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Las Mujeres Qué Nos Sostienen: Reproductive Justice in the United States and El Salvador

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of
Philosophy

in

Ethnic Studies

by

Mellissa Francesca Linton

Committee in Charge:

Professor Yen Le Espiritu, Chair
Professor Kalindi Vora, Co-Chair
Professor Brian Goldfarb
Professor Shelley Streeby
Professor Daphne Taylor-Garcia

2020

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Co-Chair

Chair

University of California San Diego

2020

DEDICATION

Many have struggled for me to be here. I do not take their sacrifices lightly.

I dedicate this dissertation to both of my parents and their upcoming retirement.

May you find healing and peace in this new chapter of your life.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to the humble and resilient people from Central America, especially El Salvador. Those who live in diaspora, who refuse to leave, or leave when presented with no other option. I dream of a world where our countries reckon with decolonization, land repatriation, and demilitarization. Imagine the lush beauty of our future.

God is Change.

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Chapter 2, in part has been submitted for publication of the material as it may appear in “Mosquiteros: ZIKA and Reproductive Justice in El Salvador.” *A Queer and Trans Central American Anthology*, Kórima Press, edited by Maya Chinchilla, Forthcoming 2020. The dissertation author Mellissa Linton was the primary investigator and author of this paper.

Chapter 3, in part is currently being prepared for submission for publication of the material. The dissertation author Mellissa Linton was the primary investigator and author of this paper.

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PUBLICATIONS

“Mosquiteros: ZIKA and Reproductive Justice in El Salvador.” *A Queer and Trans Central American Anthology*, Kórima Press, edited by Maya Chinchilla, Forthcoming 2020.

“Corriendo Con Mis Ancestros – Running with My Ancestors.” *The Critical Refugee Studies Collective, Refugee Archives*. January 31, 2019.

<https://criticalrefugeestudies.com/archives/corriendo-con-mis-ancestros-running-with-my-ancestors>

“A Personal Reflection of the CISPES Radical Roots Delegation.” *CISPES, The Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador*, September 2018. <http://cispes.org/section/personal-reflection-radical-roots-delegation>

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Ethnic Studies

Studies in Marxist Feminism, Reproductive Justice, Transnationalism, Queer of Color Critique, Border Militarization, Cultural Studies, Central American Studies, Critical Refugee Studies

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Las Mujeres Qué Nos Sostienen: Reproductive Justice in the United States and El Salvador

by

Mellissa Francesca Linton

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnic Studies

University of California San Diego, 2020

Professor Yen Le Espiritu, Chair

Professor Kalindi Vora, Co-Chair

This dissertation focuses on semi-structured and informal interviews with five Salvadoran activists living in the U.S. diaspora that support Central American national politics, five Central American asylum seekers, and several activists that work in San Salvador. Using interdisciplinary methods like critical ethnography and participant observation, I explore the transnational, intergenerational organizers in the Salvadoran U.S. diaspora that use reproductive justice to connect to an array of activist communities in the U.S. and El Salvador.

Critical ethnography and cultural studies are important methods for this dissertation because it affords me the opportunity to move from a fixed set of moments or knowledge while also attending to the complexity of lived reality, and the position of the researcher (Madison,

2012). My participant observation hours at marches, protests, meetings and informal conversations in both San Salvador and the U.S took place with three organizations: CISPES (The Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador), the San Diego Migrant and Refugee Coalition and the Otay Mesa Detention Resistance (San Diego/Tijuana). I discuss not only reproductive autonomy, but also the right to “reproduce” children and communities in healthy and safe environments by introducing water privatization and migrant rights as reproductive justice concerns. My intervention in ethnic studies and queer of color critique as a Central American scholar are to extend the reproductive justice issue beyond a North American and heteronormative context. In my expanded conceptualization, reproductive justice constitutes forms of life-giving power that move care work beyond biological understandings of the reproductive.

INTRODUCTION

The central argument of my dissertation is that the right to plan one's reproductive destiny, the right to access clean water and the right to migrate are inherently related reproductive justice concerns because they are all connected to the holistic environmental needs that sustain life. Necessarily transnational, this dissertation features interviews and action research with both U.S. based Salvadorans politically organizing in the diaspora, and Salvadorans organizing in El Salvador. I extend recent theorizations on reproductive justice, moving away from the focus on the right to choose, *to the structural conditions that shape choices*, such as access to water, safety, citizenship status, family separation through detention and deportation, and the environment. In expanding reproductive justice as a framework, I explore the words, actions, and aspirations of the transnational, intergenerational organizers in the Salvadoran U.S. diaspora that use reproductive justice to connect to an array of activist communities in the U.S. and El Salvador. Rather than focusing only on the right to choose abortion, I argue that reproductive justice advocates needs to ask: How do colonialism, class inequalities, racism, and heterosexism shape the contours of choice? And how is the audacious demand for better life conditions for your chosen and/or biological family is simultaneously a demand for reproductive justice?

As a Salvadoran woman who was raised and came out as queer in the U.S. diaspora, I have grown exceedingly frustrated with how U.S. news media created and circulated masculinist and heterosexist assumptions about Salvadorans. Up until the mid 2010's, academic research about Central Americans in the U.S. was saturated by sociological and anthropological studies about gang violence that downplayed or even denied the root causes of deportation and structural violence that created the transnational circulation of gangs like MS-13 and Barrio 18 in the first

place.¹ The contemporary Central American migration to the United States in the form of caravans, which began in 2005 and continues to today, has become highly visible in U.S. media, especially the uproar against the practice of family separation institutionalized by the Obama administration. Rather than being given due process as asylum seekers, as specified by international and federal law, Central Americans arriving at the border, particularly from 2018 to the current moment in 2020, are criminalized, racialized as “animals,” turned back and even separated from their children.² This political tactic of othering and pathologizing, as Ethnic Studies scholarship shows, is a form of racial formation that has long been central to xenophobia in the United States.³

Central America, particularly El Salvador, is under-represented in studies of the racialized and gendered experiences of the political economy under neoliberalism. When I started graduate school in 2014, I was interested in the relationship between the political economy in El Salvador and gendered exploitation of the body via the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). At the time, while I was well-read about the negative effects of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) such as the proliferation of maquiladoras, and gender-based violence like femicides alongside the U.S./Mexico border, I was not able to find much in the literature on the lived realities of Central Americans also working under the

¹ Manwaring, Max G. “A Contemporary Challenge to State Sovereignty: Gangs and Other Illicit Transnational Criminal Organizations in Central America, El Salvador, Mexico, Jamaica, and Brazil.” December 2007. <https://apps.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA475687>.

² “Trump: Immigrant Gangs ‘Animals, Not People.’” BBC News. Accessed September 19, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-44148697/trump-immigrant-gangs-animals-not-people>.

³ Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States*. Routledge, 2014. Erika Lee, “The Chinese Are Coming. How Can We Stop Them?: Chinese Exclusion and the Origins of American Gatekeeping,” pp.23-46 in *At America’s Gate: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

conditions of free trade and neoliberalism.⁴ In searching for a Central American perspective about the gendered effects of the Dominican Republic - Central American Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA), I identified a clear need to not only provide a critique of United States Imperialism, but also to respect and learn from Salvadorans themselves. I came to this realization because U.S. based scholars can elide important regional knowledge in El Salvador. I focus on DR-CAFTA because I am a Marxist Feminist that attends to material and lived realities of the political economy. Centering and learning from Central American political genealogies are important because of the regional specificity not only of oligarchic control and neoliberal reform but also of resistance practices.

In the U.S., Central America, as a region and a people, has come to stand for gang violence. U.S. politicians and mainstream media have long publicized what they perceived to be the Salvadoran notorious gangs that purportedly began in Los Angeles, and later recirculated to El Salvador. These (mis)representations ideologically depict El Salvador as violent and unstable, citing homicide rates in 2016 that allegedly exceeded those of the country's civil war.⁵ The U.S. and Salvadoran governments' binational efforts to combat gang violence in the early 2000's typically rely on specialized anti-gang units funded through the Mérida Initiative that is responsible for training the police and building investigative capacity and communications equipment for police forces.⁶ Since the Marxist, Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front

⁴ "Project MUSE - Ciudadana X: Gender Violence and the Denationalization of Women's Rights in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico." Accessed May 8, 2019. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/183248>.

⁵ Los Angeles Times. "Op-Ed: It's Official: San Salvador Is the Murder Capital of the World," March 2, 2016. <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-0302-muggah-el-salvador-crime-20160302-story.html>.

⁶ Seelke, Clare Ribando. "Gangs in Central America," n.d. 23. Congressional Research Service (CRS). 2016. CRS Report.

(FMLN) and Salvadoran Government signed the UN-backed 1992 Chapultepec peace accords⁷, the United States has had a vested interest in combating gang violence in El Salvador in order to “create a self-sufficient Salvadoran justice system.”⁸ The Bush Administration requested \$11 million in 2008 for supplemental assistance and \$13 million in 2009 for modernization programs for the Salvadoran police. In my research on gangs in Central America and U.S. funding packages, I found that proponents of U.S. law enforcement solutions in El Salvador maintain a “repressive stance rather than restorative mental health and social services.”⁹ In the 2016 U.S. Congressional Research Service report on law enforcement in Central America, local police are described as “lacking the capacity and resources to target gang leaders effectively, share data, and conduct thorough investigations that lead to successful prosecutions¹⁰.” This information is significant because the need for a “repressive stance” suggests the U.S. views Central American youth as violent and in need of repressive, rather than restorative, measures.¹¹

While there is much social science research on Central American gangs, I discovered that there is a comparatively less emphasis on other gendered populations, such as vulnerable pregnant women, that are also affected both spatially and materially by neoliberalism and free trade policies.¹² After finishing my first year of my graduate program, I visited my aunt in San

⁷ “Chapultepec Agreement | UN Peacemaker.” Accessed May 14, 2020.

<https://peacemaker.un.org/elsalvador-chapultepec92>.

⁸ Watkins, Ali, and Meridith Kohut. “MS-13, Trump and America’s Stake in El Salvador’s Gang War.” *The New York Times*, December 10, 2018, sec. U.S.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/10/us/el-salvador-ms-13.html>.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰ Seelke, Clare Ribando. “Gangs in Central America,” n.d. 23. Congressional Research Service (CRS). 2016. CRS Report.

¹¹ Ibid. “Human rights groups maintain that the Mérida Initiative should include more of an emphasis on prevention and rehabilitation than the Administration had originally proposed, and that the U.S. government should encourage SICA and the governments of the region to develop comprehensive youth violence prevention plans.”

¹² See Stoll, D. “Gangsters Without Borders: An Ethnography of a Salvadoran Street Gang By T.W. Ward Oxford University Press. 2013, Zilberg, Elana. *Space of Detention: The Making of a*

Salvador and learned that a close family friend had been incarcerated for having an abortion. In researching the history of abortion law in El Salvador, I found that during the 1970s, abortion was deemed legal in three instances: rape, incest or fetal deformity. However, in 1998, abortion law changed to not only incarcerate women who have abortions *for any reasons* for upwards of thirty years for “aggravated homicide,” and also to criminalize health professionals suspected of assisting in abortions. As such, Salvadoran hospitals became carceral spaces, where nurses and doctors, fearful for their own careers, often called the police on women, even when some were miscarrying; multiple Salvadoran women reported being handcuffed while still lying in hospital beds.¹³ Sara García, a Salvadoran organizer against the criminalization of abortion, has pointed to how pregnant Salvadoran women were “suspected” as criminals and harassed while in public hospitals. When asked how the ban on abortion has affected women, García responded: “A mechanism for harassment and inquisition was legally put in place, and both the Prosecutor's Office and the police had the mandate to prosecute this crime, even when there was only a suspicion that it had been committed. In practice, if a woman went to a public hospital because she was bleeding, *she lost her right to be presumed innocent* and would be investigated.”¹⁴ The assumption became that every woman who is bleeding had an abortion and must be either investigated or prosecuted. García elaborated that “the fear [of criminalization] was so strong because one of the interpretations of the law, was that those speaking out about abortion were also going to be criminalized. This caused some civil society organizations, including women's

Transnational Gang Crisis Between Los Angeles and San Salvador. Duke University Press, 2011.

¹³ Watson, Katy. “The Mothers Being Criminalised in El Salvador.” *BBC News*, April 28, 2015, sec. Latin America & Caribbean. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-32480443>.

¹⁴ Citizens Coalition for the Decriminalization of Abortion on Grounds of Health, E. and F. A., El Salvador. (2014). From hospital to jail: the impact on women of El Salvador’s total criminalization of abortion. *Reproductive Health Matters*, 22(44), 52–60.

groups, to fall silent.” García critically locates the hospital as a coercive space - what I would call a biopolitical one -- that hones in on the reproductive capacity of a woman for various political and ideological ends.

I am interested in theorizing García’s comment on pregnant women losing the right to be presumed innocent and understand it as a form of racialization and gendering made possible in part through the 1998 abortion ban. Driven by the desire to understand why the Salvadoran abortion law was harshly reconstituted after the end of the civil war, and the lack of research in this area, I began my dissertation work with this first case study of reproductive justice (Chapter 1). I contend that the lack of research on the criminalization of abortion in El Salvador is due in part to ideological purposes: Criminalizing women who have abortions is a disciplining tool that functions to articulate national values about family, reproductive and sexuality in El Salvador. How then can we conceptualize the motivation behind incarcerating new criminalized populations? I turn to Ethnic Studies scholars that theorize “racial masculinity” as a tool to understand how certain racialized male populations lose the presumption of innocence in order to begin theorizing the process through which vulnerable women in El Salvador lose their presumption of innocence. In *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and The Criminalization of the Unprotected*, Ethnic Studies scholar Lisa Cacho defines racial masculinity as the dehumanizing representation of men of color who become suspected criminals because of societal tropes that treat these men as inherently violent (or *potentially* violent). Racial masculinity is evident in harmful social tropes such as the male Muslim “terrorist” or the “animalistic” MS-13 gang member; both of these tropes work to justify U.S. intervention into these respective nations. Drawing on this literature on the loss of the presumption of violence, I examine why and how certain bodies and behaviors are made “transparently criminal, while

privileged bodies and their brutal crimes are rendered unrecognizable as criminal, or even as violent.”¹⁵ I add a feminist and queer reading to this literature in order to examine how women who have (or presumed to have) abortions, as well as activists who demand water rights (Chapter 2), and trans asylum seekers (Chapter 3) are racialized and lose the presumption of innocence in the context of increased militarization and criminalization in the DR-CAFTA era. In short, I extend this notion of “racial masculinity” to cisgender women and gender variant Salvadorans as a way to interrogate how *reproduction*, sexuality and the assumption of criminality became entwined in post-civil war El Salvador.

My dissertation thus focuses on the carceral spaces that link the United States and El Salvador and shape Salvadoran women and Salvadoran migrant life. It identifies three populations that become incarcerated and detained in the post-civil war period including: women who either miscarry or abort, water defenders, and asylum seekers - some of whom identify as gay, lesbian and trans women. I couple my theoretical training in Black and Indigenous feminist contributions of Reproductive Justice with action research with feminist organizations based in San Salvador, transnational efforts to support “Water defenders” in El Salvador, and LGBT organizations based in San Diego and Tijuana. My key argument is that focusing on reproductive justice provides an important intersection point from which to discuss the targeting and displacement of poor, pregnant women in San Salvador, Indigenous people in El Salvador, and migrants and LGBT caravaneros. In addition to binding my three case studies through the theoretical and political lens of Reproductive Justice, I emphasize the role of free trade, neoliberalism and militaristic collaboration. Rather than suggesting that the U.S. is solely culpable for the gendered and sexualized violence in El Salvador, I ask important questions

¹⁵ Cacho, Lisa Marie. *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected*. NYU Press, 2012.

about the Salvadoran government as well that is fueled by Oligarchic wealth concentration. In Chapter One, I ask, for a country ravaged by civil war (1979- 1992), how did El Salvador rebuild its national image and values after the civil war, and how did this relate to drawbacks on legislation regarding women's reproductive health and family planning? Moving to another, newly criminalized population - the Tacuba water defenders, I ask in Chapter Two why is reproductive justice a useful political framework from which to critique water privatization? What is the U.S. diaspora's role in joint struggle work with organizers living and working in El Salvador? Finally, in Chapter 3, I ask what forms of collective care are occurring/or enacted amongst caravaneros themselves and by the Central American and Chicana diaspora organizers living in the United States? These questions are important contributions to Critical Refugee, Central American and Ethnic Studies scholarship that document Salvadoran resistance and collaboration in the diaspora.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Reproductive Justice

My main theoretical framework is reproductive justice. I draw from women of color legal scholars who insist that reproductive justice must engage discourses about sexuality and racism. Black feminist works on reproductive justice is foundational to my work because they illustrate how *reproduction* is a site where legal policies are enacted against racialized subjects who are oftentimes women resisting while living within exploitive systems of oppression. Black Feminist Scholars such as Dorothy Roberts, Hortense J. Spillers and Ruth Wilson Gilmore make important connections between reproductive justice and anti-black racism in the United States¹⁶. Control of African Americans' reproductive choices dates back to 18th and 19th-century efforts to police the enslaved population through "procreative exploitation of enslaved women and continues today in the form of discriminatory welfare policies, abortion restrictions that target African-Americans, and criminal prosecutions of pregnant and child-rearing women."¹⁷

Reproductive justice began as an African Americans political and intellectual movement for autonomous organizing that focused on challenging coercive government policies that have compelled or punished their childbearing practices and choices throughout U.S. history. In *Killing the Black Body*, Dorothy Roberts illustrates how reproductive justice struggles must necessarily engage the criminal system and legal violence that targets racialized women as

¹⁶ See: Roberts, Dorothy E. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1997.

Spillers, Hortense. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics* 17.2 (1987): 65-81. Print.

Wilson, Ruth, *Golden Gulag*. Accessed May 14, 2020.

<https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520242012/golden-gulag>.

¹⁷ El Salvador pardons woman sent to jail for 30 years after suffering a miscarriage. (n.d.).

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/el-salvador-miscarriage-abortion-strictest-laws-in-world-sonia-t-bora-a7584671.html>

degenerate drains on society. As an example, in the opening story of Chapter 4, “Making Reproduction a Crime,” Roberts begins with the 1992 incident of Cornelia Winter, a Black mother in South Carolina who gives birth to a child who has crack-cocaine traces in his urine. Winter endured an eight-year prison sentence for child neglect charges, and was part of a startling trend of poor, young black mothers targeted for their drug addiction. This phenomenon came to colloquially be referred to as “crack babies” who would later grow up to be racialized as degenerate criminals.¹⁸

Most important to my research are the arguments that U.S. prisons and hospitals cooperated with one another to both racialize and incarcerate Black women who were suspected of drug-ingestion or criminality. In this dissertation, I argue that reproductive justice is not only a feminist issue in the North American context but also an issue that links together U.S. imperialism in Central America, neoliberalism in El Salvador, and concerns of the U.S. diaspora. As such, I insist that scholars in the field of reproductive justice should also be concerned about the overlapping injustices of political and social systems like hospitals, jails and prisons, and detention centers that attempt to biopolitically manage racialized, classed, gendered, and queered Salvadorans. In this dissertation, I expand the definition of “reproduction” from its biological origin to include environmental concerns--such as safe access to water and viable living conditions-- that shape the quality of life and ability for communities to socially and biologically reproduce.

¹⁸ Roberts, Dorothy E. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. Vintage Books, 2017.

Historical Materialism and Queer of Color Critique

As an Ethnic Studies scholar, I approach my research questions about reproduction and sexuality from the legacies of Marxist feminism and historical materialism. Historical materialism is a methodology that suggests history is driven by the material in general and the mode of production in particular, rather than by ideals or political leaders. This requires a study of labor and laborers, and attention to historical change that occurs in moments of contradiction. I identify the free trade era as an important transition moment in not only the Salvadoran political economy, but also in cultural resistance to new laws that targeted reproductive laborers, vulnerable young men and LGBT people. Feminists and post-colonial thinkers have contributed to historical materialism, arguing for elaborations on racial capitalism and reproductive labor. These writers like Maria Mies, Silvia Federici, Cedric Robinson argue that the historical development of Capitalism is propelled by racism, nationalism and gender.¹⁹ Feminist materialist scholarship, or understanding how women have been historically and systematically categorized as objects of reproduction has been formative in understanding why the Salvadoran state would want to make criminals out of women who miscarry or have an abortion. Racial capitalism as explored by Cedric Robinson is an important contribution to historical materialism because it illustrates how Marxism is a Western construction mediated through European people, their civilization and culture. As such it fails to account for how racism -- particularly anti-black racism motivates the development of capital as well.

¹⁹ Mies, Maria. *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*. London: Zed, 1986. Print.

Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation*. New York: Autonomedia, 2004. Print.

Robinson, Cedric J. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. London: Zed, 1983. Print.

I extend Marxist feminist critiques of the interplay between racial capitalism and gender to a transnational context (El Salvador) in order to illustrate the streamlined criminalization process that racialized women of color have endured within hospital spaces in particular. Queer of color critique is useful in the context of Central American studies because its critiques of nation and heteronormativity are apt in understanding why reproduction became the focal points of political and religious entities in the post-civil war period of El Salvador. I define Queer of color critique in the tradition of Roderick Ferguson as the “theorized intersections” of women of color feminism by “investigating how intersecting racial, gender and sexual practices antagonizes and/or conspire with the normative investments of nation-states and capital.”²⁰ Additionally, Gayatri Gopinath *Impossible Desires* also illustrates that the diaspora and the nation are mutually constituted formations. Gopinath queer, diasporic cultural analysis work against the violent effacements that produce the fictions of purity that lie at the heart of dominant nationalist and diasporic logics²¹. I utilize queer of color critique to discuss Salvadoran American identity as a disjointed and uneven terrain of cultural memory that is not easily discernible but shows up in various spaces of the transnational between the United States and Central America. This specific type of care (technologies of care) should be understood as examples of survivance and really what queer of color critique is all about -- the imaginative and utopic visions we create on a daily basis. Queer of color critique is a methodological tool, defined by Roderick Ferguson as “investigating how intersecting racial, gender and sexual practices antagonize and/or conspire with the normative investments of nation-states and

²⁰ Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*

²¹ “Gopinath, Gayatri, 1969-. *Impossible Desires : Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. Gopinath cites Stuart Hall’s diaspora scholarship that began to move diasporic longing, nostalgia and memory into a cultural practice that could uproot histories of race and colonialism violence. This is perhaps the key of Gopinath’s piece: that the queer body is a historical archive that uproots histories of colonialism.

capital.”²² In the case of abortion criminalization, the multiple state actors at the national and local level like hospitals, jails, cultural Catholicism and heteropatriarchy illustrate how queer of color critique can operate as a method for building unlikely coalitions across different categories of power. Queer of color critique operates as a method for building unlikely coalitions because rather than work within the binary of men oppressing women, these methods considers a range of subjectivities and their experiences within racial capitalism.

I argue that the imagined child, particularly in popular media like the news and radio, became the invested hope of ideal citizenship in El Salvador--an integral part of “rebuilding” the Salvadoran nation after the death of more than 80,000 people during the civil war. Considering the drastic changes in the national abortion law in just twenty years, there is a clear shift of focus to the unborn children, whose life is deemed valuable and Constitutionally begins at conception. The material effect of this legal change assigns supreme value to the fetus while simultaneously denying it to the person carrying the child. Queer of color critique allows me to identify the relationship between heterosexual reproduction and nation-building after the civil war because it exposes how classist, racialized heteronormativity targets poor women living in primarily rural areas of El Salvador. Queer of color theorist Roderick Ferguson argues that racialized heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy have played a conspicuous role in shaping sociology and social policy, and recognizes its intersection with revolutionary nationalism.²³” Furthermore, queer of color critique relates to my research because I argue that in a post-civil war context,

²² Ferguson, Roderick A. *Aberrations in Black: toward a Queer of Color Critique*. University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

²³ *Ibid.*

reproduction and sexuality became an immensely important site for “marking which subjects are deserving, and which are not.”²⁴”

Queer Encounters at the Border

One of the most gratifying aspects of my field work in Tijuana was witnessing the creative solutions that transpired between U.S. diaspora activists and Central American asylum seekers, particularly among gay, queer, and trans masculine people. Issues of gender and sexuality were prominent in the interviews I conducted with Central Americans who live and organize in the U.S. diaspora. Alexis, one of the interlocutors who helped bring food and material aid to asylum seekers sleeping in the Benito Juarez Sports stadium in Tijuana, described how the Tijuana police blocked food donations. At the time, this stadium temporarily functioned as a makeshift refugee camp. After visiting several times, Alexis built rapport with caravan members at Benito, who later informed Alexis that police tended to treat women migrants with more leniency. Together, they decided to ask the women to deliver food and supplies, concealed in reusable bags, to migrants inside the stadium. In addition to asylum seekers’ gendered experiences in Tijuana, I consider how lesbian and trans people in the caravan connect and collaborate with U.S. based queer of color activists. I believe it is important to consider not only the discrimination that lesbian, gay and trans people experience, but also the moments in which they grow, thrive and create healing bonds with other people.

In the following excerpt, I share my conversation with Yaneli, a lesbian identified woman from El Salvador. She underscores her own sense of self-development having migrated to a border city and meeting queer people of color (in this example, other lesbians) who are

²⁴ University of Minnesota Press. “The Ruptures of American Capital.” Book. Accessed May 14, 2020. <https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/the-ruptures-of-american-capital>.

responding to political and material needs of the caravaneros. Yaneli, who is originally from Santa Ana, El Salvador shared with me that she came out much later in her life, and still has trouble grappling with being a lesbian. She said she does not know if that word even fits who she is, considering her masculine center of energy. When asked if she felt any resonance with or sense of difference from the queer activists from the U.S. that she was meeting, she replied:

“Some of these words, I’ve never heard before, and I guess Americans use it [the word queer] to refer to something political. Working with other tortilleras [lesbians] from the U.S. has felt like an exchange, we teach them about our world and they teach us about theirs. One [of the employees] cut my hair really short. I liked it. I have more courage to let myself be. Even if I don’t make it [asylum in the U.S.], I think I’ll be okay here.”

