

## **ABSTRACT**

Yucuaiquin is a small pueblo in La Union, El Salvador, hidden between mountains. In Poton, the Indigenous tongue to Lenca peoples, it means “tierra de fuego” or “land of fire.” My research asks about the history of daily life in Yucuaiquin before and after El Salvador’s war (1979-1990), and for yucuaiquinenses who subsequently moved to the Greater Boston area. My approach to this work honors the oral history and storytelling tradition of Yucuaiquin by using interviews and convivencia (shared life, time, and dwelling) with people to learn the history of the pueblo.

Given the limited scholarship on the history of Yucuaiquin, this project required a creative approach. Interdisciplinary scholarship from sociologists, anthropologists, economists, psychologists, and historians of other places filled in some gaps, as did memoirs. But sharing time with Yucuaiquinenses who migrated to Greater Boston and with community members in Yucuaiquin, engaging in their daily routines of selling, cooking, building, attending church, and such, has been crucial to my research.

From these community relationships my central question emerged: How have rural salvadoreños and yucuaiquinenses understood what it means to live together? I explore this question through histories of water, commerce and labor, and migration. Routines around access to water, street commerce, and transnational migration have been areas of struggle as yucuaiquinenses have contended with systemic forces – colonialism, privatization, wealth disparities, and imperialism.

**Transcending Time and Space: Historias de Convivencia in Rural El Salvador**

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May, 2023

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to particularly thank my mom Trancito Del Carmen Villatoro-Alvarez, Milton Gutierrez, and Don Carlos Lopez, these three historical agents, family members, and supporters gave me the aliento<sup>1</sup> to be able to work on this project. They make me so proud to be from Yucuaiquin. Along with my support systems who always saw me as a Latina scholar: Professor Mary Renda, Sarah Gautier, Paola Ruiz, Samantha Exil, and Luchy Cabrera.

I dedicate this project to my grandmother, Mama Consuelo. Her name means to console, and I felt her healing presence throughout this writing process.

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<sup>1</sup> This concept is tricky to translate, but in a sense they helped breathe life to this project by sustaining me through the work.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	1
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	3
PREFACE .....	5
AUTHORS NOTE .....	7
GLOSSARY.....	9
INTRODUCTION.....	11
CHAPTER ONE.....	26
Water: Rios de Agua Viva en Mi Ser	
VIGNETTES .....	44
CHAPTER TWO .....	48
Commerce and Labor: Si Tuvieras Fe Como un Granito de Mostaza	
VIGNETTES .....	65
CHAPTER THREE.....	71
Emigration: Los Muros Caen	
VIGNETTES .....	91
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	95

## PREFACE

In Professor Dan Czitrom's seminar on Kitchen Table History, at Mount Holyoke College, I connected larger historical narratives to my family. At the time, I knew there was a war in El Salvador, but I had no clue how this impacted the day-to-day life of my family. For the class, I explored “the ways the war changed everyday life (*vida cotidiana*) and movement for my mom and Tia Silvia.” Through a series of interviews and research, I focused on learning what led to the war and what life was like during the war. After I finished the essay, I wanted to learn more about post-war Yucuaiquin.

I started this phase of my learning journey in September 2022, intent on writing an essay about post-war Yucuaiquin from people still living there and those who fled/emigrated from El Salvador to the Greater Boston area. I choose the Boston Area because that is where I grew up and it would be easiest to come in contact with these family and friends. I read material and scholarship focused on the economic, social, and political consequences of the war. I interviewed family members and yucuaiquinenses of varying ages to ask about their experience during the war and emigration to the Greater Boston area.

I encountered many roadblocks during this process. I was set on focusing on Yucuaiquin, but realized how challenging it was to find any kind of scholarly work or primary sources. An opportunity arose to travel through the Almará Grant, and I was generously given money to visit El Salvador. During my visit, I wanted my research methods to embody **convivencia**. My research is informed by the memories, stories, and oral histories that shed light on what happened in Yucuaiquin from people still living there and those who emigrated. In the sections

written about Yucuaiquin, the histories are a compilation of various interviews held from September 2022-May 2023. These interviews included Nelva Larios, Trancito Del Carmen Villatoro, Carlos Lopez, Milton Gutierrez, Ismael Perez, Maria Trancito Villatoro, Maria Soledad Villatoro-Cabrera, Gloria Gutierrez, Carmen Garcia, Leovigoldo Jose, Delsi Garcia, Dina Garcia, Melanie y Jackie Vasquez, Silvia Valle, William Valle, Rosalio Garcia, y Margarita Garcia, and a guerrillero from Perquin who gave me a tour in the Museo de la Revolución.

The project continued to evolve as I carried out my research, conducted interviews, and visited Yucuaiquin. In the end, I decided that I did not want to frame the historias de convivencia around the war. There is so much published work written about the war and I wanted to focus on the stories people naturally shared with me. The war is inescapable; unfortunately, the history of El Salvador is now commonly divided into three eras: before, during, and after the war. I have tried to hold a balance between acknowledging and addressing the war, while not having it be a central point of these historias.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

I did not grow up in Yucuaiquin, and I wanted to be mindful by practicing humility and active listening while visiting. Through experiences of *convivencia*, both in Yucuaiquin and in rural parts of El Salvador where fighting took place, such as – Perquin and Sonsonate – I wanted to be attentive to the stories people wanted to share.

This research does not end with an independent study, or when I add the last touch to my paper. This research is about learning more about my pueblo, my family, and me. When I first started, I did not realize that I was learning about myself. Through this research, I hope to model collective storytelling and ways for immigrant peoples and communities to learn about their own history. I truly believe history-making happens in community. This means people's lived experiences, traditions, and identities shape how they understand the past and how they write historical narrative. This research project is an opportunity for me to experiment with accessible and authentic ways to write historical narrative. For me, the method of research is just as important as the content. I want to honor the creative voices of yucuaiquinenses. They speak in parables, exaggerated onomatopoeia, and un-written freestyle-poetry.

Each chapter ends with a series of vignettes. Since the bulk of my research took place through interviews and shared time with yucuaiquinenses, in the vignettes I include short stories which highlight day-to-day implications of the themes discussed in the chapters. I also begin each chapter with a lyric from a Christian song, or *corito*, because Catholicism and religion are central to life in Yucuaiquin and yucuaiquinenses in diaspora. I grew up listening to these *coritos*,

and seeing the strength, unity, and peace these songs gave people. As I reflected on ways to bring in the centrality of religion, I decided to include lyrics that felt pertinent to the chapters and will give my analysis and reflections in the vignettes.

My personal philosophy is that all history flows from convivencia. This project would not be possible without convivencia. When I say this, what do I mean by convivencia? Convivencia is grabbing a colorful plastic chair and sitting in a circle outside Niña Carmen's house to hear stories from family members. Convivencia is waking up before sunrise to prepare atole to serve the neighborhood workers before they head out to work. Convivencia is the car ride home the first time you land on tierra salvadoreña after years of undocumented. Convivencia is listening to tio's stories about how the Lenca used to trade cacao seeds. Convivencia is making tortillas with your family in the states, and learning about the first time they made tortillas back home. Convivencia is sharing, coexisting, storytelling, togetherness, wholeness. A passing down of the baton. Convivencia is sacred and holy. Convivencia is embodied, sharing time and space with someone. Listening. Embracing. Serving. Convivencia is found at the bottom of an empty plate. Convivencia evolves and changes. Convivencia isn't bound by English or Spanish. Convivencia keeps us together, even when we are apart. It is a binding force that cannot be broken by war, impoverishment, gangs, violence, imperialism, classism, or migration.



## GLOSSARY

- salvadoreñes— gender neutral term for people from El Salvador. It is not a made up word because in Spanish speaking spaces people will sometimes replace the “a” or “o” masculine and feminine article to a gender neutral “e” article. On a personal level I prefer referring to someone from El Salvador in Spanish rather than in English. In Spanish, “salvadoreñe” would not be capitalized, unlike Salvadoran in English.
- yucuaiquinenses—gender neutral term for people from Yucuaiquin
- El Molino— mill where women grind maize for cooking
- El Zapote— communal water source in Yucuaiquin for washing clothes, dishes, showering, etc
- Pre-colonial — Prior to 1524, before the Spanish colonial presence in Central America
- Colonial — From 1524 to 1821, when the Spanish crown sent expeditions to Central America to exploit “resources” and people to gain personal and national profit. Colonization disrupted and forever altered the lives of Indigenous people. The expeditioners are referred to as colonists or colonizers.
- Post-colonial—In 1821, El Salvador along with other Central American countries declared independence from Spain. It is difficult to know when to refer to the territory as “El Salvador,” because prior to colonization the territory had different names. A lot of what is known about pre-colonial El Salvador, is written about in scholarship about Guatemala because the territory was not divided in the same way it is in the present day.
- Historias— In Spanish, this word both connotes histories and stories. Since this project takes a creative approach, I like utilizing “historias” because it highlights the ways

histories and storytelling are woven together to create a history of Yucuaiquin. This method of history-making is particularly important in a context, like Yucuaiquin, that is scarcely written about.

- La Guerra— From October 1979 to January 1992, El Salvador engaged in a war between the authoritarian military government and the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional<sup>2</sup> (FMLN) guerrilleros/as (guerrilla fighters). I narrate the war in more depth in the Introduction, but I wanted to highlight that I choose to 1) say the name in Spanish because that’s how I grew up hearing it from salvadoreños. 2) I don’t limit the war by using the term “civil” because the actors extend beyond the borders of El Salvador—specifically the U.S money, training, and weaponry that supported the government.
- Maiz— This translates to corn in English, and I will use it in Spanish because this particular crop is so central to life in Yucuaiquin.
- Remittances— “When migrants send home part of their earnings in the form of either cash or goods to support their families, these transfers are known as workers’ or migrant remittances.”<sup>3</sup>
- Campesine—A gender neutral term for someone from the countryside. I will use this term instead of campesina or campesino.

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<sup>2</sup> Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front.

<sup>3</sup> “Remittances: Funds for the Folks Back Home.” IMF, February 5, 2019.

<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/Series/Back-to-Basics/Remittances>.

## INTRODUCTION

These historias de convivencia are a social history of rural El Salvador with Yucuaiquin as a case study. In researching the social history of El Salvador my central question is: How have rural salvadoreños and yucuaiquinenses understood what it means to live together? For this research, convivencia is two-fold: a research methodology and a framework for understanding what it has meant to live together in El Salvador. As a research method, I relied on shared dwelling and relationship-building with yucuaiquinenses living in El Salvador and those in the Greater Boston diaspora.

To grasp the complexity of this history, I draw on Teodoro Pérez Pérez's "Aprender A Convivir En La Diferencia, Clave Para Construir Cultura De Paz" where he explores what it means to construct a peaceful society in Colombia where every generation since independence has lived through multiple forms of violence.<sup>4</sup> Pérez discusses the importance of respecting differing ideas when conflict arises, and he separates this from altruistic forms of understanding peace.<sup>5</sup> He argues that a peaceful society leads to "el ejercicio de los derechos humanos" (the exercise of human rights).<sup>6</sup> In order to build this peaceful society and learn from the histories of violence, Pérez explains two ways to convivir: la convivencia armónica and la convivencia conflictiva (harmonious convivencia and conflictive convivencia).<sup>7</sup> Pérez defines convivencia armonica as mutual respect within differences and conversations about how to behave in shared

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<sup>4</sup> Teodoro Pérez Pérez, "Aprender A Convivir En La Diferencia, Clave Para Construir Cultura De Paz," 35.

<sup>5</sup> Pérez, "Aprender A Convivir," 39.

<sup>6</sup> Pérez, "Aprender A Convivir," 39.

<sup>7</sup> Pérez, "Aprender A Convivir," 44-45.

spaces.<sup>8</sup> He defines *convivencia conflictiva* as sharing a space where people negate differences and impose ways being, behaving, and interests.<sup>9</sup>

To grasp *convivencia*, it is important to note the challenge of translation versus interpretation. In most contexts, people might translate *convivencia* as *coexistence*. However, in Spanish *convivencia* and *coexistencia* are two distinct words. The word *coexistence* means “the state or fact of living or existing at the same time or in the same place.”<sup>10</sup> However, *convivencia* goes beyond simply living and existing at the same time and space as someone/people. *Convivencia* ties to community-building, solidarity, and togetherness. Pérez’s conceptualization of constructing a peaceful society points to the struggles that have interrupted salvadoreñas efforts to maintain the values of *convivencia*. In a context like El Salvador (similar to Colombia) where people have lived through colonization, imperialism, wealth disparities, and privatization, *coexistence* has meant conflict and state sanctioned violence. As a result, communities and organizations have rebelled against these power structures. These understandings of *convivencia* and *coexistence* reflect the ways rural salvadoreñas and yucuaiquinenses have lived with one another.

These forms of *convivencia* and *coexistence* will be explored through histories of water, labor and commerce, and migration. These histories are framed within the context of El Salvador as an agrarian society, where cultivation and farming are central to life and livelihood in rural pueblos like Yucuaiquin. An agrarian lifestyle has been central to Indigenous identities and values in El Salvador since before Spanish colonization in 1521. Before 1521, the Pipils, Lenca, Cacaopera, and Pokomans – the Indigenous peoples of El Salvador – viewed nature through a

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<sup>8</sup> Pérez, “Aprender A Convivir,” 44.

<sup>9</sup> Pérez, “Aprender A Convivir,” 44.

<sup>10</sup> “Definition of Coexistence Noun from the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary,” in *Oxford Dictionaries Learners*, n.d., <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/coexistence>.

spiritual lens.<sup>11</sup> Since their lives revolved around and depended on la cosecha (cultivation), they embedded water into their spiritual beliefs.<sup>12</sup> Every February, when the river levels dropped and there were higher probabilities of drought, the tribes “perform[ed] ceremonies in honour of Tlaloc, the Aztec god of rain, Xtoh, the Mayan goddess of rain, or Chalchihuitlicue, the Mayan goddess of water.”<sup>13</sup> These ceremonies were examples of water bringing people together, water at the center of livelihood, and water as a source of life.

