

**“Transnationalism and Collective Mobilization among the Maya of Jupiter:
Ambiguities of Transnational Identity and Lived Religion”**

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Politics and Religion

As a social scientist who studies religion, I find myself frequently caught between the elusiveness and the explanatory power of my research subject. As a political scientist I have been conditioned to abridge, quantify, and correlate variables in the most parsimonious fashion possible. At the same time, everything I have learned from the field of religious studies pulls me back toward qualifiers, layers of analysis, and the shifting meanings and interpretations of religious variables across contexts and time. The most consistent finding I have discovered in the study of religion and politics is the fact that religious beliefs, identities, practices, and institutions always have complex and even contradictory effects. Religion imposes hierarchy while granting freedom, empowers agency while placing powerful restraints, and builds community while fostering conflict. This complexity is what continues to draw me to the subject of religion and politics in general, and to the subject of this paper in particular.

Transnational Identity, Reactive Ethnicity, and the Ambiguity of “Home”

One of the primary goals of our initial grant proposal to the Ford Foundation was to understand the impact that various forms of religious transnationalism have on the formation or continuation of collective identities among immigrants in South Florida. In turn, we hoped to assess how such identities might foster/and or hinder civic participation among immigrants in the public sphere. Based on four years of research among Mayan immigrants in the community of Jupiter, Florida, this paper argues that certain elements of lived religion among the Jupiter Maya symbolically and practically recreate conceptions of ‘home,’ thereby providing a sense of aggregate identity that has facilitated collective action. Some of the contextual factors acting as catalysts for this effect include a common sending community, ethnic and linguistic homogeneity, and the dominance of a single religious tradition. These factors combine with low levels of social/cultural acceptance of immigrants in Jupiter to produce what Alejandro Portes has called reactive ethnicity—a revitalized form of identity politics that emerges in the face of a perceived hostile environment.¹

But the story does not end there. In many cases, the comfortable and safe recreations of ‘home’ are more imagined than real. Nostalgia, family difficulties, and shifting transnational identities intrude and can shatter shared conceptions of a recreated home. When contextual factors are not favorable, divisions and other barriers to collective identity formation limit the possibility for collective action and expose differences within immigrant conceptions of home. Furthermore, the very factors that provide a sense of collective identity at the level of village, church, and ethnic group are likely to lead to divisions that inhibit collective action at an expanded level of identity (Mayan, Hispanic,

¹ According to Portes and Rumbaut (2001: 284), “reactive ethnicity is the product of confrontation with an adverse native mainstream and the rise of defensive identities and solidarities to counter it.” In contrast, linear ethnicity represents a continuation of past cultural orientations and practices “rather than an emergent reaction to the present” (Portes 1999, 134).

or immigrant). Reactive ethnicity may carry a heavy price in terms of acceptance within the host community and inter-ethnic conflict.

In order to put this argument in context, I will begin with a brief discussion of the key concepts of transnationalism, lived religion, and reactive ethnicity. I will then turn to a description of the immigrant community in Jupiter, with a focus on the primary religious and other civic organizations active among the immigrant community. The bulk of the paper will address conceptions of home, identity, and public action, with a focus on transnational religious institutions and practices. In particular, I will focus on the transnational and identity linkages illustrated in the initial celebration of the *Fiesta Maya* in Jupiter in 2002 and the ensuing examples of collective action among Jupiter's immigrant population. In keeping with the theme of complexity and contradiction, I will lay out some of the specific impediments to broad community collaboration that are apparent in the case of Jupiter, and may be inherent in social movements based in the formation of a shared identity politics characterized by reactive ethnicity. I will conclude with some final theoretical reflections on religion, politics, and transnationalism.

Transnationalism, Lived Religion, and Reactive Ethnicity

It should come as no surprise that transnationalism is a contested term. Scholars in the fields of cultural studies, religious studies, migration studies, political science, sociology, and anthropology use the term to mean very different things in different contexts. In the broadest terms, transnationalism refers to activities, organizations, ideas, identities, and social and economic relations that frequently cross or even transcend national boundaries (see Levitt 2001, Portes et al. 1999, Peterson, Vasquez, and Williams 2001). As is the case in many academic fields, this broad definition creates a multi-dimensional "levels of analysis problem" for the study of transnationalism. Luis Guarnizo and Michael P. Smith (2001) distinguish between 'transnationalism from above' as the processes of globalization anchored in multinational governmental and non-governmental organizations and 'transnationalism from below' with a focus on the lived realities of migrants and their cross-border communities. Within the definition of transnationalism from below, Alejandro Portes et al (1999) add quantitative and chronological dimensions, arguing that the volume of individuals and activities crossing borders must be both significant and sustained in order to be called transnational. Exactly how high the volume must be or for how long remains an issue of some debate (see Nadjie Al-Ali and Khalid Koser, 2002).

Moving beyond the study of individual transmigrants, Peggy Levitt (2001) and Larissa Ruíz Baía (2001) focus on the need to understand the social context of transnationalism. The social groups, identities, beliefs, rituals, practices, and power relationships in both sending and receiving communities (as well as locations in transit) are also critical to our understanding of the process and effects of transnationalism. Here lies the critical nexus between the study of transnationalism and the study of lived religion, for it is precisely the social groups, identities, beliefs, rituals, practices, meanings and power relationships among people that make up the substance of the study of lived religion. According to this perspective, the Pentecostal pastor proselytizing among day-laborers on Center Street and the families of those laborers back home in Jacaltenango are as much a part of the "transnational community" as the transmigrants

themselves. For each of these actors, lived religion encompasses their embodied practices as they navigate the multiple locations and relations that constitute the fabric of their daily lives. In other words, lived religion takes place both inside and outside of the formal process of “belonging” to a religious group (See Hall 1997, Orsi 1999, Brown 1999).² It is within this final level of analysis that this study is located, exploring the religious elements of transnationalism from below in the community that stretches between Jacaltenango, Guatemala, and Jupiter, Florida.

