

SUEÑOS SALVADOREÑOS:
STRUGGLES TO BUILD OTHER FUTURES IN EL SALVADOR'S
MIGRATION LANDSCAPE

Joseph L. Wiltberger

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Approved by:

Arturo Escobar

Dorothy Holland

Charles Price

Altha Cravey

Hannah Gill

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ABSTRACT

JOSEPH L. WILTBERGER: *Sueños Salvadoreños: Struggles to Build Other Futures in El Salvador's Migration Landscape*
(Under the direction of Arturo Escobar)

Since El Salvador's 1980-1992 civil war, the Salvadoran state has embraced a discourse and political economic strategy that favor international migration and remittances for development. Born out of El Salvador's long history of inequality, memory erasure, and exclusion of marginalized populations, this state-led project of "migration and development" assumes that the economic changes and identities linked to international migration and remittances are a sign of "progress," as long as migrants and their communities appropriately engage with global capitalist flows to benefit development, mainly through "productive" remittance investment in places of origin. This dissertation examines how this project, and the developmentalist and neoliberal logics and practices that guide it, are contested and challenged in networked and community-based ways. It uses a networked ethnographic lens that follows the experience of one rural community in northern El Salvador and its migrants in the United States, who come from a region known for both community organizing and displacement, to highlight the existence and potentiality of diverse logics and practices linked to migration and development, including those that take on non-capitalist, collectivist, and communal forms. This research shows how people continue to make and reconstitute community, by networking across borders, engaging in communal practices, and rooting

community in place and in a sense of collective history, even as they navigate conditions of international migration and displacement that are not of their choosing. These practices and logics of community, this dissertation argues, challenge the state's developmentalist framework on international migration, and they make way for other kinds of futures than undocumented emigration and remittance-led development. Based on engagements with cross-border networks of political actors and migrant-community activists, this study suggests that these practices are tied to a broader political shift recently to push for alternatives to undocumented emigration, to rework the state's approach to migration and development, and to rethink the meaning of Salvadoran migration in national discourse.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	American Baptist Churches vs. Thornburgh
ARENA	<i>Alianza Republicana Nacionalista</i> (Nationalist Republican Alliance)
BAC	<i>Bienvenidos a Casa</i> (Welcome Home)
CAFTA-DR	Central America-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement
CCR	<i>Coordinadora de Comunidades y Repoblaciones</i> (Coordinator of Communities and Repopulations); later renamed <i>Asociación de Comunidades para el Desarrollo de Chalatenango</i> (Association of Communities for the Development of Chalatenango)
CEB	<i>Comunidad Eclesial de Base</i> (Christian Base Community)
DED	Deferred Enforced Departure
FECCAS	<i>Federación Cristiana de Campesinos Salvadoreños</i> (Christian Federation of Salvadoran Campesinos)
FMLN	<i>Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional</i> (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front)
FOMILENIO	<i>Fondo del Milenio</i> (Millennium Fund)
FPL	<i>Fuerzas Popular de Liberación</i> , (Popular Liberation Forces)
FUSADES	<i>Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social</i> (Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICE	U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
IIRIRA	Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation
NACARA	Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGO	Non-governmental Organization

PROESA	<i>Agencia de Promoción de Exportaciones e Inversiones de El Salvador</i> (Export and Investment Promotion Agency of El Salvador)
SANN	Salvadoran American National Network
SEEM	<i>Salvadoreños en el Mundo</i> (Salvadorans in the World)
TPS	Temporary Protected Status
UCA	<i>Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas</i> (Central American University)
UCS	<i>Unión Comunal Salvadoreña</i> (Salvadoran Communal Union)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission on Refugees
UTC	<i>Unión de Trabajadores del Campo</i> (Rural Workers Union)

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

On a typical warm, dry February afternoon in Guarjila, the community in northern El Salvador that is the fieldwork base for this project, I crossed paths on the road with Juan, a local 18-year-old. He had just graduated from high school in 2009, a few months earlier. Our conversation drifted toward his thoughts about the future. Juan felt a sense of uncertainty about it; with a high school degree in a rural, marginalized region in a country where most people struggle to make ends meet and where many migrate to the United States, he was not sure of what would be possible. That day he told me that he sometimes wished he had been born elsewhere: in Sweden, in California, somewhere where life would be easier, in a country without so much violence.

Juan lives alone in his house because he is the only one in his family who has not migrated to the United States. For most of his life, he has been on his own. He has some relatives in neighboring communities, and his aunt who lives nearby often prepares him meals, but his mother, father, brother, sister, and several of his cousins, aunts and uncles live in the United States, mainly in New Jersey. Of his immediate family that previously lived in Guarjila, his father was the first to leave, thirteen years earlier, and his brother was the final one, seven years earlier. I met Juan when he was twelve, when his parents, both in the U.S., bought him a freight truck. They told him that he could use it to start a business, but Juan was not able to drive it until he was fourteen, when his feet could

finally reach the pedals. Or perhaps their intention was to show Juan, and the community, that they loved him, and show that their own sacrifice of going to the United States and leaving him behind might be worth it.

Months later, I invited Catalina, a friend and colleague from the capital, to Guarjila. Raised in San Salvador, educated abroad, and now an activist-artist and teacher at the bilingual school she had attended growing up, she was curious about Guarjila. She wanted to learn more about its famous history of organizing and resistance as a community that was a key site of FMLN activity situated at the heart of the 1980-1992 civil war.¹ As an artist whose images reflected the realities of Salvadoran migration, she was interested in seeing and hearing about the life of a community that had been reshaped through its experience of large-scale undocumented emigration after the civil war.

We went to visit Juan at his house. Meeting someone who was the youngest and the last remaining in El Salvador of a family of emigrants, Catalina expected him to represent what she had long heard and believed to be true of rural Salvadorans who depended on the remittances that their migrant family members send back. Someone like Juan was likely to have little ambition in life. If he was still in El Salvador and had not yet emigrated to become part of the labor force of twelve million or so undocumented Latino immigrants in the United States, then he must be living on remittances as a sort of “welfare check”, spending his money on beer and video games, possibly even involved in a gang.

But Catalina met someone with much different practices and character than she

¹ The FMLN, or *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) was the coalition of guerilla armies during the civil war and today is a Leftist political party in El Salvador.

had expected. Like many young people in the community, Juan was full of ambition and maturity. He spoke impeccable English and was a talented musician. He was highly involved in the community: he was a leader in the local youth group, he had just been hired as the ambulance driver at the community-based health clinic, and he played in a local band. He was contemplating pursuing a college education, but his deepest passion was for music. He hoped that the band, which was already traveling to San Salvador for gigs, would keep moving up.

Despite the steady stream of emigrants that had been leaving Guarjila for the United States throughout the 1990s and well into the first decade of the 2000s, and despite the trajectory of his own family, Juan was working to make a future possible for himself in El Salvador. This was a personal and political struggle shared by many of his generation in Guarjila, whose drive to stay in El Salvador represented a remarkable turn away from the wave of older siblings and relatives who just a few years earlier had gone to the United States because they did not see any viable options for a dignified future in El Salvador.

Catalina was impressed by Juan's engagement with the community and his will to make staying and building a future in El Salvador possible. Inspired, she painted a piece that depicted the colorful mix of images and objects in his house that reflected the entanglement of both transnational and more local, rooted identities that mattered to him. On the walls hung posters of iconic American musicians and his favorite soccer teams, along with local artisan wood crafting typical of the region. There were pictures of his family living afar, as well as of Archbishop Romero, who was martyred for speaking out against military repression during the civil war, and Father Jon Cortina, who was a key

figure in Guarjila's local history of community organizing during and after the war. His drum set sat in the corner. Juan's band mixed lyrics with a "revolutionary" edge to the sounds of modern punk and ska. Above his bed, amid the graffiti he had painted all over the wall, were the lyrics of a song by one of his favorite American pop singers, Avril Lavigne: "I'm not stupid."

Figure 1: I'm Not Stupid.

Art by Catalina del Cid, San Salvador, 2011



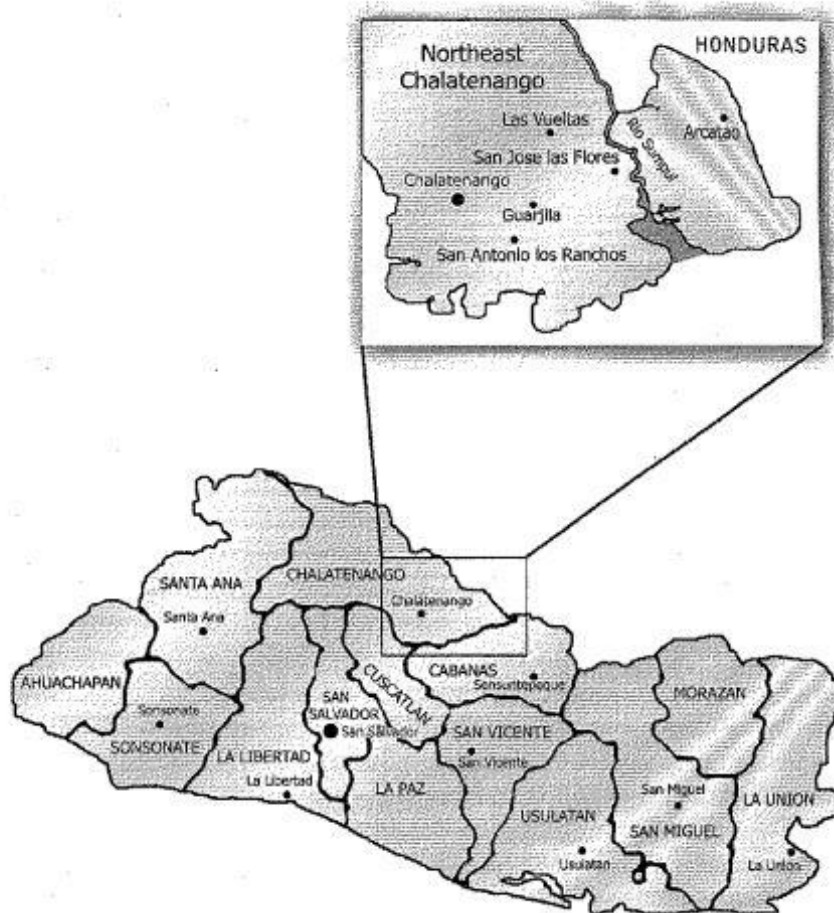
Juan's struggle to stay in El Salvador is remarkable, given that nearly three million Salvadorans have emigrated from El Salvador, which itself has a population of just over six million.² The vast majority of its migrants reside in the United States, representing the third largest Latino immigrant group there. Hundreds of thousands of

1 The U.S. Census most recently (2008) estimates that 1.5 million Salvadorans live in the United States, now ranking them as the third largest among Latino immigrant groups and fourth largest among all U.S. Latino groups (to include Puerto Ricans). However, this figure is disputed by the Salvadoran government's *Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores* (Ministry of Foreign Relations), which suggests that U.S. Census figures are undercounted and estimates that Salvadoran-born immigrants in the United States number around 2.5 million.

Salvadorans fled the devastating U.S.-supported counter-insurgency war that ravaged the country for twelve years and left more than 75,000 Salvadorans dead. After the war, a new stream of migrants followed their forerunners as conditions of inequality and marginalization deepened for many Salvadorans as the state pushed ahead with aggressive neoliberal reforms. Recognizing their economic value, the Salvadoran state has worked to harness migrants' remittances, putting them at the heart of its neoliberal development strategies, through political and economic policies and through a discourse that frames migrants as key players in constructing a better future for El Salvador.

Figure 2: Map of El Salvador with inset of northeast Chalatenango

Courtesy of Smith-Nonini (2010). Map drawn by Roque A. Nonini



In communities like Guarjila, migration became a way of life during the postwar period, (re)shaping subjectivities, practices, community dynamics, and landscapes. In particular, for Guarjila and other communities in the eastern region of Chalatenango department (a department in El Salvador is like a state or province), community members were concerned about the extent to which the community's emigration and new flood of remittances constituted an abandonment not only of a place that they had worked hard to build as resettled refugees, but of the history of revolutionary struggle, collective action, and community organizing that contributed to a valued sense of community and regional identity.

This is understandable given that communities in a region once characterized by utopian visions and a legacy of collective action must now navigate the exclusionary effects of state-sponsored neoliberal reforms and a new set of neoliberal duties and responsibilities that come from actors demanding "participation" in local development. Many scholars have emphasized how in El Salvador and in other areas that were formerly sites of revolutionary activity, hopes for social change and a collective spirit are dismissed as people embrace individualism, driven by capitalism and disillusioned with their persistent conditions of marginalization in a new moment of neoliberal peace (Nygren 2003; Silber 2004; Kowalkchuk 2004; McElhinny 2004). Anthropologist Irina Silber refers to the war and displacement that characterized the lives of those in the former revolutionary region of Chalatenango as "entangled aftermaths," suggesting that "with the broken promises and bankrupt dreams of revolution and postwar, new constrained dreams emerge." Constrained, disillusioned, and frustrated by the postwar condition, she highlights the thoughts of a local resident saying "the only option, the only

dream that awakens is to come to the United States.” (2010: 175).

Indeed, in the aftermath of war and out of the failure of postwar development, migration has taken control of many people’s aspirations and has had fragmenting effects on community cohesion. Revolutionary imaginaries formed during times of war no longer make sense in a neoliberal present characterized by cross-border flows of people and capital. But are communities like these merely shaped by the effects of neoliberal globalization? Are dreams reduced to a singularity by the constraints and “last say” of capitalist forces? How do we explain the politics of hope that characterizes Juan’s vision, shared by many other young people in the community, for making a different kind of future?

Theoretical Contributions

This dissertation is about the remarkable power of community and the politics of possibility it opens. I argue that the work of making and re-making community is a meaningful political project in people’s lives, and especially for those navigating conditions not of their choosing, in this case the circumstances of displacement and migration. Produced through particular practices and logics, communities get redefined in different contexts and reconstituted in dynamic ways across borders. For people of Guarjila and elsewhere in eastern Chalatenango, who now reside in the United States and in El Salvador, community-making continues to be a resource and an important source of meaning and strength, an enduring political project that goes deeper than the revolutionary struggle for which the region has been known. Rooted in place and a history of collective struggle, the community-making work of Chalatecos (people of

Chalatenango), which is tied to mobility, place, and cross-border networks, entails practices and logics that make way for other possibilities that go beyond capitalist and developmentalist frameworks for understanding migration and transnational processes, for conceptualizing and practicing community, and for making the future.

Communities have long been at the heart of anthropological debates and analysis. Conventionally, anthropology treated communities, places, and cultures as though they were fixed, bounded units of analysis. Reactions to this framework emerged through anthropology's gravitation toward post-structural approaches and discourses of globalization, which began to theorize cultures and peoples in less essentialist ways. By the 1990s, anthropologists began to emphasize the fluidity, hybridity, and unboundedness of places and communities, and started using such terms as "global ethnoscapescapes" and "deterritorialization" (Appadurai 1991; Gupta & Ferguson 1992). Along this vein, initial theories that pointed to international migration's transnational characteristics stressed the hybrid and unbounded nature of communities that existed in a "transnational social field," largely untethered from any particular territorial place (Basch et al. 1994; Kearney 1995).

The surge in theories of globalization drew reactions from those concerned that "place" was largely erased in these debates. In their view, these debates were asymmetrical, and a renewed attention to place was called for, in part because place often works as an important site of politics as people encounter and even defend places against new forms of globalization (Prazniak & Dirlik 2001; Escobar 2001; Harcourt & Escobar 2005). A complex task is to discover how places that have been transformed through migrations and cross-border flows, which now might be thought of in part as

“transnational communities,” can also be the site of the “politics of place” (Harcourt & Escobar 2005). We know that communities-in-place have used grassroots resistance to defy the displacement forced by unwelcome development initiatives (see Oliver-Smith 2010). But rural communities like Guarjila, and, in a parallel way, the national community of Salvadorans as a whole, which are divided between place of origin and the diaspora, face other sorts of dilemmas as they navigate the shifting conditions of globalization both *in* and *out of* place. Their mobility and potential for social movement and political organizing is constrained by state restrictions on migration. This dissertation explores the complex ways in which those of Guarjila have worked to resist migration in order to defend a sense of community at the same time that they have also engaged with international mobility to make possible the meaningful work of building and reconstituting community in place and across borders.

This dissertation explores this work of community-making in a context of international migration, and it looks at the political implications of this work. Following the line of thinking in geographer Doreen Massey’s (1994, 2005) conceptualization of “place”, it is clear that communities (whether physically located in a certain place, or stretched across borders, or both) are also made in practice, relationally constructed, and produced out of contingencies. They are always a work-in-progress, changing, and interpreted and experienced differently according to diverse subjectivities. Communities may be unbounded and “imagined” (Anderson 1991), but they are also real, meaningful, and political in people’s lives.

My research focuses on the *practices* and *logics* of making, or building, community and collectivity. Through this lens, we can see how the *work* of making

community endures, even as it is adapted to new contexts and changing conditions. The people of northern El Salvador that are the focus of this research have a long history of collective action, community organizing, networking, and alliance-building. Throughout this historical trajectory, in order to navigate harsh conditions of marginalization, war, and displacement, they have developed and depended on what can be conceptualized as communal systems, logics, and practices (Patzí Paco 2004; Zibechi 2010). For those of this region who fled to refugee camps in Honduras during the civil war and later resettled in rural communities eastern Chalatenango, communal systems, logics, and practices conditioned the work of community-making as refugees and later as repatriated settlers. In the community-building work and migration that characterize the postwar context, communal logics and practices continued to be important, even as they adapted to new contexts, involved mobility and stretched across borders.

A core assumption in my work is that the practice and logic of community-building is *political*. “Communalizing,” as Zibechi (2010) puts it, has an emancipatory potential. It is work that challenges, destabilizes, and works around existing practices and logics that are universalizing, rationalizing, and individualizing, which includes, by extension, liberalism and neoliberalism, capitalism and globalization (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2011; Zibechi 2010; Patzí Paco 2004).³ This approach to community-building does not

³ I agree with Castree (2010) that although “neoliberalism” is a varied term with a range of meanings (like the term “globalization,” which I also employ throughout the text), it can be generally understood as a policy discourse, a set of policy measures, and a philosophy, which are always being honed and rearticulated. I refer to these dimensions all together as a work-in-progress “project”. At its core, neoliberalism encompasses “a theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade” (Harvey 2007). As with developmentalism, neoliberalism emerges from a Western framework and assumes a socio-spatial imaginary in which global capitalism brings prosperity to all in a “flat world” of equal possibility (Sheppard and Leitner 2010). Although it has been advanced by powerful actors including governments, banks, multilaterals, and institutions tied to the Washington Consensus, this dissertation posits that

depend on reverting back to an older conception that views communities as fixed entities that are oppositional to globalization processes, or that “communalizing” can no longer function in capitalist contexts. Communities are profoundly heterogeneous, historical, and crossed through with power dynamics. As political work that is *relational*, the making of communities, collectivities, and communal systems is not a throwback to romanticism or essentialism. It is mobile, networked, shifting, subjective, and inclusive of a multiplicity of voices, visions, practices and logics that come, go, and are transformed. Thinking and positioning relationality and *lo comunal* politically “opens a space that responds to modern liberal, state, and capitalist forms of social organization” (Escobar 2012).

We can see the deeply political work of communal practice in a diversity of settings and operations. We can turn to the long-standing communal logics and practices in certain indigenous communities, but we can also look to more recent emergences in both urban and rural environments, and the activities of cross-border, networked collectives and communities that engage in practices of reciprocal support and care (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2011). As a political project that stands against a neoliberal, capitalist, or developmentalist ordering of things, community-making also engages the work of non-capitalist, cooperative, and community economic practices (Gibson-Graham 2006). These

neoliberalism represents a particular and contingent logic and set of practices (evident in policies), which are often contested in the community-making work driven by other sorts of logics and practices. I sometimes employ the term “(neo-)liberalism” in this text to remind readers that the neoliberal project is tied to a logic of liberalism that prioritizes individual rights, rationalism, and capitalist activity in its commitment to “progress.” Throughout the text, I also emphasize that a “(neo-)liberal” or “neoliberalist” logic is closely tied to a “developmentalist” and “capitalist” logic, all of which have tended to be advocated in state-led discourse and policies in El Salvador as they have been elsewhere in Latin America and around the world. I rarely use the term “neoliberal globalization” as the globalizing aspect of neoliberalism is already implied. I use “globalization” to refer in a broader sense to globalizing processes in recent years generally linked to neoliberalism and global capitalism, including international migration and other transnational processes.

sites of politics are found in worker cooperatives, community gardens, social centers, and other projects that re-socialize economic relations and insert the collective into the fabric of everyday life. Working with networks of community members in place and across borders, the people of Guarjila reconstitute and refashion community in varying “everyday” ways.

The political work of community-building is also *rooted* work, grounded in a place, shared experience, or sense of identity that drives political action, even as it is relational. For those from Guarjila, this work is tied to the territorial place of Guarjila itself, a place that they have been working hard to (re-)build from the ground up since its 1987 repopulation, and to the long-range experience of collective struggle in the face of repression and marginalization. I suggest that migrants, who we should remember are always moving between real territorial places (Lawson & Silvey 1999), use community networks to take part in the active work of *rooting*. As geographers Diane Rocheleau and Robin Roth (2007) suggest, networks themselves are rooted; they do not “float free from territory.” I suggest that the concept of *rooted community networks* is a useful way to interpret how people continue to build community in rooted and networked ways, even across international borders.

The cross-border practices and logics of building and rooting community, I suggest, help to make visible a different way of understanding and practicing migration and transnational processes than what appears according to the widely accepted developmentalist framework. Even as a later stream of research on transnational migration emphasized that we cannot ignore the extent to which the heavy hand of state sovereignty is a constraint on the potential for migrant cross-border agency (Baker-

Cristales 2004; Guarnizo & Smith 1998; Heyman 1994; Ong 1999), those interested in development took a particular interest in earlier theories of transnational migration that emphasized the enduring attachments of migrants to their place of origin and the potential for cross-border (in this case, capitalist economic) practices. Motivated out of an interest in the potential for migrants' remittances to contribute to development, a particular, celebratory version of "transnationalism" has been appropriated in a contemporary discourse of "migration and development" led by multilateral development agencies, lending institutions, governments, and scholars (Hermele 1997; Kapur 2004; Delgado Wise & Castles 2007).

This developmentalist logic and political project on international migration was embraced by the Salvadoran state. As I suggest in Chapter 2, the understanding that migration and remittances would lead El Salvador on a path to progress and development not only fit the recent neoliberal project favored by the state, but it was tied to a much longer trajectory of modernist and colonialist practices and logics. According to the logic of modernity/coloniality (Quijano 1991; Mignolo 2000), the postwar nation-state project has sought to homogenize national identity and erase troubled histories as it looked toward "transnational" futures built on the promises of capitalism and modernity. I see emancipatory and decolonial potential in the work of visibilizing the excluded histories, identities, and experiences of social struggle that contribute to a valued sense of meaning and rootedness for Chalatecos and other marginalized and subjugated groups and communities.

By recognizing how the developmentalist logics and practices of the state have been constructed in relation to events, actors, and processes over a long historical

trajectory (the rooted, communal logics and practices of Chalatecos were also constructed in a similar relational and historical way), we can see them in their particularity. Neither side holds more “expert” authority than the other. They are distinct, but not necessarily always in opposition. By acknowledging that they are each contingent, the door is opened for new kinds of potentialities. For people of Guarjila and others in Chalatenango, other imaginaries than undocumented emigration are made possible out of their own contingent understandings of what collective well-being means and what a better future should look like. As I describe in Chapter 6, at the current conjuncture of political, social, and economic change, a broader network of activists and political actors are also challenging the state-led developmentalist strategy in a direct and intentional way, by demanding an alternative framework to build other futures than one that favors the “expulsion” of its population in the name of progress. Their demands signal a widespread disillusionment and frustration with the failure of the two decades of neoliberal development that has been influential on state policies in El Salvador and elsewhere in Latin America.

Toward other Possibilities

The theoretical work of identifying what people are already doing to build a different kind of present and future entails what geographers Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham (J.K. Gibson-Graham 2006) have referred to as “a politics of economic possibility.” This approach guides the principal theoretical and analytical approach used in this dissertation. A politics of economic possibility calls upon us to go beyond the tendency of critical theory to privilege capitalism as the macro-context and structure that frames all hypotheses and conclusions about our social reality. Such a “capitalocentric”

lens, in focusing on the determinants of inequality, erases the political promise of economic and cultural diversity as capitalism is understood to be the prime mover and “last instance.” In this way, theory constrains politics, as “alternatives” and the possibilities for changing the world are dismissed as naive and credible discussions of such are viewed as romantic or essentialist. My research employs critical theory, an important tool for recognizing injustice, inequality, and unsustainability, to recognize the contingent and particular nature of capitalist, developmentalist, and modernist logics, practices, and projects. But this critique alone is insufficient. At the same time, following the lead of J.K. Gibson-Graham, my research demonstrates how alongside the critique there also exist diverse non-capitalist, non-individualist, collectivist, and communal logics, practices, and projects. Through this lens, I aim to challenge fundamental assumptions and open new political horizons. This work is connected to a similar kind of politics, a politics of hope. In Gibson-Graham’s words, “another world is not only possible, it already exists.”⁴

Another guiding approach of this project has been to visibilize geopolitical perspectives that are anchored in Latin America and to put them at the heart of my theoretical lens. On one hand, this is part of an effort to shift the geopolitics of knowledge away from the Eurocentrism of mainstream Western social theory. It fits into my commitment to a broader effort to move more marginalized world anthropologies from the periphery to the center of anthropological research coming from U.S. institutions and to integrate diverse perspectives that move anthropology in a trans-disciplinary direction.

I draw from scholarship coming from the Andes, Mexico, Central America, and El

⁴ To discuss their implications for my work, in addition to my reading of J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006), I borrow from Burke & Shear’s (2013) well-crafted interpretation and phrasing of how J.K. Gibson-Graham’s theoretical lens can take us “beyond critique.”

Salvador. On the other hand, my use of a more balanced theoretical lens is unintentional. I found that the rich theoretical ground I encountered in Latin America itself simply resonated well with the social reality I was witnessing and trying to make sense of “in the field.” These were perspectives that are not always able to (or may not choose to) penetrate the borders of American academia: literature that is only available in Spanish language, hard copy files only found in libraries in El Salvador, projects that were executed without the privilege and “credibility” of prestigious funding awards, conversations with scholars and activists who could not get visas or could not afford to travel to expensive international conferences in enormous U.S. hotels. Part of the reason these perspectives were useful to my project is because they tend to broaden the scope of analytical possibility beyond critical theory, placing value on engaged scholarship and the emergent knowledges coming from social movements and communities themselves.⁵

Contributions to Salvadoran Studies

I understand such a geopolitical shift to be particularly important to studies of El Salvador for the creation of a politics of hope and possibility. Like elsewhere in the

⁵ A note on the title of this dissertation. The decision to have a portion of the title in Spanish is in part motivated by this political commitment to shift the geopolitics of knowledge. It is more suited to a project that is anchored in perspectives coming from Latin America. Pragmatically, it may make this work easier for Spanish-speakers to find through the Internet once it is electronically published for on-line searching. *Sueños Salvadoreños* counters the assimilationist assumption that migrants have and follow “the American dream,” and it reminds us that there is a plurality of dreams. “Sueño salvadoreño” is an emergent term being used by activists and political actors in El Salvador to refer to the idea that collectively building dignified futures is an important political project so that Salvadorans can find alternative paths other than undocumented emigration. Also, I refer to “Other Futures” in the plural. I capitalize the “O” to stress that these “Other Futures” is an idea as a whole that can represent the diverse possibilities of future-building, and to remind readers that these Other Futures often are envisioned by and belong to groups and individuals whom anthropologists would classify as “the Other”: those who have experienced multiple forms of subjugation and marginalization.

South, El Salvador gets characterized by pervasive poverty and its status in what was long referred to as the Third World. But El Salvador in particular conjures images of notorious massacres, an atrocious war, and gang violence. Salvadorans have suffered and been traumatized from these (hi)stories of violence time and again, in layered and recursive ways. As Moodie (2010) reveals in her carefully crafted ethnography of Salvadorans' experiences of the often indistinguishable line between "political" and "common" crime and violence, many describe the postwar condition of violence as "worse than the war." Perceptions and interpretations of the Salvadoran experience, including those internalized in the subjectivities of Salvadorans themselves, get linked not only to the everyday forms of marginalization experienced by Salvadorans in El Salvador and by its subalternized and illegalized migrants, but to the violence experienced by Salvadorans historically and in the present day.

A recent wave of books published on El Salvador coming from American anthropology has made valuable contributions to our understanding of the postwar context in relation to such politically-charged questions as violence, migration and remittances, nation-state building, and reconstruction processes (Moodie 2010; Zilberg 2011; Pedersen 2013; DeLugan 2012; Silber 2010). This emergent body of American anthropological literature, along with earlier works that help to deconstruct some of the state-led discourses and policies that engender emigration (Baker-Cristales 2004; Coutin 2007), was important to informing the critical theoretical side of my analysis.⁶

El Salvador has long been, and continues to be, a site of remarkable community-

⁶ Additionally, among this recent body of anthropological literature on El Salvador is Smith-Nonini's (2010) book on popular health and collective mobilization against health care privatization, which particularly contributed to my discussion of community-building in Chalatenango.

building. Throughout the country, there is an abundance of grassroots organizing initiatives, women's groups and youth programs, cooperative work environments, community-based gardening and food production, collectivist forms of mobilization, and so forth. In any short visit to El Salvador, one can easily draw a powerful sense of hope and inspiration from the spirit of political possibility present in these types of collective projects. In putting renewed attention on the least studied nation-state in Latin America (Lauria-Santiago & Binford 2004), one that has been stigmatized by a global fixation on its violence, I hope to do more to make visible this spirit and the reality of hope and other possibilities that Salvadorans themselves are constantly constructing. The research I present in this dissertation has this goal in mind.

With its relatively small national territory and its indigenous presence hidden from view behind the experience of *mestizaje*, scholarship has also traditionally tended to treat El Salvador as a relatively homogeneous population mainly worthy of national-scale analysis. This approach has left from view more nuanced analyses of the regional experiences of particular groups (Lauria-Santiago & Binford 2004). With an elite class that educated their children in foreign universities, a critical Left in El Salvador has had free reign over much of the country's scholarly production. Of El Salvador's relatively little historical and anthropological works (the government did not invest in these programs until 2002), a good portion resonates with the Marxian perspective grounded in the 1980s revolutionary vision of the University of El Salvador, and so structural and materialist theories that use class as the primary category to analyze inequalities are prevalent.

In this project, I highlight the regional experience of resettled and "organized"

communities of eastern Chalatenango, with a focus on the community of Guarjila. While the categorical terms I must use to identify them are of course imperfect (identities are always relational and shifting), they are intended to move beyond flatter conventional representations of a rather homogeneous national-scale population of “peasants” or “labor migrants,” which also happens to be how they tend to be understood in developmentalist-centered thought.⁷ Even if we were to take these fixed and bounded categories for granted, the complexities of transnationalism and globalization force us to rethink conventional categories like the “peasantry” (Kearney 1996). The question of diversity is further complicated given El Salvador’s racialization of indigenous peoples and identities (Tilley 2005; Ronsbo 2004), which has largely removed various forms of diversity from national self-perception. Those from Chalatenango who are part of the story I tell here do not belong to a particular ethnic group nor is their experience a local one. However, as owners of their own (traveling) history, they open a window onto El Salvador’s rich, if masked, diversity. Similarly, learning of their experience also enriches our understanding of U.S. diversity, where the term “Latino immigrants” has come to be laden with homogenizing, assimilationist, and discriminatory ideas.

⁷ The long history of mobility and changing contexts that characterize their experience sheds light on the always imperfect categorical terms we are forced to use to identify people in relation to others. I refer to those whose experience is the focus of this study as “campesinos” (sometimes as “peasants” when I am referring to the way they were categorized by others rather than how they tend to speak of themselves), “refugees”, “Chalatecos”, “Guarjileños,” “migrants”, among other categorical terms at different points throughout the text. Furthermore, my use of the terms “immigrant”, “emigrant” and “migrant” vary at points of the text. While I agree with De Genova (2005) that the term “im-migrant” reinforces assimilationist assumptions, I select “immigrant” at times to emphasize the way Salvadorans are categorized in relation to other Latinos in the United States and U.S. immigration policy. I may use “emigrant” at times to emphasize the migrant-sending capacities and outflow intentionally advocated by the state or the general trend that many of El Salvador’s migrants will not return. I use “migrants” the most frequently as many of those who are the subject of discussion do and will travel back and forth and around. But I use the term cautiously so to not overemphasize migrant agency and underplay the hardships and constraints that Salvadorans face.

This attention to El Salvador's diversity is also important in the continued struggle to broaden knowledge of the presence of communal logics and practices in non-indigenous and even in trans-border settings. Much of the emergent research that proposes a communal systems framework has come out of analysis of the practices and logics of indigenous groups in the Andes (Patzí Paco 2004; Zibechi 2010), but there is a growing interest in using the framework to analyze a range of other settings, including in non-indigenous contexts. Scholars working in Mexico have identified how trans-border communities knitted together by a shared sense of ethnic or indigenous identity have maintained communitarian practices and mobilized for collective interests (Kearney 2000; Stephen 2007; Fox & Rivera-Salgado 2004). Through a lens that focuses on El Salvador's regional diversity, we can see how communal logics and practices work across borders and can be rooted in a shorter-range history and attachment to place-based identities.

In "the Field"

I have had a long-range and sustained engagement with the Chalatecos who collaborated to make this research possible, generously welcoming me to their communities, opening their homes, offering me warm meals, and engaging in rich conversation. I first went to El Salvador in 1999 as an undergraduate student through an international community-based learning program to spend the summer in Guarjila working with a local youth group. This trip initially sparked my interest in this project and in anthropology as a whole. I decided to return on two more occasions the following year for my first shot at an ethnographic research project. It was for a Latin American

studies thesis paper about the international emigration of young people from the community, which was an entry point into a much broader range of questions that have developed since then. Between 2001 and 2003, I returned to Guarjila to continue to work with young people and to teach at the high school that served Guarjila and the neighboring community of Los Ranchos. This school had just seen its first graduating class the year before. I returned each year for visits between 2003 and 2005. I conducted preliminary dissertation research in El Salvador in the summers of 2006 and 2007, and returned to El Salvador for full-time dissertation research from October 2008 to June 2011.

By 2003, I began visiting those young people and their families whom I had come to know quite well, but by that point they were in new homes in the United States. I have regularly visited and kept in touch with a number of families and individuals since then who reside in Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey, and elsewhere, and I spent extended periods of time in these areas for several months in 2009 and in 2011 for ethnographic research to inform this dissertation. I therefore reached the field of Latino studies by first starting in Latin America and following the trajectories of migrants traveling north (through their life stories and in a literal sense, since on several occasions I also worked and slept in migrant shelters in Mexico and hiked migrant trails in the Sonoran desert). The path I took never let me forget that migrants' struggles in the United States are also grounded in real places in Latin America.

My dissertation fieldwork drew from the networks and relationships I cultivated in El Salvador and in the United States, and my analysis builds on the perspectives and ideas that came out of this long-range experience. I am fortunate to have earned the

rapport and trust of the communities with which I work. I therefore chose to make the experience of the resettled community of Guarjila the focus of my dissertation, knowing that in many ways it is representative of the experience of other communities in the region (though in other ways it is very unique). Several communities in the region, including Guarjila, were repopulated by refugees toward the end of the civil war, most of who had been living in camps in Honduras for several years. These communities therefore share a similar regional experience and history, and they are highly networked through kin and politics, as it is rare to find an individual or family that is originally from the community where they resettled.

My investigation was therefore in some ways was a “classic” community-based ethnography, but it was also necessarily a networked ethnography, since community members were connected to others in neighboring communities and in the United States. During ethnographic immersion in Guarjila, I attended a range of community events and activities, from general assembly meetings to soccer games to fiestas. I interviewed and regularly conversed with community leaders, organizers, elders, as well as returned and deported migrants and young people who had contemplated migration.

I also regularly engaged with a set of several extended families that were stretched between the United States and El Salvador, with whom I have developed a close rapport. Through regular conversation, social events, and visits to their homes in both countries, I was able to closely follow the practices and trajectories of individuals and collectives that traveled along and worked with family networks, community networks, and the blurring of the two (what we could refer to as family-community networks, or those with membership that includes individuals who have close

community-based relationships and may or may not be connected through blood relations).

Through this latter dimension of my research, I often found myself playing the role of an international ambassador or liaison of sorts. I carried gifts, news, and hugs between family and community members who did not have the privilege of holding a U.S. passport. I could be spotted in videos taken in El Salvador that only I had the privilege of later seeing in the United States, or vice versa. As ethnographer and friend of my “collaborators”, I am also privileged to be able to visit the micro-spaces in the United States in which the place of Guarjila is reproduced; I don’t have to travel far to get to their communities on the East Coast. I got to enjoy community company at weekend barbecues and play with children who grandparents may not ever get to meet.

The wave of young migrants that I got to know most closely left El Salvador between 1999 and the mid-2000s. By the mid to late 2000s, emigration from Guarjila had tapered off. The immigration status of this wave of migrants is important to understand, as this research concentrates on their particular experience, which is significantly conditioned by their legal status. Those who arrived to the United States in the 1990s and up to 2001 were generally granted Temporary Protected Status (TPS). TPS is a legal immigration status that was granted to Salvadorans on the pretext that migrants during this period were leaving unstable conditions produced by the earthquake that shook El Salvador in January 2001, by Hurricane Mitch in 1998, and prior to that, by the civil war (it was first offered to Salvadorans in 1991). TPS allows migrants a limited set of rights (a driver’s license, a work permit, a Social Security number, travel to El Salvador with special permission, among others). It has an 18-month term before expiration, but so far it

has continued to be renewed by the U.S. government for those who arrived at the time it was initially offered and have applied for renewal.⁸ Those migrants who arrived to the United States after 2001 were generally not eligible for TPS or any other legal status, meaning that the vast majority of them navigate conditions of illegality.⁹ By contrast, those from an earlier wave of migrants, who arrived during the war, are much more likely to have temporary or permanent residency, and in some cases U.S. citizenship, due to a number of legislative initiatives and concessions during the 1980s. With the exception of public figures, I use pseudonyms instead of actual names to protect the identities of those whose stories and words are presented here.

The other side of my networked fieldwork entailed engagement with organizations working with migrants and their communities, development specialists, government officials, and others researching migration. This was mainly based in San Salvador, where I attended meetings, presentations, forums, and conferences, but it also led me to a handful of forums and meetings in Washington DC, Mexico City, and Los Angeles. I reviewed relevant literature coming from these actors, and I conducted interviews with contacts that continued to unfold through these engagements. Through this part of the ethnography, I examined the way migration and its relationship to development is understood and how these understandings inform various projects led by

⁸ About 250,000 Salvadorans in the United States are holders of TPS. They must regularly apply for renewal of this status.

⁹ Throughout the text, I avoid referring to those who were not granted legal immigration paperwork as “illegal” immigrants due to the unnecessary stigma of blame it conjures. I do, however, remind readers that “illegality” characterizes the conditions they navigate as undocumented migrants. I also sometimes refer to them as “illegalized” migrants to remind readers that it is a partial and imbalanced U.S. immigration system that criminalizes and excludes certain populations by denying them the possibility of legal immigration paperwork.

state and non-state actors. I was also an active participant in the conversations and debates on the table at these events. In San Salvador, I co-organized a working group on Salvadoran migration studies, which included Salvadoran and international scholars, NGO practitioners, a photographer, and an artist. I therefore treated what anthropologists refer to as “the field” as an opportunity to productively engage with various kinds of practitioners and other scholars.

Road Map

The following chapter of the dissertation traces the long historical trajectory in El Salvador from which the state’s developmentalist politics and discourse on migration and transnationalism emerged. It discusses how the historical trajectory of oligarchical rule and imperialist interventions are tied to its political and economic formations, which more recently favor neoliberalism, expelling migrants, and harnessing remittances for development. The postwar nation-state project, following this longer modernist/colonialist logic and trajectory, has excluded and uprooted particular histories and populations while emphasizing that its version of “transnationalism” and a nation of heroized migrants are a path to progress. Through these events and formations, and through its engagement with multilateral development agencies, the state has more recently embraced a discourse of “migration and development” that operates according to a neoliberal, capitalist, universalist, and individualist logic. This chapter therefore serves a dual purpose: it offers national and transnational history and context that shape the conditions that people of Chalatenango must navigate, and it also discusses the particular developmentalist logic and project of migration and transnationalism with which the state

operates, which, as I will suggest, stand apart from the communal and rooted logics and practices employed by people of Chalatenango communities.