For community members, according to scholar Carlos S. Zepeda Castillo, who has written on this history of water in El Salvador, water was considered communal and people did not take ownership of or appropriate water.<sup>14</sup> Water was not considered a “resource” as understood today. A resource is a material asset. For them, water was a spiritual element.<sup>15</sup> Since water was given and governed by gods, no human governed water.<sup>16</sup> The way of water was the way of community; a way of sharing the necessary elements for survival. However, there is a difference between an ideal and its historical manifestation.

Water has been central to the cultures of El Salvador and Central America for millennia and archaeological evidence offers clues about how ancient societies organized themselves around water. They also reveal the ways spiritual beliefs can be upheld even in the midst of asymmetries of power, as appears to have been the case of Kaminaljuyu, an ancient Mesoamerican society. In “Water Management at Kaminaljuyu: The Beginnings of Power and Ideology in the Guatemalan Highlands, Juan Antonio Valdés, writes about water management in the Guatemalan Highlands during the Middle and Late Preclassic era. From 600-400 B.C., the

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<sup>11</sup> Carlos S. Zepeda Castillo, “Water Politics in El Salvador: Power, Water and Social Change in Poor Communities of San José Villanueva,” Dissertation, University of Warwick, 2015, 90.

<sup>12</sup> Zepeda Castillo, “Water Politics in El Salvador,” 93.

<sup>13</sup> Zepeda Castillo, “Water Politics in El Salvador,” 93.

<sup>14</sup> Zepeda Castillo, “Water Politics in El Salvador,” 90-91.

<sup>15</sup> Zepeda Castillo, “Water Politics in El Salvador,” 92.

<sup>16</sup> Zepeda Castillo, “Water Politics in El Salvador,” 92.

leaders in Kaminaljuyu utilized the “fusion of ideology and technology” to gain political power.<sup>17</sup> The leaders implemented the use of new hydraulic engineering programs which led to population growth and increased harvest.<sup>18</sup> Valdés emphasizes the authority the elite held over the population through the “great works of architecture and hydraulic engineering,” “canals,” “dominat[ing] interregional commerce, and agricult[re]..”<sup>19</sup>

With the archeological findings, it is clear the “most important resource of the city” was Lake Miraflores. The urban designers placed the “lakeshore at the heart of the city,” at the center of life and livelihood.<sup>20</sup> Not only is the lake central to the city-scape, the lake is filled with “offerings and special deposits” from religious ceremonies.<sup>21</sup> Between the scholars Zepeda Castillo and Antonio Valdés, there are discrepancies between how different Indigenous groups throughout Mesoamerica understood and practiced their connection to water. According to Zepeda Castillo, Indigenous groups did not govern water. While, according to Valdés, the elites in Kaminaljuyu developed water technologies to control their populations. These discrepancies reveal the complexity in histories of accessing and organizing life around water for Indigenous peoples in Mesoamerica.

Chapter 1 will address those complexities in this history of water. In Yucuaiquin, up until the early 1970s families survived without plumbing or potable water. This contrasts the highly developed technologies that the people of Kaminaljuyu developed in their societies. Yucuaiquin is not an isolated story, throughout El Salvador rural pueblos struggled during the 20th and 21st century to bring potable water to their communities.

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<sup>17</sup> Juan Antonio, Valdés, “Water Management at Kaminaljuyu: The Beginnings of Power and Ideology in the Guatemalan Highlands.” In *Precolumbian Water Management: Ideology, Ritual, and Power*, edited by Lisa J. Lucero and Barbara W. Fash, 67–78. University of Arizona Press, 2006. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2vt02c0.7>, 70.

<sup>18</sup> Valdés, “Water Management at Kaminaljuyu,” 70.

<sup>19</sup> Valdés, “Water Management at Kaminaljuyu,” 70.

<sup>20</sup> Valdés “Water Management at Kaminaljuyu,” 71.

<sup>21</sup> Valdés, “Water Management at Kaminaljuyu,” 71.

These agrarian origins and value for water also give context for the ways communities organize to resist imperialist mining companies and international businesses polluting integral water sources. In the daily routines of accessing water salvadoreños practice the values of convivencia while contending with systemic forces, like privatization, that create barriers for people to access their most basic needs.

Chapter 2 will take up the ways people in rural El Salvador and Yucuaiquin have engaged in commerce and labor. Alongside commercial activities, people have also practiced subsistence cultivation. The practice of subsistence cultivation revolves around the needs of the family and local community, not the market. This is an example of Indigenous cultural inheritances—ways that longstanding Indigenous traditions seem to resonate with recent and contemporary cultural practices. Even if families turned towards commerce as a main source of income, they continued their traditions, which emerged out of patterns of subsistence agriculture. The Indigenous peoples rooted their systems for cultivation in their spiritual beliefs. The process of sowing, watering, and reaping informed the Indigenous people’s calendric system.<sup>22</sup> Maiz— their main crop— shaped how they understood the passage of time and their connection to the earth.<sup>23</sup> The process of planting maiz gave way to a series of ceremonies and festivities for their gods.<sup>24</sup>

The cultivation of maiz even influenced settlement patterns. One of the integral parts to the cultivation were the tools necessary for grinding the maiz. The villagers naturally settled near “tierras húmedas,” (wetlands) and the volcanic highlands provided rocks and stones useful for metates (querns).<sup>25</sup> The metate served as a ground stone tool, a hand mill, for women to process

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<sup>22</sup> David, Browning, *El Salvador: Landscape and Society*. London: Oxford University Press, 1971, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Browning, *El Salvador*, 8.

<sup>24</sup> Browning, *El Salvador*, 11.

<sup>25</sup> Browning, *El Salvador*, 19.

grain and seeds. These stones, jade, gold, and hematite iron also provided the necessary material to make the other tools for cultivation, like knives, spears, and pots.<sup>26</sup>

Festivals and practices reveal the ways Indigenous people communed with one another, nature, and their gods through the harvest of maize. Their lives and kinship to one another revolved around the harvest. This Indigenous understanding for the cultivation of maize gives context to the subsistence cultivation practices that persist throughout rural El Salvador. In Yucuaiquin, maize continues as a central grain used in day-to-day foods like atoles, tamales, and tortillas. In that sense, maize prevails as a crop informing people's labor and commercial activities, even informing their spiritual practices like el baile de los negritos (a folk and religious dance practiced in Yucuaiquin which literally translates to “the dance of the little black man”). Chapter 2 explores the ties between cultivation, commerce, religion, and diasporic practices.

### **From Colonization to Neoliberalism**

The Spaniards opened up Central America to international exports through cacao and indigo. Through backbreaking labor, the Indigenous people became the backbone of the Spanish export economy and riches. Spaniards brought famine and disease that killed off many of the villages. The export economy and death of Indigenous people disrupted and altered how people gathered through cultivation. In this sense, during the Colonial period the Spaniards, Indigenous people, Africans, and Mestizos coexisted in violence. After El Salvador gained independence, there was a period before the 1850s when Indigenous people still possessed parts of communal lands and haciendas did not “monopolize the rural economy.”<sup>27</sup> El Salvador relied on a

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<sup>26</sup> Browning, *El Salvador* 19.

<sup>27</sup> E. Bradford Burns, “The Modernization of Underdevelopment: El Salvador,” *Journal of Developing Areas* 18:3 (April 1984), 293- 294.



“subsistence economy” that “produced rather leisurely for the world markets.”<sup>28</sup> There was political turmoil, but for the most part, people produced the food necessary for the population and land was “reasonably well distributed.”<sup>29</sup>

However, during the 1850s the elite class started to idealize the European Enlightenment and tied progress to a “predominantly export-oriented economy linked to international capitalism.”<sup>30</sup> This led to the government labeling Indigenous communities, “tierras comunales,” as “backwards” and “antiprogressive.”<sup>31</sup> In 1881, President Barrios' administration “abolished the tierras comunales.”<sup>32</sup> In Chapter One, there is an example of how Indigenous people and Ladinos contended with and competed for these private lands. During the 1880s coffee planters acquired small plots of land and started coffee mono agriculture.<sup>33</sup> The rural folk started to experience the dispossession of their land, with landowners relying on the coffee plantation for cheap labor.<sup>34</sup>

The government started their authoritarian regime when the labor force rallied and revolted against low wages and their dispossession of land. The government passed laws like the Vagrancy Laws of 1881 and the Agrarian Law of 1907 to regulate the working class.<sup>35</sup> It also created a rural police force to enforce laws, “intimida[te] the workers, [and] protec[t] the planters.”<sup>36</sup> Starting in 1898, presidents entered the office through brutality and fraudulent elections.<sup>37</sup> The people in power created the coffee mono-agriculture that gave them economic power, and created greater divides between the elite class and rural campesinos.<sup>38</sup> However, in

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<sup>28</sup> Burns, “Modernization of Underdevelopment,” 294

<sup>29</sup> Burns, “Modernization of Underdevelopment,” 294.

<sup>30</sup> Burns, “Modernization of Underdevelopment,” 295.

<sup>31</sup> Burns, “Modernization of Underdevelopment,” 299

<sup>32</sup> Burns, “Modernization of Underdevelopment,” 300

<sup>33</sup> Burns, “Modernization of Underdevelopment,” 300- 301.

<sup>34</sup> Burns, “Modernization of Underdevelopment,” 302.

<sup>35</sup> Burns, “Modernization of Underdevelopment,” 302.

<sup>36</sup> Burns, “Modernization of Underdevelopment,” 302.

<sup>37</sup> Burns, “Modernization of Underdevelopment,” 301- 304.

<sup>38</sup> Burns, “Modernization of Underdevelopment,” 304.

the midst of the consolidation of power, money, and land, rural campesines formed a labor movement in rural El Salvador. The oligarchic rule and the rise and fall of coffee mono-agriculture will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

In 1932, El Salvador experienced a state-sanctioned genocide in Izalco known as La Matanza. The population in Izalco was Nahuatl speaking Indigenous people who participated in a popular uprising.<sup>39</sup> The number of people the government killed is unknown, but scholars estimate around 10,000 people.<sup>40</sup> The government propagated the belief that this revolution was a communist effort, but further studies reveal that the Indigenous people wanted “a revolution against the rapidly strengthening Ladino power structures.”<sup>41</sup> The Indigenous people did mobilize with the support of the International Communist Party and began demonstrations in May 1931 when they marched into Sonsonate.<sup>42</sup> On January 22nd and 23rd in 1932, rebels entered Nahuizalco, Ahuachapán, Juayúa, and Izalco. The number of rebels is contested from different accounts,<sup>43</sup> but altogether they attacked local offices to “destroy property records,”<sup>44</sup> killed local Ladino elites “hated for debt of land swindles against Indians,”<sup>45</sup> “broke down shop doors, and smashed furniture.”<sup>46</sup>

In Chapter 7 of “To Rise in Darkness: Revolution, Repression, and Memory in El Salvador, 1920–1932,” Jeffrey L. Gould and Lauria-Santiago Aldo narrate the aftermath of the rebels' attack in three stages. The first stage takes place immediately after the uprisings on

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<sup>39</sup> Maria Robin, DeLugan, “Commemorating from the Margins of the Nation: El Salvador 1932, Indigeneity, and Transnational Belonging.” *Anthropological Quarterly* 86, no. 4 (2013): 965–94. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43652892>, 966.

<sup>40</sup> DeLugan, “Commemorating from the Margins,” 966.

<sup>41</sup> Virginia Q. Tilley, *Seeing Indians: A Study of Race, Nation, and Power in El Salvador*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005, 145.

<sup>42</sup> Virginia Q. Tilley, *Seeing Indians*, 145.

<sup>43</sup> Virginia Q. Tilley, *Seeing Indians*, 150–151.

<sup>44</sup> Jeffrey L. Gould, and Aldo Lauria-Santiago, “Red Ribbons and Machetes: The Insurrection of January 1932.” In *To Rise in Darkness: Revolution, Repression, and Memory in El Salvador, 1920–1932*, 170–208. Duke University Press, 2008. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11sn0j8.9>, 180.

<sup>45</sup> Virginia Q. Tilley, *Seeing Indians*, 152.

<sup>46</sup> Virginia Q. Tilley, *Seeing Indians*, 152.

January 24th<sup>47</sup> when the “military hot pursuit coincided with the execution of thousands of people.”<sup>48</sup> Stage two and three refer to the events from January 25 until the end of March when the military committed massacres in Nahuizalco and “wider geographic areas” using the “lists of communist voters” and members.<sup>49</sup> After these events the famous poet Roque Dalton said “we were all born half-dead in 1932. To be a Salvadoran is to be half dead.”<sup>50</sup>

To understand the histories of water, commerce, and migration in rural El Salvador, it is integral to understand the lasting consequences of [such violence, and of] settler colonialism [more generally]. In *Seeing Indians: A Study of Race, Nation, and Power in El Salvador*, Virginia Q. Tilley, tells the history of “Indianness” or Indigeneity in El Salvador. Tilley grapples with a very important question: What does it mean to be Indigenous in El Salvador? There are other countries in Latin America, like Guatemala, Bolivia, and Mexico with distinct Indigenous peoples with their own languages, customs, and sense of identities.<sup>51</sup>

However, in El Salvador since La Matanza the government created the narrative that there are no Indigenous people living in El Salvador. Tilley supports Alan Knight's argument that mestizaje is used “as a nation-building doctrine, driven by a concern for state authority.”<sup>52</sup> Beginning in the early 1990s the government started to use Indigeneity as a post-war project because of tourism and the international funding efforts for tribes and nations.<sup>53</sup> These efforts fell apart because of internal corruption, in the form of mishandling funding, and left the international community confused about questions of Indigeneity in El Salvador.

