

1-1-2009

Voices of conflict, reconciliation, and transnational belonging : interrogating the events at the II roundtable discussions for Salvadorans in Canada

Denise I-fen Chung Guerrero
Ryerson University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.ryerson.ca/dissertations>



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Guerrero, Denise I-fen Chung, "Voices of conflict, reconciliation, and transnational belonging : interrogating the events at the II roundtable discussions for Salvadorans in Canada" (2009). *Theses and dissertations*. Paper 596.

This Major Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Ryerson. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Ryerson. For more information, please contact bcameron@ryerson.ca.

VOICES OF CONFLICT, RECONCILIATION, AND TRANSNATIONAL
BELONGING: INTEROGATING THE EVENTS AT THE II ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS
FOR SALVADORANS IN CANADA

By

Denise I-fen Chung Guerrero, Honours B.A., English Specialist & Minor in Diaspora and
Transnational Studies at the University of Toronto, 2008

A Major Research Paper
Presented to Ryerson University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
In the Program of
Immigration and Settlement Studies

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2009

© Denise I-fen Chung Guerrero 2009

Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this major research paper.

I authorize Ryerson University to lend this paper to other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

Signature

I further authorize Ryerson University to reproduce this paper by photocopying or by other means, in total or in part, at the request of other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

Signature

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my family for their unwavering support. I couldn't have done any of this without you. I love you.

To all of my participants, thank you for your time and cooperation. I hope you learn as much from reading this as I have from writing it.

To Daisy Moreno-Labine, you are my rock. Thank you for letting me share with you my confusion, my tears and my joys throughout this journey.

To Neil Ten Kortenaar, I feel blessed to have met you and been taught by you. Your wisdom and insight has in many ways shaped me into the person I am today. Thank you.

To Patricia Landolt, I am eternally grateful for your guidance, kindness and generous attention.

To Harald Bauder, your supervision was a delight. Thank you for believing in my project and helping me stay on track.

To Tanya Molina, thank you for sharing your thoughts with me and allowing me to share mine with you.

To Jairo Ortiz and Laura, thank you for keeping me sane and helping me come to realizations that have been long overdue.

To Ruth Wilson and Yogendra Shakya, I hope that one day I have the drive and passion that both of you tirelessly exercise in your work to help others.

To Matthew Fellion, you are to me "the masterpiece of nature". I love you my dear friend.

To Marlene Gemmiti, you are a beautiful person and I am blessed to have your friendship. Thank you for your thoughtfulness and your warmth.

To Johannah May Black, Nicole Holness, Orlando Skeete, Yang-Allan Song, Heber Orellana, Sebastian Marion, Philip Covoshoff, Aurelia Stefani and Shalen Lalonde, thank you for being my friends and listening to me rant. You have kept me strong and kept me going in moments of weakness.

And lastly to Paul Spencer Gemmiti, you are to blame for my strengths and weaknesses as a woman. Whatever may be, I love you endlessly. Thank you for sharing your life with me.

DEDICATIONS

I dedicate this work to the most influential people in my life – my mother and father. You are both so strong. I owe a lot to you both...

Querido Papí,

Lo quiero mucho. Gracias por creer en mí. Soy orgullosa de saber que usted es mi padre y que tengo su apoyo.

Y...

Querida madre, mi mamá, señorita,

Nunca olvides que tus sacrificios no fueron en vano. Te dedico este trabajo porque para la mayor parte de mi vida ha sido tu voz y las pocas memorias de El Salvador que han pintado la imagen de el país y la vida que dejamos. Sacrificaste tu vida, tu carrera, quizás también un poco de tu salud mental para asegurar un futuro para tus hijas y quiero que sepas que lo reconocemos, y que estamos eternamente agradecidas.

Mamita mia, eres tan fuerte, pero los años te han querido ver débil...la guerra civil, los obstáculos de la vida, el cancer, todos los has vencido... espero que encuentres fuerza en lo que tu has logrado aqui, en lo presente. En parte, tu has sido mi musa, mi inspiración para entender de donde vine y tambien para querer ver un futuro próspero para gente quién deja sus tierras en busca de un futuro mejor.

Te quiero mucho.

Los quiero a los dos muchisimo.

VOICES OF CONFLICT, RECONCILIATION, AND TRANSNATIONAL BELONGING:
INTEROGGATING THE EVENTS AT THE II ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS FOR
SALVADORANS IN CANADA

Denise I-fen Chung Guerrero
Master of Arts, 2009
Immigration and Settlement Studies
Ryerson University

ABSTRACT

This Major Research Paper is a case study examining an act of civil disobedience at a Salvadoran community event which occurred in 2007 to explore the political participation, transnationalism and a sense of belonging for Salvadorans in Canada. Interviews were done with participants who attended the event as well as members of the community not present. The questions explored are:

1. Is political engagement a strong indicator of social relations within the community? 2. What do these social relations mean for the political participation of Salvadorans and how do these intersections affect their sense of belonging? and; 3. Do these dynamics affect a sense of identity for Salvadoran in Canada? Research data emphasized an understanding of politics as “party politics” among participants, embedded with socio-economic hierarchies which are transferred through generations. Other concepts emerging from the data highlight the political socialization of Salvadorans and the impact of the civil war.

Key words: *political participation, transnationalism, belonging, identity, Salvadoran migrants in Canada*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1. Introduction.....	1
Setting the Stage.....	3
A Note on Some Definitions.....	7
Chapter 2. Literature Review: A Backgrounder.....	9
Context of Migration: Civil War and the Political Climate.....	10
Experience of Reception.....	13
Political Participation and Transnational Politics.....	16
Chapter 3. Qualitative Research Methods.....	19
Positionality.....	20
Critical Perspective.....	22
Data Collection.....	23
Data Analysis.....	23
Sample Design.....	24
Recruitment.....	25
Description of Informants.....	26
Interview and Survey.....	27
Research Ethics and Applied Analysis.....	28
Chapter 4. The II Roundtable Discussions for Salvadorans in Canada: Behind the Scenes...32	
Protest Politics: “You have to yell and scream”.....	33
Party Politics: “You’re either this, or you’re that”.....	35
Family: “Politics, it’s in my blood”.....	38
Chapter 5. The Ripple Affect: Impact of the Civil War.....	41
Identity and Sense of Belonging.....	43
Generational Differences.....	44
On Forgetting.....	45
Chapter 6. Discussions.....	47
APPENDIX A: Consent Form.....	51
APPENDIX B: Interview Guide.....	54
APPENDIX C: Optional Survey.....	56
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	59

Chapter 1. Introduction

The impact of migration on people, communities and nation-states has generated significant attention in academia over the latter half of the past century. However difficult it may seem to account for the movements of so many ethno-racial communities, each community deserves to be recognized. By doing so, we not only construct a better understanding of how different peoples with particular experiences operate in a multicultural setting and a framework of transnational migration, but also deepen our understanding of established theories, allowing ourselves room to account for variations and expansions when necessary. It is also necessary to look for this further insight while not losing sight of the most important vantage point – the individuals that make these communities – the people.

Migration flows and their effects on society have been ongoing areas of research for academics in many disciplines, replying to the emergence of a global “age of migration” (Castles & Miller, 2003). A particular movement that is increasingly demanding more attention from academic studies is the Salvadoran diaspora. Although a small group, Salvadorans were the main source of Latin American immigrants in the 1990s (García, 2006), and are still one of the many groups that make up Canada’s rich diversity. Recent research on Latin American migration to Canada has singled out Salvadorans as a unique immigrant community. Various studies on Salvadoran migrants can be found within the framework of transnationalism and the discipline of political science.

Changes in the linear treatment of migration flows by scholars now recognize “transnationalism from below” (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998, p.6) and approach the complexities of migration by acknowledging the multidirectional, multi-institutionalized phenomenon as having far more implications than previously thought. Thomas Faist’s concept of the “pentagonic

relationship” (2000, pp.200-210) suggests that we should study specific transnational relationships and value them for their particular intersections and nuances. What Faist means by this is that an examination of the relationships between the migrant group, governments and the civil societies of the host and home land, will result in an in depth analysis of the experiences of transnational migrant groups and the dynamic ways in which they operate.

In the case of the Salvadoran migrant group, research examining how transnational relationships function within the United States and Canada has been steadily emerging (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998; Landolt, Autler & Baires, 1999; Goldring, 2006; Landolt, 2007). However, the trend has been heavily focused on Salvadorans in the United States and less on Salvadorans in Canada, with comparatively little research in relation to how these experiences differ from their southern neighbors. The experience of migration has allowed Salvadorans to negotiate their identities in a new land, although not necessarily as a part of that landscape. To better understand the Salvadoran diaspora and their sense of belonging there are several things one must consider, such as their history, context of departure, and experience in the new society. To illustrate the complexities of this group in Canada and generate new insight, I wish to recall a disruption at an event which will be the base of my study, an event which I personally attended.

In November 2007, members of the Salvadoran community came together in Toronto to participate in the II Roundtable Discussions for Salvadorans in Canada (*la Segunda Mesa Redonda de los Salvadoreños en Canada*) which was considered an event of “great importance and benefit for the Salvadoran community residing in Canada” (www.eldiaropopularonline.com). The event’s organizers had hoped to strengthen and “extend the relations with the diaspora” (*Ibid.*). However many were surprised and shocked at how the event unfolded. The inauguration of the II Roundtable Discussions for Salvadorans in Canada became a dynamic and politically-

charged space – a space where homeland, Canadian, and transnational politics played out as a result of the political participation of several Salvadorans. What had occurred at this event illustrated a microcosm of a multi-layered dialogue ranging from diverse belief-systems, experiences, histories to values embedded at the core of the ensuing conflict. During the period of time that the demonstration of civic disobedience was made, the events which took place and the opinions that were shared with me among those present and other members of the community have provided the context for this case study.

Setting the Stage: The II Roundtable Discussions for Salvadorans in Canada

A month before the II Roundtable Discussions for Salvadorans in Canada (hereafter Roundtable Discussions) was held in Toronto, I had been told by my very excited and proud close friend that she would be representing the Salvadoran community for the city she lived in, joining a panel of government dignitaries (Salvadoran and Canadian) and community representatives gathered for the event. Although my particular positionality with respects to the Salvadoran “community” is in itself complex, I am culturally linked to the community even if not always recognized as such. I shared my friend’s enthusiasm, although I am not sure if I’d shared or felt the same sense of inclusion as her within the community. Nevertheless, I took the opportunity to support my friend in her endeavor and to learn more about part of “my” people.

The environment was filled with formalities I had not usually seen in past community events. Registration tables, name tags, and a conference styled panel are not the norm for community events. Yet the event still had a familiar family orientation common to other Latin American events I had been to where mothers bring their children and extended family.

This event was a big deal for many. It was a moment to be proud of their achievements, their participation, and the community. The event was also important because not only would the

Vice Minister of The Ministry of the Exterior from the government of El Salvador be there, but Canadian federal and provincial representatives had been invited and had agreed to be present. The venue was also quite formal, it was at the Toronto Board of Trade in the First Canadian Place building in downtown Toronto. Everyone was given miniature Salvadoran flags and a package containing the agenda for the Roundtable Discussions, tourism advertisements, maps of El Salvador and some literature about transnational self-employment business programs and new economic developments in El Salvador.

As the event began, I was struck by the poise and eloquence of the Vice Minister of the Ministry of Exterior of El Salvador, who emphatically repeated in her opening words that “El Salvador has changed”, followed with the catch phrase that it was “open for business.” After the Vice Minister’s speech, the Canadian representatives said a few words on the importance of the Salvadoran community in Canada as well as their particular encounters with it, ranging from memories of Salvadoran people to an art piece they had purchased on their travels there.