Yaneli’s hopeful reflection that she thinks she will be “okay,” that she can see herself creating and building a life for herself in Tijuana, displays not only her resilience, but also shows the possibility of a growing Central American community in Tijuana, rather than in Southern California. Additionally, her reflection in hearing the word “queer” shows a unique encounter and exchange of language, possibility and expansion. As a new resident in a LGBT shelter in Playas, Tijuana, Yaneli is surrounded by more trans, gay and lesbian people than she ever has in her life. This built-in community network welcomed and encouraged her to cut her hair, something she has never done before. Her reflection that, “we teach them [the queer people of color from the U.S.] about our world” like language, customs and foods illustrates a mutual exchange based not only on sexuality-based identity markers.

These two examples point out the gender- and sexuality-based experiences of being a migrant in the Central Caravan, while also highlighting the mutual exchanges of strategy and identity occurring between Central American people and activists in the U.S. As such, I am not only utilizing queer of color critique as a theory, but rather to show how queer epistemologies are created in the flesh, en route, in spite of liminality. Rather than metaphorize queer encounters

both en route to the United States and upon arriving at the border, I explain a landscape of exchanges and possibilities. Scholars of sexuality and diaspora studies like Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley have utilized queer theory as a metaphor for relations that could have been. Tinsley's use of "ship mates" in *Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage* draws from historical archives and embodied knowledge to argue that the Middle Passage allowed "ship mates" to resist the commodification of their bought and sold bodies by feeling and feeling for their co-occupants on the ships.²⁵ Her research is significant to my own because it shows the possibility of queerness despite the aspects of crisis and suppression inherent to the perilous journey of migration. In sum, I highlight the embodied experiences of growth that result from two groups of people mutually exchanging new queer subjectivities. My research, contextualized within the Central American caravan, shows that the same forces of forced migration that create chaos and destruction can also provide imaginative possibility.

Connecting Struggles Against Water Privatization, Abortion and Forced Migration

The intervention of this transnational, feminist analysis is to connect the struggles in El Salvador to the U.S. borderlands both temporally and materially. My intention is not to conflate the gender struggles in El Salvador and the U.S., but rather to expose the imperial logics that inextricably and historically tie Salvadorans and Salvadorans born and raised in the U.S. diaspora. Furthermore, struggles against water privatization, abortion and forced migration constitute entryways for Salvadorans in the diaspora to engage in cross-border organizing with their counterparts in El Salvador. As over 3.5 million Salvadorans now live in the U.S., 2 million

²⁵ Tinsley, Natasha Omise'eke. Project MUSE - "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage." Accessed January 11, 2020. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/241316/summary>.

of which constitute the first generation to ever be born and raised in the U.S., we must actively fight U.S. assimilation, stay connected to El Salvador, and use anti-imperial genealogies from disciplines like Ethnic Studies to better understand the racialized and gendered nuances of migration and intervention.

Secondly, my project contributes to Critical Refugee Studies because it highlights grassroots activists living in San Diego who make connections with detainees at the Otay Mesa Detention Center, and moves beyond the spectacularizing of refugee pain and brokenness, and instead centers their resilience and world making abilities.²⁶ In order to understand the material effects of U.S. media coverage of the Central American caravan, I leverage the term “trauma porn” as articulated by U.S. Black Americans to question the all-too flippant use of Central American suffering--as destitute people in need of saving. The curation of certain images during 2018 to represent the migrant caravan functions as a sort of trauma porn, a concept formulated by Black Lives Matter activists and survivors of sexual assault in the latter half of the 2000’s. As Indigo Ross writes, “the hyper-consumption of Black death seems like a fetish for our nation. Watching these videos at this point [of police murdering Black people in the U.S.] isn’t awareness, it’s psychologically damaging for all of us. It desensitizes us to seeing Black people killed, maimed, or abused. Why do we have to prove our pain or death to people in order for them to believe us or listen?²⁷” I argue that highly circulated photos depicting Central Americans as victims or “trauma porn” in U.S. media works to justify U.S. carceral presence in El Salvador.

²⁶ Espiritu, Yên Lê, and Lan Duong. “Feminist Refugee Epistemology: Reading Displacement in Vietnamese and Syrian Refugee Art.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 43, no. 3 (February 8, 2018): 587–615. <https://doi.org/10.1086/695300>.

See also, Tuck, E. and K.W. Yang. (2014b). ‘R-Words: Refusing Research’ in D. Paris and M. T. Winn (Eds.) *Humanizing Research: Decolonizing Qualitative Inquiry with youth and Communities*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

²⁷ The Odyssey Online. “Trauma Porn: Hyper-Consumption Of Black Death And Pain,” July 12, 2016. <https://www.theodysseyonline.com/trauma-porn-black-death-and-pain>.

In my research, I locate the cultural media representations of the Salvadoran gang member alongside asylum seekers in need of aid. The binary of violence (the gang member) and vulnerability (the refugee) are examples of imperial control and structured by ideological intent. I take up the issue of trauma porn and the role of social media platforms as both a transnational organizing tool and conceptual, discursive space where value is formulated. In many ways, I understand trauma porn in a similar vein as Saidiya Hartman's central thesis of *Scenes of Subjection*, where she writes in hopes of "illuminating the terror of the mundane and quotidian rather than exploiting the shocking spectacle." Her elaboration of the mundane and quotidian - the everyday - speaks volumes to this project that focuses on the resistance making practices that Salvadorans and Chicanas²⁸ in the diaspora engage in to forge transnational networks of support for the migrant caravan, anti-water privatization efforts and repealing the abortion ban.

²⁸ In the semi-structured interview portion of my ethnographic research, four out of five identify interlocutors identify as Salvadoran on one side of their family, and the fifth interlocutor identifies as a "transfronteriza Chicana" (Spanish for border-crossing Chicana, or someone born and raised within the context of the U.S./Mexico border.



Image 0.1: This photo is of a Honduran immigrant protecting his child after some caravan members attempt to storm the border checkpoint in Ciudad Hidalgo on October 19, 2018.
Source: Ueslei Marcelino / Reuters

At the same time, I argue that social justice activists like Alexis of the San Diego Migrant and Refugee Coalition (SDMRC) strategically leverage “trauma porn” in order to accrue resources for caravan members. In my thoughtful conversation with Alexis of SDMRC, she commented that because cisgender men are often associated with violence, representations of their suffering do not elicit the same sympathy evoked by that of a cisgender woman or anonymous child. As she reported on her experiences coordinating funding for emergency food aid at the Benito Juarez stadium that temporarily functioned as an open-air refugee shelter:

“I was open to [the other organizers] about wanting to leverage media coverage about ‘women and children’ strategically because that’s what people are willing to donate to and support. But the messed-up part about that is a lot of men are in these encampments, but do not elicit the same moral outrage-- even the young men like twelve or fifteen years old. They don’t get the same support, their worth and value is not the same and people don’t care about their lives. I’m not saying that having specific women and LGBT shelters are not important. Obviously I support that and think they are necessary, right? But what we witnessed was that when a place is largely men, it doesn’t get the support, and we saw men at Benito Juarez get kicked out for that very reason. Because they were trying to keep

women and children there so that they would care. Gender is important, but I don't want to perpetuate the idea that one is more important than the other.”

Alexis observes that American moral outrage is often utilized for different political ends. She delineates profound gendered differences amongst caravan members where women and children warrant investment, attention and aid, and men and young boys are disregarded. She reflects that rather than suggesting that one group is more important than the other, and that all groups have valid, varied realities, the lack of care of Central American men is concerning. Moreover, it shows who is valued, and who is not, and how gender and sexuality-based tropes define the contours of social value. In Chapter 3, I will discuss how these varying, gendered experiences resurface in the way caravan members line up in a food system stratified by the elderly first, women and children next and men and trans people last.

Instead of replaying the traumas of Central American flight, as in images two and three, or opting for totalizing solutions to the mass exodus of people from the Northern Triangle, I choose to center their world making practices in El Salvador, while en route to the United States, and the world making strategies U.S. based activists engage in when asylum seekers arrived at the border. Relatedly, the damaging rhetoric within U.S. media that Central Americans fleeing the northern triangle as animal gang members works to frame them as criminals rather than asylum seekers; it should be noted that MS-13's membership makes up less than 1% of all criminally active gang members in the U.S. and Puerto Rico.²⁹ Feminist refugee epistemology focuses on “gendered displacement as not only about social disorder and interruption, but also about social reproduction and innovation.³⁰” Ma Vang in her research on Hmong Refugee

²⁹“Seven Facts about MS-13 and How to Combat the Gang.” WOLA. Accessed September 19, 2019. <https://www.wola.org/analysis/ms-13-not-immigration-problem/>.

³⁰ Espiritu, Yên Lê, and Lan Duong. “Feminist Refugee Epistemology: Reading Displacement in Vietnamese and Syrian Refugee Art.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 43, no. 3 (February 8, 2018): 587–615. <https://doi.org/10.1086/695300>.

activism asserts that refugees are knowing subjects whose displaced condition teaches us about various forms of state management, as well as knowledgeable examples about care work.³¹



Image 0.2: This infamous image of the migrant caravan features a Honduran mother, Maria Lila Meza Castro, and her 5-year-old twin girls running away from tear gas deployed at the border in November 2018³². I argue this image is used to generate victimizing narratives about Central Americans; however, U.S. activists strategically leverage American, liberal public outrage at the U.S. treatment of “women and children” to raise fiscal support for the caravan.

Source: Kim Kyung-Hoon, Reuters Photojournalist.

I relate feminist refugee epistemology to my own viewpoint from Central American studies as a radical re-framing of approaching ethnographic research *with* caravaneros. Rayo del Sol who is a co-founder of OMDR noted in her interview that refusing to center trauma is a skill that has allowed her to emotionally bond with refugees she meets upon weekly visits to the Otay Mesa Detention Center; this, I argue, is the very fabric of technologies of care that are driven by ethical relationships with caravaneros. In her words, “I learned so much about interpersonal

³¹ Ma Vang, Chapter 8 unpublished manuscript, *The Language of Care: Hmong Refugee Activism and a Feminist Refugee Epistemology*.

³² Image Source: CNN, Holly Yan. “A Mother and Her Girls Tried to Reach the US Border. Then They Got Tear-Gassed.” CNN. Accessed May 11, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/26/americas/gallery/border-family-tear-gas-photo/index.html>.

relationships. I try to have folks lead the conversation. I want to talk about what they want to talk about. I don't want to pry or talk about traumas, and I don't ask too much about why they fled, and why they came here, unless that's something they want to bring up." This notion of refugees leading conversations works to actively resist the often totalizing and pitying narratives generated about Central American asylum seekers. Moreover, genuinely connecting with folks in detention and refugees crossing the border is grounded in cooperative world making. Rayo del Sol, for example, discussed the reciprocal relationship she cultivated with detainees at the Otay Mesa Detention Center:

"These are hard conversations to have, but most of the time people [detainees] just want to talk. It was very weird because one time I met this guy, I went to visit him and had this beautiful conversation about our grandmothers and lessons we learned from our moms. I came out of this place like skipping... It was weird, I was coming out of a detention center skipping, but I made a connection with someone and it was so beautiful. It was very awakening, as twisted as it is to have this beautiful conversation in this place, it was very contradictory, and because of that, I felt a little troubled by it. It was good to hear his story and humanize those experiences...it was very beautiful and necessary."

NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

Ethics of Ethnography

The themes of representation and the ethics of ethnography formidably shape my work as an ethnographer and member of the Salvadoran diaspora. Because my scholarship entails working with vulnerable populations like asylum seekers, I had to thoughtfully consider building trust with my existing connections as a queer of color and migrant justice organizer in the San Diego/Tijuana region. Though my sample size is relatively small, at just ten participants total, I spent a large amount of time establishing myself within the migrant justice organizing community as someone who is reliable and grounded in Southern California. At the same time, the relatively small number of participants should not understate the depth and thought involved

in each interview and my deep commitment to meaningfully work with LGBT people. I believe that my positionality as a member of the communities I organize and work with brings a sense of intimacy to this research that is ultimately grounded in transformative action rather than extractive research. Furthermore, reproductive justice is a practical description that is applied in the way I approach my research, and the tangible, material actions of the groups in my study. In my reading of the context of displacement from Central America, I am seeing how the imperial desire for resources and the imprisonment of gendered bodies creates not only a transparent violence against women and queer people, but also possibility for understanding resistance subjectivities in El Salvador through protesting the ban on abortion, and in Tijuana through organizing amongst LGBT asylum seekers from Central America and U.S. diasporic activists.

Reflections on the U.S. (Queer/Trans) Salvadoran Diaspora

My research with Salvadorans in the diaspora illustrated a mutual desire to harness the potential political power of the diaspora, and the shared themes of deploying technology as an important way to connect and advance political struggles. I am devoted to understanding diasporic solidarity because it is an organic illustration of how to organize not only because of but also beyond and in spite of global capitalism; we can organize from our current position, and in so doing avoid speaking on behalf of Salvadorans. We must also rid ourselves of the idea that we have to physically be in El Salvador in order to engage in mutual solidarity work. When asked to describe their sense of self, four out of five of the interviewees born in the U.S. and have family in El Salvador mention “diaspora,” with the exception of the fifth person who identifies as Chicana. Though the 2018 Central American caravan instigated much tension between the Mexican and Central American community, there were spectacular displays of solidarity in San Diego organizations that were providing immediate supplies to shelters and

encampments. In my intimate interview with Alexis in her personal home, she described her relationship to the social movement organizing in El Salvador as “completely diasporic... I am not directly organizing with groups in El Salvador but was on a diplomado and visited with the Indigenous communities of Izalco. I maintain a relationship to these people and places through social media.” I am interested in understanding how diasporic organizing can aid on-the-ground Salvadoran struggles for self-determination, and how meetings, contact and social media can bind the two communities. Gaby, a queer Salvadoran in Chicago described their diasporic identity as grappling with the lived realities of their family who were born and raised in El Salvador:

“...There are as many Salvadorans outside of the country as there are inside of the country...I think a lot about what our responsibility as people is of the diaspora. And it’s hard, right? It’s hard because we have a lot of privilege living where we live....my experiences here in the U.S. are completely different from my cousin’s [life] who is 21 in El Salvador. What is our connection to that? How do I honor their realities while also being in the U.S. and being a politicized person?”

Gaby points to the substantial number of Salvadorans living in the U.S. diaspora, and how she considers her own “responsibility” living outside of El Salvador. This comment was within the context of our discussion on class privilege, citizenship privilege and the markedly different lived realities of Salvadorans living in and outside of El Salvador. She suggests that she internally struggles with how to most ethically and effectively support and uplift Salvadoran politics. Though it is no easy feat, I show in this dissertation that mutual aid, direct action and effective use of social media are ways to uplift, rather than speak for, Salvadoran.

Though I emphasize reproductive justice as a necessarily coalition-based struggle, I would also like to acknowledge the internal political tensions that exist within the Salvadoran community living in El Salvador and in the diaspora. Gaby, for example, explains that it is hard for her to reconcile with what her responsibility is as a “salvi in the diaspora” because she

disagrees with what she perceives to be the oligarchic, neoliberal sympathizer Nayib Bukele, the President of El Salvador. In her own words, “One of my cousins in El Salvador wanted Bukele to win, and he won which means, a lot of people support him and really believe that he is the one that's going to change life for them... that he has the potential to really change the country -- that’s his whole platform. People who are actually living there firmly believe that he's what the country needs, and that makes things really complicated.” Gaby’s reflection that much of the leftist diaspora critiques Bukele - while Salvadoran nationals exalt him - is indeed complicated and illustrates the possibility for Salvadoran comparative diaspora studies.³³ Furthermore, it shows there is no singular vision of Salvadoran identity, and perhaps the internal political tensions that exist within the Salvadoran national diaspora community.

Furthermore, in regard to positionality and the U.S. diaspora, it is important to note that all of my participants from the diaspora mention that they became politicized while attending either community college or university. The participants in this study all attended college in Southern California, are first-generation, and actively participated in student organizations, especially Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MECha), Central Americans Raising Awareness in Solidarity (CARAS) and Unión Salvadoreña de Estudiantes Universitarios (USEU). All five participants discussed the importance of student organizations on their college campuses in providing a sense of mutual identity, connection to family history and historical knowledge. I believe this is informative for my study on how the diaspora engages transnational struggles in solidarity because it suggests that undergraduate student organizations in the US are important spaces to connect with other Central Americans and ultimately develop a basic

³³ Ragazzi, Francesco. “A Comparative Analysis of Diaspora Policies.” *Political Geography* (July 1, 2014): 74–89. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2013.12.004>.

political understanding of Central America. University spaces might be, in other words, the beginning of coming to political consciousness for many first-generation Salvadorans and brings them into closer proximity to the political struggles of their counterparts in El Salvador. Though I am aware of the class-privilege of attending university and am not suggesting all politicized Salvadorans have to attend university, I do think that Central American university students who encounter and organize with one another form a formidable and powerful network tool for Salvadoran nationals.

My research is also informed by community-based research in that I conceptualize my commitments to community organizations, both in the U.S. and in El Salvador, as ongoing and long-term. This commitment draws me to utilize participant observation as a grassroots activist in the U.S./Mexico border and as a part of the Salvadoran diaspora. Reflections on my participant observation are dispersed throughout the three chapters in which I feature field work in El Salvador, Tijuana, San Diego, and remotely with one participant in Chicago.

Rather than objectify, speak for, or extract from the caravan members I spoke with, my goal is to demonstrate how the Salvadoran diaspora can harness the potential of the U.S. diaspora. My positionality was critical to the research spaces that I was a part of because being part of the Salvadoran diaspora shapes how I write and think about mutual aid practices between El Salvador and the United States. Furthermore, I believe my positionality helped the asylum seekers I worked with feel more comfortable and at ease because of my familiar Spanish slang and because I was working with visibly queer people.

This research took place over three major phases and in two different time periods: In the Fall to Spring of 2018-2019, I completed field work in Tijuana and San Diego, and in the Summer of 2018, I completed field work in El Salvador, including the capital San Salvador and

Indigenous Tacuba territory. In Chapter One, I translate the abortion law from Spanish to English and note how personhood is granted to the fetus in revisions to the both the Penal Code in 1998, and soon after the National Constitution that declared that the fetus is a person. I additionally conducted formal/informal interviews with ten total participants over the span of 2018-2019, and my ethnographic approaches are based in community-based research. I used two interview approaches for collecting testimonies: informal interviews (oral history) with five caravaneros and semi-structured interviews with five grassroots organizers who work in three U.S.-based refugee solidarity organizations: the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), Otay Mesa Detention Resistance (OMDR) and the San Diego Migrant and Refugee Coalition (SDMRC). The informal interviews took place in Tijuana in May 2018 and November 2018 at Enclave Caracol, a Lesbian Support Group in Playas, Tijuana and en route to housing shelters in über car rides. I intentionally chose informal interviews while working with caravaneros in order to follow their lead in conversation. The caravan members are anonymous in this study, providing no risk to the subjects. For the semi-structured interviews, the five grassroots, U.S. based activists I interviewed chose the location of the interview so that the setting would be most comfortable for them. Three of these interviews took place in private homes, one in a coffee shop in City Heights, San Diego, and one via the phone while one of the interlocutors was in Chicago. The interviews lasted one to two hours long and were recorded on my TASCAM DR-05 Audio Recorder, and transcribed. I annotated the interview transcriptions to identify common themes across the conversations. The five interviews took place throughout the Spring of 2019. At the conclusion of each interview, each participant received \$25 or \$50, depending on the length of conversation.³⁴ To protect the identity of my participants, I use

³⁴ Compensation was funded by a research grant from the Critical Refugee Studies Collective. <https://criticalrefugeestudies.com/>

pseudonyms that the interlocutors personally chose, and have created composite stories to minimize traceability back to any specific individual. There are a handful of interviewees who chose to use their real name. These interlocutors were selected to represent an intersecting network of people that engage in transnational support and orbit one another in political and humanitarian organizations. OMDR spearheaded the largest donation drive on the U.S. side of the border and enlisted “hormigas” to transport the goods across the border. Hormigas, including myself, Bichita and Alexis were two leaders in delivering food items (Alexis) and providing political solidarity support including attending marches and coordinating rides (Bichita). Gaby, my interlocutor that represents CISPES was largely involved in financial fundraising across the United States.

Capturing Resistance Culture

In focusing on “resistance culture” in San Salvador and the U.S. diaspora, I illustrate how feminist, Salvadoran political culture “creates and transforms individual experiences, everyday life, and interconnected social relations and power.”³⁵ To do this, in addition to ethnographic research, my dissertation looks at social media, legal analysis, and embodied, direct action examples of political protest led by feminist groups in San Salvador. I am interested in theorizing the direct action tactics that organizations like the Citizen’s Group to Decriminalize Abortion³⁶ in San Salvador use including: chaining oneself to the doors of prisons, and mime face painting and political literature/cartoons created by autonomous collectives like Equipo Maíz.³⁷ This Salvadoran resistance culture archive is formulated for those engaged in joint struggles

³⁵“What Is Cultural Studies? – Cultural Studies @ UNC.” Accessed May 15, 2019.

<http://culturalstudies.web.unc.edu/resources-2/what-is-cultural-studies/>.

³⁶ Original in Spanish: Agrupación Ciudadana Por la Despenalización.

³⁷ Literature from Equipo Maíz is featured in Chapter 2 on the privatization of water and use of political cartoons

everywhere. It is also a special call to the U.S. Salvadoran diaspora to be inspired by and learn from Salvadoran political thinkers and activists. In sum, I aim to contribute a Central American perspective on embodied forms of protest against the criminalization of abortion and the privatization of water rights.

The artistic and performative ways in which Salvadoran feminist coalitions protest the ban on abortion, water privatization and other neoliberal reforms in El Salvador focus on embodied action. During my field work in El Salvador in the Summer of 2019, I participated in a commemoration march at the National University of El Salvador (UES) that annually occurs as an homage to the 1975 massacre that I discuss further in the Epilogue; this massacre, it should be noted was one of the first military occupations of a public space and an important, antagonistic precursor to the outbreak of the civil war. Students who were tagged as leftist and Marxist threatened the social order and were thus targeted, maimed and disappeared. While paying homage to an important instance of resistance, the commemoration march also featured current, political issues. As an ethnic studies scholar, I am inspired by embodiment and performance theory to elucidate the important ways Salvadoran feminists utilize culture to spur people to political action. Diana Taylor's preoccupation with embodied enactment as a way of understanding how people manage their lives is useful to my research, because Salvadoran women are not victims of the law. They do not "simply adapt to systems," but also "shape them."³⁸ For example, "LAS 17," a signifier of the fight for women's reproductive justice in El Salvador, referencing seventeen women currently incarcerated who have received international media attention, (the campaign to decriminalize abortion) often performs in front of Ilopango

³⁸ Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Duke University Press, 2003. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822385318>.

prison, chaining themselves to the walls. In a neoliberal state, these activists have appropriated public space as an arena for creative expression.



Image 0.3: A woman at the “Justice for Evelyn” protest is chained to the door of the Salvadoran Ministry of Health. This is a common direct-action technique used by the collective.

Source: Las17.org

Driven by the poetic potential that U.S. queer of color theorist José Esteban Muñoz articulated in the Introduction to his book *Cruising Utopia*, I use cultural studies analyses of embodied protest in order center the world making practices of Salvadorans. Muñoz was methodologically invested in hope as an affect, and in many ways as an attitude of futurity as well – to possess the bravery to look for potentiality as seeking alternative worlds is crucial to queerness. For me, it is not worth looking at a piece of art unless it evokes a longing, a feeling – in other words, how does art move us to imagine alternative worlds, the past, futures, pleasures? Hope is also an affective structure that is crucial to queerness and futurity because it helps us, much in the same way that art potentially can, to see that which is not yet conscious, or the anticipatory illumination of art. Macarena Gómez-Barris, a Chilean queer feminist describes instances of performance art in Latin America and her study of them as informed by Latin

American and Caribbean cultural knowledge formation.³⁹ She references the 1980s and 1990s cultural studies scholars who explored the making of social worlds even in the face of state violence: They “[c]hallenged Marxist orthodox that defined art as epiphenomenal, or of a secondary order to the capitalist economy.” Gómez-Barris describes performance art in public space in Latin America, including LAS 17, to demonstrate how to “deepen our critique by expanding the horizons of possibility, starting within artistic and political imaginaries.” She argues that Latin American cultural studies are concerned with world making and marginal critique of making politics anew.

Trans-Specific Experiences in the Central American Caravan in the U.S./Mexico Border

During my field work in Tijuana, I spoke with a small group of cisgender women from Honduras and El Salvador alongside a local, Tijuana lesbian organization called Lavanda CLIT. Two are trans women, and three women in the group identified as lesbians; two women who identified as lesbian brought their children in their journey to Tijuana from El Salvador. This group of people met in Tapachula, located on the southern border of Mexico in September, and arrived in Playas, Tijuana in early November of 2018. They were part of a group of approximately fifty other LGBT caravaneros who were traveling together and who were actively documenting their journey together and raising funding *en camino*. I attended meetings at enclave caracol with other coalitions to coordinate assistance and legal response, coordinated transportation to different albergues (shelters), created legal clinics, and participated in charlas or group conversations with people who expressed a desire to share their stories. In the small group charlas that I participated in, I identified myself as a lesbian organizer in the U.S. affiliated with

³⁹ Gómez-Barris, Macarena. *Beyond the Pink Tide: Art and Political Undercurrents In the Americas*. American Studies Now: Critical Histories of the Present 7. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018. Pgs. 10-11.

the San Diego Queer and Trans People of Color Collective (SD QTPOCC) and shared that my mom fled El Salvador during the civil war period. I also shared that I am a researcher and student at a university in San Diego and worked intentionally to outsource resources to migrant communities in Tijuana. After asking permission to take written notes on our charla, we sat in a circle -- some on couches, others on fold-out chairs, and the facilitators invited everyone to introduce themselves and share in a few words.

