

Why Origins Matter: Central Americans in Canada:

Alan Simmons



MAP OF PRESENTATION

1. Research Questions
2. Approach
3. Sources
4. Findings

CENTRAL AMERICA



Background

- Central America in land area = Ontario South of Thunder Bay.
- Population: 41 million compared with Ontario's 13 million.
- Per capita income: about one-tenth of that in Ontario.
- Distance Guatemala City to Toronto 2000 miles (3400 Km.) or same as that for Vancouver to Toronto.
- Before 1980 few Central Americans lived in Canada.
- Nearly 90,000 have since come as refugees or with refugees.
- They suffer from low income. Their children often drop out.
- They use diverse family and community strategies to recoup losses and improve their circumstances.
- "Performance" measures view their settlement in deficit rather than success terms. This is unfortunate and questionable.

1. Research Questions

- Are Central Americans doing well or poorly in Canada if one examines the challenges they have faced and the degree to which they have or are overcoming these challenges?
- Can we learn from their experiences how to improve Canadian settlement criteria and policies?
- Can the Central American experience help us develop analytic frameworks for understanding Canadian immigration and particularly how migration origins influence settlement outcomes?

2. APPROACH

A. Transnational Perspective

B. Subaltern Standpoint

A. Transnational Perspective

- States are powerful agents but not the only actors
- Avoids “methodological nationalism”
- Migration is a systemic process
- Migrant origins and links are important for outcomes
- Historical view is essential to understanding process
- Migrant “voice” is never absent
- Settlement outcomes reflect the challenges faced and the resources available to address them

B. Subaltern Standpoint

- Refugee centred
- Focus on resilience, resistance, and resourcefulness
- Counters the deficit view of refugees
- Shifts assessment of success to what refugees have faced and what they have been able to achieve in their terms
- Draws on post-colonial liberation, “intersectional” , anti-racist, and feminist frameworks.

2. DATA SOURCES

| THEMES | SOURCES |
|----------------------------|--|
| Hemispheric System | Colonial/post-colonial history |
| Civil War & refugee flight | Studies in sending and receiving countries |
| Canadian policy | Policy documents and inflow statistics |
| Refugee inflows | LIDS 1980 - 2005 |
| Response to challenges | Survey of 163 households (590 individuals) in Toronto |
| Settlement outcomes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Survey noted above.• 2001 and 2006 Canadian census |
| The next generation | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eight focus groups of youths in Toronto• Structured interviews with 78 youths |
| Community organizations | Interviews with selected agency informants |
| Narrative integration | Sixteen in-depth interviews |

3. Findings

A. Challenges Faced

B. Responses to Challenges

3A. Challenges

- Legacy of colonial oppression
- Violence and trauma
- Family losses and separations
- Refugee exclusions/“Bogus refugee” suspicions
- Weak co-ethnic community in Canada
- Internal divisions within the “community”
- Low human capital (schooling, language skills)
- “Deskilling” in the labour market
- Racialization

A History of Violence

- Violent colonial history continues in neo-colonial form from mid 1800s on to present
- Bloody Civil Wars in Central Am. from late 1970's
 - Up to 200,000 dead
 - Up to 25% of population uprooted
 - Terror through “disappearances”
- Peace, What Peace?
 - Nicaragua: End of Sandinista Government in 1990
 - El Salvador: Peace Treaty in 1992
 - Guatemala: Peace Accord in 1996
 - Violence continues!

The massacre in El Mozote, El Salvador, on December 11 and 12, 1981

- *....the soldiers [part of a special counter insurgency force trained by the US] reassembled the entire village in the square. They separated the men from the women and children and locked them in separate groups in the church, the convent, and various houses.*
- *During the morning, they proceeded to interrogate, torture, and execute the men in several locations. Around noon, they began taking the women and older girls in groups, separating them from their children and machine-gunning them after raping them.*
- *792 people were killed*

State Terror & Death Squads

- *At a November 1, 1989 press conference Joya Martinez stated that certain military units in Department 2 carried out "heavy interrogation" (a euphemism for torture) after which the victims were killed. The job of his unit was to execute people by strangulation, slitting their throats, or injecting them with poison.*

- [The Historical Clarification Commission](#), CEH) in Guatemala concluded in 1999 that the state, which is to say primarily the army, was responsible for 93 percent of the deaths and human rights violations committed during the war, the guerrillas for 3 percent (CEH 1999: Conclusions Part II).

Impact of Violence on Families

| | Salvadorians | Guatemalans |
|--|--------------|-------------|
| Percent of Central American households in Toronto in which one or more relatives died in the war | 50.0 | 25.0 |

Violence After Peace

(Events in 2005-06)

- *Deborah Tomas Vineda, aged 16, was kidnapped, raped, and cut to pieces with a chainsaw, allegedly because she refused to become the girlfriend of a local gang member. Her sister Olga, just 11 years old, died alongside her.*
- *The raped and mutilated body of Andrea Contreras Bacaro, 17, was found wrapped in a plastic bag and thrown into a ditch, her throat cut, her face and hands slashed, with a gunshot wound to the head. The word "vengeance" had been gouged into her thigh.*



Sochi

- Like many other young gang members, Sochi was abandoned by his parents.
- His mother left for the US to seek work when he was six months old and he has not seen her since.
- He says the relatives he was left with treated him so badly that he was forced to run away from home when he was 13.
- He is a member of Eighteen - one of El Salvador's largest street gangs. "I love my gang much more than my mother," he says.
- Gang members tattoo 18 over their bodies to affirm a sense of identity



Sochi

Sochi, takes the rusty M16 out of a sports bag.

- "She's pretty isn't she?" he asks of the assault rifle. "This is what we use to kill - this is how we control our neighbourhood".

- El Salvador's gangs are not home grown - in culture and style they ape the Latino street gangs of downtown Los Angeles in the US.

- In the early 1990s, President Bill Clinton began deporting back to El Salvador hundreds of Latino gang members who had illegally made their home in the US.

- Today, some estimates put total gang membership in El Salvador at over 40,000 out of a population of 6.6 million.