Reactive ethnicity is the final key concept informing this study. As Alejandro Portes (1999) and others have argued, reactive ethnicity can provide a solid foundation for collective identity and political mobilization among immigrant populations. The mobilization of Latinos in California in response to Prop 187 is a good example. Similarly, Popkin (1999) has documented the rise of reactive ethnicity on the part of Guatemalan Kanjobal migrants in Los Angeles in response to extensive discrimination in that context. In the face of an overtly or even covertly hostile environment, reactive ethnicity provides the basis for greater collective solidarity and political mobilization in defense of ethnic group interests. Not surprisingly, Portes (1999: 465) has also argued that reactive ethnicity provides a strong foundation for extensive and intensive transnational activities.³ As Portes explains, “there is no recourse but to draw a protective boundary around the group, identifying it with traditions and interests rooted in the home country and separating it symbolically and, at times, physically, from the host society.”

In the case of Jupiter, this study seeks to demonstrate that recreated images of home have been both facilitated by and reinforced through reactive ethnicity. Through planning, organizing, and celebrating the fiesta Maya, Jacaltecan Mayan immigrants in Jupiter have maintained and reinforced common ties of identity that facilitate cooperative public action beyond the festival. At the same time, religious divisions, and ethnic and regional differences among the larger Mayan immigrant population continue to serve as impediments to pan-Mayan or pan-Hispanic activism.

Mayan Immigrants in Jupiter, Florida

Jupiter, Florida is a relatively small (with a population of approximately 40,000) coastal city on the northern edge of Palm Beach County less than ten miles North of West Palm Beach. A popular winter vacation destination, Jupiter is currently experiencing a major housing and construction boom. The construction industry, lawn and garden industry, and the golf course industry rely heavily on immigrant (primarily Guatemalan and Mexican Mayan) labor. Each day, hundreds of day-laborers crowd the sidewalk and parking lots in front of apartments on a local throughway, waiting for contractors and private individuals to arrive and offer work.

According to the 2000 Census data, Jupiter’s 2,881 Hispanics or Latinos make up 7.3 percent of the city’s population (US Census Bureau, Census 2000). The majority of these individuals are relatively recent Mayan immigrants from Guatemala and Mexico. Assuming that census data undercounts the immigrant community and that the

² Indeed our survey results showed that more than 50% of our respondents reported that they never participate in religious organizations.

³ See also Popkin (1999).

community has grown significantly since 2000, we estimate the number of Central Americans and Mexicans currently living in Jupiter to be between 3000 and 4000 individuals. The majority of Jupiter's immigrants come from rural areas in Northern Guatemala (primarily Huehuetenango with 42% of those we sampled in our survey) and Southern Mexico (Chiapas, with nearly 15 %). Based on interviews with key informants, I estimate that approximately 1000 of these individuals come from the town of Jacaltenango and its surrounding *aldeas* in Northwestern Guatemala.⁴

The first wave of Mayan immigrants to arrive in Jupiter came via Indiantown. During the civil war in Guatemala, Indiantown became a major receiving destination for refugees. Many of these individuals sought asylum and eventually received legal status. As the construction industry in Jupiter grew, contractors from the Jupiter sent vans to Indiantown to pick up immigrant laborers. Eventually, small numbers of Mayan immigrants began to settle in Jupiter along Center Street and in the charter neighborhoods. Eventually, these pioneers sent for their family members, establishing a chain of migration between Jacaltenango and Jupiter, with Indiantown and the refugee camps in Southern Mexico en route. Since 1995, the immigrant population in Jupiter has grown rapidly as economic conditions in Guatemala and Southern Mexico have deteriorated, and the demand for immigrant labor in Jupiter has continued to grow in the construction landscaping, golf-course, and nursery industries.

In an initial needs assessment and in interviews conducted with members of Jupiter's immigrant community, the issue of racial discrimination was prominent. For the most part, the Mayan people we interviewed referred to Anglos when they discussed issues of racism. Other challenges facing Jupiter's migrants include learning of transit and transportation methods, dealing with local authorities, usage of banks to send remittances, daily purchases, methods for seeking employment, methods of payments for labor, using automated services, fast food, telephone cards, etc. Jupiter is not a pedestrian-friendly town, with multiple six-lane throughways and no bike lanes. Until October, 2005, the town had no public transportation, leaving most of the Mayan immigrants to negotiate the busy roads on foot or by bike.⁵ In order to afford shelter in a town with soaring property values, groups of immigrants often live together in small apartments and duplexes. This leads to problems of sanitation, tensions between the individuals, and complaints from neighbors and organized neighborhood groups. It also eliminates the notion of home as a place dedicated to privacy and relaxation. One of the primary concerns that emerged in multiple interviews and focus groups among migrants was the lack of any welcoming public space in Jupiter. The Mayan immigrants sense that they are unwelcome in public spaces (the beach, town center, etc.) and thus tend to spend the majority of their recreation time in their own domiciles.

In our initial mapping of religious institutions in the Jupiter we found evidence of what Peggy Levitt (2001) calls extended, negotiated, and recreated transnational religious

⁴ Municipal head of the department of Huehuetenango, Jacaltenango covers an area of approximately 220 square kilometers encompassing a number of smaller *aldeas*. Jacaltenango and its surrounding areas saw significant action during Guatemala's civil war, particularly during the 1980s and 1990s. Due to its proximity to the border with Mexico, Jacaltenango has a long history of cross border connections.

⁵ Advocates for the immigrant community have worked closely with town officials on a proposed bus service which began in October, 2005. Unfortunately, the busses only run during the day, when the vast majority of the immigrant community is at work.

organizations. The Catholic Church generally falls within the first category. St. Peter's, the Catholic Church located closest to the majority of the immigrant population in Jupiter, had no Spanish Mass and no mission to the immigrant population at the inception of our study. Repeated attempts by the leaders of the Mayan community to make inroads into the Church were rebuffed. However, following the celebration of the first Fiesta, Mayan leaders pressed the local Bishop to address this problem. Beginning in 2003, St. Peter's started a Hispanic ministry, which has grown significantly since that time. One of the priests, a nun, and several congregation members of St. Peter's have become strong advocates on behalf of Jupiter's immigrant community, speaking up on their behalf in front of the Town Council and working with local non-profits to organize a neighborhood resource center. In 2005, the church hosted the signing of a sister-city agreement between Jacaltenago and Jupiter. The priest and some congregation members now have plans to travel to Jacaltenago to meet with parish representatives and establish a sister-church program.