Next was my friend’s moment to shine, but less than 60 seconds into her speech she was interrupted by first one voice, and then another, both full of passion and conviction. What happened next was a series of events that intentionally threatened to dismantle the efforts put into the event. So that my memory of what happened does not seem distorted by time, I rely on some media coverage to supplement my account of the event. El Salvador’s national newspaper *El Diario de Hoy* and Toronto’s Hispanic newspaper *El Popular* covered the event and the interruption.

Mid-sentence, my friend lost her words from shock and surprise as the man who had been sitting in the front row of the audience stood up and loudly demanded that a moment of silence be observed for the Jesuit priests that had been murdered during the civil war as well as those

who died at the hands of the death squads. As government representatives instructed the speakers to proceed, ignoring the demand of the interrupting man, one voice angrily emerged from the crowd. This disruption quickly revealed itself as a protest by a group of activists that exposed a banner demanding social justice in El Salvador and distributed pamphlets listing human rights violations to seated spectators, some still in shock. Toronto's Hispanic newspaper, *El Popular*, recounts the event:

...the political discourse was taken over by [a protestor], and was becoming a yelling contest among people deaf to the spoken pleas, threatening to turn to physical force. "Be respectful, get out of here," yelled some of the event organizer that aggressively approached [the protestor] with every intention of making him leave, by force if necessary. "Don't touch me because you can go to jail. I am Salvadoran, I am Canadian, and I have the right to be here and give me opinion", responded [the protestor]... Soon after, a man tall and strong, wearing a security uniform as if the only "weapon" that could dissolve the situation, arrived to resolve the problem. But there was no need for him to do anything, because at that moment [a community representative], the Salvadoran representative of Quebec who was next in line to speak as had been planned, addressed [the protestor] and asked the panel to allow her compatriot to speak and express his point of view.

"I am from El Salvador too... I am not your enemy and nobody here is your enemy, everyone has the right to be heard, but in an orderly fashion" said [the community representative] before handing over the microphone and the podium, sacrificing her time to speak. [The protestor] took the microphone, criticizing the government [Canadian and Salvadoran], and pleaded with audience members to not participate in the event because, according to him, they were all being manipulated, he stepped down from the podium and was joined by a dozen people that had accompanied him, Salvadorans, Latin Americans and Canadians alike.

(my translation from Spanish, "Salvadoreños realizan Mesa Redonda en Toronto" by Carlos Vigil, www.eldiariopopularonline.com)

Although the journalist captured an important part of what happened during this politically-charged exchange, mostly the momentum and the intensity of the events, I discovered later through my research that some significant aspects had been sensationalized and others completely omitted.

Two years have passed since this incident took place, yet this event has revealed complexities of this particular community which require further exploration. As I continued my research and reviewed the literature available on Salvadorans, I was struck by the lack of literature which approaches the intersectionality regarding political participation, transnationalism, and an overall understanding of a Salvadoran sense of belonging. This gap in the literature has directed me to focus on these themes and embark on the research which lay ahead within the context of the events at the Roundtable Discussions. I intend to fill these gaps by providing insight on how these themes do in fact intertwine and are interrelated, drawing necessary attention to the importance of considering these dynamic intersections.

I explore how the political participation of Salvadorans is affected by their context of migration, experiences of reception and transnational politics, and indeed affects their sense of belonging in Canada. I have begun by illustrating an act of civil disobedience which occurred on November 16th, 2007, at the Toronto Board of Trade, during what was the inauguration of the Roundtable Discussions. This was a space which became politically and emotionally charged, a contested space addressing past and present unresolved issues and conflicts, a space where voices were simultaneously outspoken and silenced, and also a space where a surprising attempt at reconciliation was made. My aim is to highlight what we know about transnational political participation and provide insight into complexities that have not yet been explicitly identified. The particular questions I will explore are: 1. Is political engagement a strong indicator of social relations within the community itself? 2. What do these social relations mean for the political participation of Salvadorans and how do these intersections affect their sense of belonging, if at all? and 3. Do these dynamics affect a sense of identity for Salvadoran in Canada?

A Note on Some Definitions

Before proceeding, the use of words and their definitions must be addressed. Robin Cohen's *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (1997) illustrates an in depth understanding on the concept of "diaspora", providing a diaspora typology and two tables which categorize diaspora groups and illustrate common characteristics. At first glance, the Salvadoran immigrant community in Canada shares six or seven of the nine features which are common to a diaspora. Cohen's table of "Common features of diasporations" suggests that for a group to be diasporic they should demonstrate these characteristics:

1. Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions; 2. alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions; 3. a collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements; 4. an idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation; 5. the development of a return movement that gains collective approbation; 6. a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate; 7. a troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group; 8. a sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement; 9. and the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism. (Table 1.1, p. 26)

Some features, when applied to the Salvadoran migrant group, are debatable because there is a lot of political tension among the Salvadoran community that does not allow them to envisage the same common fate, share a collective memory or idealization of an ancestral home. Cohen also states that not all diasporas will fit nicely into the rubric of his conceptualization because each is unique in their own way. Of note for this research study, under the victim diaspora "type" emerges the problem with labeling contemporary refugee groups as diasporas, Cohen explains that "Many contemporary refugee groups are incipient victim diasporas but time has to pass to see whether they return to their homelands, assimilate in their hostlands, creolized or mobilize as a diaspora" (pp.18). Despite the implied static qualities which Cohen identifies as characteristic of diasporas, the truth is that diasporas *do* change over time and must be stimulated

by events. As a result of this, it is important to recognize that diasporas can weaken, strengthen, fade and or re-emerge.

Although the tendency to speak of a Salvadoran “diaspora” is tempting, Salvadorans lack a clearly identified myth of the homeland and a strong consistent collective consciousness because of the highly politicized context of their departure. Yet for some, it is the desire to change the politics of the homeland and engage with those politics despite where permanent residency locates them that allows a transnational relationship to exist. Sarah V. Wayland (2006) states it nicely when she speaks about “diaspora politics”, reminding us that “Not all transnational political actors constitute a diaspora” (pp.19). The retreat from confidently recognizing Salvadorans as a bonafide diaspora to naming them merely transnationals does not undermine the importance of the Salvadoran transnational migrant experience. The diasporic experience has conventionally addressed feelings of nostalgia, home and a sense of belonging. For the purpose of this paper, I will use the term diaspora loosely.

Transnationalism on the other hand is a much less ambiguous term to work with. Transnationalism is defined as “the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Basch et al., 1994, pp. 7-8). Unlike diaspora, I believe transnationalism is a term that is more inclusive of different migratory experiences and focuses on the relationships across borders in a myriad of communities. Although transnationalism and diaspora are commonly spoken of terms, often simultaneously and at times interchangeably, they differ greatly.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Political participation is a commonly used indicator of how immigrants integrate into society (Anderson & Black, 2008); however, rarely are we made aware of how immigrants regard the place they have come to reside in or how they view themselves in relation to it. How and why immigrants politically engage has increasingly been seen as an important factor to consider (Ginieniewicz, 2007). This is especially true for the Salvadoran immigrant group as researchers make links between the Salvadoran experience of a traumatic civil war and a repressive political system in the homeland to their politics in the receiving society (Chute, 2006; Ginieniewicz, 2007; Itzigsohn & Villacrés, 2008; Wayland, 2006). In the case of Salvadorans in Canada determining what their political participation reveals requires a deeper understanding of their particular context of migration, experience of reception in Canada, and the function of their transnational politics.

The context of departure for Salvadorans who migrated to Canada is pivotal for understanding the complexity of this immigrant group. The civil war in El Salvador was responsible for the mass migration of Salvadorans, many of which crossed over Canada's border as political refugees. As poverty and civil unrest increased in El Salvador, the numbers of Salvadorans entering Canada steadily soared. Salvadorans made up 30% or 23,780 of all Latin American immigrants and non-permanent residents to Canada between 1981-1990. During this period Salvadorans became the leading immigrant producing group of the Latin American category for several decades (Statistics Canada, 2003). Upon arrival, Salvadorans faced more obstacles as they experienced discrimination and lacked social capital in terms of long established social or kinship networks which earlier Latin American immigrant groups were able to benefit from (Chute, 2006). The official end of the civil war in 1992 resulted in an end to

transnational activities by grassroots organizations that were politically sympathetic to or affiliated with the insurgency (Landolt, 2008). Yet transnational politics remain strong among Salvadorans in North America particularly through transnational grassroots organizations (Landolt et al., 1999; Landolt, 2007). Considering these factors, it is important to analyze how their context of migration, experience of reception in Canada and transnational politics may be reflected in their political participation to demonstrate a sense of belonging.

Context of Migration: Civil War and the Political Climate

No other event in the history of El Salvador would match in numbers the mass exodus of people fleeing El Salvador than the civil war which officially began in 1979. Although Salvadorans have always emigrated to neighboring countries and to the United States, during the period when the civil war begun approximately 30% of the population, a population just over 5 million people, fled El Salvador seeking refuge in neighbouring countries, the United States, and Canada (Landolt & Da, 2005; Landolt, 2007). This notoriously violent civil war would last approximately 12 years and involved the extreme right Salvadoran military state government, later known as Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA) and the extreme left insurgent guerrilla uprising of five groups which united to create the Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional (FMLN). Although the Salvadoran state government proposed itself as a democracy it was far from a representative democracy, resembling more of what scholars claim is common in Latin American countries, a politics of “democratic elitism” (Itzigsohn & Villacrés, 2008, pp.666). In these suggested institutional power structures, it has been the few wealthy politicians that have partnered with large corporations and landowners to govern the country with tactics based on fear. Death squads, “disappearances”, kidnappings and mass murders are unfortunately occurrences that resonate strongly in the memory of many Salvadorans (Martín-Baro, 1994).

In the early 1980s, highlighted by the state-sponsored assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero, who spoke out against the violence in El Salvador and openly criticized those he saw as responsible for the loss of innocent lives, the FMLN gained more support than ever by appealing to the segmented and marginalized populations of Salvadorans who felt exploited by the elites and promoted Marxist politics. As neighboring countries, Nicaragua in particular, were undergoing similar revolutions that were labeled communist uprisings in this cold-war climate, El Salvador attracted international interest. Carlos M. Vilas once wrote that it was the civil war that brought El Salvador out of the “picturesque” (Vilas, 1995, pg.8) and into the world of academics, grassroots activists, NGOs, and policy makers. The United Nations’ involvement and the endorsement of each side of the civil war by foreign nations made El Salvador a playground to Cold War politics. The United States publicly commended ARENA for proclaiming democratic values and ideals, while secretly it was believed to have been funding and providing CIA training to the military. Cuba and the former Soviet Union are believed to have funded activities for the FMLN. Other literature which details the Salvadoran conflict, suggests that human rights violations were ultimately committed by all sides and resulted in the deaths of an estimated 80,000 people, many consisting of innocent civilians caught in the cross-fire (Fishel & Corr, 1998; Rosenberg, 1999; Mason, 1999; Gzesh, 2006).

