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Originary Destinations: Re/membered Communities And Salvadoran Diasporas

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ABSTRACT: This essay analyzes the ways that El Salvador as a site of origin is configured in relation to Salvadoran migrants in the U.S. The post-war Salvadoran government, well aware of the economic benefits of the more than 2.5 billion dollars that emigres send to relatives annually, depicted El Salvador as an object of longing, as a parent to which emigres owe continued loyalty. Interviews with Salvadoran emigres who have lived the bulk of their lives in the U.S. suggest a relationship that is more complex than depictions of longing and loyalty would imply. To them, El Salvador is less a parent to whom they owe loyalty and more a somewhat unknown but key element of their own biographies. These understandings of diaspora are used to develop the notion of re/membered communities as an alternative to Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities." Recent shifts in Salvadoran government policies toward Salvadorans in the U.S. are also considered.

Diaspora is usually understood as a collectivity of individuals who have been displaced from a common origin, and who are now dispersed in a variety of locations. As Brian Axel (2004) points out, however, there is also a sense in which a homeland

or origin point comes into being retrospectively, through diaspora. Writing about Khalistani Sikhs, Axel suggests: "Place ... has been installed into social practice as a definitive place of origin. Moreover, the production of knowledge of *displacement*, which apparently defines the diaspora *as* diaspora, effectively collapses that place into a specific category of temporality—an anteriority positioning the homeland ... within a time prior to the diaspora's emergence" (2004: 44). The observation that origin is not only the site from which diaspora is produced but also is itself brought into being retrospectively raises questions about how origin is to be understood, both temporally and spatially. What processes define particular movements as diasporas, and lead individuals to conceptualize themselves as part of this greater whole? What are the relationships between nation-states that have been "left behind" and diasporic "communities" that transcend them? How is origin's authenticity affirmed and challenged through the cultural and temporal translations that diaspora requires? And can state ideologies permit diasporas to be re/membered?

This paper considers these questions in the case of El Salvador. Only recently, in the late 1990s and the 2000s, has it become common to refer to Salvadorans who have emigrated to other countries as a diaspora, through a variety of terms including *hermano lejano*, *hermano cercano*, the community living abroad, and Salvadorans in the world. In relation to these collectivities, El Salvador is construed as a temporal and spatial origin point, one that merges individual biographies with the history of the nation. Within these constructions, origin also becomes a place to return to, and therefore something of a desired or in some cases feared possible destination. To analyze how El Salvador is imagined in relation to diaspora, I focus both on state depictions of diaspora, and on interviews with Salvadorans living abroad. Following the 1980-1992 civil war, the Salvadoran government, under control of the conservative ARENA party and well aware of the economic benefits of the more than 2.5 billion dollars that

emigres send to relatives annually, depicted El Salvador as an object of *longing*, as a parent to which emigres owe continued loyalty (Baker-Cristales 2004, 2008). This depiction of El Salvador was conveyed through conferences, festivals, speeches, and websites that were sponsored by the Salvadoran government and intended for emigres' consumption. Interviews with Salvadorans who were born in El Salvador but who lived the bulk of their lives in the U.S. suggest a relationship that is more complex than depictions of longing and loyalty would imply. To them, El Salvador is less a parent to whom they owe loyalty and more a somewhat unknown but key element of their own biographies. As such, it represents both the past and the possible future, and is a place that both fascinates and haunts. With the 2009 election of a more left-leaning Salvadoran president, a new governmental strategy appears to be emerging. This strategy acknowledges the violent conditions that led Salvadorans to emigrate, attends to migrants' human rights, and attempts to counter continued emigration. This strategy may create new opportunities for rapprochement between Salvadoran émigrés and the Salvadoran state.

Re/membered Communities

To analyze the relationships that Salvadorans living abroad develop with each other and with their countries of origin, I develop the notion of "re/membered communities." This notion builds on Benedict Anderson's (1983) characterization of nations as "imagined communities," a characterization that, within the anthropology of transnationalism and diaspora,¹ has been invoked as a useful starting point but also critiqued for its limitations. On the positive side, Anderson's claim draws attention to social construction of both nations and membership. As Bernal (2004: 10) notes, "this notion also lends itself to conceptualizing transnational, de-territorialized communities

