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La Siguanaba Haunts With Bravery and Doubts:
Second-Generation Salvadoran Women

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Masters of Arts

in

Anthropology

by

Mirna I. Carrillo

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2011

The Thesis of Mirna I. Carrillo is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California, San Diego

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

La Siguanaba Haunts With Bravery and Doubts:
Second-Generation Salvadoran Women

by

Mirna I. Carrillo

Master of Arts in Anthropology

University of California, San Diego, 2011

Professor David Pedersen, Chair

This ethnography applies the monstrosity and power of La Siguanaba as a methodological and epistemological tool to map the development and politicization of Salvadoran transnational identity as experienced by three second-generation women who grew up in Los Angeles County, attend the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), and are members of a Salvadoran based student organization. There are two main focal points featured in the text. Firstly, I posit that the process of forced racial formation endured within the United States is one of the factors inciting the particular

kind of discourse about Salvadoran-ness among these second-generation women. It is a racial formation based on exclusion from mainstream U.S. society, especially as inhabitants of ghettos and barrios. This exclusion is positioned against what these women experience as the idea of inclusion in a Salvadoran homeland and nation. For these women, Salvadoran identity becomes about mediating diasporic displacement from El Salvador with the realities of local contexts. Secondly, I address the transformation of the title researcher through the activity of concurrently *Being* ethnographer and subject of study. As a self-identified Salvadoran women, the formal interviews and multiple informal interactions between myself and the three women developed into a complex reciprocal process of discussing issues and theories related to Salvadoran transnational identity and simultaneously conceptualizing that identity through praxis. The integration of researcher and researched into one became an important beginning point to expand the boundaries of ethnography. It allowed the possibility to think of ethnography as also being a form of action research. More significantly, in this case, it allowed for the opportunity to think of doing ethnographic action research by, from and for the margins. This implies that the knowledge produced as part of this ethnography may hold value not only to an academic institution but also to the community of inquiry.

La Siguanaba Haunts with Bravery and Doubts: Second-Generation Salvadoran Women

Introductory Encounter with La Siguanaba

“No one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than starting-points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind...No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness...Survival is in fact about the connections between things.”¹

La Siguanaba is a popular character in Salvadoran folklore. According to legend, La Siguanaba was a Pipil woman named Sihuehet, Nahuatl for beautiful woman.² Sihuehet had an affair with a son of the god Tlaloc. A son named Cipitio was conceived from their amorous affair. Sihuehet, however, was a neglectful mother more preoccupied with caring for her lover than her son. Consequently, Tlaloc cursed her. He transformed Sihuehet into a monstrous woman, renamed her Sihuanaba - Nahuatl for horrendous woman-, and forced her to roam around rivers and the countryside haunting men and looking for her son.

Rumors and stories of La Siguanaba's existence and hauntings persist till this day. She is believed to be a tall woman with long hair, long nails, and huge breasts. At first sight, she appears to be mesmerizingly beautiful in order to lure her victims. But, upon closer inspection she reveals her true self, a frighteningly ugly monstrosity. The fright caused by her appearance can lead to insanity and sometimes death. Her hauntings happen at nighttime and all night travelers are at risk. However, La Siguanaba is especially interested in luring adulterous and lecherous men. Carrying a cross or a medallion with Christian insignia is believed to protect one from

encountering La Siguanaba.³ This preventative measure falls in line with a predominantly Christian population.⁴

In El Salvador where indigenous languages, concepts, and people are erased through the myth of their absence in present-day, the readily accessible image of the indigenous woman -La Siguanaba -in public consciousness is important to note (Tilley 2005, pp. 7,11). More than a mythological persona, La Siguanaba is a powerful feminine figure symbolizing the interstice between indigenous knowledge and European colonialism. Interstices or interstitial moments, according to Homi K. Bhabha, are the “articulation of differences” between categories and the space where individual and collective subjectivities are (re)negotiated; they are sites where collaboration, contestation, displacement, and relocation of social relations manifest themselves (1994, pp. 269-270). However, as social relations and subjectivities are (re)constituted in between categories, they can reify, deconstruct, or reframe the boundaries between categories as well as serve to reformulate the meanings of the categories themselves. Interstices prompt complex and dynamic processes that create and recreate meanings of social relations, subjectivities, and categories. As an interstice, La Siguanaba’s body contains and continually manifests and redefines the conflict between indigeneity and colonialism. This is represented in beliefs that Christian insignia (symbols representative of the colonizer’s religion) repel La Siguanaba; the two are treated as antithetical entities. La Siguanaba, however, is more complex than a relation based on the act of repulsion. She is an undeniably Salvadoran icon bound to live in between the worlds of the Pipiles and the colonizer; she can transgress the boundaries of both worlds but is not fully incorporated into

either. As an indigenous woman she can never be part of the “modern” world she haunts because she is neither Christian nor does she belong to a recognized identity. Nevertheless, her indigeneity – understood as a form of subjectivity and epistemology– is undermined as her presence in current memory reinforces the need for the colonizer’s concept of Christianity. La Siguanaba effaces indigeneity as her continued presence simultaneously renders it alive, transforming what it means to be indigenous and “modern” in the process. Thus, her monstrosity is not just physical. She is monstrous because her existence is an aberration of worldviews; she thrives in between the margins of two worlds highlighting their existence and the negotiation, erasure, displacement, and overlap taking place between them. La Siguanaba’s power lies precisely in her interstitiality that provides an insight and a critique into the fluid (re)formation of society and sociopolitical relations.

How can La Siguanaba’s monstrosity be employed as a tool to write ethnography? What purpose would it serve? An ethnography written monstrously would function at the margins; specifically, I am referring to ethnography’s ability to address and redress systematic forms of discrimination, inequity, injustice, and exploitation. Furthermore, a monstrous ethnography would constantly explore knowledge found at the interstices of social categories and/or sociopolitical relations. Focus is on the way these categories and relations are (re)created, transformed, and contested in different contexts and at different times through varying forms of power. Harnessing La Siguanaba’s ability to reveal, rework, and reframe sociopolitical categories, boundaries, and relations formed in intersecting interstitial spaces is especially relevant to the ethnographic project at hand.

In this ethnography I map the development and politicization of Salvadoran transnational identity as experienced by three second-generation women who grew up in Los Angeles County, attend the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), and are members of a Salvadoran based student organization.⁵ As a self-identified second-generation U.S. born Salvadoran and graduate student at UCSD, I am positioned in a set of conditions that permit me to experience and understand myself as part of, intimately involved with, and invested in the community of my inquiry as well as the university. My role and positionality in choosing and analyzing the topic of research is as important as and manifested through the ethnographic details presented. Thus, this ethnography operates at multiple interstices due to the subject matter and my stance within it. Focus is on two interstitial moments. One interstice is the creation of Salvadoran transnational identity in the conceptual space between a Salvadoran homeland and an Angelino homeland. The second is the transformation of the title researcher through concurrently *Being* ethnographer and subject of study. To apply the monstrosity and power of La Siguanaba as a methodological and epistemological tool to author this ethnography allows me to not only address the two interstices aforementioned, but also the complexities surrounding them.

I will discuss the interstitial moments of interest in the following manner:

1. The emergence of the Salvadoran transnational identity explored in this paper is very particular to second-generation women who were born in the late 1980's and grew up in ghettos and barrios of Los Angeles Country throughout the 1990's and the first decade of the 21st century. Even more specifically, it is an identity that these women publicly and actively discuss, debate, and pursue

intellectually as university students in a Salvadoran based student organization. Although my attention is directed at an identity contextualized within Los Angeles County and the university at a particular moment in time, it is important to emphasize the mobility and fluidity of a Salvadoran identity (re)created through diasporic movement and varying conditions of possibility both in similar and different settings across time. For these women, their Salvadoran identity is not only dynamic across boundaries but it also holds social and political implications. Understanding Salvadoran identity through the context of the Salvadoran women I interviewed, I posit that racial formation within the United States is one of the factors inciting the particular kind of discourse generated about Salvadoran-ness among these second-generation women. It is a racial formation based on exclusion from mainstream U.S. society, especially as inhabitants of ghettos and barrios. This exclusion is positioned against what these women experience as the idea of inclusion in a Salvadoran homeland and nation. Salvadoran identity, in this case, becomes a complex and multifarious set of possibilities that mediates diasporic displacement from El Salvador with the realities of local contexts.

2. The integration of researcher and researched into one is an important beginning point to expand the boundaries of ethnography. On one hand, it is undeniable that what I learned from the three Salvadoran women I interviewed was used to inform me on my Salvadoran identity. And, concurrently, I used my personal experiences as a member of the Salvadoran community to draw conclusions about the information these women provided. Through formal interviews and

multiple informal interactions, however, the relationship between myself and the three women developed into a complex reciprocal process of discussing issues and theories related to Salvadoran transnational identity and simultaneously conceptualizing that identity through praxis. There is the hope and potential that my analysis presented in this paper is of mutual benefit. From this stance, it is possible to think of ethnography as a form of action research. More significantly, in this case, my research is an opportunity to think through doing ethnographic action research by, from and for the margins. This implies that the knowledge produced as part of this ethnography may hold value not only to an academic institution but also to the community of inquiry.

I will begin with a discussion of the latter point in order to show the frame under which the ethnographic data is presented and analyzed.

