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The Broken Village: Coffee, Migration, and Globalization in Honduras

Daniel R. Reichman

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Abstract

[Excerpt] This book describes how people cope with rapid social change. It tells the story of the small town of La Quebrada, Honduras, which, over a five-year period from 2001-2006, transformed from a relatively isolated community of small-scale coffee farmers into a hotbed of migration from Honduras to the United States and back.1 During this time, the everyday lives of people in La Quebrada became connected to the global economy in a manner that was far different, and far more intimate, than anything they had experienced in the past. Townspeople did not generally view this transformation as a positive step toward progress or development. They saw migration as a temporary response to economic crisis, even as it became an ever more inescapable part of their livelihood. The chapters that follow trace the effects of migration across various domains of local life — including politics, religion, and family dynamics — describing how individuals in one community adapt to economic change.

This is not a story about an egalitarian little Eden being corrupted by the forces of capitalist modernization. La Quebrada's residents have lived with social inequality, violence, political conflict, and economic instability for generations. As coffee farmers, their fortunes have long been tied to the vicissitudes of global markets. However, the social changes wrought by migration presented qualitatively new challenges, as a functioning local economy became dependent on migrants working in distant places such as Long Island and South Dakota who lived in ways that most people in La Quebrada struggled to comprehend or explain. The new reality of migration created a sense of confusion that was especially strong in the early stages of La Quebrada's migration boom, when communication between villagers and migrants was rare. The decline of coffee markets and the rise of the migration economy happened so quickly and chaotically that people struggled to understand, evaluate, and give meaning to the changes they wereexperiencing. Therefore, migration was experienced as sociocultural disintegration in 2003-2005, when the bulk of the research for this study was conducted.

Keywords

coffee, migration, globalization, Honduras, emigration, immigration

Comments

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*Coffee, Migration, and Globalization
in Honduras*

DANIEL R. REICHMAN

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THE BROKEN VILLAGE

INTRODUCTION

Integration and Disintegration

   This book describes how people cope with rapid social change. It tells the story of the small town of La Quebrada, Honduras, which, over a five-year period from 2001–2006, transformed from a relatively isolated community of small-scale coffee farmers into a hotbed of migration from Honduras to the United States and back.[1] During this time, the everyday lives of people in La Quebrada became connected to the global economy in a manner that was far different, and far more intimate, than anything they had experienced in the past. Townspeople did not generally view this transformation as a positive step toward progress or development. They saw migration as a temporary response to economic crisis, even as it became an ever more inescapable part of their livelihood. The chapters that follow trace the effects of migration across various domains of local life—including politics, religion, and family dynamics—describing how individuals in one community adapt to economic change.

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with social inequality, violence, political conflict, and economic instability for generations. As coffee farmers, their fortunes have long been tied to the vicissitudes of global markets. However, the social changes wrought by migration presented qualitatively new challenges, as a functioning local economy became dependent on migrants working in distant places such as Long Island and South Dakota who lived in ways that most people in La Quebrada struggled to comprehend or explain. The new reality of migration created a sense of confusion that was especially strong in the early stages of La Quebrada's migration boom, when communication between villagers and migrants was rare. The decline of coffee markets and the rise of the migration economy happened so quickly and chaotically that people struggled to understand, evaluate, and give meaning to the changes they were experiencing. Therefore, migration was experienced as sociocultural *disintegration* in 2003–2005, when the bulk of the research for this study was conducted.

People sensed that their lives were becoming determined by faraway, disconnected "others" and governed by forces of which they were conscious but did not fully understand. In this sense, the collective processes of sociocultural integration that came to be known as "globalization" in Western academic and popular discourse were experienced but not fully recognized or articulated through a defined cultural or symbolic narrative. La Quebrada's encounter with "the global" created a profound sense of alienation, as people felt they were taking part in a system that they had no way of adequately comprehending, let alone controlling.