The third chapter discusses the complex history out of which collectivism and communal logics and practices have developed among Chalatecos. It explores how these logics and practices have been strategically and tactically used to navigate conditions of marginalization, displacement, and military repression in varying contexts and situations. It stresses that mobility and networks have long been linked to this collectivist and community-making work. The chapter first discusses the collective action that took form through alliance-building and rural organizing since the early twentieth century. Culminating in the tensions in the late 1970s out of which the civil war unfolded, Chalatecos were forced to flee, since the region was at the heart of the civil war. The chapter analyzes how the organized flights from the region, the years of displacement in Honduran refugee camps, and the organizing of a massive repatriation back to El Salvador all entailed the development of collectivist and communal work. The last part of the chapter discusses the experience of those who resettled in the community of Guarjila in 1987. It explores the initial community-making work that began and the use of communal systems that were needed for survival amid five more years of civil war.

Chapter 4 explores the changes and dilemmas that people of Guarjila confront during the postwar period, which began with the 1992 Peace Accords. Feeling the effects of neoliberal globalization in the aftermath of war, migration to the United States from the community began to pick up and remittances flowed into the community. This chapter examines the complex way that people understand and practice the work of building a meaningful, rooted community-in-place, but in a context of extensive

international migration. Here I draw on a more complex conceptualization of community-making to emphasize that this work, and the meanings associated with it, are relational, ever-changing, diversely understood and practiced, and can be tied to mobility and cross-border networks. Nonetheless, I suggest that this work is given meaning in large part through a sense of rootedness in both the territorial place of Guarjila and in a shared history of collective struggle. By conceptualizing community-building as rooted even as it is changing, mobile, and relational, this chapter suggests that Guarjila's international migration contributes to this work at the same time that it has fragmenting and divisive consequences, which, as we will see, becomes a politically charged concern as they confront new postwar dilemmas.

Chapter 5 explores the way community is reconstituted across international borders in communal, rooted, and networked ways. Based on logics and practices that come out of its longer history of collectivism and community-building, people turn to the work of reconstituting and rooting community as a source of strength and as an important resource in their lives as they navigate conditions not of their own choosing. This chapter first highlights the trajectories and logics of migrants that have voluntarily chosen to give up stable jobs in the United States to return to Guarjila, emphasizing the value they place on communal resources and a sense of rootedness in community. The discussion then turns to various types of non-capitalist practices that often involve migrants' remittances, which work to communally take care of others, contribute to the meaningful work of rooting community in place, and work toward the individual and collective project of building an option to not migrate for a younger generation in Guarjila. Throughout the chapter, I juxtapose ethnographic detail of Guarjila's experience against the assumptions

and scenarios coming from San Salvador-based development specialists to suggest that the sorts of communal practices and logics at work destabilize various mainstream assumptions about migration and development.

Chapter 6 returns to a discussion of El Salvador as a whole in an analysis of the way networks of activists are directly challenging the state's developmentalist framework on migration, motivated in response to the shifting conditions of undocumented migration that Salvadorans (as reflected in the experience of Chalatecos) are facing, and motivated by a moment of leftward political change. Among other challenges that would modify the government's neoliberal character, they are demanding that new sorts of policies and programs be implemented that would work toward "an option to not migrate" for status quo Salvadorans. As a struggle that is emerging out of the current conjuncture, these activists are dismissing developmentalist logics and calling for the revaluation of the lives of migrants and the well-being of their communities.

The conclusion chapter first briefly reviews some of the primary theoretical implications of this dissertation. It then turns to a discussion of the significance of these implications and the potentiality for other kinds of futures as the social and political conditions of international migration between the United States and El Salvador, and elsewhere, continue to change.

CHAPTER 2

Destierro

A familiar ritual was unfolding. Inside one of the air-conditioned banquet rooms of the Radisson Plaza Hotel located next to an under-construction high-rise called the *Torre Futura* in San Salvador's business district, people watched Power Point presentations, debated at round table sessions, and mingled at coffee breaks in black suits and skirts. Since I had arrived in El Salvador six months earlier, I had already been invited to attend several similar events involving development specialists, government officials, diplomats, and non-governmental organizations working with migrants and their communities. This time it was the April 2009 session of the Regional Conference on Migration, which was dedicated to a workshop on Temporary Migrant Worker Programs, sponsored by the governments of El Salvador and Canada and several international organizations. This meeting had particularly formal proceedings, with government representatives from several Central American and Caribbean countries seated in a semi-circle like a United Nations meeting. Just a few representatives from non-governmental organizations that worked with migrants and their communities were invited. They were seated on one side of the room, looking at the backs of suit coats; it was an arrangement that pushed them to the periphery of the conversation. Discussions ensued around the merits, consequences, best practices, policies, and models of potential temporary migrant worker programs. Those on the periphery tended to express a more critical view, while

those in the center circle tended to emphasize the positive outcomes of temporary worker programs and advocated for the expansion of programs with placements in Canada. The keynote speaker, hailing from the Philippines, concluded the event with a Power Point loaded with bar graphs, statistics, and bullet points that were evidence of the “progress” the Philippines had made in building state-sanctioned migrant worker exportation programs. After he boasted that more than 14 billion dollars of his country’s annual revenue came from the remittances of migrant laborers sent to work abroad, his presentation was received with a roaring applause.

The Salvadoran state has embraced the idea that sending migrants to work abroad and harnessing their remittances is good for development and progress. This logic did not develop in a vacuum. Rather, it has been worked out over a long history, in relation to various events, actors, and processes coming from within El Salvador and from the outside. This chapter offers history, background, and context on El Salvador’s political, economic, and social conditions. These are the conditions that have engendered migration and have led to a particular state-led political project and discourse that frame migration and remittances as a key dimension of economic and social development. With its relatively small national territory and its concentration of power and wealth yet to be untethered from its oligarchical past, El Salvador has long been a place of experimentation, and it has come to exemplify an extreme case of the conditions that arise out of a development strategy dependent on migration and remittances in a free market economy.

I argue that the development of this political project and discourse is tied to a long-range experience and logic of modernity/coloniality (Quijano 1991; Mignolo 2000).

According to this logic, migrants and their communities are made into a “development category” (Escobar 1985, 1995; Shrestha 1995), understood as belonging to a sea of people of the “Global South”. Salvadorans are understood as belonging to a country that is in need of development and that demographers have long labeled “overpopulated” (Durham 1979). In Foucauldian terms, their subjectivities are able to be governed and their “docile bodies” can be moved and employed in favor of development, “progress”, and modernity.

First, I will discuss El Salvador’s political and economic developments over a long history, which has led the state to look favorably on neoliberal economics. This discussion centers on how El Salvador’s recent neoliberal formations are linked to a legacy of oligarchical governance, inequality, and imperial interventions and forces. I then highlight how, as emigration grew during the war and postwar period, migrants’ remittances were quickly recognized and viewed as beneficial to the neoliberal economic development project. New political practices were developed to support the stability of migrants abroad, and the state began to strategically employ a discourse that framed migrants as key heroic and sacrificial actors for El Salvador’s progress and development.

Second, I discuss the question of national identity and debates over a sense of rootedness in El Salvador. The project of “expelling” migrants and harnessing remittances is part of a longer history of exclusion and erasure. The postwar nation-state building project has sought to promote universalist values, migration, and a transnationalist identity in order to create a more “modern” and “progressive” El Salvador. In so doing, it has continued to bury and keep silent the troubled histories that are meaningful to diverse, excluded populations.

Finally, this chapter looks at how these processes are connected to the more recent move of the state to embrace a discourse of “migration and development” that has global reach and is advocated mainly by multilateral development agencies. Often couched in terms of “human development”, this discourse, along with the political projects that accompany it, is guided by a logic that assumes a particular form of development driven by capitalist activity through transnational processes.

The Coffee Republic

According to a popular Salvadoran narrative, fourteen families of the Creole economic elite are said to have been the primary holders of wealth, land, and power since the colonial period. If you ask Salvadorans today who they were, the slew of names you will receive will vary, but they tend to include the surnames of a number of former presidents and the country’s wealthiest business owners (whose names are tied to major real estate developers, department stores, notable former coffee exporters, and so forth). The legendary fourteen families is symbolic (there is one for each of the country’s 14 departments, like states) but it reflects a popularly-held belief and the reality that many families who are understood to belong to what Salvadorans refer to as the *élite*, like elsewhere in Latin America, trace their lineage to those who arrived during the colonial period between the sixteenth century and Central America’s independence in 1821.

Several families made their fortunes from coffee production at the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Sugar, indigo, and coffee production had been the most important crops for colonial estate owners, but by the 1880s, coffee became the crop of choice when its market suddenly began to boom. As fortunes grew,

those who were able to work their way into a select group of leading coffee exporters by the 1920s solidified into an economic and political elite that would maintain their hold on state power throughout the twentieth century (Lindo-Fuentes et al. 2007).

Under their tight control, the state's formations and practices shifted significantly. El Salvador had previously been viewed as one of the more "progressive" of the small Latin American republics, mainly for its state reforms that stabilized its economy through diversification, increased taxes, modernized infrastructure, and a lack of military presence in local governance. By the 1920s, these experimental reforms ended as an agro-financial oligarchy took control of banking and put policies in place that engendered repressive labor conditions. Already by the 1880s, the state had privatized communal *ejido* lands, which dispossessed indigenous campesinos from their land and source of livelihood, turning them into wage-earning seasonal agricultural laborers. As the agro-financial elite opened the country to foreign investment and disinvested in El Salvador by putting their holdings in foreign banks, new monetary flows made way for corruption. Concentrated control over wealth and power in El Salvador's relatively small territory was further facilitated as the government's ties to particular families tightened; between 1913 and 1927, for example, the presidency was held by three members of one extended family (Gould & Lauria-Santiago 2008).¹⁰ As I will discuss later, the elite's hegemony was certainly met with waves of contestation, including the 1932 uprising of indigenous campesinos, and decades of rural organizing through the 1970s that actually benefited from state-led efforts to pacify resistance through rural reforms during this period.

However, the upper crust of the grower and export elite class were able to insulate

¹⁰ The presidency was held three times by members of the Melendez-Quiñonez family dynasty.

themselves from the realities of “ordinary” people and lead a transnational and cosmopolitan lifestyle. They mingled behind the walls of well-guarded country clubs, lived in luxurious San Salvador homes and country estates, sent their children to private schools, and intermarried. They vacationed and did business abroad, sent their children to be educated in Europe, played international music at their parties, and aided modernization projects in El Salvador at least to the extent that these would directly affect their quality of life. They attributed their acquisition of wealth and their role in transforming El Salvador into “productive” territory to their own hard work and intelligence (Gould & Lauria-Santiago 2008).

While El Salvador’s national economy diversified to some extent throughout the middle of the twentieth century, the vast majority of its foreign exchange revenue still came from agricultural exports up until the 1970s. From the 1950s through the 1970s, major exports also included cotton, shrimp, and sugar. There was also a rapid industrialization of consumer goods, through import substitution and exports to the Central American Common Market. A small middle class began to emerge, but the coffee and agro-financial élite maintained its position at the top of the class strata. The top tier had become a cohesive and well-solidified group. By 1930, an estimated 1,000 of about 300,000 total families in El Salvador, much less than 1% of the population, had established their status by sharing a closely knit web of business, political, and kinship ties (Gould & Lauria-Santiago 2008). Of the 63 wealthiest families at the end of the twentieth century, only four of them had made their fortune after the 1950s (Colindres 1977). Salvadoran economists commonly referred to El Salvador’s economy as an “oligarchical capitalism” (Arene 2011).

Introducing Neoliberalism

By the end of the 1970s, El Salvador's economy began to change in character as civil war engulfed the country and as neoliberal political, economic, and ideological apparatuses took hold. By 1982, the right-wing *Alianza Republicana Nacionalista* (Nationalist Republican Alliance, or ARENA) was formed and had taken control of parliamentary elections in El Salvador. Linked to El Salvador's notorious "death squads", the party was founded in 1981 at the onset of the civil war, just after the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, or FMLN) was formed among five guerrilla organizations in 1980. ARENA's membership drew from the most conservative of the oligarchical élite, with an ideology that was anti-communist and built on the ideals of nationalism, capitalism, and individualism. According to its ideological statement, "the individual is recognized as the fundamental base of the nation".¹¹

Given the party's ideology, it is not surprising that by 1989, when ARENA again held the presidency, the Salvadoran government embraced neoliberalism.¹² Similar to many other Latin American countries at the time, the Salvadoran government, with incentives and pressures from the Washington Consensus, sought to encourage foreign investment, reduce barriers on international trade, and privatize what had been national goods and services. Beginning in 1989, structural adjustments aimed to reduce government and gain access to international loans on improved terms. Policy changes included pro-corporate tax codes, the sale of national goods and services to private

¹¹ This citation was taken from Binford's (1996) quote from a 1988 handbook for ARENA activists.

¹² The party held the presidency from 1982-1984, and then the more moderate Christian Democratic Party held the presidency from 1984-1989. ARENA again secured the presidency from 1989 to 2009.

investment, import duty reductions, and intellectual property protections. In a little more than a decade, the implementation of neoliberal reforms of the 1990s had transformed El Salvador into one of Latin America's most open market economies.

The imperialist hand of the United States, of course, played an enormous role in El Salvador's shift toward a free market economy. Aside from the forces of structural adjustment coming from the Washington Consensus, the counter-insurgency operations of the devastating 12-year civil war that left at least 75,000 dead were carried out by a military that was funded, trained, and equipped by the United States. El Salvador-U.S. political and economic connections became intimately tethered throughout the 1980s, a product of the Cold War-inspired faith that market democracy would help bring political and economic stability and quell communist insurrection. Essentially, the Salvadoran government by then had been compromised by the United States in a type of neo-colonial relationship.

A handful of extra-governmental organizations were founded during the 1980s and 1990s that facilitated the government's neoliberal agenda. Their leadership came mainly from wealthy national business owners with famous last names, some of whom moved in and out of formal government positions. These included the *Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social* (Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development, or FUSADES), a think tank that originally contracted one of Chile's "Chicago Boys" to orient its mission, the *Asociación Nacional de la Empresa Privada* (Association of Private Enterprise), and the *Agencia de Promoción de Exportaciones e Inversiones de El Salvador* (Export and Investment Promotion Agency of El Salvador, or PROESA). Their offices are concentrated in a

wealthy neighborhood of San Salvador near the U.S. Embassy (now one of the largest embassies in the world, it was reconstructed out of anti-communist preoccupations after the 1986 earthquake to have a Taj Mahal-like presence in San Salvador). Advertising El Salvador's free trade zones and "hard working" labor force to potential foreign investors, publicity from PROESA in 2000 boasted that foreigners could set up a business in El Salvador "in two hours."

Liberalizing trade benefited foreign corporations, but it also benefited El Salvador's wealthiest. The government sold off formerly nationalized services (telecommunications, electricity, and so forth) to foreign companies and to wealthy nationals. Free trade was part of a regional globalization strategy to economically integrate Central American countries, facilitated by the signing of the United States-Central America-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) in 2004. In a 2004 special monograph issue of *Estudios Centroamericanos*, Salvadoran economist Alexander Segovia carefully charts the strategic alliances forged by no more than 28 principal "powerful economic groups" in Central America that now operate in such sectors as banking, construction, commerce, transportation, tourism, agro-business, and real estate. He makes the familial concentration of wealth very clear, offering the well-known family names linked to the ownership of each group.

Sending Emigrants, Harnessing Remittances

The intense wave of neoliberal reforms in the 1990s to 2000s contributed to El Salvador's dramatic economic shift away from agricultural exports toward industry, construction, financial services, communications, and other sectors, but also key to this

transformation was the rise in migrants' remittances since the 1980s. In 1975, more than 80 percent of exports were from the agricultural sector. By 2005, more than 70 percent of foreign exchange came from remittances. Migrants' remittances have become the mainstay of El Salvador's national economy ever since emigration grew in the postwar period, following the hundreds of thousands of migrants that were displaced during the more than a decade-long civil war. The Salvadoran government now estimates that nearly three million people live outside of the country, with about nine of every ten émigrés living in the United States. The country's Central Bank (an entity that no longer regulates interest rates or a national currency, since the country uses U.S. dollars, but is now responsible for carefully tracking international money transfers and macro-economic trends) calculates that in recent years, more than three and a half billion dollars in average annual remittances account for about three-fourths of the country's foreign exchange and sixteen percent of GDP.¹³

Widespread emigration has come to characterize quotidian Salvadoran life, in large part a product of displacement during El Salvador's 1980-1992 civil war and the failure of reconstruction and development strategies in its aftermath. As emigration grew, the extraordinary economic impact of migrants' remittances was quickly recognized and moved to the heart of the neoliberal ARENA-led government's free market-oriented economic development strategies throughout the postwar period. With roughly a quarter of its population abroad, remittances now constitute El Salvador's largest source of revenue. The country ranks number one in remittances as a share of GDP in Latin

¹³ The *Banco Central de Reserva* of El Salvador's role shifted when the country was dollarized in 2001. It frequently updates its website with reports on remittance flows <http://www.bcr.gob.sv/esp/> (last accessed 7/19/2012)

America and the Caribbean and tenth in the entire world. It follows that El Salvador has arguably the most entrenched dependency on migration and remittances in the region.¹⁴

By some measures, neoliberal reforms and the influx of remittances in the postwar period have produced slow but steady economic growth and a drastic reduction in overall poverty in El Salvador, and in many cases they have opened channels for families and individuals to pursue education, professionalization, and work opportunities that might have been unimaginable just a few years ago. However, the developmentalist discourses linked to remittance-sending has hidden the way El Salvador's entrenched dependency on emigration and remittances has by other measures actually exacerbated negative economic conditions, deepening inequality and producing new forms of precarity and instability. Salvadoran economists emphasize that in the neoliberal landscape, remittances have buffered severe economic instability by substituting for exports and balancing foreign accounts as public debt surged (Vega 2002; Gammage 2006; Segovia 2006; Arene 2011). When the country dollarized in 2001, the dollar was locked in at an overvalued exchange rate, inflating prices. While relatively unchanged national wages have remained low, the soaring consumption power lent by remittances may be contributing to a "Dutch Disease" effect in the national economy, further inflating prices and building dependency on imports (González Orellana 2008). Even as remittances appear to have steadily expanded the economy and reduced the poverty rate, the "real income" of the average Salvadoran — the buying power to pay for basic, non-transferable goods — is calculated to be only half of what it was a decade ago (Góchez

¹⁴ According to Ratha & Silwal (2011), the 2010 estimate that remittances account for 16% of El Salvador's total GDP ranks the country tenth among the "top recipients of remittances among developing countries."

Sevilla 2011). In sum, in El Salvador's lauded economy, displacement has been reproduced and dependency on the remittances of foreign migrants has grown, as many Salvadorans find it more difficult today to make ends meet.

Despite deepening inequality and foreign dependency, the stream of remittances was understood to be working harmoniously with the state's neoliberal project. An expanding economy, a burgeoning urban middle class, and a new affect of consumerist modernity have come to be commonly understood as tell-tale measurements of "progress" in a country struggling to move on from its troubled histories of violence and "underdevelopment." The conservative ARENA-led government, believing that the rising consumption power of remittances was working harmoniously with neoliberal reforms to grow the economy, has branded El Salvador as "a meeting place" for international businesspeople, and the Ministry of Tourism boasts that the country has Central America's most expansive shopping malls and modern highway system outside of Panama.¹⁵ Along with free market consolidations, key to the state's political economic strategy has been to encourage emigration and harness remittances. "Exporting people", to use the words of Salvadoran economists and activists, fit the neoliberal logic of opening flows of capital and flexible labor.

The growing value of migrants' remittances first began to draw the interest and intervention of the state during the war, and by the 1990s it began playing an active role in Salvadoran immigrant rights advocacy in the U.S. Initially, the government of El Salvador did not support the recognition of a refugee status for exiled Salvadorans arriving to the United States, arguing that human rights in El Salvador were being

¹⁵ Author's interviews with CORSATUR representative, March 4, 2009, San Salvador

certifiably upheld in order to maintain U.S. funding for counter-insurgency military operations. However, in 1987, Salvadoran president José Napoleon Duarte asked the United States to protect Salvadorans from deportation with the reasoning that remittances from Salvadorans were vital to maintain stability in El Salvador (Coutin 2007: 80). Leaders of the Salvadoran diaspora, working alongside Sanctuary and Solidarity Movement organizers and other Central American activists, continued to push forward with immigrant rights advocacy. By the mid-1990s, the Salvadoran government had made some initial advocacy moves in favor of Salvadoran immigrants in the United States, building on the accomplishments of activists that had been fighting for their legality. Salvadoran activists in Washington D.C. that I interviewed said that it was not until 1997, with the passing of the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA), that the government of El Salvador “suddenly saw the light,” and recognized the potential that collaborative involvement in U.S.-Salvadoran immigrant rights advocacy could have for remittance-driven economic growth.¹⁶ According to Susan Coutin (2007), NACARA was effectively campaigned for by the government of El Salvador and U.S.-Salvadoran activists in a joint effort with advocates representing Guatemalan, Nicaraguan, and Cuban immigrants. The legislation extended immigrant legal protections to these groups on the basis that they had fled unstable situations, which, as Coutin points out, ironically marked a reversal in the Salvadoran state’s prior stance that Salvadorans who had fled the war did not merit asylum.

¹⁶ Author’s interviews with Salvadoran activists, March 14, 2010, Washington D.C.

Erasing Troubled Histories

In an animated conversation at a Salvadoran-founded organization serving Washington D.C.'s immigrant community, activists referred to the state's attempt to send away part of its population and to co-opt immigrant rights activism as a politics of *destierro*. By its most common definition, *destierro* translates to "exile". As a verb, *desterrar* can mean to "exile", "banish", "expatriate", "get rid of", "deport", or "cast out". Broken down to examine its Latin origins, *des-terrar* would literally mean to "de-earth"; this resonates with other Spanish language definitions of the term: "to take away the earth from below the roots of a plant or something else", or "to throw away a use or custom." Beyond referring to the state's flipped political stance toward those exiled by the war or by poor economic conditions, the politics of *destierro* could thus also be thought of as banishing of the undesirable, or removing the earth that feeds life and gives meaning to one's roots.

In the most densely populated country in the Americas, the government's lauding of the widespread departure of marginalized Salvadorans as undocumented emigrants might be understood as a convenient strategy to try and heal El Salvador of social and economic problems, evoking a haunting resonance with El Salvador's history of state-led repression and elimination of problematized populations on the margins of Salvadoran society. I now move from a discussion of the political economic history behind El Salvador's trajectory of migrant "expulsion" and remittance-led development to an exploration of some of the meanings and discourses tied to this project. The section that follows explores how, following a longer history of excluding and silencing troubled histories and populations, a postwar nation-state building project has emerged that

promotes a celebratory discourse on migration and transnationalism. This discourse, I suggest, is tied to a longer-range history of destierro and memory erasure, and the advancement of particular ideas about progress, development, and what it means to be Salvadoran.

La Matanza of 1932 is one astonishing example of the extremely violent repression sanctioned by El Salvador's political class. Discontent with the government and conditions of inequality had been brewing since the 1920s. When indigenous campesinos in the western coffee region, who had already been dispossessed of their communal lands, faced near-slavery conditions after their wages were cut during the collapse of the international coffee market from the depression, they followed Augusto Farabundo Martí and other communist party revolutionary figures' lead and took part in an uprising against government forces. Within a few days after the fighting broke out on January 22, 1932, they had taken control of several towns and killed a few dozen wealthy planters, government officials, and security forces personnel. Once they were arrested, General Maximilio Hernández Martínez's government responded by systematically killing somewhere between 10,000 and 30,000 people in western coffee towns. Anyone carrying machetes, with Indian features, or dressed in traditional campesino clothing was targeted. Documentation of the event was thereafter destroyed by the government (Lindo-Fuentes et al. 2007).

Scholars continue to piece together the puzzle and debate the implications of the massacre (Gould & Lauria-Santiago 2008; Peterson 2007; Tilley 2005; Lindo-Fuentes et al. 2007). Generally speaking, *La Matanza* was responsible for a legacy of Salvadorans' suppression of expressions of indigenous identity out of fear of being labeled

“communist”, which has translated to the popular belief today that there are few, if any, Indians in El Salvador. Of course, when defined by other terms, Indians abound in El Salvador. Nonetheless, the belief that El Salvador is populated by a *mestizaje* population has been used by the state to support the claim that El Salvador is a more progressive and modern country in the international political sphere, one where development is received with welcome, in comparison to other more “Indian” countries in Latin America, such as its neighbor, Guatemala (Tilley 2005).

La Matanza had uprooting effects; it marked efforts to do away with people and identities considered backward and barbaric. The government made efforts to erase its memory from formal history, and those targeted made conscious efforts to keep from view certain “Indian” practices that came from a long-range history of custom and tradition. Even so, the intimidation and trauma that it produced was not enough to quell rural organizing and resistance. As we will see in the next chapter’s discussion of campesino organizing in northern El Salvador, ground-up organizing, collective action, and alliances continued to take form in the decades that followed leading up to the violence of the civil war.

The twelve-year civil war from 1980 to 1992, of course, was also remarkably characterized by *destierro*. More than 75,000 people were killed, an unknown number disappeared, and more than a half million fled the country. The Salvadoran military employed Vietnam-style counter-insurgency tactics with training, arms, and billions of dollars of aid from the United States. The notorious Atlacatl Battalion, trained on U.S. turf, was blamed for committing some of the war’s most atrocious acts of violence, including the 1981 massacre of some 600 civilians at El Mozote, which was immediately

covered up by U.S. media and officials (Binford 1996). At the war's end, the United Nations Truth Commission Report attributed 85% of the acts of violence to state agents and only 5% to the FMLN.¹⁷

One afternoon in June 2009, I went with two others to visit the *Puerta del Diablo* (Devil's Door), a scenic site advertised in the Salvadoran government's tourism literature for its breathtaking view. Atop a hill just south of San Salvador, near the town of Panchimalco (one of the few places in El Salvador recognized for manifesting indigenous identity), one can sit on the edge of a cliff and peer out between two towering rock formations and, when the fog clears, see the lush green valley below. Young couples, embracing, sat and took in the view, while children flew by on a zip line. The national tourists were happy to escape the hustle and bustle of the city and spend a weekend afternoon there. Yet this is an eerie place. What some Salvadorans will remind you is that it was a dumping ground that death squads filled up with murdered and tortured bodies during the war. We could find no monument, plaque, or sign to memorialize what had happened there. It was yet another case of an official attempt to hide the violent histories that haunt the country.

For some, this lack of a monument is a way to move forward after the war via an active project of forgetting, of erasing certain memories. After all, the war had dragged on, and Salvadorans had been longing to embrace peace and make it last. Neither side "won" the war; the 1992 Peace Accords called for a cease fire. Amnesty further contributed to the work of erasure, freeing from accountability those responsible for what "had happened" during the war. And the state sought to exclude certain histories to

¹⁷ <http://www.usip.org/publications/truth-commission-el-salvador> (last accessed 5/22/2013)

reconstruct the way El Salvador's past, present, and future would be understood.

To “move on” from the war, a new postwar nation-state building project was crafted that erased certain memories while constructing a future built on universalist values and a common national identity. This project is also linked to a broader state-led celebratory discourse on migration and transnational flows that frames these processes as fundamental to Salvadoran existence and as a pathway to development, progress, and modernity for individuals, families, and the nation. As I will discuss, this discourse has been strategically constructed by state and development actors, linked to a broader belief in constructing what could be called *transnationalist modernity*. The idea that “transnational” identities are an exemplary sign of progress and modernity has come to be internalized in Salvadoran subjectivities in quotidian ways.

As anthropologist Robin DeLugan (2012) argues, state-sponsored museums constructed after the war, which included the National Museum of Anthropology and the National Museum of Art, did not commemorate the civil war; only privately and grassroots-funded museums did. There was also a lack of formation of people who could investigate and analyze El Salvador's past, demonstrated by the fact that there were no opportunities for Salvadorans to get a degree in history or anthropology from the University of El Salvador until 2002, when it inaugurated a joint program in these disciplines. The state's efforts to redefine national belonging, drawing from the influence of the United Nations, emphasized universally accepted human values aimed at fostering a “culture of peace” that would supposedly help reduce crime and violence, unify a highly polarized society, and promote democratization and stability. A new “Values Program” was implemented in public schools and relayed through the media. Indigenous

groups were finally acknowledged, but this was at least in part motivated by the reality that the recognition of “multiculturalism” was now important to any nation-state that seeks respect in the international political sphere. Nonetheless, society was built on a common mestizaje ideology that was expected to contribute to a sense of national unity. Indigenous cultural identities were mainly portrayed in national discourse in relation to pre-Columbian ancestry, which was advantageous to the government in that it had the potential to benefit archaeological tourism.

In its narrative of El Salvador’s long-range history, the National Museum of Anthropology showcases how recent international migration is a part of life for Salvadorans; it is part of what it means to be Salvadoran. The depiction of Salvadoran migration offered by the museum suggests in a positive way that modern technologies and mobility maintain Salvadorans’ transnational connections, but it makes no mention of the perilous journey across Mexico’s borders that undocumented migrants undertake en route to the United States. By silencing certain experiences, characteristics, and meanings associated with Salvadoran migration, the museum’s narrative privileges a positive, celebratory view of migration that frames migrants and their communities as being transformed into more modern subjects through their mobility.

Certainly, migration has long been a part of life for Salvadorans. In fact, at the time of the conquest, the area that is now El Salvador was largely populated by the Pipils, who are believed to have migrated there from what is now Central and Southern Mexico in several waves between 700 and 1350. Throughout the colonial period and following independence, agricultural labor necessitated migrations. Campesinos began engaging more readily in migratory seasonal labor among coffee and other agricultural estates once

they were dispossessed of their land in 1882. As I discuss in the next chapter, others were also traveling to neighboring countries (particularly Honduras) for agricultural work. Domestic labor also increased after the 1950s, when small farmers were further displaced from their land as a result of agricultural diversification efforts that emphasized cash crops and mechanization and as rural to urban migration grew with industrialization since the 1960s. Some of the earliest Salvadoran working-class immigrants in the United States worked as west coast shipyard employees in the early twentieth century, but migration was negligible until the social unrest of the late 1970s, when the mass exodus of migrants began and continued to grow after the civil war (Menjívar 2000, Cordova 2005). Today, one in four Salvadoran families is estimated to have family members living in the United States.

The *élite*'s long-range engagement with transnational migration has also conditioned the meanings and perceived value of migration and transnationalism in the national public eye, as their "transnationalized identity" gets associated with higher class status. Salvadorans from the elite class have been in the United States since the end of the nineteenth century (Cordova 2005), and they have long gone to the United States and Europe for education, international business, and residence. The American School exemplifies the most exclusive (and expensive) of several bilingual private schools in San Salvador that cater to the privileged, grooming them for college education abroad. It reinforces the modernist and colonialist logic linked to transnational migration and class status. Students learn American history, operate on a U.S. school year calendar, and, prohibited from speaking Spanish in classes, acquire impeccable American accents and English writing skills that tend to exceed their Spanish writing abilities. Of the majority

who go to the United States for their college education, some are drawn back to El Salvador to carry on their parent's successful businesses or by other opportunities, but today most American School graduates are likely to remain in the United States to pursue careers there upon completing their degree. The expectation that El Salvador's most privileged young people will emigrate mirrors the visions that many students of the working class also have for futures in the U.S., but on much different terms (Dyrness 2012). Pervasive transnational migration thus transcends El Salvador's class strata. Depending on how Salvadorans are able to engage with it, exuding a more "transnational" identity (speaking English, going abroad for education or to work and join family, wearing clothes sent from the United States, eating at American-owned restaurants, etc.) can be an expression of privilege and class status, though this of course takes diverse forms and is subjectively interpreted.

As neoliberalism and remittances have shifted El Salvador's economy toward services and consumerism, its landscape has also changed with the construction of spaces and architectures that exemplify an illusive feel of transnationalist modernity. El Salvador's migration landscape is evident in the *Western Union* and English-language billboards found along rural roads that pass by homes reconstructed with remittances, but the sense that migration has transformed El Salvador into a more modernized place is perhaps best exemplified in San Salvador's cityscape, where new high-rises and glistening high-end shopping malls have come to symbolize the sense of modernity and high status associated with transnationalist consumerism and style. One such place is the *Torre Futura* (the "Future Tower"), the high-rise glass office building I mention at the beginning of the chapter that opened in 2010, with its adjacent outdoor plaza that lights

up at night with shows and events while well-dressed patrons enjoy outdoor seating at international restaurants. Another such space, constructed in 2005, is *La Gran Via*, an outdoor mall (dubbed a “lifestyle center”) featuring international stores and restaurants, a hotel, gym, mini-golf, and a movie theatre. Named after the famous *La Gran Via* at the heart of Madrid, Spain, El Salvador’s counterpart connotes cosmopolitanism while its aesthetic transports those walking the length of it to a shopping space reminiscent of *CocoWalk* in Miami, a long-time favorite weekend shopping destination of the élite. While these spaces appear to be public and common, they are actually high-security private zones that offer a false aura of safety. They become modern spaces to see and be seen, to get your picture taken to post on *Facebook*, even though the expensive imported clothing and goods for sale are inaccessible for most Salvadorans. The consumption power lent by remittances has conflated what used to be more defined expressions of class, now that types of environments that were once only for the élite are more accessible. Nonetheless, in a city where people count on the transient income of remittances and precarious employment in the services sector, where people emigrate to escape unmanageable credit debt, and where malls are built across the street from ravines that are home to squatter settlements, the aura of “progress” and modernity that comes from these architectural symbols (and the spending practices that they encourage) is highly illusive.

But, as one young anthropology student from the University of El Salvador pointed out to me, what archaeological remnants are under *La Gran Via*? We do not know for sure, but the neighborhood of Antiguo Cuscatlán, where the mall paved over the expansive coffee plantation of *El Espino*, was at the heart of one of the most important

settlements of the Pipil Indians. Salvadoran scholars have long been debating the struggle to define Salvadorans' "roots", which they refer to as a "crisis of Salvadoranness".

Stigmatized by violence, Salvadorans often describe their sense of national identity in relation to their famously hard-working and friendly character, and their delicious national specialty, the *pupusa*. It is perhaps in part out of this sense of a void, of not knowing, of having buried histories and uprooted populations, that the postwar nation-state building project has looked toward transnationalism and migration for a sense of meaning in defining Salvadoranness. As Lauria-Santiago & Binford put it:

El Salvador seems to be a nation without history—that is, its people, institutions, and government have only a weak and fragmented sense of their own past. Yet El Salvador often appears to be deeply, even overly, engaged with its 'rootedness,' with a sense that where it is now and where it has been lately are all tightly determined by its past, a past in which things are known to have occurred but remain for the more demanding observer elusively ambiguous and vague." (2004: 2)

And even as migration has given new meaning to Salvadoranness, the dispersion of Salvadorans around the world has complicated the question of El Salvador's deeply embedded and felt, but largely buried and undiscussed, "roots." Salvadoranness gets redefined through migrants themselves and in the (re)encounters with and (re)constructions of national history. Noted Salvadoran cultural theorist Amparo Marroquín Parducci (2009) refers to El Salvador as a *Nación en Fuga*: a nation of outflow, reconstructing itself based on multiple, fragile narratives of violence, an uncertain past, and contemporary migration.

Heroizing Emigrants

Since the 2000s, when the state began taking a more active role in advocating for

U.S.- Salvadoran immigrant legality by forging precarious alliances with community organizations led by the U.S.-Salvadoran diaspora, it also began developing a wider apparatus through which to construct discursive and political techniques to channel emigrants and remittances. A notable move was the 2004 creation of the *Vice Ministerio para Salvadoreños en el Exterior* (the Vice Ministry for Salvadorans Abroad), now a key actor in the articulation and execution of the state's migration-remittance development strategy. Under the administration of then president Tony Saca, the agency's stated goals were to support "migratory stability and family reunification" by overseeing consular and legal services for migrants abroad, extending advocacy efforts for emigrant legalization and guest worker programs, and by allying with multilateral agencies, non-governmental organizations, and foreign governments interested in improving conditions for "trafficking" victims and other "irregular" migrants in transit. Beyond these efforts to "regularize" migration by advocating for safe passage and migrant legality, it also prioritized the "economic integration" of migrants in development processes in El Salvador by encouraging migrants to fund local "hometown" development projects with their remittances and to engage in transnational investment and "nostalgic" businesses. Finally, acting on the preoccupation that if migrants, and the children of migrants, do not continue to feel a cultural and patriotic attachment to territorial El Salvador then remittances will wane, the Vice Ministry set out to "strengthen national identity" by showing support for patriotic festivities abroad and cultural exchanges such as immersion trips to El Salvador for the children of Salvadoran immigrants.¹⁸

¹⁸ These strategic objectives and their terminology used by the Vice Ministry for Salvadorans Abroad are based on publications the agency distributed to the author and the author's interview with a representative of the agency on March 2, 2009 in San Salvador.

The state has also promoted certain discourses that help cohere El Salvadoran identity around the idea of the heroic migrant. In this powerful state-led discourse on “transnationalism”, El Salvador’s emigrant is constructed as a celebrated figure of heroism, whose loyal service, via remittances, are the key to making a new, better El Salvador (Baker-Cristales 2004; Coutin 2007). The heroic, committed emigrant is hailed in *el hermano lejano* (the distant brother), the national monument that greets visitors coming from the airport to thank migrants for their service and remind them they should feel a sense of belonging to *patria*.

Another common concept used by the state is the notion of deterritorialization. The concept of an inclusive transnational population in deterritorialized El Salvador is consistently employed in state-led discourse, and emphasis is placed on the idea that migrants are crucial “participants” in the transnational populous of an “El Salvador without borders.” Former Salvadoran President Tony Saca (2004-2009) put it this way in his November 2004 speech to emigrants during the Presidential Forum with Salvadorans Abroad:

“...Out of this immense current of Salvadorans, who have extended themselves throughout the world, the borders of our fatherland today are very distinct from what they traditionally were. If we look at the map, El Salvador is a country geographically very small: but if we take as our parameter the spirit, will power and love for fatherland of our people, El Salvador is without doubt, one of the largest countries in the world... You all, friends who live outside, are those who are inside, from that El Salvador without borders... You all gave the example of reconstructing your lives before any other process of national reconstruction. You have laid out the way, like never before in our history, with loyalty and devotion, of being the most loyal and devoted to service to the country.”

The spatial imaginary of an El Salvador without borders can be seen in the national newspaper. A section of the paper devoted to news affecting Salvadoran migrants is titled *Departamento 15* (15th Department), as though the deterritorialized space of

migrants and in El Salvador's exterior is an addition to the country's division into fourteen departments (Rodriguez 2005). By heroizing emigrants and placing value on their contributions, the state-led discourse paints this space of "the exterior" as a place of "progress" for El Salvador (Coutin 2007: 88).

The Project of Migration and Development

The state's particular version of the meaning of Salvadoran "transnationalism" follows a developmentalist logic; it gazes toward the outside as it celebrates emigration and encourages remittances as the most promising path for a future of progress and modernity for El Salvador. This view is situated within the much wider, global camp of interest in "migration and development" led by governments, some scholars, and multilaterals such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Inter-American Development Bank, who emphasize the role that international migration and remittances play in local and national development processes (Hermele 1997; Kapur 2004; Delgado Wise & Castles 2007; Delgado Wise et al. 2010). Such agencies emphasize the magnitude of remittance flows and their potential to replace foreign aid, relieve foreign debt, subsidize key imports, reduce poverty, and contribute to various forms of national and local development. At play in the research debates led by these institutions is the question of the role remittances have in reducing poverty when channeled to more "productive" uses that could generate employment and contribute to local development. The positive spin these agencies put on the development power of undocumented and marginalized migrants disguises the reality that their own structural adjustment policies have been responsible for producing displacement in the first place

(Delgado Wise et al. 2009).

Following the path of other migrant-sending states in the Global South, most notably the Philippines, with its highly developed infrastructure to send away emigrant labor (Constable 1997), El Salvador has pursued the “migration and development” dream. By the 1990s, the neoliberal government began to embrace the policy recommendations and support emerging in the world of multilateral development agencies. Research on remittances began in the country as early as 1991, which inspired ensuing research and reports with policy and program recommendations. In 1994, FUSADES, a prominent think tank that has promoted neoliberal policies in El Salvador, reported that remittances were mainly spent on “family consumption,” and recommended that remittances be a regularized capital transfer that could more steadily be drawn into the Salvadoran financial system. The *Fundación Nacional para el Desarrollo* (National Foundation for Development) also sponsored several research projects on remittances in the 1990s, advocating for programs to encourage “productive” uses of remittances through local and small-scale development projects benefiting from cooperative savings and community reinvestment (Pedersen 2013).