Ethnography and Action Research

In *Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology*, Nancy Scheper-Hughes calls for a “politically committed and morally engaged anthropology” (1995, p. 410). This type of anthropology would be a field of knowledge and a field of action that would allow anthropological writing or ethnography to be a site of resistance (Scheper-Hughes 1995, pp. 419-420). Positioning anthropologists as especially able to provide narratives of the conditions of life of people from around the world, Scheper-Hughes believes it is an anthropologist’s obligation to identify and act against power relations that promote human suffering (1994, pp. 416-419). She states that the choice to ignore these discriminatory power relations is the choice to uphold injustice (Scheper-Hughes 1995, pp. 419). On that account, Scheper-Hughes

identifies two types of anthropologists, the spectator and the witness (1995, p. 419). The spectator is a passive, “neutral”, and “objective” anthropologist who believes his or her responsibility is first and foremost to science (Scheper-Hughes 1995, p. 419, emphasis original). Scheper-Hughes positions the spectator as outside of human events. On the other hand, a witness is an active anthropologist who deliberately makes judgments and takes action to be morally and ethically accountable to history and humanity (Scheper-Hughes 1995, p. 419). The witness is inside human events and is responsible for “what they see and what they fail to see, how they act and how they fail to act in critical situations” (Scheper-Hughes 1995, p. 419). Scheper-Hughes calls for anthropologists to become witnesses and strive for ethnography that is “personally engaged and politically committed” (1995, p. 419).

In addition, Scheper-Hughes suggests that anthropologists “locate and train indigenous, local anthropologists and organic intellectuals to work with us and help us redefine and transform ourselves and our vexed craft” (1995, p. 417). Further explanation for this point is not given, but following her argument a plausible assumption seems to be that indigenous, local anthropologists and organic intellectuals will help anthropology become a discipline of witnesses.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes’ demand for a politically engaged anthropology that produces ethnography that is a “tool for critical reflection and human liberation” forces anthropology to address its utility as discipline (1995, p. 418). Scheper-Hughes is engaging in the important task of questioning and reframing the purpose of anthropological practice and knowledge. She creates the possibility for anthropology to become a discipline that adds to scientific knowledge while working towards social

justice. Scheper-Hughes' reworking of anthropology is an important beginning point for thinking through this ethnographic project and is generally in accordance with the goals of this paper. However, as someone who is labeled as an indigenous/local/native anthropologist, I would like to modify Scheper-Hughes' suggestion from asking that "we" – as these specially categorized anthropologists - help transform the discipline to one that asks that "we" transform our own realities, if needed. This is a slight change, but it redirects the focus of knowledge production by these anthropologists to benefit indigenous/local/native communities and not the discipline. Equally as important, this reformulation emphasizes dismantling and transforming systematic forms of discrimination, inequity, injustice, and exploitation. Through this framework, local/indigenous/native anthropologist are held to the same criteria Scheper-Hughes originally poses for the unmarked, uncategorized anthropologist. That is, an anthropologist –regardless of whether she or he is indigenous/local/native- is first and foremost accountable to humanity and not science. This posturing does not contest the differentiation of indigenous, local anthropologist from the unclearly defined *us* that Scheper-Hughes belongs to. The purpose of highlighting this is not to challenge this categorization, but rather it is to demand attention to the power relations invoked in the anthropological discipline when Scheper-Hughes makes a distinction between "*us*" and "*them*". Nevertheless, I want to explicitly note that my goal is not to become part of the "we" that Scheper-Hughes belongs to. My objective is to acknowledge and explore the happenings and relations of the Othered space within anthropology and the possibility of inhabiting that space while practicing militant anthropology. What would a politically engaged ethnography that is by and for

local/indigenous/native/Other/marginalized people consist of? One possible paradigm is ethnography as anti-oppressive action research from the margins. However, before I engage in a discussion of the specifics of what that means, it is important to understand the role of anthropology in knowledge production.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault theorizes that power and knowledge are intimately tied together (1984, p. 175). Power relations are conveyed and implemented through a body of knowledge; and, inversely, knowledge is always an expression of power relations. Examination is a particular power-knowledge relationship that he addresses when characterizing modernity (Foucault 1984, p. 197). Foucault defines examination as the technique of observation and the process of normalization (Ibid.). He suggests that placing individuals under observation sets them in documents or a “network of writing” that “capture and fix them” into describable and analyzable features (Foucault 1984, p. 201). The type of observation that Foucault refers to is specifically hierarchical and an exercise of discipline; he is suggesting that the techniques used to supervise across a hierarchy of individuals – from top to bottom - simultaneously employ power dynamics that make the observed objects and instruments of that power (1984, p. 189). Thus, the act of examination or observation makes the individual an object of power-knowledge relations (Foucault 1984, p. 204). Understanding the power dynamics involved in examination and documentation is especially relevant to anthropologists who are positioned in a particular kind of hierarchy in relation to their *objects/subjects* of study and depend on various forms of observations to collect and *capture* data about people. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, in *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World*, describes

the hierarchy between the anthropologist and the individuals they study as one based on the anthropologist's idea that she/he is the only one who can see and accurately explain the cultural story of the Other and therefore *define* how they should or do identify (Trouillot 2003, p. 130). Trouillot is careful to point out that the anthropologist perpetuates this notion by ignoring the fact that her/his narrative is more likely to circulate in public discourse – than a narrative authored by the Other – and can consequently confine the Other's identity according to her/his text (2003, p. 75). On that account, anthropological observation, as Scheper-Hughes notes, is regarded as “a hostile act that reduces our ‘subjects’ to mere ‘objects’ of our discriminating, incriminating, scientific gaze” (1993, pp. 417-418). Scheper-Hughes makes peace with this view by acknowledging that the anthropologist is a flawed and biased translator of culture who can only do the best with her or his methodology of listening and observing (Ibid.). For Scheper-Hughes, anthropological observation can be made less hostile to its *subjects/objects* of study by listening and observing with care, sensitivity, empathy, and compassion in order to intervene in human misery (Ibid.). But, affect does not absolve anthropologists from the power dynamics engaged and reified through anthropological methods. Since anthropology depends on hierarchical observation, anthropologists will always necessarily speak from and about a position of power and privilege. If one is to use anthropology and ethnography as mediums to produce knowledge, it is important not to reduce the effect of the power-knowledge performed in those acts. These remarks are not to lessen or contest the validity of the type of intervention Scheper-Hughes is discussing, but rather to reframe that intervention from a language of human empathy and benign intent to one that

more actively conceptualizes anthropology as engaged in power-knowledge relations that produce a type of reality, a domain of knowledge, and a particular understanding of the individual. But, I am not suggesting a grim situation of power-knowledge relations to which there is no hope for dismantling systematic forms of injustice. Foucault contends that where there is power there is resistance. He suggests that the relationship between power and knowledge is best analyzed through "... the subject who knows, the objects to be known, and the modalities of knowledge..." (1984, p. 175). Therefore, Foucault argues that modifying the processes that make up knowledge – subject who knows, objects to be known, and modalities of knowledge – can lead to the possibility of creating different domains of knowledge that may be resistant to power (Ibid.).

Practicing ethnography as anti-oppressive action research from the margins changes and transgresses the processes that traditionally form anthropology and ethnographic writing. Due to a discussion intentionally centered on this approach, the history and complexities of defining ethnography will not be reviewed. For the purposes of this paper, ethnography is understood as a written work that describes and analyzes data collected from observing (whether as participant or outsider) people in their daily lives, interviewing said people, and reviewing any other sources relevant to inform the researcher about the topic of inquiry. To understand how ethnography can be anti-oppressive action research from the margins it is first necessary to define margin, action research, and anti-oppressive approach.

Leslie Brown and Susan Strega define the margin or marginalization as "the context in which those who routinely experience inequality, injustice and exploitation

live their lives” (2005, p. 6). They claim that marginalized people not only experience inequality, injustice, exploitation, etc. but are also continually silenced or barred from creating legitimate or valued truth and knowledge (Brown & Strega 2005, p. 7). As a result, marginalized people are usually topics of but not authors of research. This is especially true of anthropology where most anthropologists have been white, heterosexual, able-bodied males - the category that is considered the most privileged-studying the Othered (Moosa-Mitha 2005, p. 37). Therefore, to author and conduct research that is not about the margin, but carried out by and for the marginalized is to question, resist, and transgress normative conditions that produce knowledge in anthropology and academia in general. It is to create an ethnography whose purpose is not necessarily to expose some truth about the margins to those outside of it, but rather to provide information that is relevant to the margin and can dismantle the processes that perpetuate a system that maintains margins. Action research facilitates this goal by centering research questions and outcomes to primarily benefit the group of people or organization of inquiry through the transformation of the conditions of marginalization.