Homonationalism and Post Civil War El Salvador

Postcolonial and queer of color authors who write about homonationalism, the war on terror and subjects considered deviant or abnormal to the state are a helpful canon from and with which to consider trans and queer struggles to affirm sexual and gender diversity in different parts of the world. Twenty years after the War on Terror, and the gendered targeting of Arab and Muslim people, the United States continues to position itself as a warm, benevolent asylum-receiving nation. Numerous scholars in queer of color critique and post-colonialism have pointed to the pink washed American Dream. Pinkwashing refers to the process whereby imperial nations, namely the United States, the UK and Israel, promote diversity and tolerance as central to the social fabric and lived experiences of its citizens. Jasbir Puar in Mapping US Homonormativities theorizes what she calls “homonationalism,” or the divergences between homosexuality and the nation, national identity and nationalism.⁴⁰ Pinkwashing is how the United States promotes itself as a gay-friendly, tolerant and sexually liberated society.⁴¹ I am interested in Puar’s theorization of homonationalism because of the way she discusses the Bin Laden image as feminized, stateless, dark, perverse as a way to understand the anti-terrorist

⁴⁰ Puar, Jasbir K. “Mapping US Homonormativities.” *Gender, Place & Culture* 13, no. 1 (February 1, 2006): 67–88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09663690500531014>.

⁴¹ Osuna, Steven. “Transnational Moral Panic: Neoliberalism and the Spectre of MS-13.” *Race & Class* 61, no. 4 (April 1, 2020): 3–28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396820904304>.

“enemy” of the gang member that the U.S. has generated in popular media. Steven Osuna argues that “the spectre of MS-13 in El Salvador and throughout US cities must be placed within the limits of a Salvadoran revolution, the insertion of the Salvadoran political economy into the global capitalist system in the 1980s, the development of a neoliberal Salvadoran state, and the US sponsoring of law-and-order policies in the country as a response to regulate a relative.”

I believe that U.S. activists and queer activists of color are disrupting the idea that the United States has the safe arrival point or safe haven for queer refugees. They instead join in their fight for asylum not through the notion that they are going to be “saved” because queer of color activists, particularly trans people recognize that the idealization of the U.S. as a safe, receiving nation is a dangerous fallacy. In my field work, I emphasize how LGBT asylum seekers work intimately with diasporic, queer of color activists, a special encounter that speaks volumes to how LGBT people can care for one another. I am inspired by queer of color activists who disrupt U.S. homonationalism by providing an entryway for transnational solidarity with queer, Central American refugees.

INTRODUCTION OF CHAPTERS

In Chapter 1, *¡Aborto Legal Ya! Grassroots Organizing and Political Culture in Post-Civil War El Salvador*, I argue that the child became the invested hope of ideal citizenship in El Salvador, an integral part of “rebuilding” the Salvadoran nation after the death of more than 80,000 people during the civil war. My primary case study in this chapter is the criminalization and incarceration of Salvadoran women who terminated their pregnancy after 1998. I utilize legal analysis of the 1998 penal code that made abortion illegal in all instances and argue that the ratification of the Salvadoran constitution to declare that life begins at conception ideologically conferred personhood to the fetus. El Salvador is one of the few countries in the world where all abortions are illegal and criminalized, even in cases of potential maternal mortality, rape and incest. Moreover, many women living in poverty who miscarry are wrongly accused of aggravated abortion (*aborto agravado*) and prosecuted for murder. Some of these prison sentences run upwards of thirty years in Ilopango prison. Ninety-percent of the women arrested have at least one other living child.⁴² Multiple international entities have pleaded with the Salvadoran government to repeal the 1998 ban on abortion for innumerable reasons, including an all-time high suicide rate: three out of eight of these maternal suicides are pregnant girls under the age nineteen.⁴³ The 1998 ban on abortion has arguably restructured Salvadoran society on a

⁴² Sentenced because of Abortion: A Visit in the Ilopango Women’s Prison, El Salvador. (n.d.). Retrieved June 1, 2018

⁴³ El Salvador pardons woman sent to jail for 30 years after suffering a miscarriage. (n.d.). <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/el-salvador-miscarriage-abortion-strictest-laws-in-world-sonia-t-bora-a7584671.html>

macro level as evident in prison overcrowding⁴⁴ and a shocking rise in clandestine abortion and maternal mortality, increased surveillance within clinics, and family separation⁴⁵.

According to research conducted between 2000 - 2014 by the Salvadoran Citizens Group for Decriminalizing Abortion, more than 350 women were reported to the police for the crime of abortion; 147 of whom were prosecuted. Those arrested were young, poor and single women who had miscarried. Many women testify to anesthetization against their will, and to being arrested while unconscious.⁴⁶ Notably, all of the arrests occurred in public clinics.⁴⁷ This occurred because the 1998 ban mandated clinicians to report women to avoid license removal, and even prison sentencing upwards of six years. A 2006 survey conducted by Agrupación found that more than half of practicing obstetricians (56%) notified the police about a “suspected” unlawful abortion.⁴⁸ The high rate of obstetrician complicity illustrates how public hospitals in San Salvador *became* regulated and surveilled zones that target poor women living in the rural areas of El Salvador. Many Central American feminists argue that the Salvadoran abortion ban blatantly targets women who do not have the class privilege to enter private hospitals or fly abroad for abortion services. Take for example a common chant in rallies across Latino América: *Las ricas abortan, y las pobres se desangran*, (the rich abort, the poor bleed out). This chant calls attention to the class experiences that shape access to abortion. It also illustrates that there

⁴⁴Women Inmates Sow Hope in Prisons in El Salvador — Global Issues. (n.d.). Retrieved November 8, 2016, from <http://www.globalissues.org/news/2015/12/29/21728>

⁴⁵ In Salvadoran women’s prisons, women are allowed to stay with their children under the age of five, afterwards children are forced into resettlement.

⁴⁶<https://www.reproductiverights.org/sites/crr.civicaactions.net/files/documents/El-Salvador-CriminalizationOfAbortion-Report.pdf>

⁴⁷ Soledad, Valeria, (pp. 28), "Persecuted: Political Process and Abortion Legislation in El Salvador: A Human Rights Analysis." The Center for Reproductive Law and Policy (2008): n. pag. Web. 5 Dec. 2015.

⁴⁸ Oberman, M. (2018, January 11). The Consequences of El Salvador’s Abortion Ban. Retrieved June 1, 2018, from <https://www.guernicamag.com/consequences-el-salvadors-abortion-ban/>

are structural forces in place that shape the lived destinies of racialized women; the same single act can be criminalized and simultaneously overlooked all at once. In the latter half of this chapter, I discuss the embodied forms of resistance utilized by Agrupación and argue that their multi-pronged approach to destigmatizing abortion law and pro-life culture are examples of Reproductive Justice.

In Chapter 2, *El Agua No Se Vende: Water and Reproductive Justice in El Salvador and the U.S. Diaspora*, I follow the lead of activists in Central America who argue that the privatization of water is an understudied, neoliberal initiative that contributes to Central American migration. While Central American studies literature focuses on the legacy of U.S. involvement via its proxy involvement in weaponizing the right-wing party during the civil war, I am devoted to characterizing U.S. involvement in El Salvador in a post-civil war context. Simultaneously, I am wary of centering the U.S. as the sole imperial power in the region, and national politics controlled by oligarchic control are responsible for proposing the bill to privatize water during Saca's presidency. In El Salvador generally, water privatization has decreased the available public water sources, and has created a trend of younger and more vulnerable people leaving food-insecure areas, especially in the Dry Corridor, a drought-prone area that crosses El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.⁴⁹ Water that is available is often times unsafe to drink: consider for example that 90% of the surface water in El Salvador are contaminated, and 600,000 Salvadorans in rural villages lack access to clean drinking water⁵⁰.

⁴⁹“New Study Examines Links between Emigration and Food Insecurity in the Dry Corridor of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras | World Food Programme.” Accessed May 6, 2020. <https://www.wfp.org/news/new-study-examines-links-between-emigration-and-food-insecurity-dry-corridor-el-sa>.

⁵⁰“New Study Examines Links between Emigration and Food Insecurity in the Dry Corridor of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras | World Food Programme.” Accessed May 6, 2020.

Drawing from ethnographic field work in El Salvador while on a political delegation with other Salvadorans in the diaspora, I explore how the U.S. Salvadoran diaspora support anti water privatization efforts and learn from the Salvadoran activist's direct-action tactics.

In Chapter 3, *Reproductive Justice and Technologies of Care within the Central American*, I develop the concept "technology of care" to talk about the reproductive labor that caravaneros and asylum seekers create with one another at the U.S./Mexico border. I use the 2018 Central American caravan and political organizing as a case study for the chapter and include ethnographic interviews with asylum seekers (some of whom are LGBT) and participant observation. The impressive food distribution system is a technology of care because it is a systematic method of ensuring the most vulnerable in the encampment groups are prioritized. However, this technology of care is inflected with gendered meaning whereby men are considered the lowest priority, and in communal distribution settings, are often left hungry. Alexis's observation points to the recognition that women and children are indeed the most statistically vulnerable to trafficking. Simultaneously, these gendered forms of care make women and children most legible as needing help, and disregards Central American men as also vulnerable to forms of violence and extortion.

I argue that Reproductive Justice is what I believe to be a form of alternative world making or reproducing one another through technologies of care. In this chapter, I am calling attention to the U.S. government's negligence in handling asylum cases and networks at the border that responded. Through the term technology of care, I explore how organizers assist in coordinating transportation post-detention and provide temporary/long-term housing. I believe

<https://www.wfp.org/news/new-study-examines-links-between-emigration-and-food-insecurity-dry-corridor-el-sa>.

these acts of safety and shelter are issues of the reproductive because they are foundational elements to what constitutes a safe, viable environment.

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Chapter 1

¡Aborto Legal Ya! Grassroots Organizing and Political Culture in Post-Civil War El Salvador

Abortion in El Salvador has been illegal under all circumstances since 1998, even in cases of rape, incest, fetal deformity, or miscarriage. As of April 2015, there were over two hundred women serving abortion related charges in El Salvador, and many were arrested while still under anesthesia in the hospital.⁵¹ A group of seventeen women in particular were charged upwards of thirty years in prison for aggravated murder. Though feminist, grassroots organizing has been a notable presence in the post-civil war political landscape, communal power was consolidated in 2014 around the LAS 17, (The 17) campaign. Created by the advocacy group Agrupación Ciudadana por la Despenalización del Aborto alongside Salvadoran attorneys and previously incarcerated women, Salvadoran social movements continuously work to decriminalize the abortion. Additionally, the organization Agrupación has exonerated several women.

The main arguments of this chapter are that the 1998 criminalization of abortion in El Salvador fundamentally restructured public hospitals into a carceral space, while creating the conditions for a burgeoning, international feminist movement to decriminalize abortion. Working within the tensions of heteropatriarchal state repression and grassroots response, I contribute a Central American perspective on Reproductive Justice that considers abortion rights and prison abolition as mutually linked. There are astoundingly no known cases where women

⁵¹ Lakhani, Nina. "Where the Penalty for Miscarriage Is Jail." *BBC News*, October 18, 2013, sec. Magazine. <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-24532694>.

using private health care services were reported to the police.⁵² This is significant because it illustrates how public hospitals - in the jurisdiction of the Salvadoran government - become regulated and surveilled zones that target women living in rural areas of El Salvador who do not have the class privilege to attend private hospitals. I utilize legal analysis to discuss how personhood was conferred to the fetus in revised language to the 1998 penal code. In order to make this argument, I utilize a mixed-method approach consisting of legal analysis, a CISPES-led conversation with two of the founders of Agrupación, and the resistance culture practices of Agrupación. I highlight the ways in which Salvadoran political activists and feminist collectives, particularly Agrupación Ciudadana Por La Despenalización del Aborto reclaim autonomous power through direct-action tactics that engage their physical bodies. Focusing on embodied, direct action is important because the locations that Agrupación chooses to protest outside of -- including hospitals and jails -- organically locating the sites of power complicit in incarcerating reproductive women. In exposing the carceral spaces that monitor and discipline reproduction, Salvadoran feminists present themselves as an autonomous and united front. I argue that these direct-action techniques that often include performances practices are strategic uses of resistance culture that make discussing abortion easier in the public and private sphere. These performative expressions of resistance that I explore in this chapter include women chaining themselves to prison entrances, writing and painting on their bodies, utilizing graffiti and reclaiming public spaces that are quickly becoming privatized.

To illustrate the breadth of Central American Reproductive Justice concerns about abortion and incarceration, I evoke Maria Teresa Rivera's testimony as one the first LAS 17

⁵² Soledad, Valeria, (pp. 28), "Persecuted: Political Process and Abortion Legislation in El Salvador: A Human Rights Analysis." The Center for Reproductive Law and Policy (2008): n. pag. Web. 5 Dec. 2015.

cases that was popularized in 2016. After suffering a miscarriage, Rivera was accused of “murdering” her child in a toilet and served four years out of a forty-year sentence. Rivera’s testimony is representative of 68% of the arrests that also occurred within Salvadoran public hospitals.⁵³



Image 1.1: Maria Teresa Rivera who served four out of a forty-year prison sentence is pictured holding a sign saying “Justice for one, justice for all: Liberty for Teodora. Teodora del Carmen Vasquez pictured in the black photo collage to the left of Rivera was sentenced to prison for aggravated homicide after suffering a stillbirth at work
Source: Jose Cabezas / Reuters

Maria Teresa Rivera was born into a poor family in a rural village in La Libertad during the Salvadoran civil war and has resiliently persisted in making a living for herself and siblings after her mother disappeared during the war. A sexual assault survivor, Rivera like many campesino women take daily busses into San Salvador to work in clothing and electronic

⁵³ Lakhani, Nina. “El Salvador: Maria Teresa Rivera Jailed and Freed.” Accessed May 17, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/10/el-salvador-maria-teresa-rivera-jailed-freed-161024082718800.html>.

factories. Suspecting she was pregnant because of a missed period; Rivera informed her boss there was a possibility she was pregnant. Rivera miscarried in her second trimester, having never confirmed that she was pregnant in the first place. Maria arrived at the public hospital in La Libertad, after having lost a lot of blood. Before performing the curettage (procedure to remove excess tissue), the gynecologist attempted to coerce Maria into admitting she had an abortion while she was anesthetized. In Maria's testimony, she says:

“I remember that a doctor saw me ... and began to treat me badly and said – ‘Because of what you came for,’ he told me, ‘forget about leaving here and going back home.’ And after I was there for three days, the police officer arrived. ‘...So, you aborted your child?’ – ‘What child?’ I answered him, just like that. – ‘You’re not going to admit that there was a child here that you’ve thrown out? And why didn’t you want it? Maybe the person you are with was treating you badly? ...You’re going to leave here,’ he told me,’ but you’re going straight to jail.”

After being hospitalized for 15 days at San Bartolo National Hospital, Maria was released, arrested then jailed at Cusctancino police station. Maria Teresa Rivera's testimony was one of the first to reach the public domain, particularly as Amnesty International began research in 1999 over the Salvadoran changes in abortion law. She was hospitalized for fifteen days at San Bartolo National Hospital in 2012 and was arrested and placed in Cusctancino police station⁵⁴. Her arrest was based on a criminal complaint filed by the public hospital social worker. The complaint was bureaucratically possible because after 1998, Salvadoran law implemented a penal code that required public hospital staff to report women seeking abortions to the police. As a result of this new provision, many practitioners fear losing their license, and quickly turn over abortion-seeking women to the police.

⁵⁴ Lakhani, Nina. “El Salvador: Maria Teresa Rivera Jailed and Freed.” Accessed May 6, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/10/el-salvador-maria-teresa-rivera-jailed-freed-161024082718800.html>.

Exonerated in 2016 and now an ardent speaker and organizer for Agrupación, Rivera's exoneration and persistent activism (Image 1.1) provides a glimmer of hope because her case was the first to be declared a wrongful conviction, and the state of El Salvador was required to compensate her for psychological damages.⁵⁵ Multiple testimonies from LAS 17 recount being handcuffed while in hospital beds, a new provision of the Salvadoran Penal code that passed in 1998. In this chapter, I argue that reproductive justice in a Central American context necessarily considers the intersections amongst the incarceration of poor women living in rural areas of El Salvador and abortion rights. A vision of Reproductive Justice in Central America, I argue the abortion law created a streamlined criminalization process extending beyond the prison cell to the hospital bed.

The criminalization of mostly miscarrying women is the cataclysm of legal policy targeting women's bodies, their sexuality, and their health. In effect, the state of abortion law in El Salvador creates a collision of violence including lack of access to clinics for fear of incarceration, clandestine abortions, the rise of sterilization, and youth suicide. As the WHO (World Health Organization) has found, these criminal complaints from hospitals are problematic not only because they violate professional confidentiality standards, but also because they have direct repercussions for women that extend beyond the hospital. WHO elaborates that "the fear confidentiality will not be maintained deter many women—particularly adolescents and unmarried women—from seeking health care services."⁵⁶ As such, clandestine abortions become further precarious. The majority of at-home contraception methods involve inserting chemicals

⁵⁵ Lakhani, Nina. "El Salvador: Maria Teresa Rivera Jailed and Freed." Accessed May 17, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/10/el-salvador-maria-teresa-rivera-jailed-freed-161024082718800.html>.

⁵⁶ Grimes, David A, Janie Benson, Susheela Singh, Mariana Romero, Bela Ganatra, Friday E Okonofua, and Iqbal H Shah. "Unsafe Abortion: The Preventable Pandemic." *The Lancet* 368, no. 9550 (November 2006): 1908–19. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(06\)69481-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(06)69481-6).

like agricultural pesticides into the body, drain-o, saline solutions, and other direct extraction methods including hangers and wires. What is also of interest to note is the long-term fertility decline from major increases in contraceptive uses, particularly sterilization. The percentage of women of childbearing age using contraception increased from 47 percent in 1988 to 73 percent in 2008, led by large increases in the use of female sterilization. El Salvador has one of the highest sterilization rates in Latin America and the Caribbean, exceeded only by Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. In addition to clandestine abortions and sterilization, the Ministry of Health accounts suicide as the second leading cause of death for young people aged 10 to 19 years. Devastatingly, 57% of these deaths are pregnant girls aged 10 to 19. This is significant because the criminalization of abortion fundamentally restructures the conditions of life and death - while the fetus is constitutionally protected as human, the living conditions for women and girls are blatantly secondary.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

While researching shared themes in testimonies recorded by Human Rights and Feminist Organizations like Agrupación in El Salvador, I questioned what motivated the draconian ban on abortion, especially because abortion was legal in three instances during the civil war. As a materialist feminist, I wondered if the abortion ban was motivated by the political economy and was exploiting women's labor power while incarcerated. When I learned that some women work on prison farms or in maquiladoras making piñatas, I considered if poor women were being incarcerated and thus transformed into an exploitable labor force in the service of the capitalist state. Their failure to be reproductive, then, was 'compensated for' by their forced productivity. This question of course first requires proving that incarceration leads to wealth accumulation,

and for whom. Considering the cases did not turn a substantial “profit,” I turned to the cultural effects of incarcerating women for multiple decades for miscarrying. In this Chapter, I ask how legislation regarding women’s reproductive health and family planning were connected to El Salvador’s efforts to rebuild its national image and values after the civil war? My focus on racialization, gender, incarceration and reproduction in the context of the all-out ban on abortion shows how in post-civil war El Salvador, the law situated Salvadoran women as suspect to criminality. In addition to questioning state motivation behind incarcerating women who have abortions or miscarry, I turn to the embodied protest that Salvadoran feminist engage to resist the all-out ban on abortion. How does Agrupación utilize direct action and performance-based protest tactics as tools for their social movement work to destigmatize public conversations about abortion?

A Central American Contribution to Biopolitics

I situate my research as a Central American contribution to biopolitics. When I refer to biopolitics, I am committed to theorizing the population management of bare life as best exemplified in Alexander Weheliye’s radical discussion of Michel Foucault’s and Giorgio Agamben’s scholarship. Weheliye argues that Foucault failed to theorize racialization as the prime mechanism for articulating a set of sociopolitical processes that discipline humanity into “full humans, not-quite humans, and nonhumans.”⁵⁷ Biopolitics thus refers to the state’s ability to decide when life begins and when life ends; in this configuration, Foucault relays the state as a

⁵⁷ Weheliye, Alexander G. *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Duke University Press, 2014.

Foucault, Michel. "Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975-76." *Labour History* 86 (1977): 218. Web.

Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998. <http://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=2003>.

coercive apparatus that disciplines certain subjects (in this case, mostly disenfranchised, racialized young mothers) into the ideal national subject.⁵⁸ The law thus becomes a necessary exactor of moral judgement and reproductive decisions, and of stratifying people based on their race, gender and sexuality.

In order to make my argument that El Salvador biopolitically reorganized civil society to control and maintain reproduction, I use a combination of ethnographic and cultural studies methods. I juxtapose ‘established’ legal and policy documents such as the 1998 abortion ban and 1999 Salvadoran Constitution with more ‘ephemeral’ popular media like feminist protest culture in El Salvador and the “pro-life” culture they resist. In tandem, I draw from a CISPES-led group *charla* or conversation with two leaders of Agrupación Ciudadana por la Despenalización del Aborto, Sara García and Yoshi Lopez. My interdisciplinary method of primary sources, ephemeral culture and ethnographic research in San Salvador demonstrate how legal discourse shapes and is shaped by material and popular culture. This is a crucial expansion of the materialist focus of the historical materialists (Marx, Federici, Mies) that I engage in this dissertation. The move to the cultural, particularly embodied protest, is necessary to deal with questions of race, gender and sexuality which a purely economic analysis tends to obscure.

I argue that in post-civil war El Salvador, there was a biopolitical revamping of Salvadoran society after the civil war, and the image of the child became the invested hope of ideal citizenship in El Salvador, an integral part of “rebuilding” the Salvadoran nation after the death of more than 80,000 people during the civil war. The crystallization of the Opus Dei (Right-wing) Catholic church and the rise of the ARENA party provided an opportune environment to change the abortion penal code. Through focusing on the case study of the

⁵⁸ Foucault, Michel. "Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975-76." *Labour History* 86 (1977): 218. Web.

criminalization of abortion, I extend my analysis of biopolitics to consider reproductive freedom in El Salvador. I build on scholarship by women of color legal scholars who discuss why reproductive justice must engage discourses about class positionality, sexuality and racism. I extend their theories to a transnational context (El Salvador) in order to illustrate the streamlined criminalization process that racialized women living in poverty have endured within hospitals and prisons that I explore further in the second half of the dissertation.

Additionally, I argue in post-civil war El Salvador, the focus shifted from managing public populations through death squads, (the right to kill) to an inextricable protection of the fetus. Hospitals became biopolitical spaces where physicians and police officers were endowed with the power to decide if a woman was “suspect” to having an abortion. The shift to consider aggravated murder is significant because it acknowledges the subjectivity and right to the life of a fetus, and therefore considers any potential harm to it, to be murder. What I find most provocative to consider is not only is abortion criminalization a flagrant human rights violation, but also that it literally perceives a woman’s ability to make decisions about her body as a threat to the nation-state. The potential culpability of anyone who helps her (such as a doctor) further stigmatizes her bodily autonomy as murderous.

Additionally, I contribute to materialist feminist conversations about capital accumulation and the gendered (reproductive) body by contributing an analysis of the *racial motivation* to incarcerate mostly poor, single women living in rural areas of El Salvador, a component often elided in European materialist feminism. Materialist feminist Silvia Federici has argued that reproduction is a key arena where biopolitical concern is focused, whereby the state determines when and how the “the mortality rate has to be modified or lowered; life expectancy has to be

increased, and when birth rates must be stimulated, (247).⁵⁹” In *Caliban and the Witch*, Federici argues that the onset of capitalism in the 16th century was supplemented by state control of reproduction because of population decline - population growth was thus encouraged, and abortion was made illegal, and punishable by death. In arguing that the female body is a site of capital accumulation, Federici joins voices such as Lisa Lowe⁶⁰ who argues capital accumulation targets different populations for specific purposes. Oftentimes the production of new labor markets, or even the production of criminalized behavior and populations, such as the new social category “witch” in the mid 18th century required stealing thousands of acres from landholding women, marking their transition from the public to the private in the context of the shift from feudalism to capitalism⁶¹. I am calling attention to how in Post-civil war El Salvador, there was coalescing of Religious, political and economic forces that valued and afforded “rights” to the fetus (rights denied to the mother), because as a not fully-formed person, it represents the moral conscience of a woman’s body and sexuality, and arguably asserts the moral soundness of El Salvador as a culturally Catholic nation.

I relate the production of women as “illegal subjects” in El Salvador to the production of witches described by Federici because Salvadoran prisons warehouse women who would not have been criminalized for their abortions some fifty years prior to 1998. Abortion criminalization, or more generally targeting the reproductive body illustrates that primitive accumulation is not solely regulated to the “shift” from feudalism to capitalism but is rather a violent and ongoing process of body dispossession. Federici elaborates that “at the very moment

⁵⁹ Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation*. New York: Autonomedia, 2004. Print.

⁶⁰ Lowe, Lisa. “Work, Immigration, Gender.” *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, 1997, pp. 354–374., doi:10.1215/9780822382317-016

⁶¹ Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation*. New York: Autonomedia, 2004. Print.

that the population was declining, there was an ideology forming that stressed the centrality of labor and family in economic life, and severe penalties were introduced in the legal codes of Europe to punish women guilty of reproductive crimes.” Population decline was in other words coupled with legal policies that promoted population growth. The criminalized, “witchy” reproductive body at the center of Federici’s scholarship, alongside the method of historical reconstruction, provides a foundation for understanding how criminalized populations are produced through law.

Brief Timeline of the Salvadoran Abortion Law 1950-Present

The United Nations and Amnesty International human rights organizations have investigated the criminalization of abortion in El Salvador since 1998 and have published reports charting the change in abortion law over three major years: 1956, 1973 and 1997. In the 1956 Penal Code in El Salvador, there were no stated exceptions against abortion, and abortion was legal if a pregnant woman’s life was in danger and cases of rape or incest. The United Nations Abortion Policies review reports that in the 1970s, abortion law was expanded because “it was evident that abortion was widespread, and that it contributed significantly to maternal mortality.”