The systems of knowledge and belief through which they understood the world were rooted in a way of life that was being transformed by back-and-forth circuits of international migration. People who had been social "nobodies," including petty criminals, manual laborers, and uneducated teenagers, returned from years working in the United States magically transformed into the nouveau riche. At the same time, historically successful coffee-growing families and local political elites floundered in a struggling economy, while a new group of elites—linked to the migration business—rose in power and wealth, if not social status (a key distinction to which I will return in chapter 2). Some individuals who migrated to the United States were able to find work, amass savings, and return to Honduras triumphantly, while many others were deported or struggled to find steady work in the hostile, dangerous, and unfamiliar environments they encountered.

Young Hondurans who returned from the United States talked about jobs that were completely alien to the lifestyles of people in La Quebrada— shoveling snow, washing windows in giant skyscrapers, and preparing salads in exclusive suburban country clubs. Returned migrants built homes that were replicas of houses they had helped to build in the suburbs of Colorado and New Jersey, bringing back with them new material markers of success such as Jacuzzis, backyard swing-sets, and elaborate barbeque grills. These changes occurred in a place marked by widespread poverty, where the vast majority of the population did not have access to electricity, running water, or basic social services and relied on seasonal coffee production to meet their basic economic needs. There seemed to be no ordering logic to this new way of life.

Within this atmosphere of cultural upheaval, people tried to determine the causes and future directions of these changes and debated whether they were positive or negative, morally good or bad for individuals, families, and communities. These cultural debates could be found in private conversations, street-corner banter, religious sermons, political campaigns, and other everyday encounters that are the raw material from which this ethnography is made. This book focuses on the crisis of meaning produced by La Quebrada's rapid and chaotic integration into global sociocultural processes, and the collective and individual strategies that people developed to reassert some measure of control amidst a period of rapid change.

Readers familiar with Spanish will note that the name *La Quebrada* means both "the stream" and "the broken article." I have chosen to give the town this pseudonym for two reasons, one descriptive and the other evocative. The town is located high in the mountains near the source of one of Honduras's major rivers, and it is bisected by several streams that eventually drain into the Caribbean, which lies approximately one hundred miles to the north. Therefore, "the stream" describes a notable geographic feature of the community.

More important, the sense of being broken implied by *La Quebrada* reflects the period of crisis in which the community found itself over the course of this study. The book's title is, of course, the clearest example of this motif. Some readers will assume from the title that I view the changes experienced by people in La Quebrada as negative social pathologies rather than neutral historical changes (or even signs of progress). This would be a far too simplistic conclusion to draw. Any "break" or rupture with the past

presents opportunities for reconstruction and renewal. Although the rapid and chaotic nature of La Quebrada's experience with migration often appeared to usher in a period of crisis, this book focuses on three strategies through which people attempted to reconstruct a moral vision for society in the wake of rapid change.

First, the creation of a fair trade/organic coffee cooperative sought to raise farmer incomes and establish principles of fairness and economic justice through transnational consumer activism. Second, two religious congregations promoted campaigns for personal morality that were intended to counter the socially corrosive effects of migration. Third, a strategy for social justice is found in local discourses about migrant "greed" and flawed moral character, which frequently labeled migrants as the *cause* of social crisis, rather than its victims. These settings involve both religious and secular visions of morality, but in all three cases, people articulated visions of collective welfare and social citizenship by emphasizing the power of *individual behavior* as a way to respond to a perceived state of social decline.

The phenomena that I describe all view *the individual* as the source of social decline and the potential source of social redemption, rather than the nation-state, community, or some other collectivity. Around the world, and especially in Latin America, people have developed new political strategies in response to the perceived breakdown of the guiding visions of *modern* political philosophy, the blueprints for utopia that shaped modern ideas of progress or development, be they socialist or democratic. For some, the demise of secular, collective visions of progress, and the rise of free-market fundamentalism marks a decisive "break" with modernity and the transition to a postmodern age (Harvey 1989; Hopenhayn 2001).[2] The ethnographic and historical sections of this book explore the implications of this systematic political transformation in one very small—yet very suggestive—setting.

