

**FROM YUCUAIQUÍN TO SOMERVILLE:
RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND TRADITIONS OF A
TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITY**



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Introduction

On October 4th of 2004 a mass was held in the name of St. Francis of Assisi at St. Benedict's Church in Somerville. This mass was not all that different from masses held at St. Benedict's over the last hundred years by Italian and Irish immigrants, except this mass was held in Spanish and most of the congregants, and even the priest, were Salvadoran. This mass resembled the majority of recent religious services at St. Benedict's, as



this Church has become the primary Latino Catholic Church in Somerville. What was truly extraordinary, though, was the celebration that followed the mass at the Little Flower School across the street from St. Benedict's. As congregants moved from the parish to the school, they were greeted by people wearing a variety of colorful masks, dancing to the rhythm of drums and flutes coming from a cassette player, holding flowers in one hand and maracas in the other. They danced toward members of the community and acted as if they were about to offer them the flowers, before pulling away to tease their next victim. Their feet moved fluidly and with great precision, from side to side, following the steps of a leader who stood at one end of the room. In front of the leader was a small statue of St. Francis on a wooden school desk. The community

gathered around the dancers, eating tamales and drinking *horchata*.¹ Eventually, the



leader handed his flowers over to St. Francis and the dancers slowly followed suit. Once the tape came to an end, the priest from El Salvador who had led the preceding mass stood up behind the saint. He spoke about the importance of the celebration and its roots in the city of Yucuaiquín. Most of his words fell on deaf ears however, as the parishioners talked with their neighbors and ate their tamales.

After a few minutes, the tape was rewound, the priest sat down, and the music once again played. Dancers wearing masks returned from the back. Some were the same people as before, some were new. Once again they danced around with their flowers, teasing the parishioners and eventually placing the flowers by St. Francis' feet. When the cassette came to an end for the second time, the parishioners slowly flowed out. Cups and paper plates were collected by a few and St. Francis' statue was picked up by one of the community leaders and taken home.

I began working on this project after seeing this dance called "*el baile de los negritos*" at St. Benedict's Parish. I was looking for something to write about for an anthropology class at Tufts called Urban Borderlands and "*el baile de los negritos*" seemed to be what I was looking for. I began to have a feeling that Somerville was

¹ Horchata is a traditional Central American drink made out of rice and almonds.

home to a community of immigrants who had a lot to say, but about whom not much had been written. I soon became acquainted with the community from Yucuaiquín, El



Salvador, the community that celebrates “*el baile de los negritos*” in Somerville, and they welcomed me into their homes. I spent the next four months visiting them to talk about their stories, their lives, and their rich traditions. I used traditional oral history methodology. At “*el baile de los negritos*” I made an effort to look for people from Yucuaiquín and on that day met

most of the people I interviewed. The first few interviews I did were open ended, and as I learned, I was able to formulate specific questions for future interviews. I spent nights in the library reading on Catholic beliefs about saints, specifically St. Francis of Assisi. The few people I interviewed who I did not meet the night of the dance, I met through those who I did meet that night. By November I had conducted seven formal interviews and had spoken with a several people from Yucuaiquín. I then interviewed, formally and informally, a number of people who were able to offer me information on this community in Somerville. The more I learned, the more I felt that getting everything on paper would be of use to the community.

This project has three purposes. I took this project upon myself with the hope that the community from Yucuaiquín would feel empowered by reflecting on the



Traditional mask owned by Candelario

richness of their culture and by knowing that the general public is interested in learning about them and what they have to say. I believe this project will benefit the people from Yucuaiquín by giving them a space to reflect on their traditions and by giving them the opportunity to own a document describing their history and traditions. Secondly, I am hoping that those who do not know about the tradition and

culture that immigrants from El Salvador have brought with them will be able to use this document to inform themselves, and that it will spark an interest to learn more. Hopefully this will lead to a better understanding among the residents of Somerville and a more pluralistic welcome toward Latino and other immigrants to the area. Thirdly, this document is going to be preserved at the Tufts Digital Library, which at the moment is compiling a collection of documents relating to Latinos in the city of Somerville. It is therefore my hope that no matter what the future might bring, the traditions and history of the Yucuaiquinense community of Somerville will be known to generations to come.

I recognize that this report has a number of imperfections. If I could do it again, I would interview more women and more elderly Yucuaiquinenses. It was particularly

difficult for me to find female narrators and I hope that if someone follows up on this research in the future, he/she will make an effort to record more of the women's perspectives. I also am aware that had I known more about the Catholic religion when I began the project, I would have done a better job of understanding what I was being told. I happened to be doing this project at a time of transition for the Catholic Church in Somerville and I was therefore unable to obtain a complete understanding of its history. It would be interesting to try to complete the picture in the future.

This report is being published in two formats. It is being published on the World Wide Web, in the form of an interactive webpage with color pictures of those interviewed, "*el baile de los negritos*" and the masks used. This can be found at the Tufts Anthropology Department website. The other form is the one you are holding in your hands. This booklet is divided into seven sections. This first section is this introduction, with a short description of "*el baile de los negritos*" and the purpose and methodology of the project. The following section offers a background of the different elements that cross paths in "*el baile de los negritos*" in Somerville covering the history of Yucuaiquín and the life of St. Francis of Assisi. The third section explains the complex celebration for St. Francis done in Yucuaiquín and the fourth section includes information on what is Yucuaiquín at the moment and what the city means to the Yucuaiquinenses in Somerville. The fifth section will go into the history of how a fairly large percentage of Yucuaiquinenses ended up in Somerville and Massachusetts and their experiences since they arrived. This section also covers their relationship with the Church in Somerville, and the obstacles they had to overcome to celebrate "*el baile de los negritos*" in their new home. The sixth section is about the relationship between the Catholic community of Yucuaiquinenses in Massachusetts and their patron saint, St. Francis. Lastly, the conclusion attempts to synthesize what is said in the other sections.

The Narrators

Manuel Pérez was born and raised in Yucuaiquin. He left Yucuaiquin in 1983 due to the violent conflict in El Salvador. He settled in Massachusetts and has been an active member of YUMA (Yucuaiquinenses Unidos de Massachusetts) since its founding. He currently lives in Cambridge. Unfortunately, his picture is not available.



Father Omar Calix was born and raised in Yucuaiquín. He studied theology with Vincentians at the Mary Immaculate Seminary in Northampton, Pennsylvania. He then returned to Yucuaiquín and now works in different countries of Central America as a missionary. Recently he spent time working at prisons in Honduras. He returns to Yucuaiquín at least once every two

months and comes to Somerville once a year to celebrate “*el baile de los negritos*” on San Francisco’s day with the community. He is standing in this picture speaking to the community at “*el baile de los negritos*” on October 4, 2004.



Candelario Flores was born and raised in Yucuaiquín. He traces his roots to native Indians and to Chinese refugees. He fought for the Salvadoran army, was incarcerated by the guerrillas, tortured twice, and shot at. He believes he is alive to tell the

story because of San Francisco. He left El Salvador, leaving a large family behind, and has since become a missionary and a member of the Franciscan Third Order. He lives in

Somerville and is one of the main organizers of “*el baile de los negritos*”.