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<sup>47</sup> Gould, and Aldo Lauria-Santiago, “Red Ribbons and Machetes,” 211.

<sup>48</sup> Gould, and Aldo Lauria-Santiago, “Red Ribbons and Machetes,” 211.

<sup>49</sup> Gould, and Aldo Lauria-Santiago, “Red Ribbons and Machetes,” 211.

<sup>50</sup> Erik Kristofer, Ching, *Stories of Civil War in El Salvador a Battle over Memory*. Chapel Hill North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2016, 30.

<sup>51</sup> Tilley, *Seeing Indians*, 12.

<sup>52</sup> Tilley, *Seeing Indians*, 21.

<sup>53</sup> Tilley, *Seeing Indians*, 32.

The question remains: What does it mean to be Indigenous in El Salvador? Tilley asked salvadoreños and they struggled to construct a definition. Their definitions ranged from poverty, to a way of speaking, to where they lived, to dark hair and skin. However, nobody came to a consensus, they just “know” when they see an Indigenous person. All these assumptions are not isolated to El Salvador. Throughout Latin America the picture of an Indigenous person is “the rural poor, the illiterate manual laborers, the subsistence farmer.”<sup>54</sup> It can be equally harmful to assume Indigenous people speak Native languages, dress a certain way, and hold superior ecological practices.<sup>55</sup> Dr. Francisco López Bárcenas, a self-identified Indigenous person from Mexico writes in his article “Lenguas indígenas, colonialismo y derechos lingüísticos” about the connections between colonialism and fighting for linguistic rights for Indigenous peoples. He summarizes the ways Indegenity is placed in a “post-colonial” context:

Y no se trata solamente de la subordinación de una cultura – la colonizada – a otra cultura – la colonizadora –. Se trata de la colonización del imaginario, de la penetración del pensamiento colonizador en el pensamiento del colonizado, con el objetivo de que no se piense “otro”, diferente, menos otro “colonizado”. Se trata de sacarlo del espacio donde tienen existencia propia y particular, diferente a la del colonizador, para colocarlo en el espacio del colonizado, donde realmente no tiene existencia, a menos que renuncie a ser lo que es y se asuma como lo que no es. Se le desubica de su lugar del “ser” para ubicarlo en el lugar del “no ser.”

And it is not only about the subordination of one culture – the colonized – to another culture – the colonizer –. It is about the colonization of the imaginary, the penetration of the colonizing thought in the thought of the colonized, with the objective of not thinking “other,” different, less [than] other “colonized” [people]. It is a matter of removing them from the space where they have their own particular existence, different from that of the colonizer, to place them in the space of the colonized, where they really have no existence, unless they renounce being what they are and assume themselves to be what they are not. He is dislocated from his place of “being” to place him in the place of “non-being.” [Francisco López Bárcenas, “Lenguas Indígenas, Colonialismo y Derechos Lingüísticos,” ANRed, September 28, 2019, <https://www.anred.org/2019/09/28/lenguas-indigenas-colonialismo-y-derechos-linguisticos/>.] Translated by Rebeca Villatoro-Alvarez.

<sup>54</sup> Tilley, *Seeing Indians*, 55.

<sup>55</sup> Tilley, *Seeing Indians*, 8 & 12.

The term “lo indio” or “the Indian” in El Salvador is associated with anything backwards, impoverished, and stuck in the past. Government propaganda has successfully erased Indigenous histories and commodified Indigeneity to promote tourism. So, Indigenous peoples, as Dr. Francisco López Bárcenas says, are left in a place of “non-being.”<sup>56</sup> In Yucuaiquin, I heard people say we descend from Lencas, not we are Lenca; there is a difference between saying you have Indigenous ancestors and saying you are an Indigenous person.

In these *historias de convivencia*, the voices of Virginia Q. Tilley and Dr. Francisco López Bárcenas illuminate the ways Indigenous histories are purposefully isolated, targeted, erased, commodified, and boxed. The pinnacle of Indigeneity is not the Mayans, although the government and different communities in El Salvador claim they are Maya because of the commercial success of the Maya in Guatemala.<sup>57</sup> Ultimately, Indigenous people cannot define Indigeneity for themselves because this means internationally confronting the realities of living in colonial and colonized contexts.

These *historias de convivencia* will focus on populations in El Salvador that are considered impoverished, campesinos, illiterate, and subsistence farmers, but these conditions do not mean they are backwards or stuck in the past. These social locations are not permanent or innate, they are conditions people live in because of systemic forces that have pushed them to the margins. The systemic forces of imperialism, colonialism, privatization, and state sanctioned violence lead people to struggle to access basic resources and find labor opportunities. Ultimately, many have made the choice to leave El Salvador.

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<sup>56</sup> Francisco Bárcenas, López, “Lenguas Indígenas, Colonialismo y Derechos Lingüísticos.” ANRed, September 29, 2019. <https://www.anred.org/2019/09/28/lenguas-indigenas-colonialismo-y-derechos-linguisticos/>.

<sup>57</sup> Tilley, *Seeing Indians*, 97.

After La Matanza, President Martínez consolidated power and El Salvador entered fifty years of military dictatorships.<sup>58</sup> The elites gave the military officers executive-level positions in government so they “would keep things ordered and safe for elites to go about their business.”<sup>59</sup> The military kept order through “brutally violent means,” but because they usually came from humble backgrounds they considered reform.<sup>60</sup> Even with the minimal reforms, the government continued as an authoritarian and militant regime.

Despite the fifty years of authoritarian and militant regime, leftists groups, social movements, and militant opposition contested the government starting in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>61</sup> The five guerilla organizations that initiated, led, and fought in La Guerra formed during the 1970s. Known as “the five factions,”<sup>62</sup> these organizations formed in cities, so in the mid-1970s they started to make connections with rural populations, each faction taking up a region in the country.<sup>63</sup> The guerrillas, along with the Catholic church, and existing mobilizations worked together to “radical[ize]” and “promot[e] community organization.”<sup>64</sup> When these five militant organizations joined together as the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) they engaged in the final offensive— the beginning of La Guerra.<sup>65</sup>

La guerra lasted from October 1979 to January 1992— twelve years. The United Nations reported more than 75,000 people went missing during those years.<sup>66</sup> In the twelve years of conflict, more than one million people – out of a population of 5,389,000 – uprooted their lives

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<sup>58</sup> Ching, *Stories of Civil War*, 30.

<sup>59</sup> Ching, *Stories of Civil War*, 30.

<sup>60</sup> Ching, *Stories of Civil War*, 30.

<sup>61</sup> Ching, *Stories of Civil War*, 35-36.

<sup>62</sup> Las Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farabundo Martí (FPL), the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), the Resistencia Nacional (RN), the Partido Comunista Salvadoreño (PCS) and the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos (PRTC).

<sup>63</sup> Ching, *Stories of Civil War*, 39.

<sup>64</sup> Ching, *Stories of Civil War*, 39.

<sup>65</sup> Ching, *Stories of Civil War*, 41.

<sup>66</sup> Boutros-Grali. *Equipo Nizkor - Report of the UN Truth Commission on El Salvador*, [www.derechos.org/nizkor/salvador/informes/truth.html](http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/salvador/informes/truth.html).

by fleeing to refugee camps and immigrating to the United States.<sup>67</sup> The government was not prepared to fight the guerrillas, so they recruited young boys and men to grow the military in size.<sup>68</sup> The United States trained the soldiers and provided the government with weaponry.<sup>69</sup> The U.S. supposedly invested in the government because of the Red Scare happening during the Cold War.<sup>70</sup> The Atlacatl Battalion killed many civilians and wiped out towns because they could not find the guerrilleros.<sup>71</sup> The guerrilleros engaged in “hit-and-run strikes,” “open combat”, and “target[ed] infrastructure” to cost the “government money to rebuild or repair.”<sup>72</sup>

Two of the most catastrophic events during the war were: El Mozote and the massacre in the Jesuit Central American University. On December 11, 1981, the military, trained by the U.S, killed 1,000 civilians in El Mozote.<sup>73</sup> On November 16, 1989 the militaries killed six Jesuit Priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter in the Jesuit Central American University.<sup>74</sup> Ultimately, over a two-year period, the FMLN and government met to negotiate peace. In January, 1992 they signed the Acuerdos de Paz (Peace Accords) in Mexico City.<sup>75</sup>

### **Convivencia and Coexistencia in Post-war El Salvador**

In Chapter 3, the histories of water and commerce will come together through the impact of mass-migration. There is a certain irony of ending a history of convivencia with migration given that it separates families and members of a community. Chapter 3 will complicate the ways Yucuaiquin and yucuaiquinenses in diaspora experience the benefits and consequences of

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<sup>67</sup> “Central America's Health Plight.” *The Christian Science Monitor*, The Christian Science Monitor, 22 Mar. 1990, [www.csmonitor.com/1990/0322/echel.html](http://www.csmonitor.com/1990/0322/echel.html).

<sup>68</sup> Ching, *Stories of Civil War*, 43.

<sup>69</sup> Ching, *Stories of Civil War*, 43.

<sup>70</sup> Ching, *Stories of Civil War*, 48.

<sup>71</sup> Ching, *Stories of Civil War*, 43.

<sup>72</sup> Ching, *Stories of Civil War*, 44 & 45.

<sup>73</sup> “El Mozote.” *Cristosal*, [www.cristosal.org/el-mozote](http://www.cristosal.org/el-mozote).

<sup>74</sup> Ching, *Stories of Civil War*, 48.

<sup>75</sup> Ching, *Stories of Civil War*, 48.

transnational migration. Ultimately the forces of globalization disrupt convivencia through immigration policies in the U.S and El Salvador's government acceptance of a remittance dependent economy. However, despite these systemic forces, people have insisted upon and created new forms of convivencia.

This research is deeply personal to me and my family. Like Mérida Rúa, who wrote an ethnography about Puerto Rican Chicago, I feel deeply tied to the community I grew up in and call home. Like her, I am an “insider outsider.” Rúa realized that the ideal approach when interviewing – sharing time with people – was to lead with love. I’d like to add, we must lead with humility. I know I am from Yucuaiquin; I am from la tierra de fuego, and yet I did not grow there. So I must be respectful, careful, and honorable when hearing these stories and writing them down. I hold the privilege of the pen, but it is me who receives the gift of hearing from my loved ones and neighbors. I am researching, but really I see this research as a love letter to Yucuaiquin and yucuaiquineses. Like Rúa, I interviewed them, and they interviewed me.

I offer this collection of historias de convivencia of rural salvadoreños and yucuaiquineses as a testament to how convivencia is both embodied and can transcend time and space. I recognize the holes in research because of the limiting archives and primary sources about Yucuaiquin. The bulk of my research and primary sources are thanks to Don Carlos López, a local historian, and the generosity of family members and neighbors' openness to share time, space, and stories with me. This openness flowed because of my personal connections and familial ties in el pueblo.

I want to take people on a walk down Yucuaiquin streets like Don Carlos did with me. We walked together under the warm sun as he shared all he learned from his 72 years of living



and conviviendo in Yucuaiquin. Although you may never step foot in El Salvador or Yucuaiquin, I hope through stories you feel in convivencia with Yucuaiquin land and its peoples.

# CHAPTER 1—

## WATER:

### RIOS DE AGUA VIVA EN MI SER<sup>76</sup>

#### Introduction

El Salvador is an agrarian society, so the ways and changes in how rural salvadoreños access their water tells a story of how they live together. The struggle and labor for clean water is not an isolated story to Yucuaiquin or rural El Salvador; this struggle is a part of a larger narrative that disproportionately affects rural pueblos around the world. In 2010, the General Assembly of the United Nations met to discuss the importance of drinking water and sanitation. The Office of the President of the General Assembly declared three statements about water: water is life, water is sustainability, and water is empowerment.<sup>77</sup>

This chapter will discuss the systemic reasons rural salvadoreños have struggled to access clean water – due, for example, to the privatization of basic resources – and the ways they met those challenges through the values of community. Routines for accessing water became contexts in which rural pueblos and yucuaiquinenses would gather and share the values of convivencia. Beginning in Pre-colonial times, the changes in landownership reflect the ways different ethnic groups and classes have coexisted and contended with the systemic forces of inequality, more recently including privatization, capitalism, and imperialism. Salvadoreños have struggled to

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<sup>76</sup> Rivers of living water in my being

<sup>77</sup> High-level Meeting on the Implementation of the Water-related Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda, A/RES/73/22,6, Member States, (18 March, 2021), [https://estatements.unmeetings.org/estatements/10.0010/20210318/deBTywgTcGUG/ENATIVL8vTfU\\_en.pdf](https://estatements.unmeetings.org/estatements/10.0010/20210318/deBTywgTcGUG/ENATIVL8vTfU_en.pdf).

access clean water and to maintain their lands, ultimately leading to uprisings and water defenders advocating for their rights to these natural resources.

### **The Transcending Effects of Colonial Rule**

From the mid-fifteenth century to 1821, the colonial economy was first based on cacao and indigo.<sup>78</sup> The Spaniards considered the Indigenous people vassals responsible for paying tribute through labor or goods.<sup>79</sup> Through the *encomienda* system, the Spanish Crown gave the Spaniards land, resources, and involuntary Indigenous labor.<sup>80</sup> The Spaniards noticed the Indigenous peoples' advanced agrotechnology and systems in place for cacao production, so they allowed them to keep their landholdings. The Indigenous people living in Izalco cultivated the cacao and benefited greatly from the cacao boom both economically and because they retained their lands.<sup>81</sup> During the late seventeenth century the *encomendaderos* become more interested in indigo as an export, because indigo replaced the “inferior woad in European textile manufacture.”<sup>82</sup> For Indigenous people, indigo production resulted in exhaustive labor, diseases, and ultimately more deaths.<sup>83</sup> Populations declined in Indigenous communities because of their high death rates and because people fled to remote locations.