David Coghlan and Teresa Brannick point at three major features that define action research (2005, pp. 3-4). Research is about a group, organization or community, it is *about* action, and it is collaborative (Coghlan & Brannick 2005, pp. 3-4, 12). To say that action research is *about* action means that the knowledge produced from research comes out of praxis. That is, theory and action become mutually constitutive (Coghlan and Brannick 2005, p. 11). Brown and Strega describe this as the process of applying research theories and changing them as a result of

practice (2005, p. 9). This process of praxis becomes necessary in order to foreground the needs of the group, organization, or community involved in the research; making a contribution to scientific knowledge or a discipline is important but secondary. Similarly, Coghlan and Brannick argue that the primary goal of action research is to change the world and not explain or describe it (2005, p. 7). Accordingly, action research is not about following a strict methodology. It is about how the research is designed and who benefits from the research agenda (Ibid.). Some action research is completely participatory, meaning that research participants design and conduct the study to suit their needs. Other action research is designed by a researcher but involves participants through constant feedback and praxis (Rutman et.al. 2005, p. 154). In other considerations, Coghlan and Brannick recommend that a well-rounded action research design address “me, us, and them” (2005, p. 8). Debbie Rutman, Carol Hubberstey, April Barlow, and Erin Brown define addressing “me, us, and them” as a research process that allows researcher and participants to develop a critical consciousness, a research process that promotes the improvement of the lives of the participants, and a research process that contributes knowledge that transforms fundamental structures and relationships negatively affecting the participants (2005, p. 155). Paolo Freire’s work has set the foundation for a variation on action research that is labeled liberatory or emancipatory action research. This type of action research follows the same principles outlined above but is exclusively based on examining power dynamics and empowering marginalized people to construct and use their own knowledge (Coghlan & Brannick 2005, p. 9). Anthropology or ethnography based on action research would mirror Scheper-Hughes’ desire that anthropology be both a field

of action and knowledge. However, it would shift the power of anthropologists' decision making process – albeit not completely- on what is a worthy research question, what is worthy of observation, and what situations are worthy of acting upon to the hands of the research participants. Anthropologists are nevertheless still responsible for how they influence research processes and outcomes. An anti-oppressive approach addresses the concerns of how an anthropologist is to influence research.

Karen Potts and Leslie Brown state that an anti-oppressive approach is a choice that a researcher makes to have an “explicit, personal commitment to social justice” (2005, p. 255). I am thinking of social justice specifically through Maurianne Adams definition that identifies the concept as the ideological reshaping of societies in order that all members experience a sense of self-determination and equitable, sustainable access to resources (1997, p. 31). With this definition in mind, the idea of achieving social justice should be incorporated into research processes and outcomes (Brown & Strega 2005, p. 1; Potts & Brown 2005, p. 257). Reflexivity becomes essential to this approach. Brown and Strega place reflexivity at the center of acknowledging how the researcher (invested as a local/ indigenous/ native/ marginal researcher or otherwise) shapes and affects the research at every level (2005, p.10). There is a clear understanding that all knowledge is socially constructed and has political implications (Potts & Brown 2005, p. 261). Thus, critical questioning and assessment of power-knowledge relation is a necessity. However, this does not imply that an anti-oppressive approach is simply relegated to indentifying how the Othered is treated in comparison to the white, heterosexual, able-bodied male. Mehmoona

Mossa-Mitha stresses that it is as important to question normative assumptions that are created in privileged spaces as it is to question those created in marginalized spaces because both result in injustice (2005, p. 63). For this reason, Potts and Brown urge the marginalized and non-marginalized researcher to understand herself or himself as both oppressor and oppressed (2005, p. 258). This is a concept that comes from Paolo Freire's work that theorizes that the oppressed can overcome their position in life by transforming the societal structures that uphold oppression (2000, p.79). However, Freire is careful to consider that the oppressed –and all members of society- have internalized the oppressor due to their exposure to and existence within an oppressive society (2000, p. 48). Thus, the oppressed will always at first also be an oppressor. Oppression is to be overcome both internally and socially. In accordance with this vein of thought, Potts and Brown ask allies of the oppressed or marginalized – whether they are considered marginalized or not- to personally reflect on and dismantle sociopolitical structures that create and perpetuate their positions of privilege (2005, p. 258). An anthropology and ethnography committed to an anti-oppressive approach would not be limited to act against power relations that cause human suffering in Othered and distant locations, as suggested by Scheper-Hughes. But, one, it would be mindful of how anthropologists and anthropology create oppressive power-knowledge relations regardless of benign or empathetic intent. And, two, the anthropologist would consciously act upon and intervene against oppressive power relations that occur in the location of research, “home”, and the academy.

To summarize and bring all these concepts together, ethnography as anti-oppressive action research from the margins is an approach that is primarily practiced

by marginalized people, although not exclusively. The focus of ethnography is not to produce a work about the margins or even for the discipline of anthropology. It is a document that produces knowledge that is by and for a marginalized group or community and promotes social justice through research processes and outcomes that question and transform (or at the very least attempt to transform) the social structures and power-knowledge relations – occurring in both privileged and marginalized spaces- that perpetuate injustice and inequality. This approach is based on praxis that actively seeks and incorporates feedback from research participants, which ideally empowers marginalized knowledge. Nevertheless, the researcher –whether marginalized or not - is accountable for her or his role in creating and/or influencing the research agenda, in the resulting knowledge production, and in the exercise of power relations.

What follows is an attempt to practice ethnography as anti-oppressive action research from the margins.

La Siguanaba Speaks

Why is it important to explain this approach? Taking up space on the particularities of an ethnographic method, as opposed to directly delving into the background, detail, and analysis of ethnographic data, may seem inappropriate. But, it is the impropriety of its presence that makes it necessary. Employing anti-oppressive action research from the margins in my research design, data acquisition, and data presentation could have sufficed. However, one of the goals of this paper is to transgress the boundaries and modify the processes that usually make up anthropology and ethnography. By this, I refer to Trouillot's observation that anthropologists

confuse their object of observation for their object of study (2003, p. 121). He suggests that this had led to the perpetuation of the category of Other suspended from larger global flows of power (Ibid.). To look at the larger flows of power relations requires engagement with theory and practice at multiple levels. In accordance, the explanation on my ethnographic approach is attempting to do two things simultaneously. It is creating the opportunity for my approach to be critiqued, improved, and/or discarded by the research participants featured in this ethnography as well as other readers. More importantly, it is revealing how my hand shapes the processes and outcomes of this ethnography. It exposes ethnography as a form of documentation that produces certain types of power-knowledge relations.

Anti oppressive action research from the margins also allows an entry point for me to: 1) justify *Being* researcher and research participant of Salvadoran identity and 2) position the significance of doing research with second-generation Salvadoran transnational identity of women from Los Angeles, California.

Why does Salvadoran transnational identity matter? Arturo Arias, a Guatemalan literary scholar, asks more or less the same question in this form: “Why does Central American literature matter?” (2007, p. x). His answer is that Central American-Americans are doubly marginalized within the United States and consequently have not had the opportunity to explore their subjectivity (Arias 2007, pp. xii, 205). Arias explains this double marginality as invisibility stemming from living on the margins of the already marginalized Latin@s, despite the large numbers of Central American-Americans living in the United States (2007, p. xxiii). *Latinidad* or a Latin@ identity is “constructed through the abjection and erasure of the Central

American-American” (Arias 2007, p. 186). Arias believes Latinidad is an identity based on the more readily accessible images of Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, Chican@s, and Caribbean-Americans (2007, p. 202). According to Arias, as of now, a Latin@ identity does not address the complexities or experiences of diasporic Central American-Americans across generations; Latinidad -based on the erasure of Central American-Americans- also renders invisible the conditions of life within Central American that led/lead to immigration to United States (2007, pp. xvii, 187). Central American countries are small, poor, struggling to maintain independence, and felt/continue to feel the negative effects of U.S. incursion in Central America during the 1980s as part of Cold War politics (Arias 2007, pp. xvii, 187). In the end, Arias believes that it is important to recognize the significant and growing population of Central American-Americans that are contributing to and influencing the United States (2007, p. xii). The act of Central American-Americans speaking from a Central American perspective will allow for the emergence and creation of a much needed Central American subjectivity and identity (Arias 2007, p. xix). While I agree with Arias’ points, they require some nuance. The need for Central American-Americans to develop a self-defined identity is not specifically or even necessarily about public recognition in the United States; it is about developing the conditions of possibility for Central American-Americans to experience a sense of self-determination.

This paper is primarily a space to allow a marginalized group - Central American-American people from the country of El Salvador - to develop tools that would further a conversation about the specificities of our life, subjectivity and identity especially as related to the power relations we are embedded in. However, it

is important to note that Salvadorans and Guatemalans are the largest groups of Central Americans living in the United States (Arias 2007, p. 205). The ability to speak of a Salvadoran identity may already be a privilege (regardless of whether what we discuss as Salvadorans is considered either a positive or negative aspect of who we are as a group), based on a power dynamic exercised through numbers, that other Central American -Americans may not have access to.

The women featured in this paper are speaking from a very specific position of an identity in formation as second-generation Salvadorans born in the 1980s and raised in Los Angeles County. Although this may be considered a narrow perspective, these women address important issues about Salvadoran subjectivity. How do second-generation Salvadorans make sense of themselves? What does the nation of El Salvador mean to this generation? What does the nation of the United States mean to this generation? Is there a conception of a Salvadoran diaspora among individuals in this generation? It is important not to expect that the pursuit of these questions will lead to a homogenous, all encompassing account of second-generation Salvadoran identity; rather, the significance is in the development of tools used to answer these questions that may be of use for Salvadorans (maybe even other marginalized groups) in future discussions of their conditions of life, identity, subjectivity. For second-generation Salvadorans, our experiences seem to range from perceiving oneself as solely Salvadoran, solely American, or as a combination of both. Also, as many of us pursue university studies, we second-generation Salvadorans find it of great importance to create formal discursive spaces where one can articulate an empowering Salvadoran identity (which at times means addressing and working through

problematic, painful, or negative issues), express and work through feelings of displacement from a Salvadoran homeland, and/or discuss marginalization experienced in a U.S. context. While engaged in these discursive spaces we are constantly transforming our identities. Even as my personal experience and the scope of this paper is limited to a university setting, there is no reason to assume that these type of discursive practices and identity forming processes do not occur outside of the university.

