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Gringotenango : the U.S. retirement migration to Antigua, Guatemala

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Gringotenango: The U.S. Retirement Migration to Antigua, Guatemala

by

Katherine Wilnelia Platt

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ABSTRACT:

This dissertation documents the migration of U.S. retirees to Antigua, Guatemala. Antigua is a charming Spanish colonial city in the middle of the Guatemalan highlands with beautiful volcano views, cobblestone roads, the presence of Mayan and Ladino cultures, and an eternal spring climate. The physical and cultural beauty of Antigua allows U.S. citizens to enjoy a permanent vacation-like retirement experience. Antigua, however, is located in a country whose recent history is characterized by 36 years of civil war, and current events are stressed by new violence criminal activities. Despite the beauty of Antigua, this colonial city is an odd retirement destination as a result of the violence that afflicts Guatemala.

Since there are no prior studies about the U.S. retiree community in Antigua (or elsewhere in Guatemala), this study aims to answer the following basic questions in order to create a foundation for future research on the subject: 1) How do U.S. retirees view Guatemala? 2) How do U.S. retirees perceive the new Guatemalan violence? 3) What are the push and pull factors for U.S. retirement migration to Antigua? 4) What are the daily lifestyles of U.S. retirees in Antigua? 5) What are the perspectives of the local population on this foreign migration to their country?
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PREFACE:

The first time I visited Antigua was during the summer of 2007. I made it via chicken bus from Guatemala City; the bus dropped me off at its final stop behind the Antiguan market. From there, I took a taxi to my lodging location. The taxi driver asked me what was the motive for my visit to Antigua. I instantly answered that I was there to do research about the U.S. retiree community. The driver immediately responded, “viven como reyes,” which translates, “they live like royalty.”

This study documents the U.S. retirement migration to Antigua, Guatemala. I argue that U.S. retirees enjoy a permanent vacation retirement lifestyle in this charming Spanish colonial city despite the ongoing history of violence that afflicts the country. U.S. retirees may not literally live like royalty, as the cab driver told me, but they do indeed enjoy a lifestyle that reflects luxury and leisure. Antigua is the most expensive city in Guatemala and one of the most expensive cities in Latin America. Prospective migrant retirees must have a certain level of wealth if they want to enjoy a leisure retirement lifestyle while residing in Antigua. Antigua may not be the right place to retire for those Americans with a low retirement income seeking a higher quality lifestyle abroad. Freidenberg (2009) explained that Americans living abroad tend to be from the middle and upper classes, and this is the case of the Antiguan U.S. retiree community.

Interestingly, U.S. retirees who enjoy a permanent vacation lifestyle in Antigua do so in the middle of a country that is characterized by violence. Guatemala experienced 36 years of civil war (1960-1996) during which approximately 200,000 Guatemalans, mostly Mayas, were murdered or disappeared (Jonas, 2000). Unfortunately, the violence did not cease when the peace treaties were signed in 1996. The violence experienced
mainly by the indigenous population during the 36 years of conflict has now evolved into what is known as the “new violence” which is experienced by all segments of the population: Maya, Ladino, and foreigner. It does not matter to which ethnicity or socio-economic status a person belongs. If a person is in the wrong place at the wrong time, he or she may certainly become another victim of the new violence.

U.S. retirees have a utopian idea about Antigua. Little (2004) argued tourists perceive Guatemala City as the dangerous location, while Antigua is a safe place to be. U.S. retirees are aware of the criminal activities that afflict the country, but they perceive Antigua to be free from major forms of violence such as kidnappings, lynchings, drug violence, and gang-related crime. U.S. retirees are also aware of the crime that goes on in Antigua such as armed robberies, pick pocketing, and extortions. U.S. retirees, however, do not perceive the new violence in Antigua to be as horrendous as what occurs in the rest of the country. U.S. retirees believe Antigua can be as safe as any other city back in the United States.

Despite the ongoing history of violence in Antigua, there are U.S. retirees who opt to migrate there, whether informed or uniformed about the realities of the country. This study finds out U.S. Retirees were initially pulled to travel to Guatemala to visit friends and family, to learn Spanish, to engage in humanitarian work, to spend some time in the Rio Dulce area while sailing through the Caribbean, or simply for tourism purposes. I argue U.S. citizens end up retiring in Antigua because of chance or accident. If it were not for their initial trips to Guatemala as tourists, Spanish students, humanitarian workers, and so on, then these retirees would currently be living back in the United States or elsewhere in the world. It was that initial accidental trip to Guatemala in which they dis-
covered the beauty of the country and fell in love with Antigua. U.S. retirees realized Antigua would be a desirable place to retire, despite Guatemala’s ranking as one of the 10 most dangerous countries in the world (Associated Press, 2009).

**Research Methodology**

I traveled for the first time to Guatemala during the summer of 2007 to take an ethnographic methods course with my dissertation advisor, Professor Walter Little. It was during this first trip that I started to conduct this research project on U.S. retirees living in Antigua. I conducted preliminary interviews with 15 U.S. retirees about their migration motivations. But, more importantly, I realized that the American community in Antigua was very welcoming to me; they were willing to be interviewed and be observed as part of an ethnographic research project. As a result of my participation in Professor Little's class, I was able to create a social network with both U.S. retirees and Guatemalans, and this motivated me to return the following year to conduct my dissertation research.

I returned to Guatemala in September 2008. I stayed for six months, until March 2009, and came back for a final research trip from June-September of 2009. During my nine months of residency in Antigua, the main ethnographic research method I used was participant observation. Everyday I participated in the social activities of U.S. retirees. I socialized with the retirees in Parque Central, ate with them in restaurants, attended parties, visited their homes, and attended community events and festivities. I carried a notebook with me to take quick notes, and, at the end of each night, I wrote an entry in a diary about my observations and conversations with my research subjects, and noting my thoughts about the U.S. retiree community as a whole.
I complimented participant observation with in-depth interviews with 75 U.S. retirees. Participants were recruited into this study via snowball sampling: I initially interviewed U.S. retirees I was acquainted with, followed by retirees I was directed to by members of the American community. I also recruited participants I met at different community events. Each interview usually lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The following questions were used as a guide during the interviews:

1. Where are you originally from? What other places have you lived before? What was your previous location prior to moving to Antigua?
2. What is your former occupation?
3. When was your first trip to Guatemala? What was the purpose of this trip?
4. When did you move to Antigua?
5. How many times (and when) did you visit Guatemala prior to migrating to Antigua? What were the purposes of each of these trips?
6. Where you aware of the Guatemalan history of violence prior to moving to Antigua?
7. Where you aware of the history of natural disasters that have afflicted Antigua prior to moving here?
8. What do you do on a typical day in Antigua?
9. What did you do on a typical day back in the United States?
10. Compare and contrast life in Antigua versus the United States.
11. Will you ever return back to the United States?

I interviewed as well 18 Guatemalans in order to find out their perspectives of the U.S. retirement migration into their country. These local perspectives are discussed in
Chapter 5. The following are the questions I used when interviewing the Guatemalan participants:

1. When and how did you find out there is a US retiree community in place in Antigua?
2. Describe the kind of relationships and interactions you have with US retirees.
3. What was your opinions about these retirees prior meeting one (or more) of these retirees?
4. What is your current opinion about these retirees?
5. What are some positive aspects of these retirees migrating and living in Antigua?
6. What are some negative aspects of these retirees migrating and living in Antigua?
7. Overall, are you satisfied, dissatisfied, or indifferent about the US retirement migration to Antigua?

**How Many U.S. Retirees Live in Antigua?**

Croucher (2009, p.43), who wrote her book on U.S. citizens living in San Miguel de Allende and Ajijic in Mexico, stated:

After countless hours of researching, reading, surfing the Internet, interviewing or seeking to interview government officials, and poring over documents and reports from U.S. and Mexican agencies, I regret that I must join the chorus of voices who proclaim, as did recently the Migration Policy Institute in Washington, D.C., that “data about the numbers of U.S. citizens abroad...are meager and incomplete.”

Sadly, those of us doing research on Americans living abroad face the dilemma of not having accurate data on how many U.S. citizens live overseas. In a panel I participated in
at the American Anthropological Association annual meeting in New Orleans, both Croucher (2010) and Freidenberg (2010) discussed the lack of figures on how many U.S. citizens reside in Mexico and Argentina, respectively. Freidenberg (2010) explained that the last year the United States Department of State published figures on how many U.S. citizens reside abroad was 1999. This data indicated there were 4 million U.S. citizens living abroad. Croucher (2010, p. 5) blamed the U.S. government for not being concerned with “keeping data on Americans abroad or releasing it.”

Given that the data available on how many U.S. citizens living abroad are unreliable, I present some numbers here. According to Bill Shetz, the Commander of the American Legion Post of Antigua, there were 10,000 U.S. citizens (of any age) in Guatemala in 1999. However, part of this 10,000-person figure includes U.S. citizens who register with the Embassy but only spend a few days in Guatemala as tourists. In addition, some of the U.S. retirees who permanently reside in Antigua do not register with the Embassy and are therefore not accounted for in this figure. Another source, the Centro Latinoamericano y Caribeño de Demografía (CELADE) (2008), stated there were 5,417 individuals residing in Guatemala who were born in the United States in the year of 2002. Out of the 5,417 individuals, only 374 were aged 60 and above.

Obviously, these two sources contradict each other and are therefore unreliable. One source indicated there are twice as many U.S. citizens in Guatemala as the other source. Furthermore, both of these sources mention how many U.S. citizens live in Guatemala as a whole. I have not seen any source that states how many U.S. citizens live in Antigua specifically. I did not conduct a census of the American community in Anti-

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1 The U.S. Embassy in Guatemala provided these data to the Commander.
gua since it would be difficult for a single individual to go door to door to count people in a city of 47,044 inhabitants (Velásquez, 2007). I estimate, however, that there were 500 U.S. citizens living in Antigua when this research project was conducted in 2008-2009. Most of these 500 U.S. citizens, perhaps upwards of 80-90%, are retired.

I cannot provide accurate statistical information based on census data, but I am able to provide some basic numbers based on the 75 U.S. retirees who participated in this study:

N=75
Males=57%
Females=33%
Married Couples (both US citizens)=70%
Single Males=25%
Single Females=5%

The following map shows the last state of residence of the retirees back in the United States. The most popular state the U.S. retirees come from is Florida (12 retirees), followed by California (10 retirees), and then New York (7 retirees).

**Figure 1:** Last State of Residence of U.S. Retirees.
As Freidenberg (2010, p. 2) explained, “The lack of a trustworthy population registry of U.S. citizens abroad suggests a political discourse that negates the existence of emigration. The result is that the U.S. population abroad remains relatively invisible within the territorial confines of the country.” The point is not whether there are 500 or 5000 U.S. retirees living in Antigua but that we have to acknowledge that there are U.S. citizens who opt to migrate abroad to countries such as Mexico, Argentina, Costa Rica, Panama, and Guatemala. U.S. citizens are not the exception to international migration.

**Contributions To The Literature**

1. Prior research studies on U.S. citizens in Latin America were conducted in such countries as Mexico (Croucher, 2009; Stokes, 1981; Truly, 2001), Costa Rica (Popov, 1980; Porter, 2007), Argentina (Freidenberg, 2009) and Panama (MPI, 2006). This is the first study that focuses specifically on U.S. citizens living in Guatemala.

2. This study documents U.S. retirees who migrate to a country that is characterized by an ongoing history of violence and natural disasters.

3. This study documents how U.S. retirees perceive that there is a culture of lies among the Guatemalan population. This culture of lies influences the retirement lifestyles of U.S. retirees in Antigua.

4. This is the first study I am aware of that discusses social stratification in an American community in Latin America.

5. This is the first study I am aware of that discusses the role of gossip in a U.S. retiree community in Latin America.
6. Although some previous studies have dabbled in local perspectives (e.g. Crouch-er, 2009; Porter, 2007), this is the first study I am aware of that has interviewed the local population to find out what do they think about the migration of U.S. citizens into their country.
CHAPTER 1:
Historical and Ethnographic Context of Guatemala: As Seen Through the Eyes of U.S. Retirees

Different approaches can be undertaken to write about a broad topic such as the historic and ethnographic context of Guatemala. It is important to have a clear image of the country, in terms of recent history and current events, so we can better understand the lives of these U.S. citizens, especially when the recent history of this country is characterized by a long civil war and current events are stressed by new violence criminal activities. But instead of writing another general description of this country in this age of Wikipedia, I thought it would be more fruitful to describe Guatemala as seen through the eyes of U.S. retirees.

One of these retirees is Sue Patterson. Patterson is a retired Foreign Service officer who worked in difficult locations such as Iran, Chile, and as Consul General in Guatemala. The reason I highlight Patterson in this chapter is because she has in-depth knowledge of the Guatemalan government as a result of her Foreign Service experience. Moreover, Patterson is the only U.S. retiree who conducted talks about Guatemala to a live audience while I was doing my fieldwork in Antigua. Patterson founded and heads Wings, a non-governmental organization (NGO) aimed at decreasing population growth in Guatemala. About every other month, Patterson holds fundraising talks at Rainbow Cafe. Rainbow Cafe hosts a speaker (usually the head of an NGO) every Tuesday afternoon to talk about problems affecting Guatemala. I attended several of these talks and I noticed the talks held by Patterson had the largest audience.

Patterson is a visible and well-respected U.S. retiree in Antigua. I find it appropriate to use how she views Guatemala as a framework for this chapter. At her fundrais-
ing talks, Patterson explained that there are five specific factors that distinguish Guatemala from the rest of the world. This chapter is subdivided using her five factors: 1) a 50/50 indigenous to Ladino population ratio, 2) a fast population growth, 3) a weak government, 4) a corrupted government, and 5) a long civil war. And, I add one more factor for the enrichment of this chapter: 6) a culture of lies.

Figure 2: Sue Patterson. Photograph by author.

Factor 1: A 50/50 Indigenous to Ladino Population Ratio

The first factor that makes Guatemala unique as discussed by Patterson is that the population is evenly divided: 50% indigenous (Maya) and 50% Ladino. But, prior to engaging in this discussion, it is important to define what is “Maya” and what is “Ladino.” U.S. citizens have most likely heard the word “Maya” in school, since the ancient Mayan empire, along with the Aztec and Inca empires, is quickly mentioned at the beginning of
American history courses when discussing European and Native American contact since 1492. The Mayas in Guatemala are descendants of the peoples of the Mayan empire. Moreover, the Mayan indigenous group is well represented in American institutions such as the Field Museum, Disney theme parks, and National Geographic (Little, 2004).

The word “Ladino,” however, might be a new concept for many U.S. citizens. Ladino is better known in other parts of Latin America as “mestizo,” which is the biological mix of Spaniard and Native American. There were two waves of mestizaje in Guatemala. The first mestizos were the children of a Spaniard with an indigenous woman. The second wave of mestizaje began when these initial mestizos began to reproduce among themselves. Ladinos are the descendants of this second wave of mestizaje (Smith, 1995). Although Wade (2004, p. 356) argued against defining mestizaje in “opposition to racial absolutes”—white and Indian in the case of Guatemala—since it perpetuates the reproduction of racism.

Nowadays, the Maya/Ladino dichotomy is defined in terms of culture rather than race (Smith, 1990; 1995). As it was explained to me by Sergio Garcia, a Maya Kaqchikel tour guide and anthropology student, in order to be Mayan an individual must practice one or both of the following cultural acts: 1) wear the indigenous clothing, and/or 2) speak one of the Mayan languages. If a Guatemalan wears western clothing and only speaks Spanish, then this person is considered to be Ladino. Of course, this is not a universal rule, but it is a good heuristic.

Interestingly, U.S. retirees do not use the words “Maya” and “Ladino” much in their daily discourse. U.S. retirees opt to conceptualize both Ladinos and Mayas as Guatemalans, often referring to them as “Guats,” regardless of their ethnic background.
There is a general consensus among the American community in Antigua that the term “Guat” is derogatory, but some of them choose to use it anyway, mainly because it is easier to pronounce “Guat” than “Guatemalan” or “Guatemalteco.” Therefore, “Guat” is the preferred word of use when talking about the local population rather than the Maya/Ladino dichotomy.

Even though the words “Maya” and “Ladino” are not used much in the lexicon of U.S. retirees, it is important to discuss the indigenous/Ladino dichotomy since ethnic conflicts are part of the realities in Guatemala. For instance, Carmack and colleagues (1996, p. 259) explained the civil war in Guatemala is unique because of the “overwhelming presence of the Maya Indians in that country.” Patterson herself recognized the importance of the indigenous/Ladino dichotomy. Therefore, the first factor she discussed in her presentations is that 50% of the population is indigenous while the other 50% is Ladino.

However, this generalization is most likely inaccurate. Guatemalan scholar Cojti Cuxil (2007) stated that 60% of the population of his country is composed by the indigenous population. The largest indigenous group is the Mayas, but Cojti Cuxil also adds the Garifunas and the Xincas as part of this 60%. Garcia, the Kaqchikel tour guide and anthropology student, explained to me that he does not consider the Garifunas and Xincas as part of the same categorical group as the Mayas. For him, the largest ethnic group in Guatemala is the Mayas. The Mayas account for 48% of the population and are subdivided in 22 linguistically distinctive groups. For Garcia, the second largest group in his country is the Ladinos, which comprise 43% of the population, while Garifunas are 6% and Xincas represent 1.3% of the population. The CIA World Factbook (2010) listed the
Ladinos as the largest group in Guatemala accounting for 59.4% of the population. This last source does not categorize all Mayan groups into one category, but considers each linguistic ethnic group as a different category. For example, the CIA (2010) listed the K’iche as the second largest group representing 9.1% of the population.

The above illustrations demonstrate there is really no consensus about how to categorize the different ethnic groups of Guatemala, let alone how measure the exact proportions of the various groupings. Richard Adams (1998) explained that Guatemalan indigenous scholars such as Coijti Cuxil argue the indigenous population has been undercounted as a result of discrimination from the Guatemalan government. R. Adams (1998, p. 2) acknowledged that “the Guatemalan censuses are full of errors,” but he attributed these mistakes to “the general incompetence in census taking” instead of discrimination by Guatemalan politicians. Perhaps the Mayas have been undercounted because it is more difficult to count people in rural areas where most of the indigenous population lives. R. Adams (1998, p. 5) stated, “It is more reasonable to argue that counting rural peoples is difficult rather than that census takers hate Indians.”

Although it is likely the indigenous population represents more than 50% of the Guatemalan population, we can assume for heuristic purposes that in the highlands, where this study took place, there is roughly a 1 to 1 proportion between Maya and Ladino populations. The Garifunas and Xincas, who are part of the 60% indigenous figure discussed by Coijti Cuxil (2007), are not part of the social dynamics in Antigua and its surrounding towns. The Garifunas live on the northern coastal region while the Xincas live on the south. Antigua itself is mostly populated by Ladinos, but nearby San Antonio de Aguas Calientes is mostly indigenous. Mayas from San Antonio and other high-
land towns such as San Juan de Comalapa and Santa Catarina Palopó commute to Antigua to work as vendors, manual laborers, among other jobs in the service industry (Little, 2004). As a result, interactions between Mayas and Ladinos are common in the Antigua area.

Patterson does not discuss the aforementioned controversy about the undercount of the indigenous population. The main point Patterson makes when discussing the Maya/Ladino dichotomy is the status given to Mayas as second-class citizens. Mayas were treated as inferiors throughout the twentieth century. Consequently, Ladino and foreign landowners used Mayas as an inexpensive source of labor (Cojti Cuxil, 2007). Burrell (2005) wrote that from the 1940s to the 1980s, indigenous people from Todos Los Santos migrated to the coast to work on plantations. They not only migrated to work at large plantations, some of the indigenous women migrated to the capital city too to work as maids. Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú (1983) documented how her own family and several other people from her hometown migrated to work on the plantations. In addition, Menchu herself once worked as a maid for a rich Ladino family in Guatemala City. Peasants were not only paid miserable wages, but they were also physically and mentally abused at work. The system was set up so that rich Ladinos became richer by taking the surplus value from both the indigenous workers and poor Ladino workers (Menchú, 1983).

There has been some progress made in terms of ethnic relations. The government is now open to the idea of multiculturalism instead of insisting upon Mayan assimilation into the mainstream Ladino group. Besides, Ladinos do not want to have Mayas assimilated as equals, “but to deal with them as part of the overall race-class-gender hierarchy
rather than as a separate cultural system” (Smith, 1995, p. 741). The problem is that even though Ladinos now accept the idea of a multicultural Guatemala and want their country to stop being a racist society, Ladinos do not want to give up their own race-based privileges. Historically, Ladinos have had better access to education, jobs, healthcare, power, and landownership. Ladinos want to keep these privileges in a Guatemala with racial equality (Hale, 2006).

An example of how Ladinos embrace multiculturalism but keep the benefits for themselves is in their tourism promotions. It is the indigenous cultures that appear in the brochures and other forms of travel-based advertising; however, the indigenous vendors that attract tourists are the least paid within the tourism industry. Most of the income produced from tourism goes to the government and Ladino-owned businesses, such as hotels, restaurants, and travel agencies (Little, 2008).

Throughout the twentieth century, the government has provided Mayas with some “minor concessions,” such as giving them jobs that Ladinos do not want. The indigenous have worked in such menial jobs as cleaning, driving, and guarding. Also, professional jobs, such as nursing and teaching, are given to the indigenous in remote locations, like Peten, because Ladinos do not want to go to there. Furthermore, some Mayas are given token positions in order to illustrate that some government officials do not engage in discriminatory practices (Cojti Cuxil, 2007).

Indigenous groups have achieved a certain degree of political representation since the mid-1990s to present day. In 2005, indigenous persons accounted for 8.3% of the ministers in the executive branch, 7.6% of the representatives in the legislative branch, 7.6% of the magistrates in the judicial branch, and 35% of all mayors in Guatemala.
Rigoberta Menchu was a presidential candidate in the 2007 elections, but ended a distant 7th place. Despite these “minor concessions,” Coijti Cuxil (2007, p. 145) said that “the quotidian reality of the [indigenous] populations has changed little or not at all.”

Guatemala, along with Bolivia and Peru, are among the few Latin American locations remaining where an indigenous population remains as the majority (Carmack, Gasco & Gossen, 1996). Therefore, this Maya/Ladino discussion is important since U.S. retirees in Antigua live in a society with different ethnic dynamics from other Latin American retirement destinations. For example, whites constitute the vast majority of the population in Argentina (97%) and Costa Rica (94%), and mestizos are the largest ethnic group in Mexico (60%) and Panama (70%) (CIA, 2010). Indeed, one of the factors that makes Guatemala unique as explained by Patterson is that there are ethnic conflicts based on the opposition of the Maya and Ladino populations, unlike the other Central American nations that share the same colonial history (Smith, 1990).

Most of the U.S. retirees, however, do not care about the ethnic dimensions of Guatemala. Again, U.S. retirees conceptualize the local population as “Guats” rather than categorizing individuals as either “Maya” or “Ladino.” Perhaps U.S. retirees do not talk about the local population in terms of the Maya/Ladino dichotomy since it is difficult to pigeonhole Guatemalans in one of these two ethnic categories. Whether someone is Maya or Ladino is more of a cultural choice nowadays than an inherit trait (Smith, 1990; 1995). U.S. retirees do not view the local population with a cultural magnifying glass, but instead view them with a biological magnifying glass. If one were to categorize Guatemalans in terms of biology based on physical traits such as short height, straight
black hair, and dark skin, then most of the local population (whether culturally Maya or Ladino) would fit into one category. Perhaps that is why U.S. retirees conceptualize the local population as one category (Guats) rather than two distinct ethnic groups: most Guatemalans look racially the same to U.S. retirees.

Lastly, most of the retirees spend most of their time socializing with other Americans and other foreigners. For the U.S. retirees who have minimal socialization with Guatemalans, making the effort to learn about the ethnic issues of Guatemala seems to be more trivial than useful information. Therefore, even though U.S. retirees are aware of the alleged 50/50 divide between the local populations, they nonetheless categorize Guatemalans in the single “Guat” category as demonstrated in the use of this term in their day-to-day vocabulary.

**Factor 2: A Fast Population Growth**

The second factor that makes Guatemala unique as discussed by Patterson is that there is a fast population growth in this country. Since Patterson founded and heads Wings, an NGO aimed at decreasing population growth in Guatemala, then it is not surprising that she highlights the importance of this factor in her fundraising talks. Unlike Patterson, most U.S. retirees are not interested in actively working toward decreasing population growth. As it will be discussed in Chapter 4, most of the U.S. retirees do not volunteer at community service projects. However, the U.S. retiree community concurs with Patterson: fast population growth causes economic and health problems in Guatemala.

While the fertility rate in the United States is 2.05 children per woman (CIA, 2010), the fertility rate in Guatemala is twice that at 4.6 children per woman, which is the
second highest fertility rate in Latin America after Haiti (Alvarez, 2008). And, as Patterson explained, the fertility rate in the rural communities is even higher: the indigenous woman in rural Guatemala gives birth to an average of 8 children. To complicate matters, about 20% of all pregnant women are teenagers between the ages of 13 and 18 (CEPAL, 2008; Prensa Libre, 2008).

There are two explanations I heard from the U.S. retiree community to account for the fast population growth as illustrated in the statistics above. First, there is the explanation provided by Patterson and Wings: there is misinformation and ignorance about birth control methods. Birth control is not expensive in Guatemala. For example, a tubal ligation costs only $15 (Wings, 2009). So, birth control availability and affordability is not a problem. The problem is combating ignorance, according to Patterson. She explained that certain segments of the Guatemalan society believe the only reason for using contraceptives is so women can “sleep around.” Patterson joked during her fundraising presentations that the last thing a woman is thinking, who is struggling to raise seven children, is to have more sex. Patterson also mentioned religion as a factor for why some women do not use birth control. The Roman Catholic Church prohibits the use of all forms of birth control, except for the rhythm method, based on the menstrual cycle. The Catholic priests in towns where Wings does fieldwork tell mass attendees to ignore Wings volunteers because they are an evil organization.

The second explanation I heard to account for the fast population growth was from members of the American Legion Post. Commander Bill Shetz and other Legion members explained to me the reason why Guatemalan women give birth to many children is because this is how they define their femininity. A Guatemalteca with no children
is not considered to be truly a woman by the community. The American Legion members expressed that Guatemalan girls want to become pregnant at an early age because motherhood instantly raises the status of a girl to that of woman. The more children women have, the higher the level of womanhood they achieve. Thus, women with large families gain higher respect in the community.

These two explanations contradict each other. Patterson explained that Guatemalan women would like to have fewer children since it is a struggle for them to raise eight kids, but they are not able to do so because if they opt for birth control then their husbands and community members will think they want to “sleep around.” On the other hand, Shetz and the American Legion members argued Guatemalan women do want to have multiple children, and they want to have them at an early age. A woman is not considered a woman until she gives birth to a child.

Even though there are two contradictory explanations to account for the fast population growth, U.S. retirees concur that having to raise several children are economic and health problems for each these families. As was discussed in the ABC News program 20/20, 50% of Guatemalans (80% in certain Mayan rural communities) are stunted as a result of malnourishment. Lack of nutrients not only causes stunting but also “greater susceptibility to disease and infection, impaired cognitive function and even lower IQ. Stunted kids are more likely to drop out of school and grow up to be unskilled workers with little potential for economic success later in life” (Gowen & Martelli, 2010). U.S. retirees blame malnourishment, stunting, low academic performance, and the reproduction of poverty partly to the fast population growth. As long as women continue to give birth to an average of eight children (as is the case for certain indigenous rural communit-
ies), these women are not going to be able to provide a higher quality of life to their children.

U.S. retirees believe that fast population growth causes economic and health problems in Guatemala. However, U.S. retirees do not perceive this as a problem that affects their retirement lifestyle. Patterson works toward decreasing the birth rate in Guatemala because it is her passion to do so. But, for most retirees, the presence of Guatemalan children in such public places like Parque Central provides a sense of joy.

![Figure 3: U.S. retirees interacting with Guatemalan children in Parque Central. Photograph by author.](image)

As illustrated in Figure 3, U.S. retirees interact with local children all the time. As a matter of fact, I have seen certain U.S. retirees who interact more with Guatemalan children than Guatemalan adults. I have witnessed how some U.S. retirees spend hours a day
playing with the local children in Parque Central. I am also aware of retirees who invite children out for dinner to Pollo Campero or for ice cream at one of the ice cream shops around town. Some U.S. retirees even pay for the school tuition of the children they care about. So, the presence of children does not represent a problem to the lifestyle of the average U.S. retiree. On the contrary, the local children enrich their retirement experiences.

**Factor 3: A Weak Government**

The third factor that makes Guatemala unique as explained by Sue Patterson is that the government is structurally weak. Most U.S. retirees concur with Patterson about the weakness of the local government. Local politics is a factor U.S. retirees make an effort to understand. US retirees keep informed about current political issues by reading the local newspapers everyday, especially *Prensa Libre*. Patterson explained the Guatemalan government is weak as a result of centralization, the numerous political parties, lack of specific political ideologies along party lines, and nepotism. U.S. citizens are used to the American government system where each of the fifty states has its own government and elected officials who are responsible for the management of their territory. Small democracies like Guatemala use a centralized government due to its size. Guatemala is approximately the same size as Tennessee.

Unlike U.S. citizens who elect their own state governors, the President of Guatemala is the one responsible for appointing governors to each of the 22 departments of the country. So, each of the 22 governors follow the requests of the President and the Executive branch. Therefore, the centralized government of Guatemala is responsible for all the duties that are dispersed among federal and state governments in the United States. The only similarity between the U.S. and Guatemalan governments in terms of executive
management is that in both countries the cities and municipalities elect their own mayors and city counselors (Department of State, 2010).

Whether the centralized Guatemalan government cannot or simply does not work toward solving the needs of the rural population is subject to much debate. For instance, a major project recently undertaken by the central government was to provide electric power to 90% of all Guatemalan homes by 2004. This project, however, did not reflect the reality that 80% of the rural population lives on less than $2 a day. Since rural Guatemalans cannot afford to buy electric appliances or pay an electric bill, they do not want electricity. The heavy expense of providing electricity throughout Guatemala basically means that rural homes now have a single light bulb dangling from the ceiling to illuminate the entire house for a couple hours at night. Rural residents would have preferred the central government undertake a potable water project instead the electric power project (Taylor, 2005). Greater governmental decentralization would allow municipalities to develop regional projects geared towards the needs of the local population, provided economic resources were distributed as well.