He danced as “*negrito mayor*” (leader of “*el baile de los negritos*”) in 2004. In this picture, he is being interviewed in the basement of St. Benedict’s Church, where he often holds conversation groups. Behind him are the two masks he owns.



Daniel Mendoza was born and raised in Yucuaiquín, but during the civil war went

to look for work in another town in El Salvador and then in Honduras. He was unable to make money as a carpenter throughout the war, and came to the United States in 1980. He worked for a few years, but then had to quit his job because he was suffering from rheumatism. Now he lives in an apartment in Cambridge. He plays the accordion,

guitar, and violin. In this picture, he is in his apartment playing one of the two accordions he owns.



Patrona Pérez was born and raised in Yucuaiquín and moved to Somerville in 1986. She has traveled a number of times to El Salvador since she has been here and was in charge of making and giving out the food at “*el baile de los negritos*” in Somerville in 2004. She is pictured here in her apartment holding a statue of San Francisco that stands over her kitchen, a mask she bought in

Yucuaiquín and maracas which she made herself.

Oscar Mendoza immigrated to Cambridge in 1981 after his father’s death in order to support his family in Yucuaiquín. He had a sister already living in Cambridge who helped him out. He worked for three and a half years, and then went back to El Salvador. He came back a year later, after getting married, and has since lived in the U.S. He has worked at a candy factory for 19 years and opened a general store 3 years ago. He lives with his



mother, two brothers and a sister in Cambridge and has been an active member of YUMA.

Background

At “*el baile de los negritos*” a number of different issues and histories are at play. In order to understand it, it is important to know a general history of the town of Yucuaiquín, who St. Francis of Assisi was and how they crossed paths. This is the information found in this section.

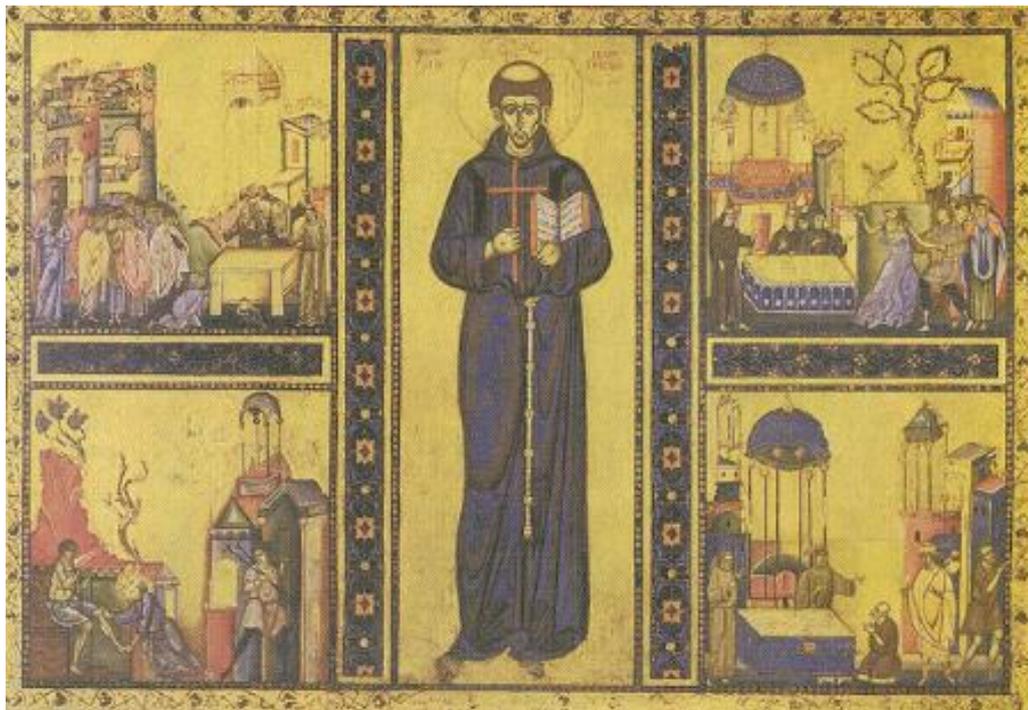
Yucuaiquín in Context



Yucuaiquín is located on the eastern side of El Salvador in the state of La Unión, near San Miguel. When the Spanish arrived, Yucuaiquín was located in a valley called “*llano grande*”, but now it is located on a nearby ridge. The area was populated by Indians of the Lenca culture when the Spanish arrived, leading to a war that lasted over

twenty years and the destruction of the Lenca culture in the region. The name Yucuaiquín is said to be “*pueblo del fuego*” (town of fire) in the Lenca language. It is believed that these Indians were highly religious. Some people in the town still remember stories that they were told by their grandparents about the Indian lifestyle. The Catholic religion which the Spanish brought was combined by the local population with local traditional customs to make a new line of Catholicism. Franciscans soon established a convent for themselves in San Miguel, the largest nearby city, and had a great influence on the area around the city.

St. Francis of Assisi



St. Francis of Assisi and 4 posthumous miracles, unknown artist in Assisi, 13th century

In 1181, long before the Spanish had any idea Latin America existed, St. Francis of Assisi was born into a wealthy Italian family. He became disillusioned with the world and, after a life altering vision of Christ, rejected the wealth of his family. He joined the war against Perugia, and was held prisoner for a year.

During his younger years St. Francis spent much time alone, asking God for enlightenment, and after a pilgrimage to Rome, had a vision in which he was told to restore the Catholic Church, which had fallen into decay. He sold his horse and his belongings in order to restore churches around Assisi, and became a wandering beggar. From then on, St. Francis devoted himself to helping the poor, the sick and lowly animals. Legend has it that he preached to animals as well as to humans. The religious Order of Friars Minor was founded by his followers. St Francis of Assisi's feast day is October 4th. He is the patron saint of animals and the environment and is known for taking care of the poor and the sick. Those with whom I spoke in Somerville called St. Francis by his Spanish name, San Francisco. San Francisco, though, is quite a different character to the community than the historical St. Francis. Therefore, for the remainder of this report I will call him by his Spanish name.

Folklorist James Griffith has documented how in some places in Mexico the image of St. Francis Xavier is celebrated as if it were St. Francis of Assisi even though they were very different people. The Jesuits, who celebrated St. Francis Xavier, had a great influence on the new continent until 1767, when they were expelled from the entire area. Franciscans were called to work in some of the missions where the Jesuits had been working. Now in some cases, images of Francis Xavier are celebrated on October 4th, St. Francis of Assisi's day.ⁱ This could be happening in many places in Latin America. Whether this is the case in Yucuaiquín, though, is unknown to me.

The Legend of How San Francisco Came to Yucuaiquín

The people from Yucuaiquín who I met told me numerous tales associated with San Francisco. These legends and myths are not to be seen as historical accounts of real events, but as narratives believed to be true at least by some in the community. Most of

the narrators prefaced them with “*La leyenda dice-*” (The legend says-), “*Nos dicen los abuelos*” (Our grandparents tell us-) or “*Recuerdo los antepasados que contaban-*” (I remember the ancestors that said-). How much they actually believe that the set of events happened varies from legend to legend and person to person. Certainly recent events that occurred to family members or friends are seen as facts while stories from long ago are approached with more skepticism. Nevertheless, the legend of how San Francisco got to Yucuaiquín is known by all of the people I interviewed and is the exception to the rule I stated above. Even though the setting of this legend is hundreds of years ago, it is held as true by everyone in the Yucuaiquinense Catholic community who I met.

