UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Imaginaries of Transnationalism:

Media and Cultures of Consumption in El Salvador

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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in

Ethnic Studies

by

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The Dissertation of Cecilia Maribel Rivas is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm:

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DEDICATION

To my friends and family, always with gratitude and affection

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnic Studies

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"Imaginaries of Transnationalism: Media and Cultures of Consumption in El Salvador" is a study of how some peoples and narratives become transnational and global, while others are excluded from this condition. The dissertation examines the Salvadoran transnational imaginary by juxtaposing three research sites, spaces where

Salvadorans come together and "make sense" of globalization: the "Departamento 15" section of the Salvadoran newspaper *La Prensa Gráfica*, the growing bilingual call center sector in San Salvador, and shopping malls and cultures of consumption in San Salvador. Media, consumption, and migration practices become constitutive and central in the production of certain global subjects. Through interviews, media content analysis, and observation, I analyze these sites as emblematic of the interactions people engage in as part of daily life in a globalized world.

The research sites relocate El Salvador in different ways within economic, social, and cultural dimensions of globalization. The shopping mall recreates the city even as it often turns its back on it, imagining and idealizing other times and places. The call center "exports" the voice of the Salvadoran employee, as this employee remains immobile. By retelling narratives of emigration and return to El Salvador, the newspaper re-spatializes the nation and incorporates the diaspora into the Salvadoran territory as a transnational "fifteenth department." While people can "freely" participate in these sites, however, the mall, the newspaper, and the call center are spaces of constraint and exclusion, where practices are regulated and people become particular kinds of subjects. Beyond a simple account of domination, however, this dissertation looks at these sites and practices closely, and asks how and why some media representations, work cultures, and ideas of language ability constituted in these sites have become part of the dominant narrative of globalization, while other narratives are marginalized. Ultimately this dissertation is about the implications of certain discourses of migration, commodity consumption, and media, and how these narratives become effective in the disciplinary dimensions of globalization.

Introduction

Imaginaries of Transnationalism

Connecting Flight

At gate five of the Houston airport the flight will not board for another hour. Behind me, two women talk about their reasons to go to El Salvador. "We only go for problems. We have come because we have problems, and return to solve some other problem. I don't hear anyone say they are going there to take a great vacation," she adds sarcastically.[1] The other woman chuckles. Everybody has "problems," and according to her, leaving El Salvador does not make them disappear.

Seated across from me is a woman in her thirties. I'll call her Claudia. She is traveling by herself, and two seats down from her another group of women wait. A few men (their husbands, maybe?) are standing apart, talking. Looking around, one of the women comments, "Como se parecen todos los salvadoreños," how alike all Salvadorans look. She goes on, talking about how easy it is to tell who is a Salvadoran, presumably not just in this obvious waiting lounge headed to San Salvador, but anywhere, because of an 'inherent' friendliness or happiness. "Es que se les nota una alegría," she says of her compatriots. To make sure she does not think I am some sort of unpatriotic stranger; I look up from my backpack and smile. "And do you live here in Houston?" she asks Claudia.

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[1] 'Uno solo por problemas va. Se ha venido porque tiene problemas, y regresa a resolver algún problema. A nadie le oigo decir que va a tomarse la gran vacación.'

To initiate a conversation, there are two broad questions you could ask in an airport lounge full of Salvadorans: 'Dónde vive?' and 'Hasta dónde va?' The first, 'where do you live?' refers to place of residence, usually in the United States, the second question, to final destination in El Salvador after a long day of travel and arrival in Comalapa Airport. The final destination is usually the *cantón*, village, or city that most first generation Salvadoran emigrants left months or years ago. These questions incorporate the flight route between Houston and San Salvador to a circuit of global connections, memories, and a history of Salvadoran migration.

A third question is 'How long have you been here?' Claudia, who wore a pretty sweater, replies, "Ya me hice cuidadana." She has been in the United States for about ten years, and is now a naturalized citizen. She is traveling to El Salvador to pick up her mother and return with her to the United States on Monday, a very short weekend trip. "I'm sure she's all packed and ready by now," she says, visibly content. Her mother is to spend four months with her in Texas.

Within minutes the two women exchange their phone numbers in El Salvador, and plan to attend a self-help group meeting together on Saturday (the women and their husbands are going to a celebration related to this group). Who knows if their plan will materialize, but many networks develop that way, through negotiation, chance meetings, and common destinations (see Menjívar 2000).

As I sit waiting for the flight to San Salvador, preparing for a four-week research trip and the Christmas holiday with my family, I am drawn into the everyday lives of many of my travel companions at gate five—Salvadorans who negotiate the spaces

between El Salvador and the United States, between obligations to family, work, friends, and "problems" in El Salvador and life in their "new country." Salvadorans, like the woman seated near me, who to some extent believe in an abstract form of 'Salvadoran-ness,' be it "alegría" or another common experience or trait. Salvadorans who are part of a "social imaginary:" a "common understanding" that "enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society" (Taylor 2002: 91). This imaginary is shared by a large group of people. Everyday, ordinary practices, like waiting at an airport lounge, link these dispersed and diverse communities.

Imaginaries

This is a study of how some people and narratives become global, while others remain excluded from this condition. The aim of this dissertation is to critically examine the Salvadoran transnational imaginary by juxtaposing three sites: the Salvadoran newspaper *La Prensa Gráfica*, particularly its migration section "Departamento 15," the bilingual call center sector in San Salvador, and shopping centers (which I also refer to as megamalls) in the San Salvador area.

I employ the term transnational imaginary or "social imaginary" (Taylor 2002) in my analysis to speak about how media, consumption, and migration are constitutive and central in the production of certain global subjects. People engage the mall, the call center and the newspaper, and become subjects through these sites, in different ways. It is important to research these sites because they are central places in which to explore the imaginary. The sites are connected and emblematic of the interactions people engage in

as part of daily life in a globalized world: internet and telephone communication, news and commodity consumption, and "imagination of community" (Anderson 1991).

As spaces where Salvadorans come together and make sense of globalization and what surrounds them daily, the call center, the mall, and the newspaper open up new ways of engaging the transnational field. Yet while people can "freely" participate in these places, these are also places of constraint and exclusion. This is why I juxtapose them and look at them closely, to ask how and why some media representations, work cultures, languages, and practices constituted in these sites have become part of the dominant narrative of globalization, while others are marginalized.

Globalization, in its economic, cultural and social dimensions, broadly indicates "contradictory transformations—in economic organization, social regulation, political governance, and ethical regimes—that are felt to have profound though uncertain, confusing, or contradictory implications for human life" (Ong and Collier 2005: 3). Global economic structures place El Salvador as a peripheral or marginal nation, dependent on migration and foreign investment as a way into participation and incorporation in the global economy (see Landolt 2001). El Salvador "becomes global" in relation to other nations, particularly the United States, through cultures of migration, consumption, and service work. Labor and migration have been part of the Salvadoran social landscape for decades, especially since the 1980s civil war.

Beyond presenting a version of the predominant view of economic globalization—that this process creates a field of equal and available opportunities and market choices for those involved in this process—in this dissertation I critically examine

the links between migration, emerging media and communication technologies, and spaces of consumption. I suggest that migrant aspirations and media portrayals of "American dreaming" in newspapers, consumption in shopping malls, and bilingual call centers signify Salvadoran transnationalism. This is a productive and contradictory process that is hypervisible in contemporary El Salvador, where a culture of increasing consumerism, emigration, and remittance circulation, along with dollarization of the economy and use of English in transnational workplaces, has become an enduring feature of post-war identity and everyday life.

The research traces the processes and ideas through which media and state institutions produce transnational communities, subjects, and capital for nation-building projects, and also analyzes the sites where these processes are grounded. Media, a site and "texture of experience," (Silverstone 1999: 4) shape global identities and facilitate connections with others. Robert Hassan cites the "astonishing wiring" of society—faster than ever before in history—as an effect or response to technological advances, but also successful in its intensity and reach because "the opportunity to [communicate] more effectively, more quickly and with more people constitutes for most people an irresistible urge" (Hassan 2004: 5). Media is an extension of the self as far as it allows many people around the world to connect and communicate. Yet the nature of these extensions is racialized, gendered, and deserves critical examination. "Connections," a powerful term and image, are not neutral and not everybody can access these connections equally. Mediated connections are socially and historically imagined and situated.

These sites, as places where I explore the imaginary, are spaces of interpellation, where people learn to self-regulate and become subjects. While Salvadorans abroad are claimed to the nation through media portrayals in "Departamento 15," Salvadorans who live within the geography of the "homeland" are claimed as "consumer-citizens" and bilingual, transnational, de-territorialized voices, as the cases of shopping mall culture and call center training and hiring practices suggest. In post-war El Salvador, these experiences are socially situated and shaped by economic development strategies, technological advances, and ideas about the linguistic and professional capacities of Salvadorans. Different sectors of society—including government, migrants, consumers, and press institutions—have something at stake as they engage the contradictions and transformations of globalization.

Through theoretical and empirical research, the objective and contribution of this dissertation is to study realms of social experience and analyze the contradictions of transnationalism. Underneath the benefits of technology and media, the nature of these realms of experience is racialized and gendered, reproducing inequalities, and thus deserves critical examination. My research seeks to understand the emergence and growth of practices of the imagination and their relationship to local conditions. I consider the narratives constructed around the English language ability of the Salvadoran workforce, the strategic location of El Salvador, dollarization of the Salvadoran economy, and dependence on migration practices as I critique this imaginary of transnationalism and how El Salvador becomes global. Idealized constructions of El Salvador in the sites I research—as a productive site of emigrant nostalgia and patriotism, a site of consumer

"choices," or of strategically located investment opportunities—are often present in "Departamento 15" media representations, government investment promotion strategies, and spaces of consumption and leisure. This definition of the nation's openness to transnationalism often contrasts with the fragmented, tense experience of Salvadoran migrants with borders and anti-immigrant sentiment in other countries and of Salvadorans caught in alienating service sector jobs and marginalized to the informal sector of the economy.

"Departamento 15"

The newspaper section "Departamento 15" is an example of how traditional ideologies of news production are shifting as transnational communities of readers, websites, and other innovations in this imaginary gain importance and affect our relationship to news. In this section of *La Prensa Gráfica* (*LPG*) the imagining of the national and transnational are mutually constituted in portrayals of Salvadoran migration, as an "imagined community" (Anderson 1991) and multiple publics and counterpublics (Warner 2002) take shape in diaspora.

I analyze the nature and function of portrayals of Salvadoran migration in "Departamento 15." The section often portrays both the patriotic nostalgia of Salvadorans living abroad and the tragedy of border violence and deportation in migrant narratives. It re-spatializes El Salvador by creating a transnational "fifteenth department," a complement to the country's fourteen departments, or states. Furthermore, *La Prensa*

Gráfica online presents a new relationship to materiality and space; in this version the newspaper is not presented in print and can be accessed from anywhere. I note that as readers respond and comment on the "Departamento 15" articles we can observe the production and circulation of new media content by readers/consumers and the trans/national recasting of traditional (print) forms of national media. I argue that the national and transnational spaces of post-war Salvadoran migration change in relation to each other while attempting to construct and (re)define the meanings of Salvadoran citizenship and belonging, as portrayed in the newspaper.

In researching "Departamento 15" portrayals, I analyzed the content of a collected sample of news stories and photographs from the print and online editions. I collected the sample since 2003, through various methods. While in San Salvador, I purchased the newspaper every day. In addition, I visited the newspaper's archives and spoke with journalists and editors. While in the United States, I accessed the newspaper's website. I have collected material over four years; giving me a broad, longitudinal picture of the newspaper section. Since the dissertation is concerned with the production of imaginaries, of which the mediated space of *LPG* is one part, I focus on themes such as patriotism, sacrifice, and family separation, to illustrate how these make up an agenda, and how imaginaries are shaped and produced by narratives that become common or "normalized" as part of Salvadoran society. In addition to qualitative content analysis, I interviewed the editors and journalists of "Departamento 15" at their offices in *La Prensa Gráfica* to learn more about their views on migration and their involvement in the news production process.

The first chapter of the dissertation examines the intersection of migration, post-war imaginaries of the Salvadoran nation, and news production. I analyze representational strategies used to produce a nostalgic, patriotic Salvadoran in "Departamento 15." The construction of patriotism for El Salvador and legal existence in the United States results in the creation of 'others' who are left out of this fundamental narrative. Chapter two analyzes this process of marginalization, with specific reference to news stories about family separation, violence against undocumented Central American migrants in southern Mexico, and the figure of the repatriated and/or deported Salvadoran in "Departamento 15." I examine the construction of knowledge about Salvadoran migration, and how the normalization of categories of violence and undocumented status in daily media portrayals reveal an alternate, but not "new," narrative of Salvadoran migration.

Call Centers: Transnational Service Work

The component of my project that focuses on call centers in El Salvador examines this sector in relation to a discussion of globalized/racialized labor niches and language ability, specifically English-Spanish bilingualism. In chapter three I consider how call centers, as a form of foreign investment encouraged by the Salvadoran government, bring transformative practices of globalization to local conditions. In my research of call centers, I began with my established contacts, acquaintances who worked in the human resources/hiring department of two call centers in El Salvador. As I discussed my research with other people in San Salvador, I established contacts with employees at

other call centers and eventually I interviewed employees from five of the largest call centers in San Salvador. The in-depth interviews with eleven participants who are involved in the call center sector as team leaders, recruitment managers, or human resources staff are the main source of data I interpret in my analysis of call center hiring, language use, and training practices. Most interviews are between one and two hours in length. I do not engage in a comparison of the training methods used in each call center. Instead, I analyze the interviews as narratives of becoming global as the call centers "export voices." I seek to better understand the emergence and development of globalizing practices across call centers, and the close, co-constitutive relationship of these practices in the production of subjects and investment promotion strategies that emphasize the language ability of the Salvadoran work force, the strategic location of El Salvador, and the dollarization of the Salvadoran economy. These are conditions that project El Salvador to the global field; they are also conditions that exclude and alienate. In addition, I analyze media coverage of call centers in El Salvador, particularly advertisements and articles that appeared in *La Prensa Gráfica*, as an example of how these sites intersect and are materially connected.

My research and interviews with human resources management at various call centers in San Salvador indicate that call center work is represented by recruiters as a desirable job option for English-speaking Salvadorans because it involves the use of linguistic and technical skills within a dynamic, globalized work culture. In most Salvadoran call centers, as I detail in chapter three, Spanish/English bilingualism is an important asset for prospective employees, while training often emphasizes listening

comprehension and the "improvement" of an American English accent to assist United States customers. Meanwhile, Salvadoran Spanish is advertised by investment promoters as "characterized by a 'neutral' accent"—in this claim, Salvadoran Spanish is not as "marked" as the distinctive intonations of other Latin American regions, thus perfect for a dislocated, transnational call center.

The call center sector is in part shaped by the state, economic policies, technological advances, and ideas about the linguistic and professional capacities of the Salvadoran workforce. The call center is a space of connection, yet of anonymity and commodification of voices. It is an expression of the moment we inhabit as globalization enables an illusion of instant availability of services. As a site where disembodied phone voices are exported while their bodies remain immobile, it exemplifies the reconfigurations of globalization as lived in communities and institutions.

Shopping Malls

My research of shopping malls and consumption practices involved observation and participation (consuming) at the malls, as well as archival research to find news articles and advertising that attempt to place malls in space and social relations. I photographed shopping malls in the metropolitan area of San Salvador, and focus on Metrocentro, Multiplaza, and La Gran Vía, three of the largest malls in the country.

The mall is a semi-public and transnational space where visitors fulfill all sorts of private wishes—window shopping and perhaps even ownership of things that come from

different parts of the world. In the shopping mall visitors experience global influences and trends within local consumption patterns. Malls can be sites of fixed and calculated exchange, or postmodern sites of shifting identities, tourism, kitsch, the negotiation of taste (Bourdieu 1984) and of fragmented subjectivities: "the shopping mall is a distinctive sign of the global dissemination of late capitalist economies" (Friedberg 1993). As part of the transnational imaginary, malls are "a socially regulated path" for the life of things (Appadurai 1986). As chapter four will demonstrate, malls are forms of urban development, exclusion, and reconfigurations of the relationship between consumption, cities, and violence. People are free to visit the mall, but constrained in their ability to shop.

I have already detailed the content of the chapters as I described each research site. Chapters one and two focus on "Departamento 15." In chapter three I discuss the call center sector, and in chapter four I discuss consumption in San Salvador's shopping centers. To conduct this research, I traveled to El Salvador four times during 2005 and 2006, and in total spent over 10 months in San Salvador. As someone who grew up in that city, treating it as a "field" was a form of re-connection. At the same time, the research questions encouraged me to make this city and its sites "strange" and view them from a renewed perspective as a scholar of ethnic and area studies. The United States is strongly present in this transnational imaginary, even as the sites are predominantly located in El Salvador. As I traveled between El Salvador and the United States, I engaged my transnational position as someone who can travel and research these sites. I

occupy the spaces I research, to different degrees, with "freedom," and also with constraints.

I approach the study of Salvadoran migration, media, and globalization with methodologies that are specific to each site. Newspapers, malls, and call centers led me to different locations and perspectives. I conducted, transcribed, and translated the interviews and the passages from "Departamento 15" and other newspaper stories cited throughout this dissertation. I have provided all interviewees with pseudonyms except for the journalists and editors who opted to use their real names. My access to the research sites, especially the call centers, was facilitated by people I knew. I was encouraged by their openness and willingness to be interviewed. However, I also found that as my research progressed it was usually not difficult to gain interviews with other people involved in call centers and language training, or with journalists and editors. Sometimes I wondered the extent to which my Salvadoran nationality, combined with my institutional affiliation with a university in the United States, opened doors for me.

But, in truth, I thought about this question of "access" differently once I conversed with the participants and we shared our experiences. I do not mean, of course, that the question became irrelevant after I explained (if asked) that I had grown up in San Salvador but presently pursued graduate studies in California. What I mean is that the question of access could be constructively recast beyond being an "insider" or an "outsider" in social science research settings. Access and the possibility of an interview could be critically rethought in terms of the very imaginaries I am researching, as access to the global and its connectivity, and as access to knowledge.

In my meeting with the director of the National English Center, she said she was glad to be interviewed because she wants more people to approach her office and "learn about the NEC." She revealed that she had spent a significant part of her life outside El Salvador, as I have, and talked about learning about other cultures and countries, and in particular why learning another language, in this case English, is important to her and to the center's purpose. Like many of the participants in this project, the director's personal and professional experiences intertwined as she responded to my questions—she was constructing herself as a transnational subject, making sense of her place in the imaginaries described in this dissertation.

Chapter One

Without Borders:

The Production of Transnational Citizenship in "Departamento 15"

Introduction

La verdad está en todas partes (truth is everywhere) Salvadoran daily *La Prensa Gráfica (LPG)* proclaims as a motto in a publicity campaign. A picture from that series of advertisements is particularly striking. Barely discernible in the darkness, the photograph shows a group of young men jumping on a train, presumably on their way north, towards the Mexico-United States border. One of the men looks directly at the camera—perhaps with a mixture of defiance and fear—while his companions are busy finding their footing. The journalists of *La Prensa Gráfica* have met his gaze and captured this moment in a full-color, two page advertisement—the uncertainty of migration, the instability of a moving train, the darkness of undocumented travel. "Truth," the advertisement adds as a caption, "does not end at our borders" (*LPG* 19 June 2003: 22-23).

This chapter, along with chapter two, is specifically about a newspaper, a country, migration, and the redrawing of borders to encompass a "truth" about Salvadorans. I focus on *La Prensa Gráfica*'s project of trans/national circulation, the "Departamento 15: Salvadoreños en el Exterior" (Salvadorans Abroad) section, which has been published in print, and online, since April 2000. I trace the ways in which media such as *La Prensa*

Gráfica can help us understand Salvadoran trans/nationalism by considering how the newspaper has responds to (and connects) processes of migration and globalization.

The dissertation as a whole is concerned with the processes of migration, media, and globalization in the production of complex transnational imaginaries. This chapter opens up "Departamento 15" as a textual space; a space constructed "without borders" where meanings about Salvadoran migration and transnationalism are produced and circulated between readers and journalists. My analysis explores the nature and function of certain portrayals of Salvadoran immigrants who live in various parts of the world, predominantly in the United States. Through an analysis of news stories, photographs, and reader responses ("Mensajes de Nuestros Lectores"), in addition to interview data, I consider how "Departamento 15" produces a transnational imaginary, a readership, and publics. "Departamento 15" brings new ways of accessing information and thinking about the mutually constitutive national and transnational fields.

In turn, this information is mediated through histories of emigration. By analyzing "Departamento 15" I consider how Salvadoran post-war national culture is transnational in nature. Histories of migration and transnationalism begin even before the traveler/migrant reaches his or her destination. Globalization and media, the "texture of experience" (Silverstone 1999) permeate everyday practices. Migration, as part of this imaginary, is rooted in prior histories of contact between the "sending" and "receiving" countries, a point retaken throughout this project. "Departamento 15" represents a space where a group (and publics also called "Departamento 15") is often, and in contradictory ways, idealized as a pure preserver of culture or an essential Salvadoran identity, and as a

hybrid subject living in two distinct societies or cultures (e.g. El Salvador and the United States, or Italy, or Australia). The image of a loyal and traditional Salvadoran who can negotiate two different worlds serves as an orientation to national identity; it is a way of representing the Salvadoran migrant as adaptable to any space.

Arjun Appadurai considers media and migration as "two major, and interconnected, diacritics," exploring "their joint effect on the *work of the imagination* as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity" (Appadurai 1996: 3). Media and migration are both central and fundamentally interrelated phenomena in contemporary society. The transnational investment in the often uneasy (and critiqued) "flow" of news is a work of capitalism and consumption. It involves the creation of a longing for "home," a nostalgic market both for the object itself—*La Prensa Gráfica* in print and digital form—and the Salvadorans in "Departamento 15." Print capitalism and the imagination of a national community of readers (Anderson 1991) acquire a new dimension as transnational spaces and bodies are claimed for the nation in news media representations.

While *La Prensa Gráfica* is a text whose news content, sources, advertisements and themes can be studied quantitatively, in this dissertation I am more interested in the qualitative meanings of this materiality and in the articulations of knowledge and imagination involved in media production. I present an analysis of texts, what Jane Rhodes defines as "closely linked arrangements of visual and written material that are designed to convey precise discourses" (Rhodes 1999: 96) and data from interviews with "Departamento 15" journalists and editors. My interviews with journalists reveal an awareness of the contradictions produced by migration and trans/nationalism, although in

practice it may be possible that journalists, by focusing on particular narratives, conceal the contradictions and transform them into idealized, easily explained categories—the messages of patriotism, civic holidays, and belonging to be discussed in this chapter.

Representing the Migrant

"Departamento 15" involves the creation and circulation of codes of shared meaning—a complex work of encoding and representation, which Stuart Hall has noted is "how you give meaning to things through language. This is how you 'make sense of' the world of people, objects and events, and how you are able to express a complex thought about those things to other people" (Hall 1997b: 16). Through my analysis of texts, I think about the creation of publics as I respond to how "texts clamor at us" and "images solicit our gaze" (Warner 2002: 62). Representations circulate through language and images, and also through tactics and strategies. Portrayals of migration change over time since they are the product of social, political and economic circumstances. As fluid categories, their "meaning can never be *finally* fixed" (Hall 1997b: 23). In the case of a newspaper section such as "Departamento 15," representation is a daily ritual of creation and reading, encoding and decoding of messages and news—a reinforcing and reworking of what a culture of migration is supposed to mean for Salvadorans everywhere. In order to exist, "Departamento 15" demands a daily renewal of attention from the nostalgic Salvadoran public it claims to represent. In this imaginary, migration is one of many shared, common experiences among Salvadorans.

To the lack of fixity which in theory characterizes systems of representation and the social/historical production of news and perceived knowledge of constructed categories such as race and nation, I juxtapose the strategy of fixing essential qualities, the creation of stereotypes—in this case, stereotypes of ideal Salvadorans who are close to their country despite geographic distance. "These are not *hermanos lejanos* (distant brothers)," explained Julio Marenco, current editor of "Departamento 15," referring to the often-used term for Salvadorans abroad and the role of the media in constituting ideas of space and of who is "distant":

> I still think the media has a debt in this sense…of somehow recognizing the contribution of people, not only in terms of remittances. […] Of cleaning up that idea of the "distant brother," which is an appalling idea…I do not know who came up with that word. They are not distant brothers. Someone who is distant does not maintain your economy for fifteen years. Someone who is distant does not move the airline market the way they have. Someone distant does not have parades that go on for blocks and blocks, someone distant does not twist the arm of the Long Island police department to have their Salvadoran parade. Someone distant does not behave that way. Those people are close. They are Salvadorans who live in another country, pure and simple, but they are Salvadoran. In fact there are many people internally [in El Salvador] who are more distant than they are, who do not feel Salvadoran, who complain about Salvadoran culture, who complain about everything the country produces or does not produce. So I think that there is still a debt from the media, of getting involved in these things a bit more and explore more, to be more faithful to the reality that is presented (Julio Marenco, interviewed 2006).[2]

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[2] Todavía creo que los medios tienen una deuda en ese sentido…de reconocer de alguna forma el aporte de la gente no solo en cuanto a remesas. […] De lavar esa idea del "hermano lejano," que es una idea chocante…yo no sé a quién se le ocurrió esa palabra…No son hermanos lejanos. Alguien que es lejano no te mantiene tu economía por quince años. Alguien lejano no dinamiza el mercado aéreo de la forma que lo han hecho. Alguien lejano no hace desfiles de cuadras y cuadras, alguien lejano no le dobla la mano al departamento de policía de Long Island para hacer su desfile del salvadoreño. Alguien lejano no se comporta de esa forma. Esa gente es, son, *cercanos*. Son salvadoreños que viven en otro país, simple y sencillamente, pero son salvadoreños. De hecho hay mucha gente interna que es más lejana que ellos, que no se siente salvadoreña, que reniegan de la cultura salvadoreña, que reniegan de todo lo que el país produce o de lo que no produce. Entonces yo creo que todavía hay una deuda de los medios de subirse un poco en eso y explorar más y ser más fieles con la realidad que presentan (Julio Marenco, 2006.)

The editor evokes specific images about the lives and loyalty of Salvadorans outside El Salvador, citing their parades and economic contributions. They are "closer" to El Salvador than many people who live within its borders. This is a re-spatialization of the normative and modern construct of citizenship, which formerly had to correspond to the national territory. In turn, this loyalty of the emigrant Salvadoran who is not distant incurs a "debt from the media," where spaces like "Departamento 15" should commit to "presenting a reality" of migration. As it portrays the emigrant, "Departamento 15" reclaims him/her for a Salvadoran nation-building and identity project. Representations acquire new meanings over time—this process, while erasing older stories of migration, also serves as a reworking of ideas of citizenship, "Salvadoran-ness," and belonging, such as the stereotype that Salvadorans are hard working and invariably nostalgic for their home country. We have to explore or read between the lines, looking for the ideas, processes and consequences of this "invented authenticity" of the deterritorialized yet "close" Salvadoran.

Post-war politics and memories of war sometimes inform current representations of Salvadoran immigrants in *La Prensa Gráfica*. Narratives of forced displacement and denial of political asylum endured by Salvadoran migrants during the 1980s civil war are selectively forgotten or deployed as part of the Salvadoran immigrant experience (Coutin 2000). "Departamento 15" constructs meaning through idealized histories of successful, exemplary migration—dedication and eventual social and legal acceptance by the host country. Parallel to these histories we find narratives of violence, deportation, and the

danger of undocumented travel, whose purposes we shall address at length later in the dissertation.

