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Surveillance, Settlements, and Sanctuary:
A Comparative and Relational History of Refugee Policies in Central America, 1979-92

DISSERTATION

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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by

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DEDICATION

To

my late grandfather, Calixto Frediluces De La Cruz, Sr.

in recognition of your sacrifices.

Thank you for showing me how to work hard and encouraging me to study hard.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Surveillance, Settlements, and Sanctuary:
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Doctor of Philosophy in History

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Associate Professor Anita Casavantes Bradford, Chair

Beginning in 1979, Salvadorans began crossing international borders. Throughout the following decade approximately 1.5 million Salvadorans sought refuge throughout Central America, Mexico, the United States, and Canada. This purported "*bomba migratoria*" (migration bomb) marked a major shift in regional migration and forced each country to contend with the demands of a new refugee population. This dissertation traces the histories of how and why the governments of Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, and Belize responded to the hundreds of thousands of Salvadoran refugees that entered their national territories during these years. Government documents, international organizational reports, newspaper articles, and refugee accounts reveal that for the states in the region Salvadoran refugees presented more than just a problem to solve. Rather, in the context of the late Cold War, Central American governments found the crisis potentially advantageous. Guided by pragmatism as much as humanitarianism, Central American governments sought to convert Salvadoran refugees into tools of the nation-state.

INTRODUCTION

In response to the outbreak of a civil war in 1979, 1.5 million Salvadorans made the decision to flee their homes. Over the following decade approximately 20% of El Salvador's population —sometimes as individuals, sometimes as families, and sometimes as entire communities—crossed international borders in search of refuge. Both the popular imagination and the scholarship remembers as the first time Salvadorans arrived en masse to the United States.[1] Indeed, over half of a million Salvadorans fled to the United States during the 1980s.[2] The foundations of Central American communities in the United States today are largely a result of this critical moment in migration history. Their ongoing migration to the U.S. continues to respond to the long-term consequences of the Salvadoran Civil War.[3] However, attention to this movement of people northward has obscured the lesser known histories of those Salvadorans who did not come to the United States, but who lived as refugees in other Central American countries. Indeed the so-called "*bomba migratoria*" (migratory bomb) marked a major shift in regional migration and forced each Central American country to contend with the demands of a new refugee population.[4]

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[1] Cecilia Menjívar, *Fragmented Ties: Salvadoran Immigrant Networks in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Susan Bibler Coutin, *Legalizing Moves: Salvadoran Immigrants' Struggle for U.S. Residency* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000). María Cristina García, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Leisy J. Abrego, *Sacrificing Families: Navigating Laws, Labor, and Love across Borders* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014); Karina O. Alvarado, Alicia I. Estrada, and Ester E. Hernández, *U.S. Central Americans: Reconstructing Memories, Struggles, and Communities of Resistance* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2017); Susan Gzesh"Central Americans and Asylum Policy in the Reagan Era," migrationpolicy.org, accessed March 4, 2015, http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-americans-and-asylum-policy-reagan-era.

[2] Gzesh, "Central Americans and Asylum Policy in the Reagan Era."

[3] Gammage, "El Salvador: Despite End to Civil War, Emigration Continues," http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/el-salvador-despite-end-civil-war-emigration-continues.

[4] Gil Loescher, "Humanitarianism and Politics in Central America," *Political Science Quarterly* 103, no. 2 (1988): 295–320, https://doi.org/10.2307/2151185; Nora Hamilton and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, "Central American Migration: A Framework for Analysis," *Latin American Research Review* 26, no. 1 (1991): 75–110; "Refugees: Growing Numbers, Growing Fears," *The Central American Report*, September 6, 1985, Vol. xii no 34

Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Belize, Canada and the United States all recognized at least a small number of Salvadorans (at some point in the 1980s) as either refugees or asylum-seekers. Mexico and Guatemala also saw many Salvadorans pass through their territory; however, military harassment created such hostile conditions for Salvadorans that they tended to use these territories as transit routes to Belize, Canada, and the United States.[5]

Focusing on Central American nations that recognized Salvadorans as refugees, this dissertation asks how the governments of Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Costa Rica, and Belize responded to the massive influx of Salvadoran refugees in the 1980s. From military surveillance to resettlement programs, why, how, and to what extent did each government enact their respective policies? In responding to this question, this dissertation draws on government documents, international organizational reports, newspaper articles, and refugee accounts to argue that Salvadoran refugees presented more than just a problem to solve for Central American governments. Rather, in the context of the late Cold War, Central American governments were also able to make use of refugees to advance their foreign policy and domestic political goals. As such, guided by pragmatism as much as humanitarianism, they sought to convert Salvadoran refugees into tools of the nation-state.

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edition, IHNCA; Arlene Lachman, "Los Refugiados En Panama" (Panama City, Universidad de Panama, 1986), 72; Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Policy Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate, "Refugee Problems in Central America: Staff Report" (U.S. G.P.O., 1984).

[5] "Guatemala, Puente de Salvadoreños a Mexico," *Prensa Libre*, September 11, 1980, Biblioteca Nacional de Guatemala; Central American Refugee Center, *Witnesses to Political Violence in El Salvador: Testimonies of Salvadoran Refugees in the United States.* (Washington, DC: Central American Refugee Center, 1984), 29; United States, *Central American Refugees Hearing before the Subcommittee on Census and Population of the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, House of Representatives, Ninety-Ninth Congress, First Session, June 27, 1985* (Washington: U.S. G.P.O, 1985), 10, http://congressional.proquest.com/congcomp/getdoc?HEARING-ID=HRG-1985-POH-0042; Edelberto Torres-Rivas, *Informe Sobre La Situacion de Los Refugiados y Migrantes Centroamericanos* (Proyecto de Migracion Hemisferica, 1985), 17.

This dissertation demonstrates that the ways in which different Central American governments responded to the plight of the Salvadoran refugees in the 1980s was intertwined with the longer histories of national mythologies, regional foreign relations, relations with the United States, as well as ongoing political, economic and social struggles within each country. These overlapping factors not only produced the overarching historical conditions of late Cold War Central America, but also motivated specific refugee policies. As such, Central American governments utilized refugees and refugee policies to carry out specific goals that transcended their varied commitments to humanitarianism.

Understanding the Refugee Crisis: State Sponsored Violence, Gender and Migration in 20th-Century El Salvador

Conditions in El Salvador in the 1980s are critical for understanding the policies implemented by each government toward Salvadoran refugees. Between 1979 and 1992, the small but densely populated nation of El Salvador experienced an extremely violent civil war. In this conflict, the U.S.-backed Salvadoran military waged war against leftist coalition of rebel guerillas known as the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (*Frente de Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional,* FMLN).[6] Although U.S. president Jimmy Carter's administration was relatively ambivalent about intervening in Central American

[6] Kampwirth, *Women & Guerrilla Movements: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas, Cuba* (University Park, Penn: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); Charles D. Brockett, *Political Movements and Violence in Central America*, Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Jeffrey L. Gould, *To Rise in Darkness: Revolution, Repression, and Memory in El Salvador, 1920-1932* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, *Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador: The Insurrection of 1932, Roque Dalton, and the Politics of Historical Memory*, Diálogos. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007); Molly Todd, *Beyond Displacement: Campesinos, Refugees, and Collective Action in the Salvadoran Civil War*, Critical Human Rights (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), http://www.myilibrary.com/?id=276595.

conflicts, it began sending money and military advisors to the Salvadoran government in 1979. Carter's successor, President Ronald Reagan, significantly escalated U.S. intervention in the region during the 1980s. This trajectory continued under George H.W. Bush, who was the U.S. President during the final years of the war in El Salvador. During the twelve-year conflict, the United States government provided the Salvadoran government over 4 billion dollars in military training, advising, and weapons.[7] These resources enabled the Salvadoran military to retaliate against civilians who had been involved in progressive political, religious, or labor organizing. This included civilian teachers, students, priests, unionists, and *campesinos* (defined here as peasants living in the rural countryside who tended to have political sympathies with the FMLN). Early military campaigns in the countryside specifically targeted *campesino* villages in the departments of Chalatenango, Cabañas and Morazán, where support for the FMLN was prevalent. The persecution of civilians in this region led to countless human rights violations, including widespread accounts of massacres, torture, and sexual violence.[8]

The roots of this war had been germinating long before 1979. A combination of extreme socioeconomic inequality and political repression had endured in El Salvador since the Spanish Conquest in the 16th century.[9] After three centuries of living under colonization, El Salvador gained its independence from Spain in 1821 as part of the

[7] "Changing Beliefs and Changing Policies: Explaining Transitions in U.S. Foreign Policy toward Central America during the Reagan and Bush Years - University of California Irvine," accessed March 2, 2020, https://uci.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=proquest60571679&context=PC&vid=01CDL_IRV_INST:UCI&lang=en&search_scope=MyInst_and_CI&adaptor=Primo%20Central&tab=Everything&query=any,contains,Reagan%20bush%20and%20el%20salvador&offset=0.

[8] "Truth Commission: El Salvador," United States Institute of Peace, accessed February 18, 2015, http://www.usip.org/publications/truth-commission-el-salvador.

[9] Luis Roniger, *Transnational Politics in Central America* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 26-42.

Mexican Empire. Shortly after, in 1823 El Salvador seceded from the Mexican Empire and formed the Federal Republic of Central America. This first attempt at a Central American union dissolved in 1841. El Salvador functioned as a sovereign nation until 1895, when it attempted another Central American federation called the Greater Republic of Central America. This temporary arrangement only lasted 3 years, and El Salvador has been a sovereign nation since 1898.[10]

Throughout the 19th and well into the second half of the 20th century El Salvador continued to experience extreme socioeconomic inequality under an oligarchical and often militaristic rule.[11] During the 19th century, foreign investment (particularly U.S. corporate investment) created a deeply unequal economy dependent on the extraction of natural resources.[12] While agricultural laborers also harvested cotton and sugar for the international market, coffee was the nation's primary export. The export-based economy also created the conditions in which just 14 families owned the majority of the nation's land, wealth, and power. Known as *las catorce familias*, these wealthy landowning families constituted El Salvador's oligarchy. [13] The 14 families working in cooperation with U.S. corporations extracted significant profit from the export economy, while those who labored in the fields harvesting coffee beans and other agricultural exports were paid very little for their work and had to endure difficult and dangerous working conditions. These

[10] Roniger, *Transnational Politics in Central America*, 26-42.

[11] Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, *Weak Foundations the Economy of El Salvador in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Aldo A. Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic - Commercial Agriculture and the Politics of Peasant Communities in El Salvador, 1823–1914* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 15).

[12] Lauria-Santiago, *An Agrarian Republic - Commercial Agriculture and the Politics of Peasant Communities in El Salvador, 1823–1914*; Lindo-Fuentes, *Weak Foundations the Economy of El Salvador in the Nineteenth Century*.

[13] Ibid.

exploitative, unequal, and unstable socioeconomic conditions earned El Salvador the derogatory moniker of "coffee republic," which in the same vein as its "banana republic" Central American neighbors (Honduras and Costa Rica) reflected the fact that its economic wellbeing largely depended on the export of a singular raw good. [14]

In addition to socioeconomic inequality, Salvadorans also experienced political repression from military dictatorships.[15] The 1932 Peasant massacre colloquially known as *La Matanza* (the slaughter) in which the Salvadoran military killed over 25,000 peasants many of whom were indigenous of the Pipil community remains one of the most egregious instances of Salvadoran state violence.[16] In January 1932 members of Communist Party of El Salvador, under the leadership of Farabundo Martí, began organizing an uprising alongside the mostly Pipil peasants. Collectively they carried out an uprising that killed approximately 50 people (30 soldiers and 20 civilians). However, the military government, which had taken power in a 1931 coup, reacted with an extreme violent suppression of the uprising, and within a mere 72 hours the army had killed over 25,000 peasants.[17] The military killed any person who "looked" indigenous due to their physical appearance, clothing, and language. In these few short days, the government massacred the majority of the indigenous population in El Salvador. Those Pipil who survived the initial onslaught were forced to abandon their language and clothing due to the continued persecution. In the end, *La Matanza* was responsible for nearly eradicating El Salvador's indigenous population.[18]

[14] Ibid.
[15] Lindo-Fuentes, *Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador*; Gould, *To Rise in Darkness*.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.

Over the four decades following *La Matanza*, memories of this event squelched much of the revolutionary spirit among El Salvador's peasants and workers and the government continued to be controlled by a string of successive military dictatorships. The government, however, could not wipe out the memory of the 1932 peasant massacre, or anger at ongoing repression and inequality, especially in the countryside. In the 1970s—like in many other parts of Latin America, including Nicaragua and Guatemala—there was a strong revival of leftist revolutionary spirit in El Salvador. At this point, many Salvadorans called on the evocation of *La Matanza* as inspiration for revolution. Legendary communist peasant leader Farabundo Martí became the inspiration for of an insurgent leftist coalition, named the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front in his honor. The FMLN quickly established a strong base of support among the nation's *campesinos*.[19]

Following the outbreak of war in October 1979, those same *Campesino* communities would face a new onslaught of state-sponsored violence and repression. The gendered nature of the state's efforts to eradicate the leftist subversion in the countryside would profoundly shape the subsequent exodus of Salvadorans from their homeland. Salvadoran government death squads kidnapped, tortured, and killed an untold number of civilian *campesino* men, women, and children. However, the Salvadoran armed forces also carried out a more targeted campaign against men and boys of military age.[20] According to the logic of the Salvadoran state, all men and boys over the age of 12 were potential FMLN guerilla fighters. Although the supposed targets were suspected male subversives, entire

[19] Lindo-Fuentes, *Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador*; Gould, *To Rise in Darkness*; Todd, *Beyond Displacement*.

[20] Rachael De La Cruz, "No Asylum for the Innocent: Gendered Representations of Salvadoran Refugees in the 1980s," *American Behavioral Scientist* 61, no. 10 (September 2017): 1103–18, https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764217732106; John Mullaney, *Aiding the Desplazados of El Salvador: The Complexity of Humanitarian Assistance* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1984).}

families and communities experienced the consequences of this state-sponsored violence. Furthermore, the military government also conscripted men and boys across the country into the Salvadoran army. Even internally displaced or refugee men and boys living in IDP (internally displaced person) and refugee camps in Central America risked conscription into the Salvadoran or Honduran armed forces. If these IDP and refugee men were not drafted, the government and military would accuse men of being rebel fighters.[21] Such accusations put both men and their families at risk. One young *campesina* mother recalled: "first, they took my husband, then I had to leave my home, now my child is gone…I have nothing left."[22]

While gender-based persecutions thus put both Salvadoran men and their families at risk in very real and devastating ways; it also shaped migration patterns, pushing rural men, who were the primary targets of forced conscription, kidnapping and murder, from the nation's urban centers and further north to the United States. During this period, the number of Salvadoran migration to the United States soared to over half a million people during the 1980s. This was a stark difference from the previous decade, when for example only approximately 45,000 Salvadorans entered the United States between 1970 and 1974.[23] During the 1980s, the majority of Salvadorans who sought asylum in the United States were men of military age due to gendered violence against young men.[24] Their departure often left behind vulnerable women, children and the elderly, who were forced

[21] *Los Refugiados salvadoreños en Honduras* (Centro de Documentación de Honduras, 1982).
[22] De La Cruz, "No Asylum for the Innocent."
[23] Gammage, "El Salvador: Despite End to Civil War, Emigration Continues," http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/el-salvador-despite-end-civil-war-emigration-continues.
[24] De La Cruz, "No Asylum for the Innocent."

to flee to safety along different pathways. As such, primarily women, children, and elderly remained in Central American refugee camps.

However, culture also played a role in shaping migration patterns. Salvadorans' highly gendered notions of family also mean that women were expected to physically care for the elderly and children, while men supported the family economically, which in the past had often included migrating for employment.[25] Pragmatically speaking, in most cases, it was also significantly easier for single men to migrate to the U.S. alone than for entire families to make the journey.[26] The intersections of gender with class, age, race, and region of origin also significantly shaped the control Salvadorans had over if and where they could find refuge. As a result of these multiple factors, throughout the 1980s, gendered persecution as well as gendered norms within Salvadoran family and broader society would produce gendered migration.[27]

For those Salvadorans who arrived in the United States during these years, the vast majority did not receive refugee or asylee status. The U.S. government, particularly during the Reagan administration, provided billions in economic and military aid for the rightwing military regime as part of its commitment to stamping out Marxism in Central America—a key Cold War battle ground. Thus, the U.S. government denied the prevalence of human rights abuses in the besieged nation and did not consider Salvadorans as "refugees." If the administration recognized Salvadorans as refugees, it would be an explicit acknowledgement of political persecution perpetrated by the U.S.-backed Salvadoran

[25] Nora Hamilton and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, "Central American Migration: A Framework for Analysis," *Latin American Research Review* 26, no. 1 (1991): 75–110.

[26] Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Gendered Transitions Mexican Experiences of Immigration* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 1994), http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft1g5004c2.

[27] De La Cruz, "No Asylum for the Innocent."

military government. Instead, Salvadorans had to apply for asylum on a case by case basis. The overwhelming number of Salvadoran and Guatemalan asylum cases were rejected, with less than 3 percent granted legal asylum during the 1980s, most were deported back to their war-torn homelands or remained in the United States, undocumented. At the same time, the U.S. government also denied asylum to Guatemalans and Haitians who fled similar forms of state-violence in countries with U.S. backed regimes.[28] However, this policy contrasted from the reception of other groups fleeing communist or other regimes hostile to the United States, such as Cubans, Vietnamese, and Iranians.[29] Indeed, as scholars have shown anti-communist Cold War foreign policy largely shaped U.S. refugee policy in the second half of the 20th century.

For displaced Salvadorans living in Central America, the governing refugee policies were equally complex and contradictory. While pretty much all Salvadorans displaced throughout the various Central American countries were widely referred to as "refugees" by government officials, researchers, international aid workers, and themselves—they were not all granted legal status as "refugees." Even those who *were* officially recognized as "refugees" did not always enjoy the same protections or assistance. As this dissertation will demonstrate, each government would make their own decisions about how to explain the presence of displaced Salvadorans within their borders, what status and benefits to extend

[28] A. Naomi Paik, *Rightlessness: Testimony and Redress in U.S. Prison Camps since World War II*, Studies in United States Culture (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016) 87-113.

[29] Gil Loescher, *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America's Half-Open Door, 1945 to the Present* (New York : London: Free Press ; Collier Macmillan, 1986); María Cristina García, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Carl J. Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate: The United States and Refugees during the Cold War*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008). Yen Le Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(Es)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

to them. Based on a complex calculus of geopolitical and domestic considerations, these decisions shaped the lives of Salvadorans fleeing violence in their homeland.

The Refugee Regime to Central America: The Shifting Role of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Salvadorans who fled to neighboring Central American countries in search of refuge during the 1980s, were likely to have interacted with the UN's Refugee Agency, which mediated refugee-state relations in many cases. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established in 1951 in response to the extraordinary number of people displaced from their homes in the aftermath of World War II.[30] The two major international agreements govern its role: The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) and the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (1967).[31] Conceptualized to carry out an apolitical humanitarian mission, the primary duties of the UN's Refugee Agency as articulated in the early 1950s was to advocate for the rights of refugees guaranteed by international refugee law. In other words, during the 1950s and 1960s the UNHCR's primary focus was the *protection* of refugees. UNHCR officials during these decades performed tasks such as identifying refugees, distributing documentation, and

[30] Gil Loescher, *The UNHCR and World Politics: A Perilous Path* (Oxford ; Oxford University Press, 2001); Laura Barnett, "Global Governance and the Evolution of the International Refugee Regime," *International Journal of Refugee Law* 14, no. 2 and 3 (2002): 238–262, https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/14.2_and_3.238; Anne Hammerstad, *Rise and Decline of a Global Security Actor: UNHCR, Refugee Protection, and Security* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014); Joël Glasman, "Seeing Like a Refugee Agency: A Short History of UNHCR Classifications in Central Africa (1961–2015)," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 30, no. 2 (2017): 337–362, https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/few044; Gil Loescher, *The New Cold War and the UNHCR Under Poul Hartling*, *The UNHCR and World Politics* (Oxford University Press), accessed April 11, 2020, https://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/0199246912.001.0001/acprof-9780199246915-chapter-7.

[31] Loescher, "Humanitarianism and Politics in Central America., 295;" Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, Kindle Location 1319.

advocating for refugees with regards to legal status and state services.[32] In the 1970s and 1980s the UNHCR began to expand their focus from solely *protection* to include *solutions*, which were longer-term projects.[33] Such projects tended to focus on providing material assistance, fostering local integration, and expanding local infrastructure.[34]

This shift can certainly be seen in the UNHCR involvement in Central America beginning in the late 1970s. The UNHCR began its first significant operation in the late 1970s in response to hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans as they fled their homes due to the increasing violent conflict between the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) and the military dictatorship of Antonio Somoza Debayle. These refugee communities sought safer condition in the bordering nations of Honduras and Costa Rica.[35] The UNHCH established camps and provided material assistance for these Nicaraguan refugees. Although, the vast majority of these refugee communities repatriated to Nicaragua following the Sandinista Revolution in 1979, this was only the beginning of UNHCR operations on the Central American isthmus as the violent conflicts of the following decade would displace millions of Central Americans from their homes.[36]

Throughout the 1980s, the UNHCR sought to advocate for *protections* and implement *solutions* in the various Central American host nations. The agency's role, however, would take unique shape in each country, as it also had to navigate the fraught political realities of the time. As the following chapters will discuss, factors that shaped the

[32] Glasman, "Seeing Like a Refugee Agency," 345; Loescher, *The UNHCR and World Politics*.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Loescher, "Humanitarianism and Politics in Central America, 296, 306, 315."
[36] Ibid.

role of the UNHCR's interactions with respective refugee communities and national governments alike included the individual host nation's signatory status on the UN Convention on Refugees, national mythologies, Cold War geopolitics, and economic troubles, and domestic priorities. As other scholars have demonstrated in other historical and geographic contexts, the UNHCR cannot in reality carry out an apolitical mission.[37] While it attempts to negotiate on behalf of refugees, the organization is anxious about upsetting the nations and getting pushed out.[38] In many cases around the world, including Central America, the UNHCR was restricted by U.S. influence, as a major factor was that the United States was one of the UNHCR's largest benefactors. [39] Indeed, navigating the fraught social, economic, and political conditions of 1980s Central America, the UNHCR attempted to maintain its apolitical veneer when responding to the refugee crisis.[40] However, as the following chapters discuss, the organization's protection and assistance of Salvadoran refugees was largely bound by the agenda of national authorities and pressure from the US government.

Disrupting the Flow: Toward a Comparative, Regional and Relational History of Salvadoran Refugee Crisis

To date, the scarce historical literature on the Salvadoran refugee crisis of the 1980s have tended to focus on the United States as the assumed host nation for Salvadoran refugees, However, while it remains necessary to understand this historical moment within

[37] Loescher, *The UNHCR and World Politics*; Glasman, "Seeing Like a Refugee Agency."
[38] Loescher, "Humanitarianism and Politics in Central America," 295.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Loescher, "Humanitarianism and Politics in Central America," 297.

the broader context of the relationship between the U.S. and El Salvador (and U.S.- Central American relations more broadly), this dissertation chooses to focus on the almost entirely unexplored history of the Salvadoran refugee exodus to neighboring nations. By shedding new light on how Central American nations, institutions, and communities responded to the influx of Salvadorans, it makes key interventions into the fields of Central American history, Cold War Latin American history, migration history, and critical refugee studies. At the same time, while decentering the United States as the presumed receiving nation for Salvadoran refugees, this dissertation also analyzes the movement of refugees to neighboring nations in relation to the migration of those who did, in fact, go to the United States. In doing so, this dissertation brings the emerging literature on Central American history into conversation with the history of U.S. immigration and in particular Latinx/ a/o migration—fields that have traditionally been viewed as separate from one another.

Interdisciplinary scholarship on migration and refugeehood, while providing insight into the factors that spark and structure movement and resettlement, tends to focus overwhelmingly on migration from less developed nations to more industrial ones such as Western Europe and particularly the United States. [41] In Central American Studies, the

[41] María Cristina García, *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959-1994* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Ana Elizabeth Rosas, *Abrazando El Espíritu: Bracero Families Confront the US-Mexico Border*, American Crossroads 40 (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2014); Carmen Teresa Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001); Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2004); Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound Filipino Lives across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). Gil Loescher, *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America's Half-Open Door, 1945 to the Present* (New York : London: Free Press ; Collier Macmillan, 1986); J. Scanlan and G. Loescher, "U.S. Foreign Policy, 1959-80: Impact on Refugee Flow from Cuba," *Annals of the American Academy of Political & Social Science* 467 (May 1983): 116; Alicia R. Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

focus on Central Americans in the United States is largely a result of the increase of U.S. Central American scholars writing on histories, politics, literatures, and epistemologies of their communities. Groundbreaking works on Central American diasporas by scholars such as Cecilia Menjívar, Susan Coutin, Leisy Abrego, Ana Patricia Rodriquez, Martitza Cardenas, Karino O. Alvarado, Alicia Ivonne Estrada, Ester E. Hernandez have been foundational to the field.[42] While this work has been and continues to be extraordinarily important, especially as Central American communities continue to fight against violent immigration policies in the United States, this dissertation adds to this conversation by uncovering other pathways and narratives of Central American migration. Inspired by recent scholarship that shifts the focus to refugee policies and politics in the global south, it frames Central American countries not just as refugee-producing and immigrant-sending nations, but also as receiving/host nations. [43]

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[42] Cecilia Menjívar, *Fragmented Ties: Salvadoran Immigrant Networks in America* (University of California Press, 2000); Leisy J. Abrego, *Sacrificing Families: Navigating Laws, Labor, and Love across Borders* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014); Karina O. Alvarado, Alicia I. Estrada, and Ester E. Hernández, *U.S. Central Americans: Reconstructing Memories, Struggles, and Communities of Resistance* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2017); Maritza E. Cardenas, *Constituting Central American-Americans: Transnational Identities and the Politics of Dislocation*, Latinidad: Transnational Cultures in the United States (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2018); Susan Bibler Coutin, *The Culture of Protest: Religious Activism and the U.S. Sanctuary Movement*, Conflict and Social Change Series (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993); Susan Bibler Coutin, *Legalizing Moves: Salvadoran Immigrants' Struggle for U.S. Residency* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Susan Bibler Coutin, *Nations of Emigrants: Shifting Boundaries of Citizenship in El Salvador and the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); Susan Bibler Coutin, *Exiled Home: Salvadoran Transnational Youth in the Aftermath of Violence*, 2016, http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/9780822374176; Ana Patricia Rodríguez, *Dividing the Isthmus: Central American Transnational Histories, Literatures, and Cultures*, 1st ed (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).

[43] For key works in the field of Critical Refugee Studies see: García, *Seeking Refuge*; Carl J. Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate: The United States and Refugees during the Cold War*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Todd, *Beyond Displacement*; Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages*, Next Wave: New Directions in Women's Studies (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Ma Vang, "Displaced Histories: Refugee Critique and the Politics of Hmong American Remembering," 2012, 1 PDF (1 online resource xiv, 234 p.); Ma Vang, "The Refugee Soldier: A Critique of Recognition and Citizenship in the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 1997," *Positions* 20, no. 3 (2012): 685–712, https://doi.org/10.1215/10679847-1593501; Alexander Betts, *Survival Migration: Failed Governance and the Crisis of Displacement* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013); Espiritu, *Body Counts*; A. Naomi Paik, *Rightlessness: Testimony and Redress in U.S. Prison Camps since*

Much of what we know about Central American migration during the 1980s was done by academics in Central America, typically in the form of unpublished master's theses.[44] However, although the published scholarship is relatively scarce, since the 1990s a handful of scholars from various disciplines have examined the movement of people across regional and hemispheric borders.[45] Historian María Cristina García's *Seeking Refuge* utilizes this framework to examine Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Nicaraguan migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada during the 1980s.[46] The only historical monograph to directly interrogate the dynamics of Salvadoran regional migration, Molly Todd's *Beyond Displacement* explores how displaced Salvadorans in Honduras during the 1980s worked with state and non-state actors to negotiate better camp conditions. Debunking the myth of the refugee as an apolitical victim, Todd reframes Salvadoran refugees as politically active historical agents. This framework demonstrates the need to conceptualize Salvadoran

World War II, Studies in United States Culture (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Abrego, *Sacrificing Families*; Anita Casavantes Bradford, *The Revolution Is for the Children: The Politics of Childhood in Havana and Miami, 1959-1962*, Envisioning Cuba (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Maria Cristina Garcia, *The Refugee Challenge in Post-Cold War America*, vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190655303.001.0001; Philip G. Schrag, *Baby Jails - The Fight to End the Incarceration of Refugee Children in America* (University of California Press, 21).

[44] Segundo Montes, "La Situacion De Los Salvadoreños Desplazados Y Refugiados," *The Situation of the Salvadoran Refugees and Displaced Persons. (English)* 39, no. 434 (November 1984): 904–20; Lachman, "Los Refugiados En Panama"; Shelly R. Daviski, "El Alto Comisionado de Las Naciones Unidas Para Los Refugiaods (ACNUR) En America Central y Panama" (Panama City, Universidad de Panama, 1982), Biblioteca Simon Bolivar; Teresa Moncado, "El Refugiado y Su Regimen Legal En Panama" (Panama City, Universidad de Panama, 1985), Biblioteca Simon Bolivar; SEGUNDO MONTES, *Refugiados y repatriados: El Salvador y Honduras* (San Salvador: Instituto de Derechos Humanos, Universidad Centroamericana "José Simeón Cañas," 1989); Anna M Alejo, "Central American Refugees in Costa Rica" (Florida International Univeristy, 1990); Torres, Marisol Hernandez, "Refugiados Salvadoreños En Belice: En Busca de Un Lugar En La Historia" (Mexico City, Mexico, Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, 2013).

[45] Hamilton and Chinchilla, "Central American Migration"; Tanya Basok, *Keeping Heads Above Water - Salvadorean Refugees in Costa Rica* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993); Robin Ormes Quizar, *My Turn to Weep: Salvadoran Refugee Women in Costa Rica* (Westport, Conn: Bergin & Garvey, 1998); García, *Seeking Refuge*; Hayden; Bridget, *Salvadoreños en Costa Rica: vidas desplazadas*, Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales (San José, Costa Rica: Universidad de Costa Rica, 2005); Todd, *Beyond Displacement*; Ana Patricia Rodríguez, *Dividing the Isthmus: Central American Transnational Histories, Literatures, and Cultures*, 1st ed (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).

[46] García, *Seeking Refuge*.

migration with a regional frame.[47] Social scientists like Tanya Basok, Robin Ormes Quizar, and Bridget A. Hayden have also published studies on Salvadorans who sought asylum in Costa Rica.

Although not typically read in conversations with history of migration, historians of Central America have also highlighted the importance of land disputes, labor organization, revolutions, state violence, wars, and U.S. intervention in shaping the trajectories of Central American nation-states, providing essential insight into the conditions that sparked and structured Salvadoran and other Central American migration during the Cold War and beyond.[48] Recent scholarship has also revealed the importance of moving away from previous approaches to Central American history, which tended to focus on either individual Central American nations or study the region as a collective entity. Luis Roniger in particular has argued that Central American historians have overlooked the transnational dimension of civil wars, U.S. intervention, transnational migration, narco-

[47] Todd, *Beyond Displacement*.

[48] Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, *Weak Foundations the Economy of El Salvador in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, *Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador: The Insurrection of 1932, Roque Dalton, and the Politics of Historical Memory*, Diálogos. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007); Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador: Education Reform and the Cold War, 1960-1980*, Diálogos. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012).; Jeffrey L. Gould, *To Lead as Equals: Rural Protest and Political Consciousness in Chinandega, Nicaragua, 1912-1979* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Jeffrey L. Gould and Aldo Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness: Revolution, Repression, and Memory in El Salvador, 1920-1932* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).; Jeffrey L. Gould and Lowell Gudmundson, "Central American Historiography after the Violence," *Latin American Research Review* 32, no. 2 (April 1997): 244; Deborah Levenson-Estrada, *Trade Unionists against Terror: Guatemala City, 1954-1985* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Deborah Levenson-Estrada, *Adiós Niño: The Gangs of Guatemala City and the Politics of Death* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2013).; Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre Latin America in the Cold War*, Updated ed (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2011). Grandin, *The Blood of Guatemala*; Christopher Darnton, *Rivalry and Alliance Politics in Cold War Latin America* (Baltimore, MD, USA: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014); Jessica Stites Mor, ed., *Human Rights and Transnational Solidarity in Cold War Latin America*, Critical Human Rights (Madison, Wis: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013); Cecilia Menjívar and Néstor Rodriguez, *When States Kill: Latin America, the U.S., and Technologies of Terror*, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005);

trafficking and illicit networks.[49] Building on these emerging insights, this dissertation makes use of a multi-faceted transnational perspective in order to illuminate the complicated interactions between national governments, humanitarian activists, and refugees throughout Central America during the Salvadoran refugee crisis. [50]

Multi-archival Methodology: Researching Refugee Policies and Politics throughout Central America

In order to craft a narrative that encompasses the transnational, comparative, and relational character of the Salvadoran refugee crisis, I completed archival research at multiple institutions in all seven countries of Central America. In the summer of 2015, I conducted research at the *Museo de la Palabra and la Imagen* (MUPI) in San Salvador, as well as the *Biblioteca Nacional de Honduras*, *Hemeroteca Nacional de Honduras*, and *Universidad Autónomo de Honduras* in Tegucigalpa. During the 2018-19 academic year I spent ten months living and conducting research in Central American national archives, national libraries, university libraries, and museum archives in Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Panama, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Belize.

At multiple libraries—especially in Panama, Costa Rica, and Belize--I found reports regarding refugees in Central America written by Central American specialists in public administration, international relations, political science, and law in the 1980s. Such texts are often considered as "gray literature," as they are unpublished, non-commercial sources

[49]Luis Roniger, *Transnational Politics in Central America* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 2; Rodríguez, *Dividing the Isthmus*.

[50] Roniger, *Transnational Politics in Central America*, 2.

such as government reports, policy statements, and theses.[51] Yet, these documents contain information and perspectives difficult to access elsewhere. In studying the 1980s as a historical period, I interrogate such materials as primary sources.[52] Framing these materials as such facilitates the evaluation of their points of view and reliability using corroborating accounts. Thus, a close reading of refugee testimonies, UNHCR documents, and reports by Central American and international observers found in these collections offers a window into neighboring states' treatment of Salvadoran refugees.

Although this dissertation focuses primarily on interrogating the policies adopted by different Central American towards displaced Salvadorans, I have also attempted to center refugee voices whenever possible. While this is not a social history of refugees, it nonetheless seeks to apply insights from the field of critical refugee studies to the study of Salvadoran migration in order to make two main contributions to the field of Central American history. . First, I seek to further illuminate the reality that the 1.5 million Salvadorans displaced by civil war in the 1980s were not a homogenous group nor did they share the same story; instead, I highlight the diverse refugee experiences of Salvadoran individuals, families, and communities and how they shaped and were shaped by the historical conditions surrounding them. Second, it is my sincere hope that by articulating

[51] Amanda Bezet, "LibGuides: Research Process: Grey Literature," accessed April 10, 2020, //ncu.libguides.com/researchprocess/greyliterature.

[52] For methodologies of grey literature as primary and/or secondary sources see Martin Gibbs and Sarah Colley, "DIGITAL PRESERVATION, Online Access and Historical Archaeology 'grey Literature' from New South Wales, Australia," *Australian Archaeology*, no. 75 (2012): 95–103. Joanne Norcup, "Geography Education, Grey Literature and the Geographical Canon," *Journal of Historical Geography* 49 (July 2015): 61–74; Luca Puddu, "STATE BUILDING, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, AND THE MAKING OF A FRONTIER REGIME IN NORTHEASTERN ETHIOPIA, c. 1944–75," *Journal of African History* 57, no. 1 (March 2016): 93–113; Joan M. Zenzen, "Grey Literature and Untold Stories: United States National Park Service Studies on LGBTQ History, Reconstruction, and the Civil War to Civil Rights Commemoration," *The Public Historian* 41, no. 2 (May 1, 2019): 317–21.

the historically situated perspective of these five Central American nation-states' policies toward Salvadoran refugees, this dissertation will provide a broader and deeper context upon which other scholars can draw in producing additional refugee-centered scholarship on the experiences of Salvadorans in Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, and Belize.

According to the archives encountered while conducting research for this project, approximately 70,000 Salvadoran refugees entered Guatemala in the 1980s; however, the Guatemalan government did not acknowledge them as refugees.[53] In the midst of its own civil war, the Guatemalan government denied the significant shift in migration patterns, characterizing Salvadorans as typical "economic migrants" en route to the United States. The Guatemalan state's bald denial left significant silences in the archives. Even UNHCR and other international accounts that did publish information on Salvadorans in Guatemala in the 1980s, still commented that much information was highly speculative. For this reason, this dissertation does not include a chapter dedicated to the Guatemalan response, prioritizing countries that established settlements, permitted the UNHCR aid, and recognized Salvadorans (even such limited amounts as 1,500) as refugees.

A Note on Positionality

As a mixed-race Filipina American woman, with a Filipino American father and white mother, born and raised in southern Virginia, I attribute the realities of my family's

[53] Edelberto Torres-Rivas, *Informe Sobre La Situacion de Los Refugiados Y Migrantes Centroamericanos* (Proyecto de Migracion Hemisferica, 1985), 17. United States., *Central American Refugees: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Census and Population of the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, House of Representatives, Ninety-Ninth Congress, First Session, June 27, 1985.*, iii, 146 (Washington: U.S. G.P.O. : [For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O., Congressional Sales Office], 1985), 10.

immigration story and growing up in the south as having led me to the humanities in general and the study of migration history in particular. For these reasons, I have personal and professional investments in immigration justice. Although I had long been interested in histories of migration and empire, I only began researching the specific topic of Central American migration following the summer of 2014 when the "Central American child migrant crisis" hit the national news in the United States. For me, this was the moment that re-focused my scholarly attention to what I considered to be one of the most urgent migrations to understand from a historical perspective. Of course, those in Central American communities have been all too aware these issues and histories for decades. Indeed, they have been enduring and fighting for both social justice and survival for centuries. As an outsider I continuously strive to be an ally to Central American communities, and as such it is my sincere hope that this research may be of use. There is much potential for Central American scholars to write rich community-based refugee histories of 1980s Central America. I am optimistic that this dissertation, which articulates many of the historical policies and politics that shaped the background for Salvadoran refugees displaced throughout Central American during the 1980s, may be beneficial to the ongoing work done by the individuals, families, and communities themselves who are simultaneously enduring state violence in Central America, Mexico, and the United States.

Chapter Overview: Histories of Central American Host Nations

The chapters of this dissertation examine the response of the refugee-receiving nations of Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, and Belize to the influx of displaced Salvadorans beginning in the early 1980s. Each chapter asks two questions: how did the

government respond to Salvadoran refugees during the 1980s; and why? While these questions appear simple at first glance, in fact, the archives offered complex and often unwieldy answers. By reconstructing the changes and continuity over time in the respective refugee policies in each country, each chapter illustrates how different Central American nation-states attempted to utilize refugee policy, and thus refugees, as tools of statecraft and nation-building, within in the context of the late Cold War. They further demonstrate that, during a moment when both national identities and trajectories were in flux, Central American nation-states often made use of refugee policy in order to define, or (re)define themselves as nations, particularly in relation to their regional neighbors and vis-à-vis the United States. However, in attempting to make use of refugees for their own purposes, Central American states also had to contend with refugee activism and the UNHCR. Each of the chapters thus reveals the ways that both refugees themselves and the UNHCR shaped refugee policy—sometimes at odds with the host nation's government, and sometimes in ways that were aligned with state objectives.

A note on terminology is necessary here. Throughout this dissertation I use the term "refugee" to denote Salvadorans who were motivated to cross international borders in search of safer and more stable political, social, and economic conditions between 1979 and 1992. The use of the term "refugee" is historically, politically, and culturally constructed. The UN defines a refugee as "someone with a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group."[54] This vague definition led many politicians, media, activists and members of

[54] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees," UNHCR, accessed February 9, 2020, https://www.unhcr.org/protection/basic/3b66c2aa10/convention-protocol-relating-status-refugees.html.

the public across North and Central America in the 1980s to debate if Salvadorans were worthy of the legal status of "refugees." I have nonetheless chosen to use the term refugee to apply to all Salvadorans displaced internationally during the civil war.