Flight from violence

- Many fled across neighboring borders
- Up to 200,000 fled to Mexico
- Up to 500,000 fled to the United States
- At least 62, 000 fled to Canada by 2001
(47,000 Salvadorians and 16,000 Guatemalans)

Flight to Insecurity



Insecure Migration Path

- Nearly all initial immigrants to Canada were refugees
- Many traveled through Mexico and the USA
- Large numbers moved to Canada following 1986 changes to US policy that threatened undocumented migrants
- Large numbers arrived as in-land refugee claimants in the 1980s and had to wait years in insecurity before their claims were adjudicated.

Migration Paths of Salvadorian and Guatemalan Immigrants in Toronto

| | Salvadorians | Guatemalans |
|---|--------------|-------------|
| Percent who traveled through another country | 58.1 | 35.7 |
| Of those who traveled through another country, first country on voyage was: | | |
| OTHER (e.g., Central Am.) | 33.4 | 7.7 |
| MEXICO | 29.6 | 65.4 |
| UNITED STATES | 37.0 | 26.9 |
| <i>Number of respondents</i> | 93 | 71 |

Insecure Path, con'd

Salvadorians Landing in Canada by Entry Class and Year, 1980-2001

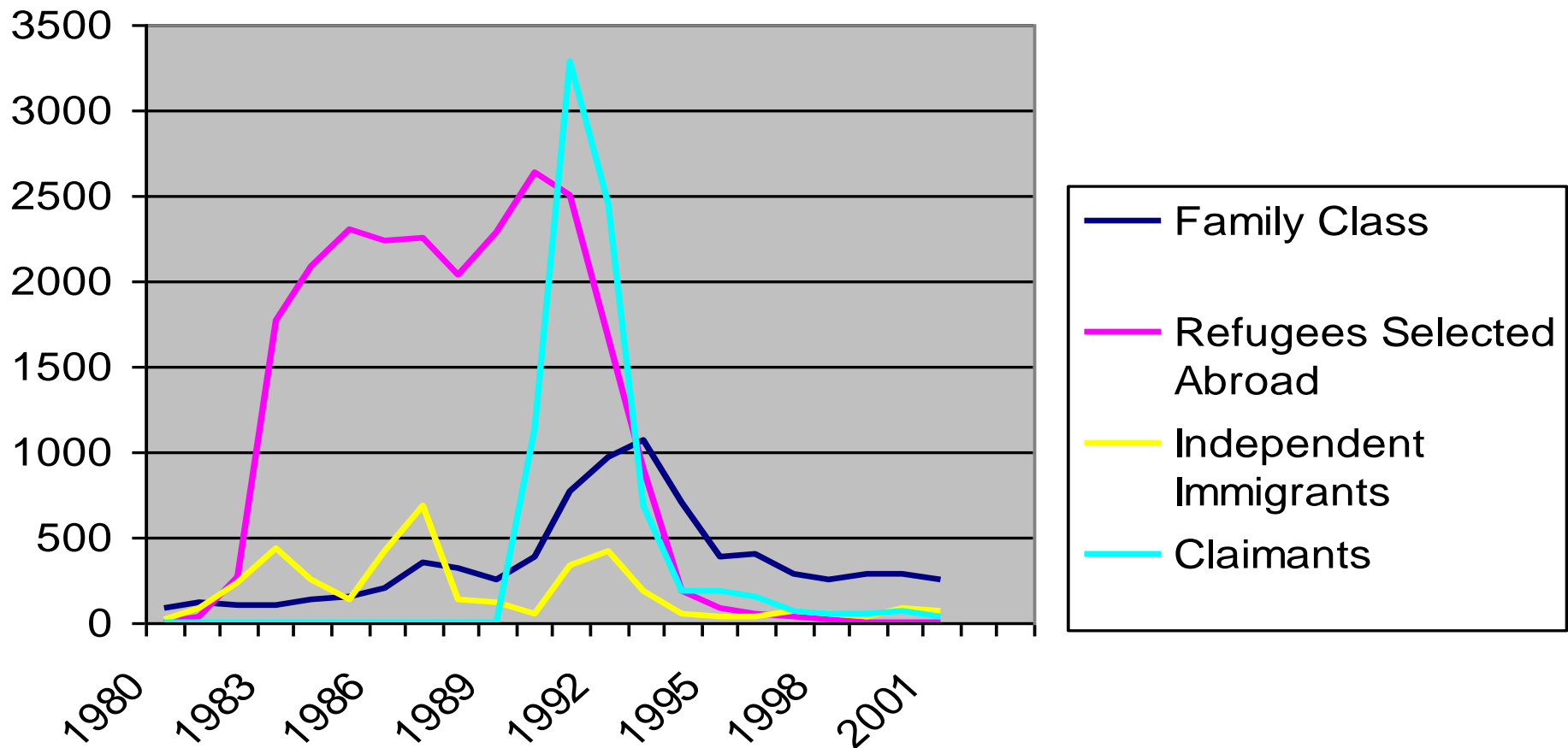
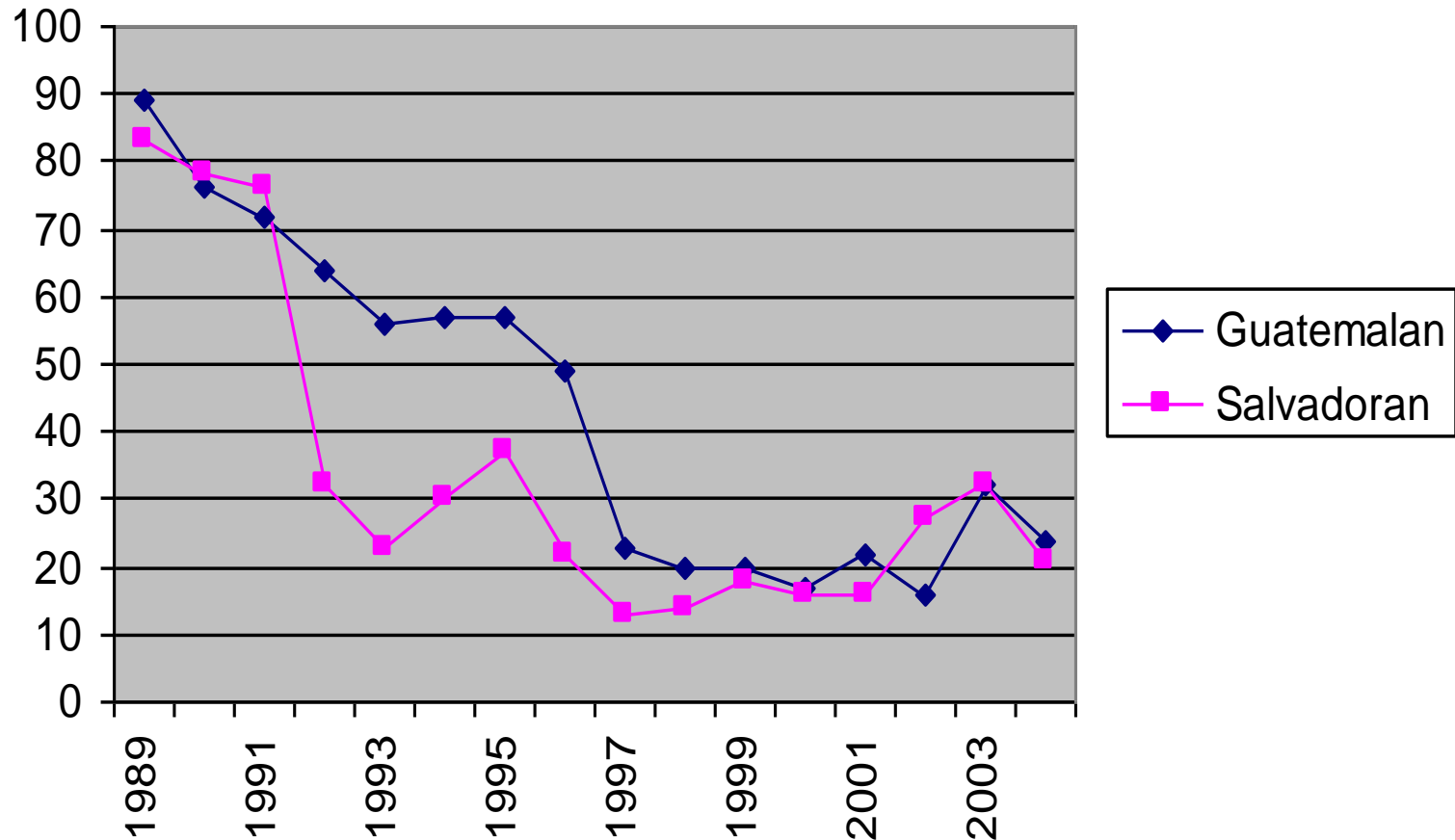


