UNIVERSIDAD IBEROAMERICANA

Estudios con Reconocimiento de Validez Oficial por Decreto Presidencial del 3 de abril de 1981

PATHWAYS TO BELONGING: THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF GUATEMALAN

MIGRANTS IN RURAL DUTCHESS COUNTY, NEW YORK (2018-2024)

TESIS

Que para obtener el grado de

MAESTRA EN ESTUDIOS SOBRE MIGRACIÓN

Presenta

ELIZA MAE PETRIE

Director: Dr. Abelardo Sumano Rodriguez

Lectoras: Dra. Laura Zamudio

Dra. Claudia Abigail Morales

México, D.F.   **2025**

Table of Contents

Introduction

I first learned of the growing Guatemalan migrant community in Dutchess County, New York, during the summer of 2019, while interning with a youth-led, bilingual community initiative called Engaging People in Community (EPIC), which was then operating in Millbrook. The program, designed to foster civic engagement and social inclusion among Latinx teens, maintained strong connections to local migrant families. The program director at the time, who nurtured close relationships with these families, introduced me to this fast-growing migrant population that stood out against the visible whiteness of the northeastern Hudson Valley. Their presence in this rural setting marked a demographic shift that had not been widely acknowledged or documented before. At the time, the arrival of these families felt sudden and almost random, which further piqued my interest. I was curious about how residents and local institutions received them, and how these migrants were building lives in the new environment despite the many challenges migrants encounter in rural America.

After completing the internship and graduating from college in December 2019, I began working with Northeast Dutchess Immigrant Services (NEDIS), formerly known as Grace Immigrant Outreach, also based in Millbrook. From January 2020 until the organization's unfortunate closure in March 2024, I served in multiple roles at NEDIS, supporting case management, coordinating health and legal referrals, distributing food, conducting community outreach, and writing grants. This work provided me with insights into the challenges and the survival and adaptation strategies employed by the Guatemalan migrant community in the region.

Over these four years, I observed steady community growth as new arrivals joined existing networks through word of mouth and family reunification. Many families initially

settled in Dutchess County between 2018 and 2019 through a state-coordinated effort that relocated asylum seekers from New York City to the village of Dover Plains. Most of the migrants I worked with during my time at NEDIS arrived during this period or shortly afterward, settling primarily in Dover and neighboring towns such as Amenia and Millerton. These locations offered manual labor opportunities in farming, landscaping, and construction, which aligned with many migrants' skills and experience.

As time passed, migration became increasingly driven by social ties and family connections. Several migrants I interviewed explained that the region's mountainous terrain, dispersed farmland, and seasonal labor market resembled their rural Guatemalan highland hometowns. These environmental and occupational similarities offered a sense of continuity and familiarity, fostering comfort and belonging even as migrants navigated complex bureaucracies, language barriers, cultural differences, and the structural exclusions common to rural American life.

The significant increase in individuals seeking support from NEDIS and other local organizations reflected the broader growth of this migrant community as well. When I became the case manager for NEDIS in the summer of 2020, I doubled the client list maintained by my predecessor. The case manager who succeeded me in 2022 then doubled the client list I had built. This consistent increase reflects the community's rapid growth, with every client being a Spanish-speaking Latin American immigrant, most from Central America, primarily Guatemala.

Figure 1

Dutchess County Landscape

Note. This photograph was taken by the author.

The Hudson Valley is often portrayed as a vacation destination for affluent New Yorkers, characterized by verdant rolling hills and blooming wild phlox in the spring and summer, vibrant foliage in the fall, and snow-covered ski resorts in the winter. However, this pastoral image obscures the region's deep-rooted economic inequalities. Migrant workers play a critical role in sustaining the agricultural and service sectors, yet they remain largely excluded from local social and civic life. Although their labor supports the regional economy, many live in poverty. In Dutchess County, for example, nearly 22% of agricultural workers earn below the federal poverty line, underscoring the persistent economic hardship they face despite their contributions (Dutchess County Department of Planning, 2023). These workers also endure long hours and often lack access to healthcare and social benefits, reflecting systemic disparities (Ku, 2006). Moreover, despite their central role in the local economy, migrant workers' voices are frequently excluded from community decision-making processes, perpetuating their social marginalization.

This reality is partly a consequence of underrepresentation in official government statistics. The 2021 census recorded just 755 residents born in Guatemala in Dutchess County,

accounting for only 7% of the county's migrant population. However, service providers and community members consistently estimate that the actual number of Guatemalan migrants in the area is significantly higher. Many are undocumented and therefore fearful of exposure. Others speak indigenous languages, such as K'iche' or Q'eqchi', and U.S. Census forms, typically offered in English or Spanish, are often both linguistically *and* culturally alienating, making participation in formal surveys and government processes difficult or inaccessible. Population categories on census surveys, such as "Hispanic white" or "non-white," frequently fail to resonate with individuals whose identities are shaped more by local indigeneity and nationality than by U.S. racial or ethnic frameworks. In interviews and informal conversations, several migrants expressed confusion over such forms and described avoiding official data collection efforts due to fears of surveillance, detention, or deportation. These experiences reveal how structural exclusion begins not only with access to institutions, but also with the very categories through which people are made visible, or rendered invisible by the state.

New York State has always positioned itself as relatively immigrant-friendly, most recently through the Driver's License Access and Privacy Act, commonly known as the "Green Light" Law, enacted in June 2019 and effective December 2019 (New York State Department of Motor Vehicles [NY DMV], 2019; New York State Senate, 2019). This law grants all residents of the state the right to obtain a state driver's license regardless of their immigration status. Additionally, state institutions—such as the Office for New Americans (ONA), established in 2012, and the Division of Immigrant Policies and Affairs—have expanded access to services including language instruction, legal aid, and labor protections (American Immigration Council, 2022; New York State Department of State [NY DOS], 2012). However, local realities often diverge from these state-level commitments. Dutchess County is politically divided, with its

voter registration data showing a near-even split between Democrats (blue) and Republicans (red) (Dutchess County Board of Elections, 2023), earning it a "purple" designation. While some towns in the county have launched initiatives welcoming migrants, others have demonstrated resistance or resentment, reflecting this mixed reception (Dutchess County Executive, 2023; Yusko, 2023).

The central research question guiding this study is how Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County have experienced social integration between 2018 and 2024, and how sociocultural and institutional factors have shaped this process. To address this question, I identified two interrelated objectives: First, I examine how migrants adapt culturally and socially, with particular attention to their access to language, community support networks, mutual aid, traditional foods, sports, cultural celebrations, and religious and spiritual practices. Second, I analyze how institutional structures support or fail to support migrants, examining their access to healthcare, education, legal aid, housing, and employment.

The original hypothesis of this thesis is that Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County face significant barriers to full integration, primarily due to two intersecting factors. First, there is a lack of sociocultural exchange, mutual effort, and recognition between migrants and host community members. Language and cultural differences contribute to a climate in which social integration is limited to economic dependency rather than community participation, with language barriers being the most significant. Second, these migrants also experience institutional exclusion. Without citizenship or legal residency, many migrants are excluded from fundamental rights and resources that enable them to participate in civic life and achieve stability. These limitations affect nearly every aspect of daily life, including the inability to access healthcare without fear of cost or exposure, challenges children face in school, and lack of legal protections

in housing and the workplace. These factors create an environment of only partial integration—economic inclusion paired with social invisibility.

To analyze these dynamics, this thesis draws from three complementary theoretical frameworks: *social integration, integration from below*, and *cultural pluralism*. The first provides a broad definition of integration as a two-way process of adaptation between migrants and host societies, encompassing participation in the sociocultural and institutional spheres. The second focuses on how integration occurs, not necessarily through formal institutions but through everyday care, survival, and community-building practices. The third emphasizes preserving cultural identity alongside adopting new practices, thereby challenging the notion that successful integration necessitates cultural assimilation. Collectively, these theories support a more nuanced understanding of migrant social integration that foregrounds migrant agency and cultural preservation, and places the onus on both the host population and local and state institutions to support migrants throughout the process.

This study employed a qualitative, explicitly *migrant-centered* methodology, grounded in community-based research. Between July 2024 and January 2025, I conducted ten semi-structured interviews with five Guatemalan migrants who met the study's inclusion criteria. These interviews, conducted in Spanish and held in private or public community spaces chosen by the participants for their familiarity and comfort, prioritized the perspectives and lived experiences of migrants themselves. Interviewees were assured confidentiality and were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities. Rather than treating migrants merely as subjects, the research foregrounded their voices as central to understanding processes of social integration. I supplemented this research with an analysis of regional and state policy to situate these migrant experiences within the broader institutional context in which they unfold.

The ethical considerations underpinning this research were critical, given the vulnerable status of many participants. Informed consent was obtained from all interviewees, and meticulous measures, such as the use of pseudonyms, were used to protect their identities and ensure voluntary participation. The research design emphasized language justice, collaboration, transparency, and mutual respect, aiming not only to gather information but also to reflect the experiences and insights of those whose lives shaped the study.

The findings of this research indicate that language is the most significant sociocultural factor for social integration. Without strong English skills, Guatemalan migrants face substantial barriers to participation in social and civic life in their local communities. Yet integration is not only about language or cultural adaptation; it also requires meaningful institutional support. Migrants must navigate complex systems that often exclude them due to their documentation status. While many Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County build strong social networks and participate actively in their communities, this sociocultural integration is insufficient. Public institutions, especially schools, healthcare facilities, workplaces, and legal systems, often remain inaccessible or unresponsive to their needs. In response, migrants develop grassroots solutions: churches offer material and emotional support, informal labor and housing networks connect people with jobs and apartments, and children serve as interpreters for adults in clinics and offices. These practices represent "integration from below," but they also reveal the limits of a system that relies too heavily on migrant self-navigation. However, despite these obstacles, the findings of this thesis demonstrate that migrants are not simply assimilating or remaining separate; they are experiencing a form of *double belonging*, maintaining ties to their cultural roots while actively contributing to local life.

Policies like New York's Green Light Law show how institutions can support this process. To truly achieve double belonging, integration efforts must bridge the two central gaps: language access and institutional responsiveness. This thesis concludes with two key policy recommendations addressing each gap to support fuller and more equitable social integration for Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County.

This thesis contributes to the field of migration studies by addressing a critical gap in the literature. While most existing studies focus on urban contexts, they overlook the challenges and opportunities that define rural migration. By focusing on a particular migrant population in a rural region, this study broadens the geographic and cultural scope of migration research. It also introduces a migrant-centered approach that treats migrants not as passive subjects but active participants in shaping their futures. Through this lens, integration becomes not a question of how well migrants conform but how they negotiate, resist, and reimagine their place in the new environment.

The thesis is organized into three chapters: The first chapter provides a theoretical and methodological foundation, discusses the limitations of assimilation theory, and presents a case for social integration, integration from below, and cultural pluralism as more suitable frameworks. It also details the research design, methods, and ethical protocols. The second chapter presents the first set of empirical findings, organized thematically around key sociocultural dimensions of social integration: language, mutual aid and community support, food, soccer, cultural celebration, and spiritual and religious life. The third presents the second set of empirical findings derived from research on institutional structures that limit migrant social integration. It offers a critical analysis of these findings, situating them within broader debates in migration studies and proposing two specific policy recommendations that prioritize

migrant agency as stakeholders within the community and direct institutional support of language justice.

Several themes introduced in this thesis need further examination. The invisibility of indigenous-language speakers in public discourse and data remains a significant obstacle to effective policy and equitable representation. The substantial disparity between the evident labor contributions of migrants and their exclusion from community life underscores the asymmetry of rural integration. Importantly, the presence of Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County is not a unique occurrence; rather, it signifies a broader reconfiguration of rural America that necessitates scholarly, political, and ethical attention.

When I began this research in 2019, I saw the Guatemalan presence in Dutchess County as peripheral—an unintended outcome of urban displacement. Two years ago, I believed that social segregation between migrants and the host community stemmed mainly from a lack of mutual interest or curiosity, an indifference that created distance. However, that view has changed. Throughout this research, my understanding of rural migrant integration has evolved significantly. I now see this community as not marginal but central to the region's economy, culture, and future. Importantly, I have realized that social fragmentation is not primarily the result of apathy, but of deeply embedded sociocultural and institutional barriers. These include language inaccessibility, limited service availability, and immigration-related precarity.

Contrary to my earlier assumptions, individuals from both migrant and non-migrant communities have expressed a desire for greater social cohesion and mutual engagement. Thus, the problem is not a lack of interest, but a lack of structural support. This thesis represents a significant contribution toward understanding that dynamic. While limited in scope due to time constraints and challenges in accessing participants willing to be interviewed, it reflects a

meaningful cross-section of lived experience in a rural migrant context. The limitations to access necessitate long-term, trust-based research methodologies that can deepen our understanding progressively.

Looking ahead, this topic must transition from descriptive to prescriptive terrain. The future of this research hinges on the development of concrete policy interventions that support sociocultural understanding, language access, and equitable access to services, regardless of immigration status. These policy interventions include housing, health care, education, legal assistance, and employment resources tailored to the realities of rural life. Policymakers must reimagine institutional support to reflect the lived conditions of migrant residents. Other regions in the U.S. and abroad offer successful models of integration that could inform local efforts. Ultimately, this work serves as a call to action for researchers, policymakers, and residents to acknowledge the migrant-driven changes now transforming rural America. Through daily acts of care, endurance, and adaptation, Guatemalan migrants are not simply surviving; they are actively remaking the social fabric of this region. It is time for our institutions to catch up.

Chapter 1: Reframing Integration: Migrant-Centered Theory and Decolonial Methodology

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical and methodological frameworks, which serve as the foundation for examining the social integration of Guatemalan migrants in rural Dutchess County, New York. This research is framed by three core theoretical concepts: *social integration*, *integration from below*, and *cultural pluralism*. These concepts serve as the analytical lens for understanding the complex social interactions between the Guatemalan migrant population and the host community and institutions in rural Dutchess County, New York. These frameworks diverge from the traditional assimilation model, which has historically required migrants to fully adapt to the cultural values, language, and practices of the host society, often at the expense of their own cultural identity, thereby undermining their agency.

Traditional *assimilation theory*, which emphasizes the erasure of cultural differences in favor of full conformity, has been widely criticized for its ethnocentric focus, particularly in its tendency to center the 'white native community' as the standard of integration. This approach has proven inadequate in contemporary, culturally plural societies, as it fails to recognize the value of cultural diversity and the complexities of migration and integration processes. Therefore, the limitations of assimilationist thinking underscore the need for more inclusive and adaptable models that can better capture the diverse lived experiences of migrants in various settings.

In response to this critique, social integration theory offers a more nuanced framework that acknowledges integration as a dynamic and reciprocal process. This theory recognizes that migrants and the host society must adapt to each other's cultural practices and values, promoting mutual understanding and respect. Unlike the rigid framework of assimilation, social integration

enables the preservation of cultural diversity while fostering social cohesion. From this perspective, the integration process is not merely about economic integration but also social engagement, where cultural exchanges and mutual adaptation play critical roles in building a cohesive society.

The concept of integration from below further enhances the understanding of migrant social integration. This concept refers to the grassroots, everyday processes through which migrants and host society members negotiate coexistence and build social connections on a local level. Rather than being driven solely by top-down policies or institutions, integration from below emphasizes informal interactions, mutual support, and community-based initiatives that encourage inclusion and collaboration between migrants and host communities. These interactions and initiatives need not be large-scale movements, but can include everyday interactions and gestures of community support. By focusing on these bottom-up efforts, this approach highlights the agency of migrants and local communities in shaping their pathways to integration. This approach also emphasizes the importance of regional networks and grassroots movements in addressing the gaps left by formal structures, ensuring that migrants' needs are met through institutional frameworks and organic, community-driven support systems. This model provides a more empowering and sustainable approach to integration, as it places value on migrants' active participation in the social fabric of their host society.

This study also explores the theoretical concept of cultural pluralism, which advocates for the preservation of migrants' cultural heritage within the host society, rather than the abandonment of their cultural identities. The analysis of the Guatemalan migrant community in rural New York necessitates an understanding of how these migrants navigate their cultural heritage while adapting to a predominantly white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant environment. Cultural

pluralism provides a lens through which to examine the complexities of maintaining cultural practices, languages, and social networks. By embracing diversity as a source of community enrichment rather than a threat to social cohesion, cultural pluralism creates a framework that values inclusion and appreciates the richness and social contributions of cultural differences and diversity. Cultural pluralism also helps cultivate social integration and a sense of belonging by fostering recognition and respect for migrants' cultural identities. When host communities value and integrate migrants' cultural contributions, it can mitigate the emotional and social disruptions that migration entails, offering migrants a sense of belonging in their new home without requiring them to abandon their heritage. In this way, cultural pluralism serves as a foundation for a more inclusive and cohesive social integration.

Methodologically, this research employs a migrant-centric approach, which is critical to decolonizing the traditional attitudes, biases, and methods historically used in migration studies. Past research has often adopted a state-centric view, reducing migrants to their economic roles or legal characteristics within the host society, thereby marginalizing their lived experiences and personal agency. In contrast, the *migrant-centric methodology* prioritizes the perspectives and voices of the migrants themselves. It decenters the migrants' role in the receiving economy and their particular immigration statuses. Instead, it focuses on their day-to-day lived experiences, aspirations, and desires in their new environment. This approach challenges the notion that integration is a unidirectional process, where the burden of adaptation falls solely on the migrants. Instead, it positions migrants as active agents in shaping their own integration experiences, navigating the social, cultural, and institutional structures of their new environment.

The theoretical and methodological framework outlined in this chapter is especially relevant in the rural context of Dutchess County, where the Guatemalan migrant population is

relatively new and faces unique challenges regarding social integration into an otherwise predominantly white, English-speaking, rural society. By employing a migrant-centric methodology, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the social integration process of migrants in rural communities. It underscores that migration is not an issue to be resolved, but rather a multifaceted social phenomenon that involves preserving and celebrating cultural heritage and the creation of new forms of social and cultural cohesion.

Thus, the theoretical and methodological frameworks established in Chapter 1 provide a critical foundation for analyzing the experiences of Guatemalan migrants in rural New York. This research transcends assimilationist models and adopts a migrant-centric approach, providing a more comprehensive view of integration that values cultural pluralism and migrant belonging. It recognizes not only the voices but also the agency of migrants in shaping their paths toward integration. This approach is essential for capturing the complexities and nuances of migrant's social experiences in rural settings, where sociocultural and structural dynamics present unique challenges and opportunities for migrants in the host society.

1.2 Understanding the Key Theories and Concepts Guiding this Study

1.2.1 Assimilation

To understand the concepts of social integration, integration from below, and cultural pluralism, it is essential first to grasp the main integration theories that preceded them. Although currently deemed obsolete, assimilation theory provides necessary context for the evolution of integration theories that inform this research. Baglioni (1964) defined assimilation in his work *Trends in Studies on the Socio-Cultural Integration of Immigrants* as the "complete conformity" of migrants to the host society (p. 125). Scholars such as Bunle (1950), Mauco (1951), Isaac (1955), and Clémens (1953) interpret assimilation as the process by which the behavioral

distinctions between migrants and natives are gradually eliminated; however, each offers a slightly different perspective. Some view assimilation as a specific phase of integration, often marked by moments when "full integration" is achieved. This process typically spans generations and involves the complete adoption of the host society's culture and language, leading to a loss of connection to one's cultural heritage. The classic interpretation of assimilation, which posits that cultural "minorities" should abandon their heritage and adopt the "American" way of life, is probably the most widely recognized (Alba & Nee, 2003). According to traditional assimilation theory, when a new group enters a host society, the burden is placed on migrants to adopt the host society's culture, customs, language, and religion. The ultimate goal is for migrants to fully embrace the host culture, even if it means abandoning their own (Baglioni, 1964, p. 125).

Milton Gordon's foundational model outlined a "unidirectional and irreversible process" in which immigrants pass through stages from acculturation to full civic and structural integration (Gordon, 1964, p. 71). Gordon argued that true assimilation required not just cultural adaptation but entrance into the "cliques, clubs, and institutions" of the dominant group (p. 81). As Papademetriou and Benton (2021) noted, "assimilation was widely regarded as a unidirectional process" in which the only acceptable outcome was absorption into the dominant culture, particularly that of white, middle-class Americans. However, this vision failed to anticipate the persistence of cultural pluralism, transnational identities, and systemic barriers obstructing full participation.

This approach is deeply flawed. As Seven (2023) explained, the complete adoption of the host society's culture often results in significant cultural and psychological consequences for migrants, including the loss of their native language, a diminished understanding of their country

of origin's history and culture, and an emotional disconnection from their homeland and family members left behind. This phenomenon, often described as a loss of cultural identity, highlights the limitations of assimilation as a model for understanding and promoting migrant integration.

According to Papademetriou and Benton (2021), the classic assimilation model failed to account for the resilience and durability of immigrant identities, often overlooking how migrants actively shaped their new environments rather than passively conforming to them. It also reflected a specific historical period, rooted in mid-twentieth-century America's confidence in its cultural ideal, a context that has shifted as globalization, transnationalism, and multiculturalism reshape both migration and host societies. Crucially, the model placed the entire burden of adaptation on migrants while giving little attention to the responsibilities of host institutions and governments to accommodate or support newcomers.

Alba (1990) critiqued the myth of complete assimilation even among white ethnic groups, showing that "ethnic identity did not vanish; it changed," and that assimilation in the U.S. often meant reframing whiteness itself rather than dissolving ethnic distinction (p. 306). Subsequently, Alba and Nee (2003) updated the assimilation theory in *Remaking the American Mainstream*, proposing a "neo-assimilationist" model grounded in institutional inclusion and declining significance of ethnic boundaries. They argue that "the mainstream is not fixed" and that successful integration reshapes it, challenging the old idea that newcomers must conform to a static host culture (Alba & Nee, 2003, p. 11).

Assimilation theory has long been criticized for its focus on the "white native community" and its failure to acknowledge the ethnocultural and racial diversity within host societies. Garcia and Schmalzbauer (2017) underscored that assimilation theory historically used white individuals as the standard against which migrants' behaviors and practices are measured,

noting that "the progress of immigrant assimilation remains gauged on whites as the reference group" (p. 66). They argued that researchers must move beyond using the white host community as the benchmark and instead consider the culturally, racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse identities of receiving societies (p. 67). The term "assimilation" frames migration as a "social challenge" or "problem to be solved," which fosters an ethnocentric, colonialist, and state-centric perspective that further marginalizes migrants and seeks to preserve the racial and sociocultural status quo of the receiving society. According to Papademetriou and Benton (2021), the model reflected an era of confidence in the American cultural ideal but was also steeped in racial and cultural hierarchies. Due to its white-centric and colonialist history and application of assimilation theory, it will not be utilized as the guiding framework for this research. However, understanding assimilation theory remains essential as a historically significant concept in migration and integration studies, providing context for the more migrant-centric theoretical framework that will guide this research.

1.2.2 Social Integration: A Two-Way Street

The concept of integration is widely recognized as a mutual relationship between migrants and the host society (Baglioni, 1964, p. 126). The International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2012) defines integration as "a process of mutual adaptation between the host society and migrants" (para. 4). These definitions suggest a reciprocal exchange in which both communities adjust to each other's needs and ways of life, allowing harmonious coexistence. Theoretically, unlike assimilation, integration does not impose a greater burden on either side to make significant changes; instead, it encourages respect, coexistence, and conditions that allow both communities to thrive.

Historically, research on migrant integration in the United States has focused more on economic than social integration. However, both are closely interrelated and should be considered together. While economic integration, which often involves labor market participation, may occur relatively quickly, social integration may not necessarily follow at the same pace (Baglioni, 1964, p. 126). Although labor market integration may reach high levels, social integration often lags as immigration levels rise. This discrepancy is primarily due to social network effects in the social integration process, which are largely absent in labor market integration. Contucci and Sandell (2015) emphasize this distinction in their article, noting its relevance in the United States, where a consistent demand for migrant labor has supported steady economic integration. However, as migrant populations grow, robust social networks within migrant communities may reduce the need for broader social integration into the host society, resulting in more visibly defined cultural enclaves. The lesser likelihood of achieving social integration than economic integration is crucial for this research.