Ignacio Martín-Baró once wrote that the people of El Salvador have learned to distrust the state because the governments that claimed to protect them, in fact created structures under military governments where they could dominate and oppress them. According to him, the people of El Salvador understood this abuse of power as a “veil of lies” (Martín-Baró, 1994, p.20) and took measures of resistance and survival which lead to strained social relations among Salvadorans. Often, agents of the state and the insurgency masked and disguised themselves as

civilians, leading Salvadorans to lack confidence in social relations and draw ideological lines between who is on which side based on their politics (*Ibid.*). It is this why some researchers believe that home-land politics has been a major influence on how Salvadorans perceived their new land. They formed an identity which was constructed by experiences where they had been deeply disillusioned by others, by ideas of democracy, and have since had a general distrust for government officials and public authorities. This led them to compare their receiving society within a framework that was and perhaps still is deeply instilled by trauma (Martín-Baró, 1994: Chute, 2006: Mountz et al. 2002). However, it should be noted that this is not true for all Salvadorans as some were inspired to organize and continue fighting for the ideals they believed in, either for themselves or their families back home. This resulted in transnational grassroots organizations which fundraised under politically motivated agendas for much of the 1980s in the U.S. and Canada (Landolt, 2007).

The civil war ended with the signing of the 1992 United Nations Peace Accords and the inclusion of the FMLN as a legitimate political entity. This was received differently among Salvadorans. Some saw this as the ultimate disillusionment of the FMLN and felt their efforts were undermined when the FMLN accepted political representation and recognition within the pre-existing government structure, allowing them to sit beside the very people who they used to fight (Rosenberg, 1999) instead of staying true to their original plan to make a full transition of power.

Since the United States refused to recognize any human rights violation on the part of the Salvadoran state, even though the United Nations-sponsored Commission on the Truth concluded that the military participated in “a deliberate strategy of eliminating or terrifying the peasant population in areas where the guerillas were active”, and that “the deliberate, systematic

and indiscriminate violence against the peasant population in areas of military operations went on for years” (qtd. in Rosenberg, 1999), it is understandable that remnants of antagonism, fear and distrust would remain among some Salvadorans. Literature defending the political stance of the United States also considers the involvement of the United Nations as watershed in conflict resolution claiming that peace and democratization now exist in El Salvador (Fishel & Corr, 1998). This addresses a debate in which many claim that the weak legitimacy of democratization processes undermine any attempts of peace and that “the hopes that democratic policies will produce betterment in the living conditions of the population [do] not pan out” (Itzigsohn & Villacrés, 2008, pp.665).

Although there have been significant improvements in El Salvador and much interest by scholars in political science and international relations since the civil war began, many argue that the oppressive living conditions in El Salvador remain largely unchanged. A constant and steady flow of people emigrating support arguments that El Salvador still faces many challenges, both political and non-political. The citizens of El Salvador continue to experience severe poverty, oppression, the threat of increasing organized crime and violence.

Experience of Reception

The majority of those who fled El Salvador were said to have gone to the United States, a long-time primary receiver of Salvadorans, while smaller but substantial populations headed to Canada as asylum seekers. The treatment of Salvadoran migrants in literature which focuses on the United States is careful and even uncomfortable with labeling Salvadorans as “refugees”, often placing them under the preferred alternative category of “exiles” (Itzigsohn & Villacrés, 2008). Many authors dedicate sections explaining why Salvadorans were not recognized as “refugees” by the United States, granted they could reasonably fit within the 1951 United

Nations Convention definition (Landolt et al., 1999; Landolt & Da, 2005; Mountz et al., 2002; Gzesh, 2006). Despite the growing conflict, Salvadorans fleeing for reasons of political persecution were not recognized as such in the United States as it did not correspond to their foreign policy. This is important when considering Salvadoran migration to Canada a safe “haven” for them (García, 2006), a country that considered El Salvador a refugee producing country during the civil war and accepted 77% of all refugee claims (Gammage, 2007).

The pathway which many Salvadorans took prior to arriving in Canada was predominantly through Mexico and the United States. García (2006) writes that “Interviews with landed claimants revealed that most had spent some time in Mexico and/or the United States before moving on to Canada”. A study conducted by André Jacob (1992) titled “Adaptation of Salvadoran refugees in Montreal” found that 73 % of Salvadoran migrants to Canada had lived in the United States or Mexico for at least one year to six months before moving to Canada, and only 27 % had chosen Canada as the country of first asylum.

Why would Canada be a “plan B” for Salvadorans? This can be explained by the immigration classes which Salvadorans attempted to navigate through and at a very pragmatic level – geography. Initially, many Salvadorans tried to enter as economic migrants instead of asylum seekers in the United States because of the failure of the United States government to recognize El Salvador as a refugee-producing country that could not or would not protect its citizens. Conversely, Canada opened its humanitarian doors and allowed substantial numbers of Salvadorans to enter Canada, although small when compared to populations in the United States. At times, Canada even actively offered refugee status in off-shore programs in partnership with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and other NGOs. Those who came to the Canadian border and chose Canada as a destination of refuge still faced the fear of being denied

their refugee claims. In both Canada and the United States, Salvadorans were susceptible to extended periods of time similar to a “limbo”, a neither here nor there place of in-betweenness, where they were unable to secure legal status or protection from the state. Although the politics in the United States did not favour Salvadorans fleeing the civil war, entry to Canada was still risky and as a result many chose to stay behind as *mojados*¹, undocumented workers, and joined the underclass in a shadow economy to make a living (Menjívar, 1999; Landolt & Da, 2005). The effect of prolonged displacement contributed to “a painful relationship with the nation-state” (Mountz, et al., 2002, p.343), one that would not be soon forgotten. Even in Canada, Salvadorans who had filed refugee claims were made to wait long periods of time for their decision to be finalized. This put an added stress on the relationship between Salvadorans, their nation state and country of reception.

Yet, Canada was by far more sympathetic to Salvadorans than any other country, offering provisions that were highly regarded and valued such as access to healthcare, social assistance, language instruction, and after residency requirements were met, access to Canadian citizenship (Landolt, 2007). Although the benefits Canada offered were great, barriers such as linguistic proficiency, discrimination, lack of awareness of cultural and political norms as well as the experience of a pan-Latin American hierarchy, are considered to have been obstacles to integration and political participation (Chute, 2006). A pan-Latin American hierarchy is a racialized scale based on skin tone and social standing where Latin Americans with closer European ties and lighter skin tone who are usually from South America are at the top, and those of darker skin tone from Central America are at the bottom. Yet it is believed that with time and

¹ *Mojados* is the Spanish word for “wetbacks” that cross the river to illegally enter the United States through the Rio Grande river along the border of Mexico. However it is also a word used for undocumented immigrants.

through negotiation of their political identities, some Salvadorans have begun to achieve a sense of belonging (Giniewniewicz, 2007).

Political Participation and Transnational Politics

Political participation is a broad category which encompasses a wide array of activities in which people can engage – both formally and informally (Black & Anderson, 2008). The lived political experience of some Salvadorans show that much of what we regard as formal political participation has been associated with corruption and deceit (Martín-Baro, 1994), whereas informal participation in the form of protests and demonstration have been seen as methods which represent and advocate for social realities.

Grassroots community organizing and organized rallies have been part of El Salvador's history dating back to the mid 1920s. Paul D. Almeida (2008) has documented the “waves of protest”, making connections between the nature of protest politics and social movements in El Salvador during different periods and transitions of governance. What is noteworthy about Almeida's work is that he makes strong links relating to politics and religion which highlights the importance of liberation theology and the role of the Roman Catholic Church in El Salvador. He notes the first incidents of political organizing and demonstrations as having been planned by and with religious affiliates in rural areas fighting for the rights of campesinos. Although these movements have occurred both peacefully and violently over history, they all seem to have resulted in severe oppression. Salvadorans have nevertheless still participated in politics whether in the homeland or abroad.

Jorge Ginienicwz's (2007) study on the scope of political participation of Latin Americans in Canada found that homeland politics can be an important factor in the political

participation of immigrants in Canada. He cites a Salvadoran respondent who explains their political work in Canada:

...the most important thing is keeping in touch with the political situation in El Salvador. Of course, we do not forget that we live in Canada, and we try to participate here too. It is strange because we are committed to our party in El Salvador but, at the same time, we have started to participate in Canadian political parties. Still, ultimately, we feel that our main political commitment is to be involved in home country politics. (Ginieniewicz, 2007, p.336)

Other Salvadoran respondents also stated that they often do political work for Salvadoran legislators, organizing campaigns and canvassing Salvadorans in Canada for monetary support. Issues of social justice and awareness about human rights violations in El Salvador are also part of the agenda for groups in Canada. This type of transnational grassroots politics are not new in Canada and predate the civil war when transnational grassroots organizations fundraised to support political activities in El Salvador.

With the signing of the peace accords, transnational grassroots organizations were believed to have largely dissolved or have evolved into Home Town Associations concerned more with the progress and development of specific municipalities in El Salvador rather than previous political ideologies (Landolt et al., 1999). This phenomenon is stronger in the United States and not as common in Canada. Only in 2004 did Salvadorans strengthen the link between home country politics and Canadian settlement and political participation with the coming together of previous groups to form the Salvadoran Canadian Association (ASALCA in Spanish), which has outlined a mandate for promoting Salvadoran cultural values, work for social justice, settlement and integration of Salvadorans in Canadian society as well as organizing and participating in civil society (<http://www.asalca.ca/>). This organization provides what Salvadorans had so desperately needed during the years of the civil war and did not have –

representation in Canada (Landolt et. al, 2009). These political interactions are important to consider because they demonstrate a transnational political agenda which “enable” and “influence” political engagement in Canadian society (Ginienicwz, 2007, p.341). This transition has by no means been a smooth one, nor does it explicitly illustrate the amount of solidarity among Salvadorans as a community as other obstacles and barriers still exist.

Chute (2006) explores these aspects further when she examines the distrust towards settlement agencies by Salvadorans in a study conducted to measure the Salvadoran political participation and the continuing struggles they face. She discovers in her study that participants were uncomfortable with settlement services because they saw them as “complicit with a racist and classist” (pp.157) treatment of newcomers. This idea is consistent with the polarization of Salvadorans in the homeland where the divide between the rich and the poor is frighteningly stark – over 49% of El Salvador’s population of an estimated 6 million lives *below* the poverty line (US AID, 2005). Chute’s study shows that some Salvadorans in Canada feel exploited and pressured into low-paying jobs. Disheartened, a Salvadoran-Canadian identity was not linked to notions of belonging or home but more with citizenship as a legal status allowing the convenience of a passport, a travel document which would facilitate trips to connect to family back home (Chute, 2006; Wayland, 2006). Landolt et al. (1999) explains that “the particularities of Salvadoran transnationalism are largely explained by the socio-political conjecture in which transnational practices first emerged on a large scale and were consolidated” (pp.313). Salvadorans are undoubtedly influenced in Canada by political factors which are mediated through their homeland politics and in some cases, like at the disruption during the Roundtable Discussions, are played out on Canadian soil.

Chapter 3. Qualitative Research Methods: Grounded Theory

Glaser and Strauss (1967) were the first to develop grounded theory in order for researcher to engage in a world which was constantly being constructed and needed reflexive interaction. Acting and reacting to environmental cues that stem from the research and carry meaning for the participants are important. Later revised in procedure and technique, Strauss and Corbin (1990) have adapted the theory and made it friendlier to interdisciplinary studies. Grounded theory was developed as a qualitative research method that focuses on data without generating hypothesis first or imposing theoretical frameworks but instead allows the emergence of theory from data. Rooted in a movement called “symbolic interactionism” which operates with the assumptions that meanings evolve from social interactions and are symbolic, and therefore subject to interpretation stemming from various forms of communication, researchers need to engage in a world that requires reflexive interaction.

These meanings or conceptualizations are reflected upon and then revised and allow researchers to engage in an interactive process of analysis where “all is data” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Researchers who employ grounded theory are subject to systematically gathering and analyzing data to focus on patterns of behaviour and meaning which account for variations in interactions around a problem or a research question in order to arrive at conceptually based explanations for *those* behaviours under *those* conditions to create general theories about those relationships that can be applied across contexts. Theories and hypotheses related to the phenomenon of immigrant political participation and transnationalism have been my initial guide in exploring the phenomenon as I strive to become theoretically sensitive (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). However, pre-existing theory has only been an initial starting point for my research as I

conducted qualitative and exploratory research through a grounded theory approach and methods within a critical framework and interpretive paradigm.