Chart 3.2. Acceptance Rates for Salvadoran and Guatemalan In-Land Refugee Claims, 1989-2004



Family Separation

| | | Salvadorians % | Guatemalans % |
|--|---------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| | | | |
| Family members in home country | Four or more | 39.5 | 50.0 |
| | | | |
| Family members in Canada | Four or more | 50.6 | 38.7 |
| | | | |
| Family members in USA | One or more | 45.7 | 22.6 |
| | Four or more | 6.2 | 1.6 |
| | | | |
| Family members in other countries | One or more | 19.8 | 8.1 |
| | Four or more | 2.5 | 0.0 |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Difficult Settlement: Finding Jobs

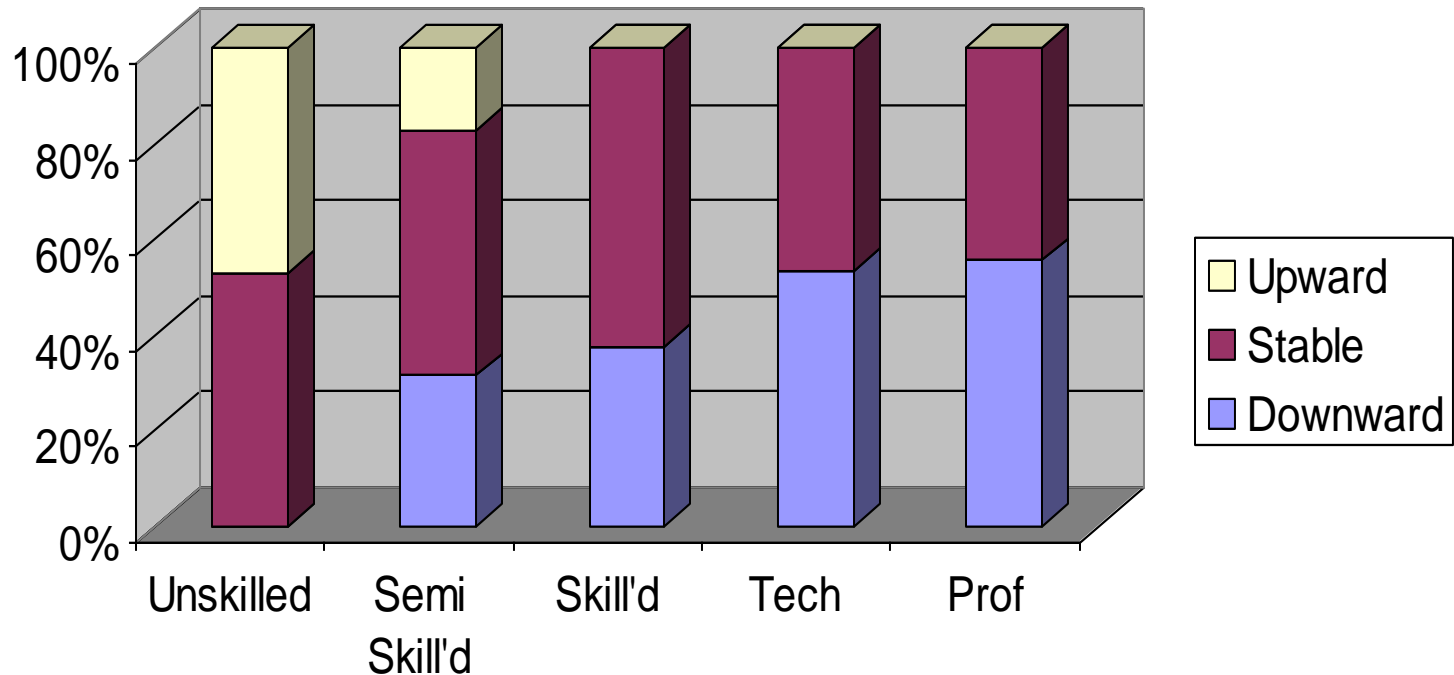
| | Salvadorians | | Guatemalans | |
|----------------------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Months to get work permit | 1.9 | 1.8 | 2.2 | 2.8 |
| Months to find first job | 6.4 | 12.8 | 9.5 | 13.5 |
| Months FT work in 1997 | 8.6 | 5.7 | 9.3 | 6.4 |