Environmental policy is one of the few policy areas that have been decentralized. Each of the 331 municipalities is responsible for the management and protection of their forests. A research study found that the forests are not a priority for 99% of the mayors in Guatemala, and the four mayors who made forestation a priority had political motivations for doing so. Even though some issues like the environment have been decentralized, decentralization in itself is not the solution. Decentralization must be accompanied by political pressure from the voters (Gibson & Lehoucq, 2003).
Centralization is not the only reason why Patterson and other retirees believe the Guatemalan government is weak. U.S. retirees also blame the large number of political parties for the weakness of the local government. In 2010, there were 23 legally registered parties in Guatemala (Martinez, 2010). U.S. retirees joked that in Guatemala, “there is a new political party created every day,” or that “the last thing Guatemala needs is another political party.” As explained by Patterson, political parties in Guatemala do not represent political ideologies, but instead these parties serve the narrow political interests of a particular group. Rather than striving towards nationwide socio-economic improvements, each political party focuses on raising the status of the group they represent over the status of an opposing group. Due to all of the opposing political interests, no single Guatemalan party has been re-elected president within the past six elections. A party with the most votes during one election is only “marginal” in following elections (Sanchez, 2008).

Political marginalization results from political party members not belonging to a specific party because of ideological reasons. Changing party affiliation is very common in Guatemala; even elected officials regularly switch parties during their terms in office. From 2003-2005, for example, 30% of legislators changed parties. Party swapping is common because the political parties do not have clearly-defined ideological standpoints; nevertheless, they claim their ambiguous ideologies are in the best interest of the nation (Sanchez, 2008). Because parties represent groups rather than ideologies, there are both leftist and rightist political views within the same party. Nevertheless, conservative representation in Guatemala is the most common (Zoco, 2006).
Political alliances between several parties are necessary to win elections since there are so many political parties. These coalitions, however, quickly fall apart after the election since the only reason for the commitment within the coalition was to win the election. Patterson explained that nepotism, too, is a problem in the government. Patterson claimed that upwards of 80% of the upper level government managerial positions are replaced in each new administration. As Sanchez (2008) explained, these parties are created for the political gains of their creators. Once they are elected, they replace governmental workers with their own family and friends who many times are not qualified to hold such positions. Patterson explained the Guatemalan government would not be as weak if there was a civil service program in place like in the United States, where government employees are not fired as a result of elections.

The weakness of the Guatemalan government does not only affect the daily lives of Guatemalans, but also U.S. retirees and other foreigners living within the country. For example, a few retirees intended to build houses so they purchased land along the periphery of Antigua or in other rural locations in Guatemala with the understanding that the government would build a water and electric infrastructure in these locations. But the constantly shifting bureaucracy means government projects are also changing. Several of these locations have not received the infrastructure; therefore, the U.S. retirees have not been able to build their houses. Nor have they had any luck when attempting to resell their lands since very few people are interested in purchasing land that lacks access to water and electricity.

A significant issue that affects all U.S. retirees is that of their immigration status. According to the Consulate General of The United States in Guatemala (2006):
...[A]pplicants for residency often report that unexplained delays in the issuance process makes obtaining a resident visa very difficult. Delays of one, two and even four years are common. During such delays, an applicant’s residency status may be uncertain, requiring regular departure from and re-entry into Guatemala in order to re-establish temporary status.

Some of the retirees I met in Antigua are struggling to get their resident visa, and even more retirees do not want to apply for such visa because they have learned from fellow foreigners how difficult the government makes this process. Therefore, those retirees who are in the process of obtaining their resident visa or those without a visa, who represent a large majority of the U.S. retiree population, must exit Guatemala every 90 or 180 days.

Tourists receive an entry stamp on their passports valid for 90 days when arriving in Guatemala. Tourists have the option to renew this entry visa for another 90 days if they go to the migration office in Guatemala City. Most of the U.S. retirees’ legal statuses in Guatemala are that of tourist. Therefore, whether they opt for the 90 day extension or not, they must exit Guatemala two to four times a year. Even though El Salvador and Honduras are the closest countries to Antigua, foreigners cannot go to these two countries to get a new 90-day passport stamp because there is a free people movement agreement between Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Consequently, people typically go to Tapachulas in Mexico to exit the country, since it is the closest exit point where visas can be renewed.

There is also a black-market means to get a new 90-day passport stamp without exiting the country. I was aware of two Americans in Antigua who have connections with
immigration officials at La Aurora International Airport in Guatemala City. These two Americans charge a fee of Q450-500 for a new stamp; the fee covers their time taken transporting passports to the airport and compensates their connection for extending the favor. This type of bribery is a clear example of the corruption that is systemic in the Guatemalan government.

**Factor 4: A Corrupted Government**

Patterson uses the following catch phrase at her fundraising talks: “Not all corrupted governments are weak, but all weak governments are corrupted.” Hence, for Patterson, the Guatemalan government is both weak and corrupted. As explained in the previous section, most of the retirees have to deal with corruption in order to obtain a residency visa or renew the tourist entry stamp on their passports. So, most of the U.S. retirees have firsthand knowledge of the corruption going on in the government. Interestingly, some of the U.S. retirees stated to me that the most corrupted government institution in Guatemala is the National Civil Police (NCP).

During the 36 years of civil war, the old National Police (NP) was controlled by the Guatemalan armed forces. It was not until 1996 when the Peace Accords were signed that the new NCP became an independent institution. As a result, for many years, the terms “public security” and “military defense” were intertwined. However, the NCP was created using men and women from the old NP who were “infamous for their corruption, abuse, and incompetence” (Glebbeek, 2001, p. 439). So, even though there were efforts made to clean up the police, this organization continues with the corruption inherited from the civil war. As Luis Ramirez, a social scientist with the Guatemalan Institute of
Comparative Studies on Penal Science stated, “[Police officers] changed uniforms but everything stayed the same” (San Martin, 2007).

Local American Legion Post Commander Bill Shetz, was a police officer in Philadelphia. Shetz explained to me that one of the problems with the local police is that the officers do not show concern for those who have been victimized. For instance, Shetz has witnessed how police officers laugh when a woman goes to report she has been raped. Gustavo, an officer with the tourism police in Antigua, told me that the police officers do not care when tourists file a “denuncia” (complaint) when they have been the victims of crime. A “denuncia” is only a piece of paper, and the police officers merely laugh about the victims. It is no surprise, then, that vigilante justice groups are common in certain communities in Guatemala (Burnett, 2008) because community members are tired of the NCP not doing its job.

The corruption of the Guatemalan government goes further than the NCP not arresting criminals or conducting criminal investigations. Members of both the NCP and the Guatemalan military are notorious for being criminals themselves. In his book about the murder of Bishop Girardi, Goldman (2007) explained the military continues to have a strong influence over the Guatemalan government, despite the 1996 peace treaties. It is said that certain members of the military have gotten rich as a result of involving themselves in drug trafficking and kidnapping, among other criminal activities. These military men are not afraid to assassinate people who get in their way. More scarily, as documented by Goldman (2007), prosecutors, judges, defense lawyers, witnesses, and anyone involved in a criminal investigation are afraid to point fingers at the military because they do not want to be murdered. Ramirez stated, "It's not that organized crime has penetrated
the police force or the Interior Ministry (equivalent to U.S. Justice Department), organized crime is directing the police, the ministry, and the military” (San Martin, 2007).

Not only are the NCP and military known for their corruption, but presidents are as well. For instance, a pre-recorded video taped message by Guatemalan lawyer Rodrigo Rosenberg surfaced in the media on May 11, 2009, the day of his funeral. Rosenberg stated, “If you are watching this message, it is because I was assassinated by President Alvaro Colom.” Rosenberg said that Colom (2008-2012) intended to murder him because Rosenberg had evidence of Colom’s money laundering at the Rural Development Bank of Guatemala (Llorca, 2009). This alleged evidence has not yet been made public. On the contrary, a United Nations investigation stated that Rosenberg organized his own murder. It was alleged that Rosenberg was so displeased with the current government that he sacrificed his own life in order to spark a change in government leadership (Associated Press, 2010c).

Former President Alfonso Portillo (2000-2004) has not escaped corruption scandals either. U.S. Attorney Preet Bharaba from New York stated that Portillo transformed “the office of the Guatemalan presidency into his personal ATM” (Associated Press, 2010a). This former president is accused of stealing $15.7 million from the government during his tenure. Portillo claimed he would run a clean and honest government when elected president, but his four years of governance are instead characterized by the image of one of the most corrupt governments in Guatemala (Lacey, 2008).

Portillo left Guatemala for Mexico just days after his tenure as president ended due to corruption charges imposed by the new administration of President Oscar Berger (2004-2008). Portillo received a work visa and worked as a financial adviser in Mexico
prior to being extradited to Guatemala in October 2008. Portillo was charged in both Guatemalan and U.S. courts. His first known crime came at the start his presidency in 2000. Portillo embezzled a $1.5 million donation from the Taiwanese government that was meant to buy books for local schools. This money eventually ended up in his ex-wife and daughter's bank account in Paris. American prosecutors said money from the Guatemalan government was also used to buy “expensive cars and watches.” On January 2010, the former president was arrested in Guatemala and is expected to be extradited to the U.S. where he could face up to 20 years in prison (Associated Press, 2010a,b).

The Colom and Portillo cases are two examples of the corruption cases currently in Guatemala at the presidential level. As explained before, all segments of the Guatemalan government are also corrupt, including the immigration office, NCP, and of course the infamous military. But, Guatemala is not unique in terms of corruption. Latin America in general is infamous for their government corruption. Weyland (1998, p.108) stated “current explanations tend to stress heightened opportunities for extracting bribes more than incentives for doing so.” Moreover, Weyland (1998; p. 108) explainid that democratization throughout Latin America is a reason why corruption is endemic in the region: “by dispersing power and requiring the consent of several institutions in decision making, the return of democracy has extended the range of actors who can demand bribes.” Lastly, Weyland (1998) argued that corruption in Latin America is not new. The reason we perceive a rise in corruption throughout the region, including Guatemala, is because politicians use the television as a platform to inculpate the opposition. Therefore, there has been a long history of corrupted governments throughout Latin America.
If U.S. retirees were not aware of the corruption in Guatemala prior to migration, they definitely became aware once living there. The retirees experience a sense of frustration when they have to deal with the corrupt Guatemalan government. For instance, I noticed how Rick was angry when a local bank stole money from his savings account and the NCP was doing nothing to investigate the matter. I witnessed how Rick made telephone calls and went to the NCP every single day for weeks. Luckily for Rick, the NCP investigated the matter and the bank reimbursed his money. But Rick is a unique case since he learned how to navigate his way though the corruption of the NCP. In addition, Rick was the victim of a minor form of crime compared with the atrocities going on around the country. Most U.S. retirees, however, do not know how to deal with the corrupted Guatemalan government. Some of the retirees told me there is nothing they can do to change the culture of corruption that is endemic in Guatemala. The only thing U.S. retirees can do is to tolerate this corruption since nobody wants to be murdered.

**Factor 5: A Long Civil War**

The fifth factor discussed by Sue Patterson that makes Guatemala unique is its long civil war. From 1960 to 1996, there was an internal conflict in which more than 200,000 Guatemalans, mostly indigenous people, disappeared (Jonas, 2000). One of the questions I asked each of the U.S. retirees who participated in this study was, “Were you aware of the Guatemalan history of violence prior to moving to Antigua?” Nearly all of the U.S. retirees were aware of the civil war that afflicted this country, although the levels of knowledge about this conflict varied from retiree to retiree. Retirees like Patterson, who was the U.S. Counsel General in Guatemala, or Sybil Francis, who is a PhD in Psychology and former college administrator, were well informed about the civil war prior to
deciding to migrate to Antigua. The majority of U.S. retirees, however, knew there was a civil war that ended in 1996, but that is the extent of their knowledge. Most importantly, U.S. retirees view the civil war as an event that happened “a long time ago,” and they do not see the connection between the civil war and the present day “new violence.” As it will be explained in Chapter 2, U.S. retirees have a utopian idea of Antigua as a safe place to be and consider new violence criminal activities overblown by the U.S. government and media.

I have read in the literature two explanations for the genesis of the Guatemalan Civil War: one given by the U.S. government and another given by American anthropologists. First let us discuss the explanation given by the U.S. government. The U.S. government explains that communists attempted to take control of Guatemala, therefore the actions of the Guatemalan military were justifiable since they had to defend their country against a communist threat (Carmack, 1988).

This communist threat referred to by the U.S. government is known in academia as the Ten Years of Spring. From 1945 to 1954, there were two democratically elected presidents in Guatemala: Juan Jose Arevalo (1945-1951) and Jacobo Arvenz (1951-1954). Arvenz tried to nationalize the lands owned by the United Fruit Company (UFCO) and redistribute them among the peasants. The UFCO did not only choose Guatemala as an operations base because of the vast banana lands, but also because “at the time [they] entered Central America, Guatemala’s government was the region’s weakest, most corrupt and most pliable” (Dosal, 2005, p. 38). It was much easier for the UFCO to do business in a country where it could bribe dictators instead of working policies through a democratically elected government.
Initially, the UFCO did not produce any bananas; it purchased the fruit from local growers and exported the commodities to the U.S. Once the UFCO gained control of the arable lands, seaports, and railroads, it then started to grow and sell its own bananas. Local producers could not compete with the large foreign company. Therefore, local peasants were forced to work as wage laborers for the big plantations, including the UFCO, in order to subsist economically (Dosal, 2005).

The government of President Arvenz did not think it was fair that a single foreign corporation was holding so much power in Guatemalan territory. Therefore, Arvenz decided to nationalize the UFCO. This attempt at nationalization ended the Ten Years of Spring and was the impetus for the 36 years of civil war. The Guatemalan elite, with CIA financial support, overthrew President Arvenz in 1954 (Dosal, 2005). Peasants, mostly indigenous people, were not satisfied with the new imposed U.S. government and decided to organize themselves into guerilla movements in 1960.

The second explanation given to explain the genesis of the Guatemalan Civil War is by American anthropologists. According to the book edited by Carmack (1988), there are two reasons why the indigenous population organized themselves into guerrillas: an agrarian crisis and their “sociological awakening.” First, the agrarian crisis was the result of fast population growth and Mayas inability to access the necessary land to care for their families. Indigenous people had migrated to coastal areas to work on the big plantations in order to earn money. Second, there was a “sociological awakening” of the indigenous population. Even though the indigenous represented 50% or more of the total population, they have been treated as a “sociological minority.” The indigenous populations, however, were exposed to democratic practices such as the creation of political
parties, labor unions, and cooperatives during the ten years of spring. The indigenous
realized that they could organize themselves politically to fight for their rights (Carmack,
1988).

There might be two different explanations about the underlying cause of this war
(communist threat versus the agrarian crisis/sociological awakening of the indigenous),
but there is an agreement that the battle lines were drawn along the ethnic lines of Maya
and Ladino. There was the guerrilla movement composed mainly of indigenous people
and a few solidarity-leftist Ladinos on one side while the other side was the Guatemalan
military composed of Ladinos (Carmack, 1988; Carmack, Gasco & Gossen, 1996). Even
though indigenous people mainly composed the guerrilla groups, most Mayas were not
and did not want to associate with these guerrilla organizations or the Guatemalan milit-
ary, according to Stoll (1999). Millions of Mayas were unjustly associated with the guer-
rilla side and were therefore tortured, raped, and/or murdered by the military.

Besides the genocide of 200,000 Guatemalans, the other major outcome of the in-
digenous victimization during the conflict was the displacement of some 1.5 million indi-
viduals, some of whom migrated internally while others fled to other countries through-
out North America. It must be mentioned that Mayas were already being displaced prior
to the war. There is a history of Mayan migration for economic reasons. But, this migra-
tion flow substantially increased during the war to escape victimization (Garcia, 2006).

State-sponsored violence was common throughout Latin America in the latter half
of the twentieth century. Examples of this are the “Dirty War” in Argentina (1976 to
1983), the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile (1973 to 1990), and the civil war in El Salvador
(1979 to 1992). What is unique about Guatemala is that the civil war was longer (1960 to
1996), and there were considerably more casualties than in Argentina, Chile, and El Salvador put together (Manz, 2008). To put things into perspective, 3,000 people were killed during the tenure of Pinochet in Chile (Amstutz, 2005), while 200,000 Guatemalans were killed during the 36 years of civil war (Jonas, 2000). But, unlike Chile and Argentina, where violence improved after the end of their conflicts, Guatemala along with El Salvador experienced high levels of post-war criminal activities.

The long civil war is probably the strongest factor that characterizes Guatemala for foreigners. Again, U.S. retirees view the civil war as an historical event that does not affect their retirement lifestyles in Antigua. U.S. retirees do not see any connection between the civil war that officially ended on paper in 1996 and present-day violent criminal activities. The sad thing about the civil war is that many segments of the Guatemalan population view violence as “normal,” since violent acts were common during the 36 years of war. We can make the argument that U.S. retirees are part of the “normalization of violence” (Little & Smith, 2009) in which “the use of terror and dominance of fear became ‘normal’” (Glebbeek, 2001, p. 433). Even though most of the U.S. retirees that participated in this study were not living in Guatemala prior to 1996, they have become part of the “normalization of violence,” and this will be argued in Chapter 2.

**Factor 6: A Culture of Lies**

Even though Sue Patterson does not talk about the culture of lies in her fundraising presentations, I find it pertinent to discuss this factor in this chapter. One of the most important research findings in this dissertation is that U.S. retirees believe there is a culture of lies within the Guatemalan population. Americans usually joked, “Guatemalans tell lies every time they move their lips.” According to my observations, U.S. retirees ac-
cused certain Mayas of telling lies, such as the Mayan vendors in Parque Central and the retirees’ indigenous housekeepers. However, U.S. retirees assume all Guatemalans are liars, regardless of ethnicity. This general assumption is due to the American practice of lumping all Guatemalans into the general category of “Guats.” This is an important finding because the Guatemalan culture of lies influences the behavior of U.S. retirees in Antigua. For instance, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, one of the reasons why most U.S. retirees do not engage in community service projects is because they perceive that the local population is trying to take advantage of them with lies. Furthermore, U.S. retirees use the culture of lies as an excuse not to socialize with the Guatemalan population. Therefore, most U.S. retirees tend to socialize with other U.S. citizens and foreigners.

U.S. retirees view the Guatemalan lies as malicious. A common story U.S. retirees have to listen to is indigenous women telling them they have a sick child. Although these women are not asking for money directly, U.S. retirees believe indigenous women fabricate stories about their children being sick as a way to get money out of them. The Mayan women know the U.S. retirees feel sorry about the poverty conditions the children live in. As a result, according to the retirees, the Mayan women are playing on the retirees’ emotions by telling them their children are having an extra hardship in addition to poverty: they are very sick. The retirees believe the Mayas are trying to manipulate them via their lies in order to get easy money. Some of the U.S. retirees give money to these women despite believing they are being lied to, since the children are suffering anyways as a result of poverty. But, there are other retirees who take the lies as a personal attack on them. U.S. retirees take the lies as an excuse to not engage in humanitarian work.
These retirees believe they should not be helping a population that is trying to take advantage of them.

Surprisingly, the topic of Guatemalan lies is not well covered in the academic literature. The best source I am aware of that covers the issue of lies is the book written by David Stoll (1999) who argued some of the statements made by Rigoberta Menchu in her autobiography (1983) are not true. Stoll (1999) made several claims which contradict the testimony of Menchu: she was not illiterate since she attended a private Catholic school from age 6; her dad did not have land disputes with Ladinos but with the indigenous family of his wife; and the body of the brother of Menchu was not burned alive at their hometown plaza. The major argument by Stoll (1999) was that the Mayas did not side with the guerrillas, as stated by Menchu, but instead viewed both groups (the Guatemalan Army and leftist guerrillas) as harmful to their lives and the community. Furthermore, Stoll (1999) argued that the Guatemalan military showed up in Menchu’s hometown only after the guerilla violence started in that region. Therefore, according to Stoll (1999), the genesis of violence in the hometown of Menchu should be credited to the guerrilla groups instead of the military.

It is worth stressing that Stoll (1999) does not argue there is a culture of lies among the Guatemalan population. Stoll (1999) simply argued that not all statements by Menchu (1983) are truthful. The autobiography of Rigoberta Menchu is considered to be in the testimony genre. Warren (1999) explained that the testimony is not a traditional Mayan literature genre. Instead the indigenous of Guatemala prefer to tell stories based on myth, superstition, and surrealism. Therefore, the goal of the Mayas is not to lie when
telling a story, but to impress their audience with a clever and imaginative story. Yet, U.S. retirees view the Mayas’ attempts to be clever as malicious lies.

This culture of lies is not only associated with the Mayas in Guatemala, but with indigenous groups in Latin America in general. Mato (2000, p.484) quoted an indigenous man from Venezuela who stated, “When the white man seeks the Indian it is because he wants to take something from him, something that the Indian wants to keep secret.” The indigenous do not only tell lies in an attempt to be clever, but as a way to protect their way of life from outsiders. The indigenous peoples generally believe that foreigners come into their lands to exploit the population and to extract wealth without due consent. Therefore, the indigenous communities throughout Latin America create fictitious stories when interacting with foreigners to prevent outsiders from gaining an in-depth understanding of their culture, thus protecting their communities from further exploitation by foreigners (Mato, 2000).

There are different definitions of “foreigner” within the Mayan communities in Guatemala. For instance, Sergio Garcia, the Kaqchikel tour guide, explained to me that his community considers a foreigner anyone who is non-Maya. In the Kaqchikel language, the word “Mo’s” means “someone who is sent from the outside,” and this term is applied to both Ladinos and foreigners. The word “Qawinaq” means “someone from our own,” and this term is applied to anyone who is Maya, whether Kaqchikel or any of the 22 Mayan ethnic groups. Goldin (1986) was more specific about her foreigner definition. She claimed that anyone who does not live in the town is a foreigner. In other words, Mayas can be foreigners to one another if they reside in different communities. Little (2004, p.101) provided a more post-modern vision of what is a foreigner. He explained
that these definitions “are never universal or constant,” but vary according to situations and contexts.

Similarly, the term “gringo” does not apply solely to American citizens but is associated with any non-Guatemalan who has light skin. Hence, Europeans and light-skinned Latin Americans are gringos too. On the other hand, it is difficult for Mayas to categorize African Americans because they are from a foreign country, but are not white. As a Guatemalan interviewee told me, she would place an African American in the “gringo” category, although it was difficult conceptualizing them as such. Goldin (1986) explained that African Americans are viewed as both “gringos” and “morenos” (dark-skinned people).

There are different perspectives on who a foreigner is and, as Little (2004) explained, these definitions vary by context. Without regard to the general disagreements, we can concur that any American citizen, regardless of skin color, is generally viewed as a foreigner. The local American Legion Commander, Bill Shetz, is married to a much younger Guatemalan woman named Marleny. Shetz explained that the men in the family of Marleny do not refer to him by his first name, but simply by “El Gringo.” Even U.S. retirees who intermarried into indigenous families continue to be referred to as “gringos” by their families-in-law, which means the retirees continue to be viewed as foreigners by their Guatemalan in-laws. This is probably due to the fact that U.S. retirees do not speak fluent Spanish or any of the Mayan languages. Furthermore, U.S. retirees do not adapt to the circumstances of the local population. For instance, Shetz has provided Marleny with an upper middle class lifestyle, while the rest of her relatives continue to live in poverty.
Therefore, it is difficult for Guatemalans to conceptualize a U.S. retiree as one of their own when the retiree lives in much affluent circumstances.

Adding to the ambiguity associated with the word “foreigner” is local superstition. According to Goldin (1986), gringos are viewed as “supernatural” by the indigenous people. Consequently, if foreigners in general are to be mistrusted, gringos pose even a greater threat. In Mayan tradition, gringos are called “sons of the mountain,” which is to say, the offspring of those who own the mountains. It is believed these offspring comes to indigenous communities to control the Mayas (Goldin, 1986). García, the tour guide, explained to me that the biggest question on an indigenous person’s mind about gringos who live in Guatemala is, “What are they doing here?” It is difficult for Mayas to conceptualize why American citizens would honestly leave their homeland to live in Guatemala. The easiest explanation for Mayas to accept regarding the presence of U.S. retirees in Guatemala is that the gringos are there to take advantage of them in some unknown, magical way.

Therefore, there are two reasons why there is a culture of lies among the Mayas. First, stories based on myth and surrealism are a part of the Mayan literary culture (Warren, 1999). When telling stories, Mayas tend to be creative and imaginative in an attempt to be clever. Second, the indigenous communities throughout Latin America have been oppressed by foreigners since 1492. On top of that, the Mayas do not understand why some gringos leave their homeland to live in Guatemala. So, the indigenous peoples use lies to protect themselves from foreigners (Mato, 2000). U.S. retirees living in Antigua, however, generalize that all Guatemalans tend to lie to foreigners in order to take advant-
age of them. Hence, U.S. retirees believe there is a culture of lies among the Guatemalan population, regardless of ethnic background.

**Conclusion**

U.S. retirees see many beauties throughout Guatemala: the volcano views, the eternal spring climate, the vegetation, the lakes, the ruins of the old Mayan Empire, the Spanish colonial architecture, the presence of Mayan and Ladino cultures, the markets, the bright colors, and the list goes on. At the same time, Guatemala is a country plagued by problems such as ethnic conflicts, poverty, malnourishment, governmental corruption, and an ongoing history of violence. Despite the problems that afflict Guatemala, U.S. citizens like Sue Patterson opt to retire in Antigua. Patterson told me that she “feels at home in Guatemala, not sure why.” When I prompted Patterson to find out if she fears to become a victim of the new violence in Guatemala, she told me, “I think it will happen to someone else, not me.”

If U.S. retirees were not aware of the Guatemalan problems discussed throughout this chapter, then they definitely become aware once they retire in Guatemala. Patterson, who is extremely knowledgeable of the social dynamics of the country as a result of her position as U.S. Consul General of Guatemala, admitted to me that she believes she is immune from the violence that afflicts this country. Indeed, many of the U.S. retirees are aware of the weakness and corruption of the government, as well as the numerous criminal activities that happen every day in Guatemala since they read the daily local newspapers. Patterson acknowledged in her presentations that one of the few positive characteristics about Guatemala is the media. She explained that local media sources such as
*Prensa Libre* and *El Periódico* do a great job documenting the violence, the corruption of the government, and other problems throughout Guatemala.

Even though U.S. retirees like Patterson are aware of the problems that affect Guatemala, they still have a utopian idea of the country. U.S. retirees are aware of fast population growth, governmental corruption, and the violence that is characteristic to Guatemala, but they perceive these problems as not affecting their retirement lifestyles. The only factor U.S. retirees perceive that affects them directly is the culture of lies, because they believe Guatemalans are trying to take money away from them via these lies. But other than that, U.S. retirees do not regret their decision to retire in Antigua, despite the ranking of Guatemala as one of the 10 most dangerous countries in the world (Associated Press, 2009).
CHAPTER 2:  

In February 2009, when I was halfway through my research residency in Antigua, I decided to take a road trip to San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Mexico. Some of the retirees and other foreigners I encountered in Guatemala encouraged me to check out this Mexican city because of its similarity to Antigua. San Cristóbal and Antigua are both well-preserved Spanish colonial cities; indigenous populations living in surrounding towns commute to both of these locations to work as vendors and in the tourist/service industry; the two cities are located in the highlands which provide them that eternal spring climate; and both have an expat community in place (van den Berghe, 1995). When I learned there was a direct shuttle bus service from Antigua to San Cristóbal and the ticket was on sale at the time, I decided to venture into this Mexican city for a few days to find out myself if both towns are comparable.

During this trip, I found out that both cities are indeed comparable, but in my personal opinion, Antigua seems to be more “authentic” because it is older, smaller, and less toursty. But the point of this story is not to compare Antigua to another Latin American colonial city. Instead, the point is to share that during this trip I personally experienced what can be called the Guatemalan “new violence.” During my shuttle ride back to Antigua on the Pan American Highway, about 40 minutes past the Guatemalan-Mexican border in the province of Huehuetenango, my shuttle was assaulted by a group of five armed men. In that moment, I immediately remembered the multiple news stories I had read in both Guatemalan and U.S. media, U.S. Embassy reports\(^2\), and academic literature about

\(^2\) For a list of recently reported crimes against U.S. citizens in Guatemala, check out the Embassy of the United States in Guatemala Crime and Public Safety website:
the new violence (e.g. Little, 2004; Little & Smith, 2009). I had read highway assaults were common in Guatemala, but I never expected one would happen to me. The criminals took control of our shuttle bus; they drove it about half an hour into a ravine area in the middle of the wilderness. These criminals tied our hands together using our shoe strings; they blindfolded us using our jackets; and they told us if we did not cooperate they would throw us down the ravine. We were held captive for an entire afternoon. Right before sunset, the five criminals left us there in the middle of nowhere, taking our valuables with them.

Luckily for us, all we lost were material things and not our lives. It is one thing to read about the new violence in newspapers and academic writings and another thing to experience it in person. Before this incident, I had the same mentality as the U.S. retirees in Antigua: the new violence is something that happens to other people; it is not something that is going to happen to me. But, it did happen to me. This incident made me realize that the Guatemalan violence is a reality; it is not a fictitious story made up by local media and academics. Antigua might be the safest city in Guatemala; it might be charming, picturesque, magical, and any other positive adjective one wants to use to describe it; but Antigua is located in the middle of a country characterized by violence and also natural disasters, which makes it an odd retirement destination.

**The Guatemalan New Violence**

Antigua is located in the middle of a country that is characterized by an ongoing history of violence, including the “new violence,” which is the name given to post-war criminal activity. While the civil war violence is characterized as state sponsored, mean-
ing that the aggressors were people in uniform, present day violence is random and unpredictable. Before, the mere fact that a person was Maya and/or associated with communism meant that he or she could be the target of violence. Today, anyone (Maya, Ladino, or foreigner) can very well be victimized in Guatemala simply by being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The civil war may have ended on paper in 1996, but that does not mean Guatemalans enjoy a substantial decrease in violence. On the contrary, Guatemalans generally believe violence has increased. Many Guatemalans told me their country is more dangerous now than during the 36 years of conflict. An estimated 200,000 individuals were murdered during the 36-year civil war while more than 60,000 have been murdered during the subsequent 11 years (1997 to 2008). And, each of the 11 years has seen more murders than the year before it (Bonillo, 2009). While the murder rate for the entire world is 7.6 for every 100,000 inhabitants, and Central America’s rate is 30 murders for every 100,000 inhabitants (Rodgers, Muggah & Stevenson, 2009), the murder rate in Guatemala in 2008 was 48 for every 100,000 inhabitants, which is high even by Central American standards. To make matters worse, 98% of the murders are not punished by the criminal justice system (Bonillo, 2009).

Present day violence in Guatemala is a lashing out by the people against “political and economic exclusion and discrimination, racism, spatial segregation, and a long standing and extreme exploitation” (Manz, 2008, p.155). Violence in Guatemala began with the encomienda and other forms of colonial-times forced labor. The Spaniards relied on violence to make the indigenous population work for free. A Spaniard would not consider an indigenous woman as his wife, but simply a servant who served her master with
sex. Therefore, the emergence of what we know today as Ladino is the result sexual oppres-

sion by Spaniards against indigenous women. After some years of mestizaje, when
the new generations of the social elite began to look more Ladino than Spanish, they con-
tinued to practice the racist ideologies inherited from their Spanish forefathers (Jonas,
1991; Smith, 1995).