For decades, migration has been viewed through the state-centric conceptions of capitalism and economic opportunity, with migrants often seen as a necessary means of production in the receiving country. In this regard, labor migration has been encouraged by both sides of the political spectrum. However, migrants are not always provided with the necessary tools, resources, or encouragement to integrate socially into their new communities. As migrant populations grow, social integration may diminish in priority for migrants who have already established social networks within their new societies.

The concept of social integration is key to this research and to understanding the types of interaction between the Guatemalan migrant community and the host community. However, these concepts fail to fully recognize the role that migrant agency, cultural heritage, and tradition

play in the daily lives of this particular migrant community. The concepts of integration from below and cultural pluralism aim to fill this gap, and encourage the celebration of migrant agency and the preservation of Guatemalan cultural practices and traditions in Dutchess County.

1.2.3 Integration from Below: Migrant Agency in Action

The concept of integration from below centers on migrant agency and their active participation in shaping integration processes, which contrasts with traditional models that often cast migrants as passive recipients of integration policies. As noted by migration researchers and practitioners Vidal and Roselló (2009) in *Integración desde abajo*, "if the immigrants do not participate in the debate, it will remain simple, and things will get worse. It is important to listen to migrants' voices, and not only in matters of immigration" (p. 7) [translated by author]. By amplifying the voices of Guatemalan migrants, grassroots efforts empower individuals to advocate for their needs and contribute to the host society. Migrant associations and other local grassroots organizations, for instance, have stepped in to fill the void left by insufficient governmental support, "financing community and regional projects from below" (Vidal & Roselló, 2009, p. 6) [translated by author]. These initiatives not only provide tangible resources but also foster a sense of community, collective agency, and shared responsibility.

The concept of social integration from below provides a critical lens for understanding how migrants and host societies collaboratively build inclusive and cohesive communities. Unlike top-down approaches that rely primarily on state-driven policies, this framework emphasizes grassroots efforts, informal interactions, and community-led initiatives that foster meaningful inclusion. As Vidal and Roselló (2009) argue, "Integration cannot wait for governments to decide; it must rise from below to address pressing societal issues such as poverty, inequality, and exclusion" (p. 2) [translated by author]. This perspective is particularly

relevant in the case of Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County, New York, where the local

community has played a vital role in bridging cultural divides and addressing gaps in resources

left by institutional frameworks.

The collaborative potential of grassroots integration extends to addressing systemic

inequalities and fostering long-term social cohesion. Community-led efforts provide a space for

marginalized groups, including migrant workers and Indigenous peoples, to advocate for their

rights and inclusion. As noted by Kan (2016), labor and social movements demand integration

processes "from below" that respond to the concrete needs of the people. For Guatemalan

migrants in Dutchess County, grassroots community initiatives have often served as the primary

means of accessing resources, building networks, and navigating a predominantly white,

English-speaking environment. These actions illustrate the importance of incorporating migrants'

lived experiences into the broader social fabric, ultimately shaping a more equitable,

understanding, and inclusive community.

Integrating the framework from below recognizes the value of intercultural education and

participatory frameworks in addressing historical inequalities. Bermúdez-Urbina (2015)

emphasizes that "intercultural education, as a political and social tool, allows for the articulation

of processes from above and below to confront historical inequalities" (p. 156).

Bermúdez-Urbina's study, *Desde arriba o desde abajo: Construcciones y articulaciones en la*

investigación sobre educación intercultural en México, focuses on the intersections of education,

politics, and social movements in Mexico, particularly in the context of Indigenous and

marginalized communities. This dual approach highlights the potential of grassroots initiatives to

complement institutional efforts, creating a more holistic and inclusive model of integration. For

Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County, education initiatives that include language programs,

cultural exchanges, and migrant-led celebrations have fostered mutual understanding and reduced social barriers.

Ultimately, social integration from below underscores the significance of migrant contributions to the host society, not as burdens, but as active agents of community change. By fostering grassroots engagement, promoting cultural exchange, and addressing systemic inequalities, this framework provides a critical tool for understanding the social integration of Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County. It demonstrates how informal, community-driven efforts can bridge divides and create spaces where diversity is celebrated, agency is respected, and inclusion is achieved. In this way, integration from below not only addresses the challenges faced by migrants but also enriches the host community, laying the foundation for a more cohesive and equitable society. Chapter 2 explores some of the grassroots, community-driven organizing in the region and demonstrates the power and importance of community coalitions in fostering social integration from below.

1.2.4 Cultural Pluralism as Resistance to Assimilation

Cultural pluralism as a concept has deep intellectual roots in early 20th-century American philosophy. It was first coined and publicly articulated by Horace M. Kallen, a Jewish-American philosopher who introduced the term in a 1915 essay series challenging the dominant ideology of Americanization. Kallen's intervention came at a time when mass immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe was reshaping the U.S. population. At the same time, assimilationist pressures sought to homogenize this diversity into the so-called "melting pot." Rejecting this metaphor, Kallen offered an alternative vision:

> Its form would be that of a federal republic; its substance a democracy of nationalities,
> cooperating voluntarily and autonomously through common institutions in the enterprise

of self-realization. The common language of the commonwealth ... would be English, but each nationality would have for its emotional and involuntary life its own peculiar dialect or speech, its own individual and inevitable esthetic and intellectual forms. (as cited in Ratner, 1984, p. 187)

For Kallen, individuality and democracy were mutually reinforcing: the cultivation of one's ethnic and cultural identity enriched rather than endangered collective life. This idea, which Kallen later refined in *Culture and Democracy in the United States*, has since become foundational to pluralist thought. Rather than urging conformity to a singular national ideal, Kallen's vision likened American society to an orchestra, in which distinct cultural "instruments" retain their uniqueness while contributing to a broader harmony. This metaphor quickly resonated with thinkers like John Dewey and Randolph Bourne, helping to launch cultural pluralism as a counterpoint to assimilationist policies and discourse (Ratner, 1984). Kallen's early pluralism emphasized that democracy was not merely compatible with cultural difference; it depended on it.

Building on this foundation, cultural pluralism promotes the idea that migrants should retain their cultural heritage while adopting the fundamental civic values of the host society, provided their cultural practices do not threaten the sociocultural equilibrium of their new environment. Kiser (1949) noted that cultural pluralism generally relates to ethnic diversity and emerged partly as a response to the limitations of assimilationist approaches, which often demanded conformity at the cost of heritage and identity. Unlike assimilation, which implies the erasure or dilution of minority cultures, cultural pluralism affirms that diversity can coexist within a shared public framework and even strengthen it. This philosophy gained particular prominence after the 1956 UNESCO conference in Havana, where cultural pluralism was

proposed to manage diversity within modern nation-states (Baglioni, as cited in Kiser, 1949, p. 125).

An essential aspect of this approach is the recognition that social and cultural integration is a two-way process in which both migrants and host communities adapt and learn from one another. As Condorelli (2018) explained,

> Pluralism ... implies a particular type of structuring of society that recognizes multiple, voluntary and mutually non-exclusive affiliations ... and admits identities that are constructed by free individual choice and a mutual tolerance between parties in potential conflict on the level of values. (p. 266)

This mutual adaptation challenges the notion that integration requires the erasure of cultural differences. Instead, it promotes the preservation of cultural heritage as a source of cultural enrichment. For Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County, maintaining cultural practices such as their native languages, food traditions, holiday celebrations, and social networks has been crucial for their sense of identity and belonging. Simultaneously, these cultural expressions enrich the host community, creating opportunities for intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding.

The pluralist perspective has also shaped educational theory and practice. Morrison (1981) explored this perspective, emphasizing that multicultural education, rooted in pluralist values, must go beyond tokenistic gestures, such as ethnic holidays or isolated lessons. Rather, it should engage deeply with how knowledge is produced and shared through curricula, teaching materials, school norms, and teacher training. Morrison argued that "Recognizing and prizing diversity" is one of the foundational goals of a pluralist educational system, along with "developing greater understanding of other cultural patterns" and fostering "positive and productive interaction among people and experiences of diverse cultural groups" (p. 185). These

principles are equally relevant in broader societal contexts, particularly in communities undergoing migration-related demographic changes.

The case of Guatemalan migrants settling in rural Dutchess County, New York, a predominantly white region, offers a meaningful example of how cultural pluralism can function as both a conceptual and practical framework for integration. It allows migrants to retain their Indigenous languages, the Spanish language, their religious practices, and communal norms while participating fully in the region's economic and civic life. This concept is especially significant given the pressures migrants often face to assimilate or suppress visible markers of difference. Reinforcing the contrast with assimilation, cultural pluralism resists erasure by recognizing the legitimacy and value of minority identities in the public sphere. As Kiser (1949) noted in his historical review of U.S. immigration, the country's dominant integrationist model has often operated through exclusionary homogenization, treating linguistic, religious, or cultural differences as problems rather than resources.

Damodaran and Visvanathan (1995) explored the dynamics of cultural pluralism in their article published in the *India International Centre Quarterly*. Reflecting on Kerala's long history of cultural exchange, they highlight how pluralism can thrive even within hierarchically stratified societies. Kerala's centuries-old interactions with Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traders, along with its linguistic hybridity—melding Sanskrit and Tamil into Malayalam—demonstrate how pluralism can embed itself in economic, social, and linguistic structures. Damodaran and Visvanathan further noted that, "Since you don't have any trading caste in Kerala, you get either the Christians doing all the internal trade ... Then you have incoming Hindus from outside ... All these people do the outside trade, concentrated in Cochin" (p. 3). Their observation that "the Christians came after the Hindus, and Hindu families became Christian; later, the Hindu families

became Muslim" (p. 3) illustrates the dynamic, interwoven nature of identity that cultural pluralism accommodates. This historical example invites reflection on the potential for rural Dutchess County to become not merely a site of Guatemalan endurance but also a site of mutual transformation through intercultural dialogue.

In this way, cultural pluralism challenges the assimilationist assumptions that dominate many majority-white spaces. It reorients integration around mutual respect and dialogic exchange rather than conformity. Cultural pluralism also offers a framework for resisting what Sayad (2004) termed the "double absence," a condition in which migrants feel alienated from their country of origin and host society. Sayad, known for his work on migration and identity, developed this concept through his influential studies on the lived experiences of migrants. I will examine the implications of double absence in more depth in Chapter 2. Cultural pluralism counters this alienation by legitimizing migrants' presence and culture, embedding their heritage in the public sphere rather than confining it to the private domain. Thus, in the context of Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County, cultural pluralism not only provides a pathway toward social belonging but also a strategy for communal flourishing. It affirms that integration does not require cultural self-effacement, highlighting the possibilities for rural America to become a truly shared space, enriched by the presence of those whose histories, languages, and experiences have been overlooked..

1.3 Justification of Theory & Relevance to the Study

Assimilation, social integration, integration from below, and cultural pluralism are all key conceptual frameworks for understanding this research study. While no single concept alone can fully capture the complex social realities faced by Guatemalan asylum seekers in rural Dutchess County, the term social integration will be used throughout to describe the general patterns of

interaction between Guatemalan migrants and the host community. However, to more effectively analyze the broader dynamics at play and to better reflect the lived experiences and agency of migrants in shaping their trajectories, the study draws on the concepts of cultural pluralism and integration from below as a form of resistance against assimilation. All three theoretical concepts guiding this study facilitate a migrant-centered analysis that highlights the bottom-up strategies and localized practices through which Guatemalan migrants navigate, negotiate, and contribute to their integration processes and outcomes.

The movement of migrants is vital to the United States, particularly in New York, which has been profoundly shaped by immigration throughout its history. As migrant populations grow, particularly in Upstate New York, it is essential to foster social integration and promote cultural pluralism. Guatemalan migrants' social integration in rural Dutchess County, New York, represents a significant contribution to migration studies, as this community is relatively new and has not been extensively studied regarding its social integration and the rich culture that influences how the community interacts with its host society. To understand the experiences, needs, and aspirations of Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County, New York, it is essential to build relationships within the community and use migrant-centric research methods that both center and validate the complex experiences and agency of this particular population.

For this study, the theories of cultural pluralism, social integration, and social integration from below are applied, along with a migrant-centric methodology, to highlight the complexity of Guatemalan migrants' experiences in Dutchess County, New York. Cultural pluralism fosters an understanding of how diverse cultural identities can coexist within a host society without necessitating assimilation. Social integration theory examines how migrants navigate and interact with social, cultural, and institutional structures in their new environment. Social integration

from below empowers migrants and host communities to collaboratively create inclusive spaces

through grassroots efforts, thereby fostering a sense of belonging and community. Lastly, by

adopting a migrant-centric methodology, the voices and agency of migrants are centered, which

encourages viewing migration not as a problem but as a rich social phenomenon that contributes

to the host society. This approach captures the nuanced ways in which migrants integrate, form

networks, and maintain cultural identities within a culturally diverse society. The following

section defines the migrant-centric methodology and explains its significance to this study.

1.4 Decolonizing Migrant Social Integration Research: In Defense of a Migrant-Centric

Methodology

This research is guided by a *migrant-centric methodology*, which aims to de-center the

state and decolonize the concept of migrant social integration into the host society. This

approach rejects the notion that migration is a social problem to be solved and instead views it as

a complex social phenomenon to be explored. Historically, migration studies and research on

migration phenomena have been controlled by the "logic of State thought" and the "principle of

coloniality" (Avallone & Molinero Gerbeau, 2021). These authors contribute to the development

of a migrant-centric epistemology that challenges traditional state-centered views. They argue

that existing theories on international migration are shaped by the state's categorization of

migrants according to their immigration status, including economic migrants, professional

migrants, asylum seekers, or refugees. These categories reduce migrants to their legal status as

defined by the state, often failing to consider the "sociology of immigration" and the more

complex sociocultural and institutional factors that shape multifaceted migration and integration

experiences (p. 3).

Academic research in the social sciences sits within a theoretical and practical tradition that drives the production of knowledge (Avallone & Molinero Gerbeau, 2021, p. 3). Social sciences research does not exist in a vacuum and is not objective or removed from the existing biases of researchers, which are shaped by their upbringing and academic formation. In the field of global human mobility, the dominant research tradition of the past 75 years has created a hierarchical structure that privileges immigration over emigration. This focus has emphasized the normative dimensions of immigration and contributed to the "othering" of migrants within host societies. The application of a migrant-centric methodology aims to transcend these binary distinctions—between immigration and emigration, immigrant and emigrant—toward a more comprehensive, biographical, and narrative-centered understanding of migration. It emphasizes the sociopolitical, socioeconomic, and sociocultural dimensions of migration at every stage of the process, placing migrants "at the center of analysis" (p. 3).

Sayad (1999) emphasized that the state is not only a body that exercises violence and control over territory and population, but also a "mental structure." In *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, Sayad argued that the state maintains its power not merely through the direct enforcement of borders, but also through its capacity to shape the socialization of its citizens, conditioning them to reproduce distinctions between nationals and non-nationals. The very concept of the migrant is contingent upon the existence of the state; without the state's territorial and legal structures, the category of the "migrant" would hold no meaning. This state-imposed distinction between national and non-national extends beyond legal or political classification; it shapes societal perceptions and embeds itself in the collective consciousness of the host nation.

This distinction is essential to legitimizing the existence of the state, as it reinforces the idea of the "foreigner" or the "other," without which there would be no need to exercise control

over borders or territory. Sayad contends that the state produces the categories through which migration is understood, hence framing the study of migration within a state-centric lens. This framing influences our understanding of the social, cultural, economic, and political implications of migration. It is particularly pronounced in research conducted within immigration-receiving states by researchers from those states, where it produces a hierarchy between those who "belong" and those who do not. Thus, it is a tendency that I, as a researcher, must actively resist.

When migrants are defined by the state or nationals within the host society, they are stripped of their individuality, subjectivity, and defining characteristics. Instead, they are reduced to a homogenized identity, shaped by pre-established, state-defined categories. As Avallone and Molinero Gerbeau (2021) observed, this process reduces migrants' experiences to the "position of [an] object" (p. 6), understood primarily through externally imposed definitions rather than self-representation. This separation reaffirms the idea that the state defines the migrant in the same way the colonizer defines the colonized.

This separation between nationals and non-nationals has given rise to several dominant theories in migration studies, whose models of interpretation are consistent with state thought. A grouping of theories, commonly referred to as the "hydraulic" or "push and pull" model, has predominated migration studies in the second half of the twentieth century, and utilizes the imagery of mechanical parts and fluids in a hydraulic system to understand migrations as flows from point A to point B and as an economic cost-benefit equation. This model reinforces the reductionist view of migrants as workers whose primary role is to fulfill the host country's labor market needs. Additionally, understanding the drivers, or "push factors," of immigration allows states to develop policies and regulations that exercise control over migrants to fulfill their labor interests, while avoiding the ethnic replacement of the white populations.

These models are economically driven and racist, and do not take into account the lived experiences, wills, desires, and behaviors of the migrant, nor do they consider the social networks in which migrants belong or the limits to mobility placed on them by state policies. In this state-centric construction of immigration, individual migrants are "passive beings entirely determined by external forces, from whose biography only those parts of interest to the destination State stand out" (Avallone & Molinero Gerbeau, 2021, p. 8). Moreover, such models "push the agency of migrants to the margins of analysis" (p. 8).

As a consequence of the state-centric understanding of migration, terms like "assimilation," which frame migration as a "problem to be solved," are imposed (Avallone & Molinero Gerbeau, 2021, p. 10). Viewing migration as a "social challenge" has led to research agendas centered on exercising control, mitigating challenges, and preserving the status quo. This colonialist lens toward the arrival of migrants has fueled the state's ethnocentric fixation on assimilation.

Avallone and Molinero Gerbeau (2022) critique the prevailing state-centric approach to migration. They argue that within this dominant framework, integration is conceptualized as something migrants must continually "run after," only to discover that "the closer you get, the more you are reminded it is not entirely it" (p. 14). In other words, integration becomes an "impossible achievement" that "conditions the migrant subject" to experience the "impossibility of reaching the goal of integration" (p. 14). This conditioning, they contend, positions non-white migrants in a state of "non-being," rendering them as "people who constantly lack something" (p. 14).

The state-centric view of migration emphasizes the challenges and priorities of host societies, often sidelining the lived experiences and perspectives of migrants. This approach

tends to frame research through a dominant, colonial lens that positions itself as objective and neutral, yet is deeply embedded in systems of power and exclusion. Drawing from Smith's (2016) critique, such methodologies reflect the legacy of colonial knowledge production, where the authority to define and interpret is claimed by those situated outside of the communities being studied. In contrast, Avallone and Molinero Gerbeau (2022) propose a migrant-centric approach that acknowledges Sayad's (2010) concept of migration as "a total social fact," which encompasses various social dimensions such as history, traditions, behaviors, language, religion, and all the political, social, and cultural elements of the migrants' society. This approach avoids the reductionist biographical division or erasure of migrants' identities in the pursuit of assimilation.

Recognizing migration as a "total social fact" acknowledges the complexity and multifaceted nature of the migrant experience, while centering on the autonomy and agency of the migrants themselves. By prioritizing the migrant in the analysis, the migrant-centric approach acknowledges the diverse and interconnected factors that shape both migration and the migrant's identity. Within this framework, migrant autonomy is crucial, as it asserts that migrants are not obliged to conform to the state-centric models of migration or integration. Instead, they possess the capacity to construct their understandings and definitions of social integration, thus challenging reductionist narratives and emphasizing the validity of individual and collective migrant experiences.

1.4.1 Justification of Methodology

Adopting a migrant-centric perspective in the study of social integration enables researchers to transcend the limitations of the traditional state-centric approach. This shift allows for an exploration of migrant integration without imposing the bias of what migrants are

perceived to be "lacking" or "not being." Instead, it prioritizes listening to migrants' lived experiences, challenges, and aspirations. A migrant-centric approach emphasizes the unique realities of the migrant subject, focusing on the "stories that make up this material reality" (Avallone & Molinero-Gerbeau, 2022, p. 11), such as their community networks, rather than the interests and biases of the state and its "imperial white eyes."

From a methodological standpoint, a migrant-centric approach encourages researchers to view immigration not merely as an economic or demographic fact but as a complex social phenomenon. This perspective transcends the reductionist view of migrants as either components of the host state's economic machine or as social problems requiring resolution. Furthermore, this methodology challenges the false dichotomy between emigrant and immigrant, promoting a more holistic understanding of migration and the full spectrum of human experiences that migrants undergo. The increased adoption of a migrant-centric approach represents a crucial step in the decolonization of migration research, shifting the focus toward the lived experiences of migrants and away from the colonialist, state-centric biases prevalent in much of the existing literature.

1.4.2 Data Collection Methods

The field research for this thesis was conducted using a qualitative, migrant-centric methodology that centered on the voices and narratives of Guatemalan migrants living in Dutchess County, NY. This field research involved two rounds of semi-structured interviews with five individual migrants, resulting in a total of ten interviews. In addition to these interviews, the study analyzed relevant policies and institutional support systems. The goal was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the complex, multifaceted realities faced by recently

arrived migrants in rural New York State, with insights rooted in the migrants' voices and lived experiences.

1.4.3 Justification of Data Collection Methods

The use of semi-structured interviews in this study is justified for several reasons. This approach offers a flexible yet focused means of gathering in-depth, qualitative insights into the experiences, attitudes, and challenges faced by Guatemalan migrants regarding social integration. Semi-structured interviews facilitate a nuanced exploration of individual narratives, enabling a deeper understanding of how migrants navigate their new environment while preserving connections to their cultural heritage. By combining the rich personal insights gleaned from the interviews with an analysis of institutional frameworks, this methodology provides a comprehensive understanding of the complex experiences of newly arrived Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County.

1.4.4 Ethical Considerations

All social science research, particularly fieldwork involving vulnerable participants, entails a range of ethical considerations that the researcher must address. These considerations include obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, ensuring informed consent, maintaining participant confidentiality, securing data collection and storage through encryption, and providing participants with a debriefing.

This research received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval on April 26, 2024, before the commencement of fieldwork. All requirements established by Pearl IRB were strictly followed, including reporting any changes to the research throughout the process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before conducting the interviews. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, how their data would be used, and the measures

taken to maintain confidentiality. Any questions or concerns raised by the participants were addressed before the interviews commenced. No interview occurred until the researcher and interviewees signed an informed consent agreement.

To ensure confidentiality, participant identities were protected using pseudonyms, and no significant identifying information was collected or stored. Data collection was limited to what was necessary for the research objectives. All interview data was encrypted and stored in password-protected electronic files on the researcher's laptop. Data will be retained only for analysis as long as necessary and securely disposed of once no longer needed. Lastly, participants were offered a debriefing after their interviews, during which they could ask questions and express any concerns about the study or their data. Participants retained the right to withdraw consent and alter the use of their testimonies even after the interviews were completed.

1.4.5 Research Limitations

A significant limitation of this research was the difficulty in recruiting interview participants, exacerbated by the closure of NEDIS. This organization had been a crucial resource for data collection. Following its dissolution, its data was transferred to a private institution for proper disposal, leading to the loss of key contacts. As a result, the study relied primarily on interviews with individuals from my network, as well as their friends and family. This reliance underscored a broader challenge in establishing trust within the community.

As a white researcher not directly connected to the community and a non-native Spanish speaker, I faced challenges gaining participants' trust and confidence. However, the preexisting relationships within my network helped mitigate these issues and enriched the depth of the conversations. While the scope of participant recruitment was limited, the quality and depth of the insights gathered were enhanced by these personal connections.

I chose to write this thesis in English to ensure its accessibility to a broad audience—locally, nationally, and internationally—thereby increasing its potential impact. Although the interviews were conducted in Spanish to engage with participants effectively, as a non-native speaker, I acknowledge that my use of the language may have influenced the nuances and depth of these discussions. Additionally, as someone who is neither Latina nor an immigrant, my background may have shaped the dynamics of these interactions. Recognizing these factors is essential for contextualizing the study and acknowledging my potential limitations as a researcher.