The highlighted “success case” of small town development through migration and remittances is Intipucá, a town in eastern El Salvador characterized by the presence of banks, transnational businesses, large homes, and well-maintained community infrastructure. Its transformation typifies the way inflows of remittances have come to shape particular conceptualizations of value, development, and “progress” in El Salvador on local and national scales (Pedersen 2002). Debates over the actual effects of remittances in rural communities have ensued in anthropological research in neighboring

areas (Binford 2003; Cohen et al. 2005), and the topic has received much attention in (and arguably dominated) migration studies research coming from El Salvador (Andrade Eekhoff 2003). Consistent throughout the region, El Salvador has hardly seen effective employment-generating local development from remittance-based “co-development” or “three/two for one” programs (where the state provides matching funds for collective remittances).

Indeed, the discourse and actors that guide hegemonic perspectives on “migration and development” have been influential in shaping the way migration is understood in El Salvador. More recently, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been one of the most significant funding sources for research, political initiatives, and public projects and presentations on migration issues in El Salvador. The agency’s widely cited 2005 country report, titled “A Look at the New ‘Us’,” presented a nuanced analysis of migration’s impact in El Salvador and marked a critical discursive turn against the state’s laissez-faire approach to economic growth through emigration and remittance flows. It affirmed El Salvador’s “transnational” national identity and called on the state to take on new planning measures that would turn El Salvador’s “migration economy” into a source of “opportunity” to improve the country’s “human development” (UNDP 2005: 9-13, 20-22). A series of initiatives supported by the agency’s “Human Development and Migration” project directed years of ensuing research and public discussion toward the question of migration-development. Even as it has made way for a more critical discussion of the state’s neoliberal migration politics, the UNDP’s optimistic focus on the role that migration can play in promoting more equitable forms of development has nevertheless contributed to a rather presumptuous global discourse on migration and

development that has tended to cast aside the human cost of emigration in order to emphasize migrants and their cross-border communities as entrepreneurial agents in local development processes.

The shift in development paradigms from an orientation toward achieving mainly macro-economic growth toward an interest in “human development” has marked a more humanistic approach in the logic and practice of development by focusing on such questions as democratic process, multiculturalism, sustainability, and overall living conditions. Harnessing remittances, from this view, should no longer be about their capture in financial institutions and in corporate growth so that they can “trickle down” and have multiplier effects. Even so, the UNDP’s use of “human development” assumes that it can be measured according to four reductionist indicators and three “dynamics”, by regions and countries that can be ranked according to their overall “human development index”. By making these generalizations, the school of thinking on migration and “human development” fostered by the UNDP’s programs in El Salvador followed a set of assumptions grounded in a capitalist and developmentalist logic on migration that assume that migrants tend to travel to more “developed” places and in so doing, remit capital and knowledge that will help their places of origin, which are assumed to be in need of development.

The idea that migrants should be participants and funders in local development “back home” assigns to them new neoliberal duties and responsibilities, and fixes blame on those of the “rural poor” who engage in what development specialists view as “wasteful” consumption spending, rather than re-investing in “productive” activities that can generate employment, usually through micro-entrepreneurial initiatives. A “popular

version” of the UNDP’s 2005 country report was widely distributed, reaching rural communities. It offered cartoon illustrations and easy-to-follow blurbs that summed up the report’s findings and made recommendations on how people could use remittances “productively” and to improve their quality of life.

This approach offers a very limited perspective on the forms and contours that development might take. By privileging cross-border capitalist activity as the only real path to improved conditions, it leaves out the possibility that people might have a different concept of collective well-being, that they may not wish to be “entrepreneurs,” and that they may not see promise in this form of development. The experience of Chalatecos, which will be discussed in the next three chapters, speaks to these other possibilities.

Second, it fixes blame on migrant subjects and their families when not appropriately using their capital for this version of development. By placing these duties and responsibilities on families and individuals (who are assumed to be the primary actors responsible for making development work), it reinforces a neoliberalist logic. As we will see in the discussion of the experience of Chalatecos, a collectivist path to well-being and making a better future is emphasized.

And finally, the emphasis on rational individualism, a universalist vision for development, and the positive value of migration, despite its costs, for development and progress, fits the modernist/colonialist logic of the nation-state project and its practices of *destierro*, which were described in this chapter. This is a particular imagination of the present and the future; one that buries diverse histories and possibilities through universalism and faith in a transnationalist modernity. As we will see in the stories and

trajectories of Chalatecos, place, history and a sense of rootedness are powerful forces that drive collective action and life projects.

CHAPTER 3:

Making lo comunal

In October 2002, I accompanied buses full of people from resettled communities in northern El Salvador to the former refugee camp in Honduras where they had lived for seven years while civil war continued to devastate the rural region they had initially fled in the early 1980s. It marked the fifteenth anniversary of their 1987 repatriation to El Salvador. Their trip marked the largest repatriation in Latin American history, comprised of more than 4,000 refugees who self-organized their own return, crossing over the mountainous Honduras-El Salvador border region in buses and by foot, defying the interests of Salvadoran authorities. For the majority of those on the buses, it was their first time returning to the abandoned site that more than 11,000 refugees had once inhabited. The day was one of meaningful commemoration. In the shadow of one of Honduras's highest peaks, the area that they had last seen dotted with row after row of wooden structures was by then little more than a vast landscape of lush, rolling grass and farmland. The visitors began to meander about in exploration, seeking out the locations of the communal gardens, kitchens, and workshops where they had once spent years of their lives working, the makeshift classrooms where they taught and learned from one another, and the improvisational wooden homes they had worked together to build. Not-so-distant memories were suddenly recultivated and translated into remarkable stories of communalism that characterized everyday life in the camp. Families and friends spent the

day gathered around wood-fired soups, chicken, and pupusas, chatting and enjoying one another's company, and reliving memories.

This chapter charts out of the historical trajectory of collective action, mobility, and community-building involving people of eastern Chalatenango, a department in northern El Salvador where several communities were resettled by refugees during the civil war. Those who came to repopulate these communities, including the community of Guarjila where I focus my research, originally hail from Chalatenango and elsewhere in El Salvador's northern region. They share a lived experience and longer historical trajectory of social struggle. Out of this shared historical experience, Guarjileños (people of Guarjila) and other Chalatecos have developed and honed particular logics and practices, which they strategically draw upon to navigate circumstances of marginalization, military repression, and displacement. These are communal logics and practices. They value and privilege *lo communal*: the work of communal systems based on shared resources and cooperation, and the work of community organizing and community-building. I tell these stories of communitarianism, cooperation, community organizing, and collective action because the logics and practices cultivated through this history, as we will see in the next two chapters, continue to condition the way those who share in this trajectory of social struggle go about their lives today even in a postwar period characterized by neoliberal peace, a lasting legacy of marginalization, and international migration.

First, I will lay out this chapter's theoretical and analytical contributions and conversations, framed around the idea of *lo comunal*. I will then turn to a discussion of some of the foundations of collective action and organizing in Chalatenango and

elsewhere around the northern region of El Salvador, since the mid-twentieth century through the 1970s, when more radicalized campesino associations and communities began to form. My discussion then turns to the experience of displacement to highlight how community-building and communal work were cultivated and counted on as many Chalatecos fled the region and took refuge in Honduras. The final part of the chapter explores the story of the resettlement and (re)building community through communal systems and collective action, by honing in on the community of Guarjila, where I have centered my ethnographic work.

The historical details from this chapter draw from several sources, but two works stand out in their careful documentation of a dynamic regional experience that has until recently tended to get relatively homogenized with a broader analysis of the experience of Salvadoran “peasants” and “revolutionaries.” First, I turned to historian Molly Todd’s (2010) regional historiography, which offers a thorough account of the practices of collective action that campesinos from northern El Salvador drew upon in Honduran refugee camps and while in flight from El Salvador’s 1980s civil war, as well as the longer history of regional organizing and networking in which these practices are rooted. She convincingly argues that campesinos were not submissive victims of displacement or passive recipients of humanitarian assistance from “outside” actors, but rather were active agents of social change who, drawing from a long-range experience of collective action and mobility, used international assistance and “displacement” to their advantage and on their own terms.

The second notable source is Salvadoran anthropologist Carlos Lara Martinez’s work on what he refers to as the *Movimiento Campesino de Chalatenango* (the

Campesino Movement of Chalatenango), based on an extensive collection of oral histories with residents of the repopulated community of Guarjila and its neighbor, Los Ranchos. Lara Martinez argues that the communal systems that came to characterize the “micro-region” in eastern Chalatenango, rooted in a longer regional trajectory of collective action, stand in contrast to “the dominant national capitalist system” (Lara Martinez 2011, 2004, 2003).

Other scholarly sources that offer regionalized evidence and are especially useful are political scientist Jenny Pearce’s (1986) analysis of campesino organizing in Chalatenango from the front lines of the war, and Sandy Smith-Nonini’s (2010) thick descriptions from her first-hand experience as war reporter and anthropologist working in Guarjila and with regional promoters of the popular health movement during the civil war.

While these sources were useful in gathering details and filling in the gaps, much of the consolidated and focused history I offer here is representative of a set of stories that are very familiar to people of Guarjila. As anthropologist Irina Silber (2010: 43) puts it, these Chalatecos are “owners of their own history.” In this sense, it is not a singular history, and it does not belong to a particular ethnic or regional experience. Rather, this trajectory is comprised of multiple histories that have long been mobile and networked across borders. I have heard these (hi)stories time and time again in conversations and encounters with Guarjileños since my arrival there for the first time in 1999. My final sources, therefore, are from Guarjileños’ themselves, based on my own interviews and notes from my sustained engagement with the community. My intention here is to tell this story in a way that conveys the familiar discourses, values, and lived experiences of

social reality to which Guarjileños find themselves attached.

Theorizing *lo comunal*

To frame and interpret the series of projects and activities that unfolded among those from northern El Salvador who repopulated communities in Chalatenango, including Guarjila, from the early 20th century through the end of El Salvador's civil war in 1992, I draw upon an emerging body of literature around communal systems, practices, and logics. My discussion is in conversation with theoretical perspectives on this topic that are anchored in Latin America. Whereas conventional analysis of the dynamics of “community” and “community-building” tend to assume a rather fixed, bounded space, and whereas “collective action” tends to be applied as a broader term that is not necessarily assigned to “community,” I find the lens of *lo comunal* to be especially useful because it lends itself to visibilizing this sort of work as a political project that is flexible and fluid, always in the making, and shaped through particular kinds of collective practices and logics. The story of communal work and community building in northern El Salvador and among its displaced people has necessarily been a mobile, cross-bordered, and networked project that has adapted and changed in various temporal and geographic contexts.

This lens visibilizes how community-making, organizing, and communal practices work together with mobility and networks in orchestrating larger collective and political projects. In this view, community-building, or community-making, entails a coming together; it is a coalescence of these logics and practices. As we will see, people from Chalatenango came together to build community through networked resistance

efforts prior to the war, while in flight from El Salvador's violence, in refugee camps in Honduras, and more recently, in the case of Guarjila and other resettled communities, in the enduring project of (re)building a community attached to a particular place. The (re)making of Guarjila since its 1987 resettlement necessarily entailed the strategic formation of communal systems for survival amidst five more years of civil war. Regardless of what goals the region's "revolutionaries" were able to achieve, the community-building work that was shaped through the recent civil conflict was arguably a lasting and valued political project that stands in contrast to that of the (neo)liberal state. Communities are made in practice and to political ends, and they carry with them deeply affective relationships.

To consider how Guarjileños have engaged with the practices, logics and politics of (mobile) community-making, I draw from Aymara sociologist Felix Patzi Paco's (2004) concept (and political proposal) of the *communal system*. Such a lens makes it possible to revision community as a networked system, without clear boundaries, that is actively made through political and economic practices coming from a communal logic. It thus functions as a different political project than the liberal (and neoliberal) capitalist framework and has a decolonizing potential.

Patzi Paco emphasizes the importance of certain kinds of political and economic practices in communal systems. Communitarian social organization, in large part, depends on the political and economic management of resources and the appropriation of work for collective ownership and production. Natural and cultural resources are collectively shared and managed, obligatory labor is expected in order to favor the collective good, and people participate in spaces for collective economic production. In

Patzi Paco's view, political organization in a communal system should rest on the rotation of voluntary representative posts and collective deliberation, rather than on the decision of elected individuals.

By introducing *lo comunal*, I want to use the history I present here to further open a conversation with Patzi Paco's conceptualization of communal systems. His proposal comes from his experience with Aymara and Quechua indigenous systems of life in the Bolivian Andes, in which communal practices and logics are to a significant extent rooted in the indigenous family-based system of community, or *aluyu*. The concept he presents offers a way of theorizing other contexts with which it resonates, and he makes clear that communal systems apply in both rural and urban contexts, but his perspective is closely tied to Bolivia's experience. According to Argentine literary theorist Walter D'Almeida, the idea of the communal system should not be limited to Bolivia. Rather, it has a global (but not universalist) scope. As a decolonial project, we should respond to "an invitation to organize and re-inscribe communal systems, all over the world, that have been erased and dismantled by the increasing expansion of capitalist economy" (D'Almeida 2011: 324). Uruguayan political theorist Raúl Zibechi and Mexican sociologist Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar also contribute to this conversation. Even as their work also centers on the indigenous experience of Bolivia, these authors build on Patzi Paco's proposal and remind us through their analyses of various contexts that we can find communal systems in the syndicates, neighborhood organizations, and cooperative work environments in urban life.

This chapter adds to the conversation the relevance of including more recent histories of communal work than those tied to a longer trajectory of indigenous ways of

life, and by stressing the broader relationships between communal systems, community-building, and communal logics and practices. The sorts of political and economic practices that Patzi Paco describes became important in the community-building work in the struggles of Chalatenango's campesinos in the second half of the 20th century and especially during the 1980s and 1990s.

Through what she terms *entramados comunitarios*, (communitarian meshworks), Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar offers another way to conceptualize the various sorts of collectivities that engage in communal practices and activities, in a range of contexts. She refers to these as “the multiplicity of worlds of human life that populate and generate a world with patterns of respect, cooperation, dignity, love and reciprocity... who are not fully subject or immersed in the logic of accumulation value, in order to address the satisfaction of multiple and varied common needs of very distinct kinds” (2011: 4) Stating that this is a “general enough, but not universal, term,” she emphasizes the diverse ways in which communitarian meshworks can be constituted:

“Some such communitarian meshworks are older and others have a closer temporal origin – contemporary – and are in the world in various formats and designs: from indigenous communities and peoples, to extended families and networks of neighbors, relatives and migrants in urban and rural environments; from mutual support and affinity groups to plural networks of women for the reciprocal support in reproduction, to just mention some “variants” of such meshworks.”(2011:4)

Her emphasis on the great diversity of forms that collectivities with communitarian and communal interests and activities can take offers a productive, and hopeful, perspective that broadens Patzi Paco's more contextualized interpretation of communal systems. Gutiérrez Aguilar's term, representing a similar and overlapping idea, helps to open the dialogue to consider the many and always changing forms of

communal systems, or communitarian meshworks, and how they extend to various contexts, including those that constitute shorter-range histories of social struggles to forge community and communal systems.

The idea of thinking about communalism as a system or meshwork – as a set of networked practices and logics that link people to people – is useful in recognizing the unbounded, fluid, and relational character of (making) community. My work is based in the school of thought that communities are made in practice, and are always being made and remade. As philosopher Jean Luc Nancy (1991) reminds us, we have to be wary of the idea of looking back toward some original community or identity; communities are always fraught with politics and interpreted differently according to different subjectivities. Still, even though communities can be critically deconstructed to a point without end, and are indeed imagined (Anderson 1991), they are, nevertheless, real. Without doubt, they have a felt political and personal significance in people's lives. The community-making work of Guarjileños and others of Chalatenango has been relational and political; it has been a networked and mobile project tied to a long history of organizing and collectivism.

Raúl Zibechi (2010) extends Patzi Paco's and Gutiérrez Aguilar's ideas to his analysis of El Alto, Bolivia, in which he stresses the *practiced* and *political* dimension of communal systems and collectives. The making of "community-based relations," Zibechi suggests, have "enormous power." Their formation is central to the making of social movements, having the potential to disperse consolidated power, including that of the state and social movements. According to Zibechi, the work of building social bonds with a communitarian character, or "communalizing," has an emancipatory potential. He

suggests that this potential to “set free” through community-making operates in the way that Marx initially understood it – through self-activity and initiative – rather than through the promise of transforming the state that was taken up later in Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Zibechei’s emphasis on the politics and practice of community is useful in considering the experience of Guarjileños and others of Chalatenango. Even though the state was not transformed according to revolutionary promises, a different political project has endured and remains active in the region (and across international borders). The trajectory of communal systems and community-based projects within the region stand in contrast to the neo-liberal capitalist orientation of the national state, just as communal logics and practices stand in contrast to the logics and practices of capitalism. As this chapter discusses, popular health care and popular education movements stemming from the region were influential in shaping wider movements and thinking against neoliberal state policies.

Enduring logics and practices tied to community-making thus emerged out of a shared historical experience, and work toward a (largely unrecognized) and different political project than the vision of overhauling the capitalist state. Rather, they operate in confluence with, around, and against the forces of global capitalism, the state, and (neo)liberalism. As Patzi Paco suggests, communal logic works as an alternative to liberal and capitalist logic, but communal systems can coexist and function with and within broader surroundings (the *entorno*) characterized by formations of liberalism and capitalism (Patzi Paco 2004: 183).

Roots of the Campesino Movement of Chalatenango

Molly Todd (2010) argues that campesinos in El Salvador's northern region were not passive victims of displacement and recipients of outside assistance, but were the principal and most active agents of organization. They used international actors strategically to their advantage in order to drive social and political change, in contrast to the modernist imaginations of a submissive and complacent peasantry. Todd's emphasis that mobility and communal organizing worked hand in hand is especially useful in elucidating the formation of communal logics and systems, even in contexts of displacement, among people in El Salvador's northern department of Chalatenango. Drawing from her outline of the trajectory of peasant organizing and the movements of campesinos across borders, in what follows I highlight the forms of communal organization that emerged in the region through various kinds of networks, events, and movements.

Todd stresses there is a long history of peasant organizing in northern El Salvador, and that even as liberation theologians and other 'outside forces' did influence organizing in the 1970s and 1980s, but many scholars have unfairly represented peasants in the region as "waking up from a lengthy stupor" until this time. Even as Chalatenango was once called *la tierra olvidada* (the forgotten land) for its marginalization and isolation, this also made it a place of "opportunity" for its trajectory of peasant mobilization (2010: 29).

The 1932 Matanza, in which tens of thousands of peasants in western El Salvador were massacred after an uprising, is generally framed as an event that, out of a climate of fear that it produced, suppressed the recognition of indigenous identities and rural

organizing far into the future. However, out of an effort to solve the agrarian crisis and pacify the potential for future insurrection, government legislation from the 1930s through the 1970s created a number of reforms and programs for the rural sector. Todd argues that some programs, especially the promotion of rural cooperatives and rural education programs, actually paved the way for campesino organizing. Campesinos were trained in organizing through cooperatives, which came to be legally recognized. Other rural reforms during this period advanced rights, resources, and benefits to both landless agricultural laborers and rural smallholders, even as they also benefited wealthy estate holders.

Government-sponsored agricultural cooperatives led to the formation of the *Unión Comunal Salvadoreña* (Salvadoran Communal Union, or UCS), an association of campesinos that bridged government programs with local rural projects. This organization, formed in connection with the government in part to keep campesinos under government control, was generally non-critical of the government programs and policies. Nevertheless, it contributed to the promotion of rural organizing through workshops and training in cooperativism and community organizing, built political involvement and awareness among campesinos, and it paved the way for future campesino associations that were more progressive and critical of the government.

Even as the UCS had the strongest presence in the country's southern and central export regions, communities in Chalatenango and other parts of the north developed various kinds of grassroots short and long term projects of their own throughout the 1950s and 1960s. These included informal and formal labor cooperatives as well as community-based councils, or *directivas comunales*. The *directivas* began by operating

as work committees to oversee community projects and eventually grew to more comprehensively organize community initiatives.¹⁹

Networks and alliances were forged between communities and regions through seasonal labor connections and trading, out of which the two campesino associations that were most prominent in the northern region developed: the *Federación Cristiana de Campesinos Salvadoreños* (Christian Federation of Salvadoran Campesinos, or FECCAS) and the *Unión de Trabajadores del Campo* (Rural Workers Union, or UTC). As was the case with the UCS in other regions, these associations, combined with the local organizing underway through cooperatives and directivas present in the northern departments of Chalatenango, Cabañas, and Morazán, fomented organizing efforts and heightened campesino political involvement and awareness of the marginalized conditions in which they lived. Even though these new organizations took inspiration from the UCS, they were distinct in that they were more critical of the government and maintained more independence from it. Both FECCAS and the UTC drew from Christian doctrine that emphasized the importance of campesino consciousness of forms of exploitation and subordination. The UTC, born in 1974 from campesinos in Chalatenango and San Vicente, had the strongest roots in the north and was the more radical of the two. Both organizations expanded their membership and grew during the 1960s and 1970s, and by the mid-1970s were organizing national strikes and protests to support the rights and interests of rural smallholders and landless campesinos.

In the 1960s, campesinos from the northern departments of Chalatenango and Cabañas were the first to begin developing networks with San Salvador-based

¹⁹ According to Todd's (2010) review of documented and oral regional histories.

organizations, including labor unions, teacher and student unions, political parties, and militant Leftist groups that eventually came to form part of the FMLN. Liberation theology was also introduced and became influential in community organizing, in part through the *Acción Católica Universitaria de El Salvador* (University Catholic Action of El Salvador), which began outreach projects and community-based training in rural areas. By the 1970s, liberation theology had significantly grown in influence in El Salvador. Progressive-minded Catholics began starting regular small group reflections in rural communities, in which campesinos made connections between Biblical readings and issues and conditions of social concern and injustice they faced, and how to overcome those problems. Training from pastoral teams, or catechists, that arrived in rural areas promoted the idea that the conditions of the “poor” should not be understood as predetermined. Out of these groupings, *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* (Christian Base Communities, or CEBs) were developed, further cultivating consciousness about conditions of inequality and advancing organizing efforts in defense of campesinos. Catechists and CEBs, which had been building a presence elsewhere in Latin America, established a number of campesino training centers in the region which advanced liberation theological perspectives along with pragmatic training in organizing and cooperativism. As their work continued to extend to more remote rural areas, they worked to strengthen community directivas, and helped build local alliances with FECCAS and the UTC.

Campesino organizing among Chalatecos and other northerners was thus intertwined with networking and mobility across regions, to urban areas, and among rural communities. Chalatecos have a long history of interregional and international mobility.

The northern region could also be conceptualized as “an extended space of livelihood” (Todd 2010). Peasants established important networks with urban zones, to areas for seasonal labor such as in the western coffee estates, and they moved regularly across the Hondurans border. Throughout the twentieth century, Salvadorans traveled to Honduras for farming and agricultural labor migration. Informal mobility, trade, and kin networks extended the northern region into Honduras. The national political boundaries were further blurred given that only three official legal border crossings existed and that the delineation of the border was not agreed upon by the two governments. By 1969, with around three hundred thousand Salvadorans then living in Honduras, unresolved political tension around the border resulted in the infamous “Soccer War”.²⁰

By the 1970s, prominent national unions and campesinos began employing more contentious practices, including protests, marches, strikes, and occupations, since the government was rigging elections and was largely unresponsive to their attempts to legally negotiate for better labor conditions and access to land. Contentious practices and protest were met with violent reprisals by government-led military and paramilitary forces. Public discontent escalated throughout the country after the military supported a fraudulent presidential election in 1972. In July 1975, more than thirty University of El Salvador students participating in a march were massacred by the military, their bodies immediately swept away by soldiers (Smith-Nonini 2010). In response, tens of thousands took to the streets of San Salvador in protest and began forming a rural-urban coalition called the *Bloque Popular Revolucionario* (Revolutionary Popular Block).

²⁰ The so-called Soccer War, which ensued after a soccer game between the national teams of El Salvador and Honduras, was actually linked to long-standing border disputes and tensions that were building around Salvadoran migration to Honduras (see Durham 1979).

In Chalatenango, the National Guard began establishing posts in local municipalities. As the presence of the National Guard and paramilitaries expanded in the region, by the late 1970s, Chalatecos had made alliances with the *Fuerzas Populares de Liberación*, (Popular Liberation Forces, or FPL), a militant organization born in San Salvador in 1970, that by 1980 was one of the largest of five established factions that eventually coalesced into the FMLN. This more radical alliance with the region was facilitated by CEB activists, and introduced a more militant political ideology to the organizing and contentious work underway in the region. By the early 1980s, the FPL had gained control of twenty-eight of thirty-three municipalities in Chalatenango.²¹

Encouraged by the FPL, in 1983 these municipalities began electing new leadership referred to as *Poderes Populares de Liberación* (Popular Powers of Liberation), which constituted an exercise in participatory and collective democracy (Pearce 1987; Smith-Nonini 2010; Lara Martinez 2011). They were juntas of campesinos elected for six month periods, which replaced the region's former middle-class municipal leadership who generally fled to urban areas. During their short terms they would address urgent concerns and work to organize the community, but the most important decisions were made at popular assembly meetings with the whole community.²²

This shift toward a peasantry in Chalatenango that was more radicalized and invested in grassroots organization thus coalesced by the 1970s through the series of historical events, processes, networks, and coalitions that I have described. According to

²¹ The most significant paramilitary organization was ORDEN (*Organización Democrática Nacionalista*). It began in 1968 and by the 1970s was increasingly being recognized as a death squad. It is important to note that, offered government benefits, such as employment, resources for farming, health care, and protection from police repression, many campesinos were also joining ORDEN at this time.

²² See Pearce (1986) for detailed documentation of *Poderes Populares de Liberación* operations.

Lara Martinez (2003, 2004), this time marked the initial makings of “the campesino movement of Chalatenango.”

Guindas

By the late 1970s, the growing paramilitary attacks forced Chalatecos to abandon their villages and hamlets in search of refuge elsewhere. During the military sweeps of the scorched earth campaign of the early 1980s, Chalateco civilians saw their homes burned, family members raped and murdered, and villages bombed in brutal aerial and ground attacks. The early 1980s were the most intense years of conflict of El Salvador’s civil war and Chalatenango was at the heart of the military’s target zone.

The fleeing of people, in groups, from Chalatenango and El Salvador’s northern region were known as *guindas*. Out of the need to survive, the initial *guindas* were relatively disorganized, as people were forced to seek refuge in the hills, to other parts of El Salvador, to Honduras, or elsewhere. The groups sometimes consisted of a few families and sometimes entire communities, and on other occasions *guindas* were flights of thousands of people.

Particularly memorable to Chalatecos who fled to Honduras and later resettled in repopulated communities (including Guarjila where I centered my ethnographic fieldwork), was the *guinda* of May 1980. More than six thousand people were fleeing to escape one of the first scorched earth operations in the region. More than 600 of them were murdered by Honduran and Salvadoran military forces in an attack while crossing

the river to Honduras.²³

Over time, the guindas became more organized and formalized. Todd refers to the communities and groups of people in flight as “mobile communities”. They drew upon communal organizational strategies and they continued the work of (re)making community in resettled locations — in sites of refuge and later in community repopulations. Recognizing how people come together in organized, strategic, and communal ways, even while in exodus, is not to idealize the dire situation out of which it developed, or to suggest that inequality, violence, and sacrifice did not exist in the process. However, many scholarly accounts, in depicting “peasants” and refugees as mere victims of displacement, tend to erase from view the agency, and in this case, community-making, of mobile populations.

Guindas became more formalized with the help of community directivas. While some guindas were long-range (the wave of people who came to repopulate Guarjila were gone for several years in refugee camps in Honduras, for example), others were short distances and temporary. Mobility became part of important systems of community security. Families constructed underground shelters, called *tatús*, in strategic locations, where they would wait and hide when soldiers invaded their communities. Community members would stand post on hilltops to warn of incoming soldiers and aerial raids.²⁴ During longer treks to other sites of refuge, a set of tactics were developed and honed.

²³ Survivors who now reside in Guarjila have shared their accounts of this massacre with me on several occasions. The massacre is commemorated in an annual event in which community members pilgrimage to the site at the river where it occurred.

²⁴ In accounts of community history, Guarjileños have described to me how these organized tactics involving hilltop lookouts and community bell alerts were also employed in the resettled community following their return from Mesa Grande.

Communities in guindas organized food preparation, camouflaged their clothing, developed techniques to move as quietly as possible, and traveled at night.²⁵

FMLN combatants also sometimes played a role in formalizing guindas. They encouraged and organized guindas, and they sometimes guided or offered protection to civilians in guindas. Temporary shelters and FMLN encampments that were constructed became strategic sites of refuge and resting points, some of which became populated centers. The FMLN was already influential in organizing communities, who, referred to as *comunidades organizadas* (“organized communities”), were careful to differentiate themselves as civilian non-combatants but sympathetic to the FMLN.

In 1981 and 1982, the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) officially established refugee camps in Honduras. Throughout the 1980s, tens of thousands of Salvadorans were housed as refugees in camps at sites including Mesa Grande, Colomoncagua, La Virtud, and El Tesoro. During the guindas, humanitarian workers roved the border region in search of hiding campesinos to be able to offer assistance and to escort them to the camps. There were extreme risks undertaken in making the trek across the border to Honduras. Between January 1980 and July 1981, an estimated 2000 campesinos were assassinated along the border (Todd: 94).

The scene of the Honduran border crossing in the early 1980s is a familiar one for those who have crossed the US-Mexico border illegally. Those in guindas, and those moving illegally to the US, driven out by the structural violence of economic inequality as well as by various forms of political and physical violence, employ similar tactics (moving at night, using camouflage, traveling in groups, following guides, stopping at

²⁵ My synthesis of guinda organization in this section is based on Todd’s (2010) in-depth documentation of guinda practices, tactics, and strategies.

points of refuge) and encounter similar kinds of actors (military personnel, a border patrol, “illicit” guides, aid workers).

Although it may not be fair to assume that the communal organizational tactics adopted during the guindas were directly appropriated to a different context and long into a later time period, there is, nevertheless, a remarkably similar logic guiding each set of activities. Mobility, in guindas, was a resource that was adapted from the much longer range history of migration and networking coming from peasant organizing, and from the use of the northern region into Honduras as an extended space of livelihood. Mobility took on a new significance during the time of conflict. In her words, “mobility became a conscious act of moral and political resistance... it comprised a combative mass movement... both physical mobility and a collective, organized effort toward specific goals.” (2010: 80-81) In each scenario, mobility is tied to a conscious political act of resistance as well as an act of desperation, and it is linked to varied forms of collective action, organizing, and community-building.

Mesa Grande

I focus on the experience of displaced campesinos who arrived in refugee camps in Honduras. Those who repopulated the community of Guarjila and four other communities in northern El Salvador in 1987 came from the camp called Mesa Grande. During the 1980s, Mesa Grande was populated by thousands of refugees, mainly from Chalatenango and Cabañas. Some Guarjileños lived there for as long as seven years up until the 1987 repatriation.

Within the UNHCR refugee camps in Honduras, including Mesa Grande, a strong

organizational system and sense of community developed among refugees. Todd (2010) compiled and analyzed a host of oral histories and documented evidence of these systems. In what follows, I will highlight some of her relevant findings and expand upon them with a handful of other scholarly sources and my own knowledge from my conversations with Guarjileños.²⁶

She suggests that the enclosure of the camps made it a space in which refugees were forced to define themselves as a community in relation to outsiders and others. They used song and slang to differentiate themselves from Hondurans who they felt mistreated Salvadorans. Even as they appreciated and took advantage of their resources and assistance, refugees maintained a degree of autonomy from humanitarian aid workers and relied on their own organizational strategies and systems. Also, community was formed in defense against a common enemy; they were conscious of military operations around them and they were on the lookout for covert infiltrations in the camps by members of the paramilitary organization, ORDEN. A common sense of struggle rooted in the regional experience of repression and marginalization further drew people together as they defined community within the camps.

Refugees developed various systems of resource sharing, cooperative labor, and community organization in the camps. They formed several work crews. Construction crews were formed to work on building and improving shelters, classrooms, latrines, and water systems. Cleaning crews worked cooperatively to maintain conditions of sanitation

²⁶ Experiences of organizing in Mesa Grande were described to me in several oral histories gathered in Guarjila from community members in July 2007 and April 2011, and from my general knowledge accumulated through several accounts community members shared with me and others during my work in the community from 1999 to 2002. My summary here draws from more detailed descriptions of these organizational systems in Todd's (2010) work, which draws from multiple sources.

and cleanliness at the camps. Kitchen teams, usually comprised of women, took on the essential task of acquiring, preparing, and distributing food. In spite of the Honduran government's mandate to rely on donated food supplies, they planted and worked cooperatively in communal gardens around the perimeter of the camps to augment food production, using terracing to plant on the steep hillsides. Other cooperatives and workshops included such trades as tailoring, shoemaking, and carpentry. In another example of resourcefulness, in one camp a welding workshop was started to make kitchen utensils and pots from recycled cans. They started other kinds of workshops that rotated in new students to cooperatively learn and produce for the camps in skills and trades, such as knitting and making clothing and shoes.

They established and continued to expand and improve upon a camp government system that entailed a range of committees to develop and manage various operations and projects. Mesa Grande, which eventually reached a population of around 11,000 refugees, was divided into seven subdivisions, each with its own *directiva* or committee (Lara Martinez 2011). Stressing egalitarianism, they oversaw distributions, work crews, workshops, and cooperative labor and shared resources such as libraries and child care. Democratic elections, majority votes on issues and negotiations were made at general assembly meetings. Refugees self-organized in the camps and saw it as important to not "give in to *asistencialismo*, a term they adopted to describe passive acceptance of and reliance on international aid. Rather they embraced the collective way of life that was in many ways encouraged (or perhaps forced) by the very nature of the closed refugee camps." (Todd 2010: 162-163)

Refugees also orchestrated their own systems of communal justice and security.

Men formed *grupos de vigilancia* to patrol the perimeter of the camp and to keep an eye out for suspicious behavior and the activity of troops surrounding the camp. In Mesa Grande, women formed an all-women security patrol, which monitored for men who engaged in abusive behaviors against women. Public identification by name and songs were used to publicly scorn individuals who were not abiding by moral codes.

Assassinations are arguably the least discussed and least documented aspects of community justice within the camps; Guarjileños who lived in Mesa Grande have rarely spoken with me of this more violent side of the community justice system.

Community systems of justice have existed in many parts of the world, including in indigenous and rural communities in Latin America. Assumed to be setting a more relativist set of disciplinary standards, they spark debates around the way injustices, violence, and inequalities are embedded in vernacular moral codes as much as they are in universalizing and state legal systems. Zibeche reminds us that community justice is locally, temporally, and spatially conditioned and is dependent on the social context out of which it arises. It constitutes an autonomous and non-state system of conflict resolution (Zibeche: 2010: 98). Based on his analysis of El Alto, he argues that such *allyu*-based and Aymara systems cannot be judged by Western standards. El Alto has a justice system inspired by community practices, and an autonomous method of self-defense, each of which takes the place of work that state authorities and others will not do. Like in the case of refugee camp systems of justice and security, these were necessary systems in the absence of state's regulation of legality and security. UNHCR representatives rarely intervened in disputes, nor were Honduran authorities or military personnel to intervene. As Zibeche suggests, the issue of communal justice nevertheless

“deserves deeper discussion, and requires the capacity to grasp without prejudice or compromise practices that should not be justified by state hostility or dangerous situations.” (2010: 99).

For displaced people of northern El Salvador, communal justice was therefore one of many systems that developed out of communal logics and practices, which were at their core driven by the need to overcome or to simply survive in extremely difficult conditions. In contexts of conflict and displacement (from the longer trajectory of campesino organizing, to collective action during wartime, to the communitarian work of refugees, and beyond) collective practices had to be learned, honed, and improved as people navigate harsh circumstances. They were not without internal tensions and divisions, selfish interests, and forms conflict and even violence that were at times worked out and at other times not. In Smith-Nonini’s (2010: 65) words, “these histories suggest that to understand origins of the ethic of solidarity in the repopulated villages, one must begin with the harsh lessons of the conflict and the process that campesinos went through of learning to trust their neighbors under fire. This, combined with a deep distrust of state authorities, helped to create conditions for much larger collective projects.”

One collective project that was initiated and developed in the refugee camps that had a far reaching and long lasting impact was the popular education movement. With family members and neighbors, often with very little formal education, educating their peers, popular education brought literacy and an educational system to refugees who otherwise would not have access to one. Embedded in the teaching and learning modules was another purpose, however, which was to cultivate a political consciousness by

narrating a shared history of struggle, experience of collective action and organization, and imagination of future social change. The history offered in popular education narratives stood in contrast to the version sanctioned by the state taught in public schools throughout El Salvador. In popular narratives, key moments of Salvadoran history (La Matanza of 1932, the Soccer War of 1969, among others) positioned campesinos as central agents of social change and emphasized the power of organizing and the leadership of revolutionary figures such as Jose Martí, whereas state narratives depicted them as violent rebels or passive victims (Todd 2010: 175-183). Popular education also went beyond nationalist narratives by raising students' awareness of the lasting consequences of Spanish Conquest, the impact of U.S. imperialism and military intervention in shaping their circumstances, and by emphasizing a pan-Latin American solidarity. (Todd: 186)

The popular education model was carried over and expanded in Chalatenango following refugee resettlements, filling the void of accessible state-sponsored public education in the region. While the region was still being targeted in military sweeps through the end of the war in 1992, teachers would sit with students under trees in case of bombardment, ready to retreat to safer areas and tatús at the warning of aerial raids and military invasions.²⁷ Classroom infrastructure was gradually built, and even as popular schools were eventually put under the auspices of the Ministry of Education years after the war ended, the historical narratives and political conscious-building infused in local curriculum and in the styles of local teachers carries a lasting effect for Chalatecos. Its effects are especially powerful considering that the project of cultivating an alternative

²⁷ Several such wartime experiences of popular education were shared in my interviews with community members collected in Guarjila in January 2001.

historical memory of social struggle has consequently conditioned subjectivities, memories, and knowledges that diverge from those that the state has sought to cultivate through the postwar nation-state building project. As I discussed in chapter 2, the postwar nation-state project, in looking toward an imaginary of a transnationalist modernity, emphasized universalist values and an erasure of indigenous identities and those historical memories that rekindled troubled times of conflict and volatility.

A collective political consciousness was also expressed through the creative production of poetry, theatre, and music, and these served as a different form of community education in the refugee camps. Many were expressions of sentiments of solidarity, of discontent with the Salvadoran government, and of commemoration of events and experiences important to them. The massacre at the Sumpul River, for example, became an annual day of commemoration in Mesa Grande. Other creative works expressed refugees' longings to return to El Salvador for times of peace.²⁸

Todd suggests that popular education, together with the collective organizing practices that they developed in the refugee camps, served a "dual purpose:"

"...first, to improve the quality of life in the camps and in the border region in general; and, second, to prepare for their eventual return to El Salvador. 'The experiences with community management that we are acquiring here,' explained the popular teacher's manual, 'will serve us well when we return to El Salvador. There, we will have many duties of popular participation. That is why we should practice here our own participation and collective responsibility.' A Mesa Grande poet agreed: 'What we are experiencing and learning here at Mesa Grande / we know that it will help us.../ when we return to our country, because working [together, collectively] / we become better organized.' As these lines indicate, Salvadoran campesinos continued to view communal organization and collective labor as crucial steps toward a more promising and productive future in El Salvador." (2010: 162-163)

²⁸ See Todd's analysis of narratives expressed through creative work and popular education (2010: 165-179)

Refugees had grown tired of refugee life and had been longing to return, and began forming plans for repatriation.²⁹ They had hoped to wait until peace had returned to El Salvador, but instead returned even as the war continued. With a lower intensity conflict than when they had fled in guindas and with President Jose Napoleon Duarte in power, who had at least initiated peace talks and promised to end the death squads, they hoped the conditions of the conflict had changed. UNHCR had entertained the idea of repatriations in a couple of meetings with Salvadoran and Honduran officials in 1986, but the refugees' return to El Salvador ended up being initiated and orchestrated by refugees themselves.

The series of mass repatriations of thousands refugees to northern El Salvador were a carefully organized and risky endeavor. The Salvadoran government vehemently opposed the idea, arguing that the repatriations were supported by the FMLN and that it would not be in national interest given that the war continued. Refugees formed a committee that decided on terms and strategies for repopulation. Appealing to UNHCR representatives, they demanded that the Salvadoran government recognize their status as Salvadoran nationals, not force them to join the military, and not bomb or occupy their civilian-populated communities.

Without approval from the UNHCR or the Salvadoran government, the refugees already began preparing for the return of thousands of refugees at a time in a series of trips. Salvadoran officials finally began negotiating directly with refugee commission from Mesa Grande, who insisted on the massive rather than gradual and small repatriations favored by the government. Despite resistance from military officials,

²⁹ People of Guarjila commonly narrate their motivation for return as being motivated by a general sentiment of feeling "tired of being refugees."