During the 1980s, a Salvadoran newspaper section such as "Departamento 15" did not exist, although during this period Salvadoran emigration to the United States reached unprecedented proportions. Much of this emigration was due to the wartime state of insecurity, repression, and economic deterioration. The Peace Accords in 1992 officially ended the civil war, yet levels of emigration did not decrease. Today, factors that encourage emigration include the search for better job opportunities, family reunification, and the continuing violence associated with post-war insecurity. These factors can also be considered as new strategies for controlling and framing news representations. For instance, the predominant focus on personal factors often tends to erase larger institutional inequalities. In addition, re-situating the news media with respect to the process of making national citizens, as described by Anderson (1991) places the media as correcting a failure of the state and Salvadorans at "home" to complete part of the trans/national project. "The state," "the people," "Salvadoran" and other concepts are co-constituted in this imaginary of globalization.

Portrayals of everyday cultural practices are fundamental to the production of transnational imaginaries of contemporary Salvadoran society. Stuart Hall writes that the connection between culture and representation in the creation and circulation of meaning is immediate: "[representation] is one of the central practices which produce culture and a key 'moment' in what has been called the 'circuit of culture' […] Thus culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them" (Hall

1997a: 1-2). As Salvadoran national culture is increasingly permeated by migration, Salvadoran migrants in are reclaimed to a space of where they are acknowledged as an essential part of Salvadoran society. As the diasporic becomes the national, "Departamento 15" "makes sense" through its choices of newsworthy themes, such as civic celebrations, narratives of immigrant success, or tragedies, which I will discuss in the following sections.

"Covering our People Abroad"

The representations of "Salvadoreños en el exterior" (Salvadorans abroad) signal a new relationship between time and space where being Salvadoran is not necessarily linked to residing within the geographic boundaries of El Salvador, or even to having Salvadoran documents of citizenship [passport] or birth [certificate]. The notion of the chronotope, used by Mikhail Bakhtin to describe "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships" (Bakhtin 1981: 84) is relevant in this analysis of the construction of imaginaries. A new chronotope was established as "Departamento 15" began to circulate. In the case of Salvadoran migration and "Departamento 15," the search for transnational publics brings up "ghosts" (Gordon 1997) of modernity and failed projects of national unity (by both the left and the right). In *La Prensa Gráfica* we see hints of how Salvadoran emigration, memories of war, and current national issues are placed in a post-war context, something that the newspaper's section on Salvadorans abroad tries to map in time and space.

"Departamento 15" first appeared on 3 April 2000. An advertisement of the time (figure one) dated 31 March 2000 reads "Nuestro país no termina en las fronteras" ('our country does not end at the borders'). The choice of name for the new section is telling in its direct reference to Salvadoran space and geography. El Salvador is divided into 14 political/administrative units called *departamentos*. For the newspaper, Salvadorans abroad come to represent the 15th administrative unit. This is a direct claim to transnational space, enhanced by the logo of the section, the interstate highway sign as a marker of location and destination. The sign connotes travel, movement and a sense of direction; but how does it achieve its purpose? Representing a transnational and globalized space, the sign "Departamento 15" is placed against a backdrop of clouds and sky, without a particular or fixed location, without a stable grip.

While this sign in the early advertising for "Departamento 15" marks a space, it also acknowledges that there is no specific location for this space. Where do Salvadorans 'belong'? The rest of the advertisement is instructive:

> DEPARTAMENTO 15: the new section of LA PRENSA GRÁFICA where you will find the most interesting histories that reflect the living conditions of Salvadorans abroad. Appreciate their successes, accomplishments and entrepreneurial initiatives that cultural exchange has provoked.
>
> Find it this Monday 3 in the DEPARTMENTS section
>
> COVERING OUR PEOPLE ABROAD
>
> (*La Prensa Gráfica*, 31 March 2000. My translation.)

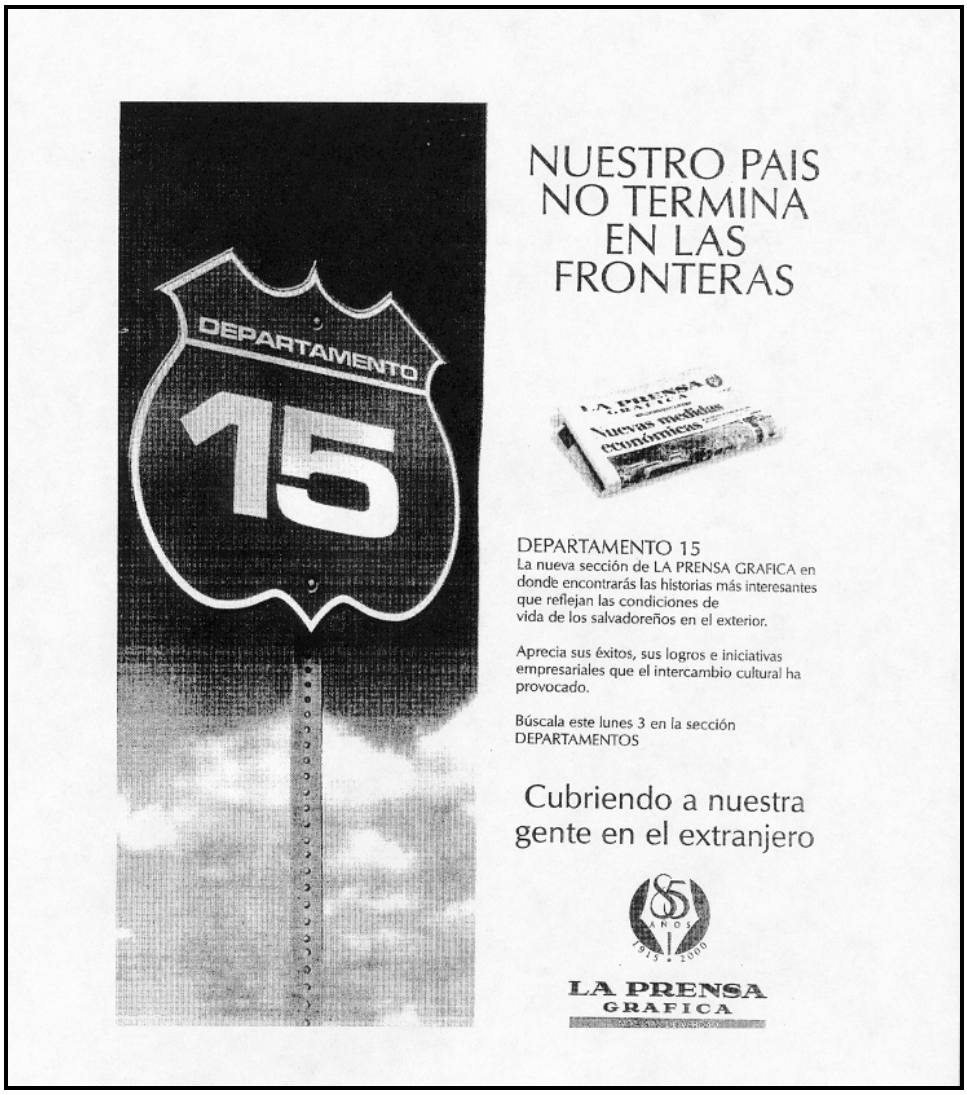

Figure 1. Nuestro país no termina en las fronteras/our country does not end at the borders. *La Prensa Gráfica*, 31 March 2000.

The newspaper advertisement constructs the Salvadoran immigrant experience as one of hard work, success, and entrepreneurial dedication, composed of "interesting histories" (or stories). It also appears as if the newspaper's mission is to "educate" Salvadorans within El Salvador about how Salvadorans beyond the border/frontier (*but not beyond the country*, as they note in their slogan) live and what they do. The

advertisement also points out that Salvadorans should appreciate the results of wartime and post-war emigration—what *La Prensa Gráfica* refers to as "cultural exchange." The section aims to be educational, to help with the establishment of a Salvadoran spatial and temporal relationship and an explanation of cultural exchange and transnational space, "an aesthetic of cognitive mapping—a pedagogical political culture" (Jameson [1991] 2003: 54). To "cover our people abroad," then, becomes a matter of educating Salvadorans within the borders; a transnational project of reclaiming subjects entails a national project of educating and disciplining subjects. Also in this advertisement, the use of the pronouns "their" and "our" construct emigrants as outside, not among the audience.

Since its first issues, "Departamento 15" articles seeped into other sections of the newspaper, defying editorial and territorial boundaries: "Departamento 15 is the axis that traverses the entire newspaper," a former editor of the section said, pointing to the salience of migration in Salvadoran daily news (M. Funes, interviewed 2005). The news articles about migration intersect with news of the Salvadoran interior, intertwined with the stories of *campesinos* who left their hometowns and now live in urban areas of the United States. This transversal news placement is already a test of the viability of portrayals in "Departamento 15;" the creation of a shared code for an imagined community of readers, regardless of location. "Departamento 15" represents a transnational flow into national and departmental news—through media representations, Salvadorans in United States cities reach their relatives and friends in towns, rural *cantones* (villages) and urban areas.

"Buscando Nuevos Horizontes" (*LPG* 3 April 2000) is an example of this reach, of "searching for new horizons" (figure two). One of the first articles to be published, it works as a statement of purpose for the new section. The article attempts to "endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system" (Jameson [1991] 2003: 54). "The rest of the world is the space of development for 20% of our people," the article begins. "Departamento 15" is presented as a space that will try to raise awareness, sensitivity, and public opinion about the "economic, social and cultural" weight of Salvadorans who live abroad:

> Because of the cultural contact they have had in other countries, they are source of inspiration and scientific, technological, entrepreneurial, and cultural experience. They are much more than their value in remittances, almost exclusive reference [of them] for many years. Here we want to disseminate the living conditions of Salvadorans abroad because it is important to bring a sense and generate more public opinion about the economic, social, and cultural weight they have in national life. (*LPG* 3 April 2000: 50. My translation.)[3]

While "Buscando Nuevos Horizontes" states that twenty percent of the Salvadoran population needs to seek better conditions elsewhere, it naturalizes this emigration. "New" transnational horizons become national spaces, the "natural extension of our small territory of twenty thousand square kilometers" (*LPG* 3 April 2000: 50). The article estimates that "more than two million Salvadorans have left for more than two

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[3] Por el contacto cultural que han tenido en otros países, son fuente de inspiración y de experiencia científica, tecnológica, empresarial y cultural. Son mucho más que su valor en remesas, referencia casi única durante muchos años. Aquí queremos difundir las condiciones de vida de los salvadoreños en el exterior porque es importante sensibilizar y generar más opinión pública sobre el peso económico, social y cultural que tienen en la vida nacional (*LPG*, 3 April 2000: 50).

Buscando nuevos horizontes

2.4 millones de salvadoreños viven en el exterior. El 91% en los Estados Unidos. Y allí, las ciudades de mayor concentración son Los Ángeles California, San Francisco y Nueva York.

DEPARTAMENTO15@LAPRENSA.COM.SV

El resto del mundo es el espacio de desarrollo para el 20% de nuestra gente. Es la extensión natural de nuestro pequeño territorio de 20 mil kilómetros cuadrados. Departamento 15, la sección semanal que hoy iniciamos, es de, para y sobre los salvadoreños y salvadoreñas insertados en distintas sociedades, culturas y países del mundo y su relación con el país.

Se estima que más de dos millones de salvadoreños se han marchado al extranjero por más de dos millones de razones.

Han llegado a una cultura con valores y exigencias diferentes, con oportunidades y recursos diferentes y en esas condiciones y circunstancias se han integrado, han absorbido nuevos patrones culturales, y muchos tienen éxito personal, empresarial y social.

Por el contacto cultural que han tenido en otros países, son fuente de inspiración y de experiencia científica, tecnológica, empresarial y cultural.

Son mucho más que su valor en remesas, referencia casi única durante muchos años.

Aquí queremos difundir las condiciones de vida de los salvadoreños en el exterior porque es importante sensibilizar y generar más opinión pública sobre el peso económico, social y cultural que tienen en la vida nacional.

PUEBLO DE MIGRANTES *Casi la cuarta parte de los salvadoreños han dejado el país para buscar una vida mejor, adaptándose a otras culturas e idiomas mientras intentan conservar su identidad.*

Para imaginarnos cuánto ganaríamos si regresaran. Para imaginarnos cuánto estamos desperdiciando. Y para imaginarnos cómo podemos aprovechar su experiencia exitosa, sus iniciativas de organización, sus vínculos y aportes sociales, económicos y políticos.

Pero también difundir las implicaciones que su salida ha tenido en el país. Las familias han cambiado mucho, las comunidades de origen también. En muchos casos abundan los ejemplos de construcciones, empresas y organizaciones promovidas por la iniciativa de salvadoreños en el exterior. Los valores y patrones de conducta han cambiado también... En este espacio estamos abiertos a conocer y difundir información en donde los actores principales sean los salvadoreños y salvadoreñas en el exterior.

Pero también queremos proporcionar información que sensibilice y motive sobre la importancia de formular políticas migratorias y contar con un marco institucional y jurídico que permita hacer de los salvadoreños y salvadoreñas en el exterior nuestros mejores y más importantes aliados en el desarrollo.

Con su partida, en fin, ha cambiado la identidad salvadoreña, ha cambiado su vida y la nuestra.

Esta nueva sección que arranca hoy y saldrá todos los lunes, espera también nutrirse con sus aportes, escríbanos.

Figure 2. Searching for new horizons: article from the first "Departamento 15" publication, 3 April 2000.

million reasons." While reasons for migration can be individual at some level, this process does not happen haphazardly, but is rooted in a history of prior contact between the "sending" and "receiving" countries that forges transnational ties, even before people migrate. I am not suggesting a simple, linear relationship between autonomous countries

defined by the movement of bodies. A critical transnational perspective (Espíritu 2003) moves beyond individual relations to migration and a United States-centered perspective on migration and paradigms of assimilation, to examine global structures and unequal "flows" that shape migration patterns. A portrayal of migration as a purely individual choice would erase other factors, such as economic inequality or war.

"Departamento 15" tries to construct a reality of Salvadoran life in the United States to produce and organize an understanding of an imagined transnational community. To do this, however, it has to create some "strange" characteristics of Salvadoran immigrants in order to justify the existence of a section such as "Departamento 15." What is particular or strange about Salvadorans abroad, but what makes them Salvadoran? Michael Warner argues that "The modern social imaginary does not make sense without strangers. A nation, market, or public in which everyone could be known personally would be no nation, market, or public at all" (Warner 2002: 57). In other words, there has to be a strangeness of the *Salvadoreños* in the United States, for them to be newsworthy and to constantly feed the imagination of community and Salvadoran national culture:

> Meaning is what gives us a sense of our own identity, of who we are and with whom we 'belong'—so it is tied up with questions of how culture is used to mark out and maintain identity within and difference between groups. Meaning is constantly being produced and exchanged in every personal and social interaction in which we take part (Hall 1997a: 3).

"Departamento 15" shapes this imaginary, sometimes in an unclear and contradictory manner. Stereotypical portrayals of Salvadorans as particularly loyal and

attached to their country of origin appear often in the news section. Stuart Hall explains how stereotypes create 'others:' *"stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes, and fixes 'difference'* […] *stereotyping deploys a strategy of 'splitting'"* (Hall 1997c: 258, emphasis in the original). Desirable qualities of "Salvadoran-ness" such as an exemplary work ethic and love of country are split from less acceptable qualities such as illegality, criminality, or resentment from wartime displacement and traumatic flight from repression.

This "masking and splitting of 'official' and phantasmatic knowledges" (Bhabha 1994: 82) allows *La Prensa Gráfica* to introduce "Departamento 15" and refer to emigration as an ambivalent "cultural exchange" and to summarize the struggle of transnational Salvadorans in one sentence, for example: "Con su partida, en fin, ha cambiado la identidad salvadoreña, ha cambiado su vida y la nuestra" ("With their departure, then, Salvadoran identity has changed, their life and ours has changed." *LPG*, 3 April 2000). Here the article clearly creates an us/them dichotomy while in other instances it focuses on creating a '*nosotros*,' an 'us' that is selectively used to facilitate "binding" of "all of us who are 'normal' into one 'imagined community'" (Hall 1997c: 258). The use of dichotomies such as us/them places Salvadorans within and outside El Salvador in different spatial and power relationships. Jacques Derrida has argued that between binary oppositions we are dealing with "a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs" (Derrida in Hall 1997c: 258). A strategy of stereotyping and othering, "in other words, is part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order" (Hall 1997c: 258).

The article on "new horizons" also begins to think about the possibility of return of emigrants, introducing an element of nostalgia and imagination of community. The section aims to be a space for the generation of public opinion in order to "*imagine* how much we would gain if they returned. To imagine how much we are wasting. And to imagine how we can make the most of their successful experience, their initiatives for organization, their social, economic, and political contributions and connections" (*LPG* 3 April 2000: 50. My translation, emphasis). The return of Salvadorans is imagined as a benefit, an expansion into exploitable global resources. However, it is necessary to note that in other "Departamento 15" stories "return" has been viewed as negative for the well-being of the nation, as in the cases of "unacceptable," deported gang members who are depicted as corruptors of local youth, leading them to crime and gang activity. Here we have at least two constructions of the Salvadoran from "Departamento 15." One is of a wanted Salvadoran with social and economic resources—the product of hard work, creativity, and honesty. He or she has skills gained elsewhere in the world, and post-war El Salvador needs those skills and good citizenship.

The other construction is of a criminalized and racialized 'marero' (gang member) who has already been "banished from the kingdom," the United States (Zilberg 2002: 232). Deportation, which would signal the end of transnational meaning-making, stigmatizes the undocumented and/or criminalized deportee. The gang member, unlike the meaningfully located "distant brother" or loyal transnational citizen of El Salvador, is spatially and socially dislocated:

> When these Salvadoran immigrant gang youth, deported from the United States, run into each other in the busy congested streets of El Salvador's

> capital, San Salvador, or in those cobbled streets of its dusty pueblos, the first thing they ask one another is 'Where you from homes?' […] a multiply determined question about origin, geography, affiliation and identity […] (Zilberg 2002: 233).

Lives are split and shaped by these stereotypes, forms of violence that lead to misrecognition and exclusion. "Departamento 15" implies or presumes a national unity, and through this process it attempts to dislocate "undesirable" elements of the transnational imaginary. Meanwhile, the "model" Salvadorans are *close*, as the editor stated, and share in Salvadoran society, inhabiting the same physical and symbolic space, as I will discuss next.

"Practically as if they were here"

In El Salvador, "transmigrants' centrality in the national economic order prompts investment strategies from different sectors of society" (Landolt 2001: 10). One strategy, as we have seen, concerns the involvement of media institutions in the production of meaning. In this section I will discuss a project of circulation in the United States that *LPG* (including "Departamento 15") executed during 2002 and 2003. Although circulation in the United States has for the moment been cancelled because, according to one of the editors, "it was not thought through" in terms of marketing strategy and became logistically difficult, here I discuss its beginnings as illustrative of how *LPG* constructs a public(s) and an imaginary outside geographical borders.

On 9 September 2002, the print version of *La Prensa Gráfica* began to circulate simultaneously in El Salvador as well as Houston, San Francisco, Los Angeles,

Washington DC, and New York. The following day an editorial chronicled the event as "Una expansión histórica" ("An Historical Expansion"):

> Starting this Monday, our newspaper will, on a daily basis, reach the hands of Salvadorans in the cities already mentioned, and with that possibility our compatriots will be able to feel closer to the realities [of the *patria*], practically as if they were here. This is a fact that transcends market policies and logistical efforts: it is the concrete result of a rapprochement that we have been dreaming about for a long time, as the realities and the interaction between Salvadorans here and Salvadorans there have become stronger and more organic (*LPG* 10 September 2002: 15).[4]

The news stories, editorials, and responses surrounding this event highlight how "historical expansion" involves Salvadoran readers in this project of circulation—how it shapes everyday practices and a public while sharing a vision with them. By addressing Salvadorans in the United States, migrants and the newspaper become accomplices in this project. According to Michael Warner, "A nation, for example, includes its members whether they are awake or asleep, sober or drunk, sane or deranged, alert or comatose. Because a public exists only by virtue of address, it must predicate some degree of attention, however notional, from its members" (Warner 2002: 61). The editorial I analyze here is a perfect example of an imagining of an attentive public, a group with a national (Salvadoran) interest.

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[4] Desde este lunes, nuestro periódico podrá llegar cotidianamente a las manos de los salvadoreños en las ciudades mencionadas, y con esa posibilidad nuestros compatriotas podrán sentirse más cerca de las realidades patrias, prácticamente como si estuvieran aquí. Este es un hecho que trasciende las políticas de mercado y los esfuerzos de logística: es la concreción de un acercamiento con el que venimos soñando desde hace ya tiempo, en la medida que las realidades y la interacción entre los salvadoreños de aquí y los salvadoreños de allá se han ido haciendo más fuertes y orgánicas (*La Prensa Gráfica*, 10 Sept. 2002: 15).

The editorial quoted above is meaningful in its allusion to a past of separation and displacement. The newspaper's circulation abroad is the tangible result of a dream of rapprochement or reunification. Circulation, as Michael Warner notes, is an analytical category in the study of print media: "public discourse has presupposed daily and weekly rhythms of circulation. It has also presupposed an ability—natural to moderns, but rather peculiar if one thinks about it at all—to address this scene of circulation as a social entity" (Warner 2002: 69). The editorial builds on this social imaginary, and recognizes the reality of "interactions between Salvadorans here and Salvadorans there." In other words, it acknowledges the strength and social significance of transnational ties, and the need to expand into that transnational field in order to reach all compatriots. This reach imagines Salvadorans in urban areas of the United States as if their daily lives were located in El Salvador, close to its realities, part of the social entity—*"practically as if they were here."* Readers of *La Prensa Gráfica* and its "Departamento 15" section are "interpellated […] and often respond by seeing themselves as members of a national audience" (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 177).

Circulation abroad is produced, in part, as a response to changing habits of news consumption, a fact identified in the editorial: "Information needs grow and change in an accelerated manner; and the fundamental imperative lies in serving the citizens, wherever they may be, in a better, more opportune, and broader way" (my translation).[5] "Historical expansion" recognizes the global space where *citizens* do not necessarily live within

[5] "Las necesidades de información crecen y cambian de manera acelerada, y el imperativo fundamental estriba en servir cada vez mejor y más oportuna y ampliamente a los ciudadanos, estén donde estuvieren" (*LPG*, 10 September 2002: 15).

geographic, territorial boundaries. Now, an entity called "the Salvadoran public," regardless of location, can claim to be a "social totality" served by its own newspaper. The basic purpose of the newspaper's circulation, its editors say, is to "serve as a permanent link, in this age when distances of all kinds give in before the uncontainable advances of technology" (*LPG* 10 September 2002: 15). This emphasis on permanence, connection, and a sense of belonging in an era of movement and instability seeks to bind Salvadorans as a national category of readers of Salvadoran news. In turn, this transnational Salvadoran public/community participates in a global division of labor, as immigrants in large global cities. Again, I quote from the editorial:

> To be able to have all that informative material on a daily basis will make the links between the co-nationals and their communities fresher and more vigorous. Our country is, percentage-wise, the one with the most population in the United States. That enormous contingent of Salvadorans who live and work [in the world's] most developed society constitutes a force of extraordinary cultural and economic power, acting in a decisive manner upon the destiny [of the *patria*] and in the configuration of the modern identity of our national conglomerate (*LPG* 10 September 2002: 15).[6]

Salvadorans have left their country and eventually settled in other areas of the world. Following the paths of its potential readership, the newspaper expands its boundaries. By addressing them, this public emerges "in relation to texts and their circulation" (Warner 2002: 50). The newspaper attempts to "refresh and invigorate the links" between Salvadorans abroad and the communities they left behind. Salvadorans in

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[6] "Poder tener a diario todo ese material informativo hará que los vínculos entre los connacionales y sus comunidades se mantengan más frescos y vigorosos. Nuestro país es, porcentualmente, el que mayor población tiene en Estados Unidos. Ese enorme contingente de salvadoreños que viven y trabajan en la sociedad más desarrollada de la tierra constituye una fuerza de extraordinario poder cultural y económico, que está incidiendo de manera decisiva en el destino patrio y en la configuración de la identidad moderna de nuestro conglomerado nacional."

the United States are reclaimed as part of a post-war national project—rebuilding and modernizing El Salvador; influencing the country's destiny and "configuration of modern identity" (*LPG* 10 September 2002:15). However, in this imaginary, the text of "Departamento 15" alone is not enough to create a public (Warner 2002: 62). *La Prensa Gráfica* as a text is not an isolated creator of this social totality, but is in conversation with existing discourses about post-war El Salvador.

Discourses of state modernization and of post-war reconciliation, democracy, migration, and globalization are already in circulation and combine to form an imaginary where Salvadorans in the United States, for years invisible and unaddressed, are now acknowledged. The multi-authored report *Temas claves para el Plan de Nación: Consulta Especializada,* (1999) to take an example, outlines a vision for post-war El Salvador. The first chapter, "Sociedad sin fronteras" ("Society without Borders," or frontiers) immediately incorporates "Salvadoreños en el exterior" as necessary for nation-building:

> In the world there are now formidable challenges for small countries. Globalization provokes a growing internationalization of national processes. […] El Salvador has resources to connect better to the world. At the same time, it has conditions to enter another stage in its history. During the 20th century there had never been so many favorable aspects to initiate the eradication of poverty and emerge from underdevelopment. There is an unequaled human experience, accumulated by the hundreds of thousands of women and men living abroad, who still maintain links with their communities of origin. (Campos et al. 1999: 3. My translation.)[7]

[7] En el mundo hay ahora retos formidables para los países pequeños. La globalización provoca la creciente internacionalización de los procesos nacionales. […] El Salvador tiene recursos para conectarse mejor al mundo. Al mismo tiempo, tiene condiciones para entrar a otra etapa de su historia. Durante el siglo XX nunca hubo tantos aspectos favorables para iniciar la erradicación de la pobreza y salir del atraso. Hay una experiencia humana sin par, la acumulada por los cientos de miles de mujeres y hombres radicados en el exterior que todavía mantienen vínculos con sus comunidades de origen (Campos et al., 1999: 3).

"Globalization provokes a growing internationalization of national processes," the 1999 proposed plan for the nation argues, sounding remarkably like *LPG*'s "Una expansión histórica." In both spaces (one, of consultants, scholars, and specialists, the other of journalists and editors) the logical way to connect to the outside world is through the Salvadorans already residing outside El Salvador, who can provide the way out of poverty (not solely through their remittances, but because of their "human experience"). The most "favorable aspects" for national development have come about after the country's armed conflict. The same discourses of local development through engagement with the transnational field and the experience of Salvadoran immigrants permeate both *LPG* and the *Plan*. As José Roberto Dutriz, executive director of *La Prensa Gráfica,* expressed in a 10 September 2002 article: "With this effort, *La Prensa Gráfica* situates itself within the process of globalization, and crowns an example for the Salvadoran economy" (*LPG*, 10 September 2002: 3).[8]

While in 2007 the print edition of the newspaper no longer reaches Salvadorans in cities in the United States, *LPG* online and daily portrayals in "Departamento 15" continue to link Salvadoran communities, regardless of their physical location. Many responses from *LPG* readers point to a sense of pride in Salvadoran nationality and culture. References to "our newspaper" and "the newspaper of El Salvador" demonstrate the connection between mass media and its trans/national public.