1.5 Conclusion

Building upon the theoretical framework and methodology established in Chapter 1, where social integration, integration from below, and cultural pluralism were explored through a migrant-centric lens, and the study's limitations and ethical considerations were addressed, Chapter 2 presents the first set of research findings. This chapter presents a detailed examination of interviews conducted with migrants, offering a nuanced understanding of the sociocultural factors that influence their experiences of social integration. These firsthand accounts bridge the theoretical concepts discussed earlier with the lived realities of the migrant community, offering valuable insights into the dynamics and complexities of social integration. Chapter 2 explores how the Guatemalan migrant population in Dutchess County defines social integration and examines their interactions with the broader host society. Further findings will be explored in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2: Narratives of Belonging: The Sociocultural Factors that Influence Social Integration

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the social integration experiences of Guatemalan migrants who arrived in Dutchess County, New York, between 2018 and 2024, focusing on the sociocultural factors that influence their integration. It examines the challenges and opportunities migrants face as they adapt to life in a new environment, highlighting how broader sociocultural structures shape these experiences. Through this exploration of lived experiences, this chapter aims to deepen our understanding of the sociocultural mechanisms that facilitate or hinder social integration in rural communities.

This analysis draws on the theoretical frameworks of social integration, integration from below, and cultural pluralism to examine how Guatemalan migrants navigate their identities and relationships within the host community. Social integration provides a comprehensive understanding of how migrants engage with social networks and cultural expectations. Integration from below emphasizes the active role migrants play in shaping their own integration experiences. Cultural pluralism offers insights into how they maintain ties to their cultural heritage while adapting to a new social environment. By linking empirical findings with these theoretical perspectives, this chapter bridges the gap between abstract theories and the lived realities of the Guatemalan migrant community.

This research employs a migrant-centered methodology, prioritizing the voices and perspectives of Guatemalan migrants. The study is based on ten in-depth interviews with five primary participants, conducted in two rounds: one in the summer of 2024 and another in January 2025. These interviews address key aspects of migration and social integration,

including personal experiences with cultural preservation and interactions with the host community, which this chapter explores. Additionally, they examine experiences with institutional structures, which are discussed in Chapter 3. The methodological design enables a nuanced understanding of the integration process, capturing migrants' perspectives from a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach.

A key challenge in this research was gaining access to interviewees, as there was no institutional support or formal networks for recruitment. To address this challenge, I reached participants through personal relationships, which were crucial in building trust. This reliance on informal networks reflects the broader experience of many Guatemalan migrants, who often navigate their integration without the guidance of institutions. Although the number of interviewees was limited, these personal connections facilitated deeper and more meaningful conversations, providing valuable insights into broader trends within the Guatemalan migrant community in Dutchess County.

To understand social integration from the migrants' perspective, examining how they define the concept in their own words is essential. During the second round of interviews, participants offered thoughtful reflections on what integration means to them, revealing a shared desire to participate meaningfully in their new communities. Ivan, a participant in the second round of interviews, described integration simply as "doing our best to get along with everyone"[1] (personal communication, January 2025). Lucía, a participant in the second round of interviews, expressed the pressure to adapt completely to the host culture, stating, "Well, I think it's like there are different cultures, right, like sometimes one feels like one has to, no matter what,

_____

[1] "Así como llevarse bien con todos, hacer nuestro mejor esfuerzo para llevarnos bien con todos."

whatever it takes, adapt to everything here"[2] (personal communication, January 2025). Isobel

offered the most comprehensive reflection, framing integration as a moral and emotional process

grounded in mutual respect and empathy:

> Social integration is the process through which a migrant person integrates into a
>
> new circle and context. To have good social harmony within the community that you
>
> are now establishing yourself in. To be a good person in the first place, respect,
>
> respect towards other people, to listen to their experiences, so that they also respect
>
> your person, and you always respect others, to be able to have a good coexistence.
>
> To validate other people's emotions to be able to have, well, a peaceful coexistence
>
> among everyone.[3] (personal communication, January 2025)

Isobel's statements indicate a vision of integration rooted not in assimilation or conformity

but shared humanity. Her definition reflects the core values of migrant-centered and

integration-from-below approaches by emphasizing coexistence, mutual recognition, and

emotional validation. These responses collectively challenge top-down narratives of

integration as a unidirectional process, instead highlighting its relational and negotiated

nature. The broader message offered in these definitions will re-emerge throughout the

study, particularly in Chapter 3, where I explore how policy realities might more

accurately embody these lived experiences.

---

[2]"Como que hay este diferentes culturas, no como que hay veces que uno siente como que uno tiene que sea como sea, lo que cueste acoplarse a todo lo de aquí o no sé si es eso."

[3]"Integración social es el proceso que una persona migrante lleva para poder.. bueno, integrarse dentro del círculo nuevo, en nuevos contextos.Tener una buena armonía social dentro de la comunidad de la que ahora te estás estableciendo. Ser una buena persona también en primer lugar, el respeto.. el respeto hacia las demás personas, escuchar sus vivencias, que respeten también a tu persona y respetar tú siempre a los demás para poder tener una buena convivencia.Validar las emociones ajenas para poder tener, pues una convivencia pacífica entre todos."

This study contributes to migration scholarship by bringing attention to the experiences of Guatemalan migrants in a rural U.S. setting—a context that remains under-examined. The findings shed light on how sociocultural factors, including language, social networks, and cultural traditions, intersect with institutional structures, encompassing employment, education, and access to healthcare, to shape the integration process. By focusing on the lived realities of migrants, this chapter begins to unpack these dynamics from the ground up. Chapter 2 presents the first set of findings from the interviews, offering an in-depth exploration of how Guatemalan migrants navigate and understand the sociocultural factors that influence their process of social integration.

By grounding this chapter in the voices and perspectives of Guatemalan migrants, the analysis foregrounds the social dimensions of integration as experienced from the perspective of those at the bottom. Rather than approaching integration as a static outcome, this chapter traces it as a lived, ongoing process shaped by both individual agency and structural conditions. The following section begins with an overview of recent demographic shifts in Dutchess County between 2018 and 2024, offering essential context for understanding the broader landscape in which these social integration experiences unfold.

2.2 Demographic Shifts in Dutchess County (2018-2024)

Between 2018 and 2024, Dutchess County, New York, witnessed significant demographic shifts as Guatemalan migrants increasingly established themselves within the region. According to Evelyn Garzetta, a representative of NEDIS, this trend emerged partly in response to the forced displacement of migrant populations from New York City to rural areas— a strategy that contributed to the formation of a growing Guatemalan enclave in the county (E. Garzetta, personal communication, 2023). Spanning 825 square miles and home to

approximately 300,000 residents, Dutchess County has become an unexpected yet vital hub for this Central American migrant community, tracing its roots back to the arrival of migrant caravans in 2018.

Figure 2

Map of Dutchess County, New York

Note. From *Encyclopædia Britannica*, ©1998 EB, Inc. Retrieved from

https://www.britannica.com/place/Dutchess

The increasing presence of Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County reflects broader national migration trends. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2023), the Guatemalan population in the United States surpassed one million for the first time in 2020, reaching 1.7 million, a rise of 625,348 individuals since the 2010 Census. New York State now hosts the third-largest Guatemalan population in the country, following California and Florida. Locally, demographic data underscore a growing Hispanic and foreign-born presence within Dutchess County. In 2021, 9.8% of the county's residents (approximately 12,100 individuals) identified as Hispanic, while 8.8% (about 10,700 individuals) were foreign-born. Among them, 755 individuals were Guatemalan-born, accounting for roughly 7% of the county's total immigrant

population. Despite appearing small, this figure reflects one of the fastest-growing migrant

communities in the region, second only to the more established Mexican population, which

numbers approximately 940 residents (Data USA, n.d.-c). This notable demographic shift

between 2018 and 2024 marks a significant transformation in the county's migration landscape.

Figure 3

Map of Dutchess County, New York
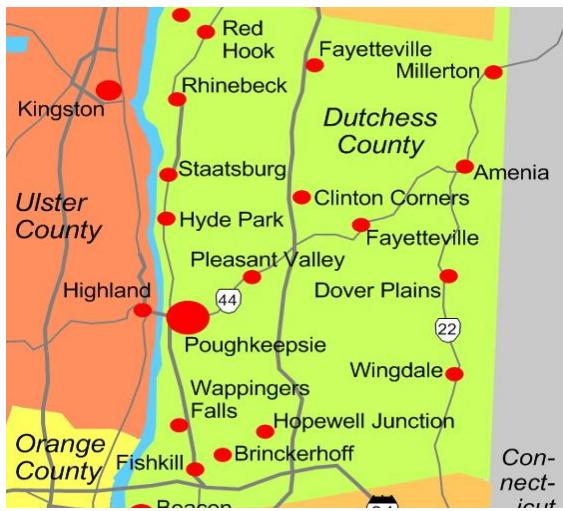
Note. Adapted from Dutchess County [Map], by Daderot, 2006, Wikimedia Commons. In the

public domain. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dutchess_County.jpg

A distinctive feature of Guatemalan migration to Dutchess County is its concentration in

three primary towns: Amenia, Millerton, and Dover Plains. According to 2020 Census data, 21%

of Amenia's population (approximately 164 individuals) identified as Hispanic, with 12.6% (98

individuals) being foreign-born (Data USA, n.d.-a). In Dover Plains, 14% of residents (about

180) identified as Hispanic, and 19.6% (252 individuals) were foreign-born (Data USA, n.d.-b).

Millerton exhibits a similar trend, with 14% (126 people) identifying as Hispanic and 16.1%

(140 individuals) as foreign-born (Data USA, n.d.-d). While exact numbers of Guatemalan

migrants are difficult to determine from official statistics, qualitative accounts and local

observations indicate a robust and steadily growing Guatemalan community in these towns.

Accurately capturing the size and characteristics of the Guatemalan migrant population in Dutchess County remains a challenge. Migrant communities, especially those that include asylum seekers or individuals with irregular legal status, are often hesitant to participate in official surveys such as the U.S. Census. Language barriers further complicate data collection, as many Guatemalan migrants in the region are native speakers of Indigenous languages such as K'iche', with limited proficiency in either Spanish or English. As a result, racial and ethnic categories like "Hispanic White" and "Hispanic Non-White"—terms rooted in U.S.-centric classifications—often fail to reflect how these migrants identify themselves, contributing to underrepresentation in official statistics. These structural limitations make it difficult to fully account for the scale and complexity of Guatemalan migration to Dutchess County through quantitative data alone.

In addition to the difficulty of measurement, the nature of Guatemalan migration to the region has undergone significant changes. While initial waves were primarily shaped by federal and state policy changes, such as the displacement of migrants from New York City to rural areas, family reunification has increasingly driven recent trends. According to Evelyn Garzetta, a NEDIS representative, extended family ties have played a central role in attracting new migrants and fostering a close-knit community (E. Garzetta, personal communication, October 2023). Semi-structured interviews with Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County, conducted during the fall of 2020 and spring of 2021, revealed that many find the region reminiscent of their rural, mountainous hometowns in Guatemala. Employment opportunities in agriculture, landscaping, gardening, and other forms of manual labor—occupations deeply familiar to many migrants— further reinforce feelings of familiarity and a sense of belonging.

Collectively, these patterns suggest that the emergence of a Guatemalan migrant

community in Dutchess County between 2018 and 2024 marks a significant demographic transformation. Though difficult to quantify, qualitative evidence strongly indicates that this population will continue to grow, gradually reshaping the county's social and cultural landscape.

2.3 Introduction to Participants

The following section centers the voices of five Guatemalan migrants, each over the age of 18, who migrated to Dutchess County, New York, at different points between 2018 and 2024. Although their migration paths differ, they share overlapping struggles in adjusting to life in a new country, including confronting language barriers, adapting to unfamiliar cultural norms, and navigating complex institutional systems. Their narratives reflect a shared determination to integrate, as demonstrated through efforts to learn English, forge social ties, and contribute to their communities. They also express a steadfast commitment to maintaining their Guatemalan identity. For confidentiality, all names used are pseudonyms.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonyms	Gender	Age	Place of Origin	Arrival Year	Current Residence	Employment
Lucía	Female	27	Chiquimula, Guatemala	2019	Amenia, NY	House Cleaner
Rosa	Female	21	Petén, Guatemala	2019	Amenia, NY	Grocery Store
Fernanda	Female	21	Petén, Guatemala	2021	Amenia, NY	Grocery Store
Ivan	Male	18	Petén, Guatemala	2021	Millerton, NY	Factory
Isobel	Female	26	Santa Cruz del Chol, Baja Verapaz, Guatemala	2024	Millerton, NY	Nanny

Note. Information collected from participant interviews conducted between 2024 and 2025.

Fernanda, 21, grew up in Petén, Guatemala, speaks K'iche at home and became fluent in Spanish. She studied Early Childhood Education and graduated from her local *colegio* before deciding to migrate to the United States. While many of her relatives had already moved there, including aunts who had lived in the U.S. for about fifteen years, she had never met other family members on her father's side. She originally planned to reunite with an uncle, but he was deported before she arrived. Traveling alone, she was robbed in northern Mexico, an experience she describes as the most challenging part of the journey. After crossing into the U.S. through El Paso, Texas, she was detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for nine days before being flown to New York. Fernanda's decision to leave Guatemala was driven by financial struggles—her family's business was failing during the pandemic, and her mother's illness prevented her from working. Having grown up with the responsibility of supporting her mother after her father left when she was young, she chose to migrate, hoping to build a more stable future. Her extended family lent her money for the journey, understanding the sacrifices she was making. Fernanda eventually settled in Amenia, New York, where she now shares an apartment with a Guatemalan roommate and works two jobs: one at a factory and another at a grocery store (personal communication, July 2024).

Figure 3

Landscape in the Petén region of Guatemala.
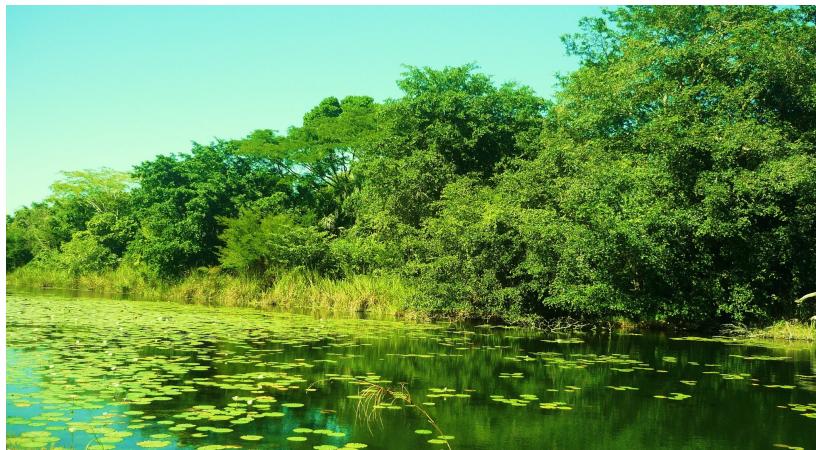
Note. From LOS_PETENCAMP.JPG, by jvcaravantes, 2006, Wikimedia Commons. Licensed

under CC BY 2.0. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:LOS_PETENCAMP.JPG

Ivan, 18, grew up in a rural *aldea* in Petén, Guatemala, speaks K'iche with his family and

learned Spanish in school. He migrated alone in 2021 at the age of 14, leaving behind what he

describes as a simple life centered around school and home. Ivan's journey was arduous,

especially in Mexico, which he recalls as the most challenging part of the trip. After crossing the

Rio Grande, he was detained by U.S. Customs and Border Protection and held in a facility in El

Paso for nine days before being sent to New York to join his family. Now living in Millerton,

New York, he shares a home with his uncle, father, and brother-in-law, though much of his

immediate family remains in Guatemala. Other relatives live in Maryland and Philadelphia, but

he has limited contact with them. Ivan works at a factory (personal communication, July 2024).

Rosa, 21, left Petén, Guatemala, in 2019 with her father, while her mother and younger

sisters stayed behind. She settled in Amenia, New York, where she now lives independently but

remains in close contact with her father, who resides in a nearby town. Rosa speaks both K'iche'

and Spanish and is trying to learn English. Upon arriving, she enrolled in the local high school

but left early to start working. Rosa now has a part-time job at a nearby grocery market.

Figure 4

Nature scene near Volcán Ipala in Chiquimula, Guatemala

Note. From *Volcán Ipala*, by TripAdvisor, n.d.

(https://www.tripadvisor.com.mx/Attraction_Review-g292005-d3929172-Reviews-Volcan_Ipala-Chiquimula_Chiquimula_Department.html). © TripAdvisor.

Lucía, 27, left Chiquimula, Guatemala, in 2019 with her toddler, fleeing violence near her home. She took a bus to Mexico and, like many others, crossed into the U.S. through the Rio Grande, where immigration authorities eventually detained her. After spending time in detention, she was released and traveled to New York to reunite with her husband, who had migrated separately before her. Lucía's mother and siblings followed shortly after, settling in a nearby county. She now lives in Amenia with her husband and two daughters—one of whom was born in the U.S. Lucía works as a house cleaner and has built a loyal clientele among local families (personal communication, January 2025).

Figure 5

Photograph of the town and surrounding landscape in Santa Cruz el Chol, Baja Verapaz, Guatemala

Note. From *Santa Cruz el Chol* (n.d.), by GuateGT. https://guategt.com/santa-cruz-el-chol/. © GuateGT.

Isobel, 26, was born in Santa Cruz del Chol, Baja Verapaz, Guatemala, but spent several years living in Petén before moving to Guatemala City. She studied journalism and worked in the banking sector, as well as in her family's textile business, before deciding to leave. Although financial reasons played a role in her migration, her choice was primarily driven by emotional factors. With the help of a *coyote*, she made her way through Mexico in early 2024 and entered the U.S. through San Diego before flying to New York. At first, she stayed with her aunt in Dover and worked night shifts at a deli with an attached bar. Later, Isobel took jobs with a cleaning business and as a nanny, which allowed for a more stable routine. Her parents and siblings remained in Guatemala, along with her dog, whom she missed dearly. Isobel has stayed connected to her culture through food and the broader Latinx community in New York, but does not see herself settling in the U.S. long-term. Isobel's goal is to save enough money to build a house on the land she owns in Guatemala and eventually return to it. Currently, she works as a

nanny for a wealthy family in Copake and lives in Millerton (personal communication, January 2025).

2.4 Introduction to the Findings

This section examines how specific sociocultural factors illuminate the broader concepts of social integration discussed in Chapter 1, through the lived experiences of five Guatemalan migrants in rural Dutchess County between 2018 and 2024. Social integration is shaped by various sociocultural elements, with key factors such as cultural preservation and language learning playing a significant role in this process.

Beyond individual efforts, community-driven processes deeply influence social integration, exemplifying the concept of social integration from below. Mutual aid networks within the Guatemalan diaspora provide essential support for housing, employment, and emotional well-being, fostering trust and resilience within both migrant and host communities. Open-mindedness and inclusivity among both long-standing residents and newcomers are central to overcoming challenges and creating a more welcoming environment.

Cultural pluralism plays a crucial role in facilitating integration by enabling migrants to maintain their cultural identities while engaging with broader society. Sports like soccer and food serve as avenues for cultural exchange, while religion offers emotional and moral support. Celebrations such as Guatemalan Independence Day provide public expressions of heritage, expanding opportunity for connection between the migrant community and the host society. These sociocultural factors not only sustain Guatemalan identity but also shape how migrants integrate into their new environment. One of the most crucial elements in this process is language, which influences both the personal and collective dimensions of integration.

2.5 From Barriers to Bridges: The Challenges and Possibilities of Social Integration Through Language Acquisition

Language barrier emerged as a substantial challenge to social integration for all interviewees, affecting their social interactions and overall adaptation to life in a new country. This barrier often fosters feelings of timidness and, in some cases, embarrassment, making the already difficult task of learning a new language even more daunting. The discomfort of speaking a foreign language can lead to a sense of isolation and undermine the motivation to learn, despite its critical role in the integration process. However, overcoming this obstacle is essential for achieving successful social integration. During my interview with Isobel, she emphasized that

> a pretty complicated barrier is the language. Because if you don't come with at least a basic knowledge of English... like me, I didn't have much knowledge of English; it was very, very basic. So, it was not something I could speak.[4] (personal communication, January 2024)

Isobel explained that it becomes much more challenging to interact with the host community without that foundational knowledge. She described her initial struggles, noting that while her first job in a Latino bar with a primarily Spanish-speaking clientele did not pose a problem, her subsequent position as a babysitter for an American family presented her with a significant challenge. She explained her boss as "totally American. [She doesn't] know Spanish. So, it's quite a big challenge and sometimes you feel a bit embarrassed with the language, but it's

---

[4]"Claro, estoy pensando, bueno, una barrera bastante complicada. Uno de los mayores desafíos acá es el idioma. Sí, porque si no vienes comienzo por lo menos 1 inglés básico."

something you have to study and not be embarrassed about"[5] (personal communication, January 2024). These feelings of embarrassment can be a major impediment to learning; however, they can be undercut by interest from the other side. In other words, an English speaker showing interest in the Spanish language. In Isobel's case, she noted that it

> feels nice when an American person speaks to you in Spanish. It's very comforting to know that they acknowledge you, try to include you, and make the effort. After all, they are in their own country, and theoretically, they wouldn't have to learn it since they are at home.[6] (personal communication, January 2024)

An English speaker showing genuine curiosity and effort in learning Spanish can transform a language barrier into an opportunity for connection. This interest not only makes communication more accessible but also affirms the value of the migrant's native language, conveying respect for their culture and identity. Such engagement helps counter the alienation often felt by non-native speakers and reinforces migrants' dignity during the integration process.

In line with the IOM's definition of social integration as "a process of mutual adaptation between the host society and migrants" (IOM, 2006), integration is inherently a two-way process. It requires both migrants and host communities to make efforts toward mutual understanding. When the host community takes steps to learn and use the migrant's language, it strengthens the migrant's sense of belonging and promotes a more inclusive, respectful environment.

---

[5]"Ella es totalmente americana. No conocen el español. Si entonces es como un desafío bastante grande y a veces pasas como que penas con el idioma, no, pero es algo que uno tiene que ponerse a estudiarlo y no tener vergüenza."

[6]"Se siente muy bonito cuando una persona americana gringa te habla en español, eso se siente bastante reconfortante saber que te toman en cuenta y que tratan de incluirte y que ellos están haciendo el esfuerzo porque básicamente ellos están en su ellos, no teóricamente no tendrían por qué estar aprendiendo si ellos son de casa."

Isobel also mentioned the importance of finding people you feel comfortable with to practice English when you first learn, saying "[it needs to be with] someone you also feel comfortable with. Because if not, you can't do anything. [For me] talking to the baby [I nanny for], it's like... how can you be embarrassed talking to a baby?"[7] (personal communication, January 2024). Thus, finding safe and supportive people to practice with is crucial to overcoming the initial barriers of language learning. It not only eases the emotional discomfort of speaking a new language but also accelerates the language acquisition process by allowing for a low-stakes environment in which mistakes are tolerated and learning can occur more naturally.

This concept of comfortable spaces for language practice can be extended to social integration more broadly. Native-born individuals in the host community can play an essential role in helping migrants learn the local language, whether through informal interactions or more structured support. This dynamic can be a powerful opportunity for social integration, as it fosters connections between migrants and the host community. By offering help and showing patience, native-born individuals contribute to bridging the communication gap and facilitating the migrants' adaptation process. It also provides an opportunity for cross-cultural dialogue, as migrants teach their native languages and cultures in return, creating a two-way exchange that enriches both groups. In this way, language is not just a tool for communication, but a means to build lasting connections, foster mutual understanding, and cultivate a shared sense of belonging within the community.

