauley noted that while they passed the counter-protestors, “We were not going to let a group of people who were in opposition to our beliefs silence us in anyway... We just basically held our heads high and as they shouted on us, we didn’t pay much attention to them at all.”<sup>49</sup> She also noted that the majority of the protestors were from outside the community of Postville. The marchers who supported the civil and humans rights of the migrants and their families responded to the counter-protestors chants of “illegals go home,” with shouts of, “stop the raids!”<sup>50</sup>

On November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2008, Rigoberta Menchú, a Mayan activist for human rights and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate visited Postville to express solidarity with the workers who were deported and those who remained. During a service she said, “I come not only

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<sup>47</sup> Susan Saulny, “Hundreds Are Arrested in U.S. Sweep of Meat Plant,” *New York Times* (May 13, 2008).

<sup>48</sup> “About FAIR,” Federation for American Immigration Reform, <http://www.fairus.org/about> (accessed May 9, 2014).

<sup>49</sup> Mary McCauley, interview by author, 25 February 2015, Dubuque, Iowa. Digital Recording.

<sup>50</sup> Julie Preston, “Iowa Rally Protests Raid and Condition at Plant,” *New York Times*, July 28, 2008, accessed May 8, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/28/us/28immig.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/28/us/28immig.html?_r=0).



to listen to your suffering, but also to identify with your suffering. Your pain is my pain.”<sup>51</sup> She recognized the human rights violations that the people had endured throughout the process of migration and deportation.<sup>52</sup>

We not only had the march in July, immediately following the raid, but then on the first anniversary we had another one too, and then we had another one on the fifth anniversary. They were demonstrations. They were to give witness and also as a sign of support for the people that they were not alone, that we were standing with them in solidarity.<sup>53</sup>

The protests, marches, and rallies continued long after the raid happened to keep the Postville story alive and because very little had changed with United States immigration system. However, because of the Postville raid and another even larger worksite raid that same year in Mississippi, a few policy changes did occur for ICE.

### Changes in Law and Rebuilding the Community

On August 25th, 2008, just months after the Postville raid, ICE conducted an even larger worksite raid at Howard Industries in Laurel, Mississippi, arresting 595 workers. Although this read was very similar in its violations of human rights such as separating families, ICE did to change some of their tactics. Undocumented workers were given immigration violations and only eight were criminally charged. The overall negative public opinion surrounding the Postville raid made judges and law officials wary of

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<sup>51</sup> Sister Carol Hoverman, “Nobel Winner Listens to Testimony of Workers Rounded up in Iowa Raid,” *Catholic News Service*. November 19, 2008. The Postville Project [on-line], <http://www.postvilleproject.org/items/show/267> (accessed October 17, 2014).

<sup>52</sup> “Rigoberta Menchú Visits Postville,” *Des Moines Register*, November 8, 2008, video, accessed May 8, 2014, <http://archive.desmoinesregister.com/VideoNetwork/50377885001/Rigoberta-Menchu-visits-Postville>.

<sup>53</sup>Mary McCauley, interview by author, 25 February 2015, Dubuque, Iowa. Digital Recording.

cooperating on the same scale that the District Court of Northern Iowa had. After these two large worksite raids that targeted immigrants, many people spoke out against criminalization of immigrants and a nationwide call was made for immigration reform in the United States.<sup>54</sup> Small victories were won such as the *Flores-Figueroa v. United States* case that decided immigrants who unknowingly used false social security numbers could not be charged with aggravated identity theft and the *Padilla v. Kentucky* case that made it necessary for all arrested immigrants to be counseled by immigration lawyers or defense attorneys well versed in immigration law.<sup>55</sup> Even though large-scale raids have not been as widespread since 2008, paper raids implemented under the Obama administration still violate human rights and continue the circumstances similar to those Postville faced across the country. They deny people access to resources for basic survival, they deny people dignity and access to work, they separate families, and they destroy towns.<sup>56</sup>

Many of the people who suffered physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or worked as minors at Agriprocessors were eligible to apply for a U-Visa that allows them to work legally in the U.S. for four years and later apply for permanent-resident status. It also allows their immediate family members to apply for temporary visas. Pro-bono immigration lawyers like Sonia Perras Konrad worked to file for U-Visas for as many

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<sup>54</sup> Adam Nossiter, "Hundreds of Workers Held in Immigration Raid," *The New York Times*, August 25, 2008, accessed April 5, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/26/us/26raid.html>, and Tim Gaynor, "U.S. Immigration Cops Nab 595 in Largest-Ever Raid," *Reuters*, August 26, 2008, accessed April 5, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/08/26/us-usa-immigration-arrests-idUSN2635579820080826>.