I gained as much knowledge as possible about the population that I wanted to study before the data collection, analysis, and interpretation, and looked to relevant literature as necessary when concepts emerged from the data. Specific concepts from my own experiences and from the literature review stood out to me as ideas that might be useful for understanding the data I planned to collect; however, since the literature on Salvadorans in Canada is relatively limited I also maintained sensitivity for other theoretical concepts. I have kept an open mind in the data discovery process to prevent these concepts from hindering the ability for me to recognize the emergence of insightful variations

The insight from this data has inadvertently contributed to a further understanding of my own personal experiences and positionality. Grounded Theory is an approach where a researcher's biases and assumptions should be acknowledged and questioned (Strauss & Corbin). This in no way means that I have imposed my beliefs or opinions upon the data. However, as a researcher, it is important for me to recognize my positionality, my biases and the ones of my respondents. My role as a researcher is not only to recognize these biases but also to confront any assumptions being made and challenge them.

Positionality

I also belong to the Salvadoran immigrant group in Canada. This requires a bit of explanation. Although I was born in San Salvador, El Salvador, I was only a child during the period my family decided to immigrate. I often relive vivid memories of the place I once called home. My own story resembles the story of many who fled El Salvador during the civil war as political refugees. I could identify myself in the 1.5 generation of immigrants, as I was born there

but have spent most of my life living in Canada. My experience immigrating to and my experience settling in Canada have strongly shaped my views about who I am and where I come from. For many years, I had not really questioned or wondered about my roots. Yet the feeling of difference was always something I had been socialized to accept and celebrate. For Children, exclusion comes in many forms and for a long time experience was never something I went through alone. I came to Canada with a whole generation of children that experienced some form of difference or exclusion and I became accustomed to, encouraged to celebrate it – a product of multiculturalism perhaps. I did not realize that my immigration experience was unique or out of the ordinary until my undergraduate years.

In high school, I became more aware of how culture is commodified through mainstream media. The ‘Asian sensation’ and ‘Latin fever’ popular movements of the late 90s made cultural artifact seem ‘cool’ and exposed people to an essentialized version of what that culture stood for or was understood as authentic. Finding my ethnic identity in Toronto was a difficult thing to do because everybody is constantly imposing labels. I mention this because my particular story has an added component of complexity to it since I am biracial –a child of a Salvadoran mother and a Taiwanese father. These ethnicities represent two very different and complicated worlds in their own right with very different histories. My distance or proximity to either one of these worlds has never been my choice alone and because of my experiences I have had a heightened sense of awareness of the process of racialization and the formation of identity among different communities and ages. The trials and tribulations of finding one’s identity, where one feels they belong, are for me ineffable. Belonging is obviously not an arbitrary choice for the topic of this paper. Although my parents have made efforts to submerge me in both cultures, and although I

believe I have struggled to embrace both cultures over different periods in my life, the dominant culture for me has always been the Salvadoran one.

It is with this revelation that I proceed in the hopes to better understand the workings of a community I consider myself to be a part of, not to represent or speak for the community, but ultimately to better understand it. I have the capacity to act as both an ‘insider’ and an ‘outsider.’

Critical Perspective

For this study I have decided to take a ‘critical’ perspective that will place emphasis on socio-political hierarchy constructs and issues of identity and belonging. I have chosen to take this stance because I believe that apart from the understanding of political systems, context of migration, and experience of reception in Canada, pre-existing socio-economic hierarchies are intertwined with the politics in El Salvador and play a significant role in the pace in which Salvadorans are or are not achieving a sense of belonging to a Canadian society.

The relationship I had with the participants was one of familiarity and distance, which I believe lent itself to my particular positionality. Some participants did not acknowledge my mixed heritage, while others kept probing into it and more so into my political affiliations and the social status of my family. It was important to keep the idea of socio-political hierarchies in mind when interviewing participants so that they would not hesitate to speak to me about their opinions and their experiences, especially considering that many Salvadorans in Canada are by-products of the civil war, were dispersed from their country by force, fearing political persecution. This recognition allowed me to be aware of which practices to employ in my data collection and also helped me interpret the meanings in the things my participants said. It was also important to identify these socio-political hierarchies in light of how my participants identified themselves which highlighted the dimensions of their specific contexts both in the past

and present and in El Salvador and Canada. This insight into the realities of Salvadorans in Canada and back home was extremely important, once I became familiar with these hierarchies it was crucial that I keep an open mind, yet remained neutral. After all, one of the goals of this study is to capture the intersecting issues that affect Salvadoran political participation and a sense of belonging as well as to encapsulate the voices of Salvadorans – as diverse as they may be – grounded in their experience and opinions and not shaped by my biases.

Data Collection

I treat the events at the Roundtable Discussions as a small scale ‘case study’ (Baxter & Jack, 2008) that enables me to explore my research questions through qualitative data in the form of interviews and an optional survey. Initially, I had planned to use a key informant technique in seeking the data (Tremblay, 1957). I wanted to interview three key informants and focus on the voices which were represented at the Roundtable Discussions by recruiting individuals who were present at the event. Names and contact information of the people who were key actors in the disruption were made available through media coverage which identified each person. However, not all the participants involved in the disruption or in the event consented to participate in this study – those who have shared their opinions have been guaranteed confidentiality and have been stripped of identifying markers.

Data Analysis

A fundamental analytical procedure of grounded theory is the process of coding. With the data collected I have used an interpretive paradigm (Strauss & Corbin), to explore the social constructions of meaning, through which transcriptions of interviews were coded and categorized in order to identify critical themes that emerge while focusing on socio-economic relations of oppression. Coding is at the core of grounded theory, the coding techniques I used have been

developed by Glaser & Strauss. I have chosen to interpret the language and symbolic markers with techniques of “open coding” – seeking out words that are significant to create a conceptual framework. I took a grounded theory approach which emphasizes that data is all and allow the ‘discovery’ of emergent themes to guide the categorizing, comparisons, and the ultimate conceptualization of the data. “Axial coding” was used to see where words and concepts intersect with each other; so that subcategories may be explored to their full potential. Theme analysis and “selective coding” was done with respects to subjects of interest to make sense of the fragments of data and create them into the underlying narrative – special attention was placed on adverbs and adjectives describing a sense of belonging.

Sample Design

I had intended to obtain key informants to represent the diversity of voices present at the event. However the beauty of grounded theory is that the data guides the research direction and not the other way around. I had found that trying to attract and secure key informants was difficult because the category “key informant” carries with it immense pressure for the participant and proved to be counterproductive to my study by making potential participants uncomfortable with the formal connotation assigned to the label ‘key informant’, making participants less inclined to speak to me without reserve. A less formal approach was far better received.

Although I had planned to have three key informants to speak from the standpoint of the communities in Canada, the Salvadoran government and the protestors, to respond to broader issues about political participation in the community and the state of belonging for Salvadorans in Canada; the category of “key informant” that I had attempted to create revealed a fluidity that I could not contain. As I began thinking about who to approach as my participants, I felt it

unnecessary to make the distinctions, which were really underlying assumptions, of who had the expertise necessary for my research question as a “key informant”. I concluded that the creation of this term was a flaw in my research design. Maintaining this category would have been very problematic on my part also because it would have granted me the power to impose those labels on participants stripping them of nuances of their reality and allowing those voices to dominate my study, instead of allowing this to emerge from the data. This would have been a disadvantage to my research as I would not have been exposed to the dynamics which shaped the realities of my potential key informants. It dawned on me that I would have been identifying these participants and labeling them before they were even given a chance to speak and therefore not grounding the research on the data fairly from the beginning. In light of this discovery, I decided to have one key informant and multiple informants from diverse backgrounds, generations, and experiences. The only requirement for the key informant was that they be invested in the Salvadoran community and have extensive knowledge of the political participation of Salvadorans in Canada as well as assist me in issues I encountered as they arose, like helping me in clarifying my thoughts and confronting my own assumptions and biases.

Recruitment

My recruitment method was through snowball sampling (Neuman, 2006) from my initial list of key informants to approach, although some did decline to participate they did assist me in the recruitment process and I had relative ease in recruiting people to participate. I found some people eager to participate and to voice their opinions about the condition of Salvadorans in Canada and in El Salvador. Others were more reserved and hesitant at first and having only agreed to consent once they felt comfortable with my own Salvadoran heritage and I had built sufficient rapport. Before my first interview with an participant and after a casual conversation

with my friends about the Salvadoran community in Canada, I realized that to narrow the sample of participants to people who had attended and been present at the Roundtable Discussions would be to take a biased sample, especially since I am aware that the popular opinion among Salvadorans and in academia is that the community is indeed fragmented. The opinions and experiences of those who did not participate in or attend the Roundtable Discussions would leave my study incomplete and a significant part of the Salvadoran community's voice silenced. So I decided to ask participants if they would take part in the snowball recruitment method by distributing my contact information to those they believed would be interested or asking others for permission to give me their contact so that I could contact them. To my surprise, before I could ask it was often participants that volunteered and suggested other Salvadorans who they thought would be good to contact and consented to speak to them out of their own accord. In total eleven interviews were conducted.

Description of Participants

The revision in my sample design allowed me to approach participants who were both present and not present at the Roundtable Discussions. I found this necessary because I wanted to capture the opinions of those that do not feel inclined to participate in community events or are not well connected to the active segment of the community. This does not mean that they do not engage with other Salvadorans, but their involvement in community events has been rare to none. Their diverse experiences in their immigration to Canada have added an interesting component to the study. In total eleven participants were interviewed; one came to Canada through family sponsorship, two were assisted refugees through religious organizations, seven were refugee claimants and one was in the economic migrant class. Out of all of the participants two had not been born in El Salvador, one was born in Costa Rica and the other in United States;

though in both cases the circumstances that lead to their birth in these countries involved their parents' choice to flee from political persecution due to the civil war. The ages of participants ranged from mid 20s to mid 50s. A gender imbalance became present in the data as only 4 out of the 11 participants, representing a third of the respondents, were male.

I obtained participants from among the 1.5 generation of Salvadoran immigrants after I conducted my initial interviews and discovered that the phenomenon of “generational differences” was a concept I wished to explore in relation to the research questions which address intersections between the community, political participation, and a sense of belonging. For a community to grow and establish itself over time requires an engagement of the youth to ensure a continued commitment to unifying efforts. We must at the very least make attempts to understand the disengagement of the youth.

Interviews and Survey

The interview questions became a combination of what had previously been two separate interview guides². All interviews were conducted in English, although participants were given the option of speaking Spanish, and took an average of 30 minutes to one hour. As previously stated, the first design had two different types of participants in mind in the hopes of obtaining two different types of informants, ‘key informants’ to address broad community relations, an overall sense of political participation, and a sense of belonging related questions and ‘informants’ for more specific questions related to their experiences of political participation, a closer look at identity issues, and their ‘sense of belonging’.

The optional self-administered survey which I asked participants to complete before the interview provided me with details about the participants demographics, immigration context,

² Please refer to appendix B for interview guide.

and questions about how the impact of the civil war affected them by providing them with a measurement scale (strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, strongly disagree). Nine surveys were collected. The design of the survey and the method of administration were carefully thought out (Seidman, 2006). Its creation was a conscious decision made by me in the hopes of decreasing the risk of psychological stress or trauma to my participants. The survey assisted my data analysis with the demographic properties of each participant. When immigration occurred and what age participants were at the point of entry became significant in determining differences among generational lines. Overall however, the survey did not yield data which was not already reflected in the interviews. I did not feel it necessary to focus on the survey findings in my analysis, although it proved to be an efficient tool for people to engage with prior to the interview. The survey had the effect of making people more comfortable and allowed them to reflect on their experiences in Canada and in El Salvador. I made every effort to treat participants with care when they began reflecting on their personal experiences in El Salvador because I am very aware of how deeply the civil war has affected some Salvadorans.