Spanish racial ideologies are a major reason why Latin America remains the most
unequal region in the world. And compared to the rest of Latin America, Guatemala re-
mains one of the most unequal countries. The top 10% of the population in this nation
makes 43.5% of the country’s income, while the bottom 30% only makes 3.8%. Around
32% of the population subsists on $2 a day, while 13.5% subsists on $1 a day or less
(Menjivar, 2008).

While Spanish colonization and income disparities are variables used today to ac-
count for present day violence, these two factors were also present before the civil war
period. Academics have cited other variables as well. The events that happened during
the civil war changed Guatemalans. For instance, residents were required to obtain per-
mission from the military during the war to exit villages. There was also pressure on vil-
lagers to denounce any suspicious behavior by other residents. Manz (2008, p.153) ex-
plained, “These divisive strategies ruptured communities and provoked fear [of the milit-
ary] as well as distrust and a sense of betrayal among one’s fellow villagers.” As a con-
sequence, Guatemalans tend to enact vigilante justice today while remaining mistrustful
of others.

Also, as some Guatemalans explained to me, members of the military and guer-
erral groups learned how to use violence during the civil war. Once the war was over,
many soldiers from both sides were unemployed. These newly unemployed soldiers were not able to find jobs and therefore resorted to lucrative criminal activities since they knew how to use the methods of violence. In addition, certain soldiers who remained employed by the Guatemalan military involved themselves in drug trafficking, kidnapping, and extortion, among other lucrative criminal activities, since they had the power and resources to do so (Goldman, 2007).

Little and Smith (2009) list youth gangs, drug trafficking, kidnappings, and lynchings as the most notorious crimes in the new violence era. The following is a description of these four major types of crimes.

Gangs:

The gangs of Central America originated in Los Angeles during the 1960s. These gangs were initially composed of Mexicans but quickly grew in the 1970s and 1980s as Los Angeles experienced an influx of Guatemalan and Salvadoran refugees who had fled their war-torn homelands. The Guatemalan and Salvadoran refugees left the violence of their native countries only to discover another type of violence in Los Angeles. Most of the members joined gangs to feel included in an organization with people who shared a common language and ethnic background. The increasing gang violence problem in the United States compelled the U.S. Congress to approve immigration reform in 1996. This immigration reform required illegal immigrants sentenced to at least one year in prison to be deported to their native countries. Over 90% of the deportees under this law were Salvadorans, Hondurans, and Guatemalans. These deportees brought back to their home countries gang organizational skills and behavioral standards they learned during their time in Los Angeles (Rodgers et al., 2009).
The deportees wove romantic stories of gang life in the United States to entice local recruits into gang activities. Statistical analysis shows no specific variable that explains why teens find gangs appealing, but this same analysis has determined that evangelical Christian teenagers do not join gangs (Rodgers et al., 2009). It appears in Guatemala the opposite may be true: teens join gangs to isolate themselves from greater violence.

The long history of endless violence in Guatemala has caused citizens to lose hope that the violence will ever end (Winston, 2005). Citizens are compelled to take their own measures to escape violence, and one such measure is gang membership. Gangs shelter teenagers from becoming victims of violence by empowering the youth to victimize others; it is better to victimize than to be victimized. Nevertheless, gang members experience increased dangers by virtue of being a gang member. Members live with the constant fear of being arrested. Members must face rival gangs in turf battles. And, gang membership often destroys opportunities for successful adult lives. 66% of gang members do not have a job (Rodgers et al., 2009), so the large income disparities in Guatemala are especially exaggerated in gang members.

A typical way for gangs to fund themselves and terrorize the community is through extortion and racketeering. An example of a protection racket is one directed at bus drivers and proceeds as follows: The gangs demand an average of $60 per week from bus drivers to protect them from violence that the gang itself instigates. Noncompliance with the protection fee will ultimately end with the driver being murdered. The previous modus operandi was that two men on a motorcycle (one driving and one behind with a gun) followed a bus to kill the bus driver, but this method was modified in Guatemala City when two people riding on one motorcycle was prohibited. Now, an underage teen-
age boy hand delivers a mobile phone to the driver, who then receives a call letting him know where he must leave a specified amount of money. Otherwise, these teenage boys will murder the driver. A Guatemalan congressman who owns a bus company said, “I’m a congressman; I could have them arrested. But then what? Have the gangs take it out on my drivers?” Over 170 bus drivers were killed in 2009 for not paying their fees (Associated Press, 2009). It seems that there is no other option but to comply with the demands of the gangs.

A major outcome of gang violence to those in the community is in the form of “spatial exclusion.” People who live in neighborhoods with a gang presence are unable to socialize with each other because fear compels them to remain in their own homes behind locked doors. The result of this social isolation is communities characterized by low levels of social capital. Another result of this social isolation is general increased anxiety and mistrust of neighbors, which increases the fear of violence: “Thus, there is a (not unsurprising) mutually constitutive relationship between fear, spatial exclusion, a lack of social capital and social exclusion” (Winston, 2005, p. 180).

Drug Trafficking:

During the years of 1978-1983, certain military intelligence officers organized for themselves criminal activities that still continue. These intelligence officers are known as the “Hidden Powers” and are suspected of “skimming customs duties, illicitly acquiring government contracts, human trafficking, and increasingly, drug trafficking” (Deibert, 2008, pp. 168-9). In recent years, the Hidden Powers have facilitated drug trafficking from the Andes en route to the United States. As a matter of fact, 90% of the cocaine
consumed in the U.S. comes from South America via Central America (Rodgers et al., 2009).

There are at least 31 clandestine runways in the northern province of Peten alone which illustrates how easy is for organized crime to infiltrate Guatemala. These runways are cleared for South American drug cartels to haul drugs into Guatemala where they will be smuggled by land into the United States through Mexico (Deibert, 2008). Even though Guatemala was intended to be a bridge from South America to North America, a part of the drug shipment now stays in Guatemala, creating a drug addiction problem for the local population. The foreign cartels originally paid 75% cash and 25% drugs to the local trafficking facilitators, but payments made today are mostly in drugs because there is so much to be made in the illegal sale of drugs in Guatemala. Clear evidence that a drug problem exists in Guatemala is the increasing presence of drug rehabilitation centers, which are mostly populated by teenagers (Grainger, 2009).

The local trafficking facilitators who help foreign cartels smuggle drugs north have organized themselves into cartels as well. These Guatemalan cartels are often composed of former gang members. Even though gangs are not directly involved in the larger drug operations, the Guatemalan cartels will hire local gangs to aid them with protection. Gangs are paid 100% in drugs for the services they provide to the cartels (Rodgers et al., 2009). Consequently, gang members not only consume illegal drugs, but they also function as local drug outlets to the local underage population (Winton, 2005). This relationship may be a major gang recruitment tool. More research could be conducted to determine whether drug users join gangs in order to have access to free drugs or, at least, drugs with substantially reduced pricing.
**Kidnappings:**

Although kidnappings in Guatemala only average around 100 per year, these cases are notable in the media because the victims tend to be the children of wealthy Guatemalans and foreigners who permanently reside in the country. Kidnappers do extensive research on potential victims prior to perpetrating the act. The children are followed to learn their daily patterns in order to identify the best time and location to take them. In most cases, the kidnappers do release the children once the requested sum of money is received (Kenney, 2008). Occasionally, kidnappers will make a second or even third request for cash.

A notable case of kidnapping that occurred while I was residing in Guatemala was the kidnapping of the 12-year-old son of a councilman from Palin. The family did everything that was requested by the kidnappers, including not calling local authorities. When the criminals received the requested amount of cash, however, they asked for a second sum of money. The family gave the amount demanded once again, but instead of freeing the child as promised, the child was murdered (Paredes, 2009).

**Vigilante Justice/Lynchings:**

As a result of the new violence and the ineptitude of local authorities to control violence, some communities have organized themselves into vigilante groups. Their goal is “social cleansing,” meaning they want all undesirables out of their communities. An example of a successful community that was cleansed of criminal activity is San Juan Sacatepequez, which is only 15 miles from Antigua. The gangs of San Juan were demanding protection fees from local residents, not just businesses. The community decided to organize its own posse since the police was not doing anything to stop the problem.
Twenty men patrolled the streets of this town every night, and, during the day, residents blew whistles anytime they saw suspicious activity. The result of vigilantism in San Juan is that this community is now free of gangs and other forms of criminal activity (Burnett, 2008).

International human rights organizations, however, complain this is not the right way to bring justice. Human rights groups would prefer that criminals go through a judicial process and be placed in prison when found guilty. What disturbs human rights organizations the most is that local vigilante posses lynch caught criminals because the police too often set the criminals free in the first place. It is estimated that vigilante groups lynched 40 Guatemalans in 2009 (Prensa Libre, 2009).

**Antigua, Guatemala: An Odd Retirement Destination**

I argue Antigua, Guatemala is an odd retirement destination. There is a history of violence along with natural disasters that have afflicted Guatemala for centuries. There are other retirement destinations in Latin America that have been documented in the academic literature where violence is not at the same levels of Guatemala: Argentina (Freidenburg, 2009; 2010), Costa Rica (Popov, 1980; Porter, 2007), and Panama (MPI, 2006). Why would U.S. citizens make the decision to retire to a dangerous location when there are safer alternatives throughout Latin America?

The beauty and magic of Antigua is certainly a reason why U.S. retirees choose to migrate to this country, despite the ongoing history of violence and natural disasters. Antigua is one of the top tourist destinations in Latin America as a result of its well-preserved buildings and other structures which date back to the Spanish colonial era, as far as the 16th century. The Guatemalan government declared Antigua a National Monument
in 1944 while UNESCO placed this city on its World Heritage site list in 1979 (CEUR, 2007; Little, 2004). Antigua has been described by Little (2004) as a “living history museum” not only because of the well-preserved colonial architecture, but also because of the Mayan presence in the area. Guatemala is one of the few countries in the Americas where the indigenous population represents a majority (Carmack et al., 1996). Moreover, the Antiguan area is blessed with natural beauty: volcano views, flowers, clean air, and an eternal spring climate.

But, Antigua is not a unique place per se. Cuenca, Ecuador is one of the best places to retire abroad, according to International Living Magazine. Both Antigua and Cuenca share similarities: they are both well preserved Spanish colonial cities; both locations are UNESCO World Heritage sites; there is an indigenous presence in both areas (Incans in the case of Ecuador); both cities are in the highlands, giving them eternal spring climates. But the difference is that Guatemala is characterized by an ongoing history of violence. Hence, Cuenca is ranked as the number one retirement destination in the entire world, while Antigua did not even make the list (Reuters, 2009).

Since I became interested in international retirement migration about five years ago I have not seen the city of Antigua or the country of Guatemala listed in the media as one of the best destinations to retire abroad. Certainly, Antigua is an odd place to retire not only because of the ongoing history of violence, but also because of the history of natural disasters in Guatemala. As a matter of fact, Antigua (historically known as Santiago de Guatemala) has been located in three different places since its inception due to political instability and natural disasters.
Santiago de Guatemala was founded in 1524 by Pedro de Alvarado in Iximche. Iximche was the capital of the Kaqchikel Mayas and is where the Iximche ruins are located. However, this first Santiago remained at Iximche for only three years since there was too much political instability between the indigenous population and the Spanish. Mayas largely outnumbered the Spanish conquistadors, and there was constant fighting between both groups (Lutz, 1994; Swetnam, 1975). As a result, Santiago was moved to its second location at Almolonga Valley in 1527, located between the Agua and Fuego volcanoes, where present day Ciudad Vieja is located. Almolonga was “chosen for its climate and water supply, its proximity to building materials, and its defensibility” (Lutz, 1994, p. 6).

The Almolonga Valley might have been a better location for Santiago in terms of political stability, but what the Spaniards did not know is that this location is vulnerable to natural disasters (CEUR, 2007). Since this location is right on the slopes of Volcano Agua, it has been susceptible to floods and mudslides. The year 1541 was not a good one for the inhabitants of this city. Their leader, Pedro de Alvarado, died in battle. As a result, his wife, Doña Beatriz de la Cueva, declared herself the new governor of Santiago and nicknamed herself “La Sin Ventura,” which translates as “the unlucky one.” She was indeed an unlucky governor; her tenure only lasted four hours as a result of a flood and mudslide that destroyed the governor’s palace and killed everyone inside, including Doña Beatriz, the first female governor of the Americas. As a result of this terrible incident, the survivors of this devastation decided to move Santiago to Panchoy Valley, its present day
location and what we know today as Antigua (Bell, 2005). The old location was renamed Ciudad Vieja.

While the first Santiago only lasted three years at Iximche, and the second Santiago lasted 16 years at what is today Ciudad Vieja, the third Santiago has been in its current location in Panchoy Valley since 1543. This third location is what we know today as Antigua. Panchoy Valley was chosen by the leadership of Santiago because of its water supply, the availability of construction materials such as wood and stone, and, most importantly, the Mayas were already living in that area. Since Panchoy is only half a league away from Ciudad Vieja, moving the indigenous population to a location much farther away would have been “difficult and counter productive” (Lutz, 1994, p. 8).

Antigua has been at Panchoy Valley ever since 1543, but it remains susceptible to natural disasters. While the residents of Ciudad Vieja have been the victims of floods and mudslides, the people of Antigua have been victims of constant earthquakes. Ironically, we can attribute present day Antiguan colonial charm to the history of earthquakes at this location. Santiago de Guatemala is comparable to Mexico City and Lima, Peru, since these three locations were major Spanish colonial cities and were the capitals of their respective governmental regions. Unlike Santiago, Mexico City and Lima’s development was not interrupted by any major natural disaster during colonial times. As a result, both Mexico and Lima evolved into what they are today (Bell, 2005).

The development of Antigua was interrupted by a series of earthquakes. The first big earthquake was reported in 1563, twenty years after the relocation of the city to Pan-

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3 Elizabeth Bell is not an academic historian, but is a well-known U.S. citizen in Antigua as a result of her tourism company, book publications, talks, and efforts to preserve monuments throughout Antigua.
choy Valley. Six more earthquakes struck the city between the years of 1565 and 1586.

On a positive note, the inhabitants overcame the earthquakes and the floods to move Antigua up the ranks of Mexico City and Lima, Peru which were the major Latin American cities during colonial times. As buildings were destroyed by these quakes, new structures were built as replacements using the latest architectural and artistic techniques of the time. Indigenous Mayas were used as construction workers under the encomienda system to build these structures. The Mayas were utilized for re-building every time the city was shaken by an earthquake, including those in the years of 1607, 1651, and 1689, long after indigenous slavery was abolished in 1542 (Bell, 2005; Lutz, 1994).

**Figure 4:** El Carmen Ruins in Antigua, a church devastated by earthquakes. Photograph by author.
The crucial year for Antigua in terms of natural disasters was 1774. This earthquake was so overwhelming that the capital city was relocated 27 miles away to the Ermita Valley, what is today Guatemala City or “La Nueva Guatemala de la Asuncion.” About 14,000 of its 35,000 residents relocated to Guatemala City while several thousand more moved elsewhere in the country. From this moment on, Santiago began to be known as “La Antigua Guatemala” which translates as “The Old Guatemala” (Bell, 2005; CEUR, 2007). As a result of this exodus of people, Antigua was left isolated for many years and therefore structurally did not change as much compared to Mexico City and Lima.

In more recent history, last century in 1976, Antigua was affected by a devastating earthquake, which is considered to be the major natural disaster in the North American continent in the 20th century (Bell, 2005). And, this century in 2010, Guatemala experienced a sequence of natural disasters in the course of just one week: the eruption of the volcano Pacaya, the tropical storm Agatha, and a 100 ft deep/66 ft wide sinkhole that swallowed an entire building in Guatemala City (Martin & Llorca, 2010). Ciudad Vieja suffered heavy floods and mudslides once again as a result of Agatha (Zosel, 2010). It is estimated that 123 Guatemalans died and 21,000 homes were destroyed as a consequence of the aforementioned tropical storm (Weaver, 2010). Luckily, the residents of Antigua were not harmed by this most recent series of natural disasters, but it was a reminder to them how devastating Mother Nature can be in Guatemala.

Despite the long history of natural disasters in Antigua and the surrounding towns, there are U.S. citizens who retire to this area, including nearby Ciudad Vieja. Sybil Francis, the retired college administrator and PhD in Psychology, purchased a lot and built her
home on the outskirts of Ciudad Vieja, on the slopes of the volcano Agua, which has a devastating history of flooding and mudslides. I asked her why she and her husband decided to build a house and spend the latter years of their lives at a location that is vulnerable to natural disasters (CEUR, 2007). Sybil responded that at her age she has to take risks in life. Basically, Sybil does not want to live in fear the few years she has remaining. She does not want to be thinking about tomorrow because there might not be tomorrow. At her age, she is thinking about the present.

Yes, Sybil is aware her house is on the slopes of a volcano that is characterized by fatal mudslides. Plus, she lives nearby to another volcano, Fuego, where smoke and lava eruptions are common. But as Sybil explained, the volcanoes add some excitement to her life. They built a giant wall against the new violence, and she also mentioned that hopefully the big wall will be strong enough to stop any potential mudslides. In addition, Sybil and her husband built a terrace in their roof so they can have an excellent view to volcano Fuego. When this volcano erupts, Sybil and her husband go up to their terrace to appreciate the beauty of Fuego’s activity.

At least Sybil and her husband were aware of the history of natural disasters when they made their decision to build a home right on the slopes of Volcano Agua. But, what about the average American who moves to this country who is oblivious about the history of mudslides, volcano eruptions, and earthquakes that characterize this region? One of the questions I asked U.S. retirees was, “Prior to moving here, were you aware of the history of natural disasters that have afflicted Antigua?” The vast majority of U.S. retirees mentioned they were not aware of the natural disasters. They found out about the natural disasters once in residence in Antigua.
U.S. retirees defended their lack of information on the history of natural disasters by stating that anyone can be the victim of a natural disaster. For instance, those who lived in California mentioned that they could be earthquake victims if they were living in this state; those from Florida mentioned that they could be victims of a hurricane; and those from the Midwest mentioned that they could be victims of a tornado. Basically, if they stayed in the United States, there is not a guarantee that they would not be affected by a natural disaster. Disasters are unpredictable, so why take into consideration the history of natural disasters around Antigua when making a decision to retire there? Basically, nobody on this planet has 100% assurance that they will never be victims of Mother Nature, according to U.S. retirees.

Despite all the natural disasters that have afflicted Antigua and its surrounding towns, the ambience of Antigua is comparable to one of a “living history museum,” which is attractive to U.S. retirees. The “living history museum” ambiance is due to the Spanish colonial historicity reflected on every corner in the form of churches, statues, monuments, plazas, cobblestone roads, and other structures the city inherited from colonial times (Little, 2004). Antigua also feels historical as a result of the Mayan presence in the area. Even though Antigua has been mainly inhabited by Ladinos, the Mayas have been part of the history of this city since the beginning (Little, 2004; Lutz, 1994; Swetnam, 1975).

Lutz (1994) argued that during the 16th century, Antigua was set up as “two republics,” meaning that communities were segregated by ethnic background. While the Spaniards lived within the city, the Mayas lived in their respective towns surrounding Antigua. Lutz (1994, p. 32) explained, “Each of the two republics possessed its own lan-
guage and racial identity, even its own governing bodies, though the Indians had long since learned whose hands held the political reins.” Since slavery was abolished, the Spaniards wanted the Mayas to live nearby to supply needed labor. As Bell (2005) explained, the Mayas were used to reconstructing buildings crumbled by earthquakes. But besides providing physical labor, the Mayas have been present in Antigua since the beginning via their participation in the marketplace (Little, 2004; Swetnam, 1975).

Swetnam (1975, p. 35) wrote that the marketplace of Antigua has historically been a “bi-ethnic institution within a Ladino city.” Not only have the Mayas provided the inhabitants of Antigua with the produce and other products needed via their market participation, but the marketplace has been a place for socialization, in which both Mayas and Ladinos (Little, 2004), urban and rural Guatemalans (Swetnam, 1975), “people from here,” and “people from outside” (Goldin, 1986) interact with each other. Even though both ethnic groups interact, and the Mayas supply the mostly Ladino population of Antigua with the products they need for their daily lives, the Mayas have been harassed by local government officials for years (Little, 2004; Swetnam, 1975).

Interestingly, during the civil war, Antigua and the surrounding indigenous towns remained relatively peaceful. Despite this peacefulness, there were (and continue to be) conflicts between the Mayan vendors and the local Ladino government that mirror the larger ethnic realities of the country. Even though the Mayas are not full time residents of Antigua, they are considered to be “semi-permanent residents” since a considerable portion of their time is spent in the city working as vendors or other sectors of the service industry (Little, 2004; Swetnam, 1975). Mayan vendors who live in nearby towns do not experience as much discrimination since their time in Antigua is limited to marketplace
hours. However, those Mayas who come from distant towns are the ones who experience higher levels of discrimination since they stay in town after marketplace hours in rental rooms for weeks at a time before returning to their hometowns (Swetnam, 1975). The Mayas in Antigua are not well politically organized since they do not live there full time. The indigenous work during the day, but at the end of the day, most of them head to their respective communities surrounding Antigua. The Mayas who work in Antigua represent 28 municipalities throughout Guatemala (Little, 2005). Therefore, it is difficult to for Mayas to organize themselves when they all head to different locations after work.

One of the indigenous towns surrounding Antigua is San Antonio de Aguas Calientes, which has a reputation of being a wealthy town by other indigenous communities. Most of the Mayas attribute the richness of this community to its successes selling handicrafts and textiles to foreign travelers. However, Annis (1987) explained that San Antonio has been economically prosperous as a result of not losing their lands to the coffee plantations like other indigenous towns did during the 19th century. Therefore, historically, the residents of San Antonio had the availability of land that was used to grow vegetables and coffee for commercial purposes. Furthermore, since this town is about a 15-minute drive from Antigua and an hour from Guatemala City, San Antonio has served as a produce shipping point between rural and urban communities (Annis, 1987; Carmack, 1988).

Annis (1987) argued it was this money obtained from the agricultural industry that aided women from San Antonio in becoming successful in the tourist sector: “With cash in town, small-business enterprise—especially the sale of textiles to tourists—tended to flourish, in turn creating unusual entrepreneurial opportunities for Indian women”
Furthermore, Little (2005) explained that certain Mayas from San Antonio de Aguas Calientes become involved in the handicraft business because of tradition: this is what their parents and grandparents did to make a living.

Other vendors who come from towns farther away opt to travel to Antigua because it is one of the most popular destinations in Guatemala among international tourists, in addition to having the reputation of being a peaceful town. More importantly, selling handicrafts to tourists is a profitable trade. These vendors tend to be wealthier than the average indigenous person (Little, 2004; 2005). Although indigenous vendors have been harassed by the local Ladino government for years (Little, 2004; Swetnam, 1975), they continue to work in Antigua because this is one of the few locations in the country where the Mayas do not have to worry about becoming the victim of extreme violence, like murder.

The Mayas do not have to worry much about extreme violence while in Antigua, but they do have to worry about discrimination. Little (2005, p. 86) explained, “Antigua is not a Maya place. Rather, it is a Ladino and Spanish colonial place, in which Mayas are expected to be silent and invisible while they provide cleaning, construction, gardening, and other services to Antigua’s non-Maya residents.” This reflects the current, larger Ladino ideology throughout the country in general in which Ladinos would like a multicultural Guatemala without any racism, but at the same time Ladinos do not want to give up their own ethnic-based privileges (Hale, 2006). Antigua might be a peaceful town by Guatemalan standards, but this city still has problems that resemble the larger ethnic conflicts occurring elsewhere in the country.
For example, indigenous vendors face constant harassment by the local government and police, who have the power to confiscate, fine, and even arrest Mayan vendors for selling their merchandise to tourists. Handicraft vending is an illegal operation in Antigua unless vendors rent a stand in a market, rent space in front of a hotel or Spanish school, or open a store somewhere in the city. But, generally vendors prefer to sell their merchandise in the streets and other public areas. They do not like to sit in a marketplace because they have to wait for tourists to come to them rather than them going to the public areas to approach tourists. Since handicrafts are not products that customers actually need (like food or clothing), then the vendors’ strategy is to create “fictive friendships” with the tourists so they feel compelled to purchase handicrafts because of the relationship they have with the vendor. Hence, the Mayas would prefer to buy a permit from the local government to sell in the streets and approach tourists to start these “fictive friendships” rather than paying rent in some random location where few tourists go (Little, 2004; 2005).

As discussed above, Antigua enjoys the reputation of being a peaceful town. During the civil war the indigenous people did not have to worry about becoming the victim of violence. Just as Mayas commute to Antigua to work, U.S. retirees migrate to Antigua because the violence is not viewed as extreme. Just as a Mayan vendor is not too concerned about getting murdered in Antigua compared to other locations in Guatemala, U.S. retirees as well think the probability of getting murdered is low. However, the civil war violence has evolved into what is known today as the new violence. Still, the violence situation in Antigua is not as bad as in other parts of the country. But, as explained to me by Guatemalans, while they did not have to worry about the military and the guerrilla
groups coming to Antigua to engage in battle, now that the war has ended, they have to worry about becoming the victims of new violence criminal activities.

Little (2004) has written that foreigners have a “utopic vision” of Antigua as the safest location in Guatemala. But, Little has written elsewhere too that after the civil war “no longer were tourists and Mayas treating major tourism centers, such as Antigua, as neutral zones. The 1990s were not, as Stoll (1993) noted for the 1980s, a period when tourists commonly felt that they were immune to the political violence that plagued Guatemala” (Little & Smith, 2009, p.57). In present times, no one is immune to the new violence. Unlike the civil war where most of the 200,000 casualties were indigenous people (Jonas, 2000), nowadays Ladinos, Mayas, and foreigners can be the victims of the new violence. Once considered a civil war safe haven, Guatemalans now consider Antigua a location where they can be the victims of the new violence.

U.S. retirees have a “utopic vision” of Antigua being the safest location in Guatemala. While I was doing my research in Antigua, I attended one of the town hall meetings organized by the U.S. Embassy in which the Embassy informed U.S. citizens about the new violence. Some of the U.S. retirees expressed to me they were upset about how the Embassy personnel handled the meeting. One of the security experts of the Embassy stated that Guatemala is more dangerous than Iraq since the murder rate is higher in the Central American country. According to the security personnel at the embassy, Iraq has a murder rate of 38 for every 100,000 people while Guatemala’s rate is about 45 for every 100,000.

Furthermore, the Embassy security expert stated that most U.S. citizens view Antigua as a safe location, but that he actually views both Guatemala City and Antigua as
equally dangerous. He said the only difference between Guatemala City and Antigua is that there are more people in the capital city; therefore, there are more reported incidents of crime. The good news, according to the Embassy speaker, is that U.S. citizens living in Guatemala are not the main targets of violence. But, that does not mean Americans and other foreigners are immune to violence. After this town hall meeting, some of the U.S. retirees stated that Guatemala is not more dangerous that Iraq and that Antigua is not equally as violent as Guatemala City. Despite the U.S. Embassy’s message, U.S. retirees continue to believe that Antigua is a safe location to be.

U.S. retirees are aware there is crime going on in Antigua such as pick pocketing, armed assaults, home robberies, extortions, and scams. What U.S. retirees generally told me is that the crime situation in Antigua is no worse than the violence going on in major American metropolises. For instance, a couple who recently migrated from Washington D.C. told me that this American city is one of the most dangerous locations in the United States. For them, Antigua feels much safer than the United States’ capital. Therefore, some of the U.S. retirees believe it is unfair that the U.S. government describes the crime situation in Guatemala as if the United States itself is immune to crime.

Little wrote about the “normalization of violence,” arguing the Maya vendors in Antigua do not keep quiet when it comes to criminal activity in this colonial city. Several of these vendors have been the victims of robberies and assaults. Even though the local authorities do nothing, and the local media does not report when an indigenous vendor has been robbed, these vendors do their best not to keep themselves “silenced.” Since their political lobbying is usually ineffective, some of these vendors use the strategy of letting tourists know which locations around Antigua are susceptible to crime and which
individuals are not to be trusted. It is in the Mayan vendors' interest to reduce crime in Antigua, not only because they are the victims of violence themselves, but also because their customers (tourists) are robbed and assaulted by criminals as well. If tourists stop traveling to Guatemala because they fear becoming the targets of violence, then these vendors will have no customers to sell their merchandise to. As a result, Mayan vendors do their best not to be part of the “normalization of violence” (Little & Smith, 2009).

Although Little argued the indigenous vendors do not deny there is a crime situation in Antigua, I would argue most of the U.S. retirees deny the new violence at this colonial city and are therefore part of the “normalization of violence.” U.S. retirees are aware of the crime situation in Antigua and in the rest of the country. They read the violence-related stories reported in the local newspapers; they read the U.S. Embassy’s messages. When sitting around Parque Central, tourists who have been assaulted approach the retirees to tell them their stories. So, it is not that these retirees are not informed about Antigua’s criminal activities, but that they do not view these cases of violence as extreme.

Several times, I witnessed tourists approaching some of the retirees in Parque Central to tell them about their victimization experiences. There were women whose purses were cut with a knife and valuables removed via this hole without the women realizing they were being robbed. Similarly, there were men whose cargo pants’ pockets were cut, and wallets and other valuables were stolen without them noticing. There were even tourists who stated they were assaulted by armed men wearing police uniforms. U.S. retirees were callous when listening to these stories. U.S. retirees believe tourists are constantly robbed because they are naive, do not have that much travel experience
outside the United States, and do not comprehend Antigua’s dynamics. U.S. retirees feel they are more knowledgeable about Guatemala than the average tourist. Since U.S. retirees claim they understand Guatemala and know what and what not to do in this country, they believe violence is something that happens to other people, not to them.

Furthermore, U.S. retirees do no view the criminal activities typical in Antigua, such as robberies, as extreme forms of violence. For U.S. retirees, anyone can be the victim of crime in Guatemala, the United States, or any other country in the world. Since there are not men on motorcycles killing random people in buses and cars in Antigua like there are in Guatemala City (Associated Press, 2009), or because community members are not getting together to lynch a person as happened in nearby San Juan Sacatepequez (Burnett, 2008), U.S. retirees view Antigua as a safe location as compared with other parts of Guatemala. Retirees believe if they use common sense, then it is unlikely they will be victimized. For instance, the retirees do not walk the streets of Antigua late at night, nor do they walk around with large sums of cash in their wallets. During Holy Week or any other day when there are large crowds in Antigua, these retirees either stay home or, if they do go out, they make sure not to carry valuable possessions. They know if they attend festivities where there are large crowds of people, their cell phones might be stolen, so they make sure to leave their phones and other valuables at home.

Moreover, U.S. retirees have learned not to trust Guatemalans. As explained in Chapter 1, retirees believe there is a culture of lies among the Guatemalan population. Retirees hear stories on a daily basis from Mayan vendors, housekeepers, local acquaintances, and even random Guatemalans they encounter while in Parque Central or any other public location. U.S. retirees believe these stories are lies since they believe Guatem-
alans want to take money away from them. For instance, if a Guatemalan says his or her child is sick in the hospital, these retirees immediately think that this person is lying. So, the American community in Antigua has taken tack of not believing everything they hear from a Guatemalan. This is one of the reasons retirees believe tourists become the targets of crime in Antigua. Tourists are naive and believe everything they are told so they are taken advantage of, according the U.S. retirees.