<sup>55</sup> *Flores-Figueroa v. United States*, 08-108 (U.S. Supreme Court, 2009), accessed May 6, 2014, <http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/08pdf/08-108.pdf>, and *Padilla v. Kentucky*, 08-651 (U.S. Supreme Court, 2010), accessed May 6, 2014, <http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/09pdf/08-651.pdf>.

<sup>56</sup> Camayd-Freixas, *US Immigration Reform and Its Global Impact*, 166-168.

Postville residents as possible. As of May 2013, 40 people had received U-Visas.<sup>57</sup> The program has been reuniting families torn apart by worksite raids and allowing people to legally work, but it can also cause further separation. The program requires all siblings to be under 19 years old to be eligible. This type of familial division was represented in Postville by Avisai Lopez who had worked at Agriprocessors as a minor and qualified for a U-Visa. Lopez was able to bring his family to the U.S. with the exception of his two sisters who did not meet the age requirement.<sup>58</sup>

Pedro Lopez and his family were able to receive permanent residency after his older sister qualified for a U-Visa. After years of traveling to Des Moines to renew their Visas and sort out their paperwork, they are on their way to becoming United States citizens. This process is not easy in any way, physically or mentally. As Pedro explained, “I have mixed feelings at times about it. But I know that the United States has been my country for a long time. I feel that, while I do owe my country of origin a great deal because that is where my parents lived, I feel that my future is here and this is where I

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<sup>57</sup> Trish Mehaffrey, “After Postville Raid, Advocates Hope Next Step Is Immigration Reform,” *The Gazette*, May 5, 2013, accessed April 8, 2015, <http://thegazette.com/2013/05/05/after-postville-raid-advocates-hope-next-step-is-immigration-reform>.

<sup>58</sup> Jens Manuel Krogstad, “Postville Guatemalan Families Reunited,” *Des Moines Register*, December 5, 2010, accessed November 12, 2014, Kourtney Liepelt, “Separation Wears on Family Torn Apart After 2008 Postville Raid: Six Years After the Raid, and the Deportations, Some Guatemalans Have Returned,” *The Gazette*, July 8, 2014, accessed April 8, 2015, <http://thegazette.com/subject/society/demographics/immigration/separation-wears-on-family-torn-apart-after-2008-postville-raid-20140708>, very similar to Avisai Lopez’s story, Jimmy Gomez worked as a minor at Agriprocessors and qualified for a U-Visa after the raid. He was able to help his entire immediate family qualify for temporary visas, except for his 23 year old sister Alicia. Alicia and her children are now separated from her brother and her parents with little chance that they will see each other in the future. Luis Argueta, “The U-Turn: A Transformational Story,” Maya Media Corp, <http://www.theurnfilm.com/welcome.html> (accessed March 9, 2015), U-Visas are the topic of Luis Argueta’s new documentary film titled *The U-Turn: A Transformational Story*. The U-Turn follows those Postville residents who received U-Visas and the community that stood behind them and others who remained in Postville. A trailer has been released but the documentary will be coming soon.

want to have my kids.”<sup>59</sup> There are many freedoms that having permanent residency affords his family. Both his parents can now work legally and he is attending college. They do not have to live in constant fear that ICE is going to knock down their front door and arrest them.

During the aftermath of the Postville raid, many people wondered how this terrible tragedy could happen in such a sleepy little town in Iowa. Surprisingly out of such terrible circumstances emerged some really great things. Postville as a town grew closer and really began to see its diversity as a positive, not a barrier. For example, the town now has a large number of Somali refugees among its residents.<sup>60</sup> Salat Elmi, the former Somali translator at the Postville schools said many people decided to settle in Postville because the positive things they had heard about Postville schools and the community.