and identities. If nations do not naturally grow out of the soil but are products of cultural imagination, there is no reason why imaginations cannot jump oceans, political borders, and other barriers in creating community." On the negative side, the understanding of nations as imagined communities has been criticized for overlooking schisms, presuming homogeneity, reproducing romantic notions of the nation-state, and focusing more on imagination than on the formation of actual communities (Creed 2004; Duany 2000). Hayden (1996: 783) points out that in the extreme, the romantic notions of imagined community can "mak[e] existing heterogeneous ones unimaginable" and thus fuel ethnic cleansing. When applied to diasporas, presumptions of community can take the form of a "solar system model" (Levy 2001: 245) in that homelands are assumed to be centers around which diasporic satellites circulate. In contrast to this model, ethnographic work suggests that in fact, the centrality and singularity of "homelands" varies considerably, with diasporic sites sometimes taking on the character of homelands themselves (Levy 2001; Lukose 2007; Pattie 1999).

Characterizing communities as "re/membered" rather than "imagined" addresses these criticisms by drawing attention to historical memory, new forms of membership, and the work that is entailed in re-assembling groups, perhaps in new ways. Memory is a central theme in the literature on diaspora. Brodwin (2003: 95) uses the term "living memory" to refer to the vivid memories of Haitians who emigrated recently, while at the other extreme, Miklavcic (2008) writes of the vicarious memories and postmemories of Slovenian and Italian youth who learned about history and conflict from parents, schools, and social institutions rather than through direct experience. Hintzen (2004: 247) and Rivas (2007) stress that collective memories are diverse in that there are multiple "diasporic imaginaries" on which migrants can draw, while Das et al. (2001) focus on the importance of memory and narrative in

enabling traumatized individuals and groups to remake social worlds. By conceptualizing communities as re/membered, I draw attention to the paradox entailed in attempting to access origins through memory: origin is foundational and therefore authentic and yet returning to origin through memory requires *translation* between past and present. Translation is a complex process. Drawing on the work of Walter Benjamin (1968), Paul Brodwin points out that “translation ... must wrest another kind of meaning from the original but must also acknowledge how different that meaning is and how much of the original it fails to capture” (2003: 97). Paradoxically, origin can neither be left behind nor reached.

Examining how communities are re/membered also attends to the ways that diasporas are constructed over time, and thus avoids the problem of presuming homogeneity, harmony, and a singular origin. Through re/membering (advocacy, historical narrative, official or unofficial recognition, cultural production) communities are put together again, even though, like Humpty Dumpty, these assemblages cannot be identical to a presumed “original.” The notion of re/membered communities directs attention to ways that both diasporic and originary sites serve as origins for self and community, and in both positive and negative ways. Thus, exclusionary practices in migrants’ countries of residency shape migrants’ identities, promoting senses of indigeneity or connection to homeland (Aparicio 2007; Delugan 2010). As Hintzen (2004: 295) points out regarding West Indians residing in the San Francisco Bay Area: “Diasporic consciousness emerged as a necessary condition for accommodation in particular national spaces of those denied the right to national belonging, or those whose rights to such were curtailed and compromised.” At the same time, diasporic consciousness can also entail claiming traditions and histories that are part of migrants’ country of residence. Thus, Dominican youth living in New York saw themselves as part of genealogies of struggle that included not only the Dominican

activists of earlier generations but also U.S. groups such as SNCC and the Black Panthers (Aparicio 2007).

Examining the ways that communities are re/membered also addresses notions of temporality associated with “imagined communities.” Eisenlohr (2004: 81) highlights Anderson’s claim that nationalism entailed a reconceptualization of time as empty and homogenous, “that is, linearly progressing time measurable in uniform units.” This linear notion of time, Anderson argues, enabled individuals to place their own lives on a timeline that included national events, and thus to perceive themselves as heir to and part of national histories. The forms of historical memory practiced by re/membered communities both draw on and challenge this notion of temporality. On the one hand, migrants who link biography and national history avail themselves of timelines, yet on the other, through community practices of historical memory, pasts that are never fully acknowledged return, troubling the distinction between past and present (Miklavcic 2008). Re/membering is thus temporally complex: it permits connections to be forged but does so through *return*, a doubling back that is simultaneously a leap forward.