Low Human Capital: Selected Characteristics of the Latin American Origin Population, Metropolitan Toronto, 1996

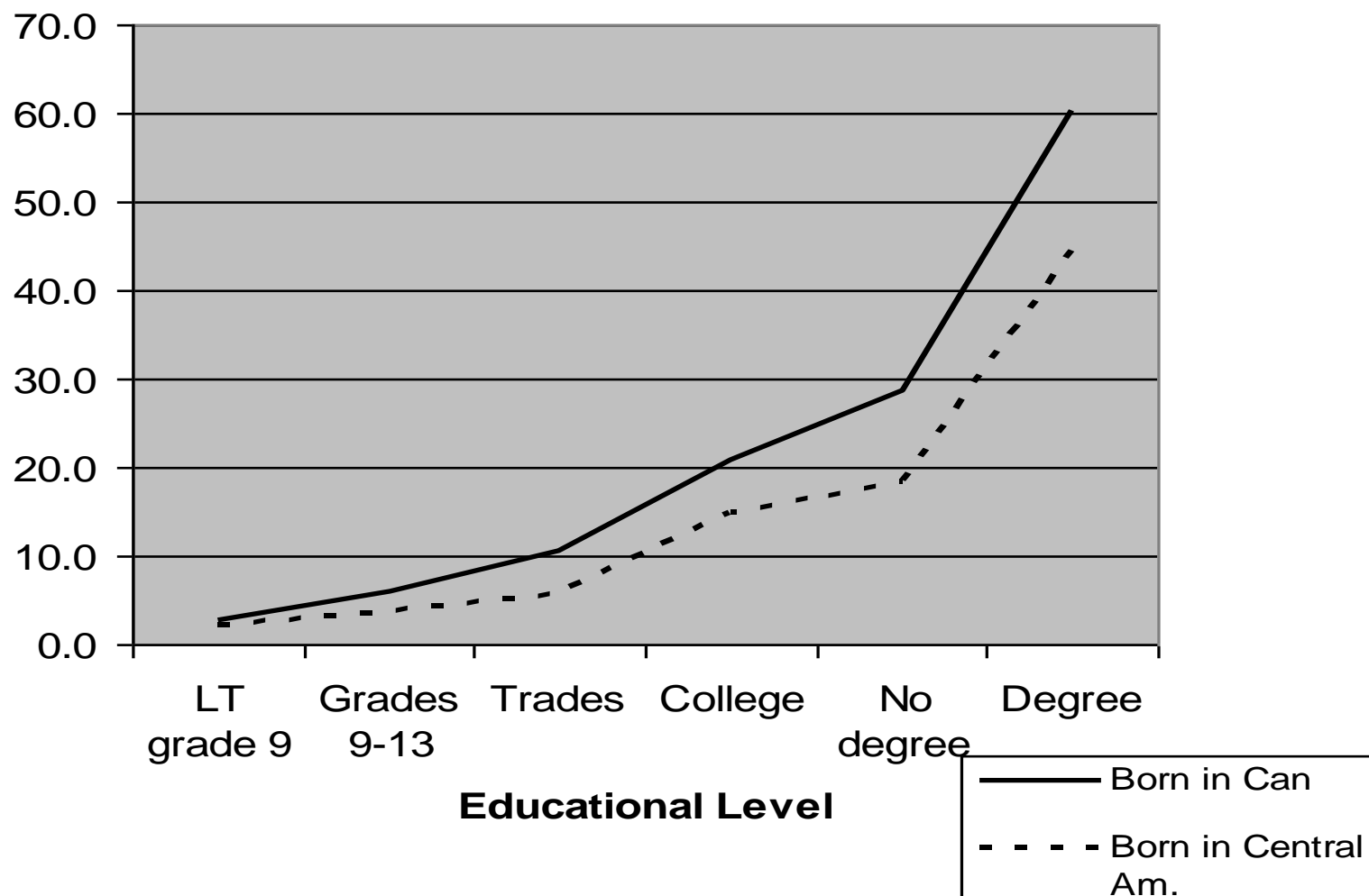
| | Central Am. | | Total City |
|----------------------------------|-------------|--|------------|
| % speak only English at home | 19.1 | | 66.3 |
| % with university complete | 8.9 | | 22.7 |
| % university grad's (ages 20-24) | 6.0 | | 15.1 |
| Unemployment rate AGES 15-24 | 32.7 | | 19.6 |
| Unemployment rate AGES 25-64 | 23.9 | | 9.4 |
| % in low-skilled jobs | | | |
| WOMEN | 79.2 | | 52.8 |
| MEN | 66.7 | | 44.4 |
| % of families below poverty line | 51.6 | | 22.7 |
| Median family income | \$31,500 | | \$51,600 |
| Numbers | 7,395 | | 2,363,870 |

De-Skilling (Downward Mobility)