The 1973 penal code was an important precedent in criminalizing women and punished women who sought or attempted abortions from one to four years. Abortion could be legally performed under three circumstances: When the abortion was the only means of saving the life of the mother, cases of rape or statutory rape and finally, serious and foreseeable fetal deformity⁶²The 1998 law stipulated that a woman who induced her own abortion, or sought help

⁶² Soledad, Valeria, (pp. 28), "Persecuted: Political Process and Abortion Legislation in El Salvador: A Human Rights Analysis." The Center for Reproductive Law and Policy (2008): n. pag. Web. 5 Dec. 2015.

from a health worker, would be subject to imprisonment from four-ten years - a notably higher sentence than before by six years.⁶³ In the wake of El Salvador's civil war and the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992, the ARENA Party profoundly changed the Salvadoran abortion law. In the last 1973 ratification, abortion was permitted in three instances: when it was the only way to save a woman's life, when the pregnancy was the result of rape, and when the fetus carried severe abnormalities. Invigorated by the symbolic hope of the Chapultepec Peace Accords of 1992, many Salvadorans in the post-civil war era fought to increase public freedoms by institutionalizing the communist FMLN party. However, the Catholic Church hierarchy and other anti-choice actors lobbied against all exceptions to the 1973 legislation, and quickly took power through financial contributions to the ARENA (right-wing) party. The Catholic Church and oligarchic families were the primary lobbyists from 1992-1996. The Church's doctrine opposing abortion was used by legislators and government officials to support the total ban on abortion. Many ideological campaigns working to "humanize" the fetus and pose abortion as murder were supplemented in this four-year, post-civil war period, including radio campaigns, posters in public spaces and plazas, and public displays of women receiving an ultrasound. In fact, on the day the Legislative Assembly was due to vote on the new Penal Code, a representative from the anti-choice lobby was granted permission to show a graphic, bloody anti-choice film to the Assembly, which worked to not only effectively sway the members, but also drive home the notion that abortion is brutal murder. After a vote just after midnight, Article 139 was revised to remove all exceptions: abortion in 1998 was now illegal in all circumstances.

⁶³ "El Salvador Legislative Assembly Penal Code 10 de Junio, 1997." "Of Crimes Related to Human Life in Formation," *Asamblea Legislativa – Republica de El Salvador*. From the World Health Organization Archive (accessed 24 November 2015).

Grassroots Feminist Response: The Founding of Agrupación Ciudadana Por la Despenalización del Aborto

The interview that I include in this chapter was facilitated by CISPES because they have long-standing relationships with Salvadoran organizers in San Salvador based on mutual aid and trust. Our conversation took place July 24 of 2018 and lasted one-hour total; two CISPES national leaders were our primary translators during our group discussion at *La Casa de Todas (The House of Everyone)*, a community organizing hub in San Salvador that several feminist organizations work out of.

Upon stepping out of our group bus on July 24, 2018, I was greeted by a green banner reading *Voten Aborto Legal* or “Vote for Legal Abortion.” My lips immediately began to curl in a smile, and I respected the audacious declaration of the center’s view on abortion. International supporters in Latin America have utilized the green scarf as an important signifier in political protests around the world. Calling attention to the ninety-seven percent of women across Latin America live in countries that have oppressive anti-abortion laws, the green scarf has become a powerful symbol for radical feminists in Argentina, Ireland, Nicaragua and a growing movement of more⁶⁴.

⁶⁴ Aborto Legal Ya. Accessed May 13, 2020. <https://womensmarch.global/abortolegalya/english/>



Image 1.2: Personal photos taken by the author in San Salvador, July 2018. On the left, an orange trash bin located in San Salvador reads “the penalization of abortion is discrimination against poor women.” On the right, the community center where several feminist groups in El Salvador are located is pictured with a green banner reading “Vote for Legal Abortion.” This green banner is part of an international campaign to decriminalize abortion.

In true Salvadoran hospitality, Yoshi, Sara and a few of the organizers working at La Casa de Todas greeted us with warmth and generosity, and the smell of fresh coffee and coffee cake filled the room. Both Yoshi and Sara García are founders of Agrupación. Because our delegation was a rather large group, it typically took us some time to enter a space, file in and get seated and situated. I came to enjoy these transition moments because it gave me an opportunity to really take in the spaces we were traveling to in order to learn from grassroots activists in El Salvador. While we slowly filed into La Casa de Todas, posters adorned the walls concerning various campaigns related to gender-based violence such as #NiUnaMenos, which is an Argentinian, fourth-wave feminist movement that describes itself as a “collective scream against machista violence. A large desk tucked in the corner with a security guard immediately caught my eye. As I continued to walk further, I encountered a medium-sized placard on the wall in memoriam of a woman named Elda Veraliz Ramos. I made sure to write her name down and

photograph the placard to pay my respects to her at a more intimate time. Upon first seeing the placard, I wondered if Elda's death in 2009 was related to incarceration or the ban on abortion. Elda, I later found was brutally murdered by her husband with a screwdriver and was a prominent feminist organizer in San Salvador⁶⁵. The placard, outlined in royal purple features an image of Elda on the right, with the words "Elda tu recuerdo nos da fuerza e inspira nuestra lucha." In English, this translates to Elda, your memory gives us strength and inspires our fight. To the left, a poem is dedicated to her.

I bring up this memoriam because I think it is indicative of the ways that Salvadoran feminists conceptualize subjectivity and members of the struggle. Rather than just reclaiming their bodies with direct action technique or inhabiting public space such as through the community center, I argue that Salvadoran feminists articulate a fourth wave of feminism grounded in inter-connected subjectivity and struggle.

⁶⁵ Aguilar, Aleksander. "Dêiticos: Elda Ramos, Militante Del Movimiento Feminista En El Salvador, Es Otra Victima Fatal de La Violencia Contra Mujeres." *Dêiticos* (blog), June 23, 2009. <http://deiticos.blogspot.com/2009/06/elida-ramos-militante-del-movimiento.html>.

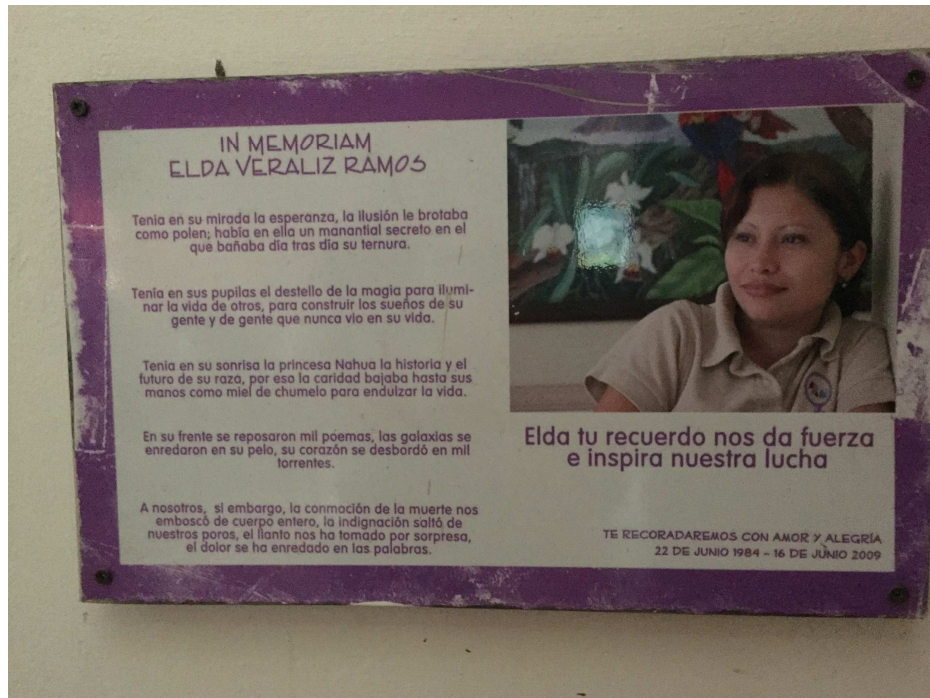


Image 1.3: A medium-sized placard on the wall at La Casa de Todas in memoriam of a woman named Elda Veraliz Ramos. Ramos was brutally murdered by her husband with a screwdriver and was a prominent feminist organizer in San Salvador⁶⁶. The placard, outlined in royal purple features an image of Elda on the right, with the words “Elda tu recuerdo nos da fuerza e inspira nuestra lucha.” In English, this translates to Elda, your memory gives us strength and inspires our fight. To the left, a poem is dedicated to her.

Source: The Author, La Casa de Todas, San Salvador 2018.

Over twenty of us sat in a circle, around a table in a conference room. Bright windows and a sliding door covered the farthest wall, filling the room with light and a view of the small garden on the patio. The yellow curtains were closed to contain the air conditioning machine that turned on and off periodically. In our group conversation or “charla,” CISPES requested for the entire delegation to rotate introducing ourselves at each of our meetings with grassroots activists in San Salvador. We began by going around the room as representatives of the Salvadoran diaspora living in the United States. One by one we introduced ourselves. Sara described her

⁶⁶ Aguilar, Aleksander. “Dêiticos: Elda Ramos, Militante Del Movimiento Feminista En El Salvador, Es Otra Victima Fatal de La Violencia Contra Mujeres.” *Dêiticos* (blog), June 23, 2009. <http://deiticos.blogspot.com/2009/06/elida-ramos-militante-del-movimiento.html>.

work as applying both political pressure and social mobilization. As a feminist organization, she and her comrades routinely work with other Latin American and Caribbean feminists and were planning an international conference for 2020. Sara emphasized that it was important for her to meet with our Radical Roots delegation to “create links of solidarity. One of Agrupación’s other organizers, Yoshi is afro-Latina and works specifically on building alliances and working at the local level in what she describes as four zones of El Salvador including the North, center (San Salvador), west and eastside of the country.

Suspect to Criminality: Central American Reproductive Justice

During our *charla*, Sara García emphasized how women are immediately suspected as criminals with the new abortion law, and the lives of mother’s are blatantly disregarded in hospitals. She passionately asked, “How did we get here [to the point where abortion is banned?] In order to talk about what’s happening right now, we have to follow the specificity of each case, and how they are similar. Cases Beatriz, Teodora, Manuela and Maria Teresa...These are cases of women who have made real life decisions. Instead of receiving medical help, they asked what she did with the fetus. The emphasis was on the child instead of the state of her health. The category of the crime has been changed in order to increase the years of penalty. The crime is no longer just abortion, but aggravated homicide.” Sara’s reflection on the struggles to adapt and move beyond legal challenges is a testament to the mobilization of people in El Salvador, and a number of feminists, international solidarity actions as well. She locates how the Salvadoran state that operates through hospital officials places more emphasis on the fetus instead of providing medical help to women who arrive either in the process of miscarrying or having already miscarried.

The transformation of Salvadoran public hospitals into zones of surveillance where women are suspected of criminality is possible because of a new Article 135 that was added to the 1998 abortion law. Translated below, Article 135 illustrates how the law creates a culture of surveillance and fear, where women are literally being arrested while under anesthesia in hospitals and taken from hospital beds to the prison cell^[6]. Previously in relationship to doctors who encourage women to have an abortion, the 1973 the penal code called for a punishment of incarceration for up to 4 years; yet in Article 135, the sentencing is raised to ten years, and applies to doctors who coerce or encourage women into having an abortion. In the primary document under Article 135 on aggravated murder, it states that practitioners or anyone who assists in the abortion will serve from six to twelve years, and also threatens to suspend people from practicing for the same period.

Article 135: If the abortion is committed by a doctor, pharmacist or by people that are tangentially involved in these activities by the aforementioned professions, when they devote themselves to such practice, they will be punished with imprisonment from six to twelve years. In addition, they will impose the penalty, and disqualify the subject from the exercise of the profession or activity for the same period of time.

Article 135 creates higher stakes for hospitals and medical staff who are few of existing abortion resources in El Salvador. As a result, hospitals are transformed into biopolitical spaces.

Criminalizing self-abortion while removing the resource of hospitals and clinics is an insidious legislative change that is invested in protecting the abstract life of a fetus over the woman.

FEMINIST, CULTURAL RESISTANCE IN EL SALVADOR

Breaking Silence in Public Cultural Discourse About Abortion

Agrupación has tackled the criminalization of abortion through several legal, cultural and grassroots responses. When I refer to cultural, I am referring specifically to how Catholicism

shapes national ideologies about reproduction and abortion in El Salvador; this is most evident in examples when Salvadoran pro-life legislators have reinforced that life begins at conception on multiple scales: in public spaces, within women's bodies, and corroborated by law. I therefore understand culture in this chapter as the ways in which the law shapes lived experiences.

I would like to emphasize Agrupación's use of the Reproductive Justice frameworks of coalitional politics and solidarity building with other Latin American and Caribbean countries. Their organizing work has included legal reform, direct action protests and international solidarity campaigns (first conceptualized as LAS 17). The result of Agrupación's organizing is a radical counter-cultural response to both Constitutional changes that declared life begins at conception and the ideological manifestations of that, including performing ultrasounds in public to reinforce the humanization of the fetus and procure guilt and shame. Agrupación's political work has forcibly brought abortion into the public sphere through their direct action, and in doing so destigmatized abortion and it is now publicly discussed more than it ever has been before. The physical presence that Agrupación has in El Salvador should not be understated given the high rates of femicide and multiple forms of violence against transgender and cisgender women. Yoshi in our interview commented on the multi-pronged approach that Agrupación has and their role in changing the cultural, pro-life discourse in law and cultural forms in El Salvador. Yoshi relays their collective progress as a result of the accumulated force of social mobilization, activism and connecting with other key factors such as the ministry of health. For the first time in twenty years, Salvadoran legislators and citizens were able to debate the issue of abortion criminalization in the legislative assembly. It should be noted that there continue to be enhanced criminalization proposals to the abortion law, and Agrupación's must retain both a defensive and offensive approach in their organizing tactics.

“Before the accumulation of this civil mobilization, there was a proposal from a right-wing legislator called Ricardo Velazquez Parker who proposed that instead of 8 years for abortion, that penalty should be increased to 15 years of prison time. In order to achieve law reform, the current party in government and other legislators including Lorena Peña [of the FMLN party] proposed a reform to the law. *There has been an intense struggle to keep this issue of the criminalization of abortion in public discourse and push the demands on this issue as demands of a civil society.* International solidarity and support were incredibly important for us to make this proposal. For the past two years [2016-2018], we have been working to push forward this proposal, and there has been a lot of civil organizing and direct action. Many politicians are now forced to talk about abortion. We got to the point where a politician couldn’t go on television without being asked about abortion. [CISPES delegation laughs]. You could be eating soup in your house listening to politicians be questioned about abortion [laughter grows louder]. The mobilization in the past two years is tremendous and international solidarity has a major impact on media pressure.”

The Secular and the Sacred: Constitution Declares Life at Conception

I aim to identify the cultural work the Salvadoran feminists enact on a daily basis to destigmatize abortion both through decriminalization on the legal level, and their direct-action protest against pro-life culture in el Salvador. I identify “pro-life” culture as the heteropatriarchal assumptions of Catholicism that dictate, restrain and punish women and gender nonconforming bodies. The material examples I provide below of 1.) changing the constitution to declare life begins at conception that supplemented the 1998 law shows the ways in which law structures and shapes death and 2.) performing ultrasounds in public show how the latter informs our realities. I am methodologically inspired by the ways in which the political economy, material culture, the

secular and the sacred shape the conditions by which life is lived. Through the use of these two examples, it becomes clear that El Salvador launched multiple regional and national efforts to ideologically ban abortion, such as changing the Constitution in 1998 to declare that life begins from conception.

The 1998 abortion penal code that made abortion tantamount to aggravated murder provided the pretext to change the Salvadoran National Constitution that decided life begins at conception. To substantiate consider *Persecuted: Political Process and Abortion Legislation in El Salvador* by Valeria Soledad. Soledad examines the political process leading up to the adoption of the new Penal Code in April 1997; in her fieldwork, she notes that at the time the penal code was debated upon, gruesome images of aborted fetuses were used. I argue that these images work to affectively solidify the idea that abortion is murder. These visual supplements were meant to corroborate the change in the actual language of the bill that suggested abortion was a crime against “the unborn.” Such images of aborted fetuses that are meant to shame and terrify were utilized in pro-life (*pro-vida*) rallies in El Salvador from 1992 onwards as well.

There are multiple video examples of pro-life demonstrations where people literally give ultrasounds outside to show a baby’s heartbeat.



Image 1.4: “Protesta pro-vida⁶⁷” In a pro-life protest in El Salvador, a woman is laying down in the center of a group of people on a hospital gurney. A doting nurse performs an ultrasound at the protest while another woman holds up a microphone so the crowd can hear the heartbeat.

Source: YouTube

On a similar national and cultural level, both the archbishop of El Salvador and the pro-life organization, *Fundación a La Vida* backed an initiative in 1993 to change the national holiday “Day of the Innocents” to “Day of the Unborn;” It is notable that “Day of the Innocents” or *Día De Los Inocentes* commemorates children killed under two years old by the biblical King Herod. I evoke the overtly Catholic and nationalist oriented ideologies that underpin the proposition to change the national holiday for a few reasons. One, it shows that ideologically, changing the language of this holiday to day of the “unborn” reframes this national holiday to shame people who terminate their pregnancy. The changes to the Salvadoran Constitution in English: “El Salvador recognizes human beings, from the moment they are conceived, as the

⁶⁷ *PROTESTA PRO-VIDA*. Accessed May 17, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f20SOOs9wuc>.

basis and the end goal of activity by the State, which is organized to attain justice, legal certainty, and the common good.⁶⁸” In this passage, the language declares human beings are the “basis and end goal of activity by the State,” meaning the state will protect life from conception. Moreover, the language of “justice and legal certainty” suggests that the Salvadoran state knows what is best for the “common good.” Aside from the rather obvious biopolitical implications of this passage that assumes state sovereignty, a question that beckons are who are the “commons” in this configuration? What exactly is deemed “illegal” here, and who is protected through “justice?” Clothed in political newspeak, the language used in the Salvadoran constitution very blatantly claims it will protect the notion that life begins at conception as the basis and end goal prerogative of the state; the change to the constitution is an example of how state projects require multiple cultural outlets to justify incarceration.

Furthermore, a second example whereby pro-life, fundamentalist advocates in El Salvador have manipulated public emotion is best explained by Yoshi. The fundamentalist group “Sí a la Vida” (Yes to Life) has notoriously used graphic images while legislation regarding reproduction is discussed. Yoshi relays, “It got to the point where legislators were actually going to be able to vote to move the proposal out of the commission. Fundamentalist groups like “sí a la vida” began putting pressure on legislators. For example, one of the pro-life groups gathered a number of youths to go in front to the assembly and held signs saying, “Our Mom chose Life”. Many of these youth were between fifteen and seventeen years old.

What I am arguing is the result of the tireless efforts of Agrupación has been a shift in popular culture, and in the way that abortion is talked about. In contradiction to the time the

⁶⁸ Soledad, Valeria, (pp. 28), "Persecuted: Political Process and Abortion Legislation in El Salvador: A Human Rights Analysis." The Center for Reproductive Law and Policy (2008): n. pag. Web. 5 Dec. 2015.

abortion law was debated, allowed to be on the legislative assembly floor showing pro-life propaganda. I argue that LAS 17 uses culture as part of their political work in San Salvador. In staging protests outside of the prison where women are incarcerated or the health ministry, they organically locate sites of power while reclaiming their embodiment in public space. A cultural studies analysis is attentive to the way that these women and activists use culture as a form of resistance. Shelley Streeby in her book *Radical Sensations* argues that “visual culture moves people to participate in projects of social, political, and economic transformation,” and is useful in considering the material effect of direct-action protest. In her historical reading of radicals in the early 20th century, The many displaced people, migrants, and aliens who comprised a substantial part of these movements thereby called into question the inevitability of the nation as the horizon for utopian hopes for justice, freedom, and revolution, and appealed to sympathies and solidarities that extended beyond it⁶⁹.

Miming Direct Action and Embodied Protest

In April of 2014, La Agrupación staged a protest outside of Ilopango state prison, east of San Salvador. At the protest outside of Ilopango prison, there are multiple photos and reports of protestors painting their faces white, painting their lips bright, deep red, and wearing heavy black eyeliner. The effect? The protestors resemble mimes, entertainers who mimic the actions of people, and refrain all together from speaking. Silence and gesticular replication are key characteristics of a mime. Mimes are a category of performance art, whereby the performer silently acts out a comedic scene. Mimes also tend to mimic what a speaking person is doing, functioning as a performative mirror in some regards. On the other hand, the black and white

⁶⁹ Streeby, Shelley. *Radical Sensations: World Movements, Violence, and Visual Culture*. Duke University Press, 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822395546>.

face painting, particularly the black circles around the eyes, could signify a calavera - or skeleton. A skeleton would on the surface allude to death and morbidity. Yet because all of the young women are sharing the same face paint, it sends the message that there is a shared sense of fate or identification with death. Unlike the state that monitors and surveys potential threats to the state, the painted masks revert the potential gaze of the state through emphasizing shared anonymity. It is difficult to “make out” who the person *is*, nevertheless, what the person’s face truly looks like as it is distorted by the painted mask. Select masks portray different emotions: the second person from the left in the photo on the next page, for example, has four black tears dripping from their mask, while others simply wear black eyeliner and bright red lipstick.

The appropriation of mime imagery by demonstrators can be understood as *representation as resistance*, offering a platform of shared unity; if you can mimic the movement of the person next to you, this symbolically signifies that our actions can be learned and replicated, that perhaps the actions we find so unique to us, as articulating a unique subjectivity, are actually shaped by one’s environment. Might the demonstrators be calling attention to the systemic silencing of Salvadoran women through their appropriation of the silent mime? The mimes’ shared anonymity refuses to give a “face” to the movement, but instead works on shared struggle, shared faces, shared gestures, shared action.



Image 1.5: Women a part of “LAS 17” host an embodied performance and protest outside of Ilopango State Prison. In November 2015, women in El Salvador marched for the freedom of 17 women accused of abortion, including Carmen Guadalupe Vasquez Aldana. She was pardoned in 2015.

Source⁷⁰: Luis Galdamez/Xinhua /Landov

Additionally, I argue that there is an emergent theme of self-communal identification and shared anonymity that defines the political strategies of Salvadoran grassroots organizers working against the abortion ban. For example, in the image above, a Salvadoran woman is chained to a door, performing the role of a prisoner indebted to a negative fate. Yet the chaining of self also suggests reclaimed agency, as the subject willingly chained herself. The chaining of self, the black bandana that obscures her face, are all political acts that suggest a continuity of identification. These counter-cultural resistance examples are objects of knowledge that provide on-the-ground understandings of resistance practices in San Salvador that the U.S. diaspora can learn from.

⁷⁰ “30-Year Sentence Lifted For Woman In El Salvador Abortion Case : Goats and Soda : NPR.” Accessed May 17, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2015/01/22/379138247/30-year-sentence-lifted-for-woman-in-el-salvador-abortion-case>.



Image 1.6: LAS 17 protestors wear mime face paint as a part of their cultural repertoire.
Source: LAS17.org

CONCLUSION

The blanket ban on abortion is not unique to El Salvador, but is rather spread across Central America including Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Guatemala⁷¹. El Salvador is one of the few countries in the world where all abortions are illegal and criminalized, even in cases of potential maternal mortality, rape and incest. Moreover, many women living in poverty who miscarry are wrongly accused of aggravated abortion (*aborto agravado*) and prosecuted for murder. Some of these prison sentences run upwards of thirty years in Ilopango prison. Ninety percent of the women arrested have at least one other living child⁷².

⁷¹ Kulczycki, Andrzej. "Abortion in Latin America: Changes in Practice, Growing Conflict, and Recent Policy Developments." *Studies in Family Planning* 42, no. 3 (2011): 199-220. Accessed May 17, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/41310730.

⁷² Sentenced because of Abortion: A Visit in the Ilopango Women's Prison, El Salvador. (n.d.). Retrieved June 1, 2018

As a result of the ban, grassroots organizations responded with political protests, performance demonstrations, and devoted community organizing amongst families, lawyers and activists. Margarita Velado was one of the few FMLN members to speak out against the 1998 bill. After the ban was passed, in an interview with *La Prensa Gráfica*, she boldly stated: “With or without laws, women have always had abortions. The situation is such that they will continue to have abortions. This law creates the condition under which women will continue to die.”⁷³ Upon first reading Velado’s statement after the ban on abortion, I was intrigued by her insinuation that the law created not only new crimes, but also facilitated premature death and incarceration.

In this chapter, I approached the criminalization of abortion by using Reproductive Justice - a coalitional politic that illustrates the continuity between incarceration and reproduction. In illustrating how right-wing, pro-life groups utilize popular culture in order to ideologically argue that abortion is tantamount to murder, I move to discuss the embodied resistance practices of Agrupación because they are changing the public tide; abortion is now more discussed on public media outlets, especially Television, more than it ever has before in El Salvador. This is a testament to the tireless organizing efforts of Agrupación and the feminist, international solidarity that began with LAS 17.

⁷³ Alvarez, Jonathan. “The Case of Beatriz: An Outcry to Amend El Salvador’s Abortion Ban,” n.d., 29.

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Chapter 2

El Agua No Se Vende:

Water and Reproductive Justice in El Salvador and the U.S. Diaspora⁷⁴

In 2018, I was fortunate to attend the *Radical Roots* delegation with CISPES, which has supported anti water privatization struggles in El Salvador since the mid 2000's. On July 29th of that year, our delegation visited Tacuba and the recently released water defenders. Central American water defenders refer to local leaders who collaborate and organize to protect private resources like water and natural minerals from powerful economic and business interests. The term "water defenders" in the context of the U.S. diaspora became popularized after the murder of Berta Cáceres in 2016, a water defender from Honduras. She was an Indigenous leader in her community, and founder of the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH). Berta is part of a wave of Central American environmental defenders killed from 2010-2020, and some research suggests that three-quarters of the environmental defenders killed annually are in Central and South America.⁷⁵ Since the early 2000's, Indigenous water defenders in El Salvador are rising fearlessly to the challenge of defending their natural resources.