President Duarte ultimately used his executive authority at the last second to approve of the repatriations. An earlier Central American accord allowed for it and it would have reflected poorly on the government in the international spotlight. (Under President Duarte, El Salvador was receiving as much as a million dollars a day in military aid from the United States on the pretext that it was upholding a certifiable human rights record.)

In October 1987, more than 4,000 refugees returned to El Salvador to repopulate five communities they had collectively and strategically chosen in the departments of Chalatenango, Cabañas, and Cuscatlán. It marked the largest repatriation in Latin American history. This initial repatriation, which included the repopulation of the community of Guarjila and its neighbor, Los Ranchos, was the first of what would be seven total repopulations over the following two years. The refugees were ready to make the trek on foot when UNHCR came through at the last minute with buses to transport them. At the border, the line of buses stretched more than two miles, while 25 Salvadoran military officers interrogated and registered individuals crossing into Salvadoran territory. Guarjileños tell of that day at the border as memorably hot, of seeking shade under the buses — some of them sleeping under them during the night — but also of the great joy they felt in returning to their home country. At the border that night they celebrated Catholic Mass, set off fireworks, and kissed the ground upon reaching Salvadoran territory. Guarjileños suggest that the sympathetic international organizations and individuals — who they simply refer to as *la solidaridad internacional* (the international solidarity) — who accompanied them at the border drew international attention to the repopulation movement and facilitated the return by demanding accountability from officials. The road into the abandoned hamlets of Guarjila and Los

Ranchos was impassable, and so returnees finished the final stretch of the trip on foot, chopping away the *monte* (tall grass and brush). Upon arrival, they found Guarjila to be surrounded by soldiers.³⁰

Making Community in Guarjila

When some two hundred families coming from Mesa Grande repopulated Guarjila, it was in ruins and overgrown with *monte*. Abandoned during the war, the hamlet had been home to just a few families. Only a handful of relatively dispersed homes made of adobe and *bahareque* (a mix of clay, mud, stones, cane, logs and bamboo) were standing, some of which had by then been bombed out and were missing roofs and walls. The new arrivals began to make quickly built *champitas* (improvisational shelters) and dwellings of bahareque. Without any electricity or potable water in the community, several families would sleep under a single shelter. This was the beginning of the relatively recent work of (re)building Guarjila: of carving out a place to live and of creating another kind of community, even amid military invasions and sweeps in a war that would continue for more than four more years until the Peace Accords were signed in January 1992.

Making and remaking Guarjila was necessarily a collective project during the war, just as it continues to be such a project in different and varying ways in the postwar context (this will be explored in the next chapter). Some of the knowledge and practices

³⁰ I draw from Smith-Nonini's (2010: 93) account from her first-hand experience of the return, Lara Martinez's (2011) record of oral histories, and the way the story is commonly narrated by people of Guarjila in my conversations with them and in Aparicio's (2006) compilation of local stories related to Jon Cortina's life.

employed and honed in Mesa Grande, which developed out of the northern region's much longer history of organizing and collective action, were applied, developed, and reworked in a new setting. They began to harvest food through communal farming and gardening. They formed new work crews and committees to coordinate different areas of collective labor, including communal agricultural production, food preparation at the *comedor communal* (communal kitchen), community-based education and health care, and a range of cooperatives for productive activities including carpentry, embroidery, among others. Teachers from Mesa Grande and others moved ahead with the popular education model, meeting with students under trees, without any classroom infrastructure until 1989. The popular education movement in the region grew to include some 45 schools and 200 teachers after the war (Lara Martinez 2011). Those who were nurses in Mesa Grande, together with doctors working in regional FMLN encampments, helped plant the foundations for what would become a long-lasting and wide-reaching popular health care system in the region (see Smith-Nonini 2010).

After the resettlement, the *directiva communal* (the representative board that was formed to solve problems and coordinate projects in Guarjila) became part of a larger association that oversaw community *directivas* in the region: *Coordinadora de Comunidades y Repoblaciones* (Coordinator of Communities and Repopulations, or CCR).³¹ Born with membership from repopulated community members, the association has come to represent the interests and projects of FMLN-sympathetic communities mainly in eastern Chalatenango. Community leaders from Guarjila and other repopulated communities have been very active in the organization. The CCR's presence contributed

³¹ After the war, the association was later renamed *Asociación de Comunidades para el Desarrollo de Chalatenango* (Association of Communities for the Development of Chalatenango, or CCR).

to the formation of a regional identity characterized by shared community interests (Lara Martinez 2011).

Salvadoran anthropologist Carlos Lara Martinez's forthcoming book extensively documents the campesino movement of Chalatenango through oral histories from Guarjila and the neighboring community of Los Ranchos. According to Lara Martinez, while under siege between 1987 and 1992, the communities of Guarjila and Los Ranchos developed a strong sense and practice of community, conditioned by their experience in Mesa Grande:

“Upon arriving to Guarjila and to Los Ranchos, the repopulation committees constituted the directivas comunales of these populations, developing more or less the same social organization that they were maintaining in the Mesa Grande refuge. This gave the revolutionary semi-campesinos a strong sense of community, which allowed them to face in a cohesive way the constant harassment of the military and of Salvadoran authorities....

But, the social organization that had been inherited in the Mesa Grande refugee camp not only helped them to face the military and Salvadoran authorities, but it also constituted the base to satisfy the basic needs of these communities, fomenting the participation of all of the returnees in the solution of problems and of the most urgent necessities. With its base in this social organization of a participative kind, the social project of these communities was developed, promoting a sense of community of a collectivist character in which the interests and needs of the collective were more important than those of its individual members.” (2011: 140)

As Martinez mentions, harassment by military officials and personnel necessitated collectivist efforts in the project of (re)building. Guarjila and eastern Chalatenango continued to be at the heart of the civil war and were considered enemy territory. The region, by then heavily deforested from aerial sweeps, had already endured years of the U.S. government-led and Vietnam-motivated counter-insurgency strategy of “draining the sea,” of displacing and murdering those who inhabited the area on the pretext that they were assumed to be FMLN combatants or their sympathizers. Bombings and attacks

continued in the region as FMLN combatants maintained a presence in the hills.

Organizing the community (or simply getting by in Guarjila) could only be advanced with the rotation of community members at hilltop posts to warn Guarjileños of incoming soldiers, with the refuge of tatús, and with regular communication with the FMLN.

International support was crucial after the resettlement. Resources and materials were garnered through international support from the Lutheran and Catholic churches as well as other organizations acting in solidarity with the resettled communities. But the Salvadoran military and government placed impediments to their ability to seize the outside resources and assistance they were offered by denying them national identity cards and permission to bring new construction material to the community as a method of control. When the military personnel arrived in the communities in an effort to capture community members on the pretext that they were FMLN combatants, the warning bell would be sounded and the entire community would come to the scene and offer protection to community members through their presence as a crowd. Similarly, the communities used the power of collective action to bring in building materials, medicines, food, and other resources by going to pick up materials as an entire community.

One story that has been told time and again in Guarjila is that of the construction of the community's clinic, led by two religious figures that were influential and continue to be revered in the community: Sister Ann Manganaro and Fr. Jon Cortina. Sister Ann, an American Catholic nun and pediatrician, came to live and work with people in Guarjila until her death from cancer in 1993. She began by practicing and teaching backpack medicine, and she was instrumental in coordinating the popular health

movement in Chalatenango. Fr. Jon, a Basque Jesuit priest affiliated with the *Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas* (Central American University, or UCA) and an engineer by training, was influential in organizing and building Guarjila, both in its infrastructure and in its spirit. He first met the returning refugees at the El Salvador/Honduran border and accompanied them in their repatriation and then continued to base his outreach efforts in Guarjila. He immediately became a well-loved member of the community who was regularly present there until his cancer-related death in 2005. In the early 1990s, out of a desire for some basic laboratory and medical equipment in a clinic in Guarjila, Sister Ann worked with Fr. Cortina to put together a proposal for a community clinic. They were able to secure twenty-five thousand dollars in donations for its construction. In a book that documents Guarjileños' stories about Jon Cortina, a community member recalled the way in which Fr. Cortina used to tell the story:

“That’s when it occurred to Father Jon that they could build a clinic and also a little hospital. They sat down and made the design. The one pending thing was that they had to ask for permission from the Fourth Brigade [where there was a military checkpoint on the road]. So, in 1991, Ann and Fr. Jon and others from the *directiva* went to speak to the Fourth Brigade. They said to them: ‘we cannot give you that approval. You have to go the Major State of the Armed Forces in San Salvador. Here we can’t do that.’

They didn’t wait any longer and they went. When they arrived the Colonel received them, and they presented the request they brought along and what they wanted: ‘we want to bring construction material to Guarjila and we need your permission to be able to do so, because without that they will not let us pass through with it.’ The colonel asked them: ‘and how are you going to do this big construction project if you don’t have an engineer?’ Fr. Jon quickly responded: ‘I am an engineer, and I’m the one who is going to direct the construction.’ And the man added a different question in rebuttal: ‘and why do you want this big clinic if you don’t have a doctor? Even worse still, where you live!’ ‘Well look, I am a pediatrician and a doctor. I will work there,’ answered Sister Ann. Then, the man had no other choice but to say that he accepted, but that he was going to mail them the approval. In the end, they kept waiting about two weeks and the approval never arrived.

Since the roadblock would not let them pass through with the material, Fr. Jon, Sister Ann and all of us, the people, went to bring the wood, the lamina [sheets of corrugated metal] and everything from there, carrying them on our heads and on our shoulders, to be able to transfer it to Guarjila. We had no other way, at midnight, at one or two in the morning, when the roadblock wasn't there, to pass through with the material.

When the approval finally arrived in Guarjila, the clinic was finished. The inauguration of the clinic was in 1992.” (Aparicio 2006: 76)

The clinic was named in honor of Sister Ann. In 1987, she immediately recognized that the community, having arrived from Honduras with very little, and injured FMLN combatants from the surrounding hills who were often relatives of resettled community members, needed health care services. She began training and working with nurses, some of whom already had popular health care experience in Mesa Grande and others who had worked with the clandestine hospitals organized through the FPL to serve FMLN combatants. Between 1987 and 1989, she had helped to coordinate and train a network of more than 200 health promoters working throughout Chalatenango.³² After the war, Guarjila's popular health clinic expanded to include physical therapy and other services, benefiting from international donations and doctors. People regularly came to the clinic from surrounding communities and Honduras. As was the case with its popular school as well, Guarjila's clinic was the last in the region to transition to become integrated into the national system, allowing for government oversight, resources, and regulations. It was only agreed to after the 2009 FMLN-elected government conceded to allow community-trained medical practitioners to keep their jobs at the clinic, rather than being replaced by a completely new set of government-certified medical professionals. The health clinic expanded to include services such as

³² Based on interview with community health clinic practitioner and promoter in Guarjila in July 2010.

gynecological and psychological care once national resources were accepted.³³

The popular health care model, with roots in Guarjila and in the network of community-based and FMLN encampment-based health promoters, has been influential on the national scale. As Smith-Nonini (2010) documents in her rich ethnography, the community-infused logic and practice of popular health care inspired the 2001 “white marches” against privatized health care services throughout El Salvador. When the 2009 presidential election went to El Salvador’s first-ever FMLN president, Mauricio Funes, he named a native of the eastern Chalatenango community of Arcatao to serve as his Minister of Health.³⁴ Selected to working most closely under her leadership: a doctor who spent years in FMLN encampments, and a Guarjileña who spent years working in Guarjila’s clinic and was also instrumental in leading the popular health movement. The new FMLN leaders referred to some of their proposed health policy reforms as part of the “Guarjilanization” of El Salvador’s health care system.

Fr. Jon Cortina’s long-range engagement made him perhaps the most iconic figure of Guarjila. Beyond acting as a spiritual guide in solidarity with the community, he helped introduce resources, knowledge, and organization for several valuable community projects. Among these, the community’s two main *colonias*, or housing developments, were constructed with his support. He helped design and find resources to build a system that channeled potable water to the community from distant hilltops. On the first full day I spent in Guarjila, in July 1999, I was assigned to join a 4am voluntarily rotated work

³³ The community’s political dilemma over whether or not to allow for Ministry of Health’s proposed oversight and resources was an ongoing and highly contentious issue. I witnessed how it played out in debates of community meetings during fieldwork in July and August 2007 and between 2008 and 2010.

³⁴ Minister of Health Violeta Menjivar was also a former mayor of San Salvador, representing the FMLN.

crew that was working on expanding the water system. I followed along in the line of women, men, adolescents, and elderly who trotted up and down the hillsides in sandals on an hour-long trek that humid morning, through the inversion of clouds sitting in between the lush green hills. I spent the day up there hauling buckets to make concrete, with a mid-day reward of wood-fired pupusas. (This was my first, and perhaps most well-remembered, pupusa: the delicious stuffed thick tortillas that are a national pride of Salvadorans. In rural Chalatenango, they are typically made with tortillas from local maize and filled with the local red beans and soft white cheese.)

In November 1989, the FMLN launched the Final Offensive, an attempt to end and win the war through a sudden, clandestinely organized, and large-scale attack that closed in on San Salvador targeting particular officials from the opposition. Chalatenango-based FPL combatants were part of the offensive, some of whom were recruited to join or rejoin the FMLN for the operation. The attack failed to win the FMLN the war, but resulted in several days of brutal combat in city streets, the wide-scale bombing of poor areas on San Salvador's periphery, and the notorious murder of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter at the UCA. Fr. Jon was not among those martyred priests only because on that day he was in Guarjila. The murder of the Jesuits brought a new level of international attention to the atrocities and human rights violations in El Salvador's war. Fr. Jon's continued presence in Guarjila, as someone who embodied martyrdom of his colleagues and carried on their work, translated to particular significance and meaning for Guarjileños and their own sense of community as emblematic of the collective struggle of marginalized and oppressed Salvadorans.

In the final years of the war, violence intensified as a series of vicious reprisals

followed the Final Offensive. Neither side could see a win on the horizon, and the violence was producing a growing sense of fatigue and discouragement on all fronts. The Chapultepec Peace Accords, signed in Mexico City in January 1992, brought a much awaited peace to El Salvador through a cease-fire. It reduced the size of the military drastically, established a civilian police force, and recognized the FMLN as a political party upon the demobilization of guerilla forces. Among the several reforms was a land reform mandate. This meant that families in Guarjila were each parceled about three *manzanas* (about five acres) of land they could use for agricultural cultivation.

As Lara Martinez (2011) remarks, the acquisition of private property for Guarjileños was one factor in the transition away from a more communal system of life toward integration into what he terms “the dominant national capitalist system.” In his view, the communities are becoming further integrated into the dominant national capitalist system through the opening of small family businesses (*tienditas* and *chalets*) in the communities, the use of migrants’ remittances, and as proposed large-scale development projects affect the region (including a Canadian corporation’s proposal to mineral mine in the area and the construction of an international highway through Chalatenango). Nevertheless, he argues that Guarjila and Los Ranchos, networked among other communities in the region, continue to maintain a strong affinity to community-based work that stands in contrast to the dominant national system.

In the chapter that follows, I present my own reading of some of the changes and dilemmas that Guarjila and other communities in the region face in the postwar condition, and how they are entangled with Guarjileños’ continued struggle to make meaning of place, community, and a collective history to which they are attached. This chapter has

offered a long-range history of collectivism, communal systems, and community-making present among Chalatecos, which linked to particular practices and logics they used to navigate conditions not of their choosing from contexts of rural organizing, mobility and displacement, and resettlement. Even as they transitioned to a postwar period characterized in large part by the effects of state-sponsored neoliberalism and of international migration, this collective history held high value in the identity-making work of building community, and these practices and logics continued to condition how they went about constructing and building a rooted community-in-place.

CHAPTER 4

Postwar Dilemmas

A photograph recently arrived in my *Facebook* News Feed of the *Longitudinal del Norte*, the new, modern highway that now crosses the length of El Salvador's historically marginalized northern region and is set to serve as a new trade corridor for Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. I was immediately reminded of my final days of dissertation fieldwork in Guarjila in May 2011, when I realized that the sense of peace one feels there in the evenings — something I have always appreciated in the more than thirteen years I have known the place — would soon be disrupted by the sound of trucks now that there was a highway being constructed through the middle of town. The photograph was taken from atop *el cerro la Mesa* where one can still find bullet shells in the grass from the civil war. The hill, which overlooks Guarjila, served as a key lookout point to warn the community if the military was approaching. The photographer took the picture peering down on the dots of red tile and corrugated metal roofs nestled in the landscape of green hills, now with a brown line running between them, to update Guarjileños living in the United States and other parts of the world, along with the community's many international visitors, about the advancements of the highway project.³⁵

³⁵ Particular countries that granted asylum to Salvadorans during the civil war, along with the social networks established with internationals from solidarity and humanitarian groups who have worked in the

Clearly, during the two decades that followed the ending of civil war in 1992, circumstances had changed for Guarjileños and other Chalatecos. In the postwar period, even after Peace Accord agreements established land reform and granted the FMLN a political party status, eastern Chalatenango continued to be a marginalized region. The right-wing national government barreled on with free market reforms that deepened inequalities and further disenfranchised rural smallholders. Many of those who had resettled communities in eastern Chalatenango were now resettled in new destinations: all over the United States and elsewhere. Motivated to leave in pursuit of better living conditions, they remained connected to “home” through remittances, phone calls, and social media. Far beyond the end of bombings and military invasions of the war, these communities were now resisting new sorts of invasions: a foreign corporation determined to embark on mineral mining extraction in the area; an international highway that would permanently change the region’s landscape, geography, and economic dynamics; and the flood of migrants’ remittances, which had already changed community economics to the extent that many felt it had pacified local interest in community organizing and mobilizing resistance to such perceived “threats” to community.

This chapter explores some of these changes, with a focus on migration and the implications it has had for postwar community-building. The 1992 Peace Accords marked a significant moment of change, one that is widely interpreted of as a breakage point after which the sense of meaning that came from a collective struggle during times of war was suddenly translated to little more than a distant past, a mythicized and politicized memory in a neoliberal present. Certainly, Guarjileños have been feeling the

region, have also led Chalatecos to migrate to several countries other than the United States, such as Sweden, Germany, and Spain.

effects of neoliberal economic policies and of wide-scale undocumented emigration, as the forces of global capitalism have reshaped community life. They became largely disillusioned with NGOs, so-called grassroots leadership, and the FMLN, who many felt had given in to selfish interests. They became concerned about the divisive consequences of emigration and remittances. Along with these changes, they became intimately in touch with various forms of globalization, and political imaginaries were shifting.

Yet even amid changing conditions and new sets of dilemmas, I emphasize that the (re)making of the community and place of Guarjila – of carving out a place and forming a community laden with meaning and identity – was a constant political project linked to a longer-range struggle. A sense of collective identity was in the making that was strongly rooted in a history of struggle and in an attachment to a territorialized place that they had been (re)constructing since its resettlement, even as Guarjila's conditions and identity were increasingly “transnational.” Although the work of community-making changes in form, Guarjileños continue to draw upon practices and logics that have developed out of their trajectory of collective struggle to navigate postwar conditions and dilemmas. For Guarjileños and others of Chalatenango, community making has been a mobile and cross-border experience, and an experience linked to social movement organizing. It is an experience that has shaped varying subjectivities across time and space that engage with a range of meanings, identities, and discourses of community in different ways.

In this chapter, I will first elaborate on this theoretical perspective which centers on the idea that communities (in this case tied to a particular place) and the meanings

associated with them are relational, changing, and made in practice.³⁶ I stress that international flows, attachments to territory, and a shared experience of struggle can all powerfully condition the many ways people invest in this political work of making community.

I then begin to explore the question of meaning and identity in the postwar context by reflecting on the way Chalatenango is perceived today in national imaginations as emblemizing either Leftist nostalgia, backwardness, or the traditionalism of countryside peasantry. I juxtapose these images against an acute ethnographic situation that ensued in Guarjila surrounding the 2009 elections, which lends evidence to Guarjileños shifting political subjectivities and their own relation to both globalization (mainly through migration) and to the weighted past that so much defines outsiders' impressions of the place where they live.

In the section that follows, I discuss the growth and practices of international emigration, primarily to the United States, during the late 1990s and early to mid-2000s, based on my long-range engagement with the community and its migrants. In this discussion, I suggest that postwar emigration is not only motivated by inequality, violence, and social networks, but that it is also another form of mobility tied to collective and community-based practices, making it part of the region's much longer trajectory of collective struggle and community-building.

I then turn to an analysis of the kinds of local dilemmas, tensions, and the cultural

³⁶ Relationality characterizes all kinds of communities and community-making processes, and the logics, practices, and networks they involve. Even as these all take form in relation to all events, actors, and situations, I select a handful of actors and situations to discuss in this chapter for analytical purposes. I emphasize relationality to highlight how these logics and practices, although multiple, varying, and always being reconstructed, persist even in a changing postwar context.

politics that developed as conditions were reshaped through migration, remittances, and neoliberal globalization. I discuss the real and perceived effects of migration and remittances, which are framed in grassroots narratives as detrimental to community organizing.

In the final part of the chapter, I explore how these dilemmas and debates played out by examining the community's reaction to the proposed construction of a highway through the middle of Guarjila. By bringing to light local tensions and discontent with local leadership, the FMLN, and the social consequences of migration and remittances, I argue that what was viewed as a "failure" to organize against the highway's intrusion nonetheless elucidates the tremendous value that Guarjileños' place on their rooted project of building community and identity, even within a transnational context, something that was rendered invisible and undervalued in the logic of development and progress that guided the state sanctioned highway project.

Conceptualizing Postwar Community-Building

The conceptualization of postwar community-building among Guarjileños and other resettled communities that I present here builds on the idea that this work is relational and crosses borders, but that it has also entailed the work of *rooting*, especially as the community has become increasingly engaged with migration and various forms of globalization. After the resettlement of Guarjila, Guarjileños continued to build community and to build a place through its (re)construction. This work of connecting community to a territorial place and the shared history of collective struggle, I argue, gave particular meaning to postwar community-building. As political work, community-

building took on new significance and meaning as the community confronted new postwar “threats” (or changes) from migration, remittances, and other forms of globalization. Yet, even as postwar migration was understood as a “threat” to community, it also involved collectivist practices and gave meaning to Guarjileños’ longer collective struggle to make community.

Conventional anthropological analysis used to treat communities and places, and the identities assigned to them, as rather fixed and bounded. Following the influence of post-structuralist theoretical approaches and the discipline’s “reflexive turn” by the 1970s, the discipline began to emphasize the relationality and fluidity of communities, places, and identities. By the 1990s, a new focus on transnational connections, in part through migration research, further destabilized earlier assumptions by emphasizing the unbounded and cross-border characteristics of places and groups of people (Basch et al. 1994; Kearney 1995; Levitt 2001). These theories emphasized that migration itself, and the spaces and flows in between “deterritorialized” places, were making new sorts of fluid and hybrid identities (Appadurai 1991; Gupta & Ferguson 1992).

Guarjileños’ practices of making community are in part tied to the experiences and hybridized identities linked to migration and transnationalism. But they are also importantly linked to the meaningful territorial place of Guarjila itself. Geographers, especially, have emphasized that “place,” like “community,” should be understood as a relational and fluid category that is not bounded in territory or by a singular meaning. Rather, places can represent any convergence of time and space, and they are always being made and remade in practice. In this view, places are “open-ended” processes that are provisional and contested. They are works-in-progress that are being produced in

relation to work, narratives, movement, history, memory, landscapes, other places, and so forth (Massey 1994, 2005). The work of “place making” (Gupta & Ferguson 1997) — the active practice of building place and constructing the identities and meanings associated with place — represents a particularly valued political struggle for Guarjileños, considering that, as a group of displaced refugees from other parts of Chalatenango and northern El Salvador, they chose to resettle the abandoned place in 1987. The (re)making of Guarjila necessarily entailed communal practices and logics for survival during five more years of civil war. These practices and logics continued to condition the work of community-building, by then tied to a particular territory, in the postwar context. After years of mobility and displacement, those of resettled communities were partaking in the active work of *rooting* community in place.

Following the 1992 Peace Accords, the struggle to make the place of Guarjila continued but took on new meanings and strategies in a context of postwar reconstruction, marginalization, and growing international emigration. The attached political (and practical) struggles of making community and making place held particular value in coping with, and working with, migration and globalization. The concerns that emerged in the community with “defending” community-in-place through collective action and organizing as it was being “threatened” by the pacifying consequences of migration and remittances, and the invasion of a large-scale development project, resonates with experiences elsewhere in Latin America where people in particular places have developed strategies to resist globalizing processes that they perceive to be threatening to local livelihoods, autonomy, and ecology. The discussion in this chapter contributes to these studies of the “politics of place” (Prazniak & Dirlik 2001; Harcourt &

Escobar 2005; Keith & Pile 1993; Oliver-Smith 2010), and it helps to broaden this lens by highlighting how migration and globalization are both resisted and engaged in the project of making meaningful community in a local and transnational context.

The postwar period of neoliberal peace and migration introduced a whole new set of dilemmas, polemics, and transformations around the meanings and practices of community that were yet to be sorted out. Coping with old and new forms of marginalization conditioned by the slew of state-led neoliberal reforms, and with a significant part of the community abroad but involved in community life through cross-border economic and social exchanges, Guarjileños came to be deeply in touch with how globalizing processes were shaping their own lives and their community's transformations.

Out of necessity, community strategies were developed to cope with the conditions of marginalization shaped by the effects of neoliberalism and what I would call an "active absence" of state-led development in communities known for attempting a revolutionary movement against the state. One important community strategy, as this chapter discusses, was to advantageously garner resources from those organizations and groups that were sympathetic to the FMLN's side of the conflict and from international NGOs generally concerned with aiding in postwar reconstruction. This strategy built on tactics they had used as refugees in Mesa Grande, discussed in the previous chapter. Communal logics and practices continued to condition the ways in which postwar reconstruction (and more broadly, community-building) were understood and practiced, even as Guarjileños grappled with how to make community organizing and collective action work in the shifting postwar context.

Even as its fragmenting consequences were a source of community discontent that evolved into the intensifying local cultural politics that I discuss in this chapter, postwar migration was also worked into the collective project of community-making. Migration became a community-based strategy, a form of mobility that also drew upon the kinds of communal and collectivist logics and practices cultivated in prior contexts of prewar and wartime mobility.

As one part of a longer trajectory of collective struggle, postwar migration therefore also gave meaning to the community and place of Guarjila. Like communities and places, the collective identities and meanings attached to them should not be conceived of as bounded or fixed, singular, or assigned. Extending social practice theories, identities can be understood as dialogically constructed through people's engagement with enduring struggles in local contentious practice (Bourdieu 1977; Bakhtin 1981; Holland & Lave 2001). The experience of collective social struggle, (in and for community, place, and mobility in contexts of repression and later neoliberal marginalization and migration), I suggest, has an especially meaningful role in the making of the identities to which Guarjileños, and others of the region who share a similar historical experience, are attached.

However, not everyone engages with the meanings, discourses, and practices linked to a collective sense of struggle in the same way. Rather, individuals engage with shared collective discourses and practices linked to collective struggle, pulling some in and pushing others away, according to diverse subjectivities and experiences. Through this work, identity is made and remade in shifting contexts and in diverse ways. As with

the projects of place-making and community-making, identity-making is always a work in progress.

Despite the relational, shifting, and unbounded characteristics of identity-making, it is clear that a collective experience of social struggle, which came to be linked to the work of building community-in-place, conditioned the making of a *rooted* sense of collective identity in a powerful way. As Prazniak & Dirlik (2001) suggest, collective identities are often rooted in real places and place-based experiences, and they are important to political and economic projects.

More often than not, someone from Guarjila, in the United States or in El Salvador, will identify themselves as “*guarjileño*” before acknowledging that they are indeed also “*salvadoreño*.” This makes sense, given that a history of struggle that gives meaning to their lives was largely a struggle against and without the state, which had its own imbued national discourses on patriotism that may feel more distant or less valued than Guarjileños’ sense of history and place. As I will discuss in this chapter, the construction of a highway project through Guarjila, aimed at serving neoliberal interests while also solving the economic problems of countryside people imagined to belong to a homogenized sea of poverty, emblemized the way Guarjileños’ strong sense of community identity was erased from view according to a particular logic of development and progress advanced by the state.

I am thus presenting a relational but *political* perspective around the making of community, in a place-based but increasingly cross-border context. This perspective, I suggest, helps to reconcile a rather dualistic view that sees the work of building a rooted sense of “community” in the postwar present as a throwback to a romantic past and an

impoverished endeavor. From this view, communities like Guarjila at present are dominated by the forces of neoliberal globalization and marginalization, and undocumented emigration in the wake of a “failed” social movement is the manifestation of a resounding disillusionment and hopelessness with the promise of politics, resistance, and community. On these terms, capitalist flows constitute the primary force that shapes community activity, and the migration of those who have been forced to search for a better economic future elsewhere further fragments community and the potential for collective action. As Silber (2010) suggests, grassroots actors in Chalatenango employed a discourse that reflected a rather monolithic, mythical, and romanticized history of revolutionary struggle to impose new neoliberal duties and responsibilities on community members to become active participants in postwar reconstruction. She highlights how this reproduced various forms of violence and disillusionment in a fraught neoliberal present characterized by “broken promises” and displacement. In the aftermath of war, she suggests, locals were expected to translate their faded hopes for a revolution into a spirit of community organizing and to become active participants in postwar reconstruction and development.

Migration and globalization have indeed had fragmenting effects on community, and this chapter contributes to discussions of the politics that grows out of concern with those effects. But the chapter also explores how even in these conditions, the making of community perseveres. As a project that changes in form across varying contexts, today this work engages migration and other forms of globalization even as it works against them. As much as postwar emigration became a source of public preoccupation and has had real, fragmenting effects on community dynamics, it was also a source of meaning

for the place and community of Guarjila. Practices and logics that come from a long-range trajectory of collective struggle continue to condition the work of making community, even as this struggle is understood and practiced in a plurality of ways and according to diverse subjectivities. The collective work of making community was, after all, perhaps the most powerful and enduring political project to emerge from Chalatecos' prewar and wartime experience. It is a project tied to a longer story of community struggle that can be narrated in multiple ways.

Identities and Imaginations of “Revolutionary” Chalatenango

Guarjila and neighboring communities in eastern Chalatenango, at the heart of the civil war, today are regarded by FMLN-sympathetic nationals as an iconic place representative of revolutionary struggle. Non-Chalateco urbanites continue to embrace the region's revolutionary roots. They seek out opportunities to emplace themselves in Guarjila and the neighboring communities and mountains as a sort of pilgrimage. In recent years, more and more San Salvador dwellers I knew were adventuring the two hour drive to *la montañona*, where they could sleep in recently constructed rustic cabins, enjoy stunning views, and take home remnants from the war. The mountaintop was an important site for the guerrilla army.

Known internationally as a key site of FMLN insurrection, Guarjila itself is sometimes a destination for those who feel a desire to rekindle, reconnect, or perform their alliance with an “authentic” Left. For some, economic globalization reproduces a sense disconnect with a revolutionary spirit that has past. Swarms of FMLN- sympathetic visitors from other areas would come to Guarjila and neighboring communities for

festivals and commemorative events, some of which featured performances from invited local, national, or international “revolutionary music” bands. Two San Salvador acquaintances (cousins in their early twenties), regularly asserted their “FMLN identity” in conversation and in the political party’s street demonstrations, and they would frequently ask to come with me to visit Guarjila. But they only knew of the war from a sprinkling of incomplete stories from one’s father who led a clandestine life as a key player in the movement’s urban operations. Employed in sales and in a bilingual call center and with their family now living in a middle class suburb, they wanted to meet former revolutionaries, to sleep on a cot in an empty house and drink beer and tell stories; they simply wanted to be in Guarjila and fulfill a sense of authentication. Another acquaintance, an anthropology student at the University of El Salvador (an institution that maintains its ties to the militant Left), recently made the pilgrimage to Guarjila with his anarchist friends for their self-invented “Guarjila Punkie Fest”, where they spent the night playing their punk music alongside a local band that mixes punk and ska sounds with revolutionary lyrics.

Right-wing counterparts who are sympathetic to the ARENA political party and deeply opposed the Leftist movement have a different view. From their view, the devastating conflict was the consequence of a terrorizing insurgent uprising in their country’s northern hills, and these communities are backward and brutish. The department of Chalatenango, decades before the civil war broke out, was referred to as the *tierra olvidada* (forgotten land) for its isolation and marginalization. Its eastern region, in which Guarjila is located, as a traditionally marginalized area that was at the heart of the twelve year long civil war, particularly conjures images of a violent

battleground between guerrilla insurgents and the Salvadoran military. For many Salvadorans, this part of Chalatenango evinces backwardness in a country that longs to move forward and to forget troubled times. In their view, the region is a reminder of the persistent presence of poverty and underdevelopment and of people that held El Salvador back by propagating more than a decade of violence with their insurgent activity. Many people avoid this part of the country out of feelings of resentment or the fear they will not be welcomed, or because they feel it simply doesn't have anything to offer visitors.

Yet more recently, Chalatenango has taken on a new kind of interest and popularity in the national sphere. Through the lens of national tourism, a sense of exoticism has been reconstructed. The region sparks a sense of fascination in touring nationals who are curious to explore its hard-to-come by cool breezes amid its pined mountainous landscape and to spot the mysteriously light-skinned people with green eyes and blond hair who are known to populate them.

The mountain village of La Palma exemplifies the quintessential Chalatenango imagined by most Salvadoran visitors. Once home to the artist Fernando Lloyt, the town hosts a number of artisan cooperatives and businesses that replicate the artists' technique of etching colorful country scenes onto pine wood-crafting, a style now understood as El Salvador's most *tipico* or exemplary art. The site of unsuccessful peace talks in 1984, La Palma emanates a sense of peace to its visitors through its pristine distance from the bustle of El Salvador's crowded lowlands and urban centers. One feels the courtesy, formality, and conservatism coming from the town's local residents.

Telling folks I worked in Chalatenango almost always elicited the same series of responses from non-Chalateco Salvadorans: "*Está fresco alli, verdad?*" (the air is nice

and cool there, isn't it?), "*Dicen que las chalatecas son bonitas, son cheles*" (they say that Chalatecas are beautiful, they're white), and finally, they would suggest (humorously, but every now and then, out of confusion) that I was Chalateco. After a certain point, out of a feeling that I was crushing romantic imaginations that were a source of pride in El Salvador's ecological and human diversity, I cut back on efforts to explain that the eastern region where I worked was often hotter than San Salvador when heat got trapped in the basin of surrounding hills, that much of the area was deforested during the war, and that only some people had the prized blondish or reddish hair and hazel eyes. Nonetheless, Chalatenango is imagined to be a uniquely beautiful and mystical place that has recently garnered an increased appreciation in the national imagination.

Shifting Political Imaginaries

Seen through the lens of outsiders from elsewhere in El Salvador, there is clearly something unique about Chalatenango. It is a place that conjures images of iconic Salvadoran folklore, natural beauty, and diversity. It invokes deep seated sentiments around El Salvador's turbulent history and around the country's promise – or failure – to make "progress." Whether perceived as El Salvador's "purist" revolutionaries, as its most barbaric and backward, or as its most tranquil and traditional, Chalatecos' own far more complex and rapidly changing reality was contributing to the constant reshaping of their own sense(s) of collective identity.

Despite urban outsiders' imaginations that the region could be characterized as poor and "backward" or as representing the "traditionalism" of campesino folklore,

Chalatecos could be considered to be quite cosmopolitan and worldly relative to many urbanites. The growth of migration in the 1990s and 2000s gave new meaning to their engagement with globalization and the United States. This much different reality of globalization and migration shifted political imaginaries, transformed identities, and presented new dilemmas. In what follows, I describe a situation that unfolded surrounding the 2009 presidential election which revealed the way historical political commitments that continue to give meaning to Guarjila were renegotiated and reconciled with a new sort of politics in the changing postwar present.

The FMLN's presidential nomination of Mauricio Funes was well-supported in Guarjila. An outspoken journalist critical of the government and national politics, Funes was more centrist than other FMLN candidates who had mixed support in Guarjila. Shafik Handal, the FMLN's prior candidate who came from the party's urban-led traditionally more communist ideological faction, represented a more militant Left and lost to ARENA's Tony Saca. Guarjileños and others concurred that Funes's ability to appeal to businesspeople and maintain positive relations with the United States, while hopefully pushing for new social reforms and policies, made him a candidate that could realistically lead the FMLN to win the presidency for the first time.

In the months leading up to the March 2009 election during campaign time, a new and rather peculiar character who I had never met appeared in Guarjila. Pedro, a Swiss man somewhere near the age of 60 who sported a ponytail, a green beret, and backpack, could be spotted moving about quickly on foot around the community, responding to local hellos with his signature "ah huh." A foreigner who roamed the hills with the FMLN during the civil war, Pedro was said to have been deported from El Salvador in

the past but was known to return from time to time, getting involved with community and national politics, despite the illegality of his presence. He was a man well-known to community members and respected for his sympathetic stance toward the FMLN and the communities in the region, and so a few locals helped to harbor him in their homes.

With his arrival timed to the presidential campaign, Pedro took on a set of responsibilities and tasks that he assigned to himself while living in the community, with the assistance of a young twenty-something protégé who shadowed him and also wore a beret and a backpack. His counterpart was from the eastern department of Santa Ana and had seen a video about the war that featured Pedro. Following his own political inclinations, he chose to find and meet Pedro and work with him on whatever he happened to be up to.

Pedro proceeded to make a number of political murals and banners on display around the community with revolutionary messages in support of the FMLN's campaign. One such banner, which hung on the wall of a *tiendita* on the main street for several months, depicted Funes alongside the faces of other recent and iconic Leftist presidents in Latin America, including Rafael Correa, Ignacio Lula, Fernando Lugo, and Daniel Ortega. Evo Morales and Fidel Castro were positioned on each side of Hugo Chavez, who was in the middle of the line of presidential leaders.

Pedro attended community meetings and was quick to jump in to loudly voice his opinions. He would often call for more radical responses to issues the community was dealing with through biting, critical comments, and sometimes, by simply heckling. After Sunday church service at the community chapel, he would hand out the latest *Página de Maíz*, a two-page piece of Leftist political propaganda with cartoons and short

commentaries produced by a San Salvador-based activist group.

One of Pedro's biggest projects in the months leading up to the election was his *retén popular*, a community-supported roadside checkpoint. Election fraud has long been an issue for Salvadoran national elections, and FMLN-sympathizers complained that, among other tactics, foreigners were consistently offered false identification cards and cash payments to vote for ARENA's candidates. Pedro took it to himself, his young protégé, and crews of community volunteers he could round up to keep watch over a chain hung across the road through Guarjila. Without legal permission, he stopped traffic and buses coming from the direction of Honduras to check the IDs of those passing through. At one point, he caught eleven Hondurans who admitted to being on their way to accept fifty dollar payments to receive false voting cards. Pedro had them detained for a day in the community's *casa comunal* (communal building) while they underwent questioning.

The *retén popular* required all night vigilance. Pedro would recruit a crew of community volunteers to rotate in and hold down the fort each night, who would make a huge pot of coffee and sit in plastic chairs in the middle of town, chatting all night long. Others would come by for a while to be entertained. A few nights prior to the election, I attended the nightly vigil. That night, he read a letter of solidarity with the Salvadoran election sent from a Cuban political activist living in Venezuela. As he had been doing for several nights, he had a sheet up on which to project movies. "Which one would you like to see tonight: one about Romero or one about the war?" he asked. Indifferent, no one responded to his question, and he chose one himself. The options he provided were limited to those about wartime historical memory; perhaps people were just tired of

seeing movies about Archbishop Romero and about the civil war. Maybe the young people who gathered there at night to have “*algo que hacer*” (something to do) wanted to see a Hollywood flick this time?

For many Guarjileños, Pedro personified a political identity that no longer made sense. Wearing his beret and backpack, calling for the kind of spontaneous collective action (as with the *retén popular*) that had been so important against wartime repression, and refusing to back down from radical activism and a revolutionary imaginary, he was a relic of the 1980s war. Even as community members appreciated his intentions and looked out for him (a handful harbored him in their homes when the city of Chalatenango’s police came looking for him), he was often the brunt of jokes and his activities were a source of local humor and entertainment, if not of irritation. At one point, a quarrel manifested in the main street around the *retén popular*. Pedro had a run-in with local authorities, and one part of the crowd backed him up and the other part argued against his work and presence in the community.

Even though the community was considered to be part of the cradle of the revolution, Guarjileños were now intimately engaged with the realities and challenges of their increasingly transnational and globalized lives. Although they expressed discontent with what they felt were social and economic injustices coming from neoliberal globalization, Guarjileños were nevertheless in touch with various forms of globalization (most prevalently, migration and remittances) on which they were dependent and entangled. They saw a more measured approach to politics as the most viable future for improved well-being for Guarjileños in El Salvador and abroad; they had moved on from a wartime revolutionary imaginary that no longer seemed viable.