Lucía's experience underscores both points as well. She mentioned:

For me, it has been difficult. I think for about two years, I wouldn't even go to the store; only my husband would go because I did not know how to speak English, and it was

_____

[7]"Es importante que sea alguien con quien te sientas cómoda también.¿Cómo vas a tener pena platicando con el bebé? Entonces sí, porque ya es como que vergüenza vas a tener platicando."

mostly the fear that I put on myself. That they will talk to you and you will not

understand.[8] (personal communication, July 2024)

However, she shared with me that after a few years, and after fostering close friendships and

professional relationships with native English speakers, she gained the confidence to start

practicing speaking English with people she knew would not judge her but would help facilitate

her learning process. This process illustrates how mutual interest and comfort in language

learning create the foundation for social integration. When immigrants and native-born

Americans engage in each other's languages, they foster trust, reduce social isolation, and

encourage meaningful interactions. The willingness to learn and support one another

linguistically not only facilitates communication but also deepens social bonds, making

integration a more natural and reciprocal experience.

Ivan echoed this sentiment, stating that language is his most significant barrier to social

integration. He shares that "people are more challenging to communicate with if they do not

speak the same language, obviously"[9] (personal communication, January 2025). However, he

also pointed out the positive impact of encountering people who are open to learning Spanish or

who already possess some knowledge of the language:

There are many who do not speak Spanish, but they also make an effort to speak, and I

make the effort to communicate with people who do not speak Spanish, and there is that

---

[8]"Entonces para mí sí ha sido difícil yo pasé creo como dos años creo que yo era no iba ni a la tienda, solo mi esposo iba a comprar porque no sé más es como el miedo desde uno se pone ese que le vayan a hablar a uno y no va a entender.
[9]"Es más duro comunicarse con alguien si no hablan el mismo idioma, obviamente."

bond of helping each other and that is how we are. It is a mutual effort, so I like that.[10]

(personal communication, January 2025)

This mutual effort fosters a sense of connection and understanding, alleviating the anxieties associated with language barriers and promoting integration through a shared sense of responsibility. It fosters a sense of community and shared experience, making the process of learning and adapting less intimidating and one-sided.

Isobel, Lucía, and Ivan's experiences highlight the feelings of vulnerability and self-consciousness that can arise when attempting to communicate in a language one is still learning as well as the importance of mutual interest in language acquisition and exchange, feeling comfortable and safe, and fostering close personal relationships with English speakers to facilitate the process of language acquisition.

Overcoming the language barrier should be a bidirectional and mutual process, with the local community equally committed to accommodating the Spanish-speaking population. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), 15.7% of the county's population speaks Spanish at home, representing approximately 46,652 individuals who use Spanish in daily family life. This significant number underscores the need for broader use of Spanish among local institutions and long-term English-speaking residents. Additionally, this figure does not account for the many bilingual and multilingual individuals who do not speak Spanish at home, nor for English speakers who have a strong proficiency in Spanish. Thus, the total number of Spanish speakers in the county is likely much higher than the census suggests.

However, even with this shared, bidirectional effort, and the increasing number of

---

[10]"Y también porque hay muchos que no hablan español, pero también hacen el esfuerzo de hablar y nosotros, pues bueno, por ejemplo, yo hago el esfuerzo de comunicarse con la gente que no habla español y sí ahí como ese vínculo de ayudarnos mutuamente y así estamos."

Spanish speakers in the area, the pressure to adapt can be immense, as Lucía's experience reveals: "you are in a country where you *have* to speak English, so what did you come here for [if you are not going to learn]?"[11] (personal communication, July 2024). This combination of internal and external pressure, deeply internalized, can further complicate the language learning process, adding another layer of stress and challenge to the already complex process of social integration. Additionally, this feeling of pressure is not necessarily shared by the local English-speaking population, who largely do not view learning Spanish as necessary. This pressure, as described by migrants, begs the question of how mutual and bidirectional this process of social integration is in practice on a larger scale.

Learning a new language is just one of the many sociocultural factors that shape the process of social integration. Beyond language, informal community support networks are crucial in facilitating a migrant's adaptation to their new environment. The following section explores the interviewees' firsthand experiences with these networks, examining how mutual aid, cultural solidarity, and collective resources have significantly impacted their integration and overall well-being in Dutchess County.

2.6 Rooted in Community: How Migrants Shape and Sustain Social Integration from Below through Mutual Aid and Informal Community Support Networks

The Guatemalan migrant community in Dutchess County exemplifies the power of mutual aid and informal networks in the process of social integration. Faced with linguistic barriers, economic hardships, and cultural adjustment, many migrants turn to one another for support, demonstrating how integration is often forged from below, rather than imposed by

---

[11]"¿No, pero tú estás en un país donde se habla, se tiene que hablar inglés, me dijo entonces qué viniste a hacer acá?"

institutions. As Isobel describes, "I have a connection with my people from Guatemala"[12] (personal communication, January 2025). This shared heritage creates an immediate sense of belonging, a critical foundation for navigating migration challenges. The bonds of solidarity manifest in many ways: through sharing traditions, celebrations, and the practical guidance offered to new arrivals who might otherwise feel lost.

Fernanda's experience underscores the depth of this communal support system. She is deeply committed to helping others, stating, "If you are sinking, I will pull you out, or if you want, I will sink with you, but not let you sink and fall [alone]"[13] (personal communication, July 2024). Her words capture the resilience and interdependence within the migrant community. However, her experience also illustrates that even those who prioritize their mental health cannot always overcome difficulties with determination alone. She candidly shares her struggles with anxiety and depression, acknowledging the profound and often debilitating effects they can have. While she has found solace in the support of others, noting that she "found good people along [her] way" (personal communication, July 2024), her story highlights the importance of open conversations about mental health and the urgent need for accessible community resources.

This grassroots support aligns with Vidal and Roselló's (2009) argument that integration from below is rooted in collective action and solidarity (p. 2). It also echoes their assertion that "if the immigrants do not participate in the debate, it will remain simple, and things will get worse" (p. 7). Information sharing is essential, whether it pertains to mental health resources, job opportunities, housing, or legal assistance, as it creates an informal yet vital safety net for newcomers. This information sharing is crucial for individuals who arrive alone—such as

---

[12]"Tengo la conexión con mi gente de Guatemala y con la cultura, con la agricultura."
[13]"No, yo me considero una persona como de motivar, de motivar y si tú te estás hundiendo yo te saco de ahí o si quieres me hundo contigo, pero no de que tú te hundas y te caigas, no, es ayudar."

Fernanda—and must rebuild a sense of community from the ground up.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the necessity of these informal networks became even more apparent. For example, Northeast Dutchess Mutual Aid (NEDMA), a grassroots initiative based in Millbrook, played a crucial role in supporting immigrants who faced job loss, financial hardship, and food insecurity. Its bilingual efforts ensured accessibility for both English and Spanish speakers, demonstrating how community-driven initiatives can bridge systemic gaps. NEDMA's online platform enabled residents to request or offer help by completing forms available in both languages, reflecting a deliberate commitment to inclusivity and immediacy in crisis response (NEDMA, n.d.). A key component of NEDMA's work was its collaboration with La Mesa, a food distribution center that evolved from Grace Immigrant Outreach into NEDIS. Before its closure, NEDIS organized a weekly food distribution in Dover, specifically serving the local Guatemalan migrant population. Although NEDIS no longer operates, former volunteers and staff—many of whom are members of the immigrant community—have continued to sustain this vital resource independently. Out of concern for migrant safety, the distribution's time and location are intentionally kept discreet and shared only through trusted channels. In parallel, NEDMA worked closely with the North East Community Center to coordinate contact-free food pantry deliveries, transportation to medical appointments, and pharmacy runs. These services were particularly critical to undocumented or elderly immigrants in the area during a time when going out in public posed serious physical health risks (Dutchess County Government, 2020). These community efforts do more than provide material aid; they reinforce a sense of solidarity and belonging within Dutchess County. The importance of these initiatives is reflected in the work of Solé et al. (2002), who argue that "cultural integration does not have to be understood unilaterally in terms of adopting foreign habits... but rather as the

result of shaping a shared collective identity" (p. 23) [translated]. What emerges is a locally rooted ecosystem of mutual care, one that prioritizes relational inclusion over bureaucratic eligibility.

Beyond food security, the need for childcare and family support has also catalyzed the emergence of new grassroots initiatives. One example is *Mommysotas*, a bilingual Instagram and WhatsApp group co-founded by a Guatemalan migrant mother and a bilingual U.S.-born organizer. Still in its early stages, Mommysotas reflects a growing effort to create a sustainable support network for migrant mothers in the Hudson Valley. Though nascent, it facilitates the informal sharing of childcare responsibilities, emotional support, and social activities such as language exchange meetups. Open to both immigrants and non-immigrants, it exemplifies what Bermúdez-Urbina (2015) describes as the potential of "intercultural education [to] allow for the articulation of processes from above and below" (p. 156), thereby bridging gaps left by formal institutions through community-driven care. Additionally, research participant and Mommysota member Fernanda envisions the eventual development of a more established daycare cooperative specifically for single migrant mothers, recognizing that reliable childcare is essential not only for economic survival but also for the well-being of the community (personal communication, July 2024). Fernanda's vision echoes the argument by Vidal and Roselló (2009) that "financing community and regional projects from below" (p. 6) becomes imperative when institutional responses are lacking.

WhatsApp has become an indispensable tool for integration, reinforcing the role of informal networks in migrant communities. Encrypted messaging enables immigrants to share vital information about employment, housing, and immigration policies, ensuring community members remain informed and connected. This usage of the app supports Vidal and Roselló's

(2009) assertion that "integration cannot wait for governments to decide; it must rise from below to address pressing societal issues" (p. 2). The reliance on encrypted and private digital communication further demonstrates how grassroots integration adapts to contemporary needs, making support networks safer, accessible, and responsive.

In Red Hook, Brooklyn, the mutual aid group Red Hook Mutual Aid (RHMA) has adopted WhatsApp as a central mechanism to support undocumented migrants. Rather than implementing a more hierarchical "buddy system," RHMA created a WhatsApp group for Spanish-speaking residents, enabling individuals to request items such as strollers, share resources, and disseminate urgent information (Kuchta, 2024). As Louise Bauso, lead organizer of RHMA, explains, "It is a series of smaller groups based on language . . . moderators in all of the smaller language groups will translate the information into the native language for their group. So, it is sort of like a phone tree" (Kuchta, 2024). This decentralized structure enables the real-time translation and distribution of critical guidance, such as what to say when approached by authorities, ensuring rapid and culturally appropriate communication. By leveraging digital platforms rooted in local relationships, RHMA illustrates how migrant integration in New York City is increasingly facilitated through peer-led, multilingual, and tech-enabled networks. Such models are also utilized in rural New York.

Ultimately, integration from below is not just about survival but about empowerment. By fostering mutual aid, promoting cultural exchange, and addressing systemic inequalities, these informal networks ensure that migrants are not passive recipients of aid but active agents of change. The experiences of Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County illustrate the transformative potential of these efforts, reinforcing the idea that integration is most effective when it is shaped by those directly experiencing it.

These grassroots networks also lay the foundation for cultural exchange and community building as they empower Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County. While mutual aid and support systems help migrants navigate their new environment, cultural pluralism is pivotal in shaping their sense of belonging. The intersection of these two processes creates opportunities for migrants to maintain and celebrate their heritage while fostering connections with the broader community. Cultural expressions such as soccer, food, and religious practices are integral to this dynamic, offering shared spaces where integration can occur organically. Among these, soccer stands out as a powerful unifying force, one that brings together migrants and long-standing residents alike. Through shared passions and collective participation, these cultural elements create a more inclusive environment, thereby enhancing social integration and mutual understanding.

2.7 Living Between Worlds: Cultural Pluralism and the Reinvention of Home

2.7.1 Soccer and Kermés as Cultural Connectors

Soccer, or *fútbol*, holds a significant place in Guatemalan culture, and this passion often transcends geographical boundaries. For Guatemalan migrants in New York, soccer games and related community events become vital spaces for cultural preservation and connection to home. These gatherings recreate familiar traditions, fostering a sense of belonging within a new environment. The conservation of soccer culture in the new environment is a strong example of cultural pluralism in action. As Baglioni (1964) noted, cultural pluralism promotes the idea that cultural diversity is a valuable asset to the host society (p. 125). The town of Dover's support in facilitating this tradition through the weekly use of public town spaces during the warm weather months exemplifies this principle by acknowledging the cultural significance of these gatherings.

Figure 6

Summer soccer games in Dover Plains, New York

Note. Photograph taken by Isobel (personal communication, Summer 2024). Used with permission.

Similarly, *kermeses*, community fairs rooted in Guatemalan tradition, have emerged as another critical cultural practice for migrants seeking to preserve and share their heritage. Often organized around church groups or civic causes, a *kermés* features homemade food, music, games, and folkloric elements, transforming public or communal spaces into vibrant celebrations of national identity. In Guatemala, these events serve both social and fundraising purposes; however, for the diaspora, they carry added emotional weight. Events like the upcoming Kermés 2025 in Guatemala, which promises traditional dishes, live music, and children's games, mirror the types of gatherings that Guatemalan migrants recreate abroad (Argueta, 2025). Within the Hudson Valley, these fairs often occur alongside these weekly soccer matches or as stand-alone weekend events, offering migrants an opportunity to maintain cultural rituals while involving the broader community. Like soccer, the *kermés* provides a space where cultural pluralism takes

shape; where immigrants not only sustain their traditions but invite others to witness and appreciate them.

Both Isobel and Fernanda highlighted the significance of these events from different perspectives. Isobel notes,

I have more contact with the migrant community when there are soccer games in the summer because that is where I would go to eat or something like that. There is more typical food from a country with many Guatemalans…[14] (personal communication, January 2025)

Isobel recognized the games as a hub for community interaction and access to traditional foods, even if her involvement is limited. Isobel's seeming ambivalence aligns with the idea that cultural pluralism does not require complete participation from all members of a society but rather fosters spaces where cultural identity can be maintained and appreciated. Furthermore, she emphasized that such gatherings are much easier to organize in the summer due to warmer temperatures, highlighting a significant environmental contrast between Guatemala and New York. While community fútbol games could take place all year round in Guatemala's "eternal springtime," in New York, they are constrained by seasonal weather patterns, reinforcing the adjustments migrants must make while maintaining cultural traditions.

For Fernanda, the connection is more visceral. She painted a vivid picture of the *kermés* atmosphere, describing the scene:

They have their kermés at the games. So, every Sunday [in the summer] they do it here in Dover. Many people go. [It is] like a community event. Moreover, they sell food, which

---

[14]"Y, entonces tengo más contacto con la comunidad migrante cuando hay partidos de fútbol en verano porque era donde yo iba a comer o algo así. Hay más comida como que típica de un país que suma guatemaltecos."

is like they practice the same thing as in Guatemala. There are games, and at each little

spot, there is a food stand—juices, grilled meat, *empanadas*, French fries.[15] (personal

communication, July 2024)

This recreation of the kermés is a powerful link to home. Fernanda's description emphasizes the

authenticity of the food, particularly one vendor who

handles her food sales, puts on her outfit and apron, and fries the French fries on a grill,

but she also adds firewood to the flames and fries them there. And she fries her grilled

meat. For each portion she wants, she fries it that way. And she sells drinks. Very

traditional drinks, also made in Guatemala. She's maintaining her culture, both through

the food and in her dressing, as she would in Guatemala. How beautiful. It is wonderful.

When I saw her, I said, 'Oh, you are going to make me cry.' Because sometimes [when

you are there] you feel like you are in Guatemala.[16] (personal communication, July 2024)

This vendor's commitment to traditional cooking methods and attire evokes a powerful

emotional response, transporting Fernanda back to Guatemala through the familiar sights, smells,

and flavors of home. In a new and often disorienting environment, these sensory experiences

offer comfort, grounding her in a cultural continuity that migration has not erased. Rather than

signaling a break from the past, these moments illustrate how migrants actively shape a hybrid

cultural space that honors their heritage while embracing aspects of their new surroundings. In

---

[15]"Y hacer su kermés, le digo yo, a los partidos. Sí, bueno, cada domingo lo hacen aquí en Dover.Y venden, es como practican lo mismo con Guatemala, hay partidos, entonces venden en… en cada lugarcito hay un puesto de comida, de jugos, churrasco, empanadas, papas fritas."
[16]"Este, hace su venta de comida, ella se pone su vestimenta, su delantal, porque usamos delantal también. Pone su delantal y fríe sus papas fritas en una estufa, pero le echa leña a fuego y ahí lo va friendo. Y su churrasco lo va friendo. Cada porción que quiere ella lo va friendo así.Y vende las bebidas. Bebidas muy tradicionales también que se hacían en Guatemala, las vende. Ella está siguiendo su, practicando su cultura, pero en la gastronomía y vistiéndose como Guatemala también. Cuando la vi dije Ay, me vas a hacer llorar. Porque a veces estás como en Guatemala."

this context, integration is not about abandoning identity but finding ways for multiple cultural expressions to coexist meaningfully.

The shared experiences surrounding soccer and food, whether through active participation or simply enjoying the atmosphere, reinforce cultural identity and foster a deep sense of belonging for Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County. The presence of traditional Guatemalan food at these events plays a crucial role, not only as a comforting link to home but also as a vital element of community-building. These familiar flavors and aromas evoke memories of their homeland, offering comfort and continuity in an unfamiliar environment. In addition, this practice aligns with the principles of cultural pluralism, which emphasize that integration does not require cultural erasure. Instead, it fosters environments where diverse traditions are respected, preserved, and celebrated.

Cultural pluralism is particularly relevant when examining the experiences of Guatemalan migrants in rural Dutchess County, a predominantly white area. This theory promotes the coexistence and mutual respect of different cultural groups within a shared society. Baglioni (1964) noted that cultural pluralism challenges the dominant assimilationist narrative by asserting that migrants can maintain their cultural, linguistic, and social practices while actively contributing to their new community. The Guatemalan migrant community's participation in local soccer events and food fairs exemplifies this principle, as they create opportunities to showcase their heritage while engaging with the broader Dutchess County community.

Importantly, these cultural events were not only grassroots efforts but also acts of bottom-up mobilization. It was through the collective organization and advocacy of the migrant community that these events received town approval, showcasing how local communities can foster integration through active participation. By coming together to coordinate these activities,

migrants were able to preserve their cultural traditions and gain recognition and support from local institutions, thereby reinforcing their sense of belonging. This process of organizing, advocating, and participating reflects the true spirit of integration from below, where the community drives the process of acceptance and inclusion. By supporting such events, local institutions in Dutchess County can further enhance cultural pluralism, ensuring that integration is not about cultural loss but mutual enrichment. Soccer fields and town parks, transformed into venues of cultural expression, serve as tangible examples of how host societies can facilitate the integration of migrants. In doing so, they contribute to a more inclusive and pluralistic society that recognizes and embraces diversity as an asset rather than an obstacle. This reciprocal relationship strengthens the migrants' sense of belonging and the community's overall cohesion.

Building on the theme of cultural expression, traditional food plays a pivotal role in further strengthening the bonds within the Guatemalan migrant community in Dutchess County. The sharing and preparation of familiar foods not only serve as a comforting reminder of home but also act as a gateway for cross-cultural exchange. The following section explores how food traditions contribute to a culturally plural social integration process, providing both a sense of continuity for migrants and an opportunity for the broader community to engage with Guatemalan culture.

2.7.2 Flavors of Home: Food as a Symbol of Identity and Belonging

In addition to activities and events such as soccer games and kermeses, food plays a critical role in maintaining cultural ties to the homeland and fostering a sense of belonging in the new environment for Guatemalan migrants in rural New York. Traditional dishes serve as a tangible link to home, evoking memories of family and long-standing traditions. This connection to culinary heritage emerged as a significant theme throughout this study, manifesting in how

migrants preserve their food customs despite new challenges, the seasonal significance of certain dishes, and the deeply rooted relationship between food and agriculture. Additionally, food serves as a communal practice, a vibrant part of celebrations, and a ritual that anchors Guatemalan migrants to their cultural identity.

The theory of cultural pluralism offers a helpful framework for understanding how food functions as both a tool for integration and a means of cultural preservation. As Baglioni (1964, p. 125) emphasized, cultural pluralism fosters the coexistence of diverse cultural traditions within a shared society, rather than promoting assimilation. For Guatemalan migrants, food enables them to maintain an active connection to their heritage while engaging with the host society through community food events, informal networks, and local markets that cater to their needs.

Some barriers complicate migrants' ability to maintain certain food traditions and practices. A notable barrier is access to authentic ingredients. One of the significant challenges Guatemalan migrants face is the difficulty of finding specific ingredients. Grocery store options in rural New York often do not carry the same variety of fresh and traditional foods available in Guatemala. Isobel highlighted the frustration of running out of an ingredient and realizing that getting more would require a 45-minute round trip by car from Millerton to Dover Plains and back. She noted that a corner store with fresh produce in Guatemala was always just down the street, making meal preparation much more convenient (personal communication, January 2025). Lucía shares a similar challenge, stating that certain ingredients are only available in Ossining, where her mother and the rest of her family live, two counties and an hour and a half drive away from her town of Amenia, New York (personal communication, January 2025). The geographical spread of available stores presents a logistical challenge for maintaining culinary

traditions, making it harder to cook traditional dishes spontaneously.

Figure 7

Food Market in Guatemala

Notwithstanding these challenges, the desire for familiar ingredients, flavors, and dishes

is so strong that Fernanda dreams of opening a Guatemalan food establishment or juice bar,

despite dreading the amount of work involved (personal communication, July 2024). Her interest

in this business venture highlights the deep-seated yearning for authentic food among migrants

and a willingness and motivation to make it more accessible, allowing them to maintain their

customs and sense of home in their new environment. Fernanda's desire to create a space where

traditional Guatemalan foods are accessible reflects how migrants actively shape their integration

processes by fostering cultural spaces within their communities.

Certain traditional foods are not just about taste or preference but are deeply tied to

specific times of the year and celebrations. Fernanda describes the foods that mark the beginning

of fall: "We start in September—the *caldo Kak'ik*, the most traditional dish, *tamales*, *pochitos*, *empanadas*, *tostadas*, potatoes with chicken—eating *granizadas*, especially in the summer, having *granizada*, ice cream—oh, everything, everything"[17] (personal communication, July 2024).

Figure 8

Tostadas de Curtido at a Soccer Game in Dover Plains, New York

Note. Photograph taken by Isobel (personal communication, Summer 2024). Used with permission.

Guatemalan dishes (Figure 8) are deeply rooted in their seasonal traditions and have profound emotional significance for those far from home. Their preparation and sharing evoke memories tied to specific times of year, family gatherings, and communal celebrations. For migrants, maintaining these food practices is not simply an act of nostalgia; it is a way of

---

[17]"Partimos en septiembre, el caldo Ka'kik', el más tradicional, los tamales ponche, las empanadas, las tostadas, papas con pollo.Comer las granizadas, más en este verano, comer granizada, los helados, ay no, todo, todo."

preserving cultural rhythms amid unfamiliar surroundings. Rather than being left behind, these

traditions are carried across borders and adapted to new contexts, enabling migrants to remain

connected to their heritage while integrating into the social fabric of their new communities.

Figure 9

Tamales Guatemaltecos

Note. Photograph taken by Isobel (personal communication, 2024). Used with permission.

Tamales (Figure 9) are a special Guatemalan cuisine, especially as a celebratory and

communal dish during the Christmas season. Lucía described the process of making them,

highlighting the traditional techniques: "We make them in banana leaves. And they blend it,

cook it, and then season the chicken, and then place the cooked masa on the banana leaf"[18]

(personal communication, July 2024). This detailed process maintains a direct link to

Guatemalan traditions, especially during the holiday season, even when far from home. Food, in

this sense, becomes a marker of time and a way to recreate the rhythms of life in Guatemala,

helping migrants feel anchored even as they navigate their new environment, where seasons and

---

[18]"Y nosotros los hacemos en hoja de plátano.Y como que lo licuan, lo ponen a cocer y luego es
como condimentar también el pollo y ya le ponen a la hoja de plátano la masa cocida."

traditions have a different rhythm. This connection to traditional food aligns with the assertion of

cultural pluralism, which posits that maintaining cultural heritage does not conflict with

participation in a host society, but instead enriches the broader social fabric.