On a more abstract level, *the broken village* intentionally complicates one of the most common (not to mention utopian) metaphors for contemporary processes of global integration—the "global village." In this metaphor, *the village* symbolizes geographic proximity, social harmony, and participation in a single, integrated society, in which people from disparate places come to know each other's lives and worlds through the benefits of technology that, we are told, "makes the world smaller." Yet this sense of proximity is

broken by an equally powerful set of forces that separate people geographically, politically, and socially. Throughout this book, I describe settings in La Quebrada in which life is simultaneously integrated and disintegrated by global processes. In La Quebrada, everyday life is incredibly proximate yet impossibly distant from life in the United States. People are unified by new kinds of social connection, yet remain separated by borders and barriers of all sorts. La Quebrada is indeed a "global village," but it is a village that has been permanently fractured. In this sense, La Quebrada serves as a model for the present historical moment. If the world we inhabit is indeed a "global village," then it is a broken one.

Within the realm of anthropological theory, "the broken village" refers to anthropologists' collective attempt to understand our own place in a rapidly changing world. There is a strong parallel between the crisis of meaning experienced by people in La Quebrada and anthropologists' own intellectual struggles to come to terms with a world transformed by the intense processes of transnational interaction that came to be known as "globalization" in the 1990s. Like people in La Quebrada whose worldviews were being transformed by processes of globalization, anthropologists have had to reorient a way of understanding society that was once based on the study of small-scale "knowable communities" (Holmes and Marcus 2005) but has needed to account for complex and diverse forms of global sociocultural interconnection. As in La Quebrada, the guiding models of social life that shaped anthropologists' understanding of the relationship between culture, economy, and society were broken and reassembled to adapt to a rapidly changing world.

Anthropologists have long sought to understand and explain local processes of socioeconomic change as effects of macro-level forces such as colonialism, modernization, capitalist expansion, and economic development. In the 1990s and 2000s, anthropology was marked by an unusual sense of methodological and theoretical unease about the ability of existing concepts to accurately explain "the system." Theoretical understandings of how local settings interacted with global economic forces no longer seemed capable of capturing the complexities of contemporary life. This led to intense debate within the academic community about how to situate local-level ethnographic study within broader, perhaps global, contexts without devaluing face-to-face participant observation and how—and indeed, *if*—it was possible to understand the global economy as a structured

totality.[3] This debate led to important new understandings of how globalization—understood as a political, economic, or cultural system—did or did not differ from previous historical epochs, but it was marked by a widespread sense that a paradigm shift was in order, rather than any clear theoretical consensus about what globalization actually was.

In the words of Douglas Holmes and George Marcus, two provocative participants in these debates, "globalization is less an object for comprehensive theorizing or empirical investigation than the referent or symptom that conditions diversely posed challenges to disciplines, knowledge practices, and forms of expertise" (Holmes and Marcus 2005, 247). For anthropologists and the people with whom we work, globalization produced a sense that our ideological frames (worldviews, philosophies, theories) were incapable of grasping contemporary reality. This book will seize upon the parallels found in the ideological struggles of anthropologists and our interlocutors in order to understand how our respective worldviews, our orienting models of self and society, are being "broken" and reconstructed.

The Ethnographic Setting

I first came to La Quebrada in the summer of 2001. At that time, agricultural specialists at Cornell University, where I was then a graduate student in anthropology, were carrying out an initiative to promote sustainable and ecologically friendly forms of coffee production among Honduran farmers. During summer break, I was invited by one of the project's directors to spend a month in La Quebrada, trying to understand how local social conditions were shaping people's decisions to participate or not participate in the sustainable coffee program. For my own selfish intellectual reasons, I wanted to see the on-the-ground workings of an agricultural development project up close. The coffee project was funded by the U.S. government, designed by first-world experts, and managed by a complex web of bureaucratic agencies, yet it was supposed to be driven by the needs and desires of community members in the name of "participatory development." I wondered whether this project was marked by a contradiction between "top-down" and "bottom-up" definitions of development—the former created in the minds of the project's directors, and the latter by the

project's beneficiaries. How participatory could any international development project really be?