Funes was elected president in March 2009, and Guarjileños celebrated the night in the streets in red shirts with dancing, bonfires, drinking, and tears. Not only did Funes represent a more moderate Left that they saw as important to their country and community's globalized economy and to maintaining positive relations with the United States (the country where their family members resided), but he offered a moment of hope and an oasis from certain disillusionments and frustrations with the FMLN, which they had come to view during the postwar period as being characterized by power struggles and political drama between its five internal factions. Many Guarjileños felt that the FMLN was dominated by its urban-based leadership that left rural interests from view and from those committed to communist roots whose ideological dogma did not respond appropriately to the realities of globalization with which Guarjileños were now coping. They believed that the party's prominent politicians and the select group of leaders that formed its *cúpula* were most interested in controlling and rising to the top of the party. In pursuing selfish political interests, they had further fragmented and weakened the party, failing these communities and the fight they had endured. Even the elected Vice President, Salvador Sanchez Cerén, who led the FPL (the faction of the FMLN that was dominant in Chalatenango) and was known in the region as *Comandante Leonel* during the war, was frequently criticized by community members for his militant Leftism and his hard-line rhetoric. (Sanchez Cerén is the FMLN's presidential candidate for the 2014 election).

Months after his inauguration, Funes came to Guarjila to speak to the community. The community eagerly and warmly received him. But Pedro used the moment to voice his discontent with the President for not pursuing more radical initiatives by heckling and

interrupting his talk. With loud interjections that were not representative of the status quo, his actions embarrassed and irritated many community members and leaders. This was the last straw. Pedro was asked to leave the community and work elsewhere, only allowed to return for weekend visits.

The Growth of Migration

As evidenced in the response to Pedro and to the national elections, Guarjila's politics had shifted from wartime imaginaries, even as much of the FMLN's urban-based contingent and leaders were holding steadfast to the party's most rooted ideologies. Consistent with other communities in the region, a neoliberal postwar experience of marginalization motivated a wave of international migration and posed new dilemmas around how to cope and engage with new sorts of encounters with globalization and development.

The wave of migrants from Chalatenango who fled the civil war during the 1980s paved the way for future migrants from the region. The wartime emigrants, settled and actively investing in a future in the United States, thus established important social networks for later, postwar migrants. Settlement did not occur evenly, however. Earlier migrants carved out paths to integration in the United States with the help of solidarity networks and immigrant legalization measures, and often desired to be detached from the violence in El Salvador they had directly fled. A later wave of migrants, particularly those arriving in the early to mid-2000s, were more likely to encounter conditions of illegality and often had some degree of attachment to "home" communities in El Salvador.

Many wartime migrants were eventually able to settle and build relatively established lives in the United States with legal immigration status. Some of them received settlement assistance from Sanctuary Movement participants, who were a part of and worked with local churches throughout the United States to help find housing and work for Salvadorans. Sympathetic to other Central American Solidarity Movement initiatives at the time, their reception of Salvadorans, who they considered to be “unrecognized refugees” but were legally classified as undocumented immigrants, was also a gesture of protest against U.S. support for a war in El Salvador that was becoming notorious for atrocities and human rights violations. Many who arrived during the 1980s and early 1990s eventually benefited from U.S. President Ronald Reagan’s 1986 amnesty, NACARA, the settlement of the American Baptist Churches vs. Thornburgh case (ABC), and the granting of TPS to others who arrived in the early and late 1990s.³⁷

³⁷ In response to the U.S. government’s prosecution of Sanctuary workers, in 1985, religious organizations filed a lawsuit, known as ABC. The suit called for an end to prosecutions and to the further deportation of Guatemalans and Salvadorans, and it argued that the asylum process was biased against these two nationalities. In 1990, after continued pressure by advocates – and at a time when the Salvadoran government’s role in the civil war was receiving more attention and criticism – ABC reached a settlement agreement, marking a new turn in U.S. policy toward allowing provisional legalization for many Salvadorans. The agreement meant that Salvadorans and Guatemalans who arrived prior to September 1990 could for the first time apply for political asylum. In the same year, the 1990 Immigration Act was signed by U.S. President George H. Bush in the same year, which granted a “Temporary Protected Status” (TPS) to Salvadorans who arrived prior to September 1991. ABC cases would not be opened for another six years, and so activists encouraged Salvadorans eligible for ABC case review to apply for TPS in the meantime. The U.S. government did not renew TPS, but instead arbitrarily created an executive measure called Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) to extend the legal stay of Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees without need for reissuing TPS. By 1997, U.S. immigration authorities began reviewing ABC asylum cases, but the year before U.S. president Bill Clinton had just signed into law the Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), which placed more restrictions on undocumented and temporary immigrants in the U.S. and made it likely that ABC class and DED Salvadorans would soon face deportation. After U.S. President Clinton’s 1997 visit to Central America, he signed the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA). The legislation favored many Salvadorans in the U.S. because it made provisions to IIRIRA that guaranteed a path to permanent legal residency for the vast majority of ABC class members with pending asylum applications. In 1998, following Hurricane Mitch, and in 2001, following the earthquakes in El Salvador, TPS was granted to recently arrived Salvadorans and the U.S. government has since extended eligibility of re-registration, meaning that more than 200,000

The U.S. Latino immigration climate during the 1990s was becoming more restrictive, as immigration enforcement measures were implemented under U.S. President Bill Clinton including the Illegal Immigration Reform and Responsibility Act in 1996, and in California, Operation Gatekeeper in 1984 and Proposition 187 in 1994. By the 2000s, a new set of compounded restrictions and anti-immigrant initiatives took effect, several of which were inspired by national security concerns following the September 11, 2001 attacks.³⁸ With the displacing effects of NAFTA and neoliberalism, the influx of undocumented Latino immigrants to the U.S. continued to grow during the late 1990s and 2000s.

While Salvadorans fleeing the civil war during the 1980s in no way arrived to an “inviting” immigration climate in the United States, the growth in hostile anti-immigrant enforcement measures, and the sheer number of immigrant arrivals throughout the 1990s and 2000s drastically shifted the context of immigrant integration. Chalatecos who settled in the United States during the mid-1980s were more likely to be able to obtain legal immigration status. This facilitated integration and, in theory, the possibility to pursue their “American dream.” Those arriving more recently encountered few opportunities to obtain a legal status, impeding the potential for integration.

Furthermore, many from this earlier wave held a sense of resentment toward and alienation from El Salvador. They knew little more than an environment of violence and

Salvadorans continue to be eligible for this legal status. See Coutin (2007) for a detailed account of this recent history of political advocacy (by Salvadoran immigrant activists *and* by the Salvadoran government) for legalization of Salvadoran immigrants in the United States.

³⁸ These include, for example, reinforcement of the U.S. Border Patrol, new deportation proceedings, initiatives to facilitate local enforcement of federal immigration law, sanctions on employers of undocumented labor, and a range of measures implemented by local and state governments.

war at the time they migrated. Indeed, Chalatecos were at the heart of the conflict, and those who fled the region during the early 1980s – to the United States, to countries offering asylum, and in guindas to the United States – did so out of necessity as these years marked the height of the war's most intensive and repressive violence.

Earlier migrants' subjective experience of emigration is much different than a more recent wave of postwar migrants. As with migrants from other repopulated communities, postwar migrants from Guarjila developed a stronger attachment and identification with the community since it was now a resettled place. They were already a part of the collective and grounded project of rebuilding it in the aftermath of war. Those who left in the midst of war, displaced by violence prior to resettlement, did not feel as much of a drive to divide their commitments across borders. Rather, they invested much more so in the communities abroad that provided them refuge and where they eventually settled and found paths to integration.

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Guarjila's stream of emigrants continued to grow, reflecting a national trend. As described above, international migrant social networks continued to solidify, facilitating migration. Also, the growth of Mexican migration as a consequence of the 1994 implementation of NAFTA, which displaced millions of rural smallholders, meant that transit networks and routes became more established. These were drawn upon by Salvadorans, Central Americans, and migrants from other parts of the world as an interconnected chain continued to develop that linked migrant transporters across regions and borders.

The growth in migration was also driven by the pursuit among Salvadorans to find more livable, often safer, conditions. The mid-1990s were an unsettling time marked

by violence throughout El Salvador. Retaliations surged in the years following the cease-fire mandated by the 1992 Peace Accords and the general amnesty granted just after the Truth Commission released its report on war crimes and atrocities. Homicide rates grew with the proliferation of gang activity in the region from the 1990s deportations of gang members mostly based in Los Angeles. Dealing with entangled experiences of political and street violence, Salvadorans commonly referred to the conditions of postwar violence as “worse than the war” (Moodie 2010). Even after the end of the civil war itself, physical violence thus continued to push people out.

Smith-Nonini (2010) reminds us that despite the end of the war, the time of “neoliberal peace” that followed was characterized by multiple forms of structural violence. Her account of protests against the privatization of health care is a reminder that Salvadorans clearly understood that neoliberal reforms that excluded vulnerable populations from needed services could ultimately determine who in society is allowed to live and who is subject to dying. The legacy of neoliberal reforms that followed the conclusion of the civil war in 1992 thus contributed to new forms of structural violence that can be considered an extension of physical violence, driving people to flee El Salvador in increasing numbers.

Beyond being a mere effect of the physical and structural violence experienced during and well beyond the civil war, by the late 1990s and early 2000s undocumented international migration to the United States became an increasingly naturalized practice among Guarjileños. By the time I first arrived to the community in June 1999, migration was already becoming a rite of passage among young people in the community. Youth, mostly adolescents and young men from around fifteen to twenty years of age, were

expected to emigrate to the United States. Many would do so around the eighth grade after having completed or nearly completed the most accessible schooling at the local school.³⁹ By the time I returned to Guarjila in November 2001, a handful of young people were leaving the community each month, of the total population of around 200 families.

Emigration continued to grow between 2001 and 2003. During those years, I was living in the community, working with a community youth group and teaching. I was asked to teach English class at a high school that had just been built a year earlier to serve both Guarjila and the neighboring community of Los Ranchos. I was pleased to be invited to be involved in the new school and to fill the teaching post because it responded to the call for an affordable and local secondary education that fit part-time schedules, making it a desirable opportunity for locals with few resources. I vividly recall the first day of class when I asked students about why they were interested in learning English. When asked if they had intentions to go to the United States, nearly every single one of one hundred or so students, save two or three, raised their hand. As my two year tenure there progressed, my initial cohort gradually disappeared. Looking back years later, just about all of the students had fulfilled their initial intention to leave the country for the United States.

About half of these students were young women, and by the early 2000s the gender imbalance of emigration was becoming increasingly balanced. Collectives of family members were becoming increasingly established abroad, enabling networks for sharing households and finding employment for new arrivals. As these groups of family

³⁹ The closest available high school was in the neighboring city of Chalatenango, of which Guarjila is a *cantón* (a hamlet, a rather unfitting classification today considering that its post-resettlement population of more than 200 families is relatively large). Travel and tuition was an expense that not all could, or would choose to, afford.

members settled in the United States — often comprised of siblings, aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews, with older generations of parents and grandparents staying behind — more children also began traveling alongside adults in the small groups that would depart Guarjila (sometimes with familiar peer and immediate or extended family members from other communities in the region) to make the dangerous journey together. For the most part, however, younger children and older people were those who were likely to stay in Guarjila. Adolescents, younger adults, and some middle aged adults were more likely to migrate during this time.

Reflecting on these patterns, it is important to point out that the experience of Salvadoran migration stands in contrast to the experience of migration witnessed in many parts of Mexico, in which men (fathers) are assumed to be those who migrate to the United States, sometimes cyclically, in search of work to support women, children, and grandparents “back home.” The experience of Guarjileños demonstrates a much more balanced gendered flow of emigrants, and an abundance of youth migrants, and family settlements. The fact that migrants must endure a costly, long, and risky trip from El Salvador to the United States means that many migrants did not view cyclical back-and-forth migrations to and from El Salvador as a viable possibility. And, the conditions of structural and physical violence that in some cases made life in El Salvador untenable further destabilize common assumptions behind a familiar narrative of undocumented “labor migration” that tends to homogenize the way Latino immigration is understood in mainstream U.S. public debates.

Emigration came to be linked to a set of locally shared meanings and intertwined social practices. It became increasingly customary and took on particular ritualized

dimensions. Secrecy was one important part of the ritual. Upon departure, few, if any, people would learn of someone's intent to leave. Often, the news would be revealed to family members the night before departure or even through a note left with them the following morning.

Guarjileños said there were several possible reasons for keeping migration plans private. For one, it helped to avoid a sense of embarrassment if one “failed” to make it to the United States and returned shortly thereafter. The practice also helped one to avoid being asked for favors, and sometimes it conveniently helped one escape local debts to others. Perhaps most important, secrecy helped one avoid becoming the subject of local *chambre* (gossip) for weeks on end in the time leading up to departure as travel groups, dates, and payments were being solidified.⁴⁰ From 2001-2003, on a couple occasions young men went around shaking hands with friends the night prior to departure, and on one occasion I was invited to a word of mouth “going away party” for a few close friends and family, but these instances were unusual.

Clandestine departures add to the emotional burden already carried by migrants' family and friends. Such culturally embedded migration practices also challenge the notion that migration can be easily studied through pragmatic and quantitative approaches. How do you assess the intentions and activities of people who must hide them? I vividly recall the day I stopped by the community radio station in July 2007 to ask the 18 year old DJ (and former student of mine) if he would share the details of his experience of travel, detention, and deportation a few weeks earlier. His girlfriend was working there instead, who without smiling let me know that he had left for the United

⁴⁰ Based on interviews conducted with migrants from Guarjila and Los Ranchos in Virginia July 2011

States that morning. It wasn't until I caught up to him in Maryland, a year later, that I was able to hear his account of being "dusted" by helicopters of the U.S. Border Patrol, of being locked in a detention center's "cold room" for 24 hours, and of being fed spoiled food, encountering a chicken pox breakout, and finally having his tent collapse one night in the provisional prison for thousands of migrants in Willacy County, Texas (which he jokingly referred to as a "four star hotel.")⁴¹

By the late 2000s, emigration had subsided. Stories of the hostile immigration climate, of more unsuccessful border crossings, and of escalated violence endured by migrants traveling north were reaching the community. In my return to the community for dissertation research between November 2008 and June 2011, hardly anyone was migrating, unlike my initial years living in Guarjila. Of those who did choose to leave, many would hide travel plans, but in general, a younger generation more candidly shared with me their contemplations of whether or not they intended to migrate. Their forerunners' remittances, and a sense that El Salvador was changing, made them feel that the future had a wider field of possibilities.

Collectivist Practices of Mobility

I have just described how migration became, at a particular historical moment, a ritualized "rite of passage" that was laden with culturally nuanced customs, practices and

⁴¹ This account of the migrant's experience based on author's interview with him in Maryland on March 30, 2008. "Dusting" is an aggressive tactic employed by the U.S. Border Patrol in which helicopters are tilted as they hover low to the ground to stir up ground dirt where migrants are sited. The practice tends to cause migrants to scatter in panic as dust gets blown into their eyes. This tactic is widely considered to be one of several human rights abuses against migrants that has not been corrected through a systematic implementation of the Department of Homeland Security's procedural guidelines and policies. The organization No More Deaths offers various resources that document U.S. Border Patrol abuses on its website: <http://www.nomoredeathsvolunteers.org/borderpatrolabuse.htm> (last accessed June 20, 2013).

tactics. In what follows, I focus on how, similar to the experience of the guindas during the 1970s and 1980s, these practices of mobility took on collectivist and tactical forms that were honed over time through the accumulation of community-based experience and knowledge with migration.

As emerged in numerous conversations over the years, the actual mechanics of migration usually work in this way: the small groups of migrants regularly departing from Guarjila carefully arranged their trip with illicit transporters, or *coyotes*. They would then typically begin their trip in San Salvador where they would unite with other groups of migrants from other parts of the country to travel in a larger group. Having paid the first half of the hefty fee of about seven thousand dollars for “door to door” service (the second half to be paid upon arrival), they would begin the trip in bus rides to the Guatemala-Mexico border, carrying a backpack and dressed in the dark colored clothes they would use for the entire trip, which could last anywhere from ten days to several months. From there, they would generally be handed off to a new, Mexican guide, the first of a chain link that would work to get them across Mexico by bus, tractor trailer, and by foot, to eventually reach and (with some luck) cross the Mexico-US border and hop into personal vehicles that would take them to their destination address.

This means of transit stands in contrast to the much more familiar image now linked to Central American migration through Mexico of migrants riding atop trains moving northward. This image has emerged over the last several years from news reports, documentary and feature films, photography, research, and policy reports. This coverage has brought to light an otherwise largely invisible story of these migrants who risk injury, death, and the abuses of authorities and criminal bands. Many of the migrants

I met during fieldwork in Mexico's migrant shelters (over the summers of 2006-2008 and in April 2009) traveled on trains, caught rides from strangers, and kept a low profile on public buses. They made their mobility work with few resources and networks. They would await small money transfers from immediate family members to make the next leg of the journey possible. The trip typically took several months. Migrants would wait and even work at the northern border until the money to cross over was in hand, which so often ended in failure. Many of these Central American migrants came from areas of rural Honduras with relatively new migration streams. Of the Salvadorans, these migrants included many coming from urban and semi-urban communities in western and coastal El Salvador with relatively new migration streams. In other cases, they included those forced to suddenly flee violent threats, or those who had been recently deported and were again moving northward having found themselves feeling alienated and with few opportunities in their place of origin.

The collective strategies around international migration in Guarjila, among other communities in the region, should be understood as highly developed and organized compared to other "sending" communities throughout El Salvador and Central America. With the exception of two stories I encountered, there are no cases of migrants from Guarjila journeying northward by hopping trains. There are a couple of reasons for this. For one, even as Chalatenango is in many ways a marginalized region that has experienced an absence of local democratic participation and access to state-led development and services, its alternative local history of autonomous development, with a trajectory of communal system formation and community organizing, has paved the way for the emergence of powerful community networks through which resources are

shared and migration strategies are accumulated and refined. And second, marginalized rural and urban communities with a newer stream of emigrants see first-time “pioneers” departing with few resources in hand, have fewer migrant social networks to aid in transit and settlement, and are more likely to suffer from a harsh U.S. climate of immigrant illegalization. While not considered to be as “old” a migration stream as communities such as Intipucá and other communities of the eastern department of San Miguel where significant international emigration to the United States began in the 1960s, eastern Chalatenango’s regional emigration that took off during the 1980s and became more substantial by the late 1990s. This history makes it a more established stream than other regions that did not experience earlier migration strains or heavy wartime displacement.

This is not to say that migrants traveling with coyotes are invulnerable to abuses and dangerous threats while in transit or are guaranteed a successful arrival to their destination. In fact, unlike the often tragic stories revealed recently of migrants traveling on trains, this other migration story remains highly clandestine and invisible from the public eye. Contracting a coyote to (with plenty of luck) ensure safe passage is costly and the guided trip is risky. Rape and sexual abuse of migrants by guides are commonplace, and Central Americans particularly complain that they experience discriminatory treatment once under the auspices of Mexican guides. My earliest encounter with these abuses was when I heard of 16-year old Beto’s story in 2001. He was beaten by his guide during the journey, and after enduring several weeks of travel in horrific conditions (at one point in the hidden compartment of a tractor trailer taking in the vehicle’s exhaust fumes), he was caught by authorities and returned to El Salvador. His tale was representative of several other travel testimonies I collected in the early 2000s.

Through experience, community migration strategies became more refined. First, as the wave of postwar migrants arriving in the late 1990s and early 2000s settled (many of whom arrived in the wake of Hurricane Mitch and the 2001 earthquake and thus were eligible for TPS), cross-border networks and resources were strengthened, which also facilitated migration. Small collectives of migrants would pool money to finance migrants' expensive trips north and family-community networks facilitated employment and homes for new arrivals in the United States in places across several states where settlements of Guarjileños and other Chalatecos were growing. And, by the mid to late 2000s, stories of a migrant who reported the sorts of abuses and conditions that Beto described were no longer prevalent, though sexual and other forms of mistreatment have in no way disappeared. When stories of unsuccessful and abusive conditions circulated within the community, the coyotes linked to them were weeded out and others were sought out, until after some time only a small handful had earned the trust and respect of the community.

I have come to know Beto's family closely since my first arrival to Guarjila in 1999. During my time there from 2008-2011, the family saw several relatives leave with a coyote who had earned their respect. Beto's mother, eager to receive word of safe crossings, would await regular reports from their favored coyote, and would sigh in relief once she received word that each had made it to Houston. With consistently successful crossings, transit time of only about ten days, and much less worry and anguish about the travel conditions than with her first two sons' trips, she had confidence in and recommended this coyote to neighbors, family, and friends, and invited him to her home for meals.

Migration and (Hi)stories of Struggle

Migration thus became increasingly tied to collectivist-based tactical practices and community networks cultivated through the accumulation of community-based knowledge and experience. As we have seen, particular practices also became customary and naturalized. Similarly, the tales and stories of relatively recent emigration during the 1990s and 2000s are now a part of local folklore, and in Guarjila, they get worked into popular narratives of community struggle. My ensuing discussion builds on these ideas to explore how migration, through the making of these practices, meanings, and identities, can be understood in relation to a longer trajectory of community-making.

The stories, practices, and characters linked to international migration become part of various genres of storytelling that are worked into the folklore and interpretations of everyday life. The coyote, for example, is historically characterized in El Salvador and around Central America and Mexico to be a legendary, sometimes heroic figure (though the tragic stories of migrants in transit who are subject to violence of various kinds of “traffickers” has challenged this characterization). Familiar, sometimes funny, tales of migration are evidence of people’s comfort and intimate familiarity with a part of life that to others may seem distant and peculiar. A local Chalatenango mechanic, for example, engaged me with his repertoire of funny, mythical but believable tales of migrants who left Chalatenango while we waited for parts to arrive for a repair. The migrants each had the misfortune of not making it successfully to their destination and having to return home. In each story, the returned migrant had to own up to personal debts and to reencounter with family feuds they had expected to be able to dodge for good, which made for hysterical post-migration scenarios. The man could not hold back the tears from

laughing at his own humor.

In Guarjila, a particular narrative of the community's postwar migration is told through a genre that is also rife with humor in a vernacular genre of community theater. The local community-based youth theater group called *Tiempos Nuevos Teatro* (or TNT) grew out of the repopulated communities' rebuilding efforts after the 1992 Peace Accords and was considered to be a part of popular education efforts. The actors and actresses, young people from Guarjila and neighboring communities, use dramatizations to convey messages that address issues of social concern and to represent community narratives of local history in an effort to cultivate local historical memory. The group uses scenes that intertwine serious representations of historical events with slap-stick comedy that caricaturize local customs, familiar figures, and quotidian life. In the theatrical group's narratives of community history, the caricature of the migrant, representing the pattern of emigration that developed during the postwar period, is just one of a series of scenes that make up the community's longer local history of social struggle. It follows a longer narrative that tends to begin during the military repression of the late 1970s, to guindas, to refugee camps, to community repopulations, to the postwar reconstruction efforts.

This narrative, which is very familiar to communities in the region, is also represented in a recently painted community mural. It was painted in 2010 on a wall along the road from Guarjila to the neighboring community of Los Ranchos by a group of local youth with the help of a visiting American mural artist. A young woman from Los Ranchos had the idea to make the mural and led the effort. The mural starts with symbolic representations of El Salvador's long-range attachment to maize cultivation and a rather hazy ancient indigenous history. The story soon jumps to the recent civil war. At

the end of the mural, and the story, are those waiting to get aboard a bus with a sign that reads *el extranjero* (abroad).

Figure 3: Community Mural in Los Ranchos, Chalatenango

Photographed by Joel Bergner. (Each photograph, in order from top to bottom, captures one piece of this long mural as it extends from left to right.)





From one perspective, the narrative presented by this mural presents postwar migration, and the wartime migrations of displacement and resettlement, as integral parts of a longer history of struggle that is linked to the identity-making and place-making work of Guarjileños and those communities that share a similar experience in the region.

Bringing community together, the active work of carving out a *place* to live even amid a series of displacements, as well as the practice of migration itself, are all tied into a widely-accepted narrative about what it means to be from the resettled communities of Chalatenango.

Interestingly, the mural jumps from an abstract representation of iconic identity more than a thousand years ago to the relatively recent history of wartime resistance and community-making and onto the postwar period of reconstruction and migration. Why is the longer range history prior to the civil war hardly represented in the mural, and hardly a part of local efforts to recapture local “historical memory?” How does this particular narrative of “local” history shape the meanings and identities with which Guarjileños engage? My point is that, aside from a broad recognition that structural injustices are largely rooted in the colonial encounter, the rupture in historical memory prior to the late 1970s is evidence that this recent history carries a profound value for people of Guarjila and neighboring communities. What it means to be Guarjileño and from other repopulated communities in Chalatenango, according to popular narratives and understandings, gets tied to three relatively recent projects or processes: the local history of communal (and mobile) struggle in the face of military repression since the 1970s, the work of resettlement and constructing place since the mass repatriations of the late 1980s, and finally, even to postwar migration, as a strategic practice in and of itself, since mobility has been wrapped up in and an integral part of both of the aforementioned projects.

Emigration, according the argument presented above, might be conceptualized as an integral dimension of the identity-making that gives meaning to Guarjila as a place

and as a (transnational) community. From another perspective, the story of Guarjila and the communities of eastern Chalatenango could be told in a much different way. The popular narrative depicted in the mural posits that emigration constitutes abandonment of the important community-building and place-making work that was underway since the war and of a longer-range commitment to social change through revolutionary and community-based struggle. Both sides are part of the way the community and the place itself of Guarjila are understood and imagined.

The Cultural Politics of Migration and Community

This critical discourse on migration, which came about as emigration took off in the postwar period, has shaped a cultural politics on the community scale that positions grassroots community-organizing/development on one pole and emigration seen as abandonment on an opposing pole. According to this trope, not only is emigration seen as an abandonment of community, but the remittances that migrants send back have negative consequences. The influx of money generates new class divisions within the community that disrupts a cohesive social fabric, changes the dynamics of community organizing, and shifts priorities and values in such a way that the ambition to engage in ground-up social change is pacified and diluted. One community member put it like this:

“Everyone has at least, a brother, a son, someone immediate in the United States, at least. Which is to say that a small, moderate amount of money is entering the community... and once I no longer need something, I believe that someone else doesn't either. And that's where we begin to lose the sense of community. And before long I keep getting things for myself. I build my house, I want to have a TV for myself. I want to have a car, a TV, a sound system, a fridge, I want a — I no longer care about others and when I no longer need something I think that someone else doesn't either. And that's when we begin to have fear, that I don't want to leave the house alone because they are going to steal what I have. And we no longer think about organization, we think of ourselves, you know what I

mean? And so I no longer care about everyone else, and when something happens to someone else, since it doesn't affect me, I don't even lift my hand. This is the point that Guarjila has reached. There have to be critical circumstances confronting the community so that the people revive again, on the contrary no one lifts a chair.”⁴²

The foundation of this discourse comes from the real tradition of communal work and organizing with which people of the resettled communities of Chalatenango have engaged with in varied ways before, during, and after the war. Particularly, the work of postwar reconstruction that went on in the immediate years following the 1992 Peace Accords was part of an important and valued project of (re)building Guarjila and other resettled communities. This work was part of the larger project of carving out a place and making identity for Guarjila. It was also a time when community organizing took on new and contentious meanings and dynamics.

All sorts of community development projects were funded with the support of NGOs, solidarity groups, churches, foreign governments, and multilateral agencies, which in part shaped and reshaped how these projects could be pursued. Chalatenango became a landscape of organizations with endless acronyms (Van der Borgh 2003). The NGOization of the region, with a new set of expectations placed on community members, lent itself to the neoliberal interests of the government. Silber (2010) argues that NGOs and local leaders, in attempting to shape local subjectivities by calling for participation in community development using a particular narrative that sought to transform past legacies into a neoliberal-postwar present, contributed to the reproduction of various forms of social, economic, and gendered inequalities.

One of the most significant actors was the CCR (after the war, renamed

⁴² Author's interview in Guarjila in April 2011.

Coordinadora de Comunidades en Desarrollo de Chalatenango, or the Association of Communities for the Development of Chalatenango), which has overseen much of the postwar reconstruction of the resettled communities. The CCR was formed in 1988 after the resettlements, and today much of its membership still comes from repopulated communities. Since then, it has established more than 100 *directivas comunales* in communities in Chalatenango and in other regions. These *directivas* continue to look to the CCR to promote their interests and to seek funding for proposed projects. During the late years of the war, the CCR was an organization born from and directly linked to the FPL (the faction of the FMLN prominent in the region), and as it grew in the postwar period it became well-known for helping to pave the way for community organizing and for its activism on behalf of the interests of these communities.

Despite the valuable activist, organizing, and development work advanced by the CCR, many Guarjileños, among other Chalatecos, complain that its leadership now acts out of selfish interests and that its work had changed in nature since its initial years when the communities saw it as the principal conduit for advancing local political and development interests. The critique maintains that the CCR, in recent years, has shifted its priorities toward garnering international funding for a slew of “NGO-style” projects. At the time of its 2009 annual review meeting, which I attended, the CCR’s funding amounted to hundreds of thousands of dollars. A large portion of the funds were being directed to projects that fit NGO schemes and would appeal to international funders (micro-lending, environment, health, women’s rights, and so forth). That year, the CCR was involved in activism against mineral mining in the region and in solidarity protests in support of Manuel Zelaya, Honduras’s ousted president, but these efforts (as is often the

case for activist work) were able to bring in only a few thousand dollars from church and solidarity groups, which was a small fraction of their yearly funding compared to other projects.

There were a number of performative rituals during the annual meeting, which was held in the neighboring community of Los Ranchos under the roof of the community's recently constructed amphitheater in its well-renovated park. The crowd sat in lines of plastic chairs. During parts of the meeting, CCR and community leaders on stage led a series of chants: *Que vivan las comunidades repobladas!* (Live the repopulated communities!) *Que vivan las comunidades organizadas!* (Live the organized communities!) *Que viva la CCR!* (Live the CCR!). They also led the crowd in several songs: first, El Salvador's national anthem, and later, a song about the repopulations and one about the strength of Salvadoran women. The meeting concluded with *El Sombero Azul*, a song about El Salvador's revolutionary struggle that has been performed by musicians around the world and is arguably the most well-known Leftist nationalist tune among Salvadorans.

The performative aspects of the meeting reflect the larger and strategic narrative that the CCR advances. Evidenced in the messages of the meeting's speeches, music, and banner imagery, the CCR and other local community leaders emphasize that these communities uniquely draw from their historical experience of revolutionary struggle to effectively organize and execute community development projects. The region's "organized communities" are indeed known throughout El Salvador for their organization and trajectory of autonomous development, but this has not come without the assistance of international organizations. Since the war, Chalatecos became skilled in securing

international support to meet their own interests. The performative work that this entails also contributes to the construction of meanings and identities linked to place and community. In the crowd at the 2009 annual meeting sat a delegation of *gringas*, young white women from a church in the U.S. Midwest, wearing long dresses and carrying *Nalgene* water bottles. One of dozens of delegations to visit Guarjila each year, this group was spending a week learning of community history, touring projects, and moving from meeting to meeting with *directiva* community leaders. They endured the several hours long CCR annual meeting, looking a bit dazed over, with their limited knowledge of Spanish.

The particular narrative that is performed by the CCR, NGOs, and other leaders includes some elements of community-building work while excluding others. One matter that tends to go unspoken is how migration and remittances are intimately wrapped up in the lives of community leaders themselves, even as they preach about the negative impacts that migration and remittances have on community life and the potential for grounded, grassroots organizing.

Understandably, many people view the “grassroots” critique of migration and remittances, even as “grassroots” leaders themselves depend on them, as hypocritical. This has added to a sense of resentment on the part of some toward NGO practitioners and community leaders who are viewed as relatively privileged by “working the system.” One Salvadoran I interviewed once referred those who work for NGOs as “NGOers” to critically and typologically define their role in society. His critique was built on the impression that those who work for NGOs hold a hard-to-come-by professional career in El Salvador by learning to strategically play into narratives of the “grassroots” and

community organizing, but have the privilege of going about their work with little accountability. “NGOers” have to be savvy: they learn to speak the language of community organizing, development, and even “solidarity,” they sport typical NGO attire (for women, the embroidered white “peasant” shirt and for men, jeans and a tucked-in shirt). But they can show up to their meetings hours late. Along the same vein, they can speak critically of the “problem” of migration and remittances, but supplement the steady income they receive from agencies with income from the remittance payments of family members abroad, and not make mention of it. The “unspoken” side of migration and remittances is not so surprising, given that even though migration and remittances are now framed as an area of public concern in the community, just how much income individuals and families receive in remittances is rarely disclosed and remains inside the black box of local “family economies.”

The surge in remittances has changed life in Guarjila significantly, especially since the early 2000s, as a more recent wave of migrants took off and got their footing in the United States. For many families in Guarjila, remittances became the primary source of income, and communities throughout the region increasingly came to depend on remittances. The tradition of local agricultural production declined, and by the early 2000s the Saturday morning line to receive remittances at *Banco Cuscatlán* in the city of Chalatenango was usually so long it went out the door and wrapped around the corners of the small city’s hilly blocks. Several local teachers and the primary and secondary schools’ directors suggested to me that some students who received regular remittance payments and expected to migrate to the United States had little interest in learning and came to school only to fill time or to fulfill a family obligation.

Aside from the way these patterns add weight to the national concern over wasteful consumption and the development of a “welfare state” in El Salvador, concerns around the negative impacts of remittances were laden with particular meaning for Chalatenango’s formerly “revolutionary” communities, where community members were, in the postwar period, then being called upon to be active participants in carrying on a new (neoliberal) commitment to grassroots community organizing. The neighboring community of Los Ranchos was often used as a reference point by Guarjileños to show how migration and remittances came into conflict with the potential for effective community-building and transformed the community into a place that bragged of its “revolutionary” roots but did not effectively organize as well as Guarjila.

Los Ranchos’s outflow of migrant youth, adolescents, and young and middle-aged men was more abundant than that of Guarjila. Like its migrants, remittances picked up rapidly. Well-improved homes and chrome-detailed pickup trucks quickly became a trend. They complemented the paved roads, renovated park, and the generally better infrastructure it boasted over that of Guarjila, made possible from municipal funds from its FMLN mayor. Guarjileños were quick to point out how those from Los Ranchos lived in excess and that the community was full of delinquent hoodlums. According to Guarjileños, youth from Los Ranchos were known for carrying cell phones, wearing baggy clothes like their migrant siblings and parents abroad, skipping out on school, showing up at local bars, doing drugs, and picking fights.

Unlike Los Ranchos, which had better access to municipal funding for local projects and infrastructure and had visibly used remittances for home improvements and particular kinds of “luxuries,” Guarjila had to count more on its community organizing.

Guarjila was on the fringes of receiving municipal-level resources as an FMLN-sympathetic *cantón* belonging to the municipality of Chalatenango, especially at the times when the mayor in office was part of the ARENA political party. And local leaders had to speak highly of community organizing in order to court international organizations to get funding for community projects. Community infrastructure and projects thus entailed resourceful uses of local funds from organizations and community members themselves (abroad and in Guarjila itself), voluntary labor, and appeals to funders on the part of the community's *directiva*.

Also, even though in recent years, as I explained above, the CCR has undergone criticism from locals who believe the organization is failing to fulfill its promises to advance their interests in the way it initially did, the CCR nevertheless faces new sets of challenges amid community dynamics shaped by the consequences of neoliberalism and migration. One CCR activist, for example, pointed out to me that the organization had to advocate even for basic municipal services in Guarjila, such as regular trash removal. These sorts of efforts, she commented, went underappreciated by critical community members. She elaborated by saying that she felt that those Guarjileños who complained about the CCR rarely engaged in community organizing and activist efforts themselves.⁴³

Aside from whether or not Guarjila could be understood as more or less organized than Los Ranchos, and whether or not it even merits the label of an “organized community”, my point is that the work of building and constructing community, since resettlement and well into peacetime neoliberalism and migration, has nevertheless entailed a lot of hard work, organization, planning, and resourcefulness.

⁴³ Based on author's interview with CCR representative in San Salvador, October 3, 2009.

The Highway

The local politics of organizing and migration are a reminder that communities are neither pure artifacts of the state and global capitalist forces nor do they exist according to entirely endogenous or autonomous communal logics and practices. Rather, these logics and practices, and their distinction from the developmentalist and neoliberal logics advanced by the state, vary in form and in degree. This local politics around concern for community organizing in a context of migration surfaced in a local controversy that developed around the construction of a major highway to run through Guarjila. In what follows, I describe the situation. The community's response to the highway, of course, cannot and does not represent any sort of uniform, singular, or "pure" form of communal logic and practice against the state's neoliberal development project. Nonetheless, the controversy and tensions developed precisely because of the value that Guarjileños apply to a rooted sense of community identity and collectivist practices, which were not valued in the logic of development guiding the state-led highway project.

For miles on the road leading up to the edge of Guarjila, the ground was being cleared to make way for a modern highway, soon to divide the community down the middle, to create a new corridor to facilitate travel through the length of northern El Salvador and connect Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. An army of yellow-shirted construction workers, equipped with shovels and a few back-hoes, were busy digging up the clay, dynamiting hillsides, taking out trees, and demolishing roadside buildings and homes.

Highways have always been a symbol of progress for El Salvador, much like they are in other parts of the world. The country prides itself on having the best highways of

any country in Central America; the Ministry of Tourism boasts that tourists can get from volcanoes to lakes to the ocean all in a day, in contrast to the distance and rough roads of Costa Rica. The new highway was El Salvador's hallmark project funded by the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), an international development agency funded by the United States that seeks to reduce poverty in the Global South. The highway was allocated the largest portion of funds from the FOMILENIO (the entity created by the Salvadoran government to receive and allocate MCC's funds and implement the projects it supports), accounting for 248 million of the 460 million total destined for anti-poverty projects in northern El Salvador. As a "Connectivity Project," it had by far the largest budget of three components of a larger government plan supported by MCC for poverty alleviation in northern El Salvador.⁴⁴ The other two components, "human development" and "productive development", were categories that specified improvements to infrastructure, vocational and small business training, and a university campus in Chalatenango. Complementing these other development initiatives, the highway was expected to spur entrepreneurship, make it easier for locals to travel between markets, and introduce new industries to generate employment in the region.

The *Longitudinal* would also facilitate international trade and commerce. CAFTA-DR, signed in 2004, had cut back regulations on trade between the United States and Central America. The recent alliance of CA-4 countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua) meant that the transit of goods, capital, and people faced fewer restrictions across their regional borders. But the project was never billed as being about free trade. When former El Salvador President Tony Saca, of the ARENA party and the

⁴⁴ These components were budgeted at 101 million and 71 million dollars, respectively.

project's biggest advocate, was there to break ground on the project in 2009, he reiterated on the radio waves his message that "development had finally arrived to the northern zone of El Salvador."

For Guarjileños, the highway proposal at the outset looked like a mixed bag. Some opposed it and some supported it, but most seemed apathetic. Those who opposed it complained that it would introduce noise and traffic, bring drugs, crime, and prostitution, and that the only local businesses that it would spark would be watering holes for truckers. In any case, they conceded to the belief that it was a done deal. No one was going to stop a major project sponsored by the United States and the state; it was going to be constructed regardless of their community's wishes, so the many felt the best they could do is make the most out of the inevitable. After all, ever since they lived in Mesa Grande and began working with international aid and solidarity groups, Guarjileños were skilled in advantageously getting what they wanted from international funders and assistance. When the *directiva* signed onto it, they were able to negotiate \$70,000 in supplemental projects designated to support employment, training, education, and infrastructure. When they agreed to allow for the highway to come through Guarjila, the possibility that there would be a bypass around the perimeter of the community was on the table but that was not yet settled.

FOMILENIO had good publicity and made a lot of promises. Pamphlets about the benefits of the project were distributed to community members. Locals could apply to work on the construction work (though those who proposed lower salaries tended to win the bid). Houses that would have to be demolished were promised to be rebuilt elsewhere. FOMILENIO's website showed off a video of its director and a team of blue-shirted

agency workers handing an elderly woman the keys to her new two-room cinder block home, equipped with a wash basin and a young palm tree plant, as the director reminded her that her former home, demolished for highway construction, had a leaky roof and no electricity. Other videos about the highway project offered aerial shots of the region's new, modern highway landscape as bridges and segments get constructed; of female construction workers waving traffic through with flags; and of uniformed representatives' presentations in local communities to help them make development work. Another video boasted that this would be the first Latin American highway project to offer HIV-AIDS prevention training for construction workers and local communities.⁴⁵

Yet even as MCC and FOMILENIO promise transparency and a commitment to consultation and participatory development with local communities, Guarjileños complained that in meetings with the *directiva* and in community assemblies, agency representatives were vague about construction details, emphasized the highway's benefits and underplayed its potential side effects (there wouldn't be much traffic, and no tractor trailers, they were told), and didn't offer to conduct a feasibility study for the bypass option beyond a general estimate of the cost, which they said was over the budget given that the community was nestled in its surrounding hills.