South of Jupiter, the St. Ignatius Loyola Church in Palm Beach Gardens serves close to 200 Guatemalans, divided between the Jacaltecos and other Mayan groups. There is little mixing between the Anglo and Mayan congregations served in the Church, with Spanish Mass held separately and few opportunities for mingling. Some members of the St. Ignatius Church are very active through the *Tepeyac* mission in projects in Jacaltenago, supporting schools, fiestas, and a nutritional center. *Tepeyac* is an organization that is independent from the Jupiter parish, with its own independent board of seven people.

While there are some clear and growing transnational connections between the institutional Catholic Church and Jupiter's Mayan community (also see Burns, 1993), the majority of transnational religious organizing seems to fall into Levitt's final two categories of negotiated and recreated transnational religion. Many of the more successful evangelical churches appear to have been initiated by "religious entrepreneurs" who found both a survival strategy and a source of authority through church founding. The Evangelical Church of Kanjobal in Lake Worth, the *Templo de Adoracion Familiar*, and *Cristo Rompe las Cadenas* (an extremely charismatic evangelical group with a radio program on "Radio Fiesta" 1340 AM) were all founded by early religious entrepreneurs in Palm Beach County. In a unique transnational twist, one pastor who left the *Templo de Adoracion Familiar* is now working to spread the influence of the Guatemalan neopentecostal *Iglesia Elim* in Palm Beach County through the use of the internet.

A relatively large number of Mayan immigrants also gravitate toward North American evangelical and Pentecostal churches. The Baptist Church on Center Street has a significant immigrant membership and approximately 70 Guatemalans attend the Assembly of God Church.

The primary civic organizations that operate in Jupiter and the surrounding areas include Corn-Maya Inc., the Maya Jacalteco Association, and the Friends of the Jupiter Neighborhood Resource Center. Corn-Maya, Inc. is a 501 (c) (3), non-profit, non-sectarian organization that was formed by Mesoamerican refugees and advocates in South Florida in the early 1980s. The organization was formed initially to represent and assist the thousands of refugees, mostly Mayan indigenous people, who were fleeing civil wars in Central America. Since that time, Corn Maya's activities have included immigration services, referrals, interpreting services, emergency services, and the

sponsorship of community forums for immigrant education on different aspects of rights and responsibilities in U.S. society. Corn-Maya Inc. has also sponsored a number of cultural events including Guatemalan festivals, concert and dances

In 2002, the organization became revitalized through the process of planning for the first *Fiesta Maya* in Abacoa (a new planned community that houses the Florida Atlantic University campus). The members of the Maya Jacaltec Association (a non-incorporated group of Jacaltec Maya immigrants) asked permission from the original founders of Corn-Maya to re-instate the non-profit for operation in Jupiter. Corn-Maya opened a small office in Jupiter in 2003 to coordinate services to the immigrant community and will open a larger neighborhood resource center in collaboration with Catholic Charities in 2006.

The Friends of the Jupiter Neighborhood Resource Center is an advocacy group made up of members of St. Peter's, members of the Jupiter Democratic Club, representatives of Corn-Maya, and residents from the Charter Neighborhoods where Jupiter's immigrant community primarily resides. Since 2004, this group has met monthly to lobby the town in support of a Neighborhood Resource Center (including a day-labor center) to serve the immigrant community. The groups support was critical in convincing the Jupiter Town Council to vote in support of using town property to house the resource center.

Together, these civic and religious organizations made up of and in support of Jupiter's immigrant community have been extremely effective in advocating for Jupiter's immigrants. Prior to 2002, there was little public representation for the immigrant community in Jupiter.

Lived Religion and Conceptions of Home

According to anthropologist Allan Burns (1993:129), "a well-documented aspect of Maya cultural identity in Guatemala is the connection that people have to the communities where they were born (Nash 1989, Tax 1952, Wagley 1949). The coincidence of language, the town or community, and culture has been described as the basis for Guatemalan Maya identity." If the study of transnationalism and lived religion is partly about recreated spaces and cultural reproduction, it is critical that we explore immigrant images and recreations of home.

I should note that this is hardly a novel idea or one that applies exclusively to the Mayan community. In Robert Orsi's rich study of lived religion among Italian immigrants in East Harlem, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, he reaches a key conclusion about some of the fundamental ambivalences that characterize the inner history of migration. As Orsi (1985:162) puts it, "The inner history of immigration is also a story of complex needs: for success, stability, participation and autonomy, faithfulness to tradition and openness to the new ways, the need to recreate the familiar while in the midst of change." This is as true among Mayan immigrants in Jupiter today as it was among the Italian immigrants in Harlem at the turn of the century. Just as the Southern Italians who came to New York sought to reproduce and celebrate their devotion to la Madonna del Carmine through the celebration of the *fiesta*, Jupiter's Jacaltec Mayan immigrants proudly march the streets of Jupiter's newest development (Abacoa) to honor their virgin of Candelaria during the *fiesta*.

In the case of the Maya in Jupiter, these images of home entail physical, cultural, ideological, familial, religious, national, and local elements that combine to create a sense of belonging and identity in the face of a confusing and sometimes hostile environment. The transnational connections among the Jacaltec Maya in Jupiter appear to be extremely strong. The celebration of fiesta, the organization of soccer tournaments, the collection of funds to return the dead to Jacaltenango, the presence of the Marimba at community gatherings, and the transmission of information (community news, videos of celebrations, and fireworks for celebrations) all serve to reinforce the connections between the home town and the present location. A brief history and explanation of the celebration of the *Fiesta Maya* in Jupiter provides multiple illustrations of this process.

From *Fiesta Candelaria* to *Fiesta Maya*

Planning for the initial celebration of the Fiesta began in 2001, and evolved from plans for a much less ambitious cultural exchange program involving the Mayan community and university students. University representatives, members of the Mayan community, and university students met with Ed Maietta, Executive Director of the Abacoa Partnership for Community to discuss the possibility of a cultural exchange event for the Mayan community, the Abacoa community, and the University. As talk progressed, the possibility of including Marimba music in the presentation was discussed. As dates for the event were debated, we found that the best date for all parties was January 27th, the weekend of celebration of *La Fiesta de la Virgen de Candelaria* for the Mayan community. Ultimately, all parties decided to schedule a series of activities around the fiesta (soccer games between Mayan teams and students, traditional Guatemalan food, and a talk about the situation of Mayan immigrants in the Jupiter community).