I had some people come up to me and ask me this question why are the Somalis moving to Postville? And it’s a good question. Is it because the job... Or is it because of the school? Or what is it? It’s not about the job, it’s not about Agri... So most of them they moved because of the school. They heard the school is good. Because the school and the town is very small so it is also safe for their kids.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Pedro Lopez, interview by author, 15 March 2015, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>60</sup> Trish Mehaffrey, “Five Years Later: Ever-Changing Diversity Maintains Postville: Town Still Feeling Impact of 2008 Agriprocessors Raid,” *The Gazette*, March 28, 2014, accessed April 8, 2015, <http://thegazette.com/2013/05/05/five-years-later-ever-changing-diversity-maintains-postville>.

<sup>61</sup> Salat Elmi, interview by author, 31 August 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

A trend in rural Iowa in recent years has been for merging of small schools that are often struggling, and since 1990, 92 school districts have closed.<sup>62</sup> Luckily, that is one problem Postville does not have to face for now. Chad Wahls commented,

You look across the state of Iowa and you probably hear at least every year two to three schools shutting down or merging with another school district because of enrollment. This community has been able to continue to have this school because of the workforce here and because of the people that have come into this community and made it their home.<sup>63</sup>

As a consequence of more residents moving to Postville, their school is not experiencing the drops in enrollment or financial difficulty that others in Iowa are experiencing.

Schools often function as the center of communities. In Postville this was and continues to be true. It is the one place where nearly everyone goes no matter their ethnicity or religion.<sup>64</sup> The school has also implemented a bi-yearly event, the Diversity Celebration that brings together students, Postville residents, and members from nearby communities to showcase information, handicrafts, food, dancing, singing, and traditional dress from the populations that are represented in Postville.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Mary Stegmeir, "Consolidation Trend Continues in Rural Districts," *Des Moines Register*, June 8, 2014, accessed April 10, 2015, <http://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/education/2014/06/09/consolidation-trend-continues-rural-iowa-districts/10217285/>.

<sup>63</sup> Chad Wahls, interview by author, 2 March 2015, Postville, Iowa. Digital Recording.

<sup>64</sup> "Schools," City of Postville, 2011, [http://www.cityofpostville.com/cgi-bin/csvsearch.pl?mytp=tpMenu3&mydb=db1&order\\_by=OrderOf&order=123&Page=Schools](http://www.cityofpostville.com/cgi-bin/csvsearch.pl?mytp=tpMenu3&mydb=db1&order_by=OrderOf&order=123&Page=Schools) (accessed April 7, 2015), Jewish families typically send their children to the boys or girls school run under the Torah Education Program.

<sup>65</sup> Anna Jeide, "Postville Honors Diversity: HOLA-Enlaces Attends Diversity Night in Postville to Learn About and Support the Community," *Luther College Chips*, March 20, 2014, accessed April 10, 2015, <http://lutherchips.com/2014/03/19/postville-honors-diversity.html>, Chad Wahls, interview by author, 2 March 2015, Postville, Iowa. Digital Recording, and "The Postville High School Hosted a Diversity Celebration on March 14, 2014," Postville Community School District, <http://www.postville.k12.ia.us/vnews/display.v/ART/5318c9ca29ead> (accessed April 7, 2015), The decision was recently made to host the event every other year. The 2013 event featured groups from

Postville is returning to the bustling town it was before the raid, with kids playing in nearly every yard on sunny days and storefronts filled with goods on Main Street.

Business owner Aaron Goldsmith described it as a totally new Postville.