During colonial rule, the Indigenous population diminished so greatly that the Spaniards created provisions for *comunidades* (community) “provid[ing] Indigenous communities with collective land and corporate representation to colonial authorities.”<sup>84</sup> These *comunidades* extended into El Salvador's independence, and helped them “retain their corporate cohesion” and

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<sup>78</sup> In the following chapters, I will discuss more in depth the economic activity and labor of cacao and indigo.

<sup>79</sup> Tilley, *Seeing Indians*, 110.

<sup>80</sup> Tilley, *Seeing Indians*, 110.

<sup>81</sup> Tilley, *Seeing Indians*, 110.

<sup>82</sup> Browning, *El Salvador*, 66.

<sup>83</sup> Tilley, *Seeing Indians*, 110.

<sup>84</sup> Tilley, *Seeing Indians*, 111.

“defend their collective interests.”<sup>85</sup> Even through the nineteenth century, Indigenous people held a quarter of the country's land through the comunidades.<sup>86</sup> After the colonial period, two Indigenous comunidades in Izalco wanted to keep Ladinos off their lands.<sup>87</sup> In El Salvador, Ladinos were non-Indigenous people, including people who chose to dissociate from Indigeneity.<sup>88</sup> The Ladinos and Indigenous peoples had conflicts over land and public offices. Even though the Ladinos, a rising commercial elite, began taking control over the municipal government, for the most part, the Indigenous people retained control over their communal lands.<sup>89</sup>

But then in 1881, “communal and municipal land-tenure forms were by law abolished in favor of private property ownership.”<sup>90</sup> In 1882, the state abolished ejidos: land managed and owned by Ladinos.<sup>91</sup> The Indigenous people were in favor of the privatization, because this way they could retain their ownership of their land<sup>92</sup> and they began “to develop valuable commercial sugar and coffee farms on community lands.”<sup>93</sup> The Indigenous and Ladino communities wanted to acquire the best land for agriculture and commercial success. This led to Indigenous uprisings, because they believed the Ladinos were cheating and lying to limit the Indigenous people from acquiring the private parcels of land.<sup>94</sup> The revolts led to the government abolishing comunidades in April 1885.<sup>95</sup> In Izalco, some Indigenous people privatized their communal land so it remained within their families. Any unclaimed land was considered a part of the state for “private buyers

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<sup>85</sup> Tilley, *Seeing Indians*, 111.

<sup>86</sup> Tilley, *Seeing Indians*, 114.

<sup>87</sup> Aldo A. Lauria-Santiago, “Land, Community, and Revolt in Late-Nineteenth-Century Indian Izalco, El Salvador.” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 79, no. 3 (1999): 495–534. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2518288>, 501.

<sup>88</sup> Lauria-Santiago, “Land, Community, and Revolt,” 499.

<sup>89</sup> Lauria-Santiago, “Land, Community, and Revolt,” 501.

<sup>90</sup> Lauria-Santiago, “Land, Community, and Revolt,” 474.

<sup>91</sup> Tilley, *Seeing Indians*, 129.

<sup>92</sup> Lauria-Santiago, “Land, Community, and Revolt,” 505.

<sup>93</sup> Lauria-Santiago, “Land, Community, and Revolt,” 504.

<sup>94</sup> Tilley, *Seeing Indians*, 129.

<sup>95</sup> Tilley, *Seeing Indians*, 129.

by municipal authorities.”<sup>96</sup> Since the Ladinos held positions in the municipal government, they were in charge of “survey[ing] and distribut[ing] the private plots.” The Ladinos economic and political influence limited the unclaimed land [the] Indigenous acquired.

The changes in government policy around abolishing comunidades and ejidos directly affected the land distribution in Izalco. Since the Ladinos held the positions of power in government, they controlled who acquired the best lands. As discussed in the introduction, these government initiatives to privatize lands were directly correlated with an economic divide between the landholding elite and the landless rural communities. These liberal policies in the 1880s, ultimately continued during the twentieth century when politicians privatized water. The privatization of water has caused inequalities around accessing water in rural communities. These inequalities have led to communities organizing around the need for water.

### **Accessing Water During the 20th century in Yucuaiquin**

For the majority of the twentieth century, yucuaiquinenses lived without potable water in their houses. The need for water led to initiatives in the local government, even becoming more severe in the twenty-first century. Don Carlos has written extensively about the history of water in el pueblo. He draws from his own memories along with interviews he conducted with key figures in Yucuaiquin and elders. When yucuaiquinenses lacked potable water in their houses, the communal water sources became meeting places and centers of life for el pueblo. From 1920-1930, Mr. Miguel Angel Arbaiza was the mayor of Yucuaiquin.<sup>97</sup> During his mayorship he established two pozos de agua (water wells) in the town square.<sup>98</sup> People lined up every day with

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<sup>96</sup> Tilley, *Seeing Indians*, 130.

<sup>97</sup> Carlos López, “El Servicio de Agua Potable en Yucuaiquin.” Unpublished manuscript, n.d. Shared with author, February 13, 2023), typescript.

<sup>98</sup> López, “El Servicio de Agua.”

their cantaros (jugs) waiting for their turn to access water from the well.<sup>99</sup> Sometimes people left their cantaros in line and returned home until their turn.<sup>100</sup> Although many people received water from this well, the water was contaminated because of the dirty buckets and ropes used to pull the water.<sup>101</sup>

Other than the water wells in the town square, El Zapote served as the main source of water for the entire pueblo. El Zapote, unlike the water wells in the town square, did not dry up during the summer season.<sup>102</sup> This made El Zapote a dependable water source year round.<sup>103</sup> El Zapote is about a twenty minute walk down a hill. The path starts at the end of a long street that looks like a dead end. The trips down to El Zapote started around three o'clock in the morning when people met with their friends and family members to start the journey.<sup>104</sup> One family needed about five to six cantaros de agua (jugs of water) per day for cooking, cleaning, and washing. This meant on a daily basis, people took five to six trips up and down the hill.<sup>105</sup>

Prior to 1975, water from rain gathered in a giant pila (water basin) connected to four main lavaderos (cement sinks) where women washed their clothes.<sup>106</sup> There were also four showers where people bathed with the water collected from rainfall.<sup>107</sup> After 1975, Yucuaiquin constructed a tubing system; they sealed off the nacimiento de agua (a water source) and tubes connected the water force to the water basin and cement sinks.<sup>108</sup> Women used huacales (gourd

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<sup>99</sup> López, "El Servicio de Agua."

<sup>100</sup> López, "El Servicio de Agua."

<sup>101</sup> López, "El Servicio de Agua."

<sup>102</sup> Trancito del Carmen, personal communication, September 2022-June 2023.

<sup>103</sup> Trancito del Carmen, personal communication, September 2022-June 2023.

<sup>104</sup> Carlos López, Interview with the author, Yucuaiquin, El Salvador, January 18, 2023.

<sup>105</sup> Carlos López, Interview with the author, Yucuaiquin, El Salvador, January 18, 2023.

<sup>106</sup> López, "El Servicio de Agua." & Trancito del Carmen, personal communication, September 2022- June 2023.

<sup>107</sup> López, "El Servicio de Agua." & Trancito del Carmen, personal communication, September 2022- June 2023.

<sup>108</sup> López, "El Servicio de Agua." & Trancito del Carmen, personal communication, September 2022- June 2023.

canteens) to gather water from the water basin to wash their clothes (if there were no lavaderos available).<sup>109</sup> After 1975, the tubing system also brought water to the showers.<sup>110</sup>

People in Yucuaiquin say “nuestras vidas eran jalar agua” (our lives were hauling water). Life revolved around the difficulty and manual labor of walking up and down to El Zapote. Prior to people gaining access to potable water in their homes, El Zapote acted as a community center where people learned la noticia y chambre del pueblo (the news and gossip). While walking, people ran into their family members, neighbors, and friends who shared the latest news. In El Zapote, people washed clothes, bathed, swam, and played. Since everyone in el pueblo fetched water, everyone knew each other and shared time and life with one another.

### **A Historical Agent: Gloria Gutierrez’s influence in Yucuaiquin**

Gloria Gutierrez was one of the historical agents I spoke with during my time in El Salvador. From 1972-1975, Gloria Gutierrez became the first woman mayor of Yucuaiquin.<sup>111</sup> Prior to speaking with her, other community members mentioned how as an elder and due to her career in politics, she held integral knowledge about Yucuaiquin’s history. She did not grow up in a political or wealthy family, but ever since she can remember, she had a vision for the kind of life she wanted to make for herself and her community.<sup>112</sup>

Gloria Gutierrez married someone with a powerful position in the army.<sup>113</sup> According to Gutierrez, he wanted political connections to Yucuaiquin so he asked her to run for mayorship. On the day of the election the army appeared in support of Mrs. Gutierrez. During the 1970s at

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<sup>109</sup> Trancito del Carmen, personal communication, September 2022- June 2023.

<sup>110</sup> López, “El Servicio de Agua.”

<sup>111</sup> Gloria Gutierrez, Interview with the author, Yucuaiquin, El Salvador, January 16, 2023.

<sup>112</sup> Gloria Gutierrez, Interview with the author, Yucuaiquin, El Salvador, January 16, 2023.

<sup>113</sup> Gloria Gutierrez, Interview with the author, Yucuaiquin, El Salvador, January 16, 2023.

the precipice of war, the army felt like a threatful presence to the population. El Salvador was deep in a series of authoritarian and militant administrations. Yucuaiquineses voted in favor of Gutierrez, even though most preferred her opposing candidate, El Coronel Molina.<sup>114</sup> Mrs. Gutierrez focused on two needs: access to clean water and a clinic.<sup>115</sup>

During her youth, she saw young folks walking with cantaros (jugs of water) to El Zapote multiple times a day to provide water for their families. When Mrs. Gutierrez accepted her husband's offer of running for candidacy, she did so on one condition: the government would help her start the process of bringing potable water to everyone's houses.<sup>116</sup> She met with representatives of the Administracion Nacional de Acueductos y Alcantarillados (The National Administration of Aqueducts and Sewers) (ANDA), a "centralized entity" dedicated to working "across the entire national territory" to provide clean water throughout El Salvador and address polluted water.<sup>117</sup> The representatives informed Mrs. Gutierrez that the water project would cost over a million dollars. Mrs. Gutierrez – a woman with vision and conviction – did not take no for an answer. She responded "que se va hacer" ("we will start this project").<sup>118</sup> ANDA accounted for the capacity of the El Borbollón (a water spring located in Yucuaiquin) along with the pumping facilities necessary for bringing the water to people's houses. The PVC pipes ANDA originally installed did not support the water pressure, so they replaced them with iron pipes.<sup>119</sup> Even after these installations over two-thirds of the pueblo remained without potable water.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Synthesis of conversations with Gloria Gutierrez, Don Carlos, Trancito Villatoro, and Milton Gutierrez

<sup>115</sup> Gloria Gutierrez, Interview with the author, Yucuaiquin, El Salvador, January 16, 2023.

<sup>116</sup> Gloria Gutierrez, Interview with the author, Yucuaiquin, El Salvador, January 16, 2023.

<sup>117</sup> Ladawn, Haglund, *Limiting Resources: Market-Led Reform and the Transformation of Public Goods*. Penn State University Press, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.5325/j.ctv14gphd9>, 92.

<sup>118</sup> Gloria Gutierrez, Interview with the author, Yucuaiquin, El Salvador, January 16, 2023.

<sup>119</sup> Carmen Garcia, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023.

<sup>120</sup> Carmen Garcia, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023.



Only the people in el pueblo's center – the more affluent residents – installed potable water to their homes.<sup>121</sup>

The rest of the population continued accessing water from El Zapote. On the outskirts of el pueblo near the cantones (cantons—is a type of administrative division of a country),<sup>122</sup> people also accessed water from El Borbollon, Las Pilas, El Corral, and El Chorro (other natural water springs and sources).<sup>123</sup> But for the most part, El Zapote era el único lugar que sostenía el agua del pueblo (the only place that sustained water for el pueblo). After Mrs. Gutierrez, other mayors followed in her footsteps and continued to improve access to water in Yucuaiquin. But as of the start of the war, the process was far from complete.<sup>124</sup>

Yucuaiquin is divided into barrios and cantones, like all pueblos in El Salvador. In these barrios and cantones people form their own sense of community and solidarity, especially since family members tend to live near each other. Starting in 1991, el Barrio de la Cruz started to work on a project to bring potable water to their houses.<sup>125</sup> Community members organized amongst themselves and went to ANDA to ask for water. The workers at ANDA informed the community members they needed to raise their own money and install their own tubing systems for ANDA to provide water.<sup>126</sup> Through their own funds and with the support of family members living outside the country, the residents of El Barrio bought the necessary tools and tubes for the project.<sup>127</sup> The men from El Barrio worked together to dig the holes and install the tubes into the ground.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Carmen Garcia, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023.

<sup>122</sup> Hugh Chisholm, ed. (1911). "Canton" . *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Vol. 5 (11th ed.). Cambridge University Press. p. 221.

<sup>123</sup> López, "El Servicio de Agua."

<sup>124</sup> López, "El Servicio de Agua."

<sup>125</sup> Carmen Garcia, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023.

<sup>126</sup> Carmen Garcia, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023.

<sup>127</sup> Carmen Garcia, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023.

<sup>128</sup> Carmen Garcia, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023.

This example of el Barrio de la Cruz is not an isolated story. These efforts reveal the lack of support ANDA provided for yucuaiquinenses with limited resources. In order for most cantones and barrios to receive water from ANDA, they did the labor of buying and installing the necessary tubing systems.<sup>129</sup> These efforts reveal a deep sense of necessity and the ways yucuaiquinenses mobilized to bring potable water into their houses. These changes started during the war when family members started fleeing to the U.S and sending remittances. In the twentieth century, the combination of community organizing in Yucuaiquin with the support from family members sending remittances increased the number of families who installed pipes to bring potable water to their houses.<sup>130</sup> Through community organizing and remittances yucuaiquinenses practiced a culture of convivencia.