These initial conversations soon grew into a series of organizational meetings and plans for the festival. After many meetings and hours of planning, the *Coalición Jacalteca de Jupiter* formed a set of commissions, each responsible for different elements of the festival. The coalition met weekly in the months leading up to the festival to prepare for the mass, procession, food, publicity, and other aspects of the celebration. Students and faculty from the Honors College attended some of these organizational meetings and also participated in planning for the festival.

As planning for the festival moved forward, countervailing tendencies within the process of “community building” became evident. The religious nature of the festival was questioned by some participants, while questions of inclusion or exclusion of the wider immigrant community were debated. One potential conflict that arose during the planning stages of the festival centered around divisions in the community between the primarily Catholic and traditional Jacaltec coalition and a group of Mayan evangelicals associated with a North American pastor at a local evangelical church. While initially enthusiastic about the project, the pastor began to express skepticism when he learned more about the religious nature of the festival. As the pastor explained:

I started out enthusiastic about the Fiesta, but I guess I was also a little naïve...as soon as I began to mention this to our people I got a surprise. This Fiesta is only embraced in the Christian Community by those who

are Catholic or pagan. It is not participated in at all by other Christians in the evangelical groups. Though the majority in most Spanish speaking countries are from Catholic background, this is not true in Guatemala, where the majority is evangelical.

As these religious and cultural dividing lines began to become clear, organizers of the festival were also warned by University officials about using University premises for religious events. After hours of discussion on the merits of inclusiveness, cultural identity, and religious significance, the Jacalteco Association eventually came to the decision to remove religious references from publicity for the festival and to restrict religious activities to off-campus locations during the morning of the fiesta. The festival was renamed and advertised as the *Fiesta Maya*. I will return to this issue in the discussion below.

The first year's festival drew more than 700 community residents, primarily Guatemalan Mayans, to the new planned community of Abacoa for a day of cultural exchange, celebration, music, sports, and food. In the following years, the festival has grown in size (drawing nearly 1500 participants) and has expanded to include participating music and dance groups from Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, and Chile. The results of the festival continue to reverberate within the Guatemalan community and in the larger Jupiter community. The initial organizers of the fiesta continued to meet and eventually filed for non-profit status under the name of a previously active group, Corn-Maya Inc. The non-profit has grown significantly since 2002, garnering grant support from the United Way, the Community Foundation, and multiple private donors. Representatives of Corn-Maya lobby on behalf of Jupiter's immigrant community and are now cooperating with town authorities to open a Neighborhood Resource Center that will address day-labor issues in the town. Since 2002, Corn-Maya's office has served as an unofficial employment office, a hurricane relief center, a community care closet, and a clearinghouse for immigration, legal, counseling, health, and other services to the immigrant community. In August, 2005, Corn-Maya collaborated with the local Catholic Church (St. Peter's) to sponsor a sister city agreement between Jupiter and Jacaltenango. The agreement was signed by the mayors of the two cities and Guatemalan Foreign Minister, Jorge Briz.

Corn-Maya has also played a key role in sponsoring soccer tournaments for Guatemalan and Mexican teams on Sundays. Teams are organized around the sending communities, each with its own *reína* who gives a speech prior to the beginning of the tournament. Soccer plays a crucial role for the Mayan community as it is the primary social event of the week and serves as the location for the dissemination of community information. The finals of each tournament are broadcast live via cell phone to a radio station in Jacaltenango.

In order to understand the movement from organizing a fiesta to organizing collective action in the interest of the immigrant community, it is necessary to explore the transnational connections as well as immigrant perceptions of the meaning of the fiesta.

The Fiesta as Transnational Landscape and Social Field

As Alejandro Portes(1999), Peggy Levitt (2001), and Sarah Mahler (1998) have argued, the concept of "transnational social fields" spanning host and receiving countries provides a useful tool for understanding the religious elements of transnationalism among immigrant communities. Individuals within these communities actively move between sending and receiving countries or use other means to maintain active lives in their new home and their country of origin. Many of these connections and recreations of images of home relate to religious and cultural institutions and practices. The celebration of the first *Fiesta Maya* in Jupiter provides us with a clear case in point.

One of the clearest transnational connections in the *Fiesta Maya* relates to publicity and coverage of the event. No less than five video cameras were wielded by Guatemalan participants to document the procession, mass, soccer game, and multiple interviews. Throughout the day, Guatemalan Mayans could be heard in front of the camera sending salutations to their friends and families in Jacaltenango. At least two of the cameramen flew to Guatemala to show their work during the celebration in Jacaltenango. During the nights of celebration before and after the fiesta, videos of previous celebrations in Jacaltenango were shown on a television set up in the backyard of one of the Jacalteco Mayan Association leaders' home.

Another connection took place via the radio airwaves. One individual who was unable to attend ceremonies in either Jupiter or Guatemala received a live report of the Jupiter celebration from a local leader via cellphone. During the celebration in Jacaltenango, this individual called a local radio station in Guatemala and passed along news of the Jupiter fiesta.

The traditional Marimba played for the procession also illustrates the transnational nature of this cultural and religious festival. In the months leading up to the festival, a traditional Marimba was located, but it was in a serious state of disrepair. A local Mayan carpenter was able to make the major repairs, but the essential replacements were not available in Florida. Arrangements were made to ship the *tela* (vibrating reeds made from pig intestines) from Guatemala in the final weeks prior to the festival.

Some of these connections are institutionalized through the *San Isidro Association*, a group that works and organizes both here and in Jacaltenango. The association is made up primarily of traditional Catholics who collect funds for social services and Church related organizations and fiestas. They provide funds from Mayans in Jupiter for the celebration of fiestas in Jacaltenango. Some of them travel to Jacaltenango each year for the fiesta. Other connections are institutionalized through the leadership of Lucio Perez and the Guatemalan-Maya Center Inc, located in Lake Worth. The Guatemalan-Maya Center provided support and traditional attire for the procession and dance at the fiesta.

A final transnational religious connection is personified in the priest from Jacaltenango who said mass during the fiesta. The priest, who was forced into exile during the violence, is a revered as a community leader in Jacaltenango and is widely respected among the Mayan immigrant population here. He performed services to bless the traditional costumes for the *baile de venado* the night prior to the festival, said Mass the morning of the fiesta, and then flew to Guatemala to attend the fiesta in Jacaltenango.