Additionally, for many Guatemalans, food is inextricably linked to agriculture and the

land. Fernanda described the practice of going to the *milpa tapiz*, or cornfield, to harvest crops

and search for *corozo*, a plant often used to conserve firewood when cooking: "They use *corozo*

to cook large or small meals, to save firewood and avoid having to go out and gather more"[19]

(personal communication, July 2024). This relationship between food, land, and resourcefulness

highlights how cooking is not just about sustenance but also about a way of life deeply

intertwined with nature. However, the difficulty in accessing these same natural resources in

New York intensifies the longing for home. The desire to preserve agricultural traditions among

Guatemalan migrants reflects a grassroots approach to integration that prioritizes cultural

sustainability and self-reliance.

Guatemala is rich in celebration and community life; food is central to its culture. Isobel

reminisced about this vibrancy, saying, "We celebrate everything. Absolutely everything, all the

time"[20] (personal communication, January 2025). Fernanda describes how Guatemala is always

filled with music, movement, color, and warmth, a stark contrast to the quieter, colder, darker,

greyer, and more reserved lifestyle of Dutchess County, New York. "There's always music

everywhere. People are always moving. There's a lot of kindness,"[21] she added, highlighting a

neighborly essence that she suggests rural New York lacks (personal communication, January

2025). Fernanda also emphasized the vibrance of everyday life in Guatemala, saying she missed:

---

[19]"Usan el corozo para hacer comida grande o pequeña, para no gastar la leña e ir a buscar leñas
también."
[20] "Sí, porque incluso allá allá todo celebran allá. Celebran absolutamente todo mucho."
[21]"Siempre hay música en todos lados, la gente siempre está en movimiento. Mucha amabilidad."

Waking up every morning, hearing the birds singing, washing corn—because we eat

tortillas—washing your corn, going to the mill, feeling that breeze, hearing the trucks, the

cars, the motorcycles passing by, hearing the cats, the dogs barking. When you're

walking, greeting people, if you're bored, visiting a neighbor, walking with your friends,

going to eat ice cream with your best friend, going for a walk with your siblings, going

out to sell, going to the field to play with your schoolmates.[22] (personal communication,

July 2024)

These descriptions evoke the warm, inviting, vibrant, and close-knit social fabric that

Guatemalan migrants often miss when adjusting to life in the U.S.

In summary, for Guatemalan migrants in rural New York, food is more than nourishment;

it is a lifeline to home, a way to preserve identity, and a practice that fosters community. Despite

the difficulties of finding ingredients and the challenges of geographical distance, the ritual of

cooking and the memories associated with traditional dishes remain powerful ties to Guatemala.

Whether through the preparation of tamales, the search for specific ingredients, or the sensory

memories of daily life back home, food remains a crucial bridge between past and present,

between the homeland and the new environment. Cultural pluralism provides an essential

framework for understanding this dynamic, showing that maintaining cultural traditions is not at

odds with integration but an integral part of it.

---

[22]"Levantarte cada mañana, escuchar los cantos de los pájaros, lavar maíz, porque nosotros
comemos tortilla, lavar tu maíz, ir al motor, sentir ese aire, escuchar pasar los camiones, los
carros, las motos, escuchar a los gatos, los perros cuando ladran, cuando vas caminando, saludar
a la gente si estás aburrida, ir a visitar al vecino, caminar con tus amigos, ir a comer helados con
tu mejor amiga, salir a caminar con tus hermanos, ir a vender, ir al campo a jugar con tus
compañeros de escuela."

2.7.3 Dancing Between Cultures: Celebrations, Traditions, and the Reinvention of Home

Similar to soccer and food, September 15th or Guatemalan Independence Day is a universal unifier for this community. Independence Day celebrations serve as a powerful focal point for community building. These events become vibrant expressions of cultural pride and shared heritage, fostering a strong sense of belonging within the diaspora. They provide a space where Guatemalans and other Latin American community members (who share the same Independence Day) can come together to celebrate, reconnect with their roots, and share their traditions (Figure 10). These celebrations are more than just festive occasions; they are vital for maintaining cultural continuity and strengthening community bonds. They offer a taste of home, a reminder of their cultural heritage, and an opportunity to share that culture with others. The celebrations often feature traditional music, dance, food, and attire, creating a sensory experience that evokes powerful emotions and memories. It is a time for families and friends to gather, share stories, and reinforce their shared identity.

Figure 10

A Guatemalan Dancer

Note. Adapted from a photo by Comité Aj Ralchoch – Sons of the Earth Committee (2024), Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/comiteajralchoch/photos. © Comité Aj Ralchoch. Used with permission.

These shared experiences create a sense of unity and collective identity, reinforcing connections within the Guatemalan community and with the broader Latin American population, as September 15th is a shared day of independence among several Latin American nations, including Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Mexican Independence Day is also celebrated on the 16th, just one day after. For that reason, September 15th marks the beginning of Hispanic Heritage Month in the U.S. This celebration in the neighboring city of Kingston, New York, is an opportunity not only for Guatemalans to gather and celebrate their culture and shared identity, but a chance to interact with and celebrate the other Latin American cultures and communities in the region (Figure 11).

Figure 11

A Patriotically Decorated Truck at the Kingston September 15th Celebration

Note. Adapted from a photo by Comité Aj Ralchoch – Sons of the Earth Committee (2024), Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/comiteajralchoch/photos. © Comité Aj Ralchoch. Used with permission.

These celebrations also offer an opportunity for cultural exchange with the local American population, although this exchange is not always as broad as some community members might hope. According to Ivan, "gringos don't participate"[23] (personal communication, January 2025). He suspects this lack of participation stems not from a lack of interest but rather from a feeling of intimidation or a fear of intruding on a cultural celebration that they perceive as belonging to another group. "I don't think that is true,"[24] (personal communication, January 2025). Ivan reflects, expressing his hope that more people from the wider community would

---

[23]"Veo que fui una vez al 15 de septiembre. Aquí están, y eran como más hispanohablantes que gringos. Sí, entonces, como realísticamente no creo que otras personas irían —o por lo menos no muchos estadounidenses. Es como que tal vez no lo entienden, o tal vez piensan que uno, como latino, está celebrando algo y ellos ya no serían parte de eso. Como que mal piensan que nosotros los rechazamos, pero no…"

[24]"No es la verdad."

attend. He believes that sharing these celebrations offers a meaningful opportunity for cultural exchange, allowing others to engage with the richness of Guatemalan culture in a direct and personal way. In Ivan's view, the low participation from non-Latinx residents is not due to a lack of interest, but rather a sense of hesitation; an uncertainty about whether it is appropriate to participate in traditions that are not theirs.

These celebrations primarily serve to strengthen bonds within the Guatemalan and broader Latin American communities, while also carrying the potential to bridge cultural divides. When embraced more widely, they can foster greater understanding, mutual respect, and appreciation for the diversity that defines a pluralistic society. While the potential for cross-cultural connection is apparent, the perceived social boundaries that deter participation highlight the need for more intentional outreach and inclusive practices to foster a truly shared community experience.

Similar to cultural celebrations that offer a space for connection, pride, and community expression, religion also plays a vital role in the social integration of Guatemalan migrants. Beyond its spiritual dimensions, faith serves as a source of emotional support, moral grounding, and collective belonging. In the absence of extended family or familiar institutions, religious practices and spaces become powerful anchors of identity and continuity, especially in times of uncertainty or hardship. The following section examines how religion and spirituality contribute to resilience, foster social connections, and offer a more profound sense of purpose within the migrant experience.

2.7.4 The Plurality of Religion and Spirituality in the Migrant Experience

Faith and spirituality play a significant role in the lives of many Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County, providing comfort, strength, and a sense of continuity as they navigate their

new environment. Religious belief and practice often serve as mechanisms of resilience, helping migrants to maintain ties to their homeland while integrating into their host society.

While individual expressions of faith vary, the common thread is the role of spirituality in shaping migrants' sense of self and community. Isobel, for instance, comes from an evangelical family and studied theology, yet she does not consider herself a regular churchgoer. For her, spirituality is a deeply personal experience: "I always tried to have that personal prayer communication. More of a spiritual thing. Now, it's more about gratitude than asking for things"[25] (personal communication, January 2025). This shift in her faith from petitioning to gratitude reflects a form of self-grounding that allows her to find peace in the challenges of migration. Despite not engaging with institutional religion, Isobel's spiritual practice serves as an anchor that links her past and present.

Fernanda, on the other hand, finds solace and connection through attending *culto* services with her Guatemalan roommate in Dover Plains. The evangelical church she attends, operating out of a repurposed first floor of a migrant apartment building, functions as a vital 'third space,' a place of belonging outside of work and home where migrants can gather, worship, and support one another (Figure 12). The *culto* is not only a spiritual refuge but also a cultural space where traditional Guatemalan hymns, prayers, and post-service communal meals reinforce a shared identity that bridges both the homeland and the host country.

---

[25]"No y ahora es como que es más agradecimiento que pedir y todo eso, entonces sí he tenido como que esa esa paz, sí ese estado."

Figure 12

Evangelical Worship in Dover Plains

Note. Photograph by the author (2024).

Experiencing this religious gathering firsthand revealed the profound power of faith-based spaces in fostering a sense of belonging. The warm welcome extended to all attendees, including outsiders, highlights the inclusive nature of this faith community. This welcoming atmosphere reflects how religion can serve as a pathway for social integration among Guatemalans and within the broader Dutchess County community. Indeed, Latin Americans rank among the most religious populations globally, with 82% of adults in Guatemala and Paraguay, and 78% in Costa Rica and Honduras, reporting that they pray daily (Pew Research Center, 2014). This widespread and consistent devotion underscores the centrality of faith in everyday life and the enduring cultural significance of spirituality for Guatemalan migrants.

Beyond grassroots worship spaces, institutional faith-based initiatives also shape the spiritual lives of Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County. Lucía, for instance, once attended the Episcopalian church in Millbrook when it hosted a monthly Spanish-language Mass, facilitated by NEDIS (personal communication, July 2024). The Mass provided not only a space for

spiritual practice but also a culturally resonant setting where Guatemalan migrants could worship in their native language. However, with the discontinuation of NEDIS's programming, the Spanish Mass also came to an end, creating yet another barrier to worship and community-building. This interruption highlights the crucial role of community organizations in promoting religious inclusion and preserving cultural identity within institutional settings. When these programs disappear, migrants lose not just access to faith communities but also critical avenues for cultural continuity and social integration.

Religion and spirituality, therefore, play a multifaceted and deeply integrative role in the migrant experience. Faith offers personal solace, nurtures collective identity, and creates structured environments where cultural expression is permitted and affirmed. These practices reflect the core tenets of cultural pluralism: rather than requiring assimilation into a singular religious culture, pluralism allows for the coexistence and mutual enrichment of diverse spiritual traditions. Whether through private devotion or participation in public worship, Guatemalan migrants demonstrate how faith can support a dual sense of belonging, anchored in their heritage while evolving within their new context. In this way, they craft a transnational religious identity that bridges, rather than divides, their worlds.

Moreover, the shared significance of Christianity and faith-based values among both migrant and non-migrant populations in Dutchess County creates powerful opportunities for intercultural connection. Initiatives like the now-defunct Spanish Mass and the ongoing evangelical *cultos* in Dover Plains serve as organic meeting points, where spiritual common ground fosters social trust and mutual understanding. The hospitality extended to newcomers at these gatherings further illustrates how religious spaces can become catalysts for inclusion. These encounters embody the principles of cultural pluralism in practice—spaces where

difference is not merely tolerated but welcomed as part of a shared moral and communal fabric.

In summary, faith and spirituality are not peripheral to the integration process; they are central to how Guatemalan migrants sustain their resilience, affirm their cultural identity, and build social bridges. Through religious practice, migrants do not leave their cultural heritage behind but carry it forward, enriching their lives and the broader community they now call home.

2.8 Finding #1: Between Absence and Presence: The Concept of *Double Belonging* in the Social and Cultural Lives of Guatemalan Migrants

Abdelmalek Sayad, a pioneering sociologist in the field of migration studies, developed the concept of *double absence* to capture the complex structural and existential dilemmas faced by migrants. Sayad (2004) argued that migration involves far more than the physical act of relocating from one place to another; it constitutes a profound ontological rupture. Migrants are not simply absent from their country of origin; they are also not fully present in their host society. In other words, they are suspended in a condition of liminality: no longer at home in their place of origin, and never fully embraced in the place of arrival. This dual alienation gives rise to a social condition in which the migrant is defined by exclusion from the legal protections, cultural legitimacy, and symbolic recognition of both societies (Sayad, 2004).

For Sayad, this absence is not incidental but structural. It is produced by sending and receiving states, which collude, often unconsciously, to construct the migrant as a temporary figure, a mere laboring body rather than a whole person (Sayad, 2004, pp. 36–38). The host society tends to define migrants solely in economic terms, reducing their value to labor potential. This type of categorization allows the state to withhold full rights, rendering migrants politically invisible even when they are physically present. At the same time, migrants' societies of origin often treat them as having abandoned their social roles and familial obligations. This situation

leads to a profound tension: the longer migrants stay abroad, the greater their risk of becoming strangers in their societies of origin and host societies. Sayad famously termed this the "paradox of provisional permanence," the idea that migrants live indefinitely in a place where they are meant to be only temporarily tolerated (Sayad, 2004, pp. 37–38).

Sayad's concept of double absence also critiques the legalistic and economistic understandings of immigration. Sayad highlighted how juridical exclusion legitimizes social exclusion. Since migrants are not legally recognized as full members of society, they are socially constructed as "other," neither entirely foreign nor fully national. This ambiguous status is perpetuated across generations, particularly when children of immigrants remain symbolically excluded despite legal citizenship (Sayad, 2004, pp. 39–41).

However, the experiences of Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County challenge the totalizing pessimism of Sayad's framework. While many aspects of double absence, such as linguistic exclusion, labor exploitation, and legal precarity, are undoubtedly present, this community demonstrates how migrants actively reshape their marginality into something generative: a form of *double belonging.* Rather than remaining suspended in a state of absence, Guatemalan migrants forge ties across borders and communities, creating hybrid spaces of cultural and social inclusion.

One primary site of this transformation is language. Sayad (2004) viewed language acquisition as a site of symbolic violence, a demand that migrants erase their cultural origins to gain entry into the dominant society. However, in Dutchess County, the process is more reciprocal. Lucía described her early years of isolation: "I would not even go to the store… I did not know how [to speak English], and it was mostly the fear that I put on myself"[26] (personal

---

[26]"Entonces para mí sí ha sido difícil. Yo pasé, creo, como dos años que no iba ni a la tienda; solo mi esposo iba a comprar, porque no sé… es más como el miedo, uno mismo se pone eso."

communication, January 2025). This echoes Sayad's (2004) insight into the internalized barriers that prevent full social participation. However, Ivan's contrasting observation, "They also make an effort… It is a mutual effort"[27] (personal communication, January 2025), reveals that cultural inclusion can be co-constructed. This reciprocity defies Sayad's one-directional model of integration and gestures instead toward cultural pluralism grounded in mutual recognition.

Community groups such as Mommysotas serve as critical nodes in this process. Sayad emphasized how states construct migrants as "semi-skilled laborers" devoid of personal history or social depth (Sayad, 2004, p. 36). In contrast, these groups offer not only services but platforms for expression, participation, and social inclusion. They recognize migrants not just as workers, but also as neighbors, parents, friends, and cultural bearers. This transformation from recipient to agent, a migrant who participates in shaping their environment, is central to the notion of double belonging.

Cultural events, such as soccer tournaments and food festivals, actively challenge the logic of double absence. As Sayad observed, migrants often remain invisible unless portrayed as laborers or social problems (Sayad, 2004, p. 38). In contrast, public celebrations of Guatemalan heritage render migrants hyper-visible, on their terms. These gatherings affirm cultural legitimacy and invite the broader community into shared spaces of recognition and understanding. These moments are not instances of assimilation but expressions of negotiation and cohabitation.

Religious practice is another domain where double belonging is articulated. While Sayad saw religion as a coping mechanism for migrants' dislocation (Sayad, 2004, p. 34), Guatemalan

---

[27]"Y también porque hay muchos que no hablan español, pero hacen el esfuerzo de hablar. Y nosotros, pues bueno, por ejemplo, yo hago el esfuerzo de comunicarme con la gente que no habla español. Y sí, ahí está como ese vínculo de ayudarnos mutuamente, y así estamos. Es un esfuerzo mutuo, entonces sí me gusta eso."

participation in bilingual church services functions more as a mode of social synthesis. The Spanish Mass, organized by NEDIS, provided migrants with a spiritual home that fused their past and present, enabling them to feel recognized without erasing their cultural roots. Although the discontinuation of these services represents a setback, their initial success suggests the potential of institutional support in reinforcing a sense of belonging.

Importantly, Guatemalan migrants are not merely adapting but also transforming. They are influencing the host society. Their presence has prompted new forms of engagement by private citizens, local governments, schools, and religious institutions. This challenges Sayad's claim that the nation-state fundamentally resists inclusion, suggesting that at the local level, shared belonging is not only possible but already underway (Sayad, 2004, pp. 42–43).

Therefore, Sayad's theory of double absence offers a crucial lens for understanding the social barriers that migrants face. However, the lived experiences of Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County show how migrants can transform these barriers into bridges. Through mutual language learning, community organization, cultural celebration, and institutional negotiation, they cultivate spaces of belonging in their homeland and host country. This self-construction of belonging is not a denial of absence but a reimagining of it. Through intentional and reciprocal effort, what begins as a double absence can become a double belonging.

2.9 Finding #2: Language Access as the Central Axis of Social Integration

Among the many sociocultural factors shaping the integration process for Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County, language is the most significant. It is not simply a tool for communication; it is a space of vulnerability, a terrain of power, and, for many, the site of their deepest struggle. As Lucía reflected, for two years, she refused to go to the store, paralyzed by the fear of being addressed in English: "It was mostly the fear that I put on myself. That they will

talk to you and you will not understand"[28] (personal communication, July 2024). Ivan similarly

noted, "People are more difficult to communicate with if they do not speak the same language,"[29]

calling it the most significant barrier (personal communication, January 2025). These feelings of

disconnection and self-consciousness were echoed by Isobel, who admitted, "Sometimes you

feel a bit embarrassed with the language, but it is something you have to study and not be

embarrassed about"[30] (personal communication, January 2025).

However, this pressure to adapt linguistically is not borne equally. In her memoir *You*

Sound Like a White Girl: The Case for Rejecting Assimilation, Arce (2022) argued that "The

problem has never been the language, but the people who speak it" (p. 67). While Spanish is

increasingly celebrated in elite educational settings and bilingual programs for white children,

for immigrants, speaking Spanish while Brown can still provoke suspicion, ridicule, or outright

hostility. However, the personal accounts of the interviewees challenge that argument, at least in

the context of Dutchess County. Isobel's account underscores the deeply impactful moments of

linguistic solidarity: "It feels nice when an American person speaks to you in Spanish... they try

to include you."[31] When it occurs, this kind of mutual effort can transform shame into

recognition and the language barrier into a site of dignity. Additionally, as Arce (2022) writes,

"Speaking Spanish is a form of resistance" (p. 72), a defiant act against a nation that has long

sought to erase the very people it relies on.

---

[28]"Es más como el miedo, uno mismo se pone eso. Que le vayan a hablar a uno y no va a entender."

[29]"Más duro comunicarse con alguien si no hablan el mismo idioma, obviamente."

[30]"Pero es algo que uno tiene que ponerse a estudiarlo y no tener vergüenza."

[31]"Se siente muy bonito cuando una persona americana gringa te habla en español, eso se siente bastante reconfortante saber que te toman en cuenta y que tratan de incluirte y que ellos están haciendo el esfuerzo porque básicamente ellos están en su ellos, no teóricamente no tendrían por qué estar aprendiendo si ellos son de casa."

Indeed, the politics of language are inextricably linked to questions of belonging and legitimacy. Arce (2022) captures this tension with painful precision: "Why don't you speak English? Why don't you speak Spanish? Being Latino in America means the answer to both of these questions holds us to an impossible standard" (p. 74). Migrants are expected to perform Americanness through perfect English while being simultaneously punished for letting go of their Spanish. This contradiction is reflected in Lucía's internalized pressure: "You are in a country where you have to speak English, so what did you come here for?"[32] (personal communication, January 2025). It also appears in Arce's recollection of how English "cut the umbilical cord" to her family and culture (p. 71). For migrants, the stakes of language acquisition are not just practical but existential.

However, the examples from Dutchess County show the possibilities that emerge when language is treated as a shared responsibility. When English speakers make efforts to learn Spanish—even imperfectly—they affirm the value of their neighbors' cultural and linguistic identities. Ivan captured this dynamic well: "There are many who do not speak Spanish, but they also make an effort to speak, and I make the effort to communicate... and that is how we are. It is a mutual effort"[33] (personal communication, January 2025). Language learning, then, is not simply about adaptation; it is about recognition, power-sharing, and the creation of comfortable spaces where people can be vulnerable without fear. According to Isobel, "if you are not talking

---

[32]"¿No, pero tú estás en un país donde se habla, se tiene que hablar inglés —me dijo—, entonces, ¿qué viniste a hacer acá?"

[33]"Y también porque hay muchos que no hablan español, pero también hacen el esfuerzo de hablar y nosotros, pues bueno, por ejemplo, yo hago el esfuerzo de comunicarme con la gente que no habla español y sí ahí como ese vínculo de ayudarnos mutuamente y así estamos. Es un esfuerzo mutuo."

to someone you feel safe with, you cannot do anything" (personal communication, January 2025).

In theory, social integration is a bidirectional process. The International Organization for Migration (2012) defines it as a "process of mutual adaptation between the host society and migrants" (para. 2). However, in practice, Arce (2022) noted that migrants are still asked to do the lion's share of the adapting. The linguistic pressure is often unreciprocated by the host population, even in places like Dutchess County, where at least 15.7% of the population speaks Spanish at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). That number likely undercounts the multilingual and bilingual lives that exist off the official record.

It becomes evident that language is the most significant sociocultural factor not just because it governs practical access to services, work, and participation, but because it encapsulates the more profound contradictions of immigrant life: the simultaneous erasure and demand, the weight of assimilation, and the hope of mutual recognition. As Arce (2022) puts it, "I am Mexican, and I am proud of it. I am also American... I carry all of it in this gorgeous brown body" (p. 12). Language sits at the core of that doubleness. It can isolate, but it can also bind. It can marginalize but also empower. When treated with care, humility, and mutual respect, language becomes the foundation of social belonging. In Chapter 3, I propose a public policy to close the language gap and equalize the power imbalance between English-speaking and Spanish-speaking populations.

2.10 Conclusion

The narratives shared by Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County underscore the complexity, resilience, and creativity with which they navigate the social terrain of rural New York. Their testimonies reveal not only the barriers to social integration, such as language

exclusion, but also the everyday strategies through which they construct a sense of belonging, assert their dignity, and reshape their environments from the ground up.

This chapter explored the sociocultural dimensions of integration, weaving participant experiences with the conceptual frameworks of social integration, integration from below, and cultural pluralism. Through informal networks, cultural practices, and mutual support systems, migrants assert their place in a society that often overlooks them, positioning themselves not as subjects of assimilation but as co-creators of pluralistic communities.

The participants' stories challenge narrow understandings of integration as a one-sided process of absorption into a dominant culture. Instead, they exemplify integration from below, a grassroots, migrant-led process of relational adaptation and collective meaning-making. Cultural pluralism emerges not only as an ideal but as a lived ethic, evidenced in the migrants' dual commitments to preserving their heritage and engaging with their host society. This practice of sustaining ties to both Guatemala and the United States gives rise to what this thesis identifies as a key empirical finding: double belonging. While Sayad's (2000) concept of double absence offers a valuable point of contrast, describing the migrant as absent from both homeland and hostland, the lived experiences captured here suggest something more generative. Rather than a condition of loss or exclusion, participants articulate a transnational sense of self anchored in cultural continuity and social embeddedness across borders.