Nestled in the Ahuachapán department in El Salvador is the predominantly Indigenous Pipil Territory of Tacuba, an intergenerational community that had witnessed various epochs of oligarchic and imperial control including Spanish colonization and American genocide in 1932. Marked by a history of resistance and important spiritual knowledge,⁷⁶ Tacuba residents are

⁷⁴ English Translation: "Water is Not For Sale."

⁷⁵ New Security Beat. "Environmental Defenders Are Being Murdered at an Unprecedented Rate, Says UN Special Rapporteur." Accessed May 14, 2020. <https://www.newsecuritybeat.org/2016/12/environmental-defenders-murdered-unprecedented-rate-special-rapporteur/>.

⁷⁶ North Tacuba for example - Tamopán -- is revered as a sacred place where corn was cultivated, a process of transformation that endured 7,000 years. El bosque espiritual (the spiritual forest) also resides in Tacuba, and is at risk of commercialization.

embroiled in the fight against water privatization in El Salvador--the neoliberal efforts to make water a privatized commodity, which has been a prominent issue in the last twenty years in El Salvador due to foreign, mainly US, business interest. Described as a “water war” by Hilary Goodfriend, these struggles refer to the fight over ownership of a potable water system in Tacuba, El Salvador in 2005, when Tacuba community members responded to the state’s failure to provide clean water by creating their own well system.⁷⁷ The mayor of Tacuba is indicting the Indigenous leaders of Tacuba, criminalizing them for purportedly stealing government property to build the water system.

Our early morning drive from our hostel in San Salvador to Tacuba followed a winding road up into the rolling green mountains, framed by volcanoes, punctuated by humidity and vibrant forest. “This forest is impossible...I always forget how different tropical forests feel from the arid pine I’m used to in California.” I said this observation out loud, not sure if anyone was awake to hear me; my eyes struggled to maintain contact with the fast-moving river running alongside the freeway. My newfound compañera laughed with eyes closed and responded, “We’re literally surrounded by El parque nacional el imposible.” I nodded in silent agreement. While some of my compañeras were lulled to sleep by the winding road, I gazed out onto the landscape and imagined all the lives my mother and I could have lived in this place - *entre realidad e imaginación*.

Yesi Portillo, the East Coast Regional Coordinator of CISPES and key translator who maintains active connections with social activists in El Salvador, rose from her seat alongside Sam, the other co-leader of our delegation, and grabbed the wired-in microphone. Everyone on the bus perked their heads up immediately at the sound of her voice. She explained that we were

⁷⁷ NACLA. “Water Wars in El Salvador: Tacuba Resists.” Accessed May 14, 2020. <https://nacla.org/news/2017/09/01/water-wars-el-salvador-tacuba-resists>.

going to pick up Karen Ramírez, a leader from Foro del Agua. We would then make our way to the Tacuba Cultural center to be welcomed by the community leaders and would have the honor of sharing a meal with some of the water defenders and community members of Tacuba while listening to their firsthand testimonies. I recalled that the delegation leaders had requested that we read an article from *Equipo Maíz*, an autonomous leftist publication, and a media sheet about the current state of water privatization. I braced myself for another inspiring and heavy day, and quickly re-scanned the sheet.

When Karen stepped onto the bus, the hot air crept in instantaneously. “Buenas tardes mi gente del diáspora!” Karen sang into the bus microphone. We sang back, “Buenas taaaaaardes!” She carried a white binder with papers peeking out from the corners, and warmly hugged the two delegation leaders at the head of the bus. With bright eyes and tangible enthusiasm, she introduced herself, her political affiliations, and then gave us background context to the water privatization struggle in Tacuba. Though the privatization of water are “wars” often fought on Indigenous territories in El Salvador, the potential privatization would affect the nation as a whole and would determine access to water by class status and by the place of residence, whether urban or areas of El Salvador. This is to say that the social and material relationship that people in El Salvador have to water is geopolitically specific

CONDUCTING ACTION RESEARCH IN TACUBA

This chapter is based on interdisciplinary sources culled from my stay in El Salvador, including primary sources published by grassroots organizations in San Salvador such as *La Página de Maíz*, a monthly periodical alongside Foro del Agua and Alianza Contra la Privatización, and action research with organizations that support water defenders. I rely on

primary sources from political thinkers, educators and activists in El Salvador in order to understand how Salvadoran activists organize to keep water a resource controlled by community need rather than corporate greed. This chapter also draws from a CISPES-led group interview with the water defenders and Tacuba community members. I use the word “charla,” which is Spanish for “conversation,” to describe the group interview with Tacuba water defenders in order to refer to the way in which water defenders leverage storytelling as central to their political practice. *Charla* in my eyes suggests a mutual exchange between the participants, where we - as twenty-three members of the Salvadoran diaspora - offer active solidarity and listening and water defenders can build their own international awareness. Two women from CISPES - Sam and Yesi -- translated the entire conversation. We followed a similar translation formula where the speakers would speak for 1-2 sentences in Spanish, and the translators would immediately translate to English. Translators used notebooks and assisted one another in providing the translations. Karen Ramirez and two men from Tacuba who are anonymous also helped lead the conversation. I was recording the testimonies on my personal TASCAM DR-05 Recorder. In order to protect the privacy of the Tacuba residents, all names are withheld. Finally, I draw extensively from personal interviews with two U.S.-based organizers: Yesi Portillo, the East Coast Coordinator and National leader for CISPES, and Alexis Meza, who is part of the San Diego Migrant and Refugee Coalition, and who had previously attended an environmental diplomado in El Salvador concerning water privatization.

Over the course of our delegation, we had several charlas, one of which I featured in Chapter 1 with the Citizen’s Group to Decriminalize abortion. All of our group charlas were conducted and made possible through the line by line translation that various delegation leaders

provided throughout the trip. When our delegation of twenty-three people arrived at the centralized community center in Tacuba, we sat in folding chairs in a series of rows.



Image 2.1: This photo features all twenty-three members of the 2018 CISPES Radical Roots Delegation and members of the Tacuba community. We are having lunch prepared by Tacuba women including beans, tortillas and *queso fresco*. Pictured in the center of this photo is a water tank that reads “sistema de agua 7 comunidades” or water system of seven communities. This is an example of the collaborative effort required to build the potable water system.

Source: Photo Property of CISPES, July 2018.

People who understood Spanish sat on one side of the room, whereas those who needed more translation assistance sat on another side with the delegation leaders. I chose to sit on the side of the Spanish speaking room because I wanted to immerse in the experience of listening, speaking and taking notes in Spanish. After being seated, we were informed that we had extra time, and many of us began to say hello and introduce ourselves while walking around the space. We were all given atol, which is a sacred corn-based beverage. The atmosphere of the room felt filled with knowledge that was sacred and important. We listened to an hour-long presentation about Indigenous history and resistance in Ahuachapán, covering topics like Spanish colonialism, violent removal and cultural revitalizations. The Tacuba Indigenous leaders

instructed us that Spanish colonization dates to the 1800s when lands were converted into *cafetales* (coffee plantations). They maintained that there were three forms of genocide against Indigenous people in El Salvador or “tres formas de genocidio”: Physical Elimination through massacres like the Indigenous uprisings in 1833, massacres in 1932 and the las ojás massacre in 1983. The second facet of genocide is Subjugation through banning the donning of Indigenous textiles and clothing, suppressing Indigenous language, and colonization through religion and normative views of sexuality and gender. The Indigenous leaders, throughout their presentation, stressed the importance of autonomy in balancing out the years of state targeting. Finally, the third form of genocide that Indigenous Tacuba leaders conceptualize as ongoing is cultural genocide. Though a U.S. ethnic studies framework might assume that cultural genocide refers to the tenets mentioned in subjugation, cultural genocide is instead described as the racial separation institutionalized by colonialism, which relegated indios and communists as the lowest, los mulatos in the middle, and los blancos as the most privileged. This one-hour presentation overall emphasized cultural identity and celebration of culture. Members of Tacuba are active producers and conservers of local epistemologies and create their own map systems that locate regional water sources. In addition to their own literature and recording of their community, Tacuba as a community are producers of corn, regularly have dances and “fiestas patronales.”

During the second half of the day, we loaded onto the bus once more - all of us even more pensive than when we first arrived - and briefly traveled to a small community's land in Tacuba to meet with the water defenders. We unloaded from the bus and walked to a covered yet open-air brick building. Next to the brick building was a sprawling plot of corn, swaying effortlessly in the sunshine. The moment itself felt magical after learning about how the Maya manipulated corn genomes to make it more edible and plentiful. After we had our group charla,

two women cooked an entire meal to feed all twenty-three of us, in addition to the community members who had attended.



Image 2.2: From left to right, this photo collage includes three images from the Radical Roots charla with water defenders in Tacuba. Notes from the community center lecture on PLAN DE VIDA, an Indigenous epistemology that conceptualizes how to ensure the revitalization of Indigenous cultures in El Salvador, is visible. In front of my handwritten notes, I hold a coconut shell filled with the sacred *atol de elote* (corn *atoll*) drink that was served at the Tacuba community center. On the right side, the Tacuba water tank is featured atop of an image including nine water defenders who were incarcerated in 2018.

Source: the Author

THE WATER CRISIS IN EL SALVADOR

In this section, I trace the rise of the water crisis in El Salvador that accelerated in the late 1990's and early 2000's. The water privatization efforts would not have been possible without the creation in 1961 of ANDA, the Administración Nacional de Acueductos y Alcantarillados, or the National Administration of Aqueducts and Sewers. Up until the 1960s, potable water services in El Salvador were operated by municipal governments.⁷⁸ By law, all water, sewerage systems, and easements belonging to the state, municipalities, and autonomous institutions, as well as property registered on behalf of departmental development boards, were transferred to the jurisdiction of ANDA⁷⁹.

The water crisis in El Salvador is driven in large part by the World Bank and the International Development Bank (IDB) that pushed the Salvadoran government to adopt water privatization. In the 1990s, ANDA was subjected to a so-called modernization program financed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the World Bank. This program decentralized water jurisdiction and sought to establish an internal market of water in which water rights would be reduced to a business transaction (Moreno 2005). These reforms aimed at “reducing the powers and functions of the state by promoting the liberalization and openness of the economy, and the privatization or mercantilization of state assets and the public sector services,” such as pension services, healthcare, and water (Arias 2008; Ibarra 2001; Moreno 2005). Therefore, the efforts to privatize water should be contextualized within the movement to privatize other public sector services as well. Water privatization refers to decentralizing ANDA, the state entity that oversees sewage, water and aqueducts to be controlled both by local

⁷⁸ De Burgos, Hugo. “La Pila de San Juan: Historic Transformations of Water as a Public Symbol in Suchitoto, El Salvador.” In *The Social Life of Water*, edited by John Richard Wagner, 1st ed., 98–118. Berghahn Books, 2013. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qd1nk.12>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

governments and makes local water sources, which will be available for purchase as a commodity. With the coupling of DR-CAFTA in 2005 and free movement of multinational corporations, both U.S. and countries like Australia and Canada turned their efforts to Central America for access to raw materials.

Public protest against water privatization increased dramatically in El Salvador from 2006, when former President Tony Saca's ARENA (The National Republican Alliance) party proposed a new General Water Law. The law, not yet passed, would "decentralize water administration from the national to municipal levels where local governments would have to contract private firms to manage water for up to 50 years. Civil society groups in the country continue to argue that this is tantamount to privatization"⁸⁰.

In El Salvador generally, water privatization has decreased the available public water sources, and created a trend of younger and more vulnerable people leaving food-insecure areas, especially in the Dry Corridor, a drought-prone area that crosses El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Residents that live in the Dry Corridor and do have access to some rivers, such as the Paz River, still are not able to sustain their crops because dwindling freshwater has increased the salinity of El Aguacate, hurting the soil for agricultural production. Additionally, water that is available is oftentimes unsafe to drink: consider, for example, that 90% of the surface water in El Salvador is contaminated, and 600,000 Salvadorans in rural villages lack access to clean drinking water.

The second half of this section details the pushback efforts from the water defenders. In 1995, in response to the Salvadoran government's failure to provide clean water to Tacuba residents, the community organized a fund to build their own potable well system that would

⁸⁰ The Violence of Development. "Water Privatization Protests in El Salvador," January 3, 2015. <https://theviolenceofdevelopment.com/water-privatisation-protests-in-el-salvador/>.

support seven local communities, called “Sistema de agua 7 comunidades,” or the “water system of seven communities.” It should be noted that Tacuba is not the first nor last municipality in which water well systems are neglected by city infrastructure. In our CISPES-led charla with the water defenders in Tacuba, one of the water defenders referred to building the water system as a sacred and collaborative effort. He said the water system was built atop the mountains and took ninety-six days to complete: “We call it the ninety-six sacred days; we walked eighteen kilometers from here to the mountain where the fountain was in order to create this water system. We constructed the system and founded a community board in 1996 and this directors board was made in order to administer the system and manage any legal issues. They took over this board of directors in 2007 and we protested and challenged these corrupt directors [referring to the local municipality].” Considering his use of the word *sagrado* and the ways Indigenous leaders organize maps of Tacuba around water resources, one can begin to sense the sacredness with which Indigenous Salvadorans regard water. The long journey required to reach a high elevation water source emphasizes the process of making water accessible to all rather than the privileged few.

WATER RIGHTS, INDIGENOUS RIGHTS, AND REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

As discussed in the Introduction, the way I conceptualize reproductive justice recognizes the importance of linking reproductive health and rights to other social justice issues such as poverty, economic injustice, welfare reform, housing, prisoners’ rights, environmental justice, immigration policy, drug policies, and violence. The movement’s three core values are: “the right to have an abortion, the right to have children, and the right to parent those children.

Importantly, women must be able to freely exercise these rights without *coercion*.⁸¹ In this chapter, I argue that water privatization in El Salvador constitutes a Reproductive Justice concern because safe access to water is critical to the health and bienestar (wellbeing) of a community.

My field work in Tacuba and my lived experience in El Salvador generally emphasize how water is at the center of the social and cultural life of Salvadorans. Fluctuating gender and class meanings about water are central to the history of the postcolonial period in El Salvador. My interviews indicate that water is central to the domestic and familial tasks that Salvadoran women execute in their daily life as caretakers of the home. In the following quote, Yesi connects access to water and women's decision to reproduce or not:

“If we're talking about traditional gender roles in El Salvador, it is women identified folks who mother and take on all of the house care-taking responsibilities, and women are the ones who bear the brunt of the consequences of lack of access to water because they need water to cook, do laundry, they need water to do everything. It's women who go and fetch the water. And if they are unable to get access to water, how can they even think about the possibility of having more children? People don't have the choice to say “I can't provide for my family because I don't have access to clean water and so therefore I choose to not have this child.” It's like a rock and a hard place. In a country that does not allow pregnant people to make that decision in the first place, and let's not even talk about trans folks who get pregnant who don't identify as women and not having the possibility of raising a family without the threat of transphobia that could come for you and your children.”

The gendered dimensions of water fetching in Yesi's reflection organically illustrate that water, in addition to its status as vital to life, adopts cultural and social meaning.⁸² Previous scholarship on the social and cultural dimensions of water in El Salvador points to the

⁸¹ Price, Kimala. “What Is Reproductive Justice? How Women of Color Activists Are Redefining the Pro-Choice Paradigm.” *Meridians* 10, no. 2 (March 1, 2010): 42–65. <https://doi.org/10.2979/meridians.2010.10.2.42>.

⁸² “As a substance that is literally essential to all living organisms, water is, nevertheless, also culturally experienced and embodied.”. Strang, Veronica. 2004. *The Meaning of Water*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.

colonial/class relations of water in El Salvador that were largely restructured after Spanish colonization. Theorists write what Native people have always known: there is a social life to water.⁸³ The postcolonial period comprised the centralization of water via the creation of pilas. In this article, the author also shows how the introduction of novel water technology in Suchitoto in the nineteenth century fundamentally transformed people’s understanding of and engagement with water in that community vis-a-vis La Pila de San Juan.⁸⁴

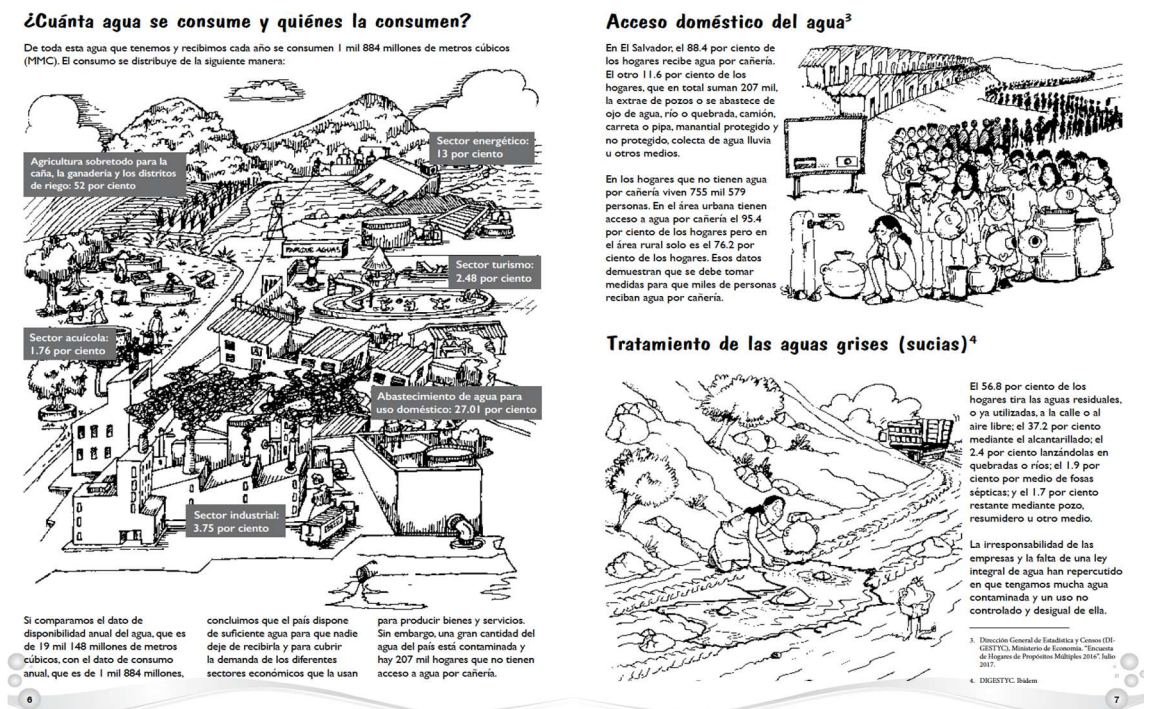


Image 2.3: This primary document is from an excerpt from a booklet detailing the social and material impacts of water privatization. I argue this is evidence of how grassroots organizations make information accessible by using comic media (thus addressing illiteracy). Source: the “El Agua Es Vida Interactiva” Booklet created by Salvadoran based organizations *Foro Del Agua El Salvador* y *Alianza Contra La Privatización*.

⁸³ De Burgos, Hugo. “La Pila de San Juan: Historic Transformations of Water as a Public Symbol in Suchitoto, El Salvador.” In *The Social Life of Water*, edited by John Richard Wagner, 1st ed., 98–118. Berghahn Books, 2013. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qd1nk.12>.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

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La página de

A derrotar el intento oligárquico de privatizar el agua

Los oligarcas así como las y los diputados de derecha dicen que no desean privatizar el agua. Pero el proyecto de ley que quieren aprobar, llamado "Ley Integral del Agua", legalizaría y protegería las prácticas sobre el uso del agua que ya hacen las grandes empresas a su antojo, pues la legislación actual no dice claro qué se puede o no se puede hacer con el agua.

¿En qué partes de la ley está la privatización?

Como las y los diputados de ARENA, GANA, PCN y PDC son mayoría en la Comisión de Medio Ambiente y Cambio Climático, desecharon el proyecto de ley que presentó el Gobierno del FMLN en 2011 y comenzaron a aprobar artículos de su proyecto presentado en junio 2017¹. Si aprueban ese, aunque el agua sea formalmente propiedad del Estado, su administración y uso pasarían a las grandes empresas, por las siguientes razones:

1. El proyecto de ley de la derecha crea una "Autoridad Hídrica" que daría los permisos para el uso del agua, establecería las tarifas y decidiría otras cosas relacionadas con la administración del agua. Dicha Autoridad la integrarían dos técnicos de la ANEP², dos técnicos de COMURES³, uno de ellos de ARENA, y un técnico designado por el Presidente de la República. Al juntarse los de ANEP y ARENA, suman tres, o sea, serían mayoría al servicio de la oligarquía.
2. La ley de la derecha, en su artículo 68, dice que las actividades de exploración o perforación de pozos para investigar los mantos acuíferos la realizarían las empresas, obviamente, solo las empresas grandes, porque solo ellas tienen la capacidad técnica para realizar esas actividades.
3. La ley de la derecha, en sus artículos 69 y 72, permite la explotación y el uso de aguas subterráneas. Y eso no se hace desde
4. La ley de la derecha, en su artículo 70, permite a las empresas explotar el agua por 10 a 25 años, de manera prorrogable. ¿Y quién daría los permisos? Sería la Autoridad Hídrica controlada por la oligarquía.
5. La ley de la derecha, en su artículo 97, permite que una empresa que dañe el medio ambiente no sea sancionada, pues la misma podría llegar a un arreglo amistoso con la Autoridad Hídrica controlada por representantes de la oligarquía.

Esos artículos de la ley de la derecha demuestran que si esta se aprobara, los grandes empresarios seguirían haciendo con el agua lo que les de la gana, hasta acabársela y contaminarla sin pagar costo alguno. Sus ganancias seguirían siendo fabulosas.

El pueblo tiene clara la movida de los oligarcas de la ANEP y sus sirvientes de ARENA. Por eso los movimientos sociales y populares se están tomando las calles para impedir que la ley de la derecha se apruebe y para que se vuelva al proyecto inicial presentado por los movimientos y el Gobierno, y reforzado por la Iglesia.

El pueblo impidió en 2002 la privatización de la salud y hoy impedirá que se privatice el agua.

Image 2.4: This primary document featured above is part of a series of comics concerning the privatization of water and is useful because it points out Oligarchic collaboration with U.S. corporations in privatizing water. The caption reads: "To Defeat the Oligarchy Intent to Privatize Water." This was published by *Equipo Maíz*, which refers to a collective of people invested in popular education work through training activities and publications that support popular social movements in El Salvador and Central America.

Source: La Página de Maíz⁸⁵

⁸⁵ <https://equipomaiz.org.sv/>

An Indigenous framework is important to understand the link between water rights and reproductive justice in Tacuba. According to North American Indigenous feminist researchers, reproductive justice has not yet appeared in environmental health literature that exposes the relationship between birth defects and lack of access to potable water.⁸⁶ The ZIKA outbreak in 2016 in El Salvador is a clear example of how environmental health should be considered a reproductive justice concern. Pregnant people who were bit by mosquitoes carrying the ZIKA virus contracted microcephaly (fetal deformation), or long-term complications. In a nation with an all-out ban on abortion, the conditions of clean water (and conversely, stagnant water), and reproduction are entwined. As discussed in the Introduction to this dissertation, the issue with second wave feminists who imagine reproduction as synonymous with cisgender women is it makes issues of “reproduction” a single-issue about abortion, when reproductive justice instead argues that reproductive futurity depends on the state of our communities. While the quantitative data is clear about the need for safe water and healthy communities, environmental health literature continues to negate the holistic resources and interpersonal support that is required to raise the next generation in a healthy environment. As such, a fuller definition of reproductive justice “stresses both individual and group rights because the ability of a woman to determine her reproductive destiny is in many cases directly tied to conditions in her community,”⁸⁷

Indigenous North American researchers have conceptualized water as integral to reproductive justice--as a central component of the environmental necessities that contribute to the survival and economy of a community. I draw from Native American scholars who have

⁸⁶ Hoover, Elizabeth, Katsi Cook, Ron Plain, Kathy Sanchez, Vi Waghiyi, Pamela Miller, Renee Dufault, Caitlin Sislin, and David O. Carpenter. “Indigenous Peoples of North America: Environmental Exposures and Reproductive Justice.” *Environmental Health Perspectives* 120, no. 12 (December 2012): 1645–49. <https://doi.org/10.1289/ehp.1205422>.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

incorporated water as a reproductive justice issue because there are similar issues of land dispossession occurring against majority Indigenous Salvadoran communities whose livelihood revolves around access to clean water.⁸⁸ In *Indigenous Peoples of North America: Environmental Exposures and Reproductive Justice*, the Native co-authors conducted ethnographic research at five Native communities in North America: Akwesasne, Oglala Lakota, Pine Ridge, St. Lawrence Island (SLI), and Tewa Pueblo Aamjiwnaang. They found that these communities are at high risk of exposure to environmental contaminants, which increase the health risks for both the mother and her unborn children. Exposure of the unborn to environmental chemicals such as methylmercury, pesticides, and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) not only increases the risk of developing several diseases later in life (Grandjean 2008)⁸⁹ but also results in impairment of intellectual function for life (Carpenter 2006).⁹⁰ Their article spells out the important link between environmental and reproductive health and justice issues in Native North American communities.

In the last ten years (2010-2020), community members, particularly those in the Indigenous regions of Central America, have gained attention for their environmental justice initiatives. In the case study of anti-water privatization efforts in Tacuba, “[t]his includes the introduction of a General Water Law citing water as a human right, constitutional reforms, and the passage of a law forbidding metal mining in El Salvador because of its adverse impacts on water availability and quality. Their cause against a newly introduced water privatization law has also gained traction among churches, learning institutions, and international supporters as well.”