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[8] In this article, Dutriz also explains that the newspaper acquired a license (from the US Dept. of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs) to distribute the newspaper in the United States, a process that required the formation of a new entity, "La Prensa Gráfica Incorporated"— to expand the nation, the newspaper becomes a transnational corporation.

Responses

The newspaper "alludes to its own popularity" (Warner 2002: 70) by publishing the responses and comments of its readers. "Departamento 15" offers some hints as to how the circuit of culture and decoding of meaning develops. Three days after the first issue of "Departamento 15," on 6 April 2000, *La Prensa Gráfica* published reader responses under the headline "La recompensa de ser pioneros"—"The Reward for being Pioneers," where the "pioneers" are both the newspaper section and the migrants it portrays. Aaron from Canada wrote: "'Departamento 15,' sincerely many thanks for making us part of Salvadoran society, for giving us a place. We are far away but our heart is always in El Salvador." José from Las Vegas wrote that "it was about time that national media took us into account and who better than the best Salvadoran newspaper. Congratulations." Pedro from Vancouver noted that "we are the first virtual department of the world!"[9] These responses bring out different spheres or locations—José imagines himself as a recipient and reader of national media; Aaron feels far away, yet included in Salvadoran society, while Pedro celebrates a new and unique "virtual" department.

When the newspaper circulated abroad in 2002 and reached a Salvadoran grocery store in New York, the newspapers arrived and "It only took ten minutes for ten people to grab their issue [of *LPG*] and start reading it" (*LPG*, 17 September 2002). Readers who e-mailed *La Prensa Gráfica* to comment on this project of circulation included José from Dallas, Texas. He said: "I congratulate the Dutriz group for such a good project, I feel

[9] "La recompensa de ser pioneros." *LPG* 6 April 2000: 58. My translation.

proud to be as Salvadoran as *LPG* and I will carry the name of my country with pride, just like *LPG* does today" (*LPG* 13 September 2002).[10] Ramón e-mailed his response, also commenting on this event: "This is one of the greatest dreams that Salvadorans have reached: to be well-informed with our own newspaper. I congratulate you, I feel very happy to be a pure Salvadoran […]" (*LPG* 13 September 2002). Alfredo wrote from Salinas, California: "I feel very proud to know that the newspaper of El Salvador is here now. For me as a Salvadoran-American it is one more achievement of our people [*pueblo*]" (*LPG* 13 September 2002). A response from José (who wrote from San Francisco) described his daily ritual of interaction with Salvadoran news; which requires internet access to the newspaper's website: "Personally the first thing I do every day is turn on my computer and read *La Prensa Gráfica*, accompanied by a cup of coffee. Congratulations!" (*LPG*, 11 September 2002).

Through these responses, and dozens of similar ones, we get a sense of positive reception of "Departamento 15" by Salvadorans who anticipate that this will be a space they can use to participate in Salvadoran society. These responses have mutually constitutive purposes. One, they reinforce a journalistic claim to a specialized kind of knowledge of the subjects portrayed in "Departamento 15," and at the same time the readers are called upon to validate that knowledge. As the subheading of the "Pioneers" response page states, "Your participation is invaluable in this section, and confirms to us that we are on the correct path." Two, while publishing the voices to the readers, the

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[10] "Felicito al grupo Dutriz por tan buen proyecto, me siento orgulloso de ser tan salvadoreño como LA PRENSA GRÁFICA y llevaré el nombre de mi país en alto, así como *LPG* lo hace hoy."

newspaper continues to justify its existence as an authority that "gives voice" and has the power to produce and represent a community of readers who in turn send messages, and so on.

Reader responses are a reminder that the text of "Departamento 15" is not fully closed, and that a reading of a text can be interpreted and reinterpreted in various ways: "Language (communication) is both material and social. It is therefore mutable. Makers and users, writers and readers, senders and receivers can do things with communication that are unintended, unplanned for, indeed, unwished for" (Newcomb 1984: 39). While some messages accommodate the prevalent meaning of Salvadoran migration portrayed in "Departamento 15;" other messages from Salvadorans abroad break or subvert the idealized narrative of migration. They aim to create a space of inclusion of other histories; many of the respondents create a "different" type of *nosotros*. For example, Héctor from California writes:

> …it is time to recognize the invaluable contribution that Salvadorans have provided to El Salvador through many years, and this sentiment is shared by many of my compatriots abroad. We are fed up that we are only viewed as a source of income, for even the exit from our country was traumatic enough for us, not to mention leaving our families, friends, and memories behind, to arrive to such strange places. Thank you for this section. (*LPG* 6 April 2000: 58. My translation.)[11]

Despite the limitations of space and access, many messages try to insert alternative histories. The response by Héctor, "a sentiment shared by many of my

[11] …ya es hora de reconocer el invaluable aporte que los salvadoreños hemos proveído a El Salvador a través de muchos años, y este sentimiento es compartido por muchos de mis compatriotas en el exterior. Ya estamos hartos de que sólo nos vean como fuente de divisas, pues sólo la salida de nuestro país fue suficientemente traumática para nosotros, ya no se diga haber dejado a nuestras familias, amigos, y recuerdos atrás, para llegar a lugares tan extraños. Gracias por esta sección.

compatriots abroad," demands something *beyond* recognition for "hard work" and sending money home. It demands restitution of family, friends, and memories—but who can provide this type of restitution? To what extent can "Departamento 15" be an effective way of restitution, and recovery of memory? The section gains a symbolic value, similar to a war memorial, as it reconstitutes migrants to the Salvadoran imaginary.

The news section is invested with a special power—through its circulation of portrayals and responses, it establishes transnational connections. While the newspaper often imagines a return and nostalgia of the emigrant community, in turn this emigrant community also thinks about searching, perhaps in an effort to link this newfound space of a transnational "Departamento 15" with some sense of recovery of a disrupted past. We turn to this sense of recovery in the next sections, where I discuss portrayals of patriotism and civic celebrations among migrants.

Independence, Part I: 4 July

We have considered how "Departamento 15" fits into the rest of *La Prensa Gráfica* and how it brings about a transnational imaginary. My analysis of representations and connections to nostalgia and politics continues with a series of cover pages and headlines of *La Prensa Gráfica* where "Departamento 15" is present—and we can examine the absences. The headline from 4 July 2003 (figure three) reads: "País fue puente de armas a Contras" ("Country was a bridge of weapons to the Contras"). The smaller notes below it read "El nexo de Oliver North" and "Ilopango, base de envío." The photo next to the headline shows Luis Posada Carriles, a Cuban exile with alleged links

to the United States Central Intelligence Agency who was interviewed for this "special report." Below this headline is a photograph of three girls. Its caption reads (my translation):

> **Family tragedy:** family photograph of the young Salvadorans (L to R) Amelia Recinos, Nancy Gavidia and Stephanie Recinos, who died on June 20 in a car accident as they drove to Las Vegas for a concert. They were buried in Victorville, California this past weekend (*La Prensa Gráfica* 4 July 2003).

The girls' fatal accident was two weeks before, while the headline refers to United States intervention in Central America throughout the 1980s. The relationship between space and time is disrupted, apparently incongruous to our contemporary expectation that news travels fast, at the moment it occurs, and that we have access to mediated knowledge about events. Both news items, however, convey a feeling of immediacy in their connection to wartime and post-war El Salvador. To an extent, this feeling depends on our knowledge of Salvadoran history in the past decades. To be meaningful on this level, the photo and the headline in part depend on the more specific knowledge of how the three Salvadoran girls and their families ended up in California, that is, how their emigration is linked to "the bridge of weapons" El Salvador was during the 1980s.

Next to the larger headline and photo of the cover page, we find other news in smaller print. On the "Nación" (national news) section we can find news about then-leader Schafik Handal, of the FMLN, about how any party member who did not approve of Schafik's proposed candidacy for president in 2004 could be "in trouble." The other national news item in small print is about the end of the 10-month doctor's strike, and how the doctors are now returning to the hospitals they had "abandoned," or left.

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NOTICIAS DE VERDAD

País fue puente de armas a Contras

ESPECIAL 2-6

EL NEXO DE OLIVER NORTH

» Luis Posada Carriles confesó haber sido parte de un grupo para enviar armas a la Contra nicaragüense.

ILOPANGO, BASE DE ENVÍO

» Las operaciones de transporte del arsenal a Nicaragua eran coordinadas por Posada desde la base aérea local.

BANCOS SUSPENDEN EMBARGOS AL AGRO

CRÉDITOS EN MORA SERÁN REESTRUCTURADOS HASTA 15 AÑOS PLAZO 54

NACIÓN

En remojo dirigentes que rechazan a Schafik

Tribunal de ética del FMLN amenaza con sanciones. 10

NACIÓN

Inician labores los médicos huelguistas

Después de 10 meses de abandonar hospitales comienza su reinstalo. 20

CINE

"LOS ÁNGELES DE CHARLIE II"

"JOHNNY ENGLISH"

"LA VIDA DE DAVID GALE"

Tragedia familiar. Reproducción de una fotografía familiar de las jóvenes salvadoreñas (de izquierda a derecha) Amelia Recinos, Nancy Gavidia y Stephanie Recinos, quienes fallecieron el 20 de junio en un accidente de tránsito cuando se conducían hacia Las Vegas, Nevada, para asistir a un concierto. Las tres jóvenes fueron sepultadas en Victorville, California, el pasado fin de semana. 52

15

DEPORTE

EL COES A ELECCIÓN

Benjamín Ruiz Rodas y Mauricio Samayoa dirimen hoy quién se queda con la silla. 118-119

DERROTA INJUSTA

La selección salvadoreña cayó por la mínima diferencia ante Paraguay, en un partido de alternativas. 126

Figure 3. País fue puente de armas a Contras/Tragedia familiar. ***La Prensa Gráfica*****, 4 July 2003.**

In this specific page we find both items of current, national, updated, post-war news placed on the margins, in small print, in contrast to the news about the Contras and the young Salvadorans in California. News about El Salvador's relationship to the United States is prioritized in this page; yet there a curious absence, considering the date, July 4.

There are no references to United States Independence Day. Even in the Salvadoran transnational codes of meaning (where there is awareness of the United States and its role or involvement) obviously not everything can make it onto the eye-catching cover page. We don't see a Salvadoran-American in the United States celebrating the 4th of July. The imaginary of "Departamento 15," after all, is Salvadoran.

Not yet invisible, but in the margins, the doctors were striking for months against the privatization of public hospitals, which could make them less accessible to many Salvadorans. The other article is about the FMLN's trajectory as a political party in the post-war period; its internal politics are here portrayed as a purge that punishes anyone who disagrees. Still more marginalized in this news page is the tiny photo of the agricultural workers next to a note on bank credits for the endangered agricultural sector; and a small (but in eye-catching yellow) blurb on the Salvadoran soccer team: "Derrota injusta" ("unfair defeat" in a match against the Paraguayan soccer team). Even the promotional picture for *Charlie's Angels II* (bottom left) takes up more space than these small photographs, indicative of a larger trend which emphasizes the weight of outside influence—wartime intervention, Salvadorans abroad, international sports tournaments, Hollywood film—in the constitution of a transnational imaginary.

I suggest that the marginality that the other news stories are treated with is not simply a matter of layout conventions. Could either "Nation" news item have enough value to be the main headline? In this cover page the political and the aesthetic are linked; some histories are deliberately placed on the margins while others are centered. In this case, transnational news of Salvadorans abroad and wartime have more news value and

thus claim their central space in the page and in a narrative of the Salvadoran imaginary. It was finally possible to speak of U.S. military support and the Contras of the 1980s as a "special investigation" news story, and place a photograph of Salvadoran emigrants below this headline, without the interference of 1980s political tensions. By remembering a conflict where El Salvador served as a *link* in the fight against a previous [and now recycled] Cold-War era "them," El Salvador's small but strategic geopolitical position comes into representation in the new chronotope of post-war globalization.

The current transnational location of many Salvadorans is the result of violent splitting (Bhabha 1994) and border-crossing. There are many things happening in the "family tragedy" front page; in its description of different time periods, selection, and marginalization of stories. As a cover page it is designed to be attractive, with its color photography and attention-grabbing headline. Yet its focus seems to be on the past, and on the possibilities for closure or recovery of selected fragments of that past to the world of post-war meaning.

We can think about the importance of the family metaphor in relation to the nation and group identification. The people involved in this tragedy will not be repatriated to the geographic boundaries of Salvadoran territory, in that sense they will never return. Nevertheless, the bodies of Amelia, Nancy, and Stephanie are symbolically recovered through the photographic image, through commodification as news. In this mediation, we do not have to confront the physical bodies, yet we still have to confront the portrayal of the migrant body involved in a tragedy and captured as a photo (see Jameson 2000: 125). This "family photograph" is also part of a larger flow of images,

remittances, and objects that form transnational links between Salvadoran families, the constant exchange of gifts and memories that keep families in contact. It is through this often reluctant yet powerful recovery that a family tragedy gains meaning as a national tragedy, by entering the public space of "Departamento 15."

Independence, Part II: 15 September

La Prensa Gráfica presents linked histories of nationalism, violence, and migration. We see how "Departamento 15" makes it into the front page, and how the transnational space of Salvadoran migration merges with or comes to stand for an idealized space of civic nationalism. In this section I focus on portrayals of the commemoration of Salvadoran Independence Day, September 15, 1821. The spaces of celebration I analyze, however, are not necessarily within Salvadoran borders established at the end of the Central American wars of independence or those theorized in modern conceptions of nationalism, where territorial integrity is fundamental.

The cover photo for 15 September 2003 (figure four) shows a crowd of people waving Salvadoran and Honduran flags (and one United States flag, as well as one Mexican flag) under an overcast sky. The caption on the front page reads:

Figure 4. The portrayal of patriotism and gang warfare.

> **Civic Festivity in the U.S.A.** Thousands of Salvadorans, accompanied by Central American brothers, celebrate the festivities of Independence [of the *patria*] in Suffolk county, state of New York, in the United States. The compatriots commemorated for the first time, in an official manner, the Day of the Central American with an attendance of over 20,000 people (*LPG* 15 September 2003).[12]

[12] **Fiesta Cívica en E.U.A**.: Miles de salvadoreños, acompañados de hermanos centroamericanos, celebran las fiestas de la Independencia patria en el condado de Suffolk, estado de Nueva York, en Estados Unidos.

The civic festivity in Suffolk County, New York gathered Salvadorans and their Central American *brothers* in a patriotic celebration. Here they remembered together—*commemorated*—the 182nd anniversary of Central American independence, but they did so officially for the first time as "The Day of the Central American" in New York, their new home. This is a first, and newsworthy, independence celebration depicted in "Departamento 15," one of remembering important dates in Salvadoran history but also of claiming cultural and civic space in the United States. Remembering a Salvadoran holiday turns into inventing a new tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). For Salvadoran immigrants, the claim to public space in the United States takes the form of loyalty to the Salvadoran flag and cultural traditions, resulting in portrayals of ideal citizenship in "Departamento 15."

The main headline of this day's *La Prensa Gráfica* depicts a different struggle for space, and a tragedy that is not viewed in fraternal terms. The headline boldly states: "Siete mareros mueren a manos de rivales" (Seven Gang Members Die at the Hands of their Rivals) (figure four). Two Salvadoran towns, Olocuilta and Ilobasco, were scenes of gang violence and death over the weekend, and "authorities demand a law against gangs" (*LPG* 15 September 2003: cover page). Authorities demand a restoration of order in the same manner as their U.S. law enforcement counterparts: "Deportation of immigrant gang youth bring into the focus the ways in which both nation-states—US and

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Los compatriotas conmemoraron por primera vez, en forma oficial, el Día del Centroamericano con una asistencia de más de 20 mil personas.

Salvadoran—are reorganizing to manage the pressures of globalization and to police their respective boundaries" (Zilberg 2002: 394). This national space of transnational violence problematizes the depiction of independence and post-war peace. The perception that Salvadoran gang members deported from the United States due to their criminal record are at the root of post-war violence, as opposed to wider unresolved socioeconomic issues, influences this thinking. The media portrayal of the Salvadoran gang member, the ruthless killer of his rivals, is part of the undercurrent of violence in the transnational imaginary.

As I did for "Independence, Part I," I want to consider the margins of this page, in the midst of which a photographic representation of Salvadoran nationalism is mapped. The left margin lists two other news stories. One can be located on page 36 in the "Mundo" (World) section: "Juan Pablo II finaliza viaje a Eslovaquia," about Pope John Paul II's trip to Slovakia; the other on page 46 in the economics section: "WTO Meeting Ends in Failure." The right margin refers us to news about Salvadoran troops in Iraq celebrating Independence Day, "Salvadoran Troops Celebrate Civic Month: the Cuscatlán battalion Sings National Anthem in Nayaf." In this page we have a representation of Central American brotherhood and civic nationalism surrounded by news of violence in Iraq and El Salvador, failure of trade negotiations, and a reference to another nation also dealing with the post-Cold War era. Here it is possible to draw from the establishment of new chronotopes: new wars, such as the conflict in Iraq, and link these spaces and temporalities to the production of Salvadoran trans/nationalism. We have a renewed connection of Salvadoran troops and United States involvement, this time

with the *Batallón Cuscatlán* stationed in Nayaf singing El Salvador's national anthem: *Saludemos la Patria orgullosos/ de hijos suyos podernos llamar/ y juremos la vida animosos/ sin descanso a su bien consagrar.*

These connections and contradictions make the presence of a civic celebration in New York even more moving: surrounded by references to violence and the fragmentation of the world, the porous Salvadoran transnational space is brought into the center. Yes, there are threats: gang violence, wars, even the gray sky that could ruin and disperse the celebration. Despite these there is a sea of Salvadoran flag; we witness one of many "lonely gatherings of the scattered people, their myths and fantasies and experiences […] *the perspective of the nation's margin and the migrants' exile*" (Bhabha 1994: 139. my emphasis). The text and photographs in *La Prensa Gráfica* point to a romanticizing of nationalism and civic feeling: "the nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin" (Bhabha 1994: 139). In the portrayal of ordinary Salvadorans celebrating *el Día de la Independencia* we have a true project of modernity, since in this instance we do not glimpse their everyday lives but can imagine them as part of Salvadoran society.

Considering the existence of a Salvadoran transnational space, we can see the failure of the state to provide for its citizens, instead pushing them out of its physical boundaries to what *LPG* called "an extension of our territory" where they must seek better conditions. Yet the nation is alive and exerts considerable influence on its citizens: "not only as a political-bureaucratic apparatus, but as an idea, as an epistemological orientation to the world" (Baker-Cristales 1999: 16). Beth Baker's analysis of Salvadoran

transnationalism argues that "Transnational politics becomes, of necessity, the politics of the state system" (Baker-Cristales 1999: 14, also see Landolt 2001) and reveals "a good deal of public pride in Salvadoran cultural identity, a pride often enacted at community events such as the Independence Day parade, fund raising parties and picnics, and soccer games in which a Salvadoran team faces a non-Salvadoran team" (Baker-Cristales 1999: 168).

To Beth Baker's examples of public pride in Salvadoran culture and identity, I want to add the idea of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) campaigns as part of a civic celebration. Coincidentally, the deadline to renew TPS in 2003 was September 15, as we can see in the newspaper's cover page (*LPG* 15 September 2003). A September 14, 2003 story clearly makes the connection: "Independence [of the *patria*] and TPS go hand in hand in San Francisco: Deadline for Salvadoran Renewal is Tomorrow" (*LPG*, 14 September 2003: 22). The story has an interesting introduction:

> San Francisco, California. Leonardo Morazán danced happily to the rhythm of a *cumbia* under a hot sun, this Saturday morning. An enormous tattoo on his left arm left no doubt about his origin: the Salvadoran emblem, reproduced perfectly for posterity. Originally from San Salvador, Morazán has lived here in California for 35 of his 42 years of life. A few steps away, Alex, who preferred not to reveal his surname, also proudly showed off the *cuscatleco* [refers to the indigenous name of the area that is now El Salvador] emblem on his skin, along with the phrase "100% Salvadoran." With 21 years, four of them in San Francisco, Alex says that he does not forget his native Chalatenango (*LPG* 14 Sept 2003: 22).

Two tattooed men represent Salvadoran loyalty and nationalism in this article. Dancing happily to a *cumbia,* their body modification is political. The perfectly reproduced *escudo nacional* (national emblem) on the skin gains social and political significance: "the body figures prominently in our notions of self and community, in our

cultural politics, and in social control and power relations" (Pitts 2003: 3). Alex and Leonardo's body marks are an expression (signs) of pride and belonging. Unlike the tattoos of gang members, these 'enormous tattoos' of Salvadoran civic symbols are represented as perfectly acceptable, as *'100% Salvadoran.'*

San Francisco's Central American Independence Festival was an opportunity to show the unity of the isthmus. The consulates of the five Central American countries organized the festival together and encouraged immigrants to celebrate ties to their countries of origin. Most of the participants were Salvadoran since they make up a majority of San Francisco's Central American population, estimated by Salvadoran consular authorities at fifty thousand (*LPG* 14 September 2003: 22). Like the gathering in Suffolk County, the festival is also portrayed as a claim to public space, a park in the Bay Area. On this occasion it is also tied to legal claims to Temporary Protected Status. I am reminded of Coutin's (2000) argument about Salvadorans inhabiting spaces of nonexistence in their struggle for legal recognition during the 1980s. In "Departamento 15" we have a post-war representation of a space of existence and visibility, an acknowledgement of Salvadoran immigrants by the United States government (Department of Justice) and the Salvadoran government (represented by the consulate). But the situation is part of the uneasy "flows" of people: the person protected by TPS is not allowed to leave and return to the United States without a special permit. It is a commitment to remaining in the United States, perhaps separated from relatives and friends; a restriction of travel. A broader commitment, as a Salvadoran out of the country, is to sending remittances and other goods to relatives in El Salvador. Therefore renewal

of Temporary Protected Status means a commitment to a transnational (albeit temporarily immobile) identity and its perceived obligations.

Conclusion

I take you back to the 3rd of April 2000 page I described early in this chapter, where the photograph next to the "Searching for New Horizons" article (figure two) caught my attention. The photo shows a Salvadoran woman and a street sign. Like the logo of "Departamento 15," the sign "Parking for *Salvadoreños* only" is not "real." It is a consumer product, private property, and serves as a marker of place and belonging, where anyone who is *not* Salvadoran "will be towed." In contrast to the "Departamento 15" sign and advertising discussed earlier, this parking sign is nailed to a wall, not flying freely in the sky. Next to it is a woman, and if we look closely, on her shoulder she carries a measuring tape. Perhaps she is a garment worker? Although the "Parking" sign is fixed to the wall, the caption that accompanies the photograph gives us no hint of exact location or any information about the woman in the picture. Surely she has a location, one of which would be within the global division of labor. *La Prensa Gráfica* emphasizes her identity as a migrant who is *parked*, immobilized in this image as she "searches for new horizons."

The representation of Salvadoran migrant productivity and daily life outside El Salvador expands the national borders and projects the country as a transnational social imaginary. A persistently imagined yet indefinitely deferred return to El Salvador is central in the production of community and nostalgic feeling in the newspaper.

"Departamento 15" circulates a notion of longing through the section of reader responses and in frequent references to Salvadoran cultural and civic celebrations. These create a field of meanings and perceptions of a shared past (and possible future) in a "borderless" El Salvador, a way of representing national identity and expanding the role of the press in constituting citizenship and the nation.

I have discussed portrayals and strategies of representation in texts and images from "Departamento 15," the use of photography, advertising, and news stories to convey notions of what Salvadorans outside El Salvador are like. I have focused on the newspaper's construction of Salvadorans in the United States as exceptionally patriotic and hard-working—model transnational citizens in the global division of labor. While in this chapter representation is most immediately linked to media representation, I also suggest the broader political and social implications of representing Salvadoran migrants in the transnational imaginary. Salvadorans outside El Salvador are addressed and become a public—they are included as part of a social totality and a trans/national project. In addition, it has been argued that because one text alone does not make a public, (Warner 2002) it is important to contextualize the emergence of "Departamento 15" in relation to wider discourses of post-war reconstruction, globalization, and plans for the economic and social future of El Salvador.

The portrayal of transnational Salvadorans as nostalgic and patriotic seeps into the rest of *La Prensa Gráfica*, where articles branded with the previously described, floating highway sign of "15" step outside the boundaries of their section. "Departamento 15" serves as a marker of location and destination, part of a space where meanings of

transnational "Salvadoran-ness" are co-produced. It also points to the contradictory spaces of immobility and mobility of Salvadorans in relation to capital; or the gaps that Salvadoran migration would reveal about global capitalism. The "Parking for *Salvadoreños* only" sign, nailed to a wall in contrast to the highway sign of "Departamento 15," is a representation of this unresolved tension.

While I point to the emergence of new transnational spaces and responses in the news section, it is not to suggest a linear, perfect palindrome of history where media representation of Salvadoran emigrants has followed complete recognition of their conditions, accompanied by political (or other kind of) representation within El Salvador. The Salvadoran transnational space has emerged out of a concern for memory and nostalgia; but also has developed for practical reasons as a survival tactic for many Salvadoran families who depend on remittances, networks of friends and family, and informal courier services to stay in touch with their relatives. I suggest that "Departamento 15," and especially its reader response section are symbolic spaces of memory, in the same manner as war memorials aim to encourage collective national remembering—or forgetting—and reclaiming of its citizens. The response section reminds us of the possibility of openness, alternative histories, and dialogue that may develop in "Departamento 15." These statements of openness and inclusion seem to perfectly complement the "Departamento 15" editor's comment on the place of emigrants and how "Departamento 15" wants to include them and be "more faithful to the reality that is presented." The respondents can be free to engage the section in precisely the ways defined by *LPG*.

On the one hand we have the persuasive argument that through "Departamento 15" Salvadoran national identity becomes something that Salvadorans everywhere can claim regardless of their location. In this scheme, the country goes beyond the borders; migration and transnational space are linked to "Salvadoran-ness." The experience of migration, which for decades was largely ignored, is now central and shapes many aspects of Salvadoran culture. However, the work of representation, as Stuart Hall (1997) reminds us, is never finalized. Thus in this imaginary of transnationalism we must also explore the presence and meaning of portrayals of gang members, deportees, and repatriated bodies, as well as the dramatic stories of violence and family separation in "Departamento 15," which I will address in the next chapter.

Chapter Two

"A Country of Desperate People:"

Emigration, Violence, and Family Separation

Introduction

This chapter examines violence, family separation, and the amputated and repatriated body as contested symbols and social relations of the Salvadoran transnational imaginary. We can think of the body as "simultaneously a physical and symbolic artifact, as both naturally and culturally produced, and as securely anchored in a particular historical moment" (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987: 7). I consider how portrayals of migrant bodies in *La Prensa Gráfica* are situated in particular and contradictory contexts. The same newspaper section that has portrayed Salvadoran transnational movement, migration, and imagination also includes stories of deportation, death, mutilation, and accidents that occur to Salvadoran migrants in the course of their trip through Mexico and to the United States. What, if anything, distinguishes the stereotyped *hermano lejano* of civic nationalism from the amputee and deportee, or from the mother who, out of necessity, leaves her children behind? Why does this difference matter?