In the absence of strong institutional scaffolding, these migrants rely on one another. Community-driven efforts such as mutual aid, mentorship, and informal organizing not only fill critical gaps but also reveal alternative models of integration grounded in reciprocity, resilience, and care. These are not only survival strategies but blueprints for a more inclusive rural society.

This chapter demonstrates that sociocultural integration in Dutchess County is a dynamic, participatory process led by migrants. Their insights and actions reframe integration not as something done *to* them, but as something built *with* them. However, the sociocultural sphere cannot be separated from the institutional structures that shape its possibilities and limits.

Chapter 3 explores the role of public institutions in either facilitating or constraining the migrant-led forms of integration documented here. In doing so, it asks: To what extent do formal systems recognize and support the pluralistic, grassroots integration already underway? And how might these systems be transformed to better reflect the agency, aspirations, and sense of belonging expressed by the migrants whose voices animate this study?

Chapter 3: Systems of Support or Separation? Institutional Influences and Policy Futures

3.1 Introduction

While cultural practices and celebrations provide a meaningful avenue for connection, proper social integration requires more than shared festivities; it depends on the systems, structures, and policies that shape daily life. The willingness of the broader community to engage with Guatemalan traditions is just one piece of a larger puzzle, in which institutional factors play a crucial role in determining the extent to which migrants feel welcomed and supported by the host environment. From housing and employment to healthcare, legal aid, education, and local governance, these systems significantly influence the opportunities available to migrants and the challenges they must navigate. Understanding these institutional dynamics provides a deeper insight into the barriers to integration and the potential for a more inclusive and equitable community.

In addition to the aforementioned sociocultural factors, the social integration of Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County is influenced by various institutional factors, including housing availability and affordability, living conditions, public school systems, employment opportunities and work conditions, access to healthcare, and access to legal aid. While state and local policies offer certain protections and resources, significant barriers remain. Insights from my interviews with migrants, combined with secondary source data on the availability of county and state resources and services for immigrants, highlight the institutional challenges and barriers that complicate migrants' successful social integration into the region.

3.2 Housing Conditions, Availability, and Affordability

Living conditions significantly impact the social integration of Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County. Many migrants face challenges related to housing affordability, overcrowding,

and substandard living environments. The lack of affordable housing options often forces migrants into shared accommodations, leading to overcrowded conditions that can affect health and well-being. Additionally, irregularized migrants face difficulties in securing housing due to legal and financial barriers.

The *2023 Rental Housing Survey* provides critical insight into the housing affordability crisis in Dutchess County. This crisis disproportionately impacts the migrant community, despite its absence from explicit mention in the report. The survey, conducted annually since 1980, highlights key housing trends, including the widening gap between wages and rental costs, as well as persistently low vacancy rates, both of which create significant barriers for migrants, particularly those with lower incomes and precarious immigration status.

One of the most pressing issues is that migrants in Dutchess County often earn far less than the Gross Income Needed to Afford Average County Survey Rents, making it difficult for them to secure stable housing (Dutchess County Government, 2023). In response, many migrants resort to overcrowding and sharing small living spaces, even when not legally permitted, to compensate for their lower wages compared to those of their American counterparts. This practice directly results from housing costs outpacing income levels, forcing people, particularly migrants, to make informal or non-traditional housing arrangements to survive.

Additionally, low vacancy rates exacerbate these challenges for everyone in the area, especially for migrants. With fewer available units, competition for housing becomes even more intense, leaving those without formal rental applications, credit history, or immigration documentation at a distinct disadvantage (Dutchess County Government, 2023). Many migrants, particularly those who are irregularized, may struggle to get formally approved for apartments or houses, leading them to rely on informal rental agreements, subleases, or even exploitative

housing arrangements. In extreme cases, this could mean paying exorbitant rents for tiny and inadequate living conditions or facing eviction without legal recourse.

Further compounding the issue is a structural affordability crisis that long predates recent economic shocks. As the *Dutchess County Housing Needs Assessment* notes, the county's affordability challenges reflect "death by a thousand cuts," with long-term income stagnation among renters, especially those earning under $50,000, failing to keep pace with the rising cost of housing (czbLLC, 2022, p. 6). Fifty-two percent of all renters are cost-burdened, and 90% of renters earning under $35,000 spend more than 30% of their income on rent, a clear evidence of structural exclusion from stable housing (czbLLC, 2022, p. 22).

The report also highlights a severe shortage of rental units affordable to low-income households—estimated at 2,155 units—which intensifies competition and forces low-wage workers, including many migrants, to "rent up" into units they cannot afford or to accept poor and often exploitative housing conditions (czbLLC, 2022, pp. 21–22). This mismatch is also evident in urban and suburban submarkets, such as Poughkeepsie and Beacon, where high cost-burden rates coincide with rental shortages for those earning less than $35,000 (czbLLC, 2022, pp. 26–27).

The combination of low wages, high rents, and limited housing availability restricts mobility and choice. Unlike more financially stable residents who might have the flexibility to move for better opportunities, many migrants are trapped in specific areas where they can find landlords willing to rent to them, often in overpriced, overcrowded, or substandard housing. This power imbalance creates a cycle of instability, further complicating efforts toward social and economic integration. By examining the *2023 Rental Housing Survey* and the *2022 Housing Needs Assessment*, it becomes apparent that Dutchess County's housing crisis not only impacts

affordability but also limits the ability of migrants to establish secure living conditions (czbLLC, 2022; Dutchess County Government, 2023). Without policy interventions such as affordable housing initiatives, tenant protections, and pathways for undocumented migrants to access formal leases, these disparities will continue to deepen, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable members of the community.

3.3 Local Public School System

The public school system plays a crucial role in the integration of Guatemalan migrant children in Dutchess County, serving as one of the primary institutions where they engage with broader society. However, significant challenges arise due to language barriers, social segregation, and limited resources, all of which shape the social integration process for these students and their families.

One of the primary obstacles for Guatemalan immigrant children is limited English proficiency, which affects both their academic performance and social interactions, depending on their age and when they migrated. While children tend to acquire English more quickly than adults, this can lead to role reversals within families, where parents increasingly rely on their children to translate and navigate public services. This dynamic, while common in immigrant communities, can add pressure to young students, as they must balance their academic and social adaptation while also serving as linguistic and cultural mediators for their families (Dutchess County Government, 2023).

To address language barriers, schools in Dutchess County have implemented English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. However, the effectiveness of these programs depends on the availability of resources, which can be inconsistent across school districts. Schools with a high concentration of Spanish-speaking students often face overburdened ESL programs, limiting

individualized attention and slowing students' language acquisition. Additionally, bilingual education policies sometimes result in linguistic isolation, reinforcing divisions between Spanish-speaking and English-speaking students rather than fostering full integration (Dutchess County Government, 2023).

A key issue in the integration process is segregation within schools, both socially and academically. Ivan explained that Hispanic and American students often remain separated in public schools in the area, noting that "Hispanics are on one side, and residents are on the other."[34] He further observed that classroom instruction for ESL students is predominantly in Spanish, which limits opportunities for students to interact with non-Hispanic peers and practice English, remarking that "classes are in Spanish, with only a few in English." Beyond the classroom, Ivan described social spaces as equally divided, stating, "there was no mixing—it was very separate"[35], personal communication, July 2024). This structural divide within schools reinforces social and cultural isolation, making it increasingly difficult for Guatemalan students to integrate into the broader community.

In addition to academic challenges, access to healthcare services within the school system plays a crucial role in students' well-being and ability to succeed. In Webutuck and Dover, School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs) provide vital medical, dental, and behavioral health services to students, many of whom lack access to private healthcare. These clinics offer primary care, immunizations, mental health screenings, and chronic illness management with no out-of-pocket costs for students, ensuring that health issues do not become an additional barrier to learning (Open Door Family Medical Center, 2022).

The Webutuck Central School District also recognizes the importance of supporting

---

[34]"Los hispanos están de un lado, los residentes de aquí están en otro lado."
[35]"Y en el sentido social, no había como una mezcla. Era muy separado."

multilingual learners through targeted academic programs and student services. The district offers explicit support for English as a New Language. It emphasizes culturally responsive teaching, aiming to foster inclusive learning environments for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Webutuck Central School District, n.d.). Additionally, Webutuck promotes small class sizes and individualized instruction strategies that are especially beneficial for Guatemalan students adjusting to a new language and school system. The district's Student Support Services division includes counseling and special education services, further enhancing the academic and social support available to migrant children (Webutuck Central School District, n.d.).

These efforts indicate a district-level commitment to integration and equity. However, as with many rural schools, resources remain limited, and the success of such programs often depends on the availability of staff, community partnerships, and sustained funding. Despite these limitations, Webutuck provides a potential model for other districts in the county seeking to strengthen migrant student integration through wraparound services and inclusive pedagogical practices.

In summary, the public school system in Dutchess County plays a critical role in the social integration of Guatemalan immigrants. Still, language barriers, segregation, and limited resources present significant challenges. While schools offer ESL programs and health services that aid in the integration process, the lack of interaction between Hispanic and American students, overburdened bilingual programs, and the need for more inclusive school environments hinder full integration. Addressing these issues requires greater resource allocation for ESL programs, policies that encourage social mixing in schools, and increased access to healthcare services within schools, with the Dover and Webutuck programs serving as models. Without targeted interventions, Guatemalan students and their families will continue to face barriers to

full participation in both the formal education system and the broader community.

3.4 Employment Opportunities and Workplace Treatment

Among the typical industries in which migrants in rural New York work are agriculture, gardening, landscaping, construction, and domestic work. According to Mary Jenkins, a contributor to the *Pine Plains Herald*, a significant portion of the workforce in these sectors consists of migrants, many of whom lack formal immigration documentation. For example, Rick Osofsky, owner of Ronnybrook Farm in Pine Plains, stated that more than half of his employees are migrants. The long, physically demanding workdays and the locals' preference for higher-paying, less strenuous jobs have led to a labor market divide between the migrant and local populations.

Work conditions and access to employment significantly influence the social integration of Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County. The experiences of Isobel, Fernanda, Lucia, and Ivan illustrate a variety of challenges and strategies in their pursuit of work and adaptation to American labor norms. Isobel's early experiences were marked by grueling hours and difficult living conditions. She noted:

> Yes, I lived with my aunt when I arrived. I stayed with her for three months, but I had a
> job that required me to get home at 1 or 2 in the morning... sometimes even as late as 4 in
> the morning.[36]

Her shifts were long and her housing situation stressful: "I shared the room with a 9-year-old girl... and a 2-year-old. When I wanted to rest the next day, I could not"[37] (personal

---

[36]"Sí viví como una tía cuando yo venía Ah o k viví con mi tía 3 meses ajá, pero yo tenía este un trabajo en el que yo llegaba a la 1:02 de la mañana a mi casa y trabajé en un deli que teníauna barra, entonces ya llegaba muy tarde. O a esos cuatro de la mañana."
[37]"Y al, pero compartir cuarto con una nena de 9 años ajá y había dentro de la casa hay una nena de 2 años también. Entonces cuando yo quería descansar al siguiente día no podía."

communication, January 2025).

Fernanda also faced challenges: "I would go with an aunt of mine who cleans houses... the chemicals almost killed me."[38] Migrants in domestic and custodial work are often exposed to unsafe products without adequate training or protective equipment. Over time, Fernanda found more stable employment in a grocery store and factory, where she was able to secure a work permit and establish a regular income: "I worked there for three months, 40 hours a week... then they called me to the factory, and now I keep both jobs"[39] (personal communication, January 2025).

However, despite their contributions to the local economy, many Guatemalan migrants continue to work under precarious or exploitative conditions. Farm and dairy workers, who are predominantly immigrants, often live in employer-provided housing that lacks basic amenities, including adequate insulation, plumbing, and ventilation. Overcrowding, pest infestations, and unsanitary conditions are frequent, especially on remote farms with limited oversight (Farmonaut, n.d.).

Although New York has made strides in expanding protections for immigrant workers, significant disparities remain. Under New York State law, all workers, including undocumented migrants, have the right to be paid at least the minimum wage, receive overtime pay, and work in a safe environment free from discrimination and retaliation (New York State Office of the Attorney General [OAG], n.d.; NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs [MOIA], n.d.). However, farmworkers were historically excluded from these basic labor protections due to the legacy of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, which excluded agricultural laborers—

---

[38]"Yo iba con una tía mía que limpia casas... los químicos casi me matan."
[39]"Trabajé allí durante tres meses, 40 horas a la semana... luego me llamaron a la fábrica, y ahora mantengo los dos trabajos."

disproportionately Black and immigrant workers—from collective bargaining rights.

The 2019 Farm Laborers Fair Labor Practices Act represented a significant step forward, granting New York farmworkers the right to unionize, earn overtime after working 60 hours per week, and receive at least one day off per week. Still, enforcement remains inconsistent, and many employers fail to comply, especially when undocumented workers hesitate to report violations (National Employment Law Project [NELP], 2021). Additionally, immigrant workers in sectors like agriculture and domestic work continue to report wage theft, lack of breaks, and pressure to remain silent about abuses under threat of job loss or immigration consequences. Studies show that undocumented workers are especially vulnerable to these forms of exploitation because of their limited legal recourse and fear of retaliation (OAG, n.d.; NELP, 2021).

Ivan's experience reflects how economic necessity often overrides educational aspirations. He found work quickly but left high school to support his family. While employment provided some financial relief, it came at the cost of his formal education. This trend can hinder long-term integration and mobility for migrant youth.

Despite these systemic barriers, Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County show remarkable adaptability. Lucia, for example, emphasized long-term economic goals as central to her integration: "To know more English and I love cleaning... then I will have more money and be able to have my own house. Well, at least first a trailer, and then a house."[40] Her vision reflects how the framework for many migrants is about survival and a path to stability and belonging.

In summary, while Guatemalan migrants are integral to the local labor force in Dutchess

---

[40]"Para saber como un poquito más inglés, y me encanta, me encanta limpiar. Entonces eso. Y después de eso voy a tener más dinero, entonces sí, tener mi casa. Bueno, por lo menos primero una casita traila, y después una casita así, porque es todo poco a poco."

County, they continue to face hazardous working conditions, limited legal protections, and systemic inequalities. State-level labor laws now affirm that all workers, regardless of their immigration status, are entitled to workplace protections; however, enforcement gaps and power imbalances persist. Thus, improving labor conditions for Guatemalan migrants requires not only the full implementation of existing laws but also accessible legal education, community-based enforcement mechanisms, and culturally competent support services.

3.5 Access to Health Care System

Access to healthcare is a fundamental aspect of social integration. However, it remains a significant challenge for Guatemalan immigrants in Dutchess County, many of whom are uninsured, irregularized, or face linguistic and economic barriers to receiving medical services. The inability to access healthcare not only exacerbates health disparities but also limits broader participation in community life, as poor health outcomes can affect employment, education, and overall well-being. However, a combination of community health centers, nonprofit organizations, school-based healthcare initiatives, and state-funded health programs for migrant women and children has played a crucial role in bridging these gaps, providing essential medical care to Guatemalan immigrants and facilitating their social integration into the county.

Nonprofit health organizations such as Sun River Health and the Open Door Family Medical Center have become key healthcare providers for uninsured and low-income families. These organizations serve patients regardless of their insurance status, ensuring that economic constraints do not prevent access to vital healthcare services. They offer comprehensive medical care, including primary care visits, immunizations, chronic disease management, dental care, and mental health screenings (Sun River Health, n.d.). Given that many Guatemalan immigrants work in low-wage industries without employer-sponsored health insurance, and few qualify for

government health insurance, these services are indispensable for ensuring the community's health and ability to participate in the workforce. Additionally, health centers assist with enrollment in New York State's healthcare marketplace, helping eligible uninsured individuals and families obtain affordable coverage, including Medicaid and Child Health Plus (CHIP), programs specifically designed to support low-income families (New York State Department of Health, 2023).

Beyond nonprofit and community-based healthcare initiatives, New York State provides critical health coverage for migrant women and children, regardless of immigration status. Under New York Medicaid policy, all pregnant women, irrespective of their immigration status, are eligible for Medicaid if they meet income requirements (New York City Mayor's Public Engagement Unit, 2023). This protection ensures that irregularized women receive the necessary prenatal, delivery, and postnatal care, reducing risks associated with inadequate maternity care. Additionally, all children under 19 are eligible for Child Health Plus regardless of family income or immigration status, providing them access to essential healthcare services, including preventive care, specialist visits, and emergency care. These state policies help reduce health disparities among immigrant families, ensuring that all children have access to healthcare from birth.

However, eligibility on paper does not always translate into access in practice. While New York's health programs are among the most inclusive in the country, particularly for children and pregnant women, many Guatemalan migrants, especially those who are undocumented, continue to be excluded from complete coverage options such as standard Medicaid or the Essential Plan. Emergency Medicaid is available to undocumented adults for acute hospital-based care but does not cover preventive or ongoing treatment outside of

emergencies (New York State Department of Health, 2024). For instance, an uninsured diabetic migrant may receive care during a crisis but not ongoing insulin management, leaving chronic conditions dangerously untreated.

Even when immigrants are eligible, a combination of systemic and interpersonal barriers inhibits access. The fear of jeopardizing future immigration status continues to deter some individuals from seeking care, particularly in light of past policies surrounding the "public charge" rule (New York Immigration Coalition, n.d.). Although New York State and many advocacy groups have worked to clarify that healthcare access does not currently impact immigration status or applications for legal residency, misinformation and distrust remain potent barriers (New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, n.d.).

Application processes are often complex, especially for individuals with limited literacy in Spanish or for those who speak Indigenous languages, such as Q'eqchi' or Mam. While individuals technically have the right to free interpretation and translation services under both New York City's Local Law 30 and New York State's Executive Order 26.1, these rights are not always effectively implemented in practice. According to city reports, even individuals with moderate Spanish proficiency often struggle with the written requirements of health coverage applications and medical paperwork (Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs & Mayor's Office of Operations, 2021; New York State, 2021). Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County who speak Spanish as a second language or not at all face heightened barriers. In these cases, translation and navigation assistance, such as that offered by community health centers like Sun River Health, becomes crucial to turning formal rights into real access to care.

Schools have also become essential healthcare access points for Guatemalan immigrants, particularly for children. The SBHC at Webutuck Central School District exemplifies how public

institutions play a role in integrating immigrant families by providing medical care directly within schools. SBHCs offer a wide range of health services at no out-of-pocket cost, including routine physical exams, vaccinations, dental screenings, first aid, and chronic disease management (Open Door Family Medical Center, 2022). By providing healthcare within schools, these programs eliminate the need for parents—many of whom work long, inflexible hours—to take time off for doctor's appointments. This program is also vital for irregularized families who may fear seeking care in traditional medical settings due to concerns about their immigration status. Additionally, national studies indicate that students enrolled in SBHCs miss three times less class time than those without such services, highlighting the educational benefits of school-based healthcare access (Keeton et al., 2012).

For many Guatemalan immigrants, particularly those who speak an indigenous language and have Spanish as a second language, language barriers pose a significant obstacle to healthcare access. Many Spanish-speaking individuals struggle with written communication, which hinders their ability to navigate insurance forms and medical paperwork. The challenge of navigating medical systems in a language one does not fully understand is a reality for many migrants, not just Guatemalans. A Mixteco-speaking patient from Mexico who sought care at Sun River Health described how difficult it was to get treatment while uninsured:

> Sun River Health helped me so much when I was sick and uninsured and could not miss work. They helped me get the right medication and treatment when I needed it. My dialect is Mixteco. My second language is Spanish, but I cannot write in it. They helped me fill out all my medical forms. They have helped me so much. (Sun River Health, n.d.)

While this patient is Mexican, not Guatemalan, their experience reflects a broader issue that affects many indigenous-language speakers from Latin America who rely on Spanish as a second

language. These communities often lack access to interpretation services in their native languages, making healthcare access even more difficult. By providing support in Spanish and indigenous languages, health centers help ensure that Guatemalan immigrants can effectively communicate with medical professionals, understand their treatment options, and feel more included in the healthcare system.

The institutional role of nonprofits, schools, and community health centers in providing medical care extends beyond addressing immediate health concerns; it fosters trust in local institutions, a critical factor in social integration. Immigrants who feel supported in their healthcare needs are more likely to engage with schools, workplaces, and community organizations, strengthening their sense of belonging. Moreover, reducing reliance on emergency room visits through preventive care enhances long-term community stability by decreasing public health costs and improving overall health outcomes (New York State Department of Health, 2023).

While significant progress has been made in expanding healthcare access, barriers remain. The continued lack of universal coverage for irregularized immigrants indicates that many still face challenges in accessing specialized care. Undocumented adults under 65 remain ineligible for full Medicaid coverage unless they are pregnant or experiencing an emergency. Recent state reforms, such as the expansion of full Medicaid to undocumented seniors in 2024, reflect a shift toward equity, but also highlight the gaps that persist for younger working-age adults (New York State Department of Health, 2023).

Nevertheless, the role of community-based healthcare initiatives in Dutchess County demonstrates how local institutions can fill these gaps in federal- and state-level policies, ensuring that immigrant communities are not entirely excluded from the healthcare system.

These efforts not only improve individual health outcomes but also contribute to the broader process of social integration by fostering a sense of safety, security, and inclusion for Guatemalan immigrants in Dutchess County.

3.6 Access to Legal Aid

Access to affordable legal representation is a critical institutional factor in the social integration of Guatemalan immigrants in Dutchess County. Without proper legal support, immigrants face systemic barriers that inhibit not only their ability to regularize their status but also their access to housing, employment, healthcare, and education. While services such as the asylum clinic operated by Legal Services of the Hudson Valley (LSHV) offer crucial assistance to asylum seekers, the availability of affordable or pro bono Spanish-speaking immigration attorneys remains a significant barrier to regularization (LSHV, n.d.). LSHV's asylum clinic provides a valuable resource by screening potential applicants, offering pre-recorded training, and coordinating pro bono legal support. However, the clinic's scope is limited. It focuses primarily on asylum seekers and does not address the broader needs of many Guatemalan immigrants who may be eligible for other pathways to legal status, such as Temporary Protected Status (TPS), U visas for survivors of violence or exploitation, T visas for trafficking victims, or family-based petitions (American Immigration Council, 2023a, 2023b).

From my experience as a former case manager with NEDIS, it is evident that the most significant challenge facing irregularized and mixed-status Guatemalan families is securing affordable legal representation. Very few Spanish-speaking attorneys in the region provide pro bono services, and those who do are often overworked and overbooked (New York Immigration Coalition, 2022a, 2022b). Many families are forced to rely on word-of-mouth referrals or informal networks to locate legal help, which can result in inconsistent quality of service,

exploitation by unlicensed providers, or missed opportunities for relief due to procedural errors or misinformation.

This scarcity of affordable legal representation has significant implications. The lack of legal representation is not merely an administrative inconvenience; it fundamentally determines who can stay in the United States and on what terms. Immigrants without legal counsel are far less likely to win their cases. Moreover, studies show that individuals represented by attorneys are up to ten times more likely to prevail in immigration court than those who must self-represent (New York Immigration Coalition, 2025). Legal status is deeply intertwined with access to employment, education, housing, and healthcare. Without legal status, immigrants remain trapped in cycles of economic insecurity and social marginalization. Many immigrants avoid contact with institutions out of fear of detention or deportation, which only deepens their exclusion and limits their participation in civic life (Migration Policy Institute, 2021a).

Although federal law does not guarantee a right to government-funded legal representation in immigration proceedings, efforts at the state and local levels have sought to fill this gap. New York is considering legislation—the Access to Representation Act (S141/A270) and the BUILD Act—that would establish a publicly funded statewide system of immigration legal services and expand legal infrastructure in underserved areas. If passed, these laws would make New York the first state in the nation to guarantee legal counsel for immigrants facing deportation, setting a national precedent for immigrant justice. Advocates have called for $165 million in state funding to ensure that all New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status or income level, have access to legal support in removal proceedings, asylum claims, and status adjustments (New York Immigration Coalition, 2025).