⁸⁸ Hoover, Elizabeth, Katsi Cook, Ron Plain, Kathy Sanchez, Vi Waghiyi, Pamela Miller, Renee Dufault, Caitlin Sislin, and David O. Carpenter. “Indigenous Peoples of North America: Environmental Exposures and Reproductive Justice.” *Environmental Health Perspectives* 120, no. 12 (December 2012): 1645–49. <https://doi.org/10.1289/ehp.1205422>.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

In tandem, many environmental coalitions and organizations were created from the early 2000's directly to support water efforts. While on our delegation in Tacuba, we learned about the impressive nation-wide coalition efforts to alleviate the criminalization of water defenders carried out by the *Foro del Agua*, which was created in 2006 and has fought since that time to demand legislative and constitutional changes to ensure the human right to water is prioritized over commercialization. *Foro Del Agua* is a nation-wide coalition of organizations and institutions that defends the sustainability and right to water and makes up around one-hundred entities of organizations and advocates; they work directly to support and sustain mostly Indigenous campaigns against water privatization and political demonstrations in the capital of San Salvador. Popularized cases in El Salvador concerning anti-water privatization efforts are concentrated in primarily Indigenous regions.

PRECARITY OF LIFE FOR WATER DEFENDERS AND REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

Water privatization efforts in El Salvador is a Reproductive Justice issue not only because of the negative impact on the unborn, but also because of the precarious life exacted on water defenders. In this section, I place the Tacuba resistance efforts within a longstanding genealogy of water defenders and state violence against their efforts.

The Salvadoran diaspora and delegations to El Salvador have consistently emphasized the precariousness of water defenders in the post-civil war period. Alexis, who attended a delegation to El Salvador to learn from leaders of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) party about current privatization efforts, commented on the impact of water privatization on water defenders:

“We did an environmentalist diplomado one year [to El Salvador] and it was all about the privatization of water and lands in the Indigenous communities and how that's also causing a lot of them to also migrate to the US because they no longer have access to producing the foods that they had lived off of for so long.... Even death, the shadow of death of political organizing so even if you want to try to make things better for your community, you are at high risk of being persecuted for that so...So we met people whose brothers or sisters had been killed, and yeah... and then, you know, personal experiences from our own families ...the threat of violence is really intense and it's very gendered on both ends. It's a combination that cannot be simplified in any way anymore.”

Alexis, in the excerpt above, uses the analogy of the “shadow of death” to describe the dangerous and highly visible position that Environmental Justice activists like the Tacuba Water Defenders occupy. The cost for participation in these economic justice initiatives, as one of my interlocutors noted, is often harassment, arrest and even assassination.⁹¹ As an example, hundreds of people in Suchitoto peacefully demonstrated against President Saca’s privatization plan. Tony Saca, the right-wing Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) presidential nomination that won the 2004 Salvadoran election, announced his plan to privatize water in 2007, and was also the intellectual author of President Francisco Flores’ health care privatization proposal. Residents of Suchitoto, another majority Indigenous territory in El Salvador organized a protest against President Saca’s privatization announcement, and fourteen people from this demonstration were brutally beaten and arrested by Salvadoran national police. They were charged under the anti-terrorism law that El Salvador passed in 2006. Known as the “Ley especial en contra de actos de terrorismo,” this law is backed by the U.S. embassy. The anti-terrorism charges against the Suchitoto fourteen were dropped in 2008 after intense international pressure from U.S. based organizations like CISPES and solidarity organizations in Canada. Yet, two weeks later, one of the fourteen people who was arrested was murdered, nineteen-year-old

⁹¹ ‘They Want to Prohibit Us From Dreaming.’ Accessed January 9, 2020. <https://jacobinmag.com/2016/03/berta-caceres-murder-honduras-agua-zarca-dam/>.

Hector A. Ventura. According to preliminary reports, Ventura was stabbed to death. Another victim, who was with Ventura, was attacked but survived. Reports say that the assailants were at least two men, who entered the back room of the house where Ventura and his friend slept and attacked them⁹². Hector was notably the youngest of the fourteen water defenders who were captured in 2007, amplifying once more the utter precariousness of water defender's lives. The premature death and brutal murder of Ventura -- and ostensibly of other water defenders -- illustrates the contested, differential values of Salvadoran life. As examined in Chapter 1, the fetus is protected at all costs with no regard for the mother; in contrast, water defenders, protecting the sacred foundation of life, are often public targets, and there is seldom retribution for their deaths.

Establishing Autonomous Control Over Water in Tacuba

In reflecting on the stories of the Tacuba water defenders, I began to question *why* water defenders posed such a threat that they were being murdered and incarcerated in increasing numbers? What threat, furthermore, might local and autonomous control over public water resources pose? In a conversation with Yesi that was conducted via phone, she referred to anti-terrorism law in El Salvador as the legal pretext for arresting the Suchitoto water defenders in 2007: "The anti-terrorism law passed in 2006 and was written by the US State Department and under that law, the first arrest made, fourteen protestors were arrested at a mass mobilization against Saca's decentralization plan."

Upon doing further research about anti-terrorism law and its potential relationship to water privatization as a reproduction justice issue, I found that El Salvador was indeed one of seven countries that modeled their anti-terrorism laws after the United States Patriot Act that

⁹² "Hector Ventura Assassinated | U.S-El Salvador Sister Cities," May 7, 2008. <https://www.elsalvadorsolidarity.org/hector-ventura-assassinated-may/>.

surveilled and racialized the Arab and Muslim population in the post-war on terror context. 8 El Salvador was one of the countries that joined in the War on Terror and used the Patriot Act as a model. On October 17, 2006, the Salvadoran legislature enacted a vague anti-terrorism law, “Decreto No. 108, the Special Law Against Acts of Terrorism (SLAAT)” which allows the government to repress its citizens' right to free expression - a right protected both under international law and the Salvadoran Constitution.⁹³ The anti-terrorism law has been leveraged against water defenders who accuse local governments of misappropriating public funding.

Charges Against Salvadoran Water Defenders in Tacuba

Anti-terrorism legislation and the suspected criminality of water defenders has created profound tensions between Indigenous residents and local government municipalities controlled by right-wing parties in El Salvador. Karen Ramírez during our *charla* highlighted that prior to 2000, the creation of potable water systems was a project that “...had become routine in rural Salvadoran communities during the 1990s. This is due in large to the “irresponsibility of the state,” whereby “rural areas have basically been totally excluded from certain services and goods for over twenty-five years.” In 1996, Tacuba made an autonomous move to control their local water aqueduct by creating a “water committee;” the tasks and goals of the water committee were to collect fees that local areas collectively agreed upon to maintain the water system, develop intra-community relations, and maintain upkeep of the water system. While listening, I questioned why there was a shift from neglecting the water systems in Tacuba during the 1990s, to such intensive surveillance of water defenders. According to San Salvador based researcher Hilary Goodfriend, the right-wing mayor of Tacuba accused the water defenders of stealing ANDA-owned materials to construct their water system in 2007, and Mayor Ramírez “refused to

⁹³ Cardona, Mirna. “El Salvador: Repression in the Name of Anti-Terrorism,” n.d., 29. See also:

recognize the newly-elected leadership of the water committee. Instead, he installed a parallel committee stacked in his favor, which promptly “donated” the community system to city hall.⁹⁴ Motivated by personal greed and extortion, the Mayor effectively took-over the water system, and this has been an ongoing, local battle to maintain community control. The arrests are but part of a series of attempts to intimidate the water defenders both in Tacuba, and nationally in El Salvador. As a water defendant exclaimed, “ We worked with 940 families putting this [the water system] together and after all this work they're accusing us of stealing it?” “He’s robbing our work,” the local water defender said of the right-wing mayor controlling Tacuba.

The persecution culminated on July 22, 2016 when police raided the homes of six members of the elected water committee. Karen explained that when the six water defenders (all men, many of whom are elderly) were dragged from their homes in the early morning, it was with the intention to destroy local leadership⁹⁵. Nevertheless, the women who were not captured continued to uphold their communities and the struggle for water access. And the men in their community were charged with three crimes: theft of energy and water resources, the appropriation of materials owned by the government to build the water system, and aggravated theft.

DIASPORA AND DIGITAL ACTIVISM

With over half of the Salvadoran population living outside of the country, we are inherently a transnational community of cross-border co-conspirators. I discovered through my research in El Salvador that the Salvadoran diaspora plays an important role in supporting anti-

⁹⁴ NACLA. “Water Wars in El Salvador: Tacuba Resists.” Accessed May 15, 2020.

<https://nacla.org/news/2017/09/01/water-wars-el-salvador-tacuba-resists>.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

water privatization efforts. As a member of the U.S. delegation, I function as a bridge from a Salvadoran diaspora position and Native Feminists in North America who also are concerned with the reproductive impacts of environmental justice and concerns like the privatization of water alongside Salvadoran Indigenous water defenders grappling with similar issues. In my experience as an educator, I have encountered Central American students and peers over the past ten years who have emphasized the complexity of their relationship to El Salvador. Often citing class and/or citizenship privilege related guilt, they have detached themselves from our cultural resistance and embodied legacies.

The privatization of water as a reproductive justice struggle is waged by transnational activists in the Salvadoran diaspora and grassroots activists and organizations in El Salvador. This coalitional framework is not new. As Yesi reflected in our interview, from 2010 onwards, “the healthcare privatization manifested as a broad-based coalition, and that is how these victories come together. It's not just Environmental activist organizers coming out into the streets, it's everybody.” In this quote, Yesi links the political activism around water privatization as a broad-based coalition similar to the protests against President Saca’s attempts to privatize the Salvadoran healthcare system in 2007. Because reproductive justice in its original conception considers the continuities of racialization, sexuality and reproduction, many RJ efforts are necessarily in conversation with other social movements. When I engaged in participant observation at a historic commemoration march as I discussed the Epilogue, I saw coalitions of LGBT activists, feminists and environmental justice activists. In other words, it would appear as if intersectionality has always been central to how Salvadorans organize in a post-civil war era.

This coalitional politics rejects the limitations of a narrow-focused politics like “pro-choice,” in favor of a more strategic, relational vision of social and environmental change.⁹⁶

The diaspora plays a pivotal role in helping local Salvadorans to pressure local authorities. A water defendant recounted that he was “expecting a hearing, but the attorney general ignored that and issued an arrest warrant and the national police captured us . . . in the middle of the night, us . . . as if we were *asesinos o criminales*” [assassins or criminals]. As a delegation from the United States, we were able to play a more effective role in publicizing the demands of the water defenders, especially through social media, in order to apply pressure on Salvadoran officials. For example, after our meeting in Tacuba with the water defenders, we publicly supported their water rights petition in a press conference in San Salvador and on social media, which carried significant weight in the Salvadoran legislative assembly. In reviewing the CISPES-facilitated interviews with the Tacuba water defenders and community members, I noted that one of the recently incarcerated men thanked PROVIDA for providing them with legal defense and several water forums to discuss their concerns and then broadcasting their struggles internationally.

In our group charla with the water defenders and community members of Tacuba, Karen emphasized the important role that international social media visibility can hold: “It is hard to fund...to finance their legal defense and it's important for organizations and other alliances that are supporting us to visibilize the struggle by tweeting or using social media, because there has been people who have, and say they maybe want to support but are not sure how.” Social media visibility of transnational feminist struggles - especially related to the all-out ban on abortion in

⁹⁶ Chiro, Giovanna Di. “Living Environmentalisms: Coalition Politics, Social Reproduction, and Environmental Justice.” *Environmental Politics* 17, no. 2 (April 1, 2008): 276–98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644010801936230>.

El Salvador and few other nations-- has been incredibly successful for the fight to decriminalize abortion. Social media help visibilize feminist struggles transnationally by helping to gain traction of international solidarity, especially of human rights organizations. After a woman was released from jail after spending four years after having a miscarriage, Maria Teresa Rivera of El Salvador has now become a voice for the LAS 17 movement, and is now actively organizing with Irish Feminists, as half of Ireland up until recently had a severe abortion ban. Further, social media support is an important network for the diaspora, who can utilize technology like Instagram, Twitter and GoFundMe to materially support.

Yesi, in her interview, discussed the importance of Salvadoran diaspora participation in social justice struggles in El Salvador from “where one is at.” In my conversation with her, we discussed the role of social media in connecting other Salvadoran diaspora subjects together. She specifically mentioned the fight against water privatization. She noted the emergent presence of Salvadorans in leadership roles within the organization in the last ten years. In discussing the role of social media in current campaigns from the diaspora, Yesi commented on a noticeable shift within the last ten years:

“It definitely feels like a different moment from 2010 and anti-mining struggle and have a hard time to get people motivated about that to now... where people are a lot more engaged with the work. It’s exciting and crucial. For example, the fight against water privatization is a way the diaspora can play a really important role in if we can image out how to support the social movements that have been pushing for the last decade and more.”

I asked Yesi to elaborate on what types of political tactics and allyship she felt that the diaspora could engage in, such as signing online petitions, or e-mailing letters to the Salvadoran Legislative Assembly. She responded that both on a personal level and organizing level she is learning and growing. Additionally, she noted:

“CISPES as an organization is.. We are somewhat limited in our capacity...but the diaspora needs... *needs* [verbal emphasis] to image out how to harness our power, you know? I think that social media is a space where a lot of political activism happens. We... need to build our skills for how to take our fight and be effective in our fight online and in the street. I think so far, the efforts that CISPES has taken to connect the diaspora with on-the-ground social movement struggles have been very fruitful, you know? I think the reason why we have such a high level of visibility is in part because of the radical roots delegations we’ve done.”

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I amplify current struggles to protect local water sources in El Salvador and draw from a group *charla* that was facilitated by CISPES with the Indigenous water protectors in El Salvador who reside in Tacuba, Ahuachapán. Their political tactics emphasize imagining water as sacred to their future generations. By the time I joined the Radical Roots delegation in 2018, I was used to the burnout that accompanies working as an activist in the U.S. Because there are several displaced immigrant and refugee communities living in Southern California, my lived experiences are guided by joint solidarity built on direct action. The struggle in Tacuba is the accumulation of years of land theft and oligarchic control, and is “generated by decades of deregulation in El Salvador, where organizers are campaigning for a nation-wide Water Law to defend the increasingly scarce resource from privatization, contamination, and depletion.”⁹⁷ Furthermore, the effort to prevent water privatization is a part of a strong Environmental justice resistance front in El Salvador. After tireless labor union organizing, El Salvador became “the first country in the world to enact a national ban on the metal mining industry, just months after the Salvadoran government defeated a transnational mining giant in the World Bank’s controversial investor-state dispute tribunals⁹⁸.

⁹⁷ NACLA. “Water Wars in El Salvador: Tacuba Resists.” Accessed November 11, 2019. <https://nacla.org/news/2017/09/01/water-wars-el-salvador-tacuba-resists>.

⁹⁸ The anti-mining campaign was a battle for the value of water over gold.” (Pacific Rim, which was bought by Australia’s Oceana Gold firm)

I argue that water is a reproductive justice concern because first, there are clear, embodied reproductive impacts of clean and sanitized water not only in relationship to the fetus, but also in relationship to the futurity of a community. Water is especially fundamental to agrarian centered and Indigenous communities that do not live in areas with strong water infrastructures under the administration of ANDA. This brings me to my next key argument in this chapter that relays water and reproductive justice: water is a reproductive justice concern because it is necessary for livelihood and the sustainability of the body, as well as the health of a community. The impressive and persistent nation-wide efforts to battle water privatization should be understood within a thirty-year genealogy; Salvadoran social movements have been successful in protecting its national resources, as most evident in the recent ban against all gold mining in the nation⁹⁹. The effort to protect water for the generations to come in El Salvador will prevail: *¡No A La Privatización del Agua! No to the Privatization of Water!*

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⁹⁹ “El Salvador, Prizing Water Over Gold, Bans All Metal Mining - The New York Times.” Accessed May 14, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/29/world/americas/el-salvador-prizing-water-over-gold-bans-all-metal-mining.html>.

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Chapter 3

Reproductive Justice and Technologies of Care within the Central American

Following the civil wars in Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua that lasted from the mid 1960s - 1990s, thousands of people from the Northern Triangle travelled to the U.S.-Mexico border seeking asylum, calling attention to the lack of viable life-building opportunities in their home countries.¹⁰⁰ In 2018-2019 alone, over 20,000 Central Americans arrived in caravans.¹⁰¹ The number of Central American asylum seekers have swelled in Tijuana and the United States since 2010 in astounding numbers. The U.S. Border Patrol for example recorded 24,122 “encounters” with Salvadorans in 2017, and then just two years later, 56,896 in 2019. Border Patrol officials use the language of “encounters” to log the amount of people that are “apprehended,” meaning detained, deported, incarcerated, or rejected for asylum. In the 2017-2019-time frame, the rise of migrants from Guatemala and Honduras are shocking as well. In 2017, U.S. Border Patrol recorded around 23,000 encounters, and then a staggering 185,233 encounters from Guatemala and 188,416 from Honduras in 2019.¹⁰² The largest and best known of Central American caravans were organized by *Pueblos Sin Fronteras*¹⁰³ that set off during Holy Week in early 2017 and 2018 from the Northern Triangle of Central America (NTCA).

¹⁰⁰ Menjivar, Cecilia. “Fragmented Ties: Salvadoran Immigrant Networks in America.” University of California Press, 2000.

García, María Cristina. *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada*. Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2006. Accessed May 19, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pp26x.

¹⁰¹ “Migrant Solidarity | Otay Mesa Detention Resistance | United States.” Otay Mesa Detention. Accessed August 16, 2019. <https://www.otaymesadetentionresistance.org>.

¹⁰² “U.S. Border Patrol Southwest Border Apprehensions by Sector Fiscal Year 2020 | U.S. Customs and Border Protection.” Accessed May 18, 2020. <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/sw-border-migration/usbp-sw-border-apprehensions>.

¹⁰³ Pueblos Sin Fronteras (Spanish for Village without Borders) is a “transborder organization made of human rights defenders that accompany and work with migrants, and describes itself as an International Migrant Rights Collective.” Accessed May 18, 2020. <https://www.pueblosinfronteras.org/>.

These caravan groups arrived in two waves between the Fall and Spring of 2018 and 2019, and both groups consisted of at least 2,500 people.¹⁰⁴ Grassroots activists living in the San Diego borderlands account that migrant caravans began arrival in the early 2010 decade.

The two waves of the Central American caravan between 2018-2019 prompted outrage and discussion because of the separation of families at the border and clashes between migrants and border patrol. For example, on November 25, 2018, about 500 migrants marched to the San Ysidro Port of Entry to demand action regarding the thousands of migrants staying at the Tijuana Benito Juarez Stadium in a state of humanitarian crisis. Four Border Patrol agents reported that migrants “hit them with rocks;” in response, Border Patrol fired tear gas and rubber bullets at the unarmed crowd of families and youth. As a result, the San Ysidro land Border crossing was closed on November 25, 2018 for six hours after Border Patrol claimed the migrants “rushed” at the border guards. The arrival of thousands of migrants and asylum seekers from Central America in the last ten years is an important elaboration of U.S. intervention in Central America; simultaneously, the caravan is a creative, political strategy. When Caravan members, who I refer to in this chapter in the Spanish version of the word “caravaneros” *encounter* U.S. diaspora activists at the border, they come up with creative solutions to provide food, clothing, transportation, legal and mutual solidarity.

While caravans are a phenomenon that illustrate the human costs of U.S. interventions in El Salvador, they also are active and strategic resistance practices from the “Third World.” It is this conversation--of forced migration and choice and how choice is problematized in reproductive justice politics--that is central to this chapter. Conceptualizing forced migration as a

¹⁰⁴ York, David Agren Amanda Holpuch. “Where Is the Migrant Caravan from – and What Will Happen to It at the Border?” *The Guardian*, October 24, 2018, sec. US news. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/oct/24/caravan-migrants-what-is-it-where-from-guatemala-honduras-immigrants-mexico>.

feminist strategy, I argue that the Central American caravans are a strategic, intentional political tool, and that activists in the U.S. diaspora can learn from the caravaneros' care strategies to inform more sustainable and long-term solidarity work at the border.

I conceptualize the Central American refugee caravans in the period from 2010 - 2020 as a reproductive justice (RJ) issue because caravaneros I have spoken with my field work describe it as a "safer option" because of the sheer amount of people one travels with in the over 2,000 mile journey to the border. Engaging communal practices of watching over youth while en transit or supporting one another in gathering supplies are community-oriented practices in the caravan. This chapter extends the reproductive justice issue beyond a North American and heteronormative context by discussing how caravan members - some of whom are queer and trans - create new forms of family, belonging, kinship and resource networks both amongst one another, and with Salvadoran and Chicana grassroots activists at the U.S./Mexico border. My analyses are drawn from my ethnographic research, including participant observation and one-on-one interviews with members of migrant-justice organizations that are based in mostly San Diego including Otay Mesa Detention Resistance (OMDR), Cipotas Fronterizas Collective (CFC), the San Diego Migrant and Refugee Coalition (SDMRC) and the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES). In my expanded conceptualization, reproductive justice constitutes forms of life-giving power that move care work like cooking, home-making and reproducing life itself beyond biological understandings of the cisgender womanhood; in so doing, I expand the "reproductive" to consider not only transgender people that can also get pregnant, but also the non-biological forms of kinship created at the border. In centering both migrants and U.S.-based activists that engage in mutual solidarity, I show how reproductive

labor and mutual solidarity are transferred between caravaneros and U.S. based activists from the Salvadoran diaspora and Mexico.

In providing a queer, Central American lens to care work and reproductive justice, I deploy the term “technologies of care” to describe the strategies and world making practices deployed by both the caravaneros and the activists who support their arrival and survivance at the U.S./Mexico border. Though the term technologies of care in the context of refugeehood is unique to this paper, I utilize the term “technology” explicitly within a Queer Feminist tradition to demonstrate how Central American migrants and U.S. diaspora activists reproduce life in spite of conditions of precarity and liminality on the most material levels like safety, food and shelter. Alexis Pauline Gumbs has theorized “technologies” like poetry, organizing and communal care as examples of survivance evident in Black lesbian feminists Audre Lorde and June Jordan. Gumbs elaborates, “Lorde and Jordan theorize survival as a threatened technology through which to transform the meanings of life, embodiment and death through a rigorous engagement with time and space. Both theorists invoke survival as a queer temporality.”¹⁰⁵

In using the word “care” within technologies of care, I draw from a Marxist feminist tradition, and I am informed by scholarship that demonstrates how forms of vital energy are required to “reproduce” a human subject including nourishment, housing, clothing and affective labor. These forms of care work are reproductive labor that have historically been racialized, feminized and devalued.¹⁰⁶ I am in conversation with scholars who discuss care work, intimate

¹⁰⁵ Gumbs, Alexis Pauline. "We can learn to mother ourselves: The queer survival of Black feminism 1968-1996." PhD diss., Duke University, 2010.

¹⁰⁶ For Marxist Feminist revisions of reproductive labor, see Davis, Angela Y. *Women, Race, & Class*. First edition. New York: Random House, 1981., and Vora, Kalindi. *Life Support: Biocapital and the New History of Outsourced Labor*. Difference Incorporated. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

labor, and the *reproductive* needs that caravan members have, and how U.S. based activists respond to provide these needs in light of glaring state negligence.

Queer Ethnic Studies scholars have established how heteropatriarchy is foundational to nation-building projects; this queer of color critique links the building of nationhood to the racialized project that propagates notions of family purity.¹⁰⁷ Building on this queer of color scholarship, I conceptualize home-making practices in the context of transience and migration as material and queer forms of support networks at the border. This care work is driven by the poetic potential of a new world--the bravery to create alternative technologies of care and non-kin networks of support in the process of seeking asylum and resettlement.¹⁰⁸ These processes of homemaking and chosen family are evident in the day-to-day interactions with caravaneros and organizers living at the border, and I believe are indicative of how nation-less, queered subjects form belonging are emerging while awaiting asylum.

ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK AND BORDER ACTIVISM

This chapter discusses the highly organized forms of grassroots activism at the border that I observed and participated in as part of the critical ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted in Tijuana and San Diego with caravaneros and Chicana, Central American activists living in the diaspora. Returning to the five U.S. activists that I interviewed for this project, four identify as Salvadoran and one - Rayo del Sol who is one of the founders of Otay Mesa Detention Resistance (OMDR) as a “transfronteriza Chicana.” Transfronteriza translates to border crosser

¹⁰⁷ Ferguson, Roderick A. *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*. Critical American Studies Series. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

¹⁰⁸Muñoz, Jose. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: NYU Press, 2009. <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/book/10726>.

and refers to Rayo's personal history as not only someone with dual citizenship in Mexico and the U.S., but also as someone who lives in both places at once, at times crossing multiple times in one day. This is significant because it shows how the U.S. based organizing around the Central American caravan also provided the opportunity for Latinx solidarity in coordinating refugee support. My positionality as a queer, bilingual Salvadoran organizer yielded access to research sites that I might not have been able to access otherwise, as I have built trust and rapport with several migrant-justice and queer organizations that support and organize alongside the caravaneros in the past ten years. Working from a framework of mutual trust and support is important in border activism because of the hyper-militarized and surveilled nature of San Diego.¹⁰⁹ Embedded in a network of people who travel from San Diego to Tijuana to distribute resources to migrants, to visit detainees in detention centers, and to provide overall grassroots refugee support, I gained unique insights on the many forms of care utilized by caravaneros and social justice activists.

In the fall and winter of 2018, I was an active leader with the Cipotas Fronterizas Collective in coordinating legal, medical and logistical support for a group of forty people staying outside of a soccer stadium in Tijuana. Our main meeting point or "punto de reunión" was Enclave Caracol in Zona Centro. My role as a Cipotas Fronterizas Colectiva representative was coordinating rides for caravaneros who were at Enclave Caracol, an autonomous community center in Zona Norte that hosts "Food Not Bombs," and many other coalitions that offer local and refugee support. In many ways, Enclave is a hub for organizers and lawyers working on behalf of migrants at the border.

¹⁰⁹ Hernández, Roberto. *Coloniality of the US/Mexico Border: Power, Violence, and the Decolonial Imperative*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2018.