Many people ask me *is Postville still the same?*... My answer is that it is a new Postville. It is another experience, this one is much more staid, its much more calm... Postville is like the little train that could, it seems to have steamed up again, pulled itself out of the hole, and it's moving forward.<sup>66</sup>

The current mayor of Postville, Leigh Rekow shares Goldsmith's belief that Postville is ready to move forward from the devastation of the raid. He said, "Postville people are pretty solid people, and we just went on. We didn't bemoan the fact that we were raided. It hurt for a while but we just kept going, started over, and never looked back. We've done well."<sup>67</sup> Postville may always be known for as the tiny town in Iowa that endured the huge ICE raid. As much as residents want to move forward, often it is because the past is too painful. Others want to build off the experiences and the abuses they witnessed to advocate for change. When asked about the future of Postville, Pedro Lopez said,

I hope the Postville story doesn't become a passive thing. I hope that it is something that is kept alive. It is something that we should be proud of. While it did bring a lot of misery and somewhat destruction it gave fertile land for hopes and dreams and aspirations to be sown and now being reaped. I feel that Postville should be proud of being that town that said *it ends right here, this is garbage what you guys are going. Let's speak up and be the voice for everybody around us.*<sup>68</sup>

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Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Peru, Ukraine, Russia, Somalia, the Philippines, and from North America. In 2014, Approximately 500 people came to the 2014 event that featured a Somali Fashion show, traditional Mexican Dance, Poetry readings from Russia, the singing of the Saudi Arabi National Anthem, and a Scandinavian Maypole dance.

<sup>66</sup> Aaron Goldsmith, interview by author, 19 November 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>67</sup> Leigh Rekow, interview by author, 19 November 2014, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

<sup>68</sup> Pedro Lopez, interview by author, 15 March 2015, Postville, Iowa. Digital recording.

Pedro wants to see Postville become an example to diverse communities across Iowa and the nation. Moving forward from the raid does not mean forgetting. Given the hardships some community members in Postville and those deported after the raid still face and the relationships that still exist between Postville and communities in Guatemala where the past is often maintained into the present, the legacy of the raid will not be forgotten.

## CONCLUSION

In this thesis I outlined the formation of a transnational community between Postville and the communities of San Jose Calderas, El Rosario, and San Miguel Dueñas in Guatemala. Between the late 1980s and the 2000s hundreds of Guatemalans traveled north with Postville as their destination. As noted, the push to leave Guatemala stemmed from the brutal Civil War and its aftermath of violence and an unstable economy. Because migration to the United States is often the only way parents are able to make ends meet, they are willing to risk their lives along the journey north. They are also willing to pay thousands of dollars to coyotes to help them cross both borders that have become increasingly fortified and dangerous. Migrants are often extorted and abused on the journey to the United States, precisely because they are a vulnerable population with very few safe places to seek help.

The second chapter sought to show how the Postville community had an immigration experience that touched nearly everyone in town, even though many of the Postville residents were not migrants themselves. This can be seen through the incorporation of newcomers into the town as they settled in, bought houses, sent their children to the Postville Schools, and began attending churches. The town began to take on a new flavor as new restaurants, clothing stores, and grocery stores catering to the new populations in town dotted Lawler Avenue, Postville's main street. Committees formed to enhance community cohesion and the cultures mixed at events such as the Taste of Postville or High School sports events. Ties between home communities in Guatemala



and those in Postville were kept as people sent letters, photos, and money to family members and friends who remained.

Although Postville was a safe and quite place, many of the Guatemalans in town were still vulnerable because of their status as undocumented. Employers who took advantage of the fact by employing undocumented workers and even minors at below minimum wage, for long hours, at substandard safety and cleanliness levels. Physical and sexual abuse reportedly took place at Agriprocessors, the main employer in town. Supervisors knew of the workers general distrust of law enforcement and subsequent reluctance to report any of the abuses. Postville residents knew that questionable things were happening inside Agriprocessors, but they did not know the full extent and reported abuses went unheeded. Outside of the workplace, a few scuffles broke out in town, but Postville seemed to be emerging as a new model for inclusion of diverse populations in a historically homogenous place.