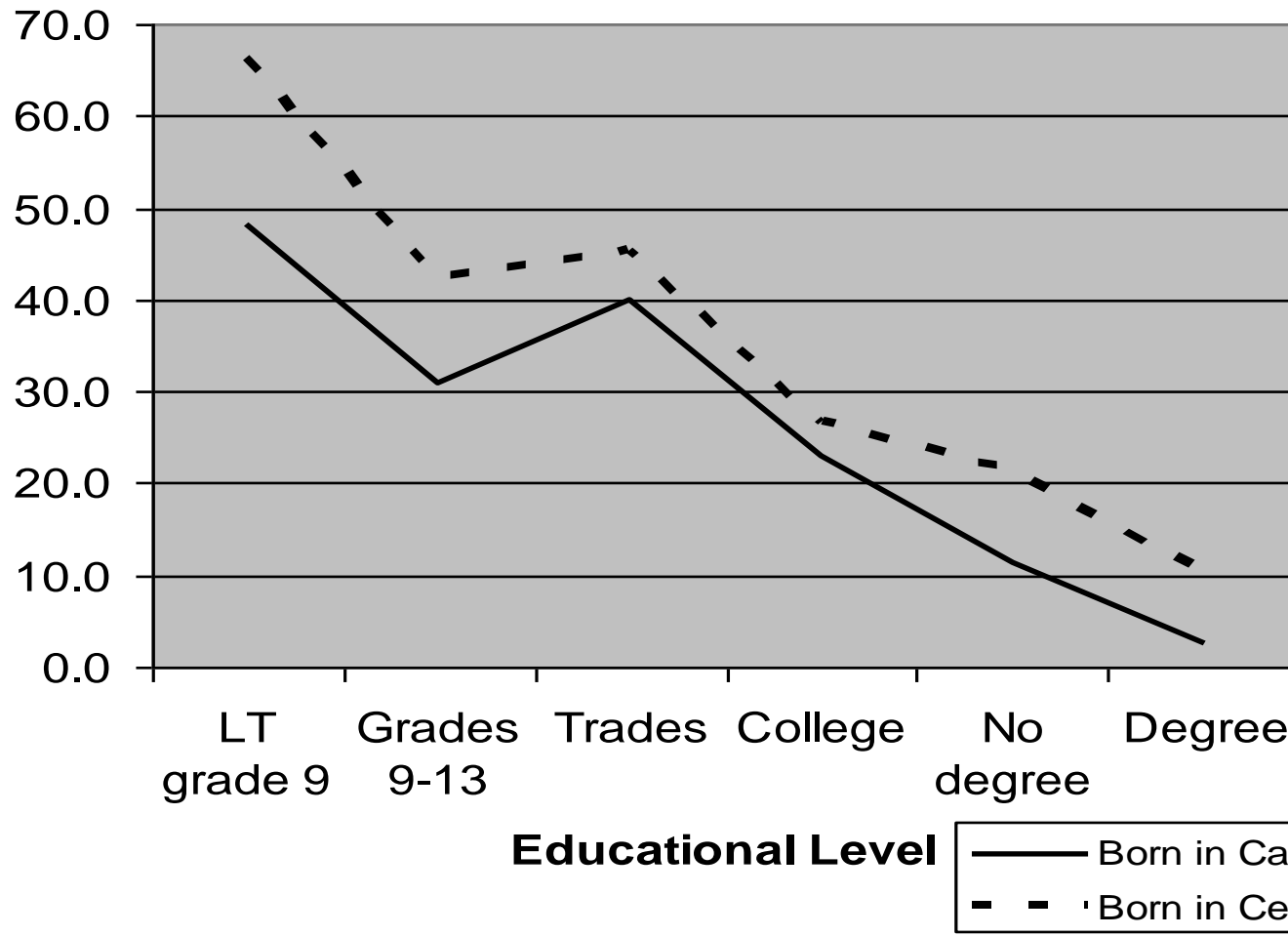
**Occupational mobility before-after immigration:
Salvadorian and Guatemalans in Toronto**



Percent with a "Professional" occupation in Canada



Percent in Manual Occupations



Racism in Canadian Society

- Racism is embedded in the text of some major institutions
- Extreme example: Toronto Police Association Poster (1999)

Police stand firm on poster

No apology for depiction of Hispanics

BY PETER SMALL
STAFF REPORTER

Toronto's police union says it has no intention of responding to demands by Hispanic community members that it apologize for putting up a subway poster showing Latino gang members.

The poster, which has been running for three weeks and is scheduled to come down today, was not meant to be offensive to Toronto Hispanics and Latin Americans, said Craig Bromell, president of the Toronto Police Association.

No one from the community has complained directly to the union, Bromell said last night, charging that the uproar over the poster was politically motivated by Judy Sgro, a Toronto Police Services Board official who is a Liberal. "This is a real cheap shot," Bromell said. "She obviously doesn't care about law and order in this city."

The poster, sponsored by the police union, asks people to consider these issues when they vote in Thursday's provincial election and it intentionally depicts a gang from East Los Angeles, he said.

The poster asks voters to "help fight crime by electing candidates who are prepared to take on the drug pushers, the pimps and rapists..."

"It doesn't matter to us really what people think as long as we get the message across," Bromell said. "I guess if it was to happen again we would do the same thing."

Bromell did leave open the possibility, however, that leaders of the 7,000-member union would review using the same photograph in future.

In its short history, it has outraged many in Toronto's Latin community, a quiet group slow to take offence, said Sgro, the police board's vice-chair and a city councillor.

"They would never have been able to do this and put five Jamaicans in there, I can tell you, or five Chinese," Sgro said. "I expect you're going to hear more about this."

Sgro (North York Humber), a rival of the union since the day she started on the police board about 20 months ago, said she will contact the police union today, urging it to apologize and remove the poster, if it hasn't done so already.

'It's completely out of line'

The written content is good, she said. "But the picture that accompanies the message is clearly racist and is clearly indicating that it's the Latin American community that's responsible for the crime here in the city."