Recruiting participants for my informal interviews required establishing rapport with caravaneros. I decided to work directly with lesbian and trans women who approached me after I introduced myself the week prior in a discussion circle and shared that I was a part of a queer collective in San Diego. Through getting to know one another in informal circles, I shared that I am a Salvadoran woman born in the U.S., and that I was researching the forms of care that caravaneros employ to support one another in their journey to the border. I also shared stories about coming out in the United States, and how people in the diaspora have to work to resist assimilation into white American culture. Establishing a shared cultural identity based on a shared history with Central Americans born and raised in the region is a particular experience for Central Americans living in the diaspora. Considering my role in coordinating transportation, I was able to establish relationships with people over a 3-month period of visiting Tijuana with OMDR and SDMRC members.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with five activists who live and organize within the United States and five informal conversations with caravaneros; this chapter features four of these five interviews of Chicana/Salvadoran activists who work in the U.S./Mexico border and are directly involved with supporting the Central American migrant caravan. The interlocutors were chosen because each represents a distinct organization in a digital and material network of resources. I have identified them as some of the key leaders of the San Diego Central American caravan that were heavily involved in providing and coordinating support. These activists represent three U.S. based organizations that engage transnational refugee and what I conceptualize to be reproductive justice work as they function on a coalitional and intersectional understanding: Committee In Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES);¹¹⁰ Otay Mesa

¹¹⁰ <http://cispes.org/>

Detention Resistance (OMDR)¹¹¹ and the San Diego Migrant and Refugee Coalition (SDMRC). In April 2018, I interviewed these activists who variously identify as Chicana, Salvadoran, educators, queer and Zapatista sympathizers. Two of the four activists have visited El Salvador on political delegations and hold important knowledge about why so many Central Americans are fleeing the Northern Triangle beyond the often cited but reductive reason of escaping gang violence.

The intention of this meeting was to gain a sense of what other resources LGBT members of the caravan needed, especially because at the time there were violent protests in Playas about trans asylum seekers staying at local AirBnBs typically inhabited by tourists. Over the next hour, I listened to migrants expressing frustrations in navigating Mexican nationalism and finding temporary housing and the endless legal labyrinth required to build a strong asylum case. There were notable differences in how trans women and lesbian women in this small group of the Central American caravan were experiencing their resettlement in Tijuana. Trans women reported routine harassment and denigration due to their visibility in the streets and were often the last to receive meals and resources. This tension of gender valuation in meal distribution came up again in my interview with Alexis who worked at the Benito Juarez sports stadium. During our charla about housing solutions, I noticed two cis women exchanging glances when two trans women mentioned that their asylum cases were potentially up for review, and that they were having a hard time finding a place to stay because many of the temporary shelters were separating populations by cisgender men and cisgender women to protect vulnerable people from potential sexual violence. While packing up my things, I gently approached the two women and asked if they felt like they were not heard in our conversation. Maricela, a survivor of domestic

¹¹¹ <https://www.otaymesadetentionresistance.org/about>

abuse, snorted and said that dividing shelters by gender is necessary, and that at least trans women’s asylum cases were more successful in proving fear of return, and therefore their asylum cases were being processed faster. In this incredibly complicated exchange, the women appeared to be claiming that in fear-of-return asylum cases, the gender-based violence cisgender lesbians experience such as domestic abuse is not taken as “seriously” as the violence against trans women. In effect, this transphobic tension that erupted between trans women and a lesbian single mother illustrates how asylum laws internally divide the LGBT community--a reminder that it is important to pay attention to the differential, lived experiences within the community.



Image 3.1: “In this Nov. 4, 2018 photo, two transgender women who are part of a group of fifty or so LGBTQ migrants traveling with the migrant caravan hoping to reach the U.S. border, apply face makeup at a shelter in Cordoba, Mexico. Sticking out among the crowd for their bright clothing and makeup, the group has suffered verbal harassment, especially from men.”

Source: AP Photo / Rodrigo Abd¹¹²

¹¹² Life, Yucatán Expat. “Gay, Transgender Members of Caravan Stick Together for Safety.” Yucatán Expat Life, November 13, 2018. <https://yucatanexpatlife.com/gay-transgender-members-of-caravan-stick-together-for-safety/>.

I conjure my ethnographic *charla* with Lesbian and Trans women from Central American to show how the law produces differential experiences based on sexuality and gender expression when applying for asylum. As illustrated in my interviews with grassroots activists in the U.S., the narrative of poor “women and children” within the Central American caravan prioritizes specifically reproducing women as the most valuable and deserving of care. The result of this discourse that only recognizes cisgender women and their relationship to heteropatriarchal exploitation elides trans women who are violently detained. As a result, popular discourse and issues of the “reproductive” can generate trans exclusionary feminist practices that assume womanhood is defined by one’s reproductive capacity, especially in relationship to the idea that only women who reproduce are deserving of asylum.

As more people in the United States want to engage in joint solidarity with migrants at the U.S./Mexico border, there is a clear need for more research on immigration justice and LGBT studies, particularly from a Central American experience. I contribute to the nascent scholarship that considers sexuality and the varied experiences of crossing the border. By focusing on the varied experiences of cisgender women and trans women in the caravan, I illustrate how the U.S. border continues to not only shape discourses of sexuality, illegality and non-normativity, but also creates internal divisions as resources are allocated based on who is considered more deserving. As Eithne Lubheid argued in *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border*, border crossing has entailed that Latinos and mostly non-white ethnicities face an institution apparatus that either denies them entrance or deports them based on their ‘undocumented’ condition¹¹³.

¹¹³Luibhéid, Eithne. *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002. Accessed May 15, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttvvgx.

In recent years, Central American scholars in the United States have begun exploring how gender and sexuality shape forced migration from Central America. Suyapa Portillo for example relays that trans women, though comprising a small percentage of the detained population in the U.S., either die or experience detention as the result of overt, transphobic violence or negligence. In her review of the murder of Roxsana Hernández, a trans woman who died after being held in solitary confinement for fifteen days while in detention,¹¹⁴ Portillo includes important research that punctuates the specific experience of transgender women navigating the U.S. Immigration Detention. Portillo relays that there are approximately sixty-five trans people in detention any given day who often endure abuse when placed in male wings of the detention centers.¹¹⁵

THE CARAVANS AND TECHNOLOGIES OF CARE

Considering the legal restrictions on processing asylum cases, Tijuana has become a place of temporary and long-term housing solutions for multiple refugee populations including Syria, Somalia, Iraqi and East African and Central American people. In my analysis, I looked for and expanded on moments and themes during the interviews where organizers recount practices of technologies of care, such as the coordinating of transportation, ranging from transporting materials by foot or via care to refugee shelters and encampments, to the coordinating of taxi rides for refugees who stayed in Tijuana; and when queer and trans caravaneros recount reproducing their lives and forging new social networks while resettling in Tijuana. These forms of collective care - whether living in *albergues* or community shelters - are what I consider to be

¹¹⁴ Familia: TQLM and the Transgender Law Center, “Do You See How Much I’m Suffering Here?” Abuse against Transgender Women in U.S. Immigration Detention

¹¹⁵ Gutiérrez, Jennicet & Portillo, Suyapa. (2018) Trans(formation) of a Movement, NACLA Report on the Americas, 50:4, 392-394, DOI: [10.1080/10714839.2018.1550983](https://doi.org/10.1080/10714839.2018.1550983)

queer, non-heteronormative ways of living and meaning making during the wait-for-resettlement period.

My ethnographic fieldwork took place in a political moment where Central American migrants were openly racialized and spectacularized in the U.S. public media. As I opened the Introduction of this dissertation, the aggressive attack against migrants at the San Ysidro Port of Entry prompted heated debate in the United States regarding whether or not launching tear gas against “women and children” was ethical. A Fox News guest grotesquely joked that tear gas was so natural “you could put it on your nachos.”¹¹⁶ In 2020, just two years after the second large wave of Central Americans arrived at the southwestern border in the caravan (2017-2018) the Trump Administration sought to bar asylum petitions from most Central American migrants.¹¹⁷ My ethnographic research focuses on two main questions: 1) After having made the life altering decision to migrate, how do Central Americans seeking asylum *care* for one another while en route to the U.S.? and 2) What forms of collective care are occurring/or enacted by the Central American and Chicana diaspora organizers living in the United States to support the migrants? These questions are important to Critical Refugee, Central American and Ethnic Studies scholarship because they focus on the seldom-studied resistance practices enacted by both the caravaneros and by Salvadorans in the diaspora who support them. The forms of care that I observed in my ethnographic work revolved around strategies to meet the migrants’ key needs, including transportation, housing, and food.

¹¹⁶ “Fox News Guest Defended Tear Gas Use at US-Mexico Border - Business Insider.” Accessed May 19, 2020. <https://www.businessinsider.com/fox-news-guest-defended-tear-gas-use-at-us-mexico-border-2018-11>.

¹¹⁷ “Supreme Court Says Trump Can Bar Asylum Seekers While Legal Fight Continues - The New York Times.” Accessed October 11, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/11/us/politics/supreme-court-trump-asylum.html>.

From October to December 2018, I conducted informal conversations with lesbian and trans identified women of the Central American migrant caravan. During this three-month period, I crossed the U.S./Mexico border on a biweekly basis, typically with other grassroots activists that are involved in food distribution, transportation or setting up pro-bono legal workshops. The commute time over the U.S./Mexico border varied, depending on who was driving. The Otay Mesa border crossing is one of the most land-trafficked borders in the world. At this time in the Fall of 2018, I was living in Normal Heights in San Diego. When possible, I tried to commute with organizers who have the Secure Electronic Network for Travelers Rapid Inspection SENTRI¹¹⁸ which is a separate land and pre-authorization by the California Border Patrol to cross the border by vehicle. While driving through the labyrinth-like maze of the border, it was as if the border structure itself fluctuated on a weekly basis. Cutting edge “razor-wire” was installed at the Otay Mesa Border Crossing and gleamed in linger San Diego heat wave of those Fall months¹¹⁹. When I arrived in Tijuana, I conducted fieldwork and my own political organizing work at Enclave Caracol, in passing during transit and at various *albergues* or shelters in Playas and Zona Centro.

While in Zona Norte, Tijuana on November 10, 2018 I was coordinating transportation for a same-sex couple and their daughter to a privately contracted Airbnb in Playas, Tijuana. This couple - Maricela and her partner - were part of a caravan of fifty LGBT identified people mostly from El Salvador and Honduras. While in an Uber ride with Maricela who was traveling with her eight-year-old daughter and same-sex partner, Maricela shared that traveling in such a

¹¹⁸ “Secure Electronic Network for Travelers Rapid Inspection | U.S. Customs and Border Protection.” Accessed May 18, 2020. <https://www.cbp.gov/travel/trusted-traveler-programs/sentri>.

¹¹⁹ DVIDS. “U.S. Marines Strengthen the California-Mexico Border at the Otay Mesa Port of Entry.” Accessed May 18, 2020 <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/4895605/us-marines-strengthen-california-mexico-border-otay-mesa-port-entry>.

large group from El Salvador was an intentional choice because it fostered a sense of communal safety:

“Being with other women [while traveling] is really important to me. I feel safer, and since a lot of people also had their children with them, there was a communal way of making sure the kids were fed first when food was distributed. We take shifts in watching over one another and our children. It’s just a better option. There’s more help involved.”

Maricela’s explanation of communal distribution of reproductive labor while en route illustrates that traveling in caravans was an intentional choice and a safer option for some women, especially those with children. Cisgender women allocated and shared caretaking shifts, including making sure that children were fed, and that people were safe during the nighttime. Queer and trans caravaneros, who experience travel safety quite differently from cisgender women,¹²⁰ also formed units of care and protection with one another and travelled together. This practice of communal-care-on-the-run exceeds the neoliberal logic of individual care, and organically conceptualizes why reproductive justice is an apt theoretical framework for the caravan.

Inspired by Maricela’s conceptualization of communal care, I posit the term technologies of care to refer to how migrant women practice communal accountability while traveling in caravans. My intention in using the term technologies of care is to illustrate that caravans are not simply, as the both the U.S. right-wing and liberal media have detailed, a way to “highlight their plight¹²¹” or the deleterious conditions they are fleeing; instead, caravans are a strategic, political mobilization tool. Technologies of care refer to the communal practices that caravan mothers

¹²⁰ For more information on the unique safety challenges trans women face in the caravan, read <http://eltecolote.org/content/en/features/queer-in-the-caravan-the-dangers-lgbt-migrants-face-in-search-for-asylum/>

¹²¹ “The Plight of Migrant Children at the Border Highlights Need to Invest in Central America.” WOLA. Accessed September 18, 2019. <https://www.wola.org/analysis/the-plight-of-migrant-children-at-the-border-highlights-need-to-invest-in-central-america/>.

employ to ensure the safety of one another and their children while en route, such as taking shifts throughout the night.¹²² The movement of the caravan creates an inherently transient environment, and people en route through Mexico are often in a new city each night. In fact, it is this transience that was most documented while the caravan was making its way to the U.S./Mexico border in the Fall of 2018. While the mass exodus of Central Americans during the Civil War period was largely facilitated by coyotes and took place outside of public eye, the caravan style makes the contemporary exodus much more visible and creates more opportunity for shared distribution of reproductive labor. Yet with more media visibility, via social media like “Facebook Live,” comes more risk and hostility. This hostility was evident as caravan members confronted unwelcoming Mexican nationals throughout the migration journey. The communal technologies of care, organically practiced while constantly on the move, illustrate how the caravan style of migration can be a comparatively safer option for many migrants to meet not only individual but also collective asylum goals.

I also use technologies of care to refer to the digital and affective realms that transborder activists engage in order to support the Central American caravan.¹²³ In other words, I am also concerned with the material forms of technology like social media, and how they are utilized to transmit technologies of care at the border. My understanding of the digital in this chapter includes social media, encrypted chat groups, internet campaigns and fundraising related to the Central American caravan in 2018-2019. Relatedly, my understanding of the “affective” are shaped by Sara Ahmed’s work that explores emotions - particularly hate as an affective

¹²² For more Salvadoran scholarship on Transnational Motherhood, see Abrego, Leisy J. *Sacrificing Families: Navigating Laws, Labor, and Love across Borders*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014.

¹²³ Boris, Eileen. *Intimate Labors: Cultures, Technologies, and the Politics of Care*. Stanford University Press, 2010.

economy. Rather than concerned with hate, I am interested in how emotions regarding the Central American caravan generates material resources like money and gear donations. The organizers in this chapter relay leverage this affective dimension of the caravan to distribute resources. Ahmed's exploration between the psychic and the social world is useful in this project in illustrating the varying encounters between caravaneros and people in Mexico and the United States. In Ahmed's words, "Emotions *do things*, and they align individuals with communities – or bodily space with social space – through the very intensity of their attachments..."¹²⁴ The relationship between digital and affective aspects of technologies of care show the multi-spatial aspects of solidarity organizing at the border.

To illustrate an example of the digital and affective join in technologies of care, I evoke an interview with Alexis who was in charge of food support with the San Diego Migrant and Refugee Coalition (SDMRC) during the 2018 Fall caravan. The SDMRC was a coalition of multiple groups with particular affiliations and migrant justice involvement and operated out of the Central Cultural de la Raza located in Balboa Park San Diego.. Each of the following groups delegated one or a few members to attend SDMRC meetings. The intention of SDMRC to connect existing grassroots organizing networks that work in San Diego and Tijuana. Some groups that were a part of SDMRC include: Border Angels, Food Not Bombs, Pueblos Sin Fronteras, Socialist organizations and ethnic studies educators from UC San Diego, San Diego State University and San Diego City College.

My conversation with Alexis was guided by several questions that I asked related to her involvement in transnational Central American caravan support, and questions that naturally arose. I met with Alexis in her home, and we sat at a table with my audio recorder between us. I

¹²⁴ Ahmed, Sara. "The Organization of Hate." *Law and Critique* (2001): n. pag. *Kluwer Academic Publishers*. Web.

often organize, exchange teaching strategies and have lengthy conversations with Alexis about the “root causes” of the Central American caravan. As another Salvadoran/Mexican woman, Alexis naturally evolved into a leadership role in the SDMRC and coordinated transnational support in Tijuana in November 2018. Her previous knowledge as a historian and political delegate to El Salvador equips her with the framework of solidarity when working alongside refugees. She and other members of the SDMRC were pleasantly shocked at how eager and willing family and friends from many reaches of Southern California were to gather resources to assist the migrants. Ultimately, SDMRC accrued \$8,000USD from GoFundMe and network shares via social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. Said differently, the intimately interpersonal networks, including digitally on social media, that comprise the San Diego/Tijuana region are activated in the technologies utilized by the subjects of this community.

Studies of late capitalism, which explore the role of technology and political activism, tend to argue that we live in a “network society.” This argument implies that political efforts are reflections of the technology that organizers use. The most significant and wide-ranging theorist to have described the condition of this network society is Manuel Castells¹²⁵ who argued that “it is through technology that our material, social, cultural, political and economic life is constructed. The process of making sense of the organization of the human world thus depends on how we understand the role of technology in society, and so in the first instance demands a consideration of the nature of technology itself.”¹²⁶ My interviews with organizers indicate that Facebook, Instagram, GoFundMe become viable sites of financial support for social justice efforts that are otherwise rendered unimportant and unnecessary. Social media throughout my

¹²⁵ Hands, Joss. “Activism and Technology.” In *@ Is for Activism*, 23–47. Dissent, Resistance and Rebellion in a Digital Culture. Pluto Press, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt183pbtr.5>.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

ethnographic research was deployed as a technology of care for both affective and material reasons. Alexis, in her interview, elaborated on the sense of responsibility that comes with being responsible for a large sum of money, and the types of political opportunities that technology has afforded. She reflected with me: “We started going down to Tijuana more regularly ,and then started thinking larger, as in -- how do we make this sustainable? How do we distribute food, or find a kitchen to rent that assures people are being fed?”

REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE AND FORCED MIGRATION:

THE RHETORIC OF CHOICE

The migrant caravan, though formed intentionally, is an example of a forced migration that is often (mis)represented, in both the US and Salvadoran popular representations to be about individual *choice*, where the rhetoric of choice and individual responsibility is deployed to explain (away) the migrants’ decision to leave their country. El Salvador’s current president, Nayib Bukele, was quoted as saying that Salvadoran people should make the “choice” to stay in El Salvador rather than go to the United States “begging” for economic opportunity. Expanding the reproductive justice framework to address forced migration, I argue that this rhetoric of choice absolves U.S. foreign policy and Central American neoliberal policy--including the Plan Mesoamerica, the Plan Colombia, the Merida Initiative and the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI)-- of responsibility for dismantling economic and social opportunities in the Northern Triangle, precipitating the eventual exodus of displaced and dispossessed Central Americans. The questions to be asked about the caravans should be: What are the conditions that make fleeing Central America the only choice of survival? Is choosing to migrate really an individual choice when it is the only viable option? In other words, moving the concept of

reproduction away from the biological to the social and political allows for leftist, U.S. based activists and scholars to consider the range of intersecting structural factors that motivate forced migration.

The discourse of choice is central to both neoliberal political economies and mainstream feminist movements. Choice is central to “pro-choice” the discourse that argues it is a woman’s right to choose what to do with her own body. On the other hand, Salvadoran scholars have illuminated how neoliberalism has manifested in the forms of privatizing public pension systems, prison building packages and increased militarization, providing more market choices for multinational corporations.¹²⁷ Additionally, my interviews with Central American migrants illustrate how the choices people make in preparing for their journey should be understood not as individual choices but rather as political choices. Further, these choices can be analyzed through a reproductive justice framework as countering neoliberal logics of individual care, considering the communal distribution of care work, such as watching over one another’s children while en route. These forms of care are reproductive issues because they are inherently concerned with sustaining and protecting life - particularly of youth.

¹²⁷ Osuna, Steven. “Transnational Moral Panic: Neoliberalism and the Spectre of MS-13.” *Race & Class* 61, no. 4 (April 1, 2020): 3–28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396820904304>.
CISPES: Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador. “Backlash to Right-Wing Water Privatization Efforts Will Influence Salvadoran Presidential Race.” <http://cispes.org/article/backlash-right-wing-water-privatization-efforts-will-influence-salvadoran-presidential-race>.

TRANSNATIONAL REFUGEE SUPPORT: THE FORMATION OF OMDR and SDMRC

My interview with Rayo Del Sol, one of the founding members of the Otay Mesa Detention Resistance (OMDR) illustrated the range of transnational support services that she provides for refugees recently released from detention in San Diego and refugees waiting for asylum in Tijuana. Providing transportation and care work for detainees takes an enormous amount of time, energy and effort, entailing coordinating transnational technologies of care and communicating over multiple platforms.¹²⁸ OMDR is a highly organized network of San Diego and Tijuana-based activists, educators and community members who engage material forms of technology (WhatsApp, Signal, Instagram, Facebook) to recruit and disseminate resources. Formed in April 2018, OMDR serves detainees who are either still incarcerated or recently released from the Otay Mesa Detention Center, located east of the San Ysidro border in San Diego. In Rayo del Sol's words, "we wanted to support the caravaneros and the folks that were coming specifically on this side of the border [San Diego]. We support folks in detention, and as they make their way out, provide as much humanitarian support as possible." The three forms of support that OMDR offers include: detainee-direct support, local power-building and outreach and communication.¹²⁹ OMDR was already engaging in refugee support prior to the November 2018 caravan arrival of around 2,500 people. She describes her involvement as originating with a call-out that *Pueblos Sin Fronteras* made to the community in San Diego because some members

¹²⁸ The World from PRX. "Arizona Volunteers Form 'Underground' Network to House Migrants Released by ICE." Accessed May 18, 2020. <https://www.pri.org/stories/2019-03-26/arizona-volunteers-form-underground-railroad-house-migrants-dumped-ice>.

¹²⁹ "Migrant Solidarity | Otay Mesa Detention Resistance | United States." Otay Mesa Detention. Accessed September 25, 2019. <https://www.otaymesadetentionresistance.org>.

were traveling from Central America with the second caravan and were anticipating much-needed support upon arrival.

Once the organization *Pueblos Sin Fronteras* communicated to key leaders in the San Diego binational community that a caravan of at least 2,500 people were on their way in November 2018, OMDR spearheaded a donation drive at the Centro Cultural de La Raza located in Balboa Park, San Diego. The Centro Cultural de la Raza is a non-profit organization founded in 1970 and is an apt space for coordinating a large project like clothing/food drives because it offers ample meeting spaces, tables and chairs, and is guided by vibrant community activists. Locally referred to as “The Centro,” they additionally hosted regular meetings for various migrant-justice organizations and engaged in coalition support, which was key to their strategy to tap into existing refugee-centered organizers. Rayo who is a long-term frequenter of the Centro relays that “we recognized that we do not have a lot of legal background and knowledge about how to navigate the U.S. legal system, but there are a lot of tools at our disposal that we can use, like networking with other organizations that were already doing very specific work such as finding sponsors for people or accruing bond funds for detainees.” These meetings at the Centro Cultural de La Raza were composed of multiple local, San Diego/Tijuana organizations who worked together to coordinate transnational support in Tijuana/Playas in two broad categories: humanitarian and political aid.

My interlocutor Alexis regularly attended the weekly Friday meetings hosted at the Centro on behalf of SDMRC. In my interview with her, she recounted that humanitarian aid - what I consider to be care work - was not seen as political “enough” by a few of the participants at these weekly meetings. As she explained:

“We broke into two committees: humanitarian and political aid at the San Diego Migrant and Refugee Coalition (SDMRC) meetings. We ended up being split into two camps: people going to Tijuana who witnessed dire and immediate need, and people who remained on the U.S. side of the border...They wanted to have rallies and marches on the U.S. side and image out how to mobilize marches here. A lot of us didn’t want to march here. Conceptually we do -- we want the representation that San Diego supports refugees...but also, they [refugees] didn't eat today - you really want to talk about a march? So, we split and stayed that way for a while... This binary was created that there is political work, and then there is humanitarian work; in my eyes, humanitarian aid is completely political. The work was political. Historically, humanitarian work is depoliticized, and we’re taught about it in this depoliticized way. But I was still involved for the rallies and marches because at the end of the day we’re in a coalition.”

In her statement, Alexis observed that the humanitarian aid she was providing to asylum seekers was not considered to be “political work” by other organizers. However, the care work that she was providing alongside the SDMRC like clothing, meal drop-offs eventually led to a community-run kitchen in Tijuana and responded directly to displaced migrants’ needs. In 2018, Alexis was working just before the Thanksgiving holiday in Tijuana when asylum seekers were evicted from the Benito Juarez Stadium to make-shift refugee encampments. Alexis’s assertion that humanitarian aid, though it can be a benevolent, individualistic, and depoliticized endeavor, can also be a political act that represents the unique, embodied experiences people from the diaspora have when working with asylum seekers. I define a political act as an action (like food distribution) that not only recognizes the humanity of an individual (humanitarian), but also supports a community’s autonomy. (creating a food kitchen for migrants to control and run). Salvadorans that are the first in their family to be born and raised in the United States have a unique positionality in engaging in mutual solidarity work with asylum seekers because this experience is evident of a recirculation of their own parent’s migration. Bichita, a UC San Diego educator and member of SDMRC is part of the Salvadoran diaspora, and described the experience of working with the caravan as “somewhat traumatizing, I mean I was imagining my

mom a lot, and what it must have been like for her when she finally made it to Tijuana. It shows that the problems that created mass displacement during their time [during the 1980s civil war in El Salvador] never really went away.” Alexis, whose mother also fled El Salvador civil war disagreed with the separation of these two strategies--care work and “political work”--to support the caravan results in ideological splits and demonstrates the range of approaches and opinions about how to best serve the caravan. Alexis nevertheless decided to also stay involved with rallies and marches because as she says, ultimately she was part of a coalition of people. Collective decision-making practices were important to the coalitional efforts that responded to the needs of the Central American caravan. Overall I am stating that both “care work” like cooking, cleaning, reproduction of the self and community and “political work” like protests, declarations and marches are perceived as separate in the border organizing spaces during the caravan arrivals in 2018-2019. A reproductive justice framework, drawing from Black feminists that do recognize reproductive work like child-rearing, cooking and homemaking to be considered innate to women. Suggesting “women’s work” is not political misconstrues the essential labor required to reproduce the self and community on a daily basis.