The point of view of second-generation Salvadorans is significantly different from academic research that predominantly focuses on first-generation Salvadorans, especially those who migrated in the 1980s and were escaping the violence of the Salvadoran civil war. It is important not to minimize the material difficulties and emotional trauma caused by war or the fact that the civil war caused the first major exodus of Salvadorans to the United States in the 1980s. However, within a U.S. context, the over exposure and retelling of this segment of Salvadoran history has led to the categorization of the Salvadoran individual as war victim. The restrictive identity of war victim imprisons Salvadorans to be perceived as always already damaged. This category also engenders a trope of U.S. benevolence. U.S. *intervention* in the Salvadoran civil war, U.S. immigration policies –both past and present- that grant Salvadorans citizenship, and Salvadorans participating –however marginally- in U.S. society are framed as acts of American kindness. U.S. involvement that fueled and prolonged the Salvadoran civil war as well as U.S. policies that promote/d underdevelopment in Central America and cause emigration push factors are rendered invisible. Moreover, to focus solely on this segment of

Salvadoran history forecloses a holistic understanding of El Salvador as a nation and a concept affecting sociopolitical relations.

The perspective of second-generation Salvadorans can be useful to dispel essentialist and mythic notions circulating in the U.S. and Salvadoran public and private realms of what constitutes Salvadoran-ness. In other words, this perspective can serve to highlight that Salvadoran subjectivity is expressed differently across space, time, age, generation, gender, sexuality, religion, race, ethnicity, class, citizenship, etc. However, the fact that the second-generation Salvadoran women who are the focus of this ethnography – as well as myself- are university students adds a complexity that must be examined. Even if marginalized within academic institutions, we – as part of the institution - have greater access to resources that permit us to publicly discuss and publicly disseminate our ideas on Salvadoran identity. Our ideas may carry greater validity- albeit erroneously- since it is coming from an academic space. But, Salvadorans are underrepresented in U.S. academic institutions mostly due to denied access (this point is elaborated upon in the section *Displacement, Race, and Diaspora*). Thus, our positionalities as university students mark us as Salvadoran women who may experience life differently from most second-generation Salvadorans. What does it mean to portray Salvadoran-ness from this position of privilege? What is highlighted and what is rendered invisible? What about our discourse resists and reifies power-knowledge relations that subjugate Salvadorans?

Also, this is a deliberately gendered project. The female perspective is hardly ever accounted for in transnational Salvadoran identity. Academic and national discourses gender the transnational Salvadoran individual as male through ideas of el

hermano lejano⁶ and el marero⁷. James Clifford notes that, “When diasporic experience is viewed in terms of displacement rather than placement, traveling rather than dwelling, and disarticulation rather than rearticulation, then the experiences of men will tend to predominate”(qtd. in Pratt & Yeoh 2003, p. 159). Accordingly, the hermano lejano is portrayed by Salvadoran media and the Salvadoran government, as a heterosexual, patriarchal male who is breadwinner and adventurer (Baker-Cristales 2004, p. 99; Rodríguez 2009, p. 172). *He* is the missed and heroic man that carries the Salvadoran nation on his back because *his* remittances sustain the nation’s economic lifeline. Salvadoran women are rarely recognized in the story of transnational or diasporic migration (Rodríguez 2009, p. 172). The alternative and antithesis to el hermano lejano, el marero, is portrayed as the violent, transnational remnant of the civil war. He is read as male, traveling gangster, and the problem of El Salvador.

While women are the focus of this ethnography, the scope of this paper unfortunately does not allow the space to tell the story of countless transnational Salvadoran women who predominantly labor as domestic workers, childcare providers, and in the service industry. Moreover, simply because a female perspective has been voiced it does not mean that there is an effective dialogue disrupting and dismantling sexist and gendered structures that support heteropatriarchy. In addition, although gender is addressed in this paper, other issues- such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion and class- that require immediate and extensive attention are not contended with. However, I hope that the tools and discussion presented in this paper will provide a productive jumping-off point to initiate discussions on these issues (and others) that work towards dismantling the power relations –employed by non-

Salvadorans AND Salvadorans - that lead to the marginalization of Salvadorans BOTH within a U.S. context AND a Salvadoran context.

La Siguanaba Speaks: Methodological Notes and My Role

I designed this ethnography using an anti-oppressive action research from the margins paradigm. I acquired the ethnographic material presented in the paper from formal interviews and informal discussion carried out – between September 2010 and December 2010 -with three Salvadoran women who are students at the University of California, San Diego. We met through a Salvadoran based student organization in February 2010. I originally sought out this space for personal desires to meet and socialize with other Salvadoran students on campus. My interest to conduct research with and for the women of the organization was expressed in September 2010. It was made clear that the topic of choice reflected my current endeavors to conceptualize, theorize, and discuss my own subjectivity as a second-generation Salvadoran woman. Thus, I designed and set the original parameters of this ethnography. However, my research questions, findings, and analysis have continuously been presented to the research participants for critique and modification. Discussions and interviews revolved on understanding how our identities and subjectivities were formed and are in constant formation based on the various power relations, situations, contexts, and issues we encounter. There was a consensus that there was something collective about our experience and conditions of possibility as second-generation Salvadoran women born in the late 1980s and raised in the ghettos and barrios of Los Angeles County. However, there was also an understanding that there are necessarily individual differences in our experiences, conditions of possibility, identities and subjectivities as

they did and will develop. More importantly, we recognize that Salvadorans are positioned in various contexts across time and place and therefore, there are multiple ways to read, form, and transform Salvadoran subjectivity/identity. I mainly focus on those power relations, contexts, and issues that we – the three women and I - deemed as the collective part of our subjectivities that affected and will continue to influence our identities as they transform. This ethnography is not meant to create a master narrative for other Salvadoran subjectivities/identities to be read through and against, but rather demonstrative of discussions founded on theory and action actively attempting to understand and dismantle power relations. The “finalized” thesis version will be presented formally to the Salvadoran student organization aforementioned in March 2011; it is expected that the information presented here will be modified depending on how the group members feel it is best. This project is personal and community orientated and will also fulfill academic requirements.

*Las Tres Mujeres*⁸

The following is a brief formulaic documentation of the three women interviewed. I am fully aware that this is *capturing and fixing* the women within descriptions and features. Here I return to Foucault’s point that I am engaged in a type of hierarchical observation whereby I employ the power to frame and interpret the lives of Las Tres Mujeres for the purposes of creating an argument in this ethnography. However, there is greater complexity to the situation. Through various negotiations, Las Tres Mujeres and I worked together to decide what descriptions and arguments about themselves they were most comfortable revealing in an academic paper as well as those they thought were most representative of their viewpoints. But,

it is undeniable that I had the most power in producing the final product. I do not mean to portray the women as words, thoughts, or identities that are not fluid and dynamic. The descriptions are for the organizational purpose of introducing the women, giving background to their families' migration history, and providing insight into why and how the woman understand themselves as Salvadoran. The thoughts and memories that the women expressed are constructed through the rigid parameters of a formal interview in a particular socio-historical moment. Thus, these women's explanations of self can change in different contexts. Pseudonyms are used for all three women.

Evelyn is a 24-year-old woman from Bell, California, a city located in Los Angeles County near the Alameda Corridor. She is currently a third-year graduate student in the Literature Department. Generally speaking her research interests focus on Blackness and indigeneity in Central America as well as twentieth century intellectual thought in El Salvador that grapples with the nation-building process and “the problem” of the indigenous body.

Evelyn's parents are from San Miguel, El Salvador and migrated to the U.S. in the 1980s along with her two older brothers. Their reasons for migrating to the U.S. are related to the Salvadoran civil war. Her parents and brothers were able to enter the U.S. legally due to previously established familial networks; Evelyn's aunt migrated to the U.S. in the 1970s for economic reason and became a naturalized U.S. citizen who subsequently was able to request visas for Evelyn's immediate family.

Evelyn thanks her mother for instilling and nurturing a Salvadoran identity in her, an identity that is always regarded as a sense of pride. Outside of the home, Evelyn understands that as a child her Salvadoran identity was created through the use of Spanish language spoken with a Salvadoran accent and vernacular that positioned her against and different from the predominant Mexican population in Bell, CA. As an undergraduate at University of California, Los Angeles, Evelyn also began to understand herself as Salvadoran-American. She recognizes that she has been influenced by an American society and education system. Moreover, her white-American godparents created a context where she did not necessarily feel completely alienated in the U.S. Evelyn very adamantly notes that her being Salvadoran is not in contest with her being American and vice-versa.

Araceli is a 22-year-old woman from South Central Los Angeles, California. She is currently a fifth-year undergraduate at UCSD. Araceli is an Ethnic Studies and International Studies double major and a Middle Eastern Studies minor. Her research interests as she enters graduate school focus on the contemporary formation of whiteness in Europe.