The exploration of these contradictions is central to this project: an analysis of "Departamento 15" and the transnational spaces it claims for the nation. To constitute itself, the transnational space of fluidity and exchange needs "others"—Salvadorans who

are denied mobility, sometimes in the most dramatic forms. Immobility and family separation are disruptive of the idea that the experience of migration and borderless transnationality is accessible to every Salvadoran. Anna Tsing argues that metaphors of "flow" and "circulation" transform problematic processes with profound human consequences into feel-good, quasi-natural processes; she argues that migration, one of the "flows" we address as we study globalization, "is movement stimulated through political and economic channels." (Tsing 2000: 338). Tsing engages "friction" as a nuanced view of flow and global connections, where "heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power" (Tsing 2005: 1, 5).

As "flows," representations of bodies rely on "historically determined (and therefore socially acceptable) images that permit a distinction to be made between the observer and the Other" (Gilman 1988: 7). The experiences of violence and deportation are part of a history of "nonexistence" of Salvadoran bodies in transnational migration. Stories of tragedy and separation connect wartime with the post-war moment. During wartime, various narratives of violence, illegality, and refugee status were strategically ignored and eventually reconstructed to make claims to what had been legally and politically denied (see Coutin 2000, Montes 1987). In this chapter, I analyze current portrayals of Salvadoran suffering and victims of violence, specifically referring to selected articles from "Departamento 15," in print and online, interviews with journalists, and an internet bulletin board on violence and emigration, where Salvadorans comment on their experiences.

Stereotyping and stigmatization function as forms of social control, evidenced in the portrayal of productive and civic transnational bodies. A stereotype arises from a combination of fear or repulsion and curiosity, and seeks to contain/manage the subject by flattening its characteristics (Hall 1997c, Bhabha 1994). Thus as I discussed in the last chapter we have a reduction and idealization of the complexity of Salvadoran transnationalism to a set of clear-cut cultural practices (e.g. nostalgia for Salvadoran holidays such as Independence Day) and the assumption that the vast majority of Salvadorans in the United States are represented through these practices regardless of location or time of arrival. Stereotyping excludes, "fixes difference," and "tends to occur where there are gross inequalities of power," (Hall 1997c: 258) and results in a practice of othering to justify ideas of superiority and inferiority. Similarly, stigma is quite literally a bodily marker of social identity and its effect is to exclude and "type-cast" individuals (Goffman 1963).

In newspaper accounts, Salvadoran unity is often emphasized through the common and naturalized understanding that emigration, with its resulting remittances and transnational ties, is a survival tactic for Salvadoran families and vital for a nation-building project. The importance of the family as a social unit is reproduced, this time transnationally, as families are, ironically, split by migration and forced to negotiate distances, anxiety, and to find "poor substitutes for parental presence," (Horton 2006) such as remittances or gifts.

A presumed common diasporic identity is set against life-altering, tragic stories where failed attempts at migration disrupt the "normal," homogenizing transnational "us"

of "Departamento 15." I propose that in addition to their newsworthiness as stories of tragedy, the "Departamento 15" 'others' have a disciplining value, which accounts for their presence in the news section. Like the features of Salvadoran patriotic transnationals, which produce an idealized, didactic narrative of migration, national belonging, and merit; tragic stories and the emotional strain of family separation also produce meaning(s). They seek to discourage undocumented emigration but also reinforce the idea that for many Salvadorans the "American Dream" is worth the life-threatening risks described in "Departamento 15." Stories of tragedies and repatriation of victims also serve to reclaim, symbolically and in reality, emigrant bodies to the sovereignty of Salvadoran territory.

In some of the stories I discuss here, the process of migration is interrupted and ends unexpectedly. In narratives of the undocumented journey through Mexico, Salvadorans confront many risks—a majority of the cases discussed in "Departamento 15" focus on the southeastern region of Mexico, especially Chiapas. Near the train tracks, cities, and the surrounding countryside Central Americans are caught and deported. They are killed and their bodies are repatriated. They fall off trains and their limbs are mutilated.

The route through Mexico has long been described as dangerous and risky for the undocumented travelers of the isthmus. During the 1980s, Central Americans fleeing wars were already the targets of unscrupulous *coyotes*, thieves, and extortionists who took advantage of their disorientation, undocumented status, and traumatic experiences with authorities in their countries of origin (Menjívar 2000: 58-76). Crimes and human

rights abuses against Central American migrants leaving repressive regimes during the 1980s echo in the current conditions of violence in borders such as southern Mexico; just as in the militarized United States-Mexico border we see the redeployment of low-intensity conflict (LIC) doctrine from 1980s Central America (Dunn 1996).

I suggest that the geographic distance of families and the physical incompleteness and social stigma of amputation and deportation indicate the complexity of Salvadoran migration and its effects. Tragedy becomes a circumstance that allows many Salvadoran migrants any portrayal or newsworthiness in "Departamento 15" and any presence in the transnational imaginary. Stories of maternal suffering, or of violence and bloodshed along the multiple, physical, national borders Salvadorans must cross to reach the "American Dream" stand in stark contrast to the world of nostalgia, patriotic celebration, and success presented in the borderless transnational space of "Departamento 15" previously described.

"A Public Service" in the Imaginary

"Departamento 15" is representative of the salience of emigration in post-war Salvadoran culture. The name of the section refers to Salvadoran geography, claiming the transnational space of migration as part of the territorial extension of the Salvadoran nation-state. Margarita Funes, an editor, explains:

> The section was proposed as […] that link between the country and the communities of Salvadorans abroad. [For example] that people here in the country become aware that the community in Sweden gathered and

> celebrated something. […] the other objective is to reunite the Salvadorans who at a given moment were separated from their families and from their country (interviewed 19 August 2005).

As part of this objective of community connection, the "Busco a…" ("I search for") column in "Departamento 15" links Salvadorans who have lost contact with relatives or friends due to migration. The section is available both in print and online. Every day, about twenty new messages from Salvadorans searching for old friends or long-lost relatives are posted on the "Departamento 15" website, and many of these announcements are published in the print version of the newspaper. "Departamento 15" and its readers/respondents open a dialogue. The newspaper "gives voice" to the readers and their messages, and declares: *Find your loved ones through "Departamento 15"* (*LPG* 4 September 2003: 36; 2 October 2003: 42). The section is thus invested with a special power: the ability to *produce* the return of the migrant through media and reestablishment of connections. "Departamento 15" journalists referred to "Busco A…" as a free and "public" service, an important and rewarding aspect of their work as communicators:

> This section of encounter, of search for people is another of the sections that we all like. That satisfaction of someone calling to say, 'Thanks because I found the person I was looking for, I found my friend, I found my father.' […] In the end one realizes that this is a public service, really, although the state does not pay us we are servants of our Salvadoran community by uniting them, by informing them, by linking them to each other. We will unite Salvadorans who left with their country, family, and friends, but also abroad we will unite communities (reporters of "Departamento 15," group interview, 19 August 2005).

"Departamento 15" characterizes its work as a *public service* primarily for the emigrant community even as the newspaper is privately owned. "Busco A…," letters, and the forum associated with the online version enable "Departamento 15" to project its reception by Salvadorans, both at home and abroad, precisely as a confirmation of its own ideological construction as a public service that reunites people, and as a necessary mediating link between nation and diaspora.

In addition to the message column, "Departamento 15" often deals with the idea of separation and sacrifice in its stories. These themes are especially present in accounts of Salvadoran women who emigrate and leave their children behind, often in the care of grandmothers or sisters, in the hopes of earning enough money to eventually reunite in the United States. In "Sacrifice and tears of an emigrant mother: Salvadoran will spend Mother's Day without her children" we learn about Noemí, who has not seen her children in two years. The story was published on Mother's Day. She says: "I have nobody here and I wish, through *La Prensa Gráfica,* to tell my children that I love them very much, that I miss them and that everything that I am doing here is for them" (*LPG* 10 May 2003, 38). In another story, "Cecilia," an undocumented woman who did not want her real name published in the newspaper, paid $12,000 to reunite with her children after six years of separation. When she left El Salvador, her oldest son was eight years old, the second was four, and the youngest was only a few months old. From the time she arrived in Washington DC, she worked two, three, and sometimes even four jobs. Finally, after many years, she had saved enough money to hire a *coyota* (female smuggler) to bring her children from El Salvador. But for that amount, the *coyota* could only bring two of her

three children. The *coyota* decided that only the two older children, now aged fourteen and ten, would make the journey, because according to her, if they waited any longer, the journey would be riskier for teenage boys. The *coyota* took the money without specifying when she would finally return to Washington DC, "Because that depended on their luck on the border" (*LPG* 13 Dec. 2003: 46). As she waited, Cecilia "cried every night out of fear that her sons would not make it" and "prayed to God asking Him to protect them on their way." Finally, after one month, her children arrived safely: "The tight hug, the uncontainable happiness, thousands of questions and tears of emotion filled the mother and her two sons, in spite of the memory of the youngest brother who stayed behind" (*LPG* 13 Dec. 2003: 46). Because of him, Cecilia continues to work, and hopes to save 5,000 dollars to someday see her youngest child again: "God will help me," she says, "He will guide me until we are all together."

Sometimes, children decide to travel on their own, and what are usually seen as adult roles and decisions are taken on by the very young. Eight-year-old Jonathan had not seen his parents in five years. Two weeks after disappearing from his aunt's house in El Salvador, he was found by the Border Patrol in Arizona. His mother arrived at the detention center from Los Angeles, and claimed him. She said: "I did not know he was coming here, he is a hyperactive boy" (*LPG*, 8 December 2004, 53). Jonathan said he decided to travel because "he felt lonely in El Salvador and wanted to be near his parents." However, at the time of this article (December 2004) Jonathan had received a deportation order and had to appear in court. This could end his wishes of reunification with his parents and his one-year-old, U.S.-born sister, whom he is just beginning to

know. Jonathan's access to his parents, limited by his undocumented status, contrasts with his younger sister's United States citizenship and the relative security and stability of her household, symbolic of global inequalities even between siblings.

In another story, seventeen-year-old Margarita left her home in La Libertad (near the coast) without telling anyone of her intention to reach her mother in Los Angeles. "Young woman survives the dangers of undocumented travel" (*LPG* 11 December 2004: 62) describes Margarita's journey through the Arizona desert to reunite with her mother, although this meant leaving her grandparents and younger sisters behind, and risking her life. After traveling through Guatemala, she set out from Sonora, Mexico with other migrants. Later, she separated from the group as they walked through the Arizona desert and she ran out of food. She said, "I walked for about seven hours, towards the highway, ready for the *migra* (Border Patrol) to find me. I did not want to die" (*LPG* 11 December 2004: 62). As the day ended, the lonely, hungry, and exhausted teenager faced the extreme temperatures of the desert night. Yet Margarita did not lose hope, as the article describes:

> The cold [weather] could not put out the flame of faith in the heart of Margarita, a young Salvadoran who endured the low temperatures of the Arizona desert only to see her mother again and find a better future for her and her family. As she walked alone in the desert and could not feel her body and her strength waned, Margarita could only ask for help to the one who according to her never fails her, "God, let [the Border Patrol] find me, but I do not want to stay here." It was then that a *coyote* and a group of immigrants appeared and brought her to the city of Gardena, California (*LPG* 11 Dec. 2004: 62).

Margarita's migration narrative emphasizes the dangers of her journey: a young woman, alone in the cold desert night. Despite facing extreme temperatures she keeps "a flame of faith in the heart" as she hopes to reunite with her mother. Then, right on cue, a coyote and his group found her and led her to California. As a "melodramatic" narrative, it is a "perpetually modernizing form […] an evolving mode of storytelling crucial to the establishment of moral good" (Williams 2001: 12). The readers of "Departamento 15" can relate to Margarita's journey, sympathize with her suffering, and rejoice in her reunion with her mother and the timely arrival of a *coyote*. A new mode of Salvadoran belonging has claimed Margarita to "Departamento 15:" "a second model of citizenship has emerged around the visible emotions of suffering bodies that, in the very activity of suffering, demonstrate worth as citizens." (Williams 2001: 24).

Margarita's mother stated: "It is a miracle that she is alive. What she did was crazy. I will not bring my other daughters this way" (*LPG* 11 Dec. 2004: 62). Margarita said that one of her companions was another young Salvadoran, a pregnant teenager. "She was coming here to give her child a better future. I never saw her again," she said (*LPG* 11 Dec. 2004: 62). Perhaps by coincidence, five days later "Departamento 15" ran a story about Mirna, a pregnant teenager who crossed the border after nearly two months of travel. "I was very lucky I was not caught," Mirna admits in the story; as she "dries her tears remembering her sister, her grandmother, her uncles and cousins, who stayed behind in La Unión, in eastern El Salvador" (*LPG* 16 December 2004: 78). Mirna's mother paid $5,500 for the trip, and has now accumulated debt with friends.

Even a happy ending to a migratory tale is complicated here. Mirna's tears, the cold numb hands of Margarita in the desert, and Cecilia's tears and nervousness embody "friction," (Tsing 2005) the bodily, affective, and economic costs of migration. Stories of suffering in the migratory passage continue to inflect narratives of success as immigrants; as stories that are directed, in part, to audiences of migrants and their friends and relatives. Suffering and tears become "evidence of a subjectivity worthy of recognition" (Williams 2001: 24). At the same time that they become complex subjects, women become gendered subjects—all these examples point to the gendered aspects of migration, where ideas of sacrifice and suffering for children are more dramatically expressed through accounts of women's migration and representations of family relations, both as "reunited" and "separated." Women in migration in particular seem to become subjects who embody and normalize friction in media portrayals.

At one level the accounts I have described serve as cautionary tales for Salvadorans who may be considering undocumented travel. Yet the transnational imaginary depends on the permeability of borders—on Salvadorans being able to cross into other countries, on the internet and other technologies that enable mobility and "flows." Stories of separation, danger, and violence against migrants can be interpreted as the perception of a threat to a social order, an imaginary dependent on transnational practices, what have become the "normative outlines of our society" (Hall et al. 1978: 66) portrayed in "Departamento 15." As families suffer separation and individual bodies are mutilated, violence extends to representations of social bodies and the body politic (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987).

Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1997) has reconsidered Franco Basaglia's notion of "peace-time crimes" in order to "imagine a direct relationship between war time and peace time […] a continuity between extraordinary and ordinary violence" (Scheper-Hughes 1997: 473). She argues that "Internal 'stability' is purchased with the currency of peace-time crimes" (Scheper-Hughes 1997: 473-474). In El Salvador, economic and political stability is purchased through hyper-visible survival strategies of emigration and remittances sent from abroad. These are naturalized forms of displacement and exclusion from Salvadoran territory. In "Departamento 15" we see the normalization of transnational ties and of emigration as a characteristic of modern Salvadoran everyday life. Portrayals of Salvadorans living abroad become a visible, everyday part of an "imagined community" (Anderson 1991) of readers. In contrast, emigration practices during the 1980s acquired an extraordinary tone, as people were displaced violently by soldiers and forced to clandestinely leave El Salvador to escape the explicit violence and political terror of war. Presently, in a simplification of a complex story, emigration is taken for granted as the antidote to lack of opportunity and a guarantee of stability and income for Salvadoran families, even as they are emotionally affected by separation.

As the Salvadoran migration pattern continues to be an "ordinary" practice, the transnational space of "Departamento 15" creates a reading public and a concern for the everyday life of the Salvadoran migrant. An interest with keeping a body count of migration develops: how many in Los Angeles, how many Salvadorans in Houston, and so on; in addition to how many have been deported, how many dead and wounded have been repatriated from Mexico; and how many who made it to the United States have

applied for an extension of Temporary Protected Status (TPS). It seems like the only way to keep a semblance of control over such a contradictory practice—to survive, thousands of people risk their lives by crossing multiple borders. As an extension of a pattern that increased due to armed conflict, migration and violence—specifically accidents and repatriations—still force Salvadorans to "disappear." This is the price paid for Salvadoran post-war stability. Because of this, repatriation of bodies carries a symbolic value during wartime (Ashplant et al.: 2000) as it does in the case of "peace-time crimes." When the migrant is repatriated to El Salvador, he or she is physically recovered from disappearance, to the *patria* and its imaginary.

The Mutilation of the American Dream

Two storylines predominated in the reporting of "Departamento 15" as the Christmas holidays approached. One was the narrative of return of relatives, holiday celebrations, and the continuity of cultural and emotional ties between Salvadoran immigrants, their families, and their country of origin. Another storyline presented a less optimistic situation for the Salvadoran migrant. An article from 31 December 2003 was entitled "20 Salvadorans dead in 2003: They Died in Tragedies occurred in Southeastern Mexico." The photograph for this article about migrant tragedy and death is captioned "Victim: family and friends carry the casket with the remains of Jenri Daniel Márquez, 18 years old, who died last May 8 run over by a train in Ixtepec, Oaxaca" (*LPG* 31 December 2003: 38. my translation). This caption directly points to a geography of

tragedy where Jenri the young migrant became a victim, where his movement towards the United States abruptly stopped.

Jenri is one of at least 20 known cases of Salvadorans who died in the border region of southern Mexico that year. Lucas Asdrúbal Aguilar, at the time the Salvadoran consul in Tapachula (Chiapas) detailed the body count: "six were run over by trains in attempts to board; a similar number, in highway accidents; five, in violent assaults; two of natural causes, and one asphyxiated inside a trailer" (*LPG* 31 December 2003: 38). The consul informs that all the bodies, except one, "had been repatriated to their place of origin with the aid of Mexican [and Salvadoran] authorities." Also during 2003, 21 Salvadorans were repatriated after suffering accidents during their journey through Mexico—eight of them had their legs amputated, and the rest suffered knife or bullet wounds during assaults.[13]

Another article on the same page of the newspaper was entitled "Once pandilleros en la mira por asalto" ("Eleven gang members [arrested] for assault"). Gangs such as "Salvatrucha" are mainly made up of young Central American migrants and deportees, also caught between El Salvador and the United States. The gang member refuses to return as a failed migrant, and cannot return as a "village hero." But in "Departamento 15" he returns as a hypermasculine image, shirtless, tattoed, and caught up in violence. The gang member is stigmatized by his lifestyle, status as a deportee, and tattoos.

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[13] Figures of repatriation are not the same as figures for deportation. These are different processes. A news article dated 2 December 2003 cited a statistic from the Mexican Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM) where 24, 696 Salvadorans were *deported* between January-October 2003 (*LPG*, 2 December 2003: 38).

Meanwhile, the Salvadoran migrant—a compatriot, but also a potential victim—is marked by undocumented status and the violent experience of the migration journey. Both are trapped within larger structures of power and global inequality that force emigration and lead to frictional encounters such as José Ismael Sorto's, an experience shared from the confinement of bed #56 in the Tapachula hospital:

> Sorto narrated that he left Ciudad Dolores, in the department of Cabañas […] with the objective of returning once more to Los Angeles, in California, from where he was deported two years ago. "In the area known as El Ahorcado (south of Tapachula) we the undocumented (about 30) were assaulted by gang members, we came on the train from Ciudad Hidalgo; but because I resisted, they hit me with machetes on the back and two gunshots in the head with homemade weapons," he said. He added that he was thrown from the train, and later aided by some *campesinos* that passed by where he lay. Later, the young Salvadoran was able, on his own, to arrive at the Jesús El Buen Pastor shelter in this city and speak by telephone with his mother in El Salvador.
>
> Sorto has in his body a tattoo of the number 18, which confirms his belonging in that gang which operates in El Salvador. The compatriot accepted that he was processed some years ago in the correctional for minors in El Salvador.
>
> (*LPG*, "Salvadoreño herido de bala por mareros." 17 November 2003: 54).

The excerpts from José's story show a less-than-ideal migration narrative, yet they conform to a representational strategy where the "other" can be reclaimed as a compatriot in the pages of "Departamento 15." We learn about José's current lack of mobility— hospitalization due to bullet wounds received while on the train traveling north with about thirty other undocumented migrants. We also learn about a previous history of gang membership and that he had been deported from the United States, or become "transnational by force" (Zilberg 2002). After the bullets are extracted José will be repatriated to El Salvador; a second return rooted in violence is about to take place.

The news story operates as a reclaiming of a now-victimized Salvadoran, migrant, and gang member. José admits his membership to a Salvadoran gang (the "Mara 18," or 18th Street Gang) since his tattoo shows his loyalty to this group (unlike the national loyalty displayed in the "100% Salvadoreño" tattoos described in chapter one). In addition to the tattoo, José is marked by deportation from Los Angeles, violence in Chiapas, and repatriation to El Salvador—a complex and violent history of transnational movement that problematizes the notion of nostalgia, "homesickness," for El Salvador. José, after all, wanted to return to Los Angeles—a Salvadoran city, outside El Salvador's borders, but within the imaginary—so where is José's nostalgia and sense of belonging located? José Sorto's tattoo confirms his belonging to a gang, but his experience of violence in Chiapas transforms him into a "reclaimable" Salvadoran subject and good son who telephones his mother in El Salvador as soon as he can (*LPG* 17 November 2003: 54).

A few days later another story about José appeared in "Departamento 15:" "Asaltan a cónsul y migrante," ("Consul and migrant are mugged") the headline reads. On November 18 the Salvadoran consul accompanied the still-convalescent José on his repatriation journey. They took a bus together from Chiapas to Guatemala. In the town of Escuintla (Guatemala) some men boarded the bus, ordered the driver to reduce speed, and proceeded to rob the passengers. Eventually the consul and José arrived in Guatemala City, where they boarded another bus and completed the repatriation process (*LPG* 2 December 2003: 38).

The intersection of gang violence, mugging, and undocumented migration in "Departamento 15" is of particular newsworthiness because of its symbolic and

disciplinary value. The gang member and the migrant are represented as two distinct sectors of society in relation to border violence. The story of José and the consul's mugging can be imagined to cause a collective outrage over a crisis; the eruption of gang violence against migrants. It is a crisis of marginalized Salvadoran bodies involved in assaults and murder against each other, "a fundamental rupture in the social order. The use of violence marks the distinction between those who are fundamentally of society and those who are outside it. It is coterminous with the boundary of 'society' itself" (Hall et al., 1978: 68). The portrayal of gang violence in Chiapas is closely tied to headlines like "Seven Gang Members Die at the Hands of their Rivals" (*LPG*, 15 September 2003, see chapter one)—a told and retold story of unruly Salvadorans killing each other. Those portrayed as "outside" society—deported gang members in the *zonas marginales* and villages of El Salvador or near the railroad tracks of Southern Mexico—are caught up in violence. Those who are "inside" society, on the other hand, engage in post-war reconstruction, help their families, and keep their Salvadoran identity through demonstrations of patriotism. Migrants traveling north are caught in the midst of these extremes, marginalized and then reclaimed to the social imaginary, a "slippage of categories" (Bhabha 1994: 140) produced by symbolic power.

Zuleyma's Story

Zuleyma's story further illustrates the disciplinary "slippage of categories" and gendered aspects of emigration portrayals. She is a young woman from Cabañas, a department of El Salvador. In December 2003 Zuleyma and her sister decided to travel to

the United States, accompanied by a friend and a larger group of undocumented migrants. Her trip ended in tragedy: "Compatriotas mueren en asalto" ("Compatriots die in Assault") was the title of a 10 December 2003 story (*LPG* 10 December 2003: 63). Thirty gang members boarded the train where nearly 100 undocumented migrants, including Zuleyma and her companions, traveled. The gang members proceeded to shoot and hit the migrants with machetes. Several travelers jumped off the train, but were still chased by the assailants. Zuleyma's sister, Hipólita, and a friend, Sandra, were assassinated with machetes.

The following day, Thursday 11 December, a "Departamento 15" headline in the "Nation" section of *La Prensa Gráfica* reads: "Piden repatriación de dos fallecidas: Tres salvadoreños heridos en asalto en Chiapas, México" ("Repatriation of Two Dead Requested: Three Salvadorans Wounded in Assault in Chiapas, Mexico" *LPG* 11 December 2003: 42). Family members of the victims asked for help from the Salvadoran government to bring the bodies back to Cabañas. In this article we also find out that Zuleyma was wounded and is hospitalized in Tapachula. Later in the article, we are informed that the consuls of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador issued a joint statement condemning the violence of gang members against migrants, a call similar to the one that followed gang murders between "rivals" and other cases of violence (see chapter one): "We convoke the Mexican authorities to stop the violence of gang members against migrants and to reinforce the observation of respect for life and other human rights equally and for all" (*LPG* 11 December 2003: 42). An article on the same page provides a response to the consular statement:

> The deputy attorney general […] announced the capture of 10 gang members suspected of assaulting the freight train where two Salvadoran women died and another three were wounded last Tuesday. […] Among the captured are Salvadorans, Hondurans, Guatemalans, and one Mexican. […] And added that another 36 undocumented people who were on the train were sent to the National Institute of Migration (INM, in Spanish) to begin deportation proceedings to their countries of origin ("Detienen a 10 pandilleros," *LPG* 11 December 2003: 42).

Not only did the Mexican authorities capture ten gang members of diverse nationalities, but they also captured over a third of the train's migrant passengers, to initiate the proceedings to deport them to their countries of origin. While the authorities in Chiapas are policing their borders, the proceedings to repatriate the bodies of Hipólita and Sandra continue. On 12 December 2003, the news sources are no longer Central American consuls or Mexican officials, but friends and family of the victims. They await the bodies of Sandra and Hipólita in Sensuntepeque, department of Cabañas. We learn that Sandra was 20 years old and Hipólita, 21. Both were young single mothers and had two children each, with ages between two and four years ("Cadáveres de mujeres asesinadas en Chiapas serán repatriados," *LPG* 12 December 2003: 106).

On 18 December 2003, Zuleyma is repatriated along with another wounded man. "Repatrían a dos heridos" ("Two Wounded are Repatriated," *LPG* 18 December 2003: 48) is a story of return to the homeland. Speaking about her and her companion's tragedy, Zuleyma says, "It is good that most of the gang members were detained. I hope they send them to jail so they will not kill again. I will never again leave my home" (*LPG* 18 December 2003: 48). The social imaginary gives meaning to Zuleyma's experience. Her return is part of a history of emigration and violence. Now she hopes all gang members go to jail, and as for her, she will remain "local" and will never attempt to emigrate again.

Zuleyma's tragic migrant experience serves as a cautionary, disciplinary tale for her and makes sense for the "imagined community" that has followed her story for several days through "Departamento 15."

Finally, on December 20, the newspaper reveals Zuleyma's point of view in "Me daban machetazos: Sobreviviente de tragedia relata la pesadilla que vivió" ("I was struck with machetes: Survivor of tragedy narrates the nightmare she lived" *LPG* 20 December 2003: 66). A large photograph shows Zuleyma with a bandaged arm and her two small children. She has survived, to return to Cabañas where her children are, and to tell the story of the migrant. What she narrates is a nightmare, a "ghost story" (Gordon 1997). She has, in fact, pretended to be dead: "They struck me everywhere with machetes. I only covered my head. After receiving two wounds on my head I pretended to be dead so they would stop hitting me. They left me for dead because I stopped breathing when they touched my neck" (*LPG* 20 December 2003: 66). She has also witnessed the death of her sister and her friend. The final paragraphs of the story describe Zuleyma's extreme poverty, the cause of emigration. In the pages of "Departamento 15," she is physically and symbolically recovered from ghostly disappearance and repatriated to the Salvadoran social imaginary.

I have traced Zuleyma's story in an effort to grasp how the newspaper understands and portrays the complex path of the undocumented migrant. Her story is one of migration, lost family members, violence, tragedy, repatriation and return to a life of poverty and marginality in rural El Salvador. Like the family separation stories of Noemí, Cecilia, and Margarita, Zuleyma's story is symbolic of the intersection of class,

gender, and migration status as categories of difference, and highlights the contradictions of Salvadoran post-war migration and the complexities of claiming and reaching all transnational Salvadorans.