The nights of celebration preceding and following the public celebration of the Fiesta Maya also provide evidence of the creation of what Peggy Levitt (2001) has called "transnational religious space as an alternative landscape." The night prior to the festival, I was invited to a community member's house for the blessing of the procession marimba and other materials. The entire backyard was covered with tarp, under which a central altar was erected with the image of the virgin surrounded by candles and the costumes for the dance of the deer. Churrasco and tortillas were served to the sounds of a perpetually rotating set of marimba players. As the night progressed, coolers of beer appeared, more and more people arrived, and eventually the crowd formed a circle to begin the dancing. At that moment, we made our first visit to the transnational religious landscape of Jacaltenango, Guatemala. We returned to visit this remarkable alternative landscape each night for the rest of the week-long celebration.

Identity, Solidarity, Action and Home

"This was the first time that we were able to show the people our culture, the dance of the deer, the marimba. That was important. But what was even more critical was that we were able to celebrate our most important event of the year in such a place (Abacoa)...a place for rich people." –member of the Jacalteco Coalition

As illustrated in the festival and surrounding activities, religiously and culturally recreated images of home may assist transmigrants in the process of maintaining a sense of identity and solidarity in the face of the many difficulties encountered in daily life. Our interviews with members of Jupiter's Jacalteco community provide evidence for this process. As one young member of the Jacalteco community explained, "the unity among Guatemalans is essential. We unite with the purpose of showing this country who we are so that they pay attention to us... and so we can get our papers." A community leader in Indiantown added the following, "The success of the Guatemalans is that they help each other, in contrast to the Mexicans who don't have support. In the larger cities there is less solidarity."

What is the origin of this solidarity? To large degree, it is rooted in shared images of home, shared practices, shared language, and a shared sending community. When any Jacalteco dies here in the U.S., the Jupiter Jacalteco Association raises funds to return the body to be buried in Jacaltenango. When a new immigrant arrives from Jacaltenango he/she is generally offered a lower interest (or no-interest) loan to pay off the higher interest charges of the *coyote* who brought him/her. When the soccer tournaments are organized, the teams represent the various physical locations surrounding Jacaltenango. When the fiesta is celebrated in Abacoa it is organized, as much as possible, in direct parallel with the fiesta in Guatemala.

The elements of solidarity and self-help that have emerged among the Jupiter Maya have also translated into public action. Organizing for the festival morphed into organizing to reinvigorate the non-profit Corn-Maya. Representatives of Corn-Maya have met frequently with Jupiter's political authorities, sought funding for community services, participated in community events (i.e. the Solid Waste Authority Great American Cleanup), and worked to coordinate the various civic and religious groups related to the immigrant community.

Corn-Maya also played a leading role in demanding that the Catholic Diocese address the fact that the Church located closest to the Guatemalan community in Jupiter did not have any mission to the immigrant community. A letter addressed to the former Priest of St. Peters stated:

As a community of faith with very traditional and strong Catholic values, we wanted to worship, practice, and share them in a congregation that can receive us as equals. Nevertheless, you did not include us in the convocation 15 years ago and you have excluded us to this very day...you are one of us, our brother in Christ who doesn't know it, and we love our wayward brother. As you go to your powerful position the prayer meetings will ask that God be with you. Don't be mad at us for reminding you that there is no Holy Communion when people are excluded.

Within the year, St. Peter's opened its new and highly active Hispanic ministry.

In short, it appears as though the organizing and collective action necessary to carry out the public celebration of the fiesta has acted both as a unifying force, and an impetus to public action for the Jacalteco community in Jupiter. The many transnational elements of the celebration of the fiesta, along with other imagined and real conceptions of home (such as sending back the dead and organizing the soccer leagues) appear to have a direct link with increased activism and civic engagement.

This is not to say, however, that transnational connections and re-creations of home are simple and overwhelmingly positive in their connotations. The entire experience of immigration is fraught with ambiguities, nostalgia, and contradictions.

Ambiguities within Immigrant Conceptions of Home and Collective Identity

In the years following the first fiesta, we have conducted focus groups and individual interviews with the participants. The following description of one such focus group exchange captures a sentiment repeated in multiple interviews. The interviewer prompted the group of seven men by asking what their home was like when they left it. Her description, a summary report of their ensuing conversation, provides us with clues to some of the ambiguities within recreated images of home.

In remembering Guatemala they recall the poverty, but also the freedom, the marimba music, the festivals, traditions (cacao drink), *semana santa*, processions, and most of all the *Fiesta de la Candelaria*. They talk about the flowers used in this festival; purple flowers that grow high in the trees and require the most agile young men to collect them. They also recall the food (*tamales*). Everyone participated in this festival. They are happy that they can do it in Abacoa because they feel like it's a rich place and it took a lot to get there. Still, they feel that the procession here is just a summary of the real thing. At home no one works on this day, it is solemn and at the same time joyous. Everyone drinks during the fiesta, even the women drink. This is a stress release for them, they don't have to worry, and it is seven days of true freedom. Mostly here in Florida during the

fiesta they miss the landscape of their homes; the mountains and the rivers.⁶

As Allen Burns has demonstrated, transnational migrants often maintain multiple identities that cross national boundaries and traditional "ways of being Mayan" (Burns 1999). In relation to images of home, Nadjie Al-Ali and Khalid Koser (2002:6) add the insight that, "conceptions of home are not static but dynamic processes, involving the acts of imaging, creating, unmaking, changing, losing and moving 'homes'." In other words, the relatively simple notions of 'home' and collective identity I have used up to this point require further elaboration. Clearly there is more to immigrant images of home than comforting thoughts of solidarity. There are also immeasurably strong feelings of nostalgia, stresses related to families separated by long distances and borders, and pressures to assimilate and shift identities to fit the alien context of Jupiter.

While there are multiple individuals in the Jupiter community who illustrate the more complex aspects of the strategic and changing nature of identity among the Maya in exile, I will focus here on a single case, Juan Gonzales. Juan maintains multiple identities and a life that spans the miles between Jupiter and Jacaltenango. In Guatemala, Juan initially held a job in road construction, traveling the country to work on multiple government and private projects. He made his first visit to the Jupiter area in 1993, but returned to Guatemala to finish a project building bridges. In the mid-nineties he returned to Jupiter, only to leave again for work in Guatemala, this time with a government sponsored non-profit organization. With the election of Alfonso Portillo in 2000 the program Juan worked for was cut and he made the trek to Jupiter a final time. His wife and children remained in Jacaltenango. Since Juan's daughter was *la reina* of the festival in Jacaltengango in 2001, he was able to obtain a special visa for a visit from his wife and daughter for the festival in Jupiter in 2002. This was the first time Juan had seen his wife and daughter in two years. Shortly afterward, Juan returned to Jacaltenango to reunite with his family.