At that time, I was reasonably well-prepared to conduct an ethnographic study in Honduras. I was a fluent Spanish speaker who had traveled and lived in various parts of Latin America, including Honduras. I had never been to La Quebrada—indeed, I had never even seen a picture of it—so my imagination was fueled by bits of information that I had been given by members of the coffee project before I left. I knew the town of about 4,500 people was in the middle of a severe economic crisis that had been caused by a recent drop in world coffee prices. I knew the town was relatively remote and far off the beaten track for tourists or the legions of scholars interested in Honduran Maya civilization.[4] I also knew that fewer people were participating in the ecological coffee project than had been expected, and that the town had a reputation for feuding between political factions, which sometimes escalated to violence. Beyond that, I knew little about the place, and—truth be told—I saw this trip as an interesting and potentially fun opportunity to try to figure out an unfamiliar locale. Little did I know that this trip would spawn a project that would occupy the next ten years of my life.

La Quebrada is a rural place that feels remote, but one can get to either of Honduras's major cities—San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa—within a full day of travel. Heading south to La Quebrada from the industrial hub of San Pedro Sula, the differences between country and city in Honduras can be jarring. Leaving the city by car or bus, it is impossible to ignore the signs of American dominance that blanket the landscape. The highway is lined with *maquilas,* export processing facilities where thousands of young Honduran workers manufacture apparel for major U.S. brands.[5] Packed into shipping containers and hooked directly onto waiting semi-trucks, the finished garments travel north to the port city of Puerto Cortés, to be loaded onto ships as quickly as possible. American chains such as Wendy's, Subway, Sears, and Ace Hardware populate the sleek new shopping malls, each one ringed by its own expansive, well-lit parking lot. Cast-off yellow school buses from American school districts clog the roads. Discarded plastic wrappers from Doritos and Cheetos line every roadside ditch.

Once one leaves the Pan-American Highway, however, the exhaust fumes from the semi-trucks begin to dissipate from the air, and the malls and fast food chains give way to roadside stands selling fresh fruit,

handicrafts, and whole fish strung out to hang in the hot sun. The shanty-towns and new suburban developments that creep up the muddy hillsides around the cities are quickly replaced by placid little hamlets where groups of young people sit and stare blankly at passing cars for entertainment and children trudge along the roadsides, carrying impossibly large bundles of firewood on their backs.

The trip to La Quebrada requires several hours of travel over rough mountain roads, across creeks and rivers, and through banana groves that give way to pine forests and, finally, coffee farms as the elevation rises. Long stretches of the road pass through undeveloped forest. After cresting the sierra and beginning the short descent into La Quebrada, a bustling, disorganized, and surprisingly vibrant little town appears out of nowhere. I recall traveling to La Quebrada with a young man from a Honduran city, who was visiting the town for the first time in 2004. As we bounced around, perched on the rails of a pickup truck on the way to town, he exclaimed, "Qué salvaje!" (How wild!) as we traveled along a forested ridgeline with a stunning twilight view of the mountains. As we finally descended into town, he incredulously declared, "This town is enormous," noting that block after block of squat, adobe and concrete buildings seemed to rise out of nowhere, scattered willy-nilly around disorganized streets that are the antithesis of the ordered grids found in most Latin American towns. I would later learn that the town's disorganized layout and remote location was a product of its origins as a logging camp carved out of virgin forest.[6]

On my first trip to La Quebrada, I was brought by a member of the Cornell coffee project to a large *beneficio* (coffee mill) that was located at the main entrance to the town. I was introduced to Alex and Hernán López, the two directors of a newly formed coffee cooperative that was working with Cornell to enter the organic and fair trade coffee markets. Both men were coated with a foul-smelling concoction of rotting coffee husks and chicken manure—two important ingredients in an organic coffee fertilizer that they were mixing in concrete sinks that were designed to receive sacks of freshly picked coffee for processing in the *beneficio*. Built by the Honduran government's coffee marketing board in the 1980s and funded by international aid money, the coffee mill had been abandoned for several years when I arrived in 2001 (figure 1). Although it was the largest and (potentially) the most productive facility in town, it had fallen into disrepair and no one was certain who owned it or was responsible for

its upkeep. The government program that originally created the mill had ceased to exist, and the mill sat idle for several years. When I arrived in La Quebrada, the sustainable coffee cooperative was using the mill, but legal and political wrangling was required to determine to whom, exactly, the mill belonged.