Research Ethics and Applied Analysis

It is important to recognize that a large number of Salvadoran immigrants in Canada have come during a context of migration that centers on the civil war. It is therefore likely that a high number of Salvadorans in Canada have experienced violence, trauma, or psychological distress as a result of the context of migration. Psychological risks exist in that research participants describe and “re-live” negative experiences they have encountered. For example, participants may experience anger, sadness and/or homesickness based on the answers they provide to the questions. Although I attempted to safeguard against triggering or increasing this trauma I was confronted with it during interviews conducted where the manifestations of trauma were made

present. I asked participants if they wished to discontinue, warning them that if I saw their stress levels increase I would stop the interview and provide them with referrals to professionals they could contact for support. This took its toll on me as a researcher because I observed the subtle gestures which were telling cues when combined with their words. What has struck me most are the gestures of fidgeting hands, looking down, the beginnings of teary eyes, the empty looks and monotone voices as they recall “killings”, “shootings”, the loss of family members and friends, the retelling of their families stories which in some form bore stress on them because of the relation, and the faces which looked transported back in time...but most of all the silences and incoherent sentences. The interviews did not focus on the civil war, yet the subject matter inevitably compelled people to mention their personal experiences related to the civil war or those of their parents experience and talk about the things that they had seen and stories they had heard. Although these signs were present, they were often short-lived and did not escalate to high levels of stress.

A climate of distrust around political conversations manifested itself as a reluctance to speak to me as a researcher. Recognizing that the relationship between researcher and participant can often be seen as one of exploitation, I felt it necessary to emphasize the voluntary nature of participation and reminded participants of the option to opt out at anytime. Confidentiality was of the utmost importance in the study as the Salvadoran community is relatively small and the nature of my case study reflects on an event that was open to the community.

Finally, one of the most difficult issues to resolve in my ethics review was the location of the interviews as organizing around individual schedules and asking participants to meet with me at a convenient time proved to be difficult when they did not live in the GTA and could not meet

with me at Ryerson University. Phone interviews were conducted when these issues arose with the participant's consent recorded by audio-taping or obtained through email scans.

Although I made attempts to code and categorize the interviews from the 'ground up' approach as per grounded theory, I must acknowledge that I created the interview questions with my research themes in mind and therefore began the coding of the interviews with the research question as directional guidance for the initial codes. In essence, during the interviews I took notes and highlighted relevant themes to my research question and once I transcribed them I revisited them and begun with those coded concepts to better organize and accumulate data collection. After this initial sorting, I reread each transcript while listening to the tapes for accuracy and tone of voice and proceeded with open coding techniques (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in individual transcripts, constantly comparing them to the initial codes and each other. Aside from constant comparisons between transcripts, I looked for particular language that stood out and words that were relevant to the themes as well as 'waved the red flag' to identify biases and assumptions being made (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.80). I categorized and subcategorized creating memos and a collage of concepts on a wall so that I could change, rearrange and visually identify their intersections and similarities while making notes and revising my memos. I kept dated code notes and memos and also made notes on the margins of the transcripts. Recognizing that I also carry assumptions and biases, I made great efforts to identify them and question their origins before proceeding. I have used my knowledge and experiences to assist me in understanding the stories of my participants and have constantly reflected on my own assumptions, challenging them when necessary. I have played a crucial role in the final interpretation of the data.

The process of labeling phenomena or events proved to be tedious and challenging for me as I found myself awkwardly questioning each and every one of my conceptual labels. Although it is expected in grounded theory for the investigator to create labels that logically relate to what the data represents, I found it difficult to jump from labeling events or actions into abstract concepts and kept questioning my efforts, constantly second-guessing myself, and was haunted by the thoughts and questions like “I feel like I’m making this up, am I making this up?” and “where is this coming from, the data or myself?” The discretionary power of labeling was daunting for me and I found myself making quick calls to very generous and far more experienced researchers as well as bouncing off my ideas with my peers. This assisted me greatly in assuring that the concepts were in fact being grounded in the data and not being imposed by my assumptions. I also kept a reflexive journal to enhance the trustworthiness of my research along with noting my reflections in the memos (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I learned that it is one thing to propose a method of analysis and familiarize yourself with techniques and another to actually apply it to your own research. Only after talking out my concerns did my comfort level increase and I found the joy in the process.

Chapter 4. The II Roundtable Discussions for Salvadorans in Canada: Behind the Scenes

The experience and opinions of participants present at the Roundtable Discussions as well as those not present increased my understanding of how this disruption resonated with the community and how it was received. Participants often began by explaining their feelings at that particular moment which in many ways revealed their “location”, an umbrella concept with sub-categories such as “social location” and “political location” underneath³. One participant gave their initial thoughts about the disruption at the Roundtable Discussions:

I was at the beginning very disturbed...I felt ashamed that the disruption happened while these people were there [Canadian government representatives]. Plus, the way these people interrupted was really bad. (T4-5a)

The participant’s disapproval of the demonstration resonated with the state of being disturbed which followed a feeling of shame. This shame came from an understanding of the “method of doing politics” and made them feel that they had been portrayed as uncivilized and uneducated as they believed the protestors had shown that the community as a whole had “*not progressed a meter*”(Ibid.) and misrepresenting their understanding of what the reality of the majority was.

The participant felt that to have been associated with protestors as belonging to the same community was negative because they felt their action had portrayed the whole community in a negative light. Another participant explained their experience as a more neutral “surprise” but not “a shock” because they had already been warned to expect a disruption, although they had not imagined how it would have been organized. The organizing of this disruption was identified as a “backwards” method of political participation. Most participants agreed that the approach of the disruption was meant to create a reaction, as one participant who was involved in organizing the disruption explains:

³ “Location”, “social location” and “political location” are the categories which emerged from the data which I began to code.

[This] was an action of civil disobedience...it was an orchestrated political action. We had banners and placards and flyers...my participation was orchestrated and the interruptions that occurred at different times were orchestrated. It was a way of creating momentum for political action within that event...we were going to stay there until we got arrested, that was the plan. Its protest politics...we were going to call attention to the issues and people were going to listen and then we were going to wait until we got kicked out....(T7a)

The issue here lies in what we understand to be political organizing as there are many ways in which people “do politics”. The properties of organizing this particular event did in fact show that it was highly organized as the protestors included members of Amnesty International, solidarity workers and left wing transnational political groups as well as lawyers on site should their act of civil disobedience become violent. The protestors had not only been participating in politics but were exercising a popular education theatric technique believed to have been commonly used in El Salvador (Hammond, 1999) which was as the participant stated “orchestrated” from the beginning. This informal political participation in the form of community organizing as a protest also had a different effect on some of the audience members who felt that this type of politics was all too familiar for them because of the aggressive nature of it. One participant recalled their experience:

“I was afraid because I thought they would start to carrying guns and try to shoot somebody and things like that because that is what happens in El Salvador...I didn’t understand but as time goes by, I think I understand that. I don’t know, I don’t belong to any political party and I in a way I don’t think I care.” (T3b)

Two sub categories under the concept of “understanding politics” that I wished to explore came out of this segment of my interviews: “protest politics” and “party politics”.

Protest Politics: “You have to yell and scream...”

Whether they were sympathetic or not to the issues being voiced by the protestors, many of my participants felt compelled to speak about politics in El Salvador. Even the

newspaper version of the disruption of the event spoke of “*folklore Salvadoreño*” refers to the approach of the disruption as something customary, traditional or part of the heritage.

Interestingly, many of my participants also described that this type of protest politics as if they were something very much a part of Salvadoran history and culture almost as demonstrating an understanding of which justified the protest. One participant described the act as stemming from the experiences of a segment of the population and rooting it in the history of the civil war, as they explained: “*You need to protest. In El Salvador people feel so repressed and so unheard that they feel it necessary to act that way.*”(T4a) Many of the participants showed an understanding of protest politics although they believed that it was very much rooted in the experiences of people during the civil war and that they had not learned other more useful tactics to express themselves, some even had a very top-down way of looking at this overall as one participant explains:

Disruptions are very common in El Salvador...we see other groups act like this and we reject them.. The Tamils...they were rejected...It's not that I don't feel their pain but that's not the way to do things. (T4b-5a)

Comparisons with recent group protests of Tamils in Canada trying to draw attention to the human suffering being caused by the civil war in Sri Lanka were mentioned by participants to further explain the intensity of protestors:

...it's just like the Tamils fighting for power back home...outside of Sri Lanka we have the biggest Tamil population and you can't break that bond between the Tamils and Sri Lanka, just like you just can't break that bond between Salvadorans that grew in up there and have family and land in El Salvador. You can't break that bond. (T6b)

I wish to draw attention to the opinion of another participant who when asked if engaging in Salvadoran homeland politics by protesting on Canadian soil was justified responded in this manner:

No. It's not that I don't think it's justified but I don't think it's appropriate. You're basing yourself off of a bias from when you left El Salvador...Here's the thing, if you were gone from that country for ten years, no matter what's written in the paper, you'll know that one paper has one party in mind and vice versa....Everything is biased... (T2a)

With further probing, I concluded that this bias was indeed pointing to binaries which were recognized in all the interviews. These binaries became sub categories which I grouped under the heading “understanding of politics”. This connected the opinions of the participants to an embedded understanding of a rigid social structure often understood to be associated with particular “party politics”⁴.

Party Politics: “You’re either this or you’re that...”

A participant who was not present during the disruption of the Roundtable Discussions mentioned something that struck me as particularly interesting when asked for his opinion of what had occurred. Their comment was, *“I think it was a political standoff between ARENA and the FMLN.”* (T2a) I began questioning this confidence in appointing the actors of the protest with these political party labels, and after much consideration I discovered that this binary came out in all of the interviews. I understood why ARENA was mentioned, since they were the ruling government party at that time but I did not understand why FMLN was mentioned, especially since I knew that there had been members of the FMLN there and this participant did not know, but made this assumption out of his own understanding of the event. The conflict and tension between these two political parties emerged and would become very clear from the opinions of my participants. When I asked the participants if they believed Salvadorans had diverse political opinions, an overwhelming number of respondents said that

⁴ No links were found which explicitly spoke of “party politics” and or “protest politics” concerning Salvadorans in Canada prior to the interviews from the available literature. These themes emerged from the data, although through research conducted after the interviews these concepts were found to be present in the study of a broader Latin American context.

you could only be one of two: FMLN or ARENA. One respondent commented: “No. *[Political opinions among Salvadorans]* are not diverse at all. You have the Right or the Left, or ignorant. Ignorant in the sense that they don’t understand how society works” (T4b-5a). This ignorance pointed to a lack of awareness about politics but most of all, a lack of concern which was rooted in an intentional choice to not politically participate or become involved. My key informant shared with me their personal experience of with this phenomenon which may partially explain this division:

...compared to my experience in Canada, El Salvador is a much more highly politicized society in general. Here you can get away with not being too interested or involved or participation in politics, but I found when I was in El Salvador that people tended to hold very strong political opinions in part because of the history of civil war, there wasn’t a lot of neutral space in the middle, you were either on the right or on the left and you felt very strongly about it... (T6a)

The idea of party politics became even more nuanced than what I had originally expected and I discovered that these sub-categories were extremely intersected and bled into many other institutional and social beliefs according to the data. According to the participants, each side of the political party had with time accumulated properties that were immediately associated with them and spoke to other social constructs within the workings of the Salvadoran community. The idea that “*everything is biased*” was a frequent idea among the participants.