Therefore, with the proper precautions, U.S. retirees believe Antigua can be as safe as any other city in the United States. Yes, U.S. retirees are aware foreigners have become the victims of violence while in Antigua, but that is because tourists are naive. Yes, U.S. retirees are aware that both Guatemalans and foreigners have become the victims of extreme forms of violence, but this is something that happens elsewhere in the country, not in Antigua. As a result, we can argue that the American community in Antigua is affected by the “normalization of violence.” Usually, newly arrived retirees are shocked when they hear the crime stories or have been robbed themselves while in Antigua, but after years of living in the country, U.S. retirees become callous when it comes to the new violence. After several years in Guatemala U.S. retirees “have seen it all,” as they state.

Certainly, there are safer retirement destinations in Latin America, such as Panama, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Argentina. However, Guatemala is not the only retirement destination that can be classified as dangerous. Mexico, the country with the highest number of U.S. retirees outside the United States (Truly, 2001), is currently experiencing a war on drugs. Since 2006, when President Felipe Calderon declared a war on Mexican drug cartels, 30,000 people have been killed (Beaubien, 2010b). Mexicans
from all walks of life fear victimization by the drug cartels. A proof of this is that there has been a boom in the security sector of the Mexican economy, including the car bullet-proofing business (Beaubien, 2010a). I have not seen any research about the intersection of U.S. citizens living in Mexico and the war on drugs. It would be interesting to find out if U.S. retirees in Mexico have similar views on violence as U.S. retirees in Guatemala, whether “violence is something that happens to other people, not me.”

Just like in Guatemala, El Salvador is currently experiencing high levels of post-civil war violence, including drug trafficking, gangs, kidnappings, extortions, and murders (Beaubien, 2009). However, I have not seen any studies in the academic literature or in the media on whether there is a retirement migration flow to El Salvador. But, I am aware that there are U.S. retirees in Guatemala who travel to El Salvador for tourism purposes. U.S. retirees in Guatemala travel to Mexico as well to renew their visa entry stamps and for tourism purposes too. Therefore, the violence in Mexico and El Salvador, both neighboring countries to Guatemala, affects U.S. retirees living in Antigua since both of these countries are popular vacation destinations for the Antiguan American community.

Conclusion:

Antigua is an odd retirement destination. Even though Antigua is a charming colonial city with a Mayan and Ladino cultural presence, historical buildings, volcano views, and an enjoyable eternal spring climate, Antigua is located in the middle of a country characterized by violence and natural disasters. The ruins located throughout the city remind U.S. retirees that earthquakes have affected Antigua since its inception. The latest series of 2010 natural disasters (the Pacaya volcano eruption, tropical storm Agatha,
and a giant sinkhole) remind U.S. retirees how vulnerable Guatemala is to Mother Nature. Furthermore, since the mid twentieth century, Guatemala has been a location characterized by violence, initially by 36 years of civil war that has now evolved into what is known as the new violence. Even though Antigua is not exposed to extreme cases of new violence as seen elsewhere in the country, this colonial city has experienced increased levels of crimes such as robberies and arm assaults since the mid 1990s when the civil war came to an end.

However, U.S. retirees view Antigua as the safest city in Guatemala. If a person uses common sense and takes the proper precautions, U.S. retirees believe Antigua can be a safe location just like the United States. But, just because U.S. retirees have a fictitious perception of safety in Antigua, does not make it a safe place to be. As stated by one of the security experts of the U.S. Embassy in the aforementioned town hall meeting, Antigua can be as dangerous as Guatemala City. The only difference is that there are fewer reported crimes in Antigua since it is much smaller than the capital city.

But, for heuristic purposes, let us assume Antigua is indeed a safe place to be. What about when we are on the road to travel elsewhere in the country? As stated above, retirees are well aware of the extreme violence in other parts of Guatemala. All of the U.S. retirees have to travel to Guatemala City to go to the airport, attend doctor’s appointments, or go grocery shopping at one of the big stores. Some retirees take road trips to El Salvador for shopping and/or vacation purposes. The U.S. Embassy constantly sends warden reports stating the road to El Salvador is dangerous, and several U.S. citizens have been assaulted on this highway. Furthermore, several retirees take road trips to Tapachulas, Mexico to renew their Guatemalan entry stamp. And, several take leisure
trips to Rio Dulce, Lake Atitlan, Monterrico, Tikal, and other tourist locations in Guatemala. Even if Antigua is as safe as perceived, U.S. retirees sometimes have to get out of this city for some reason or another. I never became the target of violence while in Antigua, but when I took that road trip to San Cristóbal de Las Casas in Mexico, I experienced what the new violence is.

Retirement migration to Antigua, Guatemala does not mean a person is going to spend all of his time in Antigua, but it actually means he is going to spend all of his time in Guatemala. I can understand why U.S. retirees perceive Antigua as safe. When a person hears new violence stories about kidnappings, dead bodies found on highways, raped women, and the other criminal activities discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the crime situation in Antigua does not seem as horrendous. I agree with U.S. retirees that if an individual uses common sense, this person will probably not get robbed in Antigua. What I disagree with U.S. retirees about is that they conceptually separate Antigua from the rest of Guatemala. But, this is a wrong conceptualization because Antigua is nonetheless located in Guatemala, a country characterized by violence. Sometimes common sense is not enough to evade victimization in the rest of the country. The retirement experiences of U.S. retirees are not limited to Antigua; they also take “vacations away from their vacation” (as discussed in Chapter 4) to other parts of Guatemala where it is possible to be victimized whether the retirees use common sense or not.
CHAPTER 3:  
Push and Pull Factors of US Retiree Migration to Antigua, Guatemala

Vignette # 1:

Ken and Marlyn are a married couple originally from Colorado who have been living in Antigua since 2006. Their first trip to Guatemala was one year prior to moving, in 2005, to visit their daughter who had been living in both Belize and Guatemala for the past 30 years. They wanted to retire in Central America to be close to their daughter and opted for Guatemala rather than Belize because of the spring-like climate year round. The history of violence did not cross their minds when making their choice to move to Antigua. Their daughter told them it was “okay” to move to Antigua, and they wanted to spend their final years close to her no matter the circumstances of the country.

Vignette # 2:

Julio is a widower who was born in Guatemala to Spanish parents, but migrated to the U.S. at age nine due to his father’s job at the United Nations. He lived his adult life in California. Julio wanted to retire abroad for economic reasons and considered Costa Rica, Panama, and Mexico. Julio was aware of the history of violence of Guatemala but ended up choosing this country to retire to anyway because he thought he belonged in Guatemala. Julio always felt like a foreigner in the United States despite living there most of his life and being a citizen of that country. He did not want to feel like a foreigner in the U.S. or any other Latin America country anymore. He ended up choosing Antigua specifically because is the safest town in Guatemala.

Vignette # 3:

Robert is a married man from Chicago who lives part time in Antigua. His wife does not understand his passion for Guatemala. Robert’s wife is African American, and
he says she is afraid to experience racism in Guatemala, so she opts to live full time in Chicago. Robert’s love for Central America began when he was a child. He looked at a map and just liked the shape of the Central American isthmus. And, on this map, Guatemala was represented with a pick and shovel for mining. During his first trip to Guatemala back in 1975, he was not aware of the civil war going on in the country. His second visit to Guatemala was almost 25 years later in 1999, when he came to “reattach.” He finally ended up retiring in Antigua in 2004, where he goes for two or three months twice a year. His reason for retiring in Guatemala goes back to when he saw that pick and shovel on the map. Robert went to Guatemala to realize his lifelong dream of making money, “not to spend it, just to get it.” He had enough money to live comfortably in Chicago but came to Guatemala anyway to start a mining company. Robert enjoys his time in Guatemala because he feels powerful and important. The violence in the country adds to the sense of grandeur he never experienced back in the United States. He loves the fact that he walks around with an armed bodyguard when he goes into the mining fields out in the country.

The above vignettes illustrate the diverse reasons why U.S. retirees end up choosing Antigua as their retirement destination despite the history of violence that characterizes Guatemala. Ken and Marlyn migrated to Guatemala because of the social networks they already had in the country, in this case their daughter and her acquaintances. Julio migrated to Guatemala because it is the country where he was born. And, Robert migrated to Guatemala to realize his lifelong dream of being a powerful man. The fact that he has to walk with an armed bodyguard because of the violence in the country makes him feel superior to the average Guatemalan who cannot afford this luxury. Whether in-
formed or uninformed about the ongoing violence in Guatemala, hundreds of U.S. citizens end up choosing Antigua as their retirement destination.

This chapter uses the push and pull factors theoretical framework to explain the reasons why U.S. retirees migrate to Antigua. Even though push and pull factors are widely used in migration studies, this theoretical framework is not perfect. There is not a clear division between what is “push” and what is “pull,” and it can be argued that this is a simplistic way to conceptualize migration (Croucher, 2009). As a matter of fact, I argue the reasons U.S. retirees migrate to Antigua are not so much based on push factors. Most of the U.S. citizens in this study were satisfied with their lifestyles back in the United States and did not imagine most of their adult lives that they would be living in Guatemala as retirees.

The reasons why U.S. retirees have been retiring in Antigua are based on the following pull factors: 1) They had prior travel experience in Guatemala as a result of visiting family and friends, taking vacations, learning Spanish, engaging in humanitarian work, and while seeking hurricane refuge in Rio Dulce while sailing though the Caribbean; 2) A small group of the U.S. retirees are Guatemalan-Americans who wanted to retire in their native country; 3) Some U.S. Retirees feel powerful and superior while living in Guatemala; 4) Single male retirees migrate to have sexual relationships with younger women; and, 5) A few retirees discovered Antigua while conducting research on retirement destinations abroad. Even though push factors are not strong forces that motivate U.S. retirees to retire in Guatemala, it is relevant to discuss some ideas why some U.S. citizens are pushed to retire overseas.

**Push Factors:**
My initial hypothesis was that U.S. retirees living in Antigua were pushed out of the United States for economic reasons and migrated to Guatemala seeking a lower cost of living. After all, the literature states there is a retirement planning crisis in the United States (Munnell, Webb & Golub-Sass, 2007). Only 47% of Americans between the ages of 55 and 64 have a retirement account in place. The median balance for these accounts is $25,000, which is about $200 a month if the money is put on an annuity pension (U.S. Congressional Hearing, 2004), while the average Social Security pension is $1,082.30 per month or about $12,000 a year (Burns, 2008).

If we round up the average Social Security pension ($1,100) and add it up to the average income drawn from an annuity pension ($200), the total is $1,300 of monthly income, which is enough money to live comfortably in most Latin American destinations. So, there are U.S. retirees who migrate to such countries as Panama and Mexico because of the lower cost of living (Croucher, 2009; MPI, 2006). Antigua, however, does not fit into this less expensive bracket. In fact, Antigua is the most expensive city in Guatemala and one of the most expensive cities in Latin America as a whole. According to Brian Wilson, President of Century 21 Casa Nova, the average value of a house on the outskirts of Antigua is between $275,000-$300,000. Houses located in the eight by eight city center block are in the $500,000 to $5,000,000 range.

According to my experience as someone who rented apartments in Antigua, the rent of a furnished one-bedroom apartment ranges anywhere from $400 to $700. The cheapest alternative to this is to rent a single room from a local family, which can go anywhere from $250 to $400 depending on whether there are amenities like access to a private bathroom, cable TV or Internet, or whether meals are included. As the numbers
show, housing in Antigua is comparable to and sometimes more expensive than most locations back in the United States. For someone who migrates from New York City to Antigua, a $700 furnished one-bedroom apartment is a bargain, but for someone who comes from rural Indiana, it can be pricey. As a result, my initial hypothesis that U.S. retirees were pushed out of the United States seeking a lower cost of living in Antigua is not applicable in this case study.

Another theory I read in the literature is that there are U.S. citizens who emigrate out of the United States as a result of political and cultural dissatisfaction with their native country (Croucher, 2007; Popov, 1980). Yes, I did met a few U.S. retirees in Antigua who were dissatisfied with their American way of life. For instance, Rick described the American way of living as a “rat race” full of consumerism. Rick wanted a more relaxed environment where material possessions are not as important. However, Rick and other dissatisfied U.S. retirees represent a minority. I noticed most of the U.S. retirees are proud Americans who enjoyed their American lifestyle while they were members of the work force, and now as retirees, they simply want a permanent vacation lifestyle abroad. In general, U.S. retirees in Antigua are proud of their country and keep themselves connected with the United States through trips, television, the Internet, telephone calls, and even political participation, as will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Croucher (2009) had similar findings in her research with U.S. migrants in San Miguel de Allende and Ajijic, Mexico. Croucher borrowed Peggy Levitt’s (2001) “transnational villagers” concept to illustrate how even though Americans are living in a foreign country, they are still well connected to their family and friends via trips back to the homeland, the Internet, and telephone calls. Moreover, Croucher (2009) argued that
the U.S. citizens in Mexico “re-create” their American lifestyles at their new destination. For instance, they celebrate American holidays, watch American sporting events such as the Super Bowl, and organize themselves into American organizations such as the Democrats Abroad and the American Legion.

U.S. retirees in Antigua are also “transnational villagers” who, despite residing in a city that is physically, culturally, and socially different from their hometowns back in the United States, are well connected to their homeland. Actually, about half of the U.S. retirees reside only part time in Antigua, usually during the cold months (September to April), and spend the summers back home in the States. Alternately, I met a few U.S. retirees who opt to spend the summer months in Antigua and return to the United States in November to spend Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year’s, and Easter with their relatives. U.S. retirees who reside year-round in Antigua take short annual or semi-annual trips back to the United States to visit children and grandchildren, have medical examinations, and/or renew the Guatemalan visa stamp on their passports. Furthermore, current Internet technologies like Skype and Facebook connect them virtually to their acquaintances back in the United States. Again, in general, there is not a sense of animosity toward their native country, but retirees continue their participation in the American lifestyle via trips, the Internet, and in Antigua itself.

If a lower cost of living and dissatisfaction with the American lifestyle are not major factors why these retirees were pushed out of the United States, then what are the push factors that influenced their migration? I argue the major factor that pushed U.S. retirees living in Antigua out of the United States is that they were in search of amenities and assistance not available in their homeland. Wiseman (1980) and Serow (1987) asser-
ted that there are at least two types of retired migrants: a younger and healthier cohort looking for “amenities” and an older, less healthy cohort that migrates for “assistance.” A housekeeper, for instance, represents both an amenity and a type of assistance. Most of the retirees who participated in this study were young and healthy retirees in their 60s. These younger retirees are thinking long term. They are anticipating that in 10, 15, or 20 years they are going to need assistance, and therefore might as well be in a location where they can afford to hire as many household staff members as needed. I also met a few older, physically fragile retirees who hired household help, not so much as an amenity as for assistance, since they have health problems. But, overall, most of the participants in this study are healthy retirees with active lifestyles.

Even though Antigua is an expensive place to live overall, there are two economic perks that can be classified as amenities for the U.S. retirees who live in this city. First, as discussed above, U.S. retirees can hire household staff such as maids, cooks, and gardeners, since the daily minimum wage in Guatemala for 2010 was Q56, approximately $7.00 (Contreras & Gamarro, 2009). Second, Antigua is a walkable city, so there is no need to own a car. Most of the popular locations, such as the market, grocery store, restaurants, hotels, churches, museums, and ruins, are located within the 8x8 center block of town. And, Parque Central, arguably the most popular location in Antigua, is located at the very center of the city. If retirees need to go longer distances or simply do not want to walk for whatever reason, a tuc-tuc (motorcycle taxi) ride within town costs about $2.00. As a result, U.S. retirees do not have to spend money on car payments, insurance, gas, repairs, or any other expense associated with owning a vehicle. The money they save on transportation, they use it to pay the salaries of their Guatemalan employees. Plus, some
of the retirees told me they feel healthier in Antigua than when they were living back in the United States because they get exercise when they walk from point A to point B. Some of the men showed me their belts; they have had to add extra holes since they have lost weight as a result of walking all the time.

Some people have asked me whether the cheaper Guatemalan healthcare system is a factor that motivated U.S. retirees to migrate to Antigua. The answer is no. U.S. retirees only use the Guatemalan healthcare system for routine check-ups, vision, and dental. When it comes to major medical issues, such as heart surgery, retirees travel back to the United States because they do not trust the Guatemalan healthcare system for major events. Retirees who are veterans rely on the VA hospital system, and those who are 65 and older rely on Social Security. A U.S. retiree who traveled back to the United States for heart surgery stated to me that his co-pay through Social Security was about $8,000, which was more or less the same as the full cost of the surgery if performed in Guatemala. Therefore, the smart decision was to make the trip back to the United States where healthcare has a reputation of higher standards.

However, U.S. retirees feel they have healthier lifestyles in Guatemala despite their lack of trust in the Guatemalan healthcare system. Again, U.S. retirees walk to get around Antigua. Plus, the retirees told me they have healthier diets now that they are living in Guatemala. Some of the retired women commented that they love to go to the market because of all the “beautiful” fruits and vegetables sold by the vendors. U.S. retirees consider shopping at the market an adventure. The Antiguan market is large, complicated to navigate, the hallways are loaded with merchandise and people: it seems like a maze. U.S. retirees find it fun to go shopping at the market. Since retirees are buying
produce to get their shopping adventure, then they have no choice but to eat the fresh fruits and vegetables at home in order for them not to go to waste. Therefore, U.S. retirees claim they have healthier lifestyles as retirees in Antigua than when they were workers in the United States, thanks to both diet and exercise.

In general, the cost of living in Antigua is not lower than the United States, but it is similar. The only difference is that retirees have several extra amenities they would not have back in the United States. The amenities are not limited to a household staff, but also include priceless perks such as improved diet and increased exercise, in addition to living in a foreign country, having the presence of Mayan and Ladino cultures, residing in a Spanish colonial city in which some of the buildings trace back to the 16th century, and enjoying the impressive volcano views and eternal spring climate. U.S. retirees were pushed out of the United States because they wanted a permanent vacation lifestyle abroad.

Overall, the push factors findings in this study concur with Popov’s (1980) findings in Costa Rica. Popov (1980) argued that most of the retirees end up in Costa Rica because of “chance” or “accident.” I also argue that U.S. retirees end up in Antigua because of chance or accident. The fact that they can have amenities and assistance that they otherwise would not have in the United States is discovered after that chance or accidental trip that brought them to Guatemala in the first place. Therefore, the reasons why U.S. retirees migrate to Antigua are not because of push factors necessarily, but because of the pull factors that made them visit Guatemala in the first placed, as discussed in the following section.

**Pull Factors:**
Most of the U.S. retirees in this study never planned or imagined during their adult lives that they would retire abroad. Yes, there were some whose dream was to spend their retirement years in a foreign country and ended up choosing up Guatemala for a particular reason. These few cases will be discussed below. However, most of the retirees were initially pulled into Guatemala for a fixed period of time for such reasons as visiting relatives and friends, tourism, to learn Spanish, and/or to do volunteer work. From what I gathered from my personal interviews with the U.S. retirees, their reason to visit Guatemala for the first time was to take a break from their daily routines back in the United States when they were members of the workforce. Most of them had no idea about the dynamics of the country prior to their first visit. On average, retirees had a vague idea about the civil war, were not well informed about the new violence, and were oblivious to the connection between the new violence and the civil war. For most of them, the violence was not taken into account when they traveled to Guatemala for the first time, during their subsequent trips, and when they finally made the decision to retire in Antigua.

This section covers nine factors identified during this research study that pulled the U.S. retirees to visit Guatemala for the first time: 1) While visiting friends and family (Social Networks), 2) While taking vacations (Tourism), 3) While learning Spanish (Spanish Schools), 4) While doing volunteer work (Humanitarian Work), 5) While sailing throughout the Caribbean (Via Rio Dulce), 6) While researching retirement destinations abroad (Research), 7) Guatemala is their native country (Born in Guatemala), 8) To feel powerful and superior, and 9) To Have Sexual Relationships with Younger Women. Most of these are factors that initially pulled U.S. retirees into Guatemala as temporary
visitors, except for factors 6, 8, and 9, which influenced certain U.S. citizens to move to Antigua for retirement purposes specifically. As a result of their experiences as tourists, students, and/or humanitarian workers, they learn about what Guatemala has to offer. Not only did they discover that they could have housekeepers, or that there is no need to own a vehicle as discussed in the previous section, but they also discovered the intangible qualities that characterize Antigua: the Disney-like magic, the living history museum atmosphere, the eternal spring climate, and the cultural and geographical diversity of the country in general.

It must be mentioned that some terms such as “tourist,” “student,” and “volunteer” are blurred in Guatemala. Usually, Guatemalans do not distinguish a tourist from a student—they all are viewed as foreigners. And, from the perspective of a foreigner, a lot of them not only travel solely for tourism, but travel for multiple reasons. For instance, a first-time American visitor who travels to Guatemala to volunteer at an NGO would not only go to work but would likely also enroll in a language school and engage in tourism. Similarly, someone who travels to visit a relative or friend in Antigua would not just stay in that city but would also tour other parts of the country. Therefore, these nine factors are interconnected with each other.

Factor 1: Social Networks

Several of the U.S. retirees who decide to visit Guatemala later migrate into Antigua because of the social networks they already have in place there. As stated in vignette #1 at the beginning of this chapter, Ken and Marlyn decided to retire in Antigua in order to be close to their daughter who has been living in Central America for 30 years. Similarly, Stuart has a daughter, Lissa, who has been living in the country for 36 years. Stuart
was ultimately pushed out of the United States because his wife developed dementia. He did not want to place his wife into a nursing home. It would cost him $20 an hour during the day and $40 an hour during the night to have a nurse around the clock at home in the United States. As a result, per the suggestion of Lissa, Stuart moved to Antigua so that his wife could receive medical attention at home at 80% of the cost of care in the U.S. In addition, Stuart would have the physical and emotional support of his daughter during their final years.

According to network theory, there are two reasons why individuals decide to migrate to a destination where they have a social network in place: “declining costs” and “declining risks” (Massey et al., 1993). Both declining costs and declining risks have to do with access to information through the social networks in place. In the case of Ken and Marlyn, their daughter told them it was “okay” to migrate to Antigua, despite the history of violence. They have access to information only locals would know because of their daughter, such as which neighborhood to live in, which roads to travel, where to do their shopping, who to socialize with, and so on. Yes, Guatemala is a dangerous country. But, if Ken and Marlyn were to migrate someplace else, say Mexico or Panama, which are more popular retirement destinations for American retirees, they would not have access to the information their daughter provides. Therefore, their costs and risks are lower in Guatemala than they would be in a random location where they do not have a social network in place to guide them through the relocation process.

Ackers and Dwyer (2004) divided migrant retirees into five different categories. One of these categories is called “joiners,” which is defined as the parents, grandparents, or any other “ascendant relative[s]” who join their family member(s) at their foreign des-
ination. It is not uncommon for elderly Europeans to retire abroad to the place where their children or grandchildren live. Ken, Marlyn, and Stuart fit the “joiners” category perfectly. If they did not have children living in Guatemala, then they would not have made the decision to migrate to Antigua as retirees.

U.S. retirees not only migrate to Antigua because they have social networks in place with their children, but also because some Americans (mainly males) married a Guatemalan while in the United States. For example, Mark has been married to his Guatemalan wife, Beth, for over 30 years. They had the same conversation for 20 years: where should we retire? They knew they wanted to retire abroad and were considering several locations around the world. Though Beth did not want to retire in her homeland, Mark made the decision to move to Antigua because of the social network they have in place through his wife’s family. Beth would have preferred to retire in a location that would be foreign to both of them. Since she is Guatemalan, Beth thought she would get bored easily, while her husband enjoys the thrill of living in a location that is foreign to him. Mark was fearful of moving to a location where the culture was totally unfamiliar to him and therefore difficult to adapt to. Mark was familiar with the Guatemalan culture since he and Beth traveled to visit her family for one week every two years throughout their marriage. Furthermore, the adaptation process for Mark would be easier in Guatemala than someplace else since he would have the guidance of his wife and her relatives. The history of violence in Guatemala was not a setback for Mark because he believes the country is not more violent than Washington D.C., where he lived for most of his adult life.
Social networks are not limited to a child or a spouse. There are also those who migrate because they have friends who have retired in the area. For instance, Wade and Rita decided to visit Guatemala for the first time back in 2003 to visit their friend, Deet. Both Rita and Deet are originally from Chicago, where they were best friends. Deet was traveling back and forth between Antigua and Chicago from 1992 until 2000 when she finally decided to live full time in Antigua. While vacationing in the United States, Deet visited her friend Rita and Rita’s husband Wade in their New Mexico home. Deet showed them pictures of Guatemala and encouraged them to visit her in Antigua. As a result, Wade and Rita visited Deet in 2003 for three weeks and enjoyed their experience so much that they decided it would be nice to live there too. Because of the history of violence in this country, Wade and Rita initially decided to move to Guatemala for just one year. But, after the first year ended, they decided to stay longer. When I met Wade and Rita they had been residing in Antigua for four years. They had no plans to return to New Mexico, but they also had no plans to spend the rest of their lives in Antigua. They decided to rent a house rather than purchasing property because they did not want to be attached to a country with a history of violence. Rita believes that Guatemala will have another civil war in the near future because, according to her observations, the ethnic dynamics of the country are not improving, but deteriorating. As a consequence, Wade and Rita are planning to stay in Guatemala until the start of the new conflict they are anticipating.

Finally, there are also those who went to Guatemala for the first time to visit a child who was temporarily living in the country because he or she was, for example, an Anthropology graduate student doing dissertation research or a Peace Corps volunteer.
Joe traveled to Guatemala for the first time in 1999 to visit his son in Peten where he was doing dissertation research. Joe did not even know where Guatemala was located on a map prior to his son becoming academically interested in the country. The main cultural shock experienced by Joe, who knew nothing about this country, was to see so much poverty. He could not believe that there were people sleeping on the streets. This shock motivated him to travel to Guatemala 11 times between 2001 and 2005, long after his son left the country, to do volunteer work with NGOs that build houses for the poor. In 2005, Joe decided to retire in Antigua part time (seven months out of the year) to start his own NGO.

Similarly, Linda traveled to Guatemala for the first time in 1999 to visit her son who was working as a Peace Corps volunteer in a small village two hours away from Antigua. Even though Linda was a history teacher and wrote a master’s thesis on economic development in Brazil and Peru, she did not know much about Guatemala, including its history of violence. Linda assumed if the Peace Corps sends volunteers to Guatemala, then that means it is a safe location to visit. Inspired by her son’s work in Guatemala (he transported villagers to Antigua’s Hermano Pedro Hospital), Linda, along with her husband and son, decided to start an NGO geared toward providing medical attention to villagers who live long distances from a hospital. Linda and her husband never planned to retire abroad, but as a result of the creation of their NGO, they must live part time in Antigua, about five-six months of the year. Linda stated that she has a nice middle class life back in Virginia that she does not want to leave completely behind.

As the above examples illustrate, those who initially traveled to Guatemala and later on retired in Antigua as a result of their social networks, usually had some idea
about the ongoing history of violence that characterizes this country. They know because they have heard stories from their families and friends who have lived in the area. Even though their social connections are aware of the violence of the country, the Americans still believe that the media has overblown the topic of violence. As explained in the previous chapter, foreigners, including those who reside in Antigua, have a “utopic vision” that Antigua is a safe place to be, while Guatemala City is a cancer of violence in the country (Little, 2004). As a result, the social networks usually say yes, there is a problem with violence, but this problem is exaggerated by the media and U.S. government; for the most part Antigua is free from violence. Therefore, these networks tell prospective migrants that it is “okay” to move to Antigua as Ken and Marlyn’s daughter told them.

**Factor 2: Tourism**

Tourism is a major factor why American citizens visit Guatemala for the first time and later on retire in Antigua. Ray is an 87-year-old World War II veteran who worked as an elevator repair technician until he retired in the late 1970s. Once retired, Ray and his wife decided to take annual vacations to both Mexico and Guatemala. One year they would drive to Mexico and the other, Guatemala. So, Ray has been vacationing in Antigua every other year since the early 1980s. When his wife passed away in 2009, Ray decided to migrate permanently and spend the latter years of his life in Antigua. Ray clearly fits King, Warnes, and Williams’ (1998) point about retirement migration being a natural progression of the annual vacations taken in the past. Ray has traveled many times to Guatemala throughout the past 30 years, and it just felt right for him to move there permanently after the death of his wife. Ray did not choose Mexico, the other country he frequently vacationed to, because he did not have that many social connec-
tions there. He preferred Guatemala because of the many friendships he had created with the international community in Antigua throughout the years. Therefore, tourism and social networks were the two primary factors that pulled Ray to migrate full time to Antigua.

Tourism is a major reason why the current cohort of retirees decided to migrate: they have accumulated a knowledge of foreign locations via vacations that their parents and grandparents did not have (Williams et al., 2000). Previous research in Cape Cod, Massachusetts illustrated that over 90% of those who decided to retire to this location have vacationed there in the past (Cuba, 1991). Gustafson (2002) argued that Spain has become a popular retirement location for northern European retirees since this country is a popular tourist destination for them.

A typical question in international retirement migration studies is whether these retirees are tourists or residents of their retirement location. Williams et al. (2000) wrote that those retirees who during their lives focused on traveling to places of mass tourism tended to seek mass tourist destinations to retire to in order to mimic the experiences they had in the past. On the other hand, those individuals who traveled to destinations off the beaten path tended to seek retirement locations that are away from popular tourist destinations. As a result, even though retirees are residents of their selected retirement destinations, they tend search for locations that resemble their preferred ways of tourism.

Antigua definitely fits into the mass tourism category. Little (2004) explained that many of his tourist research subjects use Disney theme parks to describe Antigua and Guatemala. Epcot Center, where each of the exhibits represents a different world culture, is sometimes used by tourists to explain how moving from one Guatemalan town to the
next is like switching from one local culture to another (Little, 2004). Similarly, some of the U.S. retirees use Disney to describe Antigua. Just as Disney is considered by many to be a magical place, retirees comment that Antigua is magical too, especially because it feels like a haven in the middle of a country that is characterized by violence. There is no other place like Antigua in Guatemala, and some claim there is no other place like Antigua in the world. When a person enters Antigua, he feels like he has been transported back in time. It feels like leaving reality and entering a Disney theme park exhibit. This mythical Disney magic sensed by tourists is a force that compels first time visitors to keep traveling back to Antigua until some of them finally make the decision to retire there.

Someone like Ray, who has been vacationing in Guatemala for around 30 years (including the 1980s, which is considered to be the decade of peak violence), knows about the civil war that happened in this country and knows about its aftermath, the new violence. This violence was not taken into consideration when he made his decision to retire in Antigua simply because he had never been a victim of violence in this country. Ray and his wife drove their car to Antigua every other year for 30 years and never had a problem. They enjoyed their time, kept coming back, and finally Ray made the decision to live in Antigua permanently when his wife passed away.