### **ANDA, Privatization of Water, and Environmental Impacts**

Privatization of land, water, and basic necessities impacts the day-to-day lives of rural salvadoreños. ANDA started in 1961 as an “autonomous government agency dependent on the Presidency of the Republic.”<sup>131</sup> However, from the very beginning ANDA focused on larger cities and only invested in impoverished rural areas when they had political incentive.<sup>132</sup> In 1967, the Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance created the National Rural Basic Sanitation Plan (PLANSABAR) to fill in the gaps for water access in rural pueblos.<sup>133</sup> PLANSABAR incorporated “community participation” to “promote the construction and operation of drinking

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<sup>129</sup> Carmen Garcia, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023.

<sup>130</sup> Synthesis from conversations with Gloria Gutierrez, Don Carlos, Trancito Villatoro, Carmen Garcia, and Delsi Garcia

<sup>131</sup> Zepeda Castillo, “Water Politics in El Salvador,” 99.

<sup>132</sup> Haglund, *Limiting Resources*, 92.

<sup>133</sup> Armando, Flores and Donatella Morales, eds, “Siete Piezas De La Privatización y Mercantilización Del Agua En Centro América,” 2008.

<http://www.cdc.org/sv/images/cedoc/investigaciones/siete-piezas-de-la-mercantilizacion-y-privatizacion-del-agua.pdf>, 35.

water systems.”<sup>134</sup> This looked like the formation of “Rural Boards, Boards of Directors, Community Committees, Operators and Administrators” to facilitate the communication between government and rural pueblos.<sup>135</sup>

However, La Guerra (1979-1992) interrupted the plans to centralize and manage water in rural areas. In 1989, in the midst of the war, the government started implementing neoliberal policies.<sup>136</sup> By 1995, the government stopped funding PLANSABAR and transferred their rural water systems to ANDA. This led to the creation of Rural Systems Management, who oversaw the remaining 385 water systems out of the 700 that PLANSABAR had started.<sup>137</sup> On top of the inefficiency and corruption in ANDA, the war left natural water sources contaminated with debris, pesticides, massacred bodies, and blood.<sup>138</sup>

During La Guerra, the rampant violence between the military and FMLN guerrillas left civilians with difficulties accessing water. For rural people without running water, they risked their lives by leaving their homes and carrying water back and forth from Las Pilas, El Corral, El Chorro, and mainly El Zapote.<sup>139</sup> The sacrifices, particularly women engaged in by fetching water, revealed the ways they continued to support their families. If combatantes (FMLN guerrilla fighters) tampered with electricity by knocking down poles, the hydroelectric pumps stopped functioning leaving people waterless for days.<sup>140</sup> La Guerra left rural poblanos with greater water inequalities, and the pozos no longer served as centers for community and life.

During the 1980s and the Post-war era, elites and politicians focused on modernization, neoliberal policies, and privatization of the public sector. In order to modernize, International

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<sup>134</sup> Flores and Donatella Morales, eds, “Siete Piezas De La Privatización,” 35.

<sup>135</sup> Flores and Donatella Morales, eds, “Siete Piezas De La Privatización,” 35.

<sup>136</sup> Flores and Donatella Morales, eds, “Siete Piezas De La Privatización,” 35.

<sup>137</sup> Flores and Donatella Morales, eds, “Siete Piezas De La Privatización,” 35.

<sup>138</sup> Zepeda Castillo, “Water Politics in El Salvador,” 103

<sup>139</sup> Trancito del Carmen, personal communication, September 2022- June 2023.

<sup>140</sup> Trancito del Carmen, personal communication, September 2022- June 2023.

Financial Institutions (IFI) facilitated and funded “structural changes in water governance.”<sup>141</sup> The IFIs wanted to “insert[t] the private sector in the lucrative business of water and sanitation reforms.”<sup>142</sup> The elites and politicians argued that by selling state-owned enterprises the government would raise revenue and be able to focus on other tasks and policies with more efficiency.<sup>143</sup> However, the privatization process only benefited the elite and limited the necessary resources available to impoverished and rural populations. A few elite families controlled private utilities, like electricity and water, and cut costs by hiring private contractors for evaluations and contracts.<sup>144</sup> Without the proper oversight, there was room for corruption, deception, and more concentration of wealth.

The government promised to invest in water and electricity projects, but instead the electricity and water prices only increased. From 1999-2002 salvadoreños experienced numerous system failures in electricity distribution and bills for electricity they never used.<sup>145</sup> Five companies reported a total of 95,277 system failures.<sup>146</sup> The state does not regulate over 1000 organizations that provide water and sanitation services. The state does not “support these providers in the planning, financing, and maintenance of its operations.”<sup>147</sup> In the most remote areas of the country, no federal entity oversees operational services and follows through with water and sanitary services.

ANDA is the only public institution capable of protecting environmental conservation, but without the funds, struggle to hold businesses accountable. The business sector leans towards market efficiency and regulation that benefits them, not ecological practices that will yield

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<sup>141</sup> Zepeda Castillo, “Water Politics in El Salvador,” 106.

<sup>142</sup> Zepeda Castillo, “Water Politics in El Salvador,” 106.

<sup>143</sup> Haglund, *Limiting Resources*, 126.

<sup>144</sup> Haglund, *Limiting Resources*, 138.

<sup>145</sup> Haglund, *Limiting Resources*, 191.

<sup>146</sup> Haglund, *Limiting Resources*, 191.

<sup>147</sup> Zepeda Castillo, “Water Politics in El Salvador,” 109.

greater impacts in the long run. Environmental regulations affect “emissions, plant siting,” and the kinds of energy used.<sup>148</sup> According to the businesses, the government ought to create “market incentives” for clean energy without taking “protective action” or giving penalties.<sup>149</sup> These positions lead to increased water pollution because of untreated discharge in natural water sources. Despite the increase in polluted water, the water management and quality only decreased in rural areas. In the long-run, El Salvador's natural resources experience detrimental effects and impact the population's health.

### **Efforts to Provide Potable Water for Yucuaiquinenses in the Twenty-First century**

Starting in 1999 until 2021, yucuaiquinenses experienced a long period of surviving with very little potable water.<sup>150</sup> The barrios and cantones who lograron (succeeded) in organizing to install water pipes and bringing potable water to their homes suffered a period where they rationed water daily.<sup>151</sup> In these twenty years, during the best periods ANDA gave water three days a week for two hours.<sup>152</sup> Everyone in el pueblo knew what time of day they received water; people filled their huacales (buckets) and cantaros (jugs) with water to last them during the week.<sup>153</sup> During the most extreme period ANDA only gave water for an hour.<sup>154</sup> The water people received to their homes they only used cooking and drinking because of the limited supply.<sup>155</sup> Yucuaiquinenses returned to El Zapote, and other fresh water sources, to shower and wash their clothes.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Haglund, *Limiting Resources*, 141.

<sup>149</sup> Haglund, *Limiting Resources*, 141.

<sup>150</sup> Carmen Garcia, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023 & López, “El Servicio de Agua.”

<sup>151</sup> Carmen Garcia, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023 & López, “El Servicio de Agua.”

<sup>152</sup> Carmen Garcia, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023 & López, “El Servicio de Agua.”

<sup>153</sup> Carmen Garcia, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023 & López, “El Servicio de Agua.”

<sup>154</sup> Carmen Garcia, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023 & López, “El Servicio de Agua.”

<sup>155</sup> Carmen Garcia, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023.

<sup>156</sup> Carmen Garcia, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023.

During this period, the commercialization of water in el pueblo both sharpened inequalities and brought out new forms of convivencia. Certain families dedicated themselves to selling water or “jalar agua” (hauling water).<sup>157</sup> These families traveled to a water source called “El Salto” in one of Yucuaiquin’s cantones to fill barrels with water.<sup>158</sup> Yucuaiquinenses reached out to these families and let them know how many barrels of water they needed. If people needed water, they also bought water from other families who perhaps received more water because of the positioning of their land.<sup>159</sup> ANDA eventually banned the selling of water in Yucuaiquin, so people did so in secret because they desperately needed water.<sup>160</sup> The commercialization of water revealed the wealth disparities in Yucuaiquin. Families with resources like cars profited off of others' need for water, while others struggled to make ends meet and provide their families with water. In some sense, by buying water, people benefited from not needing to travel to the water sources by foot and carry heavy cantaros. Others in the community supported one another by giving each other water for free.<sup>161</sup> Within comunidades and families, people saw the need for water, so they spared some and gave each other the extra water. These acts of sacrifice, sharing with such limited resources, demonstrate family and community support.

Like other candidates, Don Carlos Ernesto Gutierrez,<sup>162</sup> an engineer, ran for mayor in 2009 with the promise of solving the water inequalities in Yucuaiquin. When yucuaiquinenses elected him as mayor, the water services from ANDA completely collapsed.<sup>163</sup> Don Carlos Gutierrez, along with his City Council, took a risk and used the money from Fondo para el Desarrollo Económico y Social (Municipal Development Fund) (FODES) to pay for a study to

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<sup>157</sup> López, “El Servicio de Agua.”

<sup>158</sup> López, “El Servicio de Agua.”

<sup>159</sup> Maria Trancito Villatoro, Interview with the author, November 23, 2022.

<sup>160</sup> López, “El Servicio de Agua.”

<sup>161</sup> Maria Trancito Villatoro, Interview with the author, November 23, 2022.

<sup>162</sup> Not a related to Señora Gloria Gutierrez

<sup>163</sup> Carmen Garcia, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023 & López, “El Servicio de Agua.”

find a water source for the population.<sup>164</sup> Through the study, they found a water source in the land of Señor Miguel Romero, who donated a portion of his land to install the necessary tubing systems.<sup>165</sup> Families requested and paid the costs of the water services. Yucuaiquin inaugurated the water installations on December 7th, 2012.<sup>166</sup> An inaugural event included end-of-year and Christmas festivities, such as turning on the Christmas lights and unveiling the replica of the birth of Christ in the park.<sup>167</sup> Through these celebrations, water continued as a center of life and gathering in Yucuaiquin. The fact that people celebrated the inauguration reveals the gratitude and scale of impact the water services had on families' day-to-day lives.

Since Don Carlos Gutierrez ran as an ARENA candidate, the local FMLN militants did not approve of his candidacy or project.<sup>168</sup> In Yucuaiquin, since the war, people feel particularly divided along party lines between FMLN and ARENA.<sup>169</sup> During political campaigns people will not speak to one another because of their respective political parties.<sup>170</sup> People will avoid going to certain grocery stores that post political posters of opposing parties.<sup>171</sup> The FMLN supporters spread rumors that the water from Don Carlos Gutierrez's project was poisoned and rejected these services.<sup>172</sup> The rumors prevailed so strongly that the water Health Ministry examined the water, ultimately finding the water fit for human consumption.<sup>173</sup> These political affiliations so strongly divided people, they denied services in the midst of water scarcity.

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<sup>164</sup> López, "El Servicio de Agua."

<sup>165</sup> López, "El Servicio de Agua."

<sup>166</sup> López, "El Servicio de Agua."

<sup>167</sup> López, "El Servicio de Agua."

<sup>168</sup> López, "El Servicio de Agua."

<sup>169</sup> Synthesis from multiple conversations & interviews with yucuaiquinenses

<sup>170</sup> Synthesis from multiple conversations & interviews with yucuaiquinenses

<sup>171</sup> Synthesis from multiple conversations & interviews with yucuaiquinenses

<sup>172</sup> López, "El Servicio de Agua."

<sup>173</sup> López, "El Servicio de Agua."

Unfortunately, because of the lack of rain during the winter season, the mayor's office reduced water services to every-other-day for an hour a day.<sup>174</sup> ANDA services also experienced a severe drought so their services diminished to once a week for an hour.<sup>175</sup> Because of the droughts, people started to sell water again.<sup>176</sup>

Yucuaiquinenses mobilized not only within the community, but also reached out to Spain to continue the fight for potable water.<sup>177</sup> In 2013, Don Carlos Gutierrez proposed to the Spanish Embassy “El Proyecto de introducción de agua potable para las comunidades rurales” (the project for the introduction of drinking water for rural communities).<sup>178</sup> After a hydrographic study, the Spaniards decided to use tanks to filter and purify rainwater with a home distribution system.<sup>179</sup> The duration of the water content of the tanks depends on the savings made by the users.<sup>180</sup>

In 2021, ANDA in collaboration with the Spaniards found another water source in a hamlet in Yucuaiquin called “Agua Caliente.”<sup>181</sup> This water source provides water every other day for eight hours a day.<sup>182</sup> Access to water reveals the wealth disparities in Yucuaiquin. There are still more rural and remote communities in Yucuaiquin without potable water in their houses.<sup>183</sup> The families who installed potable water to their homes did so with the support of remittances from families living in the U.S.<sup>184</sup> These families continue to depend on remittances

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<sup>174</sup> Carmen García, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023 & López, “El Servicio de Agua.”

<sup>175</sup> Carmen García, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023 & López, “El Servicio de Agua.”

<sup>176</sup> Carmen García, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023 & López, “El Servicio de Agua.”

<sup>177</sup> Carmen García, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023 & López, “El Servicio de Agua.”

<sup>178</sup> Carmen García, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023 & López, “El Servicio de Agua.”

<sup>179</sup> Carmen García, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023 & López, “El Servicio de Agua.”

<sup>180</sup> Carmen García, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023 & López, “El Servicio de Agua.”

<sup>181</sup> López, “El Servicio de Agua.”

<sup>182</sup> López, “El Servicio de Agua.”