When the raid occurred on May 12, 2008, it seemed like a slap in the face for everything that the Postville community had worked for. Children were terrified they would be separated from their parents and many were. Parents were frightened that ICE would raid their homes and destroy everything they had worked so hard and sacrificed so much to gain, like the chance for their children to have an education, the ability to feed their families, and the chance to lead a secure life free from violence. In the third chapter I argue that the raid, arrests, and deportation had a much deeper reach than the nearly 400 people who were arrested, it had a huge effect on nearly everyone in Postville and the

communities in Guatemala. Teachers and administrators at the Postville School dealt with the consequences of the raid for months and years afterwards as some students dealt with the emotional baggage of losing a parent during the raid or a friend in the aftermath when many families fled Postville in fear that ICE would be back. Religious workers dealt with a community that had been broken and was left in extreme fear. Especially those at St. Bridget's Catholic Church where so many people sought shelter the week of the raid. Volunteers at the food bank did what they could for people who could no longer work. Almost everyone in town helped in some way by donating food or money to the relief response in the days, weeks, and months after the raid.

The raid and the U.S. immigration system challenged the core values many people in Iowa held. The detained workers and shamed women were their neighbors, for the religious they were their brothers and sisters in Christ. The important values of hard work and family cohesion were stripped away from the undocumented migrants, a terrible injustice in many Iowans' minds. The local economy of Postville was left in shambles as one fifth of their population evaporated overnight. They were faced with questions like how would the community rebuild? What would happen to the detained? What lies ahead for the families separated in the U.S.? How will the families relying on wage earners from Postville in Mexico and Guatemala get by? These questions swirled through the minds of women rocking crying babies at St. Bridget's, pierced the thoughts of Postville residents lucky enough to feel safe in their homes, shattered hopes and dreams for a better future as the news spread to communities in Guatemala, and shared space in the

consciousness of the detained in Waterloo with the sounds of the clanging chains surrounding their holding pen, their wrists, and their ankles.

In the midst of all the upheaval due to the raid, the Postville community came together to rally for rights for immigrants, an end to worksite raids, and immigration reform. The marches and protests after the raid showed that even in a time of extreme fear and vulnerability, the people of Postville expressed their agency through speaking out about the abuses of the raid and the entire immigration system. Many people in Postville are proud of the changes in legislation that were made shortly after the Postville raid that require any immigrant that is arrested has the right to council by an immigration lawyer and that people could not be charged with aggravated identity theft if they truly did not knowingly use a fake social security number. Both changes would have greatly benefitted the undocumented workers from Postville, and will be a great boon for any migrants who find themselves criminalized for being caught in a system that depends on migrant labor, but makes it virtually impossible for migrants to find a legal way to come work in the United States. The deported and their families in Guatemala also advocated for their rights through demanding Agriprocessors pay them their final paychecks and for those who qualified, continuing the legal process of obtaining U-Visas.

Postville has been rebuilding since the time of the raid. Many of the stores that closed in the aftermath have reopened or new businesses have moved in. More workers have been moving in to town to fill the void at Agriprocessors and other businesses after the raid. The Postville School's enrollment is nearly the same as before the raid in 2008

and more students are graduating. Before the raid, many students were dropping out of High School to work at Agriprocessors or elsewhere and did not earn a degree. Some are continuing on to colleges and Universities. Many people who live in Postville now have temporary residency or have become citizens of the United States. These statuses come with a certain degree of security and freedom and a life with less pervasive fear.

However, freedom, security, and a life without fear are rights that all people, regardless of status are entitled to. Small towns and rural villages in Guatemala still face the same challenges that pushed people to migrate to the United States in the first place. There are few jobs and a lot of violence in certain parts of the country. Many rural areas are being threatened by development projects promoted by the government or by international companies. These projects are often carried out without the consent of the people living there and the effects to the land often make it impossible for people to live there.

The history of migration out of Guatemala is long and complex and migrants to the United States experience human rights abuses throughout the migration process, while living and working in the United States, and during raids, arrests, and deportation. The United States immigration system disregards the root causes of migration and tries to stop the flow of migrants by throwing money at police in Guatemala and at border forces, which further violates human rights by denying migrants a life of dignity and access to basic needs. In the case of Postville and similar situations, worksite raids separate families and perpetuate a life of fear. As I hope to have portrayed by examining the immigration experience in Postville, Iowa, migrants enhance the communities that they

settle in and are a vital part of the economy of the United States. Observances of human rights are not contingent on an arbitrary status, but as this thesis argues, undocumented migrants are more vulnerable to human rights abuses.

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