I do so for two reasons. First: to stay true to the sources. Central American government documents, UNHCR reports, U.S. Congressional Hearings, and international media—not to mention Salvadorans themselves—all consistently utilized the term "refugees" (*refugiados* in Spanish) to refer to the Salvadorans displaced throughout Central America. Secondly, this is a purposeful political move that allows me to contribute to challenging the "refugee" versus "economic migrant" conceptualization that still harms people today. As scholars have demonstrated, the dichotomous thinking that separates persons crossing international borders due to a well-founded fear of persecution from persons motivated by economic need is both inaccurate and dangerous, since in most situations, these motives overlap. My use of the term "refugee" to refer to those fleeing El Salvador during the 1980s thus purposefully echoes the logic of sociologist Alexander Betts, who suggests that the status of refugee should be applied to all "survival migrants" who are "outside their country of origin because of an existential threat for which they have no access to a domestic remedy or resolution."[55] Therefore, throughout this dissertation, the term "refugee" describes the condition of forced migration, rather than indicating a state-sponsored legal status. However, where it is important to distinguish between those Salvadorans with and without legal status in any particular country, I have denoted that distinction through terms like recognized/unrecognized, legal status/unauthorized.

[55] Betts, *Survival Migration*, 23.

The first chapter of this dissertation discusses how when tens of thousands of Salvadorans began entering Honduran territory in 1980, the government responded by incarcerating refugees in military-surveilled camps, where refugees faced harassment, sexual assault, and military incursions throughout the decade. The Honduran state implemented such policies because the United States used Honduran territory as a staging ground for its military maneuvers in the bordering nations of El Salvador and Nicaragua.

The second chapter discusses Nicaragua, which on the other hand generously welcomed tens of thousands of Salvadoran refugees. The arrival of the refugees—who were fleeing the right-wing state violence in El Salvador—offered the revolutionary Sandinista government a chance to send a message to the Nicaraguan public and the international community alike. From the international relations perspective, the Sandinistas' reception of Salvadoran refugees was intertwined with the Contra War and U.S. intervention in Nicaragua and Central American in general. On the domestic front, the timing of the arrival of thousands of Salvadorans was critical in influencing their reception as it coincided with the new Sandinista government beginning to implement its revolutionary social and economic policies. This chapter argues that in particular the revolutionary government sought to further its agrarian reform projects through the integration of Salvadoran refugees.

The third chapter contends that during the early 1980s the Panamanian government under the Torrijos regime provided exceptional aid to a small refugee settlement as a strategic act of sovereignty, nationalism, and anti-U.S. imperialism. This treatment of this curated selection of refugees constituted a performance of an act of sovereignty for the Panamanian state. The Panamanian government utilized the refugee

families — particularly women and children—as an opportunity to distance itself from the United States while highlighting its own economic and humanitarian modernity through a plan for refugee resettlement and land development along the "backwards" Atlantic Coast.

The fourth chapter suggests that Costa Rican refugee policies toward Salvadoran were shaped by three major intertwined and often conflicting factors: myths of national exceptionalism, economic crisis, and attempted Cold War neutrality. Between 1980 and 1983 approximately 15,000 Salvadoran refugees entered Costa Rica, a nation which long understood itself as a regional beacon of democracy. Despite its imagined national virtue, the Costa Rican government did not warmly welcome Salvadorans. While it made some attempts to establish rural refugee settlements, these were generally not successful. Also, during this time, the UNHCR, with its regional headquarters located in San Jose, assisted approximately two thirds of the Salvadoran refugees in Costa Rica. Although the UNHCR offered some assistance, Salvadoran refugees still faced obstacles from Costa Rican immigration officials. After 1983, the Costa Rican government tightened its immigration restrictions citing the economic burdens of refugees. The influx of Salvadoran refugees compelled the Costa Rican government to reconcile its national myths with the real and perceived burden on its economy.

The final chapter explores how in the early 1980s, upwards of twelve thousand Salvadorans sought refuge in Belize. Between 1980 and 1992, the Belizean government cooperated with the UNHCR, assisted registered and non-registered refugees, implemented settlement programs, and enacted inclusive refugee laws. Furthermore, refugees received the same social service benefits as Belizean nationals. Because the arrival of Salvadoran refugees coincided with Belize gaining its independence from the British in 1981, the

Belizean government utilized the refugee crisis as an opportunity to define their nationhood in terms treatment of and services for citizens and non-citizens alike. Even though Belizean government officials took to the international stage denouncing other Central American governments for their role in creating the refugee crisis, as well as their inhumane treatment of refugees, there was a growing fear of "Latinization" among the black creole population of Belize. These tensions and preoccupations would temper the otherwise generous policies a discourse related to Salvadoran refugees and produce resentment about the disproportionate burden Belize was carrying vis-à-vis other Central American nations in responding to the region's migration crisis. Together the five chapters reveal transnational and relational dynamics of statecraft and nation building during the late Cold War era of Central America.

The state logic of Central American host nations, which were reeling from revolutions, civil wars, economic crisis, and foreign intervention in the 1980s, sought to repurpose Salvadoran refugees from problems for the state to solve into opportunities and solutions to their complex and often contradictory geopolitical and domestic agendas.

CHAPTER 1

Precarious Encampments:

Honduran Hostility toward Salvadoran Refugees (1979-1989)

Figure 1.1 *Embroidery on repatriation and relocation from Colomoncagua*, 1987, Museo de La Palabra y La Imagen, San Salvador, El Salvador, photo by author.

In 1987 a Salvadoran refugee living in camp Colomoncagua embroidered a vignette depicting their daily life in Honduras (Figure 1.1). The scene included multiple small housing structures and two gardens enclosed by barbed wire with trees and mountains in the background. A man and a woman are also represented in the embroidery; the woman

sweeps among the small houses and the man walks along the barbed perimeter. The creator stiched the following words across the middle: "*Refugiados Salvadoreños en Honduras no aceptamos la repatriación ni reubicación violenta. Colomoncagua* 1987" (Salvadoran Refugees in Honduras do not accept the repatriation nor violent relocation, Colomoncagua 1987). Although the scene may appear simple, many complex forces undergird this vignette. The embroidery captured much about Honduran refugee policy toward Salvadorans in one scene. Its barbed wire depicts the enclosure and lack of freedom the Honduran government imposed on refugees. It illustrates the gardens planted by refugees and the refugees carrying on with their work. The words function as an act of protest against the Honduran government's threats of forced relocation to the interior of Honduras and forced repatriation to El Salvador.

Between the late 1970s and mid-1990s Honduras hosted over 70,000 Central American and Caribbean refugees. At least 20,000 of these refugees were Salvadorans who entered Honduras in the early 1980s. The Honduran government responded to the Salvadoran refugee crisis by detaining refugees in closed, military-surveilled camps in which the military refugees endured state-sponsored violations such as harassment, sexual assault, and military raids into their camps.[56] This chapter demonstrates how the arrival of

[56] Juan Ramon Martinez, *Informe Sobre La Situación de Los Refugiados Salvadoreños Ubicados En Honduras* (Tegucigalpa, Honduras: AESORES PARA EL DESAROLLO: ASPADE, 1981); Ascoli, *Tiempo de Guerra Y Tiempo de Paz: Organizacion Y Lucha Delas Comunidades Del Oriente de Chalatenango (1974-199*4), 68; Servicio Jesuita para el Desarrollo "Pedro Arrupe," *Tiempo de Recordar Y Tiempo de Contar: Testimonies de Comunidades Repatriada Y Reubicadas de El Salvador,* 49-70; Segundo Montes, "La Situacion De Los Salvadoreños Desplazados Y Refugiados," *The Situation of the Salvadoran Refugees and Displaced Persons. (English)* 39, no. 434 (November 1984): 904–20; SEGUNDO MONTES, *Refugiados y repatriados: El Salvador y Honduras* (San Salvador: Instituto de Derechos Humanos, Universidad Centroamericana "José Simeón Cañas," 1989); Segundo Montes, "A La Búsqueda de Soluciones Para Los Desplazados Salvadoreños," *Relaciones Internacionales* 17 (October 1986): 25–43; SEGUNDO MONTES MOZO, "Los desplazados y refugiados salvadoreños," *Relaciones internacionales*, n.d.

tens of thousands of Salvadoran refugees posed a significant problem to solve in eyes of the Honduran state.

This chapter argues that Honduran government implemented repressive refugee policies because the United States used Honduran territory as a staging ground for its military maneuvers in the bordering nations of El Salvador and Nicaragua. Additionally, this chapter contends that the Honduran government harbored a deep anxiety over engaging in armed conflict with neighboring El Salvador—fearing a replay of the brief but violent skirmish between the two nations only 10 years prior to the arrival of the first Salvadoran refugees. While these factors largely shaped the violent nature of Honduran refugee policy toward Salvadorans in the 1980s, the Honduran government faced mounting pressure from both the UNHCR and refugee activism to provide safe accommodations for Salvadorans near their homeland. With the UNHCR serving as a mediator between the government and the refugee communities, some Salvadoran refugee communities were able to stave off some of the Honduran government's threats (e.g. forced relocation to the interior or forced repatriation to El Salvador). Nevertheless, Salvadoran refugees in Honduras lived under highly precarious conditions throughout the 1980s, even as they did much work to contest the repressive conditions imposed by the Honduran government.

Honduran Foreign and Domestic Relations in the 1960s and 1970s

Honduran policies of forced encampment, military surveillance, and harassment of Salvadoran refugees in the 1980s must be understood as part of the larger history of state-sponsored human rights violations resulting from Honduran Cold War politics as well as Salvadoran-Honduran relations. Indeed, the long history of cross-border conflicts between

El Salvador and Honduras set the stage for the manner in which the Honduran government responded to the arrival of thousands of Salvadoran refugees in 1979. Merely a decade before Salvadoran refugees fled civil war in their homeland, the two nations had engaged in a conflict known as the Hundred Hour War.[57] This violent clash was the climax of long existing tensions that followed decades-old, if not centuries, of failed attempts to unify Central America. In 1893 and again in 1918 El Salvador and Honduras had attempted to forge an agreement regarding a dispute over multiple sections of land along the 160-mile border. However, the two governments could not find a mutually satisfying solution.[58] The failure of these negotiations set the stage for the brief but volatile outbreak of war in July 1969.

In 1969, due to the traditional labor migration in which Salvadorans crossed into Honduras for seasonal employment there were approximately 300,000 Salvadorans living in Honduras particularly in areas near the shared border. As a result, Salvadorans comprised approximately 12 percent of the Honduran population.[59] This relatively significant population of Salvadorans created resentment among sectors of the Honduran population who perceived Salvadorans as competition in the labor market. Honduran

[57] Jorge Arieh Gerstein, "El Conflicto Entre Honduras y El Salvador: Análisis de Sus Causas," *Foro Internacional* 11, no. 4 (44) (1971): 552–68.; William H. Durham, *Scarcity and Survival in Central America: Ecological Origins of the Soccer War* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1979). Vincent Cable, "The 'Football War' and the Central American Common Market," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 45, no. 4 (1969): 658–71, https://doi.org/10.2307/2613335; Glenn Anthony Chambers, *Race, Nation, and West Indian Immigration to Honduras, 1890-1940* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010); Thomas M. Leonard, *The History of Honduras*, The Greenwood Histories of the Modern Nations. (Santa Barbara, Calif: Greenwood, 2011).

[58] Gerstein, "El Conflicto Entre Honduras y El Salvador." 552.

[59] Gerstein, "El Conflicto Entre Honduras Y El Salvador," 552.

politicians often fanned these flames of discontent by charging that opposition party electoral victories were a result of "illegal" Salvadoran voter fraud.[60]

Such hostilities proved explosive, when in 1969 the Salvadoran government claimed that the Honduran military had systematically and violently disposed and expelled Salvadoran immigrants from its territory. Using these alleged attacks as the pretext, the Salvadoran government launched an invasion of Honduras on July 14, 1969. Over the next few days, the Salvadoran military targeted the border regions with airstrikes, until a ceasefire went into effect on the 20th. In the end the Hundred Hour War left 1,000 dead and 100,000 displaced. However, the event is also commonly called the "Soccer War" (*Guerra del Fútbol*), because just days before the invasion, an anti-Salvadoran riot erupted in Tegucigalpa following the Salvadoran victory over Honduras in a qualifying match for World Cup. The Salvadoran government used that outburst of violence to further justify their invasion.

Scholars, however, have troubled the idea that the Salvadoran government launched the war only to defend the attacked Salvadoran campesinos, suggesting that the actual goal was to militarize the border region. These scholarly arguments in fact echo the claims of the immigrant *campesinos* who alleged that the Salvadoran government constructed the campesinos as one-dimensional victims of Honduran repression to justify their military actions and to blame Honduras for the war.[61] Salvadoran immigrant *campesinos* also expressed that the Salvadoran government was using them as a convenient excuse and did not actually care about them. Instead, *campesino* narratives claimed that the government's

[60] Gerstein. 552; Cable, "The 'Football War' and the Central American Common Market," 659.

[61] Gerstein, "El Conflicto Entre Honduras y El Salvador." Cable, "The 'Football War' and the Central American Common Market."

true objective was to militarize the border region due to *campesino* leftist political mobilization. Subsequently, this event served to create further class divisions between the ruling elite and campesinos within El Salvador in addition to amplifying cross-border tensions with Honduras.[62]

Also, in the second half of the 20th century, the domestic political struggles fostered an increasingly violent and repressive environment. Between 1972-1978 the Honduran government attempted to prevent popular uprisings through coopting protests for agrarian reform.[63] During this period of military reformism, the authoritarian state implemented measures which claimed to give land to landless *campesinos*. While the state distributed 164,129 hectares of land to 30,376 beneficiaries between 1973 and 1978, this top-down approach to land redistribution was largely an effort to "buy off" rural protest movements.[64] The ways that military reformism slowed the momentum of popular leftist mobilization by the late 1970s contributed to the fact that Honduras never experience a full-scale civil war like its neighbors.[65] However, divisions between the left and right continued to grow following 1978. And the Honduran state responded to leftist organization with increasing repression over the next decade.[66]

The infamous Battalion 3-16 death squad formed in 1979. This Honduran military unit known as Battalion 3-16 "detained scores of leftist activists, including students,

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[62] Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, Kindle Location 2432-2486.

[63] Rachel Sieder, "Honduras: The Politics of Exception and Military Reformism (1972-1978)," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 27, no. 1 (February 1995): 99, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X0001018X, 99-100.

[64] Sieder, "Honduras: The Politics of Exception and Military Reformism," 126.

[65] Sieder, "Honduras: The Politics of Exception and Military Reformism," 100.

[66] Ibid.

teachers, unionists, and suspected guerrillas who then disappeared."[67] The CIA trained and instructed the unit, which grew out of "the billion-dollar collaboration between the Reagan Administration and the Honduran military."[68] While its purported purpose was to prevent gun-running through Honduras to Salvadoran guerillas, Battalion 3-16 essentially functioned as a death squad that tortured and murdered protestors who opposed the U.S. aligned right wing Honduran government throughout the 1980s.[69] Battalion 3-16 stands as an example of the ways in which the right-wing government, collaborating with the CIA, committed state-sponsored violence against Honduran leftists. Furthermore, it represents the interplay between U.S. Cold War intervention and Honduran state-sponsored violence.

Another key domestic conflict between the Catholic Church and the Honduran government took shape during the 1960s and 1970s. In Honduras, as in much of Latin America prior to the 1960s, the Catholic Church was politically aligned with the state. However, in the 1960s the Catholic Church began challenging state-sponsored violence through its practice of Liberation Theology—a religious ideology that advocated for the liberation of the poor from political, economic and social oppression.[70] In 1975 Honduran armed forces assassinated 14 people, including priests, campesino leaders, and students, then hid their bodies in a well and covered up their graves with explosions of dynamite. However, the Catholic Church's pressure ultimately led to an investigation which

[67] Human Rights Watch, "Honduras: Human Rights Developments," *Human Rights Watch: World Report 1996* Americas (1996), https://www.hrw.org/reports/1996/WR96/Americas-08.htm#TopOfPage.

[68] Warren Hoge and Special To the New York Times, "Slaughter in Salvador: 200 Lost in Border Massacre," *The New York Times*, June 8, 1981, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/1981/06/08/world/slaughter-in-salvador-200-lost-in-border-massacre.html.

[69] "The Truth America Owes Honduras," *The New York Times*, October 9, 1995, http://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/09/opinion/the-truth-america-owes-honduras.html.

[70] Martinez, *Informe Sobre La Situación de Los Refugiados Salvadoreños Ubicados En Honduras*.

uncovered the atrocities.[71] As a result of the Church's intervention, conflicts between the Catholic Church and the government escalated. The border region between Honduras and El Salvador experienced growing tension between the Honduran state and Catholic Church in the sixties and seventies.

The increasing tendency of the U.S. government to see all Central American conflicts as Cold War proxies—following the 1979 Sandinista Revolution—aided in realigning Honduran-Salvadoran state relations, as these government became allies with each other and the United States against leftist subversion in the 1980s. Like the Salvadoran government, the Honduran government also struggled to control leftist political activities inside its own border region during the 1960s and 1970s. Moreover, because Honduras is located strategically between El Salvador and Nicaragua, the United States utilized Honduras as a military staging ground for campaigns against leftist insurgents and governments in the region. The Cold War context of the Salvadoran refugee crisis, shaped as it was by US intervention in the region, further laid the groundwork for the Honduran government's response to Salvadorans seeking asylum with their borders. Although the country never experienced a civil war in the way of other Central American nations, because of its strategic location, Honduras still played a key role in the region's Cold War struggles.

When Salvadoran refugees arrived in Honduras in 1979, the nation was not a signatory of the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) and its Protocol (1967). However, the government did have recent experience hosting a large refugee

[71] Martinez.

population.[72] The Honduran government began cooperating with the UNHCR beginning in the mid-70s, when 100,000 Nicaraguans fled the Somoza regime and the ensuing conflicts with Sandinistas and sought refuge in Costa Rica and Honduras. This refugee population consisted mainly of indigenous Miskito campesinos and most repatriated to Nicaragua following the Sandinista Revolution in 1979.[73] This was the first of two major influxes of Nicaraguan refugees, while the second would occur simultaneously with Salvadoran flight in response to the Contra War of the following decade. Although it offered some material assistance to the Miskito refugees prior to their repatriation, the UNHCR had a relatively limited role in Honduras during these years. Following the arrival of thousands of Salvadoran refugees in 1980, debates between the government and the UNHCR ensued once again. Over time, the influence of the UNCHR increased, particularly in 1983 when the government officially allowed the UNHCR to take on the majority of assistance for Salvadoran refugees. However, this did not mean unconditional government support for UN involvement nor a commitment to improving conditions for refugees.

La Guinda: Salvadoran Refugee Flight to Honduras (1979-81)

Beginning in 1979, following the outbreak of war between the FMLN and the right-wing government, Salvadoran *campesinos* began fleeing their homes in the *tierra olvidada* or the forgotten lands of the Chalatenango, Cabañas and Morazán departments in response to attacks by the Salvadoran military. Most Salvadorans who fled to Honduras were

[72] Todd, *Beyond Displacement,* Kindle Location 1319.

[73] *Out of the Ashes: The Lives and Hopes of Refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala.* (S.L.: El Salvador & Guatemala Committees for Human Rights : War on want campaigns, 1985).; *Refugiados En Centroamericano* (ACNUR, 1990).; "'Una de Las Caras de La Guerra: Refugiados y Desplazados En Centroamerica' Reproduced from ENVIO n. 33 Marzo 1984," *Iglesia Solidaria*, March 1984, IHNCA.

campesinos with a collective consciousness that aligned closely with the leftist guerillas. Indeed, many refugees from this region were family members of guerrillas. Contrary to the common dichotomy of the time that depicted them as either an apolitical victim or an armed guerilla, Salvadoran refugees were communities consisting of people with strong political opinions and survivors of human rights violations. [74]

As a survival tactic, beginning in 1979 *campesinos* created the complex system of flight known as the *guinda*.[75] Originally, the *guinda* began as path of war flight within the Salvadoran countryside. Once it became clear that their village was no longer safe in their homes, *campesinos* would embark *en guinda* by hiding from Salvadoran troops in caves in the mountains of El Salvador. Furthermore, they made use of information on military activities, often with the help of the FLMN.[76] In the early months of the war, they foraged the land for food eating roots, herbs and fruit. They also moved collectively along a planned route at night, sometimes walking up to 20 or 30 kilometers per night.[77]

As the violence of the war escalated and they no longer considered hiding within El Salvador a safe option, many campesino communities purposefully "internationalized the *guinda"* by adding Honduras to the existing route.[78] After weighing the forms of repression in El Salvador and Honduras, they made the conscious decision to go to Honduras.[79] To

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[74] Molly Todd, *Beyond Displacement: Campesinos, Refugees, and Collective Action in the Salvadoran Civil War*, Critical Human Rights (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), Kindle Location 274. See Todd for an exhaustive account of refugee collective action in Honduras and El Salvador.

[75] Ascoli, *Tiemop de Guerra y Tiempo de Paz: Organizacion y Lucha Delas Comunidades Del Oriente de Chalatenango (1974-1994).;* Servicio Jesuita para el Desarrollo "Pedro Arrupe," *Tiempo de Recordar y Tiempo de Contar: Testimonies de Comunidades Repatriada y Reubicadas de El Salvador* (San Salvador, El Salvador: Servicio Jesuita para el Desarrollo "Pedro Arrupe," 1994)., Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, Kindle Location 1341.

[76] Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, Kindle Location 1341.

[77] Ascoli, *Tiemop de Guerra y Tiempo de Paz: Organizacion y Lucha Delas Comunidades Del Oriente de Chalatenango (1974-1994)*.

[78] Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, 1251.

[79] Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, 1251.

travel to Honduras in secret they implemented their detailed knowledge of the land gained through a long history of cross-border labor migration before its militarization in order to flee previous or impending military incursion to move families to safety. Thousands of Salvadorans fled El Salvador during the early years of the war, arriving in Honduras between 1979 and 1982. On such journeys, the FMLN frequently accompanied campesinos along the route attempting to protect them. They often scouted for Salvadoran troops, at times planned mass departures that included escort to the border. From there refugees would meet international humanitarian workers who then accompanied them to locations with camps.[80]

The organization and ingenuity demonstrated by the development and implementation of the *guinda* was carried into the daily lives of refugees. Fleeing bombings, massacres, and other state-sponsored violence, campesinos made the journey across the Salvadoran-Honduran border in search of refuge.[81] Although *la guinda* was extremely perilous, it was also organized. This strategic path of war flight represents only one of many examples of organization and activism enacted by refugees who had to constantly fight for control over their living conditions in Honduran refugee camps throughout the following decade.

[80] Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, 1334-49.

[81] Ascoli, *Tiemop de Guerra y Tiempo de Paz: Organizacion y Lucha Delas Comunidades Del Oriente de Chalatenango (1974-1994)*. Todd, *Beyond Displacement,* Critical Human Rights (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), Kindle Location 740-743; Servicio Jesuita para el Desarrollo "Pedro Arrupe," *Tiempo de Recordar Y Tiempo de Contar: Testimonies de Comunidades Repatriada Y Reubicadas de El Salvador* (San Salvador, El Salvador: Servicio Jesuita para el Desarrollo "Pedro Arrupe," 1994); Ascoli, *Tiemop de Guerra y Tiempo de Paz: Organizacion y Lucha Delas Comunidades Del Oriente de Chalatenango (1974-1994)*.

Honduran Hostility toward Arriving Salvadoran Refugees (1979-82)

News outlets first reported on Salvadoran refugees in late 1979. On November 3 of that year, Honduran Foreign Minister Eliseo Perez Cadalso announced the official reception of the first Salvadoran refugees. Minister Perez Cadalso stated "we will do this for humanitarian reason, since we do not have any relations with our neighbor El Salvador… those Salvadorans who enter Honduras will be treated like the Nicaraguan who on another occasion escaped from violence."[82] While there were already some 30 Salvadoran refugee families present by this point, he hoped that there "will not be too many" more Salvadoran refugees entering Honduras in the future. This, of course, would not be the case. By April 29, 1980, the newspapers were reporting the presence of hundreds of Salvadorans in Honduras. Reportedly, Salvadoran refugees of "both sexes and all ages" were seeking refuge in Guarita in the Lempira department. According to Honduran immigration officials their "stay in Honduran territory is completely illegal and that they could be expelled but that humanitarian reason has prevailed." However, immigration officials stated that the government had placed 530 Salvadorans under military supervision "to prevent their dispersion throughout the country." Furthermore, the government decided to send the military to patrol the border, expressing that they wanted "to prevent an invasion by thousands of Salvadorans."[83]

In response to the influx of refugees, the Honduran government's earliest reactions to Salvadoran refugees in 1979 and 1980 illustrate how government officials initially attempted to downplay the burgeoning refugee crisis. Fearful of repeating the kind of

[82] "GOVERNMENT TO RECEIVE SALVADORAN REFUGEES," *Panama City ACAN*, November 3, 1979.
[83] "SALVADORANS ARRIVE SEEKING REFUGE FROM FIGHTING," *Panama City ACAN*, April 29, 1980.

military invasion that occurred during Hundred Hour War, the Honduran government acted cautiously in its response to the refugee crisis. For this reason, the Honduran government did not want to draw attention to the growing influx of Salvadoran refugees. Not wanting to upset the Salvadoran government who viewed the populations of refugee *campesinos* as guerilla threats, the Honduran government tried to limit the exposure of the earliest-arriving refugees to the press.[84] When the news sources did cover Salvadoran refugees, the articles commented on how El Salvador and Honduras, estranged neighbors since the 1969 Hundred Hours War, were now in the process of peaceful negotiations.[85] Moreover, the Honduran right-wing government vocalized agreement with the similarly right-wing Salvadoran government that the refugees were either leftist FMLN or guerilla sympathizers. This discourse of refugees as guerillas serve as a justification of the practice of enclosing them in military-surveilled camps surrounded by barbed wire, as well as cooperation in violent attacks on Salvadoran refugees.

The burgeoning Salvadoran-Honduran military cooperation of 1980 marked a shift in the relationship between the countries—who had been at war just a decade previously. That the militaries would work together to commit the massacres in 1980 and 1981, as well as numerous incursions into refugee camps, highlights how refugee policies and refugee lives became enmeshed in shifting international relations between the two governments. The gross human rights violation known Río Sumpul massacre exemplify the two states' shared antipathy toward Salvadoran refugees and cooperation between the Salvadoran and Honduran governments and militaries to prevent them from reaching

[84] Martinez, *Informe Sobre La Situación de Los Refugiados Salvadoreños Ubicados En Honduras*.
[85] "SALVADORANS ARRIVE SEEKING REFUGE FROM FIGHTING."

asylum. This infamous example of such military coordination occurred on May 14, 1980, when the Honduran government sent their military to the border in order to prevent new refugees from entering Honduran territory along the Sumpul River. Meanwhile, the Salvadoran army positioned its troops on the Salvadoran side in Chalatenango. Blocked by the Honduran army, hundreds of would-be Salvadoran refugees were left at the mercy of the of the Salvadoran army, which massacred 600 *campesinos* over the next two days.[86]

In the months following the Río Sumpul massacre, Catholic priests and nuns of the Diocese of Santa Rosa de Copan called for an investigation into the role of the Honduran military. However, the government denied any role. Regarding the accusation of Honduran military's role in the event, Honduran Colonel Cristobal Diaz Garcia stated "No one doubts there was a massacre on the other side but we did not participate in it."[87] A June 24, 1980 statement issued by Honduran Armed Forces called their charge "serious, slander, and irresponsible…absolutely false and reckless."[88] Outright denying its role in these atrocities, the Honduran government continued to work together with the Salvadoran government to monitor and control the perceived threat of left-wing subversion in the border region—including a similar massacre of 600 Salvadoran at Rio Lempa in 1981.[89] In addition to these massacres, this cooperation would also facilitate violent incursions in camps along the

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[86] "Truth Commission: El Salvador," United States Institute of Peace, accessed October 30, 2014, http://www.usip.org/publications/truth-commission-el-salvador. http://www.usip.org/publications/truth-commission-el-salvador; Servicio Jesuita para el Desarrollo "Pedro Arrupe," *Tiempo de Recordar Y Tiempo de Contar: Testimonies de Comunidades Repatriada Y Reubicadas de El Salvador; 51*. A similar incident would also occur in March 1981, almost a year after the massacre at Sumpul, when the Salvadoran military perpetrated another multi-day siege against a second group of campesinos attempting to cross into Honduras, this time at the Lempa River. According to survivors and witnesses, the Honduran troops "joined in and that some 600 Salvadorans died."

[87] "NO INVESTIGATION OF SALVADORAN MASSACRE CHARGE," *San Pedro Sula TIEMPO*, July 2, 1980.

[88] "CHURCH STATEMENT ON 'MASSACRE' PROMPTS GOVERNMENT, OAS REPLIES," *Tegucigalpa Domestic Service*, June 25, 1980.h state

[89] "Truth Commission."

border by both Honduran and Salvadoran armies extending the violence to those who had ostensibly found refuge.[90]

Even though the Honduran government did not want to acknowledge it, more and more Salvadorans fled into Honduras each week. By June 1980, thousands of Salvadorans were in the country. As the numbers of displaced Salvadorans within their borders increased, the government began negotiating with the UNHCR and religious aid groups over which organizations could provide assistance and what kind of assistance it would sanction. In July 1980, the UNHCR announced that it had appointed a head of the UNHCR mission in Tegucigalpa.[91] Even after the Honduran government recognized Salvadorans as refuges and increased cooperation with the UNHCR in 1983, neglect and abuse continued. Refugees remained under constant military surveillance and threat of forced relocation or repatriation by the Honduran armed forces in the established camps.

Encampment, surveillance, raids, and lack of food and medical care constituted the various forms of state-sponsored daily violence. Indeed, the Honduran government engaged in forms of repression by relegating Salvadorans to closed refugee camps, forbidding them from leaving the barbed-wire parameters. Likened by some international observers to concentration camps, Honduran refugee camps often lacked basic food, shelter, and health care and the option to leave. Salvadorans in these camps also endured widespread health problems of exhaustion, malnutrition, and eye and skin infections.[92] Refugee testimonies illuminate how the Honduran military also frequently harassed those

[90] Central American Refugee Center, *Witnesses to Political Violence in El Salvador,* 29.

[91] "UN REFUGEE OFFICIAL APPOINTED TO CARE FOR SALVADORANS," *Tegucigalpa Domestic Service*, July 18, 1980.

[92] *Los Refugiados salvadoreños en Honduras* (Centro de Documentación de Honduras), 5-12.

encamped. The testimonies indicate that some Honduran soldiers would terrorize refugees at night by rattling their machines guns against the fences of the camps. Refugees also described how the military disappeared people and raped youth while they washed clothing or bathed in the river.[93] The Honduran, and sometimes the Salvadoran armies, perpetrated violent incursions into camps, justifying their violent actions by claiming they were searching for known guerillas.

Furthermore, gendered violence against men and boys made it particularly dangerous for those over the age of 12 in the Honduran refugee camps. Like they did in El Salvador, men and boys in refugee camps risked being conscripted by the Honduran or Salvadoran armies. If they were not drafted, the government and military would accuse men in refugee camps of being rebel fighters and potentially subject them to harassment, torture, or death.[94] These conditions, created and maintained by the Honduran government, exacerbated the gendered patterns of migration in the region by pushing men and boys further to countries like Belize, Costa Rica, and the United States. [95]

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[93] *Los Salvadoreños en Honduras*, Centro de Documentación de Honduras, 17.

[94]John Mullaney, *Aiding the Desplazados of El Salvador: The Complexity of Humanitarian Assistance* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1984).

[95]An extensive number of sources characterizes the Honduran treatment of Salvadoran refugees as consistently violating basic human rights. The following is a short selection. Alto Comisionado para los Refugiados Naciones Unidas, *Refugiados en Centroamérica* (Lugar de publicación no identificado: ACNUR, n.d.); Central American Refugee Center, *Witnesses to Political Violence in El Salvador*; *Los Refugiados salvadoreños en Honduras*., Segundo Montes, "La Situacion De Los Salvadoreños Desplazados Y Refugiados," *The Situation of the Salvadoran Refugees and Displaced Persons. (English)* 39, no. 434 (November 1984): 904–20; *Out of the Ashes*; Renato Camarda, *Traslado forzado: refugiados salvadoreños en Honduras* (Tegucigalpa, Hond: Centro de Documentación de Honduras, 1987).; SEGUNDO MONTES, *Refugiados y repatriados: El Salvador y Honduras* (San Salvador: Instituto de Derechos Humanos, Universidad Centroamericana "José Simeón Cañas," 1989)"Truth Commission: El Salvador," United States Institute of Peace, accessed February 19, 2015, http://www.usip.org/publications/truth-commission-el-salvador.; "Central American Refugees," Hearing before the Subcommittee on Census and Population, 20. *Refugiados en Centroamérica*.

As early as 1982, the Honduran government repeatedly threatened to carry out forced relocation and repatriations of Salvadoran refugees. For mounting pressure from the U.S. government encouraged the Honduran government to respond to Salvadoran refugees in repressive ways. The U.S. government under the Reagan administration demonstrated clear priorities in Central America, as it gave approximately 4.5 billion dollars to fund the right-wing Salvadoran government and tens of millions to the right-wing paramilitary Contras in Nicaragua. Furthermore, the United States government also viewed Honduras as a strategic location for its military operations, as it shares a border with both El Salvador and Nicaragua. Of particular concern to the Honduran, Salvadoran, and the U.S. governments—for different reasons— was the unfortunate location of refugee camps along border regions. The U.S. government desired to make use of the borderlands to stage maneuvers in El Salvador and Nicaragua. As such, the fact that the border region was populated by thousands of refugees posed a significant obstacle.

Ideologies of Aid: The Role of UNHCR and other Humanitarian Organizations

Those Salvadorans who did seek refuge in Honduras would become beneficiaries of UNHCR assistance. Between 1980 and 1982, the UNHCR would place over 20,000 Salvadorans into refugee camps located in areas along the border in the departments of Lempira, La Paz, and Ocotepeque.[96] By 1983, the UNHCR had gained primary control of refugee assistance in Honduras. The UNHCR with the reluctant approval of the Honduran government established five main camps with populations varying from hundreds to more than ten thousand. Mesa Grande housed between 1,500-11,500 Salvadoran refugees. La

[96] *Out of the Ashes*, 10.

Virtud sheltered between 3,000 to 10,000. Approximately 8,400 lived in Colomoncagua. San Antonio had 1,500 refugees. And Buenos Aires was the smallest with 200 to 300.[97] Between 1981 and 1982 the Honduran government forcibly relocated refugees from La Virtud to Mesa Grande, making Mesa Grande the largest camp.[98]

Honduras was a complicated locale for the UNHCR to operate in due to influence the U.S. government had over both the UN refugee agency and Honduran government. Additionally, Honduras was not a signatory of the UN Convention on Refugees. Although the Honduran government allowed the UNHCR to operate within its borders, the organization's officials faced significant challenges in maintaining their mission to protect the rights of refugees and provide material assistance in the camps in this context. Nervous that strong opposition to the will of the Honduran or U.S. government would result in the termination of their operations, UNHCR officials served to mediate threats of forced relocations and repatriations. However, on the numerous occasions of state-sponsored harassment, incursions, and killings the UNHCR was not able to protect the rights of Salvadoran refugees.

Furthermore, the Honduran government sought to control refugee access to certain aid-providing organizations. Continuing the trajectory of the antagonistic relationship that had developed since the 1960s, Catholic leadership and organizations immediately criticized the Honduran government's violent response to Salvadoran refugees.[99] During the decades leading to the arrival of Salvadoran refugees, the Catholic Church had a strong

[97] Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, Kindle Location 1326.
[98] Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, Kindle Location 1828.
[99] "CHURCH STATEMENT ON 'MASSACRE' PROMPTS GOVERNMENT, OAS REPLIES"; "NO INVESTIGATION OF SALVADORAN MASSACRE CHARGE."

presence in the border regions, which was also where Salvadoran refugee camps were established beginning in 1980.[100] However, the ongoing antagonistic relationship between the Catholic Church and the Honduran government would provoke the Honduran government to prevent Catholic charities from providing extraordinary assistance to Salvadoran refugees in the departments of Lempira, La Paz, and Ocotepeque. Specifically, the Honduran government to prevented Caritas—the largest Catholic Church charity in the nation— from taking extraordinary measures to assist refugees.[101] The state saw Caritas as a threat due to its connections to Liberation Theology.[102]

Instead, the Honduran government called upon Protestant Evangelical groups like CEDEN (the Evangelical National Emergency Committee) and World Vision to assist refugees. These evangelical organizations were far more sympathetic to the Honduran government because they had conservative and anti-communist leanings. CEDEN, which had been founded in the wake of the Hundred Days war, had an outspoken stance of objecting to any actions that appeared to challenge authorities and the policy of not speaking out against Honduran authorities. Thus, in 1980 the Honduran government found them to be an ideal candidate for handling the refugee situation in the manner the Honduran government saw fit. However, in response to the Honduran military leaders having expressed dissatisfaction with the organization's handling of Salvadoran refugees, the control was quickly shifted from CEDEN to World Vision, an even more conservative and anti-communist evangelical aid organization. In the eyes of the state, CEDEN went from

[100] Martinez, *Informe Sobre La Situación de Los Refugiados Salvadoreños Ubicados En Honduras*.
[101] Martinez, *Informe Sobre La Situación de Los Refugiados Salvadoreños Ubicados en Honduras,* 2.
[102] Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, Kindle Location 3384.

quiet complicity to "agents of international Marxism."[103] Anti-communist World Vision then became the ideal choice.

Instead of denouncing its human rights violations, evangelicals wanted to maintain a positive relation with the Honduran government, so they could continue their missionizing work unobstructed.[104] When the Honduran government used ideological criteria to determine which religious organizations were allowed to assist refugees, it created a policy harmful to refugees in many ways. First, it deprived refugees of access to Catholic resources, which represented the majority of those preexisting in the border region where the government set up refugee camps. To make things worse, many of the evangelical organizations that provided aid to refugees, including CEDEN and World Vision, maintained evangelization as their top priority. Refugees discovered that evangelical agencies were more likely to assist them if they said they would be willing to convert to Protestantism.[105] Such religious and political ideologies justified aid workers prioritizing eternal salvation over the immediate, worldly suffering of refugees. Evangelical aid workers needed to convert them so that they could be saved in Heaven. Thus, to withhold assistance from refugees unless they were willing to convert, made sense to them, with the most pressing issue being the need to save their souls. Although the government allowed the UNHCR and other aid agencies to set up camps for Salvadorans in Honduras, refugees had left a country engaged in civil war only to cross into a country that served as a staging area for that same war. Thus, no organization could actually guarantee safe asylum for these Salvadoran refugees in Honduras.

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[103]Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, 1674.

[104] Martinez, *Informe Sobre La Situación de Los Refugiados Salvadoreños Ubicados en Honduras*, 2-4.

[105] Martinez, *Informe Sobre La Situación de Los Refugiados Salvadoreños Ubicados en Honduras,* 7.

Cold War Counterexample: Honduran Treatment of Nicaraguan Refugees

The Honduran government's simultaneous response to Nicaraguan refugees provides a stark contrast to the conditions faced by Salvadorans. Indeed, understanding the Nicaraguan refugees as a counterexample, also highlights just how Honduran refugee policies were subject to the pressures of larger Cold War conflicts. In the early and mid-1980s, in addition to Salvadorans, Honduras received over 20,000 Nicaraguans, of which at least 13,000 were Miskitos, seeking refuge from the Sandinista government that carried out forced relocations of Miskito communities.[106] This was the second large group of Nicaraguan refugees that Honduras had hosted in recent years, with the first having repatriated in 1979. The situation in Nicaragua differed from that in El Salvador, as Nicaragua had experienced a successful socialist revolution in 1979 when the Sandinistas overthrew the Somoza dictatorship.[107] However, the Sandinistas taking control of the government did not end the conflict between the left and right in Nicaragua, instead it was followed by the Contra War throughout the 1980s. The Contras were a U.S.-backed, right-wing paramilitary group that sought to destabilize and overthrow the Sandinista government. U.S. support of the Contras, just like the Salvadoran government, was a key part of the Reagan administration's anti-communist foreign policies of the late Cold War. It is difficult to characterize all who left Nicaragua as refugees during this time. According to international humanitarian and church workers, while some were campesinos who fled

[106] *Refugiados En Centroamericano* (ACNUR, 1990); *Out of the Ashes*, *10;* "22 Mil Refugiados Salvadoreños Hay En Nicaragua," *La Prensa*, June 26, 1982, IHNCA; "'Una de Las Caras de La Guerra: Refugiados Y Desplazados En Centroamerica' Reproduced from ENVIO N. 33 Marzo 1984," *Iglesia Solidaria*, March 1984, IHNCA.