After brief introductions, I was dropped off in the house where I would be living. My mind was already racing, wondering how a valuable and useful coffee mill could have been abandoned after only a short period of successful operation. The abandoned mill's rusting, looming presence at the main entrance into town eventually came to symbolize the town's economic and political decline for me.

My sense of puzzlement only increased after being introduced to Ramón, the man whose family owned the house we were renting. Ramón was about my age, then in his mid-twenties. His family owned a large coffee farm outside of town, and his late father was, for a time, a formidable political leader of the right-wing National Party.[7] I asked Ramón if he was a member of the new coffee cooperative, assuming he would have been since
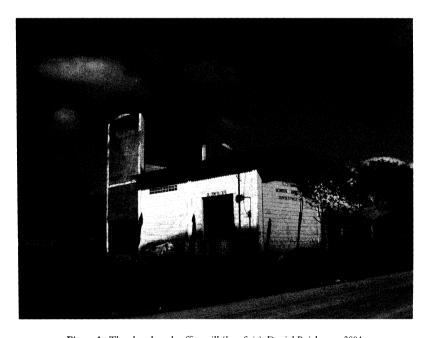

Figure 1. The abandoned coffee mill (*beneficio*). Daniel Reichman, 2004

he was renting his home to us and had also rented to other members of the project team. He looked at me in disgust. "I don't want anything to do with those people. I don't get along well with those *barbones* [long-beards], and I don't trust them. *Son como izquierdistas* [They are, like, leftists.]"

Alex and Hernán, the two directors of the coffee cooperative (who did, in fact, have beards) had been longtime rivals of Ramón's family. Onetime communists, they had led a campaign to stop the use of chemical fertilizers that leeched into the town's water supply, ultimately filing a lawsuit against Ramón's father, claiming that he had violated several of the country's environmental regulations by using toxic chemicals to fertilize coffee planted in close proximity to the water source. Alex and Hernán's new organic coffee project was perceived by some community members as a continuation of their antipollution campaign, which was symbolically associated with left-wing politics. Incredibly, Ramón's family had decided to rent a house (at an unusually high rate) to people, like me, that were affiliated with their political rivals.

Trying to avoid venturing any further into a touchy discussion of local politics, Ramón and I began to look at a photo album that we found while unpacking. As we leafed through the pictures, Ramón began to tell me about all the relatives he had in the United States—in Colorado, New Jersey, and various parts of Long Island. He was trying to find cultural common ground to help along our awkward conversation, but he also revealed that he was in the process of arranging his own trip to the United States. He was looking to sell some of the coffee land he had inherited from his father, he said, and would use that money to pay a *coyote* (smuggler) to help him cross the border illegally.

That early encounter with Ramón introduced me to themes that ran through the rest of my study of migration in La Quebrada: local party politics, the rise and fall of coffee farming and the fortunes of the people that depended on it, the lure of emigration to the United States, and the new illicit economy that migration had spawned. When I returned to La Quebrada in 2003, Ramón was gone. His mother told me he was in Baltimore, working as a window washer. His house was shuttered and abandoned, and I moved into it alone to begin fieldwork. The coffee cooperative had also collapsed. Because of a severe decline in world coffee prices, the co-op had had to sell its crop for less than the price of production for two consecutive seasons. Several of its members had left for the United States.