Memories of Violence and E-migration

The narrative of the migrant reaches the readers of "Departamento 15." The stories become constitutive of a transnational imaginary, and enable practices, such as reader responses and participation in internet bulletin boards, around a "common knowledge" about migration. Narratives about migrants find their way to the internet forum in the form of responses and comments such as "R.R.'s" who said: "I would like to ask for a moment of silence for our compatriots who have lost their lives abroad. They died trying to reach what has always been denied in El Salvador, the right to live in dignity as a human being" (Forum 2005).

In the "Departamento 15" online forum, memories of violence coexist with nostalgic sentiments. This message board is a site for the production of community and mediation of experience, and shapes ideas of belonging, interaction, and inclusion as participants "consume the words of others" (Dean 2001: 260). Speaking of diasporic Filipino and Filipino-American communities, Emily Ignacio characterizes the Internet as "a transnational space where people from all over the world can converge" (Ignacio 2005: 3). In the newspaper's multimedia website, pictures and words combine with audio, video, and bulletin boards where readers can comment on news articles.

The readers of *La Prensa Gráfica* become content producers as they participate in a forum where they can post their opinion on current events, and read the opinions of others. They can explore the possibility of emigration in real time chatrooms where they can seek advice on visas and legal migration, primarily to the United States and Canada. The digital version of *LPG* is a space where Salvadorans in El Salvador and abroad come together and share community and meanings of Salvadoran transnationalism. The website becomes a "discursive space where identity is performed, swapped, bought, and sold" (Nakamura 2002: xiv) around histories of Salvadoran transnational migration.

"Interaction with our readers is very important," the website editor for *LPG* explained in an interview. For her, audio, video, words, and images "converge" on the Internet because of its immediacy. She added, "We want to reach other countries [where Salvadorans are] and the Internet allows us to do that." To accomplish this, the newspaper's website has gone through a series of changes and modifications since the 1990s—back then, it was simply "a reflection of the print edition" (Internet editor, personal interview, 2005). In a manner similar to the project of circulation in the United States I described in chapter one—a project introduced with the intention of reaching Salvadoran communities abroad and claiming them to a national space—the website expands its media content to reach the consumer of news in different ways, as it becomes a "new medium increasingly dissimilar from the old one" (Boczkowski 2004: 188). Journalists also come to realize that their work is read beyond El Salvador, reaching Salvadoran publics who respond from different cities around the world. The newspaper website adjusts to different locations and habits of news consumption: some people may

prefer to see a picture slideshow, or listen to a recording, instead of reading the news article.

Communities of participants are formed in this site of consumption and interaction. They come to discuss current issues and events in the *foro* (forum). They come to know each other and to respond to opinions, sometimes to disagree, and sometimes to agree that they "should just print these comments out and give them to the president," (Internet editor 2005) an idea that unites the forum commentators in a common political participation, however informal. Jodi Dean argues that "the cybersalon provides political theory with structural and empirical information important for thinking about the democratic possibilities of certain kinds of social and political spaces" (Dean 2001: 264). As a social space, the online forum extends beyond El Salvador, and "unites the communities of Salvadorans around the world," (Internet editor 2005) in discussing news and common issues.

In this sense, the online forum seems like a Habermasian "democratic public sphere" because it is a "universal, antihierarchical, complex, and demanding mode of interaction" (Buchstein in Dean 2001: 246). However, as the memories of violence and migration that are often discussed in the online forum symbolize, this online space is already shaped by inequalities that extend beyond access to the internet. Extending beyond the concept of public sphere, Jodi Dean argues for a concept of civil society that "acknowledges the inequalities, exclusions, and competing rationalities characteristic of networked societies in an age of globalization" (Dean 2001: 251). As the newspaper claims to have privatized information about migration and other concerns, we come back

to the question of how "Departamento 15" attempts to establish itself as a crucial space for shaping citizenship, as a space for communicating back to the state, and as a "public service" that links Salvadorans. Turning to the online forum on violence and migration, how do participants construct violence and place it in relation to their experience of migration? In May 2005, 154 people responded to the question "Was violence a determining factor in your emigration from El Salvador? What changes has your life had in another place?" (Forum 2005).

Many of the respondents wrote that the answer was an obvious yes, adding that lack of job opportunities also motivates emigration. "Latina del Sur," responding to the question and addressing the other participants, said: "reading this forum, it is clear that the causes are economic, because of bad governments and their policies of tyranny, where the poor become poorer."

Other participants thought that violence was still the main cause of emigration: "The current wave of violence is an echo of the past war," Juan wrote. "My wife and I felt insecure in our own country," added Jorge. Victoria commented on gendered violence: "Yes, it was violence, but domestic violence because women in El Salvador have no protections." Manuel contributes his story: "Life had no value if you were a young university student. I came to the United States in 1980 […] the war destroyed my ideals in El Salvador […] but it is still the tiny piece of land where I was born." Ramón posted: "my idea was to return in a year or two, when things had 'calmed down' but 25 years have gone by. I do not plan to return. I read the newspapers on the internet because they bring back memories of my childhood, of a reality that will not return."

Linked to memories of violence, other participants in the bulletin board expressed anger and depression about their situation as emigrants: “Yo misma,” writes, “It is a mix of feelings, anger and questions […] things in a strange country are not easy [especially because I had to leave my son].” Jesús Posada also expresses anger: “our family was separated […] even today I become angry about everything my brothers and I went through, because of the violence that stalked us. Thanks for letting me vent a little.” And “Pispilio” referred to violence as something that is passed on, projected to the future, by saying, “We [left] violence to our youth, instead of the opportunity to make a life in their own country.”

Mauricio joined the conversation: “now we live in racist countries where the governments are not interested in us, after they provoke wars, they drain our best-qualified workforce.” Meanwhile, “Monchez” posted: “I think the biggest mistake we have made, countrymen, is abandoning our Madre Tierra (motherland) for a materialism that is only a fantasy.” Finally, Victor says, “It tears my soul apart when I see news of […] Salvadorans apprehended in Mexico and the U.S. border to be deported. Entire families gamble their future to cross the border. We have become a country of desperate people [because] the war is fresh in the minds of Salvadorans.”

As we can see, respondents have a variety of conceptions of violence, experiences shaped by disparities in gender, socioeconomic status, and time of emigration. In the imaginary, it seems as though everybody can speak about violence, and agree on its tie to migration. Franklin posted this message: “All Salvadorans knew the post-war would be harsher than war.” We come to a naturalized representation and explanation of the

connection between violence and migration in the question posed on the newspaper. By asking its readers to comment on it to create public opinion, violence and migration become shared codes of meaning in online interactions, as they link Salvadorans around the world to the climate of violence in El Salvador.

The contributions by Salvadorans in the online space of "Departamento 15" reveal anxiety around leaving El Salvador, and an ambivalence, even fear, about return. These impressions may be related to particularities in the immigration experience of participants, perceptions about the post-war climate, and pre-existing inclinations to return to El Salvador. The voices of the content producers circulate and talk back to each other in a virtual space, yet are anchored in memories of separation from El Salvador. In answering a question such as "was violence a factor in your emigration?" the respondents consider individual *and* larger, structural, historical and global perspectives on the movement of Salvadorans across borders.

The examples I have cited draw attention to the complex migration that undocumented immigrants risk their lives and resources for. They produce disciplinary meaning(s) as they are consumed by the section's readers. The stories reinforce the idea that for many Salvadorans, improved economic conditions and family reunification are worth the life-threatening risks and financial costs described in "Departamento 15." The mediated processes I describe illustrate the broader inequalities of globalization—the free circulation of newspapers, capital, and other commodities versus the restricted migration of bodies.

Conclusion

"Departamento 15" does not just present nostalgic pictures of happy immigrants and their families "back home." It complicates these representations, drawing the attention of the readers to the contradictions of transnationalism. "Friction" is embodied in separated families, migrants killed or maimed during their journey north, and Salvadorans returning home in caskets.

Like Zuleyma, Hipólita, and Jenri, the migration narratives of hundreds of emigrants traveling through Southern Mexico end in tragedy, death, or deportation. Salvadoran undocumented migrants are rejected or reclaimed—criminalized, deported or repatriated to the sovereignty of Salvadoran territory. Their tragedies are reminders of the violence of migration, which permeates the Salvadoran transnational imaginary. I have suggested that Salvadoran stability depends on these "peace-time crimes." I borrow the use of the term from Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1997) to suggest that post-war migration from El Salvador through Mexico is a continuation of wartime emigration—it continues to marginalize.

In its daily news production, "Departamento 15" normalizes representations of undocumented migration, the movement of bodies is "risky but necessary" for a country defined by violence and dependent on remittances, "a country of desperate people," as the online participant said, where shocking stories become everyday news. The travel path is dangerous, a test of the limits of society (Hall et al. 1978: 68). The networks used to make travel and reunification possible hint of illegality or criminality in news portrayals. Narratives of migration and violence are also constructed in the forum of

"Departamento 15," virtual yet anchored in memories of emigration. The complex transnational imaginary assembled in these sites seeks to engage all Salvadorans, regardless of location.

These spaces of circulation are representational, between El Salvador and Salvadorans abroad; as constructed by reporters, people at "home," and migrants, these are shared stories. "Busco A…" and the online forum are crucial techniques for projecting reception. A simple account of domination and hegemony would not capture this space or people's participation in it: the view of globalization that emerges is controlled in certain ways but still complex, where contradictions, the management of violence, portrayals of patriotism, and of who is worthy of being reclaimed are very much part of the story.

Migration keeps capital flowing into post-war El Salvador. The transnational imaginary depends on a regular flow of remittances, communication, goods for consumption, and bodies, migrating and returning, sometimes involuntarily. In the next chapter I turn from the migrant body to the immobile body with a transnational voice as I discuss call centers and the production of bilingual Salvadoran service workers.

Chapter Three

"We Will Export Voices:"

Globalization and the Training of the Voice in Call Centers

Introduction

This chapter traces how the voices and skills of Salvadorans who remain in—or in some cases, return to—El Salvador are recruited and trained for employment at transnational call centers, also known as contact centers or customer service centers. These global logistical operations, along with government investment promotion strategies, construct narratives and ideologies of national development in apparently positive terms of "foreign direct investment" and "progress." In this chapter I aim to critically examine the construction of these views, as I unpack the asymmetric relations of global communication, language, and service work that come to life in the everyday operations of a call center.

Transnational circuits of labor and migration are vital to Salvadoran post-war macroeconomic stability. Labor and migration are integrated in the imaginary of El Salvador as a nation without borders, as "Departamento 15" newspaper articles and the *Plan de Nación* show. Focusing on media portrayals in the "Departamento 15" section of *La Prensa Gráfica*, I have discussed El Salvador's post-war dependence on emigration and on maintaining emotional and cultural connections with "Salvadoreños en el exterior" (Salvadorans abroad) as a strategy for guaranteeing the flow of remittances and nostalgic links to the "home country." In addition, narratives of violence and exclusion in

"Departamento 15" become "everyday news," as part of a story of migration as a risky yet necessary enterprise. These portrayals and practices construct a complex imaginary of citizenship, the nation, migration, and other modern ideas and institutional affiliations.

In this chapter on "exporting voices," I extend my discussion of "flows" of culture and capital to address the creation of new job opportunities for Salvadorans as part of the Salvadoran government's promotion of foreign investment. The projects addressed in this dissertation—media portrayals and investment promotion, migration and attracting foreign capital—constitute and inform each other as they circulate ideas of Salvadoran labor discipline, circulation of capital and commodities, emerging communication technologies, and presence in global "scapes" (Appadurai 1996).

I consider the growing call center sector in El Salvador as a globalized and racialized labor site, through which I can evaluate the consolidation of globalization and bilingual, transnational identities into a nation-making agenda in post-war El Salvador. Globalization broadly indicates "contradictory transformations" (Ong and Collier 2005: 3) in economy, society, and politics. Thinking of globalization as a process with profound implications, I study the call center to see how it shapes and is shaped by transnational, global, and local histories. The call centers I study are situated in the particularities of El Salvador in the early twenty-first century. Any account of development and globalization, as Maxine Molyneux has argued, "is necessarily partial and selective, at best it can provide a focused illumination of a part of a complex whole" (Molyneux 2001: 273). I argue that ideas of globalization are closely tied to specific and local ideas of development and modernization even as they embody, as Tsing (2005) reminds us,

claims to universality. I acknowledge the uneven and often alienating experiences generated by these processes in the Salvadoran context.

In this chapter I am especially concerned with the screening, hiring, and training processes that enable call centers to produce and commercialize a trained Salvadoran bilingual voice and a "neutral" Spanish accent within a transnational imaginary of global and mobile capital that, in turn, is used for projects of national economic development. My research is primarily based on interviews with call center employees and human resources staff, the Contact Center Advisor for PROESA (a government agency in charge of promoting foreign direct investment in El Salvador) and the Director of NEC, the National English Center, which since 2006 has established a specialized English course to train prospective customer service agents for the call center sector in San Salvador. As my research in El Salvador traces, and is informed by, processes that occur globally, I also draw from relevant examples of call centers in other parts of the world and from selected websites, news stories, brochures, manuals, and editorials that produce and circulate knowledge about call centers, voices, technologies, and forms of capital.

The case of call centers in post-war El Salvador shows how "connections" are shaped by economic development strategies and ideas about the linguistic and professional capacities of the Salvadoran workforce. Ideas and transnational culture become social practices of the imagination (Appadurai 1996) manifested in finance, labor, media, migration, and in everyday lived reality. The call center is a central example of a site where transnational imaginaries and linguistic capital are produced and

commercialized via what Emily Martin calls "practicums," processes that "involve learning about new concepts of the ideal and fit person" (Martin 1994: 15).

Exporting Voices

What exactly is a call center? Like many western consumers living in a globalized economy, I have called several; mostly for troubleshooting, travel, or financial reasons. Not surprisingly, banks, computer companies, and airlines have call centers to support the global networks in which they are enmeshed. Restaurant chains, telephone services, and nearly every business interested in maintaining contact with its customers while lowering costs has a call center. Akşin and Harker have researched the operations, design, and management of call centers, and attribute the growth of the sector to "advances in telecommunication and information technology. In the past decade, automatic call dispatching systems have enabled firms to sort incoming calls so that they can be routed to the appropriate departments within a firm" (Akşin and Harker 2001: 324). As we know, in addition to technological advances, other historical and social forces that enable global networks are present as well. Call centers and other forms of technological innovation are not simply technological advances, but are "inflected by the values, cultures, power systems, and institutional orders within which [they are] embedded" (Sassen 2004: 302-303). Companies based in the United States, Canada, or Europe have split and moved segments of their operations to other countries as a strategy to lower costs and access new markets. This practice is known as Business Processing

Outsourcing (BPO). As processes are cut into blocks and established around the globe, once fully-local practices of customer care become links in a transnational service sector:

> Gone is the linear work sequence of the moving assembly line, its machinery dedicated to mass production and mass marketing. Instead, the organization is a fleeting, fluid network of alliances, a highly decoupled and dynamic form with great organizational flexibility (Martin 1994: 209).

Call centers become crucial to economic flexibilization (Harvey 1989). Corporations that aspire to be successful and healthy, as Emily Martin argues, need "flexible bodies" as their workforce:

> the nature of the new workers that corporations desire: individuals—men and women—able to risk the unknown and tolerate fear, willing to explore unknown territories, but simultaneously able to accept their dependence on the help and support of their coworkers. In a word, *flexibility* (Martin 1994: 214).

El Salvador becomes one of these links of flexible labor, a work site in the "technologies of extraordinary speed [of capital and information circulation] and unprecedented immobility" of the worker (Aneesh 2001: 383). Flexibility becomes a desirable and marketable characteristic. A newspaper article titled "Call centers in search of Salvadoran voices: Two new centers in 2004" (*LPG* 4 December 2003: 41, my translation) ties projects of call centers, bilingualism, and globalization to the flexibility of the Salvadoran worker and the strategic location of El Salvador. "Starting in the first quarter of 2004, 'We will export voices from El Salvador,' affirms Patricia Figueroa, executive director of the Agency of Investment Promotion of El Salvador (PROESA)" (*LPG* 4 Dec. 2003: 41). Representatives of this governmental investment promotion group noted the advantages El Salvador offers for companies interested in establishing call center operations:

> The modernization in telecommunications, the bilingual workforce, the [convenient] time zones, neutral accent and the distances between the country and North America have positioned El Salvador as one of the profitable nations for this business (*LPG* 4 Dec. 2003: 41. my translation).

The main requirement for employment, as the article notes, is "perfect English" because the call center employees "will wait on North American customers" (LPG 4 Dec. 2003: 41). In addition to perfect English, Salvadoran call center employees have what PROESA executives describe as a "neutral" accent. Relative to the more distinctive Spanish intonation of Mexicans or Argentinians, Salvadoran Spanish is marketed and imagined by some business and government sectors in El Salvador as unmarked—almost invisible and not widely known, difficult to locate in social, geographic, or linguistics space, thus perfect for a dislocated and disembodied call center.

Through constructions of flexibility and language neutrality, El Salvador becomes part of a naturalized array of logics of global flows, where some histories and accents are made invisible while certain language skills and labor flexibility are especially valued and marketed to potential foreign investors. That many cultural "flows" originate in Europe or the United States; or spread due to violent histories of colonialism, displacement, and economic inequality, quickly reminds us that at many points in history the world has networked in order to conduct wars and conquest. As a critical corrective to Eurocentric views, "the periphery" of colonialism and imperialism is a site that produces global formations—encounters of language and culture. Histories of racism, forced migration, and civil war shape experiences of foreign investment and globalization, as the Salvadoran case demonstrates. Rodolfo (not his real name) a recruitment manager at a

call center that provides sales and technical support for a U.S.-based computer company, linked globalizing media technologies, migration, the end of war, and the presence of call centers in El Salvador:

> Since the war ended […] the country, the government has tried to reach out to foreign countries to invest in El Salvador by having a series of plans, for example infrastructure. The telecommunications infrastructure in Central America, specifically El Salvador, is very, very modern, very advanced […] I think there are three fiber optic undersea lines that converge in El Salvador, and that makes it really advanced on a certain level compared to other Third World countries. On the other hand due to the massive emigration of Salvadorans to the States through the years and the cultural influence, culturally we are very, or up to a point similar to the U.S., and there is much affinity with U.S. culture and U.S. society because of so many expatriates […] from this country there (Rodolfo, interviewed 6 September 2005).

Rodolfo places the call center and foreign investment within a specific historical and political moment, "since the war ended," and refers to the histories of migration and cultural exchange that have affected a significant percentage of the Salvadoran population. Currently it is estimated that between 25 and 30 percent of Salvadorans live outside El Salvador. On its website, PROESA estimates the population of Salvadorans abroad at what seems a high figure, 2.5 million, while El Salvador's total population is projected as 7 million. The population of Salvadorans abroad is part of how El Salvador is "globalized." Clearly, the sometimes uneasy and contradictory "flows" of people, commodities, and discursive forms and practices that shape transnational identities have become constitutive of post-war Salvadoran national identities, as Rodolfo suggested. Salvadorans who live in the United States and continue to communicate with friends and family in El Salvador have shaped how Salvadorans in El Salvador imagine and engage transnational relationships of "cultural affinity" and connections with the United States.

In addition, the Salvadoran government and global companies also take part in the formation of transnational imaginaries.

Through the creation of institutions and strategies that promote the globalization of El Salvador's economy and labor force, post-war El Salvador is situated in strategic geographic, economic, and political "scapes" (Appadurai 1996). As Rodolfo the call center recruiter stated, the government opens its markets and reaches out to foreign countries, partly through the neo-liberal privatization of the telecommunications sector.[14] In addition to the privatization of key sectors of the national economy, the past three administrations of the Salvadoran government (plus the current administration of President Elías Antonio Saca) made attracting foreign investment a key component of the country's development strategy after the end of the armed conflict in 1992. The establishment of PROESA (Comisión Nacional de Promoción de Inversiones) in June 2000 came through

> strong participation of the private sector and seeks to generate employment, transfer technology and aid the country's development process. The Agency's primary objective is to attract and assist foreign direct investment in industries such as: agro industry, textiles and apparel, contact centers, light manufacturing and electronics, logistics and distribution centers, software development, tourism and footwear. […] PROESA has helped more than 138 multinational firms expand or establish operations in El Salvador. Successful companies have proved that El Salvador works for their business and that Salvadoran people work to make their firms even more productive and profitable ("PROESA: Who we are," 2007).

[14] "El Salvador's modern telecommunications network is a leading sector in the Salvadoran infrastructure system. The growth of the telecommunication sector was specially spurred by the privatization of ANTEL, the former public telecommunications institution, which was sold in 1998 as two separate companies (a fixed wire firm and a wireless firm). As a result of privatization, 51% of the fixed-wire company's shares were sold to France Telecom, and 51% of the wireless firm's shares were sold to Telefónica of Spain" ("PROESA: Telecommunications," 2006).

> The slogan "El Salvador Works" has a dual meaning: The people of El Salvador work hard, and El Salvador works for businesses. Warm colors were chosen for the logo. A circular shape that encloses 3 people united by the arms represents the human connection ("PROESA: El Salvador Works: a brand that travels around the world," 2007).

Using the slogan "El Salvador works," and a logo that represents unity and human connection, the government agency promotes and markets El Salvador as a "brand that travels around the world," with a globalized, flexible, and "healthy" (Martin 1994) set of characteristics represented in the "warm colors" of the logo. The people representing human connection, of course, are Salvadoran workers. Their arms, the most important "link" in BPO operations and global labor, are prominently represented.

PROESA's marketing and publicity strategy of El Salvador as a place that "works," a country of flexible labor and human connection, complements the changes in the country's infrastructure and corporate culture. In an interview, "Paula," (not her real name) the Contact Center Advisor for PROESA, emphasized the importance of the modern telecommunication infrastructure in El Salvador, because "this guarantees linkages" globally and makes investment attractive. Among the favorable conditions for foreign investment in El Salvador, she cited political stability, dollarization,[15] and the "openness" of the economy, in addition to shared time zones and cultural affinity with the United States. While the Contact Center Advisor acknowledged the widespread violence and climate of insecurity that prevails in contemporary El Salvador and may discourage investors, she quickly added that "security is a problem everywhere, not only in El

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[15] El Salvador has used the United States dollar as official currency since January 2001. It replaced the *Colón*, which had been used since 1892 (Herodier 1997: 36). In 2001, the exchange rate was fixed at 1 Colón (¢) = USD 8.75.

Salvador" ("Paula," interviewed 29 August 2005). She also cited the country's strategic location, particularly in the hemisphere, which the PROESA internet site describes at length:

> The proximity to the United States' market offers 'a very particular advantage over China; it allows production in regular cycles and more timely response than Asia to market demands,' says a textile and apparel business representative already established in our country.
>
> Nearly 2.5 million Salvadorans reside and work outside the country, mostly the United States.
>
> Location is a natural advantage, but it is just one of the many advantages El Salvador offers. 'The human quality of our people makes our work force a very special one, so special that the Salvadoran labor force is recognized throughout the region and the world,' says Patricia Figueroa, Executive Director of PROESA.
>
> ("PROESA: Strategic Locations," 2006)

The description of strategic location maps the place of the Salvadoran call center within relations of global capital and in the transnational imaginary. It is a location somewhere in between the United States and Latin America—and with a "natural" and "very particular advantage over China." It acknowledges the importance of trade ties across the Americas, and places El Salvador as central to the development of the isthmus and the region. Finally, it describes El Salvador's main asset—human capital, within the country ("a special workforce known worldwide") and outside El Salvador (2.5 million Salvadorans who live and work around the world). Salvadorans are portrayed as a readily available and global workforce.

The reference to Salvadoran emigration may at first glance seem out of place in a website that promotes the capacities of Salvadorans within the country. Yet in a context

where emigration is naturalized as a strategy for economic survival, while press institutions and the state are involved in processes of reclaiming transnational Salvadorans for national development, the reference to the millions of Salvadorans abroad further brings out the extent to which El Salvador is "globalized," projected to the world, and thus attractive to foreign investors. Transnational imaginaries and their materialities intersect in portrayals of migration as they do in slogans with dual meanings such as "El Salvador works." In the following sections I discuss how this imaginary of work culture goes from being a slogan to shaping the practices of training, hiring, and work for many Salvadoran employees, as I keep in mind the globalizing processes that shape these sites and voices.

Researching the Call Center

In 2005, seven major call centers in San Salvador employed about 3,200 representatives, and the number of employees grew during 2006. As of 2007 there are nine large call centers that serve all kinds of needs: airline travel, computer software, and food service among others. In addition, there are several smaller, "in-house" operations, mainly Salvadoran or Guatemalan companies that serve domestic/regional customers (although for the purposes of this study I focus less on this sector, which could be characterized as a "spillover").

As I set out to research the operations of customer service centers in San Salvador, I contacted friends or acquaintances who had worked or currently worked in

some of these large, transnational call centers. While most were willing to openly discuss their work experiences and share what they could about their interactions with callers and co-workers in general, few thought direct observation or visits to the call center would be allowed as part of my research. So, while contacting interviewees was relatively easy and provided rich information about employment, the possibility of visiting and observing a call center floor on a daily basis was not offered directly. When I asked, most participants said it was not possible. They offered to describe the site. Although this was not a substitute for first-hand experience, I thought their descriptions of the site added to the depth of the impression they had of their workplace. I imagined the call center through their descriptions, even as I had my own general ideas about the layout of this place, from pictures, news, or documentaries. Gabriela (not her real name) described her workplace as a "series of cubicles…and everyone has the same chair" when she described the non-hierarchical culture of the company and how everyone had the same amount of personal space and worked equally. However, she also described it "like a *maquila*" when talking about how the company hopes to hire more people to maximize the fixed cost of maintenance and the building's space—the more employees taking calls, the more profitable it is to maintain a large call center (interviewed 23 August 2005).

During a visit to another call center, "Sara" (not her real name) offered to show me the training room instead of the actual place where agents were taking calls. We stood in front of large glass panel. Through it, I could see two or three rows of computers, headsets, and keyboards, about twenty workstations in total. Here, the participants in the call center training program practiced with recorded, simulated calls for a few weeks

before taking actual calls. It is to the larger context of these training practices that I now turn.

Hiring Practices

Prospective call center employees in El Salvador undergo a series of interviews and language exams to determine level and knowledge of English, especially competence in spoken English and listening comprehension. The process I will describe in this section is quite standardized and has few variations across bilingual call centers in San Salvador. The recruitment process often begins with a newspaper ad, printed in English in the employment section, or on the company's website (or, in a few cases, commercials on cable television).[16] The following is a text of an advertisement in *La Prensa Gráfica,* for one of the largest call centers in San Salvador, which currently has about 1200 employees and plans to expand its sales teams:

> **How fast is your career growing?**
>
> We offer an opportunity to start a high speed career as a sales or technical support representative. Apply today and be part of the best computer company in the world.
>
> **Requirements to apply:**
>
> High school graduate, Be at least 18 years of age, 100% fluent in English, Computer knowledge.

[16] One of my interviewees explained that the television advertisements are usually placed on cable channels because spots cost less there than in "regular channels." Also, since cable channel programming is largely in English, there is a better chance of reaching an audience interested in and qualified for a bilingual call center job.