However, those who made their first trips to Guatemala during recent years are less aware, or maybe not aware at all, of the history of ongoing violence. For instance, Steven, who first traveled to Guatemala in 2001 for tourism purposes, was not really sure what he was getting into when vacationing in this country for the first time. Steven is a young retiree, 43 years old, who receives a pension from the U.S. Army as a result of los-
ing an arm while in the service. Steven was depressed and bored in America and therefore decided to take a long vacation to Central America for fun. Steven ended up in Tela, Honduras, because there was a military plane that flew from South Carolina to this location, and he did not have to pay for airfare. While in Tela, Steven met an American who owned a house in Lake Atitlan and offered him free housing in exchange for taking care of the illegal marihuana plants he was growing there. Steven accepted the offer because of the free housing (and the free marihuana) and had no idea about the violence and the social dynamics of the country. Eventually, Steven ended up retiring in Antigua because he got married to a local woman and had a baby with her.

Factor 3: Spanish Schools

This third factor, Spanish schools, is closely related to tourism. Barrera Núñez (2005) explained that many Guatemalans perceive foreigners who come to study Spanish as “tourists” rather than “students.” Spanish schools and tourism are two topics that are usually blurred in Guatemala. Many foreigners who plan to travel all over Central America and sometimes South America start their trips in Guatemala so they can learn Spanish quickly in order to prepare themselves for their long journeys as tourists. For example, Caroline took a two-year break from her job in Massachusetts to travel all over Central and South America. Caroline decided to start her trip in Guatemala because of its Spanish schools’ good reputation. Her idea was to spend two weeks in Antigua to learn Spanish before departing for her long journey across Latin America. However, Caroline fell in love with Antigua and decided to stay there rather than to continue on her journey as previously planned. Although Caroline is in her 40s, she considers herself to be “retired from the American life.” Her planned two-year break from work back in Massachusetts
has now shifted into a permanent residence in Antigua where she lives off interest from investments in the U.S. and also operates a youth hostel in Antigua.

Spanish schools became popular in Guatemala during the 1980s—the middle of the civil war—since several international organizations arrived during that difficult decade to provide aid to the indigenous communities whom foreigners view as “disempowered” and therefore in need of international aid. The volunteers needed to learn the local language prior to engaging in their humanitarian work. As a result, Spanish schools began to pop up first in Antigua and later all over the country in order to satisfy the demand of the volunteers who needed to learn the local language. The schools became a popular business in Guatemala as the result of an intersection between factors like the “expansion of market economy, academic research, political activism, and economic development” (Barrera Núñez, 2005, p. 57).

According to Little (2004, p. 78), “The majority of independent American tourists who visit Antigua go there to see a Spanish colonial city and to study Spanish.” In the case of U.S. retirees specifically, I would not say “the majority” of them were pulled to Antigua because of its Spanish schools, but instead the pull factors are evenly disbursed over the nine pull factors discussed in this chapter. Nonetheless, some of the U.S. retirees first visited Guatemala (and Antigua specifically) with the specific intention to learn Spanish. Rick traveled to Antigua in 2006 for tourism purposes but at the same time took the opportunity to learn Spanish because he was planning to retire somewhere in Latin America. Rick though it was a good idea to learn the local language prior to his actual migration to Latin America. Since Rick enjoyed his time in Antigua as a tourist and stu-
dent, he decided to choose Antigua as his retirement destination and moved permanently to the country in 2009.

Even though Caroline, Rick, and several others were not considering retirement in Antigua, they ended up retiring here since they were initially pulled into Guatemala for both tourism and to learn Spanish. Barrera Núñez (2005) explained that foreigners have the desire to learn Spanish in Guatemala because of this country’s “history of violence, the exoticism of [the Mayan] culture, and [Guatemalans’] impoverished living conditions” (p. 56). Guatemala can be the perfect setting for those who are looking for an adventure while studying Spanish. And, indeed, some of the Spanish students opt to migrate to Antigua later on as retirees.

**Factor 4: Humanitarian Work**

As mentioned in the previous factor, in the 1980s Guatemala became a popular location for international organizations that provided aid to Mayas viewed as victims of the political violence that characterizes the country. The goal of many of these international organizations is to empower the indigenous communities who historically have been subjugated by the Ladino ruling class (Barrera Núñez, 2005; Little & Smith, 2009). Some of the U.S. citizens who are currently retired in Antigua were first pulled into the country to do humanitarian work. As explained by Barrera Núñez, many of the foreigners who travel to Guatemala are “seduced” to aid the indigenous due to the combination of variables such as tourism, Spanish schools, academics, and NGOs, among others (Little & Smith, 2009). Again, categories such as “tourist,” “Spanish student,” and “NGO volunteer” are usually blurred in Guatemala since these categories are associated with foreigners who engage in more than one of the aforementioned activities.
Most of the Americans who travel to Guatemala for humanitarian reasons are volunteers. Chuck and Sandra first traveled to Guatemala in 1992 as Peace Corps volunteers where they spent 28 months in Pueblo La Union. At the time, Chuck was a trial attorney and Sandra had recently gone back to college after being a stay at home mom. Both of them wanted to do something different, have some sort of an adventure, but were held off because of their children and Chuck’s work-related commitments. What motivated them to get out of their daily routines was the death of a close friend from cancer. They realized they were not going to live forever. Furthermore, it was the perfect time of their lives: their kids had gone to college and both of their parents were healthy. Chuck and Sandra did not want to leave the United States if their parents were terminally ill. Therefore, the couple decided to enroll in the Peace Corps program because they had read somewhere that this organization looks for middle-aged couples to send abroad. This is how they discovered Guatemala: the Peace Corps decided to place them in this country. They did not know anything about Guatemala prior to their first trip. They later returned to the U.S. where Chuck went back to his law firm and Sandra got a job. In 2001, they traveled to Antigua for a short vacation and finally in 2006 decided to move to Antigua part time where they spend their winters.

There are also U.S. citizens who travel as paid workers in the humanitarian job sector. For instance, Jack was the Peace Corps Deputy Director in Guatemala and, as a matter of fact, he supervised Chuck and Sandra. Jack and his wife Rae moved to Guatemala as the result of his placement in this country. They had previously lived in the Dominican Republic due to Jack’s job placement there and were originally planning to retire to this location. However, they changed their retirement plans and opted for Anti-
guatemala because they preferred its highland setting to the Dominican Republic’s beach setting. Furthermore, Rae’s main hobby is sculpture, and it was a challenge for her to get wood and other resources on the Hispaniola island. They did not encounter issues getting materials in Guatemala.

Similarly, John and Mary Ann were USAID employees who were placed by this agency in several locations around the world, including neighboring Honduras, during the 1990s. Both of them had made quick trips to Guatemala prior to living in Honduras, but it was their trip to Antigua during “Semana Santa” (Holy Week) toward the end of their residency in Honduras that drew their attention to the country. Later on, Mary Ann accepted a job placement by USAID in Guatemala City in the early 2000s while John went back to the United States. At that point, they were not considering Guatemala as a retirement destination due to the violence that characterizes the country. They both made the choice to retire in Ajijic, Mexico, where they made several offers to purchase a house without luck. However, while Mary Ann was working in the capital city, she traveled to Antigua to attend a concert. During this trip, Mary Ann fell in love with a house and decided to make an offer while John was in Virginia. The house offer was accepted, and both of them moved permanently into the house as retirees in 2005.

As mentioned in the social networks factor section, Linda and Joe were first pulled into Guatemala to visit a son who was temporarily residing in Guatemala. Linda came to visit a son who was a Peace Corps volunteer, while Joe came to visit a son who was conducting dissertation research. Both Linda and Joe were consequently pulled into Guatemala to engage in humanitarian work long after their respective children finished their residencies in this country. Again, neither Linda nor Joe were planning to retire in
Guatemala, but since they were “seduced” to engage in humanitarianism, both of them
had to move to Antigua for at least six months out of the year in order to operate the
NGOs they started. Otherwise, they would be living full time in the United States.

Finally, it is relevant to mention that Protestant missionization is not a factor that
pulls Americans to retire to Guatemala. One of my initial hypotheses prior to engaging in
research in Guatemala was that some of these retirees would have been pulled into the
country for missionization reasons since Guatemala, historically, has been a popular des-
tination for U.S. missionaries. The U.S. missionary presence in Guatemala started in the
late 1800s but increased dramatically after the 1950s when “countries [were] closing
across Asia” due to the Korean and Vietnam wars (Garrard-Burnett, 1998; Stoll, 1990, p.
10). Garrard-Burnett (1998) used the term “spiritual manifest destiny” to explain why
U.S. missionaries initially arrived in Guatemala to do missionary work. Although at first
there was not a connection between U.S. missionaries and the U.S. government, these
missionaries were inspired by the manifest destiny ideology to civilize Latin American
nations who were viewed as children. For these missionaries, Protestantism was the key
to civilizing Latin American societies. Later on in the twentieth century, when Commun-
ism was seen as a threat to economic freedom, missionaries pushed Protestantism as an
alternative to Communism (Garrard-Burnett, 1998). By this time, however, U.S. mis-
sionaries worked together with the Central Intelligence Agency to prevent Latin America
from turning Communist (Stoll, 1990).

During the initial years of U.S. missionization, they were only able to convert the
marginalized: alcoholics, adulterers, and the like. After the 1960s, more and more
Guatemalans converted to Protestantism when these formerly marginalized, now leaders
of the different Protestant churches, provide a Guatemalan image in conjunction to the
U.S. image to Protestantism (Garrard-Burnett, 1998). The Guatemalan earthquake of
1976 also helped Protestant churches convert Guatemalans since Protestants engage in
“disaster evangelism” (Stoll, 1990).

There is no doubt one of the main reasons, as covered in the literature, why U.S. citizens travel to Guatemala is to engage in missionization and do humanitarian work via the different Protestant denominations, most usually evangelicals. However, according to the data gathered in this study, these American missionaries do not end up retiring in Antigua. It might be that there are Protestant missionaries who have retired in Guatemala City, Lake Atitlan, Rio Dulce, or elsewhere in Guatemala, but I did not conduct research in these locations so I do not have data to validate or reject whether Americans have retired elsewhere in Guatemala as a result of their missionization engagement. What I can confirm, based on my interviews, is that there are Americans who were influenced to retire in Antigua as a result of their humanitarian involvement via secular organizations such as the Peace Corps, USAID, or their own NGOs.

Factor 5: Via Rio Dulce

I met several couples who discovered Antigua as a result of sailing throughout the Caribbean. The retirement plan of these couples was to spend their early retirement years (health permitting) on a boat sailing to locations along the Central American coast and the Caribbean islands. As these couples told me, Rio Dulce, located in northern Guatemala, is a safe place to station boats during the hurricane season. Therefore, if meteorologists were predicting a hurricane to pass through the Caribbean, the retirees would seek refuge in Rio Dulce.
I have never been to Rio Dulce, so I am not that knowledgeable about this community. But, informants have told me there is an expat community living there. Some of them live on their boats while others decided to purchase property and build houses. The expats who choose to reside in Rio Dulce discovered this community via their sailing trips. The foreigners who are waiting for hurricanes to pass by sometimes must spend weeks in Rio Dulce while weather conditions improve in the Caribbean. As a result, they decide to venture into other locations in Guatemala rather than sitting for weeks on a boat. The main recommendation by the local expat community in Rio Dulce to these transient sailors is to go to Antigua. Usually, these retirees have never heard about Antigua until the hurricane season pushes them into Rio Dulce to park their boats.

Judy and Gene’s retirement plan was to sail for five years around the Caribbean. Five months into their sailing adventure, they sought refuge from a hurricane in Rio Dulce. Once in this community, they were advised by fellow foreigners to take a trip to Antigua. They initially decided to stay one month in Antigua but loved it so much that they ended up staying for three months during their initial visit to this city in 2004. Their retirement plans shifted completely while in Antigua. They decided to quit their sailing plans and instead live full time in Antigua. They had no idea about the history of violence, or the rich indigenous culture of Guatemala, prior to visiting this country. If they would not have had to wait for weather conditions to improve, then they would have never made it to Antigua and therefore never made the decision to retire to this location.

On the other side of the spectrum, Sybil and John sailed the Caribbean for about 10 years. Their plan was to spend their initial years as retirees on their boat. They also decided to take a trip to Antigua while in Rio Dulce waiting for a hurricane to pass. Their
first trip to Antigua was in 1999, but unlike Judy and Gene who impulsively made the decision to move to Antigua, Sybil and John continued their sailing trip and returned to Antigua once a year during hurricane season. Later, in 2004, Sybil and John made the decision to live permanently in Antigua because they wanted to settle down in one place. They were also considering living permanently somewhere in Mexico: Sybil is knowledgeable about this country since she frequently vacationed there throughout her life. However, Sybil believes Mexico has become too Americanized. She preferred to live in a location completely different from the United States, and she felt Antigua was the right choice.

Finally, Gary bought his first boat at the age of 26, and his retirement plan was to sail around the world. Throughout the years, his plans shifted to focusing on sailing along the Central American Caribbean coast since it seemed more doable. Just like the two previous couples, Gary and his wife first visited Antigua in 2005 as a result of their stay in Rio Dulce while awaiting improved weather conditions. He took short one-week trips to Antigua from 2005 until 2008 until he finally decided to live full time in this city. Gary and his wife separated, and he did not want to continue sailing by himself. He chose Antigua because it was his favorite city that he visited while sailing in Central America.

Sailing throughout Rio Dulce is a significant example of how U.S. citizens discover Antigua accidentally. In the three aforementioned cases, the people involved had limited knowledge about Guatemala (and its history of violence) and did not know about the existence of Antigua until someone recommended this location to them while in Rio Dulce. If these people never had a passion for sailing, or if they had decided to seek hur-
ricane shelter elsewhere, then they never would have learned about Antigua or come to the decision to retire there.

**Factor 6: Research**

There are those individuals whose first time in Guatemala was when they migrated there permanently to live as retirees. These Americans did research via the Internet or found about Antigua when someone recommended the location as great place to retire. I learned of three cases in which retirees ventured into a country they had never visited before and thus were not aware of the dynamics of Guatemala, including the ongoing history of violence. Like U.S. retiree Katie explained to me, “It was just a shot in the dark.” These retirees had no idea what they were getting into when they moved to a country they knew very little about.

Mike and Katie arrived in Guatemala for the first time in 2007 to retire. They had never traveled to Latin America before and opted to retire somewhere in this region because they wanted a higher quality of life. Katie told me that at her age, 66, she was more interested in having affordable services, such as a cook and a housekeeper, rather than owning possessions. Katie researched several locations on the Internet and narrowed her decision down to Guatemala because of its close proximity to the United States, its year round spring climate on the highlands, its lack of visa requirements, and that she could bring her dogs with her since Guatemala had no quarantine requirements. Basically, her research was focused on these trivial factors rather than familiarizing herself with the history and culture of the country. Katie admitted her decision to move to Antigua was impulsive and not well thought out. Her husband, Mike, did not want to migrate abroad, but followed along to make Katie happy.
Frank worked in the advertising industry in New York City for many years and was simple looking for an affordable location to retire to since he could not afford the Manhattan lifestyle with his retirement income. As Frank explained to me, he has been passionate about Spanish culture—both Spain and Latin America—since he was a child. When he was in high school, Frank was awarded a scholarship to attend college in Spain. However, he declined the scholarship because was afraid to leave home. Frank later on regretted this decision and wished he had had more courage back then to venture into a foreign country all by himself. As an adult, Frank decided he would retire abroad, and his first choice was Nicaragua. Frank decided on Nicaragua because he was a fan of President Daniel Ortega, who was in office in the 1980s and assumed office once again in 2007. Frank admired his leftist policies and involvement in the Sandinista movement back in the 1980s.

Since Frank was not very familiar with the Nicaraguan lifestyle (what he knew about the country was based upon media and mostly political in nature), he called the rector of a Catholic university in Nicaragua to find out about retirement options. The immediate response of this rector was, “Who wants to retire in Nicaragua?” Basically, the rector told Frank that Nicaragua is a country that has no culture, is not developing, and that it would not be a smart choice to retire in such a country. The rector suggested Frank instead retire in Guatemala, a country rich in Mayan culture. Frank followed this recommendation and began to do online research about this country, especially on Lonely Planet. As a matter of fact, Frank communicated via e-mail with Sybil (who discovered Antigua sailing through Rio Dulce), who was listed on an online forum. Sybil encouraged Frank to retire in Antigua. Therefore, since the Nicaraguan rector recommended Guatem-

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ala and because Frank had received positive feedback about this country from Sybil, who was already retired there, Frank decided to venture into Guatemala to have that adventure of a lifetime he turned down when he was a teenager. (By the way, Frank took a trip to Spain for the first time a couple years after retiring in Antigua.)

Finally, Judith was a junior high school teacher from California who was also looking to retire somewhere in Latin America because of the lower cost of living. Judith initially planned to retire in San Miguel de Allende since it is the most popular retirement location abroad for U.S. citizens. She took an exploratory one-week trip to San Miguel in 2003 and realized she could not afford to live there since the town is very expensive. Judith explained she did not fit in San Miguel for two reasons: she could not afford it, and she did not belong in the upper class American society. Back in California, Judith explained her situation to a Spanish college professor. This professor recommended Antigua since the ambiance is similar to San Miguel, but the location is more affordable. So, Judith followed the recommendation and as with the previous two cases, her first time in Guatemala was when she made the trip to retire there permanently.

MPI (2006) reported that most of their interviewees came to the decision to migrate to either Mexico or Panama as a result of research. U.S. retirees living in Mexico and Panama did Internet searches, read books, paid attention to media reports, and read International Living Magazine. MPI (2006) stated their interviewees did not completely believe what the sources stated about Mexico and Panama since they painted an extremely positive picture of these two countries. Unlike Mike and Katie, Frank, and Judith, U.S. retirees in Mexico and Panama took research trips to see these countries with their own eyes prior to making the decision to migrate abroad.
Out of the 75 Americans who participated in this dissertation project, only the aforementioned four retirees retired in Antigua without any prior travel experience in Guatemala. Most of the U.S. retirees (95% of those in this sample), had traveled to Guatemala prior to deciding to retire in this location. These four retirees were misinformed when making their decision to retire in Guatemala. They based their decision on superficial Internet searches and/or relied on the recommendation of a single person. These retirees opted to trust this person because they considered him/her to be an expert (or at least more knowledgeable) on the topic. And, they did not bother to make a research trip to Guatemala to find out whether Antigua was indeed the right retirement destination for them.

Factor 7: Born in Guatemala

I met several Guatemalan-born U.S. citizens who decided to retire in Antigua because they want to spend the latter years of their lives in the country where they were born. These tend to be individuals who were born in Guatemala but migrated to the United States as children. Ironically, these are not indigenous or indigenous-looking Ladinos, but white-skinned Guatemalans of European decent. These individuals do not fit into the category of Guatemalans who migrated to the United States to escape political persecution during the civil war and/or as undocumented migrants in search of income. The parents of these Guatemalans belonged to the Ladino ruling class in Guatemala. However, the Guatemalan experience of these Guatemalan-Americans is usually limited to vacations taken into this country, just like any other foreigner. These individuals may consider themselves to be Guatemalans, but most locals perceive them as gringos or foreigners. And, they mostly socialize with other U.S. retirees and foreigners.
As mentioned in vignette # 2, Julio was born in Guatemala to Spanish parents. He migrated as a young child to the United States as a result of his father’s job placement at the United Nations. Julio considers himself to be Guatemalan, but locals view him as a gringo. Not only he is white and a well-dressed individual, but he does not speak Spanish with a Guatemalan accent. Actually, I could not associate Julio’s accent with any particular country, not even Spain, the country where his parents are from. Furthermore, Julio has a particular body language that does not resemble Guatemalans or Americans. As a result of his looks, accent, and body language, locals immediately perceive him as foreign. For instance, when Julio goes to the market, he has to pay the inflated prices that are usually given to foreigners.

I also met Margarita and Dicky. Margarita was born in the United States but was brought as a baby by her Guatemalan parents to Guatemala when she was six months old and lived in this country until age of six, when her family returned to the United States. Ten years later, when Margarita was 16, she returned to Guatemala to visit relatives, and after that visit, she would visit the country once every three years. Even though Margarita was born in the United States and does not have a Guatemalan passport, she introduces herself as a Guatemalan. Her Guatemalan connection was not the solely reason why this couple migrated to this country. Margarita, like Julio, is white with a non-Guatemalan Spanish accent. Locals view her as a foreigner as well.

As explained in Chapter 1, being Maya or Ladino is defined by culture (Smith, 1990; 1995). Julio and Margarita may consider themselves to be Guatemalan, but the local population does not conceptualize them as fitting in either of these categories. Julio and Margarita lived most of their lives in the United States. As a result, their language,
body language, and behavior in general resemble Americans rather than Guatemalans. Plus, legally, they are U.S. citizens since they have U.S. passports. Socially, they mingle more with the American community than with local Guatemalans. And, these Guatemalan Americans have U.S. retirement pensions. So, their economic status is like any other U.S. retiree living in Antigua rather than average elderly Guatemalans who have to keep working or rely on their children since they do not have retirement pensions. Guatemalan-American retirees can afford the same luxuries as any other U.S. retirees, like employing a housekeeper, or dining out at restaurants every day.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter in the social networks section, there are those Americans who retire to Guatemala because of the social networks they have in place with the families of their Guatemalan spouses. Therefore, not only did these Guatemalan-Americans and their partners migrate to Guatemala for emotional reasons such as dying in their homeland, but also for practical reasons such as receiving support from relatives who live in the area. Moreover, these individuals frequently vacationed to Guatemala during their lives since they had Guatemalan relatives to visit and stay with. As mentioned earlier, in several cases there is not just one factor that compels these retirees to migrate to Guatemala. In the case of these Guatemalan Americans, they not only retire in Antigua because they consider themselves to be Guatemalans, but also because of the social networks they have in place in the area and also because of the multiple trips they took to this country during their pre-retirement years.

**Factor 8: To Feel Powerful and Superior**

I only met one person who directly told me his main reason for retiring in Antigua was so that he could powerful and superior. As stated in vignette #3, Robert migrated to
Antigua to start a gold mining company because he wanted to realize his lifelong dream of becoming a rich and powerful man. Even though most retirees do not acknowledge that they migrated to feel powerful and superior, a popular topic during my conversations with U.S. retirees was that many Americans chose to live in Guatemala because of this factor. Although U.S. retirees did not attribute this factor to themselves, they pointed fingers at other Americans who moved to Guatemala for this particular reason. As explained to me by Julio, the Guatemalan-American, U.S. citizens feel superior in this country because the typical Guatemalan is a “midget,” dark-skinned, and very poor. Even a five-foot tall person who would be considered short in the United States feels tall when walking around the streets of Antigua. Fifty percent of the Guatemalan population is stunted as a result of malnourishment (Gowen & Martelli, 2010).

A few American retirees are philanthropic, and they have a desire to help local Guatemalans. But at the same time, even though they do not say it directly, sometimes retirees’ words and actions say that they indeed feel they are better than the average Guatemalan. One of the retirees told me that Guatemalans are docile, hard workers. But he also told me two negative characteristics of Guatemalans. First, he said that Guatemalans cannot multi-task. Apparently, when he gave several tasks to his employees to perform, they only finished one or did not finish any at all. As a result of this negative experience with some random Guatemalans he had as employees, now he assumes all Guatemalans are incapable of multi-tasking and only asks his workers to do one task at a time. He claims that he has not had any trouble with this approach, and his employees finish everything he asks them to do. Second, this American also told me that Guatemalans do not understand the third dimension concept. He claims that an American psy-
chologist he met on a plane told him that there is a gene running through the Latino population that inhibits comprehension of what the third dimension is. Basically, this U.S. retiree was saying that all Guatemalans (and Latinos in general) are not good for engineering and natural science careers because their genetic structure inhibits them from figuring out what the third dimension is.

There are all kinds of absurd stories about Guatemalans running around the American community. One such story that I heard several times is that many Mayas have dark spots on their skins because they do not eat fruit and vegetables. According to the Americans, the Mayas rely on a tortilla and bean diet. They do not incorporate fruits and vegetables into their daily meals because they cannot afford to purchase these items. One of the U.S. retirees told me that he has witnessed Mayas who started eating vegetables on a routine basis and their skin clear up after only a few weeks. Not only do the poor dietary choices of Guatemalans influence their looks, but they also affect their intelligence, according to these Americans. Children are not able to perform well at school because their parents do not provide them with a nutritional diet. This is one of the reasons why Guatemala is underdeveloped, because its children go to school with a stomach full of tortillas (or nothing at all) and are not receiving the nutrition necessary to increase their learning capabilities, according to some members of the American community.

When one hears such stories, it is no surprise the Americans who retire in Antigua believe they are better than the average Guatemalan. Not only do Americans believe they are better than Guatemalans because they eat their fruits and vegetables, are able to multi-task, and have the third dimension gene, but also because of philosophical beliefs. For instance, a U.S. retiree, who grew up in the pre-Civil Rights era in Georgia, told me that
as a little girl her family had African American employees working for them in the house. Obviously, they did not have any more African Americans working for them after the Civil Rights movement. This woman acknowledged one of the reasons she migrated to Guatemala was because she was able to have employees serving her once again. As a working adult in the United States, she missed the fact she did not have African Americans working around the house for her. She enjoys having minorities working for her not only because she does not have to do any chores, but also because she is able to nurture her employees and see them grow as individuals throughout the years. This retiree claims that her parents and grandparents aided their African American workers in becoming better people. In Guatemala, she is able to continue this tradition. Basically, this retiree hires Guatemalans whom she considers in a “raw state” and as time goes by, she is able to “polish” these individuals to American standards.

For example, this woman mentioned her plans to help a 16-year-old boy employee to get a driver’s license when he turns 18. She is going to teach this boy to drive the correct, American way rather than the incorrect, Guatemalan way. She wants this boy to have his driver’s license so he can drive her around town as the aging process disables her. However, this woman emphasized that if this boy does not learn the American way of driving, then she will not help him get his driver’s license. This driving example clearly shows how some American retirees think they are better than Guatemalans. There is a consensus among the American community in Antigua that Guatemalans do not know how to drive. In addition, this example shows how these U.S. retirees believe that by teaching them the American way, they are helping the Guatemalans they are in contact with become better people.
Croucher (2009, p.73) found the American expat community in Mexico has similar attitudes to the Americans in Guatemala: “The narratives U.S. migrants tend to offer regarding Mexicans and themselves reveal a sense of cultural superiority.” Banks (2004, p.361) argued the same about American and Canadian citizens living in Mexico: the foreign retirees view the local population as “untrustworthy, inaccessible, lazy, and incompetent.” Sadly, it seems when Americans are abroad they become an “Ugly American,” a term popularized by a novel of the same name by authors Eugene Burdick and William Lederer (1960). In the novel, the authors wrote that when in the United States, Americans are usually good, friendly people. But, these Americans instantly change their behavior when in a foreign land. Basically, Americans behave obnoxiously abroad as a result of the high levels of wealth they possess compared with the locals.

As illustrated, Americans can have a sense of power and superiority when they travel abroad, including when they travel to Guatemala. This sense power and superiority is indeed a factor influencing some U.S. citizens to retire in Antigua, even though few of them acknowledge this fact.

Factor 9: To Have Sexual Relationships with Younger Women

Similar to the previous factor about feeling powerful and superior, this factor is not usually personally acknowledged by the American men, but there are U.S. citizens, both men and women, who point fingers at specific men who decided to migrate to Guatemala because in this country men are able to have sex with women who are 30 or 40 years younger than them. Also, the words and actions of these men do indeed give the perception that they moved to Guatemala in order to be with younger women.

Bill Shetz, the Commander of the local American Legion Post in Antigua, who is in his late 60s is married to Marleny, a Guatemalan who is 36 years younger than him.
During my conversations with Bill, he explained that the availability of younger women was not a factor that motivated his migration to Guatemala. His relationship with a younger woman was an unexpected consequence of his decision to migrate into this country. Bill explained that his original plan was to retire in Florida, which he tried for a short time. However, Bill disliked the idea of permanently residing in Florida when a retired woman approached him in a grocery store and offered to bake him a cake, which he understood as an invitation for sex. Bill said he did not want to live on a location where desperate old women ask random men for sexual favors. While in Florida, Bill offered his Philadelphia home to a Guatemalan woman who needed a place to stay. Bill never met this Guatemalan woman since he was in Florida, but when he returned to his Philadelphia home, he found a note that invited him to visit Antigua any time. Bill accepted the invitation, and we can easily guess what happened next. He felt in love with the place and made the decision to retire in Antigua rather than Florida. He went back home to Philadelphia, sold his house, and packed his belongings into a truck that he drove all the way to Guatemala.

Bill may say that his marriage with Marleny was an unexpected consequence of his migration, but his Florida anecdote implies that he was not interested in a relationship with a woman of his own age but preferred to be with a younger woman. And, he did date younger women as soon as he permanently moved to Antigua prior to his marriage with Marleny.

Popov (1980), who did his dissertation research in Costa Rica, argued that one of the main motivations single American men have for retiring in this country is that they are able to have sexual relationships with younger women, even though most of Popov’s
interviewees deny that sex was a motivation for migration. Popov (1980) quoted one of the few men who acknowledged the sexual motivation to retire in Costa Rica: “If any of the single men indicate that the climate or the cost of living is the main attraction of living in Costa Rica, they are lying. Sex is the main attraction. It was a big attraction for me” (p. 134). The same story goes for Guatemala. Many of the single men do not acknowledge that sex was a consideration for migration to this country. However, their everyday behavior implies differently.

Figure 5: Ad posted by a U.S. retiree who is seeking a younger Guatemalan woman. Photograph by author.

For instance, Rick, who was initially pulled into Guatemala to study Spanish and to engage in tourism, did not acknowledge that he wanted to retire overseas in order to be in a relationship with a younger woman. Rick told me that he was tired of the American
“rat race” and just wanted to retire as soon as possible in a more relaxed atmosphere. As explained in the Spanish school section, Rick wanted to retire somewhere in Latin America, though he was not sure of the exact location. He came up with the idea to study Spanish in Antigua in order to prepare him for his life as a retiree in the region. And, as we can infer, Rick made the decision to retire in Antigua as a consequence of his experience as a Spanish student and tourist.

![Figure 6: U.S. retiree Rick Van Meter taking a young Guatemalan woman on a date. Photograph by author.](image)

Even though Rick does not admit that a sexual relationship with a younger woman was a motivation to migrate to Latin America, his behavior tells a different story. Every day, I saw Rick in Parque Central looking for a woman. He even made some business cards with his name and telephone number that he handed out to women he ran-
domly met in the park. Rick even handed me some business cards to pass out to any young, single Guatemalan women who might be interested in a relationship with a retired gringo. Rick constantly asked the Mayan vendors in the park whether they knew any women in their hometowns who were looking for a man. One time, I witnessed an older Mayan vendor telling Rick that she was looking for a husband, that she cooks well, and that she is good at doing chores around the house. Rick did not say anything and walked away. Also, Rick was courting a young Ladina Spanish teacher who was in her early twenties. Rick stopped courting this woman when he realized that she was not interested in a much older man and that she would only have sex with the man she marries. Finally, Rick met a poor indigenous woman in her mid twenties who lived in a one-room shack with 15 of her relatives. This woman was quickly willing to have sex with him, and after only two weeks of meeting each other, they moved in together as a couple.

Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Latin America in general are not the only regions in the world where one can see older American retirees with young, local women. Koch-Schulte (2008), who conducted research in Udon Thani, Thailand, described the location as an “odd site” to retire since it does not have any natural or cultural amenities. Rather, Udon Thani is a place full of bars and brothels, and these are the main attractions for the male foreigners who live in this town. Koch-Schulte (2008, p.2) argued the main reason why American and other Western men end up retiring in Udon Thani is because they can marry “local women who are almost always much younger.” Basically, the author argued that these men initially travel to popular tourist destination Pattaya for sex tourism. Once in Pattaya, they fall in love with Thai prostitutes and, once married, move permanently to Udon Thani, the hometown of their wives.
According to Koch-Schulte’s (2008) research, though the main and oftentimes sole reason why foreign retirees migrate to Thailand can be to have sexual relationships with younger women, it is not the primary reason why U.S. retirees migrate to Guatemala. Yes, we could argue that sex is the main reason why single American men migrate to Guatemala, but single men represent only 25% of my sample. About 70% of those in my sample are Americans who migrated to Antigua as couples and about 5% are single women. Therefore, the sex factor is not a reason why married couples and single women, who represent 75% of the sample population, end up retiring in Guatemala.

As a side note, I only encountered one case of an American woman marrying a younger Guatemalan man (the man is seven years younger than his wife). Generally, the single American women who migrate to Antigua remain single and do not engage in sexual relationships with foreign or local men. This is probably due to the fact that the single male foreign retirees who live in town are not interested in relationships with women their own age but opt to court the younger local women. I witnessed a retired woman who wanted to have a relationship with one of the U.S. retirees who spent his time in Parque Central. Once the man figured out the intentions of this woman, he and his friends immediately made fun of her (behind her back) and said that nobody wants anything to do with a crazy old lady.

Sexual relationships with younger women is a factor motivating single American men to migrate to Antigua, but it is not the universal reason why U.S. retirees in general migrate to this location, as is the case in Thailand. I am not sure whether these single male retirees, prior to visiting this country, knew Guatemala as a place where they would be able to engage in sex with younger women or whether they discovered this fact during
their first and subsequent trips to Guatemala as tourists, Spanish students, humanitarian workers, etc. Whether the discovery of this sexual factor was made before or after their first trip to Guatemala, it nonetheless becomes a motivation for single American men deciding to live permanently in Antigua as retirees.

**Conclusion**

Croucher (2009, p. 53-4) wrote, “Ten out of ten [Americans] identified economic considerations as an important factor in their decision to migrate [to Mexico].” Croucher (2009) argued U.S. citizens living in Mexico, including San Miguel de Allende, which is one of the most expensive cities in Latin America, do so because of the lower cost of living. Antigua is also an expensive city in which to live. I cannot argue U.S. retirees migrate to Antigua for economic reasons, since the cost of living in Antigua is comparable to most locations in the United States, in my opinion. I say, however, that there are two amenities that are considerably cheaper than in the United States: household help and transportation. U.S. retirees are able to afford housekeepers, cooks, gardeners, and home nursing care while in Guatemala. And, there is really no need to own a car while in Antigua. But, for the most part, the monthly expenses of U.S. retirees are similar to what they would be back in the United States.

I agree with Freidenberg (2010, p.4) who argued, “U.S. nationals residing outside the territorial boundaries of the U.S. are highly trained and educated individuals with access to money, information, and connections.” According to Freidenberg (2009; 2010), U.S. citizens living abroad tend to be from the middle and upper classes. This is the case for U.S. retirees living in Antigua; some of them explained to me that they had “nice middle-class lifestyles” back in the United States. Most of the U.S. retirees did not mi-
grate to Antigua because they were pushed out of the United States for economic reasons, but instead were pulled to Antigua as a result of an accidental trip as tourists, Spanish students, or humanitarian workers; visits to friends and family; and so on.

After their initial and during subsequent trips as pre-retirees, these U.S. citizens felt in love with the charm Antigua has to offer. The priceless amenities U.S. retirees enjoy while in Antigua (the Spanish colonial architecture, Mayan culture, volcano views, and the eternal spring climate) are enticing enough for these Americans to leave behind their homeland to migrate into the Guatemalan new violence. The next chapter describes the lifestyles of U.S. retirees that live in Antigua.
CHAPTER 4:  
“Every Day Is a Saturday:” Lifestyles of U.S. Retirees in Antigua

Christmas 2008 should have felt like a special day. The main activity for the day was for me to attend a potluck lunch at the home of a U.S. retiree. About 50 Americans showed up to this event; this is one of the biggest parties I attended while doing this research project. There was plenty of food, drink, and conversation. After the event was over, I headed to Parque Central to socialize with another group of U.S. retirees and Mayan vendors. When the afternoon was over, I headed to my apartment. Did Christmas 2008 felt like a special day? No, it felt just like any other day. Actually, every day felt the same: every day felt like a Saturday.

One of the U.S. citizens living in Antigua once commented to me, “Every day is a Saturday.” I immediately understood his feeling because it was something I had felt as well. It did not matter whether it was Thanksgiving, Christmas, Fourth of July, or any of the Guatemalan holidays—they felt the same to me. I was not officially “retired” while living in Antigua, but as a consequence of doing ethnographic research on U.S. retirement migration, I did live the life of a U.S. retired person while in Guatemala. When going to bed at night, I did not have to worry about waking up early in the morning to go to school or work. As a graduate student, I felt liberated when I did not have to worry about writing a term paper, preparing a PowerPoint presentation, or reading the tens of books and articles required to pass a course. My main duty was to “hang out” with the U.S. retirees. Yes, I did lots of interviews with both U.S. retirees and Guatemalans, took notes, and kept a diary, but these tasks did not feel like “work.” I actually enjoyed doing this ethno-
graphic project, since it was something completely different from what I was accustomed to as a university student back in the United States.

Therefore, it did not matter to me whether it was a holiday. I was socializing with the retirees every single day. I was doing interviews and writing in my diary every day, including the holidays. In principle, my days were the same as the U.S. retirees. On any given day, these Americans socialize with friends at each other’s homes, at restaurants, parties, and/or Parque Central. They watch American cable television, surf the Internet, and talk on their cell phones. They take road trips to other tourist locations in Guatemala, Mexico, or Central America any time of the year. I met one couple that had to take a trip to Tapachulas, Mexico on December 24 because that was the day they needed to renew their passport entry stamps. They could have gone to Mexico days before in order to spend Christmas Day at home in Antigua, but they went on the 24th anyway because it did not matter where they spent Christmas. Holidays feel like any other day to retirees. The fact that a person is retired gives him or her the freedom to do leisure activities every single day. Furthermore, most retirees do not have children and grandchildren living in Guatemala to make their holidays feel special. As a result, every day feels the same: every day is a Saturday.

“A Vacation Away From The Vacation:” Antigua as a Permanent Vacation Retirement Destination

“A Vacation Away From The Vacation” is the best catch phrase I heard from U.S. retirees that illustrate their retirement experience in Antigua. This phrase is used when retirees travel out of town, for instance when traveling to Mexico, other Central American nations, or doing internal tourism in Guatemala. They conceptualize their living experi-
ence in Antigua as a permanent vacation, while their out-of-town trips are viewed as a temporary vacation. Truly (2002, p. 264) wrote, “Although tourism migration may be more temporary than retirement migration, the two activities complement each other.” Indeed, it is difficult to exclude tourism from international retirement migration. Truly (2002) explained that sources that promote U.S. retirement migration to Mexico highlight the same amenities used to attract tourists: climate, physical landscape, culture, and so on. Furthermore, Cuba (1991) illustrated that the decision to migrate to a particular location for retirement purposes is heavily influenced by the vacation trips taken to this location prior to retirement.

As shown in this study, most of the retirees had travel experience in Guatemala prior to making the decision to migrate to Antigua. There were only two cases I met whose first trip to Guatemala was to live there full time as retirees. The fact is that these Americans have a history of traveling to this country, which influenced their migration decision-making process. Tourism, however, is not the sole reason why these retirees initially travelled to Guatemala. Other factors that pushed U.S. citizens to go to Guatemala were to visit friends and family who were living in the country, to study Spanish, to engage in humanitarian work, to seek hurricane refuge in Rio Dulce, or they were born in Guatemala and traveled back to visit their homeland. Even though these retirees may have chosen to travel to Guatemala for other reasons, tourism usually played a part in their Guatemalan travel experience. For instance, a person who travels to Guatemala to learn Spanish does not spend all of his time in the classroom, but engages in tourist activities as well. Usually Guatemalans perceive foreign Spanish students, humanitarian workers, and so on as “tourists” (Barrera Nunez, 2005). As it is difficult to separate tour-
ism from retirement migration (Truly, 2002), it is difficult as well to separate tourism from the other activities foreigners do in Guatemala, such as taking Spanish lessons, doing humanitarian work, and so on. So, this study concurs with Cuba’s (1991) findings that prior to retiring in Guatemala, retirees have a history of travel experience in this country that included leisure/tourist activities.

The Americans discovered a charming colonial city during their first and subsequent trips to Guatemala. Antigua certainly is a touristy place. There are several expressions used to describe Antigua: a living history museum, a time machine, a Disney theme park experience, a literature novel, and a magical place to be. When we hear words such as “museum” and “Disney” being used to describe an entire city, then we know foreigners view Antigua as a touristy place. Little (2004) used the term “living history museum” to describe Antigua, since it is a place where both Spanish colonial and Mayan indigenous cultures co-exist. There are American tourists who compare Antigua to other colonial cities in the United States like Williamsburg, Virginia. However, these tourists consider Antigua more authentic because there are not actors pretending to be people from some other time period, and can tourists view locals being themselves (Little, 2004).

Furthermore, tourists also view Guatemala as a Disney theme park, more specifically Epcot Center. Since in Epcot Center tourists can experience different cultures in one place, tourists in Guatemala feel they experience different cultures as well when they travel from one town to the next (Little, 2004). Guatemala is one nation state, but within the state there are multiple ethnic groups: Mayas, Ladinos, Garifunas, and Xincas. And, the Mayas themselves are sub-divided into 22 linguistically distinct groups (Coijti Cuxil,
Therefore, just as Epcot Center visitors experience different world cultures when walking from one exhibit to the next, tourists in Guatemala experience different local cultures when going from one town to another (Little, 2004).

Antigua itself is also compared to a Disney theme park. Some of the U.S. retirees expressed to me that Antigua is like Disney World because of the “magic” they feel in this colonial city. When retirees coming from Guatemala City exit the highway to enter Antigua, they immediately feel as if they have been transported back in time, hence the “time machine” reference used by some foreigners to describe their experiences while in Antigua. The cobblestone roads and other architectural structures give the illusion of being transported back in time. The volcano views, eternal spring climate, and Mayan and Ladino cultures complement the historicity of Antigua. All of these characteristics make Antigua feel like a magical place to these U.S. retirees.

There were some U.S. retirees who also used the word “magic” because Antigua makes them feel as if they are living in a location described in literature. “Magical realism” is a popular genre in Latin American works of fiction. One U.S. retiree described her retirement experience in Antigua as if she were inside an Isabel Allende novel. Two other U.S. retirees told me what they have experienced in Guatemala reminds them of Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s novels. One of the retirees went as far as to read me a passage from Garcia Marquez’s Ojos de Perro Azul, which describes a man who comes up with absurd stories in order to take advantage of other people. U.S. retirees claim Guatemalans tell them lies in order to take money away from them. Therefore, U.S. retirees perceive Antigua to be a magical place because of the Disney-like experience, the illusion of
time traveling, and literature references. This perception of magic is indeed part of the reason why U.S. retirees feel they are on a permanent vacation while living in Antigua.

Little (2004, p.64) described Antigua as “a place of contradictions:”

Antigua Guatemala is a place of contradictions: colonial, modern, and postmodern; Ladino, Maya, and foreign; a tourism site and a place for tourists to rest; an expensive suburb of and playground for elites from Guatemala City; the administrative and economic center of the department of Sacatepéquez. Antígüeños (residents of Antigua) view it as a preserved-in-time Spanish colonial city, a modern cosmopolitan city, or a combination of these. To tourists, Antigua is both inauthentic, corrupted

Figure 7: View of 4ta. Avenida Sur in Antigua. Photograph by author.

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by tourism and tourists themselves, and authentic, a place where “Indians,” colonial architecture, and Western conveniences blend together. Some Mayas view it as their Ladino enemies’ town, but others claim it as theirs, the place where they buy needed items and earn a living.

Antigua is surely contradictory. It is a location that juxtaposes the “colonial, modern, and postmodern” as Little (2004) described. Seeing someone ride a motor scooter on the colonial cobblestone roads while talking on a cell phone is not uncommon. Having breakfast on the internal patio of a colonial home with Volcano Agua in the background while perusing the Internet on a laptop is not uncommon either. Antigua might be very old under new world standards, as some of its buildings can be traced back to the sixteenth century when the city was relocated to its current location. Antigua might be old, but it has remained open to modern conveniences, making it attractive to U.S. retirees.

Americans retirees are able to live in an historical Guatemalan colonial town without having to sacrifice present day conveniences, especially the technology that keeps them in contact with those back home. For instance, cell phones are inexpensive in Guatemala. Retirees can buy a brand new phone for $20.00, and calls to the United States via cell phone cost the same as making a call within the country. So, the fact that retirees can spend 30 minutes on the cell phone talking to a relative who lives back in the United States as if they were living right next door in Antigua is a postmodern convenience that helps them deal with any homesickness.

Internet access is also widespread. I would argue that it is even more accessible in Antigua than it is in most United States locations. Generally, in the United States, people must own a computer and/or a smart phone if they want to have Internet access. If
they do not own a computer or smart phone, they typically must borrow someone else’s equipment or go to the public library. In Antigua, there is, without exaggeration, an Internet cafe on every corner. Some retirees expressed to me that they do not feel the need to own a computer because they can easily walk to an Internet cafe. Additionally, the Spanish schools offer free Internet to their students. Several U.S. retirees who are former students of the Spanish schools continue to go there to use the free Internet. And, those U.S. retirees who own laptop computers can buy Wi-Fi access for their homes and/or can have free Wi-Fi access at most restaurants and hotels in town. Even Parque Central has free Wi-Fi access sponsored by the local government. Therefore, there are plenty of cheap and even free options to connect online whether retirees own a computer or not.

U.S. retirees do not only keep in touch with their loved ones back in the United States via Internet conveniences such as e-mail, Facebook, and Skype, but they also use these tools to keep themselves culturally connected to their home country. Retirees can buy American products not available in Guatemala via online stores. For example, there is an American woman whose hobby is to make porcelain dolls. Since the materials are not available in Guatemala, she buys her supplies online from an American store and has them shipped to Antigua. Also, there are plenty of used American clothes sold around the country in “pacas;” however, it can be a challenge to find brand new designer clothing in Guatemala. So, there are some retirees who buy the latest American fashions online and have them shipped to Guatemala.

The Internet also makes it very convenient for retirees to manage their money; there is not really a need to open an account with a Guatemalan bank account. Retirement paychecks are direct deposited into American bank accounts, and, from the Internet,
the retirees can transfer money from one account to another, pay bills online, and keep track of their spending. Since most banks and credit card companies in the United States charge a fee for every transaction made on a foreign currency, what retirees do to limit these fees is to use their debit card once or twice a month for withdrawing a large sum of cash from an ATM. They then use this cash for daily expenses. Because of these bank fees, retirees limit credit card usage to Internet purchases where transactions are made in dollars. Even though there are several businesses, mainly restaurants and hotels, that take credit cards, Antigua is primarily a cash-based society. So, the fact that retirees limit credit card usage in town to avoid extra fees is not really an inconvenience.

Most of the U.S. retirees use the services of a corporation to receive mail, such as their bank statements and online purchases, from the United States. The way this operates is that this company provides each of their users with a P.O. Box address in Miami Springs, Florida. Anything bought online is shipped to an American address rather than a foreign address. What the company does then is transport the mail from the Florida P.O. Box to the local office in Antigua where the retirees go to pick up their mail. At the same time, any packages the retirees want to mail to their families or friends in the United States are sent via this corporation. Most American retirees do not trust the Guatemalan Postal Service because it has a reputation of being slow and of its workers stealing valuables. As a result, even though the private mailing company is pricey, retirees prefer to use their services because is quick and reliable.

U.S. retirees are well connected with the United States via cell phones, Internet, and private mailing services, but the item mostly used to keep them connected with what is going on in America is cable TV. They do not watch local programming, but instead
watch American cable news networks, such as CNN and Fox News, and networks that show sitcoms and movies. Usually, U.S. retirees do most of their activities (socializing, shopping, exercises, Spanish classes, and community service) during the day. Their nights are mostly spent at home, and the only thing to keep them entertained is American TV, just like any other retired person back in the United States. Whatever retirees living in the United States are watching, U.S. retirees living in Antigua are probably watching it as well. U.S. retirees are living in a foreign country, but they keep themselves well informed with whatever issues are going on in their homeland.

Just as Antigua juxtaposes the “colonial, modern, and postmodern” conveniences, this city juxtaposes as well the “Ladino, Maya, and foreigner” (Little, 2004). I have covered elsewhere in this dissertation the Ladino/Maya dichotomy in Antigua and Guatemala as a whole. However, it is relevant to add the foreigner variable to the equation not only because this dissertation is about the U.S. retiree community living in Antigua, but also because foreigners (both residents and tourists) are a part of the social scene of this city. A study conducted by the University of San Carlos illustrated that there were 47,044 inhabitants residing in Antigua in 2007 and there is a growing presence of immigrants from both Europe and North America (Velásquez, 2007). Although this study did not mention foreign population numbers specifically, at least Guatemalan academics are acknowledging that foreign residents are part of the reality in Antigua.

Even though there is a growing foreign population in Antigua, the reality is that there are not meaningful interactions between U.S. retirees and Guatemalans. As will be explained in more detail in the next chapter, most of the Guatemalans I interviewed had no idea these retirees were actually living in Antigua. Usually, Guatemalans believe U.S.
retirees are tourists and do not view them as residents. This simple fact shows the lack of meaningful interaction between U.S. retirees and locals. Furthermore, U.S. retirees distrust Guatemalans of any ethnic background (both Mayas and Ladinos). As explained elsewhere in this dissertation, U.S. retirees believe Guatemalans lie in order to take advantage of them. Retirees usually joke “Guatemalans tell a lie every time they move their lips.” So, it is difficult to have some kind of meaningful conversation with someone with whom there is a sense of distrust.

I argue this lack of meaningful interaction between U.S. retirees and the local population is part of the reason why U.S. retirees have not been heavily affected by the new violence. Although U.S. retirees argue they have not been the victims of violence while in Guatemala because they use “common sense,” I would say the sense of distrust retirees have for Guatemalans, and the limited meaningful relationships they have with the local population, are two significant reasons why they have not been victimized. The fact is that most retirees live alienated from Guatemalans.

Those single American men who retire in Guatemala, which constituted 25% of my sample, are the segment of the U.S. retiree population that ventures into socializing with the local population. This is because the single American men are lonely and are usually in search of local women for company. Single retired men do not only socialize with their Guatemalan girlfriends or wives, but also with their families. But, again, single American men comprised only 25% of my sample. The other 75% have limited interactions with the local population, such as with a housekeeper, gardener, Spanish teacher, restaurant waitress, or Mayan vendor. These interactions with the local population are not particularly meaningful. For example, a U.S. retiree may have many interactions
with a Cafe Condesa waitress, but this interaction is limited to ordering from the menu. According to my observations, single American men tend to be the ones with meaningful interactions with the local population as a result of their relationships with local women. But since most U.S. retirees do not socialize much with Guatemalans, this means the chances of being victimized are low. Retirees do not give potential criminals the chance to study their patterns of living.

While Antigua juxtaposes the colonial, modern, and postmodern; as well as the Ladino, Maya, and foreigner; this city also juxtaposes the authentic and inauthentic (Little, 2004). As any other historical tourist destination, there are both authenticities and inauthenticities. As Gable and Handler (2005, p. 125) explained, tourists do not go to historic destinations “in pursuit of the really real...in order to make up for the alienating inauthenticities of their bourgeois lives, but to appreciate and participate in the theatricality of it all.” Antigua is a place where there are authenticities such as the Spanish colonial architecture; cobblestone roads; indigenous women wearing traditional clothing; the presence of Spanish and Mayan languages; and traditional Guatemalan food such as pepian, tortillas, tamales, elotes, and choco-bananos. But at the same time, there are theatricalities in Antigua, such as Mayan vendors creating “fictive friendships” with foreigners in order to make a sale (Little, 2004). The Internet cafes, bars, nightclubs, fast food restaurants, cellphones, digital cameras, and MP3 players are viewed as inauthenticities in Antigua.

Although there are certain tourists and even local residents who dislike what they perceive as inauthenticities in Antigua, for the average U.S. retiree who resides in this city, this combination of authenticity and inauthenticity is perfect. Although, as Gable
and Handler (2005) argued, tourists enjoy the “theatricality of it all” even if it is inauthentic. I do not think U.S. retirees would be living in Antigua if the inauthenticities were not present. When people are in the latter years of their lives, they do not want to give up present day conveniences. For instance, in the community where I used to live, a U.S. retiree and I were interested in installing an antenna in the ceiling in order to have a Wi-Fi connection right there at home. However, the manager of the community did not allow us to install the antenna because the place would not look “authentic.” So, there are local residents who do not view present day technology positively because they are afraid it will take Antigua’s authenticity away.

U.S. retirees enjoy the authenticity the city has to offer to them, but the inauthenticities are the things that make their life enjoyable. U.S. retirees may vacation in a truly authentic location for a limited period of time, but I do not think they would migrate and live permanently to Antigua if it did not offer the inauthenticities or modern day conveniences. U.S. retirees do not mind the fact that English is not the first language in Guatemala. I have met several pre-retirees in the United States who are considering retirement migration but only to English speaking locations. The U.S. retirees in Antigua do not mind that the local population speaks Spanish or that the Mayas speak their native tongues. Actually, the foreign languages contribute to the overall living history experience. In fact, retirees have mentioned they discarded San Miguel de Allende and other Mexican locations because there are too many gringos around, making the experience inauthentic. But the U.S. retirees appreciate the fact that the waitress at the restaurant or the vendor at the market knows a few basic English words. When the U.S. retiree knows
some basic Spanish, and the average Guatemalans they interact with know some basic English, then retirees and natives are better able to carry out daily business.

If a person is going to make a foreign location home, then he wants that place to feel like home. U.S. retirees want access to computers, cell phones, cable TV—things that some tourists and local residents argue make Antigua inauthentic. U.S. retirees would not want to be in a location that was not Internet wired because the Internet is one of the tools they used to keep themselves connected with family and friends back home. Actually, most of the city is Internet wired. I happened to have the luck to live in a community with a conservative manager. But, there are plenty of Guatemalans who would prefer their properties not be wired with Internet and cable TV, but they have opted to have this technology to attract foreigners to rent space from them.

As Turner (2005, p. 16) stated, “All stages of history are as authentic as any other.” U.S. retirees have a good understanding of this statement. True, there were not computers, cell phones, cars, and other technology during Spanish colonial times. But, we are living in the 21st century now. Antigua with Internet wires is authentic for current times. U.S. retirees certainly do not want to give away what some people perceive as “in-authentic” because it taints the colonial ambience; U.S. retirees want present day technology and other goodies available because Antigua is the place they call home. U.S. retirees want to be comfortable at home.

“Every Day Is a Saturday:” U.S. Retirees’ Leisurely Lifestyles

An American citizen living in Mexico once said: “The cost is so low that it doesn’t make sense not to employ a maid unless you love cleaning the toilet” (as cited in Croucher, 2009, p. 29). As explained in Chapter 2, Antigua is not inexpensive in terms
of property values; commodities like electronics, appliances, and clothes; and meals and drinks at restaurants and bars. However, Antigua is, indeed, inexpensive in terms of wages for labor. The minimum wage in Guatemala in 2010 was about $7.00 a day (Contreras & Gamarro, 2009). And, I am aware of certain retirees who pay more than the minimum wage because they want to be perceived as “good employers.” Some retirees pay their maids as much as Q90-Q100 a day (about $11-$13). But, let us assume the U.S. retiree is paying a conservative $7.00 a day to a Guatemalan for six weeks of work. The monthly wage comes to $182.00. As the American citizen quoted in Croucher’s (2009) book said, it does not make sense when a U.S. retiree living in Latin America does not employ a maid. A maid service for under $200.00 a month makes life easier, especially when the body feels tired as a result of aging. U.S. retirees do not have to worry about showing up to work each day, nor do they have to worry about cleaning the toilet and doing chores around the house. Certainly, “every day is a Saturday.”

Croucher (2009) described the lifestyles of U.S. citizens in Mexico as “replicas of home [United States].” She explained these U.S. citizens do the same activities they did back in the United States: they watch American programming on TV; they are members of American organizations such as Democrats and Republicans Abroad; they mostly interact with other American citizens; and they continue to speak English despite the fact they are in a Spanish-speaking country. I would agree to a certain extent that the lifestyles of U.S. retirees in Antigua are “replicas” of the United States. Since this research study is about U.S. retirees specifically, rather than Americans of any age as in Croucher’s (2009) case, I cannot argue that U.S. retirees in Antigua are completely mimicking their lifestyles from back home. Yes, U.S. retirees in Antigua watch American TV,
mostly socialize with other U.S. citizens and foreigners, belong to American organizations, and mostly speak English while in Guatemala. However, these U.S. citizens were living the lives of workers while in the United States, but now they are living the lives of retirees while in Guatemala. In my opinion, a worker and a retiree have completely different lifestyles. Therefore, the goal of these U.S. retirees in Antigua is not to replicate their American lifestyles: they move to Antigua to have a vacation-like retirement experience.

There is a quote in Croucher’s book from a U.S. citizen in Mexico that contradicts her “replica” statement: “It really bothers me to see Americans leaving the U.S. and forgetting all about it. They move to Mexico and live with a vacation mentality the rest of their lives” (as cited in Croucher, 2009, p. 144). Surely, U.S. retirees in Antigua have a vacation mentality. As former housewives, workers, and business owners, these retirees are not replicating their previous lifestyles. When they go to bed at night, they are not thinking about waking up early the next morning to go to work. Even the women who were housewives back in the United States do not have to worry about doing household chores anymore. They can have breakfast served in bed if they want it that way. Their lifestyles in Antigua do not resemble the lives they used to have back home. Instead of working for someone else, now they have Guatemalans working for them.

The lifestyles of U.S. retirees now resemble a collection of leisured Saturdays. As explained in the following chapter, there are Guatemalans who dislike these retirees because they do not engage in productive lifestyles. An upper class Ladina told me that just because they are retired, this does not mean these retirees should sit around all day: they should be productive, doing such things as creating their own businesses or engaging in
community service. Even though there are a few U.S. retirees who own businesses like restaurants, shops, and tuc-tucs, most of the retirees have no interest in owning a business. A business would be too much of a hassle—it would not allow them to live every day as if it were a Saturday. And, some of the retirees engage in humanitarian work (some are more involved that others), but for most of them, community service does not define their lifestyle. For many of the retirees, the way they help the community is simply by donating money, since this does not take any leisure time away.

Every day might be a Saturday for U.S. retirees, but that does not mean the retirees all have the same lifestyle. At first, I got the impression that the Americans were a cohesive community in Antigua. But, after some time in Antigua, I began to realize there are some conflicts among the community based on social class.

“Park and Wall People:” Social Stratification in Antigua’s American Community

The American community in Antigua might be homogenous in terms of nationality, age, and race, since all of them are U.S. citizens, most are in the retirement age cohort, and basically all of them are Caucasians (the few exceptions are the Guatemalan Americans who would be categorized as Hispanics/Latinos in the United States). Despite these similarities, there are some conflicts within this community based on social class. Social stratification in the United States is measured by class, which is defined as “the socioeconomic differences between groups of people that create differences in their material prosperity and power” (Giddens, Duneier & Appelbaum, 2003, p. 222). Social stratification within the American society in Antigua is defined by class as well. The good news for U.S. retirees in Antigua is that none of them are “have-nots.” When we compare U.S. retirees with the average Guatemalan, even those Americans who rely solely on
a Social Security check have a better standard of living than most of the Guatemalan population. However, each of the U.S. retirees has a different level of consumption, investment, skill, and social capital, which are the four variables that determine social class in the United States (Perrucci & Wysong, 1999).

As some of the U.S. retirees explained to me, the American community in Antigua is divided in two classes: “the park people” and “the wall people.” The park people are the Americans who spend most of their leisure time in Parque Central. Park people tend to be single men who only have one source of retirement income. Since park retirees live on a limited budget, they tend to rent cheap rooms or one bedroom apartments to keep costs down. As Rick explained his situation, he lives in a small efficiency apartment with no internal patio or backyard. His place is too small to host a party, lunch, or other activities with friends. As a consequence, Rick claims Parque Central as his backyard, and he socializes with friends there. On the flip side, the wall people are the Americans who socialize with each other at home. The wall people tend to be married couples who have more than one source of income. Since they do not spend their leisure time outdoors in Parque Central, they are referred as “wall people” because they socialize indoors (behind a “wall”). Rick told me that of course the wall people spend their leisure time in their own homes or in friends’ homes since they live in big fancy colonial homes. Who wouldn’t want to spend their leisure time in a resort-like home?

U.S. retirees might be homogenous in terms of age, race, and nationality, but they are heterogeneous in terms of the four kinds of capital. Each of these retirees has a different level of consumption capital. Hence, some of them live in rented rooms in a Guatemalan family home; others rent apartments with different levels of luxuries and
amenities; and others still own homes. Retirees may have different levels of consumption capital that place them in either the park or wall class categories, but none of them have to worry about doing household chores. The wall people, who have high levels of consumption capital, have several Guatemalans working for them. I met a couple who employs five Guatemalans because they wanted at least one person working at all times. I also met several couples who employ three Guatemalans each: a housekeeper, a cook, and a gardener. Wall people with lower levels of consumption capital hire one Guatemalan, a housekeeper, who is in charge of doing all chores around the house: cleaning, laundry, cooking, gardening, and so on.

Figure 8: “The Park People.” Photograph by author.
The park people do not have a bad situation in terms of help. There are park people living in small apartments who have maids. But unlike wall people who employ their maids full-time (six days a week), park people employ maids on a part-time basis (two-three days a week) to keep costs down. Those retirees who live in rooms in a Guatemalan family home do not have to worry about chores either because the family usually provides services like cleaning, and changing sheets and towels. Several of the Guatemalan families provide three meals a day to the retirees and other foreigners who stay at their homes.