Juan was a community leader here in Jupiter. His house served as a meeting place for Corn-Maya and was the central location for pre and post fiesta nights of celebration. In Jupiter, Juan worked in landscaping and restaurant work. Any funds above and beyond his expenses weekly remitted to his family in Jacaltenango.

Juan is, in the words of Allen Burns, able to live "with ambiguity and seemingly opposite values and ideals" (Burns:145). His house served the center of the traditional Catholic celebration of the fiesta. The image of *la Virgin* and the lighted candles took center stage in his living room for the duration of the first year's celebration. Yet Juan also attended services at an evangelical church in Jupiter. When he first arrived in the early nineties, Juan frequently attended Mormon services. While in Guatemala, Juan plays in a musical group that performs for services in both traditional and charismatic Catholic churches.

For Juan, these seemingly contradictory activities and values are part of a survival strategy or situational identity that makes perfect sense given the context and opportunities available. While in Jupiter, he is metaphorically with his family in Jacaltenango each and every day in the form of letters, phones calls, and financial

⁶ Focus group conducted by Anya Canache for research on her Honors Thesis, "The Maya in Jupiter Florida: Remittances and Immigrant Perceptions of Change in the Home Community."

contributions. He crosses borders based upon changing economic opportunities and changing political contexts. He is a skilled and trusted worker both in Guatemala and in Jupiter. He is more than willing to utilize whatever religious or social connections are most expedient to survive in a changing and potentially hostile environment.

Juan's story suggests that immigrant conceptions of home and identity are not as straightforward as it might at first seem. As he navigates the multiple elements of his identity, Juan is faced with emotional difficulties and personal trials. During one of the nights of celebration preceding the fiesta, Juan stood with a group of older Jacalteco men reminiscing about the physical geography of Jacaltenango. As the night wore on, the group's conversation took on a distinct note of sadness as they discussed the particular type of flowers (mentioned above and necessary for the procession in the fiesta) that grow only on the mountain outside of town. By the end of the night when the talk turned to family members (both living and dead) most of the group was in tears. Similar scenes have unfolded during many nights of gathering for the fiesta.

Juan's story provides only one illustration of the problems with accepting a universally positive or simplistic notion of home and identity. When prompted to talk about their home and what they miss about it, most Mayan respondents in Jupiter referred to the unity, warmth, and caring of family life at home. Most expressed the desire to be reunited with family in a single location (Canache, 2003). On the other hand, some of the young Jacaltecos we interviewed were more than happy to be away from home. As far as they were concerned, Jupiter provided the best of both worlds: they could live and work among other Jacaltecos without having to take on certain responsibilities or follow certain norms that would be enforced had they remained in Jacaltenango. For the most part, however, these stories were the exception.

Almost inevitably interviews focused on home and family quickly turned to many of the interpersonal, economic, and family problems associated with carrying on relationships over distance. Stories of infidelity, illegitimacy, and changes in values were common. The Mayan men and women living in Jupiter are painfully aware that just as they seek to recreate some of their most positive images of home here, their very presence in this location is fundamentally changing their homes in Jacaltenango.

As remittances flow from Jupiter to Jacaltenango, the economic and social impact is not lost on the immigrants who send them. Most of those we interviewed were well aware that their remittances and construction of their newer block houses have driven up property values to the point that families who do not send migrants to the U.S. can no longer afford housing in Jacaltenango. Consumption of higher-cost imports has also increased among remittance recipients in Jacaltenango. One respondent explained that the kids back home now demand that their fathers send them Nike shoes--they refuse to wear the shoes made in Guatemala now that their fathers are making money in the U.S. "People no longer want to work the land," one of our older respondents lamented, adding that they had become consumers, interested only in what people are doing in the cities and in the U.S. He also mourned the damage done to the environment in Jacaltenango because of massive exploitation as opposed to small-scale sustenance. He said that the land which was once so beautiful, and could easily provide people with what they needed to eat, had been sucked dry and destroyed by overuse and exploitation.

Possibly even more distressing to the Jacaltecos here are the social changes that they have begun to notice going on back home, changes that they willingly attribute to their own

migration and remittance sending. Respondents reported discipline problems with children whose homes lack male authority figures, spouses who misuse remittances, and increases in alcohol abuse among women and children. There have been many cases where marriages have broken up and families have been divided because of the distance and time. As one respondent put it “some say that if we are doing well economically then we are doing well...but if my wife is sleeping with another man then what do I have?”

Three important insights arise from these interviews. First, images of home and the identities constructed around them are fragile and ambiguous. Just as home is recreated and celebrated through the festival and surrounding activities taking place in Jupiter, it is simultaneously under assault in Jacaltenango. From the need for transmigrants to assume different identities across contexts to the social and economic effects of remittances, Jupiter’s Mayan immigrants find their most cherished memories of home and their aspirations for the future to be increasingly in peril.

Second, the migrants are fully aware of this tragedy. Because transnational connections are so strong Jupiter’s Jacaltecos are completely up to date on events and activities at home. Frequent phone conversations, emails, videos, and the human grapevine pass information back and forth on a regular basis. What quickly becomes clear is that the decision to come to Jupiter is made in spite of these known risks.

In describing the festa among Italians in Harlem, Robert Orsi (1985:xviii) writes that it is:

...not about individuality but about selves united in social worlds, not about transcendence but about religion’s place in everyday life, not about autonomy but about the ways that people come to be within the forms of their culture, not about empowerment but about living within the coordinates of the possible.

While this statement characterizes many of the similarities between the experiences of Italians in New York and Mayans in Jupiter, it is last line that strikes me as most fitting. The fiesta in Jupiter is about many things, but it is mostly about the every day struggle of “living within the coordinates of the possible.” Jupiter’s immigrants are keenly aware of the trade-offs necessary to achieve the possible. They play out their lives within the tension between home and away, past and future, dreams and realities.