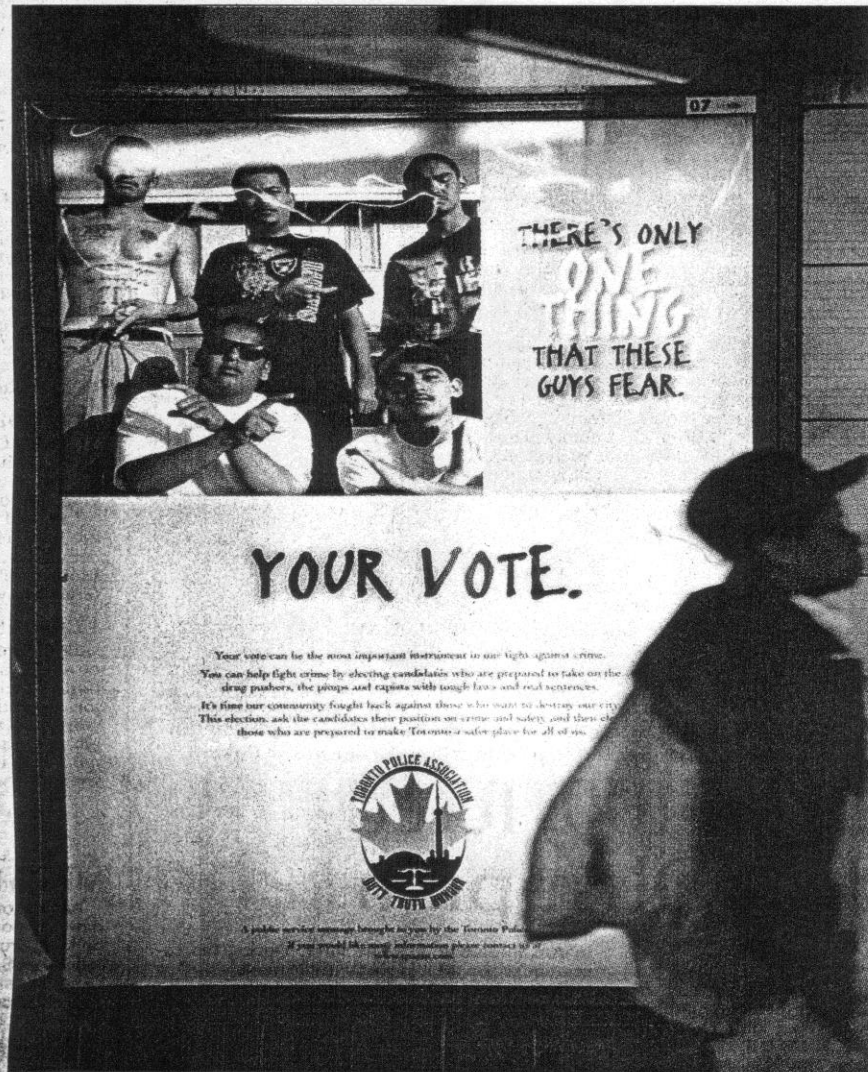
"I personally would apologize for having that poster posted in our subway system," TTC chair Howard Moscoe said. "I think it's completely out of line."

"These things can and do happen but when they're drawn to our attention, I think we're prepared to act on them fairly quickly."

The Toronto Transit Commission will refer the poster to the Advertising Standards Council, the industry's watchdog, said Bob Brent, the TTC's chief marketing officer.

The TTC doesn't vet its advertising because it doesn't believe its role is to set community standards, but it responds to complaints, he said.

With files from John Duncanson



RICK MADONIK/TORONTO STAR

SCARY MESSAGE: The Toronto Police Association's poster, at Yonge-Bloor subway station, uses a Latino gang to highlight union's law and order campaign.

3B. Responses to Challenge

Resistance and resilience through:

- Family reconstruction and support
- Community formation
- Transnational institutional linkages
- Ethnic pride
- Optimism
- Selective Acculturation

Pro-active Family Re-construction

| | | |
|--|---------------------|--------------------|
| Percent of principal respondents and spouses who: | | |
| | Salvadorians | Guatemalans |
| Received help from family in Canada to immigrate | 32.1 | 12.9 |
| Have helped family abroad to immigrate | 29.6 | 21.0 |

Strategies of Resilience Include:

- Transnational family connections
- Familism (“respect” etc.)
- Flexible family roles (older siblings “parent” their brothers and sisters, etc.)
- Religious community and faith
- Retention of cultural heritage (language, etc.)
- A future orientation (focus on children, etc.)
- Work-study ethic (focus on economic goals)
- Multiple identities

Table 7: Quotes reflecting “resilience”

- **Religious Community and Faith:** More than anything a faith in God and that love united us.
- **Familism:** The wish of my father, and he always enforced it, was that the family had to always stay together.
- **Hyphenated Identities:** My attitudes are perhaps Canadian now; but my feelings (emotions) are Guatemalan.
- **Retention of Cultural Heritage:** ...the love that you have for the place that you came from is never going to be... the same as the love that you take for the place that you now are.
- **Focus on hopes for children:** My aspirations are that these children educate themselves; above all that they finish their growing up and that they can discover themselves in this society (Canada).
- **Flexible Family Roles:** (Single man raising two of his younger siblings after their mother died.) It is a question of duty. At times I think ‘Well, this is the least that I can do for my mother.’