One participant explained his belief that party politics adds to the fragmentation of a Salvadoran community as such because it is part of the culture and world view we are socialized in:

It is in the culture that we are being raised on. It comes from the Catholic culture of good and evil. So we come from a very polarized vision of the world, where you are or are not. That judgment occurs both in the Left and in the right of the country...that is the way Salvadorans understand, that is really ingrained in our culture and we really haven’t learned to be tolerant and we really haven’t learned to look at the fact that we are

Salvadorans first before assigning a political label onto a person...That is something we still have to evolve from but we haven't yet. (T7a)

On this topic, participants revealed experiences where they had been labeled as belonging with a political party that they did not fully sympathize with or support either because of the company they kept or because of critiques they had made. However some participants were proud of their affiliation to these political parties and shared with me their strong beliefs. The “*judgment*” spoken of by each of the political party sympathizers took the form of accusations and stereotypes. One participant explained his understanding of what each group represented, “*...essentially, someone that has more money...and actually has or wants power affiliates themselves with ARENA, those who don't have much money or side with the poor are usually FMLN.*” (T2a)

Another participant who expressed annoyance with Left wing groups said that they did not respect them and believed that the protestors at the Roundtable Discussions did not truly want to see El Salvador progress, they explained:

...they call themselves by a lot of different names. That's why I say Left-wing groups, they use a lot of names to cover themselves with, they say they are solidarity groups...they even use Mayan names to call themselves but they are groups that have clear agendas to go against whatever is established by people they recognize as Right-wing people or tied to the political party, so ARENA...for me it is this type of attitude that I am not approving or supporting. (T4b-5a)

The beliefs held by the participants about the binaries of party politics were extremely static. Although participants were able to recognize that the presence of a common understanding of politics as structured within a party politics framework in the Salvadoran community, several participants demonstrated signs of cognitive dissonance (Bem, 1967). Participants would identify the political binaries without identifying their particular position at first, often implying that their understanding was larger in scope. Many participants contradicted themselves and dissociated

themselves from being “stuck” supporting one side or the other, yet later expressed their party inclinations. This phenomenon was also something I encountered in interviews with participants who were part of the younger generations that came to Canada as infants, where the beliefs they inherited from their “family” seemed to have greatly influenced their “political socialization”⁵ partially resulting in their decision to participate or identify themselves with a party.

Family: “Politics, it’s in my blood”

Like many Latin American groups, the concept of “family” plays a role in shaping many of the opinions and beliefs of individuals. This concept was often intertwined with the “understanding of politics” and will be explored in relation to the sub-category of political socialization. Political socialization is a term often used to describe the beliefs, opinions and attitudes of adults and children as having been influenced by socializing agents represented in different institutions (Hyman, 1959). I wish to explore the importance of family for the purpose of this study. Often, the stories of migration spoke of family security, family survival and family loss. These experiences affected some of the participants’ attitudes towards politics. One participant believed that the participation of Salvadorans stems from the desire to intensify bonds between families. This participant stated:

“[Salvadorans] still feel a sense of duty to represent and to better the situation for people back home...That can be classified as activism but I just think it’s all about family...it’s not about doing something for your nation, it’s about helping your family back home...and that goes beyond activism that’s just about doing what you can about those you love back home.” (T6b)

Family experiences were in some cases a catalyst to political participation or a complete deterrent for others. At some level, the data suggests that the children of Salvadoran families have been affected by the impact of the civil war on their parents – either directly or indirectly.

⁵ “Family” and “Political socialization” were concepts that were created based on the data.

For some participants this familial link was transparent in their responses, such as *“I know that my political views are very influenced by my father...”* or *“I don’t know much about the civil war, what I do know is what my parents have told me and that may be... that’s a bit biased.”*

(T2a). The participant who I have cited for the title of this section, for example, made the claim that politics ran through their blood and this was followed by the reciting of a political slogan *“FMLN para siempre. El pueblo unido jamas sera vencido!”*⁶(T1a). This was a participant who was not born in El Salvador, but had a strong connection to the history through his family’s experiences and the family that he had lost due to the civil war.

However, political socialization does not only refer to the central values and beliefs that are transmitted by parent to child (Langton, 1969), but also the choices and affiliations they make with other influential factor such as media for example. “Media” was another category I labeled as it appeared some participants had very strong views about particular media outlets. It was a common belief that the media in El Salvador was controlled by political parties and that in a way the media that trickles into Canada is also biased. The media was not perceived as functioning as a watchdog for the people but rather as a lap dog and political mouthpiece of corrupt elites, echoing the party politics and further dividing the community. A contradiction was revealed by one participant who stated:

I hate El Diario de Hoy, it makes me sick...only one media outlet in el Salvador...kind of speaks the truth...they have their times when they go pro ARENA...it boggles my mind that people believe this crap that’s being published. (T1a)

The idea that only one media outlet “kind of” speaks the truth “waved a red flag” for me, since many participants acknowledged that there are many versions of what people believe to be truths. It became obvious that the socialization of this participant fit into the “party politics” sub-

⁶ English version translated by me is: “FMLN forever. The people united, will never be defeated!

category under the “understanding of politics” which seems to be ultimately an understanding of a greater Salvadoran society⁷.

One participant who was able to recognize that many of his opinions biased, influenced by the understandings held by his friends and family, still continued to express them. Recognizing the differences of opinions based on politics and socio-economic status from his family experiences this participant commented:

“I personally wouldn’t [go back to live] because of the way status is built over in El Salvador. You’re either this or you’re that, rich or poor, ARENA or FMLN. You’re friends with one family or another, its way too segregated...I don’t get why it matters [here in Canada] because [we’re] not there anymore.” (T2a)

What struck me with this participant was that after saying this, at the end of the interview, this participant made attempts to identify which political side *I* was on.

⁷ Please note that I am not qualifying these truths, but pointing to the contradictions and assumptions of these binaries.

Chapter 5. The Ripple Effect: Impact of the Civil War

“*Absolutely*”, “*Definitely*”, and “*Of course*” are examples of the responses from all participants who demonstrated a general consensus of the belief that the civil war had impacted Salvadorans in their political participation and in other aspects of their lives. Participants that belonged to the 1.5 generation of Salvadoran immigrants who could not remember or did not know about El Salvador drew on their parent’s beliefs and experiences to make sense of what they understood. When participants did not feel that they had been directly affected, they spoke of a relative or friend who had.

First generation Salvadorans expressed concern that the 1.5 and second generation would engage in politics that they were not directly familiar with as a result of their parent’s involvement in the civil war, for example, one participant said, “*Some Salvadorans from the second generation breathe the politics that their parents taught them...they fight their parent’s battle.*” (T4b-5a) They continued by questioning the use of these efforts:

I have talked to those parentssome of them want to see war criminals of the civil war be brought to justice and taken to court. But I ask them, do you think it’s worth it to spend time and money on that? Isn’t it a little too late? Is that all the justice you aspire to see, is that really what you want?...I’m a true believer that war criminals need to be brought to justice but I don’t think that this is the time for it to be done. This time has past. We need to move forward from the suffering. (Ibid.)

Yet the steps to move forward for those who have experienced trauma because of the civil war have not been large for some. The fear attached to political participation and the desire to dissociate from politics for some has been a decision made with the memories of the civil war in mind. It is important to note that these experiences have led to different reactions in the Salvadoran community, as one participant explains:

It went two ways. For some the memory of the war made them continue to organize but other people say they are in a place that is peaceful and they want nothing to do with the

war and don't want to think about it, understandably so. The trauma of the war is not an easy thing to overcome. As a community I think we need to do a lot to overcome that because there is this collective amnesia that takes over and people forget. Either that or there is the collective memorizing of what happened going over and over again, partly because there has still been no national process of reconciliation. (T7b)

The Peace Accords were signed in 1992 and a Commission on the Truth was held with a report published a little over a year later by the United Nations identifying those responsible for the atrocities committed by all parties. However, five days after publication, the ruling government approved legislation that granted amnesty to all violent events during the civil war. This participant continued by talking about the Chilean civil war and their process of reconciliation:

Pinochet went out of power in the early 90s and soon after they began a process of reconciliation, and 20 years later they are still dealing with that. I have a friend whose father got killed in 1987, and just now the case of his father is getting looked at in the courts. Imagine El Salvador... that would never happen. And we're talking about numbers that are much bigger than that and we are talking about people that everyone knows are political criminals, they have committed crimes against humanity and they are running free in the country. It's going to take us much longer than 20 years...but we are waiting... (T7)

The impact of the civil war has become a ripple effect that inevitably touches the next generations at some point. Genealogical narratives told to me by five of my participants have lead me to conclude this. One particularly vivid account was told to me, after a short period of reflection, following the response "definitely" to whether the civil war impacts Salvadorans in Canada. The participant stated:

Every year we go to the States and we've been going there for every summer...for the last past 18, 19 years. And yet still every time we cross that border my parents get nervous. They still get nervous. Even though they have they're papers to cross over and they're legal in every sense of the word they still get nervous crossing the border because it's in them that they are singled out and targeted...I don't get nervous...but they get nervous though. Last time they got nervous was just this year actually...Like, if you still feel targeted you don't want to do anything to bring attention to yourself because of the fear that you'll get sent back home and not knowing how they'll take you back home...like a deserter of a whitewashed Salvadoran...

My dad growing up, there was one point where they didn't like him having long hair. So they cornered him and cut it off with a machete. And they really scared him. At the moment he may not have known the implications later, but the fact that he's still scared of authority, seeing that in him every single time he has to cross that border...the nail that sticks out gets hit the hardest...he just wants to blend in. keep to ourselves, be successful and being involved in political activism is very much a front line action...
(T6b)

The feeling of fear when approaching borders perhaps requires a bit more explanation as I do not want readers to assume that the fear comes from crossing border's illegally, but has much to do with the experience of being a refugee claimant and occurrences during the civil war. During the civil war in El Salvador, buses and trains were often stopped at designated checkpoints by both the guerilla groups and the paramilitary. Some of these occurrences resulted in disappearing and kidnappings of people never to be seen again. The nervousness at borders also has a lot to do with fear that the authority in place will not recognize you as having legitimate status. The parents of this participant had spent over 4 years in state of 'in-between-ness' and 'limbo' of sorts awaiting their petition as protected persons in the United States before being granted recognition as refugees in Canada. It is my interpretation that the observations that the participants makes of his parents' "nervousness" as they cross the border is an observation that offers him an understanding of how deep rooted this trauma can be, and that although he does not share this experience at the same level, he feels its ripples, as he becomes party to it and witnesses its manifestation in his own parents.