Sometimes during the nights of the fiesta, as the younger men drink and listen to the marimba music, they cry out with high-pitched screams and yells. The yelling appears almost involuntary. The sound invokes something between deep sorrow, frustration, and release. One young man described the yelling as a celebration of what is not. They yell for the women who are not here with them, for the families they cannot start or reunite with, for the steady work they cannot find, for the legal status that is out of their reach, and for their homes, many of which hold little promise for them should they return to them.

And this leads to a final insight highlighting the key difference between the experience of turn-of-the-century Italian immigrants and Mayan immigrants in Jupiter today. The fundamental difference is that most Jacaltecos come with the intention of returning to their homes at some point. For most, the hope is that four or five years of work here will provide the financial assets necessary for them to return to life in their hometown. This is

rarely possible. Some return only to come back again a few years later. Others stay but hold on to the dream of returning some time in the future. As one of the elder statesmen of the Jacalteco community explained:

In Guatemala when I was young I was very happy with my land, my little garden, my tomatoes.....I didn't have any psychological problems. Now I do....I wish I could go back to Guatemala. I am a U.S. citizen but I wish I could go back there so I could live the life that I wanted. So that my self [soul, being] could go back to what it used to be.

Further Ambiguities: Religious and Ethnic Divisions

As with images of home, some of the religious and social institutions and processes surrounding the fiesta also hold ambiguities and contradictions. Religious and ethnic divisions as well as counter-reactions to the sort of mobilization that has emerged through reactive ethnicity are evident in the case of Jupiter.

First of all, clear religious cleavages exist in the transnational social field that has emerged between the Guatemalan Mayan immigrant community the small Guatemalan town of Jacaltenango. These divisions cut across families and social groups. As noted earlier, divisions between evangelicals and Catholics nearly undermined the process of planning for the first fiesta. To this day, the evangelical churches discourage their members from attending the fiesta, though many of them find their way into the audience to view the procession and the dance of the deer.

Among the evangelicals we interviewed we also found significantly fewer connections to home villages and less interest in returning Guatemala than we did among Catholics. While evangelicals also send remittances, it appears as though their adoption of a new home in their churches in Jupiter, along with the notion that some of the traditional elements of their previous lives are now forbidden, leaves less room for the formation of a transnational Jacalteco identity. One evangelical young man we spoke to said,

I've managed to get a house and I've helped my brothers go to school. I have four brothers. I'm not married. But it is hard to find a good woman, because they're liberal and materialistic. My relationship with my worldly family in Guatemala is by telephone. From time to time I send them money.

Another evangelical lay-pastor echoed this sentiment. According to the pastor, he sees himself as part of a new community of brothers and sisters in the church. Where they come from is less important than who they are now. His church is small, but it has members from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Venezuela, and Cuba.

Interviews I conducted with evangelicals in Guatemala also illustrate some of these differences, but from a very different perspective. An evangelical shopkeeper I spoke to in Panajachel was virulent in his critique of those who migrate. "Once they go away they become in love with the lifestyle, and they forget about their family and their

church here. Immigration destroys our families and undermines our churches and our values.”

The charismatic/non-charismatic split is also a powerful social dividing line. In Jacaltenango, the Catholic Church split into two congregations along the charismatic divide long ago. In Jupiter, this division continues and serves as a major impediment to cooperative collective action among the Mayan immigrants. While both charismatic and non-charismatic Catholics are active in community programs, philosophical, theological, and practical differences keep them from working together on a regular basis. Any event involving alcohol or some forms of marimba music is likely to be avoided by the charismatics. According to one Catholic lay leader, “some of them [charismatics] run the risk of being fundamentalist. They are against the Mayan *cosmovision*. For example they say that the marimba is the devil’s rib. But they are also devoted to community work.”

Other divisions that undermine solidarity relate to national, language, and ethnic differences. During the planning for the second year’s fiesta, a group of Mayan dancers from Totonacapan were invited to perform during the festivities. After much discussion among the members of Corn-Maya, it was decided that the invitation should be withdrawn because people back in Jacaltenango who viewed videos of the event would be upset by the intrusion of seeing another town’s queen in their fiesta. Despite the previous year’s decision that the event was to be open to various groups, the Jacalteco leaders were more concerned with their own particular connections with home than with building a sense of community with other groups. In other words, the very factors that facilitated unity and collective action among the Jacaltecos—reactive ethnicity--produced the opposite effect when applied to the larger Mayan community, the Hispanic community, and the immigrant community in general.

Community divisions also characterize the case of reactive ethnicity in Jupiter. Jacalteco Mayans face significant cultural and communication barriers and sometimes outright hostility to their presence. Not surprisingly, the early mobilization of immigrant groups in Jupiter tended to be inward-oriented, focused on reaffirming a Jacalteco identity and sense of belonging through transnational religious and cultural activities (reactive ethnicity). Since then, the organizing efforts growing out of the Fiesta Maya have been aimed at achieving a more positive public image for the Mayan community and recognition for its contributions to the local economy.

While receiving some support from prominent town officials, civic and religious leaders, Corn-Maya’s struggle to create a neighborhood resource center has also met with significant opposition from some corners. Local neighborhood complaints about day-laborers and overcrowded houses quickly transformed into an anti-immigrant lobbying group when representatives of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) began organizing in Jupiter in 2004. Although small in number, the members of the JNAIL organization (Jupiter Neighbors against Illegal Labor) have received extensive press coverage from the local paper (The Jupiter Courier) and other local media. At the same time, public acts of intolerance toward the immigrant community have increased, including public insults and derogatory statements at town council meetings, targeted acts of vandalism, and a sign that reads “Slow Illegal Immigrant Children at Play” placed near the local elementary school. As Jupiter’s immigrants have taken to a more public stage to address concerns within their community, they have also become the target of greater

hostility on the part of some residents and have found themselves in the sights of national groups such as FAIR.

Portes and Rumbaut (2001, 285) also argue that reactive ethnicity may have a less positive impact at the individual level: “Youthful solidarity based on opposition to the dominant society yields an adversarial stance toward mainstream institutions, including education.” The result, according to Portes and Rumbaut, may be a form of downward assimilation. In Jupiter, we find little evidence of downward assimilation among the second generation. Rather, the children of immigrants in Jupiter appear to gain as much (in terms of spiritual and psychological resources) from the celebration of the fiesta as their parents. While they do face discrimination and even outright intimidation in some cases, the celebration of fiestas and other activities sponsored by Corn-Maya and St. Peter’s Catholic Church allow the children of Jupiter’s immigrants to experience and take pride in their Mayan culture. As Portes (1999: 471) explains, “participation in transnational political activities can empower immigrants and invest them with a sense of purpose and self-worth that otherwise would be absent.” In regards to the second generation, Portes adds that transnationalism “offers a valuable counterweight to a relentless process of acculturation” that “carries the price of learning and introjecting one’s inferior place in the social hierarchy” (472). In Jupiter, the transnational connections elaborated through the fiesta and other events appear to serve as something of an antidote to the process of downward assimilation among the second generation.