[107] Jeffrey L. Gould, *To Die in This Way: Nicaraguan Indians and the Myth of Mestizaje, 1880-1965*, Latin America Otherwise (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1998).

from the violence of the Contra War, others were Contra sympathizers and operatives. These groups settled along the Honduran-Nicaraguan border and the Costa Rican-Nicaraguan border. International observers, Church officials, and Salvadoran refugees accused them of staging Contra attacks in Nicaragua from these refugee camps.[108] However, the Honduran government was far more welcoming to Nicaraguans in the 1980s. They allowed Nicaraguans to live in open settlements along the border.[109] The accusations of sympathizing and participating in paramilitary activities was similar to the discourse around Salvadoran refugees—even if referring to diametrically opposed sides of the political spectrum. However, the difference existed in the treatment of Nicaraguan refugees in the face of accusations that refugees were assisting Contra rebels or were Contras themselves. Unlike the military surveillance, harassment and incursions that the Honduran armed forces committed against Salvadoran refugees, the government housed Nicaraguan refugees in far less restrictive conditions, permitting Nicaraguans the freedom of mobility . The hypocrisy of the Honduran government's justification to forcibly encamp Salvadoran refugees because it claimed they constituted a threat to national security becomes even clearer when comparing the treatment of refugee groups from contrasting political contexts. Furthermore, the Nicaraguan refugee counterexample illustrates how the Honduran state implemented its repressive refugee policies toward Salvadoran in response to ongoing Cold War pressures from both the Salvadoran and the U.S. governments.

[108] *Out of the Ashes*, 10.
[109] *Out of the Ashes*, 10.

Continued Violence: Incursions, Harassment, and Threats (1984-1987)

Coinciding with the influx of Nicaraguan refugees to Honduras due to the Contra war, was the escalation of violence in El Salvador. In 1984 the incipient presidency of José Napoleón Duarte and the massive increase of U.S. military aid initiated another large exodus of Salvadorans seeking international refuge, with thousands more searching for assistance in Honduras.[110] Figure 1.2 depicts massacre that occurred in Chalatenango in August of 1984. The brutal images included soldiers beating and burning individuals, a helicopter gunning down a group of campesinos, and baby cut from a woman's womb and eaten by a pig. In addition to oral testimonies and written letters, such art became an important way of remembering and expressing what they had experienced in El Salvador before fleeing.

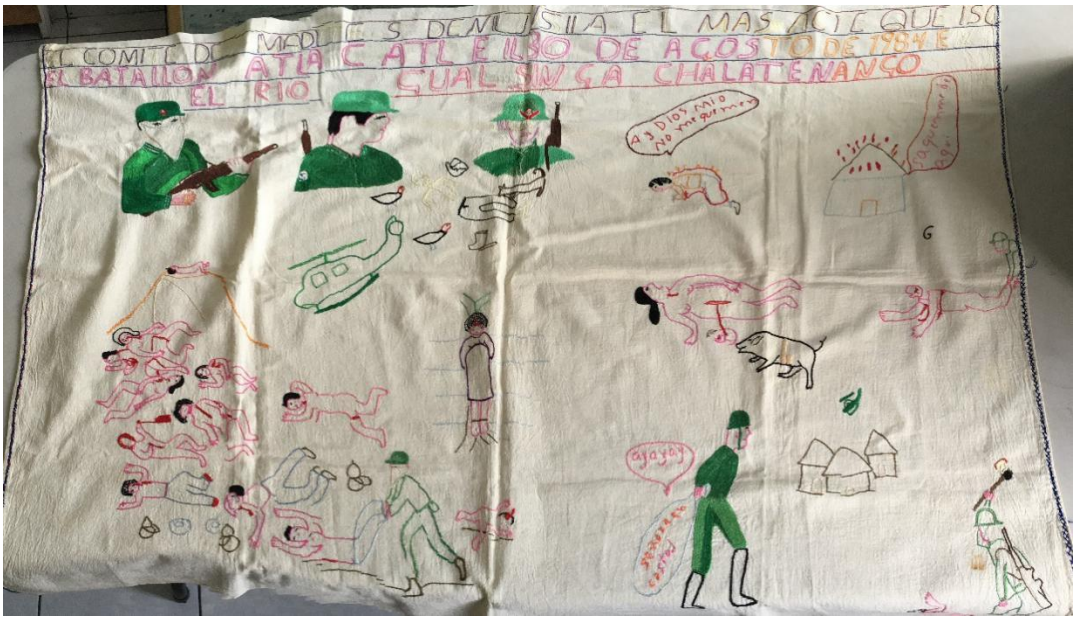

Figure 1.2 *Embroidery by Refugees from Chalatenango*, Museo de La Palabra y La Imagen (MUPI), San Salvador, El Salvador, photo by author.

[110] *Out of the Ashes*, 14.

In the context of escalating violence in both El Salvador and Nicaragua, the Honduran army reportedly killed 17 Salvadorans who crossed the border attempting to reach refugee camps in 1984.[111] Indeed, Honduran abuses against Salvadoran refugees continued through the decade. On August 29, 1985 Honduran armed forces entered the Callejones refugee camp, part of Colomoncagua and killed at least two refugees, wounding dozens more and arresting ten. Refugees alleged that after invading the camp, some Honduran soldiers beat and fired on the residents.[112] According to international aid workers present in the camp at the time, refugees were "tortured and beaten with rifle butts, two others were knifed to death and their bodies carried away in a helicopter, one woman was raped, and a baby was ripped from her grandmother's arms and kicked to death."[113] Furthermore, the workers alleged that some 200 soldiers circled the camp to prevent the press from entering during the incursion.[114]The government's official version of the events of August 29, 1985 was that troops entered Callejones refugee camp "in search of 500 Salvadoran guerillas allegedly posing as refugees in the camp."[115] The army claimed that the camp residents attacked the soldiers. The government maintained that "the violent attitude of the refugees against the patrol carrying out an inspection in the camp" was to blame for the confrontation that ensued. Foreign Relations Minister Edgardo Paz Barnica claimed the confrontation actually justified an increase military control over

[111] *Out of the Ashes,* 4.

[112] "FOUR BODIES FOUND NEAR COLOMANCAGUA CAMP," *San Pedro Sula TIEMPO*, April 27, 1984; "ARMY NAMES 10 ARRESTED IN COLOMONCAGUA ACTION," *Tegucigalpa LA TRIBUNA*, September 4, 1985; "REFUGEE COMMISSIONER ACCUSES ARMY OF ABUSE," *Panama City ACAN*, September 4, 1985.

[113] Central American Report, 27 September 1985 Vol xii no 37 Issn 0254-2471, 283.

[114] Central American Report, 27 September 1985 Vol xii no 37 Issn 0254-2471, 283.

[115] Central American Report, 27 September 1985 Vol xii no 37 Issn 0254-2471, 283.

the refugee camps in the border region.[116] Location was a major factor in the 1985 incursion, as Callejones was only about 8 km from the border with El Salvador, as the U.S. and Salvadoran governments deeply disliked that refugee camps existed in the border regions.[117]

Through the end of the decade, the situation in Honduras would remain similarly precarious for Salvadoran refugees. As the government continued to threaten force relocation and repatriation, refugees continued to protest the hostile policies, claiming the refugee camps were hotbeds of guerilla activity.[118] They publicly declared through various acts that they did not want to be relocated. By speaking with researchers and international aid and church workers, these Salvadorans refugees living in Honduras were able to have their demands reach beyond the fences of the camps. Refugees produced numerous writings and testimonies, which would often outline their demands. On occasion they sent them to be published in the Salvadoran press and even addressed some to Salvadoran government officials, like the President.[119] In this way, they were also able to build networks of information between Salvadoran refugee camps across the region. Salvadorans in Honduras organized and worked every day to better their lives in refugee camps.

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[116] Central American Report, 27 September 1985 Vol xii no 37 Issn 0254-2471, 283.

[117] Central American Report, 27 September 1985 Vol xii no 37 Issn 0254-2471, 283.

[118] "OFFICIAL SAYS REFUGEES, GUERRILLAS LINKED," *San Pedro Sula LA PRENSA*, April 24, 1984; "GOVERNMENT TO EXPEL REFUGEES RESISTING RELOCATION," *Rome IPS*, July 19, 1984; "FMLN Rebels Reportedly Train at Refugee Camps," *Tegucigalpa EL HERALDO*, March 14, 1989; "FMLN Controlled Colomoncagua Refugee Camp," *Paris AFP*, December 1, 1988.

[119] Examples include: Comunidad de Refugiados de Colomoncagua, Honduras, "Los Refugiados Salvadorenso En Colomoncagua, Honduras, Estamos Dispuestos Repatriarnos" (Diario El Mundo, June 1989), A2 04 4.2 F4 187, MUPI; Comunidad Salvadorena Refugiada en Colomoncagua, Honduras, "Buletin de Prensa," July 25, 1989, A2 04 4.1 F4 190.1, MUPI; La Comunidad de refugiados salvadorenos en San Antonia, Honduras a la comunidad nacional e interncacional, al Gobierno de El Salvador presdidido por el Lic. Alfredo Cristiani Bukard, al Alto Mando dela Fuerza Armada, "Manifestamos Nuestra Firme Decision de Retornar En Comunidad a Nuestra Querida Patria y al Lugar Que Hemos Decidido Repoblar" (La Prensa, October 12, 1989), A2 04 4.1 F3 184, MUPI.

Throughout the duration of their years living as refugees, they maintained their desires to return to El Salvador after the conflict ended. Through organized protests they prevented forced relocation and forced repatriation campaigns in the mid-1980s. Finally, beginning in the late 1980s, Salvadoran refugees living in Honduras began to organize their voluntary return home.

Resisting Forced Relocation and Repatriation: Salvadoran Refugee Activism

While the Honduran government constantly threatened forced relocations and repatriations between 1982 and 1989, Salvadoran refugees responded with organized activism. Indeed, through their activism refugees themselves shaped the Honduran government's policies during these years. In particular, they tackled the issue of forced repatriations and relocations. Refugees also gave oral testimonies to church and international aid workers in order to spread their stories and garner more international support. They welcomed international visitors to their camps as well, seeing their presence as a way of raising public awareness. This sentiment can be seen in the following embroidery, made as a gift for such a visitor. The message declares "We, the Salvadoran refugees, en Colomoncagua Honduras appreciate your visit and the support that you offer us and we want more international presence in the camps." Refugees knew that more international visitors meant less abuses in the camps as well as the opportunity to exchange information and receive more aid. They strategically provided international visitors to the camps with art, embroideries, testimonies through which they articulated their demands for better living conditions to the international community. Some embroideries and testimonies made public both the success of their communities that they

had collectively worked for years to build, while others took a more explicitly political stance against the U.S., Honduran, or Salvadoran governments.

The embroidery in Figure 1.4, adorned with bold red flowers, states "We, the Salvadoran refugees, do not accept relocation"—meaning that they refused to be uprooted from their established camps and moved further into the interior of Honduras. Refugee testimonies also decried forced relocation because they had worked for years to build the community they had—with schools, councils, kitchens, workshops, gardens etc. Their lives would be completely disrupted (again) by the move and they would have to rebuild everything (again). A celebration of the successes of their daily life, particularly the presence and work of women, can be seen in the embroideries of Figures 1.5 and 1.6.

Figure 1.3 *Embroidery gift to international visitor*, Museo de La Palabra y La Imagen, San Salvador, El Salvador, photo by author.

Figure 1.4 *Embroidery on Repatriation with Red Flowers*, Museo de La Palabra y La Imagen, San Salvador, El Salvador, photo by author.

Figure 1.5 *Embroidery on refugees working together*, Museo de La Palabra y La Imagen, San Salvador, El Salvador, photo by author.

Figure 1.6 *Embroidery on memories from La Virtud*, Museo de La Palabra y La Imagen, San Salvador, El Salvador, photo by author.

Strategically utilizing the international press and foreign aid workers to disseminate their demands, many refugees expressed strong opposition to forced relocation in the statements given to the international press. The press shared such powerful statements against relocation like "They are not allowed to take us from here…if they kill us, they have to kill us here…pray for us."[120] Refugees also explicitly called out Honduran cooperation with El Salvador, stating that "What they want is to not have witnesses of the existing relationship between Honduran and Salvadoran militaries…that is their objective."[121] Refugees clearly opposed the relocation because they knew that the U.S. government wanted to use the border region to engage in military operations in El Salvador and they opposed this action and made claims for the sovereignty of El Salvador.[122]

In the 1983 "Letter from Colomoncagua," a collective of Salvadoran refugees vehemently protested the prospect of their forced relocation from the border region to the interior of Honduras.[123] The refugees also questioned the promises of "freedom, land, and a normal life" by the UNHCR, which supported this relocation, because the international organization could not even guarantee protection where they already resided. The letter explicitly stated that refugees did not accept the plans of the UNHCR. Furthermore, they questioned how the UNHCR could make promises in the context of Honduran and U.S. aggression. Refugees alleged Honduran policy hypocrisy: "we are not an armed movement like the Nicaraguans that use the Honduran territory as a base and rear their activities to

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[120] *Los Salvadoreños en Honduras*, Centro de Documentación de Honduras, 17.

[121] *Los Salvadoreños en Honduras*, Centro de Documentación de Honduras, 17.

[122] *Los Refugiados salvadoreños en Honduras*, 17; *Repatriación de Refugiados: Parte Del Proyecto Contrainsurgente (Documento de Los Refugiados Salvadoreños En Colomoncagua)* (Ediciones Sistema Radio Venceremos, 1985).

[123] Refugees of Colomoncagua, "Letter from Colomoncagua, Translated and Reprinted in From out of the Ashes: The Lives and Hopes of Refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala," October 24, 1983, MUPI, 43.

topple the Sandinista government; in our case we are the civilian population, the majority of women, children and elderly that have no power to represent a threat to the stability of Honduras."[124] In their protest to relocation, the refugees of Colomoncagua were referring to the drastically contrasting treatment of the two major refugee populations in Honduras at the time: Salvadorans and Nicaraguans. In the face of powerful opposition, Salvadoran refugee activism was able in many cases to prevent or at least temper Honduran state violence.

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During the final years of the war, the refugee communities worked with the UNHCR to organize their voluntary mass repatriations. For this reason, safety was a major concern—particularly for the first groups that returned earlier in the decade. For example, in October 1989 the 1,200 refugees at Mesa Grande announced their imminent repatriation. Then in November 1989 approximately 8,500 refugees of camp Colomoncagua announced their collective desire to return to El Salvador with the assistance of the UNHCR. The voluntary mass repatriation of the residents of the camp began the following month. The repatriates resettled in four villages in Meanguera in Morazán. Both the Honduran and Salvadoran governments had approved the return.[125] Thousands more would repatriate during the last two years of the war.

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[124] *Repatriación de Refugiados: Parte Del Proyecto Contrainsurgente (Documento de Los Refugiados Salvadoreños En Colomoncagua)* (Ediciones Sistema Radio Venceremos, 1985), 7.

[125] "8,500 Salvadoran Refugees To Return Home," *Tegucigalpa EL HERALDO*, November 9, 1989; "Salvadoran Refugees Permitted To Return Home," *Panama City ACAN*, December 12, 1989.

Ample evidence exists to illustrate that the Honduran government responded to Salvadoran refugees with repression and violence by organizing and participating in massacres and camp incursions, the restricting refugee mobility, subjecting some refugee to forced relocations, and daily forms of neglect or harassment.[126] What is less evident is why Honduran refugee policy took such a hostile shape. This chapter has demonstrated that the Honduran government negotiated the following concerns when determining its refugee policies: U.S. Cold War intervention and Honduran-Salvadoran relations on the one hand and the role of the UNHCR and refugee activism on the other. The Honduran government had to respond to the desires of the U.S. government. As part of its Cold War strategy in Central America, the U.S. government used Honduran territory as a staging ground for its military maneuvers in the bordering nations of El Salvador and Nicaragua. Additionally, the Honduran government had a long history of tense relations with El Salvador. Only ten years earlier the two countries went to war over a border conflict. Because they feared the response to refugees may upset the Salvadoran government, the Honduran government officials chose to cooperate with them, particularly regarding joint military actions along the border region, including massacres and refugee camp incursions. Furthermore, throughout the decade the UNHCR and other aid organizations struggled often unsuccessfully to protect refugee rights. Finally, through their activism, refugees themselves shaped Honduran policies by limiting some of the government's most violent impulses while they simultaneously worked collectively to improve their daily life under extremely precarious conditions.

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[126] *Out of the Ashes: The Lives and Hopes of Refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala.* (S.L.: El Salvador & Guatemala Committees for Human Rights : War on want campaigns, 1985); 10, 14-15, 43; *Los Refugiados salvadoreños en Honduras,* 17.

CHAPTER 2

They were our friends':

Revolutionary Refugee Policy and Statecraft in Sandinista Nicaragua (1979-90)

In the October 1983 weekly bulletin known as *¡Volveremos!,* the Salvadoran refugee community of Los Leches reported that "they are happy with their sowing. This week it yielded nothing less than 120 acres of yuca and 25 acres of corn." [127] It went on to explain how the community of Brasil Grande had "planted a very good type of potato that adapts better to this lands' conditions of production. It seems that a Salvadoran compañera specialist advised them. They will see if it can serve other collectives." [128] Such updates were common in *¡Volveremos!*, whose name translates to "We Shall Return!." Produced by an organization of refugees living in Nicaragua, *¡Volveremos!* circulated information to other communities in Nicaragua regarding Salvadoran refugees and news from the war in El Salvador.

The excerpts from this refugee-produced publication hint at multiple aspects of the Nicaraguan government's response to the influx of as many as 20,000 Salvadoran refugees into their nation during the 1980s, as well as how Salvadoran refugees experienced life in Nicaragua.[129] In the broadest of terms, they suggest that refugees in Nicaragua were able to

[127] Comunidades Cristianas de Refugiados Salvadoreños en Nicaragua, *¡Volveremos!* , October 22, 1983, IHNCA.

[128] Comunidades Cristianas de Refugiados Salvadoreños en Nicaragua, *¡Volveremos!* , October 22, 1983, IHNCA.

[129] "22 Mil Refugiados Salvadoreños Hay En Nicaragua," *La Prensa*, June 26, 1982, IHNCA; Hemispheric Migration Project and Intergovernmental Committee on Migration, "Study on the Basic Socio-Demographic and Economic Characteristics of Central American Refugees in Nicaragua 1981-1983," May 1984.

circulate information between refugee camps at a rate that permitted a weekly publication. Furthermore, they imply a stark contrast to conditions in Honduras, as Salvadorans were able to live openly, safe from state persecution or repression. The discussion of sowing, crop yields, and different varieties of potatoes among multiple refugee camps also illustrates a particular importance placed on agricultural collectives in Nicaragua. Indeed, the government promoted the formation of refugee agricultural cooperatives among Salvadoran refugees. In stark contrast to the conditions their counterparts faced in the closed, repressive Honduran camps, Salvadorans were encouraged to integrate into Nicaraguan society. While the government only officially recognized 5 to 6 thousand as legal refugees, it generally permitted all Salvadorans "the opportunity to survive and produce."[130] In fact, the Nicaraguan government's policy, recognized by the UN as 'exemplary,' granted all refugees the same civil rights as Nicaraguan citizens regarding health, education, and employment.[131]

The timing proved mutually beneficial for both the Sandinistas and Salvadoran refugees. As recent as 1979—a year before Salvadoran refugees began arriving—that the leftist Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) overthrew the Somoza dictatorship, which had been in power since the 1930s.[132] In the context of the region's ongoing Cold War conflicts, the Sandinista government used Salvadoran refugees to make a statement to

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[130] *Out of the Ashes: The Lives and Hopes of Refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala.* (S.L.: El Salvador & Guatemala Committees for Human Rights: War on want campaigns, 1985), 11.

[131] "22 Mil Refugiados Salvadoreños Hay En Nicaragua."

[132] Erik A. Moore, "Rights or Wishes? Conflicting Views over Human Rights and America's Involvement in the Nicaraguan Contra War," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 29, no. 4 (December 2018): 716–37, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2018.1528789; Michael Zalkin, "The Sandinista Agrarian Reform: 1979-1990," *International Journal of Political Economy* 20, no. 3 (Fall 1990): 46–68, https://doi.org/10.1080/08911916.1990.11643801; For foundational texts in Nicaraguan history see Jeffrey L. Gould, *To Lead as Equals: Rural Protest and Political Consciousness in Chinandega, Nicaragua, 1912-1979* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Gould, *To Die in This Way*.

the international community. The revolutionary government demonstrated that Nicaragua would provide humane and generous treatment of refugees. By recognizing thousands of Salvadoran refugees as having fled persecution in El Salvador, the Sandinistas highlighted the atrocities of the Salvadoran and U.S. governments. They positioned Nicaragua as a nation of refuge, while criticizing the Salvadoran government as a one that slaughters its own people. As such, it utilized refugees to legitimize the revolutionary state, while delegitimizing its foes. Furthermore, the revolutionary government did so while concurrently perpetrating violence against the indigenous Miskito community. Also, in the name of agrarian reform, the revolutionary government displaced thousands of indigenous Miskitos from their ancestral lands in order to forcefully resettle them into their own agricultural cooperatives.

Not only did its generous practices regarding Salvadoran refugees make a symbolic statement on human rights and US imperialism, but the policies also addressed domestic concerns around land and labor. Specifically, the FSLN furthered its agrarian reform projects through the integration of Salvadoran refugees, the majority of whom already supported the spirit of the Sandinista revolution due to their FMLN sympathies.[133] In 1981 and 1982 the Sandinistas implemented a nationwide agrarian reform policy which promoted the development of agricultural cooperatives through land redistribution.[134] In this way, Nicaraguan refugee policy toward Salvadorans functioned as revolutionary acts of

[133] Hemispheric Migration Project and Intergovernmental Committee on Migration. Annex V; "22 Mil Refugiados Salvadoreños Hay En Nicaragua."

[134] Laura J. Enriquez and Marlean I. Llanes, "Back to the Land: The Political Dilemmas of Agrarian Reform in Nicaragua Global Perspectives on Social Problems," *Social Problems* 40 (1993): 255.

both nation-building and statecraft under the Sandinista platform.[135] The timing of the arrival was critical in influencing their reception as it coincided with the new Sandinista government beginning to implement social and economic policies that were an essential part of their agenda.[136]

From the Somoza Dictatorships to the Sandinista Revolution (1936-1979)

This treatment of Salvadoran refugees by the Nicaraguan state must be understood in the larger context of the twentieth century, with a particular focus on national and international tensions between the left and right. From the 1930s through the 1970s, the Somoza regime, with the support of the National Guard and the U.S. government, controlled Nicaragua with rampant corruption and violent repression. Under Somoza, the export of agricultural goods, primarily depending on the U.S. market, constituted the country's economy. Also, during this time, the wealth of the country was concentrated in very few hands. In particular, the Somoza family owned 23 percent of Nicaragua's land. The large, privately owned farms produced commodities such as coffee, cotton, sugar, and bananas, as well as raised cattle to be sold to U.S. consumers. This agro-export economy required migrant labor. Prior to the late 1970s both Salvadorans and Nicaraguans participated in regional labor migration determined by harvest seasons. The governments of these

[135] The argument of this chapter was significantly shaped by the following texts in critical refugee studies: Gil Loescher, "Humanitarianism and Politics in Central America," *Political Science Quarterly* 103, no. 2 (1988): 295–320, https://doi.org/10.2307/2151185; María Cristina García, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Yen Le Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(Es)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

[136] Laura Enriquez, Harvesting Change: Labor and Agrarian Reform in Nicaragua, 1979-1990 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); E. J. A. Bilbao and Georgetown Univ. (Usa). Hemispheric Migration Project, "Migration, War, and Agrarian Reform: Peasant Settlements in Nicaragua" (Hemispheric Migration Project, Center for Immigration Policy and Refugee Assistance, Georgetown University, 1988).

countries permitted, even encouraged, this system of shared migrant labor. However, the increasing tensions between the governments in the late 1970s and early 1980s prevented this traditional migration.[137] Thus, the Sandinista government would find the Salvadoran refugees a welcome addition to the economy in light of this new labor shortage.

One of the most significant reasons for the increased tensions in the region was the rise of the leftist Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in response to the Somoza dictatorship. The FSLN carried the name and the tradition of the national hero, Augusto Sandino, who had led the fight against the U.S. Marines' occupation of Nicaragua from 1927 to 1933 and whom the Somoza regime killed in 1934. Through its namesake, the Sandinista Front invoked early revolutionary peasant, nationalist, and anti-imperialist movements.[138] Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s the FSLN attempted insurgencies but was largely unsuccessful.[139] By the mid-1970s, however, repression, corruption, and economic hardship under the Somoza regime led to mass unrest throughout the country. By the late 1970s, thousands of Nicaraguans from various sections of society had joined the Sandinistas' revolutionary cause. Then after staging several successful armed uprisings in 1978 and 1979, the Sandinistas overthrew the Somoza regime and took control of the government on July 19, 1979. Over 50,000 Nicaraguans died during the revolution.[140]

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[137] Laura J. Enríquez, *Harvesting Change: Labor and Agrarian Reform in Nicaragua, 1979-1990* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 105.

[138] "The Rise and Fall of the FSLN," NACLA, accessed May 24, 2019, /article/rise-and-fall-fsln. For work on Augusto Sandino see: ; Manuel Andrés García, "Sandino En La Habana: La VI Conferencia Internacional Americana a Ojos de La Prensa e Intelectualidad Españolas," *Sandino in Havana: The VI International American Conference in the Eyes of the Spanish Press and Intellectuals.* 43 (January 2017): 285–306; Richard Grossman, "Solidarity with Sandino: The Anti-Intervention and Solidarity Movements in the United States, 1927-1933," *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 6 (2009): 67–79; Richard Grossman, "The Nation Is Our Mother: Augusto Sandino and the Construction of a Peasant Nationalism in Nicaragua, 1927-1934," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 35, no. 1 (January 2008): 80–99.

[139] Moore, "Rights or Wishes?," 718.

[140] Moore, "Rights or Wishes?," 718.

The revolution faced a notable lack of opposition from the United States government. Jimmy Carter was the president in 1979. Differing from other U.S. presidents Carter had promoted a human rights discourse in his foreign policy.[141] Following the 1979 Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua, his policies in Central America changed course. After this turning point, his administration sought to stifle further revolutions in the region by providing funding to the Salvadoran government. However, the level of U.S. involvement in Nicaragua drastically intensified following the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan. As such, the Sandinistas taking control of the government in 1979 did not end the violence between the left and right in Nicaragua. Rather, the so-called Contra War ensued. The Contras were a U.S.-backed, right-wing paramilitary group. Throughout the 1980s the Contras sought to destabilize and overthrow the Sandinista government. U.S. support of the Contras, much like its support of the Salvadoran government, was a key part of the Reagan administration's anti-communist foreign policies of the late Cold War.

Having overthrown the Somoza dictatorship, in the second half of 1979 the Sandinistas began their attempt to radically transform Nicaraguan economy and society. However, international and domestic conflicts between the left and right shaped how the Sandinistas would govern. Although the FSLN generally lacked a clearly defined and unifying ideology in the years following the revolution, party leaders described Nicaragua as a "socialist-oriented" nation.[142] Core elements of the revolutionary government's platform included the literacy crusade, public health campaigns, food development programs, military build-up, and agrarian reform. Economically, the primary goal for the

[141] John A. Soares Jr., "Strategy, Ideology, and Human Rights," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8, no. 4 (Fall 2006): 57–9162,

[142] "The Rise and Fall of the FSLN."

revolutionary government was a transformation of the agro-export economy to a mixed economy which included diversifying trade partners, expanding economic infrastructure, and generally attempting to redistribute the nation's resources through agrarian reform. Regardless of their lofty yet noble social and economic plans, over the following decade the FSLN diverted much of the national budget to fighting the Contra War.[143]

Welcoming Refugees of a 'Fraternal Nation': FSLN Emergency Response (1980-82)

Similar violent struggles between the left and right were occurring in El Salvador. Beginning in 1980, varied experiences of violence and repression of the civil war forced approximately 20,000 Salvadorans to flee to Nicaragua. Those who sought refuge in Nicaragua generally belonged to various targeted groups in El Salvador. They were people who worked for the Catholic Church; family members of people who had been indiscriminately killed in military sweeps; family members of FMLN guerillas; and people who had participated in any type of mass organization.[144] Coming from these often-overlapping backgrounds signifies that those Salvadorans who fled to Nicaragua were likely sympathetic, if not active participants in leftist politics. Approximately half of these refugees were from rural areas and the other from urban areas. The majority arrived in nuclear, extended, and/or female-headed family units, consisting of mixtures of men, women, and children.

Most of these refugees had to implement creative strategies in order to reach Nicaragua. As the Salvadoran government began restricting travel to the nearby socialist

[143] "The Rise and Fall of the FSLN;" Enríquez, *Harvesting Change*, 53.
[144] "La difícil situación de refugiados," *Envío* 6 (November 1981): 16.

country, entering Nicaragua was often a complicated process for displaced Salvadorans. Since the two countries do not share a border, the only ways to enter directly from El Salvador to Nicaragua without first passing through other countries was either by boat or plane. Previously, between 1980 and the early months of 1981, many Salvadorans had entered Nicaragua via the Nicaragua-El Salvador ferry. However, due to tense political relations between the two countries, the ferry ceased operation in March of 1981. Before the Salvadoran government further restricted air travel between the countries, more Salvadorans arrived in Nicaragua by plane.[145] As violent conflict grew in both countries, however, the Salvadoran government suspended flights, citing the increase in arms trafficking between the Sandinistas and the FMLN. [146]In particular, the government restricted men from entering Nicaragua, claiming they were going to train with Sandinista forces, leading to disproportionately more women and children in Nicaraguan refugee settlements.[147] Subsequently, many who arrived in Nicaragua strategically chose to pass first through other Central American countries. Some entered Panama and Costa Rica on 8-day visas intended to visit friends and family, before continuing their journey. Others crossed through Honduras on their way to Nicaragua.[148] Approximately 20,000 Salvadorans used these strategies and others to enter Nicaragua prior to a significant slowdown in migration in 1984.[149]

[145] "La difícil situación de refugiados."

[146] "La difícil situación de refugiados;" "Armas de Nicaragua Para El FMLN Descubre Honduras," *El Diario Del Hoy*, January 8, 1989, A2 04 4.1 F4.192.3, MUPI.

[147] "SALVADORAN REFUGEES ARRIVING AT PACIFIC PORT," *Panama City ACAN*, June 14, 1980.

[148] "La difícil situación de refugiados."

[149] Hemispheric Migration Project and Intergovernmental Committee on Migration, "Study on the Basic Socio-Demographic and Economic Characteristics of Central American Refugees in Nicaragua 1981-1983." 10.

In response to the influx, the Nicaraguan government found it imperative to allow Salvadorans fleeing war and repression to live without fear of persecution in Nicaragua. From a geopolitical perspective, the Sandinistas' reception of Salvadoran refugees was intertwined with the Contra War and U.S. intervention in Nicaragua and Central American in general. The arrival of the refugees—who were fleeing the right-wing state violence in El Salvador—offered the Sandinista government a chance to condemn on the international stage the right-wing Salvadoran government and its financiers, the U.S. government, by officially recognizing Salvadorans as refugees fleeing persecution. Thus, in February 1980 the government of Nicaragua announced by Decree that it would adhere to the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. This decision also distanced the revolutionary state from the former Somoza regime, under which Nicaragua had not been a signatory.

In June1980, Doris Tijerino Haslam, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, read an appeal on behalf of the FSLN National Directorate: "to all Latin American people to welcome the large number of Salvadoran refugees who are fleeing and seeking refuge from the ferocious repression undertaken against the people of that fraternal nation."[150] This public plea, which was reported to the public through Radio Sandino, called on other Latin American countries to take in Salvadoran brothers and sisters from the "fraternal nation" suffering at the hands of "ferocious repression." Through this official FSLN statement, the Nicaraguan government positioned itself as generous and humanitarian, while simultaneously condemning the abuses of the right-wing Salvadoran government.

[150] "FSLN Appeal for Help," *Managua Radio Sandino*, June 7, 1980.

Between 1980 and 1982, the Nicaraguan government and the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) created and funded reception centers as part of an emergency program intended to process the extraordinary number of incoming refugees.[151] Once in Nicaragua, most Salvadoran refugees passed through a transit camp—the first step in the government's resettlement process. Originally there were two camps in the northeastern region, with one in Leon and one in Chinandega. However, between 1982 and 1985 the government closed the Chinandega camp, and Leon became the primary location for processing refugees. Refugees commonly stayed at the transit camps for approximately two months as the government attempted to resettle refugees rapidly into agricultural cooperatives."[152]

In February 1981 the Nicaraguan government announced a "Census of Salvadoran refugees to be taken."[153] The Ministry of the Interior requested that all undocumented refugees "come forward and to normalize their situation," claiming it would "make their stay in Nicaragua easier."[154] The announcement asked Salvadorans to go to regional immigration office in Rivas, Ocotal, Chontales, Matagalpa, or Managua in order to receive identification cards that would officially allow them to freely move throughout the country.[155] In September 1982 another government Decree established the nation's Office for Refugees, which institutionalized the processing of and assistance for refugees. The office was the under the authority of the Nicaraguan Social Security and Welfare Institute and was tasked with the following purposes: determine the status of refugees; keep

[151] "22 Mil Refugiados Salvadoreños Hay En Nicaragua;" "Salvadoran Refugee Camp," *Managua Radio Sandino*, June 7, 1980.

[152] *Out of the Ashes*, 18; "22 Mil Refugiados Salvadoreños Hay En Nicaragua."

[153] "CENSUS OF SALVADORAN REFUGEES TO BE TAKEN," *Managua Radio Sandino*, February 7, 1981.

[154] "CENSUS OF SALVADORAN REFUGEES TO BE TAKEN."

[155] "CENSUS OF SALVADORAN REFUGEES TO BE TAKEN."

permanent and updated registration of refugees; coordinate with other state bodies to develop programs for integration into the economic process without detriment to employment of Nicaraguans; cooperate with other state agencies to administer necessary health, housing, education and other services; supervise the implementation of UNHCR and other international aid projects.[156] The establishment of the National Office for Refugees was a visible manifestation of the Sandinista government's commitment to ensuring displaced Salvadorans would live safely, with their basic needs met, by Nicaragua.

The National Office for Refugees recognized approximately six thousand of the twenty thousand Salvadoran refugees as "legalized refugees"—which meant they could receive assistance via the Nicaraguan state and the UNHCR. The 14,000 additional unrecognized refugees, integrated into Nicaraguan society, living throughout the country, without applying for state or UN aid. However, the government and the UNHCR were aware of the presence of unrecognized refugee population.[157] While the state did not provide these refugees assistance, they also did not harass or target them for deportation.

Undeniably, Salvadoran refugees benefited from various forms of state and UNHCR assistance. Refugees received assistance in the form of food, housing, clothing, medicines, medical and hospital care, and cash.[158] Both legal refugees and all migrants in general could benefit from Nicaraguan social welfare. This meant that Salvadoran refugees had access to

[156] "Law Establishing the National Office for Refugees: Decree No. 1096," published in Hemispheric Migration Project, "Study on the Basic Socio-Demographic and Economic Characteristics of Central American Refugees in Nicaragua 1981-1983," Annex V.

[157] Hemispheric Migration Project, "Study on the Basic Socio-Demographic and Economic Characteristics of Central American Refugees in Nicaragua 1981-1983," 20.

[158] Hemispheric Migration Project, "Study on the Basic Socio-Demographic and Economic Characteristics of Central American Refugees in Nicaragua 1981-1983," 18.

the same educational, recreational, and medical government programs as citizens. Medical services like mass vaccinations, pre and post-natal care, illness prevention, and hospitalization were "absolutely free" for citizens and migrants alike.[159] While these healthcare services were promised, they were not always actually provided in practice. Indeed, in a June 1984 meeting with President Daniel Ortega, Nicaraguan *campesinos* and Salvadoran refugees from the Ivan Lopez cooperative shared their concerns about access to healthcare. Additionally, in order to guarantee an adequate nutritional program, all refugee camps in Nicaragua had classes for communal cooking run by dieticians.[160]

Additionally, the revolutionary state invested heavily in providing refugees access to formal education—a logical investment considering that the literacy crusade constituted another major piece of the revolutionary platform.[161] As the government encouraged multiple forms of integration into Nicaraguan society, Salvadoran parents living both inside and outside of refugee camps could send their children to local schools.[162] In 1984, approximately 89% of school age children between the ages of six and sixteen (split basically evenly between girls and boys) attended school. The government also provided legal refugees access to adult education programs and higher education. Extensive programming focused also on increasing literacy rates among refugees—which were as low as 46% upon their arrival. [163]

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[159] Hemispheric Migration Project, "Study on the Basic Socio-Demographic and Economic Characteristics of Central American Refugees in Nicaragua 1981-1983," 29.

[160] "La difícil situación de refugiados."

[161] "The Rise and Fall of the FSLN."

[162] *Out of the Ashes*, 11.

[163] Hemispheric Migration Project, "Study on the Basic Socio-Demographic and Economic Characteristics of Central American Refugees in Nicaragua 1981-1983," 21-22.

Salvadorans living inside or outside of camps had a fluid, open relationships with the rest of Nicaraguan society. Indeed, the government actively encouraged the integration of Salvadorans into the Nicaraguan society and economy. Indeed, one of the purposes of the National Office of Refugees, established in 1982, was to coordinate with other government agencies in order to develop specific programs to encourage the integration of Salvadoran refugees into the economic process of the country without detriment to the employment of Nicaraguans.[164] Economically, the refugee cooperatives specifically did not appear to have a negative impact on Nicaraguan nationals' employment, according to the government and international observers. Socially, many Nicaraguan nationals also lived in refugee collectives. These Nicaraguan nationals were likely children and spouses of Salvadorans.[165] While the implementation was imperfect, by delivering medical, recreational, and educational services to Salvadoran refugees in ways visible to international observers, the Sandinista state fashioned itself as a humanitarian nation that provides social services to all, while simultaneously critiquing US and Salvadoran authorities.[166]

Exploiting Opportunities: Intertwining Agrarian Reform and Refugee Policy (1981-89)

Because the arrival of thousands of Salvadoran refugees coincided with the Sandinista implementation of economic and social restructuring, the revolutionary

[164]Hemispheric Migration Project, "Study on the Basic Socio-Demographic and Economic Characteristics of Central American Refugees in Nicaragua 1981-1983," Annex V. "22 Mil Refugiados Salvadoreños Hay En Nicaragua."

[165] Hemispheric Migration Project, "Study on the Basic Socio-Demographic and Economic Characteristics of Central American Refugees in Nicaragua 1981-1983," 9.

[166] *Out of the Ashes*, 11; [166] Hemispheric Migration Project, "Study on the Basic Socio-Demographic and Economic Characteristics of Central American Refugees in Nicaragua 1981-1983," 9.

government also responded by weaving together its refugee policies with its agrarian reform policies. Between, 1981 and1982 the Sandinistas were in the process of implementing a nationwide agrarian reform policy. Agrarian reform intended to alleviate poverty and raise the standard of living for rural poor via the formation of agricultural cooperatives through land redistribution,.[167] The 1981 Agrarian Reform Law legalized the expropriation of unused, underutilized, and rented land on farms greater than 350 hectares in the Pacific and central interior regions and on farms greater than 700 hectares in the rest of the country.[168] In the early stages, the majority of the redistributed land had been expropriated from Somoza and his close associates.[169] The revolutionary state desired to create a mixed economy by diversifying trade partners and producing for a more localized market. To achieve this, the government opted not to redistribute this land to individual campesino families as it saw this as a "step backward" in terms of economic production, rather land reform fostered agricultural collectivism. [170] Beneficiaries of the agrarian reform consisted of landless workers, tenant farmers, smallholders with insufficient land, cooperatives, and state farms.[171] While significant large-scale production of cotton, coffee, sugarcane, beef continued to sustain the Nicaraguan economy in the years immediately following the revolution, agricultural collectives began cultivating staples such as basic grains, corn, beans, potatoes, yuca, etc.

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[167] Enríquez, *Harvesting Change*, 54.

[168] Carmen Diana Deere, "Cooperative Development and Women's Participation in the Nicaraguan Agrarian Reform," *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 65, no. 5 (1983): 1044.

[169] Laura J. Enriquez and Marlean I. Llanes, "Back to the Land: The Political Dilemmas of Agrarian Reform in Nicaragua Global Perspectives on Social Problems," *Social Problems* 40 (1993): 255.

[170] Laura J. Enriquez and Marlean I. Llanes, "Back to the Land: The Political Dilemmas of Agrarian Reform in Nicaragua Global Perspectives on Social Problems," *Social Problems* 40 (1993): 255.

[171] Deere, "Cooperative Development and Women's Participation in the Nicaraguan Agrarian Reform," 1044.

The refugee-assisting agencies, along with the Social Security and Welfare Institute, aligned their policies with the larger Sandinista goal of agrarian reform by creating (semi)permanent Salvadoran refugee settlements that functioned as agricultural cooperatives using land redistributed by the state. In fact, much of the land granted to Salvadoran refugees was on farms expropriated from Somoza and his close supporters."[172] By 1985, the Nicaraguan Ministry of Land Reform provided 15,000 acres of "good agricultural land" to refugee cooperative camps using expropriated properties.[173] The burgeoning refugee settlements did the work of statecraft.