Once the highway construction was moving closer to the edge of the community, Guarjileños began witnessing the environmental destruction and the idea of having to cross the proposed pedestrian overpass to get from one side of the community to the other suddenly became very real and more worrisome. By then more than a year after the *directiva* had agreed to the highway, resistance and discontent suddenly surged.

⁴⁵ www.mca.gob.sv (last accessed Feb 22, 2012).

Community assembly meetings that typically drew only a few attendees (mainly elderly women) were suddenly jam packed with hundreds of upset community members. They formed a new community committee to petition for the bypass option in a series of meetings with FOMILENIO representatives and the Minister of Public Works (who by then was of the FMLN). But those petitions were dismissed on the pretext that the community's leadership had already signed onto the agreement. Samuel, who sat on the committee, recalled his frustration at the meetings:

“It was at that point that we realized the type of people with whom we were negotiating — well, it wasn't negotiating, Joe, because to negotiate is to arrive to an agreement that is accessible to everyone. ‘But what you all are bringing,’ he said, ‘this proposal, it's as though you are asking us to go to the moon’, he said, ‘and I can't.’ And the guy was direct, and he said, ‘you know what, we don't have to be tolerating such an ignorant community, who opposes such a good project.’... [This was] the Vice Minister of Public Works. And I was surprised because in the first meeting, he said, ‘for us, as Ministry of the Republic, we don't have anything to do with FOMILENIO, we are just intermediaries.’ And by the third, it was he that said, ‘the road is going,’ he said, ‘through Guarjila because it is a government project, and you all are not going to stop it’...the man said to us ‘the road will be built even though you all oppose it, and so there is nothing else to discuss, he said.”⁴⁶

By the end of 2011, the highway was indeed moving forward through the middle of Guarjila. The polemical situation surrounding the highway elucidates some of the underlying postwar tensions around the community's migration, development, and politics discussed above in this chapter. Even though the FMLN-led government elected in 2009 was carrying out a project that had been initiated by the ARENA-led government, it is clear that Samuel felt slighted by the FMLN's Vice Minister in the way he tells the story of their meetings. His sentiment reflects the broader sense of disillusionment and frustration with FMLN leadership that has brewed in the community

⁴⁶ Author's interview in Guarjila in April 2011.

and in the region since the war. The sentiment has a particular potency in eastern Chalatenango, considering that Chalatecos fought for and supported the FMLN during twelve years of civil war, and that they were now cautiously testing out the hope that the new Funes administration would mark the first time the government would take their interests into account.

The highway drama also brought out postwar disillusionment and distrust of local leadership. But community members were frustrated that the directiva was quick to sign onto the highway construction contract, and were suspicious that some of its members were assigned to oversee the community projects that were now to receive funding from FOMILENIO. Among other circulating rumors was the contention that another community leader — who had a track record of getting international agencies to source his income — had been spotted privately negotiating with FOMILENIO representatives to purchase his land and direct the highway through it.

One directiva member remarked to me that the community should have organized its opposition and alternative proposals long earlier. In Samuel's words, the community's reaction was "at the last second." No matter how valid the critique, it is indicative of broader preoccupation that migration and remittances had quelled the potential for mobilization. Migration had split the community across international borders and "drained" it of young people who would have taken on leadership positions, and income from remittances had made people too "comfortable."

But how, and why, was a rural community to collectively organize against a transnational highway? Guarjileños were known for taking to the streets to make human roadblocks and throw rocks at the vehicles of campaigning ARENA politicians. People

from the “organized communities” had staged protests and successfully blocked a Canadian mining company from breaking ground in the region. (The resistance raised enough public concern that former President Tony Saca’s ARENA-led government actually revoked the license they had granted the company which then sued the Salvadoran government for hundreds of millions of dollars.) During the war, the “enemy” was clear, and following it, problems were most easily blamed on the neoliberal-minded government. But the highway project represented an encounter with a new kind of disorienting postwar development. Even as it was met with skepticism, there was no clarity about the target or the outcome. Samuel described how forms of collective action that had worked in times past were no longer operable:

“As a national project, and one that has practically been imposed on us, which didn’t come from what the current government is doing — this was an agreement that was there before Funes came into office. People felt, well, practically tied down. And now we can’t say, ‘okay, if the highway isn’t rerouted where we want, we’re going to burn the construction vehicles, we’ll throw grenades, we’ll do this, we’ll do that,’ because now, if you do something like that the law will stop you, it individualizes things, you’ll get caught. And so, it’s no longer the community that corresponds. Let me tell you that in a protest, if someone, for example, throws a bottle of gas and a construction vehicle burns, do you think that the community is going to get involved and defend that guy? No, they’re going to catch him and take him to jail. So, even though the road was a big threat for Guarjila, there were people who were in agreement.”

But whether or not they should have been able to effectively mobilize against the highway’s intrusion into their community is beside the point. As Samuel put it, a highway funded with hundreds of millions of dollars by the United States, a signed contract, and a bit of deception had them “tied down.” The highway controversy brought to light the ongoing community politics around organization and migration at a shifting moment when globalization, development, and national leadership were going in new directions. Guarjileños were struggling to make their past make sense in a confusing and rapidly

changing present. Evidenced in the way the highway argument played out, at stake were also larger questions around how community, migration, and development were understood differently by the opposing actors.

A particular kind of development logic guided the highway's proponents. As a "connectivity project," the highway was a metaphor and agent of transnationalist progress; it stood for the promise of (neo)liberal capitalist development by facilitating flows of capital and people. By prioritizing these flows and offering some training and incentives, the region's economy would get a kick start. In the eyes of the developers, Guarjila looked like any other rural community in El Salvador's marginalized north (except that it was a bit more troublesome than most): it was poor, in need of development, and locals did little more than count on the payments sent by their emigrant counterparts.

What was invisibilized through this logic was a different view of community, one that valued a rooted sense of identity, non-economic assets, and prioritized community cohesiveness for a better future. Guarjileños felt that the more than two decades of work they had put into building and rebuilding community, and the collective history that made it unique, was being run over by a highway that would divide the community in half, passing just a few feet in front of their community radio station and forcing cooperative workshops they had built to be torn down. Competing logics on development — on what would be best for the community's well-being and its future — were also tied to two distinct understandings of the question of migration. As Samuel conveys in his story, the idea that the promise of development could be a panacea to the migration "problem" did not make sense to him:

“I said to the director of FOMILENIO... ‘I would like to feel as optimistic as you all about this project, but I can’t.’ And the director said to me, ‘Let’s bet on it,’ he said, ‘we can bet as much as you want, that one day you will feel optimistic,’ he said, ‘because you are going to have a good road that goes through your community.’ I said to him, ‘I doubt it, I doubt it.’ They, ironically, Joe, they have to talk about this project as if it were the eighth wonder of the world. Do you know what the director of FOMILENIO said on a TV program? He said, ‘I make the call to all of our compatriots who are in the United States, who left to lift their families out of poverty, that they no longer need to be there, that they can come back. Because with FOMILENIO, this northern zone will be so developed that your family won’t need your remittances. Come back, and recuperate the lost years alongside your family.’ That’s what he said, don’t you believe this guy is a hypocrite? ...What kind of development do we have here, Joe? Everything that is here, people have made with their sweat, or with the communal projects and help of other countries.”

As seen in Samuels’ contentious stance, as well as in the contentious stance of the community as a whole when outrage suddenly manifested in the form of resistance, distinct logics around what migration and development meant for community well-being were in competition. Even if the mobilization was at the “last second,” rife with internal divisions, tensions, and inward-oriented criticism, the rooted identities and practices of community mattered in a powerful way to Guarjileños.

This chapter has emphasized that although neoliberalism and migration in the postwar context have introduced new dilemmas and challenges to community-building, Guarjileños continued to engage with collectivist and communal logics and practices to navigate changing conditions. These practices and logics represent a valued political project among resettled Chalatecos that is conditioned by a long-range trajectory of community-making and collectivism linked to place, networks, and mobility. These practices and logics vary, are constantly being relationally produced, and continue to change and adapt to new globalizing conditions, all the while working both with and against the state’s developmentalist and neoliberal projects. In the next chapter, I unearth

the way these logics and practices of community are at work and interwoven with Guarjila's migration and cross-border networks, and how these challenge the kind of mainstream developmentalist logic on migration advanced by the state in El Salvador's postwar nation-building project.

CHAPTER 5

Rooted Community Networks

This chapter explores the way people work to reconstitute and root community, through networks, across borders, and in place. Chapter 3 examined the collectivist communal logics and practices that were cultivated among Chalatecos in the prewar and wartime context, and Chapter 4 explored the postwar conditions of community-building within the place of Guarjila itself as it was reshaped by neoliberalism and migration. This chapter turns the focus to cross-border practices of community-making that involve Guarjileños both in the United States and in El Salvador, based on ethnographic analysis during the 2008 to 2011 fieldwork for this study. By exploring the cross-border practices and trajectories of migrants, it highlights how Guarjileños use mobility and networks to favor communal well-being and preferred futures, on their own terms. These networked rooting and communalizing practices are conditioned by a longer trajectory of collective action and communal systems, and by attachments to the active project of building community with meaning and dignity in Guarjila itself. They are activated as Guarjileños turn to community as a resource and a source of strength as they continue to navigate conditions of marginalization and exclusion in the United States and in El Salvador. Operating through *rooted community networks*, Guarjileños' practices produce circulations, flows, and trajectories that destabilize key assumptions behind the particular logic of "migration and development" embraced by the Salvadoran state and some

multilateral development agencies. These social, economic, and political practices are evidence of a different kind of logic: one that partly places value on non-capitalist activity and on the constant work of making and rooting community, and one that conceptualizes well-being and the “development” of a better future on different terms.

This chapter follows family-community networks of Guarjileños to weave together ethnographic stories that connect and move between the United States and El Salvador. I juxtapose these stories, and the windows to other ways of thinking that they open, against the schematics and logics bought into and advocated by San Salvador-based development specialists interested in making El Salvador’s undocumented emigration work for a particular version of “local” and “human” development. I chose stories with the goal of making visible situations, practices, networks, and trajectories that, due to their contingent, informal, or “against the flow” nature, might go unnoticed through a “mainstream” lens that privileges capitalist and developmentalist approaches to understanding the way people engage with migration and economic flows. These “other” kinds of practices and movements, I suggest, are abundant, contextually shaped, and remarkably powerful.

First, I will discuss the theoretical contributions of this chapter, which I frame around the concept of rooted community networks. I then follow the logics, practices, and dilemmas of a wave of migrants who are voluntarily returning to Guarjila from the United States. Their decision, or struggle, to return is linked to an active project of rooting and investing in futures in Guarjila. I discuss how their trajectories are largely conditioned by a view that non-capitalist resources and community-based economic activity are also important contributors to living well. My analysis then turns to the way

remittances are used for non-capitalist ends and in ways that development specialists would regard as less than “productive”. I highlight how remittances contribute to the work of building Guarjila and giving it a meaningful sense of place, and how they are incorporated into collectivist, networked systems of taking care of others and favoring community well-being. I close with a discussion of how remittances play a role in the work of *superación* (overcoming), particularly for a younger generation of Chalatecos whose personal-political life projects include struggles to build other viable options for their future than undocumented U.S. emigration.

Theorizing Rooted Community Networks

In this chapter, I return to the question of development. In the second chapter, I discussed how the conversations around “migration and development” that came into vogue recently in El Salvador among development specialists, the government, and other actors, have emphasized that migrants and their remittances can and should be key agents in development. This view was embraced by the neoliberal state, which had been establishing political and economic policies and a strategic discourse that engendered emigration and worked remittances into its neoliberal development strategy. It also was embraced by development specialists who stress that, despite some costs, migration and remittances can and should contribute to more equitable forms of development. According to this theory, this kind of development can occur when migrants and their families and communities commit to using remittances more appropriately for “productive” ends, including for the generation of local employment through small business creation in places of origin.

There is a particular developmentalist logic at work here. It purports that as migrants pursue their “American dream” and settle in the United States, the remittances they send back will help to bring the kind of progress they have now achieved in their own lives to their families and communities back “home”. It is a modernist/colonialist logic that generally assumes that a better quality of life will be found in the United States, that people from the Global South view their communities of origin as places in need of development, and that development can be achieved through capitalist activities and with the help of globalization. As we saw in Chapter 2, in El Salvador it is also linked to the postwar nation-state building project of *destierro*, one that uproots and erases troubled histories as it looks toward the appeal of transnationalist modernity in constructing the future.

The practices I highlight in this chapter are evidence of a different kind of logic. Rather than erasing historical memory, these Guarjileños are constantly working to recultivate the history of collective struggle and rootedness that is meaningful to their community, no matter how troubling the memories. Rather than celebrating the potential “opportunities” for development lent through displacement and dispersion, they continue to work to root themselves in place, even as they use mobility and cross-border networks to meet needs and interests. And, rather than putting faith in the idea that “development” will be achieved through individual willpower as they engage with global capitalism, they work to count on and build collectivist, communal, and non-capitalist resources and activities to work toward collective well-being. As Lawson (1999) found in her research with Ecuadoran migrants, the practices, narratives, and trajectories of migrants themselves can contest assimilationist, modernist, and developmentalist assumptions.

To conceptualize the implications and dynamics of Chalatecos' communal, rooting, and networking practices, I build on geographers Diane Rocheleau and Robin Roth's (2007) proposed concept of *rooted networks*. They remind us that networks, like places and communities (as I have discussed), are relational and contingent. They are not equally fixed or equally mobile, and they are always being made and remade. They are also *rooted*; they do not simply exist in space and "float free from territory." Just as they tie people to people (and many other actors and elements), they also connect people to territory and are created out of territory. They remind us that territory, as the terrain of ecology and places, cannot be conceptualized in a Cartesian sense. Relational and without set boundaries, territory becomes the "rooting zone" for networks.

Their proposal is useful when considering how networks connect migrants and resources with family, community, and places. Guarjileños, as we will see, use cross-border flows (including remittances, an important resource, and migration itself) along networks to make these connections to place and to others, in ways that are conditioned by a rooted experience of collective struggle and community-building, even as the meaning of rootedness is subjective, relational, varied, and changing. As geographers Rachel Silvey and Victoria Lawson (1999) remind us, even as migration theory tends to focus on flows in between places and laden with capitalist dynamics, we must remember that migrants are always moving between the real, meaningful, territorial places to which they are attached. In making visible this meaningful connection to rootedness and to place itself, we can identify non-capitalist and non-developmental activity. The intention here is to address the concern that "within developmentalist research, however, this central assumption—that migration processes are transparently economic in nature—

has been subject to very little critical attention” since “the embeddedness of migration in modernization thinking has been so complete that it has gone largely unacknowledged.”

(Silvey & Lawson 1999: 122-123)

Furthermore, Rocheleau and Roth suggest that when thinking of rooted networks as a verb (*rooting, networking*), we can see how there exists an “infinite variety of rooting strategies” that connect the elements and actors in a network to territory. Migrants and other community members, to whom they are connected, therefore engage in rooting and networking *practices* and *strategies*.

I introduce one more type of practice to the mix that is particularly important to Guarjileños: the work of *communalizing*, to use Zibechi’s (2010) term for the political and liberating work of building social bonds with a communitarian character. As we have seen, people of Guarjila and other communities have a long trajectory of communal systems and community making, which continued to change in form and adapt to new contexts. As Gutierrez Aguilar (2011) suggests, *entramados comunitarios*, or the meshworks of community and collectivity that favor collective care and well-being, are created and recreated through a multiplicity of groups, networks, sources, and contexts. In today’s context of migration and cross-border flows, the practices of rooting, communalizing, and networking – and the actors, elements, and resources that involve them – constitute what we can conceptualize as *rooted community networks*.

The types of communitarian and rooting practices employed through these networks have important implications for rethinking the rather delimiting view that migration processes are almost exclusively driven by capitalist and developmentalist forces and interests. The proposals put forth in the work of geographers Katherine Gibson

and Julie Graham (J.K. Gibson-Graham 2006) are particularly helpful in identifying these practices and their implications. They encourage us to go beyond “capitalocentric” and developmentalist perspectives to be able to visibilize the non-capitalist and community economic activities that people are already putting into practice.

Through the lens of *community economies* (Gudeman 2001; Gibson-Graham 2006), we can see how Guarjilenos’ economic practices, networked across borders, can and do operate through a shared base of community resources, labor, and interests. Remittances are incorporated into community economic activities. Migrants and community members often must work with capitalist production and globalization to make ends meet and to satisfy immediate needs. However, as Gibson-Graham propose, by drawing attention to the way they use what’s left over, or the *surplus*, we can see how remittances, added to a larger pool of communal resources and assets from which they draw upon, are used for non-capitalist and collectivist ends.

I identify how one such use of surplus is a contribution to the active work of *taking care* of others. *Care*, as Brazilian liberation theologian Leonardo Boff (2008) puts it, is an act and an attitude “at the very root of the human being” that stands against the “attitude of neglect and abandonment of acts of kindness” that are “undermined by the current dominance of neoliberalism, with its individualism and its exaltation of private property” (2008: 3).

These collectivist, yet cross-border, practices that value community economic and non-economic resources and the work of taking care broaden the scope of possibilities for conceptualizing “development”, well-being, and the building of better futures. To think beyond the mainstream boundaries of doing “development”, the notion of *Buen Vivir* –

living well, or collective well-being – is useful. As a concept that emerged out of the Andean Region but now being employed in contexts around the world, Buen Vivir has been critiqued by Western standards for representing a “romantic” or “utopian” vision, that without a clear set of guidelines, cannot be viably used to guide development, or as an alternative to development altogether (Gudynas 2011). However, I agree with Walsh (2010), that it offers a useful alternative principle by which the Western notion of “development” might be guided. As she points out, in the last decade in Latin America, development has shifted from being conceived of as being mainly measured by marks of economic “progress” toward a more humanistic view focused on the individual and quality of life. This shift, supported by multilaterals institutions such as the Inter-American Development Bank, UNESCO, and the UNDP, has guided the idea of “human development”, which focuses on the principles of sustainability, democratic participation, and better living conditions. Nevertheless, human development assumes that reaching a better quality of life, for example, not only can be measured by quantifiable indicators but that, as Walsh (2010) states, it “depends on the manner in which people – particularly the poor – assume their life.” It assumes that “when individuals take control of their lives, acting on their life conditions, then social development and progress occur” (Walsh 2010: 16). As we will see in this chapter, the practices of return migration and the valuation of non-capitalist activity lend evidence to the way that people conceptualize living well on more diverse terms.

The identification of the potentialities and already-in-practice work of carving out other “development” trajectories, or futures, entails employing an analytical eye that is attuned to recognizing contingencies and experimentations. This lens, in the words of

Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham, entails engaging with what they call “a politics of economic possibility,” or:

“an enlarged space of decision and a vision that the world is not governed by some abstract, commanding force or global form of sovereignty. This does not preclude recognizing sedimentations of practice that have an aura of durability and the look of ‘structures’, or routinized rhythms that have an appearance of reliability and the feel of ‘reproductive dynamics’. It is, rather, to question the claims of truth and universality that accompany any ontological rigidity and to render these claims projects for empirical investigation and theoretical re-visioning. Our practices of thinking widen the scope of possibility by opening up each observed relationship to examination of its contingencies and each theoretical analysis for its inherent vulnerability and act of commitment.” (J.K. Gibson-Graham 2006: xxxiii)

The examination I present in this chapter therefore contributes to this effort by identifying practices that may be experimental and contingent, yet rooted in long-standing communal systems and attachments to place. Using what Gibson-Graham identify as a “weak theory” approach that goes beyond a capitalocentric lens, I make visible practices that are understood as going against the (main)stream.

Salvadoran Dreaming

“Why should we invest in a future here?” Juliana asked me on a rainy July day in northern New Jersey, as I drove her and her two children to Sears to buy a dress for her daughter on her seventh birthday. With no driver’s license and with her partner, Beto (whose migration story I told in the last chapter) working hard in home construction seven days a week, Juliana was hardly ever able to escape their tiny apartment. The building was surrounded by parking lots on a busy main street, and the kids played on the kitchen floor because it had no living room. One oasis was the garden the family had planted on the grassy strip at the edge of the parking area, where, picking tomatoes with

the kids, she could feel and taste a bit of Guarjila.

She asked the question that day because limitations on Beto's and her immigration paperwork kept the future in a state of uncertainty and because she was so much invested in building Guarjila and its future, the community and place to which she was most closely attached. How can you build a future here in the United States, she asked me, when the government makes it impossible by refusing to grant you rights or even recognize your presence? Beto had Temporary Protected Status (TPS), a temporary, liminal immigration status granted by the United States. It instills a sense of "permanent temporariness" in many Salvadorans as it continues to be used as a means to manage flexible immigrant labor (Bailey et al. 2002). And Juliana experienced an everyday sense of volatility as she was forced to navigate illegality, and its associated stigma and reality of "deportability" (De Genova 2005). If forced to return to El Salvador, she would be displaced from their home in New Jersey, and possibly even from her U.S.-born children. Juliana, by then in her late twenties, was born just prior to her family's *guinda* to Mesa Grande. She had been toughened by plenty of experiences of displacement and liminality in her life, and she wanted to be in a place where her family could plant roots and live with dignity.

That day she spoke with me of her pride in being from Guarjila and of her longings to return there. It was a difficult decision to come to the United States in the first place. She did so because she loved Beto and so she followed him north. In Guarjila, she imagined reuniting with family, of stepping back to work at the community radio station where she had been for years up until she left, of being able to move about freely and again own a house and land, of being able to construct a future for her family in the place

to which she was most committed.

But returning to El Salvador posed serious challenges, one of the most obvious being the loss of the steady income from Beto's now well-established subcontracting business. They had contemplated the idea of Beto staying and continuing to work for a while longer while the rest of the family moved to El Salvador. It would be easier if Beto were allowed to travel freely, but TPS only gave permission to travel to El Salvador under special circumstances (commonly to see an ailing family member). She would have no hesitation about putting her children in Guarjila's school, an idea that didn't settle well with Beto's older half-siblings who were from an earlier generation of migrants that had fled the war. They were since able to secure permanent residency and citizenship in the United States, and they now owned successful businesses and properties in both countries. When she brought up the idea at his house over lunch later that day, her half-brother-in-law interjected in a baby voice directed at her two-year old son, "No, Gabriel wants to stay and study here!"

Juliana's desire to return to Guarjila was thus motivated on the one hand by a sense of uncertainty and alienation conditioned by immigration paperwork and discrimination in the United States, and on the other hand, by her strong and deeply rooted connection to Guarjila itself. Her brother, Ciro, returned to Guarjila that same day. He had been living for seven years in the United States. We talked with him on the phone the day before, when he told me he had *sentimientos encontrados* — conflicting feelings — about going back. It was not going to be easy leaving his stable job in Maryland but he had his partner and children in Guarjila, and a community that was important to him. Juliana talked with him on the phone every day, but that day she was too emotional to

bring herself to call. With her daughter's birthday party coming to a close just before the New Jersey town's Fourth of July fireworks show, she turned to me and said, "he must be there by now."

Juliana and her kids had just spent the week before with Ciro at the house in the Maryland suburb of Washington DC where he had lived. She loved the old house, in a depressed neighborhood southwest of the district, because it had a creek and a picket fence around its big yard. The family upstairs was from Guarjila. Ciro and others from Guarjila and its neighboring communities, unrelated to the family, shared rooms in the basement. I stayed at the house the following week, and in many ways, it felt like Guarjila. Lili, the homeowner upstairs, had worked for years in Guarjila's communal kitchen. Drawing wood from the creek's thick foliage, she fired up homemade pupusas the traditional way, over a *comal* (a round griddle) by creatively using an old barrel as the stove. (She got the idea from Guarjileños she had visited in Indiana a few months earlier.)

A dozen or so more Guarjileños who were family and close friends came in from the neighborhood for the pupusas and a barbecue. The hot Saturday was a day off from work for those who could come, and so they enjoyed spending it gathered together in community. Several of them worked in fast food restaurants and others worked cleaning services for the Census Bureau. Notably, a U.S. government agency that is only able to make an approximate estimate of the number of undocumented immigrants in the United States itself contracts an immigrant workforce to clean its offices. The U.S. government, after all, is assumed to be the largest contractor of undocumented and provisionally documented immigrants in the greater Washington DC area. What's more, as I was routinely reminded, let's not forget that Salvadorans, the vast majority of immigrants in

the metropolitan DC area, initially arrived in the United States fleeing a counter-insurgency war funded by the very government that now employs them.

For Ciro, going back to Guarjila meant giving up a good job, and a set of both conveniences and inconveniences associated with living in the United States. He had been working with other Guarjileños at a small printing shop that made signs and banners. A decorative banner he had made at the shop hung proudly in his room in Maryland. It was red with white print, mimicking the color and font of the FMLN's flag. Instead of the acronym FMLN, it read "Guarjila."

A few days after his arrival to Guarjila, he posted a status update on *Facebook* with a picture of himself with his family at their house there with the caption: "*Ya soy pobre otra vez*" (Now I am poor once again). It was received by Guarjileños in and outside of El Salvador who left a string of comments expressing joy and laughter, congratulating him on his homecoming and reunification with his family.

Against the (Main)stream

Ciro's decision to voluntarily return to El Salvador went against the (main)stream. It was a difficult decision and it involved sacrifice. But Ciro was representative of a wave of postwar migrants who left eastern Chalatenango in the late 1990s and 2000s, many of whom had planned to return to their community in El Salvador since they left. Yet return migration, which just a few years earlier was unheard of and extremely unusual among Guarjileños, was becoming an increasingly normalized occurrence. The recent trend began to pick up in Guarjila by the late 2000s. During fieldwork in Guarjila from November 2008 to May 2011, more than a dozen migrants intentionally returned to the

community and resettled. Prior to 2008, very few, if any, migrants had voluntarily returned to the community.

It is widely assumed that, like many other immigrant groups, Salvadorans who migrate to the United States, even with the fullest intentions to stay, rarely, if ever, return to resettle in El Salvador. Upon settlement in the United States, they are for some period of time, “trapped” as they work off the large debt accrued to pay for illicit travel to the United States. Many migrants start new families in the United States and places of destination and plant new roots and build new commitments in their destinations. And the majority of those who find stable employment find it impossible to give up wage earnings that they use to support themselves as well as family in both countries. Furthermore, Salvadorans and other Central American migrants face a perilous journey to arrive in the United States, and so returning to El Salvador and back again incurs an enormous risk and cost. Salvadorans and other Central Americans are less likely to engage in cyclical and return migration in comparison to migrant groups from central and northern Mexico, where undocumented migrants have a shorter and less costly journey and where other migrants have access to temporary work visas for seasonal U.S. labor.

For the most part, these characteristics are well-founded and exemplary of the U.S. Salvadoran immigrant experience. But there were also changes that research on migration during the 1990s and 2000s did not foresee. The recent wave of returned migrants is in part an effect of the economic crisis that began in late 2008 and a sign that the immigration climate in the United States has become less welcoming in recent years. There is evidence of a larger trend throughout Mexico and Central America of a documented increase in non-deported return migration since the onset of the recession.

This trend suggests that many Latino migrants in the United States in general have been compelled to return to places of origin as they suddenly faced new economic challenges in the United States. Indeed, many sectors that typically employed immigrant labor, especially residential construction, were those most affected by the crisis. Economic motivations for return are compounded by the effects of increasingly tightened immigration and border security enforcement measures that haven't taken shape especially since the mass protests of immigrants during the spring of 2006.

Even so, the non-deported returned migrants that I spoke to in Guarjila who arrived between 2008 and 2011 did not suggest that their return was forced out of economic need. Like *Ciro*, they were generally men who had been maintaining a steady income from stable employment. And when the economic recession hit and took its toll on remittances, Guarjileños on both sides of the border were incredibly resourceful and developed strategies to weather the crisis. In Guarjila, as remittances declined, many families returned to farming a larger section of their agricultural land than they had been doing while receiving steady remittances. In some remarkable cases, remittances were sent in “reverse” — from El Salvador to the United States — to support migrants who had lost jobs so that they could get by in the interim while they searched for new employment.

A number of deported migrants were also arriving to Guarjila, especially since deportations from the United States for minor legal infractions have increased in recent years. As another form of displacement, deportation can uproot people suddenly from families and jobs to which they are committed in U.S. communities where they have settled. In spite of the assumption that deported migrants will be forced to find work and

resettle in El Salvador once deported from the United States, the vast majority of those who have arrived back in Guarjila have gone back to the United States. Their temporary stay usually lasts a few weeks and in a few cases for months.

Community networks are an important source of support for deported migrants. Migrants from Guarjila will frequently pool funds to make an expedited return trip to the United States possible for a deported migrant. In a quick and improvisational but organized fashion, they communally finance the trip until the migrant is able to pay off the debt.

For the select few deported migrants who have chosen to resettle in Guarjila, community networks, meaningful community-based activities and work, and the sense of welcoming and belonging that comes from community-in-place were also a source of strength. As more have been deported recently based on minor legal infractions, the community as a whole in Guarjila itself has grown more sympathetic to the plight of deported community members who years earlier would have been more stigmatized. As Juliana's mother put it when, in passing through Guarjila one day, she encountered a young man who had left ten years earlier but now expressed his plans to resettle there: "Welcome back. Here is your community. Here no one is going to send you to China." Shortly after his arrival, the young man got involved in local community groups, found work in masonry, fell in love, and built his own home from the ground up.

Others who were deported, including those who only made a temporary stay in Guarjila, immediately dove back into roles they held in community-based activities and work that had long been important to them. While some individuals perhaps subjectively viewed them with more or less respect than they had before they migrated, on the whole,

they were received and reintegrated into these groups almost as though they had never left. Of those who were deported between 2008 and 2011, several rejoined the long-standing community youth group that was initiated immediately after the Peace Accords in the wake of the violence. Another jumped back into his character role in the theatrical group that presents its narrations of community histories and social issues. One reassumed his position as a respected soccer coach. Another, whose story of deportation I mentioned in the last chapter, returned to voluntarily work at the community radio station in the interim while he awaited his trip back up north.

Rooting

The experiences and contemplations of return migration are exemplary of the powerful work of community, operating through rooted community networks. The struggle to make returning possible is, in the most literal sense, a struggle to return to one's roots or to re-root oneself in place. But in a different way, community, now networked across borders but still rooted in place and in a shared history, was a valuable resource and an important source of strength for navigating difficult circumstances, just as it has been for people of Chalatenango in varying contexts: their long-range experiences of community organizing, organizing flight from the conflict region, organizing and working communally within refugee camps, and in coping with and working with postwar migration as they struggled to (re)build the region's "organized communities".

Community networks, rooted in place and in a sense of shared history, make it possible for deported and non-deported returnees to reintegrate into community-based

activities that stem from a long trajectory of communal logics and practices that have contributed to the making of Guarjila. From the perspective of pragmatism, community networks of migrants in the United States, still committed to and tied to Guarjila, work to facilitate mobility and settlement. Community members collectively offer funds for travel, and as evident in Ciro's situation, they share housing and help with job networking, working together whenever possible. The collective and communal care-taking work that took shape in spaces where community was reconstituted in transnational geographies was a valuable resource.

And in its most meaningful way, the sense of belonging and warmth from community both in Guarjila and in the United States was another resource, no matter how intangible. The yard around Lili's house (with or without her delicious pupusas) became a space for reconstituting community, and a space where the place of Guarjila itself was reproduced. For Ciro and Juliana, who were constantly navigating the conditions and indignity of illegality, the sense of community in these sorts of spaces was a source of strength in its own right, in addition to the kinds of collective and networked community practices mentioned above. A sense of community played a similar role in Guarjila itself for those returned and deported migrants who were now navigating the challenges of reintegrating into a place they had left for some time.

Ciro and Juliana's deeply rooted and closely networked connection to Guarjila is in large part conditioned by their involvement in building the community of Guarjila in El Salvador and their sustained commitment to that work from afar, and even by continuing to invest in a future there. Like other recent returnees, they represent a wave of postwar migrants who departed during the 1990s and 2000s who share in this

experience. Most of them were either offered TPS or no legal immigration status, and so many of them question the plausibility of trying to invest in a future in the United States, where they continue to be regarded as an expendable labor force and face multiple forms of social and political exclusion. But for many of those from this generation of migrants, especially those with “mixed status” families like that of Beto and Juliana (who each have a different immigration status and whose children are U.S. citizens), the idea of returning to El Salvador after several years of working abroad poses a series of dilemmas as they take into account the interests of their children’s future, the needs of family members in El Salvador, and the feasibility of leaving stable jobs. They are constantly balancing commitments that are split on both sides of an international border.

The contours of cross-border commitments are shaped by other kinds of subjectivities for an earlier wave of migrants, such as Beto’s half-siblings who emigrated from El Salvador during the 1980s civil war. Sentiments toward El Salvador are in part shaped by the memories of chaos and violence when they fled Chalatenango. Furthermore, their involvement in postwar community-building in the region has always been from a distance, and, having arrived in the United States in a different immigration climate, many of them were able to secure U.S. Green Cards and even citizenship.

An “American dream” narrative generally resonates with their experience more strongly than it does with the experience of the later generation of migrants, some of whom can now be seen returning to Guarjila and other communities in eastern Chalatenango. Just as Juliana’s desire to return to Guarjila and place her children in the community’s school seemed insensible to Beto’s half siblings, their own subjective view that privileges life in the United States over El Salvador seems insensible to Juliana. In

her view, they tend to look down upon more recent migrants, flaunt their success from businesses and rental properties in both countries, and have “let go of their roots” in emphasizing the pursuit of an “American dream” over a “Salvadoran dream”.

Nonetheless, earlier migrants have their own ties to El Salvador. Many of them, like Beto’s half-siblings, have plans to retire in El Salvador where there is a more accessible cost of living. The privilege of being able to continue to engage in transnational travel, business, and property ownership also makes retirement in El Salvador a sensible opportunity for them. For this generation of migrants, immigration paperwork has made it possible to engage in the (re)making of El Salvador’s future not only through mobility and transnational economic practices, but also through transnational involvement in political and cultural activities.

Living Well

These sorts of transnational engagements by migrants with paperwork are well received in the eyes of the postwar nation-state building project, which values migrants’ participation in El Salvador’s “human development.” Having successfully pursued the “American dream” while remaining transnationally-engaged, these migrants are understood to be introducing outside capital, knowledge, and development capacities (simply put, “progress”) to El Salvador from the United States. According to this same framework, the later wave of migrants, having been denied or only having been granted provisional immigration paperwork while holding onto firm attachments to communities of origin, are best able to contribute to “human development” through economic practices directed toward their “home” communities: preferably (to the Salvadoran government at

least), by using their remittances for employment-generating local development.

The idea that migrants from this later generation should choose to return to their communities of origin — voluntarily, without being forced out by the economic recession or by deportation, and with few resources in hand (usually just a bit of savings) — thus does not fit into this particular schematic of development. The latter assumes that migrants, once settled in the United States and pursuing their “American dream,” look back at a distant past in places of origin with nostalgia. Nostalgic sentiments and attachments to place become a source of pride and identity that continue to drive migrants’ desires to send remittances and buy “nostalgic” products from transnational entrepreneurial migrant businesses, which are each economic practices that support the economies in places of origin. By contrast, those who intended to return to El Salvador did not view their attachments to Guarjila as a nostalgic memory of the past. Rather, their attachment and networks were a source of strength as they coped with difficult conditions in the United States and as they actively worked to build futures for themselves and others in Guarjila. They envisioned a different kind of future, one that prioritized the constant work of (re)building community and rootedness in place over U.S.-based employment and a lasting stream of remittances.

In the world of development agencies and experts back in San Salvador, these “reverse” migrant trajectories didn’t make logical sense. In February 2009, at a meeting from within the fogged glass doors of the United Nations building overlooking San Salvador’s wealthiest suburb, I spoke with the UNDP’s Program Coordinator on Human Development and Migration about how I had been hearing of more migrants that were returning to El Salvador since the onset of the economic crisis. In his view, this

observation wasn't credible. He predicted that the economic turn would not stimulate any significant return migrations, since migrants are often forced to spend years working off the large debt incurred from illicit transit. He suggested that rather than returning to El Salvador, migrants would move to other parts of the United States, perhaps in states like Oklahoma, where migrants are increasingly employed for agricultural and meat packing labor. A well-respected Salvadoran economist, by June 2009 he was appointed to be the Vice Minister of the Economy under President Funes's new administration.

A year later, at a regional forum on migration and development held at the Radisson Plaza located next to San Salvador's new *Torre Futura* building in the affluent neighborhood of Escalón, a UNDP representative presented findings from recent research about the effects of the economic crisis on El Salvador's migration and remittances. In his talk, he first spoke to the formally dressed audience in the cold banquet room about how El Salvador was a top recipient of remittances, and that as a source of national income they made a sizable contribution to the tax base and had a multiplier effect. Even so, he reminded the group that day, migration had "some costs," such as brain drain. The statistics yielded from the study showed that some migrants expressed fear they would be affected by the crisis, but that despite these fears, trends in overall national remittance flows had only declined slightly. According to the UNDP's questionnaire, of the fears expressed by migrants, 36% were concerned they would make less money, 12% feared they *would have to return* to El Salvador, 5% were afraid they would lose their job, and 3% were worried that another family member would have to migrate to the United States. Unfortunately, the results presented from the study did not account for the legal status of immigrants surveyed. And, curiously, when the presenter read the results of the survey on

the Power Point slide aloud to the public, he paraphrased the second statistical result to instead say that “12% feared they would be *deported*.”⁴⁷

According to a logic that privileges evidence from macro-economic data and puts faith in the idea that remittances can and should help to spark “human development”, the idea that migrants would return to El Salvador, even during the worst recession to hit the United States since the Great Depression, seemed unlikely, even unbelievable. Just as the knowledge produced from migration research lags behind the rapidly shifting political and economic conditions that shape the contours of migration flows and experiences, so do the understandings of migration that guide the paradigms and predictions used by international development agencies.

By privileging macro-economic evidence, this perspective pushes to the margins contextual considerations and emergent contingencies. It reinforces the discursive dominance of capitalism as a whole as the main lens through which to seek out credible evidence. As a capitalocentric and developmentalist logic, the potentiality for other migrant trajectories, and thus other development trajectories, is discredited.

For Guarjileños who were voluntarily returning, a different type of logic guided their decisions, one that was more rooted and communal, and conditioned by a long-range collective experience. This logic challenges the state-led discourse that celebrates emigration and the “American dream,” as well as developmentalist assumptions that Salvadorans will generally find a better quality of life in the United States (with its much higher “human development” index ranking than El Salvador). According to a different

⁴⁷ Dialogo Migratorio de America Central, held in San Salvador June 9-10, 2010, sponsored by the United Nations Development Program, the International Organization on Migration, and Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores of the Salvadoran government, the Sistema de la Integración Salvadoreña.

logic, quality of life gets conceptualized in relation to a broader set of “indicators,” some of which are affective and place value on non-capitalist assets.

In Sarah Mahler’s engaging (1995) ethnography, she recognizes the “workaholic” lifestyles led by many Salvadorans in the United States as she elucidates their disillusionments with the “American dream”. When I asked why they chose to return to Guarjila, many returnees simply said they had grown “tired” of life in the United States. Paco, who came back in 2010 after five years in the United States, much of which he spent working seven days a week at a steakhouse in New Jersey working shifts as long as seventeen hours, put it like this:

“I wanted to return because I got tired of being in the United States. I was tired of just working. It doesn’t give you time for anything, just sleep and go to work. There is a threshold that you reach. After that I decided to return to El Salvador, to be with family, children and all of that, too, right? ...I like it here because you’ve *convivido* [coexisted] here, you know, the time that you have had here, you know? I like everything here about this place.”⁴⁸

Clearly, it is exhausting to overwork far beyond legally allowable work shifts for immigrant wages that tend to be rarely classifiable as “dignified” wages (in some cases below the minimum wage), a large portion of which are then usually sent away to El Salvador to support family once immediate expenses are met in the United States. But there was more to the fatigue felt by migrants like Paco. For him, there was something deeply refreshing about reuniting with family, belonging to community, and having an affinity to a place. Like the kind of fatigue felt by refugees in Mesa Grande that activated their return to Chalatenango, the fatigue of migrants in the United States was also linked to an experience of displacement, temporariness, and estrangement. Adjusting to life in the United States, and navigating conditions of illegality, were exhausting in their own

⁴⁸ Author’s interview in Guarjila, January 2011

right. And outside of Guarjila itself, it takes work to reconnect with others from the community who were living there, in other parts of the United States, or elsewhere, through phone calls and more recently through social media. In some areas, migrants made consistent efforts to reconnect as community in the micro-spaces of neighborhoods, homes, and work environments, and in other situations, long work schedules meant that even Guarjileños who were living close to one another found it difficult to see each other in person.