On the other hand, young male migrants who arrive in Jupiter without family connections or extensive networks of friends do appear to be more susceptible to downward assimilation. Through interviews with both adults and youths, it quickly became clear that levels of participation in both religious and civic organizations are much lower among the youth than adults. Informal youth groups promote entertainment, distraction, and social activities including consumption of drugs and alcohol. In Jupiter, many of the youth travel to West Palm Beach to visit pay-per-dance clubs on the weekend, spending much of the money they have made for the week. For the most part, this cohort includes boys who leave Guatemala at 14 or 15 to make the trip to Jupiter. These youths are truly in cultural limbo, arriving with hopes of making enough money to return, only to be quickly socialized by their peers into a very different culture. It is these youths who are most at risk of adopting the “adversarial stance” described by Portes. Far apart from their families and sending communities and unwelcome in the host community, young first generation immigrants are highly susceptible to problems with substance abuse and a cycle of economic deprivation.

Concluding Thoughts

This study is located within the literature that focuses on transnationalism from below and the transnational community that is formed through social groups, rituals, practices, beliefs, and institutions that span borders. I argue that recreated images of home help Jacalteco immigrants in Jupiter to foster their sense of collective identity. The images of home are evident in the celebration of *the Fiesta de Candelaria*, in the organization of soccer tournaments with teams from the corresponding *aldeas* in Jacaltenango, and in the practice of collecting funds to return the bodies of the dead to be buried in Jacaltenango. A transnational community has been created and reinforced by

secular and religious institutions, practices, ideas, and individuals that frequently pass between the borders of Guatemala, Mexico, and Florida. This sense of collective identity has translated into public action, much of it directed towards resolving the common difficulties faced by the immigrant community. Corn Maya Inc. has worked to build bridges with the community, address questions of workers rights, help individuals obtain language skills and immigration papers, and ameliorate some of the effects of loneliness and nostalgia through community organizing and social events.

The fiesta is particularly revealing, because the connections between religious, cultural, and social mobilization are clearly illustrated in the results of the process of planning and organizing the fiesta. As is often the case, religious and cultural institutions provide resources, motivations, and ideological legitimacy for community organization and collective action. In this case, a previously defunct social and political organization (Corn-Maya Inc.) was revived and reactivated through the process of planning and implementing the fiesta. Activities which began with a primarily cultural and religious motivation were transformed through dialogue and action into a springboard for community organizing and civic engagement.

On a cautionary note, we need to take care not to assign unambiguously positive connotations to images of home or to mobilization through reactive ethnicity. As Juan's story suggests, identity is far from static, and must be negotiated across borders and experiences for individual immigrants; process fraught with emotional and physical hardship. Furthermore, recollections of home are often tinged with sadness, loss, pain, escape, and in some cases regret. Recreations of home for transnational immigrants can bring forth all of the social, psychological, and physical images associated with home, including very negative images linked either to the horrific conflict in Guatemala or to other dramatic personal experiences. Jacalteco immigrants live with the tension of knowing that their presence in one place creates an absence in another and that very support they send to their families in the form of remittances undermines some of their most deeply-held community values.

We should also note that mobilization based on religious or cultural identity can create divisions within the transnational community as well build connections. Our interviews with evangelicals suggest that they are less likely to retain strong connections with their families in the sending communities than are Catholics. However, the evangelicals we spoke to are more likely to attend churches that are made up of a multiplicity of ethnic and national groups. In other words, evangelicals may be more likely than their Catholic counterparts to assimilate into larger groups and assume identities as Hispanics or simply as evangelicals.

Finally, the very transnational religious and cultural factors that draw the Jacalteco community together may also serve to keep them apart from the larger Mayan and Hispanic communities in general. As Patricia Fortuny and Philip Williams point out in the case of Immokolee, transnational religious, cultural, and hometown connections are weak, but the pan-ethnic Coalition of Immokolee workers is relatively strong. In Jupiter, by contrast, Corn-Maya Inc. is very active, but the pan-Mayan group, The Organization of Mayan People in Exile (OPME) is relatively weak. Ethnic and cultural divisions that emerged during planning for the second fiesta are not atypical of the relationships between the different Mayan immigrant groups in Palm Beach County.

So what sort of generalizations and hypotheses can the struggling social scientist glean from study? First, collective identity bolstered by ethnic, linguistic, and religious homogeneity and transnational connections can lead to successful collective action in immigrant communities. In the face of a foreign and relatively hostile environment such as Jupiter, this may lead to mobilization based in reactive ethnicity. Reactive ethnicity, in turn, may generate a backlash against ethnic mobilization and bring the possibility of downward assimilation, particularly for first generation immigrant youths.

Second, the concept of lived religion and the practice of studying it can assist social scientists in understanding the way that collective identity is reinforced through recreations of home. At the same time, by examining lived religion in detail, we gain a window into the fundamental ambiguities within immigrant conceptions of home. Immigrant identities are flexible and fragile. To “live within the coordinates of the possible” for Jupiter’s immigrants means living away from their loved ones while simultaneously witnessing the deleterious effects of their absence and the decidedly mixed impact of their social and economic remittances.

Third, religious and ethnically based mobilization among immigrant groups is a double edged sword. The very glue that holds Jupiter’s Jacaltec community together, serves as an impediment to pan-Mayan, pan-Hispanic, or even pan-immigrant organization.

Finally, the patterned differences in transnationalism and attitudes toward migration between Catholics and evangelicals merit further study. While these findings are only preliminary, it may be the case that evangelicals are less likely to migrate than Catholics. Furthermore, immigrants who join evangelical churches here may be less likely to maintain their transnational connections or mobilize along ethnic lines. In other words, these evangelical immigrants may more likely to assimilate and less likely to return to their communities of origin.

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