While the original beneficiaries of agrarian reform had been imagined as Nicaraguan nationals, the arrival of thousands of refugees in the early 1980s altered the plan to extend to Salvadoran beneficiaries. The government settled between four and five thousand Salvadorans in these refugee settlements located throughout the country. The leader of the UNHCR mission in Nicaragua between 1981 and 1983, stated in July 1982 that "the programs for the incoming refugees [give] them economic independence, incorporating them primarily into production activities in the agriculture and artisanal work…of the 5 thousand refugees that are in the country, 3 thousand have reached a high level of financial independence.[174] While this statement only referred to the legal refugees, and not all refugees, it nevertheless proclaimed a relative success in relation to refugee agricultural cooperatives. By 1984, with government and international aid, refugees had created eleven

[172] *Out of the Ashes*, 18; Enriquez and Llanes, "Back to the Land," 255.
[173] *Out of the Ashes*, 11, 18.
[174] "22 Mil Refugiados Salvadoreños Hay En Nicaragua."

cooperatives throughout Nicaragua, with two in the handicrafts sector and nine in agricultural sector.[175]

The UNHCR had been in the country since 1979. Throughout the 1980s, the UNHCR supported the goals of the revolutionary state regarding refugees through the funding of cooperative projects. The UN's refugee agency supplied 77 percent of assistance, while the government and other organizations contribute 23 percent. The UNHCR assistance, however, was administered to refugees through the National Office for Refugees.[176] Between 1979 and 1982 the UNHCR spent approximately 8.5 million dollars in Nicaragua.[177] While it was not immediately clear to refugees where the aid came from, what was evident was that legal refugees received assistance that was intended to help them reestablish and maintain sustainable livelihoods.[178] Throughout the 1980s, the government and UNHCR remained aligned in their plans for refugee social and economic integration. Although the UNHCR in general was influenced by the United States, in Sandinista land reform plans that incorporated Salvadoran refugees worked exceptionally well with the UNHCR's durable solutions. Both institutions believed that agricultural cooperatives reduced refugee dependence on UNHCR and governmental aid. Thus, with it

[175] Hemispheric Migration Project, "Study on the Basic Socio-Demographic and Economic Characteristics of Central American Refugees in Nicaragua 1981-1983," 27. This 1984 study was conducted by the Hemispheric Migration Project (HMP), a project sponsored by Georgetown University that employed researchers from across the Americas to examine migrations in Latin America and the Caribbean. HMP had the explicit goal of impacting public policy. The demographic study of the legal refugees in Nicaragua was one of many the project conducted in the 1980s.

[176] Hemispheric Migration Project and Intergovernmental Committee on Migration, "Study on the Basic Socio-Demographic and Economic Characteristics of Central American Refugees in Nicaragua 1981-1983," 18.

[177] "22 Mil Refugiados Salvadoreños Hay En Nicaragua."

[178] Hemispheric Migration Project and Intergovernmental Committee on Migration, "Study on the Basic Socio-Demographic," 28.

being the specific goals of the government and UNHCR, the process of social and economic integration continued for Salvadoran refugees throughout the decade.

Among the Sandinista goals for agrarian reform was the integration of rural women into agricultural cooperatives. The state's desire to incorporate rural women into agrarian reform, certainly fostered a smoother integration of Salvadoran refugees into the agricultural collectivization, as many women constituted a large portion of the refugee population. The Sandinista plan differed from previous land reforms in other Latin American countries, because it was the first to officially consider all women as potential beneficiaries.[179] In the cases of Chile and Peru, agrarian beneficiaries were generally heads of household with dependent children. This stipulation meant that mainly men received land. Even among the eligible women, few received land because women were not seen as agriculturalists. In Sandinista Nicaragua, however, by acknowledging all rural women as potential beneficiaries, women became eligible to participate in the agrarian reform projects without men. Furthermore, Article 132 of the Agricultural Cooperative Law of 1982 codified that cooperatives must incorporate women under the same conditions and with the same rights as men.[180]

The revolutionary state's explicit goal of integrating women into agricultural cooperatives also aligned well with the demographics of the Salvadoran refugee

[179] Carmen Diana Deere, "Cooperative Development and Women's Participation in the Nicaraguan Agrarian Reform," *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 65, no. 5 (1983): 1044.

[180] Deere, 1044. The incorporation of rural women in agrarian reform does not signify that the Sandinistas were particularly concerned with women's rights overall. For an excellent account of the experiences of women Sandinistas see the 2018 documentary *¡LAS SANDINISTAS!,* accessed June 10, 2019, https://www.lassandinistas.com/.

population, approximately half of which were headed by women.[181] As such, the practice of incorporating women as beneficiaries of land reform function in tandem with the government's larger goal of integrating Salvadorans into Nicaragua's economy and society. Salvadoran women took on many roles in the agricultural cooperatives. In addition to cooking and childcare, Salvadoran women also worked in both handicrafts and agriculture. As seen in the opening excerpt from *!Volveremos!*, it was a Salvadoran woman comrade who advised the Brasil Grande collective regarding the introduction of the new type of potato that may have benefited all of the collectives.[182] Indeed, women took on many integral roles in refugee agricultural collectives.

As the Salvadoran government halted its support for transnational labor migration between neighbors following the 1979 Sandinista Revolution. As a result, the traditional labor migration had ceased.[183] This shift in international relations left Nicaragua with a shortage in agricultural labor. The state's emphasis on the integration into agricultural cooperatives also conveniently converted refugees into workers in the context of a labor shortage. While land redistribution and agricultural collectivization among the Nicaraguan people were intended to alleviate this problem, the arrival of thousands of Salvadorans, although refugees presented the Sandinistas with an opportunity to further address the labor shortage. Considering their extraordinary efforts to integrate Salvadorans into agrarian reform through large land grants, the Sandinistas likely saw the arrival of

[181] Hemispheric Migration Project and Intergovernmental Committee on Migration, "Study on the Basic Socio-Demographic and Economic Characteristics of Central American Refugees in Nicaragua 1981-1983, 12."

[182] Comunidades Cristianas de Refugiados Salvadoreños en Nicaragua, *¡Volveremos!* , October 22, 1983, IHNCA.

[183] Enríquez, *Harvesting Change*, 105.

Salvadoran refugees as a potential solution to the labor shortage. As such, they celebrated the labor contributions of Salvadoran refugees. In February 1981, Radio Sandino reported that "brothers, fleeing the Christian Democratic repression in El Salvador, have joined the cotton and coffee pickers in…the Departments of Managua, Leon, Chinandega, and Nueva Guinea."[184] The report also implied that the Salvadoran refugees were able to do so because the refugees had received official documents allowing them "to move freely throughout the country."[185]

Determined to collectivize and facing the Contra's paramilitary tactics, the Sandinistas also carried one of their darkest acts in the early 1980s. Just as the FSLN welcomed thousands of Salvadoran refugees by granting them collective lands, it also violently displaced thousands of indigenous Miskitos from their ancestral land along the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua in order to resettle them in agricultural collectives in the interior of the nation.[186] Historically, Miskito communities had not supported the Sandinistas, as many enjoyed the relative political and cultural autonomy of the coastal regions under Somoza.[187] In the 1980s the revolutionary state believed the Miskitos were Contra-sympathizers—which some certainly were.[188] In December of 1981, the Sandinistas carried out a forced relocation of over 8,000 Miskitos. This action also resulted in the

[184] "SALVADORAN REFUGEES PICKING COTTON, COFFEE," *Managua Radio Sandino*, February 11, 1981.

[185] "SALVADORAN REFUGEES PICKING COTTON, COFFEE."

[186] Bilbao and Georgetown Univ. (Usa). Hemispheric Migration Project, "Migration, War, and Agrarian Reform."

[187] "The Costenos and the Revolution in Nicaragua on JSTOR," accessed April 24, 2020, https://www.jstor.org/stable/165548?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents, 285.

[188] Mateo Cayetano Jarquín, "Red Christmases: The Sandinistas, Indigenous Rebellion, and the Origins of the Nicaraguan Civil War, 1981-82," *Cold War History* 18, no. 1 (February 2018): 91–107, https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2017.1347637.

deaths of dozens. This violation of human rights, highlights the fact that the revolutionary government was willing and able to utilize marginalized populations to address their domestic and geopolitical concerns.[189] With the Miskitos, as with Salvadoran refugees, the Sandinistas had political and economic reasons for their respective policies.

Open and generous policies benefited refugees in real and material ways. This was exemplified by the San Ramon camp in Estelí, which was located in the northern mountains of Nicaragua. Indeed, the San Ramon refugee collective exhibited many characteristics common among agricultural cooperative refugee camps created by the Nicaraguan government. By 1984, eighty-five Salvadoran refugees, mostly from Morazán, the northeastern department in which the Salvadoran government perpetrated the infamous 1981 El Mozote massacre of 900 civilians. The 6 men, 31 women, and 48 children living in San Ramon were among the poorest refugees who had arrived in Nicaragua. Most had fled El Salvador without any money or possessions. Some families reported having male members who were killed or joined the FMLN.[190] Outside of the camp, approximately 250 more Salvadoran refugees were living in the surrounding neighborhoods of Estelí. International observers reported that the conditions of the camp itself were "fairly good by any Central American standard."[191]

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[189] Luciano Baracco, "Sandinista Anti-Imperialist Nationalism and the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua: Sandinista—Miskitu Relations, 1979–81," *Nationalism & Ethnic Politics* 10, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 625–55, https://doi.org/10.1080/13537110490900377; Mateo Cayetano Jarquín, "Red Christmases: The Sandinistas, Indigenous Rebellion, and the Origins of the Nicaraguan Civil War, 1981-82," *Cold War History* 18, no. 1 (February 2018): 91–107, https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2017.1347637; Philip A. Dennis, "The Miskito-Sandinista Conflict in Nicaragua in the 1980s," *Latin American Research Review* 28, no. 3 (July 1993): 214; Bilbao and Georgetown Univ. (Usa). Hemispheric Migration Project, "Migration, War, and Agrarian Reform."

[190] "La difícil situación de refugiados."

[191] "La difícil situación de refugiados."

In addition to cultivating a plot of beans, the Nicaraguan government helped to establish carpentry and clothing cooperatives in the larger town of Estelí, where many of the residents worked. With materials supplied by the Nicaraguan government to these workshops, they made hammocks to sell in addition to those used in the camp. Reportedly, the cooperative alleviated "the problems of lack of money, idle time and boredom" in San Ramon.[192] The Ministry of Social Welfare and UNHCR provided the camps' food, which was described by camp visitors as "both substantial and appetizing."[193] The women of the camp prepared the meals, which consisted of eggs, milk, beans, corn for tortillas, vegetables, and some meat.[194] Medical care at San Ramon was similar to that at other Nicaraguan camps. A doctor made weekly visits to the camp. Early on, residents at San Ramon were concerned by low temperatures at night due to its location in the northern mountains. Because they were unaccustomed to such low temperatures in El Salvador, people were getting sick. However, some church and solidarity groups from the United States and Cuba donated warmer clothing, resolving the issue.[195] Following this initial difficulty, international visitors described the physical wellbeing of the refugees at San Ramon as overall "quite healthy." Between 1980 and 1985, the refugees and international visitors of San Ramon alike, reported satisfactory health, education, and economic programs implemented by Nicaraguan government and UNHCR.

[192] "La difícil situación de refugiados."

[193] "La difícil situación de refugiados."

[194] "La difícil situación de refugiados."

[195] Although I am unable to expand here on the role of Cuban, U.S., and other international solidarity groups in Nicaragua and their assistance of Salvadoran refugees there would be a place for fruitful future inquiry.

San Ramon functioned as a way for the Sandinistas to make their humanitarianism more visible on the international stage. The case of San Ramon was published in *Envío*, a journalistic publication that proclaimed to have provided "critical support to Nicaragua's revolutionary process from the perspective of liberation theology."[196] *Envío* attempted to provide objective and critical interpretations of events in Nicaragua and elsewhere in Central America. Publishing in both Spanish and English, the magazine had an international audience. On multiple occasions *Envío* covered the refugee crisis in Central America. In particular, it highlighted the poor conditions for Salvadorans refugees in Honduras. While its stance on this subject has certainly been validated by corroborating accounts from international observers, the multiple *Envío* articles stand as examples of how the Sandinistas sought to disseminate information regarding their generous treatment of Salvadoran refugees in contrast to the war in El Salvador and the repressive conditions in Honduran refugee camps.[197]

'They were our friends': Salvadoran Refugee Support of the FSLN

Because the Sandinista's treatment of refugees was generous and beneficial, Salvadoran refugees generally supported the Sandinistas. This perspective can be seen in refugee testimonies and publications as well as photos. The weekly bulletin *¡Volveremos!* frequently demonstrated its support of the Sandinistas. One of the starkest examples of this is the cartoon entitled "El Teatro Sangriento del Tío Sam" published on the first page of the

[196] "Revista Envío," accessed June 10, 2019, http://www.envio.org.ni/quienes_somos.en.

[197] "La difícil situación de refugiados;" "La masacre de Sumpul: aclaración y testimonio de la muerte de 600 campesinos salvadoreños el día 14 de mayo de 1980," *Envío*, 1981; "'Una de Las Caras de La Guerra: Refugiados y Desplazados En Centroamerica' Reproduced from ENVIO n. 33 Marzo 1984."

October 22, 1983 publication (Figure 2.1).[198] The cartoon, whose title translates as "Uncle Sam's Bloody Theater," depicts Uncle Sam, the iconic personification of the U.S. government, as a puppet master pulling the strings of the Contras and Nicaraguan peasants. Uncle Sam, looms over a stage with perverse pleasure, as his grotesquely long fingers yank the strings, forcing the Contra to murder the unarmed peasant. The cartoon condemns the U.S. involvement in the Contra War, arguing that in carrying out the bidding of the United States, the Contras were killing innocent Nicaraguans. This condemnation is unsurprising, as the refugees had fled similar situations in El Salvador. Moreover, the circulation of this image on the front page of the refugee-produced bulletin also suggests an implicit alignment with the Sandinistas—the revolutionary government that the U.S. government and Contras sought to destabilize and overthrow. Indeed, similar sentiments were commonly included in *¡Volveremos!.*

[198] Comunidades Cristianas de Refugiados Salvadoreños en Nicaragua, *¡Volveremos!* , October 22, 1983, IHNCA.

Figure 2.1 "El Teatro Sangriento de Tío Sam," *¡Volveremos!*, October 22, 1983.

Further declarations of pro-Sandinista attitudes can be seen in the testimony of Gloria Núñez, a refugee woman who had lived in the San Roque collective in Nicaragua before she had decided to repatriate to El Salvador. Núñez articulated this pro-Sandinista perspective clearly:

> "In Nicaragua we had the support of the army of the Sandinista Front. We had confidence in them. Here [in El Salvador] the army was different, they're very

> repressive. This was shocking. It was a major difference. There, they were our friends, here they are our enemies."[199]

With the sharpest of juxtapositions, Núñez deemed the Sandinista Front "friends" and the Salvadoran government "enemies." Because the Sandinistas offered them safety and land, and because the Sandinistas were ideologically in line with El Salvador's FMLN, most refugees supported the Nicaraguan government in the 1980s. Indeed, they desired a similar revolutionary government in their homeland.[200]

Printed alongside Núñez's testimony were captioned photographs conveying similar sentiments. "A refugee family: Soledad returning from her job in the cooperative waiting with her kids and her family ready to celebrate the 19th of July, the date of the Sandinista triumph." In this photograph, a young refugee woman, identified as Soledad is walking home after working in the cooperative. Soledad, accompanied by her two young children, is carrying one bundle on her head and one by her side. While the son looks back to something behind him, the daughter, wearing a white dress, smiles at the camera. The children appear to be walking with a casual, even carefree posture. The following caption described the second photograph: "The women were at work with the machete and celebrating the revolution." In this image, an elderly woman and two younger women

[199] Nueva Vida de R.L., "La Repatriacion de Nueva Esperanza (1990-1991)," 1991, CE4 ARN REP EJ 1, MUPI. Using testimonies and photographs, repatriated Salvadorans also documented their political support of the FSLN. In 1991, the Salvadoran printing cooperative, Nueva Vida de R.L. published a booklet entitled La Repatriacion de Nueva Esperanza, 1990-1991. The author of La Repatriacion de Nueva Esperanza was a Spaniard named Ángel Arnaiz Quintana, who had come to Nicaragua and supported the Sandinista revolution. Beginning in the late-1980s, he began working with a Salvadoran refugee collective in Managua. Eventually Arnaiz Quintana accompanied the community on their repatriation to El Salvador, where they founded the town of Nueva Esperanza. Consisting primarily of captioned photographs and the lengthy testimony of one refugee woman, the booklet recorded the story of the repatriation and the founding of Nueva Esperanza. The curation of the photographs and the testimony remember the Salvadoran refugees' amicable relationship with the Sandinistas as one of mutual support.

[200] Nueva Vida de R.L., "La Repatriacion de Nueva Esperanza (1990-1991) 31, 40;" This sentiment can be seen throughout the weekly publications of "¡Volveremos!" as well.

stand in a door frame. On the exterior wall of the building there was a poster that reads in large block letters “19 de Julio: Todos En la Plaza.” The presence of this poster suggests efforts (either by the state or the refugees, or both) to gather the refugee community in celebration of Liberation Day. These photographs and captions function in tandem to construct a narrative in which Salvadoran women and children celebrated the Sandinista revolution in two ways. First, the photograph serves as documentation of Salvadoran refugee support of the Sandinistas via their July 19th celebrations. Second, the publication of the photographs along with the explanatory captions, allow the community to remember and represent their previous support of the Sandinistas, now that they have returned to El Salvador.

Furthermore, the caption notes that the women had previously been working with a machete, even though there was not a machete included in frame. Together these photographs captions highlighted the diverse labor of women in the communities. These depictions intertwine the simultaneous domestic and productive labors of refugee women, reflecting the Sandinista emphasis on women being both workers and mothers. The caption for the first image claimed that Soledad engaged in childcare, immediately finishing a day of laboring in the cooperative (either artisanal or agricultural). Similarly, the second caption suggested that women had just finished work with machete. The specific type of work was not explained, leaving it open to interpret the machete use for either cooking or agricultural labor.

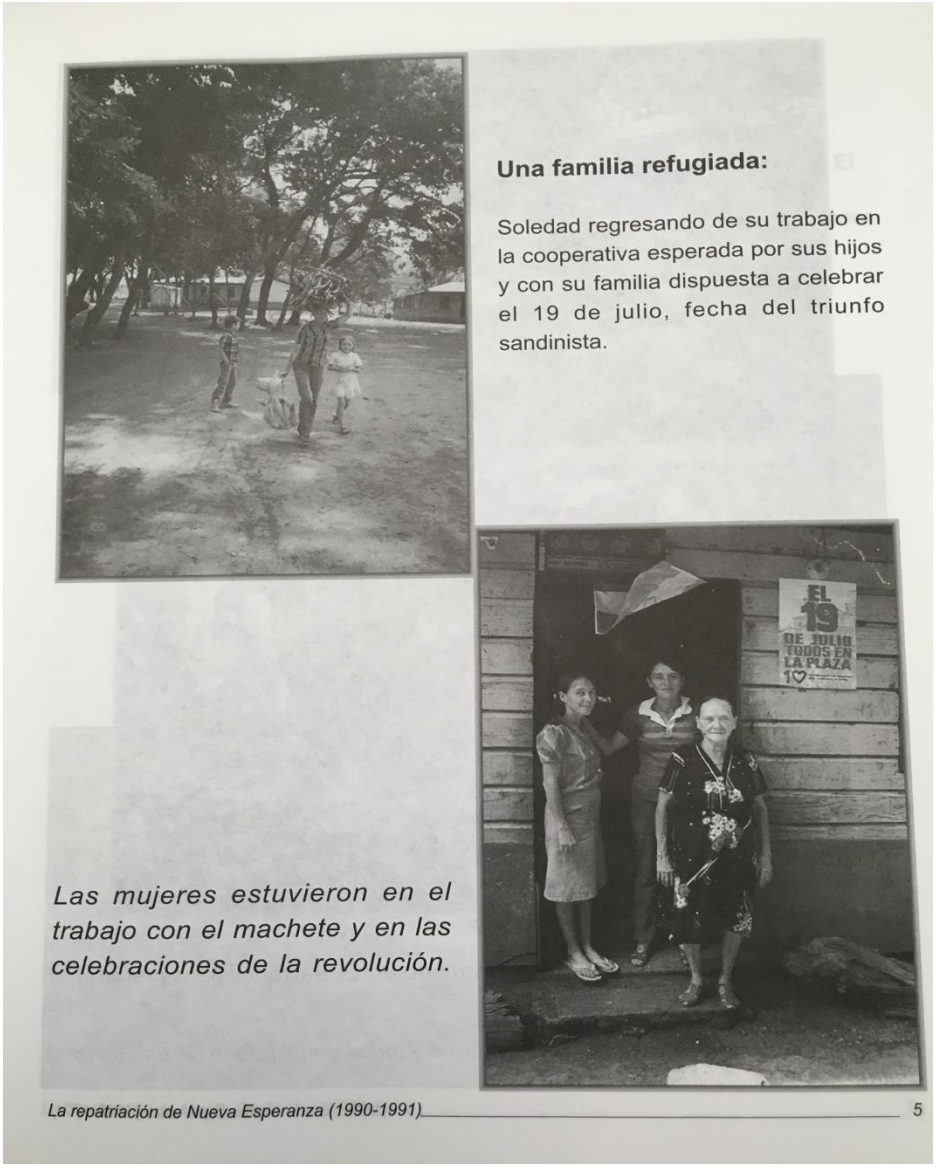

Figure 2.2 Women and Children Celebrate the Sandinista Victory, *La Repatriacion de Nueva Esperanza, 1990-1991*, 5.

The Rise of National Opposition Union and Fight for Repatriation (1990-91)

The Sandinistas maintained goodwill, strategically or otherwise, toward the Salvadoran refugees throughout the decade. President Daniel Ortega himself made clear and public his stance on Salvadoran refugees. As late as April 1989, when UNHCR representative Jean Pierre Hocke informed President Ortega of a request for 200

Salvadorans to become refugees in Nicaragua, reportedly replied to him "Our doors are open."[201] However, in 1990 the political climate of Nicaragua changed. In that year's presidential election, Sandinista candidate Daniel Ortega lost the election to the National Opposition Union candidate, Violeta Barrios de Chamorro. This election ended revolutionary control of the national government. The new administration under Chamorro stripped refugees of their social security benefits. The new government also began accusing displaced Salvadorans of being guerillas. The refugee policy under the conservative government marked a drastic change in Nicaraguan refugee policy, and thus a drastic change in Salvadoran lives.[202]

The combination of the loss of rights, persecution by the government, threats to cooperative land, led many Salvadoran refugee communities in Nicaragua to follow their compatriots in other Central American countries and fight for the UNHCR to guarantee that the Salvadoran government would allow a safe return to El Salvador. In her testimony, Gloria Núñez cited confrontations with the new government as a motivation for returning:

> "Other reasons [to return] were that Nicaragua had a change in government and they were looking suspiciously at us, they accused us of being part of the FMLN. In the newspapers of doña Violeta, in La Prensa, in the month of May they began to list more than 300 Salvadorans they accused of being guerrillas. And there was an ideological campaign against us, searching on various sides. Everything coincided. We were not feeling good about being there and the situation was very different than the years before. We began to have problems with the land in the cooperatives. Already, UNO [National Opposition Union] was looking poorly on us, they said that we had to leave these lands because we were taking them away from them and there were bosses that were coming to reclaim these lands that they had given us for the cooperatives."

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[201] "Ortega on Refugees, Repatriation Plan," *Managua Radio Sandino*, April 18, 1989.

[202] Nueva Vida de R.L., "La Repatriacion de Nueva Esperanza (1990-1991)," 1991, CE4 ARN REP EJ 1, MUPI, 36; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Refworld | Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala: Exit and Return," Refworld, accessed March 14, 2019, https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6a81110.html.

From this testimony it becomes clear that the end of the revolutionary state and the opposition's rise to power, created troubling conditions for Salvadorans. The Nicaraguan state no longer viewed Salvadoran refugees as useful due to their status as survivors of Salvadoran and U.S. government violence. Thus, what in the 1980s was a country with one of the most generous refugee policies in the region, started to show parallels to the hostility towards Salvadoran refugees faced in Honduras.

In addition to the new policies and practices, Salvadorans in Nicaragua learned through their transnational refugee networks that their brothers and sisters in Honduras and Panama had returned or were preparing to return by choice in 1990. However, they also knew the challenges of resettlement and the violent receptions of previous mass repatriations from Honduras between 1987 and 1989. Still in the midst of civil war, the government of El Salvador had not wanted the refugees back. Claiming the repatriated refugees were FMLN guerrillas, the Salvadoran state once again targeted these communities.[203] Contrastingly, Salvadoran refugees in Nicaragua had safe and relatively sustainable living conditions throughout the decade.

Following the 1990 election, however, Salvadoran refugees no longer felt that Nicaragua could serve as place of refuge. Thus, they began to demand that the Salvadoran government allow their return from Nicaragua and that the UNHCR assist and protect refugees throughout the process. According to Núñez, "we asked ourselves, why shouldn't

[203] Nueva Vida de R.L., "La Repatriacion de Nueva Esperanza (1990-1991)," 1991, CE4 ARN REP EJ 1, MUPI, 36.

we organize ourselves and return?"[204] Considering that refugees had been living in cooperatives and sustaining transnational communications for years, it is not surprising that that powerful refugee mobilization for repatriation ensued. A group dedicated to the repatriation began organizing weekly meetings at different cooperative communities throughout Nicaragua."[205] From the beginning they had framed repatriation as a collective decision. Nunez explained how they were already accustomed to living as a community. They felt stronger as a community and believed rebuilding a life in El Salvador would be easier and safer together than individually.[206] Thus, they assembled the Return Committee of Salvadoran Refugees (Comite de Retorno de Refugiados Salvadoreños) with representatives from different communities.[207]

The Salvadoran government, still at war with the FMLN, did not want any refugees--particularly those who had been living under the revolutionary Sandinista government for ten years--to return to El Salvador. Thus, the Committee faced the many obstacles trying to prevent the return of refugees from Nicaragua. For example, the Salvadoran government declared it would only grant entrance to hopeful returnees if they had acquired a temporary safe house in a government approved location. However, the refugee community had secured a location in El Jícaro, 20 km from San Salvador, the government refused to approve this location.[208] Because the government was determined to make it

[204] Nueva Vida de R.L., "La Repatriacion de Nueva Esperanza (1990-1991)," 1991, CE4 ARN REP EJ 1, MUPI, 36.

[205] Nueva Vida de R.L., "La Repatriacion de Nueva Esperanza (1990-1991)," 1991, CE4 ARN REP EJ 1, MUPI, 36.

[206] Nueva Vida de R.L., "La Repatriacion de Nueva Esperanza (1990-1991)," 1991, CE4 ARN REP EJ 1, MUPI, 36; "Refugiados Salvadorenos Protestan En Managua y Panama," *Diario Latino*, January 22, 1991, A2/04/4.1 F11.300, MUPI.

[207] Nueva Vida de R.L., "La Repatriacion de Nueva Esperanza (1990-1991)," 1991, CE4 ARN REP EJ 1, MUPI, 36.

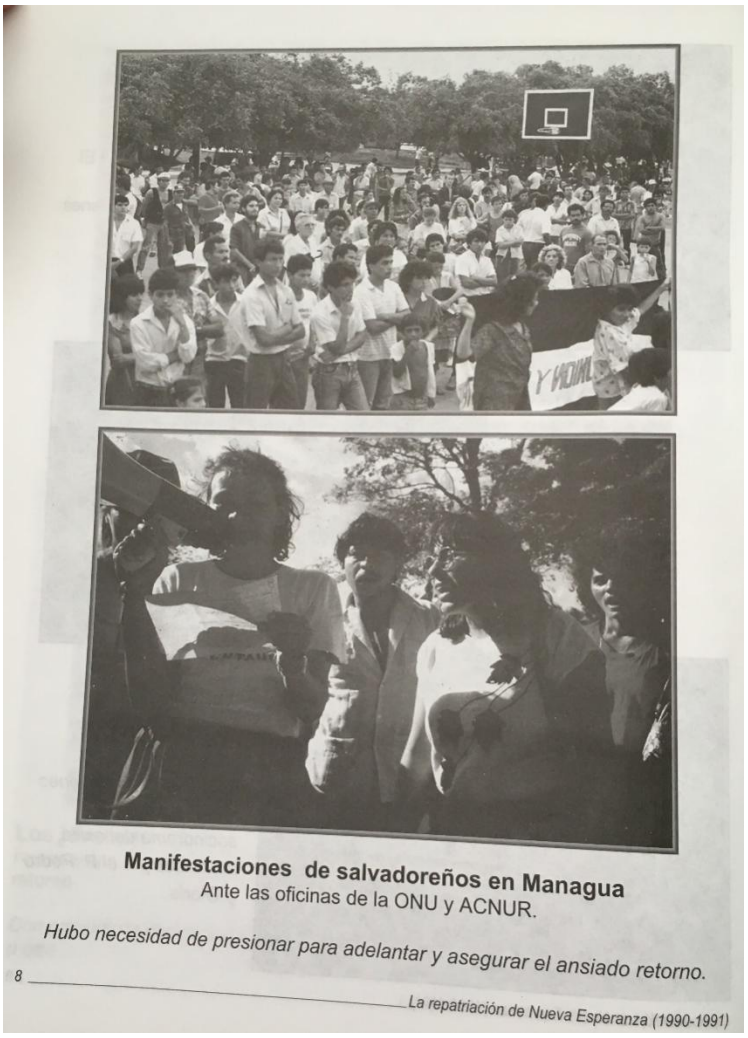
[208] "Refugiados Salvadorenos Protestan En Managua y Panama."

impossible for refugees to repatriate, the committee knew that the UNHCR had to act on their behalf.

Thus, on January 21, 1991, the committee and representatives from approximately 80 families peacefully occupied the UNHCR facilities in Managua in order to demand that the organization intercedes on their behalf and forces the Salvadoran government to allow them to repatriate soon.[209] The committee staged other actions in Managua. Figure 2.3 depicts a large protest in front of UNHCR offices in Managua. Figure 2.4 depicts the fifteen day occupation of the Salvadoran Embassy in Managua, where refugees demanded travel documents and specific dates for their return. With a group of refugee women in the foreground, the top photograph captured a sign that read "We demand the immediate repatriation of Salvadoran refugees from UNHCR and the Salvadoran government."[210] With two of the four photographs capturing women refugees protesting, these pages also make clear the prominent role of women in the refugee communities.

[209] "Refugiados Salvadorenos Protestan En Managua y Panama."

[210] Nueva Vida de R.L., "La Repatriacion de Nueva Esperanza (1990-1991)," 1991, CE4 ARN REP EJ 1, MUPI, 8.



Manifestaciones de salvadoreños en Managua
Ante las oficinas de la ONU y ACNUR.

Hubo necesidad de presionar para adelantar y asegurar el ansiado retorno.

Figure 2.3 Occupation of the Embassy of El Salvador in Manauga, Nicaragua, *La Repatriacion de Nueva Esperanza, 1990-1991*, 9.

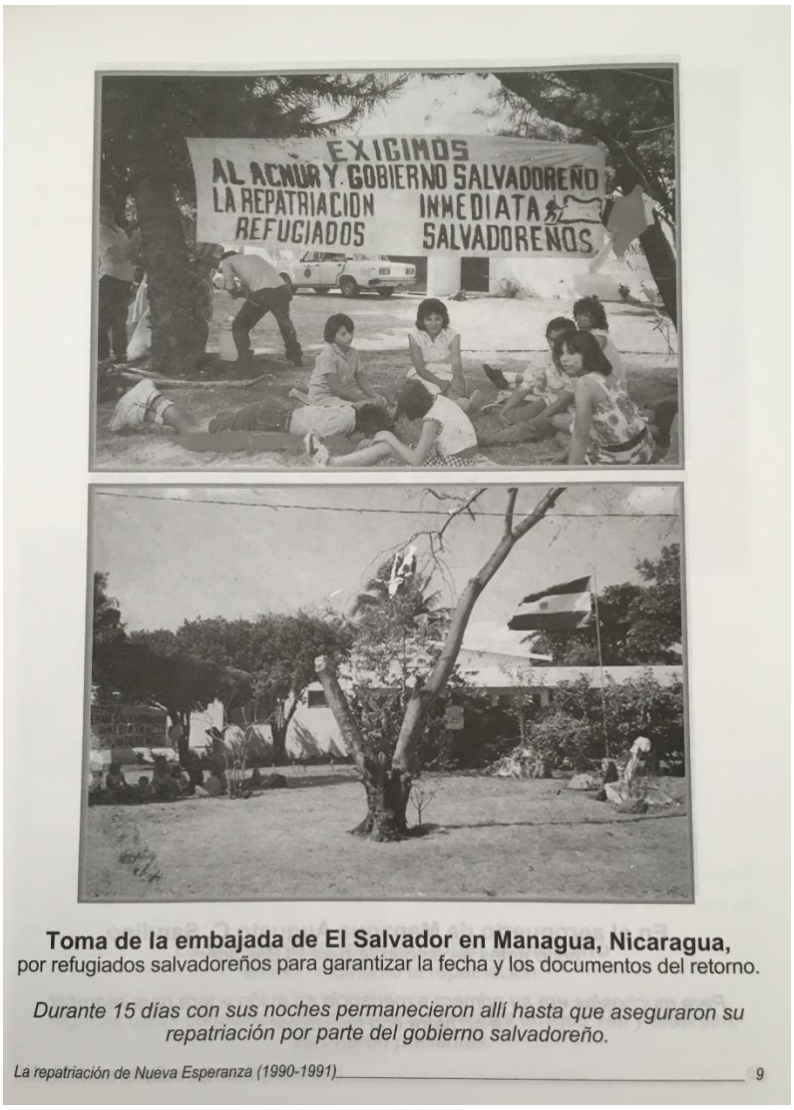


Figure 2.4 Salvadoran Protests in Managua, *La Repatriacion de Nueva Esperanza, 1990-1991*, 8.

The refugees were successful in pressuring the UNHCR to support their goal of repatriation. However, even with the support of the UNHCR, the Salvadoran government still claimed repatriates returning from Nicaragua would be a dangerous security threat due to their potential support of the FMLN.[211] Nevertheless, with the assistance of the

[211] Nueva Vida de R.L., "La Repatriacion de Nueva Esperanza (1990-1991)," 1991, CE4 ARN REP EJ 1, MUPI, 36, 40.

UNHCR they continued to push for their right to a safe repatriation. In 1991, Gloria Nunez and her 400 *compañeros* boarded a plane at the Augusto C. Sandino airport in Managua to fly back to El Salvador. Following their arrival, the repatriates founded the town of Nueva Esperanza in Usulután. Indeed, by the end of 1991, the majority of refugee communities once living in Nicaragua had repatriated to El Salvador.

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For ten years, Sandinista refugee policy had benefited Salvadoran refugees in literally life-saving ways. Nevertheless, the government did not act on mere altruism. Rather, the revolutionary state strategically utilized refugees to carry out specific geopolitical and domestic goals. This chapter has argued that as the revolutionary government positioned itself as a generous and humanitarian nation, refugee policy became tool to help define Nicaragua in opposition to El Salvador and the United States. Domestically, the Sandinistas integrated refugee policy with agrarian reform projects, which helped carry out the goal of agricultural collectivization. Thus, throughout the 1980s, as a means of legitimizing itself, the revolutionary state exploited the opportunity presented by the Salvadoran civil war and the refugees it produced.

CHAPTER 3

A Nation of Ambivalent Asylum:

Costa Rican Refugee Policy in the Late Cold War (1980-90)

In July of 1980, approximately 200 Salvadoran *campesinos* entered the Costa Rican Embassy located in San Salvador. The community composed of women and children including an 8-day-old baby were survivors of the Salvadoran military's violent destruction of their homes. They refused to leave the embassy, charging that the Salvadoran government had violated their human rights. Through their occupation of the Costa Rican embassy, they collectively demanded asylum from the Costa Rican government. The *campesinos* intended the occupation to draw international attention to the tremendously violent situation in El Salvador in general, as well as to request asylum in Costa Rica.[212] Indeed, the international media did cover it widely, and the story elicited international criticism and forced the hesitant Costa Rican government to respond to the burgeoning refugee crisis. Due to the high visibility of the occupation, the government immediately sent an envoy from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to investigate the situation. During the following two weeks, as the survivors continued their occupation, Costa Rican government officials conducted a complex set of negotiations between the Costa Rican government, Salvadoran leftist forces, and the Salvadoran government. On July 19th , the Costa Rican

[212] "Grant of Asylum," *Paris AFP*, July 12, 1980; "OFFICIAL COMMENTS ON ARRIVAL OF MORE PEASANTS AT EMBASSY," *San Jose Radio Reloj*, July 18, 1980; "FOREIGN MINISTRY COMMUNIQUE ON SALVADORAN EMBASSY," *San Salvador DIARIO LATINO*, July 22, 1980.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that it was granting asylum to the displaced Salvadoran *campesinos* occupying the embassy.[213]

While the specifics of this case were exceptional, as most Salvadorans would not enter Costa Rica in this manner, the embassy occupation nevertheless reveals key aspects of the nation's refugee policy during the tumultuous period of Central American civil wars and revolutions. Having long understood itself as a regional beacon of democracy and as a "nation of asylum," Costa Rica hosted over 200,000 refugees and immigrants (authorized and unauthorized) from El Salvador and Nicaragua in the 1980s. However, despite its imagined national virtue, the Costa Rican government did not in fact offer the warmest of welcomes to Salvadoran refugees. Instead throughout the decade, Costa Rican state agencies attempted a complex balancing act that included partnering with the UNHCR and other voluntary agencies to grant refugee status and resettlement opportunities to a limited number of refugees before adopting a new refugee policy in 1983, one that would both reassert Cost Rican control over refugee programs from the UNHCR while imposing new visa restrictions for admission to the country under President Luis Alberto Monge.[214]

These new restrictions, adopted in response to economic downturn and a subsequent upsurge in anti-refugee sentiment, would disproportionately impact Salvadorans, who of necessity entered Costa Rica by air and through official ports on entry.

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[213] Comisión para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos en Centroamérica, "Primera Jornada Científica Sobre La Problemática Del Refugiado Salvadoreño, 4 al 8 de Agosto 1980" (San José, Costa Rica), Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica, 1-2.

[214] For works on Salvadorans in Costa Rica see: Tanya Basok, "Welcome Some and Reject Others: Constraints and Interests Influencing Costa Rican Policies on Refugees," *International Migration Review* 24, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 722–47; Basok, *Keeping Heads Above Water - Salvadorean Refugees in Costa Rica*; Robin Ormes Quizar, *My Turn to Weep: Salvadoran Refugee Women in Costa Rica* (Westport, Conn: Bergin & Garvey, 1998); Hayden; Bridget, *Salvadoreños en Costa Rica: vidas desplazadas*, Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales (San José, Costa Rica: Universidad de Costa Rica, 2005).

As a result, of the estimated 15,000 Salvadorans who sought refuge in Costa Rica, the majority arrived in the first three years of the decade—and of them, only approximately 7,000 received legal refugee status.[215] In contrast, despite their much larger numbers, the Costa Rican government would continue to allow many more displaced Nicaraguans to enter their nation across an unprotected land border.[216] However, like their Salvadoran counterparts, few would ever be officially recognized as refugees. The majority of Central American asylum seekers from both nations would therefore live in Costa Rica without legal status, which made them ineligible for UNHCR assistance and government funded social services.[217]

In this chapter I demonstrate how unlike the governments of Honduras and Nicaragua, the government in Costa Rica lacked a clear vision for its response Salvadoran refugees. Rather, as this chapter argues, Costa Rican refugee policies toward Salvadoran were shaped by three major intertwined and often conflicting factors: myths of national exceptionalism, economic crisis, and attempted Cold War neutrality. The first was the nation's exceptionalist national identity and political culture. Costa Rican national myths of political, social and racial exceptionalism meant that Costa Rican's took pride in their nation's high standard of living and its proven commitment to democracy, social justice and human rights—and therefore saw it like 'northern' nations, as a 'nation of asylum' to less fortunate, however, the same exceptionalist narratives through which Costa Rican understood their nation were interwoven with a tradition of xenophobia that viewed

[215] "7,000 SALVADORANS TO BE GIVEN REFUGEE STATUS," *San Jose Radio Reloj*, May 14, 1981.
[216] Anna M Alejo, "Central American Refugees in Costa Rica" (Florida International Univeristy, 1990).
[217] Edelberto Torres-Rivas, *Informe Sobre La Situacion de Los Refugiados y Migrantes Centroamericanos* (Proyecto de Migracion Hemisferica, 1985), Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica, 45-46.

immigrants as a threat to the nation's standard of living, economic prosperity, and peaceful social order.[218] These contradictory threads of the nation's political culture would be reflected in the ambivalent welcome offered to the first wave of refugees to arrive between 1980 and 1983. But after only a few years of a laisse-faire approach to refugee policy, domestic economic factors would increasingly impact Costa Rica's shifting refugee policy. Costa Rica experienced a significant backlash toward refugees due to its poorly performing economy beginning in 1983. Costa Rica's crisis was part of the larger world-wide recession of the time. The combination of xenophobia and a failing economy led to the scapegoating of Central American refugees for the nation's problems, exerting pressure on the government to restrict the continued admission of asylum seekers.