By drawing attention to re/membering and to the ways that origins are also destinations, I attempt to capture the temporal and spatial paradoxes entailed in diaspora. Thus, re/membered communities devise symbols that, to paraphrase D’Alisera (2002: 80), embody distance from home and yet deny separation. They are simultaneously indigenous and diasporic (Delugan 2010), centers and peripheries (Levy 2001). They are produced through traumas that can neither be completely remembered nor completely forgotten (Robben 2005). And, they are constructed both materially and discursively through state practices. I turn now to an examination of those practices in the case of Salvadoran diasporas.

Constructing Diaspora

The Salvadoran state played a central role in producing diaspora by creating economic and political conditions that led Salvadorans to emigrate. Although emigration from El Salvador to neighboring countries has long existed (Hamilton and Chinchilla 1991; Menjívar 2000), the size of this exodus increased dramatically during the 1980-1992 Salvadoran civil war. Anthropologist Dickson-Gómez (2003: 329), who conducted fieldwork within a repopulated rural community in El Salvador, described the ways that authorities targeted the civilian population:

The early 1980s were characterized by large numbers of mutilation killings and “disappearances” designed to create terror in the population and suppress growing political organization and popular unrest among the Salvadoran people. In 1981, the government initiated aggressive attempts to depopulate rural areas in order to destroy what it perceived as the social and material base of the opposition movement.

Direct and indirect victims of such depopulation efforts fled to other parts of El Salvador, Central America, and elsewhere. By 1984, “within El Salvador there were 468,000 displaced people (9.75 percent of the population), 244,000 in Mexico and elsewhere in Central America, and 500,000 more in the U.S., for a total of more than 1.2 million displaced and refugees (25 percent of the population)” (Byrne 1996: 115). In the U.S., emigres formed community organizations in solidarity with popular movements in El Salvador and to provide services to the burgeoning refugee population (Coutin 2005). Not surprisingly, there was an adversarial relationship between these organizations, and the Salvadoran government (Baker-Cristales 2008). Organizations protested human rights violations in El

Salvador, denounced U.S. military assistance to the Salvadoran government, and held protests at Salvadoran consulates.

During the post-war period, as migrant remittances became increasingly important for the Salvadoran economy, the Salvadoran government began to court this population, promoting particular understandings of the diasporic Salvadoran population (see also Levy 2001; Rivas 2007). Within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a directorate and vice ministry post to attend to the community living abroad were created; the Salvadoran consulates began to provide immigration services and to intensify their work with Salvadoran hometown associations and other groups; matching funds were set aside to support development projects in Salvadoran communities; a website with information about donations, Salvadoran products, talented Salvadorans living around the world, and community association's events was established; and Salvadoran president Antonio Saca began holding forums with Salvadorans living abroad. These festivals, websites, programs, and activities sought both to redefine the Salvadoran polity as extending beyond territorial borders and to define El Salvador as an object of nostalgia and devotion, in short, as key to emigrants' identities, pasts, and futures. Baker-Cristales (2008) has noted as well that through these activities, the Salvadoran government adopted the transnational discourse that had been developed by Salvadoran immigrant organizations in the U.S.

In consultation with Salvadorans living within and outside the country, the Salvadoran government developed and promulgated a particular vision of the role that Salvadorans in the exterior could play in the life of El Salvador. During his presidency, Calderón Sol created the Comisión Nacional de Desarrollo (National Development Commission), which in 1998 published a report based on consultations with Salvadoran academics, professionals, and scientists on specific themes (Comisión Nacional de Desarrollo 1999). Two of the themes (*sociedad sin fronteras* [Society without Borders] and

Los salvadoreños y salvadoreñas en el exterior [Salvadoran men and women living abroad]) spoke specifically to the relationship between emigrants and El Salvador. The report's authors (which included Salvadorans living abroad) emphasized the need to "overcome the stereotype that identifies us [Salvadorans in the exterior] solely as 'money machines'" (p. 333) and stressed the idea that Salvadorans in the exterior had much more than money to offer El Salvador. Statements such as "the Salvadoran emigrant professional, trained in the exterior, can .. share his advanced or specialized knowledge" (p. 343), depict the "exterior" as a place where Salvadorans progress and acquire new capabilities. The emphasis on Salvadoran emigres' desire to contribute to national development promotes a sort of transnational nationalism (see also Baker-Cristales 2004). That is, the nation is deemed to transcend borders, but is still a key source of identity and object of devotion. For example, authors assert, "living outside of our national borders (*fronteras patrias*) does not make us foreigners, that is to say, it is a reality that tends to strengthen our national identity" (Comisión Nacional de Desarrollo 1999: 336). Urging the Salvadoran state "to take the Salvadoran community in the exterior into account as a key partner" (Comisión Nacional de Desarrollo 1999: 351), the authors argue that emigrants can promote national development by sharing their expertise, purchasing Salvadoran products, investing in Salvadoran businesses, and engaging in tourism. All these initiatives, they suggest, require action on the part of the state.²