Strategies of Resistance Include:

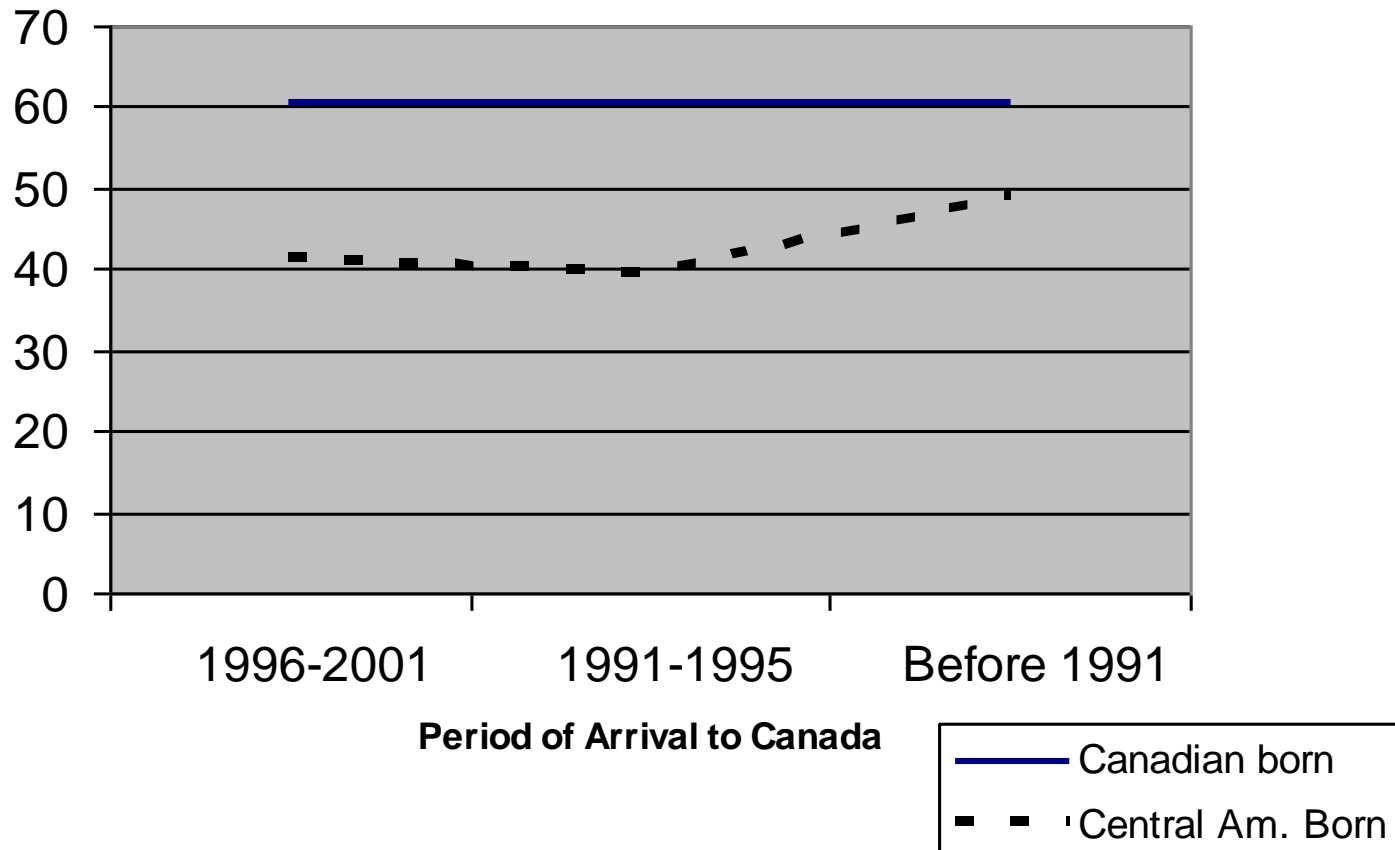
- Narrow range of trust in “home” community and in Canadian society
- Mobilization against discrimination
- Risk taking (“dangerous passage”)
- Identifying allies in various struggles
- Seeking help from own community and from Canadian agencies to address trauma & loss

Table 8: Quotes reflecting “resistance”

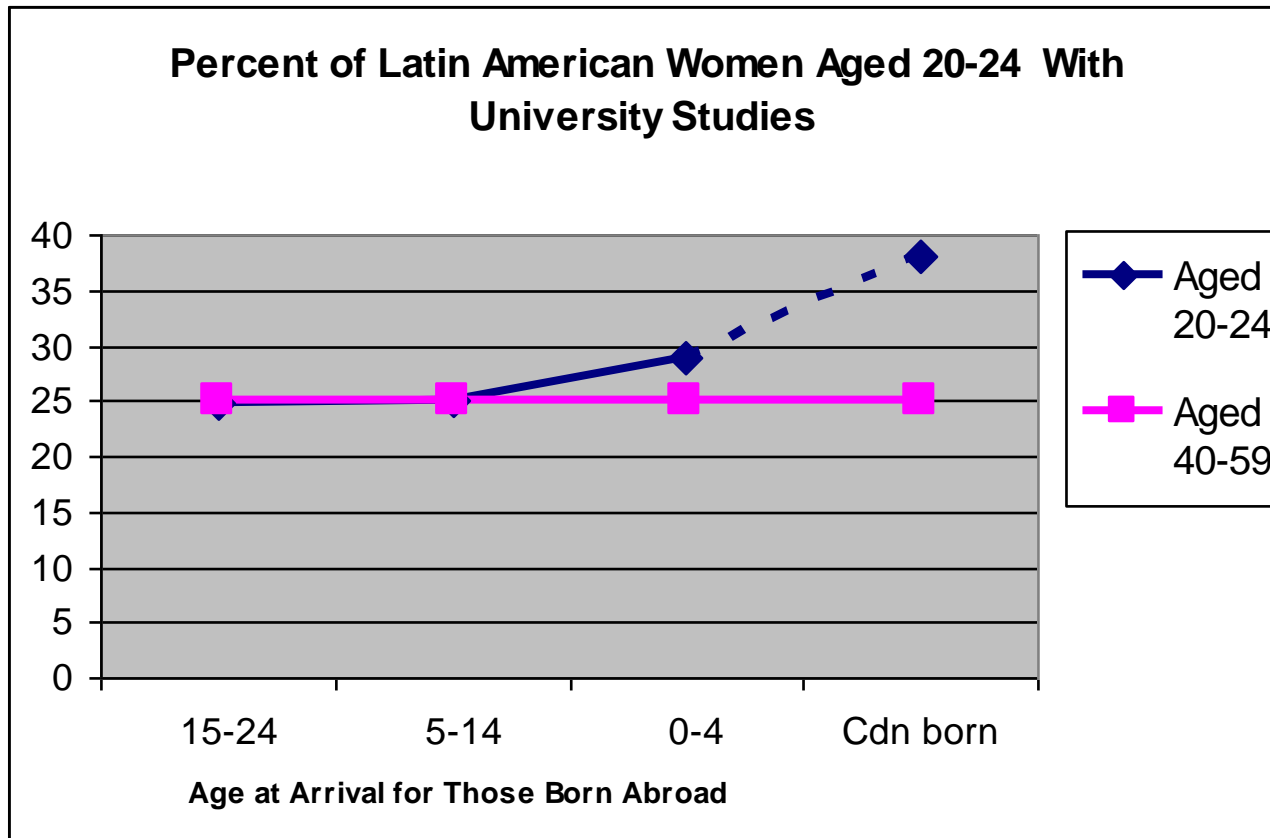
- **Distrust:** I believe that the lack of trust will continue here for a long time in our generation. We came from a culture of violence.
- **Against Discrimination:** I do not believe that I must be servile or something because I am in this country. It is my eternal belief that all human beings deserve respectful treatment, a life with dignity.
- **Risk Taking:** I went alone back from Mexico to El Salvador to get my mother and children because they were also in danger after my father crossed the border... We crossed back in the night surrounded by thieves.
- **Identifying Allies:** During the whole time I was working for him [boss] things went well. Even though we were illegally in the country he gave us all the help we needed.
- **Seeking Help for Trauma and Loss:** Our children were very affected by my wife’s depression. They had tantrums and acted badly. The psychologist helped us...