Javier, who returned to Guarjila in 2008 after eight years away, said life in the United States was generally pleasant. Granted TPS, he was able to own a car and move about freely, and work legally without trouble from immigration enforcement. He generally enjoyed his stable job at a barbecue restaurant, where he got along well with the English-speaking owner and coworkers. He chose to work long hours at the restaurant so that he could have savings to eventually return to Guarjila. As with other recent returnees I spoke with, even though he described his experience in the United States as generally positive, there was a particular sense of community and place in Guarjila that he missed:

“A friend of mine, who was not my girlfriend, just a friend of mine, she always had wanted to try to help me in some way. So she used to tell me that if I wanted to, that she would marry me so that I could get my papers. She used to tell me that if I wanted her to she would even live with me for a while in my house, so that they would believe us more — so that they would believe us. Back then it wasn’t — it was easier. They didn’t ask a lot of questions. But I never planned to — I always planned to go there, to make something, and return right here to be with my people, with the people who I know. There, you go out to the street, and one day you’ll see one person and the next day someone else. You walk down the street and even if you wanted them to, people don’t say hello or anything at all. I don’t know if you’ve realized that people don’t even bother to say hello. And so I never planned to stay living there. I always planned to leave here with a goal, work to make something, and before long come back here to be close to my family, the place where I was born, the people who I know.”⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Author’s interview in Guarjila, March 2009

Javier's decision to return was not only conditioned by an affective sense of the warmth of community-in-place that he valued, but there was also a pragmatism to it. From a "rational" economic-oriented perspective, one might assume that pragmatism would lead him to remain in the United States and keep his stable income, with the hope that TPS would continue to be renewed or that a policy change would enable TPS holders to apply for residency (without having to seek out legal loopholes and special qualifications to do so, as some migrants currently do). But Javier's decision was built on a community-based pragmatism. He recognized the value of Guarjila's communal resources, which made it possible to return and give up the promise of a steady U.S. wage:

"There is freedom here, you know, you can work if you want if you have a small job. You do it and you make a little bit of money, and you can rest on the weekend if you want. And you don't have the worry about the electric bill, the gas bill, the phone, cable, insurance — that you have to buy food, that you have to buy this and that, clothes — lots of things. Here you pay a little bit for electric, just a little, and nothing for an entire month of water...Look, here, these communities — if you've realized — these are communities that have gone to the United States for a long time. And thank God the projects we have here are not projects that are things that belong to the government, but they are projects that were done by this very community which found the funds and carried them out. The government can't come and put their hands in these things. And so that has given a lot of benefits to the community."⁵⁰

Guarjila's autonomous trajectory of developing communal resources and non-capitalist assets contribute to community well-being. The communally constructed water system draws water from surrounding hilltops to offer virtually free of charge potable water to households and community buildings and areas. The local community clinic, built on the popular model and drawing from international support, holds to its initial commitment to offering accessible and affordable health care. Returned and deported

⁵⁰ Author's interview in Guarjila, March 2009

migrants have integrated into cooperative workshops in trades such as carpentry and welding, and have returned to actively play a role in community politics through the *directiva* model of participatory democracy. Javier valued these communal assets, along with the ability to own a plot of land and a house with yard space where he could plant fruit trees and grow his own food. Essentially, he returned with his partner and U.S.-born daughter because he was confident that they would be able to *live well* in Guarjila.

Networked Community Economic Systems

Javier knew he was assuming the risk of having to find a way to make a living upon arrival. But he considered himself to be a jack of many trades and a resourceful person. Even though he had worked for several years in a barbecue restaurant, as a returning migrant, Javier was assumed to be a skilled mason since many of the community's migrants worked in construction in the United States. The same was true for Paco, who had mainly worked in a steakhouse during his time in the United States. They were both actually skilled in masonry from years of work experience in Guarjila prior to their departure, but it was not a skill that they acquired in the United States. Almost immediately after their returns, Paco and Javier, like other returnees, were contracted to design and lead the construction of local home building projects.

Many in Guarjila were expanding their homes with the remittances of family members, and migrants were ordering the construction of homes from afar for themselves to be able to return. What had developed out of this trend was a networked community economy around masonry projects. Connections through family-community networks won Javier and Paco the projects. They then employed local community members to

work on the construction with them. Remittances sent across borders by community members funded the construction projects, and provided a relatively sizable and livable wage to the workers. At the time, as project directors, they each earned around twenty dollars a day, which amounted to about 400 dollars a month. Take into consideration that a similar monthly earning would be made by many professionals in San Salvador, an amount that is hardly enough to make ends meet there where people must pay for privatized services, generally higher food prices, and much higher housing expenses (monthly rent for a small house in a working class area of the city would generally cost at a minimum 200 dollars, and in Guarjila, a much larger house might go for around 25 dollars).

Clearly, the masonry economy is dependent on the availability of remittances and the current demand for construction, and how sustainable it is or whether it can generate viable local employment over the long-range would be difficult to predict. But that is beside the point. What is important here is that these economic dynamics follow the logic and practice of a community economy, one that is networked across borders but still rooted in a particular place. And it is precisely these *community* dimensions of the masonry economy that foster livable wages, dignified working conditions, and a sense of contribution to a meaningful community and place.

The existence of a networked community economy, a range of communal assets and resources, and the strong affective value of community-in-place were a powerful draw for returning migrants. They conditioned logics, practices, and trajectories of migration and development that went against the (main)stream, and made it possible to broaden conceptualizations of quality of life and visions of community well-being

beyond more narrowly focused capitalocentric and developmentalist perspectives. Even if Guarjila's conditions are unique, it is a site to turn to in considering broader potentialities. The uniqueness of one context should not "weaken" its position in theory. Rather, it offers us a strong base for theorizing and recognizing the remarkable strength of rooted community-building, based in place and networked across borders.

Investing in the Future

From the perspective of development specialists concerned with how migration can contribute to local development, the investment of remittances in home construction projects tends to be viewed with criticism. The surge in interest recently in El Salvador about how migrants can most "productively" use remittances looks unfavorably on the tendency of hometown associations to contribute to local infrastructure (soccer fields, parks, roads) and of family-scale remittances to go toward the expansion of homes because they are not employment-generating ventures or more directly improving the "human development" in their communities of origin. The critique is linked to a broader concern that remittances get directed toward consumption and luxuries that do not contribute to economic growth and better living conditions.

Rural communities with extensive emigration and remittances in other parts of El Salvador, Central America, and Mexico were critiqued for having American-influenced, often multi-story home designs that were critiqued by urban onlookers and development specialists as tacky, excessive, and non-functionalist. In rural Mexico, large homes stand empty or are inhabited by the handful of women, children, and elderly who remain in remittance-dependent communities that have seen an exodus of migrants over many

years. In El Salvador, the eastern region of San Miguel (home to the famous migrant-sending town of Intipucá) most exemplifies this architectural shift. One San Salvador-based architect I spoke with explained that he found some design requests of rural remittance-receivers to be peculiar; for example, he couldn't believe that one family wanted the front side of their home plated with ceramic bathroom tile.

In Guarjila, the change has been less drastic. The rows of simple one or two-room cinder-block houses, built with the help of international funding after resettlement and in the initial years of postwar reconstruction, were expanded. Additional rooms were added onto homes, locked gates and fences popped up around them and floors were tiled. Appliances such as refrigerators and gas ranges (instead of the traditional wood-fired stoves) found their way into kitchens, while stereo sound systems and TVs came to seem obligatory in living rooms. In recent years, some driveways (sometimes with a truck parked in them) were added and more houses were painted to disguise the raw cinder-block.

A Central American NGO was awarded UNDP funding in 2009 to document what its proposal called the *arquitectura de las remesas* (architecture of remittances). The researcher, photographer, and architect that pursued the project visited communities in San Miguel, El Salvador (including Intipucá) and indigenous communities of Guatemala among others in Central America. They photographed homes and documented stories of community and architectural transformation, to be put on display in a blog and in an exhibit that traveled to *El Museo de Arte de El Salvador*, El Salvador's national museum of art, in 2011 while I was in El Salvador.

Reflecting on the family-scale experience of emigration and suggesting that these

architectural changes were material markers of migrants and their families' "dreams of return" and "signs of success," the project offered a valuable contribution that documented one remarkable and fascinating reality of the transformative effects of migration. However, by a different token, in putting on display the decisions and practices of rural people in the form of "gaudy" houses and in eliciting such external fascination, one could say the exhibit helped effectuate a form of othering and contributed to a (developmentalist) discourse that places blame on rural migrant-communities for their supposedly wasteful consumption, poor decisions in using remittances, and general tastelessness.

Through the lens of an *arquitectura de las remesas*, home improvements might be viewed as excessive and wasteful spending, especially given that fewer people tended to use the dwellings as family members emigrated and given that return migration might very well remain only a "dream" for many migrants. But I suggest that we need to be cautious of these assumptions. In Guarjila and neighboring communities, home construction is one step in fulfilling an intentional plan that many migrants have to actually return. Funding home construction from abroad is part of the active work of continuing to root oneself and one's family in a community-in-place; it is an investment in the future.

In Guarjila, home improvements were part of the active project of making place in a postwar resettled community. Since its resettlement, Guarjila has been under construction. Home construction after resettlement is one part of a larger project of building a community from the ground up. Much of the housing was haphazardly and quickly assembled with international funding and out of immediate need. With its simple,

unpainted cinder-block dwellings, the community continued to resemble the kind of refugee camp settlement that community members had abandoned prior to their repatriation. The houses trapped heat and did not fit the cool adobe architecture that traditionally characterized the region.

Making Meaning out of Place

The critique of home construction fits a broader developmentalist concern that remittances are not being used productively to contribute to local development by generating local employment through entrepreneurial activity and by aiming to improve living conditions. According to this view, family remittance uses tend to get wasted on simple luxuries, and hometown associations (groups of migrants who organize to fund community projects), lacking a long-range or broader development vision, tend to direct remittances toward infrastructure projects.

In Guarjila, remittances first need to go to meet basic needs, and they have indeed gone toward some simple luxuries. J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006) showed how the *surplus* remittances from migrants from a community in the Philippines were involved to foster community economic activities. Drawing from J.K. Gibson Graham's concept of surplus, let's consider how Guarjileños use what's left over of remittances are used to contribute to the meaning-making and well-being of community-in-place in non-capitalist ways.

Remittances have contributed to community activities and construction that give meaning to Guarjila, cultivating its sense of community identity in place. This is part of the active project of making place out of an experience of displacement, and of cultivating a sense of historical memory that gives meaning to community. Remittances

have contributed to community projects to build material markers that commemorate events and figures that were key to the making of Guarjila. A local museum has been built in Fr. Jon Cortina's honor, and pictures and engravings on the wall of the community's renovated chapel commemorates Fr. Cortina, Sister Ann Manganaro, Archbishop Romero, and fallen combatants who were family members of Guarjileños.

Beyond the patron saint day fiesta, community members (including migrants who send significant remittances to support them) hold in high regard the annual fiestas and rituals that commemorate historical events that were integral to building the community. Among these include the fiesta to commemorate the return from Mesa Grande, Jon Cortina's death, and the annual pilgrimage to the site of the Sumpul River massacre. The neighboring community of Los Ranchos, with a combination of municipal funds and remittances, is able to draw in internationally renowned bands that play "revolutionary music" for its yearly fiestas.

If one's framework for seeing the value of remittance contributions for community development is limited to capitalist activity, then remittances contributed to fiestas and cultural activities, or to community infrastructure that does not appear to improve living conditions, seem like a waste. But by recultivating historical memory through commemorative power, these material markers and events may also be seen to serve as non-capitalist, but highly valued, contributions to community.

Guarjileños are dispersed across several states in the United States and several countries. The community does not have a hometown association that conventionally functions as a group of migrants who can meet in person in a local area to organize community projects funded with the help of remittances. Surplus remittance contributions

to support the community tend to be improvisational with varying degrees of organization. Community leaders in Guarjila remind migrants abroad of community activities and projects that need funding and then appropriately direct and acknowledge the designated money transfers from those who are able to give.

One large project that was carefully organized was the building of Guarjila's first church, something that the community had been wanting for many years. A church is at the heart of many communities in Latin America; community members felt that a church was important to Guarjila's sense of place and permanency. Since the war, they had been using their small, rustic open-air chapel for church services and community meetings. With piece by piece contributions of community members, the construction of the church moved ahead slowly and steadily over the course of several years since 2008. Each week at the end of the church service, the names of those who had donated that week and what they had donated were read aloud. Donations might include a few dollars earned from a local bake sale, a couple bags of cement, or fifty dollars from a migrant abroad.

Benjamin, a Guarjileño who had been living in Virginia for several years, reminded me of the importance of the tedious accountability system. He said that one year he had donated to support activities for the community's senior citizen group. His father was in the group, and he felt that it was important to support the small community of elderly people. He was delighted to receive a video at the end of the year with smiling old folks taking part in the regular activities at their designated communal building. He donated to the group again the following year, but when he did not receive a video in return that time around, he told the group coordinator that he would be putting his money toward something else the next time.

At other times, gathering surplus remittances to support meaningful activities and projects were much more spontaneous and improvisational. On another occasion at Benjamin's house, he passed around a hat and asked if each of us in the room (myself and the others from Guarjila and nearby communities) to donate to the *carerra de cincha*, a fun competition at the annual fiesta in which men ride on horses and try to tag a piece of tape hanging on a line. This was one of Benjamin's favorite activities at the annual fiesta when he lived in Guarjila, and he felt good knowing that his name would be acknowledged as the official sponsor of the event and that he was contributing to the community by helping to cover the costs of the annual fiesta. I was happy to contribute twenty dollars from my wallet to the effort (and moreover felt that it would look bad if I did not).

Communal Care and Well-Being

Migrants also spontaneously gather together funds to support community members in need and in moments of crisis. Let me offer one instance as an example: while I was visiting a Guarjileño in Virginia in 2009, he received a phone call from another community member asking if he could contribute to a pool of money being collected to support medical expenses of a recently arrived migrant who was pregnant and had not yet found employment. He responded that he would gladly help out the young woman (who was also from Guarjila but not from his family) by sending 100 dollars right away. One might call these practices "random acts of kindness", but they are not random. Even if spontaneous, I would suggest that they are actually quite systematic, as they are linked to a strong sense of community and belonging, and to a longer

trajectory of communal logics and practices.

The economic practices of migrants can constitute cross-border systems and strategies, with varying degrees of organization, for taking care of community. By focusing on how remittances, along with other non-monetary resources, are circulated for *taking care*, we can move beyond exclusively developmentalist and capitalist frameworks to conceptualize how people collectively contribute to community well-being. Collectivist practices of taking care entail less than “productive” uses of remittances and migrant-community networks, since they get integrated into broader economic exchanges that do not prioritize development, or by extension, the production of migrant-entrepreneurial subjects. They are based on communal practices and logics that favor community well-being on their own terms, according to their own priorities and values.

One very common cross-border strategy of taking care — in its most direct form, capitalizing on the warmth of family care taking rather than the expenses of outsourced child care — happens when migrant parents, so often working more than full-time hours, send U.S.-born children to be taken care of by grandparents and extended family members for periods of time in El Salvador. Similarly, returned migrants, such as Javier, consider sending their U.S.-born children back to the United States for periods of time under the supervision of family members abroad to take advantage of schools, English-language acquisition, and U.S. citizenship rights. While these practices tend to draw upon more closely-knit family networks than broader community networks, it is nevertheless a strategic and collectivist strategy of taking care, and it is important to mention for two reasons. First, either of the above scenarios is a product of failed U.S. immigration policy as migrants and their “mixed status” families are forced to face extremely difficult

decisions and to cope with the troublesome condition of bi-national division. It is therefore representative of the dilemmas and the cross-border coping practices of migrants' families in many parts of Central America and Mexico. And second, in Guarjila and other communities in eastern Chalatenango, extended family networks and community networks tend to be connected and entangled. Some families have long been taking care of children in the community who are not family members since their parents and immediate family members fled or were killed or disappeared.

The collectivist practices of care taking along community networks often operate in informal ways, as "ad-hoc" collectives come together to circulate remittances or non-monetary resources to support individuals or the community as a whole in difficult circumstances. Just as families use mobility strategically to favor the well-being of their children, collectives of migrants will pool funds to finance the travel of community members across the border, working with the community's well-established transit networks. Travel to the United States from Guarjila via coyote currently costs about 7,000 dollars. While in other areas without a history of collectivist action, individual families might work with lenders to cover trip costs, among Guarjileños, it functions much differently. It is typical for migrants in the United States to contribute two hundred to five hundred dollars each toward the traveling migrant's fund, meaning that anywhere from fifteen to thirty-five people might pool money to pay collectively cover the cost of the trip. Those who contribute tend to be the most trusted friends and community members of the migrant preparing planning travel to the United States. Unlike lending from banks and from informal local lenders, migrants do not pay interest on funds that are lent in this collectivist form. The migrant is expected to pay back each contributor

within reasonable time after finding employment in the United States. Because a number of people contributed a relatively small amount to the fund, the migrant should pay back the debt to avoid shaming or damaged trust within the community. Furthermore, should the migrant not (be able to) repay the debts, because they each contributed only a small fraction of the total cost, those who are collectively financing the trip are protected from what would have been a much more significant financial burden had the lending come only from one or a few individuals in the migrants' immediate family.⁵¹

As I mentioned in Chapter 4, collective funding for travel is common for deported migrants, who arriving to Guarjila, find themselves in the difficult situation of having been suddenly displaced from stable jobs, family, and homes established in the United States. In another example, migrants communally pooled remittances to fund a living stipend for a student from Guarjila who was studying at a Cuban university toward a degree in sports science under an FMLN-supported scholarship. Funding for his living stipend was suddenly no longer available shortly after he began the program. (The student later used the degree to work for El Salvador's National Institute of Sports in an outreach post in Chalatenango communities.) The communal funding (by U.S.-based sources) of the return travel of deported migrants and of the education of someone studying in a country economically embargoed by the United States lends evidence to the powerful way community well-being becomes a political project that challenges (il)legality. In these scenarios, communal logics and practices trump concerns for adhering to U.S. legal frameworks.

A highly organized system of resource pooling I encountered that regularly drew

⁵¹ Based on author's interviews in Maryland in July 2011 with migrants from Guarjila.

from migrants' remittances was in the nearby community of Carasque. In this much smaller "organized community" in eastern Chalatenango, migrants were asked to transfer ten remittance dollars each month to the community's *colectivo comunal* (communal fund), which used the pooled funds to support community resources. Each month, the community drew 50 dollars to be redistributed among elderly community members who most benefited from the income.

The communal redistribution of pooled resources was a well-orchestrated system of collective care that fit into the community's larger efforts to build cooperative activity and community-based assets with the help of its migrant networks. With its small population, Carasque became highly organized and was effective in helping migrants be actively involved in community-building. The community had its own library, park, and immaculately kept soccer field, communally resourced potable water, and several new cooperatives and a *mercadito* (small public market) were under construction. When I visited Carasque in 2009, its *directiva's* president was a migrant who had voluntarily returned, and he was proactive in keeping migrants involved in community projects.

When the economic recession hit, migrants' contributions to Carasque's *colectivo comunal* were put on hold. The stream of remittances reaching Guarjila was also affected by the recession. These changes, rather than weakening communal practices, actually reaffirmed the value Chalatecos place on communal resource sharing; times of crisis further activate efforts to reconstitute community. As I mentioned above, there were some instances in Guarjila in which families sent "reverse remittances" to migrants in the United States in an effort to help them weather tough times, and many families chose to again farm a larger portion of their land. Similar to Carasque and other "organized

communities,” Guarjila had its own long-standing system of pooling surplus resources. Sacks of corn, beans, and rice are gathered in the casa communal, donated after each growing season by local families. They are regularly redistributed to take care of elderly and marginalized community members (typically from the handful of families that do not receive remittances), and they collectively can be used as a reserve should community members encounter unusually difficult circumstances or a moment of crisis. Similar to Carasque, the redistribution of surplus (in Guarjila’s case, non-monetary) resources functions as a redistribution system to favor more equitable conditions and well-being on the community scale.

In November 2009, when Salvadorans in the United States and in El Salvador were fully feeling the effects of the economic recession that began a year earlier, El Salvador was hit by severe flooding from Hurricane Ida. Guarjileños were among the least affected, and marginalized communities that sit on the banks of Lake Ilopango, an enormous crater lake 20 miles east of San Salvador, were among the most affected. The downpour produced landslides that pummeled homes, destroyed crops, and killed several hundred people. The humanitarian aid that poured in was poorly organized and unevenly distributed. The varying levels of geographic isolation and accessibility of the lakeside communities, the interests of local politicians, and the politics of humanitarian aid practicing itself all conditioned how and where aid was distributed. And contrary to the hypotheses of international aid, remittances played a remarkably insignificant role in subsidizing international aid, given the conditions of economic crisis and the marginalization of many of the communities (Tellman 2011).

Guarjileños who traveled to the communities to offer them surplus sacks of staple

crops were struck not only by the ineffectiveness of humanitarian aid, but also by the challenges these communities faced in organizing post-disaster reconstruction efforts. They felt that Guarjila, should it encounter a similar disaster or a sudden drop in remittances, was comparatively “privileged” because of its strong knowledge of organization, its commitment to pooling resources, its consistent support from NGOs, and its local practice of maintaining some degree of local agricultural production—even though for most families, remittances could typically now supply enough income to cover food costs.

This sentiment was shared by Pablito, a twenty year-old from Guarjila who was attending college in San Salvador, when we had a conversation over pupusas on a rainy night in the city in October 2012. It had been raining steadily for weeks, re-inundating communities that had suffered devastation three years earlier during Hurricane Ida. Pablito was leading an outreach group of San Salvador-based university students who were offering a helping hand to a now flooded hillside community in the southern department of La Libertad. Upon seeing what he perceived to be extreme conditions of marginality, a problematic dependency on remittances, and a need for better community organization, he felt compelled to return again and again to the community, investing much more than his required university community service hours and taking on an active role in organizing the community as he continued to coordinate the outreach group.

Superación

Pablito belonged to a younger generation of Guarjileños who had sought out other options than emigration, setting them apart from older siblings and relatives who saw no

choice but to leave El Salvador. Pablito is the youngest of four brothers, the rest of whom had emigrated to Virginia and New Jersey in the late 1990s and early 2000s when they were teenagers. (Beto, whose story I have been telling, is the second oldest brother in this family.) By the late 2000s, migration from the community had slowed down to a trickle as the overwhelming majority of young people in their teens and twenties were working toward a personal future other than undocumented U.S. emigration. Remarkably, just a few years earlier, most young adults were migrating to the United States.

The growth of remittances has played a significant role in the community's turn away from widespread emigration. A stream of income from the remittances of family members abroad has reduced the need for other family members to have to migrate. Remittances have helped to introduce a wider range of possibilities for a younger generation interested in pursuing other options. In the 1990s, it was not uncommon for parents to pressure their children to leave the country to help make ends meet. Today, it is common to hear parents speak of their desire to see distant family members come home, or of their wishes to see those of their children who still remain in El Salvador, who may be contemplating migration, to choose to stay in the country. This change is largely linked to growing concerns over worsening conditions for immigrants in the United States and of travel for undocumented migrants in transit, a shift that also weighs heavily on the life choices of those of a younger generation who have not followed the migration path of other family members.

When used as a means to support the wishes of young people seeking out other futures than undocumented U.S. emigration, remittances most commonly get directed to finance their college education. Beto, working long hours six to seven days a week to

raise his family in New Jersey and committed to supporting his mother and Pablito's college fund back in El Salvador, repeatedly put it like this when he spoke of his vision for Pablito's future: "the decision to migrate or not should be *his choice*." His emphasis that Pablito should have a *choice* is a reminder that Beto himself did not. Migrating from El Salvador when he was Pablito's age, ten years earlier in 2002, because he had an immediate need to support his family and saw no means to do so in El Salvador. He understood migration to be his only viable option.

The directing of remittances to build other possible futures for a younger generation extends the concept of *taking care* toward the goal of *superación* (overcoming). *Superarse* is a verb that Chalatecos have uttered throughout time; there really is nothing new to it. It is a word of choice employed by Chalatecos to express individual and collective intentions to overcome structural constraints and barriers, to rise above past struggles and setbacks, to get ahead in life, to build a better future. Indeed, the long trajectory of collective action among Chalatecos have constituted a constant effort toward *superación*.

From the perspective of many of those from the younger generation of Guarjileños, the most promising form of *superación* entailed aspiring to professional careers. A 2009 study led by El Salvador's Universidad Panamericana used discussion groups and poetic and artistic expression to explore the "attitudes and understandings" that condition the "life projects" or "cosmovisions" of young people in two CCR-affiliated communities with high remittance levels in eastern Chalatenango. The participants, who represented the general heterogeneity of young people in the communities, all expressed that they aspired to professional careers with university or

technical education (Quintana Salazar & Winship 2009).

The professional aspirations of young people in the region challenges the rather delimiting developmentalist assumption that people of rural communities with high emigration and remittances, if not destined for low-skilled immigrant labor abroad, should capitalize on the remittances they currently receive to open micro-businesses in their “home” communities. This assumption that has guided the logic of some development specialists who continue to have a rather one-dimensional and presumptuous view of the “capacities” or “responsibilities” of “rural poor” people from a homogeneously imagined *campo*.

Many young Guarjileños wanted something different out of their future than to work selling food at family-run *tienditas*, *comedores* and *pupuserias*. And the feasibility of more creative entrepreneurial endeavors was uncertain and entailed significant risk that many did not want to assume in a regional economy dependent on remittances. Many efforts led by the CCR and local NGOs to start new sorts of small-scale cooperatives had flopped shortly after opening. For those who were not pursuing professional degrees, some of the most promising local economic options were community-based: they found viable work in the community masonry economy or in cooperatively-run welding and carpentry workshops that were not overseen by NGOs. The community-based clinic, schools, and regionally operating NGOs were another minor source of employment for some who had acquired a degree or some level of professional training.

Recent national migration and development discussions around how rural people should invest their remittances “productively” have acknowledged that directing them toward college education in El Salvador is one form of “investment,” though it may not

be the best. Part of the reasoning behind this critique is because El Salvador's respected universities are located in San Salvador, and most offered the same set of long-standing majors that destined their students for well-saturated professional job markets. Tens of thousands of students were studying to be lawyers, doctors, business administrators, with the hope that they could put their education to work even for low salaries. The two-hour bus ride from Guarjila, and the significant investment in city living expenses meant that young people and their families were betting on uncertain futures.

The government has taken a few small steps recently toward expanding professional and education options in rural areas. FOMILENIO had made the first effort to bring a respected regional higher education option to Chalatenango. Its promising new campus built in 2009 offered new technical degrees aimed at spurring local development. Unfortunately, paying for its cost of attendance, for many Chalatecos, necessitated getting accepted to its scholarship program or counting on migrants' remittances. Even so, community members seemed to have a hard time imagining that Guarjila would someday be a place that would see regular employment from thriving local businesses and industry. As was the case with FOMILENIO's highway, they had long received economic and human development initiatives with skepticism, whether supported by the state, by international agencies, or by local and regional community leaders. After all, they had already developed and honed their own tactics of *superación*, one of which was migration itself. Two young men who worked in construction and welding, as they meandered through the resettled community's roads in the evenings, would often joke that one day it would have tall buildings, large supermarkets, and banks. They would sarcastically refer to their home (in English) as "Guarjila City."

No matter the potential impediments coming from failed regional and national development (and education) policies and planning, Chalatecos from communities in the eastern region were long known by nationals and internationals for being savvy and for being fighters. What is important here is that these young people, who did not see viability in solely working the land the way their parents had, or in migrating as their older siblings had, were taking on an active personal-political life project to find other future paths, to resist displacement. Many expressed a desire to travel to the United States to visit family, or to work and live, but *legally*.

Some were explicit about the politics of their struggle to follow a different life trajectory than undocumented emigration, particularly those from a slightly earlier generation who were most evidently going against the stream of migrants in the 2000s. Among the few who went against the stream of emigrants their age in the early 2000s, three young men were able to secure student scholarships. After doing so, they made it a clear political intention to put their degrees to work in Chalatenango. One returned to teach at a school in a neighboring community, two others earned degrees in Cuba where one became a doctor and has recently returned to work in the community clinic, and the other studied sports science and runs regional recreational programs. As a pioneering cohort of community members to earn professional degrees who were old enough to have experienced the civil war and who saw nearly all of their peers migrate, they were arguably the most intentional and explicitly political of any whom I have met about articulating the “rooting” of their work and their futures in place.

Furthermore, the efforts of a younger generation toward *superación* by building an *option to not* migrate, enabled through rooted community networks, also constitute

personal-political projects. Although those pursuing professional degrees knew that viable employment may very well be far away from Guarjila, a sense of rootedness and an attachment to community continued to shape commitments and subjectivities. On the weekdays, they were in San Salvador studying for degrees including journalism, civil engineering, international relations, social work, education, law, or business. On the weekends, they would typically return to Guarjila, staying involved in a range of community activities (teaching an art class to members of the youth group, working at the community radio station, organizing cultural activities, assuming a leadership role on a community project). Juan (the 20-year-old whose entire family lives in the United States, whose story I told to open this dissertation), is still contemplating whether or not to pursue a university degree and has been working as the ambulance driver for the community clinic, offering local rides, and playing in his local band. In 2013, he was elected to serve as the president of the community's directiva.

The practices and trajectories interlinking migrants and other community members discussed in this chapter shed light on the diverse ways that people work to reconstitute community and build paths to preferred futures and well-being on their own terms. For Guarjileños, who are from a community with strong cross-border ties, rooted community networks play a significant role in this work. By following the social, economic, and political practices and the life projects of migrants and non-migrants, we are able to broaden our conceptualizations of development and transnational activity beyond dominant versions advocated by the Salvadoran state and international development specialists. In the next chapter, I further explore the emerging shift toward building “an option to not migrate” in El Salvador more broadly by discussing how cross-

border networks of migrant-community activists and political actors are working to shift the state's development framework away from its neoliberal legacy of advocating for emigration and remittances.

CHAPTER 6

Beyond Remittances

“We cannot continue to indiscriminately export our most valuable asset, our human capital. The objective of the new focus that we are implementing aims to make migration a choice in the lives of Salvadorans, a voluntary decision, not a survival option or the fruit of desperation...as I said in my inaugural address: a country that is incapable of housing its children cannot live in happiness.”

Mauricio Funes, President of El Salvador, addressing the public at the annual convention of Salvadoreños en el Mundo, San Salvador, December 8, 2009

The words of President Funes, directed to a cross-border association of Salvadorans that aims to represent the interests of the country's diaspora, were delivered at a moment of political change, rising disillusionment with neoliberal development, and heightened concern over the conditions of international migration. An unsympathetic climate marked by shifting practices of immigration enforcement, record-level deportations, anti-Latino sentiment, and economic recession have made life increasingly difficult for marginalized migrants. Undocumented Salvadorans en route through Mexico, among other migrants, are now targeted by drug smuggling organizations that subject them to new conditions of vulnerability and violence, aggravated by the U.S.-driven “war on drugs.” And in El Salvador itself, the persistent and deepening dependence on migration and remittances as a livelihood strategy for so many Salvadoran families has become a source of growing preoccupation, breeding disillusionment with neoliberal promises that the state's political and economic strategies have been building a

viable future.

This chapter explores how, at the current conjuncture, national and cross-border networks of activists are intentionally challenging the state's developmentalist discourse and its neoliberal political-economic project that looks favorably on emigration and harnessing remittances as a key resource in development. Since the ending of the civil war, the neoliberal state has encouraged migration and remittances in favor of a particular developmentalist imaginary of "progress" and well-being for a "transnational" El Salvador. By focusing on demands made by transnational migrant community activists at a series of events as El Salvador's government took a leftward turn, this chapter examines the way developmentalist-centered politics, discourses, and logics on transnational migration are contested and re-imagined. The collective articulation of activists' demands makes way for new political imaginaries of transnational state formations, migration, and development.

The focus of the dissertation therefore returns to the migration landscape of El Salvador as a whole, the development of which was charted in Chapter 2. As a form of networked activism representing the interests of migrants and their communities, the push for the Salvadoran state to shift its politics of migration and development is evidence of the reality that the experience of Guarjileños, and other Chalatecos, is by no means one of isolation. Rather, the strategic practices they have developed to navigate conditions are a manifestation of a widely shared discontent with the conditions produced out of failed migration policies and development strategies coming from both El Salvador and the United States. In the previous chapter, we saw how people reconstitute and turn to community as a source of strength as they navigate the current terrain of U.S.

immigration and the double marginalization they experience in El Salvador in the wake of war and in a national state that, as Salvadoran economists and activists put it, “expels” its own people. Networked, rooted, and communal practices interlinking migrants and their communities introduce other possibilities for understanding how people use mobility and cross-border flows to make a better future. Guarjileños’ return trajectories, engagement with community economies and non-capitalist practices, and struggles to build other options than emigration all challenge the particular capitalist and developmentalist framework advocated by the Salvadoran state. This chapter highlights how this developmentalist framework is being challenged directly and reworked by activist and political actors in other ways at a historic moment of change. By broadening the lens, we can see how the contingent (yet powerful) practices of Chalatecos are also temporally conditioned. Diverse struggles that are just as contingent emerge, connect, and gain strength at conjunctural moments. One important struggle that has come out of these connections: that other viable options than undocumented emigration can and should be made possible for Salvadorans.

Evidence for this chapter is based on my engagement in discussions at various events, presentations, forums, and meetings of migrant rights activists, organizations addressing the interests of migrants, development specialists, government officials, and scholars of migration. These took place between 2008 and 2011 and were mainly in San Salvador, but also include events that took place in Mexico City, Washington DC, and Los Angeles. I also draw from several interviews that came out of these engagements. Investigation into the meanings and discourses (re)constructed through the collective claims being made by these various political actors thus necessarily entailed networked

ethnography. Drawing from this evidence, this chapter offers a broad analysis of how the political discourse on emigration from El Salvador, and the policies that have engendered such emigration, have been recently contested and reframed in response to shifting migration conditions and out of emergent efforts to rearticulate state formations in ways that challenge conventional neoliberal development frameworks.

One particularly interesting trend emerged over the course of my engagement with these actors and events during this period. Out of growing discontent with worsening migration conditions and with the state's neoliberal development strategies, coupled with high expectations for El Salvador's first ever FMLN-led government with the election of President Mauricio Funes in 2009, transnational Salvadoran activists and organizations working with migrants and their communities began pressuring for a reformulation of the state's migration politics that would go, as they put it, "mas allá de las remesas" (beyond remittances). They contended that the government lacked "any clear and comprehensive migration policies" but instead pushed on with a tunnel vision strategy that prioritized garnering remittances and left from view urgent concerns and threatening conditions affecting Salvadorans within and outside of the national territory.⁵²

Going "beyond remittances" was first employed by leaders of the diaspora to refer to the state's failure to recognize what migrants considered to be other, non-monetary contributions they were making to Salvadoran society. While I conducted research in El Salvador from the time of Funes's presidential campaign in 2008 well into the first half of his term in 2011, the phrase was reiterated at a number of strategic meetings, public

⁵² The "lack of a clear and comprehensive migration politics" was a salient phrase frequently used by activists and the new government at public events, where they planted alternative platforms and demands for policy reform.

presentations, conventions, and forums to discuss public policy and international migration, during which diverse organizations working in the interest of migrants and their cross-border communities (including networks of human rights activists, humanitarian organizations, legal advocates, various NGOs, and representatives of migrant organizations abroad), began making demands of the new government, calling for a closer engagement with their agendas.

As migrant activists continued to confront a growing set of concerns linked to the rapidly changing conditions of Salvadoran migration, the idea of going “beyond remittances” came to encompass a broader critique of the state’s developmentalist politics on migration. Seizing the (perhaps momentary) political opportunity yielded during El Salvador’s own “turn to the Left”, activists pressured the government to address the transnational reality of hardship that Salvadoran migrants were currently facing.

In what follows, I will first discuss the theoretical significance of the emergent push to shift the state’s politics on migration. Coming out of the conjuncture, as a whole, activists are pushing for a revaluing of the lives of migrants over capitalist development to shape a different kind of future for El Salvador. I will then discuss several of the claims being made on the state, coming from various strands of activists. They called upon the state to extend more services to migrants abroad, to provide services to the massive wave of deportees arriving to El Salvador, to reach out to undocumented migrants in transit who were now navigating what activists labeled “crisis” conditions, and to rework development strategies to focus on building other options than undocumented emigration for marginalized Salvadorans. These political claims

ultimately amounted to a remarkable contestation of the state's developmentalist political strategy and discourse on migration, as activists were collectively, and quite urgently, calling on the state to stop "expelling migrants."⁵³

Conceptualizing Networked Activism at the Conuncture

I suggest that activists' pressures to make new sense of and respond to El Salvador's migration experience "beyond remittances" are dynamized at the current conjuncture of aggravated migration conditions and a moment of growing disillusionment with neoliberal state formations in El Salvador and elsewhere in the region. The conjuncture, in this case, can be conceptualized in historical-political terms, as a critical moment of overdetermination out of which new political and social struggles are produced (Grossberg 2005). The conditions of Central American international migration today, in which undocumented migrants are prey to a range of both licit and illicit actors — from corporations, to governments, to drug cartels — did not naturally evolve but were produced in relation to sets of events linked to projects of state sovereignty, security, and global capitalism, including Central American counter-insurgency wars, free trade agreements, and the tightening of international border security.

Amid what they viewed as a developing crisis and a key moment of political opportunity, transnational networks of migrant rights activists have worked to shift the predominant discourse that has governed subjectivities on the meaning and value of migration for Salvadoran well-being. As David Graeber reminds us, the coding and

⁵³ The reference to El Salvador as a "país expulsor de personas" was commonly employed by activists and analysts.

organization of value does not operate on universal terms but is contextually conditioned, and political struggles arise not just over the unequal accumulation of value, but also over “how value itself is to be defined” (Graeber 2001: 115). Value is in itself historically and conjuncturally produced, and it is integral to the making of other possible futures (Graeber 2001; Grossberg 2005). Rather than valuing migrants as sacrificial actors to favor a particular (neoliberal) version of national progress, activists were revisioning El Salvador’s future by calling for a revaluing of human life and a much different concept of development and well-being in transnational terrain.

As key players in the making of incipient or full-fledged social movements, activist networks and organizers are important political actors, whether they operate within or outside of institutional politics, and they are capable of collectively producing diverse political imaginaries (Alvarez et al. 1998; Edelman 2001). The state has long been a target point of contentions by activists and movement organizers (Tarrow 1998; Tarrow & Tilly 2007), with Latin America as no exception (Slater 1985). For migrant communities with transnational belongings (abroad and “at home”), contentious political demands get directed toward multiple and increasingly transnationally spatialized states (Ferguson & Gupta 2002) that only partially recognize migrants’ presence and confer incomplete forms of citizenship (Ong 1996, 1999; Rosaldo 1997; Coutin 2007). In the case of El Salvador, the denial of full citizenship is not in the name of sovereignty or multiculturalism; the “expulsion” of people from national territory and denial of full membership is in the name of a particular version of development, “progress”, and modernity. Activism in response to the developmentalist project of El Salvador’s “transnational” state draws attention to the reality that migrant struggles can no longer be

strictly conceptualized on national scales and according to individualist “immigrant rights” frameworks. Rather, the story of Salvadoran transnational activism represents a cross-border coalescence of political work by diverse actors that is increasingly networked, standing not only for migrant rights in places of destination (and in-between), but also favoring the collective sense of dignity and well-being of migrants’ communities in places of origin.

Network trajectories of transnational migrant activism have followed the paths of the mobile subjects they represent to intervene in multiple geographies, forging novel cross-border connections. Long-standing and emergent associations of immigrant and diasporic communities have connected with human rights and legal advocacy organizations addressing the transitory circumstances of migrants, as well as with “grassroots” organizations hoping to empower people in places where emigration originates, and new dialogues have opened between governmental and non-governmental actors.

In pursuit of developmentalist aspirations, the state has assumed little more than a regulatory role in the formation of a migration politics geared toward what the government phrases as “regularizing” flows of migrants and their remittances. This remittance-focused political strategy on migration has become a source of discontent, especially as marginalized migrants have faced new hardships recently in a hostile U.S. immigration climate and amid economic recession, and as the human toll of undocumented international migration continues to be felt by Salvadoran families, even more so in recent years. By crossing El Salvador’s transnational geography of migration, ethnographically and analytically, we can highlight how the range of interests pursued in

the demands of various political actors, within and outside of El Salvador, have contested the legacy of the neoliberal state's developmentalist migration politics and introduced a new discursive framing that is shifting the way international migration is understood, experienced, and valued in El Salvador's transnational imaginary.