Legend has it that on a fourth of October, probably sometime in the 1700’s, a man from Yucuaiquín was out hunting when he found the image of San Francisco on the bark of an “*amate*” tree. Though much of this legend has been lost or distorted through the years, everyone I spoke with mentioned that the tree in which the image was found was an “*amate*”.² It is interesting to me that while so much seems to be lost, details like this one remain. At the time of this legend, the people lived in a valley called “*llano grande*” and the image was found up on a ridge called “*cerro de la cruz*”. What happened next is debated among the Yucuaiquinenses. They learned the legend from their parents and grandparents and thus there are slight variations in each account. Some believe that the man and other hunters tried to take the image back to town, but were unable to do so. The image would not yield. Others believe that this image of San Francisco was taken back to town, but it returned on its own the next day. After having done so repeatedly, the people decided the image was really San Francisco himself. Patrona, the only woman I interviewed, told me that the image was found by a woman

² The “*amate*” is a 25 to 40 meter high tree found in Central America from which a paper is made, which is called by the same name.

and some children. When the woman tried to clean it up, it bled, which confirmed that it was a saintly figure. It is interesting to me that the only woman I interviewed was the only one to have a role for women in her version of the legend. Everyone I interviewed agreed that the community realized that it was God's will for them to create a temple at the place where the image was found. Soon the entire community moved their houses to settle around this new temple. The temple is now the main church of Yucuaiquín. It is known that the town had earlier patron saints and many wonder why the prior ones did not remain through time like San Francisco has. Many believed that the strong Franciscan influence in the area led to St. Francis becoming the patron saint of the town.ⁱⁱ

The Festivities of San Francisco

The image of San Francisco was placed in a “*nicho*”, a freestanding wooden structure in which the image is carried. The legend ends with the reminder that from that moment on the community praised the image of San Francisco and celebrated it. There does not seem to be a clear understanding as to whether the image currently in the church is the original image of San Francisco. Father Calix told me that the original image has been lost, but many of the Yucuaiquinenses I spoke with believe that the original image is one of the images currently in the church. There are also a lot of stories about the image and its powers. Many stories revolve around people who have tried to move or do things to the image, but the image has not allowed them to. “*La imagen solo se deja mover si le pide permiso*” (The image can only be moved if you ask it for permission), Daniel told me.

There are two images of San Francisco belonging to the church in Yucuaiquín. One is large and remains in the church, while the other one is small and is carried

around from house to house. There is a debate as to whether the image taken around is the original or if the original is the large one in the church. Beginning around May, at the onset of the rainy season, this image of the saint is taken around Yucuaiquín and neighboring towns in what is called “*la demanda*”. During “*la demanda*”, the image of the saint is carried around the city and its neighboring communities and is taken to a different house each night.

At the house where the saint stays for the night, a “*velorio*” is held. A “*velorio*” (also called “*velación*”) is a tradition of praying and celebrating the saint in a private house. In order to prepare for a “*velorio*”, the owners of the house clean their home, prepare a lot of food, and open their doors to the public. When the image of the saint arrives at night, many people gather and shoot fireworks, pray rosaries, and dance “*el baile de los negritos*”. Food is served for everyone. In fact, one of the main purposes of the *velorio* is for the poor people to be fed. Patrona told me that If she were to hold one of these celebrations for San Francisco, she would tell people and it would be an open invitation. At her home, she would prepare a lot of food and people would come to pray all night. They would use drums and bells and they would pray “*velaciones*”. At these events, food never runs out, because if it seems like it will, San Francisco always intervenes and multiplies the food.

Some followers sleep over and the next morning rosaries are prayed once again, and the image of the saint is taken from the house. At least four people, called the “*demandantes*” travel with the saint to every house, and each one of them has a specific role. The “*secretario*” is in charge of a notebook in which he keeps track of where the saint is supposed to sleep each night. The “*mayordomo*” is the head man, and makes sure the “*velorios*” are done according to tradition. The “*encargado de las mascararas*” takes care of the numerous masks that travel with the saint. People approach the

“demandantes” to ask if they can have San Francisco over for a night. Usually the schedule is tight and it is difficult to find a day in which the image of San Francisco is free. It is also expensive to have San Francisco at one’s house, as the person inviting San Francisco is expected to contribute monetarily to the church and feed whoever comes to the “*velorio*”.

Toward the end of September, the image of the saint is brought back to Yucuaiquín where the community gets ready for the “*fiesta patronal*” (patronal feast), which begins five days before and continues through San Francisco’s day, October 4th. While in private houses there is a dedication to San Francisco throughout the year, the “*fiesta patronal*” is the yearly celebration in which the town becomes flooded with people. An important part of this feast is “*el baile de los negritos*”, but there are many more aspects to it. Upon the return of the image, the festivities begin, welcoming San Francisco with the traditional cultural dance called “*la partesana*”. Arrows called “*partesanas*” are used in the dance, and many believe the dance resembles the fighting between the Spanish and the Indians. A “*negrito mayor*” leads the “*partesana*” as well as “*el baile de los negritos*”. While the “*partesana*” and “*el baile de los negritos*” seem to have a lot in common, Yucuaiquinenses discern between the first one which is a cultural dance and the second one which is a religious one. “*El baile de los negritos*” is danced at the houses during the “*velorios*” throughout the year and also in the streets during this yearly celebration.

Father Calix said:

La fiesta de San Francisco es en octubre pero empezaba a visitar las casas esta imagen con algunas personas como en mayo o en junio, cuando empezaba a llover, y empezaban a salir las flores, los frutos, verdad? Y este baile, es decir, era como una alegría, es decir, que venia

la lluvia, era bendecido el pueblo por la lluvia, y que al venir lluvia, este, iban a tener frutos. Iban a tener frutos. Y que era como una alegría y un dar gracias a Dios por la lluvia y por los frutos que iban recibiendo.

(St. Francis day is in October but the image began visiting the houses with some people around May or June, when it began to rain, and flowers began to grow, and fruits, right? And this dance, let's say, was an expression of joy, that the town was being blessed by rain, and that with the coming of the rain would come fruits. It was like a joy and a giving thanks to God for the rain and for the fruits that they were receiving.)

The fact that “*el baile de los negritos*” is so tied to the seasons supports the theory that a variant of this dance was probably originally celebrated by the Indians living in the area before the Spanish arrived. If this was once the case, proof of this seems to be lost in history. All the Yucuaiquinenses I spoke with believed that the festivity was celebrated for the first time when San Francisco's image was found on the “*amate*” tree. None of them, however, have been able to offer me an explanation as to why their ancestors would choose to wear masks and dance to the sound of drums and flutes in order to celebrate San Francisco. Interestingly, there are also other areas in Latin America in which people dance “*el baile de los negritos*” for different saints. I personally believe that the dance was probably an Indian tradition, which already involved the music and the masks, which was later combined with the Catholic faith and traditions.