I have studied the relationship between coffee and migration in La Quebrada more or less continually for nine years. Village fieldwork in 2001, 2003, 2004, and 2008 has been supplemented with interviews with key informants in several U.S. communities, along with frequent online interaction with people in La Quebrada. Over the years, I have encountered scores of people whose lives were being transformed, for both good and bad, by economic and social change. Some people who had gone to the United States had been economically successful, while the lives of others were destroyed. Some families were deeply grateful for money that was sent home to them by relatives working in the United States; other families resented the absence of their migrant kin, castigating relatives abroad for their perceived selfishness. Some people felt that migration was the only thing keeping La Quebrada afloat, while others saw it as a sign of the community's downfall. The chapters that follow describe the experiences of people living in the midst of a new, disruptive, sometimes confounding, social reality wrought by dependence on migration.

This book begins with the stories of individual migrants, and places their experiences within progressively wider social and historical contexts. Chapter 1 attempts to answer a deceptively simple question: Why do people leave La Quebrada for the United States? Through biographical profiles of individual migrants, I describe the complex sets of factors that lead individuals to leave Honduras. Conventional wisdom states that migrants seek "a better life," by escaping poverty for the economic opportunity that awaits them in the United States. However, migrants from La Quebrada come from all social classes, and many do not leave out of economic desperation. People define *a better life* and *opportunity* in varied ways, making it ludicrous to suggest an *a priori* definition of "a good life" to which all migrants aspire. In this chapter, migrants explain their individual motivations for leaving Honduras for the United States.

These profiles reveal that migrants are always motivated by the possibility of economic gain, but they wrestle with the fact they must leave behind their families and communities in Honduras, often risking their lives in search of a higher wage. Thus, their social responsibilities to family and community become radically disconnected from their economic responsibilities. Migrants and their families negotiate this tension every day in La Quebrada, weighing the personal, social, and psychological costs of migration against the potential for economic advancement. In this sense,

migrants experience a basic element of all capitalist economies in extreme form: They must sever economic production (acquiring the material necessities of life) from social reproduction, performing and maintaining defined roles and obligations within a social group, such as a family (Graeber 2006).

Chapter 2 expands on the inherent tension created by the separation of migrants' economic and social responsibilities, describing how people in La Quebrada evaluate migration decisions in moral terms, celebrating or denigrating migrants in different contexts. The community's dependence on U.S. migration has led to economic progress for some, but this progress has been accompanied by social hardship, as families adapt to the absence of an entire generation of productive adults. People judge migrants as altruistic or selfish, dutiful or greedy, depending on their particular family circumstances and their ability to manage the competing economic and social demands of migration. This chapter describes the local ethics of migrant behavior, focusing on the distinction made between ethical "needy" migrants and unethical "greedy" migrants.

Taken together, chapters 1 and 2 introduce the reader to the contemporary realities of life in La Quebrada. Chapter 3 explains how the community got to this point, and connects its story to macro-level changes that occurred throughout modern Latin America. Migration to the United States from La Quebrada did not become a common practice until the late 1990s. Prior to that time, migration to the United States, however temporary, was almost unthinkable as a strategy to deal with economic hardship. For technological, political, and cultural reasons that I address at various points in the book, Honduran emigration boomed in the 2000s, much later than migration from other Central American countries. In this chapter, I argue that the rise of migration from La Quebrada—and Honduras as a whole—must be placed within the context of post–Cold War history. For much of the twentieth century, "development," however that term was defined, was the goal that shaped political and economic aspirations in La Quebrada. After the Cold War ended in the early 1990s, both the theory and practice of international development changed. The state took a narrower role in the promotion of social welfare, and focused its attention on market-friendly neoliberal policies that would improve Honduras's competitive position in the global economy. In this context, the social welfare function of the state narrowed, and nongovernmental organizations

(NGOs) became increasingly responsible for providing social services in rural Honduras.

Profitability, efficiency, and competitiveness often came at the expense of social stability.[8] Poor people were encouraged to relocate to fast-growing urban centers to work in *maquilas,* and social expenditures were reduced to control inflation. Migrant remittances came to be seen as a key resource in rural development, and U.S. migration came to be viewed as a beneficial economic option that helped to bring much-needed cash to impoverished parts of Honduras. Migration became a path to "development," rather than a symptom of its failure.