Araceli's family is from La Libertad, El Salvador. Her parents, aunt, and grandmother came here in the 1980s due to the Salvadoran civil war. They migrated to the U.S. "illegally" and crossed the borders of Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States. Her father was the first of the family to migrate. He crossed the U.S.-Mexican border with a Mexican migrant who became an important family friend; they helped

each other establish themselves in Los Angeles, CA upon arrival. After Araceli's father established himself, Araceli's mother, aunt, and grandmother joined him.

Araceli currently describes herself as Salvadoran-American, Chicana, student, woman of color, underrepresented, underserved, able-bodied, and heterosexual. Her Chicana identity is a political identity that is not in contestation with her being Salvadoran-American. She is quick to point out that not a single part of her identity takes precedence over the other. Araceli says, "Growing up, I knew I was Salvadoran which was not Mexican and it [the idea of being Salvadoran] was also heightened through the use of language [Spanish] at home. Also, for example in school, I knew I was Hispanic and I would call myself that." Her parents think of her (and her younger brother) as American because she was born in the United States and did not grow up in El Salvador.

Adriana is a 21-year-old woman from South Central Los Angeles, California. She is currently a fourth-year undergraduate at UCSD majoring in Ethnic Studies. Next year she will pursue a Masters degree in education. She hopes to develop a career based on critical pedagogy and helping underserved and underrepresented students.

Adriana's family is from La Paz, El Salvador. Her parents knew each other's families in El Salvador but married in the United States. Her mother migrated "illegally" to the United States in the late 1970s for economic reasons and became a naturalized U.S. citizen through her employers. Her father also migrated "illegally" to the United States in the late 1970s for economic reasons. Both parents crossed

Guatemalan and Mexican borders on their way to the United States and were able to migrate due to familial networks that their respective families established in the early to mid 1970s.

Adriana identifies as a Salvadoran and an American. She says, "...these two nationalistic markers are not in conflict and they are not mutually exclusive. My identity is a whole created from a dialectic of the two". She grew up identifying as Salvadoran because she spoke Spanish and her parents identified as Salvadoran. Adriana says her parents always took care to teach her about El Salvador through folklore and children's stories. In preschool and elementary school she gained a greater sense of being Salvadoran by being positioned as different from her predominantly Black and Mexican schoolmates. However, she says she did not feel excluded or alienated because she always had friends who accepted her. This school environment was also where she learned she was American because, unlike her parents, she spoke English.

Context of Encounter

Our (Las Tres Mujeres and I) initial discussions and interviews were largely dedicated to defining what the Salvadoran based student organization we were a part of meant to us and what our purpose was in belonging to it. This was not a discussion I initiated, but rather a contentious issue that was prevalent in the general body meeting discussions of the organization at the time. Taking the discussion outside of that space was helpful in allowing us to fully articulate our positions. The following is a summary of how we –as a collective - currently define ourselves in relation to the organization.

The Salvadoran based student organization at UCSD is part of a statewide initiative with chapters in many of the campuses of the University of California and California State University systems. The first chapter was officially initiated in 2007 at California State University Los Angeles and the organization expanded across California shortly after. The founders of this statewide initiative are male, but women currently hold the majority of leadership positions within the organization. The space is advertised as an empowering place for those Salvadoran university students who wish to actively participate in transforming transnational Salvadoran society in order to overcome the sociopolitical fragmentation affecting it and stemming from the Salvadoran civil war and global capitalism. The organization calls for national unity to construct a different El Salvador.

Evelyn met the founders of the statewide initiative when she was studying at UCLA. She was the first connection that the founders had to the UCSD campus. She facilitated the introduction between some Salvadoran students at UCSD – including Araceli- and the founders at the 2009 Student of Color Conference. Plans to establish a UCSD chapter came to fruition soon after. A meeting with the founders and members of a pre-established Central American organization at UCSD called CARAS (Central Americans Raising Awareness in Solidarity) and other Central American students, including Evelyn and Araceli, was arranged. The Salvadoran based student organization was created at UCSD to work in solidarity with CARAS and other student organizations as well as to form a site for dialogue where identity, politics, and transnationalism could be discussed from a Salvadoran perspective.

The description of the organization presented above is not without debate. Evelyn wants to emphasize that CARAS was not a functioning organization at the time that the Salvadoran based student organization was initiated. She clarifies that it is because of the Salvadoran organization that CARAS became active again. Araceli, on the other hand, states that without the foundation and history that CARAS laid out at UCSD the Salvadoran organization would not have been established so quickly. I find that the points are not mutually exclusive. In my opinion, the Salvadoran organization was built with the structure and members of CARAS. Simultaneously, members of CARAS who were coming together again for the Salvadoran organization found motivation to take up the goals and purposes of CARAS once more. Despite our disagreements, dialoguing about and compromising on our differing positions and investments in a more intimate setting was an important beginning step for our facilitating future general body meeting discussions where we solidified the mission statement and purpose for the Salvadoran organization at UCSD.

Overall, the three woman and I feel the Salvadoran student based organization is a very crucial and special discursive setting where we not only build community and engender a sense of belongingness with other Salvadorans, but also where we can openly discuss the nuances of our experience as Salvadorans and as students. Most members of the Salvadoran organization are second-generation and undergraduate students with ties to Los Angeles County and El Salvador. The women's initial experiences with the organization are telling of how important the space is to them. Evelyn's first encounter with the Salvadoran based organization was at California State University Los Angeles and it was cathartic, exciting, liberating, and joyful. She

was surprised to see so many Salvadorans in one room. She found it comforting to hear the experiences of other second-generation Salvadorans which mirrored her own, such as, being made fun of for speaking Spanish with a Salvadoran accent and vernacular, feeling like their Salvadoran culture was discredited and made invisible, and feeling a sense of trauma and displacement because their families had left their homeland due to the Salvadoran civil war in the 1980s. Similarly, Araceli, Adriana, and I found the idea of belonging to this organization alluring and empowering because we could talk about our Salvadoran-ness and be part of a space that was about our families and us.

As important and great as this organization is to the members of the UCSD chapter, we currently find ourselves in conflict with the majority of founding and leading members of our statewide affiliates. Evelyn, Araceli, Adriana, and I have been intimately involved with this conflict as the UCSD members who are taking part in conflict resolution talks with various members from the statewide organization. We frame the tension as stemming from our questioning the “master narrative” organizing the purpose and force of the statewide organization. That is, members of the UCSD chapter feel that founding and leading members are forcing a nationalistic and state-centered idea of what it means to be Salvadoran. Salvadoran-ness hinges on understanding oneself as rooted solely in El Salvador without any acknowledgement of how living in and growing up in the United States (or different transnational contexts) affects perceptions of being Salvadoran. This is an especially important point that UCSD members –including Las Tres Mujeres and myself- feel needs further discussion since most members of the statewide organization are second-generation

U.S. born. The Salvadoran civil war and the class divisions that induced and sustained it as well as the mass emigration it caused are the pivotal points on which founding and leading members understand diasporic Salvadoran identity. Although our families – and by extension we individually - have been personally affected by the war and we wish to actively explore and critically articulate its causes and happenings, we are weary of reducing Salvadoran history, migration, and identity to this moment in time. The women and I are concerned that the nationalistic identity created by founding and leading members are homogenizing and impose criteria for an *authentic* Salvadoran subjectivity that do not address issues of race, gender, sexuality, and religion affecting Salvadoran communities located within and outside the borders of El Salvador.

As our interviews and discussions were organically framed more and more around our chapter's dissent from the larger statewide organization, the women and I decided this was the entry point for my larger discussion of our second-generation Salvadoran woman identity. I do find it important to note that theorizing through this dissent was not an easy decision to make for either the women or myself. It was emotionally taxing and painful to admit that we felt marginalized and ousted by the founding members and the larger statewide Salvadoran based student organization because of our views; the space where we thought we had found a Salvadoran home in the United States now seemed like a place of rejection. Furthermore, there was a fear among the four of us that announcing our differences would make the Salvadoran community appear unorganized and divided. Nevertheless, the women and I felt it necessary to use our interview time as well as the space in this paper as an opportunity to grow intellectually and personally as individuals, as an organization, and as part of

the Salvadoran community. In other words, we hope the topics we dealt with in our in-person discussions and which are purposefully featured below will initiate critical discussions within the Salvadoran diaspora about dealing with in-group differences as well the power relations in which we are embedded and implicated. Here I want to remind the reader of the power of La Siguanaba. I find it beneficial to invoke the monstrosity of La Siguanaba in highlighting our differences in order that we as Salvadorans - in our struggle to become empowered - learn to recreate, redefine, and survive with and through our disparities towards a more social justice oriented paradigm.

The tension and points of dissent between the UCSD chapter and other statewide members of the Salvadoran based student organization call attention to the difficulty of addressing the issues of transnational or diasporic movement based on displacement while simultaneously accounting for the specificities of local contexts in which diasporic members settle after moving away from a homeland. Based on the concerns that we pose in regards to the nationalistic politicization of second-generation Salvadoran college students, the following is an attempt to analyze the complexities of the Salvadoran diaspora while grounding the aforementioned organization's development and the women's dissent within the Angelino context in which it arose.