Since San Francisco is the saint of nature, it makes sense that he would be celebrated for the gift of rain. Father Calix, however, spoke in the past tense when

mentioning how people thanked San Francisco for the rain. The meaning of “*la demanda*” and thanking San Francisco has changed. Most people I spoke with are aware that the festivity has a connection with the seasons, but everyone I spoke with is thankful to San Francisco for things that are not directly related to nature. They believe that their ancestors were “*indios*” who were dependent on the rain, but the lives of the Yucuaiquinenses now do not depend so much on rain.

Many also believe that the people who used to dance were the poorest people, and that these were the ones who worked in the fields, and therefore relied on the rain the most. No one was certain about the veracity of the explanation as to why the “*negritos*” are given that name. Father Calix said:

Alguna interpretación es que eran como los campesinos, eran como la gente más pobre la que le daba mas gracias a Dios. Y ellos por trabajar en el monte, trabajar en el sol pues ¿eran negritos, verdad?

(An interpretation is that they were like farmers, they were the poorest people that gave the most thanks to God. And because they worked out on the ridge, in the sun, well they were black, right?)

When I asked Father Calix what he meant by black, however, he said “*Del color mío... algo morenos trigueños*” (My color, “morenos” “trigueños”). Father Calix would definitely not be identified as black by most North Americans. It is also interesting that the dancers traditionally wear masks of white people and animals.

Yucuaiquín has always been an agricultural town. It is possible that at the time when most of the Yucuaiquinenses worked in the fields, or when the people who worked in the fields dominated the “*baile*”, having a festivity to show thanks for the rainy season was significant. Through time, however, giving thanks for the rain became

less significant for the population. The meaning of the “*baile*” changed. For the Yucuaiquinenses in Massachusetts, who live very different lives than their parents did in Yucuaiquín, the meaning of the festivity is once again changing, taking on a whole new significance.

Yucuaiquín Today

Soccer games, a marathon, a bull run, and night dances are also organized during the annual celebration of San Francisco. People from around the area, and from the United States as well, come to take part in the celebration. This “*fiesta patronal*” has definitely developed during the past two decades. The religious aspects of the days, however, are not to be underestimated. Most people I spoke with explained why so many people come to their city by mentioning the greatness of San Francisco. They said most people come to show their gratefulness and respect to San Francisco. Masses are held every day and the “*negritos*” dance their dance around the streets and in the plaza in front of the church, taking the image of the saint with them. The “*fiesta patronal*” (patronal feast), of which “*el baile de los negritos*” is a large component, still stands strong.

Yucuaiquín recently became an official city, having surpassed the threshold number of 10,000 residents.ⁱⁱⁱ Yucuaiquinenses remembered the size of their hometown when they were younger as tiny compared to what it is now. Many spoke to me about the bus lines: there used to be one and now there are many. The streets which used to be covered with stones and mud are now covered with asphalt.

The entry of new money to the city has had its negative and positive effects. Social classes have been altered, as rich are now only those who have relatives in the United States who send them remittances. In explaining why drug and alcohol

addiction has become a problem among the newly rich, Daniel told me, “*Dicen que el pobre no sabe manejar el dinero*” (They say that the poor person cannot manage money). Yucuaiquín has also felt the effects of the “*maras*”, gangs that began among Salvadorans in Los Angeles, California. When many of them were deported, the gangs took ground in Central America and are now considered a major threat to the safety of the population. There have also been positive effects. Oscar remembered winning a prize at the annual marathon in his adolescence and receiving only a few cents. He said that now, due to the money coming from the U.S., the city can offer respectable prizes. Many also believe that the quality of life has improved.

Overall, though, everyone agrees that the city has changed significantly due to remittances. Daniel told me, “*Yo nacido en ese pueblo, me crecí ahí y ahí fui hombre, ahora que fui, no lo conocía. Las casas todas con carros, bien arregladas, casas bien bonitas. Me hallaba como que estaba en un hogar extraño*” (Having been born in that town, I grew up there, became a man there, and now, when I went, I did not recognize it. I found myself in a stranger’s home.) Patrona, though a native of Yucuaiquín, said she still goes back and “*uno se siente raro en medio de la comunidad*” (one feels strange in the midst of the community). About the last time she was there, she said “*me daba pena que la gente me mirara*” (I was ashamed of having people look at me). She now feels more comfortable in Somerville than in Yucuaiquín because she is not looked at as a stranger.

Yucuaiquinences in Somerville and Massachusetts

Yucuaiquinenses began coming to the United States in the 1970’s, as repression was mounting and the civil war was destroying the lives of many in El Salvador. Much has been written about trends in Salvadoran migration to the United States and most

things written about Salvadorans seem to be true for Yucuaiquinenses. The majority made their way through the Mexican border, paying a coyote to guide them through the process. Some immigrated due to economic reasons while others immigrated because of political reasons; most immigrated due to a number of reasons. There are now large communities of Yucuaiquinenses around the U.S., concentrated in Boston, Los Angeles, Nashville, New York City, Union City, Jersey City, Washington, Dallas, and Austin.

Those who arrived in Massachusetts in the early 1980's remember when the community from Yucuaiquín in the area was so small they all knew each other. They came to Massachusetts because they had family members or friends who had already settled here, and were planning on relying on them for support. They would often visit each other's houses and it would be an anomaly for one of them not to know of another living in the area. It was also an anomaly to find a grocery shop or other business in which Spanish was spoken, and the community relied on each other for help. They remember it as a more unfriendly environment, and many of them went back to El Salvador. Some returned to the U.S. to stay for good. In the 1980's, many Yucuaiquinenses lived in Cambridge and some lived in Somerville, Chelsea, East Boston, and other cities on the outskirts of Boston. A major hike in Cambridge's cost of living in the late 80's and early 90's caused much of the Latino population to leave Cambridge and many moved to Somerville. Similar patterns are now being seen in Somerville and the same people who had to leave Cambridge are now leaving Somerville for places like East Boston and Chelsea. There are still people coming from Yucuaiquín and the community offers them a hand, but there are not as many recent newcomers as there were ten years ago. It seems to be a general agreement that the situation now is very different from what it was 20 years ago. The border between the U.S. and Mexico is now better-guarded, making attempts to cross it a much riskier and

more expensive expedition. Also, policies inside the United States make it increasingly harder for undocumented immigrants to live normal lives.

Yucuaiquinenses identify themselves as a subgroup of Salvadorans. They do not all know each other, but most of them believe they know at least something about every other person from Yucuaiquín living in the area. There is no accurate census data on how many Salvadorans are living in Somerville or Massachusetts; no data at all on Yucuaiquinenses. Some of the following numbers, though, can aid in understanding Somerville and its residents. Somerville is a city of 77,000 residents, out of which 7,000 consider themselves Latinos. It is the most densely populated city in Massachusetts and East Somerville. The area where most Salvadorans live is one of the most densely populated areas of Somerville, with about 50 residents per acre. In the 02145 zip code (which encompasses East Somerville and surrounding neighborhoods), 40 percent of the population is foreign born and 15 percent live below the poverty line.^{iv} I asked every person I interviewed how many Yucuaiquinenses they thought were living in Somerville and Massachusetts. To my surprise, most educated guesses were similar. Most guessed that there are about 300 Yucuaiquinenses living in Somerville and about 1,000 in Massachusetts. If these guesses are right, then about 10% of the population from Yucuaiquín is living in Massachusetts.