Government and other initiatives designed to more fully recognize Salvadoran emigres' involvement in Salvadoran life constructed emigrant citizens as "kin" (*hermanos*), connected to El Salvador by birth, blood, culture, and love of country (see also Bernal 2004; Creed 2004; Hobsbawm 1990). The Minister of Foreign Affairs characterized Salvadorans living abroad as people who "long to remember their customs, see images of their people, transmit their culture to the children that have

been born to them in the U.S., in short, they want to remain connected to El Salvador" (Brizuela de Avila 2003; see also Rivas 2007). The notion that such connections could be solidified through, among other things, service to and sacrifice for country was linked to the efforts to increase El Salvador's competitiveness in the global market. Emigrants' potential as a market for Salvadoran exports, investors in Salvadoran businesses, and sources of expertise would only be realized if Salvadoran emigrants continued to identify closely with El Salvador. As Baker-Cristales notes, "migrant-producing states seek to enchant their mobile subjects, to make them believe that they belong to the place where they are not present, and to monitor, claim, and control them from afar" (2008: 353).

Such increased attention to Salvadoran émigrés redefined Salvadoran identity, both at home and abroad. Officials frequently characterized Salvadorans living abroad as "more Salvadoran" than Salvadorans living in El Salvador. For example, at a conference in San Salvador (ASOSAL 2000), the Salvadoran vice president remarked, "We can probably say that .. those who have had to leave feel much more united to this land that saw their birth than those of us who live in it. At the same conference, a Salvadoran scholar commented, "In foreign lands, that is when the Salvadoran most feels the need to identify himself, and that is where he dreams of his country. In most cases, distance makes identity stronger."³ The notion that emigres have the strongest cultural identities may be proscriptive as well as descriptive. That is, without negating the intense nostalgia, longing, patriotism, and sense of connection that many emigres feel, it also seems clear that many people are telling them that they are *supposed* to feel this way (Baker-Cristales 2004).

These reassessments of cultural identity also redefined national spaces in ways that incorporated diaspora. As the Salvadoran vice president Carlos Quintanilla Schmidt told a group of U.S. academics in 2002, "El Salvador is no longer only

El Salvador with the six and one-half million inhabitants who live in Central America. Today, El Salvador is wherever there is a Salvadoran." Similarly, an economic official told me that she had come to envision El Salvador more as a nation than as a country: "Our borders are no longer sufficient for us.. We are one nation no matter where we are." And, at a conference in Los Angeles in 2007, a Salvadoran foreign affairs official working in the area of culture commented that El Salvador had become "a society without borders." This official showed a video that featured photos of cultural celebrations and Salvadoran art exhibits. Each photo first showed a close-up of the cultural display and then panned outward to display a subtitle with the location of the event : Italy, Canada, the U.S., Australia, and so forth. Such depictions redefine El Salvador not only as origin point but also as having extended itself throughout the world via the emigration of Salvadorans. Rather than emphasizing displacement, such imagery stresses connection. Like offspring, émigrés are depicted as being linked to their parent nation through ties of love, kinship, and sacrifice. Speaking via a video shown at the signing ceremony awarding matching funds to Los Angeles-based hometown associations, a Salvadoran official stated: "Although it's true that there are many miles of distance between the U.S. and El Salvador, it is also true that your presence is felt. I, personally, have felt your presence. Through the projects that you realize." These comments suggest that emigrants can return to El Salvador through social involvement and recognition, even when they do not move back to El Salvador.