While coding interviews for common themes, I noted that both Alexis and Rayo emphasize the importance of local leadership in crafting sustainable support for the Central American caravan. They both noted that existing migrant-rights organizations like *Pueblos Sin Fronteras* and *Border Click* specifically recruited local community organizers to the San Diego/Tijuana area. Investing in local leadership and trusting existing networks that have been doing work on the ground is an excellent way to avoid refugee-extractive activism - or what I understand to be “helicopter activism.” The notion of a helicopter indicates that much aid for the caravan can be temporary - one drops off goods and flies back home. The longevity of the

material and political support for the caravan is critically important: a donation drive one or two times does not suffice in sustaining long-term support, and while financial donation and remote organizing is undoubtedly important to sustaining work at the border, local long-term housing and solutions are required. As Rayo elaborated in her interview:

“They [Pueblos Sin Fronteras] wanted to specifically make a call to people that are native to San Diego...people that weren’t going to leave San Diego, or only be here to organize for a little bit and then leave. So, their purpose was to find folks that were grounded here, had networks here and could focus their energy in this region. I felt a huge responsibility to respond to this call-out because I am native to this place. I am bilingual, I have dual citizenship and can navigate the border back and forth so freely.”

Indeed, caravaneros - and the larger Central American refugee community - are highly sensationalized in U.S. media, leaving this community particularly vulnerable to reporters aiming to extract “newsworthy” stories of spectacular suffering. I attribute the rise of helicopter activism to the U.S. media, which from 2014 to 2019 has focused on youth, children and mothers as a result of new policies that mandate family separation at the border. The ideological effect of doing so has prompted renewed conversations amongst the U.S. public about the ethics of separating families, and incarcerating minors in detention centers. The transnational refugee networks in San Diego and Tijuana are created and sustained in response to the fluctuation of the law and border. Returning to my research questions on the forms of care that ensure the mutual survivance of caravaneros and the activists who work alongside them, I move to discuss themes that demonstrate technologies of care transmitted between caravaneros and the activists in a humanitarian and political capacity.

“LES PONEN MUCHAS CONTRAS”:

TRANSPORTATION AND TECHNOLOGIES OF CARE

In this section, I feature OMDR and SDMRC as two local and necessarily transnational organizations based in San Diego. These two grassroots organizations coordinate refugee support, transportation and sponsorship post-detention including providing prepaid cell phones, housing solutions and legal support. The material practice of accruing a large enough network to send out “calls” for available people to pick up refugees, house them, or secure a reliable sponsor if that has not already been established is the most intimate form of emotional and physical caretaking. I consider short term housing as a technology of care and intimate endeavor because it implies inviting acquaintances into your home and homemaking together; Even if only for a short period of time, this act requires a tremendous amount of trust.

OMDR’s critical work in post-detention support illustrates the dehumanizing structural protocol with which ICE agents interact with refugees. Detention centers like Otay Mesa that operate at the U.S./Mexico border not only routinely harass, violate and denigrate detainees, but also continue these practices immediately after detainees are released.¹³⁰ According to the U.S. Immigration and Custom Enforcement release protocol, people released from secure custody become part of a “non detained docket” managed by Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO). Every case, whether "detained" or "non-detained," remains part of ERO's caseload and is actively managed until it is formally closed.¹³¹ Though case managers are supposedly assigned to recently released detainees as part of the watchful eye of the ERO, there are virtually zero

¹³⁰ The World from PRX. “Arizona Volunteers Form ‘Underground’ Network to House Migrants Released by ICE.” Accessed May 18, 2020. <https://www.pri.org/stories/2019-03-26/arizona-volunteers-form-underground-railroad-house-migrants-dumped-ice>.

¹³¹ “Detention Management.” Accessed May 19, 2020. <https://www.ice.gov/detention-management>.

humane, structural resettlement practices. Rayo’s interview sheds light on the institutionalized practices that leave recently released detainees vulnerable to sexual violence and extortion, and more importantly, how grassroots activists in the diaspora respond to the needs of migrants. Rayo is one of several core members in OMDR that drive to the San Ysidro bus station to meet detainees. She shared that upon release, detainees are often taken to the greyhound bus station in San Ysidro in the middle of the night, even though these stations are closed and inoperable between eight at night and one in the morning. Additionally, she assists in contacting volunteers to meet recently released detainees in the event she is unable to go herself. In my interview with Rayo, she noted that the goal of meeting detainees at the Greyhound station was to provide them with support to get to their next destination:

“ICE drops people off at the McDonalds at the end of the trolley station, and they drop them off very inconveniently, in the dark, and sometimes after the trolley even stops running. So, if people had the resources to pay for the trolley, they cannot because it's so late. It's a big window from 8pm to 1am at night, it's very disorienting, and most of these folks have never been in the U.S. and don't know how s*** works, or just how do you even navigate transportation? *Les ponen muchas contras.*”

Rayo’s reflection that ICE “puts a lot of barriers” against refugees (*les ponen muchas contras*) astutely points to the intentionality of dropping off refugees in the middle of the night; the choice to do so is calculated and is meant to further exert physical and mental violence on Central American detainees. Dropping detainees off alone, at night, places refugees in a precarious position, such as sleeping in bus stations, and roaming at night leaves especially women and trans migrants vulnerable to extortion or bodily harm.¹³² At times, detainees are

¹³² “Human Rights Groups Allege ICE, Private Detention Companies, Provide Poor Care to LGBTQ Migrants and Those with HIV - The Washington Post.” Accessed October 2, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/human-rights-groups-allege-ice-private-detention-companies-provide-poor-care-to-lgbtq-migrants-and-those-with-hiv/2019/09/25/a4f3747c-dfc9-11e9-be96-6adb81821e90_story.html.

released with an established destination in mind: either with a potential sponsor, or with family/friends that are waiting for them. Often, these sponsors are far and wide within the United States, such as Texas, Florida, NYC, L.A and Chicago. If detainees already have a sponsor, their transportation is often paid for; if not, OMDR uses discretionary funding to pay for bus or plane tickets for refugees. Disoriented, confused and often stepping foot for the first time in the U.S., many recently released detainees’ resort to sleeping in the bus station until the morning. The precariousness of being released in the middle of the night should not be understated, and ICE’s decision to do so illustrates the utter carelessness with which Central American lives are handled post-detention.

NBC San Diego News reported that ICE’s systematic release of detainees in the middle of the night in the Fall of 2018 caused a unique strain on local churches and community centers. The sheer volume of asylum cases and structural dehumanization of Central American refugees has prompted the rapid processing of asylees; hence, post-detention life is largely unstructured: people are swiftly removed in order to make room for already overcrowded detention centers.¹³³ NBC reports that “Immigration and Customs Enforcement is releasing detained families without any plans on where these asylum seekers should go, or how they should get there. The immigrants are released in an ‘Alternatives to Detention’ program that allows them to remain in the U.S. while they await their hearing in Immigration Court.”¹³⁴ In this context, leftist activists, along with local clergy groups, labored to provide transportation and advice for suddenly

¹³³ San Diego Union-Tribune. “Report Highlights Unsanitary Conditions, Potential Abuses at Immigration Detention Centers,” August 28, 2019.

<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/immigration/story/2019-08-27/report-highlights-unsanitary-conditions-potential-abuses-at-immigration-detention-centers>.

¹³⁴ Rodriguez, Gaby. “Immigration Detainees Dropped on Streets With Nowhere To Go.” NBC 7 San Diego. Accessed October 2, 2019. <http://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/local/Asylum-Seekers-Dropped-on-Local-Streets-With-No-Where-to-Go-499485421.html>.

released detainees. I consider the logistical planning that OMDR does in determining and intervening as soon as ICE drops off recently released detainees to be important intervention work and evidence of technologies of care.

TEMPORARY HOME-MAKING AND QUEERING

I also conceptualize both temporary and long-term homemaking for asylees as technologies of care. The U.S. government's negligence in creating a proper system for releasing detainees to the public created more care work for the refugee support networks in San Diego that have formed over years of transnational border activism. In addition to helping coordinate transportation through OMDR, Rayo and her family often provide emergency housing for recently released detainees or refugees for a day or two if they do not have a set destination post-release. Rayo described her experience in providing temporary housing to recently released detainees as akin to building a family; this queering of normative family relations, though symbolic, shows the possibilities of non-normative family structure in providing intimacy and safety. Embedded within an existing immigrant community in San Diego, Rayo's mother who lives with young children, opened her home for families. In the following excerpt, Rayo describes the family's presence in the home as "familiar":

"A whole family stayed at my mom's house, and that was a beautiful experience because my mom lives with my sobrinos, so there was this one time where all the kids were playing together in the backyard, and it was so harmonious. Estos ninos were so sweet and caring, and it felt familiar to observe the way we all moved in the house with each other."

These quotidian moments should not be understated when felt and experienced within the context of the journey that brought these people together. Considering the well-documented levels of trauma, PTSD and mental health disorders that many Central American refugees

developed prior to and post migration, the feeling of safety and familiarity upon detention release establishes the beginnings of reproducing themselves, and rebuilding their lives.¹³⁵ Moreover, I argue these quotidian moments are the material evidence of technologies of care: of refusing to turn an eye to the profound exodus and human rights crisis that was --and is -- the Central American caravan. Homemaking, wrought with gendered and heteronormative expectation, is reconceptualized and circulated amongst not only biological family, but also amongst strangers. The multiple encounters these two communities have are moments of queer kinship whereby the life-giving labor that sustains personhood is given - not with the expectation of extraction of personal gain, but rather because it is just. In direct contrast with ICE intentionally leaving detainees at closed bus stations, the welcoming of strangers into Rayo's home presents an alternative world making process, whereby refugee life is reproduced and ensured with trust, tenderness and care.

FOOD AND TECHNOLOGIES OF CARE

While Rayo participated in housing resettlement and transportation as technologies of care, Alexis focused on food distribution, eventually helping create a migrant-led kitchen in Tijuana. My conversations with Alexis about her experience as an *hormiga* and why she focused on food distribution shed light on gendered value within the caravan. Food as a technology of care calls attention to the material and immaterial labor that is invested in SDMRC's efforts to feed detainees who were held at a sports stadium in Tijuana. In addition to the technologies of care in their most blatant form online, I am also inspired by the ways activists have worked around the police and immigration officials who have regulated and barred humanitarian aid

¹³⁵ Keller A, Joscelyne A, Granski M, Rosenfeld B (2017) Pre-Migration Trauma Exposure and Mental Health Functioning among Central American Migrants Arriving at the US Border. PLOS ONE 12(1): e0168692. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0168692>

from reaching the encampments. Alexis recalls the conditions of the Unidad Deportiva Benito Juarez - the location in Tijuana where close to 3,000 caravaneros were waiting. Upon first arriving, Alexis and the four SDMRC members she was with were barred from entering the stadium by Mexican police and threatened with arrest. She recalls:

“But my friends and I were really committed to this [food distribution], and we said you know what, if they’re going to arrest us, then let them arrest us. The police told us to move when we tried to drive in, and when we parked further away, they came over and told us, “You can't park here. You can't take things inside.” We talked to some caravaneros walking by, and they told us, “You know what, if you let us carry it, we can take it in.” We found ways around it.”

Soon after SDMRC made their first visits to evaluate what was most needed in Tijuana, Mexican police thereafter evicted the majority of the caravaneros to another location called El Barretal, which was a muddy courtyard that was transformed into refugee outdoor housing¹³⁶. However, not all were transferred to El Barretal, and a group of around one hundred caravaneros remained outside of the stadium. This is the group of people SDMRC was mostly concerned with providing medical and food care to while caravaneros calculated their next move. Alexis recalls that while they were embedded in a network of grassroots supporters in Tijuana, the sheer volume of people made it impossible to continually coordinate with leaders from local shelters. Alexis relays being concerned that because many activists were living in the United States, their work in food distribution was not sustainable, making it that much more crucial to network with Tijuana based activists as well.

The conditions of the Benito Juarez stadium illustrate the collaboration between SDMRC and the caravaneros. *Hormigas* like Alexis and Bichita who emphasized food distribution as a

¹³⁶ Olivo, Antonio “A Makeshift Shower in a Muddy Courtyard. Donated Meals Too Far Apart.” Washington Post. Accessed May 19, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/a-makeshift-shower-in-a-muddy-courtyard-donated-meals-too-far-apart/2018/12/03/43c6e078-f67f-11e8-863a-8972120646e0_story.html.

vital technology of care provide immediate, material support and much needed food to the encampment during October- December of 2018. Alexis recounted how caravaneros autonomously formed security patrols while at the Benito Juarez stadium; these security patrols were a response to recent anti-caravan targeting. Aggression and violence frequently erupted in Tijuana - particularly Playas - because the caravaneros were perceived as dirty, taking up space, and wasting Mexican national resources. Alexis, in her conversations with the caravaneros, pieced together that twelve men were designed to “watch the parameters of the encampment,” and rotate shifts throughout the night. Prior to the increased policing and eventual eviction of this stadium, SDMRC was responsible for transporting the donation of drive goods that were coming through the Centro Cultural de la Raza. As such, the activists in SDMRC formed coalitional bonds with caravaneros, who already had a system of organizing themselves for meals. Considering that SDMRC was not allowed inside the stadium, they packed reusable bags and purses, and caravan members slowly brought in the bags. This intricate system that SDMRC coordinated with the caravaneros to discreetly meet outside the stadium, and slowly bring in food shows how long the *hormiga* journey of bringing food from San Diego can be, as it includes crossing the border by foot or vehicle and avoiding fines, and finding a way to distribute the food through security at the Benito Juarez stadium.

Notably, Alexis and other SDMRC members witnessed the distribution system that caravaneros had crafted on their journey from the northern triangle. I pause to reflect on this collaborative effort to feed one another to comment on the forms of care caravaneros have conceptualized amongst one another. In the three weeks that SDMRC was involved with the stadium food support before transitioning to a local community kitchen, Alexis explains caravaneros would “line up” according to gender, age and ability:

“When it comes to food, there was clearly an existing system... we [SDMRC] always brought enough to feed about two hundred... [once they brought the food in] everyone lined up by gender: Children all had to be fed before anyone else could, then the women, elderly or disabled got food, the men were last. No one questioned this format, and I'm guessing it came up with them from Central America... This is the structure that had developed on the way up. There were times where not everyone got food, and it sucks because it was almost always the men... yeah it was the men who didn't eat for a long time or didn't know when their next meal would come. Some were literally begging us...but for the most part we usually had enough at least to... yeah ...but yeah, that was the structure as much as we observed? They definitely prioritized women and children when it came to resources, even the tents and shelters. Men were telling me that they were still sleeping under tarps because they wanted the gear to go to families or women and children. There were a lot of internal belief systems in place.”

Alexis in this excerpt reflects on a food delivery day to the Benito Juarez stadium alongside four other members of the San Diego Migrant and Refugee Coalition. Typically, coordinating food distribution for hundreds of people can be chaotic; yet as Alexis relays, caravaneros organized themselves by a clearly pre-existing value system of who needs food first, or who is more deserving of food. In this example of food distribution as a technology of care, who receives food first is clearly inflected by gender, whereby men are considered the lowest priority, and women and children are higher. Alexis reflected that it was very common for men to go for several days without eating. I believe the gendered implications of this example are complicated: when contrasted with the punitive approach in which both El Salvador and the U.S. approach gang members that are comprised of men and young boys, it appears as if men within the Central American community are expected to be able to handle physical suppression and starvation. In communal distribution settings, are often left hungry. Simultaneously, the impressive food distribution system is a technology of care because it is a systematic method of ensuring the most vulnerable in the encampment groups are prioritized. Alexis's observation points to the recognition that women and children are indeed the most statistically vulnerable to trafficking.

Simultaneously, as explored in the Introduction of this dissertation, these gendered forms of care make women and children most legible as needing help, and disregards Central American men as also vulnerable to forms of violence and extortion.

CONCLUSION

This chapter demonstrates how U.S. based activists responded to the Central American caravan crisis at the U.S./Mexico border in 2018-2019. Through utilizing action research and formal and informal interviews with both caravaneros and activists, I highlight the forms of world-making created amongst asylum seekers while en route, in Tijuana, and in their encounters with Salvadoran and Chicana organizers. These forms of world making are what I call technologies of care in the context of the Central American caravan, referring to the material and affective support that U.S. based activists provide for asylum seekers. One of the most rewarding aspects of both witnessing these technologies of care and recording them through interviews with Rayo, Alexis, Bichita, Yaneli and Maricela was how caravaneros imparted important cultural and regional knowledge as well. Rather than just victims of U.S. intervention and regional displacement, the dignity and creativity of Central Americans is celebrated in this chapter.

In my future research, I want to theorize and elaborate upon the emergent theme of burn-out, and self-care versus community care. The grassroots organizations that I highlighted in this chapter that support caravaneros are critically pivotal lifelines that ensure the survival of our people. I argue the organizing work that these activists engage in are predicated on technologies of care, such as navigating transience and coming up with creative solutions such as transportation coordination and providing temporary housing and creating shelters as short and long-term solutions. These two technologies of care though centered around the common interest

of housing are distinct because temporary housing relies on word-of-mouth and digital networks of U.S. activists to know when to meet recently released detainees in the middle of the night. Creating shelters, on the other hand grants caravaneros more autonomy in Tijuana to collectively organize their space. Both methods are important grassroots responses to state negligence on both sides of the border. The notion of transience is central to working with caravaneros who arrive in Tijuana, or as Alexis said, “You could be working with folks one day, and on your next visit to Tijuana [From San Diego] they might not be there.” This is what makes homemaking spaces so important as most evident in my interview with Rayo del Sol and her family housing several asylum seekers.. This chapter highlights these networks of care and illustrates how resettlement options amongst caravaneros are diverse. Alexis’s interview attested to the temporary - yet meaningful - nature of organizing in the U.S. Mexico border from the standpoint of political solidarity and humanitarian responsibility.

“Organizing with the caravan wasn’t easy because many encounters are transient. You don’t know who would be there the next time [we crossed into Tijuana]... maybe they crossed over [into the U.S.], or moved to another shelter. We were working with transient communities, so in some ways it feels impossible to make actual sustainable connections; you work with who is there when you are there.”

Movement building moves through phases, as most important things on this earth do. The interlocutors in this ethnographic analysis emphasize sustainable connections and long-term solutions for asylum seekers in Mexico, as claiming asylum in the United States is legally impossible at this time. The repercussions of the U.S. negating accountability for the neoliberalization of El Salvador has resulted in the Mexican government largely “dealing with” the influx of refugees. In my future research, I intend on conducting a legal analysis of Mexican national policy in refugee resettlement and exploring further the role of self-care vs community care in sustainable movement building. Rayo elaborates in her reflection on care and burnout:

“I am very concerned about the longevity and sustainability of our [Otay Mesa Detention Resistance] efforts, and how we focus our energy is something that I think we are all constantly thinking about. We want to be effective in the work that we do, and in order for it to be effective, it needs to be long-term and ongoing. It's not something I can tap into and then tap out of. We're working against a massive system that is not going to go anywhere anytime soon... that is working against us.”

Some of the efforts that Rayo alludes to include visiting currently detained Central American refugees at the Otay Mesa Detention center, coordinating sponsorship and travel support, and humanitarian response. Her emphasis on sustainable movement building - on work that endures - requires a strong organizing core of people that care for one another.

Chapter 3, in part is currently being prepared for submission for publication of the material. The dissertation author Mellissa Linton was the primary investigator and author of this paper.

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EPILOGUE



Image 4.1: Universidad Nacional de San Salvador, July 30, 2018. After the annual commemoration march at the Salvadoran National University to honor the 1976 student massacre, a Salvadoran woman stands with her left fist raised to the sky. She is in front of an army tank that was set on fire at the culmination of the march. To the right, cadaver stencils painted in white are visible on Avenida 25 Norte.

Source: the Author.

I end this dissertation with reflections on historical memory and an example of embodied direct action to inspire the Salvadoran diaspora to action. On the final day of our CISPES delegation, we attended the Salvadoran National University March to honor the 1976 Student Massacre that led to the eruption of the civil war. This was a corporeal encounter of Salvadoran nationals and U.S. born Salvadorans. Present at this march are water defenders, LGBT organizations, feminists from the capital and rural areas; a colorful coalition of people dance and sway before me. In this dissertation I situate these groups of people that work tirelessly against the criminalization of abortion, water defenders in El Salvador and, *al otro lado -- on the other*

side, asylum seekers at the US./Mexico border. I argue these instances are interrelated structural violence best understood through the lens of reproductive justice. In spite of this, technologies of care required to sustain ourselves and our social movements for dignified life flourish. Focusing on collective care lends itself to a reproductive justice lens because reproduction of the human is predicated on discourses of care and affective labor.

Reproductive labor is the replenishing life force that enables the worker to go to work, such as home cooked meals, clothing, and a nurturing home environment. These double meanings are connected, and I offer technologies of care as a form of reproductive labor, but move the term away from the biological: I understand technologies of care as not tethered to the heterosexual family unit or the reproduction of life itself, but instead the life-giving energy that *transfronteriza* activists offer to refugees - people who are not part of their “chosen” nor biological family. The labor itself invested in technologies of care rightfully are within the realm of tech - for example, nearly all of my interlocutors use forms of technology to generate material support for the caravan, including creating GoFundMe campaigns to open refugee shelters, calling for donation items via Instagram, Facebook, Slack, Signal and WhatsApp and generating revenue to buy food, tents, and supplies. Technologies of care are also within the realm of the affective, such as the emotional labor that is required to visit someone in detention as my interlocutor Rayo Del Sol does, or the emotional labor of having to tell a caravaneros that there is no more food left as Itzel had to do while in Tijuana.

The way I teach and research Critical Refugee Studies and Marxist feminism are through the perspective of situated knowledge and transnational diaspora. My work expands the reach of sexuality studies through migration and racial formation. Queer of color critique and its revisions of the nation and family articulates other forms of subjectivity, kinship, belonging, organizing

and community building that might not be legible within the nation's understanding of post-civil war society and subjectivity.

Running With My Ancestors

Can the volcanoes hugging Avenida Norte 25 see us in the elevated distance? It is July 30, 2018, and we are over two-thousand sweaty and electrified bodies baking in the San Salvador heat. The Salvadoran UES (Universidad Nacional de El Salvador) drumline slowly begins to build a sonic and infectious atmosphere for us; the bass and snare create a rhythm that calls my body to sway back and forth. The march is about to begin, and Salvadorans are in the streets exchanging politics, memories and lamentations. Others are yelling out their carefully selected merchandise items like scarves, water and *aguas*. My delegation of twenty other Salvadorans from the U.S. are enveloped by the sound of blow horns, whistles, sirens and pre-march jitters. In our reflection time after the march, so many of us spoke of our interiority throughout the march; we each weighed the significance of marching in El Salvador, as many of our parents condemn political participation because of their trauma from the civil war. At a standard ninety-nine degrees with ninety-nine percent humidity, the energy weaving through the UES 1975 massacre commemoration march crowd is both powerful and chaotic.

We carried the spirit of the Tacuba community with us through creating a banner that read “El Agua No Se Vende, Se Cuida y Se Defiende!” (Water is not for sale, [we] take care of it and defend it!) To my right: “Diáspora Salvadoreña Con La Lucha Estudiantil.” (The Salvadoran diaspora with the Student Struggle) Through dancing, chanting, singing and laughing: we formed a bridge Salvadorans living in the U.S. diaspora to Salvadoran nationals.

The Weight of The Struggle, The Will to Continue On

3:49PM - July 30, 2018: My TASCAM audio recorder indicates that an explosion went off somewhere to my east, causing my ears to ring, and my body to tense like a rock. Grecia, an *hermana* on my delegation, meets my panicked eyes, extends a hand to me without words, and I clasp it tightly while trying to steady my breathing. *Breathe In. Hold It. Breathe Out. Breathe In. Hold It. Breath Out.* When I look down, I see white paint stencils of dead bodies on the floor. Dread pools at the base of my belly while I imagine the slain students on the floor in 1975: I time travel, and taste the fear, confusion, chaos and unabashed *resistance* that must have enveloped everyone. With the drumbeat guiding my emotions - at times erratic, other times a slow, rhythmic snare, I fall into a sense of interconnectedness and ocean-deep empathy. I am considering the weight of death in the struggle, of what it means to offer your life for justice that you feel and believe deep in your bones. I am terrified and exhilarated, and recognizing deep within me I was embodying historical memory, feeling out its contours: cutting frames between the present moment and past, unable to distinguish the two, recreating moments, lost in remembering state terror, while simultaneously living within it, and fighting against it for a future that reflects our imaginations.



Image 4.2: These two photos show two banners created by the Radical Roots Delegation created by CISPES in 2018. These banners were created by our delegation for the UES Massacre Commemoration March. The top banner celebrates the current struggles against water privatization. It reads in green paint: “El Agua no se vende, se cuida y se defiende,” translating to water is not for sale, it is cared for and protected. In the middle of the banner is a water droplet filled with a tree and protruding roots. The bottom banner was painted and created by Julia P Mata with conceptual inspiration from the delegation. The banner reads: “Diáspora Salvadoreña con la Lucha Estudiantil,” translating to the Salvadoran Diaspora with (or in solidarity with) the Student Struggle. I am pictured on the bottom left alongside my friend Grecia.

Source: The Author

Suddenly, our comrades in front of us stopped marching, and motioned for us to kneel down. I silently sent a puzzled look towards my compañera Grecia, to which she sang out: “Get ready - we’re going to run!” To which I shouted back: “Why are we running?!” She smiled and said, “because we’re following the same route they took!” The intention behind the march crystallized: honor student struggle through physically reliving the day of resistance. The entire manifestation - drumline and all - counted off, and then began to sprint. I lifted my body off the hot asphalt and ran as fast as I could to keep up with the crowd lurching forward like a wave behind me. We must have sprinted over six times, and we did so methodically. We alternated between twenty minutes of marching and chanting, an *alerta*, kneeling down, sprinting, then marching and chanting once again. Following the third sprint, fatigue began to creep around me, but the drumline kept my spirit high. After the fourth sprint, I felt nearly transcendental from the endorphins, environment, and acknowledgement that I am continuing a struggle my mother carried. Our ability to occupy public space together in San Salvador, to demand that our communities thrive, scream in anger when they are violated, to proclaim our vision of what is just in the world - these are visions of reproductive justice in action.