Yucuaiquinenses Unidos de Massachusetts

The people from Yucuaiquín have succeeded in organizing themselves in the last fifteen years. In 1991, YUMA (Yucuaiquinenses Unidos de Massachusetts) was founded with the purpose of *“la idea era dejar un recuerdo de la gente que vino a Estados Unidos, especialmente a Boston, dejar un recuerdo que sirviera a las generaciones.”* (leav[ing] a memory of the people who left for the United States,

specifically Boston, in a way that would serve generations), mentioned Oscar Mendoza. As its first campaign, the organization bought a piece of land in Yucuaiquin to make a soccer field for the residents. Since then, YUMA has donated scholarships, allowing a number of needy children in the community to attend school. It has also donated fans for the church and a park for young children to play in. It has also helped specific people in need and has allowed the community in Massachusetts to meet and work as a unit. YUMA took a great part in the planning of “*el baile de los negritos*” in Somerville.



YUMA was given a certificate of appreciation by the school system in Yucuaiquin in 2001 for offering scholarships to its students.

Mendoza, an active member of YUMA, and asked if he could come to the area to celebrate mass on San Francisco’s day. Father Calix was invited “*con el propósito de incentivar, de tratar de unir mas a la comunidad, con la idea de que no se pierda la fe de San Francisco y las cosas típicas que tenemos*” (with the purpose of motivating and bringing the community closer, so that the faith in San Francisco and the traditions we have would not be lost), commented Oscar Mendoza. He came for the first time in 1993

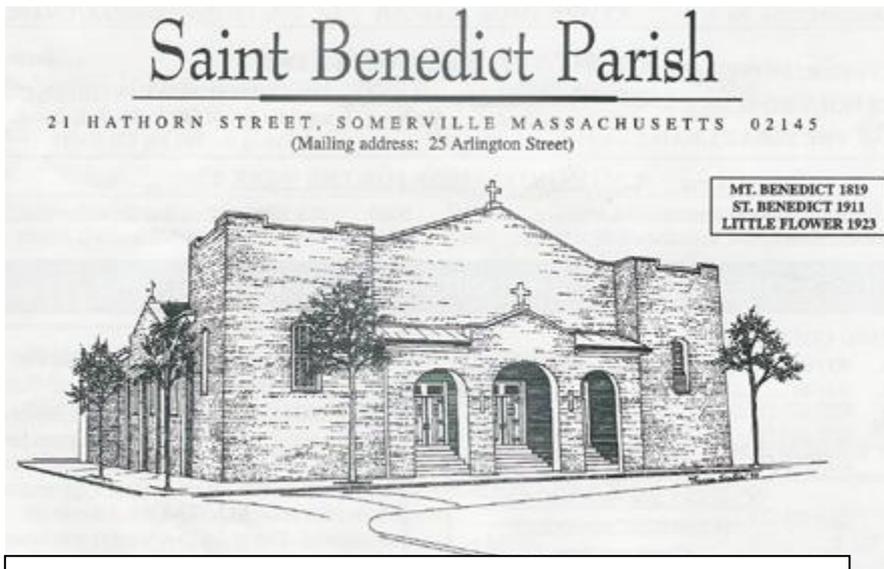
and the celebration was held at a community center in East Boston, near the Church of the Holy Redeemer. This was done for a few years but the festivities did not receive a large following. Most of the residents from Yucuaiquín at that moment were living in Somerville, and it takes about an hour to reach East Boston by subway. It took a few years, however, for Latinos to develop a relationship with the Catholic Church in Somerville and to be given permission to hold “*el baile de los negritos*” in Church facilities.

St. Benedict’s Parish

In Somerville there are a handful of Catholic churches but only one in which Latinos feel welcome. St. Benedict’s Parish is located in East Somerville, the neighborhood with the largest Latino population in Somerville, and masses have been held there in Spanish for the last two decades. In the past twenty years, there have been three priests serving the community at St. Benedict’s. Father John McLaughlin has served as the Pastor of the Church and has played an important role in welcoming the Latino population while Father Doucet serves as the Parochial Vicar and works mostly with the English-speaking community. Father Joaquin Martinez, who used to work in Dorchester, was transferred to St. Benedict’s after two churches in Dorchester merged. He was also very welcoming to the growing Latino community.

The Yucuaiquinenses I spoke with told me that they had wanted to celebrate St. Francisco’s day for years, but had faced obstacles at the church. It was difficult to explain to the North American priests what “*el baile de los negritos*” was and to gain their approval. “*Tuvimos que explicárselo como se lo explicamos a ustedes*” (We had to explain it to them in the same way we have explained it to you), I was told by Candelario Flores, one of the main organizers of the dance. Father John McLaughlin

learned Spanish on the street, speaking with parishioners.



St. Benedict's Parish, from St. Benedict's monthly newsletter.

Word has it that he would walk down East Somerville's streets and approach people that looked Salvadoran to make sure they felt welcome and knew where St. Benedict's was located. Father McLaughlin, or Padre Juan as he is called by the community, traveled to El Salvador and learned about the culture and the manner in which the Catholic religion is practiced there. "*Conoció otra tradición por Chalatenango*" (He saw another tradition in Chalatenango³), Candelario said, and then he understood what "*el baile de los negritos*" was. When Father Calix, a native of Yucuaiquín, came to the U.S. to celebrate St. Francisco' day in East Boston, he took the opportunity to speak with the clergy at St. Benedict's in Somerville about the traditions of his hometown with the hope that it would one day be celebrated in Somerville. According to Candelario, the local clergy finally understood what the dance was all about because this time it was coming from a priest.

Recently, however, many of St. Benedict's Latino parishioners are unsure about what the future will hold for their community. Father Joaquin Martinez passed away in the Spring of 2004. Father McLaughlin has been absent for the past semester and the

³ Chalatenango is a fairly large city in El Salvador.

community hopes he will return. Father Doucet does not speak Spanish and has not made a real attempt to get to know the Spanish speaking community. He does not attend Spanish mass, did not go to “*el baile de los negritos*” and refused to be interviewed for this project. Daisy Gomez, who is officially the C.C.D. Director at the church, has stepped in to ensure the community’s needs are being fulfilled. She is Cuban however, and admits that even though the Catholic faith is universal, she has a lot to learn about Salvadoran traditions. Some Yucuaiquinenses, in fact, wondered whether “*el baile de los negitos*” would be celebrated this year. Many believe that it would not have happened had it not been for the efforts of Candelario, Daisy and other community leaders. About the community, Daisy said,

Tenían miedo que muchas de estas costumbres que se hicieron con el Padre Juan, tenían miedo que con los cambios todo esto se acabara. Y yo les dije que ni hablar. Ahora mas que nunca tenemos que hacerlo. Ahora mas que nunca la presencia salvadoreña tiene que decir aquí estamos, y estamos esperando que el Padre Juan regrese y no vamos a dejar caer todo esto.