Despite this effort to deemphasize the significance of borders, other aspects of the Salvadoran state's work with diaspora reinscribed borders. The Vice-ministry of Attention to Salvadorans Living Abroad is located in the Ministry of *Foreign Affairs*, and the vice-ministry post itself is designated for Salvadorans living *abroad*, in the *exterior*. Moreover, the Directorate of Attention to the Community Living Abroad has created programs to

strengthen the cultural identity of Salvadoran communities in the exterior, implying that the connection between El Salvador and its expatriate citizens is threatened. This program promotes knowledge of Salvadoran culture, history and geography, and distributes materials on traditional games, songs, sports, folklore, music, and dance.⁴ One of the items that is available for distribution is a giant map of El Salvador, that can be used for children's games (Dirección de Asuntos Comunitarios n.d). This program suggests that the exterior may be a place where cultural identities are not only sharpened, but also undermined. The use of a map to strengthen culture within a "society without borders" suggests that despite the emphasis on transnationalism, the nation of El Salvador is still seen as a key source of identity and cultural renewal.

Displacement and Re/membering

Interviews with Salvadorans who were born in El Salvador but who grew up in the U.S. indicated that their re/memberings were more complex than state images of nostalgia, loyalty and cultural renewal would suggest.⁵ These individuals (members of what is known as the 1.5 generation) may be in certain respects positioned between two countries, and therefore may have particular insight into the meanings of El Salvador in relation to diaspora. In contrast to state images, which emphasized connection, for these young people emigration was in many cases a profound displacement, a removal from one life trajectory to another. Significantly, many of these interviewees lived with a sense of the selves that might have been, and that they might still become. The profound displacements that some of these migrants experienced were products of a particular set of circumstances: the 1980-1992 civil war that led their parents to flee El Salvador, the privileging of birth as an origin point, the laws that prohibit unauthorized movement across national

borders, the policies that restrict access to U.S. citizenship, the discrimination that new immigrants, particularly from Latin America, experience in the U.S. The existence of alternative versions of the self can create a desire for something like reunification between, or at least deeper knowledge of these alternatives.⁶ Some interviewees described a deep desire to go to El Salvador, do research about El Salvador, or contribute to El Salvador through fundraising or addressing social problems. Interviewees saw such activities as ways of connecting with the past. At the same time, those who faced the threat or actuality of permanent removal from the U.S. stressed their connections to the U.S. and their lack of ties to El Salvador. Desire can therefore be coupled with aversion, particularly to being compelled to abandon lives that were developed in the U.S. Interviewees' ties with their homelands were ambivalent (see also Levy 2001).

Some interviewees evinced a deep desire for knowledge of and connection to El Salvador. Roxanna Ábrego, who had not returned to El Salvador since she left at age 4, imagined that in El Salvador, her culture would be the dominant culture, and she would no longer be marked as particularly different, as she was in the U.S. Roxanna said: "I still have so much of El Salvador influencing me, you know, and the way I speak, things like that are, are, are just you know, indicative of, of my past there, or my roots there. The idea that I can go and I can use the words that are normal to me in my house, without somebody pointing out, 'Oh' you know, 'That's a Salvadorean word,' you know." For Roxanna, El Salvador was a place where her own culture was practiced, and where she would encounter others like herself. Milda Escobar, who came to the U.S. in 1989 at age 5, also saw El Salvador as a source of knowledge about her own (and her nation's) past. She emphasized that her generation has "such a desire to connect, to know!.. There is a deep desire to connect! The past. They just took us! We didn't leave on our own. And then for those of us who were active in organiza-

tions, or who are [socially and politically] conscious, we want to connect. '*Dejamos el ombligo allá,*' as they say." Similarly, Rosa Hernández, a college student who immigrated to the U.S. at the age of 18 months, suggested that individuals who were born in El Salvador and who were taken away as children had the strongest desire to return. She commented: "Those who were born there and who stayed want to leave. Those who were born and raised here [in the U.S.] see themselves as American or don't want to go back. Those who were born there and were brought want to go back.... They have lost something and they want to recover it."⁷

Interviewees who desired to reconnect with El Salvador sought to return to origin through a re-acquaintance with their childhood selves and a deeper knowledge of their family's and El Salvador's history. Roxanna Ábrego was interested in "finding my roots in El Salvador." Mónica Ramirez, who immigrated to the U.S. in 1992 at age 8, wanted to "trace where I spent most of my childhood. And, the home I grew up in that I can't really remember in details. You know? I can remember like, my bed and the kitchen and certain stuff. But I would really like to see it for myself. And, where I played and how it has changed from the little things I can remember. And then, visit my mom's side of the family because it's something I used to do once in a while, when I was little when my grandma could take me." Mauricio Nuñez Arellano, who came to the U.S. in 1989 at age 2, wanted "to learn more about where I was from." Numerous interviewees wanted to pursue research in El Salvador, or to develop projects that would benefit the nation. Roxanna Ábrego hoped to do medical research, Mauricio wanted to start a construction company in order to help people build houses, and Rosa Hernández dreamed of organizing a theatre workshop in her hometown. Roxana commented that she and her friends "feel like we need to work to change things here, we also have that responsibility over there. You know, we

still consider that part of us enough to where we need to do something to improve things there.”