We offer:

Competitive Salary, Opportunity to grow, Teamwork environment, Benefits above the law

CALL US FOR A JOB

OR SEND US YOUR RESUME AT: [email address]

(*La Prensa Gráfica,* 8 May 2006: 13).

The ad is published in English and takes up one fourth of a page in the employment section; it appeals to "high speed" and career growth, directly related to knowledge of English, technology, use of email, and sales ability. As it evokes and constructs the speed of globalization and connections, it addresses people who are comfortable with computers, with talking on the phone, and especially to Salvadorans who feel in some way "attuned" to United States consumer cultures. The advertisement appeals to the aspirations of Salvadorans who may be looking for a job with relatively good benefits ("above the law," i.e. more than what is minimally required by the Salvadoran labor code) and a comparatively good salary of about $450-$600 per month, nearly three times the minimum wage. It may also appeal to high school graduates searching for a first job—an automatic career linked to technology, although of course the 18-24 age group is not the only one employed as call center agents.

Once people respond to the ad listed above, or to cable television advertisements, or to the brochures handed out at job fairs, malls, universities or other locations, a long process begins in the call center's offices in San Salvador before the employee sits down

with a headset to take his or her first transnational call from the customers in the United States. About six weeks of interviews, tests, and paid training workshops pass between the first interview and the first actual day of work. "In the company there is a rather long process," Gabriela, a human resources manager for a technical support and sales call center explained:

> *Gabriela:* First we receive all the interested candidates. This can be through the Internet, or advertisements in the newspapers or directly, through other programs where employees can refer acquaintances or even relatives. The first thing that is done is a telephone screening, to know the level of English. If they can maintain a conversation over the phone, well that is the most basic thing, and there we ask them certain questions to know more about what level of English the candidate can manage. If the candidate fits the requirements, we invite him/her to take some computerized tests to measure their skills, technical as well as in personality, which he/she must have.[17] If the person passes this test, the next step is an interview with the managers, who are fully bilingual. But if they do not pass, we invite them to take a course to improve, depending on how much they need it, and we give them a chance to retake the test.
>
> *Cecilia:* And why is this, because there aren't enough bilingual people?
>
> *Gabriela:* No, the truth is that…the lack of skills in terms of language is so large that we need to invest in the people, so they can master the language. First the language, and then improve the accent (Interviewed 23 August 2005).

Gabriela's explanation highlights important points: even as the process tries to be rigorous and selective, involving aptitude tests and several interviews, eventually the demand for employees is high enough that the call center has to produce *exactly* the competent bilingual Salvadoran employee with an "improved accent" of its imaginary. It

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[17] Several call centers commented that their hiring process includes psychological or personality testing of prospective employees. One call center manager explained that it was important to avoid hiring people who had problems with drug addiction. Another recruitment manager said it was to assess if the applicant was "fit" for the pace of call center work (see Martin 1994). Beyond hiring, I am unsure as to how this testing benefits the employee.

has to "invest in the people" to actually take advantage of the decision to invest its transnational capital in El Salvador. In other words, the ideal, bilingual Salvadoran call center agent does not exist naturally as an immediately available workforce; but this subject is shaped and produced by the very technologies of service and language it then serves. As prospective call center employees take language and personality tests, one might think employers are conducting surveillance and regulation as they construct and measure competence and linguistic capital.

Where applicants learned English and its relationship to ideas of class (social/economic status) is also articulated in call center hiring practices. If an applicant learned English at a bilingual school in El Salvador, as Gabriela noted, "They are people whose parents can afford to pay that kind of education…yes, we have people working here that we know are from wealthy families." She added that Salvadorans who were raised in the United States and learned the language there sometimes return to San Salvador, and seek employment at call centers. They speak English well and are familiar with United States culture. Although they are good candidates for the job, Gabriela suggested that they have to re-adjust to El Salvador, and to Salvadoran customs and ways of interacting with other employees. A team manager at another call center also noted that "for many people who have returned, this job *les cae como anillo al dedo* [is a very good fit]. The only thing is that they use too much jargon," she added, disregarding her own use of a colloquialism (interviewed 15 August 2006).

Although call center agents may go home to vastly different neighborhoods at the end of their shift, one of the human resources managers I interviewed emphasized the

lack of strict class hierarchies within the call center. “We celebrate equally, and help each other equally,” she said. In this example we can see the construction of a “deep horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 1991) of a social imaginary in the transnational call center, as employees with the same obligations in a global division of labor.

Another example further illuminates the contradictions within the hiring process. “Sara” is a human resources manager at a company with merged Canadian and Spanish capital, and has now established call center operations in El Salvador and Guatemala, with plans to reach Nicaragua and Panama. The initial screening and hiring process is similar to the one I already described: applicants present their CVs, schedule an interview, and take an English test. After this, personnel managers decide if they “feel comfortable with this accent or not, if we think the accent is too thick.” If the “accent” is acceptable and the candidate passes the tests, the company then asks for references and a police record, and checks up on these. What could a police record have in common with spoken English ability? Sara explained:

> In this world, if you ask for a native speaker of English or someone who speaks English [well] you can get just about anything. Many of the applicants we get are either deported or are people who maybe had legal problems. […] If they have been deported for any criminal act, there is nothing we can do. All of us need a second chance, and we have the will to help. [..] But we cannot expose our other employees, or trust the agent with expensive equipment (interviewed 15 August 2006).

The association of illegality or criminality with a “native speaker of English”—even when most deportees are not criminals or gang members—brings the history of violent migration and the relationship between the United States and El Salvador to the call center. Where the applicant learned English becomes an issue. English ability, often

seen as a marker of integration into mainstream U.S. society, ironically contrasts with a less-than-ideal history of migration and deportation from the United States. It brings a degree of stigmatization upon forced return to El Salvador and when job-hunting in San Salvador's call centers. Thus even as the investment promotion agency wants to "export voices" and market the bilingualism of its workforce, in call center Human Resources departments such as Sara's there is some anxiety around the origin of the ideal, "native speaker" call center employee's much desired linguistic capital.

The case of "Raquel" (not her real name) provides another example of the conflicts of call center hiring practices. Raquel was 49 years old at the time of the interview, bilingual, and has three children, all in their late teens or early twenties. She went through the long hiring process and workshops, and worked at a call center for only three days before quitting. She said she had gone to six different appointments before she was hired:

> I had to go many times. It took over one month. I had to wait for their calls, to take a urine test and a drug test, to pick up my employee ID card, another time just to sign the contract. I don't know why they do not make it [the process] simpler. Ah, another time, for a typing exam (interviewed 5 September 2005).

As she went through the training process, Raquel felt uncertainty about her abilities although she had scored very well in the spoken English test: "I do not feel that I have the agility to answer questions fast, like a young person would. There were many young people at the training, high school age or maybe in their first or second year of university." Although she was told that she would have a choice when picking her

schedule, later she found out that at some point, because of the rotation of employee shifts, she would have to work nights and weekends. This was an idea she rejected: "my family is worth more than this […] on the third day I did not go and I felt liberated," Raquel said. "It is not easy for women to combine everything, work, well-being. […] that work was too much pressure, too 'up the hill.' It ends up being like a *maquila*, working all weekend. […] Women my age do not have many opportunities" ("Raquel," interviewed 5 September 2005).

Raquel's comments provide an insight into the career paths of women in El Salvador. Before marrying and becoming a housewife, she worked as a secretary, where her bilingual skills were an advantage. After twenty-six years of marriage and raising her three children, she finds it difficult to return to a job that demands schedule flexibility and a "mental agility" that she considers are not suited to her lifestyle and family obligations. Despite her language skills and organizational experience, Raquel is not confident about her abilities to be a part of a transnational call center, and equates the strains of call center work to *maquiladoras*. In equating these, the skills of women in the global division of labor seem devalued and particularly exploitable. In addition, the assumptions of age and "mental agility" further naturalize the connection of technological know-how with youth. Although Raquel's age was not an impeding factor in the management's decision to hire her, she "self-selected" out of the call center job.

Language and Labor Flexibility

Porque si comunicarse es complejo, ya no se diga en otro idioma.[18]

Bilingualism is important for call center work in San Salvador. The global reach of English as the language of corporations seeps into views of what is viewed as "competitive" and professional behavior. In the post-war Salvadoran imaginary, working in English is part of a project of global integration, just like adopting the dollar as national currency and having a daily newspaper section that connects Salvadorans in El Salvador and the United States as an imagined community of readers of Salvadoran news. The national project depends on bilingualism—Spanish and English—to attract global capital.

My interviews suggest that call center work is represented as a desirable job option for English-speaking Salvadorans because it involves the use of linguistic and technical skills that become valuable in a global economy. Spanish/English bilingualism is an important asset for prospective employees in this sector, while training often emphasizes listening comprehension and the improvement of an American English accent to attend customers calling from the United States, in addition to learning a script to use in daily interactions. A recruitment manager described this environment:

Cecilia: How important is bilingualism, both written and spoken?

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[18] "Because if communicating is complex, imagine [doing so] in another language" (Gabriela, interviewed 23 August 2005).

> *Manager:* Well at least in a call center environment, especially this one that waits on U.S. consumers, customers from all over the States, it's really important because U.S. customers are very, very delicate when it comes to accent. […] And vice-versa—we get calls from different parts of the States that have very strong accents […] Like the south, for example, when they speak really fast. So if we don't have agents with good comprehension skills who understand the different accents, tone of voice, speech rate. If you don't understand the customer we will not give the service that we are required to give. If we do not communicate what we are doing, if we don't understand a customer's needs, we will fail at our jobs; so it's really important for people to have at least a native, 95 to 100 percent command of the language. The written part is not that important but the verbal understanding, comprehension, and speaking is the most important part (interviewed 6 September 2005).

Paradoxically, R.S. seems to conflate "accent" with "bilingualism." He recognizes the difference between accents, that there is not a single, neutral accent, particularly in the United States. Yet in his view this awareness translates into a burden for the call center agent, where he or she must have a clear and objective pronunciation and exceptional listening comprehension skills, or else "fail at her job." Like their bilingual counterparts, Salvadoran agents in Spanish-only call centers are presented in advertisements and brochures by PROESA investment promoters as agents with "neutral" accents. In this claim, Salvadoran *Spanish* is not as recognizable as are the distinctive intonations of other Latin American varieties. The website of the Salvadoran Investment Promotion Agency (PROESA) states: "Spanish spoken by Salvadorans is characterized by a neutral accent, another point in favor of the industry, opening up the possibility of answering calls from many different Spanish speaking countries at one single place" ("PROESA: Contact Centers," 2006).

But Spanish is far from neutral. Anthropologist Pedro Geoffroy Rivas states that Salvadoran Spanish, or what he calls *lengua salvadoreña* (1978: 32) is the unique product of 400 years of colonialism and "nearly 150 years of independent life" (Geoffroy Rivas

1979: 40-41). Salvadoran Spanish is the product of indigenous languages, colonizers, contact with other Central American countries, and immigrants from different regions of Spain and other parts of the world, contact with the United States, and "the creative genius of the people, who have always and everywhere been the great modifiers of languages" (Geoffroy Rivas 1979: 41. my translation). The language Salvadorans use is far from fixed and neutral; it is co-constituted with social, political, and historical practices.

The idea of a neutrality of language ignores the racial and class origins of its speakers. The idea of Spanish language neutrality in contemporary El Salvador is closely associated with an idea of homogeneity of the Salvadoran population. As the "most mestizo" nation in Central America, El Salvador's indigenous population converted to the use of Spanish language and dropped their own language and cultural norms, in sharp contrast to Guatemala. This was due in part to the violence against indigenous populations, historically and especially after the 1932 *matanza*.[19] John Lipski discusses the differences in language that arise from inequalities between Salvadorans, seeing:

> a sociolinguistic discontinuity between the speech of marginalized groups and that of the urban middle and professional class. The latter, increasingly, turns outward to Mexico, Spain and the United States for advanced training, acquiring in the process a de-regionalized language, while the socially marginalized sectors advance in their linguistic evolution at an ever greater rate. The discrepancy is immediately noticed upon listening to a Salvadorian, whose socioeconomic origins can be identified after only a few words (Lipski 1994: 256).

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[19] There are several accounts of the 1932 events, for example Roque Dalton's *Miguel Mármol*. Also see Erik Ching and Virginia Tilley, "Indians, the Military and the Rebellion of 1932 in El Salvador," *JLAS* 30.1 (February 1998): 121-156; and James Dunkerley, "El Salvador since 1930" in *Central America since Independence*, ed. Leslie Bethell. New York: Cambridge UP, 1991. 159-190.

The neutral Spanish that is supposedly spoken in call centers, then, aims to be a global and more prestigious form of Spanish, a "de-regionalized" and professional language that is readily marketable. In the context of language and commercialization, Arlene Dávila has argued that the representation of Latinos in the United States by advertising agencies is overwhelmed by the codes and symbols of middle or upper-class, fully bilingual, educated Latin Americans who arrive in the United States as adults to work as creatives (Dávila 2001: 35). Dávila traces the creation and portrayal "of a neutral or universal version of Hispanidad—the putatively neutral, 'non-accented' Spanish and 'generic' Latin look" (Dávila 2001: 93). Similarly, the investment promotion strategy that produces the notion of linguistically "de-regionalized" (Lipski 1994) Salvadoran call center agents is part of post-war economic development projects where Salvadoran business elites and the government present the linguistic abilities of Salvadoran workers to the world as flexible and fit for a global market. In this imaginary, the "non-neutral"—the marginal, poor, or speaker of indigenous languages—is excluded (see Mignolo 2000).

With practices such as the standardization of language and the use of scripts—prepared phrases which guide the use of language—global call centers flatten the characteristics of difference among their agents in an effort to provide standard, consistent information and service to their callers (see Akşin and Harker 2001: 325). This flattening critically connects the technological and cultural contexts that constitute call center operations. Human error is undesirable. Standardization extends to the characteristics of the employees of customer service centers, in the shaping and surveillance of their voices. Thus, the voices that are being "exported" are partly brought

into being by the transnational discursive imaginaries of corporate managers and the institutes that help train their employees.

The Director of the National English Center, (NEC) a new language school funded through an educational initiative of the Salvadoran government, discussed the need to train groups of language students especially for the call center field, as a ten-week program they have recently established does. “English has taken a leading role in the national educational plan,” she explained:

> Our courses seek to benefit the Salvadoran population, we have a scholarship program, and the results so far have been favorable. We want a larger [and more competitive] bilingual workforce. We want people to develop a new attitude toward language—they have to speak and not be shy, become proficient (Interviewed 25 July 2006).

The director pointed to attitudes towards language and accents, to fears of speaking another language that in the vision of NEC must be overcome if bilingualism is to be a productive asset for Salvadoran economic development. She considers that the call center sector in El Salvador has a future, especially as the NEC builds relationships with the established call centers in San Salvador and coordinates training practices and call simulation drills “to know the expectations of call centers.” In terms of human resources, she commented that “maybe call centers should be a bit less ambitious” in terms of the English proficiency of employees, and should consider students at an upper intermediate level of English (and not only those with “perfect” English) as good candidates for a job at the call centers. “Do they want a *persona integral* (a person with integrity) or a mechanical native speaker of English?” she asked. “There is no such thing

as a 'native speaker'! So putting on a headset [at the call center] is a challenge [for anyone]" (NEC Director, interviewed 25 July 2006).

As the director's comments made evident, the rift between "integrity" and "flexibility" is symbolized in the measurement and evaluation of the language ability of NEC students and call center agents. The employee is subjected to continuous education and retraining—the kind provided by NEC to make the bilingual force more competitive and to develop a more flexible and fearless attitude (Martin 1994) toward language, and the testing, "accent improvement," and training conducted by hiring departments at the centers. English, then, becomes a new terrain for the Salvadoran worker; a terrain of constant change. Speaking of the demands of her work, a call center human resources manager compared herself to a rubber band, as she remarked, "It's like, 'stretch, stretch, people'…and then [snap] and they reward you" (interviewed 23 August 2005).

As Salvadoran workers in call centers experience English as their everyday language at work, or shift their everyday use of Spanish to a de-regionalized form, and as their capacities are "stretched," the human voice that responds and empathizes with customers at a call center is trained. The quality of the voice, as a commodity "for export," is improved and brought into the imagination of El Salvador as transnational and globalized. Skills such as listening comprehension and bilingualism are encouraged in the flexible worker in order to increase productivity and efficiency. Deborah Cameron suggests that call centers are "communication factories" where workers follow a scripted conversation, a "regime" that tries to "regulate many aspects of talk" (Cameron 2000: 123). Cameron views the call center "as a deskilling and disempowering place to work"

(Cameron 2000: 124). The expanding call center sector is in part shaped by technological advances and ideas about the linguistic and professional capacities of Salvadoran workers. Salvadorans are often described as hard working, inherently *amables* (polite, affable) and as willing to learn and work at new things (NEC Director, interviewed 25 July 2006).

In a global economy, however, what is the nature of contact center work once production is segmented, outsourced, and divided so dramatically between American consumer, in this case imagined as an English speaker, and bilingual Salvadoran agent? The following transcript excerpt from an interview with a human resources manager vividly describes some aspects of the work of call center agents in San Salvador:

> Let me tell you a bit about, maybe the human part of all this. Because it is really admirable, what these people [agents] have to face daily. Look, in the area of sales it is not so hard because frankly it is people who want the product. Or want the information, or have the intention of buying something. But there are some [young people] who attend to all the tech support…that work is *extremely* stressful because the first thing you hear is a complaint. People who are annoyed, people who maybe have been through a lot of other agents, and nobody resolves their case…frustrated people, probably impolite people, probably people you do not understand. Imagine…aside from the scarce knowledge of your first days [as a call center agent] or know-how, it's like 'What? Really, how can I solve this?' Because the goal is that our client takes away the best experience. I mean, really if we can solve it we will do whatever is possible to solve it and that the customer, when he hangs up, thanks us for the support that we have given. So…not all calls at the end of the day are successful. And the burden you have is heavy. Sometimes there are men, crying from frustration. Because simply, there was someone at the other end of the line, hysterical, screaming, telling him, *'I am fed up that nobody solves my problem, and what are you going to do?*' Poor guys. Ah! It's horrible.
>
> So, any day we go and take calls, to maintain empathy with the needs of our internal client [the employed agents]. Well, what do they need? They need to learn to manage stress. Remember that we also live in a very violent society. The Salvadoran, by nature, we are like…yes, people who are very reactive to the moment. In some way, we have to help them, [to make sure] they do not take that problem home. There are people who are so apprehensive. They come out of work, depressed, or arrive, arguing.

> Everything they have received, they have to learn to let go of. Those are some of the most interesting, and the most draining, aspects [of the job] that we deal with. Because not solving a problem is also very frustrating for an agent, not receiving a 'thank you' from the client [caller] is very frustrating. There are things you simply cannot do…!" (interviewed 23 August 2005).

The manager's comments bring out another side of call center work, and of service work in general. As it supports economies and global operations, it can also degrade and reduce human beings. In this case, "voices" (the agents) become frustrated by ineffective communication as well as the violence of everyday life in post-war El Salvador, where people are "reactive" to their surroundings inside and outside the workplace. The stress and work of hearing complaints day after day is a factor in the quick burnout and high turnover rate of the call center industry as a whole. In the call center where the manager quoted above works, 70 percent of the agents quit before their first year on the job. Good salaries, benefits, and an air-conditioned office in San Salvador are not enough. Maintaining the call center—continuously hiring and training people, and in turn attempting to minimize the frustration and quit rates of the employees—becomes an operation that contradicts the global illusion of easily available, immediate services.

The efficient operation of a call center depends on the number of calls that are answered and on how many customers receive good service (i.e. resolve their problems), while lowering the amount of reneged[20] calls. But there is more to this. Within the

[20] "Some customers may exhibit impatience and leave the system while on hold before service initiation. This loss of customers is labeled *reneges*" (Akşin and Harker 2001: 27).

"global situation" (Tsing 2000) a call is not an individual friendly exchange—rather, it is an opportunity for "friction" (Tsing 2005). The customer needs to consume something, and calls with the expectation of immediate service and an answer. Most callers are impatient:

> A new survey indicates that customers trying to get through to call centers are hanging up faster than ever. 65 seconds of canned music is all the average caller will tolerate […]. This growing impatience comes at a time when the number of calls to call centers is increasing by 20% per year (*Outsourcing Times*, March 11 2005).

As disembodied voices, must call center employees always guess the whims of their unseen customers from distant locations, and respond before 65 seconds? The call is situated in larger relations of global capitalism and technologies that make services appear instant. In addition, the call is impersonal, for both the caller and the agent, and a strangely unequal exchange. Frustration surfaces as intolerance to "canned music" and a 65-second wait, or stress and high quit rates. This intolerance, in turn, prompts companies to consider more outsourcing, to have more agents for a faster response. If we remain as uncritical and impatient consumers, the access to call centers and instant services and information frames our world view, an illusion of global media that masks global inequalities. As a form of foreign investment encouraged in El Salvador, call centers bring transformative and challenging practices of globalization to local conditions.

Conclusion: Calls and Imaginaries

On a Sunday afternoon, the phone rang. I answered. A woman spoke in Spanish. "We want to ask you a few questions about the products you consume. This will take approximately five minutes. Do you have time?" she asked. I agreed. I tried to picture the caller: probably young and maybe Mexican, as far as I could tell from her "accent." She asked me if I was Puerto Rican, Cuban, Mexican, or other. "Other," I said flatly. She did not try to guess if I was Central American or from somewhere in South America; and moved on to the next question. She asked me if I was born in the United States. And if the answer was "no," how long had I lived in the United States? She asked how old I was, and about my level of education. She asked if I listened to radio during the day. I rarely do. She asked how many hours per week I spent watching television; how many hours per week I spent reading newspapers. I answered her questions, without asking about or distinguishing between online newspapers and print editions.

Then she asked the central questions of her survey: from the options she listed, what kind of cooking oils do I use most? I said I use olive oil most frequently, and sometimes canola oil. She asked if I used *manteca*. I said no, feeling less and less attached to the "traditional" preparation of many Salvadoran dishes, and even less connected to the "Hispanic culture" of the advertising world (Dávila 2001: 125).

She asked me if I had ever heard of Brand X corn oil, or Brand Y vegetable oil. I had not. She asked me to rate different kinds of oils, from one to ten, with ten being the one I was most likely to buy. In the midst of this questionnaire where my "Latinidad" was being quantified as media and cooking oil consumption, I commented, "Aren't the

two brands you just listed corn oils, why not put them together?" "I don't know…" she trailed off, perhaps just as confused and taking a second look at the page or screen she had been reading. "Yes, maybe, but these are the questions I *have* to ask you," she finally said. "These questions are strange!" I replied with a quiet laugh, sensing that the survey was ending and that maybe we could talk less formally for a moment. "I know, I know, but it's my job, and I have to show this to my boss," she said, relaxing a bit, perhaps knowing that I would not hang up.

Finally I had the opportunity to ask. "Where are you?"

"Los Angeles." She even told me the name of the street where she was.

"Really? And what is this for?" I asked.

"Ah, a market study for Telemundo. They want to know how well the commercials for these cooking oils are doing," she explained.

From my answers, the marketing campaign for cooking oils X and Y was not doing too well—it had not reached me, the intended audience. I could not be helpful in producing the answers the questionnaire so openly wanted. I could not even recall what brand of olive oil I had in my kitchen at the moment (she had asked about that too). The call had to end; she had to move on to another survey. "*Andale pues, gracias*," she said as farewell, letting go of the exit script. I hung up.

The telemarketing survey for Telemundo that I had just participated in linked the Americas in ways which closely parallel the description of the call center and other

imaginaries of transnationalism I engage throughout this dissertation. I had been called, interpellated as a consumer of media and commodities (specifically cooking oil) and a Latina living in the United States. I had been interviewed in Spanish, and this set of assumptions that I spoke fluent Spanish, watched Telemundo, was not necessarily born in the United States, and loyally used brands linked to a "Hispanic imaginary" of consumption and cultural citizenship was clearly present in the caller's questions.

Like the call center employee from Los Angeles, agents in El Salvador's call centers participate in circuits of consumption, assumptions of language ability, and im/mobility. Call centers have become major sources of employment in San Salvador, and also generated a need for English language training, as evidenced by the creation of the National English Center and its course for call center employees. "It's like English is a fashionable accessory," a human resources manager said, "you have it, or you're out" (interviewed 10 August 2006). In this scheme of language as a fashionable tool for transnational imagination, it is important to remember the histories, language requirements, and current, local contexts of violence that to an extent characterize call center work. The investment promoters assume and naturalize the importance of the call center as a link in the chain of production and consumption. The global reach of English seeps into views of competitive and professional behavior, as part of a project of global integration. These transformations are in part shaped by economic policies, technological advances, and ideas about the linguistic and professional capacities of the Salvadoran workforce. Information and technology are never neutral—as communication tools they serve to advance ideologies, many of them rooted in Eurocentric thought.

The call center, where disembodied voices are "exported," trained, and commercialized, is an example of the many reconfigurations of globalization and "friction" as lived in communities and institutions. The search for a perfect, "neutral" accent involves a larger process of surveillance and regulation, as anxieties about the return of bodies from the United States contradict with the economic need to commercialize their bilingual voices. Deportation of Salvadoran migrants from the United States and call center hiring and training are two processes situated within the historical, political, and economic transformations of post-war El Salvador, yet as they are intertwined in this imaginary, they also seem to have clashing effects. In addition, the "frustration" of call center employees described by some interviewees embodies global inequalities and the uneven and often alienating experiences in the transnational service sector.

Salvadoran call center agents are hired as bilingual, de-territorialized voices. As a "fashionable accessory" that you can "have," English proficiency is commodified and measured. It is tied to opportunities for career advancement, as portrayed by recruiters and in the advertisement. The voice as a commodity is projected to the global. "Fashionable accessories" are linked to an emerging, sophisticated transnational subject and consumption patterns, which in the next chapter I will discuss in relation to shopping malls and cultures of consumption in El Salvador.

Chapter Four

Imaginaries of Citizenship and Consumption:

El Salvador and the Megamall

To consume is to participate in an arena of competing claims

for what society produces and the ways of using it.

-Néstor García Canclini, Consumers and Citizens

Metrocentro: El corazón de la ciudad…y tú lo haces latir.

-Shopping mall slogan, San Salvador

Introduction: Beyond Shopping

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that imaginaries are produced and commercialized between uneven and contradictory trans/national conditions. As the Salvadoran call centers and media institutions I have previously discussed show, transnational spaces of media, commerce, and migration are increasingly managed by the pull and direction of the nation-state (see, for example, Alvarez 2005). In this chapter I explore shopping malls in El Salvador. These spaces of consumption, leisure, and

socialization have gained salience in recent years, as the "megamall" has altered San Salvador's physical and social landscape. I examine transnational imaginaries, the privatization of public space, and consumption practices as co-constitutive processes that shape the experience of everyday life in El Salvador. In doing this, I aim to situate the shopping mall as a space of imagination of the national and the global, where Salvadoran consumers are presented with "choices" that both constrain and liberate.