(They were afraid that the traditions that were formed with Padre Juan, they were very afraid that with all of these changes, it would all end. I told them not to even think about it. Now more than ever we have to do it. Now more than ever the Salvadorian presence has to say, we are here, we are waiting for Padre Juan to return, and we are not going to let this all fall.)

Candelario also told me that as long as he is there, he will not let the “*baile*” cease to exist. While there is a lot of fear associated with the recent change in the community, there is also a lot of hope for the future.

When I asked Yucuaiquinenses how they identify themselves, almost all of them immediately said it depends on who is asking. To North Americans, they are Salvadorans. To Salvadorans, they are Yucuaiquinenses. Not one of them identified himself or herself as a North American. In fact, many told me that one of the purposes of “*el baile de los negritos*” is to make sure the younger generation stays in touch with their community and their traditions. Oscar Mendoza, for example, told me he dances for his children at home every once in a while so they will not forget where his father came from. Father Calix told me what he tells the children in the community,

Que no se les olvide su propia gente. Si nosotros perdemos la historia, perdemos nuestra identidad. Nosotros no somos estadounidenses. Si perdemos nuestra identidad, ni somos de allá, ni somos de aquí. Nosotros no somos estadounidenses. Vivimos en los Estados Unidos pero venimos de allá, y aunque nos hagamos residentes, aunque nos hagamos ciudadanos, podemos ser ciudadanos pero no estadounidenses. Que su identidad es de ser hispanos.

(They should not forget their own people. If we lose our history, we lose our identity. We are not North Americans. If we lose our identity, we are not from there, and we are not from here. We are not North American. We live in the United States, but we come from there, and even if we become residents, even if we become citizens, we can still not be North American.

Their identity is Hispanic.)

The community at the moment feels strongly Salvadoran and Yucuaiquinense and celebrating traditions like “*el baile de los negritos*” allows them to reinforce these identities.

The Role of San Francisco in Migration, Daily Life and Transnational Ties

Many of the people I met dancing at “*el baile de los negitos*” told me they were there because they had promised San Francisco they would be there. I wondered how these promises were made and how they were being fulfilled in the U.S. Hearing all of these stories, what interested me the most of the Yucuaiquinenses was their deep relationship with San Francisco and the relationship between this devotion and their identities and transnational ties. The Yucuaiquinenses I met often make conditional promises to San Francisco, hoping to encourage him to do miracles in their favor. They fear San Francisco because they know of many who have been punished for disrespecting him. They also know that many people pray to San Francisco at the border between the U.S. and Mexico and some believe that he has a special relationship with the border.

Promises

Roman Catholic saints are people who have lived such exemplary Christian lives that after death, they went up to the presence of God. Once in the presence of God, they are believed to have the power to communicate with God and encourage God to do something for the people who ask them for favors. They become official Catholic saints only after a complicated process in which evidence of miracles has to be presented. The Catholic Church makes it clear, however, that the miracles are performed by God and that the saints can only intervene by asking God to perform these miracles, but cannot perform them themselves. By speaking with the people from Yucuaiquín, however, it would be easy to get the impression that many of them believe that San Francisco

performs miracles. Daniel Mendoza told me, “*San Francisco es un santo que hace los milagros constantemente, por eso le digo que a mi mismo me los ha hecho*” (San Francisco is a saint who performs miracles constantly, and I tell you that he has done them to me). This manner of speaking of San Francisco as having the power to do miracles is representative of the manner in which most people spoke to me.

Promises to San Francisco can take a number of forms. The way it usually works is that a person in need asks San Francisco for something and promises to do something for San Francisco’s benefit in return if San Francisco answers his or her prayers. This allows the person to have leverage on the saint. It allows the person to feel that he or she is in control of the situation. Once the saint fulfills the person’s request, the person has to fulfill the promise. If the person fails to fulfill the promise adequately, then they usually suffer dire consequences. One of the most popular promises is to dance for San Francisco on his day, October 4th. In this way, celebrating “*el baile de los negritos*” plays an important role in allowing the community to fulfill its promises. Other promises include lighting candles for him at Church, holding “*velorios*” as described above and sending money to the church in Yucuaiquín. Most people I met have asked San Francisco to perform miracles based on health and immigration.

Candelario is the person, of all those I met, who seemed to be most in touch with San Francisco. As San Francisco has done more miracles for him throughout his life, he has become more religious. During the Salvadoran civil war, he was held by guerilla members along with thousands of others and he was sure he was going to be killed. He remembered San Francisco, and suddenly a man came, called his name, and allowed him to escape. Due to the injuries Candelario suffered during the war, he lost his eyesight, but later recovered it after making a promise to San Francisco. “*Estoy bien*

seguro que estoy con ustedes aquí por San Francisco” (I am very sure that I am here with you because of San Francisco), he told me. A few years ago he promised to devote himself entirely to the Church, joining the Franciscan Third Order and becoming a missionary. He told me,

Mi promesa es que en mi casa [San Francisco] duerme todos los años. Allí se muele, se cocina, bueno, mi esposa. Llega la imagen ahí y se duerme, se le da de comer a toda la gente pobre, y son cientos de gente que andan todos pobrecitos.

(My promise is that in my house the saint sleeps every year. There my wife grinds and cooks. The image comes and it sleeps, and food is given out to the poor people, and there are hundreds of poor people around, all very poor.)

Candelario was not the only person I met who claimed to have been cured by San Francisco. I met people who danced because they had recuperated from hemorrhages and other health problems. *“Los que son residentes se largan para allá”* (Those who are residents go there), to Yucuaiquín, for St. Francis’ day, Patrona told me. Those who do not have the legal status that allows them to travel back and forth, celebrate here. Before the dance was celebrated here, people had to come up with promises other than dancing since it is not common to dance alone. The people would light candles or ask their relatives to hold *“velorios”* in their name in Yucuaiquín. A few held *“velorios”* in Somerville. Patrona, who has been to *“velorios”* for San Francisco in Somerville told me that they are not as good because there are not as many hungry people. An important part of the *“velorios”* is to feed the poor. *“Lo importante es que usted le pague la promesa al santo. Porque es muy delicado comprometerse con los santos y no pagarles”* (What is important is that you pay the promise to the Saint.

Because it is very dangerous to make promises to the saints and not pay), Candelario told me.

Punishments

Those who make promises and do not fulfill them are punished harshly by the saints. San Francisco is not only known for being powerful, but also for demanding payment of the promised. Candelario told me,

Yo le prometí muchas veces a San Francisco y nunca le cumplí. Y una vez en una finca de café, me llegó a castigar. Me pego unos azotazos en la espalda con la cuerda y me cobró, y me botó de la cama. Por eso yo digo que con él no se juega.

(I promised many times to San Francisco and did not keep my promise. And one time at a coffee farm he came to punish me. He smacked me in the back with a rope and charged me, and threw me from the bed. That's why I say that one should not play with saints.)

I heard many frightening stories about San Francisco punishing people who disrespected him. Daniel told me the story about a man who was chased by the police and was saved by San Francisco. He was sleeping on the peak of a mountain when he was awoken by a person who told him that he was surrounded. He was told that if he walked out with the man and kept his sight down, he would not be seen. He was able to escape, but he.....

se metió a otra religión, dijo que San Francisco era un pedazo de palo. Mire que ese hombre tuvo una muerte en un bus, que ninguna otra gente se mato en el choque de ese bus, solo la esposa y él murieron. Una cosa bien rara.