This desire for knowledge of and re-acquaintance with El Salvador, family history, and shadow selves demonstrates the powerful hold that nations exert on imaginations (see also Anderson 1983). Roxanna Ábrego, for example, described El Salvador as “this fabled place. It’s like enchanted. It’s like a fantasy to me.... It’s a mixture of my parents and my family’s tales of things that happened. It’s a collage of like, posters that I see when I go to *pupuserias* and images that I see on the T.V., when they have reports on El Salvador.... And then books I’ve read or pictures that I’ve seen or little children that I met that just came here.” Roxanna imagined that upon returning, she would feel “so happy. Just very so happy to be there. Like, I can’t believe that I’m here. Hmm, just, just overwhelmed.... It’s going to be very powerful for me to go back.” Eduardo and Cesar, student activists who were born in the U.S. and who helped to found a Salvadoran student organization at their University, described El Salvador as a source of inspiration: “It is our Mecca, our motivation to keep going, and to share what we have learned with others, for the betterment of our country.” Eduardo and Cesar hoped to coordinate their own work with that of student organizations in El Salvador and elsewhere. They planned to travel to El Salvador repeatedly.

In contrast, for other interviewees, the circumstances that had led their families to emigrate eliminated or reduced any desire to return to El Salvador, a place that they envisioned as characterized by violence and poverty (see also Dickson-Gómez 2003). Carlos Pineda, who emigrated to the U.S. in 1982 at the age of eleven, told me that it would be difficult for him to return to El Salvador, due to his memories of the civil war: “I was escaping from over there. I was trying to get out. And it’s got so many things on my mind that it’s, it’s like if I go back I’ll probably have flashbacks of what I seen when I was a kid. It was so terrible over there. What I seen was so bad, it

was horrible." Mónica Ramirez and Juan José Olvera Saldivar, who came to the U.S. in 1993 at age 6, both wanted to visit El Salvador, but only occasionally. For example, Mónica stated, "I don't know if you've asked people if they want to go back? And, I would want to go but, to visit, but never to actually live there again. Just because I feel, like, my opportunities are here and I would want my kids to grow up here too, you know?" Mónica wanted to visit her childhood friends, even though her mother worried that such a reencounter would be too disturbing: "My mom says that maybe wouldn't be so good for me because that would kind of, give me an insight to where my life would have been like.... I mean, especially with what's happening in El Salvador with the gangs and stuff. I'm sure a lot of people have lost their lives to that or have been involved in it. So sometimes I have fears of going there because of that. Because I hear it's very dangerous." Moises Quinteros, who was born in the U.S. to parents who had emigrated from El Salvador in the 1960s, had little desire to visit El Salvador. He told me that for most of his life, his attitude was: "Go to El Salvador? For what? It's so poor!" He imagined El Salvador as a place that had been bombed out, where those who spoke their minds could be killed. In fact, his own grandfather, he told me, had gone deaf after being beaten for attending political meetings. Sandra Mejillas, who came to the U.S. at age 4, recalled hearing whispered stories about the Salvadoran civil war when she was a child in Los Angeles. An account of a woman who was cut in half for wearing jeans frightened her deeply, and made her think of El Salvador as a symbol of male violence.

The aversion that some emigrants experience regarding El Salvador can be traced to several sources. As noted above, trauma can neither be completely remembered nor forgotten, and interviewees' circumstances of departure shaped their knowledge of El Salvador. While some interviewees sought greater connection to their past, these interviewees wanted to distance themselves from painful or stigmatizing circum-