While Honduras and Nicaragua both had a clear—although contrasting— policies regarding Salvadoran refugees, Costa Rica's response was a murkier, more ambivalent balancing act. The nation's complex and shifting refugee policies were heavily influenced by the Costa Rican' government's complicated relationship with the U.S. and other Central American nation-states. Although a U.S. ally, throughout the 1980s, the self-styled "Switzerland of Central America" sought to preserve the nation's sovereignty and a degree of neutrality within the context of the region's Cold War conflicts. However, the United States government recognized Costa Rica's strategic location between the Panama Canal and Nicaragua and exerted significant pressure on the nation to support its goal of toppling the leftist Sandinista regime. These pressures compelled Costa Rican state officials to adopt

[218] Anna M Alejo, "Central American Refugees in Costa Rica" Thesis (Florida International Univeristy, 1990) 7; Basok, *Keeping Heads Above Water - Salvadorean Refugees in Costa Rica,* 33.

policies throughout the decade that implicitly favored anti-Sandinista refugees, while turning a blind eye to incursions onto Costa Rican borderlands by contra fighters.[219]

Thus, even as government officials sought to live up to their own exceptionalist understanding of their country as a "nation of asylum," the influx of Central American refugees beginning in the early 1980s would force the Cost Rican government to grapple with the real and perceived burden of refugees on its economy and social welfare system while negotiating its fluctuating late cold war alliances. [220] The tensions between these competing interests would test the sincerity of the nation's commitment to a humane and inclusive refugee policy, leading ultimately to an approach that welcomed a few at the expense of many more, while also producing differential treatment towards displaced Salvadorans and Nicaraguans.[221]

Making National Myths: The History of Costa Rican Exceptionalism

To understand the complex Costa Rican political, social and economic stage that Salvadoran refugees stepped onto in 1980, key aspects of the nation's history must be examined. First and foremost, we must consider the historical trajectory that produced Costa Rica's exceptionalist political culture and national identity. While these narrative of exceptionalism had been contorted over time, the origins of Costa Rica's national mythology did lie—at least partially—in the reality of the region's colonial history. Prior to

[219] Basok, *Keeping Heads Above Water - Salvadorean Refugees in Costa Rica,* 33.

[220] Alejo, "Central American Refugees in Costa Rica;" Basok, "Welcome Some and Reject Others."

[221] Graeme S. Mount, "Costa Rica and the Cold War, 1948-1990," *Canadian Journal of History* 50, no. 2 (September 2015): 290–316, https://doi.org/10.3138/cjh.50.2.290; Tanya Basok, "Welcome Some and Reject Others: Constraints and Interests Influencing Costa Rican Policies on Refugees," *International Migration Review* 24, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 722–47; Basok, *Keeping Heads Above Water - Salvadorean Refugees in Costa Rica*; Quizar, *My Turn to Weep*; Hayden; Bridget, *Salvadoreños en Costa Rica*.

the Spanish colonial period, approximately 400,000 indigenous people lived in what is today known as Costa Rica.[222] The territory lacked mineral wealth and thus remained extremely isolated from the rest of the region throughout the 16th century. However, European diseases reached this population before the Spanish colonizers physically arrived. Nonetheless, as Spanish control expanded across the Americans, into the early 17th century, Costa Rica's indigenous people were also subjected to the long and violent project of conquest and colonization, which included enslavement, war, the spread of disease, and a prolonged process of forced relocation that amounted to genocide. By 1611, the area's indigenous communities had been reduced to a mere 10,000 persons.[223]

Having decimated the indigenous populations, the Spanish colony lacked exploitable labor through which to develop the region's agriculture. Even though enslaved Africans performed forced labor in all aspects of daily life, the population of enslaved Africans in Costa Rica was comparatively small. Due to its isolation, the slave trade in Costa Rica was limited and so the Spanish colonizers could not utilize enslaved persons to resolve the region's chronic labor shortage. The land also lacked mineral wealth, which further disincentivized labor migration to the area. Together these factors positioned Costa Rica firmly along the political and economic periphery of colonial Central America.[224] However, during the 18th century, Costa Rica's sparsely populated society would gradually develop

[222] Steven Paul Palmer and Iván Molina Jiménez, *The Costa Rica Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, The Latin America Readers. (Durham [N.C: Duke University Press, 2004) 9-12; Monica A. Rankin, *The History of Costa Rica*, The Greenwood Histories of the Modern Nations. (Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood, an imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2012).

[223] Steven Paul Palmer and Iván Molina Jiménez, *The Costa Rica Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, The Latin America Readers. (Durham [N.C: Duke University Press, 2004) 9-12.

[224] Steven Paul Palmer and Iván Molina Jiménez, *The Costa Rica Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, The Latin America Readers. (Durham [N.C: Duke University Press, 2004) 9-12.

into what Costa Rican historian deemed a "rural democracy," in which land was relatively widely distributed and the population was by that point was largely homogenous.[225] The myth of "rural democracy" in this period was a historical narrative promoted by Carlos Monge Alfaro, a famed 20th century Costa Rican thinker, in which landowning elites were few and ethnic divisions between Spanish, mestizos, blacks, and mulattos were believed to have diminished due to racial mixing.[226] Estimates of the population in 1741 as less than 10,000 with 8 percent Indian, 17 percent Spanish, 22 percent Free black and mulattos, and 53 percent mestizo.[227] Class divisions deepened over time as merchants purchased agricultural goods from peasants in an unequal exchange that permitted them to amass wealth, which became concentrated in the colony's central towns and cities.[228] By the 19th century, however, even as class divisions deepened, the continued racial mixing between the colony's subjects increasingly came to be imagined as a "whitening" process, which by the 20th century had allowed the Costa Rican nation to understand itself as "whiter" and therefore distinct from (and superior to) other Central Americans.

The nation's political trajectory was also unique in the region. Emerging from its history as a society of small, independent farmers and merchants, and in the absence of significant landed oligarchy by the mid-20th century, Costa Rica had a well-established

[225] Joseth F. Thorning and Joseph F. Thorning, "COSTA RICA: A RURAL DEMOCRACY," *World Affairs* 108, no. 3 (1945): 171–80; Steven Paul Palmer and Iván Molina Jiménez, *The Costa Rica Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, The Latin America Readers. (Durham [N.C: Duke University Press, 2004) 9-12; Russell Lohse, *Africans into Creoles: Slavery, Ethnicity, and Identity in Colonial Costa Rica*, Diálogos Series. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014).

[226] Lohse, *Africans into Creoles,* 17.

[227] Lohse, *Africans into Creoles*, 22.

[228] Lowell Gudmundson, *Costa Rica before Coffee: Society and Economy on the Eve of the Export Boom* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986); Marc Edelman, *The Logic of the Latifundio: The Large Estates of Northwestern Costa Rica since the Late Nineteenth Century* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

tradition of democracy, peace and social order. In February 1948, however, the annulment of a contentious and allegedly corrupt presidential election, the country endured a brief but bloody civil war. The Costa Rican Civil War, which lasted forty-four days and killed 2,000 citizens, tarnished the nation's extraordinary record. This war would become one of the most important moments in Costa Rican history, when following the cessation of hostilities President José Figueres Ferrer of Costa Rica departed dramatically from the region's Spanish colonial legacy by abolishing the military on December 1, 1948.[229] In the following decades, the Costa Rican government would move further away from the region's militaristic authoritarian regimes and closer to European post war social democracy by promising its people robust democracy, economy, and social services—promises that, for the next three decades, it mostly kept.[230]

During this period, there was significant investment in the development of the Costa Rican welfare state, with the founding of over 50 new state agencies. The state also invested in schools, colleges, transportation, health services, and other infrastructure. By the 1970s, it appeared as if the Costa Rican government had been able to deliver on its promises.[231] All residents enjoyed universal healthcare and public education. As such, Costa Rica ranked in international polls as having a higher standard of living than most other

[229] Kyle Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk: Costa Rica and the United States during the Rise of José Figueres* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997);

[230] "Steven Paul Palmer and Iván Molina Jiménez, *The Costa Rica Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, The Latin America Readers. (Durham [N.C: Duke University Press, 2004) 183-186; Rankin, *The History of Costa Rica*; Ivan Molina, *The History of Costa Rica*, 2nd edition (San José, Costa Rica: Universidad De Costa Rica, 2002); Mavis Hiltunen Biesanz, *The Ticos: Culture and Social Change in Costa Rica* (Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999).

[231] Steven Paul Palmer and Iván Molina Jiménez, *The Costa Rica Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, The Latin America Readers. (Durham [N.C: Duke University Press, 2004) 183-186.

developing nations. This also contrasted dramatically with neighboring nations, where inequality, poverty, low standard of living and inadequate social services were common. [232]

Costa Rica's distinct trajectory of economic and political development from the colonial period and into the 20th century thus contributed to the emergence of an exceptionalist narrative that has defined the country as a prosperous nation with long-held liberal democratic and humanitarian values. Together with a belief in their relative "whiteness" vis-à-vis other Central Americans (one that obscures the actual racial and ethnic diversity of Costa Ricans) this narrative led many citizens to believe that the nation was in fact superior to others in the region and inspired a national commitment to offering political asylum to the less fortunate.[233] To that end, Costa Rican government officials proudly claimed in their official plan for refugees that "since the dawn of independence," they had "granted and recognized the right of asylum to all persecuted for political reasons."[234] However, the shadow of this exceptionalist narrative was the belief that immigrants threatened the economic prosperity of the nation and strained highly prized social services, while threatening its racial demographics and peaceful social order. The nation's sense of exceptionalism thus underwrote both the humanitarian impulses and countervailing xenophobic forces would both be important to the evolution of Costa Rican refugee policies from the 1970s to the 1980s.[235]

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[232] Steven Paul Palmer and Iván Molina Jiménez, *The Costa Rica Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, The Latin America Readers. (Durham [N.C: Duke University Press, 2004) 183-186.

[233] Hayden, *Salvadoreños en Costa Rica*.; Lara Putnam, *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Steven Paul Palmer and Iván Molina Jiménez, *The Costa Rica Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, The Latin America Readers. (Durham [N.C: Duke University Press, 2004) 9-12.

[234] DIGEPARE, *Plan Maestro Para La Atención de La Problemática Del Refugiado y Desplazado Externo En Costa Rica* (San José, Costa Rica: Gobierno de Costa Rica, 1989) Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica.

[235] Alejo, "Central American Refugees in Costa Rica;" Basok, "Welcome Some and Reject Others."

In Pursuit of Neutrality: Costa Rica and Regional Cold War Conflicts (1978-1980)

Costa Rica publicly asserted its commitment to refugees' human rights when it became a signatory of the UN Convention and Protocol on Refugees in August 1977. Although many of the nation's neighbors would also become signatories in the coming decades, Costa Rica would in fact be the first Central American nation to commit to the UN-led international refugee compact. In the years immediately following, the government granted political asylum to several high-profile political exiles.[236] However, it was not until the height of the Nicaraguan Revolution in 1978 and 1979, that Costa Rica's commitment to refugees would be tested for the first time. In its efforts to maintain control, the Somoza regime killed and tortured Nicaraguan civilians. During the revolutionary uprising, 40,000 Nicaraguans were killed. Approximately 100,000 Nicaraguans fled to Costa Rica, Honduras, and the United States.[237] Thousands of Nicaraguan refugees, including many indigenous Miskitos, who tended to not be particularly committed to either party yet were caught in the crossfire, fled to Costa Rica.[238] In response to this crisis, the UNHCR established its regional headquarters in San Jose. During this period, the Costa Rican government allowed the UNHCR to primarily oversee refugee aid efforts. Sixty thousand of these refugees repatriated from Costa Rica, Honduras, and the United States following the 1979 Sandinista victory.[239]

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[236] DIGEPARE, *Plan Maestro Para La Atención de La Problemática Del Refugiado y Desplazado Externo En Costa Rica* (San José, Costa Rica: Gobierno de Costa Rica, 1989) Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica.

[237] Alejo, "Central American Refugees in Costa Rica, 22"

[238] Mount, "Costa Rica and the Cold War, 1948-1990, 300;" Alejo, "Central American Refugees in Costa Rica, 27."

[239] Mount, "Costa Rica and the Cold War, 1948-1990, 300;" Alejo, "Central American Refugees in Costa Rica, 27."

During this period, Costa Rica maintained its international reputation with its generous policies of extending social services such as public education and medical assistance to all legally recognized refugees. The legacy of this historical moment would remain important ,when the rest of the region burst into active conflict, the Costa Rican commitment to refugees—and the promise of the universality of its welfare state— would be even more strenuously tested beginning in 1980. In addition to the establishment of the UNHCR, this period would mark the beginning of complex relations with the Sandinistas and their opponents, both of whom sought to use Costa Rican border territories, at various points. This intrusion on Costa Rican sovereignty by opposing Nicaraguan factions put the country who proudly abolished its military in difficult situation to navigate. The country desired neutrality but found it almost impossible to achieve in the context of the Salvadoran civil war and the Contra War.[240]

The President of Costa Rica at the time of the Sandinista Revolution and the beginning of the Salvadoran Civil War was Rodrigo Carazo Odio. Carazo was the leader of the Unity Coalition, a rightwing political coalition, which would become known as the Social Christian Unity party in 1983. Due to a longer history of conflict between the Costa Rican government and the Somoza regime in Nicaragua, Carazo refused to support Somocistas against the Sandinista leftists. Thus, he is considered to have "quietly welcomed" the Sandinistas.[241] The region of Costa Rica that borders Nicaragua became a combat zone for Somocista and Sandinista forces under Carazo's administration.[242] While

[240] Mount, "Costa Rica and the Cold War, 1948-1990, 304."

[241] Mount, "Costa Rica and the Cold War, 1948-1990, 301;" "Rodrigo Carazo Odio, Former President of Costa Rica, Dies at 82 - The New York Times," accessed February 6, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/13/world/americas/13odio.html.

[242] Mount, "Costa Rica and the Cold War, 1948-1990, 301."

the Carazo administration tacitly supported the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship, they did want to share a border with a socialist government. As conflict along the border continued to encroach on Costa Rican sovereignty, the Costa Rican government developed antagonistic relations with both contingents.[243] Their concerns, were of course, somewhat realized following the establishment of the revolutionary Sandinista state in Nicaragua in 1979. The Contra War was quick to ensue, and the Nicaraguan factions would once again utilize Costa Rican territory.

A Nation of Asylum's Ambivalent Response to Salvadoran Refugees (1980-82)

Simultaneously, beginning in early 1980, a growing number of Salvadorans fled their homeland for Costa Rica. Under Carazo's administration, Costa Rica had a relatively limited response to Salvadoran refugees between 1980 and 1982. However, the plight of the Salvadoran people was public knowledge. On April 20, 1980 *San Jose Radio Reloj* reported that Arnoldo Ferreto, a Communist political leader in Costa Rica, criticized what he considered Carazo's concern over "the inconsequential matter" of Cuban exiles from Fidel Castro's Communist Cuba, while "Salvadorans are being murdered daily in El Salvador and the humanitarian Carazo is not moved."[244] Indeed, prior to the occupation of their embassy by Salvadoran peasants in July of 1980, the Costa Rican government had not recognized Salvadorans as a group qualified for "refugee status."[245]

[243] Mount, 301.

[244] "COMMUNIST LEADER CRITICIZES CARAZO'S STAND ON REFUGEES," *San Jose Radio Reloj*, April 22, 1980.

[245] "FDR MEMBERS: SALVADORAN 'REFUGEES' BEING PERSECUTED," *San Jose Radio Reloj*, June 25, 1980.

Since Costa Rica and El Salvador do not share a land border, many of the displaced Salvadorans arrived by plane and bus, with a few arriving on foot or by boat. Most entered the country on tourist visas.[246] Their methods of travel suggest that class was a factor in shaping the pattern of migration to Costa Rica, as those who arrived in Costa Rica were more likely to have some financial resources. Indeed, the ability to purchase bus or plane tickets as well as pay the $150.00 fee to apply for a tourist visa--which would be necessary if crossing through official ports of entry—required access to a not inconsiderable amount of cash.[247] The refugees thus tended to be of higher socioeconomic class than those displaced in Honduras. They also tended to be young, single men or families. Roughly 51% of recognized Salvadoran refugees identified as male, while 49% identified as female. Understood within the larger context of gendered displacement, this pattern suggests that it was relatively more challenging for Salvadoran families with women and children who were also displaced in large numbers to travel to Costa Rica, than it was for single men due the difficulties of attaining visas and traversing the relatively long distance. It also suggests that Costa Rica, more so than countries like Honduras, Nicaragua, and Guatemala, was perceived as safer for young men who were so often persecuted in other contexts.[248]

Salvadorans in Costa Rica largely listed human rights violations as the cause for leaving El Salvador. However, many refugees also stated that they chose Costa Rica because they understood it—in line with its own expeceptionalist self-representation—as a place that enjoyed greater political freedom, better employment opportunities, and a

[246] "FDR MEMBERS: SALVADORAN 'REFUGEES' BEING PERSECUTED." Comisión para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos en Centroamérica, "Primera Jornada Científica Sobre La Problemática Del Refugiado Salvadoreño, 4 al 8 de Agosto 1980 Costa Rica," Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica, 2.

[247] Vega Carballo, *Central American Refugees in Costa Rica,* Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica, 4-7.

[248] Vega Carballo, *Central American Refugees in Costa Rica,* Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica, 4-7.

higher standard of living. Other cited its closeness to their homeland or noted that they had family already living there.[249] Although initially choosing not to offer them official refugee status, the government did nonetheless continue to allow the refugees to enter on tourist visas. They also turned a blind eye to the smaller numbers of impoverished Salvadoran *campesinos* who, unable to afford the cost of a tourist visa, had begun to seek out unauthorized ways to enter the country, making the dangerous journey across the Nicaraguan-Costa Rica border, a minimally surveilled area that was also a zone of significant Contra paramilitary activities. In doing so, they joined a growing influx of anti-Sandinista Nicaraguans traversing into Costa Rica.

The government, however, was forced to respond to the Salvadoran refugee crisis in a much more explicit manner, when the 200 Salvadoran campesinos, most of whom were women and children, occupied its embassy in San Salvador in July of 1980. The immediate reaction of the Costa Rican government was to send a special envoy with members of the Foreign Affairs ministry.[250] Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Bernd Niehaus and his team had to figure how to respond to this event, which quickly became surrounded by a barrage of politically charged rumors. For example, the Salvadoran government claimed that the *campesions* under the leadership of alleged guerrillas "took over" the embassy, holding embassy officials hostage. On the other hand, leftist critiques claimed that the Salvadoran army was planning to "storm" the embassy.[251] Costa Rican Foreign Minister Niehaus denied both and claimed that the Costa Rican government was working diligently to negotiate with

[249] Vega Carballo, *Central American Refugees in Costa Rica,* Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica, 4-7.

[250] "Grant of Asylum"; "OFFICIAL COMMENTS ON ARRIVAL OF MORE PEASANTS AT EMBASSY."

[251] "'STORMING' OF SALVADORAN REFUGEE CAMP PROBED," *San Jose Radio Reloj*, March 16, 1981.

the group of displaced campesinos requesting asylum in his country.[252] The group of displaced campesinos remained living in the embassy for the next two weeks, while negotiations took place. The Red Cross provided basic assistance for them during this time.

Following negotiations the *campesinos* and the Salvadoran government, the Costa Rican Foreign Affairs Ministry issued an official Communique on the Salvadoran Embassy on July 19, 1980. The Communique stated that "although the persons who are occupying the diplomatic mission do not have the characteristics of political refugees, Costa Rica has granted them asylum for humanitarian reasons."[253] This statement referred to the UN definition of "refugee" (person with well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group) in which there was much debate over whether or not Salvadorans at the time fit that category.[254] In the case of the embassy occupation, the Costa Rican government granted them asylum, even though it did not deem them as fleeing persecution as part of a targeted group. It is likely that the demographics of the collective that influenced the decision, as they it was largely women and children who had occupied the embassy. The perception of women and children as innocent victims likely made the group more palatable to Costa Rican officials.[255] This decision stands as just one example of how each Central American governments defined "refugee" differently at different moments. Moreover, it indicates that

[252] "Grant of Asylum"; "OFFICIAL COMMENTS ON ARRIVAL OF MORE PEASANTS AT EMBASSY"; "FOREIGN MINISTRY COMMUNIQUE ON SALVADORAN EMBASSY."

[253] "FOREIGN MINISTRY COMMUNIQUE ON SALVADORAN EMBASSY."

[254] Refugees, "Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees."

[255] Rachael De La Cruz, "No Asylum for the Innocent: Gendered Representations of Salvadoran Refugees in the 1980s," *American Behavioral Scientist* 61, no. 10 (September 2017): 1103–18, https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764217732106; Rachael De La Cruz, "Ciudad Romero: The Salvadoran Refugee Family and Panamanian Statecraft under the Torrijos Regime," *Journal of Caribbean History* 53, no. 2 (2019): 245–62, https://doi.org/10.1353/jch.2019.0013.

the conversations in Costa Rica were more complicated that a mere "refugee" versus "economic migrant" dichotomy.

Following this decision, Costa Rican Red Cross members greeted the 26 women and 150 children—now refugees—who landed at the airport 230 km north of San Jose in Liberia, Costa Rica on July 27, 1980. They provided them immediate medical attention, particularly for children suffering from severe malnutrition. The Red Cross relocated the community to the large Murcielago Estate in Guanacaste, which interestingly, had been formerly owned by Anastasio Somoza, to set up temporary shelter.[256] By October 1980, Costa Rican government officials and the public were well aware of the influx of displaced Salvadorans to countries throughout the region, including into their own territory. The Costa Rican radio newscasts provided reports from immigration authorities which suggested that approximately 30 to 50 Salvadoran refugees were arriving in Costa Rica per day.[257] Although referred to as "refugees" in public discourse the Salvadorans arriving in Costa Rica at this time were still largely doing so through tourist visas, and thus not officially recognized as "refugees."

1980 and 1981 were indeed precarious years for the Salvadorans in Costa Rica, who whether they were recognized as refugees or not, could not work legally. Furthermore, the government also prohibited Salvadoran refugees from participating in political activities in Costa Rica, due to fears of leftist political organization. The media circulated reports of attacks on Salvadoran refugees living in Costa Rica by both Salvadoran and Costa Rican forces. In October 1980, for example, leftists in El Salvador claimed that 50 members of the

[256] "EMBASSY REFUGEES ARRIVE FROM EL SALVADOR," *Paris AFP*, July 27, 1980.

[257] "SALVADORAN REFUGEES CONTINUE TO ARRIVE, FACE PROBLEMS," *San Jose Radio Noticias Del Continente*, October 3, 1980.

Salvadoran National Security agency were "violating the sovereignty of the Costa Rican state" by "organzing the persecution, kidnapping and assassination of Salvadoran refugees in Costa Rica."[258] During this time, many international human rights organizations criticized Costa Rica's response to Salvadoran refugees. In March 1981 the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in Central America (CODEHUCA), an international non-profit with UN consulting status based out of San Jose, alleged that Costa Rican authorities "stormed" a Salvadoran refugee center at Paso Ancho in San Jose province and "detained four or five refugees, apparently without justification." CODEHUCA announced it would investigate the situation. The circulation of reports of these alleged assaults on Salvadoran refugees by Salvadoran and Costa Rican officials illustrate how Salvadoran refugees were politicized as either victims or threats.[259]

The Costa Rican's government's initial Laissez-faire approach to the admission of Salvadoran "tourists" as well as the movement of Salvadorans and Nicaraguans across the Nicaraguan border, was consistent with the nation's largely open borders policy, a product of historical experience of limited immigration, consisting mostly of small scale migrations between the border regions of Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Panama. Uninterested in regulating those migrants because of the benefits to the agricultural industry, the Costa Rican government had not been concerned with regulating "illegal immigration" before the 1980s.[260] However, in October 1981, the government passed a bill allowing Salvadorans to

[258] "SALVADORAN BPR CHARGES JUNTA AGENTS PERSECUTING EXILES," *Paris AFP*, October 2, 1980.

[259] Comisión para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos en Centroamérica, "Primera Jornada Científica Sobre La Problemática Del Refugiado Salvadoreño, 4 al 8 de Agosto 1980 Costa Rica," Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica, 2.

[260] Jose Luis Vega Carballo, *Central American Refugees in Costa Rica* (Intergovernmental Committee for Migration, 1984) Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica, 45.

apply for refugee status.[261] Furthermore, in response to new the influx of Central Americans, the government did establish the Costa Rican National Commission for Refugees (CONAPARE), to begin evaluating refugee applications in May 1981. By that time, over 6,000 Salvadorans had submitted applications. However, this large number of asylum requests overwhelmed the capacity of new refugee agency to process them individually.

The enormous backlog of refugee applications pushed the Costa Rican government to shift course when it granted thousands of Salvadorans refugee status. In May 1981 members of Costa Rica's National Migration Council met with the Vice President, the Justice Minister, and the director of the Costa Rican Red Cross met to discuss the Salvadoran refugee situation. This meeting resulted in the government's decision to grant refugees status to approximately 7,000 Salvadorans who were already living in Costa Rica, without evaluating them on a case by case basis.[262] This *prima facie* policy constituted a significant shift by granting legal status to so many Salvadoran asylum seekers and was in place through December 1982. However, even after this sweeping action, the government under President Carazo continued to have little direct involvement with the refugee population. Instead, the UNHCR, the Red Cross, and other aid organizations provided the vast majority of the assistance to refugees between 1980 and 1982.

Between 1980 and 1982 the UNHCR took the lead on providing emergency services, reception care and economic support for Central American refugees in Costa Rica. While the Costa Rican government did contribute financially to the assistance programs, the UNHCR also provided the majority of the funding. The UN's refugee agency on average

[261] Basok, *Keeping Heads Above Water - Salvadorean Refugees in Costa Rica*, 29.
[262] Hayden; Bridget, *Salvadoreños en Costa Rica,* 23.

spent between 7-9 million dollars each year in Costa Rican during the 1980s. Importantly, at this point, although the people of Costa Rica also cooperated with relief efforts in various ways, the UNHCR enjoyed relative autonomy in assisting tens of thousands of Central American refugees in the first two years of the decade.[263]

'Voting with their feet': Rural and Urban Salvadoran Refugee Settlements

In 1980 and 1981 the UNHCR placed many Salvadorans in refugee camps close to the Nicaraguan border. [264] Although most Salvadorans would eventually move closer to San Jose, the Costa Rican government, the UNHCR and other aid organizations had initially hoped to create rural refugee camps for Salvadorans that fostered self-sufficiency among refugees by engaging them in a range of "experimental" agricultural, artisanal and small industrial projects."[265] One such UNHCR initiative was the Los Angeles refugee camp in the northern border province of Guanacaste, which was founded in 1980. The UNHCR expected Salvadoran refugees to "slot into an ambitious and complicated agricultural project," rather than allowing them to establish their own small cooperatives.[266] A reported complication to these projects was also that a significant proportion of the population were children and

[263]Comisión para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos en Centroamérica, "Primera Jornada Científica Sobre La Problemática Del Refugiado Salvadoreño, 4 al 8 de Agosto 1980 Costa Rica," Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica, 2.

[264] Vega Carballo, *Central American Refugees in Costa Rica,* Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica, 14.

[265] *Out of the Ashes: The Lives and Hopes of Refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala.* (S.L.: El Salvador & Guatemala Committees for Human Rights : War on want campaigns, 1985), 19; Torres-Rivas, *Informe Sobre La Situacion de Los Refugiados y Migrantes Centroamericanos*, 46.

[266] *Out of the Ashes: The Lives and Hopes of Refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala.* (S.L.: El Salvador & Guatemala Committees for Human Rights : War on want campaigns, 1985), 19.

elderly adults. Thus, there were limits to the number of people who could do the required "hard labor."[267] Some critics also claimed the projects were costly and ineffective.

Most importantly, settlements like Los Angeles, were generally not successful for Salvadorans, because they did not feel safe living with politically polarized Nicaraguan refugees.[268] As discussed in other chapters, many Salvadorans tended to sympathize with the leftist FMLN revolutionaries. However, Nicaraguan refugees tended to oppose the revolutionary Sandinista government. Given the context of their migrations, the plan was doomed from its onset. Each refugee group generally represented a different side of the social, economic, and political spectrum. As early as 1981, the media reported that Salvadoran refugees in Los Angeles were suspected FMLN subversives and threats to Costa Rican national security.[269] By 1982, the media frequently depicted Salvadorans "as using Costa Rica as a bridge to Nicaragua, here they receive military training and later return to El Salvador as guerillas." Refugee camps along the border, like Los Angeles, were termed " 'communist agitation' centers" in the press.[270] Aid workers from the United Kingdom described the Los Angeles refugee camp dynamics as "people of opposite political beliefs were expected to live and work together."[271] Furthermore, the Salvadoran refugees felt threatened by the presence of the Contras, who were reportedly planning an attempt to

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[267] *Out of the Ashes: The Lives and Hopes of Refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala.* (S.L.: El Salvador & Guatemala Committees for Human Rights : War on want campaigns, 1985), 19.

[268] *Out of the Ashes: The Lives and Hopes of Refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala.* (S.L.: El Salvador & Guatemala Committees for Human Rights : War on want campaigns, 1985), 19.

[269] Basok, *Keeping Heads Above Water - Salvadorean Refugees in Costa Rica*, 32; Hayden; Bridget and Hayden, *Salvadoreños en Costa Rica*, 34.

[270] "REFUGEE CAMP TERMED 'COMMUNIST AGITATION' CENTER," *Panama City ACAN*, October 7, 1982.

[271] *Out of the Ashes: The Lives and Hopes of Refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala.* (S.L.: El Salvador & Guatemala Committees for Human Rights : War on want campaigns, 1985), 19.

overthrow the Sandinista government.[272] While thousands of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica were Miskitos displaced by Sandinistas relocation schemes, others were indeed Contra operatives.[273] For example, Salvadoran refugees reported to international aid workers that Eden Pastora, a Contra leader, lived as a refugee on the border of Nicaragua and Costa Rica. For this reason, Salvadorans at Los Angeles endured constant threat of Contra operations.[274]

However, throughout the 1980s the 220 miles of largely unmonitored jungle along the border with Nicaragua remained largely unrestricted. [275] Thus, while Salvadorans had to enter through official ports of entry, Nicaraguans were able to easily enter Costa Rica. Moreover, even though the majority of those Nicaraguans did not secure status as refugees or immigrants—and were therefore not eligible for Costa Rican social services—Costa Rican officials made little to no effort to prevent them from crossing the border or to effect their departure once they had entered the country. The decision to make entry through official ports of entry more difficult, while continuing to turn a blind eye to unauthorized land crossings, would implicitly facilitate the entry of Nicaraguans while having a disproportionate impact on asylum seeking Salvadorans.

Comparing this to the Costa Rican government's less restrictive policies towards Nicaraguans calls into the question the government's proclaimed reasons for the restrictions impacting Salvadorans entrants. Rather than a reflection of a preference for

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[272] *Out of the Ashes: The Lives and Hopes of Refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala.* (S.L.: El Salvador & Guatemala Committees for Human Rights : War on want campaigns, 1985), 19.

[273] *Out of the Ashes: The Lives and Hopes of Refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala.* (S.L.: El Salvador & Guatemala Committees for Human Rights : War on want campaigns, 1985), 19.

[274] *Out of the Ashes: The Lives and Hopes of Refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala.* (S.L.: El Salvador & Guatemala Committees for Human Rights : War on want campaigns, 1985), 19.

[275] Alejo, "Central American Refugees in Costa Rica, 28."

one group of refugees over the other, however, this new approach to the refugee crisis grew out of Costa Rica's complex relationship with the United States. According to social anthropologist Tanya Basok—the lack of entry enforcement against Nicaraguans was in part due to Costa Rica's relationship with the United States.[276] Though most historians do not traditionally consider Costa Rican an important Cold War player, ostensibly neutral Costa Rica was still a location of interest to both the Soviet Union and the United States.[277] The U.S. government in particular believed Costa Rica to be a strategic location regarding both Nicaragua and the Panama Canal. While the Costa Rican government desired to take a neutral stance on regional conflicts—promoting the idea of "The Switzerland of Central America"—it nevertheless allied more closely with the United States. Indeed, the U.S. government's relationship with Costa Rica became even more critical to U.S. foreign policy once the Sandinistas took control of the government of Costa Rica's neighbor in 1979.[278] This allowed for the safe asylum of many Nicaraguans put at risk by the conflict between the Contras and the Sandinistas. However, it also allowed for a creation of a base of operations for Contras. While the Costa Rican government did not prefer Nicaragua under Sandinista revolutionary control, it simultaneously did not want the Contras using their land and air space and thus violating their sovereignty. Unfortunately for Costa Rican officials both happened.[279]

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[276] Tanya Basok, "Welcome Some and Reject Others: Constraints and Interests Influencing Costa Rican Policies on Refugees," *International Migration Review* 24, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 722–47.

[277] Graeme S. Mount, "Costa Rica and the Cold War, 1948-1990," *Canadian Journal of History* 50, no. 2 (September 2015): 290–316, 292.

[278] Graeme S. Mount, "Costa Rica and the Cold War, 1948-1990," *Canadian Journal of History* 50, no. 2 (September 2015): 290–316, 292.

Despite the government's desire to secure its northern border, its need to maintain cordial relations with the United States won out. As a result, the border would remain largely open to both incursions by contra guerillas and anti-Sandinista Nicaraguan refugees. A small number of Salvadorans would also continue to enter this way, however, as the decade progressed, the escalating conflict in Nicaragua would make it more difficult for Salvadorans to cross safely through the nation on their way to asylum in Costa Rica. Within this climate of an increasingly restrictive (and implicitly discriminatory) refugee policy, Costa Rican leaders nonetheless sought to maintain its international reputation as a nation of asylum.[280]

One right Salvadorans in Costa Rica could exercise that their counterparts in Honduras were denied was that of movement. The government did not force them to remain in refugee camps. Salvadoran refugees could freely move throughout the country and decide where they wanted to live. Thus, by 1985 most Salvadoran men, women, and children had "voted with their feet" and left the rural UNHCR camps along the northern border and headed to the urban San Jose area.[281] There, ironically, Salvadorans could find more successful cooperative ventures both agricultural and otherwise closer to the urban center. For example, many Salvadoran refugees moved to Heredia on the outskirts of the capital. There they were able to form a small community, which included a Salvadoran parish priest, clinics, cooperatives, and other development projects. By 1985 the government allowed recognized Salvadoran refugees to participate in collective projects

[280] María Lorena Molina and Marjorie Smith Venegas, "Trabajo social en la atención a refugiados centroamericanos en Costa Rica," *No.44 - No.46*, 1989, Universidad de Costa Rica, 136.

[281] *Out of the Ashes: The Lives and Hopes of Refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala.* (S.L.: El Salvador & Guatemala Committees for Human Rights : War on want campaigns, 1985), 19.

through buying land and create agricultural communities with small groups of families.[282] By 1983, the UNHCR would ultimately settle the majority of Salvadoran refugees in or around the capital city of San Jose, which was also the base for the region's UNHCR office.

In the early 1980s, many Salvadorans found safer and better housing and informal employment opportunities in San Jose proper. Some worked in a small factories weaving clothing, others worked in a larger factory making shoes and dresses. [283]According to UNHCR representative Oldrick Hanselman, the main plan for Salvadoran "urban refugees" who lived in San Jose focused integration into Costa Rican society.[284] While self-sufficiency had been the primary goal of the UNHCR rural projects, it was integration that it urged in the urban areas. Thus, in San Jose many Salvadorans lived with Costa Rican families, which was intended to foster this process of integration encouraged by the UNHCR.[285]

Heredia, located only 10 km from San Jose proper, became an ideal location for some Salvadoran refugees as early as 1980. For in the 1970s Heredia had become home to cooperative named Longo Mai. Meaning "may it last long" in the French dialect Provençal, the cooperative had been named after the European Longo Mai cooperative movement originating out of Austria, Germany, Switzerland, and France in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[286] The Swiss Cooperative Movement had purchased the land in Costa Rica in the 1970s. Between 1978 and 1979 the cooperative served as shelter for Nicaraguans who fled

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[282] *Out of the Ashes: The Lives and Hopes of Refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala.* (S.L.: El Salvador & Guatemala Committees for Human Rights : War on want campaigns, 1985), 19; Basok, *Keeping Heads Above Water - Salvadorean Refugees in Costa Rica*, 69.

[283] *Refugiados en Centroamérica*, Film (ACNUR, 1990) Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR).

[284] *Refugiados en Centroamérica* Film (ACNUR, 1990) UCR.

[285] *Out of the Ashes: The Lives and Hopes of Refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala.* (S.L.: El Salvador & Guatemala Committees for Human Rights : War on want campaigns, 1985), 19.

[286] *Out of the Ashes: The Lives and Hopes of Refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala.* (S.L.: El Salvador & Guatemala Committees for Human Rights : War on want campaigns, 1985), 19; "Longo Mai, Costa Rica," accessed October 14, 2019, http://www.sonador.info/en/.

the violence of conflict between the Somoza regime and the FSLN revolutionaries. Once the Sandinistas took power in 1979, however, most of these Nicaraguan families returned home. Within the next year, Salvadoran refugees began to arrive.[287] Thus, the founders of Longo Mai repurposed it for the needs of the Salvadoran refugee community. This settlement project eventually included 5 small farms and housed 35 families—both Salvadoran and Costa Rican.[288] To stem potential criticisms against 'land grabbing foreigners,' Longo Mai included at least once Costa Rican national for every four refugees. Most Costa Ricans who participated in the Longo Mai cooperative had previously been landless peasants.[289] Working the land with the intent to own it eventually, allowed Salvadorans a path to acquire legal status in Costa Rica. Even though the agricultural cooperative faced hazardous conditions due to erosion caused by heavy rain, Longo Mai achieved success over time producing corn, beans, rice, yuca, bananas, meat, milk, and eggs. It also cultivated coffee and sugarcane to sell. Today, Longo Mai is a community with 2,200 acres, schools, and churches and is focused on environmental protection and eco-tourism. Families with Salvadoran roots still comprise much of the community.[290] Longo Mai, however, was largely an exception for Salvadoran refugees in Costa Rica, which became increasingly increasing hostile and restrictive policies beginning in 1982.

[287] "Origins, Welcome to Longo Mai," *Welcome to Longo Mai* (blog), accessed February 9, 2020, http://www.longomaicostarica.org/about/originss/.

[288] *Out of the Ashes: The Lives and Hopes of Refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala.* (S.L.: El Salvador & Guatemala Committees for Human Rights : War on want campaigns, 1985), 19.

[289] *Out of the Ashes: The Lives and Hopes of Refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala.* (S.L.: El Salvador & Guatemala Committees for Human Rights : War on want campaigns, 1985), 19.

[290] *Out of the Ashes: The Lives and Hopes of Refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala.* (S.L.: El Salvador & Guatemala Committees for Human Rights : War on want campaigns, 1985), 19.

Reforming CONAPARE: Refugee Policies during Economic Crisis (1982-86)

When Luis Alberto Monge became president in 1982, his administration ushered in a markedly different approach to refugee policy. Alleging that his predecessor Carazo had allowed the UNHCR and other organizations to exert too much control over refugee affairs in Costa Rica, Monge would seek to reassert Costa Rican sovereignty by taking back control of the nation's refugee response from the UNHCR. The Monge administration thus pushed for refugee policy reform that would lead to direct government involvement with refugees.[291] In December 1982 President Monge reformed CONAPARE by a decree that relocated CONAPARE as a subsidiary of the Ministry of Justice. In addition to appointing a director, the decree also required CONAPARE representatives from the Ministries of Foreign Relations, Interior, Labor and Social Security, Public Security, Planning, and the Presidency.[292] The state and non-state agencies of the Social Assistance Institute (IMAS), the Agrarian Development Institute (IDA), the National Training Institute (IDA), and the Costa Rian Red Cross were slotted to assist CONAPARE operations.[293] The UNHCR now had less control over refugee affairs. However, UNHCR representatives could still attend CONAPARE meetings, even if they lacked the power of a vote in decision-making. Furthermore, UNHCR projects now required CONAPARE approval. Thus, the newly reformed CONAPARE became the authority supervising all aspects of refugee assistance.