<sup>183</sup> Trancito del Carmen, personal communication, September 2022- June 2023.

<sup>184</sup> Synthesis of conversations with yucuaiquinenses



to pay their monthly dues.<sup>185</sup> Through the remittances, family members continue to support one another – the community ties go beyond Yucuaiquin.

### **The Climate Crisis and Water Defenders Advocating for their Lands**

In 2004, “access to safe water stood at 84 percent and access to adequate sanitation at 62 percent.”<sup>186</sup> What are the systemic forces causing water pollution? What consequences are rural pueblos dealing with because of the inaccessibility of clean water? As Discussed earlier in this chapter, the government in El Salvador is pro-privatization and on the side of businesses and corporations. One of the companies causing detrimental environmental impacts is Coca-Cola. Coca-Cola, like many other international companies, profit off the loop-holes in El Salvador’s laws and come bearing promises of providing jobs for locals. Coca-Cola has a factory that is allegedly “pumping” polluted water into a stream in Nejapa, San Salvador, El Salvador.<sup>187</sup> Coca-Cola also has sugar cane plantations which are “unaffected by [water] rationing.”<sup>188</sup> There was a General Water Law passed in 2021 for the benefit of companies like Coca-Cola with “industrial needs or intensive agriculture.”<sup>189</sup> By 2019, because of the freedom given to big business to exploit the land and water, “at least 90% of El Salvador’s surface water is contaminated by untreated sewage, agricultural and industrial waste.”<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Synthesis of conversations with yucuaiquinenses

<sup>186</sup> Zepeda Castillo, “Water Politics in El Salvador,” 123.

<sup>187</sup> Nina, Lakhani, “Living without Water: The Crisis Pushing People out of El Salvador.” *The Guardian*, July 30, 2019.

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/jul/30/el-salvador-water-crisis-privatization-gangs-corruption>

<sup>188</sup> Lakhani, “Living without Water.”

<sup>189</sup> “El Salvador: The Never-Ending Struggle for Water.” We Are Water Foundation, May 17, 2022. [https://www.wearewater.org/en/el-salvador-the-never-ending-struggle-for-water\\_350881](https://www.wearewater.org/en/el-salvador-the-never-ending-struggle-for-water_350881).

<sup>190</sup> Lakhani, “Living without Water.”

While these companies benefit, the people most affected by water scarcity and contamination are women and children.<sup>191</sup> Like in many rural pueblos, the women and children in Nejapa are typically responsible for bringing water back and forth from wells and water sources multiple times a day.<sup>192</sup> The women place their lives at risk when they wash their laundry in the San Antonio River because of the rival gangs living in Barrio 18 and La Estación (two separate communities in Nejapa).<sup>193</sup> The residents are juggling unreliable running water, water droughts, and rival gangs causing them to ration how much water they use day-to-day. In 2016, El Salvador entered a state of emergency because of a water drought.<sup>194</sup> These water droughts affect the small and subsistence farmers who need water for their land.<sup>195</sup> Even though El Salvador experiences a rainy season from May to October, industrial agriculture leads to “hard packed soil,” so the rain does not reach the groundwater reserves and instead causes “deadly floods that further displace residents.”<sup>196</sup> The water pollution and scarcity in El Salvador reveal the ways imperialist companies and pro-business governance profit while salvadoreños bear the consequences of risking their lives for natural resources. All in the attempt to revive El Salvador's economy, the government is slowly killing its people and natural environment.

One myth is that salvadoreños do not know the consequences of water pollution and passively accept the government's policies, or lack thereof. But because of the powerful community ties and international struggles various people in El Salvador rally in a common goal to protect water; they call themselves water defenders. In Las Cabañas, a community fought

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<sup>191</sup> “El Salvador: The Never-Ending Struggle for Water.”

<sup>192</sup> Heather, Gies, “Once Lush, El Salvador Is Dangerously Close to Running Dry.” *National Geographic*, November 2, 2018.  
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/el-salvador-water-crisis-drought-climate-change?loggedin=true&rnd=1681749655611>.

<sup>193</sup> Jordan, Leibel and Ramiro Laínez. *Private Waters. We Are Water*. We Art Water Film Festival, n.d.  
[https://www.wearewater.org/en/el-salvador-the-never-ending-struggle-for-water\\_350881](https://www.wearewater.org/en/el-salvador-the-never-ending-struggle-for-water_350881).

<sup>194</sup> Gies, “Once Lush, El Salvador.”

<sup>195</sup> Gies, “Once Lush, El Salvador.”

<sup>196</sup> Gies, “Once Lush, El Salvador.”

against the Canadian-headquartered Pacific Rim Mining Corporation because of the “toxic cyanide that Pac Rim would use to separate gold from the rock.”<sup>197</sup> This mining would occur along the Lempa River, a source of water “for over half the population” for “drinking, fishing, and farming.”<sup>198</sup> This community, along with international supporters, succeeded in banning mining in 2017.<sup>199</sup> El Rodeo, another community in Las Cabañas, “constructed a water treatment and distribution center” for their residents.<sup>200</sup> The local committee fundraised, organized, and constructed without the support of the government.<sup>201</sup>

## Conclusion

The histories of water reveal the ways rural salvadoreños' lives were shaped by their need for potable water. The natural water sources like El Zapote served as centers of community and connection for Yucuaiquinenses. In the fight for their most basic needs, salvadoreños contend with systemic forces like privatization. The government continues to recover from the repercussions of colonialism and implement ways of exploiting the land and water.

While private and international businesses gain wealth, rural salvadoreños disproportionately experience the effects of polluted and scarce water resources. If El Salvador does not make extreme changes the population will soon have no access to clean water. However, salvadoreños, along with international support, fight to protect their water resources. Salvadoreños practice the values of *convivencia* by rallying together to encourage the government to take action for the protection of the environment.

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<sup>197</sup> Robin, Broad and John Cavanagh, *Water Defenders: How Ordinary People Saved a Country from Corporate Greed*. S.I.: BEACON, 2022, 4.

<sup>198</sup> Broad and John Cavanagh, *Water Defenders*, 4.

<sup>199</sup> Lakhani, “Living without Water.”

<sup>200</sup> Leibel and Ramiro Láinez. *Private Waters*.

<sup>201</sup> Leibel and Ramiro Láinez. *Private Waters*.



## VIGNETTES

### *Rios de agua viva en mi ser*

*"Yo tengo un gozo en mi alma / gozo en mi alma / gozo en mi alma y en mi ser / son como ríos de agua viva / ríos de agua viva / ríos de agua viva en mi ser."*

*"I have a joy in my soul / joy in my soul / joy in my soul and in my being / it's like rivers of living water / rivers of living water / rivers of living water in my being."*

*This corito speaks to an abundant joy in our souls and compares this joy to a river of living water. As I worked on this chapter, I remembered and reflected on this corito. What kind of hope does this song give to rural communities in El Salvador who have struggled to access water?*

*I sing this corito as a metaphor, because I never struggled to access potable water. I can turn on the faucet and what feels like endless streams of water flow. So this abundant joy from living streams of water is not so far fetched.*

*But what does it look like to sing this corito in the midst of droughts? What does it mean to have streams of living water in your soul when you are facing water scarcity?*

*Perhaps, for yucuaiquinenses this song was a battle cry. An active hope that one day, through community efforts and mobilization, potable water would be abundant.*

*Que rios de agua viva would run through everybody's houses.<sup>202</sup>*

*Que el gozo iba a nacer de la abundancia de los recursos más necesarios.<sup>203</sup>*

*Yet, there is an implicit idea that this joy is innately present in our souls. So the question is, how do we tap into that innate joy?*

*It seems like the answer lies within our community ties— within the active pursuit of convivencia.*

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<sup>202</sup> That streams of living water would flow through all the houses.

<sup>203</sup> That joy was to be born from the abundance of the most necessary resources.

### ***El Zapote - ‘nuestras vidas eran jalar agua’***

*El Zapote is about a twenty minute walk down a mountain. The camino (path) is at the end of a long street, and if you did not know El Zapote was down this way, you might stop to enjoy the view of the mountains but miss the wonder hidden beneath.*

*Although the camino down was steep and filled with rocks, the young people ran down, most times barefoot. Since they went up and down so many times in a day they had all the rocks, each and every position, memorized. The walk down was the easy part; people dreaded the walk uphill. At the beginning of the camino (walk), there sits a massive tree called arbol de ojushte. The tree is over one hundred years old, so at least four generations in a family have walked past the tree. The ojushte fruit was an integral part of Indigenous peoples diets, especially during plagues, famines, and droughts.<sup>204</sup>*

*At the bottom of the camino, people washed clothes, bathed, swam, and played. In the midst of El Zapote stood a massive arbol de caimito (caimito tree). While mothers washed their families clothes, cipotes threw rocks towards the branches to eat the delicious fruit. The children used one of the giant pilas de agua to catapult and learn how to swim.*

*On the way up, couples rested on the “piedras chachas” or “piedras de amor” (love rocks). Couples sat on top of these rocks, settled down their cantaros, to talk and share kisses. The curves on the camino and the monte hid the rocks giving couples privacy. However, they always looked out for their parents' watchful eyes. Sometimes the parents found out from other people and came running down el camino to give their children sinchazos. Infamously telling their daughters, “no quiero que andes con ese cara de sapo.” There was one part in the camino with flat ground where people took a break from carrying the heavy cantaros, wet clothes, batallas, and huacales.*

*Women placed the cantaros on their heads and men carried the cantaros with their hands on their sides or backs. A few women carried the cantaro on their head without using their hands. They talked, laughed, moved their head side-to-side and up and down without dropping the cantaro. People's biggest fear was dropping the cantaro. The camino was steep, so the cantaro would roll down breaking into smaller pieces. If someone broke the cantaro, they walked home terrified to tell their parents what happened, because their parents los castigaban/punished them. Walking up and down the camino, people saw broken pieces of the cántaros.*

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<sup>204</sup> <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/revistas/Ojushte-comida-ancestral-20150809-0058.html>

### ***Reflections from walking to El Zapote***

*As I walk down El Zapote with Don Carlos I'm transported to another time. I see my grandma running past me as she makes her way down el camino. I hear her feet hitting against the rocks. I look over the landscape of all the mountains and trees and feel a sense of peace.*

*"Your grandma could carry the cantaro on her head and keep running up the mountain."*

*"Your grandma and grandpa fell in love walking down these rocks."*

*I imagine, trying to see with my spirit what it was like for them to walk to this camino every day. I am so aware of how I am stepping on the same rocks they did. I am looking over the same mountains they did. Don Carlos, walks me through all the stories hidden within the rocks, trees, and mountains. He giggles and asks me if I know la leyenda de La Siguanaba.*

*When we reach the bottom of the mountain where rios de agua viva used to spring, I feel so far removed and disconnected from the past. I am so aware of how I'm living this in a story and not in my bones.*

*I've defined convivencia as being physically present; sharing time and space. This definition is reminding me of how I'll never experience convivencia in El Zapote. Convivencia is reminding me I grew up in the States. I did not grow up running down el camino like my mom. I did not grow up in the beating sun. I did not grow up throwing rocks at trees hoping caimitos fell like rain.*

*Growing up separated from family and loved ones, the distance palpable. You are so aware of different time zones and borders that separate you.*

*"My wife and your grandma were best friends. We grew up seeing each other every day. Uña y mugre those two."*

*I'm never going to walk down these steps with my grandma. Los ríos de agua viva are now private property. But, I realize water has brought me to Don Carlos. We walked down the mountain together; we shared stories about loved ones, our ancestors, and leyendas. We drank water from el chorro. We stood and contemplated the beauty. We took shade under the caimito tree.*

*"Do you know what caimitos are?"*

*"Yes! I actually ate some yesterday. Melanie brought some over from my grandma's house. My mom told me that Mama Consuelo (grandma) planted a tree, because there weren't many in el*

*pueblo. My mom said it's her favorite fruit and she's so jealous I'm eating basket-fuls. My Tia Carmen told me her son Ismael used to call them 'pega' (glue) because of how they left his lips."*



**CHAPTER 2 —**  
**COMMERCE AND LABOR:**  
**SI TUVIERAS FE COMO UN GRANITO DE MOSTAZA<sup>205</sup>**

**Introduction:**

Through much of Yucuaiquin's history, subsistence cultivation has been central to life and livelihood. Yucuaiquinenses descend from the Lenca people who practiced subsistence cultivation. The fruits that sustained them and later became produce for profit are: guineos, mangos, aguacates, zapotes, sandías, melones, marañones, limones, semillas de pan, nances, marañones, coyoles, anonas, caimitos, arroz, frijoles, maicillo, maíz, ajonjolí, y ayotes.<sup>206</sup> As a result of subsistence cultivation, prior to the 1980s, various people in el pueblo cultivated different fruits and vegetables.<sup>207</sup> If someone grew avocados, they shared with their friends and family because of the sheer volume they cultivated. If someone shared avocados others returned the favor by giving their abundant crops. With cultivation came a sense of responsibility to share and reciprocate. This way everyone in el pueblo knew who cultivated the avocados, mangos, watermelon, etc.

Prior to the 1950s and the construction of roads, cars, and mototaxis people walked everywhere. Don Ismael, a 70-year-old man with a pharmacy in el pueblo, remembers a time when people walked to San Miguel to sell their produce, fabrics, clothes, etc. Women carried their products on their heads and men carried them a puro lomo (on their backs). The most

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<sup>205</sup> If you had faith the size of the mustard seed

<sup>206</sup> bananas, mangos, avocados, zapotes, watermelons, melons, cashews, lemons, breadfruit, nances, cashews, coyoles, anonas, caimitos, rice, beans, maicillo, corn, sesame seeds, and ayotes. Carlos López, "El Comercio en Yucuaiquin." Unpublished manuscript, n.d. Shared with author, March 17, 2023.