“Las vacas flacas siempre lecheras”

In December 2008, just a few months before the national presidential election, *Salvadoreños en el Mundo* (Salvadorans in the World, or SEEM), an association that seeks to advance the interests of the Salvadoran diaspora, held its annual convention in San Salvador, an event aimed at fostering collective discussion and political advocacy efforts around issues of shared concern. The theme for the convention, “The human capital of the diaspora: Beyond Remittances”, was meant to highlight migrants' non-monetary contributions to the making of “transnational” El Salvador. As part of a continued effort to advance SEEM's years-long campaign for political representation and voting rights in Salvadoran national elections, the thematic was chosen to underscore the idea that emigrants should be viewed as valued participants in Salvadoran society, rather than as an expendable labor force whose value was measured only in remittances (Hallett & Baker-Cristales 2010).

Mauricio Funes, the critical journalist chosen to represent the FMLN who later won the election, was received with a roaring applause at the convention, where he talked about his campaign promises to please the diaspora with new public policies and initiatives on migration. (Consistent with other occasions, ARENA's candidate declined his invitation to present a platform to migrant community advocates.) SEEM was not the

only network targeting the Left-leaning leadership. Networks and coalitions of organizations representing migrants had either been recently formed, reawakened from dormancy, or were growing in influence.⁵⁴ By the time of Funes' inauguration in June 2009, they descended upon San Salvador and approached the new government with strategic proposals in a frenzy of luncheons, receptions, and meetings, mingling in suits and dresses with diplomats, legislators, and newly appointed cabinet members inside the city's hotel banquet halls and cultural centers.

As Beth Baker-Cristales (2008) suggests, leaders of organizations serving the diaspora were, in their view at least, considered to be real political actors that had come to represent a significant portion of El Salvador's population better than the Salvadoran state. Yet these networks represented a relatively small cohort of migrant activists, many of whom were involved in the initial Salvadoran refugee activism of the 1980s, whose own experiences of immigration differed significantly from the more recent, illegalized wave of migrants that their organizations also represented. Their decades of work for migrant rights advocacy in the United States had in many ways now been co-opted by the state in favor of regulating subjectivities and garnering remittances, extending the state's transnational governmentality (Baker-Cristales 2008). And, as the most eager sponsors of their work are corporations that profit from transnational migrant activism, another form of governmentality is reproduced that is driven by market interests and transnational

⁵⁴ Most notably, influential in representing interests of the U.S. Salvadoran community were *Salvadoreños en el Mundo* (SEEM), the Salvadoran American National Association (SANA), the Salvadoran American National Network (SANN), and *Concilio Nacional Salvadoreño Americano* (the Salvadoran American National Council, or CSAN) which was formed most recently. Leaders of these organizations were generally involved in the initial advocacy efforts for Salvadoran immigrant legality in the 1980s and many of them continue their activist work in various organizations today on behalf of Salvadorans or other U.S. immigrant groups.

capitalism. At the 2009 SEEM convention, a young woman modeling in a cocktail dress handed me a free bright yellow hat and a coupon packet for American-chain fast food restaurants from a key sponsor: *Western Union*.

Despite their entanglements with market and state efforts to advance remittance flows, these migrant activists viewed their organizations as part of a “transnational civil society” charged with the responsibility of advocating for social policies and resources to be extended to migrants. They understood their work as one of advocating for migrants’ civil rights, access to resources, opportunities for development, and a more inclusionary status not just within the United States, but also as Salvadoran citizens living abroad with the same entitlements from the state as those in El Salvador. With the recent turn in leadership, they wanted to have a more leveled playing field and closer engagement with the state to advance their interests, and some of them were hopeful they would be assigned posts in the new government.

At a meeting of the Salvadoran American National Network (SANN), just prior to inauguration day, activists convened to strategize about how “to contribute to the construction of a transnational space” by building common objectives among governmental and a range of cross-border non-governmental actors, and by identifying and promoting the interests *and expectations* of the U.S. Salvadoran community to the new government. Of course, the state had long held common objectives with migrant rights activists. As discussion ensued at the meeting, one U.S.-based advocate commented that “the Right had done a lot in the way of immigrant rights,” including the former ARENA government’s opening of new consulates and campaigning for renewals of TPS (Temporary Protected Status, the provisional legal immigration status obtained by

a few hundred thousand eligible Salvadorans in the United States). A San Salvador-based activist elaborated that these initiatives were, however, tied to “the state’s strategy to relocate part of the population abroad.”⁵⁵ In their view, a “transnational space” of political action did not exist if the state’s transnational political engagement was motivated purely out of economic interests.

The other dimension of this construction of a different kind of transnational political space was hinged on the claim that the state disproportionately placed expectations on migrants to sacrifice and contribute for a better El Salvador, and that, if they were actually considered to be members of a transnational citizenry, as it was framed in state discourse, then they too had a set of claims on the state. As one Washington DC-based activist described it to me, “*Somos las vacas flacas siempre lecheras*” (we are the skinny cows always getting milked).⁵⁶ His expression reflects a widely-held sentiment of the diaspora: that of being drained, of being taken advantage of by the state, with little in return.

Demands of what the state “owed” to Salvadoran migrants became charged with frustration at the December 2009 SEEM convention in San Salvador, as high expectations and campaign promises of the new government, now well into its first year, were far from being met. The limits and possibilities of what could be expected of the state were up for debate at the convention, but as a starting point activists wanted the Vice Ministry for Salvadorans Abroad to be elevated to full status of Ministry to be able to offer extensive services and resources to the migrant community. Their demands were

⁵⁵ April 27th, 2009, San Salvador at SANN meeting.

⁵⁶ Author’s interview with Salvadoran activists, March 14, 2010, Washington DC.

built on cognizance of the strategic, remittance-motivated state discourse that aimed to remind emigrants of their affective attachment to *patria*. As one activist put it during a discussion panel, “we cannot continue with the political myth of the *hermano lejano*.”⁵⁷ The idea that more state resources should extend across “transnational” El Salvador to reach migrants in the United States was also a reminder that these migrants continued to struggle with new forms of marginalization and exclusion in their new geography, even as they had followed a path that would, according to the language and measurements of the discourse on migration and development favored by the state, presumably lead to conditions of “improved well-being”.⁵⁸

A Shifting Terrain of International Migration

In recent years, the terrain of international migration has rapidly shifted for Salvadorans. The United States began tightening immigration enforcement since the immigrant mega-marches of spring 2006, and by the end of 2008 the economy sank into a recession, leaving marginalized and undocumented migrants out of work. Leaders of the Salvadoran diaspora and immigrant rights organizations saw a new level of urgency in forging a coherent strategy and collective effort (with the help of the Salvadoran government) to push for legalization paths for Salvadorans.⁵⁹ The last time Salvadorans

⁵⁷ December 9th, 2009, San Salvador at SEEM Convention.

⁵⁸ For example, consistent with the logic it presents in other reports, the UNDP’s 2009 Human Development Report titled “Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development,” which was presented to the public in San Salvador, reminds its readership that people can generally find “improved well-being” upon migrating to areas with a higher ranking on the agency’s Human Development Index (UNDP 2009:9).

⁵⁹ One noteworthy example of such efforts was the September 2009 gathering of more than a hundred leaders of organizations and networks representing Salvadoran migrants in Washington DC for the first

arriving illegally to the United States were granted TPS status was just after El Salvador's 2001 earthquakes, meaning that more recent arrivals are often denied access to any legal immigration status, which has further scarred Salvadoran migrants with a status of "illegality" and "deportability" (De Genova 2002). Record-level deportations from the United States in recent years took on a new level of concern among transnational activists on both sides of El Salvador's border. Activists in the United States interpreted new enforcement initiatives under George W. Bush and Barack Obama that streamlined deportations with the help of local authorities as a tactic that unfairly targeted Latino immigrants. And in El Salvador, receiving more than 20,000 deported migrants from the United States annually overwhelmed the minimally staffed government office in charge of processing their arrival and flooded the handful of temporary shelters that received them.⁶⁰

Bienvenidos a Casa (Welcome Home, or BAC), El Salvador's program since 1999 to receive and assist deportees at the airport, was once viewed as a model for the region. But by 2004 when BAC was moved from the oversight of an NGO to *Migración y Extranjería*, the government's agency for immigration and security, activists complained that the program was no longer outreach-motivated but instead became a processing site that extended the state's hand as a manager of migration flows. With the growth of deported gang members from U.S. cities during the 1990s, deportees came to

ever "Salvadoran American Leadership Summit". Representatives of the Salvadoran government, Latino advocacy organizations, and U.S. Congress were invited to the event to cooperate in the push for U.S. immigration reform.

⁶⁰ According to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) reports (2010, 2011), the agency deported 21,049 Salvadorans from the United States in 2009 and 20,975 in 2008. During those two years combined, the number of all immigrant deportations from the United States reached a total of 757,011.

be treated by the state as a potential security threat, and BAC soon became a venue for authorities to profile for tattooed markings that signaled potential gang membership. Citing several wrongful incarcerations, Salvadoran human rights activists advocated against the tactic and drew attention to its stigmatizing effects.

Deportation has since come to be understood as an event that increasingly affects “ordinary” folks. Human rights advocates emphasize that the vast majority received from the United States were sent back just after crossing the border and for non-criminal infractions, or, as one activist phrased it, for “cultural misdemeanors.”⁶¹ The new tidal wave of deported migrants has posed a threat to the state’s developmentalist project, as the precarious status of forced returnees disrupts the expected flows of emigrants and remittances and produces the new problem of wide-scale reintegration. The state has treated deportees as problematized subjects, seeking to mitigate, through its managerial work, what could potentially develop into a social and economic mess. BAC, as deported migrants described it, had turned into little more than an interview, a plate of El Salvador’s traditional *pupusas*, a pep talk, and a job board. Returnees were encouraged to behave well and to try to find a job — if they had qualified English skills, they could seek work in the burgeoning industry of bilingual call centers, which employed a flexible and transient labor force that tends to draw a mix of college students and deportees.

When the government changed hands, the *Red para las Migraciones* (the Network for Migration), a recently-formed El Salvador-based activist network seeking to influence

⁶¹ Translated by author from “delitos culturales” in Spanish and taken from author’s interview with a Salvadoran activist on November 5, 2008 in San Salvador. Enforcement programs including 287 (g) and *Secure Communities* have constructed new collaborations between ICE and local authorities to facilitate deportations. ICE reported that 29,922 of the 42,024 total deportations to El Salvador in 2008 and 2009 (71%) were for non-criminal infractions.

migratory policies, along with human rights organizations, began pressuring the state to go beyond its managerial strategy on deportation to instead take seriously the question of labor reintegration and to address their concerns that deportees' rights were being violated due to inconsistent processing standards both in El Salvador and in the United States. As a gesture that the state would no longer treat deportation as a security issue but as outreach to emigrants, BAC was moved in 2011 from the direction of *Migración y Extranjería* to the Vice Ministry for Salvadorans Abroad. Even so, the surge in deportations has become an overwhelming burden both for migrant rights advocates and for the state, a situation framed by activists as one limb of a larger "crisis" that had come to define the transitory milieu of Salvadoran migration.

Of the most pressing concerns of migrant rights activists in El Salvador was what they now viewed as a catastrophic situation in Mexico. Central American undocumented migrants traveling through Mexico, whose clandestine status already made them long-time subjects of a host of abuses and threats while en route, have been increasingly targeted by organized criminal bands that have proliferated in recent years (most notably, the *Zetas*). Horrific stories were now reaching El Salvador of migrants that were sequestered, abused, tortured, and found in mass graves.

It was in November 2009, in a packed auditorium at the UCA (the university where six Jesuits, their housekeeper and her daughter were massacred exactly twenty years earlier), that I first heard the situation of migrants in transit referred to as "a humanitarian crisis". It was assessed as such by a team of journalists of *El Faro*, El Salvador's independent online newspaper rooted in the critical tradition of the UCA, who had just returned from a year of accompanying migrants in Mexico — jumping on trains

and staying in shelters — and were presenting the initial makings of a multi-media report from the experience. The images and stories shared that night were jarring and triggered emotional responses among the public.

Their work fit within a growing amplitude of media reports, films, research, and activist publications that were shedding light on the situation. A partially hidden social reality of “clandestinity” (Coutin 2005), the troublesome story of migrants en route was now reaching the public eye. International human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International, also framed it as “a humanitarian crisis”, and, following the lead of *El Faro*, it came to be consistently labeled as such by Salvadorans in national presentations and forums on migration, including in the 2009 SEEM Convention where “the drama of migrants in transit” was chosen as that year’s theme. The *El Faro* journalists spent a year presenting the developing products of their investigation at national and international spaces of discussion on Central American migration. At one meeting, after I told one of the journalists that I was doing research around the question of migration and development, he snapped back with an unsolicited rebuttal that no more research on development or remittances was needed in El Salvador. Human rights issues and migration conditions, he stated, merited more attention.⁶² His comment was demonstrative of the recent push to broaden the national conversation on migration beyond remittances, to unearth missing stories.

Like immigrant rights advocacy abroad, protecting migrants in transit from human rights violations and dangers had long been a convergent point of interest of both activists and the state. After all, ensuring the safe passage of undocumented emigrants

⁶² Working group meeting with *El Faro* journalists, February 23, 2010, San Salvador.

served the state's interest in "regularizing" flows of migrants and their remittances. The Salvadoran government increasingly showed its support for multilateral agencies that promoted policy research and initiatives to improve in-transit migration conditions, and it recently made agreements with the Mexican government to establish basic standards to prevent labor exploitation and to guide procedures for the detention, deportation, and repatriation of remains of undocumented migrants.⁶³

By framing the conditions as a "crisis", activists were calling for the state to go beyond its tactic of steadying flows through risk minimization. As an initial engagement with their demands, shortly after shifting into the hands of the FMLN, the Vice Ministry for Salvadorans Abroad held a closed-door meeting with the *El Faro* journalists, instated well-established migrant rights activists in new posts at Salvadoran consulates in Mexico, and freed up UN funds (that had been indefinitely frozen by the former government) to build an international information database about disappeared migrants. But with unprecedented numbers of disappearances, activists wanted a more radical intervention.⁶⁴

COFAMID, a coalition of family members of disappeared migrants in search of their loved ones, had demanded of Mexican authorities more thorough investigations into disappearances, but their efforts produced futile results. Activists were skeptical that similar political advocacy and the opening of new consulates in Mexico, two proposals

⁶³ Based on publications distributed to the author by the Vice Ministry for Salvadorans Abroad and the author's interview with a representative from the agency on March 2, 2009 in San Salvador.

⁶⁴ Estimates of violence and disappearances, especially against migrants, in Mexico are highly problematic. A recent special report from what is perhaps one of the most comprehensive sources available, Mexico's National Commission on Human Rights, states that disappearances and violence against migrants continues to rise. From January to December 2010, for example, it documented 214 total kidnapping events of migrants, of which there were 11,333 victims. Migrants testimonies offered revealed that 16% of the victims were Salvadorans and another 60% hailed from elsewhere in Central America (CNDH 2011:26-28).

on the table for the new government, would do much to improve conditions.

The discovery in August 2010 of the mass grave of 72 Central and South American migrants in the state of Tamaulipas, Mexico, generated a new level of outcry in El Salvador, from which thirteen of the migrants hailed. According to investigators and the three lone survivors, the *Zetas* were responsible for killing the migrants, who were unable to pay for their kidnappings. Activists complained that the incident was not thoroughly investigated, and that it was depicted in news coverage as an extraordinary tragedy, when in reality, stories of mass exhumations in Mexico were becoming quite ordinary.⁶⁵ The roused sense of urgency gave force to a critical discourse that had been emerging among migrant community activists: that beyond pushing for channels for legal migration, El Salvador must forge a new political economic strategy to counter its status as “a country that expels its people.”

Toward Other Futures

The emphasis that the human toll of emigration could no longer be ignored sparked a reassessment of El Salvador’s development strategies. In response to the humanitarian conditions they were addressing, organizations and networks representing migrants and their communities began employing the idea that Salvadorans needed “an option to *not* migrate”, which could, in theory, be realized through economic and social policies and programs that addressed undocumented emigration directly as an issue of concern. Already, critical views of the remittance-centered, open market economy had

⁶⁵ For example, the following year, 193 bodies were exhumed near the same site in Tamaulipas. Activists complain that stories of such killings are receiving trivial news coverage in Mexican and international news sources.

been building in the discussions of scholars and activists. Appealing to the migrant community activists, Mauricio Funes took up the language of “an option to not migrate” in his speeches by the time of his presidential campaign as part of his platform for a broad reform of El Salvador’s migration politics.

According to Funes, mitigating the quotidian necessity of emigration would come through a long-range reworking of national economic development strategies. He argued that boosting domestic production could generate decent employment “at home” for Salvadorans, and would curb dependency on imports and remittances.⁶⁶ The viability of Funes’ nationalist proposal for a small, densely populated country that is now so dependent upon migration, remittances, imports, and its low-wage labor force in the global market, is open to debate. His idea of focusing on boosting domestic production, something he claims is possible to do if his country follows a “Lula” model of development (despite the immense difference in size and resources comparing El Salvador and Brazil), on one hand, sounds like a hearkening back to earlier development orthodoxies like Import Substitution Industrialization. On the other hand, if in recognizing that a conventional neoliberal migration-development strategy is no longer viable, El Salvador should turn toward a more state-centered but globally-informed approach to development, his proposal resonates with the kind of modified neoliberalisms emerging elsewhere in the region under recent leftward leadership. But the extent to which Funes’s ideas can actually transform into comprehensive policy and a lasting political change is also in question, since it is not clear whether or not El Salvador’s

⁶⁶ Funes discussed this strategy in an August 2011 interview with Al Jazeera journalists: <http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/talktojazeera/2011/08/201181582912837697.html> (last accessed July 22, 2012).

leftward turn will even last beyond his term. Salvador Sanchez Cerén, the current Vice President known for his role as a *comandante* during the civil war, has been selected to be the party's 2014 presidential candidate, a move that has generated fear among many Salvadorans who believe his more hardline anti-globalization stance could destabilize U.S. relations and put the Salvadoran population in the United States, their remittances, and the Salvadoran economy as a whole in a more precarious condition. Nonetheless, Funes's echoing of the critical narratives of activists that El Salvador's economic trajectory of "exporting people" has not been healthy for national social and economic well-being is a departure from prior leadership and evidence of recent efforts to shift state discourse on Salvadoran transnationalism and development.

Some regional networks of organizations interested in rethinking remittances and development were also intersecting with the emerging critical discussions in El Salvador. Notably, the short-lived *Red para las Migraciones Sustentables* (the Network for Sustainable Migrations), a network of migrant community organizations spanning from Argentina to California, staged meetings in San Salvador before it collapsed due to a lack of funding for further forums and joint projects. Their discussions were illustrative of a more cautious assessment of the role of remittances in community development. El Salvador remained on the fringes of more radical dialogues emerging in the region, in which the widely-praised idea of remittance-driven "local development" was being tossed out altogether on the pretext that such models were unsustainable and contingent upon undocumented migrations. The *People's Global Action on Migration, Development and Human Rights*, for example, was set up as a "grassroots" forum to counter what its organizers argued was a hegemonic and neoliberalist discourse on "migration and

development” being reproduced in sites like the *Global Forum on Migration and Development*, held during the same week and led by multilateral development agencies. The latter forum was held in 2010 in Puerto Vallarta, a city that is rather unexemplary of the conditions that instigate migration throughout other parts of Mexico (that country was represented by *Banamex*, a major bank, for its “civil society” seat at the event).⁶⁷ Days later, over a thousand delegates were invited to gather in Mexico City for its “grassroots” counterpart, many of whom were members of international networks present in the region.

Along a different vein, moving beyond dependency on migration and remittances, or building “an option to not migrate”, was considered to be a cultural project as much as it was economic, hinged on the possibility of developing positive subjectivities in which dignified futures in El Salvador could be imagined. According to this logic, undocumented emigration, now problematized in public discourse as a social pathology similar to the gang violence that plagues El Salvador, could be curbed not only through viable work, but also through community-based initiatives that targeted young people most “at risk” to emigration (and gangs).

By placing a (perhaps unfair) moral obligation on youth to reconsider what may well be their most viable future, such “cultural” strategies can actually reproduce neoliberal developmentalism and regulatory discourses of the state in new and overlapping ways, as can the emerging calls for an alternative political economy on migration and development. Just after his March 2011 visit to El Salvador (a trip aimed at

⁶⁷ The claims made about these two contrasting forums were stressed in author’s May 24, 2010 interview in Zacatecas, Mexico with an organizer of the *People’s Global Action on Migration, Development and Human Rights*, and during the forum itself, in which the author was a participant, held in Mexico City on November 2-5, 2010.

reinforcing U.S.-El Salvador cooperation over security matters amid growing preoccupations with drug trafficking and violence in the Central American region), U.S. President Barack Obama appealed to Republicans by suggesting that such development proposals were “the best strategy” to curb illegal immigration (Calmes 2011), a proposal that rekindles a Cold War-infused logic that grassroots development as a means to poverty reduction would protect U.S security and economic interests. And what are the promises of other kinds of development and economic growth? However well-intended the idea, building an “option to not migrate” seems a monumental task in a country where migrants’ remittances patch together a precarious economy wrought by neoliberal reforms and where neighborhood gangs regularly charge unpayable rents to mom-and-pop business owners or threaten to kill them, encumbering aspirations and real opportunities for viable local economic paths.

Even as identifying just how building “an option to not migrate” might feasibly play out in the way of policy is not yet clear, it is a worthy pursuit, and one that is being taken up in local communities by migrants and non-migrants, as is evident in Chalatenango. The struggle to build an option to not migrate, as we have seen, is both individual and collective. Beyond the strategic uses of remittances and cross-border resources to advance educational and other opportunities for young people (described in Chapter 5), a number of community-based groups and organizations in the region direct their efforts toward engaging young people in meaningful recreational, cultural, and outreach activities. Combined with the constant effort to creatively construct viable present and future work opportunities that are appealing to young people (who today in rural areas like Chalatenango tend to see agricultural and “traditional” livelihoods as non-

viable and unenticing, and who weigh work options in El Salvador against the option of wage labor in the United States), these sorts of community-based initiatives (including youth groups, theatre and artistic cooperatives that involve young people, sports teams and programs, organizations that encourage young leadership and outreach, and so forth), are part of the important and challenging project of connecting younger generations of Salvadorans to the value, hope, and real possibility of other options than undocumented migration.

The emerging shift in discourse on migration, interestingly, marks an important turn in the imagination of El Salvador's transnational and territorial future. Undocumented emigration and remittances are framed as a problem capable of being addressed, rather than as a naturalized, unwavering trajectory into the future. There is a destabilization of the embracement of the assumption that "progress" lay on the outside, of reminding not-yet emigrants that the heroic, monetary sacrifices of El Salvador's *hermanos lejanos* were to be celebrated as the key to making a better El Salvador. Rather, new attention was directed toward rescuing value "at home" in order to break from the momentum of wide-scale emigration and remittance dependency. Perhaps drawing inspiration from other recent movements in Latin America that have worked toward reclaiming various forms of localism, autonomy, and territoriality (the Zapatistas, *Via Campesina*, and so forth), migrant community activists were pushing Salvadorans to imagine and make possible an alternative politics that would mitigate emigration rather than push people out, and that would diminish the need for remittances, rather than simply cultivate their accumulation.

This other imaginary for the making of El Salvador's future was produced at a

moment of urgency, disillusionment, and discontent. Transnational migrant activists were cognizant of the state's discourse on migration, and were insisting on the formation of new political strategies that looked beyond their remittances to favor the well-being of Salvadorans abroad and in El Salvador itself. In what they now understood to be "crisis" conditions, they were demanding a revaluation of human life, insisting that migrants could no longer be commodified as money transfers, as economic indicators, and as agents of development; they were pushing the state to stop systematically "expelling" its people.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

International migration has come to characterize life for many communities of El Salvador and elsewhere, produced out of histories of various forms of inequality and violence. The Salvadoran state has recently embraced a project and discourse that frames migration and remittances as key to development and progress. This approach fits a global camp of interest in “migration and development” coming from multilateral development agencies, governments, and other actors, which is guided by a particular developmentalist and capitalist understanding of the meaning and dynamics of migration and transnational processes. This discourse emphasizes the idea that migrants and their communities follow a rational, individualist economic logic and should appropriately engage with global capitalist flows to benefit development, mainly through emigration and “productive” remittance investment in places of origin. This project of “expelling” migrants and harnessing remittances is linked to the Salvadoran state’s relatively recent engagement with (neo)liberal practices and logics and a postwar nation-state building project that emphasizes the value of migration and a transnationalism for progress and modernity. It is part of a longer history of exclusion, uprooting, and erasure in El Salvador that follows a long trajectory of modernity/coloniality.

The stories told in this dissertation reveal the particularity, contingency, and limitations of the logics and practices underlying this state-led project, and of

capitalocentric and developmentalist ways of understanding the contemporary dynamics of community, migration, and cross-border practices as a whole. The experience of Guarjila, along with other communities in Chalatenango and around El Salvador and Central America, could be read according to such a singular perspective. Such a standpoint emphasizes that global capitalist forces are shaping contemporary dynamics. They direct the future by pushing people to emigrate, by individualizing and fragmenting communities and collectivity, by uprooting people from territorial places and collectivist trajectories of struggle, and by acting as the primary, if not the only, driver of development for places and people understood to be impoverished, in need, and with limited capacities.

By contrast, this study has emphasized the existence and potentiality of more diverse logics and practices, including those that take on non-capitalist, non-individualist, collectivist, and communal forms. By privileging a politics of economic possibility, it has shed light on the endurance, adaptability, and political promise of such logics and practices, even in — and especially in — contexts assumed to be primarily characterized by displacement, marginalization, a “loss” of community, and a singular future.

People of Guarjila continue to turn to “community”, in practice and logic, as a resource and a source of strength to navigate conditions of marginalization and exclusion in the United States and in El Salvador, and to build a better future. The cross-border practices and logics of building and rooting community, I suggest, are evidence of a much different way of understanding and practicing migration and transnational processes than according to a widely accepted developmentalist framework. Through rooted community networks, Guarjileños’ practices produce flows and trajectories that

work to reconstitute community and build paths to preferred futures and well-being on their own terms. Even as this work is networked across borders and takes on multiple and changing forms, it is nevertheless rooted and communal work that functions politically to stand against the developmentalist project advanced by the state. The complex practices in which Guarjileños are engaged reveal the contingency of the state-led project of remittance-led development and the possibilities of envisioning and putting into practice collective well-being and the making of the future (or more precisely, futures) on different terms.

Community, and by extension, place, should thus be conceptualized on more complex terms than in the traditional sense that assumes boundedness and fixed identities. But neither should they be assumed to be so unbounded and tied to globalization that they have “lost” the political drive that comes from a sense of rootedness and collectivist practice. I have stressed that community is made in logic and in practice, is tied to mobility and cross-border networks, is constantly changing, and is relationally constructed and understood. Nonetheless, as in the case of Guarjila, communities are rooted, in territorial places, in shared histories and struggles, and through other collective experiences that shape collective political imaginaries, projects, and practices. By conceptualizing community in this way, we can see how communal logics and practices endure in, along with, and against conditions of displacement and migration, global flows of capital, and the projects of the state and neoliberalism. Communities and the work of community-making are rooted and networked, connecting people and other actors to territories, meanings, histories, and experiences. The networked rooting and communalizing practices with which Guarjileños engage are

conditioned by a longer trajectory of collective action and communal systems, and by attachments to the active project of building community with meaning and dignity in Guarjila itself. Even in a postwar period characterized by neoliberalism, marginalization, and migration, the enduring practices and logics produced out of this long trajectory are adapted to these new circumstances and changing contexts in contingent and relational ways.

The developmentalist logic which celebrates the promise of emigration and remittances and helps guide El Salvador's postwar nation-state building project is thus also contingently, relationally, and historically produced. Coming from actors and institutions linked to positions of authority and "expertise," this project is widely understood to be hegemonic and mainstream. But it is a project that is not all-encompassing and cannot be understood to have the final say. The failure and unsustainability of this project, which has gained force over the last two decades, is evident in the other possibilities that are already in practice among Chalatecos and in the recent contestations coming from regional and cross-border migrant-community activist networks. At a historic moment of crisis and change, these actors are challenging and demanding possibilities other than the developmentalist-centered politics on transnational migration that have been advanced by the state.

Change

At the time of writing the conclusion to this dissertation, an immigration reform bill recently proposed by a bipartisan group of U.S. Senators is soon to be debated by the U.S. Congress. If it were to be passed into law in its current form, among other provisions

and policy changes, it would allow undocumented and TPS-holding immigrants that fulfill given requirements to apply for a new special provisional legal status that could eventually, after a ten-year period, make them eligible to apply for legal residency and then citizenship. The proposed law would be a significant change to immigration policy as it could potentially legalize millions of immigrants and it lifts some exclusionary provisions on immigrant visas and documentation eligibility. However, it also includes the introduction of a number of new exclusionary policies. For example, as it stands, the bill proposes billions of dollars more in funding toward border security enforcement and a mandate that employers electronically verify that their workforce has legal documentation. Those to be granted the new special status would have to meet English language requirements, pay hefty fines, prove that they have had continuous lawful presence and employment and that they arrived to the United States prior to 2012. They would be excluded from public benefits programs.

The bill was a topic of discussion among Guarjileños in Maryland, Virginia, and New Jersey whom I visited in May 2013 (just prior to writing this conclusion chapter), some of whose stories were told in this dissertation. They expressed skepticism about the bill and were wary of the political motivations driving its creation. Still, here and there changes to the execution and implementation of certain immigration enforcement policies over the last couple of years were making a significant difference in their lives. In Maryland, for example, undocumented immigrants would again be eligible to renew driver's licenses, a decision that would allow tens of thousands of people to be able to drive to their place of employment without fearing deportation for not having a driver's license.

Lili (introduced in Chapter 5), who has held TPS and had never returned to Guarjila in the more than ten years she had lived in the United States, was making two trips there in 2013. Enforcement authorities had become more lenient on the interpretation of the special circumstances required for TPS-holders to be able to return. She no longer needed to furnish a doctor's note or proof of a deceased family member to justify a trip. She returned to celebrate the community's patron saint day fiesta where she reunited with long-missed family and community members. She was struck by the way migration had changed the community's social dynamics and landscape. She had invested in a home in the United States and had not been building in El Salvador, waiting with the hope that TPS-holders like herself would eventually be granted the opportunity to apply for legal residency. If immigration reform passed that included the provision, the sense of being in a state of temporariness would be lifted and she could more fully invest in the Maryland community where she now resides.

Lili's oldest children, now in their late teens and early twenties, had dropped out of the U.S. high schools where they had been enrolled to start families and to begin full-time jobs. Her youngest El Salvador-born daughter was now entering her sophomore year in high school. Lili, already in the United States, had her daughter brought there when she was seven years old. The trip north took her a month and half since she was abandoned by her guides and was lost near the border. U.S. President Obama's 2012 executive decision to suspend deportations of DREAM Act-eligible youth meant that she was able to apply for paperwork that could make it possible for her to be the first in her family to attend college in the United States. Even so, aside from the sheer cost of a college education in the United States even at public institutions, as a student attending a public

school with limited resources and who must work to support the family, she faces significant challenges to pursuing such a dream.

Such executive and legislative decisions provisionally fill tiny voids in a severely punitive U.S. immigration system that excludes populations from basic citizenship rights and systematically subjects them to conditions of marginalization at the same time that it works to divide families and communities. But such decisions that change policy and enforcement, no matter how minor, can make a significant difference in people's lives and condition the way they go about making their futures. In early 2013, several groups of young migrants, mostly young men in their late teens and early twenties, left Guarjila and arrived to the United States. It is true that while I was in El Salvador from 2008-2011, some young people contemplating migration expressed a "wait and see" stance as they were attentive to potentially changing immigration conditions. It is not clear and perhaps worthy of examination as to whether or not these migrants, who departed after several years of relatively little migration from the community, came to the United States in part influenced by the hope that the hearsay around immigration reform would materialize into something beneficial to them and their family and community members. I cannot comment as to whether this is the beginning of a new wave of widespread migration from the community or a reflection of a broader regional trend, or if it is a more isolated surge of just a few groups of coming-of-age young people who departed from the community. I also cannot comment as to whether and or when these migrants might return to El Salvador.

What we can say with some certainty is that this is a reminder that building other options than undocumented migration is indeed a *struggle* that necessitates remarkable

individual, collective, and cross-border efforts. The groups of young people that have just arrived are evidence of both the draw of reuniting with family and community members now based in the United States and the sense that, in their view, international migration may offer the most possibilities as they construct futures for themselves. These futures, as we have seen, may continue in El Salvador, in the United States, or somewhere else.

The wave of recent arrivals is also a reminder that the story of migration involving people from this region of El Salvador has no conclusion. The intertwined work of mobility and community-making is an ever-unfolding (hi)story that continues in changing conditions and contexts. Today, as in the past, as young people join community members abroad, it is clear that the work of community continues to be linked to mobility in ways that transcend legal borders and boundaries. Collective strategies to navigate current conditions and to work across borders and in place to build a better future get adapted to a shifting terrain of U.S. immigration and to the economic, political, and social changes within El Salvador itself. As this dissertation has revealed, mobility and cross-border networks have long been part of the history of the community-making work for Chalatecos throughout which strategies of collective action have been adapted to varying contexts. One migrant who had voluntarily returned to Guarjila in 2010, having built his home there and worked in masonry, is now on his way back up north at the time of my writing. One might conclude that this is a sign that some returned migrants' aspirations to build a future in El Salvador were not viable. Perhaps this is so. But this particular migrant has more U.S. travel experience than many U.S.-born natives; he spent years in the United States moving from state to state for temporary jobs in construction. Mobility has long been and will continue to be an important resource in the personal lives and

community-building work of Chalatecos, especially as the shifting conditions of the present make for uncertain futures.

At the time of this writing, Juliana awaits the arrival to her home in New Jersey of her nephew, who left Guarjila a month earlier. He is a 23-year-old who is strongly involved in the community, and who attended two years of college at the University of El Salvador studying journalism, so it was a surprise to me to hear that he had migrated. He said he made his decision to leave on the expectation that working in the United States for a few years would be an opportunity to save earnings and later return to El Salvador. Juliana and Beto expressed their hesitations and concerns about his intentions in their discussion with him. They offered to put the seven thousand dollars it would cost to fund his trip toward a college fund instead. Her nephew responded to their offer: “But how would I ever pay you back?” Development specialists, urban business owners, and economists I have spoken with have at times suggested that the hefty price tag of sponsoring someone to go to the United States would be better spent on start-up costs for a small business in El Salvador, rather than on putting someone’s life at risk. The offer and her nephew’s response is a sign that everyone felt that the nephew was better fit for pursuing a professional degree than for starting a small local business, but that even so, there was no certainty around what opportunities would come from continuing his college education in El Salvador. Believing that migration should be a *choice*, they offered him their support.

During my visit to their home, Juliana had been anxiously calling the guides in Texas several times daily to see if her nephew was safe, but they had not answered her calls for several days. He had already entered Texas, but the trek of several hours on foot

to avoid roadside checkpoints and migration police was in an area where migrants were frequently targeted by drug traffickers and susceptible to kidnappings. As with the Sonoran desert in southern Arizona, one of the most dangerous points on the migrant journey is, curiously, in the United States itself, not in Mexico. Waiting for days for a response, her feeling of worry was overwhelming. Having just had her call ignored again as I was leaving, she said to me: “This is too frustrating. If anyone else asks for my help to come to the United States, I will say to them: ‘No, do not come.’ This is too frustrating.”

The largely overlooked humanitarian crisis affecting undocumented migrants in transit through Mexico and across borders, as Salvadoran activists stressed, is of urgent concern. The clandestine endangerment and suffering of migrants en route are reproduced not only by the licit and illicit actors that prey on their vulnerability, but by the failure of neoliberal economic policies that have pushed migrants out of their places of origin to work as virtually “outsourced” undocumented labor in places of destination, and by the failure of U.S. immigration policies that do not humanely respond to the current reality of international human mobility in the Americas and elsewhere. In the way of policy reform, there should be a rethinking of the failed development strategies *and* the failed immigration policies that produce such a crisis. A rethinking of failed policies might benefit from multilateral agreements and strategies guided by a transnational perspective that goes beyond conventional neoliberal developmentalist frameworks and assimilationist assumptions, and recognizes the value of building an option to *not* migrate as much as an option *to* legally migrate in humane and dignified conditions.

Chalatecos consistently turn to community as a valued resource, strategy, and

source of strength in navigating the conditions wrought by the failure of both neoliberal development policies in El Salvador and the failure of the U.S. immigration system, each of which are conditioned by a legacy of colonialist and imperialist involvements. Their communal and rooted practices are guided by logics that stand in contrast to hegemonic neoliberal frameworks for understanding the meaning of migration and development and the nexus of the two; they illuminate other ways of thinking and other possibilities.

Sueños Salvadoreños

Migration, therefore, will continue to be part of the story of El Salvador, but it is a story that is lived and told in diverse ways. One version of the story was told eloquently through a national educational art exhibit directed by Catalina, the artist mentioned at the beginning of this dissertation who was so inspired by young Juan's struggle to build other possibilities than undocumented migration to the United States. Drawing from the creativity of several artists from El Salvador, the exhibit, titled *Carta del Norte* (Letter from the North), takes the public on a path that shows the way postwar migration has come to characterize Salvadoran life, its current conditions, and the realities of hardships and struggles that migrants and their families endure on both sides of the border.

On display in this storyline was another piece that Catalina painted about Juan, called *The Musician*. The painting, which is of the drum set in Juan's house, was inspired by his aspirations to stay in El Salvador and to further pursue his love for music. She said that meeting Juan and her trip to Guarjila marked a shift in the focus of her artwork on Salvadoran migration. Prior to the trip, her art had focused on the horrific conditions of Central American migration through Mexico. Using her trademark technique of

appropriating popular, cartoon-like images and re-piecing them together, her former works offered uncomfortable and in-your-face reminders of migrants' clandestine trauma hidden from view: child trafficking, migrants loaded into the compartments of tractor-tailors. Produced out of a personal and collective feeling of frustration, distress, and emergency, these discomfoting representations were a form of activism to raise awareness, to provoke. But her turn toward representing realities of hope and other possibilities, as in *The Musician*, was provocative and political in a different way.

Figure 4: The Musician

Art by Catalina del Cid, on display in “Carta del Norte” exhibit. Photographed by author, May 2011, Museo Tecleño, Santa Tecla, La Libertad.



Carta del Norte was inaugurated in May 2011 in a new museum and cultural center that was renovated from what was once a prison, a reminder of violence in times

past. The museum is located in Santa Tecla, a suburb up the hill from San Salvador that just a few years earlier was notorious for its street violence and crime but has recently seen an urban renewal with the help of its FMLN-affiliated mayor (currently the party's Vice Presidential candidate). Santa Tecla is a community that now boasts participatory democracy-style governance in its local neighborhoods, a number of restored cultural centers and heritage sites, renovated parks, and new community spaces. In a span of just a few years, a pedestrian street came to be loaded with locally-owned shops and restaurants in Santa Tecla's downtown area. The area is replacing what were considered to be among San Salvador's few perceivably "safe" public social spaces in the neoliberal postwar period: its newly constructed private high-security shopping malls filled with foreign-owned vendors. Now a lively place for Salvadoran families, a truly public common space has been reclaimed in Santa Tecla, reinvigorating a sense of community in a city known for the divisions produced through privatized basic resources, gated communities, and everyday violence. The exhibits opening here seemed very fitting.

After one walks the length of the exhibit, tracing the path of El Salvador's migration experience told in the narrative presented through various artistic and educational pieces, it finishes with the following words in between a collage of the diverse faces of Salvadorans within and outside of El Salvador's borders:

"WHAT IS THE GOAL?

That the Salvadorans who stay in the country can, each day, improve their living conditions, and the Salvadorans who go can do so enjoying all of their rights.

PROUD TO BE SALVADORANS

We live in a beautiful country, we have the capacity, creativity, and will to create opportunities in our community. Will we stay to build this Salvadoran dream?"⁶⁸

⁶⁸ See Figure 5. Author's translation. "¿Nos quedamos a construir este sueño salvadoreño?" might alternately be translated to "Will we commit to constructing this Salvadoran dream?" to imply that this

Figure 5: Final Image in *Carta del Norte*

Final image on display in “Carta del Norte” exhibit. Photographed by author, May 2011, Museo Tecléño, Santa Tecla, La Libertad.



project of constructing a new El Salvador can involve actors from within and outside of El Salvador's geographic borders.

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