CONAPARE under the Monge administration desired to define and increase its role in refugee affairs. For example, CONAPARE established that integration into the national economy was the primary initiative of Costa Rican refugee policy. The level of the

[291] Alejo, "Central American Refugees in Costa Rica," 55.
[292] Alejo, "Central American Refugees in Costa Rica," 56.
[293] Alejo, "Central American Refugees in Costa Rica," 56.

government's direct involvement with refugee assistance administration would increase throughout the decade. However, by augmenting its role in refugee assistance, state relations with the UNHCR declined. UNHCR officials, unaccustomed in their previous dealings with the Costa Rican government to demands for government approval of every action, became frustrated by the state's interference. Furthermore, they criticized that CONAPARE could not actually carry out refugee assistance without the aid of multiple state and non-state agencies (IMAS, Costa Rican Red Cross, etc.).[294]

This conflict points to a larger pattern in Costa Rican history. The criticism of CONAPARE's inability to serve refugees without relying on other agencies coincided with criticisms that the Costa Rican welfare state had become debilitatingly bloated.[295] Furthermore, the national GDP had decreased by two percent between 1980 and 1982; unemployment in 1982 was at 9.4 percent; the inflation was at 80 percent in 1982. The Costa Rican government was also in debt to the US government $3.5 million.[296] By 1983, the Costa Rican economy was in crisis. The consequences of this economic decline combined with the perceived threats to national security led to a severe public outcry, some of which pointed to refugees, both Salvadoran and Nicaraguan, as the nation's problem.[297]

Thus, in 1983 the Costa Rican government tightened restrictions for entry for Central Americans. However, Salvadorans would be the most impacted by the changes. The

[294] Alejo, "Central American Refugees in Costa Rica," 56.
[295] Alejo, "Central American Refugees in Costa Rica," 65-68.
[296] Basok, "Welcome Some and Reject Others, 732."
[297] *Refugiados en Centroamérica* Film (ACNUR, 1990) UCR; "REFUGEE CAMP TERMED 'COMMUNIST AGITATION' CENTER;" "ARRIVING SALVADORAN REFUGEES 'DISAPPEAR,'" *Panama City ACAN*, October 7, 1982; "REFUGEE CAMP TERMED 'COMMUNIST AGITATION' CENTER;" "OFFICIALS ON BORDER SITUATION, REFUGEES," *San Jose LA PRENSA LIBRE*, June 20, 1983.

government now required Central American entrants to have a visa, proof of 15,000 *colones* in the bank, and a return ticket to their home country.[298] These new restrictions caused the number of Salvadorans entering the country to sharply decrease, as Salvadorans commonly arrived in Costa Rica by air or through official ports of entry due to the lack of a shared land border. The required visas were difficult for many in El Salvador to obtain due to the political dangers of the war and lacking the financial means.[299] And as in the past, those Salvadorans who were able to obtain the visa, were only able to get tourist visas, which technically only permitted them to remain in Costa Rica for up to 30 days. Thus, as in the past, the now reduced numbers who secured legal authorization to enter, were not authorized to remain--making much of the migration of refugees undocumented.[300] And therefore they lacked access to needed resettlement programs and social services. These changes would dramatically curtail Salvadoran migration throughout the rest of the decade. In fact, of all the thousands of Salvadorans who sought refuge in Costa Rican during the 1980s, eighty-three percent of them entered prior to 1983.[301]

In 1984, when the UNHCR held a colloquium in which many representatives of Latin American countries met to discuss the Central American refugee crisis, the nation sent a delegation to participate. Dr. Hugo Alfonso Muñoz of the Ministry of Justice and Hilda Porras, the director of CONAPARE, represented Costa Rica at the international meeting.[302]

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[298] Anna Alejo, Central American Refugees in Costa Rica, Thesis Florida International University (1990), 29.

[299] Torres-Rivas, *Informe Sobre La Situacion de Los Refugiados y Migrantes Centroamericanos*, 43.

[300] Torres-Rivas, *Informe Sobre La Situacion de Los Refugiados y Migrantes Centroamericanos*, 43.

[301] Basok, *Keeping Heads Above Water - Salvadorean Refugees in Costa Rica*.

[302] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, Adopted by the Colloquium on the International Protection of Refugees in Central America, Mexico and Panama, Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, 22 November 1984," https://www.unhcr.org/about-us/background/45dc19084/cartagena-declaration-refugees-adopted-colloquium-international-protection.html.

The colloquium resulted in the production of the Declaration of Cartagena, a document that encouraged the definition of "refugee" to be expanded to include: "Persons who have fled their country because their lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violations of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disrupted public order."[303] This broadened the definition set by the UN (person with well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group) to one that included "generalized violence," "massive human rights violations," and "other circumstances which have seriously disrupted public order" would easily qualify displaced Salvadorans as "refugees."[304] Costa Rican government representatives attended the UNHCR colloquium and signed the Declaration of Cartagena--a seemingly ironic action, considering it had recently implemented restrictions making it near impossible for Salvadorans to seek refuge in Costa Rica.

The Monge administration issued another decree reforming refugee policies in 1985. The Decree replaced CONAPARE with DIGEPARE (Dirección general para la protección y ayuda de los refugiados/ Director General for the protection and aid of the refugees). DIGEPARE became a subsidiary of the Executive office of the President and was intended to make refugee aid more efficient. Its primary functions were to assure legal, economic, social and administrative protections of refugees, coordinate with the UNHCR, and carry out any additional policies.[305] DIGEPARE would struggle to administer assistance

[303] Alejo, "Central American Refugees in Costa Rica, 28."
[304] Refugees, "Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees."
[305] Molina and Smith Venegas, "Trabajo social en la atención a refugiados centroamericanos en Costa Rica," UCR, 136.

to refugees through the rest of the decade. Over the next two years, Costa Rican refugee policy would continue to be defined by similar ironies and contradictions, these would stem from the Monge administration's efforts to juggle the maintenance of its international image with its poorly performing economy, xenophobic scapegoating, the geopolitical complexities of its relationship with the US and surrounding nations, as well as the demands of refugee communities themselves. However, they were only partially successful at best.

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Between 1985 and 1990, as economic conditions remained poor, the state would face a growing public backlash, expressed through a xenophobic public discourse that blamed refugees for the nation's problems and accused them of being a "drain" on the welfare state. Many critics claimed the state was overextended and inefficient, allegedly worsened by DIGEPARE refugee assistance efforts.[306] As a result, the government implemented some key policy changes with respect to refugees. On and off during the second half of the 1980s, the Costa Rican government interrupted public funds for refugees, claiming political, social and economic factors prevented it from supporting Salvadoran refugees.[307] The government also attempted to limit work permits to occupations that "would be scarce in competition" with the Costa Rican national workforce.[308] While it did little to stop Nicaraguan entrants—whether refugees or Contras—the Costa Rican government could at least highlight its attempts to prioritize Costa Rican nationals. Even

[306] Alejo, "Central American Refugees in Costa Rica, 61-65."
[307] *Refugiados en Centroamérica* Film (ACNUR, 1990) UCR.
[308] Torres-Rivas, *Informe Sobre La Situacion de Los Refugiados y Migrantes Centroamericanos*, 45.

though much of the public's ire was directed at the unregulated Nicaraguan border, Salvadorans, who mostly lived and worked in and around San Jose were very likely to be impacted by these policy changes. Nevertheless, of those Salvadoran refugees who built lives despite the increasingly challenging conditions in Costa Rica, many made the decision to remain following the de-escalation of the war El Salvador.[309] Thousands of Salvadorans chose not to repatriate to El Salvador, and instead continue building their lives and communities in Costa Rica.[310]

This chapter has demonstrated how the Costa Rican government responded to Salvadoran refugees with shifting and contradictory policies throughout the 1980s. Government documents and international organizational reports revealed that Costa Rican refugee policies toward Salvadorans were shaped by three intertwined and often conflicting factors: myths of national exceptionalism, attempted Cold War neutrality, and economic crisis. While the Costa Rican government desired to maintain its reputation as nation of asylum with a proud democratic tradition, its complicated relationship with the U.S. and other Central American nation-states in the context of the region's conflicts impeded such humanitarian agendas. Rather, the Costa Rican state sought neutrality in the regional Cold War conflicts. The state attempted a delicate balancing act that both appeased and annoyed the U.S., the Nicaraguan, and the Soviet governments.[311] Thus, the government was unwilling to regulate the border with Nicaragua, which inevitably provided the conditions for hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans to enter Costa Rica without documentation. Additionally, the government sought to squelch public discontent

[309] Quizar, *My Turn to Weep*.; Basok, *Keeping Heads Above Water - Salvadorean Refugees in Costa Rica*.
[310] Basok, *Keeping Heads Above Water - Salvadorean Refugees in Costa Rica*; Quizar, *My Turn to Weep*.
[311] Basok, "Welcome Some and Reject Others."

over the national economy, as the xenophobic side of national myths of both political and racial exceptionalism intensified when the refugee crisis met the failing economy. In trying to delicately balance the domestic and geopolitical pressures, the Costa Rican government may have cost the "nation of asylum" its claims to the highest apolitical humanitarianism standards.

CHAPTER 4

(Re)Settling for Sovereignty:

Panamanian Refugee Policy and the Performance of Humanitarianism (1980-92)

On November 1, 1980, the Panamanian National Guard at Fort Cimarron greeted 360 Salvadoran nationals disembarking from Honduran airliners. The Salvadorans who arrived in Panama that day were refugees of El Salvador's civil war. Over half of them were children under the age of fifteen. The UNHCR, with the support of the Panamanian government, had funded the air transfer of these men, women, and children from their temporary domicile in the mountains of Honduras to what would become their semi-permanent home along the Atlantic coast of Panama. Over the next decade and with the assistance of government agencies, the community of this settlement--known as Ciudad Romero—achieved self-sufficiency by constructing housing, establishing manufacturing workshops, and harvesting coconuts, cacao, and rice. They accomplished all of this prior to lobbying the Panamanian and Salvadoran governments for their right to voluntary mass repatriation to El Salvador in 1990.[312]

By the late 1980s, the UNHCR and scholars alike were hailing Ciudad Romero as a shining achievement of refugee policy in Central America.[313] Ciudad Romero stood as an example of how refugee communities could become self-sufficient if allowed freedoms and resources. However, the successes of Ciudad Romero stood in stark contrast to the far more precarious position of approximately 6,000 Salvadoran refugees also present in the country

[312] Community of Ciudad Romero, 1-2;" Seminario Rural, 65-73.
[313]Arlene Lachman, "Los Refugiados En Panama" (Universidad de Panama, 1986), 88.

at the time. Between 1980 and 1982, thousands of Salvadorans sought refuge in Panama, despite the pointed measures taken by the Panamanian government to prevent them from entering their territory, which included the implementation of a temporary refugee bans and the closing of sections of the border with Costa Rica. These policies created the conditions in which the vast majority (approximately 5,000) Salvadorans became unauthorized entrants who were ineligible for government and UNHCR assistance.[314]

This chapter reconstructs the state's contrasting responses to the two broadly defined groups of Salvadoran refugee communities in Panama: First, the exceptional collective of women and children tasked with "settling" the country's Atlantic Coast and second, those thousands who lived throughout the country, whether as recognized or unrecognized refugees. Based on archival sources that reveal the varied response to these distinct groups of Salvadoran refugees, this chapter argues that divergent policies responded to the entangled geopolitical and domestic concerns of a state that was simultaneously seeking to assert its commitment to refugees, condemn U.S. imperialism in Central America, and perform economic modernity during the early 1980s. [315] The Panamanian government, particularly under General Omar Torrijos, practiced a calculated level of generosity, to a strictly limited number of refugee families recognized by the state as strategic acts of sovereignty, nationalism, and anti-U.S. imperialism in the context of the

[314] Lachman, 60, 76.

[315] Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate*. In this groundbreaking history, Bon Tempo argues that U.S. refugee policy post WWII was a product of interactions between foreign policy imperatives and domestic political and cultural considerations and that these histories are inseparable. I apply this framework to the study of refugee policy in Central American nations. The argument of this chapter was significantly shaped by Bon Tempo's work and the following texts in critical refugee studies: Gil Loescher, "Humanitarianism and Politics in Central America," *Political Science Quarterly* 103, no. 2 (1988): 295–320, https://doi.org/10.2307/2151185; María Cristina García, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Espiritu, *Body Counts*.

late Cold War. This curated selection of small group of mainly refugee mothers and children created an opportunity to criticize U.S. foreign policy and its impacts on Salvadoran families, while simultaneously highlighting its own economic and humanitarian modernity through General Torrijos's plan for land development along the "backwards" Atlantic Coast. As in Nicaragua, the Panamanian state attempted to utilize refugees for economic and agricultural projects.

Soon however, the government faced growing criticism, as the public and the media blamed the floundering economy and high unemployment on the burden of refugees. As a result of these new strains, the state's policy quickly evolved from one limited but highly visible assistance to a small number of officially recognized refugees to a complete rejection of Salvadorans by mid-decade. This reversal was grounded in both changing international and domestic considerations. And much like in Costa Rica, these policies suggest that the Panamanian government's commitment to refugees was based less in a principled commitment to the human rights of refugees and more in a form of "calculated kindness" that offered asylum to refugees primarily their admission served the national interest.[316]

[316] Gil Loescher, *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America's Half-Open Door, 1945 to the Present* (New York : London: Free Press ; Collier Macmillan, 1986), 190-192; Gil Loescher, "Humanitarianism and Politics in Central America," *Political Science Quarterly* 103, no. 2 (1988): 295–320. The contradictions inherent in Panama's refugee policies suggest that the Panamanian government practiced what scholars Gil Loescher and John Scanlan have called "calculated kindness." Loescher and Scanlan argued that competing restrictionist and humanitarian tensions shaped U.S. refugee policies in the decades following World War II.

Struggling for Sovereignty: Shifting Panamanian Politics in the 20th Century

The relationship between U.S. intervention and Panamanian nationalism, particularly under the regime of General Omar Torrijos (1968-1981), shaped both why and how the Panamanian government implemented such disparate policies towards different groups of refugees. As was the case in the rest of Central America, U.S. intervention shaped twentieth-century Panamanian history in innumerable ways.[317] Most significantly, in 1904, the United States took over control of the interoceanic Canal project, which had been initiated by France in 1881 but never completed. The signing of the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty of 1903 made Panama a protectorate of the United States and granted the United States right to construct and control the Panama Canal.

Even though Panama never became an official colony of the United States, 1903 marked the beginning of U.S. quasi-colonial presence, justified by the need to maintain control of the Canal zone. U.S. governance of the Canal Zone would shape the political, economic and social landscape of the country throughout the entire twentieth century. During the next three decades, massive numbers of foreign laborers were imported to support the construction and management of the canal, which became operational in 1914. During this period, the entry of between 150,000 to 200,000 West Indian workers profoundly altered the country's racial and ethnic composition.[318]

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[317] Michael L Conniff, *Panama and the United States: The End of the Alliance*, 2012, http://site.ebrary.com/id/10754379; Aims McGuinness, *Path of Empire: Panama and the California Gold Rush*, The United States in the World (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Katherine A Zien, *Sovereign Acts: Performing Race, Space, and Belonging in Panama and the Canal Zone*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2017); Michael E. Donoghue, *Borderland on the Isthmus: Race, Culture, and the Struggle for the Canal Zone*, American Encounters/Global Interactions (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

[318] For works on West Indians in Panama see: Senior, *Dying to Better Themselves*; Donoghue, *Borderland on the Isthmus*; Coniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*, Watson, *The Politics of Race in Panama*; Zien, *Sovereign Acts*; McGuiness, "Mourning Maria Pantalones."

Even though the 1936 signing of the Hull-Alfaro Treaty, ended Panama's protectorate status, the United States would continue to exert political and economic influence over the nation's affairs, increasing its presence on the isthmus during World War II. In the second half of the century, as Panamanian desire for sovereignty and control over the Canal zone continued to grow, nationalistic protests intensified, leading in 1964 to a violent clash in the Canal Zone, which left 22 Panamanians and 4 U.S. soldiers dead. In the aftermath of this event, the two governments began negotiations to transfer control of the canal zone over to Panama.[319]

Then, in 1968, the Panamanian military overthrew the nation's democratically elected president, Arnulfo Arias.[320] Arias had only been president for 11 days when the Panamanian National Guard staged a coup, marking the beginning of a 21-year military regime rule. During these tumultuous two decades, Panama was ruled by a succession of *caudillo* (strongman) military leaders who frequently implemented repressive and brutal measures to quell opposition. The most notorious of these leaders, was General Manuel Noriega, took power in the 1983. By the time he was ousted by a U.S. invasion in 1989, Panamanian national leadership had made uneven strides toward sovereignty, but still struggled against U.S. intervention in the country's affairs.[321]

Although Noriega was in power for much of the 1980s, an earlier leader was primarily responsible for formulating the Panamanian state's original response to the Salvadoran refugee crisis. General Omar Torrijos Herrera was a military strongman who rose to power in 1969 and remained there until his unexpected death in 1981. An ardent

[319] McGuiness, "Mourning Maria Pantalones."
[320] Donoghue, 20.
[321] McGuiness, "Mourning Maria Pantalones."

populist and nationalist, Torrijos sought to increase political participation among marginalized populations, such as peasants, the urban working class, indigenous groups, and black West Indian immigrants. Espousing a complex and often contradictory form of military populism known as Torrijismo, he criticized economic disparity, U.S. control over the canal zone, and Panamanian oligarchs, and he called for land redistribution. However, Torrijos was not a radical leftist.[322] In fact, his military government often suppressed criticism from the left. Because of this, the U.S. government did not explicitly view Torrijos as a threat. However, this regime was also no puppet of the U.S. government, as it made clear through its assertive promotion of Panamanian sovereignty.

In 1971 Torrijos launched Panama's struggle for autonomy onto the world stage, headlining protests in the Canal Zone and offering fiery speeches in international forums, positioning Canal sovereignty within the larger ongoing conflicts against U.S. imperialism in Latin America.[323] Building on a longstanding tradition of hosting both state-sponsored and grassroots dramatic and artistic performances in the Canal Zone, Torrijos would also sponsor and make publicized appearances at patriotic and nationalist-themed parades, festivals, as well as opera and popular theatrical performances. Purposely using the Canal Zone as a stage, Torrijos skillfully promoted his regime's nationalist, modern, and pro-sovereignty agenda to both national and international audiences.[324] His pro-sovereignty efforts would continue until 1977, when Torrijos began negotiations with President Jimmy Carter culminating on October 1, 1979, when the two leaders signed the Carter-Torrijos

[322] For exhaustive work on the Torrijos Regime see Priestly, *Military government and popular participation in Panama: the Torrijos regime, 1968-75;* Sharon Phillipps Collazos, *Labor and Politics in Panama: The Torrijos Years* (Milton: Routledge, 1991).

[323] Zien, 141.
[324] Zien, 140.

Treaty, whereby the United States agreed to surrender 58 percent of land held in the Canal Zone back to Panama. The rest of the U.S.-controlled land would subsequently become a military zone known as the Panama Canal Area.[325]

While General Torrijos is most remembered for his successful assertion of Panamanian control over the Canal zone, his efforts to resist U.S. intervention in Central America did not end with the signing of the Torrijos-Carter Treaty. Instead, the Salvadoran civil war and the subsequent refugee crisis would provide Torrijos with another opportunity to perform his pro-sovereignty, anti-imperialist agenda for both domestic and international audiences.

Panama as a Nation of Asylum

Like in Costa Rica, a key component of the Panamanian national mythology is the concept of Panama as a nation of asylum. Panama did, in fact, have a long history of offering asylum to political exiles.[326] However, the scenarios in which the state offered such shelter to important work leaders were far different than the crisis facing Central American in the 1980s. Panama had a tradition of offering political asylum to controversial yet important figures such as Argentina's President Juan Peron in 1955.[327] As recently as 1979, Panama had offered asylum to the deposed Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.[328] In the 1980s, the Panamanian government would continue point to these exceptional asylum cases of

[325] The United States would gradually return the remainder of the land back to Panama over the next 20 years, with the transfer officially completed in 1999. Donoghue, 9, 22.

[326] Teresa Moncado, "El Refugiado y Su Regimen Legal En Panama" (Universidad de Panama, 1985), Biblioteca Simon Bolivar; Arlene Lachman, "Los Refugiados En Panama" (Universidad de Panama, 1986); "TORRIJOS COMMENTS ON U.S. CANDIDATES, OTHER ISSUES," *Panama City ACAN*, July 2, 1980.

[327] "BANS ON REFUGEES TEMPORARY, SAYS FOREIGN MINISTER," *Panama City ACAN*, April 8, 1981.

[328] "BANS ON REFUGEES TEMPORARY, SAYS FOREIGN MINISTER."

wealthy and important world leaders, in order to occlude the reality of increasing restrictions and outright banning of thousands of refugees with limited economic resources fleeing extreme violence in their homeland.

Only a few years prior to the mass displacement of Salvadorans, Panama, under General Torrijos, became a signatory to the UN Convention and Protocol Relating the Status of Refugees. Indeed, in 1977 that the National Assembly of Representatives passed *Ley 5 de 25 de Octubre de 1977* (Law 5 of October 25, 1977), which officially approved the UN Convention and Protocol Relating the Status of Refugees. However, the Panamanian state's commitment to refugees was not tested in any significant way in the years immediately following the passage of the law. This changed in 1980 when violent conflicts across Central America kickstarted the displacement of millions, testing its willingness to provide the forms of asylum codified in *Ley 5*.

The Foreign Broadcast Service Information reports, which relayed and translated publicly available news sources from around the world for the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, make it clear that the government of Panama was concerned with the refugees in Central America, Latin America, and the world. Panamanian news sources reported on the Panamanian responses to refugees from Nicaragua, Cuba, Haiti, Iran, and El Salvador beginning in the late 1970s.[329] The Foreign Broadcast Service Information reports also indicate that the news of Panama and possible incoming refugees were important to the Panamanian public, but that its response was also being followed by US intelligence agencies.

[329] "JOINT HEMISPHERE POLICY ON REFUGEES URGED," *Panama City LA ESTRELLA DE PANAMA*, August 12, 1980; "TORRIJOS COMMENTS ON U.S. CANDIDATES, OTHER ISSUES."

(Re)Settling the Atlantic Coast: The Exceptional Case of Ciudad Romero

Regarding refugees displaced from El Salvador specifically, the Panamanian government and public were well aware of the region's refugee crisis. According to an August 1980 newspaper editorial published in the *La Estrella de Panamá* (Panama Star) called for a joint hemispheric policy for refugees to assist Cuban, Haitians, and "the thousands of Salvadorans fleeing the worsening climate of violence of that neighboring Central American country."[330] Just a few months later, on November 1, 1980, Panamanian televised news report stated that "first Salvadoran refugees arrive under UN Sponsorship."[331] It was reported that the group of 360 Salvadorans were airlifted first to Tegucigalpa, Honduras then "delivered to Panamanian Government officials." The broadcast explicitly stated that "fifty percent of the persons evacuated are minors under 15." This news story reported the arrival of the refugees who would eventually establish the settlement of *Ciudad Romero* along the Atlantic Coast. Their exceptional experiences would continue to stand in contrast to the Panamanian government's treatment of the other 6,000 Salvadorans present in Panama during the 1980s. Indeed, the Panamanian government would embark on the project to resettle 360 Salvadoran refugees on the nation's isolated Atlantic Coast as it simultaneously tightened restrictions on refugees entering the country.[332]

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[330] "JOINT HEMISPHERE POLICY ON REFUGEES URGED," *Panama City LA ESTRELLA DE PANAMA*, August 12, 1980.

[331] "FIRST SALVADORAN REFUGEES ARRIVE UNDER UN SPONSORSHIP," *Panama City Televisora Nacional*, November 1, 1980; "380 SALVADORAN REFUGEES TO ARRIVE FROM HONDURAS," *Panama City Domestic Service*, October 29, 1980.

[332] Semanario Rural, "Informe General Sobre El Programa de Refugiados de 'Ciudad Romero,'" Exposición de Panamá, September 1984, MUPI, 65.

Distinct from the state's response to other refugees, the exceptional formation of a state funded refugee community in what would become known as Ciudad Romero can be understood as a continuation of the *Torrijismo* regime's pursuit of modernity as well as the ongoing performance of its nationalist and anti-imperialist agenda. The story of this refugee settlement began in 1980, when General Torrijos founded a new state agency, PROESA, (*Proyectos Especiales del Atlantico*/Special Projects of the Atlantic) with the goal of settling and developing the land along Panama's Atlantic Coast of Panama. PROESA's objective was "*la conquista del Atlántico*" or the conquest of the Atlantic. Steeped in colonial language that projected a desire to modernize the parts of the country envisioned as "backwards," PROESA's mission was to "conquer" the "virgin land" and build infrastructure to connect the widely dispersed population of the region to one another and the nation's capital.[333] As part of this modernizing campaign, the agency swiftly began construct highways, radio communication, schools, medical centers, and churches..

During the same year, PROESA would also internationalize its efforts by extending an offer of land, education, medical care, and security along the Atlantic coast to a group of displaced Salvadoran refugees.[334] In October of 1980 General Torrijos sent a team of government representatives to investigate the situation of Salvadoran refugees in a UNHCR camp in La Estancia, Honduras.[335] Once there, they learned of a group of refugees who had fled their village of Nueva Esparta after it was bombed by the Salvadoran military in the

[333] Lachman, 73.
[334] Lachman, 73.
[335] Lachman, 77;Teresa Moncado, "El Refugiado y Su Regimen Legal En Panama" (Universidad de Panama, 1985), Biblioteca Simon Bolivar., 181-184; Seminario Rural, "Informe General Sobre El Programa de Refugiados de 'Ciudad Romero, '" 65.

spring of 1980. Following the destruction of their homes, crops, and livestock, the men, women, and children of Nueva Esparta made the decision to seek asylum in Honduras.[336]

Making days-long journey on foot, with only those belonging they could carry, the group of 360 refugees over half of whom were children— arrived in La Estancia, Honduras.[337] They would remain there for several months, hiding from Honduran authorities, surviving on foraged food, including green mangoes and honey, and sleeping outdoors on the ground.[338] Like tens of thousands of other Salvadoran refugees who fled to Honduras during the civil war, they endured prolonged hardship and hunger, always looking out for the Honduran military."[339] [340] However, after these first few terrible months, the story of the refugees from Nueva Esparta, El Salvador would diverge dramatically from that of refugees forced into closed camps surveilled by the Honduran military.

After a few months of living in Honduras, the UNHCR recognized this group as refugees and offered to resettle them in either Mexico or Panama. Underlying the offer of resettlement in Panama was General Torrijos' promise to provide them with comprehensive resettlement assistance through the recently founded land and infrastructure development agency, PROESA. However, this offer of resettlement was not a simple demonstration of benevolence; rather, it was a highly calculated act that intertwined humanitarianism with the pursuit of the nation's regional economic

[336] Community of Ciudad Romero, 1.
[337] Community of Ciudad Romero, 1.
[338] Community of Ciudad Romero, 1.
[339] Community of Ciudad Romero, 1.
[340] Todd, Kindle Location 732-740.

development agenda.[341] By assisting this particular group of Salvadoran refugees to establish a new community along the nation's Atlantic Coast, Torrijos hoped to further his goal of "conquering" and modernizing the isolated and underpopulated region.[342] After discussion, the Nueva Esparta refugees collectively chose to accept the offer of resettlement in Panama, preferring it to Mexico because, they stated, it was closer to their homeland.[343] Seizing the opportunity presented to them by the Torrijos regime, these future residents of Ciudad Romero embarked on a far different course than those who would continue to endure the oppressive camp conditions created and maintained by the Honduran government throughout the 1980s.

Setting out on a divergent and exceptional path, the refugees traveled on Honduras' SAHSA airlines from Honduras to the to Panama on November 1, 1980. [344] This quintessentially "modern" experience of air travel represented another divergence from the more common Salvadoran refugee experience, marked by flight into foreign territories by land. Upon arrival at Fort Cimarron in Belen, Panama, they were welcomed by troops of the Panamanian national guard. In February 1981, the thirty adult men over the age of fifteen among the displaced community members—women, children and the elderly constituted over ninety percent of the group—made the journey to the site of their future settlement, where they would immediately set to work clearing the land and beginning construction of their new homes.[345] Their relatives would remain in transitional housing in

[341] Loescher and Scanlan; Zien..
[342] Lachman, 73; Moncada, 181-184.
[343] Community of Ciudad Romero, 1.
[344] Lachman, 77.
[345] Community of Ciudad Romero, 1-2; Semaniario Rural, 65.

Fort Cimarron for several more months, awaiting the move to the undeveloped Atlantic coast where they would build their new community.[346]

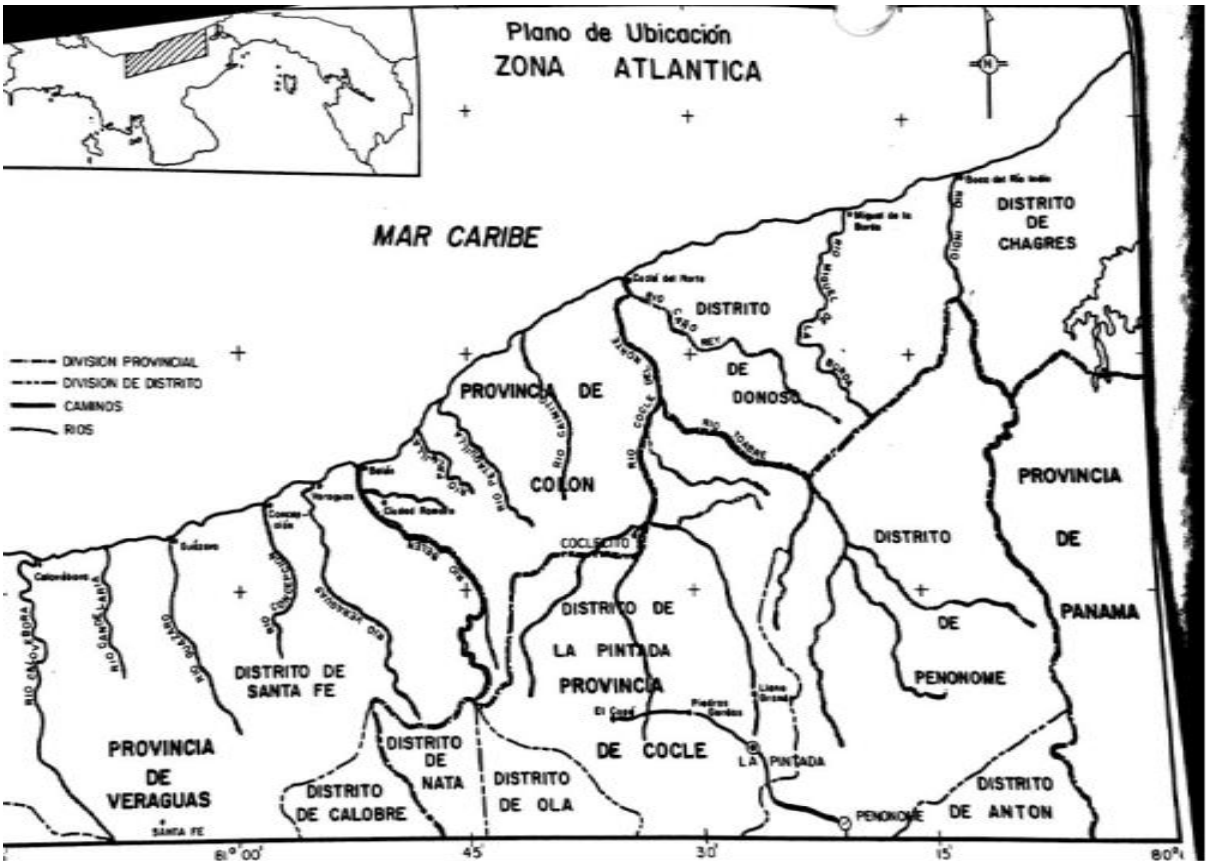

Figure 4.1 "Map of Location: Atlantic Zone," reprinted in Lachman, *Refugees in Panama*, 74.

The community elected to build at the convergence of the Caño River and the Honda Ravine in the border region between Veraguas and Colón Provinces, near the town of Belen.[347] Community accounts would later describe the men's struggles clearing trees and brush from the "virgin mountain," under harsh conditions, with sometimes only unripened bananas to fuel their labor."[348] After clearing the land, they built a structure which would temporarily serve as dorms for the refugees, as they continued to build more houses and

[346] Community of Ciudad Romero, 1; Semaniario Rural, 65;
[347] Seminario Rural, 66; Moncada, 181-184.
[348] Community of Ciudad Romero, 1-2.

infrastructure. They then erected two large houses where they provisionally slept prior to the arrival of the women and children. They also built small Panamanian style houses, with a roof of guajara palm and walls of 'gira' palm, for each family.[349] The construction and distribution of the houses for "each family" notably reveals the family-centric structure of the community in which they desired to maintain a their more traditional nuclear and/or extended family structure rather than the type collective living arrangements of their temporary dormitories.

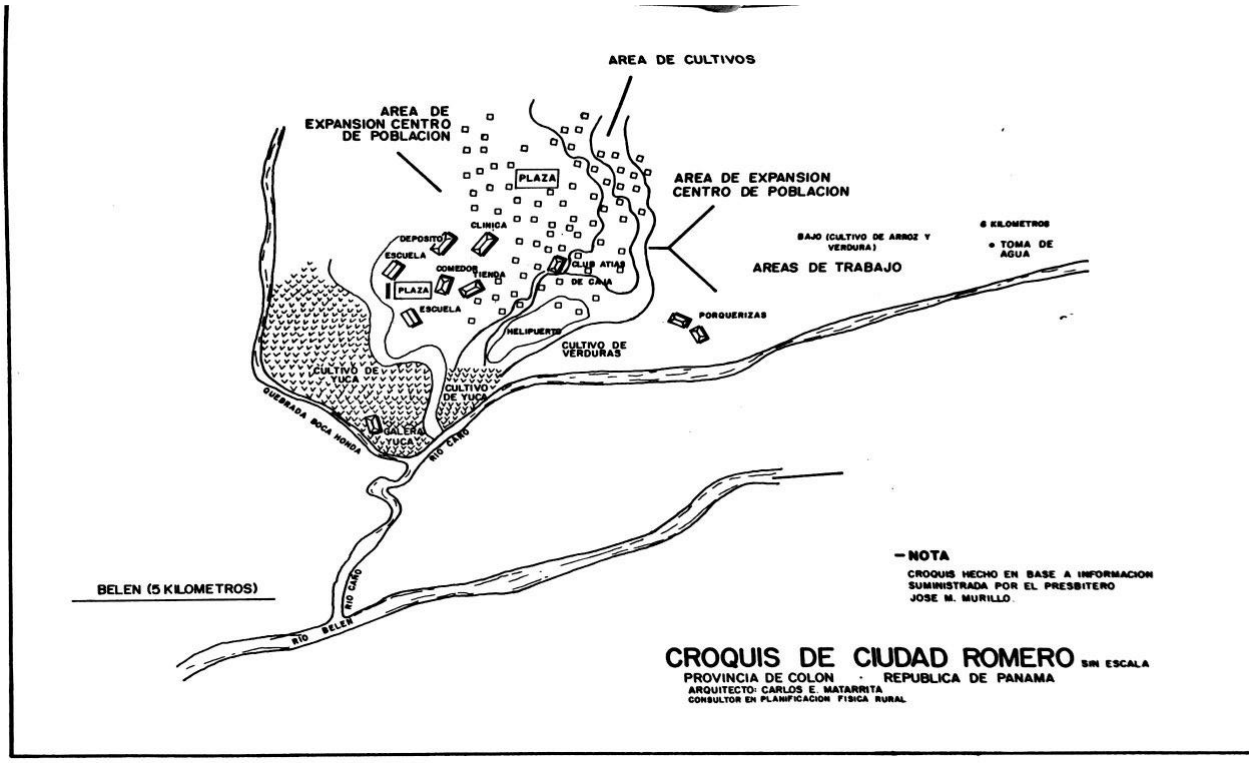

Figure 4.2 Sketch of Ciudad Romero," reprinted in Lachman, *Refugees in Panama*, 79.

Over the next few years the refugees experienced various hardships in establishing their community. The drastic difference in land and climate constituted one of the earliest

[349] Community of Ciudad Romero, 2.

obstacles. They were from the dry, temperate mountainous region of El Salvador, where the land primarily produced coffee, sugar cane, and cereals.[350] Thus, they were not accustomed to the tropical climate of coastal Panama, where it rained 300 days a year. Nevertheless, in time Ciudad Romero's residents established agriculture as their main productive activity. They successfully harvested cacao, coconut, corn, and rice. Further productive activities included fishing and raising animals, as well as running workshops where they made tools, sewed clothes, and created artisanal goods.[351] With the assistance of PROESA, the community also undertook infrastructure projects, such as toilets, electricity, roads, and barges.[352]

Government-sponsored programs and resources also played a key role in reunifying the families of the Nueva Esparta refugees as they rebuilt their lives in the new community of Ciudad Romero.[353] Like many refugees, the residents of Nueva Esparta had to leave almost everything behind when they fled, and in some cases, this included family members.[354] In 1981, PROESA responded to the community's insistent expressions of "uncertainty and fear" about the destiny of separated loved ones " by instituting efforts to locate and relatives who had been left behind.. PROESA and the community created a list of names of fifty missing family members, whom the UNHCR attempted to locate in El Salvador and Honduras. By February 1982, these searches had resulted in the reunification of four adults and twenty-two children with their families in Ciudad Romero.[355] This exceptional family reunification program is dramatic evidence of the Torrijos'

[350] Community of Ciudad Romero, 2; ACNUR, 9-15.
[351] Seminario Rural, 66.
[352] Community of Ciudad Romero, 2
[353] Espiritu.
[354] Seminario Rural, 70.
[355] Seminario Rural, 70.

government's concern for families and in particular children—85 percent of those brought to Panama as part of the reunification project were children.

The state's concern for the children of Ciudad Romero was also reflected in its close attention to their education. With government support, as families moved into their newly constructed homes, the two structures that had previously served as men's dormitories were converted into classrooms.[356] The Panamanian Ministry of Education also sent teachers to direct the community school; five teachers, including two from the National Guard, taught 150 students from kindergarten to sixth grade.[357] With over half of Ciudad Romero's population under the age of fifteen—and as refugee women continued to give birth to dozens of new babies throughout the decade—the provision of state funded education would prove critical to the community's wellbeing.[358]

Even though Ciudad Romero endured difficulties, its members, with the assistance of PROESA and the UNHCR, were able to build a successful and largely self-sufficient community.[359] The wellbeing of the community was both a product of the refugees' own resilience and initiative as well as the extraordinary lengths that the government was willing to go to on their behalf. Closely linked to Torrijos' desire to modernize the nation's isolated Atlantic coast, the Panamanian state's generosity to the refugees of Nueva Esparta was also part of the General's ongoing performance of Panamanian sovereignty and his own anti-imperialist political ideology, both of which implied a critique of ongoing U.S. intervention in Central America. By accepting the refugees' desire to christen their new

[356] Community of Ciudad Romero, 2.
[357] Seminario Rural, 68.
[358] Lachman, 70.
[359] Lachman, 60.

settlement Ciudad Romero—in honor of the famous Catholic priest and liberation theologian assassinated the previous year by a Salvadoran military officer—the Torrijos government had made abundantly clear that they understood refugee settlement at least in part as an expression of solidarity with Salvadoran people. By allowing the community to take on his name, the Panamanian government sanctioned the settlement to inherently stand in protest of the U.S. backed Salvadoran government. This purposeful political and religious act of commemoration on the part of the refugees was thus also a deliberate assertion of Panamanian sovereignty and an act of resistance to ongoing U.S. intervention in the region.[360]

Similarly, the Torrijos government's close attention to the wellbeing of families and children in Ciudad Romero should not be solely attributed to Panamanian and Latin American culture's prioritization of the family as the fundamental building block of society.[361] After all, Ciudad Romero's family units did not reflect traditional norms of a male-headed household; although some of Ciudad Romero's households contained fathers, grandfathers or other male relatives, the majority of the settlement consisted of female-headed family units. In fact, the non-normative structure of Ciudad Romero's families may hold the key to explaining the government's generosity towards this specific refugee community.

It was indeed a gendered logic that bridged many parts of the political spectrum at the time. For example, in an official statement to the media in 1983, the Workers' Socialist

[360] Community of Ciudad Romero, 2.

[361] Heidi Tinsman, "A Paradigm of Our Own: Joan Scott in Latin American History," *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (December 1, 2008): 1365-1366.

Party/*Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores* (PST) publicly condemned the government's refugee policy, stating "No pro-Yankee government should deny honorable shelter to a Salvadoran or a Nicaraguan mother or young woman who flees the troops armed and maintained by the Pentagon." Beyond the expected criticism of US imperialism by the PST is the call to shelter displaced Nicaraguan and Salvadoran mothers and young women. This suggests that across the political spectrum mothers and children were discursively conceived as innocent and worthy of asylum. As such, Ciudad Romero allowed the government to show it off as an example of Panamanian humanitarianism, even as it simultaneously banned other refugees.