El Salvador and Its History of Migration

One of the issues that came up when I interviewed Las Tres Mujeres was how to conceptualize of El Salvador as a transnational country caught in global and national power structures and relations across time and space. This concern stemmed

from a desire to expand conversation about El Salvador and its migrants beyond the topic of the civil war of the 1980s without dismissing the importance of that event. We ask: How can formulating a multi-perspective and expansive history of transnationalism, transmigration, and glocal power relations in El Salvador help us understand differences between migrants across time, generations, gender, location, sexuality, class, religion, etc. in order to take multiple approaches when discussing and addressing the Salvadoran diaspora? But also, what does this history tell us about the way Salvadorans across their differences may be mutually constituted by the same power relations? With these questions in mind, I decided to provide the following history of Salvadoran migration. While the history I chose to present may not provide the answers to these questions and definitely does not give an all encompassing account, it is an exercise that uses La Siguanaba as an analytic to think how different conditions of possibility emerge and transform concepts and subjectivities -especially those relevant to Salvadorans -across time and space.

Salvadoran transnational migration does not begin or end with the Salvadoran civil war of the 1980s. Nor is it limited to relocation in the United States. In *The Salvadoran Americans*, Carlos Cordova identifies at least six waves of Salvadoran migration to the United States (qtd. in Rodríguez 2009, p. 168). José Luis Benítez, Cecilia Menjivar, and Ana Patricia Rodríguez document the movement of Salvadorans to other parts of the world. The main reasons for migrating range from seeking employment and economic opportunities, fleeing internal national conflicts based on class, land, and resources, and at other times fleeing internal national conflicts based

on class, land, and resources and their intersection with the racialization of indigenous bodies and campesinos⁹.

The following account of El Salvador's migration history is based on information presented by Benítez, Cordova, Menjívar, and Rodríguez. It is an incomplete history that does not explain the permeability of the Salvadoran national borders in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century and it does not look into movements occurring within El Salvador. Important events in Salvadoran history and the intricacies of how race, class, religion, sexuality, gender, etc. are a part of those events and related to migration are either mentioned and left largely unexplained or left unmentioned due to the scope of this paper. Although this account of migration is for the most part U.S.-centric, it is meant to show the larger picture of Salvadoran diasporic/transnational movement across the world. This history begins in the nineteenth century and continues to present day.

From the nineteenth century to the beginning of the Salvadoran civil war, Salvadoran migrants mostly traveled to the United States and Honduras. Menjívar notes that migration to the United States was primarily carried out by elites while the most impoverished of Salvadoran society left for Honduras (2000, p. 54). U.S. immigration records show that in the nineteenth century Central Americans that were part of the elite class, political dissidents, and workers in transnational companies (e.g. fruit and coffee) vacationed and/or settled in port cities including San Francisco, New Orleans, and New York (Rodríguez 2009, p. 168). This is corroborated by the existence of fifth-generation Salvadorans in San Francisco (Ibid.). From the 1930s to the 1940s, urbanites from the upper and middle class and who were characterized as

having high levels of education moved to the U.S. (Ibid.). Salvadorans came to work in industries (e.g. textile industry and shipyards) suffering shortage of laborers during World War II (Ibid.). In the 1960s and 1970s, Salvadorans came to the U.S. for economic reasons and most of those migrants were women (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001, p. 45).

The first wave of Salvadoran migrants to Honduras occurred in the 1920s and 1930's. They were mostly campesinos and indigenous people who left to work for the banana companies (Menjívar 2000, p. 41). Other events fueling migration of campesinos and indigenous people to Honduras were the insurrection of 1932 and La Matanza of 1932 (Ibid).¹⁰ Throughout the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, migration to Honduras continued and resulted in thousands of Salvadorans, mainly campesinos, living in Honduras. (Benítez 2010, p. 191, Menjívar 2000, p. 41). Salvadoran president Fidel Sánchez Hernández sited protection of Salvadoran migrants in Honduras as one of the principal reasons behind the initiation of the Soccer War of 1969 between El Salvador and Honduras (Benítez 2010, p.191). The validity of Hernández's claim is still in question.

In the 1980s, mass emigration happened across all sectors of Salvadoran society and it was largely due to the Salvadoran civil war. Approximately half of the Salvadoran population currently living in the U.S. immigrated during this period (Rodríguez 2009, p. 68). Most migrants settled in the Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Washington D.C. areas (Rodríguez 2009, p. 169). Salvadorans also sought asylum in Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Mexico, Canada, Italy, Australia, Sweden, and Spain (Benítez 2009, p. 191).

Presently, migration continues to be a significant part of Salvadoran society as a poor economic climate and remittances create push and pull factors for moving abroad. Most migrants move to the United States (Menjívar 2000, p.56). It is estimated that the U.S. contains approximately twenty percent of the total Salvadoran population (Benítez 2009, p. 191). The remittances sent by Salvadorans established in the United States approximate fifteen percent of the total gross domestic product of El Salvador and have become necessary for the survival of the Salvadoran economy (Gosh 2006, p.19). Thus, it can be assumed that for the Salvadoran community migration will persist as research has shown that the need for remittances and the existence of networks abroad creates a perpetual migration cycle (Wucker 2004, p.68).

The 2007 Salvadoran census estimates that there are approximately six million Salvadorans and three million of those live abroad; these numbers include second-generation Salvadorans registered at Salvadoran consulates (Benítez 2010, p. 191; Rodríguez 2009, p. 169). The breakdown of the three million Salvadoran living abroad is: 1, 842,100 in the United States, 135, 500 in Canada, 36,049 in Mexico, 137, 499 in other Central American countries and the Caribbean, 32, 130 in Italy, 18, 755 in Australia, 3,200 in Spain, and 2,320 in Sweden (Benítez 2010, p. 192).

The Angelino Context

Mapping the details of where and why Salvadorans migrated allows for a more nuanced conversation of how the specific contexts converge with historical power relations to create certain conditions for migrants. Thus, aside from presenting a larger picture of Salvadoran migration, the women and I decided that discussing/presenting a detailed picture of Los Angeles would help us (specifically Las Tres Mujeres and I)

understand how and why we understand our Salvadoran-ness in the manner that we do. The Los Angeles we speak of specifically reflects our experiences and it is a Los Angeles found in the margins of Angelino society.

The transnational Salvadoran population is an assortment of various generations in multiple locations and with countless identities formed by different contexts (Rodríguez 2009, p. 170). But, the Salvadoran population in Los Angeles is given disproportionate attention across time and place in the diasporic context because of population size. The city of Los Angeles has the second largest number of Salvadorans after San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador (Baker-Cristales 2004, p. ix). In Los Angeles, Salvadorans live predominantly in inner city areas alongside Latin@s, Asians, and Blacks (Baker-Cristales 2004, p. 5; Hamilton & Chincilla 2001, p.57). The majority of Salvadorans living in Los Angeles are found in Westlake, Pico Union, McArthur Park, Koreatown, and South Central (Hamilton & Chinchilla 2001, p. 42; Cordova 2005, pp. 129-130). The Alameda corridor, East Hollywood, and San Fernando Valley are also known to have concentrated numbers of Salvadorans (Hamilton & Chinchilla 2001, p. 53). Latin@s are the largest population in most of these areas with Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, and Chican@s making up the majority within the category of Latin@s (Hamilton & Chinchilla 2001, pp. 42, 57; Cordova 2005, p. 129-130). The inner cities in which Salvadorans are located can be characterized as working class areas with poor living conditions that include constant violence and policing as well as under-serviced and under-resourced schools and public-service centers. The less than satisfactory living conditions in conjunction with the multi-ethnic context of inner city areas have led to racial tensions between

Latin@s, Blacks, and Asians. Moreover, the majority of undocumented Salvadorans live in southern California, which includes Los Angeles, making life for many of these individuals and their families unstable due to the difficulty or inability to access resources and employment. Living in a state of permanent impermanence is also a reality for undocumented Salvadorans and their families as the possibility of deportation is always present (Cordova 2005, pp. 38-43).

Displacement, Race, and Diaspora

Using La Siguanaba as an analytic, how does she help us make sense of the way historical, global, and local conditions of Salvadoran migration intersect to constitute and transform our subjectivities and understanding of power-relations? This section is an attempt to synthesize the various tensions and conditions of possibility at play –historical and glocal circumstances - with the personal experiences of Las Tres Mujeres.

Las Tres Mujeres acknowledge that there is a lot of privilege in living in the United States –especially when conceptualized as being part of the resource-full First World - but that overall the living conditions for those who have settled here are predominantly unfavorable as aforementioned in the previous section. Beth Baker-Cristales’ theorizes that the unfavorable set of circumstances inhibits full incorporation into U.S. society and leads to a national identity and national imaginary based on El Salvador as a place of longing and belonging (2004, pp. 87-88, 127). But, first-generation Salvadorans categorize their children –second-generation Salvadorans- as “unproblematically American” (Baker-Cristales 2004, p.118). However, as noted in the descriptions of Las Tres Mujeres interviewed and the

premise and activities of the Salvadoran based student organization, some of us second-generation Salvadorans do not understand ourselves as uncomplicatedly American. Many of us find it important to identify as Salvadoran and actively participate in the Salvadoran and American public spheres as Salvadorans.