<sup>207</sup> Synthesis of conversations with yucuaiquinenses

privileged people with horses transported their produce and products on carts.<sup>208</sup> People started walking around one o'clock in the morning, in what Don Isamel described as the “ugly” paths. On these paths, people traversed rocks and dust; they marked the way with their footprints, carts, and horses. Don Ismael traveled in the early hours of the morning and often fell asleep while riding his horse. After so much practice, his body held him upright. Everyone traveling in the early dawn always went in groups for safety reasons.

Along with cultivation, yucuaiquinenses have depended on informal ventas (sales), local businesses, construction, teaching, and government employment. When interviewing and discussing life prior to La Guerra (1979-1992), many yucuaiquinenses paint a picture of *convivencia armonica*. Despite living with no potable water, little to no educational opportunities, and insufficient monetary resources. Even when discussing La Guerra, some yucuaiquinenses say “no pego tan fuerte en Yucuaiquin” (it didn’t hit as hard in Yucuaiquin). This *convivencia armonica* seems tied to sharing resources with one another; a community that depended on one another for survival. This is why subsistence cultivation has been integral to the social fabric of Yucuaiquin.

La Union is in the easternmost part of the country. Unfortunately, little to no research has been done in this area. As discussed in the introduction, the government banned communal lands in 1881 in favor of private lands for *cafetales* (coffee plantations). There is no research available to discuss the processes of yucuaiquinenses acquiring or being dispossessed of their land. However, the topic of land ownership, buying land, and passing down lands has caused conflict for family and community members. This reveals a duality to land possession and cultivation: cultivation as central to community solidarity and survival, and land as a source of wealth and accumulation dividing families and community members. Don Carlos, Yucuaiquins local

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<sup>208</sup> Ismael Perez, with the author, Yucuaiquin, El Salvador, January 22, 2023.

historian, reports after the 1990s the following generations no longer work the land. The country as a whole started to depend on importing food to feed the population since the 1930s.<sup>209</sup> What ended the generations-long practice of working the land? What labor replaced farming? How did land possession and dispossession cause strife amongst families and community members?

This chapter will discuss the complexities of gathering through labor and commerce in Yucuaiquin. Especially as modernization, war, mass migration, and remittances transform the economy and reconfigure the conditions in which people work out what it means to be in community. In El Salvador the advent of repressive governments, oligarchic families in power, and state sanctioned violence, the Popular Education movement gave salvadoreñes an opportunity to unite, protest, educate each other on their rights as forms of convivencia.

### **Colonial times**

During the colonial period, Spaniards opened El Salvador to an international market leading to one of the most poignant shifts in the economy.<sup>210</sup> Prior to the Spaniard invasion and settlement, the Indigenous people practiced commerce within communities and Central America.<sup>211</sup> For Indigenous people, cultivation resulted in religious practices, subsistence farming, and offerings to the elite class. After claiming the territory as New Spain, the Spaniards aimed to exploit the land and people of their “valuable resources:” cacao and indigo. The Spaniards took note of the deep care with which the Indigenous people tended to cacao, so they allowed the Indigenous people to do all the work of sowing, interplanting, irrigation, and harvesting.<sup>212</sup> The Spaniards saw the commercial success of chocolatl, so they created plantations

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<sup>209</sup> Burns, “Modernization of Underdevelopment,” 313.

<sup>210</sup> John, Ripton, “Export Agriculture and Agrarian Crisis: Salvadoran Peasants and the Global Market.” *Latin American Perspectives* 33, no. 6 (2006): 101–35. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27647974>.

<sup>211</sup> Browning, *El Salvador*, 51.

<sup>212</sup> Browning, *El Salvador*, 52-53.

and continued to ask for tributes and diezmos (tithes) from the Indigenous people.<sup>213</sup> The main harvest of cacao came from cacuatales (cacao orchards) in Izalco.<sup>214</sup> By the 1540s, the production from Izalco grew greater than from any other part in the Americas.<sup>215</sup> The Spaniards shipped cacao all the way from Mexico to Peru.<sup>216</sup> The merchants in Izalco gained wealth over their monopoly and extortion of Indigenous people and their land.<sup>217</sup>

Izalco stands out as one of the communities in El Salvador who resisted colonial change and continuously fought to retain their culture, language, land, etc. (as mentioned in Chapter 1).<sup>218</sup> During the height of the cacao exports the Indigenous people retained their land. However, it is important to note that during the colonial period the population of Indigenous people decreased significantly. In less than forty years, from 1550-1590, many villages disappeared.<sup>219</sup> The combination of diseases, cattle, and exploitative working conditions on plantation, and Indigenous resistance to Spaniards' impositions led to their dwindling populations. The Spaniards sought commercial gain from the exports. Despite the dwindling population they continued to demand tribute and taxes. Indigenous people started to lose their land because they did not keep up with the high demand of cacao and did not pay the necessary tributes.<sup>220</sup> The Spanish Crown implemented laws to protect the Indigenous people from harsh labor conditions and overworking, but both the Spanish Crown and the Spaniards living in El Salvador overlooked the violations because of the commercial demands and profit.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Browning, *El Salvador*, 52-53.

<sup>214</sup> Browning, *El Salvador*, 57.

<sup>215</sup> Browning, *El Salvador*, 57.

<sup>216</sup> Murdo J. MacLeod, "The Cacao Boom." In *Spanish Central America: A Socioeconomic History, 1520-1720*, REV-Revised, 2., 80-95. University of Texas Press, 2008. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7560/717893.10>, 82.

<sup>217</sup> MacLeod, "The Cacao Boom," 83.

<sup>218</sup> Browning, *El Salvador*, 65.

<sup>219</sup> Browning, *El Salvador*, 43.

<sup>220</sup> Ripton, "Export Agriculture and Agrarian Crisis," 107.

<sup>221</sup> Ripton, "Export Agriculture and Agrarian Crisis," 107.

With a diminishing population and a high demand in cacao exports, Izalco villagers depended on migrant workers from other parts of the territory to meet the Spaniards demands.<sup>222</sup> Even though the Izalco landowners benefitted from the high exports, sometimes by the end of the year losses in exactions fared greater than their total earnings; with the economic loss they did not meet their basic day-to-day needs.<sup>223</sup>

The exploitative labor and famine led to an increase in orphans and widows, and the Spaniards held the orphans and the widows responsible for keeping up with their tributes.<sup>224</sup> The women struggled to juggle keeping up with their tributes and finding labor opportunities. The women also struggled to remarry since single men did not want to take on debt through marriage.<sup>225</sup> The decrease in marriage led to a decrease in the birth rate amongst Indigenous people.<sup>226</sup> For the orphans, the Spaniards assigned them “tutors” or guardians, but most times the tutors neglected the children because they struggled to take on the responsibility of paying two tributes.<sup>227</sup> The decrease in population along with the increase of widows and orphans signaled a dwindling in community members. Even the migrant workers stopped traveling to Izalco for fear of death, and because the Spanish Crown began to prohibit Indigenous people entering the coastal region in the 1570s.<sup>228</sup> By the 1600s, the cacao boom ended, perhaps proving the unsustainability of the model of plantations, exploitative labor, tributes, and stripping the land.

Since the Spaniards sought the economic benefits of the cacao boom, they did not take into account the compounding ways in which Indigenous peoples' communities and lives

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<sup>222</sup> MacLeod, “The Cacao Boom,” 87.

<sup>223</sup> MacLeod, “The Cacao Boom,” 88.

<sup>224</sup> MacLeod, “The Cacao Boom,” 88.

<sup>225</sup> MacLeod, “The Cacao Boom,” 88.

<sup>226</sup> MacLeod, “The Cacao Boom,” 88.

<sup>227</sup> MacLeod, “The Cacao Boom,” 88.

<sup>228</sup> MacLeod, “The Cacao Boom,” 92.

changed. The Spaniards banned Indigenous people from practicing cacao cultivation through their religious practices. Indigenous people cultivated the land, but under exploitative conditions and without practicing communion with their gods or nature. The disappearing villages greatly affected the Indigenous peoples' opportunities to resist colonial presence, culture, and exploitation. During colonization Indigenous communities lived under exploitative labor conditions that directly affected their community, religious, and cultivating practices.

### **Oligarchic Rule and Popular Education as Community Organizing**

In the aftermath of Colonialism, oligarchs and elites in El Salvador turned to European ideals for international and capitalistic markets. This led to a coffee mono-agriculture that created greater wealth disparities between the elite class and rural salvadoreños. In 1898, there was a succession of presidents entering by force and manipulating elections.<sup>229</sup> Starting in 1913,<sup>230</sup> the Melendez-Quiñonez family held a “tightly knit family political dynasty” for fifteen years, as a part of the small group of men controlling the thriving coffee “processing and export.”<sup>231</sup> At the time, the elite tied to coffee not only held economic power, but also political power.<sup>232</sup> The economic divide between the elite class and the impoverished rural people grew while the government kept them “repressed or manipulated.”<sup>233</sup> The prices of basic foods, like maize and beans, skyrocketed and only 8.2 percent of the rural population owned land.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Burns, “Modernization of Underdevelopment,” 301- 304.

<sup>230</sup> Jeffrey L. Gould, and Aldo Lauria-Santiago, “A Bittersweet Transition: Politics and Labor in the 1920s.” In *To Rise in Darkness: Revolution, Repression, and Memory in El Salvador, 1920–1932*, 32–62. Duke University Press, 2008. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11sn0j8.5>, 34.

<sup>231</sup> Burns, “Modernization of Underdevelopment,” 304.

<sup>232</sup> Burns, “Modernization of Underdevelopment,” 304.

<sup>233</sup> Burns, “Modernization of Underdevelopment,” 304.

<sup>234</sup> Burns, “Modernization of Underdevelopment,” 307.

The U.S invested in El Salvador and imported their coffee.<sup>235</sup> During the 1930s the United States experienced the Great Depression. This caused coffee exports to drop and the “government revenues plummeted 50 percent” leading to the “highest index of rural unemployment in Central America.”<sup>236</sup> In 1930, the Labor Party formed as a result of the mass unemployment and landlessness.<sup>237</sup> Their nominee, Auturo Araujo, won the election but he did not step up to the occasion and only confused and isolated his followers.<sup>238</sup> In December, the military took over and gave the office to Vice-President General Hernandez Martinez, who governed for the following thirteen years.<sup>239</sup> The landscape in El Salvador had completely shifted since the early 1850s when rural and Indigenous populations retained their lands and practiced subsistence cultivation. After the 1930s, El Salvador depended on importing food to feed the population.<sup>240</sup> However, in the midst of the military repression and oligarchic rule, there was a labor movement forming in rural El Salvador. There was a battle between the repressive government and the demonstrators, educators, and obrera/os (laborers).

One of the major barriers to labor opportunities for the rural salvadoreños has been illiteracy. In 1975, the lack of educational opportunities left illiteracy rates amongst men as 48.9 percent and 57.2 percent for women.<sup>241</sup> In “Popular Education as Community Organizing in El Salvador,” John L. Hammond discusses the inequality in educational opportunities for rural campesines (country people) and the ways communities educated and politicized themselves prior and during La Guerra.

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<sup>235</sup> Burns, “Modernization of Underdevelopment,” 306.

<sup>236</sup> Burns, “Modernization of Underdevelopment,” 308.

<sup>237</sup> Burns, “Modernization of Underdevelopment,” 309.

<sup>238</sup> Burns, “Modernization of Underdevelopment,” 310.

<sup>239</sup> Burns, “Modernization of Underdevelopment,” 310.

<sup>240</sup> Burns, “Modernization of Underdevelopment,” 313.

<sup>241</sup> John L. Hammond, “Popular Education As Community Organizing in El Salvador.” *Latin American Perspectives* 26, no. 4 (1999): 69–94. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2634018>, 70.

Prior to La Guerra during the 1970s, the church experienced a renewal throughout rural communities in Latin America.<sup>242</sup> The church activists petitioned to give the liturgy in Spanish and worship in music inspired by popular genres to make more accessible services for Latines.<sup>243</sup> In Aguilar, El Salvador, the Jesuit order created a three-part course Bible study.<sup>244</sup> During these Bible studies, they discussed biblical texts “informed by liberation theology” and “discussed national reality.”<sup>245</sup> They used the Bible to understand the “poverty and the social structure of El Salvador.”<sup>246</sup> In the end, they learned to plan and facilitate their own popular education meetings.<sup>247</sup> This way campesines discussed and discussed the political problems in El Salvador while learning to read and write.<sup>248</sup> Since church has been at the center of life for salvadoreños, the activists used Bible studies to support campesines as they “learn[ed] skills, analyz[ed] social structure, and organiz[ed] for change.”<sup>249</sup>

In places like Torola, Morazán people practiced what they learned by “experiment[ing] with working their fields collectively.”<sup>250</sup> They wanted to find ways of cultivating the land that created economic opportunities for more people in el pueblo. People not only learned to read and write but experienced “conscientization,” learning about power structures and the root causes of poverty.<sup>251</sup> These organizers formed groups like Federacion Cristiana de Campesinos Salvadoreños (Christian Campesino Federation) and the Union de Trabajadores del Camp (Rural

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<sup>242</sup> Hammond, “Popular Education As Community,” 73.

<sup>243</sup> Hammond, “Popular Education As Community,” 73.

<sup>244</sup> Hammond, “Popular Education As Community,” 73-74.

<sup>245</sup> Hammond, “Popular Education As Community,” 74.

<sup>246</sup> Hammond, “Popular Education As Community,” 74.

<sup>247</sup> Hammond, “Popular Education As Community,” 74.

<sup>248</sup> Hammond, “Popular Education As Community,” 74.

<sup>249</sup> Hammond, “Popular Education As Community,” 74.

<sup>250</sup> Hammond, “Popular Education As Community,” 74.

<sup>251</sup> Hammond, “Popular Education As Community,” 75.