While seeing refugees in general as a tool for advancing the economic development of the isolated Atlantic Coast, the selection for resettlement of a group of displaced Salvadorans composed mainly of women and children also provided the Torrijos government with a unique opportunity to continue walking a fine line between advancing its critique of the Salvadoran civil war and its U.S. financiers without provoking U.S. retaliation.[362] Through official and media attention to the Ciudad Romero project, the Torrijos government could successfully highlight the harm being done to women and children—seen as innocent and non-threatening by virtue of their age and/or gender—in El Salvador, while at the same time demonstrating that it was not harboring military-age men (i.e. potential FMLN guerillas) on Panamanian territory, which might have opened the country up to further U.S. intervention.[363] The specific demographics of this refugee community thus allowed the Panamanian government to further advance a relatively "safe"

[362] "Lista de Refugiados de Ciudad Romero."
[363] "Lista de Refugiados de Ciudad Romero."

critique of the human rights violation of the U.S. backed Salvadoran regime and more broadly, of U.S. intervention in the region.

In July 1981, General Omar Torrijos died unexpectedly in a plane crash in Coclesito, Panama. Since his death, it has been speculated that he was assassinated due to U.S. interest, but the allegations remain unproven. On August 6, 1981, only one week after the unexpected death of general Omar Torrijos, the national news reported that Colonel Florencio Florez, Commander in Chief of the National Guard, visited Ciudad Romero and the town of Belen "to offer assurances to the residents there about the continuation of the projects begun by General Torrijos, specifically reiterated the National Guard's support of Ciudad Romero.[364] The importance and exceptionality of Ciudad Romero is clear. They received a special visit from a high-ranking office to assure the continuation of their refugee settlement, which was originally sanctioned by Torrijos himself in conjunction with the Special Projects of the Atlantic. Beyond the death of Torrijos himself, the reassurance was necessary for this refugee community, as the public and governmental discourse toward refugees turned more and more vitriolic.

'Vigilance of our borders': Growing Restrictions against Salvadoran Refugees

Other than those few resettled in Ciudad Romero, however, thousands of other Salvadorans seeking to live in Panama would encounter a much a more ambivalent, if not hostile, government response. The state's primary institutional reaction to the Central American refugee crisis was to establish the *Comisión Nacional para la Atención de los*

[364] "COLONEL FLOREZ VISITS COCLESITO, NEARBY TOWNS," *Panama City Televisora Nacional*, August 6, 1981.

Refugiados (National Commission for Refugee Assistance) on July 6, 1981. The Commission was tasked with conducting research on the refugee problem and recommending policies. The Commission also assessed refugee petitions and decided who received refugee status. The commission would then administer funds to assist those it recognized.[365] However, the Commission experienced difficulties carrying out the procedures recommended in the UN Convention and Protocol regarding refugees. Following a six-month period of inefficiency and instability within the Commission, the government created OPNAR (*Oficina Nacional para Atención de los Refugiados/*National Office for Refugee Assistance) in order to streamline the work of the Commission. In December of 1981, OPNAR began administering direct assistance to the hundreds of recognized refugees of Salvadoran, Nicaraguan, and Chilean nationality. OPNAR's services included accepting petitions to the commission and helping to secure employment for refugees. Charged with dealing with day to day administration, OPNAR coordinated with other national agencies as well as the UNHCR.[366]

The restrictive refugee policies implemented by the Panamanian government toward Salvadorans and other Central Americans created a significantly larger number of undocumented Salvadorans than registered Salvadoran refugees. Panama, a signatory of the UN Convention and Protocol on Refugees, with a newly established national refugee office did not warmly welcome and assist all Salvadorans refugees. Rather, as the decade progressed, the political leaders and the media discursively positioned refugees as threats to the economy and national security. On March 24, 1981, General Omar Torrijos delivered

[365] Lachman, "Los Refugiados En Panamá," 36.
[366] Lachman, 36.

a “general order” to the National Guard on refugees. He opened his speech to the national guardsmen with the following:

> “Since the beginning of the republic, due to its democratic spirit and for humanitarian reasons, Panama has permitted politicians of various countries to make use of the right of asylum in our territory. However, this principle of human solidarity must never be interpreted as an excuse to violate national and international legal precepts that political refugees must respect. These include those of not meddling in the domestic affairs of the country that has offered them hospitality, nor of using our territory to make statements against their governments or to prepare acts of hostility or aggression against their countries of origin.”

In this opening statement General Torrijos calls upon Panama’s history of political asylum. He then transitions into the present with a “However,” that contrasts this past with the current moment. He depicts the current moment as a time in which refugees are using Panamanian territory to stage political violence. Torrijos goes on to explicitly state that this threat to national security and sovereignty will not be tolerated. Thus, from that date forward “all our security operations in all military zones are garrisons must be intensified to guarantee that the political refugees living in our territory will not be involved in acts that compromise national impartiality and neutrality with regard to the domestic problems of any other nation.” Similarly, all military and police will ensure all people identified as refugees respect Panamanian neutrality and sovereignty. Torrijos ensures that the National Guard will keep “vigilance of our borders, seas, airports, sea and river ports and roads to prevent violation of the conditions that make Panama a country which respects international law and is zealous of its domestic peace.” Torrijos mentions no specific nationality of political refugees seeking to disrupt Panamanian sovereignty, but rather groups all refugees together as a potential threat to the nation. For these reasons, the National Guard would police all border locations and refugee populations.

In the following month, the government placed a ban on all incoming refugees and required all refugees living in Panama to register with the government. The Panamanian Foreign Minister at the time, Jorge Illueca, told the press that this ban was due to "difficulties with Colombia due to charges of infiltration into that country by armed elements from Panama."[367] Also in April of 1981, the Directorate of Immigration and Naturalization of the government the Ministry of Justice required "all foreigners residing in the Republic of Panama who are political exiles and refugees in the country to come to the international immigration control office located at the National Guard in the province where they reside within 30 days from today. Those who refused to register would be considered undocumented.[368] As such, those without authorization would become eligible for deportation under Article 10 of Law 6 of March 5, 1980, which allows the Panamanian government to deport foreigners who threaten public order, security, and health.

Panama's banning and policing of refugees actively created the conditions in which most Salvadorans who entered Panama were more likely to remain undocumented. OPNAR and the Commission granted refugee status to 1060 Salvadorans between 1980 and 1982, allowing them to legally live and work in Panama. Located mainly in the urban capital Panama City or its suburbs, those granted refugee status tended to be craftsman and students rather than campesinos. The Commission and OPNAR, subsidized by the UNHCR, offered basic assistance to this community, which included assistance finding employment.[369] However, these 1060 recognized Salvadorans were just a small number of

[367] "BANS ON REFUGEES TEMPORARY, SAYS FOREIGN MINISTER."

[368] "EXILES, REFUGEES TO REGISTER WITH IMMIGRATION."

[369] "Another Facet of the War: Refugees and Displaced Persons in Central America," Evnio, No. 33, Mar. 1984, http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/3963; Lachman, "Los Refugiados En Panamá," 60.

Salvadoran refugees who entered Panama in the 1980s, as an estimated 5,000 Salvadorans did not or could not register as recognized refugees in the early 1980s.[370] Government reports suggest that the vast majority of the undocumented refugees were mainly *campesinos* who entered Panama from the Costa Rican border and the coasts around Chiriquí on the Pacific side and Bocas del Toro on the Atlantic side.[371] Without documentation or recognition of refugee status, these Salvadorans lacked access to the resources provided by the Panamanian government and the UNHCR. The estimated 5,000 undocumented Salvadoran refugees outnumbered the entirety of all refugees of any nationality with recognized legal status in Panama during the 1980s.[372]

Although for a range of reasons the Panamanian government desired to appear to uphold its commitment to the UN Convention and its Protocol on refugees, domestic fears impeded its ability to do so. Throughout the 1980s, the Panamanian government faced growing internal pressure due to a poorly performing economy. In particular, high unemployment rates led Panamanian nationals to criticize OPNAR's practice of assisting refugees secure employment. Indeed, at times both public opinion and the government suggested that Salvadoran refugees were a threat to the national economy.[373] In 1984 the Panamanian media reported on the alarming situation of the "*Bomba migratoria*" (migration bomb) which implied that refugees were causing high unemployment.

However, politicians also utilized similar explosive rhetoric to signal refugee threats to national security. In 1985, General Manuel Noriega gave a speech to the National Guard,

[370] Lachman, "Los Refugiados En Panamá," 60.
[371] Lachman, "Los Refugiados En Panamá," 68.
[372] Lachman, 60.
[373]United States., *Central American Refugees*, 21; Lachman, "Los Refugiados En Panamá," 76.

which also aired on live television, celebrating the first anniversary of the founding of the 2000 Battalion at Fort Cimarron. In this public speech, he warned that "the winds of war are blowing in every direction of the Central American isthmus." As such, a "migratory explosion" consisting of Nicaraguans, Salvadorans, Hondurans, and Guatemalans threatens Panama's national security. Noriega specifically stated that "the most dangerous thing is that there are already some refugee camps in Limon, 50 km from the Panamanian border; in Buenos Aires which has 7,500 refugees; and in Talamanca, which has 5,000 refugees." Here Noriega, is referring to camps along the border of Costa Rica, which specifically house Nicaraguans, many of whom are accused of being Contra operatives, which he reminded his audience was happening only "2 hours from the Panama border." He also described how residents of the Chiriqui border areas of Canas Gordas, Rio Sereno, Piedra Candle have complained that refugees are trespassing on their property. Even acknowledging that the refugees are "in search of better wages and food," he states the Panamanian government plans to aid the leaders of Chiriqui Province by sending in a new united of National Guard, called the Peace Battalion. The purpose of the Peace Battalion is to "become part of the region with a developing doctrine and... provide that which the community needs from all the state-owned organizations."[374] Although this was an incredibly vague description, taken in context it can be assumed that at least one purpose of the Peace Battalion would be to patrol the border region for suspicious foreigners

In response to the growing fears and against the wishes of the regional UNHCR office, the government decided to close the border with Costa Rica multiple times. Its

[374] "NORIEGA SPEECH VIEWS DOMESTIC, REGIONAL STATUS," *Panama City Domestic Service*, August 12, 1985.

closing of the border intended to prevent the entry of Salvadoran refugees—whom had been reported as entering through the Costa Rica border as well as the coasts in massive numbers"[375] By 1985, claiming to have previously cooperated with the UNHCR, the Panamanian government, declared it was no longer open to receiving more refugees, as it had "insufficient resources."[376] Indeed, throughout the decade, the Panamanian government not only refused to heed the calls that the country should open more refugee settlements like Ciudad Romero—it also moved increasingly toward characterizing refugees as a 'problem' and often as a threat.

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By the end of the decade, Ciudad Romero stood as an example of how refugee communities could become self-sufficient if allowed freedoms and resources. With such freedom and self-sufficiency, the members Ciudad Romero began organizing for their right to safely repatriate as a community to El Salvador beginning in 1990. Expressing their desire to return to their homeland, the community stated the following:[377]

> Ten years have passed, and we were thinking that we could return to our country in a year. And during those days, despite the problems, the stumbles, the desire to return, we still kept going. The community has grown, today we are 610 refugees, almost half are children born in Panama; and for them, our children, we want to look to the horizon for a dignified life.[378]

The community's words illustrate that while the Panamanian state may have had its own intentions regarding the utilization of the children of Ciudad Romero, the members of the

[375]United States., *Central American Refugees*, 21; Lachman, "Los Refugiados En Panamá," 76.

[376] United States., *Central American Refugees*, 21.

[377] Community of Ciudad Romero, 1-2; Brown, Levine, Panetta, and Nagle, "Letter from U.S. Congressional Representatives to President Alfredo Cristiani of the Republic of El Salvador."

[378] Community of Ciudad Romero, 2.

community were hardly passive victims of nationalist schemes. Rather, throughout the decade the community worked diligently to better the conditions initially provided by the Panamanian state. And in their own words, they did so to provide their children with a dignified life.

Figure 4.3 Sketch of Oscar Romero and Ciudad Romero, printed in "Trabajando Para La Repatriación, 1990."

While their motivations diverged significantly, both the refugees and the Panamanian state placed an emphasis on the children of Ciudad Romero. While the refugee parents yearned to "give [their] children a better future," the Panamanian government, particularly under the Torrijos regime, attempted to make use of the children to lodge a carefully constructed protest against U.S. imperialism. More broadly, however, the creation of Ciudad Romero presented the Panamanian government with an opportunity to highlight its own humanitarians as a means of criticizing U.S. foreign policy and its impacts on Salvadoran families, while simultaneously advancing its own claims to modernity through the economic development of its isolated and 'backwards' Atlantic Coast. The strategic nature

of Panama's refugee policy during this period is revealed by the comparatively small number of refugees it recognized versus the much larger number it excluded. The Panamanian state offered legal status to only a very small number Salvadorans, which together only represented approximately one fifth of the total of their unauthorized countrymen, women and children. Furthermore, the number of recognized refugees were a miniscule number in comparison to the overall population, which totaled roughly 2 million in the early 1980s. Including the refugees of Ciudad Romero, the 1,500 recognized Salvadoran refugees constituted less than .01 percent of total population. These numbers Panama's refugee policies strikingly different than that of other UNHCR-cooperating Central American nations at the time. For example, in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, refugees were approximately 1 percent of the population, while in the Belize refugees became approximately 12-15 percent of their population.[379]

When placed in comparison to the rest of the region, the contrasting numbers further reveal the seeming inconsistencies of Panama's response to the Salvadoran refugee crisis. In some ways, Panama's refugee policy in the 1980s can be understood as an expression of generous humanitarianism, particularly if contrasted against the human rights abuses of Honduras or the state's absolute denial of the existence of refugees in Guatemala. Home to one of the most successful refugee settlements in the region, Panama nonetheless restricted refugee status to a small number of families. This contradiction illustrates the state's desire for sovereignty and modernity under the Torrijos regime. But the closing of borders in the middle of the decade highlights how, as time progressed,

[379] Government of Belize, "International Conference on Central America (CIREFCA) Preparation Meeting" (Belize City, Belize, January 20, 1992), Belize Archives and Records Services, 2.

subsequent governments struggled to uphold the nation's internationally publicized commitment to refugees while grappling with rising unemployment rates and a poorly performing economy. Meanwhile, Salvadorans were caught in the crossfire of the state's contradictory responses, which sought strategically engage or avoid refugee policy as a means to address the geopolitical and domestic concerns of each corresponding moment. Although the Panamanian state did not accept nor reject refugees strictly on the basis of international cold war politics, it is clear that they acted with a limited, highly selective and strategic generosity towards Salvadoran refugees.[380] The particular demographics of Ciudad Romero permitted the Panamanian government, particularly under General Torrijos, to highlight its benevolence and generosity toward women and children—innocent victims of civil war and U.S. imperialism. This happened simultaneously with the much more restrictive policies that highly regulated the border and created a community of thousands of Salvadorans living without documentation and assistance.

[380] Lachman, "Los Refugiados En Panamá," 72.

CHAPTER 5

Toward a 'Compassionate Approach':

Postcolonial Refugee Policy and Nation-Building in Belize (1980-92)

Beginning in the 1980s, Belize's broadly generous response to Salvadoran refugees covered up deeper ambivalences about the impact of the influx of refugees on the newly independent nation. During the decade, after initial attempts to restrict the admission of those fleeing civil war in their homeland, approximately 8,000 Salvadoran adults and children received asylum in Belize.[381] Thousands more, although lacking official status as refugees, were permitted to remain in the country with limited harassment from the authorities. Moreover, much like in Nicaragua the Belizean government offered social services to registered and non-registered refugees alike, on the same basis as Belizean nationals. This would include equal access to government funded health care and education. Through collaborations with the UNHCR and faith-based NGOs, they would also build schools, health care centers and other infrastructure to support refugees, and launch ambitious resettlement and integration programs that provided land and vocational opportunities to displaced Salvadorans and Belizean citizens alike.

However, throughout the 1980s, this principled commitment to an open refugee policy, together with the belief that refugees could play a role in the new nation's economic

[381] Government of Belize, "International Conference on Central America (CIREFCA) Preparation Meeting" (Belize City, Belize, January 20, 1992), Belize Archives and Records Services; John C. Everitt, "The Recent Migrations of Belize, Central America," *The International Migration Review* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 322; Torres, Marisol Hernández, "Refugiados Salvadoreños En Belice: En Busca de Un Lugar En La Historia" (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2013), 60.

development, would coexist with persistent government fears about the strain of displaced Salvadorans on under-funded social services and infrastructure. Furthermore, xenophobic public discourse that framed Salvadorans as dangerous criminals worked in tandem with generalized anti-refugee sentiment to create specific negative perceptions of Salvadorans as a threat to their nation's unique racial and cultural identity.

In this chapter I explore the logic underlying the tiny, newly independent and still relatively economically underdeveloped nation of Belize to adopt one of the hemisphere's most expansive refugee policy—as well as the multiple tensions and contradictions that accompanied that policy. Belize's unique historical trajectory within Central America and its distinct cultural identity and political tradition provide important context for understanding its approach to the Salvadoran refugee crisis. The contemporary geopolitical and domestic considerations shaped the nation's refugee policy in the 1980s. This chapter argues that the Belizean government utilized the Salvadoran refugee crisis—which coincided with their own nation's 1981 formal declaration of independence from Britain—as an opportunity to assert a distinct national identity. The construction of the Belizean national identity built upon their sense of identification with British parliamentary democracy and individual rights while asserting a distinctly post-colonial commitment to social justice. Furthermore, government officials did so by counterposing these values with the Spanish and authoritarian political traditions of neighboring nations. Making use of its generous refugee policies in order to "brand" itself as a nation, Belize juxtaposed itself with others in the region not only professing its respect for human rights, but also acting in line with its stated values.

However, regional tensions and domestic challenges also shaped how the Belizean government responded to the refugee crisis. This chapter demonstrates how during the 1980s a prolonged territorial dispute with Guatemala inflamed latent anti-Central American sentiments, sparking concerns in some of the nation's leaders about the "Latinization" of Belize and threat to the former British colony's Creole identity in the immediate post-colonial period. Belizean Creoles are descendants of enslaved black Africans. At the same time, as the decade progressed, the Belizean government began to worry about its ability to continue to provide expensive social services to a growing refugee population while upholding its commitment to maintaining the standard of living of its native-born population. These tensions and preoccupations would temper the otherwise generous policies and discourse related to Salvadoran refugees and produce resentment about the disproportionate burden Belize was carrying vis-à-vis other Central American nations in responding to the region's migration crisis.

However, parsing out exact numbers for Salvadoran refugees in Belize in the 1980s is challenging since many figures gathered by the government and UNHCR counted Guatemalans and Salvadorans together.[382] Beyond difficulties delineating nationality, there was also the issue of recognized and unrecognized refugees. The government of Belize did not grant legal recognition of the status of refugee to all Salvadorans. Some received recognition upon arrival, others in mid or latter part of the decade, and others still never received recognition as refugees.[383] According to a 1991 report, an estimated 32,000

[382] Government of Belize, "International Conference on Central America (CIREFCA) Preparation Meeting."2.

[383] John C. Everitt, "The Recent Migrations of Belize, Central America," *The International Migration Review* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 322; See also Torres, Marisol Hernández, "Refugiados Salvadoreños En Belice: En Busca de Un Lugar En La Historia" (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2013), 60.

refugees and displaced person entered Belize between 1980 and 1991. At that point the government had registered 7,500 as legal adult refugees (12,000 including dependent minors). Of those 12,000 refugees, 70 percent (8,400) were Salvadorans. There were potentially thousands more to whom the government did not grant refugee status. Although national laws allowed all immigrants the same access to healthcare services and education as Belizean nationals, unrecognized Salvadorans were at times of heightened xenophobia at risk of deportation.[384] Regardless of the specific numbers, when understood proportionally to the tiny population, it becomes clear that Belize did accept a large number of Salvadoran refugees, particularly in comparison to the other countries in the region.

Becoming Belize: From British Colonial Rule to Independence

In many ways, Belize has long been an outlier among Central American nations. An understanding of its unique history is thus necessary to provide context for the new nation's decision in the early 1980's to adopt a uniquely expansive approach to the Salvadoran refugee crisis. The smallest and least populous nation in Central America, Belize shares with the rest of Central America a history characterized by centuries of colonial rule, legislated racial inequality, and exploitative labor.[385] In other ways, however, Belize's

[384] The Government of Belize and The UNHCR, "Report on a Workshop on Refugees in Belize Held at the Belmopan Convention Hotel on Thursday, October 22, 1987," October 22, 1987, ASR 1539 Box 116, Belize Archives and Records Services, 2; Nancy Moss, Michael C. Stone, and Jason B. Smith, "Child Health Outcomes Among Refugees and International Migrants: Evidence from Central America," Paper Presented at 1990 Annual Meeting (New York, New York: American Public Health Association, August 27, 1990), ASR 1003 Box 77, Belize Archives and Records Services, 8.

[385] O. Nigel Bolland, *Colonialism and Resistance in Belize: Essays in Historical Sociology*, 2nd rev. ed., Belize Collection. History. (Benque Viejo del Carmen, Belize: Cubola Productions, 2003); Assad Shoman, *Belize's Independence and Decolonization in Latin America: Guatemala, Britain, and the UN*, 1st ed., Studies of the Americas. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Mavis Christine Campbell, *Becoming Belize: A*

historical experience diverges significantly from that of its neighbors. In the early colonial period (16th-17th centuries), Great Britain and Spain laid competing colonial claims to the Caribbean-facing coast of the Central American land mass, which belonged to the Mopan, Kekchi, and Yucatec Maya indigenous peoples. Although the Maya largely resisted conquest, diseases dwindled the population prior to the arrival of the British.[386] In 1862, the British officially took control of the territory that would be known as British Honduras until it was renamed Belize in 1973.[387]

As a result of more than one hundred years of British rule, by the time it became an independent nation in 1981, it is expected that Belize should have more in common with the British Caribbean, than with its immediate neighbors. The nation's unique demographics and cultural identity were fundamental aspects of this difference. As in Great Britain's other Caribbean possessions, the legacy of British colonialism, the African slave trade, and historical patterns of migration led to the creation of a largely black Creole, English-speaking, and Protestant population in Belize.[388] During the pre-independence era however, as a byproduct of Mexican and Guatemalan migrations of Belize during the 19th century, the colony also became home to a large minority of "Mestizos" (people of mixed European and Indigenous ancestry).

History of an Outpost of Empire Searching for Identity, 1528-1823 (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2011); Anne S. Macpherson, *From Colony to Nation: Women Activists and the Gendering of Politics in Belize, 1912-1982*, Engendering Latin America (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

[386] Bolland, *Colonialism and Resistance in Belize*, 18.

[387] Campbell, *Becoming Belize*; Anne S. Macpherson, *From Colony to Nation: Women Activists and the Gendering of Politics in Belize, 1912-1982*, Engendering Latin America (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007). For the clarity and ease of the reader, I will henceforth in this chapter refer to the territory as Belize.

[388] Torres, Marisol Hernandez, "Refugiados Salvadoreños En Belice: En Busca de Un Lugar En La Historia" (Mexico City, Mexico, Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, 2013), 10; Macpherson, *From Colony to Nation*, 6-7. Department of Immigration and Nationality of Belize and Ministry of Foreign Affair of Belize, "Report and Refugee Affected Areas of Belize: Diagnosis and Strategies for Durable Solutions, 2."

Although the population would also be supplemented by a small patter of regional labor migration, as well as by the relocation of a small community of Mennonites from Canada and Mexico in the second half of the 20th century, Belize would not receive any major migrations between those of the 1800s and the arrival of Central American refugees.[389] By the release the of the Nation's 1980 census, a process which corresponded with the nation's independence as well as the beginnings of the Salvadoran refugee crisis, of Belize's tiny population of 145,353 people, 40% identified as Creole (black), 33% identified as Mestizo (from Mexico and Guatemala). Although the relatively diverse nation also had smaller minority communities, including the Garifuna (Afro-indigenous), Mopan, Kekchi, and Yucatec Maya, Indo-Caribbeans, and Mennonites, Belizean leaders nevertheless persisted in envisioning it as a Creole nation.[390] This set them apart from the other six isthmian countries, which were majority mestizo, Spanish-speaking, and Catholic.

Politically, the nation's path had also diverged significantly from that of its neighbors that had been former Spanish colonies. For more than a hundred years, even as the surrounding Central American territories gained their independence from Spain during the 19th century, Belize would remain a British colonial possession. Beginning in the 1960s, however, the local Belizean government had experienced increased self-governance since the 1960s, when it became largely autonomous from Britain.[391] Slowed significantly

[389] Department of Immigration and Nationality of Belize and Ministry of Foreign Affair of Belize, "Report and Refugee Affected Areas of Belize: Diagnosis and Strategies for Durable Solutions, 2;" Melvin Gingerich and John B. Lowen, "Belize," Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, accessed January 26, 2020, https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Belize.

[390] Moss, Stone, and Smith, "Child Health Outcomes Among Refugees and International Migrants: Evidence from Central America, 5," [390] Department of Immigration and Nationality of Belize and Ministry of Foreign Affair of Belize, "Report and Refugee Affected Areas of Belize: Diagnosis and Strategies for Durable Solutions, 2."

[391] Shoman, *Belize's Independence and Decolonization in Latin America*, 76.

by hostilities with Guatemala in the 1960s and 1970s, the news of the final negotiations for Belize's independence appeared in the press alongside stories of the Central American civil wars and its forced migrations in the early 1980s. Belize officially became free from British colonial control on September 21, 1981. Belize, like many other former British colonies ironically inherited the democratic and parliamentary systems from their former colonial regimes. The legacy of democracy and the parliamentary system—however marred by colonialism—still stood in contrast to the rest of the region. While ostensibly 'independent' Central American nations struggled under the leadership of authoritarian and corrupt leaders that built upon the anti-democratic tradition of Spanish colonialism, Belize's local leaders had moved slowly and steadily towards greater autonomy from Britain until the nation's peaceful transition to independence in 1981. At that time, Belize's leaders, inculcated in the values of British parliamentary democracy, would seek to build upon the democratic legacy of British rule, however imperfect, in order to take their place in the world of democratic and rights-respecting nations.

Thus, on the eve of independence, Belize understood itself to be a culturally pluralistic but also predominantly Creole nation; that was proud of its British political tradition and record of peaceful democratic self-governance during its phased transition to nationhood. Inspired by these principles, as well as by a distinctly post-colonial commitment to human rights and social justice, the nation's center-left People's United Party (PUP), the nation's first Prime Minister, George Price, who had played a major role in the Belizean 'home rule' government as well as the independent movement would assume responsibility for charting the post-colonial society's transition into nationhood. Furthermore, as Prime Minister Price and his administration would grapple with the influx

of refugees and design relatively welcoming—but also contradictory—policies. Since this took place at precisely the same time Central American refugees began arriving at the new nation's borders is important, Belize's unique history, cultural identity and political tradition would play a key role in setting the stage for the government's response to the incipient refugee crisis.[392]

From Ambivalent Admissions to a 'Compassionate Approach': Initial Response to Salvadoran Refugees (1980-82)

Beginning in the spring of 1980, Salvadoran refugees began arriving at Belizean ports of entry. Because Guatemalan territory served as a major transit route for Salvadorans journeying to Mexico, the United States and Canada, as well as Belize, it is likely that many were from the Northern regions of El Salvador nearer to its shared border with Guatemala. Having crossed through Guatemala to reach the Guatemala-Belize border, many Salvadorans entered at Benque Viejo del Carmen.[393] This path between El Salvador and Belize became a well-known route for Salvadorans traversing to Belize over the next few years. Of those who arrived in Belize, many hailed from rural regions and had experience with small-scale agriculture, who tended to have some financial resources. [394] While many Salvadoran refugees arrived in family units, which varied in their composition. Some families had female heads of household, some included extended relatives, while others were nuclear. There was, additionally, a significant number of single men who

[392] Torres Hernández, "Refugiados Salvadoreños En Belice," 9.

[393] Joseph O. Palacio, "ILLEGAL ALIENS IN BELIZE: FINDINGS FROM THE 1984 AMNESTY," *Center for Migration Studies Special Issues* 6, no. 2 (March 1, 1988): 156–77, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2050-411X.1988.tb00561.x.

[394] Ministry of Home Affairs, "Influx of Refugees from the Region" (Belmopan, Belize, May 27, 1980), Belize Archives and Records Services.

arrived. [395]. This mixture of families and single men makes sense within the larger gendered migration patterns of the region. Belize was safer for young single men—often the targets of violence and recruitment by the Salvadoran military and the FMLN. The distance of travel, while longer than a crossing into neighboring Honduras, was much shorter than a journey to the United States. Thus, in combination with the growing perception of the country as a safe haven, Belize became an appealing option for refuge for those Salvadoran individuals and families who had the means and opportunity to make the mid-length trip. Salvadorans arrived in tandem with smaller numbers of Guatemalan motivated by political and economic crisis in their own homeland.

As the number of arrivals started to increase in March 1980, the government of Belize began to recognize that the nation was experiencing an unprecedented influx of Central Americans.[396] In response, they instructed the Belizean police force, which monitored ports of entry, to begin closely counting and reporting on Central American entrants as well as those leaving the country. At the time, the Belizean Police classified the majority of those Salvadoran entering as "agricultural workers and 'other manual workers,'" a designation that implied a temporary status, in which the entrants were expected to exit the country following the completion of their work. This had been common for the much smaller migrant flows from neighboring nations. This historical pattern had included Salvadoran migrants who sought work in the construction and agricultural

[395] The UNHCR and The Belize Refugee Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "A Report on Refugee Law and Policy Workshop," 23.

[396] Ministry of Home Affairs, "Influx of Refugees from the Region;" Government of Belize, "International Conference on Central America (CIREFCA) Preparation Meeting, 2."

industries.[397] However, as they began to systematically track those entering and exiting, however, the Commissioner of the Police realized that Salvadoran migrants were no longer returning home at the same rate.[398] This discrepancy alerted Belizean officials to the extraordinary nature of the situation in El Salvador.

By May 1980, the Belizean Ministry of Home Affairs expressed concerns to the Cabinet over the elevated numbers of migrants entering-and the reduced number departing—the country. In a confidential memorandum, officials relayed a report sent by the Commissioner of Police to the Ministry that more than 2,500 Guatemalan nationals had arrived at the Belize Western Border Station to apply for entry in February and March of that year. The Commissioner of Police noted that an "inordinately high number of Salvadoreans" were also entering at this time. Following the initial influx in February, the Western Border Station began keeping more detailed figures on a weekly basis. Between April 21st and May 16th the station recorded the entry of an elevated number of "visitors from the Central American countries": 1,520 Guatemalans, 584 Salvadorans, 106 Hondurans, and 11 Nicaraguans.[399] Despite the higher number of Guatemalans, the Home Affairs memo author's overriding concern was with the growing influx of displaced Salvadorans as it denoted an exceptional shift in migration resulting from the war in El Salvador.

The memorandum used contradictory terminology to designate the immigration status of the entrants, thus revealing early anxieties and ambivalences toward the incoming

[397] "GOVERNMENT SUSPENDS ENTRY OF SALVADORAN REFUGEES," *Buenos Aires Latin-Reuter*, July 11, 1980.

[398] Ministry of Home Affairs, "Influx of Refugees from the Region, 1."

[399] Ministry of Home Affairs, "Influx of Refugees from the Region, 1."

population. In particular, the shifting terms *refugee*, *economic migrant*, *visitor*, and *illegal alien* highlight the quandaries around framing the burgeoning crisis. Warning the Cabinet that with "the escalation of unrest in the area, particularly El Salvador, the problem of refugees is bound to grow." The memo explicitly referred to Central Americans as *refugees* in its title "Influx of Refugees from the Region" and acknowledged that Salvadorans had fled and were likely to continue to flee the recent unrest in El Salvador.[400] It recommended that government officials understood Salvadorans to be fleeing political unrest and violence as push factors.[401] He also suggested the need to carefully study the impact of the incoming refugees, and to consider liaising with the UNHCR and other agencies to develop a more comprehensive plan for responding for the rapidly expanding influx.[402]

However, the same report also referred to Salvadorans officially designated as *agricultural laborers*—not refugees of political violence. It also identified Central Americans as *illegal aliens* and warned that the growing influx he predicted would pose a potential strain on the nation's social services. [403] This discourse othered and dehumanized Salvadorans, which in turn justified and reinforced the memo's suggestion that the country implement new limits and conditions on the entry of Central Americans, despite the fact that many of them were in fact fleeing violence.

This May 1980 memorandum, like a self-fulfilling prophecy, predicted the ambivalences of the Belizean response to more than 8,000 Salvadorans who would seek refuge throughout the 1980s, even as it continued to guide the Belizean policy making

[400] Ministry of Home Affairs, "Influx of Refugees from the Region, 1."
[401] Ministry of Home Affairs, "Influx of Refugees from the Region, 1."
[402] Ministry of Home Affairs, "Influx of Refugees from the Region, 2."
[403] Ministry of Home Affairs, "Influx of Refugees from the Region, 2."

process.[404] Throughout the decade, the observations and anxieties expressed in this initial Home Affairs report would continue to shape the Belizean government's refugee policies as the nation grappled with the presence of a growing number of Salvadoran refugees.

In line with the memo's recommendations, the government attempted to reduce the Salvadoran influx as early as June of 1980. As a result of the May 1980 memorandum, the Cabinet of Belize decided on June 15, 1980 to place a halt "on all admission of refugees from El Salvador to Belize."[405] However, the halt was not successful in its stated goal to "stem the influx of aliens from El Salvador." Refugees found multiple places along Belizean land and sea border for relatively easy unauthorized entry, successfully avoiding the border stations and police officers in their search for safe harbor.[406] Aware of this reality government officials expressed anxieties over the impact the newcomers would have on social services fears that would remain a continuous theme throughout the decade. They were particularly concerned with potential burdens to national healthcare and education. They surmised that refugees would seek medical attention and strain the healthcare system, thus harming Belizean citizens in the long run. Additionally, they reasoned that refugee children would attend Belizean schools, inevitably encountering language and cultural barriers and contributing to the Latinization" of the Creole, English-speaking, and Protestant nation. Yet, the same government documents also reveal that Belizean officials were working off the assumption that Salvadorans were likely to continue to arrive in large

[404] Ministry of Home Affairs, "Influx of Refugees from the Region, 2."

[405] Ministry of Defense and Home Affairs, "Emergency Food Assistance from WFP for Salvadorean Refugees" (Belmopan, Belize, December 29, 1982), Cabinet Confidential Information Paper No. 31 of 1982, Belize Archives and Records Services; Cabinet Confidential, "Refugee Resettlement Programme," Memorandum, 1980, BARS.

[406] Palacio, "ILLEGAL ALIENS IN BELIZE, 2."

numbers, and that the Belizean government would allow them to stay.[407] Furthermore, they predicated their concerns over healthcare and education on the idea that Belize would not only accept Salvadoran refugees but offer them the same social services as Belizean nationals, such as public education, health care, and access to water systems.

On July 11, 1980, the Minster of Home Affairs, Carl Lindbergh B. Rogers met with the UNHCR regional representative, Phillip Sargisson. *Latin American Reuters* reported that in this meeting Minister Rogers stated that "Belize has made its contribution and simply cannot absorb an additional number [of refugees]" and that…"the refugees who are already here need help."[408] In response, UNHCR representative Sargisson pledged immediate aid to Belize in the short term, which would "be followed by the development of a plan for substantial additional aid over the long term."[409] This meeting between Minister of Home Affairs and the UNHCR representative highlights the ambivalence towards Salvadoran refugees, as Rogers both says that Belize cannot take anymore, reinforcing the June 1980 halt. However, Rogers also implies that Belize, with the assistance of the UNHCR, was responsible for helping the refugees already in the country.

Between 1980 and 1982, government's officials' concerns about the economic and cultural impact of the refugee influx and unsuccessful attempts to restrict entrance, coexisted with what became de facto open-door policy to Salvadorans fleeing the civil war. This ambivalence had its roots in the tensions between domestic factors that favored restriction and a historical and geopolitical context that worked in favor of an open-door

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[407] Ministry of Home Affairs, "Influx of Refugees from the Region, 2."

[408] "GOVERNMENT SUSPENDS ENTRY OF SALVADORAN REFUGEES;" "MINISTER MEETS WITH UN OFFICIAL ON REFUGEE PROBLEM," *Belize City Domestic Service*, July 11, 1980; "GUATEMALA REPORTEDLY EXPECTS END TO BELIZE DISPUTE BY 1982," *Belize City THE-REPORTER*, July 20, 1980, pp 1, 8.

[409] "GOVERNMENT SUSPENDS ENTRY OF SALVADORAN REFUGEES."

policy towards displaced Salvadorans. Both were intertwined with the nation's ongoing territorial conflict with the neighboring nation of Guatemala.

Another legacy of colonialism—its territorial dispute with the bordering nation of Guatemala—would play a key role in Belizean history.[410] While this territorial dispute had its roots in the 19th century, British sovereignty over the territory had meant that it largely gone uncontested until the mid-20th century, when the Guatemalan government declared that British Honduras was the "23rd department of Guatemala."[411] Guatemalan hostility toward Belize increased in the coming decades, particularly following the U.S.-orchestrated 1954 coup that deposed the democratically elected reformist President Jacobo Árbenz and put in place a violent right-wing military government, instigating the 36-year-long Guatemalan Civil War. Under the authoritarian regime Guatemala's claim over the territory impeded the international negotiations for Belizean independence throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Even following Belize's 1981 independence, the Guatemalan authoritarian military regime continued to claim that the entirety of Belize belonged to Guatemala. The Guatemalan government propagated its territorial claim and refused to acknowledge it as an independent nation until 1991.[412] Even still, the territorial dispute remains unresolved today.

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[410] Shoman, *Belize's Independence and Decolonization in Latin America*.

[411] Torres Hernandez, "Refugiados Salvadoreños En Belice," 3.

[412] "Contentious Issues and World Politics: The Management of Territorial Claims in the Americas, 1816-1992 on JSTOR," accessed May 15, 2018, 92. *The Central America Report*, published by Infopress in Guatemala City in the 1980s, ended every weekly report with "The editorial staff obtains information from country correspondents; interviews; specialized publications; US, European, and Latin American new agencies; and newspapers and periodicals published in Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama (Great Britain granted Belize independence in 1981, but Guatemala retains its territorial claim, and does not recognize Belizean independence. In any case, the Report considers Belize, as well as Panama, Part of Central America."

As a result of this conflict with a neighboring Spanish speaking nation, it is unsurprising that Belizean government officials, already self-consciously proud of their British political tradition, wanted to assert their political and cultural distance from other Central American nations. The decision to publicly announce a policy of welcoming refugees into the newly independent nation—would thus create the context for the adoption of a uniquely expansive refugee policy in 1982.

Regarding his administration's refugee policy, Prime Minister George Price stated to Belizean news sources that, "We must not forget that we are a nation today as a result of immigration in our history…Because of this historic situation, there should be a compassionate approach to the problem without in any way diminishing the attributes of nationhood."[413] Here, Price, keenly aware of the need to define and respect Belizean nationhood, explicitly calls on Belize's history of immigration and plurality.[414] Even though Price's Cabinet implemented extensive refugee resettlement projects, this was perhaps an overly generous and positive characterization of refugee policy under PUP, whose policies were not always the most "compassionate" (i.e. "round ups" and deportations in 1984).[415]

However, the opposition party took a stronger anti-refugee stance. For example, in 1983 the party leader of the center-right United Democratic Party (UDP) put forth a motion calling for the government to end its "importation of aliens into the country of Belize."[416] However, the Constitution and Foreign Affairs Committee rejected the motion, due to the fact that the government of Belize not having been "involved in the importation of aliens.

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[413] "FORMER PRIME MINISTER CLAIMS RIGHT TO USE MEDIA," *Bridgetown CANA*, May 13, 1987.
[414] "FORMER PRIME MINISTER CLAIMS RIGHT TO USE MEDIA."
[415] "POLICE ROUND UP ILLEGALS FOR DEPORTATION," *Bridgetown CANA*, February 10, 1984"UK Troops Presence Approved.".
[416] "UK Troops Presence Approved," *Belize City Domestic Service*, June 18, 1983.

This move by UDP leaders, while quickly squashed, illuminates the discord among government officials regarding policies.[417]

The Valley of Peace: Refugee Resettlement and Social Integration Projects

In 1982, regardless of such internal disagreements, the Belizean government, proposed a resettlement project for those Salvadorans who were already in the country. The desire to adopt a generous approach to refugees predates this decision though. Government records that simultaneously discuss the June 1980 halt and the resettlement projects embody the contradictions and internal struggle to rank geopolitical and domestic priorities.[418] While its language used to describe Salvadorans did betray fear, the government was in the process of carrying out multiple rural and urban refugee settlement projects which assisted Salvadoran families under the Refugee Resettlement Programme, including the Valley of Peace in the early 1980s and Las Flores in the early 1990s.[419]

The UNHCR originally pitched the resettlement scheme to the government of Belize in 1980. By 1981, the government had adapted it into the highly ambitious pilot project intended to create a refugee settlement in the Cayo District.[420] Under the plan, each family received fifty acres of land for farming.[421] Yet, the land located in the Belize River Valley was not ideal for agriculture. Rather, it was largely tropical rainforest. Thus, in building the

[417] "GUATEMALA REPORTEDLY EXPECTS END TO BELIZE DISPUTE BY 1982."