Consumption is a cultural, social, and economic practice that is concretized, or grounded, in relation to how the transnational is claimed to a national space—among other things, to how global patterns of consumption find a space in San Salvador's malls, and how consumers participate or are excluded from this space. In the previous chapter I examined the production of "ideal" call center employees, part of a transnational service sector where voices and information are commodified. Here we can think of ideal sites of consumption, and ideal consumers. While the shopping mall may seem like an unexpected field site in my research that has traced migration, media portrayals, and communication technologies, this location brings these issues together. It allows me to connect and examine a local, urbanized space that is shaped by the intersection of various factors, including violence, dollarization of the Salvadoran economy, global fashion trends, and the prevalence of migration and international connections of commerce and people. Much like the production of a bilingual, technologically proficient Salvadoran worker in call centers, the megamall embodies and produces a range of cosmopolitan aspirations and tastes for the consumers who visit it. Yet this chapter is not narrowly about shopping or the hegemony of neo-liberal concepts of choice, access to goods, or

opportunities, even as it takes these ideas as points of departure and critique. As it relates to the dissertation as a whole, this analysis is less obviously about consumption in isolation and more about other things. It is about a growing city, an imaginary, and the shifting class, gender, and trans/national identities of consumers in post-war El Salvador within conditions that both enable and constrain the experiences of globalization. What is the relationship between consumption and nationalism in a new global economic order? How do megamalls in El Salvador, where people purchase commodities with United States dollars, illustrate this relationship and the transnational circuits, exchange, "material density" (Zilberg 2002: 206) and "social life of things" (Appadurai 1986) between the Americas?

To think about these questions, I spent significant amounts of time 'interacting' in the Salvadoran megamalls, spaces where the range of products, in addition to the architectural scale and size of these buildings, engulf the emerging Salvadoran consumer of the 21st century. Every day, thousands of people circulate through these spaces, moving from the teeming parking lots or bus stops to the department stores to the smaller boutiques and shops, cell phone accessory kiosks, banks and other services, food courts, and coffee shops strategically placed throughout this landscape. Many of these visitors do not exchange money for things, yet they consume as they look through shop windows or remember other objects and sites of consumption. Because of this, I consider memory and window shopping as key ideas in the experiences of consumers in different malls in San Salvador. My research in three Salvadoran malls, Metrocentro, Multiplaza, and La Gran Vía (LGV) combines observations and reflections on my own participation as a

shopper and as a researcher, taking notes, visiting shops, and engaging the "field" of consumption. I also consider media portrayals of the megamalls. The research on imaginaries of consumption presented in this chapter advances the larger argument of the thesis—that the national and transnational fields constitute each other in varied and often contradictory sites. Shopping at the mall is constitutive of citizenship *and* a form of participation in globalization.

The Study of Consumption

The literature on commodity consumption is extensive, a sign of the importance of this practice across cultures, borders, and theoretical perspectives. Consumption permeates everyday life and is intertwined with questions of social status, race, class, and taste. Social science disciplines, particularly history and anthropology, have focused on the nature and significance of the gift, reciprocity, and responsibility (Mauss 1950) and on the meaning and value of certain objects and rituals (Baudrillard 1981, Otnes and Lowrey eds., 2004) in addition to how consumption and material culture relate to larger processes. Some scholars view consumption "less as an individual choice framed by meaning and more as a collective consequence, itself consequential, of political-economic forces" (Carrier 2006: 275). Following this idea of the forces that shape "collective consequences," or imaginaries, of consumption, this chapter is less obviously about shopping and more about global exclusion manifested in the local. Why has the meaning of consumption been so widely studied since the rise of neo-liberal hegemony in

the 1980s even as shopping itself becomes "more uncertain for many people"? (Carrier 2006: 272, also see García Canclini 2001).

In the past twenty-five years, purchasing power, the ability to shop and spend money, has been affected by structural adjustment policies, high inflation, and unfavorable exchange rates throughout the Latin American region. Context is important in the study of consumption, and in this sense the situation in El Salvador has changed dramatically over the last twenty-five years. In an interview I conducted with "Raúl" a Salvadoran economist, he spoke about earlier models of development that had been adopted throughout Latin America since the 1960s, particularly developmentalism/ Import-Substitution Industrialization (ISI), which in his opinion led to the "de-globalization" of El Salvador and other countries in the area as their economies turned inward. To this I would add the precarious economic conditions of wartime El Salvador. "So [in the 1970s and 1980s] what do you have?" my interviewee the economist said. "Bad products. Do you remember those really bad chocolates?" he asked, as we discussed and recalled specific Salvadoran brands of snacks and shoes that had been available in the 1980s. "Back then, to get a Snickers bar here was a luxury, you see? And a pair of Reeboks? Wow. That was a big deal" (interviewed 6 September 2005. my translation). For Raúl it was rather clear that an economic model that depended on the manufacture of "bad products" had failed. Another model that allowed for the globalization and economic openness of El Salvador and for the availability of "higher-status" and luxury products (Bourdieu 1984) from abroad was necessary.

Raúl did not refer to neoliberalism directly—in fact, this economist has strong criticisms regarding economic inequality, the government's limited spending on social programs, and the "offensively low" salaries in El Salvador as prices have risen and nearly everybody has taken to rounding up price tags to the next dollar. "We are not doing well," Raúl said. "El Salvador is a strange (*raro*), contradictory country. […] We have everything necessary to grow economically and yet for some reason we don't." We should keep in mind, however, that a model of development where social services were severely cut back and privatized was uncritically adopted in the region during the 1990s with the idea that it would signal the end of "the lost decade" and underdevelopment in Latin America (see Levine ed. 1992).

In San Salvador we can see the growth and expansion of shopping malls as an interesting contradiction in Salvadoran economic conditions. Why are there several megamalls in a country where a significant part of the population (at least 30%) lives in poverty? Who shops here? How do these shops stay in business? While this chapter does not set out to provide quantitative answers to these questions, and El Salvador's situation as a country with extreme social inequality may not strike many as unique in Latin America, I consider the specificities of this location and how commodities are central to social relations. Karl Marx wrote that a commodity is "a mysterious thing," a powerful object that satisfies human wants and actively shapes labor and social relations between people and things: "There is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things" (Marx [1867] 1978: 321). The act of exchange is where the producer's relationship to labor becomes visible. Fetishism

"attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities" (Marx [1867] 1978: 321). For Marx, the study of consumption and commodities was a key to the study of the worker's alienation, to how "people were estranged from their own humanity" (Gottdiener 2000: 4) and separated from their labor. Appadurai (1986) argues that regimes of value and exchange shape the paths of commodities. Things, like persons, have social lives which do not simply end when the commodity is bought or sold. To study these "lives,"

> we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. […] even though from a *theoretical* point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context (Appadurai 1986: 5).

Tracing the paths and interactions of commodities provides insights into the social structures and locations (such as the megamall) that shape imaginaries of objects and consumers.

Néstor García Canclini proposes a "sociocultural theory of consumption" (2001: 38) which accounts for complex processes of communication and brings together multiple disciplinary perspectives. García Canclini, like other scholars, moves beyond questions of taste and the isolated meaning of objects. He defines consumption as a politically important exercise intertwined with questions of citizenship and belonging, consumption as "*the ensemble of sociocultural processes in which the appropriation and use of products takes place*" (García Canclini 2001: 38, emphasis in original). In his formulation, communication and consumption are no longer simply explained as "processes of domination" where consumers of media and commodities obediently

receive messages. These processes are now interactive, dialogic (Bakhtin 1981) and similar to the idealized public sphere in that "If consumption was once a site of more or less unilateral decisions, it is today a space of interaction where producers and senders no longer simply seduce their audiences; they also have to justify themselves rationally" (García Canclini 2001: 39).

As several of the scholars I have cited above note, when we research consumption, citizenship, labor, capitalism, and communication, we must critically analyze the (trans)formation of these processes and how they are connected, instead of viewing them as if in a vacuum. Michael Taussig has pointed to how capitalist relations of production are naturalized in western, industrialized societies. By looking at cases of Colombian and Bolivian peasants and how segments of these societies approach money and consumption as pre-capitalist and pre-modern pacts with the devil, he critiques modern capitalist cultures from the periphery. Taussig writes that

> In capitalist culture this blindness to the social basis of essential categories makes a social reading of supposedly natural things deeply perplexing. This is due to the peculiar character of the abstractions associated with the market organization of human affairs: essential qualities of human beings and their products are converted into commodities, into things for buying and selling on the market (Taussig 1980: 4).

The study of spaces of consumption offers insights into the development of contradictory practices of inclusion, interaction, and exclusion. In popular culture, the shopping mall is often portrayed as a superficial space of teen alienation and mindless, irrational, or "zombie" consumption (Friedberg 1993, Jacobs 1984: 97-102). The mall is associated with boredom and immaturity, perhaps, even, with a less than complete understanding or appreciation of the "value" of objects. In addition to the association of

the mall experience with the anxieties of teen life, shopping spaces are usually portrayed in gendered, feminized terms. Shopping is linked to women, as a frivolous or impulsive activity of women who publicly display the wealth of their husbands and their dependence on them (Veblen 1899, Loaeza 1992). Elaine Abelson (1989) has analyzed the intersection of shopping with the growth of urban life in the United States during the late 19th century. The growth of cities in the face of Victorian norms led to the medicalization of shoplifting, where respectable, middle or upper-class ladies were portrayed as ill and imbalanced, this diagnosis offered as a simplistic and gendered explanation for their sudden urge to possess the novel items displayed in American department stores. Abelson's skillfully portrayed history of shoplifting points to structures of gender, class, media, and law that were in many ways uncomfortable or unprepared to deal with the emergence of a middle or upper class woman (and here, criminal) shopper, a signal of the shifting roles of women in society. Abelson's argument regarding the social changes produced by shopping echoes in the shopping malls of the twenty-first century, as does economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen's critique of American consumption patterns. He viewed the accumulation of goods, starting with the "ownership of women," as extravagant: "So far as concerns the present question, the end sought by accumulation is to rank high in comparison with the rest of the community in point of pecuniary strength." (Veblen 1899, n. pag.) Consumption, then, becomes a superficial and fruitless search for a "reputation" of wealth within what Veblen viewed as a modern and very hierarchical continuation of "tribal" societies.

Yet we cannot simply explain the rise of massive shopping spaces where Salvadorans spend money in the face of widespread poverty and debt as some form of irrational or "bad" modernization, as a single-minded and wasteful attempt to emulate a leisure class, or as an inability of Salvadoran families to consume "rationally" or put migrant remittances to "proper" or "productive" use as savings, creation of small businesses, or investment, as encouraged by many government officials and agencies (see Rodríguez 2004). As migration over the past decades has shaped the lives of Salvadorans, consumption patterns have gradually shifted. Speaking of the permeation of Salvadoran culture by the transculturation of Salvadorans in the United States, Waldemar Urquiza writes that

> this exchange perhaps was not express or conscious, it took place in linguistic expressions, in talking about what they did, what they learned, what they acquired, as they sent clothing, appliances, as they sent money [to their family in El Salvador] so they could buy a product they had suggested. […] the relatives resident in El Salvador were influenced as they received and used what was sent to them, as they imitated the habits of their immigrant relatives (Urquiza 2004: 93. my translation).

Monetary flows have affected a range of everyday consumption practices in El Salvador. Remittances from abroad, especially from the United States, account for at least 18%-20% of household income in some parts of El Salvador (*LPG*, 3 May 2005). This money, while not earned in El Salvador, has a significant impact on what is bought and sold in the country. Ultimately, these dollars represent nearly one-fifth of a typical Salvadoran transnational household's budget.

Since emigration increased in the 1980s, changes in taste and patterns of consumption became more obvious in urban as well as rural areas, where, for instance,

different facets of the consumption of soft drinks, vitamin supplements, fast food, and electronics has drawn scholarly interest (Zilberg 2002, Urquiza 2004). Clothing and other commodities have become signs of the experience of Salvadoran migration and globalization. Sneakers, cell phones, and jeans connote a familiarity with the United States while remittances, as "extra" income, are spent in many of the country's fast food franchises. While transnational ties between migrants and their families are not the sole cause of the shifting consumption patterns found in post-war El Salvador, their importance in contemporary Salvadoran society lends predominance to this idea. Travel and mass media, for instance, also shape cultures of consumption, as have internal economic and social policies. Spatial relations also shape consumption, as we will see in the next section.

The Shopping Mall and the City

Shopping malls in San Salvador are private spaces with public character, where visitors can consume while temporarily escaping the violence of the streets, an important means by which the nation is currently defined. The potential of the shopping mall as a place of study and theoretical inquiry is both enhanced and overlooked by its hypervisibility and apparent superficiality. As a "generic building type" the mall has become prevalent in the landscape of cities in late capitalism (Friedberg 1993, Harvey 1989). While malls have a basic, "generic" design in order to keep the consumer's attention on different things, and to make people circulate and buy, these sites also cultivate distinct characteristics to enhance their appeal and uniqueness. "La Gran Vía,"

for example, recreates the pedestrian streets of Europe, where one can walk outdoors as if on the street, while avoiding the real street—the mall is a space where the actual city can be avoided.

As cities grow and relatives, former neighbors, and childhood friends are dispersed throughout the city and its suburbs, the mall becomes a reference point, an accessible location that can replace the living room as a space of interaction and hospitality. Moreover, as it has taken over the "private" space of the home, it has also overshadowed the downtown plaza, the street, and the public park: "people promenade less in the parks specific to each city and ever more in the shopping malls that mirror each other from one corner of the world to the other" (García Canclini 2001: 73). As it substitutes these public and private spaces of social contact, the mall becomes even more attractive as a point of reference and (theoretically) a "nonplace" (Augé in García Canclini 2001: 73). Beatriz Sarlo characterizes malls as "spaces without qualities" and as a place that is indifferent "to the city that surrounds it" (Sarlo in García Canclini 2001: 73). The mall is a socially and culturally produced space that in turn shapes and enables experiences of mobility, access to goods, new habits, and transnational imaginaries. In the context of El Salvador the shopping mall has been defined as

> A privately owned commercial complex, conformed by independent establishments, which possesses a public character, own image, and interrelates commerce, services, cultural activities and entertainment. It is strategically designed to maximize the attendance and permanence of the public, as well as the good functioning of its activities, all under an environment of comfort and security (Fuentes et al. 2005: 457. my translation).

In this definition we find that the shopping mall is a private enterprise and a public space, a mix of activities, a place that aims to please most or all sectors of the population—the mall, as a "nonplace," is whatever the consumer can imagine. The experience of consumption seems malleable even as it is shaped and constrained by socioeconomic contexts. In all these characteristics, we can see how the mall has come to substitute for public parks, downtown areas, and plazas as spaces of congregation and imagination of community. The megamall recreates public spaces; it is like a theme park (Zukin 1991). It can supply a lifestyle—everything from secure parking and identification with brands, to "culture" in all its forms—for those who can afford to be its citizens.

What does this mean for the mall as a particular space for escaping violent imaginaries and consuming transnational ones? The mall, as a space of new habits and lifestyles, is also a space of exclusion and masking of inequalities:

> [The mall] is private but with a public character, *there is an interest in making it look this way*. There are invisible barriers. Yes, I would say it is an exclusive space. I mean, the mall is 'free,' but there is something that says 'no,' something that makes some people feel out of place (Architect P. F., interviewed 5 September 2006. my translation/emphasis).

Without engaging in a form of architectural determinism, we can say that architecture and spatial organization lead to the development of new habits, new ways of circulating in and relating to spaces. As a new city center where people come together to consume, the malls in San Salvador can provoke renewed perceptions of citizenship, modernity, and security—meanings increasingly attached to consuming and less to participation in San Salvador's public spaces. Edward Soja argues for a renewed attention

to space and human geography as ways of advancing critiques of how spaces reproduce inequalities:

> We must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology (Soja 1989: 6).

The mall can reproduce preexisting ideas of unequal access to goods, economic inequality, and "invisible barriers" of class even as it appears to be an innocent and novel space. In his analysis of Brasília as a modernist city, James Holston writes that the architecture of Brazil's capital followed a central idea in modernist planning, that "the creation of new forms of social experience would transform society, and [architects] viewed architectural innovation as precisely the opportunity to do this" (Holston 1989: 52). In the next sections, I consider these ideas of proposed social transformation through spatial innovation as I reflect on spaces of consumption as realms of experience: Metrocentro, Multiplaza, La Gran Vía, and *el centro,* downtown San Salvador.

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There are many malls in El Salvador; some are better known, draw more visitors, and in this manner are more successful and profitable than others. As an architect I interviewed said, "so some malls can live, others must die" (Architect P.F., 2006). My research is not about describing all of them, or tracing every mall's life cycle from novelty to decay. However, as the definition of a shopping mall I have cited above notes, each mall attempts to develop a distinct, even innovative, image. I focus on three

shopping malls: Metrocentro, (inaugurated in 1971) Multiplaza (inaugurated in 2004) and La Gran Vía (also inaugurated in 2004). These malls, built decades apart, signal ideas of modernity and new forms of consumption in pre-war and post-war El Salvador.

Metrocentro

The oldest and most popular shopping mall in San Salvador is Metrocentro. Better known by its familiar nickname, "Metro" was built in the early 1970s and is still expanding. With its twelve stages (known as *etapas*) which have been built and remodeled over the course of thirty-six years, this mall is known as the largest in Central America, with hundreds of shops, a cinema, theater, food courts, and other services. When this mall was built, this area of San Salvador was "the frontier," the direction in which the city was expanding (see Herodier 1997). Due to the city's growth, Metrocentro is now located in the actual geographic center of San Salvador and as its slogan states, it is at "the heart of the city." Placed in a geographic and symbolic center, "Metrocentro is aimed at a middle-class market, and it pulls people from everywhere […] some Salvadorans have never been to the beach, but they know Metrocentro" (Architect P.F., interviewed 5 September 2006. my translation).

When Metrocentro opened its doors in October 1971, it was described in futuristic terms, highlighting its novelty. To gain a sense of how this new space was presented to the public(s) I researched in the archives of *La Prensa Gráfica*, looking for news articles and advertisements of Metrocentro. I think that reading the mall through the newspaper

may provide an insight into how these sites are connected in the production of citizenship and consumption and of how media consumption and window shopping are intertwined as forms of perception (see Buck-Morss 1989: 345). “Hoy inauguran primera etapa Centro Comercial Metrocentro” (“First Stage of Metrocentro Shopping Mall Inaugurated Today,” *La Prensa Gráfica* 25 October 1971: 3, 32) described the shopping center as an innovative place that included a spacious, “American style” supermarket and a soda fountain. The article makes a very specific reference to the size of the shopping mall, and to its imagined future as a megamall: “The first stage of the Metrocentro shopping center has a constructed area of 5,000 square meters. When the entire shopping center is completed, the constructed area will be approximately 20,000 square meters” (*LPG* 25 October 1971: 32).

In the same issue of the newspaper, I found what is probably Metrocentro’s first slogan in an advertisement: “Ir al centro comercial de Metrocentro es gozar el placer de comprar” (“To visit the Metrocentro shopping center is to enjoy the pleasure of shopping” *LPG* 25 October 1971: 55. my translation). It is interesting to note the repeated use of the phrase “Metrocentro shopping center” in the advertisements and news articles—apparently to link and explain the new concepts to the potential shoppers, the readers of *La Prensa Gráfica*. Pleasure, shopping, and the built environment are connected in that short, memorable phrase. People are introduced to and encouraged to imagine Metrocentro, to develop an impression of the mall even before they visit it in person. Further, in an article titled “Metrocentro has futuristic projection says Mr. Poma” (“Metrocentro tiene proyección futurista dice el Sr. Poma,” *LPG* 26 October 1971: 3, 22)

the space of the shopping mall in 1971 becomes an imaginary of San Salvador's growth and future as a city—almost a Benjaminian dream of the future.

President Fidel Sánchez Hernández, then in office, was in charge of the "corte de cinta," (ribbon cutting ceremony) giving the inauguration of the mall an air of official Salvadoran state involvement, of a project of national development and progress that went beyond private enterprise. In 1971 Luis Poma, president of the real estate group that developed Metrocentro, projected that by 1981 the population of San Salvador would surpass one million inhabitants. He added that "the economic growth of the country requires the modernization of its service facilities. We do not work for today but for the San Salvador of tomorrow" (*LPG* 26 October 1971: 3). The growth of the city's population would go together with urbanization, the growth of its service sector, and Metrocentro.

As the 1980s civil war displaced thousands of families from the rural areas to the city, growth took another form—the city beyond Metrocentro grew in exclusion and *lack* of services, far from the idealized order of modernity. In a grisly turn of the futuristic dream, it was war, not economic development, which made the city's population grow rapidly. In 2007, San Salvador's population is 507, 947 in a territory of 72.25 square kilometers (*LPG* 24 April 2007). Beyond this main area of San Salvador, other neighborhoods and districts have been absorbed into what is known as the AMSS, (Area Metropolitana de San Salvador, the Metropolitan Area of San Salvador) an extension of 610 square kilometers that is now administered as a whole and is home to approximately 2.2 million people—a third of El Salvador's population.

In the news articles from 1971, Metrocentro was described as "an urban complex of multiple uses in an area of approximately 30 manzanas[21] of terrain, strategically located in the center of the metropolitan region of San Salvador" (*LPG* 26 October 1971: 3, 22). Currently, in 2007, about 30,000 people walk through Metrocentro every day, for various activities including shopping, movies, eating at the food courts, bank transactions, or simply to walk and window shop. The number of visitors increases to 55,000 on weekends (Architect P.F., interviewed 5 September 2006). During certain holiday seasons, particularly Christmas and the August holiday in honor of San Salvador's patron saint, live music and an amusement park with rides for children and adults entertain the crowds—the mall becomes a "true" theme park, and part of the city's celebration. As Fuentes et al. (2005) have argued, Metrocentro fulfills all the qualities of a successful shopping mall: because of its diversity of stores and "tenant mix," it attracts people from different parts of the city for diverse reasons, its image as a site of enjoyment and shopping possibilities remains current after several decades, it is a geographic reference point in the city, a required stop for many bus routes, a meeting point for tourist groups. Over the years it has expanded as "an architectural response to the social demand of each period during its thirty years of existence" (Fuentes et al. 2005: 17) and become the "center" of a city's social life, ingrained in the minds of people. Its current slogan, "Metrocentro: El corazón de la ciudad…y tú lo haces latir" (Metrocentro: the heart of the city…and you make it beat) connects Metrocentro to a system, a relationship between people and space. The mall and the consumer *together* create the "heartbeat" of a city and

[21] A *manzana* (mz) is a unit of land measurement equivalent to .6989 hectares or 6,989 square meters; 30 mz=20.967 hectares.

the vital circulation of commodities and ideas. Malling in Metrocentro is what Kowinski (1985) refers to as "a chief cultural activity" that in turn shapes memories and imaginaries of consumption.

In malls such as Metrocentro, sensory experience and personal memory are tied to stores, the everyday, and holidays. In the 1980s, my brother and I liked to walk the corridors of Metrocentro and its then-neighbor Metrocentro Sur (known as Metrosur, and now absorbed by Metrocentro as its twelfth stage of expansion). We did this very often on Saturday mornings. Allowing two small children to walk alone *anywhere* would be rare in the present, given the climate of insecurity in San Salvador. But in the 1980s, in the context of the mall, it seemed fine. The mall provided a sense of security. We always had to tell someone we were going out to *ver vitrinas,* to window shop. The people in different stores—bookstores, sports equipment, toy stores—came to recognize us. We ate chicken at Pollo Campero, and donuts at the first (and for a long time, only) Mister Donut in El Salvador. My Christmas letters to Santa Claus looked more like an inventory of shop windows, for example "the doll at shop X," and "the shoes at shop Y, available in white and blue." However, Santa Claus did not buy his gifts at Metrocentro—even though he liked to walk around the mall in the warm, dry December afternoons of El Salvador wearing his heavy red costume.

Twenty years later, Mister Donut still exists, not only in Metrocentro but in twenty-seven other locations across San Salvador. It sells a variety of donuts and coffee, as well as traditional foods such as pupusas, horchata, and *desayunos típicos* ("typical" breakfasts—eggs, fried plantains, cheese, red beans, or tamales). While this donut

franchise has practically disappeared in the United States and Canada, Mister Donut has grown in El Salvador and found new markets in Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines (see "J. Lyons" website). Pollo Campero, originally from neighboring Guatemala, has become closely associated with Salvadorans. Since 2003, Pollo Campero has opened restaurants in California, Virginia, and Washington DC; as well as Madrid and Indonesia ("Pollo Campero" website). The Pollo Campero in El Salvador's Comalapa Airport, one of fifty-seven restaurants in El Salvador, is usually crowded. Travelers buy boxes of chicken to take with them on the plane—a final purchase before leaving El Salvador, in an effort to reproduce the experience of the restaurant at the other end of the trip.

Why do people buy chicken to take on the plane, and why does a transnational donut shop sell pupusas and tamales? In 1980s El Salvador, these places were already present; "the imprint of the image" (Buck-Morss 1989: 7) shaped the perceptions of many young people prior to migration, later converging with a period of high emigration and increased connections between emigrants and their relatives in San Salvador. My early memory of the mall and the presence of the donut shop and the restaurant only begin to sketch the transnational circuits of brands and franchises. Walking through Metrocentro or Metrocentro Sur, despite the remodeling and changes of recent years, is for me a different experience than walking through other malls, and it might be because of the work of the memory and a "dreaming collective" (Buck-Morss 1989) of Salvadorans who visit that mall every weekend just to *walk*. The varied meanings of places such as the mall, the donut shop, the department store window, and the restaurant

are spread across the transnational imaginary of consumption as examples of the connections and multidirectional circuits of people and capital.

Multiplaza

Multiplaza is owned by the same real estate developers as Metrocentro. Multiplaza, opened in 2004, is remarkable in its architecture and use of bright colors. It is also a real maze with its countless hallways. The escalators that lead into the mall resemble a vault or a cavern and give the impression of descent into a world where the only escape is to gaze and buy. Mexican architect Ricardo Legorreta is known for these design features that evoke Mexican/Latin American culture—in contrast to Metrocentro's "Americanized" architectural forms; Multiplaza is "Latinized." The bright colors, for instance, bring to mind the colorful walls of houses found in some Latin American villages, or the colors of tropical flora and fruits. Multiplaza is Legorreta's first mall project. Most of his previous work is in churches, factories, hotels, museums, and private homes, all part of a long career:

> For forty years, Legorreta, a Mexican architect, has been recognized throughout the world for his gigantic vaults, high flat surfaces finished with bright colors, maximum use of light sources, and surprising turns. In Multiplaza, the visitor meets all that and wanders along a corridor, without thinking that at its end he will find an aquatic illusion or a waterfall whose end slides him to a café (*El Diario de Hoy*, 10 December 2004).

Multiplaza invites the Salvadoran consumer to escape and wander, to not think, to simply follow the path and unexpected turns of the mall, to be led by the staircases, the

flow of the water, and the light from the windows, to eventually stroll into a coffee shop or a department store (figure five). Once the remaining phases of the project are completed, Multiplaza aims to be a city in itself (see "Legorreta+Legorreta" website). Stores, supermarkets, nightclubs, bars, coffee shops, movie theaters, and even an apartment complex (currently in its design phase) are encompassed in this vast structure. It suddenly emerges on the horizon, near what in the mid-1990s, as part of an almost forgotten political campaign, was to become a park and a protected area for the dwindling parrot population of San Salvador (the "Parque de los Pericos" project is still under consideration but has not yet been executed). Finca El Espino, a "lung" or forested area close to where Multiplaza, La Gran Vía, and other megamalls are presently located, has been a contested zone between environmentalists, the government, and urban developers. Malls definitely mark the expansion of the city and its population of consumers.