At the city level, New York City has already implemented robust models that can be

adapted to more rural contexts, such as Dutchess County. A 2025 report by the New York City Office of the Comptroller recommends a $134 million investment in the city's immigration legal system, including $60 million specifically for expanding nonprofit legal services and $40 million for the Immigration Opportunity Initiative, which embeds legal aid into public institutions like schools and hospitals (New York City Office of the Comptroller, 2025). Programs such as ActionNYC offer free, in-language legal services and screenings to immigrants in municipal settings, enabling them to navigate complex immigration procedures with clarity and confidence. While these models have yet to be replicated in upstate areas, their success offers a blueprint for county-level interventions that can improve access and trust among immigrant communities.

Despite these positive developments, persistent barriers remain. In Dutchess County, economic constraints and rural isolation significantly limit access to consistent and affordable legal aid. Legal fees for routine immigration cases often exceed several thousand dollars, which is simply out of reach for many Guatemalan families working in agriculture, construction, or domestic labor. The lack of Spanish-speaking or culturally competent attorneys in the region further compounds these difficulties. For those who speak indigenous languages like Q'eqchi' or Mam, the barriers are even greater, as interpretation services in these languages are scarce and legal materials are often not translated or accessible. According to the New York Immigration Coalition (2024), many of these individuals rely on community advocates to explain their rights and complete legal forms; however, this support remains underfunded and inconsistently available.

Organizations such as the Immigrant Defense Project and the New York Immigration Coalition have worked to close these gaps by distributing multilingual "Know Your Rights" resources, conducting community legal education workshops, and training non-attorneys to assist

with basic immigration forms and referrals (Immigrant Defense Project, n.d.; New York Immigration Coalition, 2024). In rural regions, where immigrants often avoid public spaces due to fear or logistical barriers, these community-based interventions are crucial. However, they cannot fully substitute for professional legal counsel, particularly in high-stakes cases involving detention or family separation.

Addressing this legal aid gap requires a comprehensive and well-funded response. Dutchess County can begin by supporting legal service partnerships with community-based organizations, encouraging mobile legal clinics, and advocating for state-level funding to ensure rural areas are not left behind. Embedding legal services into trusted institutions such as schools, churches, and health clinics—as modeled by Action NYC—can reduce stigma and logistical barriers. Training bilingual legal navigators and expanding pro bono networks through bar associations and law schools can also alleviate attorney shortages in the region. Crucially, public education campaigns must continue to inform immigrants of their rights and protections under New York State law, particularly following the end of the Trump-era "public charge" policies, which left many fearful of seeking help.

Without targeted investments and systemic reform, the legal representation crisis will continue to undermine the integration, safety, and stability of Guatemalan immigrants in Dutchess County. Access to legal counsel is not just about legal status. It is a gateway to economic security, family unity, and full social participation. Ensuring every immigrant has a fair chance to defend their rights and build a future in the United States is a moral and practical imperative for communities committed to equity and inclusion.

3.7 Chapter 3 Finding: Theory in Practice: Institutions Obstruct Social Integration

The social integration of Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County cannot be fully understood without examining the institutional conditions that either enable or constrain migrants' capacity to participate in the broader social fabric. While migrants often demonstrate remarkable resilience and adaptability, the degree to which they can belong—to feel secure, included, and respected—hinges on the structural systems that govern their access to housing, education, employment, healthcare, and legal status. This section examines how institutional dynamics in Dutchess County influence the opportunities and constraints of migrant inclusion by applying theoretical frameworks such as the theory of social integration, the grassroots model of integration from below, the concept of cultural pluralism, and my intervention, the theory of double belonging.

As Ivan noted in his interview, students are often divided along linguistic lines: "classes are in Spanish, with only a few in English," and "there was no mixing—it was very separate"[41] (personal communication, July 2024). Although schools in Dutchess County have implemented ESL programs, these are frequently overburdened, especially in districts with a high concentration of Spanish-speaking students (Dutchess County Government, 2023). While intended to support language acquisition, these programs can inadvertently isolate students from their English-speaking peers, reinforcing cultural silos and stalling broader social integration.

The theory of cultural pluralism, which advocates for the preservation of migrants' cultural identities within a shared social framework, helps illuminate the shortcomings of these systems. In theory, pluralistic integration would support students' native languages and cultural

---

[41]"Hispano con hispano… tu amigo, van juntos a una clase, y algunos estadounidenses llegan a la clase, pero como que las clases eran diferentes. Unas eran en inglés, pero la mayoría de los hispanos estaban juntos, como separados. Y en el sentido social, no había como una mezcla. Era muy separado."

practices while promoting interaction across cultural groups (Baglioni, 1964, p. 125). However, the current educational infrastructure in Dutchess County often fails to strike this balance. The result is a school environment where Guatemalan students are simultaneously underserved and socially separated, hindering both academic progress and meaningful participation in the wider community.

The labor market similarly reveals the limits of institutional support. While Guatemalan migrants actively participate in the regional economy, particularly in sectors such as agriculture, domestic work, and construction (Jenkins, 2023), their economic integration often does not translate into social inclusion. Isobel recounted the fatigue of laboring through late-night shifts at a deli with a bar while living in crowded conditions that offered little privacy or rest. Fernanda's early experiences with housecleaning exposed her to harsh chemical environments that caused physical distress. "The chemicals almost killed me; it was like a drug."[42] Although she eventually found more stable work in a factory, this transition required significant personal adaptation, including overcoming language barriers and obtaining a work permit.

Alba's distinction between economic and social integration is critical here: migrants may quickly enter the labor market due to high demand for their labor, but this does not guarantee access to supportive networks, upward mobility, or recognition in public life (Alba, as cited in Baglioni, 1964, p. 126). Institutional inattention to the quality of working conditions, access to legal employment pathways, and protections for undocumented workers results in a form of partial or conditional inclusion, where migrants remain on the economic margins of society.

In the face of institutional neglect, Guatemalan migrants often turn to grassroots strategies to meet their needs and build a sense of community. This bottom-up strategy aligns

---

[42]"Los químicos casi me matan; era como una droga."

with the framework of *integration from below*, which emphasizes the importance of community-led efforts in constructing inclusive spaces when state systems fail to meet expectations. As Vidal and Roselló (2009) assert, "integration cannot wait for governments to decide; it must rise from below to address pressing societal issues such as poverty, inequality, and exclusion" (p. 2). In Dutchess County, informal housing networks, mutual aid systems, and participation in church communities reflect migrants' efforts to create social infrastructure where formal systems fail to deliver.

However, while these grassroots community-building efforts demonstrate remarkable resilience and creativity, they also reveal the structural limitations of integration from below, particularly in contexts where migrants lack formal political power. Undocumented migrants, in particular, face profound legal and civic exclusion that severely limits their ability to mobilize beyond their immediate networks. Fear of deportation, surveillance, and institutional retaliation also creates a climate of silence and invisibility, undermining the potential for broader collective action. Without voting rights, formal representation, or access to institutional channels of power, community organizing remains constrained to survival rather than systemic transformation. As a result, key institutional barriers, such as the absence of language access, legal aid, or healthcare, persist unchallenged at the policy level. This barrier underscores a central contradiction: while migrants may succeed in cultivating local belonging through informal means, the lack of political power fundamentally restricts their capacity to claim rights, demand change, or reshape the systems that continue to marginalize them.

Nowhere is the failure of top-down integration policies more evident than in healthcare and legal services. While nonprofit organizations such as Sun River Health and Open Door Family Medical Center provide essential medical care regardless of legal status or insurance

coverage, these services are limited in scope and capacity. Many Guatemalan migrants remain uninsured and face difficulties navigating medical paperwork due to limited literacy in Spanish or English, particularly those who speak an Indigenous language as their first language (Sun River Health, n.d.). This lack of institutional linguistic and cultural competency exacerbates healthcare disparities and isolates migrants from critical services that would otherwise support their integration.

Legal exclusion is even more severe. The scarcity of affordable, Spanish-speaking immigration attorneys in the region presents one of the most significant barriers to regularization. As a former case manager with NEDIS, I observed firsthand how irregularized Guatemalan families struggled to access legal representation. While LSHV offers asylum assistance, its limited scope and capacity demonstrate that most migrants seeking family-based petitions, U-visas, or TPS are left without options (LSHV, n.d.). Without legal status, migrants are systematically denied access to employment, housing, healthcare, and education, perpetuating a cycle of marginalization and social invisibility (Migration Policy Institute, 2021b).

The experiences of Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County reveal both the possibilities and limitations of social integration in contexts where institutional support is inconsistent or insufficient. Chapter 2 identified the emergence of double belonging as a central finding: many migrants expressed a deep sense of connection to both their home country, Guatemala, and their adopted home in Dutchess County. This sense of belonging is actively constructed through participation in local schools, churches, workplaces, and community events while maintaining transnational ties through family, language, and cultural practice.

This dual orientation challenges Sayad's (1999/2004) theory of double absence, which describes the migrant as excluded from both their country of origin and their host society. While

Sayad's framework remains helpful in understanding the structural conditions of migrant exclusion, the narratives collected in this study suggest that migrants do not passively inhabit this absence. Instead, they pursue forms of rootedness and recognition across both spheres—what this research terms *double belonging*.

Chapter 3 finds that a lack of institutional support undercuts this emerging sense of double belonging. Migrants' ability to participate fully in local life remains conditional on legal status, access to healthcare, language interpretation services, and the availability of culturally competent support systems. The absence of such resources reinforces exclusion and limits the extent to which migrants can experience themselves as full members of either society. As several participants noted, the fear of deportation, lack of documentation, and restricted access to public services continue to hinder their ability to engage, despite strong ties to the community.

Thus, while grassroots networks and personal resilience have helped foster partial integration, these efforts cannot substitute for comprehensive institutional support. The promise of dual belonging remains incomplete without pathways to legal recognition, equitable access to healthcare, education, and legal aid. Migrants may build futures in Dutchess County, but those futures remain precarious without institutional scaffolding.

The final section of this chapter outlines policy recommendations designed to bridge these structural gaps. These proposals acknowledge that double belonging is not merely an individual experience or cultural ideal but something that must be made possible through inclusive and pluralistic public policy. Intentional integration frameworks that affirm migrants' rights and contributions while addressing inequities in access are essential to moving from fragmented adaptation toward full inclusion. In this sense, double belonging can be safeguarded and expanded not just through community efforts but through policy reform.

3.8 Double Belonging as an Institutional Outcome: Pluralist and Integrative Policy Frameworks in Dutchess County

3.8.1 Policy Recommendation #1: Stakeholder Citizenship

Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County are embedded in the lifeblood of the community. They contribute essential labor, raise families, attend schools and churches, and participate in everyday cultural life. However, despite these contributions, they remain structurally excluded from many legal and political rights, which calls for a new framework of belonging grounded not solely in federal immigration policy but in lived experience and local participation. The concept of stakeholder citizenship offers such a model. Rather than viewing civic membership as a rigid legal status, stakeholder citizenship reframes it as a reflection of shared community.

Bauböck (2008) defines stakeholder citizenship as the moral and democratic claim to membership that individuals have when their lives are integrally connected to the future of a political community. Bauböck argues that citizenship should not be limited to those who meet arbitrary legal requirements, but extended to all individuals who are long-term residents, deeply invested in their communities, and permanently subject to the laws and institutions of that place. This principle responds directly to the "mismatch between citizenship and the territorial scope of legitimate political authority" created by international migration (Bauböck, 2008, p. 1). Stakeholder citizenship reorients membership around presence, participation, and contribution— criteria that more accurately reflect who is already part of a political community and who deserves a say in its direction.

Unlike the "all subjected" or "all affected" principles, which risk over-inclusion or becoming too fluid to implement, the stakeholder model focuses on individuals' permanent

interests in the polity they inhabit. According to Bauböck, the shared fate of stakeholders, whether through residency, family ties, or deep-rooted participation, makes them rightful members of a democratic society. This framework challenges exclusionary definitions of citizenship and affirms the legitimacy of claims to rights, representation, and recognition, even for those without formal legal status.

Elements of stakeholder citizenship are already emerging in state and local policy. A clear example is New York State's Green Light Law, passed on June 18, 2019, which granted undocumented residents the right to obtain driver's licenses (Riverhead Local, 2019). While not a formal change to immigration status, the law marked a significant step in recognizing residency as a legitimate basis for accessing rights and services. It improved migrant mobility, expanded access to work and education, and reduced the risk of profiling by police. Especially in rural areas like Dutchess County, where driving is often essential due to limited public transportation, the law was not just a bureaucratic reform; it was a lifeline.

This policy also subtly illustrates one of Bauböck's (2008) key points: that democratic legitimacy can and should extend to denizens, including those who live within a society, contribute to its success, and are affected by its decisions, even if they lack citizenship papers. The Green Light Law demonstrates how states can provide meaningful inclusion without becoming entangled in the complexities of federal immigration enforcement.

Figure 13

Noncitizen Voting in the United States as of April 1, 2025
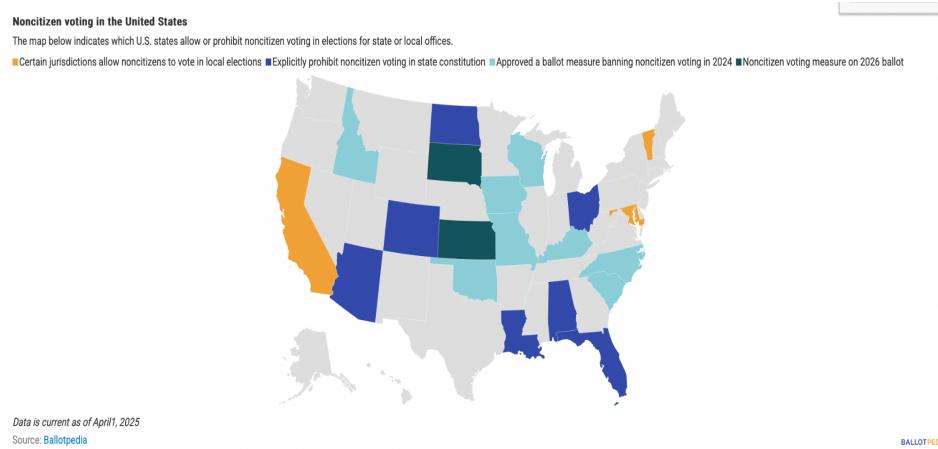
Note. Adapted from *Laws permitting noncitizens to vote in the United States*, by Ballotpedia, 2025, https://ballotpedia.org/Laws_permitting_noncitizens_to_vote_in_the_United_States. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.

Moreover, the idea that noncitizens can and should participate in local democracy is no longer a radical one. Several U.S. cities and municipalities have implemented non-citizen voting rights for local elections, as depicted in the graph above. In San Francisco and Oakland (California), Takoma Park and Hyattsville (Maryland), and Montpelier and Winooski (Vermont), noncitizen residents are allowed to vote in school board or city council elections (Ballotpedia, 2025). These cities acknowledge that residents, regardless of their immigration status, have a direct and daily stake in local decisions that impact their families, children, and neighborhoods. These policies operationalize stakeholder citizenship at the municipal level, demonstrating how local governments can lead in redefining civic inclusion. Bringing this model to Dutchess County, New York, would provide a more just and locally grounded path toward migrant integration. It would also give concrete expression to the framework of double belonging

developed throughout this thesis: a vision in which migrants are both rooted in their countries of origin and fully integrated into the communities where they now reside.

Based on the principle of stakeholder citizenship, I recommend the following local policy changes: granting local voting rights in municipal and school board elections for all long-term residents, regardless of immigration status; providing health insurance access and enrollment in county-level health programs based on residency; ensring workplace protections and access to county employment resources or wage theft legal aid, grounded in local contribution rather than federal status; allowing participation in advisory boards, community planning councils, and school leadership bodies by undocumented or mixed-status residents, and formal recognition of residency as a valid criterion for receiving services like housing assistance, child care subsidies, or educational support.

These recommendations aim not merely to improve material conditions but to affirm the dignity and belonging that migrants articulate in their daily lives. Bauböck (2008) emphasized that denying stakeholder rights undermines democratic legitimacy. By recognizing residents as co-owners of the communities they help sustain, Dutchess County could become a model of equitable, inclusive governance in the absence of broader federal reform.

Adopting a stakeholder citizenship framework in Dutchess County would create the institutional conditions necessary for both social integration and the realization of double belonging. By recognizing long-term residents as legitimate members of the political community, regardless of legal status, this model affirms the everyday contributions migrants make and grants them a voice in shaping the futures of the places they call home.

Crucially, stakeholder citizenship advances cultural pluralism by validating the diverse identities, languages, and traditions that migrants bring with them, rather than demanding

assimilation into a singular cultural norm. At the same time, it acknowledges and strengthens migrant agency by offering concrete avenues for participation, representation, and recognition in local governance and civic life. In doing so, it transforms belonging from a legal category into a lived, participatory reality in which migrants are seen not as outsiders to be accommodated, but as co-creators of an inclusive and democratic community.

3.8.2 Policy Recommendation #2: Toward a Bilingual, Culturally Pluralist and Socially Integrated Public School System

The integration of Guatemalan migrant youth into the public school systems of rural Dutchess County represents a critical site where the broader dynamics of social integration, cultural pluralism, and double belonging are both negotiated and contested. Schools function not only as educational institutions but also as foundational spaces for socialization, language acquisition, and identity formation. However, the dominant educational model in the region, segregated ESL programs, too often isolates migrant students from their peers and reinforces a one-directional assimilationist logic that undermines their cultural identity and sense of belonging.

Participants in this study frequently described their school experiences as alienating, especially in the absence of structured bilingual support. As Isobel noted, "[The children] learn English because they have no other option, but that does not mean they feel comfortable or part of the group." Such comments reveal the social and emotional costs of English-only environments, where language serves as both a gatekeeper and a boundary marker. These costs are exceptionally high for children who enter school speaking not only Spanish but also indigenous languages such as K'iche' or Q'eqchi', which are often excluded from formal recognition or pedagogical support.

This pattern reflects long-standing tensions in U.S. education. As Bale (2010) explains, "The greatest barrier to the Mexican American child's scholastic achievement … is that the schools, reflecting the dominant culture, want the child to grow up as another Anglo" (para. 8). In this model, English is not just a tool of instruction; it is an instrument of assimilation, one that delegitimizes the cultural and linguistic identities students bring with them. According to Bale, the result is an educational system that systematically "denies the language and culture of the children" (para. 6), sending an implicit message that immigrant presence must be subordinated to Anglo norms.

From a theoretical perspective, the lack of bilingual schooling options reinforces the assimilationist model critiqued earlier in this thesis. In contrast, a culturally pluralistic approach to education that affirms students' linguistic and cultural identities while also facilitating the acquisition of English can serve as a powerful mechanism for fostering academic success and social cohesion. Integrated bilingual programs encourage migrant children and their families that their heritage is valued and that their presence is not a deficit to be remediated but a contribution to be recognized.

Moreover, implementing inclusive bilingual education would benefit Guatemalan students and foster intercultural dialogue among all students in the classroom. As Bermúdez-Urbina (2015) argues, intercultural education "makes it possible to coordinate top-down and bottom-up processes to confront historical inequalities" (p. 156). In this sense, bilingual schooling becomes a site of integration from below, a grassroots restructuring of educational space that centers on the voices of migrants and promotes mutual adaptation between communities. Bilingual schooling aligns with the concept of double belonging, as students are

empowered to retain and celebrate their linguistic and cultural heritage while actively engaging in the broader social and civic life of their schools and towns.

Beyond the classroom, bilingual education can help bridge communication between schools and Guatemalan families, many of whom feel excluded from parental engagement due to language barriers. These language barriers affect not only academic outcomes but also broader social integration, as schools often serve as one of the few institutions through which migrant families engage with the host society. Bilingual liaisons, culturally responsive curricula, and school-community partnerships grounded in mutual respect could dramatically alter this dynamic.

Expanding and reimagining bilingual education is not simply a matter of pedagogical preference; it is a matter of social justice and a necessary step toward equitable integration. Bale (2010) reminds us that even when bilingual education gains institutional traction, it often "wilts in the face of segregation, racism, and attacks on immigrant rights" (para. 9). When Guatemalan children are taught in ways that affirm their identities and when schools become spaces of cultural exchange rather than erasure, the conditions for meaningful social integration are created. Dutchess County, like many rural areas across the United States, stands at a crossroads: it can continue to marginalize migrant communities through assimilationist policies cloaked in educational language, or it can invest in bilingual schooling as a tool for pluralistic, migrant-centered integration.

In this context, bilingual education is more than an instructional model; it is a transformative institutional practice that enables the realization of double belonging through recognizing cultural pluralism and empowering migrant agency. By affirming the linguistic and cultural knowledge that Guatemalan students bring into the classroom, inclusive bilingual

programs reject the deficit-based logic of assimilation and instead cultivate a learning environment rooted in mutual respect and shared growth.

These programs allow migrant youth to maintain strong connections to their heritage while equipping them with the tools to navigate and contribute to their new social surroundings. In doing so, schools become sites not of cultural erasure but of cultural co-construction, where students are recognized as active participants in shaping inclusive educational and civic communities. Through this shift, Dutchess County can model a more just and pluralistic vision of rural migrant social integration where education serves as a bridge rather than a barrier to full membership in society.

3.9 Conclusion

This thesis examined the pathways to social integration for Guatemalan migrants in rural Dutchess County, New York, from 2018 to 2024. Grounded in a migrant-centered decolonial methodology, it explored how migrants navigate sociocultural adaptation and institutional access in a predominantly white rural context. This approach was not only a methodological choice but also a theoretical intervention, insisting that integration be understood not through top-down frameworks of assimilation but from the ground up as a process shaped by migrant agency, cultural affirmation, and everyday acts of social negotiation. The research, grounded in local fieldwork and community engagement, highlights the need to reassess prevailing paradigms in migration studies, particularly in the distinct context of rural American life.

The integration of Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County cannot be explained through linear or universal models. Instead, this study conceptualizes integration as a contested, dynamic, and relational process, one shaped by exclusionary structures on the one hand and by grassroots resilience on the other. The use of social integration, cultural pluralism, and integration from

below as theoretical frameworks made it possible to see how migrants actively build lives across multiple cultural terrains. Through language acquisition, mutual aid, spiritual life, and community formation, migrants are not simply assimilating into a host society; they are transforming it, challenging notions of who belongs and on what terms.

The decision to center a decolonial lens was crucial. This lens allowed the research to move beyond dominant narratives of crisis or deficiency, instead emphasizing the power of migrant knowledge. The fieldwork revealed that migrants often experience what this thesis terms a "double absence," characterized by exclusion from institutions in both their country of origin and the United States, while simultaneously cultivating "double belonging" through strong transnational ties, cultural practices, and community participation. This dialectic was not merely observed; it fundamentally reshaped how integration was theorized in this project. In this sense, the field did not simply confirm theory; it transformed it. What emerged from the field were not abstract categories but grounded, lived practices that demanded a rethinking of academic assumptions. The importance of fieldwork cannot be overstated. The stakes of integration and its contradictions became apparent in Dutchess County, not in the literature.

The empirical findings speak to both the resilience of Guatemalan migrants and the limitations of local institutions. While migrants build vibrant social networks through churches, sports, food, and kinship, they are routinely marginalized by systems that fail to accommodate their linguistic, cultural, and legal realities. Schools, clinics, and legal aid services are present but underperform in terms of cultural competence and accessibility. These gaps are not neutral; they reproduce structural inequality and reflect deeper political tensions, including the ongoing fallout from the Trump administration's anti-immigrant policies and the broader climate of federal neglect.

The political resurgence of Donald Trump in the 2024 United States presidential election and his return to office in January 2025 have brought a sharp escalation in anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy. This new political moment holds direct consequences for Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County, a community already navigating substantial institutional barriers to integration. As this administration enacts restrictive immigration policies with sweeping implications for undocumented and mixed-status families, the capacity of Guatemalan migrants to experience full social integration, let alone the form of double belonging theorized in this study, faces mounting threats.