[418] Ministry of Defense and Home Affairs, "Emergency Food Assistance from WFP for Salvadorean Refugees" (Belmopan, Belize, December 29, 1982), Cabinet Confidential Information Paper No. 31 of 1982, Belize Archives and Records Services.

[419] Cabinet Confidential, "Refugee Resettlement Programme," Memorandum, 1980, BARS.

[420] Cabinet Confidential.

[421] Department of Immigration and Nationality of Belize and Ministry of Foreign Affair of Belize, "Report and Refugee Affected Areas of Belize: Diagnosis and Strategies for Durable Solutions" (Belmopan, Belize, January 28, 1989), 16.

settlement, the government sanctioned the destruction of the rainforest in order to clear land for agricultural development. The UNHCR and the local Mennonite community, who have a growing presence in Belize since their arrival in the mid-20th century and basically function as a humanitarian NGO in this context, subsidized the project. In 1981 the Belizean government signed an agreement that promised it would provide 12,000 acres of land and technical support, while the UNHCR would contribute US $920,000 and the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) would contribute US $267,000. In addition to securing millions in funds over the decade, the UNHCR also provided technical assistance and aided in the implementation of this and other projects that aided Salvadoran refugees.[422] The pilot project, which became known as the Valley of Peace settlement or *Valle de Paz* in Spanish, originally included 140 Salvadoran families. Following the largely successful creation of the Valley of Peace settlement, the government developed a second settlement called Las Flores also in the Cayo district in the early 1990s. Fifty Salvadoran families received agricultural plots approximately 4.7 acres in size. Between the two settlements, approximately 75% of registered refugees lived in the Cayo district.[423]

Importantly, however, the resettlement projects also incorporated Belizean families. Indeed, the goal of integration was a key aspect of refugee resettlement projects. [424] The title of one of the projects the "Belize River Valley Resettlement Scheme for Salvadoran Refugees and Some Belizeans" made clear that integration was a key goal."[425] The inclusion of "some Belizeans" in the refugee resettlement was intended to benefit both Salvadorans

[422] PRODERE Belize, "Progress Report for Period July-December 1991" (Belize, February 24, 1991), ASR 781 Box 61, Belize Archives and Records Services.

[423] Department of Immigration and Nationality of Belize and Ministry of Foreign Affair of Belize, 4.

[424] Ministry of Defense and Home Affairs, "Emergency Food Assistance from WFP for Salvadorean Refugees."

[425] Cabinet Confidential, "Refugee Resettlement Programme."

and Belizean nationals. Government officials "highly encouraged" integration and desired a 50/50 split between Belizean and Salvadoran families for the settlement.

The imagined benefits of integration were three-fold.[426] First, the government argued that integrated communities would help Salvadorans learn English more and adapt to Belizean culture more quickly if they were in direct and frequent contact with Belizean families. Second, Belizeans would benefit materially from the refugee resettlement project, as they would be granted land and not excluded from the opportunity. This was an appealing option for some Belizean families who had been struggling financially. Finally, those benefits for Salvadorans and Belizeans functioned in tandem to assuage Belizean concerns over both "Latinization" of the nation and frustrations with perceived special treatment for Salvadoran refugees. The emphasis on learning English and adjusting to Belizean culture would prevent the process of the imagined Latinization. Thus, the Valley of Peace settlement project intended to provide land to both refugees and nationals—over 60 percent children—in hopes of integrating the Salvadoran refugees into Belizean society.[427]

Indeed, government officials took the nation's culture, language, and ethnicity into account as it carried out the ambitious land development project. On the integration of Salvadorans, the Director of Immigration and Nationality stated that "We have to look at the ethnic balance and the cultural differences, whilst allowing them to integrate, for they

[426] Government of Belize, "International Conference on Central America (CIREFCA) Preparation Meeting, 16."

[427] Ministry of Defense and Home Affairs, "Emergency Food Assistance from WFP for Salvadorean Refugees."

do contribute to the development of the country."[428] Yet, the Director's statement suggests that while tensions over culture and ethnicity existed, the government still framed Salvadorans important contributors to the development of Belizean society. Government and UNHCR officials imagined integration as an alternative to exclusion that also addressed concerns about negative impact on the economy and social services as well as cultural change produced by the refugee influx. Thus, integration in this context, was envisioned as a policy that measuredly responded to the ambivalences resulting from a domestic context that worked towards restriction in tension with a political tradition and geopolitical context that favored a generous refugee policy.

Like any community, the Valley of Peace and other refugee resettlements faced serious challenges and accomplished many successes throughout the following decade. By 1988, a total of 99 Salvadoran and 23 Belizean families had settled in the valley.[429] In 1989, the Department of Immigration and Nationality reported that the "overall and specific objectives of the project had been accomplished."[430] To measure the success of the Valley of Peace project, Department officials stated that "122 recognized families had been settled, a school and health center established, water supply set up and feeder and access roads constructed."[431] Certainly, the rights to the school, health care center, infrastructure, and land stood as strong examples of material benefits to Salvadoran refugees, as well as some Belizean families.

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[428] The Government of Belize and The UNHCR, "Report on a Workshop on Refugees in Belize Held at the Belmopan Convention Hotel on Thursday, October 22, 1987," October 22, 1987, ASR 1539 Box 116, Belize Archives and Records Services.

[429] Department of Immigration and Nationality of Belize and Ministry of Foreign Affair of Belize, "Report and Refugee Affected Areas of Belize: Diagnosis and Strategies for Durable Solutions" (Belmopan, Belize, January 28, 1989), 16.

[430] Department of Immigration and Nationality of Belize and Ministry of Foreign Affair of Belize, 16.

[431] Department of Immigration and Nationality of Belize and Ministry of Foreign Affair of Belize, 16.

However, difficulties continued for the settlement project. For example, by 1989, there were reportedly 48 unrecognized "squatter families" in the Valley of Peace. These so-called squatters, which constituted 1/3 of the people living there, were not legally granted land and resources by the government. Furthermore, the settlement had not met the desired goal of 50% Belizean families.[432] The reasons for this disparity was that although living conditions were improving over time, the standards were understood as being lower than the levels that Belizeans were otherwise accustomed. Additionally, the Valley of Peace was far removed from urban centers, unintentionally isolating the settlement.[433] There was also concern around the use of the land for agriculture. The land was considered to be under-utilized due to issues like climate and training. This led many of the valley's settlers to enter at least part-time into wage labor. Even with these challenges facing the community, it nevertheless was able to generate income at approximately the national average.[434]

Rising Xenophobia and Fears of the Latinization of Creole Nation

Even though government policies explicitly intended integration to assuage fear and anger toward Salvadoran refugees, the discourse of "Latinization" continued to persist among some sectors of Belizean society.[435] Throughout the 1980s, there were many examples of fear mongering in the Belizean press by nationalists calling to protect Belizean

[432] Department of Immigration and Nationality of Belize and Ministry of Foreign Affair of Belize, 16.
[433] Department of Immigration and Nationality of Belize and Ministry of Foreign Affair of Belize, 16.
[434] Department of Immigration and Nationality of Belize and Ministry of Foreign Affair of Belize, 16.
[435] Torres, Marisol Hernandez, "Refugiados Salvadoreños En Belice: En Busca de Un Lugar En La Historia" (Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, 2013), 54-73; Joseph O. Palacio, "Illegal Aliens in Belize: Findings from the 1984 Amnesty1," *Center for Migration Studies Special Issues* 6, no. 2 (1988): 160.

heritage against the invasion of "illegal aliens."[436] Critics blamed the government for trying to "Latinize" Belize, by allowing so many Central American refugees. Furthermore, their discourse associated refugees and migrants with a rise in crimes—including murder, armed robbery, and drug trafficking.[437] They also claimed that unscreened refugees and migrants could and would spread communicable diseases. Such xenophobic attitudes remained in the media throughout the decade. For example, a 1987 Caribbean News Agency (CANA) article reported that residents of Orange Walk, a town located in interior Belize yet relatively close to the border with Guatemala, complained that "the jungle area in the northern region of Belize is infested with aliens." The Police Commissioner Maxwell Samuels of consisting of "illegal aliens coming into Belize from Guatemala, Honduras, and [El] Salvador." The article also alleged that "illegal" Salvadoran and Guatemalans were responsible for recent kidnappings and violent attacks.[438]

In November 1983, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense and Home affairs, C.L.B. Rogers met with a group of 31 religious leaders from the Anglican Council of North America and the Caribbean in Belize City to discuss Belize's refugee policy. Minister Rogers informed them about the Valley of Peace project, which he described as "the ongoing project…where some 12,000 acres of land have been provided by the Government of Belize to be used by refugee and Belizean families in farming ventures."[439] On the

[436] Joseph O. Palacio, "Illegal Aliens in Belize: Findings from the 1984 Amnesty1," *Center for Migration Studies Special Issues* 6, no. 2 (1988): 160.

[437] "Enforcement of Immigration Laws to be Tightened," *Bridgetown CANA*, April 27, 84; "FOREIGN MINISTER COMMENTS ON ALIENS," *Bridgetown CANA*, January 31, 1987; "FORMER PRIME MINISTER CLAIMS RIGHT TO USE MEDIA."

[438] "FOREIGN MINISTER COMMENTS ON ALIENS."

[439] "ROGERS DISCUSSES NATIONAL REFUGEE POLICY," *Belize City Domestic Service*, November 2, 1983.

nation's refugee policy, Rogers stated the members of the Anglican Council that "one race will not be favored at the expense of another race or group. And that a conscious effort must be taken to integrate the refugees into the wider society."[440] He went on to assure that a major goal of the settlement projects was the "assimilation and acculturation of the refugees."[441] The audience is key to contextualizing these remarks. Rogers was assuaging potential concerns that Anglican officials may have over the incoming Central American refugees, who were largely Catholic, and distinctly not Anglican. Beyond fears that the Belizean nation might "Hispanicize" or "Catholicize," was likely the common concerns that Belizean nationals are being overlooked in favor of refugees in terms of government provided services. Roger's meeting with the Council demonstrates the government's awareness of these complex set of concerns, while selling the resettlement projects, like the Valley of Peace, as a viable solutions for the refugee crisis.

Regardless of such attempts to assuage fears about the influx of refugees, xenophobic attitudes continued to gain traction among the public and government officials. In response to these concerns, the Belizean police conducted a "round up" of "illegals for deportation" in February of 1984.[442] CANA reported that the policed "deported 19 of 70 Latin Americans, mostly Salvadorans, rounded up and charged them with illegally entering this country or failing to register as aliens."[443] Importantly, the article also stated that "the success of the roundup will determine the scope of future operations illegal aliens…"[444] Government officials found this tactic to be an appealing option, as two months later the

[440] "ROGERS DISCUSSES NATIONAL REFUGEE POLICY."
[441] "ROGERS DISCUSSES NATIONAL REFUGEE POLICY."
[442] "POLICE ROUND UP ILLEGALS FOR DEPORTATION."
[443] "POLICE ROUND UP ILLEGALS FOR DEPORTATION."
[444] "POLICE ROUND UP ILLEGALS FOR DEPORTATION."

government announced it would more strictly enforce immigration regulations.[445] The new policies were however more complex than just carrying out more "roundups" and deportations. Rather, government announced an Amnesty plan.

In April 1984, the Minister of Home Affairs responded to this rising xenophobic sentiments with an Amnesty plan that would allow that unauthorized migrants already in the country would have the opportunity to register with the government without negative repercussions. Unauthorized migrants had from May 1 to July 31, 1984 to apply.[446] The police department was tasked with the registration process, which was extended through September. Approximately 2351 Salvadorans registered with the government during this period.[447] The 1984 Amnesty plan was a balancing act for the government. On the one hand, the motivation behind the plan was "curbing crime and other socioeconomic ill effects linked to the inflow of refugees and illegal aliens."[448] While the sweeping offer of amnesty to thousands of Salvadorans and Guatemalans was a potentially generous move, the discourse around the law's implementation further enforced the idea that Salvadoran refugees brought "an increase in the number of brutal murders and robberies" as well as "sophisticated schemes for the storage and export of marijuana.[449]

Amnesty, the government decided, was the surest way to deal with the issue of illegality—while allowing the government to maintain a humanitarian position and

[445]"POLICE ROUND UP ILLEGALS FOR DEPORTATION."

[446] Joseph O. Palacio, "Illegal Aliens in Belize: Findings from the 1984 Amnesty1," *Center for Migration Studies Special Issues* 6, no. 2 (1988): 160.

[447] Joseph O. Palacio, "Illegal Aliens in Belize: Findings from the 1984 Amnesty1," *Center for Migration Studies Special Issues* 6, no. 2 (1988): 174.

[448] Enforcement of Immigration Laws to be Tightened," *Bridgetown CANA*, April 27, 84.

[449] Enforcement of Immigration Laws to be Tightened," *Bridgetown CANA*, April 27, 84.

juxtaposing itself against other Central American countries.[450] Through this amnesty program, just as in its emphasis on 'integration' as a key goal of resettlement, the Belizean government demonstrated its commitment be "humanitarian and generous" toward refugees while still facing the reality of internal pressures and severe limits on economic resources.[451] Such a plan granted the government of Belize the ability to define itself in opposition to other Central American governments.

In September 1984, the Belizean people voted Manuel Esquivel of the center-right United Democratic Party (UDP) as the new Prime Minister. Thus, the PUP no longer headed the government. Between 1980 and 1984, PUP officials had tried to strike a balance between assisting refugees and addressing the rising tide of public concerns about foreigners. While Price's Cabinet had promoted refugee resettlement projects and integration it also conducted "roundups" and echoed criminalizing discourse about Salvadorans and Guatemalans. Over the next five years, the new UDP Cabinet under Prime minister Manuel Esquivel continued the trend of tightening and enforcing restrictions on refugees and immigrants.

In January 1987, CANA reported that Belizean officials has ordered the deportation of 117 people. According to the news source, of those deported, there were 64 Guatemalans, 35 Salvadorans, 11 Mexicans and seven Hondurans. This deportation order had been part of a "major crackdown on illegal immigrants" in the Orange Walk area. Following this event, Foreign Affairs and Immigration Minister Dean Barrow announced in

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[450] Joseph O. Palacio, "Illegal Aliens in Belize: Findings from the 1984 Amnesty1," *Center for Migration Studies Special Issues* 6, no. 2 (1988): 160.

[451]The UNHCR and The Belize Refugee Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "A Report on Refugee Law and Policy Workshop" (San Pedro, Belize, April 27, 1992), ASR 478 Box 38, Belize Archives and Records Services, 2.

a CANA interview "the round-up was triggered by the separate kidnappings last week of a cane farmer and businessman by Guatemalan and Salvadoran nationals."[452] Barrow also announced his plans to streamline immigration law. Minister Barrow stated "as the law now stands, illegal aliens who are registered but not properly documented as permanent residents, can take advantage of the law by appealing to the Supreme Court against deportation."[453] In this interview, Barrow justifies the strict refugee and immigration policies by associated Guatemalan and Salvadorans with crime on the one hand and stating that they are "taking advantage" of the laws on the other.

Barrow indicated the severity with which he views the subject by claiming that "the illegal immigration situation is one of national security overweighting the humanitarian considerations."[454] With this statement, the Foreign Affairs and Immigration Minister acknowledges that refugees are fleeing dangerous conditions in their homelands but believes that "national security" was more important to the Belizean government.

In June of that same year, CANA reported that the government of Belize is "putting the brakes" on refugee entry. Furthermore, unnamed sources told the paper that the government "no longer want[ed] the presence of the UNHCR in Belize." and "unwilling to ratify the UN Convention on Refugees and related accords. As the UN Convention on Refugees was founded on the principle of *non-refoulement*, signing the international agreement would prevent Belize from returning Salvadoran refugees to El Salvador.[455] The article also alleged that Minister Dean Barrow had been instrumental in designing these

[452] "FOREIGN MINISTER COMMENTS ON ALIENS."
[453] "FOREIGN MINISTER COMMENTS ON ALIENS."
[454] "FOREIGN MINISTER COMMENTS ON ALIENS."
[455] "1,000 More People Granted Refugee Status," *Bridgetown CANA*, November 18, 1988, Government 'Putting Brakes' on Refugee Entry," Bridgetown CANA, June 8, 1987.

potential new policies. The severity of these proposed policies did not come to fruition under Prime Minister Esquivel's Cabinet, as the UNHCR continued to operate in Belize and the government of Belize eventually signed the UN Convention on Refugees, albeit under a PUP ministry in 1990.

Critiquing Central American Neighbors: Belizean Refugee Policies on the World Stage

In a somewhat ironic turn of events, the subject of Belizean refugees policy—a topic that divides internal Belizean politics—was used on the world stage by the UDP Cabinet to critique the other Central American nations in an address to the Inter-Parliamentary Meeting between Mexico and Belize held in August 1987, Belizean Minister of State Samuel Rhaburn (UDP) delivered a scathing critique of the refugee-producing nation-states of Central America.

> For us in Belize, it is ironic that the nations who promote warfare and civil strife in the region are the very ones who are refusing to accept these refugees. This so, notwithstanding the fact that they signed the UN conventions and protocols and contribute to the UNHCR funds. Most of the countries of the region have democratic governments, we are told, yet they seem to be following the path of the repressive military regimes of the past. There is little regard for human rights and civil liberties, and as for social justice it seems to be in many quarters a luxury. As a result, the refugee problem is being perpetrated. I said for Belize it is ironic that warfare, civil strife, violation of human rights, civil liberties and the denial of social justice are evils that affect a region of which we are a part. This is said because our people have expectations of their own and this government is committed to ensure that those expectations are realized. Our people are entitled to live decent and dignified lives. The question we need to ask is how long will this madness continue?[456]

[456] "Report on the Proceedings of the First Inter-Parliamentary Meeting Mexico-Belize, Belmopan 17th-20th August, 1987," 1987, ASR 431 Box 36, Belize Archives and Records Services, 9.

Denouncing the region's other governments for perpetuating civil wars, violating human rights, and rejecting refugees, his piercing assessment that "the nations who promote warfare and civil strife in the region are the very ones who are refusing to accept these refugees" clearly referred to Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. At the same time, this speech address before an international forum positioned Belize as a peaceful and generous nation with a commitment to humanitarianism and human rights. Rhaburn thus juxtaposed the values of the newly independent nation of Belize against the hypocrisy and brutality of other governments in the region.

In the same speech Minister Rhaburn also expressed the nation's commitment to distinctly post-colonial vision of human rights by explicitly challenging the treatment of the region's refugees, particularly in regard to referring to them as economic migrants as a way to deny their refugeehood. He argued to the international community that the UNHCR definition of "refugee" (person with a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group) was not sufficient for tackling the migration crisis in Central America. He described "the true situation" as one in which the definition of *refugee* is expanded to include economic migrant. Minister Rhaburn then declared that "Based on this expanded definition the number of refugees in Belize is, conservatively speaking, ten times as high."[457] What the remarks above indicate is that from the perspective of the Belizean state, the distinction between "refugee" and "economic migrant" was meaningless in practice. The reality of the situation in their country and the situation in the region—as a result of the civil wars—

[457] "Report on the Proceedings of the First Inter-Parliamentary Meeting Mexico-Belize, Belmopan 17th-20th August, 1987, 9."

transcended this subjective distinction. But at the same time, Minister Rhaburn himself expressed his frustration with the unequal burden Belize had been undertaking for years and described how Belize's principled commitment to refugees and the migration crisis confronted the nation with urgent social and economic challenges. Recognizing the malleability of the meaning of *refugee*, the Belizean government encouraged others in Central America to expand their definitions.

Following the damning question of "how long will this madness continue?"[458] Minister Rhaburn asked "How long will we be able to accommodate these unfortunate people from the South. Can this government continue to deprive our nationals of the level of services to which they are entitled so as to facilitate those driven out of their country by their own Governments? Our people have said enough is enough and cannot ignore their desperate pleas."[459] Employing equally vivid language to describe a deteriorating situation for Belizean nations, Minister Rhaburn claims that in caring for Central American refugees, the government has inadvertently "deprived" its citizens of a higher level of social services. Rhaburn was a representative UDP, the center-conservative party, who more likely to traffic in nationalist rhetoric. Importantly, his speech does not demonize refugees with explicit xenophobic discourse; however, the language is nationalistic in its praise of Belize and condemnation of Central American wars and responses to the refugees of those wars. Although it highlights Belize's humanitarian achievements, it pleads for others in international community to take on the "burden."

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[458] Report on the Proceedings of the First Inter-Parliamentary Meeting Mexico-Belize, Belmopan 17th-20th August, 1987," 1987, ASR 431 Box 36, Belize Archives and Records Services, 9.

[459] "Report on the Proceedings of the First Inter-Parliamentary Meeting Mexico-Belize, Belmopan 17th-20th August, 1987," 1987, ASR 431 Box 36, Belize Archives and Records Services, 9.

Minister Rhaburn's speech highlights more similarities than difference between the PUP and UDP approaches to refugee policies. Both rely on a nationalistic discourse that depicts Belize as humanitarian and extraordinarily generous in comparison to the other Central American nations, while simultaneously imploring others to do more because Belize had done enough. Indeed, while there were increased deportations under the UDP government, more refugees continued to be recognized. In November 1988 the government granted 1,000 people refugee status. According to UNHCR officials, 700 of those granted refugee status were from El Salvador. The others were primarily from Nicaragua and Ghana. The PUP government proved to be far more interested in working with international agencies to continue refugee assistance and integration efforts, requesting 8 million U.S. dollars from the UN Development Programme.[460]

In May 1989 representatives of the Central American nations and NGOs came together through CIREFCA (International Conference on Central American Refugees) in Antigua, Guatemala to strategize how to better address the Central American refugee problem. During this process the representatives of the government of Belize sought to development-oriented programs that would benefit both refugees and Belizean nationals. During a 1990 CIREFCA follow up meeting, Belizean officials presented nine proposals for the development of their refugee projects that must address the concerns of Belizean nationals, regarding health care, education, and infrastructure. As such, the two projects

[460] "1,000 More People Granted Refugee Status," *Bridgetown CANA*, November 18, 1988.

that received funding reinforced social services, promoted productive and income-generating opportunities and improved infrastructure for refugees and nationals.[461]

Following an election, George Price returned to the seat of Prime Minister in September 1989. Nine years after his Cabinet first debated how to respond to Salvadoran refugees, the Belizean government was still contending with how to respond to incoming refugees. Between the first CIREFACA meeting in 1989 and the peace accords in 1992 that officially marked the end of the Salvadoran Civil War, the government of Belize under George Price's PUP, continued to request aid from the UNHCR. In 1990, Foreign Minister Said Musa (who would become Prime Minister in 1998) delivered an address to the UN General Assembly in which he decried that the Central American refugee crisis constituted "a humanitarian problem of herculean magnitude." Requesting more help from the international community, Minister Musa claimed thousands of refugees continued to enter Belize "in search of peace and hope for a better life." In 1991, Belize would officially became a signatory of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, when it passed the Refugee Act that also established the Refugees Office.[462] However, it had met its standards throughout the previous decade, having adopted one of the most open stances on refugees

In May 1992, three months after the signing of the Peace Accords, CANA reported that the first group of refugees repatriated from Belize to El Salvador. This particular group consisted of 19 people, but the UNHCR reported that 200 people had applied. However, it soon became evident to the refugees, the government, and the UNHCR that most

[461] Government of Belize, "International Conference on Central America (CIREFCA) Preparation Meeting, 4."

[462] Department of Immigration and Nationality of Belize and Ministry of Foreign Affair of Belize, "Report and Refugee Affected Areas of Belize: Diagnosis and Strategies for Durable Solutions, 18;" The Government of Belize and The UNHCR, "Report on a Workshop on Refugees in Belize Held at the Belmopan Convention Hotel on Thursday, October 22, 1987, 1."

Salvadorans were choosing to remain in Belize—perceived as offering both greater physical security and economic opportunity than their homeland—rather than repatriate to El Salvador.[463] A report by Belize's newly established Refugees Office and the UNHCR, claimed that Salvadoran refugees were still straining the nation's precariously funded social safety net."[464] Continuing to struggle to balance the perceived negative economic and cultural impact of the refugee influx with their desire to maintain a generous policy towards Salvadorans, the Belizean government would subsequently seek to address this problem and assuage the fears of the Belizean public by deepening its commitment to the 'integration' through rules that any refugee programs must benefit members of the Belizean population—whether through employment, access to land, or improved infrastructure.[465] They would nonetheless continue to attempt to carry out generous and humanitarian refugee policy in the face of significant economic and political limitations.

Due in part to their ongoing commitment to these comparatively open and generous refugee policies, Salvadorans have been able to build new and safe communities in Belize. In the decades following its creation, the population of the Valley of Peace has continued to grow. There are currently 2,000 members and it is the largest refugee community in Belize. Furthermore, in recent years, the Valley of Peace has once again become a site of refuge, as it has welcomed unaccompanied youth fleeing violence in El Salvador.[466] Thus, the struggle

[463] Perriot-Marrith, Santos, and Topsey, "Report on the Contribution of Refugees and Central American Immigrants in Belize, Central America, 49;" Government of Belize, "International Conference on Central America (CIREFCA) Preparation Meeting, 1."

[464] The Government of Belize and The UNHCR, "Report on a Workshop on Refugees in Belize Held at the Belmopan Convention Hotel on Thursday, October 22, 1987, 4."

[465] Government of Belize, "International Conference on Central America (CIREFCA) Preparation Meeting, 1."

[466] "UNHCR - Salvadorans Fleeing Street Gangs Find Safety in Belize Village," accessed September 24, 2019, https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/stories/2017/7/5968a2224/salvadorans-fleeing-street-gangs-find-safety-belize-village.html.

during the 1980s among Belizean public and government to reconcile their humanitarian desires with competing concepts of Belizean nationhood created a relatively generous and safe environment for Salvadoran refugees to lay long-term roots from which a new community could bloom.

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This chapter has demonstrated that the set of historical circumstances and considerations that shaped Belizean refugee policies throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s were complex and contradictory. The legacy of parliamentary government and a relatively diverse demographic influenced Belize's mostly open and generous response to Salvaodran refugees. Importantly, the arrival of Salvadoran refugees coincided with Belizean independence from the British. This timing allowed Belizean government officials the opportunity to define its malleable nationhood in contrast to other Central American nations, which it depicted as countries with violent and authoritarian governments. The most progressive policies it implemented were the refugee resettlement projects, like the Valley of Peace and Las Flores, which encouraged "integration" by creating communities with a mixture of Salvadoran and Belizean families. However, a rise in xenophobic discourse that criminalized Salvadorans, fears of "Latinization" in an imagined Creole nation inflamed by the ongoing dispute with Guatemala, and the government's consistent struggle over its ability to continue accommodating Salvadoran refugees without depriving its native-born population of rights and benefits, led to the occasional tightening of immigration restrictions. Such tightening of restrictions resulted in the practice of "roundups" and deportations. Belizean refugee policies were obviously far less restrictive

than other non-signatory nations, such as Honduras and Guatemala. However, many of their policies were more open and generous than even the signatory nations of Panama and Costa Rica. The establishment of agriculturally based refugee resettlement communities makes the closest comparison to the refugee policies in Nicaragua under the Sandinistas. From the early 1980s into the 1990s, like the other Central American nations, Belize would continue to struggle to resolve the tensions between its political values and geopolitical goals and the domestic limitations on its ability to care for a large refugee population.

CONCLUSION

In its five chapters, this dissertation analyzes and compares the different responses of the governments of Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, and Belize to the hundreds of thousands of Salvadoran refugees that entered their territories during the Salvadoran Civil War.[467] Making use of government documents, international organizational reports, newspaper articles, and refugee accounts, it reveals that Salvadoran refugees represented, to varying degrees, both a problem and an opportunity for the region's governments. Guided by pragmatism as much as by humanitarianism, and responding to their own unique political, economic and social contexts, Central American governments found ways to convert Salvadoran refugees into tools of the state through which they pursued a range of national and international policy goals during the late Cold War era.[468]

The contrasting refugee policies of the Honduran and Nicaraguan governments vividly exemplify this dynamic. When thousands of Salvadorans began entering Honduran territory as early as 1979, the government responded by forcing them into closed, military-surveilled camps, where refugees faced harassment, sexual assault, and military incursions throughout the following decade. This dissertation has revealed that that the

[467] Nora Hamilton and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, "Central American Migration: A Framework for Analysis," *Latin American Research Review* 26, no. 1 (1991): 75–110; María Cristina García, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

[468] Gil Loescher, *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America's Half-Open Door, 1945 to the Present* (New York : London: Free Press ; Collier Macmillan, 1986). ; Carl J. Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate: The United States and Refugees during the Cold War*, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Yen Le Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(Es)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

Honduran state implemented these repressive policies largely in response to pressure from the United States, which used Honduran territory as a staging ground for its military maneuvers in the bordering nations of El Salvador and Nicaragua throughout the 1980s. Moreover, even though Honduras had a long history of tense relations with its neighbor El Salvador, the U.S.-backed Honduran government chose to cooperate with the U.S.-backed Salvadoran government in carrying out joint military actions along the border region, including violent incursions on refugee camps. The arrival of tens of thousands of Salvadoran refugees thus posed a significant problem for the Honduran state, which the government chose to resolve in ways that prioritized the maintenance of its precarious relations with El Salvador and the United States over the wellbeing of refugees.[469]

In sharp contrast, Nicaragua, having just experienced the leftist Sandinista Revolution in 1979, implemented comparatively open and generous policies toward thousands of Salvadoran refugees. However, this dissertation has argued that the Sandinista government did so not strictly out of altruism. Rather, it has demonstrated that the Sandinistas viewed refugee policy as a way of making a symbolic statement. Recognizing Salvadorans as refugees of violent persecution condemned Salvadoran human rights violations and US intervention in Central America. At the same time, they also sought to make use of refugees to as address domestic concerns around land and labor. The FSLN furthered a key part of their revolutionary agenda—agrarian reform—through the integration of Salvadoran refugees into agricultural cooperatives on expropriated and redistributed land.[470] Thus, where the refugee crisis was primarily a problem for the

[469] Todd, *Beyond Displacement*.
[470] Enríquez, *Harvesting Change*.

Honduran government, it largely represented an opportunity for the new Sandinista regime in Nicaragua, which was able, with some degree of success, to turn its refugee policy into a tool of revolutionary nation-building.

On the other hand, a comparison of Panama and Costa Rica's highly measured refugee policies reveals how the interplay between national histories and identities and geopolitical and economic fears shaped their similar responses to displaced Salvadorans. Chapter 3 argued that national myths of exceptionalism, Costa Rican refugee policies were shaped by the nation's exceptionalist national identity, the desire for neutrality in Cold War regional conflicts, and economic crisis led to ambivalent, shifting, and contradictory refugee policies. The complex political culture that imagined Costa Rica as a uniquely democratic nation with a strong commitment to human rights, also fostered a tradition of xenophobia that viewed immigrants as a threat to the nation's standard of living. The poorly performing economy exacerbated this anti-immigrant tradition, leading to the scapegoating of Central American refugees and exerting pressure on the government to restrict the continued admission of asylum seekers. Simultaneously, despite the government's professed desire to maintain neutrality among Cold War Central American conflicts, Costa Rican officials would adopt policies throughout the 1980s that implicitly favored Nicaraguans with right-leaning politics over those Salvadorans with leftist sympathies. The tensions between Costa Rica's commitment to democracy and human rights, its foreign policy objectives, and its tense economic and social context, would test the sincerity of the nation's commitment to a humane and inclusive refugee policy. Ultimately, Costa Rica implemented an approach that welcomed a few at the expense of many more.

As was the case in Costa Rica, Panama's highly selective refugee policy emerged from the entangled geopolitical and domestic concerns of a state that was simultaneously seeking to assert its commitment to refugees, condemn U.S. imperialism in Central America, and perform economic modernity during the early 1980s. Under General Omar Torrijos, the Panamanian government decided to offer a precisely calculated level of generosity to a strictly limited number of officially recognized refugees. But rather than a strictly humanitarian gesture, this dissertation argues that the Torrijos regime saw refugee policy as an arena in which they could continue to strategically assert the commitment to nationalism, national sovereignty and anti-imperialism upon which their domestic popularity rested. Through the admission of a small, carefully curated group of mainly refugee mothers and children, which were then settled along the nation's "backward" Atlantic coast, the Panamanian government seized an opportunity to criticize U.S. foreign policy and its impact on Salvadoran families. Similar to what the Sandinistas did in Nicaragua—although on a much smaller scale—the Panamanian government attempted to highlight its humanitarian commitments while advancing its aspirations toward economic modernity through General Torrijos's plan for land development.[471]

Finally, this dissertation has reconstructed and analyzed the complex and sometimes contradictory logic underlying the uniquely generous refugee policy of the tiny, newly independent and still relatively economically underdeveloped nation of Belize. Chapter Five demonstrates how Belize's distinct cultural identity and political tradition, and in particular its experience as a former British colony, are crucial to understanding in

[471] Lachman, "Los Refugiados En Panama"; Moncado, "El Refugiado y Su Regimen Legal En Panama"; Phillipps Collazos, *Labor and Politics in Panama*; De La Cruz, "Ciudad Romero.".

shaping its response to Salvadoran refugees. Having just formally declared its independence from Britain in 1981, Belizean officials endeavored to utilize the refugee crisis as an opportunity to assert a distinct national identity that nonetheless built upon their sense of identification with British parliamentary democracy and individual rights. At the same time, the former colony sought to assert a distinctly post-colonial commitment to social justice. Juxtaposing itself with others in the region by not only professing its respect for human rights, but also by acting in line with its stated values, Belize made use of its generous refugee policies in order to frame itself as a certain type of nation. However, as was the case in other Central American nations, tensions between leaders' commitment to human rights and the economic realities of the 1980s also shaped Belize's refugee policy.

Filling the Gaps: Trajectory of Future Research

As mentioned in the introduction, this dissertation omits the history of the Guatemalan responses to over 70,000 Salvadorans who entered the country in the 1980s. With over twice the number of Salvadorans in Honduras, this was by far the largest number of Salvadoran entrants in another Central America country. However, contemporary observers of this phenomenon described Guatemala as a "transit route" for Salvadoran refugees. The military dictatorship created the hostile conditions, characterized by state-sponsored harassment and violence, which pushed Salvadorans to continue their journey to Belize, the United States, and/or Canada alongside Guatemalan refugees. The government's stance on the issue was "*No hay éxodo de salvadoreños hacia Guatemala*" (There is not an exodus of Salvadorans toward Guatemala), as reported in the 1980 *Prensa Libre* article that described how Ministry of Migration denied the existence of a mass

exodus due to political violence in El Salvador.[472] Instead, Guatemalan government officials claimed Salvadorans were "economic migrants" passing through Guatemala on the way to the United States in "normal" numbers. In this way, the Guatemalan government's response to Salvadorans reflected the U.S. response to Salvadorans and Guatemalans at the time, as the United States also denied their asylum claims and instead determined they were "economic migrants."

In future iterations of this research I plan to examine how the tumultuous geopolitical and domestic state of Guatemala in the 1980s relates to this hostile response. Like El Salvador, Guatemala was also in the midst of its own violent civil war. Considered the longest civil war in the history of the Americas, the Guatemalan civil war began in 1960 and did not officially end until 1996. The origins of the Guatemalan civil war date back to the colonial era and its legacies of racism, coercive labor, and political violence.[473] Because of the conditions facing Salvadorans in Guatemala in the 1980s, the archival documentation is quite limited. Recognizing these constraints as I develop this line of research further, I intend to grapple with these histories silenced in the archives by using a methodology that reads the silences on the one hand and the public discourse on the other.

After enduring years of threats of forced repatriation to El Salvador, many Salvadoran refugee communities living in Honduras decided to organize for voluntary mass repatriation in the final years of the decade. Although some voluntary repatriations occurred as early as 1987, it was in 1989 that most Salvadoran communities collectively

[472] "No hay éxodo de salvadoreños hacia Guatemala," *Prensa Libre*, May 28, 1980, Biblioteca Nacional de Guatemala.

[473] Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre Latin America in the Cold War*, Updated ed. (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Greg Grandin, *Who Is Rigoberta Menchú?* (London ; New York: Verso, 2011).

decided that the time to return had come. However, process to return was challenging due to the continued hostility of the Salvadoran government. Refugee communities had to fight for the right to a safe return, by pressuring the UNHCR to step in and force the Salvadoran government to commit to their safety. These voluntary mass repatriations of entire refugee communities from Honduras to El Salvador constituted some of the largest repatriations in Latin American history. Upon receiving news of these from repatriated comrades, Salvadorans refugees from Panama's Ciudad Romero and from the various agricultural collectives in Nicaragua were inspired to organize their own community repatriations beginning in 1990.

That same year the government and FMLN entered peace negotiations overseen by the UN. The parties signed the Chapultepec Peace Accords on January 16, 1992, bringing an official end to twelve year conflict. By this time, tens of thousands of Salvadorans had repatriated from Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama and established new communities in El Salvador. Even after the war officially ended, however, Salvadoran communities in Costa Rica and Belize chose to remain and forge more permanent communities in their host countries, as they felt they enjoyed higher standards of living and better economic opportunities there. The finer details of these histories of repatriation and re-establishing communities are deserving of scholarly attention. And I anticipate expanding my discussions of the voluntary mass repatriations in future research.

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Regardless of the peace agreement, the war had permanently altered migration patterns from Salvadorans. Prior to the war, migration had been regional labor-based

movement structured by seasonal harvests. Following the war, however, Salvadoran migration northward became more permanent in nature.[474] In El Salvador, political instability, economic hardships, and violence continued throughout the 1990s alongside the rise of transnational gangs. In the United States, many of the young and undocumented Salvadorans who had arrived in Los Angeles in the 1980s faced poverty, racism, and disenfranchisement and were the targets of existing American gangs.[475] What had started as an attempt to protect themselves quickly warped into a unique and violent gang culture. These gangs were made transnational, spreading through many parts of Central America, only when the U.S. government began deporting thousands of gang members in the 1990s.[476] In the decades that followed, Salvadoran migration, like that of Honduras and Guatemala, continue to respond to the economic, social, and political legacies of the violence and destruction of U.S.-funded conflicts in the region during the 1980s. It is these forces that drive the survival migration of Salvadorans northward to Mexico, the United States, and Canada today.[477]

Understanding the complexities of these histories remains critical as the U.S., Mexican, and Central American governments continue to carry out violently exclusionary

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[474] Hamilton and Chinchilla, "Central American Migration."

[475] Susan Bibler Coutin, "Falling Outside: Excavating the History of Central American Asylum Seekers," *Law & Social Inquiry* 36, no. 3 (July 1, 2011): 569–96; Elana Zilberg, *Space of Detention: The Making of a Transnational Gang Crisis between Los Angeles and San Salvador* (Durham [N.C: Duke University Press, 2011); Deborah Levenson-Estrada, *Adiós Niño: The Gangs of Guatemala City and the Politics of Death* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2013); Cecilia Menjívar and Andrea Gómez Cervantes, "El Salvador: Civil War, Natural Disasters, and Gang Violence Drive Migration," migrationpolicy.org, August 27, 2018, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/el-salvador-civil-war-natural-disasters-and-gang-violence-drive-migration.

[476] Zilberg, *Space of Detention*.

[477] Alexander Betts, *Survival Migration: Failed Governance and the Crisis of Displacement* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013); Cervantes, "El Salvador."

policies toward Central American asylum-seekers in the present moment. Indeed, the study of the mass displacement caused by the Salvadoran Civil War has immediate connections to crises facing Central American migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers today.[478] Between 2018 and 2020, the U.S. media and politicians have depicted Central Americans migrant caravans as forces invading the United States. In addition to being hyperbolic and xenophobic, these narratives also imagine the United States as the singular, highly coveted destination for all Central American migrants. This in turn, reinforces the common notion that Central Americans did and do migrate directly and only to the United States. As this dissertation has revealed, this is simply not true.

This dissertation sheds new light on the complex calculations which shaped neighboring states' responses to Salvadorans who fled their homelands in the 1980s. In doing so, it reveals the multiple ways that these states—like others around the world—have long attempted to deploy refugee communities in pursuit of their own international and domestic political objectives. Much research still needs to be done in order to more fully document and account for the diverse experiences of displaced Salvadorans over the past forty years. However, by taking a first step in that direction, this dissertation contributes emerging scholarship seeking to make more visible both Central America and the experiences of Central American migrants within the fields of migration history, critical refugee studies and Latin American history.

[478]Cecilia Menjívar and Andrea Gómez Cervantes, "El Salvador: Civil War, Natural Disasters, and Gang Violence Drive Migration," migrationpolicy.org, August 27, 2018, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/el-salvador-civil-war-natural-disasters-and-gang-violence-drive-migration.

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