Each of the retirees has a different level of investment capital. Park people tend to have few or no investments at all. Most of them rely on Social Security and/or retirement pensions. Wall people have more investments than park people, and these investments provide them with the extra source of consumption capital needed to keep their “wall” lifestyle. Besides Social Security, wall retirees have 401k plans, savings accounts, stock market investments, real estate, and businesses back in the United States and/or Guatemala. Most importantly, many “wall” couples have more than one investment source. For instance, if both wife and husband worked prior to retirement, then they would each have a 401k plan. I met some couples that met and married each other later in life. So each individual comes into the relationship with his or her own investment sources. Most of the park people tend to be single or formerly single men who have married Guatemalans. Even if they have a nice retirement source of income, it is nonetheless one source of income. Therefore, they do not have as much spending power as a wall couple.
As back in the United States, skill capital is a social class determinant within the American community in Antigua. Yes, most of the Americans in Antigua are retirees. But each of these retirees has a different level of education and differing career histories. Most of the park people are veterans. Only a few of these veterans served in the military until retirement. Most of these veterans served temporarily to fight in a foreign war, most notably the Vietnam War. After serving in Vietnam, they went back to the United States and worked in different blue collar jobs as police officers, electricians, construction workers, and so on. While park people tend to have a blue-collar background, wall people tend to have a white-collar background. I met wall retirees who used to be college professors, government employees, doctors, nurses, engineers, business managers, and so on.

Social capital is the final class determinant. Social capital is defined by the relationships a person has with family, friends, and acquaintances. A high social capital level is not necessarily attained by the quantity of friends and family members a person has, but by the quality of these relationships. As explained above, wall people tend to be married couples, while park people are single individuals. So, wall couples do not only have an economic advantage, but they also better situated than single park people, since married couples have each other.

Social capital is arguably the most important of all capitals. Coleman (1988) explained that the other forms of capital could be irrelevant if social capital is low or non-existent. Coleman (1988) applied the social capital term to the education field: a child is not likely to succeed in school if he does not have a strong relationship with the people that surround him (family, friends, classmates, teachers, and school counselors). Social
capital is important for those Americans living in Antigua, as well, in order for them have happy retirement lives. These U.S. retirees are living in a foreign location, away from most relatives and friends. It is important for them to build strong friendships with other Americans and Guatemalans in order to obtain information, emotional support, or to simply have a conversation.

Figure 9: “The Wall People.” Photograph by author.

Social capital is a significant factor that determines social class in Antigua. According to my observations, wall people tend to be friends with other wall people, while park people tend to be friends with other park people. Any inter-group relationships between a park and a wall person tend to be weak and superficial. For instance, some of the wall people describe park people as “marginal.” Rick, who is a park person, believes
that Americans in Antigua, regardless of class status, should be friendly with each other rather than using insulting terms like “marginal” because all of them are in the same situation: they all are Americans who live in the same foreign community. Most of them do not have family in Guatemala, except those who are married. At one point or another, each of these Americans will need the help of a fellow American citizen, no matter which class group he or she belongs to. Therefore, Rick does not think it is healthy for the American community to be so heavily divided on class lines since this creates a sense of distrust within a community that should be trusting each other.

Bourdieu (1984) argued that upper-class society determines what is tasteful and what is not. The wall people in Antigua verbally express their opinions about tastefulness. Wall people dislike park people because they are “bench warmers.” Wall people find it distasteful that a group of American citizens spend most of their time sitting on a bench in Parque Central. Wall people believe the local Guatemalan population may have a negative opinion of the American community as a whole because of the retirees who opt to sit around Parque Central just to let time pass by. Wall people think is distasteful as well that some of the park men have sexual relationships with much younger women. Some of the wall retirees told me that these men get married to a much younger woman simply because they want a free maid. They say these men are so cheap that they do not want to spend under $200 a month for a housekeeper.

The park people are aware of the wall people’s opinions. But, unlike Bourdieu (1984) who theorized that the middle and working classes eventually do what the upper class thinks is tasteful, park people do not really care what wall people think about them. Park people continue to go to Parque Central to spend time with friends. The park men continue their relationships with younger Guatemalan women. Park people continue with their lifestyles despite what the wall people think is tasteful or not. So, it is these ideas
people have about tastefulness that create conflict and disharmony within the American community in Antigua.

Certain retirees like Rick get upset and think it is wrong that the American community is divided along class lines. But others retirees do not really care if there is a class division in their community. When talking with Bill about the topic, his immediate reaction was: “How is this different from back home?” Bill is correct: U.S. retirees cannot expect to have one classless community in Antigua when the American society back in the United States is stratified along class lines. Even though the American community is stratified, I argue there is a significant difference between this and American society back home in the United States: in Antigua, there are not poor Americans.

As stated elsewhere in this dissertation, Antigua is an expensive city to live in by Latin American standards. As a single woman who had the lifestyle of a “park” person, I spent on average $800 a month on all my expenses. When talking with some of the park retirees, they mentioned they spent anywhere between $800 and $1,200 a month. Those retirees who have a wall lifestyle spend anywhere between $2,000 and $6,000 a month. Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter 2, 70% of my sample is married couples (who tend to be wall people) while 30% is single individuals (who tend to be park people). Therefore, unlike the American society back in the United States where the upper-class group represents a minority of the population, wall people represent more than half of the American community in Antigua.

I do not argue park people are the poor American class of Antigua. I simply argue there are some Americans who have a higher level of capital than others that places them in the more luxurious wall lifestyle group. The reason why I do not argue there are poor U.S. retirees in Antigua is because those who spend as little as $800 a month have a priv-
ileged lifestyle compared with the average Guatemalan. Park retirees eat out at restaurants basically every day while the average Guatemalan family struggles to put food on the table. So, even though the American community is stratified, this community is nonetheless part of the larger Guatemalan society where there are high levels of malnutrition (67.8% of the indigenous population) and high levels of stunting (up to 80% in certain indigenous communities) as a result of extreme poverty (Gowen & Martelli, 2010; PAHO, 2010).

In general, all U.S. retirees enjoy a leisure lifestyle regardless of social class. For all U.S. retirees, every day is a Saturday, and they have a vacation-like retirement experience. The park retiree does not have to worry about waking up early each morning to go to work, just like a wall retiree. Park people do not have to worry about cleaning the toilet, just like wall people. The wall people may have big fancy colonial homes, but park people have Parque Central, and they are happy about it. Basically, the main worry for all of these park and wall retirees is to enjoy their retirement experience as best as they can with the capital means they have. The wall people may take vacations away from their vacation to distant locations like Europe, Africa, and South America, while the park people take their vacations away from their vacation to Mexico and El Salvador, but all of them have that leisure, permanent vacation retirement mentality. It does not matter whether a retiree has an $800 or a $5,000 lifestyle: every day is a Saturday for all of them.

“**You’re in a Secret Relationship!”** Gossip among U.S. Retirees

One of the first things I realized while conducting this research study in Guatemala is that the U.S. retiree community in Antigua relies heavily on rumors and gossip in
their conversations. Sometimes I found it difficult to discern which stories were true. I suppose the only story I was 100% sure was false was the gossip about me stating that I was in a “secret relationship” with Rick, one of the U.S. retirees. Indeed, I had a good friendship with Rick. He not only helped me with this research project in terms of recruiting participants and discussing research ideas, but he also kept me entertained with conversation, lunches, and activities around town. I spent a lot of time socializing with Rick in Parque Central, a very public place where everybody that passed by saw us talking with each other. I had a very good friendship with Rick, but it never became romantic. However, U.S. retirees and even some of the Mayan vendors who worked in Parque Central thought that Rick and I were a “secret” couple. Even after Rick moved in with his girlfriend, there were rumors running around that Rick was cheating on his girlfriend with me.

Gossip can be defined as the “situations in which people discuss intimate details about other people while not in their presence” (Farley, Timme & Hart, 2010, p. 361). Gossip has three main purposes: 1) to amuse other people, 2) to transmit information (whether factual or not), and 3) to have influence over other people (Dreby, 2009). Research suggests that about 2/3 of any particular conversation is gossip transmission (Farley et al., 2010). I did not quantify what percentage of U.S. retirees’ conversations are gossip-based, but it certainly felt that at least 50% of most conversations were about discussing other people’s private lives. Gossip conversations were mostly about other members of the American community, but the U.S. retirees also gossip about Guatemalans, for instance when they perceive a Guatemalan was telling them a lie.
Gossip helps to strengthen ties between those passing on the rumors (Dreby, 2009; Farley et al., 2010; Herriman, 2010). Therefore, I do not think the retirees engage in gossip to be malicious, but they use gossip as a means to create and strengthen relationships with other members of the American community. As Dreby (2009, p.35) explained, “Sharing a good piece of gossip among friends may be much like the social experience of telling a good joke; it enhances bonds between community members.” A newly arrived migrant retiree may not have that many acquaintances in Antigua, so gossip is one of the tools he uses to begin friendships with other Americans.

Furthermore, one of the characteristics of gossip is that it is “horizontal,” meaning the information is transmitted among people of similar social status (Herriman, 2010). So, gossip can be viewed as a tool for making friendships with those we view as equals. In the case of U.S. retirees, an equal could either be another American or a foreigner, and more specifically, a park or a wall person. Gossip can either be positive or negative, but interestingly, only the negative gossip is useful for “increasing the intimacy of social bonds” (Farley et al., 2010). Therefore, when conversing about a U.S. retiree married to a young Guatemalan, negative phrases are more likely to be heard: “He wanted a free maid;” “She doesn’t love him; she just wants his money;” and “She must be stupid for marrying him.”

In the case of migrant retirees, gossip is not only a tool used to bond with people at the new location, but it is also a way to “clear up matters that are not explained well in the formal communication system” (Farley et al., 2010, p. 361). As mentioned elsewhere in this dissertation, U.S. retirees try to keep themselves well informed about what is go-
ing on back in the United States via cable television and the Internet, and what is going on in Guatemala via the local newspapers. Since retirees are reading local news in a foreign language, then they do not fully comprehend the information transmitted in the media. Furthermore, there are plenty of events in Antigua such as new violence crimes that are not disseminated in the Guatemalan newspapers (Little & Smith, 2009). Therefore, U.S. retirees engage in gossip simply because they want to understand what is going on locally. For instance, if someone in Antigua was assaulted, retirees will resort to gossip to obtain and transmit that information.

Finally, we cannot forget that these Americans are, after all, retirees. As Dreby (2009) wrote, gossip is a way to entertain people. U.S. retirees have plenty of free time and resort to gossiping to have fun. Several of the gossip conversations I engaged in with other retirees were funny ones. We laughed, and we had a good time. Therefore, I argue U.S. retirees resort to gossip for these three main reasons: 1) they want to bond with other Americans and foreigners in the area; 2) they want to obtain information about local events; and 3) they are seeking to amuse themselves and let time pass by.

However, not all of the information transmitted via gossip is factual. Gossip might be a great tool to create friendships and to entertain each other, but it is a dubious tool for obtaining information. Some of the members of the U.S. retiree community actually believed that I had a romantic relationship with Rick. This rumor was completely false. My alleged relationship with Rick was not an important story. But what about topics that matter, such as new violence crimes? Since some of the U.S. retirees themselves are aware some of the stories floating around the American community might be exaggerated or not truthful at all, then there are times when truthful gossip is not believed. For
instance, while I was in Guatemala one of the U.S. retirees said that he was kidnapped for ransom the previous year. The U.S. retirees did not believe his story. They said this man was saying he was kidnapped simply to call attention to himself. U.S. retirees could not believe that one of their own was the victim of extreme violence, right there in Antigua, the safest city in Guatemala.

“U.S. Retirees are Callous about Problems Affecting Guatemala:” Community Service in Antigua

As Croucher (2009) explained in her book about Americans living in Mexico, no description about the lifestyles of these Americans would be complete without a mention of their community service activities. After all, one of the reasons why these retirees are initially pulled to travel to Guatemala is to do humanitarian work. Julio, the Guatemalan-American retiree, explained to me that usually those U.S. citizens who have limited travel experience in Guatemala have a sense of urgency about helping Guatemalans in need. That is why we see so many Americans traveling to Guatemala to engage in community service as missionaries, NGO volunteers, or individuals.

Newly arrived U.S. retirees also experience that sense of urgency to help Guatemalans since they see so much poverty around them that they did not see back home in the United States. Some of the Americans have a utopian idea that they can change the conditions of so many poor Guatemalans through their community service ideas and actions. However, as Julio explained, after one or two years of living in Guatemala, U.S. retirees become “callous” to the local poverty conditions. When the Americans realize their operations cannot change Guatemala, then they start to see poverty as something that is natural for the people of this country, and some of them go as far as to believe that Guatemalans deserve to be in the conditions they are living with.
U.S. retiree Sybil told me a story about how she and her husband John were initially helping a local woman with young children. They were paying the private schooling of the children in addition to giving this woman money for her house expenses. They felt good about themselves knowing they were making a difference in the lives of this family. However, after some time, Sybil noticed that this woman was asking for increasingly large amounts of money for this or that. After some point, she noticed that the stories told by this woman about these alleged expenses did not make sense and were obviously lies. At some point, this woman handed Sybil a letter which claimed to be written by the school administrator asking for money for some school activity that the children were required to participate in. Sybil immediately noticed that the letter was not written by an adult but was written in child-like handwriting. Sybil explained that this woman is illiterate, so she probably had one of her children write the letter. Sybil went to the school to confirm her suspicions, and the administrator told her that she did not write the letter.

Sybil told me she was psychologically abused by this woman who did not have to go to such extremes to take money from her. As Sybil explained, she was not obligated to help this family, but she did it out of free will. After the incident with this woman, Sybil and her husband decided they would not help any more Guatemalans. The only thing they are doing is providing employment to the Guatemalans who work for them at their home. But, she does not try to be friendly with them. On the contrary, she is strict with her employees because she does not want to get emotionally attached to them as happened with the aforementioned woman. If she is not emotionally attached to her employees, then it is easier for her to fire them if they do something wrong.
As explained elsewhere in this dissertation, the U.S. retirees in Antigua experience a culture of lies among the Guatemalan population, which contributes to them becoming “callous” against the local realities. Sybil is an extreme example: she is simply not interested in helping the local community anymore. Other Americans experienced similar situations in which they tried to help a Guatemalan and after some time they notice the exaggerated, contradictory stories told by the locals in order to take extra money from them. Sybil believes the average Guatemalan is happy when he or she takes extra money from a gringo, even if it is only one Quetzal. She does not think it is ethical for a Guatemalan to take advantage of someone who is helping him or her out of free will.

I agree with Julio. Initially, some of the retirees have a utopian belief they can make a difference in the life of needy Guatemalans, but after a couple years living in the country, most of them become “callous” about the local realities. Barrera Nunez explained that many Americans are “seduced” into helping the indigenous population in Guatemala, but after some time doing humanitarian work they become frustrated about how things are not going their way (Little & Smith, 2009). As a result of this frustration and lack of change in the communities they are attempting to help, Americans start to shift their perspectives about poverty. Initially, they view poverty as something awful and unacceptable. Later on, they believe poverty is an acceptable way of life.

Furthermore, some U.S. retirees simply opt not to do community service activities because it takes time away from their vacation lifestyle. Some of the retirees told me they worked very hard while in the United States, and now that they are retired in Antigua, they simply want to relax. Despite the fact that most retirees for one reason or an-
other prefer not to participate in community service activities, some of them are philan-
thropic. Here are some examples of their community service work:

The American Legion

The American Legion Post in Antigua is one of the few posts in the world that
centers their operations on community service activities. The main purpose of the Amer-
ican Legion as a whole is to provide information and assistance to those veterans who
fought in foreign wars. The legion post in Antigua does that. It helps veterans who live
in Guatemala to get any pension or benefits they deserve. If the veteran passes away
while in Guatemala, it helps to organize a funeral in this country or transport the body
back to the United States if that is what the family desires. And, it helps the (American
and Guatemalan) widows of these veterans to get from the U.S. government any pensions
they deserve. The American Legion is there to help its veteran members in times of
crises. The American Legion also helps those U.S. citizens living in Guatemala in any
emergency, even if they are not veterans. As a matter of fact, the U.S. Embassy in
Guatemala has contacted the local commander, Bill Shetz, several times to provide assist-
ance to U.S. citizens who need help.

The average American Legion post in the United States has a bar so that its mem-
bers can have a place of their own to socialize. The post in Antigua does not have a bar.
Shetz does not want his organization to encourage drunkenness and alcoholism. If any of
the veterans wants to get drunk at some bar or in their own home, then that is their own
decision. But, Bill will not allow the veterans to get drunk at the legion headquarters.
That is not the image he wants for the American Legion in Guatemala.
Rather than sponsoring alcoholism, Bill proposed that the local legion members sponsor community service programs. Bill noticed that all of the veterans who migrate to Antigua sit around all day in Parque Central, at some restaurant, or at home. He wanted his community to do something useful for the country. One of their major projects is to provide an Incarparina (nutritional drink) daily breakfast to all of the 316 students of the Colegio Hermano Pedro in the nearby indigenous town of San Antonio de Aguas Calientes. The U.S. retirees in Antigua believe in the idea that the indigenous people do not provide an adequate breakfast to their children, and as a result, the children suffer from stunting and malnutrition in addition to not performing well academically. As a result, the American Legion members provide daily Incarparina drinks to the children so they receive proper nutrition prior to starting their classes.

The Legion also sponsors a scholarship program for 11 children whose families cannot afford to pay their school tuition. Some of these children attend elementary school at Colegio Hermano Pedro, while others attend different private high schools in Antigua. Bill said that grades do not matter to him. He mainly pays attention to the attendance record of the scholarship recipients. If these kids miss too much school, then the Legion will stop paying for their education. There are some kids Bill would like to help, but he does not do so because he knows their parents would not allow them to go to school every day, if at all. Bill explained that if a child goes to school every day, then he is going to retain some information even if he has bad grades, while the student who has a poor attendance record will not learn anything. Furthermore, if a child goes to school every day, then that shows the student has discipline, which is a characteristic that will carry over into his adult life.
Finally, the latest project by the American Legion is to purchase Eco-Filters (ecological water filters made out of clay) for those in need. Potable water is an issue in Guatemala. People cannot drink tap water because it is contaminated. Families have the extra expense of buying bottled water. However, there are Guatemalans who cannot afford to buy bottled water. They do not have any choice but to drink the contaminated tap water, or use river or creek water if they do not have running water at home. Since this Eco-Filter is a new product in the market that is an economical and environmentally friendly alternative to bottled water, the Legion decided to encourage the local population to buy these filters rather than expensive water bottles. First, to set an example, Bill and the other Legion members bought the Eco-Filters to use in their homes. They even
bought a water filter for the American Legion library so everyone who goes there can learn about this new product.

Then, the Legion bought a water filter for each of the classrooms at Colegio Hermano Pedro in order for the kids to have potable drinking water while studying. Later the Legion members realized that it does not make sense for the kids to drink potable water at school and then drink contaminated water back at home. As a result, they have engaged in a project to provide an Eco-Filter to the family of each student who cannot afford to drink potable water at home. So, this Eco-Filter project has two purposes: first, to educate the local population—both American and Guatemalan—to switch from water bottles to an eco-filter because is cheaper and better for the environment; and second, to provide filters to those families who cannot afford to buy one.

The way the American Legion funds their operations is via donations from its members and non-members who are on its e-mail newsletter list. I initially thought part of the Legion’s membership dues were used for these projects, but Bill explained most of the membership money goes to the American Legion headquarters in Indianapolis. The Antigua post sees very little of this money, so they have to rely on donations. Bill sends a monthly newsletter to over 4,000 people across the world explaining their community service projects and asking for donations. Actually, most of their donations come from people who live outside of Guatemala. The Legion members themselves who live in Antigua are park people, meaning they do not have extra money to give away. What the active Legion members do is to decide how the donations will be spent.

*Wings*
As discussed in Chapter 1, Wings is an NGO whose main purpose is to decrease population growth in Guatemala. Wings was founded and is directed by Sue Patterson, a former Foreign Service officer who worked as Consul General in Guatemala and is now retired in Antigua. Sue Patterson, along with other U.S. retirees, truly believes the major problem affecting Guatemala is its high population growth rate of 2.5% per year. Presently, this country has a population of 13.2 million inhabitants, and this is expected to double in 30 years. Sue believes the main way to combat poverty, discrimination, and other issues is to decrease the population growth rate. How can a single woman with eight kids get out of poverty? This is a question posed by Sue when doing her fundraising presentations.

There are six ways in which Wings tries to accomplish its population control goal. First, they educate and provide birth control methods, including tubal ligations, to families, especially the ones who already have several children. Second, they educate adolescents about engaging in safe sex. Third, they provide cervical cancer examinations and treatments to women. Fourth, they try to educate the male population against machismo ideas such as the more children they have, the manlier they become. Fifth, they advocate for the enforcement of a Guatemalan law which states every Guatemalan has the right to sexual education and reproduction control services. And, sixth, Wings trains other organizations within the country that advocate population control (Wings, 2009).

There is no doubt that the volunteers at Wings are doing their best, but that does not mean they are achieving population control. As a matter of fact, Sue Patterson told me she is not happy with the results of the organization. Administratively, Wings does well in fundraising, attracting volunteers, organizing operations, and so on. But, Wings
has not been effective in changing the mindset of the local population. It provides education and birth control alternatives to those it reaches, but it is difficult to change cultural ideas such as the notion that when a woman wants birth control is because she wants to cheat on her husband. The hardest segment of the population to reach is men because even though there are women who would like to use birth control, their husbands will not allow them to do so. That is why Wings has a specific program that focuses on educating men about these stereotypical ideas based on machismo. The good thing about Wings is that they are not giving up. They continue to raise money and organize programs to change the cultural attitude about giving birth to so many children.

Partner for Surgery

Frank and Linda Petterson and their son Todd started this organization in order to match poor Guatemalans who need surgery with foreign doctors. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Linda first visited Guatemala with her husband to visit their son while he was working as a Peace Corps volunteer. What Todd did while in the Peace Corps was to drive sick indigenous people who do not have hospitals in their respective towns to Antigua to seek treatment at the Hermano Pedro Hospital. After the Peace Corps, Todd and his parents decided to start their own NGO based on the concept that there are a lot of indigenous Guatemalans who do not have access to healthcare. In their brochure, they state, “One out of ten Guatemalans suffers from a physical condition or disability that can be surgically cured. However, only 11% of Guatemalans have access to surgical care” (Partner for Surgery, 2008).

What this organization does is to link the hundreds of foreign organizations who travel to Guatemala to provide free surgery with the indigenous towns and people who
are in need of a surgical procedure. The Pettersons manage the logistics of getting these volunteer doctors to Guatemala. In the first five years of operation, Partner for Surgery has linked 25,000 Guatemalans with foreign doctors, and 4,000 of them have received surgery.

The American Legion, Wings, and Partners for Surgery are several examples of community service organizations. There are also others who provide community service on their own. For example, I met a U.S. retiree who volunteers three days a week at a local school as an English teacher. When this retiree found out that the school did not have the resources to hire someone to teach a foreign language to the students, this retiree offered his services free of charge. Rather than spending seven days a week as if every day were a Saturday, this retiree volunteers three days a week, but still has four Saturdays. As he explained, his volunteer service does not feel like “work,” but is an enjoyable experience.

Overall, most of the retirees are not heavily involved in community service activities. Bill Shetz with the American Legion, Sue Patterson with Wings, Linda Petterson with Partner for Surgery, and the aforementioned English teacher are some of the few exceptions. Again, in general these retirees have a vacation mentality, and they think that after so many years of hard work in the United States, they deserve to relax now that they are in the golden years of their lives. Those who planned humanitarian work as a part of their retirement lifestyle become callous about poverty after living some time in the country. But the few retirees like Bill and Sue who work hard to aid Guatemalans stand out within the American community. Other U.S. retirees usually cited both Bill and Sue as exemplary Americans who do great things to help the local population.
“We Don’t Talk About American Politics:” U.S. Retirees Political Participation

When I first visited Antigua during the summer of 2007, Sybil told me that “we don’t talk about American politics (and religion)” in order to avoid unnecessary arguments and fights with fellow members of the American community. And, for the most part, most U.S. retirees refrain from discussing American politics. However, when I returned to Guatemala the following year in September, two months prior to presidential elections in the United States, American politics was a common topic of conversation. Croucher (2009) explained that Americans are very active in U.S. politics while living in Mexico and have organized themselves politically into the Democrats and Republicans Abroad. Unlike Mexico, where there are plenty of both Democrat and Republican Americans, most of the U.S. retirees living in Antigua are Democrats. There are a few Republicans, mainly veterans, who have not organized themselves like the Democrats have with the Democrats Abroad organization.

U.S. retiree John Chudy started Democrats Abroad. John explained that he never was a political person for most of his adult life. As a matter of fact, John and his wife spent a considerable portion of their lives abroad while working for USAID. They constantly moved from one country to the next, so they never got a chance to become politically active. During a trip back home to Virginia a couple years before the 2008 election, some of John’s friends asked him what the Americans living in Guatemala were doing in terms of political campaigns. John told his friends that the American community in Antigua was not politically active. John’s friends encouraged him to start a Democrats Abroad chapter to make sure that all of the Americans who live in Guatemala would be able to cast an absentee ballot—absentee ballots can mean the difference between win-
ning and losing for the Democrat presidential candidate. John listened to his friends, and since he is now living permanently in one location and is retired, he has the stability and time to become politically active. Thus, he started Democrats Abroad. The main purpose of this organization is to encourage and assist all U.S. citizens living in Guatemala, no matter their political leaning, to register to vote and make sure they receive an absentee ballot.

Figure 11: John Chudy, founder of the Democrats Abroad branch in Guatemala. Photograph by author.

When I was in Antigua during the election peak, Democrats Abroad organized several events open to everyone: Democrats, Republicans, Americans, Guatemalans, and other foreigners. However, the events were mainly attended by U.S. Democrats who were members of this organization. There were five major activities during election time.
First, three meetings were centered on watching the Presidential debates between candidates Barack Obama and John McCain. The meetings were held at Casa Convento Concepcion, which is owned by a retired American woman who is a member of Democrats Abroad. Second, there was a party on election night at the home of Dave Evans, a personal friend of John Kerry who met him while fighting in the Vietnam War. This party was centered upon finding out the Electoral College results as votes were counted state by state. Finally, there was a gala at Casa Convento Concepcion the night Barack Obama started his job as President.

Figure 12: Democrats Abroad celebrating the victory of Barack Obama. Photograph by author.

Unlike the American Legion, which is organized as a community service organization to help Guatemalan children, Democrats Abroad is not involved in helping the local
community. As explained to me by John Chudy, the President of Democrats Abroad, its main purpose is for all U.S. citizens who live in Guatemala to receive an absentee ballot. The members are not there to help Guatemalans. The only way members have helped local NGOs is by donating collected money they cannot legally use. Democrats Abroad is not allowed to use money donated by non-U.S. citizens. For instance, during the Presidential inauguration gala in which the organization charged $20.00 per person, the money collected from non-U.S. citizen guests was donated to a local NGO. That is the only way Democrats Abroad as an organization helps the local community since the members do not know what else to do with the money collected from those who are not U.S. citizens.

The few Republicans in town tend to be park people, those who live on a limited income. There are two kinds of Republicans who live in Antigua: first, there are those who watch Fox News; second, there are those who refer themselves as Republicans but in reality are non-political people. Those who watch Fox News are constantly discussing what Glen Beck and Bill O’Reilly said the night before and as a result are disliked by the other Americans, both Democrats and non-political Republicans. These Fox News Republicans are tolerated, but when they are not around, the other Americans gossip negatively about them. For instance, I was told that the Fox News Republicans “do not have a brain” because all they do is repeat what is mentioned on Fox News rather than think for themselves. The non-political Republicans are well liked among the American community. They simply refrain from talking about what is going on politically back in the United States and prefer instead to talk what is going on in the political world of Guatemala.
And, actually, after the U.S. presidential elections, the Democrats did not talk that much about American politics either but preferred discussing local issues. The only ones who kept talking about American politics after the presidential elections were the Fox News Republicans. I get the impression that these Fox News Republicans are disliked not because of their political beliefs, but simply because their preferred topic of conversation is what Glen Beck and Bill O’Reilly state on TV. The other Americans, Democrats and non-political Republicans, do not like to talk about American politics. As stated above, research shows 2/3 of people’s conversations are gossip. U.S. retirees certainly prefer to talk about what is going on in the private lives of other people as well what is going on around the community. As Sybil commented during my initial trip to Guatemala, with the exception of the months just prior to the U.S. presidential elections, most of the retirees prefer not to talk about American politics.

**Conclusion**

I have been asked before whether the Americans who retire abroad are migrant retirees or permanent tourists. In Antigua, these Americans are not one or the other; they are both. Lee (1966) defined migration as a “change of residence.” These Americans have left their homes and lifestyles back in the United States to move to a foreign country. Therefore, U.S. retirees definitely fit the definition of “migrant.” But U.S. citizens do not fit the stereotypical definition of migrant (Central Americans and Mexicans who cross the U.S.-Mexico border in search of a job, for example). These Americans are retired, and they have a stable source of income. Instead of looking for work, these retirees are looking for an adventure. U.S. retirees travel to Guatemala to have a vacation lifestyle. So, U.S. retirees are indeed both migrants and vacationers.
Although some retirees have more capital than others, which place them in different social classes within the American community in Antigua, all of the U.S. retirees have a vacation lifestyle. Since not everyone has the same amount of capital, then each retiree enjoys their permanent vacation at different luxury levels. Some Las Vegas vacationers stay at expensive strip hotels, while others stay in more affordable hotels away from the strip, but all Las Vegas vacationers are there to have a good time. The same idea applies to U.S. retirees in Antigua: some of them can afford expensive colonial homes, while others can only afford a room or small apartment, but all retirees enjoy a vacation lifestyle. Since they do not have the commitments they used to when they were working and raising families back in the United States, now their lifestyle can be summed up in one phrase: “every day is a Saturday.” Antigua is located in a country characterized by violence. But, U.S. retirees perceive more pros than cons about living in Antigua. Otherwise, U.S. retirees would not be living a vacation-like retirement lifestyle in the middle of the Guatemalan new violence.
CHAPTER 5: Local Perspectives: What Guatemalans Think About the Migration of U.S. Retirees into their Country

When initially reading the literature on international retirement migration, one of the points that caught my attention was this statement by MPI (2006, p. 64) who were “not aware of any published studies that have examined the perceptions of local residents in areas experiencing substantial inflows of foreign retirees.” The few studies available on Americans who retire abroad focused solely on the perspectives of foreigners living in a non-U.S. location while local views were largely ignored. I felt my dissertation would not be complete if I did not take into consideration how Guatemalans feel about the U.S. retirement migration into their country, especially when one of the characteristics of the Guatemalan population is that they are often migrants themselves to Mexico, the United States, and Canada as a result of violence and economic hardships (Garcia, 2006).

