



# In Search of Providence: Transnational Mayan Identities

*Patricia Foxen*

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## **In Search of Providence: Transnational Mayan Identities** Patricia Foxen

Traveling back and forth between the Guatemalan highlands and Providence, Rhode Island, the author followed the migration paths of a community of K'iche' Indians, often acting as a courier to bring news and photographs to families. As several said to the author, "Now you have lived with your own skin what we have gone through, only you can leave at any time."

This ethnography juxtaposes the context of post-war reconstruction at home, shaped by a fragile institutional peace process and emerging pan-Maya movement, with the hidden, marginal lives of mostly undocumented K'iche' transmigrants in New England, and describes the continuous movement of people, money, symbols, and ideas between the two locations. Transnational migration creates tension between material success and K'iche' traditional suspicion of standing out and displaying that success. Showing off or losing touch with one's responsibilities at home can invite envidias (envy), chismes (malicious gossip), and even brujería (witchcraft).

Some of the perpetrators of violence in Guatemala have re-created their positions of dominance in Providence. One K'iche' recounts, "He used a notebook, like the one you have, and each time I took even a glass of water he would write it down. He charged me \$300 just for arriving, those \$300 were like a tip for him. He told me he would not help me find work, and he would drink a lot and would say, 'You thought it would be easy here, you thought it is just picking up dollars here--well, you are screwed.'"

For students, the book provides rich accounts of the difficulties of entering the field and maintaining trust among people in divided and changing communities.

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