Through a biography of Hernán López, the leader of the coffee cooperative and one of La Quebrada's most prominent political activists, chapter 3 describes how the failure of "development" in the context of the Cold War, led to the era of migration in La Quebrada. Here, the image of the abandoned coffee mill provides a fitting symbol: A piece of infrastructure funded and built by the government to improve agricultural production was abandoned due to bureaucratic mismanagement. It was finally brought back to life by an organic coffee cooperative that that was supported by a network of international NGOs. This cooperative eventually failed in the midst of an unprecedented boom in migration to the United States. Through the life of a single individual, chapter 3 describes the shift from the state-driven, nationalistic visions of development to local-level, NGO-driven activity, arguing that migration emerged as a "way out" of economic hardship after the failure of political strategies for development.

Chapter 3 connects the earlier chapters' descriptions of life in La Quebrada to broader cultural and political strategies that have emerged in response to social upheaval. As the government's role in the promotion of social welfare narrowed, new forms of politics emerged to articulate collective visions of social justice and political reform. Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate how the political debates described in chapter 3 have shifted outside of mainstream political institutions, examples of what Aihwa Ong refers to as the "disarticulation and rearticulation of citizenship" (Ong 2006, 17). Chapter 4 focuses on how two different churches used theology to articulate radically different political and moral visions in the context of migration. In La Quebrada, a relatively ascetic Pentecostal church has banned drinking, dancing, and conspicuous consumption as a way to combat social disintegration. At the same time, a rival "libertine" congregation

from a fringe Christian sect has embraced personal affect, glitz, wealth, and other values that are associated with U.S.-driven processes of modernity. These religious debates are fundamentally political discussions about the meaning and direction of social change and the role of the individual as a citizen. People discuss the political and social implications of migrant dependency within religious congregations.

Chapter 5 returns to the topic of coffee production. The coffee project that originally brought me to La Quebrada was another "way out" of economic crisis for Honduran coffee growers based on secular, ethical principles of "social justice" that were defined by international NGOs. Attempts to establish economic justice through consumer choice, I argue, are the secular analog to the evangelical vision of ethical conduct described in chapter 4. Like the churches described in chapter 4, fair trade is a setting where people articulate collective social principles outside the boundaries of the nation-state. These chapters are united by a common theme—the ways that people and groups develop ethical principles of social responsibility and citizenship in a situation where the nation-state seems incapable or unwilling to address the social consequences of globalization. In these cases, the terrain of politics shifts to nontraditional arenas such as ethical consumerism and religious movements, where people express a sense of alienation toward "the system" by focusing their energies on particular symbols of ethical crisis—"greedy" migrants, sinful behavior of non-Christians, and "unfair" and ecologically harmful coffee beans. In each instance, these enemies come to symbolize a new, alienating encounter with globalization, and people work to express principles of social responsibility in response to a changing world.

The realities of life in a global system are apparent to everyone in La Quebrada, where people can rattle off the names of delis in Long Island where their children work, describing how their son or daughter's big holiday bonus will help them buy fertilizer for their coffee fields; where seven-year-old children talk about *Nueva Jersey* as if it were a hamlet down the road; where a religious congregation huddles around a computer monitor in a dark room to listen to the Internet sermon of a Miami-based apostle; and where people joke about how the *coyote de la gente* (human smuggler) has replaced the *coyote del café* (coffee broker) as the town's richest resident. The existence of these global connections is obvious, but their meaning depends on hotly contested cultural, philosophical, and moral points of view.

I must apologize to readers familiar with Honduras who will no doubt wish for more fine-grained detail about my research site to evaluate my findings. I regret the loss of specificity and historical detail that is an inescapable consequence of the use of pseudonyms. I have invented names to protect the identity of many townspeople who are involved in illegal activities such as human smuggling and undocumented immigration. The only real names included in this work belong to historical figures, scholars, and religious leaders. Some readers may find the names unusual, but they are all names that actually exist in La Quebrada, put into combinations of my own making. I have tried to capture the tone and rhythms of life in La Quebrada without giving too much away. Despite my attempts to preserve anonymity, some Honduran specialists will be able to determine the community in which this study is based. I ask that future commentators respect the standard of privacy to which I strive in this work and refrain from publicly revealing the town's name or identifying the real names of the people described here.