One of the advantages I have over other researchers who conduct studies on U.S. citizens in Latin America is that Spanish is my native language. So, I can understand why the local perspectives have been ignored thus far in the international retirement migration literature. Researchers must speak the tongue of the local population in order to learn about their opinions on the subject. While Spanish fluency is a plus when conducting research in Latin America in general, in Guatemala it is not enough. As explained elsewhere in this dissertation, the Mayas account for about half of the Guatemalan population and usually their dominant tongue is one of the 22 Mayan languages spoken around the country.
Furthermore, we have to remember that it is difficult for the indigenous people to trust outsiders (Goldin, 1986; Mato, 2000). In order for a social scientist to gain the trust of her Mayan subjects, she must know how to speak their indigenous tongue and spend considerable amounts of time (sometimes several years) living with them. This is not my case: I do not speak any of the 22 Mayan languages, and I did not spend years living among an indigenous population. Therefore, the local perspectives covered in this chapter are mainly of those Spanish-speaking Ladinos. There are some indigenous individuals who will be mentioned in this chapter, but they represent a minority in this sample group. So, I acknowledge the fact that this sample is not representative of the whole Guatemalan population.

When selecting the Guatemalan research participants for this study, I did not want to choose subjects with no relationship at all with U.S. retirees. My intention was to select people who know these retirees, at least to a certain extent, in order to get a fair opinion based on actual experience with these foreigners. The problem with selecting participants who have no relationship at all with the U.S. retirees is that they will provide opinions based solely on superstitions and gossip. And, yes, some of the Guatemalans I did interview expressed opinions based on superstitious ideas such as some American women go to Guatemala to traffic the organs of babies. Abigail Adams (1998, p.114) explained, “All levels of Guatemalan society—elite, poor, city, countryside, Mayan and Ladino—people believe organ-trafficking exists and that gringas play a big part in it.”

While I did get opinions based on superstitions and rumors from Guatemalans who know and interact with U.S. retirees, imagine how less objective the perspectives of this chapter would be if I had included the opinions of Guatemalans with no experience at
all with American retirees. Porter (2007, p.164), who did her dissertation research about
the American community in the Guanacaste province of Costa Rica, explained:

“Because there are limited interactions between Guanacastecos and U.S. expatriates due to language, financial resources, living spaces, and conceptions of time, perceptions of one another often develop from passing interactions and observations thereby stunting substantive/meaningful relations at the community level.”

The same idea applies in Antigua. Most of the Guatemalans who are aware of the existence of a U.S. retired community in Antigua do not have “substantive/meaningful relations” with the Americans because of cultural barriers. Even those who have plenty of interactions with the gringos do have some negative bias against the Americans as a result of the rumors running around the community. Therefore, I thought it would be more productive for this research study to interview Guatemalans with plenty or limited interactions with U.S. retirees, rather than having research participants with no interactions at all with the American community.

The most common comment I got from the Guatemalan subjects is that they did not have any idea there were U.S. retirees living permanently in Antigua until they met a specific American who introduced them to the U.S. retiree community. Some of these Guatemalans have seen the retirees in Parque Central or elsewhere but initially thought they were tourists. Yes, some of them noticed the same elderly faces over long periods of time, but they nonetheless thought these retirees were tourists since there are foreigners who travel to Guatemala to study Spanish or do community service for several months. When these Guatemalans met a specific U.S. retiree, then they realized that these Americans are actually living permanently in the country.
Six Guatemalan perspectives on U.S. retirees will be discussed below: 1) U.S. retirees engage in community service; 2) U.S. retirees are lazy and conformist; 3) U.S. retirees inject dollars into the local economy; 4) U.S. retirees think they are superior; 5) U.S. retirees raise local prices; and 6) U.S. male retirees seek sexual relationships with younger women.

**Perspective 1: U.S. Retirees Engage in Community Service**

The size of Antigua’s U.S. retiree community is significant enough that it has its own American Legion post. Those Guatemalans who are well acquainted with the members of the American Legion highlighted the community service activities the veterans do in the region. For instance, Marleny, the wife of the Legion’s commander, described the social service programs this organization implemented in Guatemala: a daily breakfast to all students of an indigenous school; scholarship programs; a library with over 30,000 English sources; and an ecological water filter project for schools and families who lack potable drinking water. These service programs were described in detail in the previous chapter.

While living in Guatemala, I participated in the community service programs organized by the American Legion Auxiliary, which is a sub-organization comprised of the wives, daughters, and sisters of American Legion members. Antigua’s Auxiliary has taken over the responsibility of helping Cabecitas de Algodon, a local nursing home that takes care of the elderly. As Marleny expressed, there are many NGOs in Guatemala that are there to help the children, but it seems that nobody wants to help the elderly, a segment of the population that needs help as well. Unfortunately, the Auxiliary does not do an effective job raising money like the American Legion does. Therefore, Marleny and
the other Auxiliary members resort to entertaining the residents at Cabecitas de Algodon. For instance, they organize a Christmas party in which they bring food, presents, and live music to the residents of the nursing home.

Marleny also discussed The American Legion Library, which houses over 30,000 English and 2,000 Spanish books. Marleny explained that if Guatemalans want to learn and/or improve their English language skills, they can go to this library to check out materials for a nominal annual fee (Q100, which is about $13.00). Marleny not only volunteers at this library but also reads some of the books because she wants to improve her English. Although, I should stress that Marleny was the only Guatemalan I was aware of who was a member of the Legion Library. This library is mostly a community service program aimed at the American community residing in Antigua.

I also talked with Cesar, an 18-year-old college student. Cesar’s dad passed away unexpectedly as a result of a throat infection. Bill felt sorry about this incident because people in the United States do not die of throat infections. Bill said this was a preventable death if Guatemala had a better healthcare system. So, the American Legion decided to provide a scholarship to Cesar’s sister for her high school education. Cesar told me he is very grateful to Bill and the Legion members for helping his sister go to school.

Marleny and Cesar were two of the few Guatemalans who discussed the community service projects that Americans do in Antigua. Interestingly, I got more comments about the retirees’ laziness than their contribution to the local community.

**Perspective 2: U.S. Retirees are Lazy and Conformist**

An interesting perspective from the Guatemalan participants in this study is that they view U.S. retirees as lazy and conformist people. There is a group of U.S. retirees,
mostly veterans, who spend a considerable amount of time each day socializing with other Americans and foreigners in Parque Central. People who pass by the park notice elderly American faces there every day. Because retirees are sitting around in the park “all day,” Guatemalans stereotypically view U.S. retirees as benchwarmers, or in the words of the tour guide Sergio, “vienen a estorbar,” which translates as “they come to hinder.” It is Sergio's view that the U.S. retirees are taking up space and are not doing anything productive in the community. The U.S. retirees are consuming community resources; so they are hindering progress. Sergio cannot understand how the American community can be so lazy and simply sit around on benches in Parque Central all day.

Sergio thinks that U.S. retirees should want to do meaningful acts for their host community; he suggested the U.S. retirees might volunteer to teach students English at the public schools. Sergio explained that some of the schools have no English teacher, and where English is being taught, the teacher does not usually speak English very well. The result is that most students learn broken English. Sergio explained that the Mayas are appreciative when a foreigner puts time and effort into teaching their language to the Mayas. Sergio said that some of these retirees might even donate money. At any rate, money will always come and go, but English skills are something the Guatemalan children will have for the rest of their lives if only they had the opportunity to learn them. Sergio argued that just because these retirees are “retired,” that does not mean they should not work. Sergio argued the U.S. retirees must quit their lazy ways if they want to be valuable members of the Guatemalan society.

Like Marleny, Mariluz is a Guatemalan married to a U.S. retiree. Mariluz expressed similar views to those of Sergio. However, Mariluz did not use Sergio's descrip-
tion of laziness; instead, she stressed the term conformity. She said that the retirees con-
form to anything just because they have a pension; therefore, Mariluz explained, U.S. re-
tirees have mediocre expectations. For instance, Mariluz pointed out that her husband
will not leave the house to get a job or start his own business for no other reason than that
he has a military pension. In addition, she has seen plenty of other U.S. retirees in the
park doing nothing as well. Mariluz believes that these retirees should be much more
productive, and their retirement income should not be an excuse for them not to work.
Mariluz went as far to say that if she had the power, she would deport all of these retirees
out of Guatemala because most of them are there to take advantage of the local popula-
tion. She explained that the U.S. retirees are not just sitting around and doing nothing,
but worse: they use the Guatemalans as “carpets.” By this Mariluz means the U.S. retir-
ees walk all over the local population. U.S. retirees expect Guatemalans to serve them,
but the retirees do nothing to serve the local population. Not only do the U.S. retirees
have no remorse about how they treat Guatemalans, they have no remorse about what
they do not do for Guatemalans.

Generally, both Sergio and Mariluz would not mind so much that U.S. retirees
live in Guatemala if only they would keep themselves busy with community service
activities or even working for profit.

**Perspective 3: U.S. Retirees Inject Dollars into the Local Economy**

There were positive comments from the Guatemalan participants in this study
with respect to the economic impact U.S. retirees have on the local economy. The most
obvious impact commented on by Guatemalans is that these retirees are spending their
American dollars on everyday necessities such as housing, food, transportation, entertain-
ment, and so on, which overall strengthens the local economy. Furthermore, the additional business generated by the retirees provides employment for the local population. Many retirees hire local women as housekeepers. And, some retirees even open their own businesses.

Cristina represents a person for whom U.S. retirees generated additional work opportunities. Cristina is a 24-year-old Spanish teacher. Cristina stressed that she greatly benefits from foreigners of several nationalities migrating to Antigua, not just U.S. retirees. Non-Spanish speaking migrants from all over the world have moved to Antigua. These migrants need someone like Cristina to teach them basic Spanish as a survival skill. Not only has Cristina taught Spanish to newly arriving retirees, she has also given Spanish lessons to Koreans who come to manage Korean-owned garment factories.

Cora is the 45-year-old manager of Cafe Condesa, a restaurant owned by an American citizen. Unlike Sergio and Mariluz, Cora enthusiastically expressed her admiration of U.S. retirees in Antigua. She argued that these retirees do create jobs and bring new ideas to the community. Having lived in Antigua her entire life, Cora explained that prior to Cafe Condesa opening, there was no place to go to have cheesecake and a cup of coffee. But, with the success of Cafe Condesa, Guatemalans began to open other small specialty restaurants around town. Cora pointed out that Guatemalans would never have imagined opening these competing restaurants had it not been for an American woman who brought the idea with her from the United States. Cora emphasized that the major benefit of the U.S. retiree migration to Guatemala is the new ideas that they bring, especially entrepreneurial ideas.
To better understand the perspective of Cora, we should know that her work back-ground was in the banking industry of Guatemala for 20 years. Cora explained how Guatemalans are paranoid about losing their money, and as a result, Guatemalans gener-ally invest in traditional ventures that are viewed as more secure investments. Americans are different, according to Cora. Americans are willing to risk their money on a good al-beit unproven idea. Let me stress, however, that most U.S. retirees do not go to Guatem-alan to start a business. Their goal is to enjoy a vacation-like experience for their retire-ment. But the few Americans who are business owners are well known in the com-munity. At any rate, most of the U.S. retirees in town hire housekeepers, cooks, and gardeners. And, there are other ways foreign retirees impact the receiving economy, as explained in the literature.

Back in the 1970s, Ball (1971) did his dissertation research in Jalisco, Mexico about the benefits of attracting retirees for economic development. The objective of Ball’s dissertation was to show that international retirement migration can be an econom-ic strategy that underdeveloped countries can take to further development. Ball estimated that in 1969, U.S. retirees in his study collectively spent $35 million a year on “recurring expenditures” and $11 million on “non-recurring expenditures,” making a total economic contribution of approximately $46 million that year. Moreover, these U.S. retirees attrac-ted 47,700 tourists to Mexico who spent over $7 million that year. The “short term eco-nomic impact” of the U.S. retirees was $168 million and the “long term economic im-pact” was $380 million. The author concluded that foreign retirees have a positive im-pact on the Mexican economy (Ball, 1971).
Moreover, Deller (1995) used the Regional Economic Models (REMI), a computer simulation program, as his methodology to simulate what would happen to a local economy over an eight-year period if 5,000 retirees migrated into a particular rural community in the United States. The simulation suggested 35 additional people would migrate into this community for every 100 retired migrants recruited. Furthermore, the calculations suggested there would be 55 new jobs created for every 100 migrant retirees. Sectors that would be heavily affected are retail, healthcare, construction, and restaurant industries. The positions would likely be taken by younger adults in both the public and private sector since retirees tend not to be in the labor market. Deller concluded that migrant retirees provide an “injection of new monies” into the receiving community, and therefore encourages rural communities to promote the attraction of retirees for economic development (Deller, 1995).

Even though U.S. retirees provide a source of employment (directly or indirectly), some Guatemalans complained that these jobs are not enough. For instance, Jaime and Edilia are employed by U.S. retiree Robert on a part time basis. Jaime is a geologist at Robert’s gold mining company, while Edilia initially taught Robert Spanish and later on cleaned his house. The issue is that Robert only spends about six months out of the year in Guatemala. Robert travels for three months and then goes back home to Chicago for another three months. When Robert is back home in the U.S., then Jaime is left without a job and a source of income. Yet, though Jaime is unemployed six months out of the year, he gets work almost every day and a good paycheck when Robert is in town. Edilia is in a worse situation. She can teach Spanish classes to the newly arrived retirees, but this only lasts a small period of time. After the retiree learns the basics of the language they
stop taking classes. Edilia is not teaching Spanish to Robert anymore because he now has
enough knowledge of Spanish to get by. So, now Edilia cleans Robert’s house, but she
only does this once a week during those months he is town.

U.S. retirees do not only provide employment to local Guatemalans as housekeepers,
Spanish teachers, or as managers for those who own businesses. Some of the retirees
are known to hire prostitutes. Edilia confessed to me that she has needed some quick
money to pay for her elderly and sick father’s medical expenses. Edilia resorts to prosti-
tution with some of the U.S. retirees: in one hour she can get $20, which is substantive
money for the average Guatemalan. Ray, who is 86 years old, stated that Edilia started to
pay him visits in his apartment. Initially, they talked and drank liquor. But, one after-
noon, she took her clothes off, and as Ray puts it, Edilia did things he “did not even know
were written in the book.” In exchange for this sexual favor, Ray paid Edilia $20 “to buy
a cell phone.”

Interestingly, there were Guatemalans who mentioned that the injection of U.S.
retirees’ money into the local economy is not a reason why they should welcome U.S. re-
tirees to Guatemala. Sergio pointed out that these retirees are spending money locally,
but they are only doing so because they have no other choice. The U.S. retirees are not
buying food for the purpose of helping the local economy to grow; they buy food because
they need to eat. Nor do these retirees hire local women as housekeepers for the sole pur-
pose of providing employment, but they hire the women because they do not want to
clean the toilet. Similarly, 46-year-old tourist policeman, Gustavo, stated, “Not
everything is about money.” These retirees may indeed spend their money locally, but at
the same time, they discriminate against Guatemalans.
Perspective 4: U.S. Retirees Think they Are Superior

There were several occasions when Guatemalans mentioned the American history of slavery, segregation, and discrimination against minorities; this is done to justify their view that U.S. retirees act as though they are superior to Guatemalans. Colibri, a 46-year-old singer of traditional Guatemalan music, expressed several discrimination-based comments. First, Colibri made the point that white Americans are discriminatory even in their own country against African Americans and Latinos. Consequently, Colibri reasoned, of course U.S. retirees will discriminate against Guatemalans since they discriminate against their own people back in the United States. Second, Colibri stated that these retirees come to Antigua to implement their own American culture. These retirees do not want to learn the language, culture, or history of the country, but they expect the Guatemalans to know how to speak English and be knowledgeable of American culture. Third, Colibri mentioned that these retirees have opinions on matters that should not be their concern. Colibri said, “Vienen a imponer su estatus de gringo,” which means, “They have come to flaunt their American status.” He feels that retirees expect Guatemalans to do whatever they say for no reason other than because they are from the United States.

Gustavo, the tourist police officer, was angry while talking about the foreigners who are “invading” his country. First, Gustavo thinks it is unjust that so many Americans citizens can enter Guatemala trouble-free when Guatemalans must endure tremendous difficulties migrating to the United States. Gustavo pointed out that most Guatemalans are denied tourist visas when they apply for them at the U.S. Embassy. Like Colibri, Gustavo too claimed that gringos are racists. Again pointing to racism against African
Americans and Latinos, Gustavo lamented that U.S. retirees bring their racist manners and beliefs from the United States when they migrate to Antigua. Then the retirees inflict the local populations with that racism. Gustavo went so far as to claim that U.S. retirees think they own Antigua because of their retirement pensions.

The underlying issue appears to be an indictment of one lifestyle against another. One this theme, Gustavo explained that the American and Guatemalan cultures are not compatible. He pointed out that U.S. citizens tend to be liberal, while Guatemalans are conservative. Gustavo argues that rather than adapting to the more conservative culture, U.S. retirees expect the local culture to adapt to their more liberal American culture.

Liberal and conservative in Guatemala do not have the same connotations as they do in the United States. Gustavo used the term “liberal” to describe what Americans may call freestyle living: drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, using illegal drugs, and not having an exclusive sexual partner. Gustavo worries that Guatemalan children are observing this liberal American behavior, which may entice them to do the same as they enter adolescence. In addition, Gustavo believes that the liberal American culture that the U.S. retirees bring actually prefers countries that have widespread violence, pointing out that these conditions allow affluent Americans to do whatever they want.

A disturbing result of the attitude expressed by Gustavo is police indifference toward crime against Americans. Not only does the local police force in Antigua not care when foreigners become victims of crime, they make jokes about it. Gustavo was emphatic: police officers in Antigua actually like it when Guatemalans commit crimes against foreigners. Gustavo told me how he and his friends on the police force joke about and poke fun at foreigners that file a criminal complaint, a “denuncia.” Gustavo said the
“denuncia” filed by a foreigner is just paper; no effort will be made by the police to investigate the matter. They just laugh about it.

Most of the Guatemalans I talked with mentioned that sense of superiority that U.S. retirees have. Interestingly, though, there was one person who argued the opposite. Juliana, a 35-year-old Mayan vendor, used an interesting strategy to explain why she likes these Americans living in Antigua: she contrasted U.S. retirees with Ladinos. Juliana, who is an indigenous woman with very little money, told me that she is constantly discriminated against by Ladinos. She said that Ladinos hate when indigenous women try to make some money. Juliana explained that she is only trying to “ganarse la vida,” an expression that means trying to make some money to survive. As she explained, she is not making that much money, just enough to get by day to day. Therefore, Juliana believes the Ladinos should stop hating her for her handicraft vending business because it is not making her rich. The police not allowing her to sell tipica items and confiscating her merchandise are political examples of how Juliana experiences discrimination. But, as she explained, there are more hurtful ways in which Ladinos discriminate her. Simple acts such as Ladinos not wanting to sit next to her because they view her as a “dirty Indian” or not wanting to have a conversation with her because they think she is “stupid” are painful to her. And, this is why she is happy about the U.S. retirees: she can sit and have a conversation with any of the Americans who spend time in the park. Actually, Juliana explained that she does not only socialize with the local retirees but with foreign tourists as well. When she approaches a tourist of any age to sell merchandise, they are polite to her even though they may not have an interest in purchasing anything. So, in general, foreigners tend to be more friendly and respectful than Ladinos.
**Perspective 5: U.S. Retirees Raise Local Prices**

A popular comment I got from the Guatemalan subjects is that they believe Antigua is expensive because of the presence of U.S. retirees and foreign residents in general. For instance, as 30-year-old accountant Aracely explained to me, whenever she is in the company of a U.S. retiree outside of the Antigua area, such as in her hometown of Quetzaltenango, she has to be ready to pay inflated prices for food and merchandise. But, when Aracely is alone or in company of other Guatemalans, the vendors offer the regular prices. Furthermore, Aracely told me that since Antigua is very touristy and foreigners are found everywhere, she has to pay high prices whether she is in company of a U.S. retiree or not. According to Aracely, Antigua is the most expensive city in Guatemala because the presence of foreigners has inflated the prices.

Gustavo, the police officer, blames the high real estate prices in Antigua on all the migrant U.S. retirees and other foreigners who buy and rent property. The president of Century 21 Casa Nova, Brian Wilson, told me that the average price for a home in Antigua outside the 8x8 city center block is around $275,000-$300,000. And, a house inside the 8x8 center of town costs anything between $500,000-$5,000,000. However, Wilson said that 90% of all property he sells in Antigua is bought by rich Guatemalans from the capital city. These Guatemalans do not necessarily live in their Antigua homes, but buy them as an investment. Actually, most of the year, the houses sit empty and are only used by their owners to vacation during holidays like Holy Week. According to Wilson, foreigners have nothing to do with the high prices; he claimed that rich Guatemalans are willing to pay the high prices to own a property in Antigua.
Indeed, Antigua is an expensive place to live by Latin American standards. Whether the expensiveness of this city is due to rich Guatemalans or foreigners does not seem to be a debate among the local population. The average Guatemalan believes Antigua is expensive because of the increasing foreign migrant population that resides in Antigua, in addition to the presence of tourists.

**Perspective 6: U.S. Male Retirees Seek Sexual Relationships with Younger Women**

A popular comment made by Guatemalan subjects was that retired men move to Guatemala so they can have sexual relationships with much younger women. Indeed, retired American men can find young women to be with. They are financially secure, and they can care for a young woman who lacks money. Couples in these relationships often have a 30-40 year age difference. Aracely explained that there is obviously no love between these couples. The relationships are more like contracts. The woman takes care of the aging man in exchange for having all of her living expenses paid for. And, if she stays with him until the very end, she gets an inheritance that will carry her through the rest of her life. According to Aracely, these U.S. retirees are not merely looking for sex, but they also want a housekeeper. Finding a young woman to marry takes care of both the sex and the housekeeping.

The most notorious couple that fits this description is the one of Phil and Gloria. Phil is 36 years older than his wife. Phil and Gloria met each other while she was working at the front desk of a hotel. After some months of meeting each other, Phil started to call Gloria on the phone for no specific reason, just to say hello. Then, Gloria explained, she was tricked: Phil offered her a job at the American Legion, so she quit her job at the hotel. But what Gloria did not realize was that the American Legion job was a volunteer
position with no salary. As a result, Gloria was left with no income; she could not pay her rent and other expenses, so she felt she had no choice but to accept Phil’s invitation to move in with him. As Gloria explained, Phil did not offer to be her boyfriend, but to be her husband.

A popular comment I got from both Americans and Guatemalans is that they do not understand why Gloria married Phil. They are sometimes described as the “oddest couple in Antigua.” Phil is much older than Gloria; he is a heavy smoker, most of his teeth are missing, and he has an imposing personality. Gloria, on the other hand, is a tall, slender, sweet young woman. Why did Gloria marry Phil if we take the job deception out of the equation? Gloria confessed to me that she does not love Phil and getting married was a mistake. She reluctantly accepted the marriage proposal because no man ever proposed to her before and she was already in her mid-twenties. Usually women in Guatemala get married at an earlier age, as she explained. Gloria felt that if she did not accept this marriage proposal then “the train would have left her.” Three years into the marriage, Gloria felt trapped not only because she was living with a man she did not love, but also because he had not been able to impregnate her. Gloria’s dream is to become a mother, but she realizes Phil’s sperm is too weak to impregnate a woman due to his advanced age. Gloria now dreams about getting a divorce and marrying a younger man who could give her a baby.

Gloria, however, is sticking with Phil for economic reasons. If she and Phil separate and Gloria enters a relationship with a Guatemalan, then her quality of life will go down. Phil and Gloria live in a four-bedroom apartment in El Panorama, an upper-middle class neighborhood in Antigua. Gloria does not work; her only commitments
are to household chores and American Legion community service activities, which, as she explained, do not consume as much time as her past hotel job did. So, she has plenty of personal time for hobbies and travel. She travels at least once a year with Phil to the United States to attend the American Legion national convention. Plus, they frequently travel to Mexico and the rest of Central America. Although Gloria feels trapped in a relationship with a man she does not love, Gloria nonetheless likes the fact that she has a higher quality of life than the average Guatemalan.

Angela, a 30-year-old Mayan vendor, expressed that male retirees scare young indigenous women because these men want to be in relationships with them. She explained that it is not that the young Mayan women do not want to be in relationships with foreigners, but that they want to be in relationships with men their own age (no matter their ethnicity). Angela is starting to see in her hometown of San Antonio de Aguas Calientes some women getting married to foreigners, although these relationships are sporadic. In addition, Angela commented that Mayas view marriage as a lifelong commitment while foreigners, including U.S. retirees, want marriage for just a short period of time, until they get tired of the relationship. That is why, according to Angela, there is a large divorce rate in the United States. However, she does not condemn U.S. retirees for court-ing young Guatemalan women, since there is nothing illegal about this. If a woman is not interested, she should say so and put an end to the relationship immediately rather than getting involved with the retiree for economic gains.

**Conclusion**

There were other negative comments that have not been discussed here because these were strong claims and I did not see any evidence of such things happening. For in-
stance, a Guatemalan told me that he used to work for a U.S. retiree who asked him to find young boys and girls for child molestation. There was also a Guatemalan who told me that some of these Americans traveled to Guatemala to steal babies and traffic their organs on the black market. And, there were other strong negative comments about the American community based on superstition and rumors.

Overall, the general impression I got from the Guatemalan participants in this study is that they do not favor the migration of U.S. retirees to their country. Yes, U.S. retirees inject money into the local economy, but they are doing so because they need to spend money in order to have shelter, food, transportation, and so on. These retirees are not spending locally to help the Guatemalan people, but they are doing so in order to survive. Yes, some of the U.S. retirees engage in community service, but the vast majority of retirees are viewed as lazy and conformist. These Americans sit around all day instead of being productive in the local community, according to the Guatemalans. As some of the research subjects told me, not everything is about money. The local population perceives the U.S. retirees as people who think they are superior to the Guatemalans. U.S. retirees use the local population as “carpets,” as Maryluz stated. And, many single American men travel to have sexual relationships with young local women.

I think the significant issue here is that Guatemalans would like U.S. retirees to be active members of the community rather than sitting around all day in Parque Central, restaurants, and their homes. As a native Panamanian, I suspect that if this study were conducted in Panama, Panamanians would not claim that U.S. retirees are lazy. Panamanians view the “retirement” concept similarly to the United States: after several decades of hard work, seniors have earned a lifestyle free of labor responsibilities. How-
ever, some Guatemalans have a hard time understanding what “retirement” is. One
Guatemalan woman told me she does not understand why all U.S. retirees are old. Most
of the Guatemalan elderly have to keep working into their latter years or live with their
children because they do not have retirement pensions. Therefore, it seems that Americ-
ans and Guatemalans have different expectations of what should be done during the
golden years.
**FINAL THOUGHTS:**

Antigua, Guatemala is certainly a beautiful, magical place to be. Each time I was transported from Guatemala City to Antigua, I instantly felt the time-travel magic once the vehicle exited the main highway and drove onto the cobblestone-paved roads of this charming Spanish colonial city. Antigua indeed feels like a “history living museum” as referenced by Little (2004), not only because of the historical architecture, but also because of the presence of both Mayan and Ladino cultures. Plus, geographically speaking, Antigua is blessed with impressive volcano views, beautiful flowers and vegetation, a variety of food and vegetables grown in the Guatemalan highlands, and the eternal spring climate that makes air conditioners and furnaces obsolete.

If the decision to retire there is solely based on the beauty of Antigua, I would recommend every prospective migrant U.S. retiree consider this colonial city as their destination. However, I cannot make this recommendation because the country of Guatemala is characterized by an ongoing history of violence: first, 36 years of civil war in which 200,000 Guatemalans of mostly Mayan decent were murdered and second, the new violence which is defined as post-war criminal activities. Antigua might indeed be the safest city in Guatemala, as U.S. retirees claim, but we cannot forget this country is characterized by violence. Any person, whether Maya, Ladino, or foreigner can be victimized by present-day new violence if he or she is in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Based on the findings of this dissertation research, I believe the U.S. retirees that live in Antigua did not pick the best retirement destination in Latin America. First of all, other countries like Mexico and Panama have a relatively easy process for foreign retirees to acquire legal residency (MPI, 2006). As explained by the U.S. Consulate in
Guatemala (2006), the process to obtain a legal residency in this country is long (two-
four years), and the retirees must be willing to pay bribes in order to smooth the process. Second, Panama (and to a certain extent Mexico) offers all kinds of discounts to retirees on such things as property taxes, medical expenses, airline tickets, restaurant dining, and movies and other forms of entertainment (MPI, 2006). U.S. retirees in Guatemala do not get any discounts. On the contrary, they are living in a city that is expensive under Latin American standards, on top of which the vendors charge retirees inflated prices simply because they are foreigners. Third, if colonial Spanish Latin America and indigenous culture is of interest to U.S. retirees, there are other Latin American destinations that offer similar ambiance. For instance, Cuenca in Ecuador was ranked as the best place to retire in the world by International Living Magazine (Reuters, 2009). Nearby San Cristobal de Las Casas in Mexico offers a similar Spanish colonial ambiance/Maya presence combination (van den Berghe, 1995). Overall, though, it is not advisable for U.S. retirees to migrate to Mexico until the war on drugs comes to an end.

When I was in Antigua, once in a while I heard references to U.S. retirees who were living in Antigua but ultimately decided to migrate back to the United States. For instance, I learned about a U.S. retiree who returned to the United States as a result of a heart condition. Apparently, one time, this retiree had a heart attack, and when his wife called for an ambulance, the hospital told her that the ambulance driver was on his lunch break. I also briefly communicated via e-mail with a retired woman who was robbed several times while in Guatemala by pickpockets in the streets and by the housekeeper at her home. So, she made the decision to migrate back to the United States as a result of the new violence.
I recommend anyone interested in international retirement migration consider doing a research study on returned migrant retirees, those Americans who retired abroad (in Guatemala or elsewhere), but decided to migrate back to the United States. I think it would be interesting to find out the reasons why former migrant retirees decided to return to their native countries. Second, I recommend those interested in retirement migration also do a research study on the intersection between U.S. retirees living in Mexico and the War on Drugs. Mexico is the country with the largest number of U.S. retirees living abroad (Truly, 2001), and it would be interesting to find out whether they have similar views on violence as the Antiguan U.S. retirees do: “Violence is something that happens to other people, not me.” Third, I recommend those interested in this topic to pay attention to social stratification within the American community abroad. Past research studies on expatriates, describe these communities as if they were a cohesive group who all get along. The fact is not all U.S. retirees are created equal when it comes to retirement migration: social class do play a role in the interactions and behaviors of Americans abroad. Finally, I recommend researchers take into account the perspectives of the local population. As documented in this dissertation, Guatemalans do not view favorably the migration of U.S. retirees into their country. The opinions of Mexicans, Panamanians, Costa Ricans, and other Latin Americans regarding the migration of foreign retirees into their countries would offer an interesting comparative perspective on this issue.

Overall, Antigua is definitely a beautiful, magical city. However, prospective migrant retirees must carefully study their options prior to making the decision to migrate to Antigua (or anywhere in the world) and not make the decision based solely upon impulse
and emotions, instead taking into consideration the realities going on in the destination of choice.
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