As the consumer enters Multiplaza and parks in the large, multi-level underground parking lot, he or she meets with one of the mall's most striking features—the use of vivid colors. The walls on different floors are painted in bright yellow, blue, pink, and orange. Color is supposed to evoke the *pueblos* of Latin America, a way of rescuing the regional. The orange and yellow, for example, are meant to bring to mind the "Árbol de Fuego," a tree with vivid orange-red flowers, immortalized in Salvadoran poetry.

In addition, the use of bright color works within a capitalist logic—the autochthonous or traditional becomes the "exotic," global culture with an ethnic touch. Like the commodification of crafts (see García Canclini 1993) the use of traditional

Figure 5. "To eventually stroll into a coffee shop." Multiplaza, 2005. Photo by author.

elements within a modern capitalist structure fulfills a powerful function: "the picturesque, the primitive, can seduce the tourist because of their contrast to his/her everyday life, but it is even better if the folkloric-advertising discourse can convince him/her that poverty need not be eradicated" (García Canclini 1993: 42). Tradition lends social status; "the local" lends legitimacy and coherence to a trans/national project. The built environment, after all, is a luxury mall, an imaginary of wealth, designed by a world-class architecture firm; not a tacky, kitschy rural home with bright—but peeling—fuchsia walls. In its scale, it seems to serve the function of a monument to post-war, 21st century economic progress.

The appropriation of color and the local carries elements of high and low culture. As globalization and contemporary urban culture make it increasingly difficult and problematic to claim one "true" culture, the mall can support contradictory discourses of tradition and modernity as they mix in the marketplace/mall, what Olalquiaga (1992: 38) calls a "synchronized difference" of objects and iconography. Circulation of things, images, and colors acquire new meaning and interest as contestations to older forms and cultural boundaries.

Multiplaza is a single and enclosed structure with multiple meanings for its visitors. Different people spatialize the mall differently, and these differences reflect and produce political and economic gaps. While its style is "architecturally homogeneous," the stores within the building have their own identity, "much like stores along a city street" (Architect P.F., interviewed 5 September 2006). They are, literally, *multi-plazas*, democratic (and, neoliberal) sites where people can "choose" as they shop for commodities. The city street, which "embodies a principle of architectural order through which the public sphere of civic life is both represented and constituted" (Holston 1989: 103) becomes irrelevant. The actual street or plaza of a city is erased in the mall, and an idealized street is created as a point of connection between Salvadorans who can be citizens of the mall and the commodities they consume.

La Gran Vía

"La Gran Vía"—The Great Way—is a "cathedral of consumption," (Crossick and Jaumain eds. 1999) a massive new mall in San Salvador, $60 million worth of imported glass from Spain, French iron benches and trash bins, marble, brass, and elegant white walls (*LPG* 7 December 2004: 56-57). The European glass is new and clear against the warm tropical sky, the floor polished to perfection. Despite its fresh, glimmering look, La Gran Vía draws its inspiration from the nineteenth century. The mall is reminiscent of the traditional. Architecturally its main corridor is evocative of an arcade, a structure described in an 1852 illustrated guide to Paris:

> These passages, a new discovery of industrial luxury, are glass-covered, marble-walled walkways through entire blocks of buildings, the owners of which have joined together to engage in such a venture. Lining both sides of these walkways which receive their light from above are the most elegant of commodity shops, so that such an arcade is a city, a world in miniature (Buck-Morss 1989: 3).

How did the Parisian arcade, already a world in itself, become the megamall and "lifestyle center" in El Salvador? Clearly, La Gran Vía is tied to the imagining of European streets, complete with "outdoor" cafés emulating the sidewalks of Paris. The mall is contextualized somewhere between the idealized space of 19th century Europe and the modernity of post-war Salvadoran transnational imaginaries, including the technologies of globalization and commerce that allow for the importation of products to recreate this site in El Salvador. This megamall "promises to transport its visitors to the ambiance of the classic European cities. Benches, garbage bins, and other implements have been imported from France, and the tempered glass that has been used is the same as in the terminal in Barajas, Spain" (*LPG* 7 Dec. 2004: 56).

La Gran Vía recreates some aspects of late 19th century European streets and a sentimental, even selective, vision of San Salvador's past splendor, when it was still a small, manageable, and relatively non-violent capital (see Herodier 1997). Percy F. Martin, a British traveler, wrote in 1911 that San Salvador was a perfect city to visit during any season of the year, full of amenities, a "well-built, even beautiful city, with many notable public buildings that could grace any European capital" (Martin in Herodier 1997: 38-39. my translation).

In *Passagen-Werk,* Walter Benjamin compiled notes and observations about the arcades of Paris, "the capital of the 19th century" and their condition in 1920s Europe. What he saw at that time was already in decay, the remains of a glittering culture of consumption that now stood far from an idealized, fixed linear progress of modernity. Benjamin does not view modernity simply as a break with tradition and myth; the Weberian "demythification and disenchantment of the social world" is replaced by a Surrealist vision (and humor): "Benjamin's central argument in the *Passagen-Werk* was that under conditions of capitalism, industrialization had brought a *re*enchantment of the social world" (Buck-Morss 1989: 254). Benjamin tried to imagine alternative pasts in these places, once full of novelties and mass culture but now obsolete and shadowed by World War I. With this memory of conflict and the emergence of regimes that would soon lead to war once again, Benjamin urged his readers to "wake up from the world of our parents" (Buck-Morss 1989: 279). Benjamin's work is an exploration of the impact and relevance of the commodity on philosophical thought, on modernity as a productive rupture with tradition. As a critical view on consumption, the memory of the Arcades

Project opens a possibility for connecting futures and pasts, and for collectively reviving the historical and political potential of mass consumption. My reference to La Gran Vía links the idea of "decay" of the European arcades and alternative pasts with the ultra-modern, trendy megamalls of the 21st century—sites where the latest fashion may be a dream of the past, or the future, a recirculation of an older idea, a "dreamworld of mass culture," (see Buck-Morss 1989: 253) but also an opportunity for creative rupture.

I walked along the "street" of a mall and took some pictures of the glass ceiling and the fountain. As I was finishing, a security guard approached me. He said that taking pictures was not allowed, that he had seen me take out my camera twice. In our mistrustful world, shadowed by a history of violence, taking pictures of buildings may seem suspicious. The security guard asked me to stop, so I did. He said that if I needed to take more pictures, I would have to ask for a permit at the main office.

I respected the fact that photography inside department stores was not allowed, but why couldn't I photograph the photogenic fountain and Christmas lights *outside*? I did not ask. My picture card was full anyhow; I was done for the day and preparing to leave. But that moment shook me—convinced me that the mall, despite its character, is not really a public space of freedom; it is private property.

Inclusion and exclusion take shape, and are masked, in the promise of equal access. As the nation becomes a community of consumers, those who cannot participate in this community are left behind. In García Canclini's formulation, "consumption is good for thinking." It forms nations and narratives around commodities, "expanding the political notion of citizenship" by opening access to health and housing (García Canclini

2001: 5). Again, while any city may offer an example of the production of global imaginaries, the specific projects of modernity and management of inequality encourage us to think about the contradictions of consumption, citizenship, and globalization. As citizenship and belonging become more about what one consumes, about identification with brands instead of identification with national civic symbols, "the past haunts the present" in the world of commodities. Ultimately it marks the way societies remember and experience everyday life, and constitutes a massive restructuring of existing consumer cultures, sensibilities, and public memory (Seremetakis 1994: 3). The mall creates a nostalgic ambiance, yet has prohibitive, invisible barriers. Mall strollers cannot always have the pleasure of capturing the image. How ironic that visual consumption (Jameson 2000) was not allowed in this shopping cathedral. The security guard, an employee of a private company, had done his job of reminding me of that invisible barrier. He said nothing else and walked away. I kept my digital camera safe in my bag as I headed to the parking lot, to return to the street.

Downtown San Salvador

Salvadorans who stroll and can afford to shop in the megamalls no longer need to visit the downtown markets to consume or socialize. For this socioeconomic segment of society, the mall substitutes the city's downtown or pedestrian streets. The corridors, window shops, and food courts of the malls offer an entertaining and sanitized version of San Salvador, an escape from the traffic, pollution, and crime of the city's arteries. Who would visit the Teatro Nacional in downtown San Salvador, where street parking is the

only option, when the theater in Metrocentro, the bars in Multiplaza, or the movies at La Gran Vía offer a sense of security?

Even as the mall intends to eliminate the consumer's need to confront the reality of the street, the street continues to be an important site where the economic and political importance of consumption is realized for many Salvadorans who are excluded from the formal sector. While the mall is enclosed in colorful concrete walls and under imported glass, "San Salvador is a market under the open sky," (*LPG* 20 April 2007). The entire city is a place of consumption and competing forms of citizenship and participation. At least 772,407 people (49.8 percent of the total economically active/working population of the country) work in the informal sector, according to a 2004 national survey conducted by DIGESTYC, El Salvador's statistics and census bureau (*LPG* 20 April 2007). The nation's informal sector is concentrated in the country's capital city, as "ventas callejeras" (street vendors). "The growth of the informal markets has been so large that the ordering of the city has been the stumbling block ("la piedra donde se han estrellado") of successive municipal administrations." According to the mayor's office, all of downtown San Salvador (an area of about sixty manzanas—twice the size of Metrocentro) is to some degree the home of "ventas callejeras:" "The problem obviously grows in the last 25 manzanas of the historic center. The municipality estimates that in San Salvador alone there are between 17,000 and 27,000 informal vendors" (*LPG* 20 April 2007. my translation).

This market may be disorderly, with limited sanitation and safety features. It presents a political minefield for every mayor of San Salvador who in recent years has

attempted to regulate the space the vendors have claimed. As part of the street, the "ventas callejeras" place objects and private property on public display in a different manner than the mall (a private building with public character) does. Thus while the shopping mall is viewed as futuristic, orderly, secure, global, and in good taste; the market under the open sky is chaotic, unsanitary, dangerous, and full of commodities that may be "suspicious"—bootleg DVDs, stolen merchandise, or at the very least cheap imitations of well-known brands of jeans, handbags, or sneakers.

While the malls and their shops validate social status and a lifestyle based on the consumption of certain brands, the downtown space popularly known as "Metrosuelo" in San Salvador is a site of "ropa pirateada," (knockoffs) ironic "flows" of the global imagination, subversions of trademarks and intellectual property rights. Brand recognition is brought to a new level in the capitalist informal sector. The imitations bought from the street vendor are evidence of marginality within capitalism, but also open a space of mimicry, of making the trans/national influence of brands, malls, and dollars "strange," less naturalizable (see Bhabha 1994: 89). Imitation and informality are forms of access and participation in the field of global consumption. "Metrosuelo," of course, is a play on the word "Metrocentro," and "mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable. Mimicry *repeats* rather than *re-presents*" (Bhabha 1994: 88). Metrosuelo also refers to where the street vendors often display their commodities: *suelo*, the sidewalk or the asphalt instead of the shop window, a floor where we can gain a new perspective on objects. The public space of the street repeats or

parodies the mall in its own way, while the mall recreates an idealized version of the street.

Although apparently strange and alienated from each other, these spaces are involved in a dialogue about the processes and consequences of consumption in Salvadoran society. They communicate and link as they differentiate: "if the members of a society did not share the meanings of commodities, if these were meaningful only for the elites or the minorities that use them, they would not serve the purposes of differentiation" (García Canclini 2001: 40). The spaces create political/economic gaps, structuring and reproducing inequalities between consumers in "formal" and "informal" sectors of the economy. These spaces shape imaginaries of wealth, access to goods, and security. Without the subaltern imitation in Metrosuelo or similar sites shaped by structural inequalities, the expensive brand name in the megamall is not considered as valuable.

I have engaged in a description of how the mall relates to the city as a private space with public character. The mall recreates the city even as it turns its back on the city's reality. The mall is a privately owned "landscape of power" (Zukin 1991) where some sectors of society are excluded from participation due to limited purchasing power and other "invisible barriers." I focused on shopping malls, Metrocentro, Multiplaza and La Gran Vía, as spaces where Salvadoran consumers may escape violent imaginaries of the nation and consume transnational ones, and also considered Metrosuelo, street vending in San Salvador as a site of mimicry and access to products within the confinements of capitalist logic. Newspaper portrayals of the malls as innovative and

modern, together with the actual sensory experience of the mall—the colors at Multiplaza or the "street" of La Gran Vía—project the mall into the future. They shape a perception of a linear progress, "like the beads of a rosary" (Benjamin in Buck-Morss 1989: 7). This linearity is presented in the ideal versions of tradition and the past of monumental sites (be they public, private, or somewhere in between). Considering this, how can we think of innovation if "the past haunts the present; but the latter denies it with good reason" (Buck-Morss 1989: 293)? These histories, made up of individual and collective memories, are linked by the commodity.

Conclusion: Consuming Transnational Imaginaries

In her study of Salvadoran transnationalism, Patricia Landolt noted that during the early 1990s, as the civil war came to an end, there was a short-lived but visible construction boom in San Miguel, located on the eastern, severely war-struck area of El Salvador:

> A stroll through its downtown reveals how profoundly the migration process regulates the life of this small city. […] Extending out from the city core into the agricultural lands that lay idle during the war, are row after row of newly constructed family dwellings. For five years (1990-1995), transmigrants were buying homes in a single cash payment but sales have now dropped and many of the newest developments remain unoccupied. […] Metrocentro, a massive postmodern construction housing the country's main department stores was built. Recently inaugurated, Metrocentro's store windows are empty and, like San Miguel itself, rests on the verge of bankruptcy. […] Migration has rescripted the city's social landscape. […] A totally fictitious economy, based solely on the circulation of money and credit, forced a disregard for the simple post-war fact that San Miguel produces absolutely nothing (Landolt 2001).

Landolt's observations bring to life a "rescripted social landscape" and the reality of empty shop windows, the bankruptcy of a city, and purchased homes whose migrant owners live thousands of miles away. The "production of nothing," aided by money and faced with conditions of poverty and a decline of the agricultural sector, characterizes the failure of this space and moment in the embodiment of a "productive" national socioeconomic space. I note, however, that something *is* produced in San Miguel and anywhere in El Salvador's trans/national space—a powerful image, however abstract, of an ideal Salvadoran consumer who is able to buy a house in one cash payment. An image of a transnational Salvadoran migrant and laborer whose earnings are to this day destined for the consumption of food, her children's education, her mother's medicines, and so on, in his or her "home country." The remittances sent to San Miguel are not for the consumption of luxury goods in Metrocentro San Miguel (not to be confused with the Metrocentro I discussed earlier in the chapter). They are destined for the basic survival and consumption needs of households split by war and economic inequality (see Sancho 2004, Rodríguez 2004, Pedersen 2004, Zilberg 2002).

The ties between consumption and migrant remittances are significant in post-civil war El Salvador. As my analysis in chapter two showed, the normalization of emigration as a survival strategy and of narratives of suffering and violence are crucial to the production of uneven flows of people, commodities, and ideas in the formation of a trans/national space. The material and emotional deprivation of emigrants portrayed in many of the stories of separated families and undocumented migrants in "Departamento 15" noticeably contrasts with the large sums of money that are collectively sent by them,

with the "excess" of malls in San Salvador, and with the widely accepted idea that this available income from abroad has a significant effect on Salvadoran consumption patterns and on Salvadoran macroeconomic stability.

A former editor of "Departamento 15" noted that an initial interest in developing this migration section in *La Prensa Gráfica* in the late 1990s stemmed directly from the observation that "people [in El Salvador] were dressing differently, eating differently" as a result of contact with their emigrant friends and relatives (interviewed 2005). As "Departamento 15" claims the diaspora for the national it is interesting to note that here the national is read as having been already shaped by the transnational, and as a reason for having "Departamento 15." In the post-war Salvadoran imaginary, consumption and communication are closely linked to citizenship and ideas of Salvadoran modernity and presence in the global. The shopping mall, as a site of this global activity, is significant in the construction of trans/national imaginaries.

In this chapter I have engaged in a description of the shopping mall or megamall as a significant site of consumption in contemporary Salvadoran society. As shopping malls have grown in number and size, the informal sector in San Salvador has also expanded, as has the country's dependence on remittances and migration. These conditions constitute each other and a transnational imaginary of consumption. In the same manner as migration, practices and sites of consumption have long histories rooted in prior contacts with spaces and countries where trends "originate," in previous "flows" of people, commodities, and cultural capital (Tsing 2000, 2005). Shopping does not just happen in the moment the cashier scans the purchases. The commodity is central in a

cyclical relationship of continuity and discontinuity in the "dream world" of mass culture. In this dream world, people who have access to malls and shopping can gain social status as consumers, showing their economic power. Others are marginalized from national economic life and a dominant construction of the global, as their field of consumption is the informal sector. "Metrosuelo" contrasts the private space of the mall and its façade as a sanitized version of the city's downtown. To speak of "adaptation" in these sites is often to speak of marginality, as Metrosuelo demonstrates. This marginal space is not simply an inadequate reproduction of the modern, powerful model, Metrocentro (or any "global" mall—of which Metrocentro, in turn, is not a "bad copy"). As an original space of the national imaginary, the city's downtown continues to hold some power, this time as a site of ironic flows, "illegitimate" products, or street violence. It is part, and consequence, of the contradictory imaginary where Salvadorans participate and become transnational consumers, and part of larger political economies, through spaces where the everyday experience of citizenship is removed from explicit participation in the complexity of the nation.

Conclusion

Narratives of Becoming Global

"Return" Flights

I introduced this dissertation with a scene at an airport lounge, as I waited to board a flight from Houston to San Salvador to conduct research and visit family members. I bring you back to another airport, this time Comalapa Airport in El Salvador, a space of transnational links and, again, of "connecting flights."

After checking in, I went to an area where travelers and their relatives assemble before the traveler says good-bye and proceeds to airport security. The lobby is a farewell mini-mall for the already nostalgic traveler who, boarding pass in hand, prepares to leave El Salvador. A stand sells gum, cell phone cards, and *La Prensa Gráfica*. Another sells traditional, artisanal Salvadoran candies, and another one sells coffee beans by the pound, and coffee liquor. The Pollo Campero restaurant is nearby, its tables occupied by people eating breakfast and ordering boxes of chicken to take on their flight. The smell of chicken will later waft through the airplane cabins.

The window of a crafts store—the largest shop in the waiting area—displays *colones*, the Salvadoran currency that was replaced by the United States dollar. Now the *colones*, colorful bills with pictures of Salvadoran monuments and historical figures, are for sale as souvenirs. Eight bills are pasted to a varnished wood board, in all the denominations: 1, 2, 5, 10, 25, 50, 100, and 200 *colones*. I add them. Based on the present currency conversion rate, the bills would exchange for $45 dollars. But it is more difficult

to calculate the actual value of this trophy of nostalgia, a plaque to the triumph of global finance. Salvadoran money has become a commodity, now a bizarre souvenir replaced by a global currency. In a few years, who will remember ever purchasing goods with these strange, varnished bills?

Moments later I pass the security check, now an obligatory ritual in every airport. Once in the departure area I walk to the gate, passing the duty free stores full of brand name cosmetics, digital cameras, luggage, and other necessary luxuries for the cosmopolitan traveler. In the lounge most people sit quietly, holding their passports, looking out through the glass panels at the airplanes on the runway, or at the palm trees moving only slightly against what soon will be another hot morning on the Salvadoran littoral.

A few travelers softly ask each other, where are you going, what is your final destination? Now the question is asked more cautiously—we are all flying to Houston, but who knows what the end of so many connecting flights might be. New Jersey. Miami. San Diego. Boston. Madrid. Australia. Connecting flights to every possible location scattered across the Salvadoran imaginary.

A Narrative of Becoming Global

A primary concern of this dissertation has been to examine the production of global connections and transnational imaginaries. I have explored how media images, transnational business practices, spaces of consumption, and migration constitute ways of 'making sense' in contemporary Salvadoran society. I have argued for the centrality of

three sites that coexist and form part of a transnational imaginary in post-war El Salvador: "Departamento 15," bilingual call centers, and shopping malls in San Salvador. These are spaces where texts, voices, and practices intersect and produce transnational subjects. The mall, the newspaper, and the call center are contact zones between consumers, journalists, callers who need tech support, foreign investment promoters, and guests of the *La Prensa Gráfica* website; migrants, bilingual employees, and other "ordinary" Salvadorans who inhabit the Salvadoran transnational imaginary.

As these are zones of flow and contact, they are also zones of friction (Tsing 2005) where Salvadorans engage relations of power, and El Salvador projects itself to the global in relation to other nations and markets. Competing forms of citizenship and participation emerge and constitute each other in the pages of "Departamento 15," the cubicles at the call center, and the "streets" of the megamalls.

These three sites are spaces of interpellation and power. There is "freedom" for people to participate in and to occupy these spaces, but within certain discourses, and within certain narratives of becoming global. That is the complex and unlimited nature of the imaginary, and the power of the narrative of becoming global, in the constitution of social subjects.

There is an intricate discursive tension within this imaginary. Powerful sectors, media and government institutions among them, can mark "spaces of enunciation" (see Bhabha 1994) and construct a dominant narrative of globalization and El Salvador's place within this process as a strategically located and natural "link" for flexible labor,

thus predetermining the discussion. This is not a simple account of domination, but about how discourses become effective in the disciplinary dimensions of globalization.

In this discussion, then, Salvadorans already have "neutral" accents, perfect for the needs of foreign investors. Salvadorans receive significant remittances from the United States; therefore changing the country's currency would present no problems and be ideal for global finance. In this discussion Salvadorans already have a long history of emigration, thus migrants can be either conjured and marketed by investment promoters as "proof" of the extent to which El Salvador is globalized, or claimed in media portrayals as "close," exemplary citizens who care about El Salvador's economy.

In this predetermined discussion, changes in work culture encourage call center employees to be "flexible" in the global division of labor. While their voices are exported, they remain physically immobile. The call center and investment promotion agencies shape expectations of linguistic ability and work ethic. This work site trains and produces the ideal, bilingual employee of its own imaginary of global capital and immediately available services, an agent with perfect listening comprehension skills. As El Salvador becomes a brand that "works," it enters the terrain of global capital, the discourse of neoliberalism, the dogma of labor flexibility. At the language school, students are taught to change their *attitude* toward speaking English. "Raquel," mother of three, quit her job at the call center because she did not have the "mental agility" to balance her family life and the demands of the job. "At my age, how do you *acquire* flexibility?" she asked during the interview. The high quit rates of "frustrated" call center employees, who apparently can only fault themselves for not learning to balance their

lives, manage stress, and solve the problems of their callers, or for not having the right "attitude," are part of a discourse of individualism associated with neoliberalism.

We also have, as part of this transnational imaginary, the call center employee who refers to English language ability as a "fashionable accessory," the architect who speaks about the "invisible barriers" of shopping malls, and the security guard who enforces these barriers. The malls are spaces characterized as new "city centers," yet they are exclusive. They only bring together and nurture the consuming communities that have already been invited to this part of the Salvadoran imaginary through the discriminations of class and taste that make up a "map of social space" (Taylor 2002: 107). Other consuming communities come together in the informal sector, selling ironic flows of brands and objects in the margins of this imaginary of citizenship and consumption. The consumer is produced in relation to Metrocentro and Metrosuelo, spaces that in the imaginary are projected, respectively, as futuristic and global, or as poor and dangerous. In the imaginary of citizenship and consumption, the success of businesses and economies is the responsibility of the individual consumer, who, as a subject presented with "consumer rights" and a broad range of "choices" in the formal and informal sectors, can be trusted to make the one that is "best" for the market. She will avoid the "bad products."

The guard at the shopping mall (like the security staff at the airport) is part of a grand narrative of heightened global terror and privatized security. It is okay to gaze at the mall in awe, to take family photographs in this "theme park," to escape the awful reality of the streets, and, of course, to spend as many dollars as possible in the boutiques.

The guard, however, interpellates visitors who photograph the mall in ways that seem suspicious, visitors who engage this site in ways that do not conform to ideas of what is "safe." And what is safety? The interpellated mall visitors learn to self-regulate and consume in the acceptable, established ways of global shopping culture.

The tension within this imaginary is accentuated by the mediated narratives of people who have attempted to escape the geographic space of the nation. In "Departamento 15," Salvadorans abroad are portrayed as part of a "natural extension" of El Salvador's territory, once again interpellated. The news articles are written in El Salvador, but these images and words can be accessed online and are aimed at Salvadoran readers around the world—preferably the patriotic and nostalgic ones who become complicit publics in these circuits of media and culture—making the newspaper one of the institutions that bring a "borderless" transnational imaginary into being.

Salvadorans, addressed as a "social totality" (Warner 2002) are presented with the stories of the wounded, repatriated Zuleyma and her tragically dead sister, of Margarita, the teenager whose individual, unwavering faith in God led her through the Arizona desert to reunite with her mother, and of Jonathan, the "hyperactive" eight-year old unaccompanied child migrant who "felt lonely" in El Salvador and decided to search for his parents.

These stories are reminders of the real and violent consequences of poverty, forced emigration, and tragic repatriation. In stories of repatriation such as Zuleyma's, the power of the nation-state to reach across borders and reclaim the emigrants of its choosing is demonstrated. The violence of migration ceases to be extraordinary in the

post-war period. Violence against migrants is absorbed as part of the discussion of who is "free" to occupy the space of the nation, and of who is worthy of being reclaimed. Some returnees are categorized as "undesirable," as people who cannot be trusted to be good citizens. Narratives of suffering make the subject newsworthy in print and online; they also make the subject worthy of citizenship and belonging in the imaginary.

A Narrative of Re-enchantment

Ultimately this dissertation is about the construction and implications of a narrative of becoming global. A concern with the histories of violence and inequality that haunt the Salvadoran transnational imaginary was critical to my research. I asked questions about how imaginaries in the post-war period enable and are co-constituted with practices of migration, consumption, work, and citizenship. El Salvador now has fifteen years of post-war, longer than the armed conflict itself, (c. 1979-1992) and the Salvadoran imaginary is shaped by common understandings of emigration as a survival strategy, of violence as an everyday occurrence, and of where economic and political power are concentrated. As this situation "makes sense," it has actual consequences for Salvadorans. And this is how the sites I have presented in this dissertation are especially central as imaginaries. They shape "common understandings" of who has the power and privilege to represent, exclude, and project itself to the global, and of who has the power to shape the national discourse on these issues, while ensuring that others remain marginal, vulnerable, and pre-global. In this discussion, the possibility of other imaginaries and other narratives seems muted.

We may feel disoriented. As many ask at the airport, *where are we going?* This question suggests spatial and temporal locations. The research sites relocate El Salvador in different ways, within economic, social, and cultural dimensions of globalization. The mall recreates the city even as it turns its back on it, imagining and idealizing other times and places. The call center disembodies and exports the voice of the worker, compressing time and space (Harvey 1989). And the newspaper re-spatializes the nation, adding a transnational fifteenth department. As manifestations of unevenly experienced globalizing processes, these sites reproduce notions of whose narratives are dominant in the Salvadoran transnational imaginary.

If we could see beyond the predetermined discussion of how El Salvador becomes global, what might emerge is an equally limitless, but more *inclusive,* imaginary. The spaces and commodities I have explored in this project would give way to "new forms of social existence," to practices of social solidarity. Our surroundings would become "fully reenchanted" (Buck-Morss 1989: 261, 254). The contact zones I have researched are spaces of the imagination, but also have actual consequences as spaces of mobility and constraint. Their potential as linkages to a critical perspective on globalization lies in an expansion of the notion of what is legitimated in a narrative of becoming global, and in the possibility of a re-enchantment of the world.

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