Evelyn, Araceli, and Adriana all place the learning and use of Spanish language, with a Salvadoran specific accent and vernacular, as a site where their Salvadoran-ness was cultivated. On one hand, the Spanish language functions as a defining and differentiating characteristic for these Salvadoran women because of its *deviation* from the norms of 1) speaking English in an American context and/or 2) speaking Spanish with a Mexican specific vernacular and accent as would be consistent with the majority of the Latin@ population in California. While the importance of these factors cannot and should not be dismissed as crucial in defining the parameters against and through which a Salvadoran identity is formed, the importance of language does not end there. Through language, stories and memories were transmitted from parent to child creating an intergenerational diasporic bond based on El Salvador as a homeland. The majority of stories and memories consolidate into a sense of nostalgia and displacement from El Salvador. Evelyn points out that most students in the Salvadoran based organized find a sense of community and commonality through their family histories and passed down stories that invoke a sense of longing and displacement from El Salvador to the United States. Evelyn herself finds one particular anecdote told by her mother as explicative of her family's migration to the United States. Having to migrate to the United States very abruptly due to the Salvadoran civil war, her parents and two older brothers found it

very hard to settle. According to Evelyn's mother, the younger of the two brothers longing for a familiar place where he and his family could belong to told his mom, "Nos hubiermos traido nuestra casita."¹¹ Similarly, Araceli and Adriana have inherited memories of El Salvador as an idyllic home. Araceli's parents, in fact, do not speak about the Salvadoran civil war and do not wish to return to what they now consider a violent and dangerous place (due to the *maras*¹²), but they do speak of El Salvador – as a place located in a past time - that holds imaginaries of roots, belonging, and happiness. Adriana's father, who came here for economic reasons, travels to El Salvador regularly with Adriana and plans to live there upon his retirement; consequently, his stories are filled with nostalgia about places and people that he loved and tries to connect Adriana to those places and people through memories and physical proximity. Adriana's mother on the other hand does not plan to return to El Salvador but regards El Salvador as her home and her departure from it as the rupture from the availability of the support and love of her immediate and extended family and the comfort of a tight-knit community.

The experiences of Evelyn, Araceli, and Adriana seem to mirror those of other students in the Salvadoran based student organization (myself included). Nevertheless, it may not be prudent to generalize these experiences to the entire Salvadoran diaspora. How we –as Salvadorans across time and space- trace ourselves is particular to the way we negotiate, transform, (re)define, and (re)create the glocal conditions and relations surrounding our transnationality. For the group of second-generation Salvadorans in question, I suggest that our idea of being part of El Salvador and members of the Salvadoran diaspora hinges on the concept that our families were

wrongfully displaced from El Salvador due to war, poverty, or other reasons. We forge active connections across different Salvadoran generations, communities, and geographic locations through the transmission of imaginaries, stories, and memories of El Salvador as home. James Clifford suggests that the term diaspora is a signifier of transnationality, movement, and the political struggle to define local communities in historical contexts of displacement (qtd. in Benítez 192). Tina Campt adds to the definition of diaspora by arguing that memory is the source defining diaspora and diasporic identity (101). In addition, La Siguanaba shows us that the displacement and memory of her subjectivity between and generative of two worlds at once erases and renders her alive. But, more importantly, her survival in public memory is necessarily based on her reformulation through and against the negotiation of her displacement. Together displacement and memory approach a definition that approximates the Salvadoran diaspora as created and conceived of by us, the second-generation Salvadorans who are the focus of this paper. The Salvadoran Departamento 15 -the name given to the extra-national space of the Salvadoran diaspora in the United States- is a Salvadoran place created out of intergenerational memories and connections. These memories and connections prompt some second-generation Salvadorans (especially in reference to some of members of the student organization in question, but not necessarily in reference to Las Tres Mujeres and myself) to actively participate in the current Salvadoran government. For some members of the Salvadoran based student organization (in this particular case, not including Las Tres Mujeres and myself), participation in the current Salvadoran government is based on the premise of creating connections that mitigate the displacement of Salvadorans AND building a

nation that will eventually welcome our return home. For example, Articles 90 and 91 of the Salvadoran constitution are given primary attention during group discussions at the Salvadoran based student organization's statewide conferences. Article 90 grants citizenship to 1) those born in the territory of El Salvador, 2) children of a Salvadoran parent born in a foreign country, and 3) citizens of the Federal Republic of Central America. Article 91 allows Salvadoran citizens to hold dual citizenship. These two articles are thought of by some organization members as establishing the right to participate in the affairs of the Salvadoran nation in order to redress the unjust factors leading to and the trauma/inequities resulting from the Salvadoran civil war as well as managing the current problem of the maras. While these articles of the constitution and the interpretation of them offers the hope of belonging and building a "better" nation to many members of the organization, Araceli makes the observation that the ability of second-generation Salvadorans to participate in Salvadoran affairs can be problematic. It may led to power dynamics that grant Salvadorans in the United States unequal influence over the affairs of Salvadorans in El Salvador due to our greater economic resources. Overall, I contend that our complex notions and actions that manifest our longing for and belonging to the conceptual and geographic place of El Salvador situate many of us second-generation Salvadorans in the same position as first-generation Salvadorans who are described by Baker –Cristales as involved in a transnational movement but, nevertheless, reinforcing the discursive hegemony of the state idea (2004, p. 30).

The discussions held with Evelyn, Araceli, Adriana, and myself about the formation of our identities led us to believe that the creation of a diaspora based on the

idea of belonging to El Salvador requires a more nuanced understanding than one based solely on displacement and memory. The idea of belonging to El Salvador is also an effective way to deflect or protect against racialization and marginalization in the United States. Here I move into a conversation directly about Los Angeles as a place of contestation composed of power relations that marginalize and discriminate parts of its population -via the formation of ghettos and barrios- and the way most Salvadorans become affected/ implicated in those power dynamics. I am expanding the concept of Salvadoran displacement from the homeland to one that also talks about displacement through race and capitalism as experienced in the glocal power-relations of the United States.

Race is defined by Omi and Winant as a “concept that signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to the different types of human bodies” (1994, p.55). Omi and Winant further explain that this means that while the concept of race makes use of biologically based human characteristics to categorize people the features selected and the way they are framed for use in racial categorization are based in social and historical processes (Ibid.). Furthermore, Omi and Winant contend that race is a fundamental aspect structuring the social world and has real material consequences (Ibid). Racial formation, what I refer to as racialization, is the sociohistorical process through which racial categories are created and transformed (Ibid.). One of the major factors racializing and marginalizing Salvadorans in the United States has been their settlement in urban ghettos also referred to as inner cities. As aforementioned, the urban ghettos or inner cities in which Salvadorans are located can be characterized as working class areas with poor living conditions that include

constant violence and policing as well as under-serviced and under-resourced schools and public service centers. More specifically, La Paperson defines the ghetto as having three major features: 1) the place where Blackness is contained, 2) the place experiencing civil and legal divestment from the metropole, and 3) the place experiencing dislocation from the metropole (2010, p.10). By Blackness, La Paperson is referring to an analytical category that is not restricted to phenotype but which encompasses the racial categories that do not fit into the imagined purity of whiteness – the heterosexual, patriarchal, and able-bodied White male (2010, p.12). Thus, the ghetto is understood as inherently multi-ethnic. As Arias notes, Central Americans have to imagine and define their ethnicity and “belongingness” to the U.S. in a context where they are interacting and sharing living environments with multiple ethnic groups; and, to add another level of complexity, each group is more than likely struggling itself to find a place –marginal or otherwise- in the U.S. (2007, p.191). Meanwhile, all these groups of people also experience similar and differing forms of oppression in the urban ghetto, as they are constituted through power-relations of race and marginalization.

La Paperson explains the dislocation (what I am referring to as marginalization) and racialization that defines the ghetto as a project of colonialism (2010, p. 23). In this context, the ghetto is an internal and intimate part of the nation yet distant and exterior to the metropole (Ibid.). The metropole being, according to La Paperson, a place of privilege and accumulation of wealth that does not share in the world’s suffering (Ibid.). The metropole’s antithesis, the urban ghetto, becomes important in policing the domestic order of the nation by becoming the “exceptional”

place of racial and poverty problems against which the supposed norm of whiteness and privilege of the U.S. nation is defined (Ibid). Nevertheless, La Paperson observes that the U.S. urban ghetto can display the “affluent poverty of the first-world waste” making it attractive to immigrants and fueling a cycle of immigration (La Paperson 2010, p. 24). In other words, marginalization and racialization may be an attractive option - or it is the only option available – when Third World migrants are trying to overcome the inequities experienced in the global south while residing in the global north.