stances, and perhaps from the lives they might have led and the persons they might have become had they been raised in El Salvador. Growing up in Southern California, where Salvadorans are a minority within Latino communities, many were teased for being Salvadoran. Moises Quinteros, for instance, came to see being Salvadoran as something to hide. When other children made fun of him for speaking Salvadoran Spanish, he stopped speaking Spanish at school and with his siblings, and only used Spanish with his mother. Some interviewees' attitudes toward El Salvador were linked to the sense that if they either visited or moved there permanently, they might be discriminated against (or worse) due to their gender or sexual orientation. Marta Dominguez, who immigrated to the U.S. at age 8 and who traveled to El Salvador repeatedly, worried that if she had been raised in El Salvador, she would have lacked opportunities that were available to her in the U.S.: "Who knows what my life would have been like in El Salvador? I don't know, maybe I would have been married with kids, you know? Maybe I wouldn't have gotten an education. But maybe I would have, you know?" Bayardo Morazon, who emigrated to the U.S. at age 12, commented that for many years, he was reluctant to travel to El Salvador, both because of his memories of the civil war and because as an openly gay man, he did not know whether he would feel comfortable there, particularly given that he had heard anti-gay statements from some of his own family members. As Louie (2000) notes, transnationalism (including migration) can foster not only interconnections, but also a sense of the differences between those living abroad and at home. Aversion can also stem from the threat of forced return, given that some interviewees were undocumented or had only temporary legal status in the U.S. Given their legal situation, such interviewees tended to stress disadvantages that they associated with El Salvador.

Shifting Terrains

Both the Salvadoran state's and Salvadoran emigrants' re/memberings point to ways that origin, whether as birth or kinship, is key to forging collectivities. For the Salvadoran state, which, in the post war period, was attempting to strengthen the cultural identities of Salvadorans living abroad, an important goal was for Salvadorans to conceptualize themselves as part of a diaspora, united by their connection to El Salvador. References to El Salvador as a *sociedad sin fronteras* hold out an inclusive and egalitarian vision of the nation, a vision in which everyone, regardless of geographic location, belongs. The state's cultural work, however, emphasized El Salvador itself as a source of renewal, a place where Salvadorans living abroad could put their talents and resources to use as good sons and daughters of the nation. The exterior was seen as a place where Salvadoran identity could be sharpened (by not being taken for granted) but also threatened, particularly in the case of emigrants' children. Clearly, there were connections between the state's cultural work and its economic policies, which sought to maintain remittances and to foster tourism, investment, and markets for Salvadoran goods.

Interviewees who emigrated to the U.S. as young children, in contrast, are all too aware of national and other borders. In many cases, these youth experienced lengthy separations from family members who emigrated before them, difficulty crossing borders when en route to the U.S., and repeated encounters with cultural borders that situated them as "different" in the U.S., but also (though I have not addressed that topic here) in El Salvador (see also Louie 2000). The displacement that these youth experienced led, in many cases, to a desire for knowledge of their own roots, a past that they located in El Salvador. The knowledge that they sought was less that of folklore and national traditions and more that of social and political history, an answer to the questions, "Who are we and

why are we here?" The ability to answer this question *could* strengthen their identities, interviewees stated; however, those identities were not only Salvadoran, as origins were multiple. One interviewee stressed repeatedly that she did not want to be regarded exclusively as Salvadoran or as from the U.S. "I'm *both*," she commented, criticizing the demand that she adhere exclusively to U.S. or to Salvadoran cultural practices. To some interviewees, El Salvador was a source of renewal, a place where they sought to put their talents to use and to which they felt a strong familial and cultural connection. Coupled with this desire, however, was a certain ambivalence that stemmed from the circumstances that led their families to emigrate and also from a sense that their *own* identities (as women, as gays or lesbians, as individuals with strong ties to the U.S.) could be threatened, rather than realized, in El Salvador.

These depictions of El Salvador in relation to diaspora demonstrate the complexity of origin, which is imagined both as past, anterior to displacement, and as future, a future that can be feared or desired. Origin also becomes something of a "moving target" (Yngvesson and Coutin 1996), in that it multiplies. El Salvador is imagined both as a key site or geographic space, where certain sorts of cultural practices are carried out, but also as transnational, *a sociedad sin fronteras* in which people are connected despite being geographically dispersed. At the same time, displacement produces multiple origins, some of which are acknowledged by law and through state practices, and others of which are ignored or denied, particularly when individuals are subjected to deportation. The intersections and disjunctures among biography, national histories, and state practices make commonality and collectivity both presumed and quite fraught. Sorting out these connections is an ongoing cultural project.