In early 2025, the Trump administration initiated a sweeping escalation of anti-immigrant policies, targeting migrants at multiple levels of governance. An executive order titled *Protecting the American People Against Invasion* (Executive Order 14159) expanded expedited removal proceedings, threatened federal funding for sanctuary jurisdictions, reinstated punitive enforcement mechanisms, and directed the tracking, registration, and criminalization of undocumented individuals (American Immigration Lawyers Association [AILA], 2025a, 2025b; The White House, 2025a; United States Citizenship and Immigration Services [USCIS], 2025).

The administration also revoked TPS or humanitarian parole for over 500,000 migrants from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, effectively ending legal protections and pressuring them to self-deport (Al Jazeera, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c; Associated Press, 2025a, 2025b). Additionally, the White House has renewed efforts to challenge birthright citizenship, including signing Executive Order 14160 on January 20, 2025, aimed at curbing the constitutional guarantee under the Fourteenth Amendment (National Association of Foreign Student Advisers [NAFSA], 2025a, 2025b).

Across the country, particularly in cities like Los Angeles, mass protests led by migrant activists and allies have arisen in response to these sweeping policies. Such demonstrations have sometimes been met with militarized responses, including the deployment of active-duty and National Guard troops, as well as reports of aggressive policing and state repression (Cameron, 2025; Hay & Gonzalez, 2025; Herchenroeder, 2025). The federal government has expanded the enforcement net to include lawful permanent residents, student visa holders, and other individuals with legal status, fueling a widespread climate of fear and uncertainty among migrant communities (The White House, 2025b; USCIS, 2025).

The administration has further proposed or taken steps to revoke access to Medicaid and other essential health benefits for low-income migrant families, including children and pregnant women, such as by sharing immigrant Medicaid enrollment data with enforcement officials and threatening to penalize states that offer coverage regardless of immigration status (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2025a, 2025b; PBS NewsHour, 2025a, 2025b; Pifer, 2025). These aggressive policies collectively amount to a multi-front assault on the rights, health, and humanity of migrant communities, reinforcing a political agenda grounded in exclusion, surveillance, and systemic marginalization.

In early June 2025, the Trump administration issued new ICE enforcement guidelines that further complicate the everyday reality for migrants. While agents have been instructed to suspend raids on farms, hotels, and restaurants, which are sectors where many undocumented migrants in rural areas like Dutchess County are employed, these protections are narrow and uneven. Simultaneously, the administration lifted long-standing restrictions that had prevented ICE from entering schools, hospitals, and places of worship (Kanno-Youngs & Dickerson, 2025). As a result, institutions that once served as trusted sanctuaries, where migrants sought

medical care, sent their children, or practiced their faith, have become potential enforcement sites. This shift has created a fragmented and chaotic sense of safety. Migrants may be safer at work; however, their ability to access essential services or participate in community life is now shrouded in uncertainty. The anxiety this generates is not hypothetical; it is already reshaping daily life in the Hudson Valley. Migrants who once felt confident attending school meetings, church gatherings, or visiting a clinic may now retreat from these spaces entirely. As a result, they are forced into a state of semi-seclusion that undercuts the very social integration this thesis explores. What may appear as protection in one domain is, in fact, part of a broader regime of fear that pushes people into hiding and hollows out local efforts toward inclusion.

Moreover, this moment poses serious challenges to the conceptual framework of double belonging advanced in this study. While Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County often desire to maintain cultural and familial ties to Guatemala while fully participating in American society, the escalating restrictions on movement, access to legal protections, and social participation obstruct this dual affiliation. The threat of deportation, the narrowing of legal pathways to status, and increased surveillance through inter-agency data sharing, such as the proposed IRS agreement to release undocumented immigrants' tax information to ICE, make it increasingly difficult for migrants to navigate both worlds without fear. This regression echoes Sayad's (2004) theory of double absence, in which migrants are alienated from both their society of origin and the host society and never fully belong to either. However, Guatemalan migrants in Dutchess County have, until now, actively resisted this condition by cultivating transnational ties and embedding themselves in local institutions. The current political moment threatens to reverse these gains, replacing the potential for double belonging with intensified marginalization and isolation.

These developments also highlight the limitations of top-down integration policies in an era of nativist resurgence. Grassroots and community-led efforts, which are central to the theory of integration from below, have proven vital in bridging gaps in housing, healthcare, and education. However, even these efforts may be strained under increased federal enforcement and declining trust in public systems. Migrants who previously accessed services through schools, clinics, or nonprofits may now retreat from these spaces out of fear, weakening the very structures that support inclusion. These are not just policy failures but lived challenges; uncertainties that migrants must navigate daily.

These challenges also point to opportunities. The policy recommendations offered in this thesis, particularly the stakeholder citizenship model, are grounded in the lived realities and aspirations of migrants themselves. They advocate for a redefinition of inclusion based on presence, participation, and contribution, rather than legal status. Local measures such as expanded bilingual education, municipal voting rights, and culturally responsive public services represent tangible ways to build more inclusive rural communities. These proposals are not utopian; they emerge from existing practices.

This research positions the Guatemalan community in Dutchess County as a critical case for migration studies. Their experiences underscore the significance of rural spaces in twenty-first-century migration and challenge the prevailing urban bias in the field. The visibility, resilience, and cultural vitality of this community reveal much about the future of integration in the United States. At the same time, their struggles draw attention to enduring gaps in services, protection, and recognition. They are not just participants in rural life; they are helping to reshape it.

Looking forward, the work is far from finished. The gaps identified here, especially those related to language access, institutional responsiveness, and recognition of Indigenous identities, require sustained attention. The return of the Trump administration in 2025 and its aggressive rollback of sanctuary policies and asylum protections creates a pressing need for research on how federal policy reshapes local integration. Future studies should investigate how executive orders and immigration enforcement affect the daily lives of Guatemalan migrants, and whether local resistance, through legal advocacy, municipal policy, or community organizing, can mitigate these effects. Such research would refine the concepts of integration from below and stakeholder citizenship, highlighting the local–federal tension in shaping the futures of migrants.

Second-generation Guatemalan Americans and childhood arrivals in Dutchess County also warrant close study. Their experiences, including navigating schools, workplaces, and peer cultures, may differ from those of first-generation migrants, offering insight into the intergenerational transmission of identity, language, and a sense of belonging. This research could reveal whether cultural pluralism persists across generations or gives way to assimilation, and how youth negotiate hybrid identities within both migrant and host communities.

Another critical avenue concerns indigeneity within the Guatemalan diaspora. Many migrants, particularly K'iche' speakers, face compounded exclusion due to their Indigenous identity and limited literacy in Spanish. Future studies should investigate how indigeneity influences access to healthcare, legal aid, and education, as well as how traditional knowledge, cultural resilience, and the maintenance of Indigenous languages serve as tools for integration. This focus would challenge homogenizing categories such as "Latino" or "Hispanic" and deepen our understanding of internal diversity within migrant populations.

Finally, longitudinal research following Guatemalan migrants over time could trace how legal status, institutional trust, and cultural belonging evolve. Such studies would offer vital data on the durability of double belonging: Do migrants retain transnational ties as they grow more rooted locally? How do institutions respond or fail to respond to changing migrant needs? These questions could help test and extend the frameworks developed in this thesis, while informing inclusive policy at the municipal and state levels.

In sum, this thesis is not just a documentation of migrant experiences but a call to action. It affirms that integration, defined from below, is not about erasure or conformity but co-creation and justice. It urges us to see Guatemalan migrants not as marginal actors in rural America, but as central architects of its future.

References

Books

Alba, R. D. (1990). *Ethnic identity: The transformation of white America*. Yale University Press.

Alba, R., & Nee, V. (2003). *Remaking the American mainstream: Assimilation and contemporary immigration*. Harvard University Press.

Arce, J. (2022). *You sound like a white girl: The case for rejecting assimilation*. Flatiron Books.

Gordon, M. M. (1964). *Assimilation in American life: The role of race, religion, and national origins*. Oxford University Press.

Sayad, A. (2004). *The suffering of the immigrant* (D. Macey, Trans.). Polity Press.

Smith, T. L. (2016). *A descolonizar las metodologías: Investigación y pueblos indígenas* (K. Lehman, Trans.). LOM Ediciones. (Original work published 1999)

Chapters from Edited Books

Avallone, G., & Molinero Gerbeau, Y. (2021). Freeing migration: The contribution of

Vidal, J. R., & Roselló, T. (2009). People's integration. In *Integración desde abajo*. Fundación CIDOB.

Academic Articles

Baglioni, G. (1964). Trends in studies on the socio-cultural integration of immigrants. *International Migration Digest, 1*(1), 16–29.

Bale, J. (2010). *The fight for bilingual education. International Socialist Review*, (69). https://isreview.org/issue/69/fight-bilingual-education/index.html

Bauböck, R. (2008). *Stakeholder citizenship: An idea whose time has come?* Migration Policy Institute. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/stakeholder-citizenship-idea-whose-time-has-come

Bermúdez-Urbina, F. M. (2015). Desde arriba o desde abajo: Construcciones y articulaciones en

    la investigación sobre educación intercultural en México. *Revista Limina R. Estudios*

    Sociales y Humanísticos, 13(2), 153–167.

Condorelli, R. (2018). Cultural differentiation and social integration in complex modern societies

    reflections on cultural diversity management strategies from a sociological point of view.

    Sociology Mind, 8(4), 249–303. https://doi.org/10.4236/sm.2018.84019

Contucci, P., & Sandell, R. (2015). How integrated are immigrants? *Sociological Perspectives,*

    58(3), 378–397.

Damodaran, A. K., & Visvanathan, S. (1995). Cultural pluralism. *India International Centre*

    Quarterly, 22(2/3), 1–15. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23003929

Garcia, A. S., & Schmalzbauer, L. (2017). Placing assimilation theory: Mexican immigrants in

    urban and rural America. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social*

    Science, *672*, 64–82. https://doi.org/10.2307/26362017

Kan, J. (2016). *From above and from below: Governments, dominant classes, and labor and*

    social movements in the redesign of Latin American integration. National Scientific and

    Technical Research Council (CONICET). https://ri.conicet.gov.ar/handle/11336/183274

Keeton, V., Soleimanpour, S., & Brindis, C. D. (2012). School-based health centers in an era of

    health care reform. *Current Problems in Pediatric and Adolescent Health Care, 42*(6),

    132–158. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cppeds.2012.03.002

Kiser, C. V. (1949). Cultural pluralism. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and*

    Social Science, 262, 117–130. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1026981

Morrison, L. T. (1981). Cultural pluralism. *The Clearing House, 55*(4), 184–188.

    https://www.jstor.org/stable/30181980

Papademetriou, D. G., & Benton, M. (2021, April 15). *Assimilation models, old and new: Explaining a long-term process*. Migration Policy Institute. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/assimilation-models-old-and-new-explaining-long-term-process

Pew Research Center. (2014, November 13). *Chapter 2: Religious commitment and practice*. In *Religion in Latin America: Widespread change in a historically Catholic region*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2014/11/13/chapter-2-religious-commitment-and-practice/

Ratner, S. (1984). Horace M. Kallen and cultural pluralism. *Modern Judaism, 4*(2), 185–200. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1396461Shmalzbauer, L., & García, A. S. (2017). Placing assimilation theory. *Sociological Forum, 32*(3), 558–581. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26362017

Solé, C., Alcalde, R., Pont, J., Lurbe, K., & Parella, S. (2002). El concepto de integración desde la sociología de las migraciones. *Migraciones, (12)*, 9–41.

UNESCO. (1994). The challenge of cultural pluralism. *The UNESCO Courier, XLVII* (10), 33.

Reports and Policy Briefs

American Immigration Council. (2022). *Office for New Americans state network*. https://refugees.org/

American Immigration Council. (2023a). *Immigration pathways and legal challenges for Central Americans*.

American Immigration Council. (2023b). *Pathways to Legal Status for Immigrants in the United States*. https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/pathways-legal-status

American Immigration Lawyers Association. (2025a). *Executive Order 14159: "Protecting the American people against invasion" – Policy brief*.

American Immigration Lawyers Association. (2025b). *Executive Order on Enforcement of U.S.*

    Immigration Laws (EO 14159).

Argueta, A. (2025). *Fiesta La Kermesse en Guatemala 2025*. Guatemala.com. Retrieved July 3,

    2025, from https://eventos.guatemala.com/sociales/fiesta-la-kermesse-en-guatemala-

    2025.html

czbLLC. (2022, March). *Dutchess County housing needs assessment*. Dutchess County

    Department of Planning and Development.

    https://www.dutchessny.gov/Departments/Planning/docs/DCHousingNeedsAssessment-

    FINAL-PrinterFriendly.pdf

Data USA. (n.d.-a). *Amenia, NY*. https://datausa.io/profile/geo/amenia-ny/

Data USA. (n.d.-b). *Dover Plains, NY*. https://datausa.io/profile/geo/dover-plains-ny/

Data USA. (n.d.-c). *Dutchess County – Northeast PUMA, NY*.

    https://datausa.io/profile/geo/dutchess-county-north-east-puma-ny

Data USA. (n.d.-d). *Millerton, NY*. https://datausa.io/profile/geo/millerton-ny/

Dutchess County Government. (2020, August 26). *Community resources* [PDF].

    https://www.dutchessny.gov/Departments/DBCH/Docs/Community-Resources.pdf

Dutchess County Government. (2023). *2023 rental housing survey*. https://www.dutchessny.gov

Farmonaut. (n.d.). *Farmworker housing in New York: 7 urgent issues impacting immigrants*.

    https://farmonaut.com/usa/farmworker-housing-new-york-7-urgent-issues-impacting-

    immigrants

Immigrant Defense Project. (n.d.). *Know your rights with ICE* [Bilingual workshops, train-the-

    trainer materials, infographics, flyers available in 17 languages]. Immigrant Defense

    Project. Retrieved July 2, 2025, from https://www.immigrantdefenseproject.org/know-

    your-rights-with-ice/

International Organization for Migration. (2012). *Migrant Integration Fact Sheet*.

      https://www.iom.int/.../IOM-DMM-Factsheet-LHD-Migrant-Integration.pdf

Kaiser Family Foundation. (2025a, May 22). *Health provisions in the 2025 federal budget*

      reconciliation bill. KFF Health News.

Kaiser Family Foundation. (2025b). *Policy tracker: Immigration and health coverage under the*

      Trump administration. https://www.kff.org

Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs & Mayor's Office of Operations. (2021). *Local Law 30*

      report for calendar year 2020. City of New York.

      https://www.nyc.gov/assets/immigrants/downloads/pdf/CY2020-local-law-30-report.pdf

Migration Policy Institute. (2021a). *Barriers to legal status and their impact on immigrant*

      integration. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/barriers-legal-status-immigrant-

      integration

Migration Policy Institute. (2021b). *Integration and legal status: Barriers for unauthorized*

      immigrants.

National Association of Foreign Student Advisers. (2025a, April). *Executive and regulatory*

      actions under the second Trump administration [Blog post].

National Association of Foreign Student Advisers. (2025b). *Executive Order 14160 and threats*

      to birthright citizenship. https://www.nafsa.org

National Employment Law Project. (2021). *Ending injustice in the fields and dairies: New York*

      State must extend basic labor protections to farmworkers.

      https://www.nelp.org/.../ending-injustice-fields-dairies-new-york-state-extend-basic-

      labor-protections-farmworkers/

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. (n.d.). *About DOHMH*. Retrieved

      July 2, 2025, from https://www.nyc.gov/site/doh/about/about-doh.page

New York City Office of the Comptroller. (2025, June 10). *Protecting our neighbors: Investing in immigration legal services for New York*. Retrieved July 2, 2025, from https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/protecting-our-neighbors/

New York Immigration Coalition. (2022a). *Access to immigration legal services in New York State*. https://www.nyic.org/our-work/legal-services

New York Immigration Coalition. (n.d.). *Know your rights with ICE – wallet cards in multiple languages*. Retrieved July 2, 2025, from https://immigranthelpny.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/33875363424788-Know-Your-Rights-with-ICE-wallet-cards-in-multiple-languages

New York Immigration Coalition. (2022b). *Rural legal deserts: Challenges in Upstate New York*.

New York State. (2021). *Executive Order No. 26.1: Statewide language access policy*. Office of the Governor. https://www.governor.ny.gov/executive-order/no-26-1-statewide-language-access-policy

New York State Department of Health. (2023). *Medicaid and Child Health Plus: Frequently Asked Questions*. https://www.health.ny.gov

New York State Department of Health. (2024). *Medicaid recipients – General Informational System message GIS 24 MA/06 Att 1*. https://www.health.ny.gov/health_care/medicaid/publications/docs/gis/24ma06_att1.pdf

New York City Mayor's Public Engagement Unit. (2023). *Health Coverage Options for Immigrants in NYC*. https://www.nyc.gov/site/mayorspeu/programs/options-for-immigrants.page

Northeast Dutchess Mutual Aid. (n.d.). *Home*. Google Sites. Retrieved July 1, 2025, from https://sites.google.com/view/nedutchessaid/home

Open Door Family Medical Center. (2022, May 14). *Webutuck School-Based Health Center grand opening. Open Door Family Medical Center Blog.* https://opendoormedical.org/blog/entry/webutuck-school-based-health-center-grand-opening/

Pifer, R. (2025, May 28). *Trump administration threatens states over Medicaid coverage for undocumented immigrants.* Healthcare Dive. https://www.healthcaredive.com/news/trump-threatens-states-medicaid-coverage-illegal-immigrants/749102/

Sun River Health. (n.d.). *Our services.* Retrieved July 2, 2025, from https://www.sunriver.org/services/

United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. (2025, May). *Alien registration requirement* [USCIS policy summary].

U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *QuickFacts: Dutchess County, New York.* https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/dutchesscountynewyork/PST045222

U.S. Census Bureau. (2023, September). *2020 Census: Detailed Hispanic population grows 23% since 2010.* https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2023/09/2020-census-dhc-a-hispanic-population.html

Webutuck Central School District. (n.d.). *Welcome – ENL program.* Webutuck Central School District. Retrieved July 3, 2025, from https://www.webutuckschools.org/domain/290

News Articles

Al Jazeera. (2025, February 15). *Trump ends legal protections for migrants from four countries.* https://www.aljazeera.com

Al Jazeera. (2025, March 22). Trump revokes legal status for 530,000 immigrants. *Al Jazeera*.

> https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/3/22/trump-revokes-legal-status-for-530000-

> immigrants-in-the-us

Al Jazeera. (2025, May 30). Supreme Court allows Trump to revoke humanitarian parole for

> 530,000. *Al Jazeera*.

Associated Press. (2025a, February 14). *Trump rescinds protections for migrants under TPS,*

> *parole programs*. https://apnews.com

Associated Press. (2025b, June 12). Trump administration tells immigrants from Cuba, Haiti,

> Nicaragua and Venezuela they have to leave. *AP News*.

Cameron, D. (2025, June 10). *The "long-term danger" of Trump sending troops to the LA*

> *protests*. WIRED. https://www.wired.com/story/trump-marines-national-guard-la-

> protests/

Hay, A., & Gonzalez, J. L. (2025, June 18). Soldiers, Strykers and 100-degree temps: Inside

> Trump's border military zone. *Reuters*. https://www.reuters.com/world/us/soldiers-

> strykers-100-degree-temps-inside-trumps-border-military-zone-2025-06-13/

Herchenroeder, K. (2025, June 8). *National Guard troops arrive in Los Angeles after Trump*

> *signs orders*. Vanity Fair. https://www.vanityfair.com/news/story/national-guard-arrive-

> in-los-angeles-after-trump-signs-

> orders?srsltid=AfmBOoqn7nOn_yIr_5BKFrz62nJucSZsYwuNEUuYsJwzPHRsr26RXD

> gr

Jenkins, M. (2023, October). Immigrants in Dutchess County. *New Pine Plains Herald*.

> https://www.newpineplainsherald.org/articles/community/immigrants-in-dutchess-

> county-an-indispensable-workforce-a-hard-road-to-citizenship

Kanno-Youngs, Z., & Dickerson, C. (2025, June 5). *Trump lifts ICE restrictions on schools, hospitals in new enforcement shift. The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com

Ku, L. (2006, September 1). *Why immigrants lack adequate access to health care and health insurance*. Migration Policy Institute. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/why-immigrants-lack-adequate-access-health-care-and-health-insurance

Kuchta, L. (2024, June 5). Working to protect neighbors from ICE. *Red Hook Star-Revue*. https://www.star-revue.com/working-to-protect-neighbors-from-ice-by-laryn-kuchta/

New York Immigration Coalition. (2025). Advocates demand $165 million for immigration legal services. *New York Immigration Coalition*. https://www.nyic.org/2025/03/advocates-and-lawmakers-rally-to-demand-165m-for-immigration-legal-services

PBS NewsHour. (2025a, May 20). *Trump proposes new rules targeting migrant health benefits*. https://www.pbs.org/newshour

PBS NewsHour. (2025b, June). Trump administration gives data of immigrant Medicaid enrollees to deportation officials. *PBS NewsHour*.

Seven, Z. (2023). Cultural assimilation—How it affects mental health. *Verywell Mind*. https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-cultural-assimilation-5225960

Yusko, D. (2023, May 22). Migrants arrive in Dutchess County to a mixed response. *Spectrum News 1 Hudson Valley*. https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/hudson-valley/news/2023/05/22/migrants-arrive-in-dutchess-county-

Government & Legal Documents

Dutchess County Board of Elections. (2023, November 1). *Enrollment by county*. https://elections.ny.gov/enrollment-county

Dutchess County Executive. (2023, May 22). *Statement regarding NYC bussing asylum-seekers to Dutchess*. Dutchess County Government. https://dutchessny.gov

Dutchess County Department of Planning. (2023). *2023 rental housing survey*.

> https://www.dutchessny.gov

New York State Department of Health. (2023). *Child Health Plus & Medicaid eligibility*.

> https://www.health.ny.gov/health_care/child_health_plus/

New York State Department of Motor Vehicles. (2019, June 17). *Driver licenses and the Green*

> *Light Law*. https://dmv.ny.gov

New York State Department of State. (2012). *Office for New Americans*. https://dos.ny.gov

New York State Office of the Attorney General. (n.d.). *Immigrant workers' rights*.

> https://ag.ny.gov/immigrants-rights/immigrant-workers-rights

New York State Senate. (2019). *SB 2019-S1747: Driver's License Access and Privacy Act*.

> https://nysenate.gov

NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. (n.d.). *Immigrant workers' rights*.

> https://www.nyc.gov/site/immigrants/legal-resources/immigrant-workers-rights.page

The White House. (2025a, January 20). *Protecting the American People Against Invasion*

> *(Executive Order 14159)*. *Federal Register*.

The White House. (2025b, January 23). *Executive Order on protecting the American people*

> *against invasion*. https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/protecting-

> the-american-people-against-invasion

United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. (2025). *Enforcement priorities under EO*

> *14159 and 14160*. https://www.uscis.gov

Figures and Images

Ballotpedia. (2025). *Laws permitting noncitizens to vote in the United States*.

> https://ballotpedia.org/Laws_permitting_noncitizens_to_vote_in_the_United_States

Comité Aj Ralchoch – Sons of the Earth Committee. (2024). [Photograph]. Facebook.

https://www.facebook.com/comiteajralchoch/photos

Daderot. (2006). *Dutchess County* [Map]. Wikimedia Commons.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dutchess_County.jpg

Encyclopædia Britannica. (1998). *Dutchess Co., New York* [Map]. Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

https://www.britannica.com/place/Dutchess

GuateGT. (n.d.). *Santa Cruz el Chol*. https://guategt.com/santa-cruz-el-chol/

Poptun Chilero. (2024). [Photograph]. Facebook.

https://www.facebook.com/poptunChilero/photos_by?locale=es_LA

TripAdvisor. (n.d.). *Volcán Ipala*. https://www.tripadvisor.com.mx/Attraction_Review-g292005-

d3929172-Reviews-Volcan_Ipala-Chiquimula_Chiquimula_Department.html