Eventually, the attractiveness of the U.S. ghetto is juxtaposed against the marginalization and racialization experienced there. This juxtaposition can lead to what Omi and Winant call national movements, a type of social movement based on race. More specifically, Omi and Winant define nationalist movements as minority based political movements that respond to the failures of racial accommodation and integration in the U.S. (1994, p. 36). For the people involved in these types of social movements, they effectively produce a sense of a collective identity and the creation of a community (Omi & Winant 1994, pp. 39-40). With this idea of national movements in mind, I believe the type of Salvadoran nationalism currently articulated by many of us second-generation Salvadorans is influenced by the racialization and marginalization (what Omi and Winant call the failure of racial accommodation and integration in the U.S.) experienced as inhabitants of ghettos and barrios. The oppressive and displacing circumstances of the U.S. ghetto can be read as additional reasons why many second-generation Salvadorans are invested in (re)defining El Salvador as a physical and imaginary place of belonging. However, Las Tres Mujeres

and I would like to express that we believe much becomes lost in the imagining of a Salvadoran nationalism. The power relations that maintain global, national, and in-group patterns of inequities across race, class, sexuality, gender, citizenship, etc. are not addressed, at least not in the Salvadoran nationalism we are experiencing as members of the Salvadoran based student organization. We feel that many of us Salvadorans –as second-generation or otherwise and as part of the organization in question or otherwise- allow an uncomplicated sense of Salvadoran commonality to be pursued in the name of finding an idyllic home without examining the different ways that oppression is structured and reproduced by *us* as members of the U.S., the urban ghetto, the Salvadoran diaspora, the Salvadoran nation-state, etc. I do not mean to suggest that coming together as Salvadorans to assert self-determination of our way of *Being* is not important in many ways and extremely empowering in the context of marginalization. However, I am asking that we be attentive to practicing social justice oriented forms of defining our identities, social movements, and politics; that is, I ask that we critically engage and consider glocal power structures and how we are both affected and implicated by them in relation to in-group dynamics and among other groups.

Las Tres Mujeres and I recognize that our understanding of displacement based both on a longing for a Salvadoran homeland and on Los Angeles as a place with ghettos of racialization and marginalization may not be relevant or agreeable to all Salvadorans living in Los Angeles. Nevertheless, the idea of thinking through the historical and glocal power relations one is implicated in may provided useful in developing a more critical perspective that attempts to create social movements that

can address social justice through multi-dimensional approaches across race, gender, class, sexuality, citizenship, religion, ethnicity, etc. It may approach a type of social justice that not only addresses the specificities of a particular group but also works towards dismantling a global system that perpetuates marginality at all levels making everyone oppressor-oppressed.

La Siguanaba Haunts

“Merely to urge students to insist on one’s own identity, history, tradition, uniqueness may initially get them to name their basic requirements for democracy and for the right to an assured decently humane existence. But we need to go on and to situate these in a geography of other identities, peoples, cultures, and then to study how, despite their differences, they have always overlapped one another through unhierarchical influence, crossing, incorporation, recollection, deliberate forgetfulness, and, of course conflict.”¹³

This account of politicized second-generation Salvadoran women is full of missing pieces and gaps that perhaps leave the reader with more questions than answers. While the women I interviewed initially received this project with much anticipation and excitement, during its final write-up it was considered as a less than welcome piece of anthropological invasion.

Our initial excitement revolved around the possibility of this project providing a critical perspective on the development of Salvadoran nationalism by second-generation college students. The objective was to provide evidence for the way race, class, sexuality, gender, citizenship, etc. affect members of the Salvadoran diaspora and how these are as important to address as some of the other concepts that are considered priority in our community, mainly global capitalism and colonialism specifically as they affect El Salvador. Yet, I did not specifically address all of the intersecting categories of personhood/power I list above. But, we (Las Tres Mujeres

and I) hope that this paper has provided some tools and exercises that may be useful to initiate critical discussions, consciousness, and exploration of all power relations and aspects that constitute the Salvadoran community across time and space. More importantly, it was our intention and desire that this paper (re)energize a conversation among the greater Salvadoran diaspora to create a transnational social justice project that pursues a critical, socially conscious Salvadoran identity that actively seeks to work in solidarity across differences within the group and between groups.

Las Tres Mujeres and I felt the intimate and in-person conversations generated by this project did provide a safe space to discuss matters that we considered crucial in the shaping of oppression experienced by and perpetuated by the Salvadoran transnational community. But, the move from conversation to written document for an academic institution, however, was a contentious move. Evelyn, Araceli, Adriana, and myself included found it difficult to navigate the need to write a paper and the responsibility we hold to our Salvadoran community. The responsibility we feel towards the Salvadoran community is based on the idea of protecting the image and knowledge of the Salvadoran diaspora from appropriation into a university system that continues to produce knowledge about Salvadorans without granting most of them access to join and actively participate in its campuses, classes and intellectual projects. A second issue we faced was how to portray differences of experiences, opinions, and oppression and yet maintain a sense of comradeship and solidarity as Salvadorans. In other words, how would this paper enable or impede the ability to mobilize a socially conscious Salvadoran movement or nationalism through in-group critiques and differences? How does a transnational Salvadoran movement advocate for equity and

social justice when what constitutes the ideas of equity and social justice are intensely debated? Overall, we tried to very carefully negotiate and anticipate the advantages and disadvantages of making Salvadoran issues public to a non-Salvadoran and academic audience.

Unfortunately there was no easy compromise on the issue of how to appropriately write this ethnography. Thus, what is omitted in the paper is as important as what is said. However, my choice in deciding what was appropriate to silence and voice remains debatable. I want to pay homage to Audre Lorde who guided the women and myself in deciding what was appropriate to include in this paper. In *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*, Audre Lorde, offers caution about the extent of liberation that can be accomplished through academia. Lorde powerfully states, "What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable" (2007, pp. 110 - 111). Lorde's outlook for social justice, however, is not grim. She suggests that liberation is found in the formation and maintenance of a community that bases interdependence and connection on the premise that differences between people exist and necessarily create polarities and therefore varying forms of strength and knowledge. Lorde writes, "In our world, divide and conquer must become define and empower" (2007, p. 112). I interpret this as meaning that there is liberating potential in taking personal responsibility for recognizing, engaging, and understanding difference as opposed to simply tolerating them without discussing and addressing the disparities, gaps, and power relations behind them. Thus, I reiterate, my objective and

hope is that I provided the tools for initiating critical discussions about power, difference, and social justice among the members of the Salvadoran diaspora in order to dismantle systematic oppression. I thank La Siguanaba for helping me frame those tools of discussion.

I conclude with the words of Guatemalan poet and revolutionary Otto René Castillo who works the boundaries between the master's tools and liberation:

Intelectuales apolíticos

*Un día,
los intelectuales
apolíticos
de mi país
serán interrogados
por el hombre
sencillo
de nuestro pueblo.
Se les preguntará
sobre lo que hicieron
cuando
la patria se apagaba
lentamente,
como una hoguera dulce,
pequeña y sola.
No serán interrogados
sobre sus trajes,
ni sobre sus largas
siestas
después de la merienda,
tampoco sobre sus estériles
combates con la nada,
ni sobre su ontológica
manera
de llegar a las monedas.
No se les interrogará
sobre la mitología griega,
ni sobre el asco
que sintieron de sí,
cuando alguien, en su fondo,
se disponía a morir cobardemente.
Nada se les preguntará
sobre sus justificaciones
absurdas,
crecidas a la sombra*

*de una mentira rotunda.
Ese día vendrán
los hombres sencillos.
Los que nunca cupieron
en los libros y versos
de los intelectuales apolíticos,
pero que llegaban todos los días
a dejarles la leche y el pan,
los huevos y las tortillas,
los que les cosían la ropa,
los que le manejaban los carros,
les cuidaban sus perros y jardines,
y trabajaban para ellos,
y preguntarán,
"¿Qué hicisteis cuando los pobres
sufrían, y se quemaba en ellos,
gravemente, la ternura y la vida?"
Intelectuales apolíticos
de mi dulce país,
no podréis responder nada.
Os devorará un buitre de silencio
las entrañas.
Os roerá el alma
vuestra propia miseria.
Y callaréis,
avergonzados de vosotros.¹⁴*

Notes

1. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 336.
2. In *Seeing Indians: A Study of Race, Nation, and Power in El Salvador*, Virginia Tilley identifies Lenca and Pipiles (also known as Nahua) as the two major indigenous groups in El Salvador (2005, p.35). Historically, the Lenca have lived in the eastern part of the country and speak Uluwa (a branch of the Macro-Chibchan language group) and Pipiles have lived in the western part of the country and speak Nahuatl (a dialect of Nahuatl, an Uto-Aztecan language) (Ibid.).
3. This depiction of La Siguanaba referenced conversations between the author and her mother, grandmother, sister, and aunts.
4. According to 2003 estimates published by the U.S. Department of State, approximately 57% of El Salvador's inhabitants are Roman Catholic with significantly large and growing numbers of Protestant groups. El Salvador's Christian ties are also noted in the country's name and motto. In English, El Salvador translates to the savior and is referencing Jesus Christ. The country's motto "Dios, Unión, Libertad" translates to "God, Union, and Liberty" and is referencing the Christian God.
5. The official name of the Salvadoran based student organization will remain unnamed at the request of the three women I worked with to create this paper.
6. El hermano lejano translates to the distant brother.
7. El marero translates to the gang member and usually, but not always, is referring to a member of the gang MS-13.
8. Las tres mujeres translates to the three women.
9. Campesino translates to peasant.
10. One possible source for more information on the events of 1932 is:
Hector Lindo-Fuentes, et.al. *Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador: the Insurrection of 1932, Roque Dalton, and the Politics of Historical Memory*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2007.
11. "Nos hubieramos traido nuestra casita" translates to "we should have brought our little house."
12. Maras translates to gangs.
13. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 330-331.

14. Otto René Castillo, “Apolitical Intellectuals” in *Poetry Like Bread: Poets of the Political Imagination from Curbstone Press*, ed. Martin Espada (Curbstone Press, 2000).

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