I am certain that the experiences of the people I describe are in some way representative of struggles faced by many people in similar situations all over the world. I chose to write about this little town because its story connects several important threads of life under globalization. I hope that this work clarifies these connections and explains La Quebrada's importance for anthropologists and any other group interested in how globalization is changing cultures around the world. Although certain points of my fieldwork were punctuated by fear, frustration, and confusion, I never doubted that the people of La Quebrada had an important story to tell.

1

AMERICAN DREAM, AMERICAN WORK

Fantasies and Realities of Honduran Migrants

> *Chris Matthews:* When I was in the Peace Corps I calculated it would take
> 350 years for the country I was serving in to catch up to where we
> [Americans] were in GNP in the sixties.
>
> *Brent Scowcroft:* And that's a horrible thought. That gets to one of the real
> problems in the world though, and that is the people where you were serving
> didn't know much about the United States. Now they watch television
> every night. Even in the boondocks they watch television and they see you
> shopping on Fifth Avenue and so on and so forth and they think, "Why am I
> not shopping on Fifth Avenue?"
>
> Transcript from MSNBC's *Hardball*, television news program, Dec. 2, 2004
>
> Many people are coming to this country for economic reasons. They're
> coming here to work. If you can make fifty cents in the heart of Mexico, for
> example, or make five dollars here in America, $5.15, you're going to come
> here if you're worth your salt, if you want to put food on the table for your
> families. And that's what's happening.
>
> Former President GEORGE W. BUSH, presidential debate, Oct. 8, 2004

The quotations above contain two common explanations of con-
temporary migration to the United States, one "cultural" and the other
"economic." Former National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft gives a
cultural explanation of migration, arguing that increased knowledge of
riches available in the United States, thanks to the global media, has altered
individual and collective worldviews in "boondocks" around the world,
leading to disillusionment and new aspirations shaped by consumerist

desires. According to this form of reasoning, the worldwide spread of the Western media disrupts traditional concepts of status and value, leading to rising expectations for personal advancement, which Scowcroft calls "one of the real problems of the world." Alexis de Tocqueville argued long ago (1856) that rising expectations are effectively the same as declining fortunes: They set the stage for widespread disillusionment and collective action as people's lived realities fail to keep pace with their "expectations of modernity" (Ferguson 1999).[1] I characterize this line of reasoning as a "cultural" explanation because it emphasizes how peoples' decisions are shaped by subjective definitions of value, such as the meaning of "success" and "a good life," that vary across cultures, classes, and generations.

The economic explanation of migration decisions, exemplified by President Bush's comments in a presidential debate, views the decision to migrate as a common-sense response to economic conditions rather than one motivated by fantasies or dreams of upward mobility. Migrants are motivated by relatively high U.S. wage rates and the chance to support their families. (Note that Bush corrected himself to assure audiences that migrants were lured by the exact legal minimum wage of $5.15 per hour.) In this view, migrants weigh the benefits of U.S. wages against other factors and make a decision that "anyone worth their salt" would make. They are not lured by Fifth Avenue finery; they just want to "put food on the table," implying that they send earnings home to support kin. These migrants are realists who are motivated by a conscious evaluation of risk and reward and not the pursuit of a television-fueled "American Dream."

The cultural and economic explanations of migration have strong analogs in the social sciences, where the "culture versus economics" dichotomy provides a useful explanatory device to sort through a vast body of literature. Arjun Appadurai, one of the most influential anthropologists of globalization, has emphasized the importance of culture in shaping transnational migration, arguing that the flow of people and media images around the world has dramatically changed individual and collective subjectivity, allowing people to imagine "possible lives" and new aspirations that were once beyond the reach of their consciousness. Television, film, and the Internet have broadened horizons, changed consumer appetites, and, most important, changed people's concepts of membership in a wider community—that is, their identity—creating a situation whereby "scripts can be formed of imagined lives . . . fantasies that could