Job Mobility Over Time

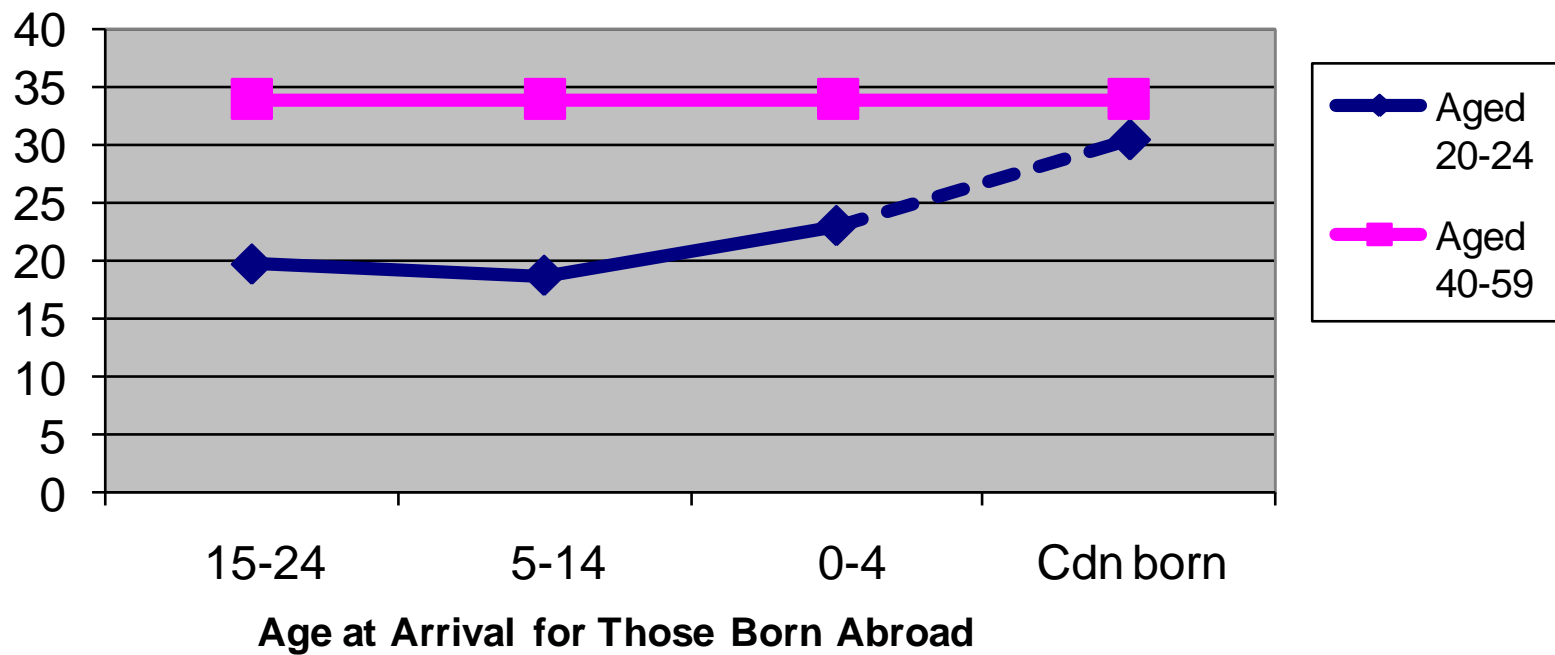
**Percent of Individuals with University Degree
Working in Professional Occupations**



Schooling of 1.5 Generation



Percent of Latin American Men Aged 20-24 With University Studies



Linking Challenges and Responses:

- Challenges and responses may be abstractly conceptualized as distinct sets
- In fact they are bound together in temporal sequences and dynamic interactions
- Historical analysis of macro events helps
- So do narrative stories

T1. Maria's brother killed. She says he was wrongly suspected as a guerrilla.

T2. Maria and spouse leave kids with her mother and flee illegally to Mexico.

T3. Maria's father, a union organizer, is threatened, his employee killed and his workplace destroyed. He flees to Mexico to join Maria.

T4. Maria returns to accompany her mother and her children to Mex.

T5-T7. Maria. and family work in Mexico until threatened with exposure when children need documents to attend high school

T8. In context of US hostility to refugees from her country Maria and family enter Canada as refugee claimants. Her professional credentials are not recognized.

T9-T10. After 3 yr wait for approval of claim, Maria sponsors immigration of her 2 sisters by then living in the US.

**A temporal narrative:
Maria and her family**

- Implications of the above?
 - Policies?
 - Models?
 - Research strategies?

- End