(got into another religion, said that San Francisco was just a piece of wood.

Imagine, that guy died on a bus, and no one else died in that crash, only he

and his wife. A very strange thing.)

Daniel also told me about a priest in Yucuaiquín, a long time ago, who did not allow the people to go on “*la demanda*”. That night he was physically punished by San Francisco and changed his stance the next day. Daniel also shared the following story,

“San Francisco solo al que no le tenga fe, no le ayuda. Una señora que es de otra religión, y tuvo un accidente en un carro, y ella inmediatamente se acordó de San Francisco en la volcada del carro, y la demás gente se golpeaba y se mataron y ella no salio nada de golpeada. Entonces ella reconoció que el santo le había hecho el gran milagro. Pero como ella estaba en otra religión, le dio vergüenza ir a la iglesia y se quedo, pues esta en otra religión”

(San Francisco will not help only those who do not have faith in him. A woman from another religion had a car accident and immediately thought of San Francisco as the car was turning over. Everyone else got bruised and died and she ended up with no bruises. Then she recognized that the saint had done a miracle for her. But because she is of another religion, she was ashamed of going to church and remained in the other religion).

As one can imagine, she did not pay San Francisco for his miracle and had a horrifying death. I heard many stories like this one, about people from other religions who think of San Francisco when they are troubled and are miraculously saved. In the stories the

people usually end up turning to Catholicism or dying after not thanking San Francisco for the miracle.

At the Border

When Daniel Mendoza was making his way from El Salvador to the U.S., he made a promise to the “*Virgen del Carmen*”, whose statue is also in the Church in Yucuaiquín. He told me he made the promise to her and not to San Francisco because that was what he felt like doing at that moment. I have decided to include this anecdote, though, because it is worth noting that not all promises are to San Francisco and because Daniel’s promise is very similar to many of the promises made to San Francisco. He is also the only person who spoke to me about making promises to the Virgin. He asked her to make sure he would not fail and in return, he promised her three new dresses. On his way to the United States, he did not see any immigration officers or the police. Once he was here, though, he forgot about the promise he had made to the Virgin. He woke up on her day, and could not open his eyes. When he was finally able to open them, he saw the Virgin in front of him and realized what he had done. That same day, he bought the cloth to make the dresses and sent it to his wife in El Salvador who made the three dresses for the Virgin.

Perhaps what I found the most interesting about the relationship the Yucuaiquinenses have with San Francisco is that which relates to migration and the border between Mexico and the U.S. Patrona told me,

“Es muy raro aquel que viene aquí que no venga con su promesa de San Francisco... no específicamente de Yucuaiquín porque viene gente de muchas partes.”

(It is very rare for someone to come here without a promise to San Francisco... not specifically from Yucuaiquín because people come here from many places.)

I even met a person who believed that San Francisco came to El Salvador as a “*mojado como nosotros*” (a wetback just like us). He believes that the stories about St. Francis which we know to have historically happened in Italy actually happened in El Salvador. What is interesting is the fact that this man related to the saint in that respect. Although most Yucuaiquinenses would not agree with this, many of them do believe that San Francisco has something to do with the borderland.

The borderland is seen as a mysterious place. It is the largest border between a first and third world country and one needs a “*coyote*” in order to cross it. “*Coyotes*” usually charge hundreds of dollars for each person they cross, and many times cheat the people they are supposed to lead, escaping before arriving at the border, taking the people’s money. The border is a desert in which it is not easy to find refuge. The American border patrol is the nation’s largest law enforcing agency with 12,000 agents. To increase the difficulty, groups of North American civilians living close to the border have joined in vigilante forces. These forces patrol the border and harass and sometimes shoot at immigrants suspected of entering the country illegally.

The border is also a highly religious place, perhaps because of the high risks involved in crossing it. At the border anything can happen, and what happens seems entirely random. Some people get caught, some people do not, and it is difficult to tell what it takes to succeed. People need to feel they are in control of their own destinies, and making a large promise to a saint can make them feel in control.

Candelario told me,

Aca hay mucha gente que se han dado la tarea de mandar para allá, dinero digamos, pero por promesas. Porque hay muchos cuentos de ese que mucha gente ha visto a San Francisco pasando gente la frontera.

(There are many people here who send money to Yucuaiquín because of promises. Because there are many stories about people seeing San Francisco when crossing the border).

Most of the people I met had in fact made a promise to San Francisco at some point in the process of migration. Oscar told me that the first time he came to the U.S., he was traveling with a “*coyote*” who did not know his way. He promised San Francisco that his mother would hold a “*velorio*” if he succeeded at crossing the border. The promise not only made him feel safer, but made his mother feel much safer about the dangerous journey she had encouraged her son to undertake. Once he arrived in Cambridge, he called his mother and asked her to hold the “*velorio*”. The second time he attempted to cross the border, he knew the terrain better and was traveling with a better “*coyote*”. He did not make a promise to San Francisco.

Patrona told me,

“Cuando yo me vine a este país, yo le prometí a él [San Francisco] que yo me iba a pasar y que no iba a tener ningún problema, y que yo le iba a hacer unos rezos y que le iba a dar a comer a los niños.”

(When I came to this country, I promised San Francisco that I would get here without problems, and that I would pray to him and give food to the children.)

After arriving here safely, she returned to Yucuaiquín and fed poor children in front of San Francisco's image. She held a "velorio" at her home and had fireworks. She was careful to give each child the same amount of food because this was a part of her promise.

I also heard many stories about people who have seen San Francisco at the border. When I interviewed Patrona, she told me that just a few weeks before, she heard about a young man who saw San Francisco at the border. "*Estaba de barbita, moreno*" (He had a beard, and dark skin). Candelario told me a long story which I believe is worth including here because it resembles many of the other stories that were told to me. It is also interesting to note the manner in which Candelario spoke of San Francisco. The manner in which he described him as an "*hombrecito*" (little man) reflects the manner in which others spoke to me. Candelario said,

En el camino se ve muchas cosas, en esa área de México, han sufrido muchas cosas. Nada menos de un Nicaragüense que viajó con unos salvadoreños y venían unos de mi pueblo. Él le prometió también a San Francisco sin ser católico él y sin conocer tanto. Y también de mi pueblo hay un llano que le dicen el llano grande. De ese lugar venían dos muchachos que eran protestantes y venía otro que era católico devoto a San Francisco. Y el coyote, el pollero, los dejó botados en México. Y el muchacho que era católico franciscano decía, "San Francisco ayúdame. San Francisco, te prometo que si me sacas de esto yo te voy a hacer un velorio." Los protestantes le dijeron a él, "Mira, porque no le dices a ese amigo tuyo, San Francisco, que si te pasa a ti y te protege a ti y te ayuda a ti, que también nos ayude a nosotros, que al llegar allá, nosotros te vamos a ayudar a ti para

que le hagas el velorio al santo allá en tu pueblo, allá en tu casa.” “Claro que San Francisco, el no niega a nadie.”