Identity and a Sense of Belonging

Like with other immigrant groups, Salvadorans derive their sense of belonging from many places. Although their connection to the land by birth was a large reason why some felt they could identify themselves as Salvadoran, the concept of a Salvadoran identity was identified as socially constructed and imposed on them by their parents, their cultural preferences, by their

political beliefs, and ultimately by others. One participant who had renounced being Salvadoran found it difficult to speak of a connection to Canada because of their experience with discrimination in Canada in the labour market. They had experienced severe discrimination and had been judged because they were Salvadoran and also because they had an accent. They decided to respond by opting to adopt their legal status and say they were “*Canadian citizens*” instead of “*Canadian*.” (T3b) Another participant said, “*I consider myself Salvadoran, the passport is a convenience. Canada is a convenient citizenship to have...it’s a very pragmatic relationship.*” (T4b-5a)

Asked about their opinion on the state of a Salvadoran-Canadian Identity in Canada, one participant answered with well thought out reflection:

There is no Canadian identity unless you are First Nations...Everybody else has come from different places. Canadian identity in terms of the national state like Canada is...is something that belongs to the nation. You are a citizen of Canada. The question is, what is Canada?...Canada is a country that is still developing and colonizing it’s First Nations...A Canadian person is someone who actually benefits from the process of colonization... I think the Salvadoran Identity is shaped by the history of immigration...So, the Salvadoran identity is the code that the dominant mainstream culture lays upon you and says, this is what you are. I can’t say I am Canadian because anyone that looks at me will never look at me as Canadian. They will look at me like, where do you come from, and they will ask me ...people will ask that question as long as you are brown... It’s the otherness that defines Salvadorans, not the sense of belonging. (T7)

Generational Differences

The concept of “generational differences” was spoken of by all participants who recognized that there was a definite generational divide among Salvadorans who had lived through the war and those who had not. The 1.5 generation that did not have their own memories of El Salvador spoke of being confused, finding it difficult to relate sometimes, as one participant commented:

My parents...they can draw on a lot from their memories back home. When I look at myself and other Salvadorans here, we don't have that.. We draw on our parent's stories...it's like a fantasy...it's not in me. It's something I have to subscribe to. I'm not sure what Salvadoran is. Other than pupusas⁸, nothing really separates me from anyone else in Central America. (T6b)

A participant from the first generation of Salvadorans also explained:

...the second generation of Salvadorans that arrived in Canada for the most part, they may speak Spanish they may know the food and practice whatever religion that their parents gave them but they don't feel a true link with El Salvador. I think the second and the third generation will become part of the Canadian culture. (T4a)

The idea of “generational differences” was also identified by one participant as also happening in El Salvador, since new generations of Salvadorans struggle to understand the aftermath of the civil war. My key informant also commented on aspects of generational differences:

I think for the Salvadoran community, as for many newcomer communities, there is a generational divide in that those who came to Canada as adults have the strongest Salvadoran identity, and those that were born here have the strongest Canadian identity; and then you have people in between, depending on what age they came here. From my experience in El Salvador, there I also see a generational divide, even there between a person who lived the war as an adult, or lived the war as a child, or was born after the war. So I think there is some of that intertwined with the migration experience and that experience for those that lived the war is a very defining part of their identity. (T6a)

As the generational differences between Salvadorans inevitably widen overtime, individual values, experiences and attitudes will have a significant bearing on the future of the community and to a collective identity.

On Forgetting

The concept related to forgetting, which I coded as “amnesia”, emerged from the data and was one that demanded attention as I conducted constant comparisons. Words related to memory loss such as “forget” were looked at carefully in context. Participants used the word with high

⁸ Pupusas are a typical Salvadoran dish.

frequency and the different types of meaning attached to forgetting became exposed. For example, one participant said:

Salvadorans here totally forget where they're from....our generation completely forgets our background our culture our people. I'm pretty sure if you talk to ten people from our generation and ask them 'hey, did you ever send money to help out people back home?' they'd probably say no....I think it's never good to forget."(T1a)

They continue to use the words under different conditions when they say, *"In the 80s a lot of nations forgot about El Salvador...I wish more people cared more"* (Ibid.) The usage of the word "forget" is employed to mean a lot of things. To forget is to turn your back on your people – it is betrayal. To forget is to be lost – to not know. It can be to leave something behind, to let it go. To forget is to no longer find the subject of that memory important or situation significant, in other words to no longer care or provide care. Another property of this word is related to the impact of the civil war, where the dynamics of forgetting mean something else altogether. *"I don't want to remember"* (T3a), becomes an admission that forgetting is a voluntary act, an act that is desired – it is an act of denial. Other people cannot forget, involuntarily remember, and this can be another manifestation of trauma. Forgetting can be an individual process or a collective process, it can take the form of personal apathy and lead to people who decide not to 'care' and not to 'remember', perhaps an indicator of people who want to ultimately desire to move on. The phenomenon of not forgetting was also attached to different concepts, especially those linked with identity and belonging as respondents said "Salvadorans don't leave El Salvador behind"; or "don't break the bond" (T6b); they could be seen as living in the past and not embracing the present, the new land. This concept is one that was intertwined with those of identity and a sense of belonging, impact of the civil war or trauma, and generational difference.

Chapter 6. Discussion

I wish to end with a return to the Roundtable Discussions. As I mentioned at the beginning of this study, it has been almost two years since this event took place and I still cannot forget the shock and panic I saw in people, particularly in the faces of the mothers who had brought their babies with them which were the first to leave as the interruption began and the loud yelling escalated during the disruption. Comments that circulated afterwards among the crowd, comments I now believe are reflections of the Salvadoran experience and context of migration were as such, *“For a minute I thought they had a bomb”*, and *“I thought I was in El Salvador again, it reminded me of the war”*, to berating comments directed at the activists, *“did you see, Canadians joined him, not Salvadorans ... and those that looked Salvadoran were too young to even know the war”*. The event was a crowded space where not all Salvadorans came together in solidarity.

When I think back to that event, I think of the different ways in which Salvadorans were politically engaged and affected. It is clear to me that the memory of the context of migration, trauma caused by the war and a sense of distrust and “social polarization” (Martín-Baró, I., 1994, p.112) is present for Salvadorans in Canada. As researchers have suggested negative experiences of reception and transnational politics became intertwined (Chute, 2006; Ginieniewicz, 2007; Landolt, 2007) and influenced both homeland and Canadian political participation by all involved. This example of civic disobedience is an exercise of democratic values like freedom of speech, a freedom that we often take for granted in places like Canada, a freedom that has often been sought for and paid at a high price.

Although I did not initially understand the pleas of the activists, I now understand their efforts. They did not approve of the Roundtable Discussions because they regarded them as

centered predominantly on issues of economic development and trade between Canada and El Salvador and not addressing any of the prevailing human rights violations past or present in El Salvador or Canada, claiming that the relationship Canada and El Salvador were nurturing was one of economic liberalization in the form of trade agreements, and accusing both nations of attempting to “manipulate” the Salvadoran people into believing that progress would not come at the cost of human exploitation or increased social inequalities. However, as I conducted this research I realized that the accusations, the good and the bad, are truly painted with a tone of grey, and not in black and white. People on all sides of the protest genuinely believed that what they were doing was for the benefit of the Salvadoran community, here and in Canada.

This event of political participation lead me to realize that the Salvadoran community is indeed still developing and that negotiating an identity and it’s own sense of belonging at a very slow pace. El Salvador now is a county with a strong remittance economy, a country where the largest export is its people (Gammage, 2007). Here in Canada, the ties that bind Salvadorans to El Salvador are familial and rarely national. The fragmented social relations of the Salvadoran community in Canada have much to do with the attitudes and opinions that have migrated with them from El Salvador. Relationships hinge on complex intersections and interactions which make cohesion and trust difficult, qualities which are necessary to achieve strong social networks in a community in order for it to establish itself. It almost goes without saying that more work remains to be done on these issues, and this case study is very limited in scope. As with many immigrant groups, the variances between the individual and the collective, younger generations and older, will largely depend on their particular experience. However, some things must be mentioned as it is of the utmost importance that equal opportunity and access for all marginalized and racialized people become a reality in Canada. From the interviews, participants

hoped that in the future improvements made in the areas of foreign credential recognition, labour market integration, and mother-tongue tailored English as a Second Language classes, would be implemented to help Salvadorans and other groups. I believe it is important for residency criteria for government programs to be lifted as this would assist all newcomers, immigrants, and refugee groups who have come to Canada and been forced to rapidly begin providing for their family by taking low-income employment, not being able to invest in themselves through language courses, credential recognition programs or other training programs.

Recognizing that immigrants with a potentially violent and traumatic context of migration need to identify and confront the trauma of their past at some point; it is important that people receive the assurance that Canada will fulfill its promise to protect them. For some participants, the necessary issues that require identification are less tangible and cannot be addressed at a local scale. The benefits and disadvantages to the social development of Salvadorans as a result of free trade agreements with Canada require attention. Good and bad comes from economic liberalization, safeguarding that the advantages are maximized and the disadvantages are minimized is extremely important for the future of the Salvadorans here and there. Environmental issues resulting from the presence of large transnational corporations in the mining industry will be a future point of contention between those Salvadorans that see progress and those that see exploitation⁹. It is extremely important that attention is placed on these transnational relationships at both the scales.

Without a doubt, this study has been a personal journey for me. I am happy to report that I have made it in one piece so far. As for my questions: I can only hope to have provided insight

⁹ Current discussions of a Canadian mining company's denied permission to exploit in El Salvador for fear of devastating environmental hazards have been discussed at a national scale and are the focus of several human right's activist organizations (<http://upsidedownworld.org/main/content/view/1637/74/>).

while I join the groups of researchers who unintentionally ask more questions than can be easily answered. The workings of the Salvadoran community and perhaps of others who have come to Canada under similar circumstances require more research and understanding. Generational differences are to be expected over time, for immigrant groups these directions point to paths in a new world they must learn to navigate. Optimists, skeptics, and realists will emerge from each generation and it is my hope that we appreciate the strengths of past, present, and future generations to come. The voices of conflict, reconciliation and transnational belonging must be heard.

APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

Ryerson University

Political Participation, Transnationalism and a Sense of Belonging: A Study of Salvadorans in Canada

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Principal Investigator: Denise Chung Guerrero, Master's Candidate at Ryerson University in the Immigration and Settlement Studies Program with an Honours Bachelor of Arts from the University of Toronto in Diaspora and Transnational Studies and English.

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Harald Bauder, Department of Geography at Ryerson University.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to explore how political participation, transnationalism, and trauma affect Salvadorans' understanding of their sense of belonging in the receiving nations. My aim is to provide an overview of these issues and intersections and show how they influence Salvadorans in Canada, in particular, to highlight what we know about political participation and what has not been explicitly identified.

Benefits of the Study: The study results will help service providers and policy makers to identify social and political barriers in the Salvadoran community in Canada. I cannot guarantee, however, that you will receive any benefits from participating in this study.

Description of the Study: You will be asked to consent to an interview ranging between 30-60 min. and will be given the option of completing a survey. The survey is optional, however the interview is not. You may opt to do the interview and survey or only the interview.

The study will conduct interviews with three key informants and up to twelve informants. Participants in this study are selected because of their expert knowledge on this subject, their institutional affiliation and also, but not exclusively, their attendance at the particular event of relevance.

Risks or Discomforts: Because of the nature of some of the questions asked, a subject may reflect on unpleasant memories while responding to the survey or interview. If you are psychologically or emotionally distressed the interview will be stopped. For your mental health you will be given the telephone number of a distress hotline in your area and the telephone number of the Canadian Council for Victims of Torture.

Confidentiality: Any identifying information resulting from this research will be kept strictly confidential. All documents will be identified only by code number and kept in a secure location.

Participants and/or their organizations will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study, and pseudonyms will be used in direct quotations. All information will be destroyed after one year of the study.

IMPORTANT NOTE: These interviews will be audio-taped unless you state otherwise. If you disagree with taping, notes will be taken.

Costs and/or Compensation for Participation: There are no costs to you as a participant nor is there any compensation.

Voluntary Nature of Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty.