In the wake of the 2009 election of FMLN presidential candidate Mauricio Funes, the Salvadoran government appears to be forging a new approach to emigration and diaspora. In contrast

to prior administrations, which were criticized for practicing a politics of expulsion, the newly appointed vice minister for Salvadorans living abroad is sociologist Juan José García, who, in (1994: 3), wrote that in El Salvador, it is as important for the government “to promote a national policy to protect migrants and to encourage development through remittances. Let’s remember that the very future of the country, at least in the short term, depends on the expulsion of surplus population and the constant foreign exchange [thereby produced].” The Salvadoran Ministry of Foreign Affairs website now features a short video, entitled, “Route of the Migrant,” that warns would-be emigrants of the dangers of traveling to the U.S. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, El Salvador 2010). In this video, a woman sobs while recounting the trauma that she experienced, images of suffering (a beaten and swollen face, a man hospitalized presumably after losing a limb to a passing train) are displayed, and ominous music, reminiscent of a horror film, plays in the background. In a speech that is captured on the video, the vice minister imagines a future in which Salvadoran migrants would be known “for the sweat of their labor and not for the blood of their wounds and of their death.” The video ends with the refrain, “Happiness is with your loved ones. Stay. Help us to give your family better opportunity. Stay. Your family, the country, need you here. Stay.” This approach to re/membering highlights the social and physical costs of migration, depicts the Salvadoran government as attending to migrants’ rights and well-being, and, in an explicit contrast to “depend[ing] on the expulsion of surplus population” redefines Salvadorans who are living in the *interior* as key to the nation’s future.

That this new strategy may bring emigres’ and state re/memberings in closer alignment is also demonstrated by recent news coverage of the 30th anniversary of the assassination of Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero. Reports note that:

...for nearly two decades after a 1992 peace treaty, the right leaning government refused to commemorate Romero's death, in large part because Romero had become a martyr of Marxist rebels.

Salvadoran immigrant activists in L.A. say that reiterating Romero's message could go a long way toward connecting Salvadorans with their home culture – and, along the way, better integrating them into U.S. society. (Guzman-López 2010)

Of course, such connections are not going to occur everywhere, as evidenced by the recent decision of the Texas State Board of Education to remove Archbishop Oscar Romero from history textbooks (Stutz 2010). This decision is unfortunate, as bringing state and emigrant's historical reckonings into alignment can facilitate new re/memberings that do not deny, erase, or ignore the role of state actions in producing diaspora in the first place.

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NOTES

- 1 For early pieces of this literature, see Appadurai 1991, Kearney 1995, and Malkki 1995.
- 2 This revised vision of the relationship between Salvadoran emigres and El Salvador was consistent with new financial strategies designed to make El Salvador more competitive in the global market

(BID 2001, 2002a, b, 2003). In 1996, through loans from the World Bank, the Interamerican Development Bank and other international financial institutions, El Salvador launched the *Programa Nacional de Competitividad El Salvador 2021* (National El Salvador Competitiveness Program 2021). Officials hoped to facilitate investment in Salvadoran businesses, and create an ethnic market for the export of Salvadoran goods.

- 3 The notion that Salvadoran emigrants have the strongest cultural identities is also reminiscent of the idea that naturalized U.S. citizens, who cannot take citizenship for granted, are the “real” Americans (Coutin 2003).
- 4 On state efforts to inculcate a sense of connection on the part of diasporic citizens, see also Louie 2000.
- 5 My analysis draws on interviews with some 117 individuals in 2000 and 2001 as part of a larger study of shifts in U.S. and Salvadoran policies toward Salvadorans from the 1980s to the present (see Coutin 2007), and in 2006 and 2007 as part of an on-going project focusing on 1.5 generation Salvadorans in particular. Interviewees included 1.5 and second generation Salvadorans in the U.S. and in El Salvador as well as staff of NGOs that work with migrant youth. Pseudonyms have been used for interviewees throughout, and all translations of Spanish sources are by the author.
- 6 I do not mean to suggest that there are only two alternatives. For example, interviewees spoke of the differences between their lives in different households within El Salvador, such as when moving back and forth between a grandparent’s home and the home of another relative, and the differences between their lives within their own homes in the U.S., and the identities that they assumed outside their homes. See also Karakayali 2005 for a discussion of the multiple worlds that immigrant children occupy and move between.
- 7 Of course, not all who were born in the U.S. lack a sense of connection to El Salvador, nor do those who stayed in El Salvador all desire to leave the country.

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