(On the way here you see many things, in that area of Mexico, there has been a lot of suffering. Nothing less than the story of a Nicaraguan who was traveling with some Salvadorans, and some of them were from my town. He also promised to San Francisco without being Catholic or anything and without knowing much about it. And also in my town there is a place we call the “*llano grande*.” From that place were two guys who were Protestant and one who was devoted to San Francisco. And the *coyote*, the “*pollero*”, left them in Mexico. And the guy who was a Catholic Franciscan said, “San Francisco, help me. San Francisco, I promise you that if you get me out of this, I will hold a ‘*velorio*’ for you”. The Protestants told him, “Look, why don’t you tell your friend, San Francisco, that if he passes you and protects you and helps you, that he should also help us, that once we get there we will help you set up the ‘*velorio*’ for your saint there in your town, in your home.” Of course San Francisco never denies anyone.)

Entonces estaban perdidos en una montaña, y se durmieron sin tomar agua y sin comer, y se durmieron a media montaña. Y se despertaron otro día a las 9 de la mañana al centro de una calle. Y venía un camión y el camión los recogió y los llevo. Y supuestamente estaban cerca de la frontera, y les dijo “Espérame aquí y voy a ir a hablar ahí a esa casa.” Y los tres quedaron ahí, se metió el hombrecito a la casa, luego salio y les dijo, “Quédense allí. Allí les van a dar protección, les van a dar vivienda, y les van a dar trabajo.

Pórtense bien y nos vemos.” Vamos. Ahí se fue el hombre en un carro todo viejo y todo flojo. Cuando ya llegaron a la casa ahí metidos en Texas el mismo hombre de la casa les pregunto, “¿Y el que los trajo a ustedes quien fue?” “¿Y usted no lo conoce?” “No.”, le dijo, “Él vino y los recomendó a ustedes, y el dijo que él se hacía responsable de ustedes. Supuestamente el va a venir. Y entonces yo los voy a proteger, y les voy a dar trabajo, les voy a dar este cuarto aquí.”

(And so they were lost on the mountain, and they went to sleep without drinking water and without eating, and they went to sleep in the middle of the mountain. And they woke up the next day at nine in the morning in the middle of a street. And a truck was coming and it picked them up. And supposedly they were close to the border, and he told them, “Wait here and I will go speak with someone in that house.” And the three stayed there, the little man went into the home, came out and told them, “Stay here. Here they will give you protection, a home, and work. Take care of yourselves, and we’ll see each other.” The guy left in an old and weak car. And when they went into the house in Texas the man in the house asked them, “And the guy who brought you, who was he?” “And do you know him?” “No”, he said, “he came and recommended all of you, and he said he would be responsible for all of you. He is supposed to come back. And so I will protect you, house you, and give you work, I’ll give you this room here.”)

Se metieron en la noche los tres pensando, y dijo el católico “Ese no ha sido mas que San Francisco de Asís. Imagínese, sin conocer aquí, y vino a

recomendarnos a nosotros. San Francisco.” Y desde ese momento los protestantes se hicieron católicos y se hicieron devotos a San Francisco de Asís.”

(The three of them went into the room that night thinking and the Catholic one said, “That guy was none other than San Francisco de Asís. Imagine, without knowing this place, and he came to recommend us here. San Francisco.” And from that moment on the Protestants made themselves Catholic and became devoted to San Francisco de Asís.)

I heard many stories similar to this one. They usually involved a Catholic and a number of non-Catholics who had become convinced of the greatness of San Francisco while immigrating. I was surprised to hear about others who were not from Yucuaiquín, but who prayed to San Francisco while crossing the border. When I mentioned this curiosity to the Yucuaiquinenses I knew, they did not seem surprised at all. “*San Francisco es un santo grande*” (San Francisco is a great saint), many of them told me. I was able to engage in a lengthy discussion with Patrona about San Francisco’s role at the border. She explained to me that San Francisco’s miracles are so great that people from all around Central America come to Yucuaiquín for San Francisco’s day. She also said that people from Yucuaiquín many times speak with San Francisco at the border, like in the story above, and encourage others to do the same.

Apparently there is also a large population of devotees to San Francisco in the northern region of Mexico.^v This might influence to whom the immigrants pray when crossing from Mexico. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note the new role that San Francisco is playing as a patron saint to a community of migrants.

Conclusions

When the maracas shake and the masks hide the faces of the dancers in the cafeteria of St. Benedict's Little Flower School, there is a lot in motion and a lot to be said about the numerous traditions coming together in that room. The life of San Francisco de Asís and the century-old legend of his coming to Yucuaiquín is embodied in the statue of San Francisco that the parishioners bring to the celebration. The flowers the dancers carry to their saint represent not only San Francisco's love for nature, but also perhaps a festivity that existed before the Spanish arrived in Latin America. It is not far fetched to imagine the newly turned Catholics hundreds of years ago adapting their ritual to San Francisco. Proof of the origin of this dance, however, has been lost in the history of colonization. The mass emigration of the Salvadoran also comes into play in this celebration, as a large percentage of the Yucuaiquinense population is now settled in Somerville. Their stories of migration reveal the details of their love for San Francisco and his role in helping them cross the Rio Grande. The Irish and Italian Catholic immigrants that settled in Somerville in the last century play no lesser a role, as they established the ethos around the local Catholic community that still exists today. Following a bloody civil war in El Salvador, the refugee community of Yucuaiquín is beginning to recover its traditions in Somerville.

“El baile de los negritos” serves many functions for the community. First and foremost, it allows its members to fulfill their promise to San Francisco. Second, it allows its members to continue to celebrate San Francisco and count on him in times of trouble. This celebration teaches the children where their parents come from and what their traditions are, as well as teach other residents of Somerville about the richness of Salvadoran culture. Finally, participating in the

“*baile*” helps the Yucuaiquinenses maintain their unique identity in the United States. The “*baile de los negritos*” is not celebrated only with the purpose of keeping Salvadoran traditions alive. It is not a relic of the past that some hold on to. It is a religious celebration which allows the community to continue its religious traditions, pass them on to the younger generations, and keep the community together. Celebrated by a community of immigrants to the U.S., it has taken on new significance and meaning.

ⁱ See James Griffith, *Beliefs and Holy Places, A Spiritual Geography of the Pimería Alta* (Tuscon, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1992), Chapter 3.

ⁱⁱ See “Yucuaiquín” by Padre Edilberto Lazo c.m.. This is a small booklet with basic information of Yucuaiquin. It has not been published but many members of the Yucuaiquinense community of Massachusetts own a copy. A copy can be found at the Tufts Digital Archives.

ⁱⁱⁱ Drogas y Delitos Conexos: Maras Iniciativas Locales de Prevención, Comisión Salvadoreña Antidrogas-COSA,
<http://www.gobernacion.gob.sv/observatorio/Iniciativas%20Locales/WEB/La%20Uni%C3%B3n/yucuaiquin.html>

^{iv} All of these statistics come from the 2000 census data, as quoted in *The Well Being of Somerville 2002*.

^v See James Griffith, *Beliefs and Holy Places, A Spiritual Geography of the Pimería Alta* (Tuscon, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1992), Chapter 3.