At any particular point in the study, you may refuse to answer any particular question or stop participation altogether.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact:

Denise Chung Guerrero, Principal Investigator
(416) 728-6915
dchunggu@ryerson.ca

Dr. Harald Bauder, Dept. of Geography, Supervisor
Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3
416-979-5000 ext. 6904

hbauder@GEOGRAPHY.ryerson.ca

If you have questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study, you may contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board for information at:

Research Ethics Board
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation
Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3
416-979-5042

Agreement:

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

[] Yes, I wish to receive a report on the study results at the following fax number, email or mailing address: _____

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Political Participation, Transnationalism and a Sense of Belonging: A Study of Salvadorans in Canada

Date:

Time: from to

Type of Representative (community, grassroots, government, NGO):

Gender of respondent: M / F

PREPARATION

- Introduce myself and study
 - Distribute consent form
 - Collect consent form
 - Turn on tape recorder
-

Please describe your immigration experience to Canada. Under what circumstances did you immigrate to Canada?

In your view, does Canada have a distinct national identity?

- Multiculturalism
- Education / standard of living/ wealth
- Politics
- Ethnicity

How do Salvadoran immigrants relate to this identity? Please elaborate.

- Challenge identity
- contribute to identity
- insiders/outsideers

Do you recall the disruption at the II Roundtable Discussions for Salvadorans in Canada? If so, can you describe your experience from attending? (If you do not recall or did not attend I will present a the newspaper clipping which covered the event and ask you to comment)

El Diario de Hoy, covered the event and suggested that the disruption at the inauguration of the Roundtable Discussion was “*folklore Salvadoreño*” and a Salvadoran government representative spoke of activism being in the “*heart*” of Salvadoran protestors. Do you have any comments on this view point?

Would you agree that Salvadorans in Canada are more or less geared to act as political agents and participate politically?

Do you think Salvadorans sway more towards informal political participation (discussions with friends or family in a less public space) or formal (voting and lobbying governments)?

Do you think that the memory of the civil war impacts their political engagement in Canada, if so how? Can you give me an example?

Would you consider the Salvadoran community has a strong political presence in Canada? Why or why not and at what scale? (national/regional/local)

How do you identify yourself in Canada? Do you think this is a political identity?

Where is home for you and what determines what home is? Do you consider Canada home, or El Salvador home?

What type of politics do you believe the community is developing and what forms do you think it takes? (political/ religious/social justice/ grassroots)

Can you comment on what you believe is the state of a Salvadoran-Canadian identity? Do you believe there a definite generational divide in the community?

Would you say that Salvadorans in Canada have diverse Salvadoran or Canadian political opinions?

Why do you think that is and do you think this contributes to the cohesion or division of the community?

Do you think that Salvadorans are achieving a sense of belonging in Canada?

Why do you think this or why not?

In which way do you think this sense of belonging is attained or not attained?

What kind of examples can you think of that demonstrate this sense of belonging?

What type of change would you like to see for the benefit of Salvadorans in Canada?

What are two things that you believe are important to know about the current conditions of Salvadorans in Canada?

Do you have any additional comments?

THANK THE INTERVIEWEE!

APPENDIX C: OPTIONAL SURVEY

SURVEY
Political Participation, Transnationalism and Salvadoran Identity

1. Please indicate the following:

Gender:

- ☐ Male ☐ Female

Immigration period to Canada:

- ☐ Before 1970 ☐ 1971-1979 ☐ 1980-1990 ☐ 1991-2000
☐ Other: _____

2. Please rate in sequence the least important reason you immigrated to Canada to most important reason, where the least important = 1, and the most important = 5.

- I feared for my well-being because of the political situation _____
I wanted to seek better financial opportunities for myself and family _____
I had heard it was a good country and knew people there _____
I felt I would have a better future in Canada than in El Salvador _____
I felt I could not express or practice my personal or political beliefs _____
Other: _____

3. Do you maintain relationships with Salvadorans abroad through family networks in El Salvador, Canada, or elsewhere?

Yes or No

4. Do you maintain relationships with Salvadorans abroad through social networks or transnational organizations?

Yes or No

5. Do you maintain relationships with many Salvadorans in Canada?

Yes or No

6. Please select one response by circling or highlighting in bold one of the following options (strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree or strongly disagree):

i.) I have personally experienced loss and sorrow because of the civil war...

Strongly Agree *Agree* *Uncertain* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

ii.) I have known people that have experienced loss and sorrow because of the civil war...

Strongly Agree *Agree* *Uncertain* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

iii.) My experiences in the civil war influence me to participate in politics in Canada...

Strongly Agree *Agree* *Uncertain* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

iv.) I feel glad to be in Canada because of my experiences in El Salvador...

Strongly Agree *Agree* *Uncertain* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

v.) I identify myself as Salvadoran or Canadian to others, but not Salvadoran-Canadian...

Strongly Agree *Agree* *Uncertain* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

vi.) I feel people judge me negatively when I reveal how I am related to El Salvador because Salvadorans have been stereotyped negatively in the media...

Strongly Agree *Agree* *Uncertain* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

vii.) I feel my experiences in El Salvador hinder my ability to feel a sense of belonging in Canada...

Strongly Agree *Agree* *Uncertain* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

viii.) I have a strong desire to achieve social justice for El Salvador from Canada ...

Strongly Agree *Agree* *Uncertain* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

viii.) I don't waste my time in formal politics because I lack confidence that any good will come of it (Canadian or Salvadoran politics - please circle which one, or both)...

Strongly Agree *Agree* *Uncertain* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

x.) I feel people, myself included, are beginning to forget the things that happened in the civil war and are no longer impacted by them...

Strongly Agree

Agree

Uncertain

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

THANK YOU!

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Almeida, P. D. (2008). *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Anderson, G. A., & Black, J. H. (2008). "The Political Integration of Newcomers, Minorities, and the Canadian-Born." In Biles, J. M. Burnstein & J. Frideres (eds). *Immigration and Integration in Canada in the Twenty-First Century* (pp. 45- 71). Montreal & Kingston: McGill- Queen's University Press.
- Basch, L. G., Glick Schiller, N., & Szanton Blanc, C. (1994). *Nations Unbound*, London: Routledge, pp. 7-8.
- Baxter, P and Jack, S. (2008). "Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers." *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4): 544-559.
- Bem, D. J. (1967). "Self Perception: An Alternative Interpretation of Cognitive Dissonance." *Psychological Review* 74 (3), 183-200.
- Castles, S., & Miller, M.J. (2003). *The Age of Migration* (3rd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.
- Chute, T. (2006). "Continuing the Struggle: Salvadorean political participation in Toronto." *Ruptures, Continuities and Re-Learning: the political Participation of Latin Americans in Canada*. Eds. Jorge Ginieniewicz & Daniel Schugurensky. Toronto: OISE/UT, 154-163.
- Cohen, Robin. (1997). *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge.
- "El Salvador". US AID: El Salvador. Retrieved online from: <http://www.usaid.gov/policy/budget/cbj2005/lac/sv.html>.
- Faist, T. (2000). *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Fishel, K. L., & Corr, E.G. (1998). "The United Nations Involvement in the Salvadoran Peace Process." *World Affairs*, 160(4), 202-210.
- Gammage, S. (2007). "El Salvador: Despite the end of civil war, emigration continues." *Migration Information Source*. Retrieved October 10, 2008, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Profiles/display.cfm?ID=636>
- García, M. C. (2006). "Canada: A Northern Refuge for Central Americans." *Migration Information Source*. Retrieved October 10, 2008, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.migrationinformation.com/Feature/display.cfm?ID=390>
- Giniewienwicz, Jorge. (2007). "The Scope of Political Participation." *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 8.3, 327-345.
- Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). *Discovery of Grounded Theory. Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Mill Valley: Sociology Press.
- Goldring, Luin. (2006) "Latin American Transnationalism in Canada: Does It Exist, What Forms Does It Take, and Where Is It Going?" Satzewich, V. & Wong, L. (Eds.). *Transnational Identities and Practices in Canada*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 180-201.
- Gzesh, S. (2006). "Central Americans and Asylum Policy in the Reagan Era." *Migration Information Source*. Retrieved October 10, 2008, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/print.cfm?ID=384>.
- Hammond, J. L. (1999). "Popular Education as Community Organizing in El Salvador." *Latin American Perspectives*, 107.26 (4), 69-94.
- Hyman, H.H. (1959). *Political Socialization*. New York: Free Press.
- Inicia la "Segunda Mesa Redonda con Salvadoreños en Canadá". (2007). *El Popular*. Retrieved on January 15, 2009, from the world wide web from: <http://www.diarioelpopular.com>

/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2107&Itemid=110.

- Itzigsohn, J. & Villacrés, D. (2008). "Migrant political transnationalism and the practice of democracy: Dominican external voting rights and Salvadoran home town associations." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31 (4), 664-686.
- Jacob, A.G. (1994). "Social Integration of Salvadoran Refugees." *Social Work* 39 (3), 307-312.
- Landolt, P. (2007). "The Institutional Landscapes of Salvadoran Migration: Transnational Views from Los Angeles and Toronto." In L. Goldring & S. Krishnamurti (Eds.), *Organizing Transnationalism: Labour, Politics and Social Change*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 191-205.
- Landolt, P., Autler, L. & Baires, S. (1999). "From Hermano Lejano to Hermano Mayor: the dialectics of Salvadoran transnationalism." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22 (2), 290-315.
- Landolt, P. & Da. W.W. (2005). "The Spatially Ruptured Practices of Migrant Families: A Comparison of Immigrants from El Salvador and the People's Republic of China." *Current Sociology* 53(4), 625-653.
- Landolt, P., Goldring, L. & Bernhard, J. (2009). "Between Grassroots Politics and the Ethnicizing Imperative of the Multicultural State: Latin American Immigrant Organizations in Toronto." *CERIS Working Paper No. 73*, Toronto: The Ontario Metropolis Centre.
- Langton, K. P. (1969). *Political Socialization*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Martín-Baró, I. (1994). *Writing for a Liberation Psychology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mason, D. T. (1999). "The Civil War in El Salvador: A Retrospective Analysis." *Latin American Research Review* 34(3), 179-196.
- Menjívar, C. (2000). *Fragmented Ties: Salvadoran Immigrant Networks in America*. Berkeley:

University of California Press.

Mountz, A., Wright, R., Miyares, I.M., & Bailey, A.J. (2002). "Lives in limbo. Temporary Protected Status and immigrant identities." *Global Networks*, 2 (4), 335-356.

Neuman, W. L. (2006). *Social Research Methods*, 6th Ed. Toronto: Pearson/Allyn & Bacon.

Rosenberg, Tina. (1999, February). "What did you do in the war, mama?" *New York Times Magazine*, 52-93.

Salvadoreños realizan Mesa Redonda en Toronto. (2007). *El Popular*. Retrieved online on January 15, 2009 from the world wide web: http://www.diarioelpopular.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&i=2141&Itemid=109.

Seidman, Irving. (2006). *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*. 3 Ed. New York: Teacher's College Press.

Smith, M.P, & Guarnizo, L.E. (1998). "The Location of Transnationalisms" in *Transnationalism from Below*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 3-24.

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Newbury Park: Sage.

Statistics Canada. (2003). "The Ethnic Diversity Survey: Portrait of a Multicultural Society". Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

Tremblay, M. (1957). "The Key Informant Technique." *American Anthropologist*, 59 (4), 688-701.

US AID: El Salvador. (2005) Retrieved on October 10, 2008, from *US Aid From the American People*: <http://www.usaid.gov/policy/budget/cbj2005/lac/sv.html> .

Vilas, Carlos. (1995). *Between Earthquakes and Volcanoes: Markets, State, and Revolution in*

Central America. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Wayland, S. V. (2006). "The Politics of Transnationalism: Comparative Perspectives."

Satzewich, V. & Wong, L. (Eds.). *Transnational Identities and Practices in Canada*,
Vancouver: UBC Press, 19-34.