Workers Union), which during the 1970s became the base of the Labor Movement in El Salvador.<sup>252</sup>

Like in most major movements, there were inequalities based on intersecting parts of people's identities. In the case of popular education, when women wanted to organize and participate their husbands limited their capacities.<sup>253</sup> Their husband experienced jealousy and “resented their wives for devoting time to the community.”<sup>254</sup> People also experienced divides amongst classes. People from middle class backgrounds felt superior to campesines, even though according to popular education everyone learns from one another. The campesines often wanted to reach the skill level of the organizers who they perceived as “well-spoken.” To break these power dynamics, the Jesuit organizers often gave the campesines leadership positions and broadened the scope of “education.”<sup>255</sup> By broadening the scope of education, learning meant becoming politically active and ultimately participating in “insurgent struggle” during La Guerra.<sup>256</sup>

During La Guerra, salvadoreños living in refugee camps in Honduras, started to teach older folks to read and write. During their lifetime, these elders experienced limited educational opportunities in their respective pueblos. The refugee camps provided an opportunity for them to learn to read and write. During their classes, the refugee children learned to speak about their experiences during La Guerra by drawing pictures.<sup>257</sup> Over the course of La Guerra, some refugee schools were given buildings and school materials for their classes.<sup>258</sup> The educators wanted to give training to the students so they learned teaching methods.<sup>259</sup> By the end of La

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<sup>252</sup> Hammond, “Popular Education As Community,” 75.

<sup>253</sup> Hammond, “Popular Education As Community,” 76.

<sup>254</sup> Hammond, “Popular Education As Community,” 76.

<sup>255</sup> Hammond, “Popular Education As Community,” 76.

<sup>256</sup> Hammond, “Popular Education As Community,” 76.

<sup>257</sup> Hammond, “Popular Education As Community,” 78.

<sup>258</sup> Hammond, “Popular Education As Community,” 79.

<sup>259</sup> Hammond, “Popular Education As Community,” 79.

Guerra, the adults received class up to fifth grade and some even learned “typing, auto mechanics, and mechanical drawing.”<sup>260</sup>

The Honduran government tried to stop the educational initiatives in the refugee camps. In 1987, they even imposed their own school curriculum and hired Honduran teachers.<sup>261</sup> However, the refugees resisted because of the sense of community they formed in the schools. Many of the adults who arrived at the refugee camps never attended school, and through these classes not only learned to read and write, but gained confidence in themselves.<sup>262</sup>

The popular education movements prior and during the war reveal the deep inequities in educational opportunities in rural communities in El Salvador. Some pueblos did not have schools and others did, but families relied on the labor of their children to get by. For adults, the opportunity to learn to read and write opened up doors for different kinds of labor opportunities. Beyond learning to read and write, people used education as a means to learn and share about their conditions as rural campesines. This encouraged people to form labor unions and ultimately to participate in the insurgency that led to La Guerra. Even under the conditions of refugee camps, people continued to organize and support one another in the educational journey. Under the contexts of wealth disparities and war, the people found power by sharing their experiences and stories with one another; seeing one another's struggle, and fighting to improve their living conditions together.

### **Yucuaiquin Commerce in the Advent of Roads and Transportation**

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<sup>260</sup> Hammond, “Popular Education As Community,” 79.

<sup>261</sup> Hammond, “Popular Education As Community,” 80.

<sup>262</sup> Hammond, “Popular Education As Community,” 80.

In the mid-1960s Yucuaiquin built the first commercial road called La Comacaran.<sup>263</sup> Once this road opened up to San Miguel, the more affluent people started to buy cars and facilitated opportunities for people to sell products in San Miguel.<sup>264</sup> San Miguel is like the second capital of the nation, so the easier access brought more labor opportunities to yucuaiquinenses.

With the new road, in 1957 Dolores Aguilar, from Jocoro, provided the first transportation services.<sup>265</sup> In the initial stages the bus, known as la Jcoreña, only did two trips: one at six o'clock in the morning to San Miguel and at twelve in the afternoon back to Yucuaiquin.<sup>266</sup> The lack of trips caused people to fill the bus to the brim by hanging out the doors and sitting on the roof with their sacks, baskets, and products.<sup>267</sup> On the route, the bus got stuck on patches of dirt and hills.<sup>268</sup> When this happened, passengers knew the drill and got off to lighten the weight or push the bus uphill.<sup>269</sup> Since the bus departed so early, in some seasons the bus left before the sunrise.<sup>270</sup> At the time, Yucuaiquin did not have street lamps to light the way, so people memorized the rocks and steps from their homes to the bus stop.<sup>271</sup> The bus facilitated commerce for Yucuaiquinenses. Now, instead of walking to San Miguel, people took the bus to sell and buy products. The new road also facilitated people coming into Yucuaiquin to buy and support the local economy.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> López, “El Comercio en Yucuaiquin.”

<sup>264</sup> López, “El Comercio en Yucuaiquin.”

<sup>265</sup> López, “El Comercio en Yucuaiquin.”

<sup>266</sup> Trancito del Carmen, personal communication, September 2022- June 2023 & López, “El Comercio en Yucuaiquin.”

<sup>267</sup> Synthesis of conversations with yucuaiquinenses

<sup>268</sup> Trancito del Carmen, personal communication, September 2022- June 2023.

<sup>269</sup> Trancito del Carmen, personal communication, September 2022- June 2023.

<sup>270</sup> Trancito del Carmen, personal communication, September 2022- June 2023.

<sup>271</sup> Trancito del Carmen, personal communication, September 2022- June 2023.

<sup>272</sup> López, “El Comercio en Yucuaiquin.”

In the 1960s, the commercial road helped to facilitate the sale of mango mechudos, leading to a commercial boom.<sup>273</sup> During the months of July, August, and September, people from the nearby pueblos came on foot and horses to buy mangos mechudos.<sup>274</sup> Even trucks started to come, up to ten in a day, to buy mangos for commerce in Guatemala.<sup>275</sup> This commerce benefited the people with mangueras (land where people cultivated mangos) who sold a hundred mangos mechudos for 25 cents.<sup>276</sup> Women and children also participated in informal sales on the streets.<sup>277</sup> Although the mango mechudos dominated the sales, people also cultivated other fruits and grains for commercial purposes in Yucuaiquin. This gave labor opportunities to the farmers, the people who bought the fruits, and those who traveled throughout the country to sell them.<sup>278</sup> Even with the advent of transportation, like buses and the beginnings of cars, women continued to walk by foot to sell their products to the different cantones and surrounding cities.<sup>279</sup>

### **How Educational Opportunities Changed el Pueblo**

During the early years of the twentieth century, the community organized so the first generation of children could attend classes in peoples' houses.<sup>280</sup> People who had attended classes in other departments stepped in as teachers.<sup>281</sup> The municipality in Yucuaiquin did not offer all the grades and children rarely finished the available grades because their families continued needing them to work the land, fetch water, and do chores around the house.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> López, "El Comercio en Yucuaiquin."

<sup>274</sup> López, "El Comercio en Yucuaiquin."

<sup>275</sup> López, "El Comercio en Yucuaiquin."

<sup>276</sup> Trancito del Carmen, personal communication, September 2022- June 2023 & López, "El Comercio en Yucuaiquin."

<sup>277</sup> Synthesis of conversations with yucuaiquinenses & López, "El Comercio en Yucuaiquin."

<sup>278</sup> López, "El Comercio en Yucuaiquin."

<sup>279</sup> Synthesis of conversations with yucuaiquinenses & López, "El Comercio en Yucuaiquin."

<sup>280</sup> Delsi Garcia, Interviews with the author, January 2023, Carmen Garcia, Interviews with the author, January 2023, and Dina Garcia, Interviews with the author, January 2023.

<sup>281</sup> Delsi Garcia, Interviews with the author, January 2023.

<sup>282</sup> Synthesis of Conversations with yucuaiquinenses.

Without the necessary economic resources, children made their own notebooks for school.<sup>283</sup> All these impediments resulted in generations of children without extensive educational opportunities.<sup>284</sup>

In 1985 the Centro Escolar (public school) was built and children started to attend school full time up until high school.<sup>285</sup> This school provided all the grades, and opened up opportunities for youth to graduate and pursue careers outside of farming.<sup>286</sup> This in tandem with the new roads and buses also gave children the opportunity to attend other schools, colleges, and travel for other kinds of jobs.<sup>287</sup> These new opportunities along with young boys and men starting to flee because of the impending war, resulted in fewer people tending to the communal lands.<sup>288</sup> Chapter 3, will go more into depth about the consequences and aftermath of generations fleeing El Salvador and Yucuaiquin due to the state violence, war, and dwindling labor opportunities. Starting as early as the 1970s people started to leave to the U.S and this new-found migration started the influx of remittances to Yucuaiquin.<sup>289</sup>

After the 1990s, the following generations no longer work the land.<sup>290</sup> This does not mean people stopped planting and reaping crops in their homes, however, the large-scale booms during the 1960s stopped.<sup>291</sup> Maiz and guineo majoncho (a type of banana) remain as the only larger scale commerce.<sup>292</sup> People continue to share and sell amongst one another, but many rely on selling produce from other parts of the country.

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<sup>283</sup> Delsi Garcia, Interviews with the author, January 2023, Carmen Garcia, Interviews with the author, January 2023, and Dina Garcia, Interviews with the author, January 2023.

<sup>284</sup> Synthesis of conversations with yucuaiquinenses, September 2022-May 2023.

<sup>285</sup> Carmen Garcia, Interview with the author, April 30, 2023.

<sup>286</sup> Synthesis of conversations with yucuaiquinenses, September 2022-May 2023 (i.e Delsi Garcia & Dina Garcia).

<sup>287</sup> Synthesis of conversations with yucuaiquinenses, September 2022-May 2023 (i.e Delsi Garcia & Dina Garcia).

<sup>288</sup> Trancito del Carmen, personal communication, September 2022- June 2023 & López, “El Comercio en Yucuaiquin.”

<sup>289</sup> Synthesis of conversations with yucuaiquinenses, September 2022-May 2023.

<sup>290</sup> López, “El Comercio en Yucuaiquin.”

<sup>291</sup> López, “El Comercio en Yucuaiquin.”

<sup>292</sup> López, “El Comercio en Yucuaiquin.”

### **Internal Ventas (Sales), Businesses, and Commerce in the 21st century**

El Molino (the mill) is the central hub for women since maiz is the base for many integral foods.<sup>293</sup> Prior to the molino nixtamal from the 1980s (electric molino), women woke up before the sunrise and walked to El Molino with huacales (bowls) and canastas (baskets) filled with maiz entero (whole corn) on their heads.<sup>294</sup> Young girls, women, and elderly grandmothers walked together to El Molino. On the walk to El Molino, young girls met up with their friends and older women walked their family and loved ones. On the walk, they caught up on life, chambre (gossip), and news. The women used metates<sup>295</sup> to wash, sort, and grind down the maiz to a fine consistency, because integral foods like tortillas, tamales, and atol require a fine consistency for cooking.

The process of learning to make tortillas has been formative for young girls. Women in Yucuaiquin recall learning to cook by observing their mothers and grandmothers from a young age. When it comes to cooking tortillas, young girls learn by joining their mothers throughout the entire process: from preparing the maiz at the El Molino to serving them for a meal. Most homes in Yucuaiquin house a separate room with a hornilla. Here, the women keep their cooking utensils and tools. Prior to electricity and personal fridges, women made tortillas every three days depending on their family size.<sup>296</sup> Moms and grandmothers expect excellence from their young girls; the girls need to make perfectly round tortillas. The final test is if the tortillas inflated or rose on the comal. If not, the elder women burn the young girls hands on the comal until they learn.

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<sup>293</sup> Synthesis of conversations with yucuaiquinenses, September 2022-May 2023.

<sup>294</sup> Synthesis of conversations with yucuaiquinenses, September 2022-May 2023.

<sup>295</sup> Carved stone for grinding maiz

<sup>296</sup> Synthesis of conversations with yucuaiquinenses, September 2022-May 2023.

The process of learning to make tortillas has been central to the ways young girls and their elders share time and life with one another. From a young age, girls tied their sense of womanhood and familial responsibilities to cooking. They formed relationships with their friends, mothers, and grandmothers through cooking. They strengthened their bonds on the walks to El Molino and in the kitchen making food with their family. Through these quotidian experiences, families pass down traditions around cooking from generation to generation.

Along with preparing tortillas and cooking for their families, young girls also cook for *ventas* (sales). Women in Yucuaiquin have depended on *ventas* in order to bring money to the families.<sup>297</sup> There are various ways for families to earn money from *ventas*: door-to-door, selling in markets in neighboring departamentos, in local markets on weekends, or during special celebrations. Since Yucuaiquin is a small pueblo, women are known for their cooking specialties.<sup>298</sup>

For example, when Melanie, along with her daughter Jackie, plan to sell door-to-door, they make about two hundred *hojuelas* and *macheteadas* (*frituras* or fried dough). They will leave the ingredients ready the night before, and wake up before the sunrise to start frying. Melanie learned to make *hojuelas* and *macheteadas* from her mother who sold them to make ends meet. Melanie's stable job is babysitting, but the extra money she makes from selling *hojuelas* helps to keep them afloat. If her daughter wants to buy something for herself, she will go door-to-door selling *frituras* and take a portion from the earnings.

These informal sales underscore the ways women have to improvise to make ends meet. Women have traditionally taken on roles and responsibilities in the kitchen, and through these informal *ventas* (sales) create connections between community members. Jackie created her

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<sup>297</sup> Synthesis of conversations with yucuaiquinenses, September 2022-May 2023.

<sup>298</sup> Synthesis of conversations with yucuaiquinenses, September 2022-May 2023.

designated route based on the customers who love and buy their frituras. People will stop Melanie and Jackie on the streets to ask when they will make the next batch of frituras. Through these interactions, people in El Pueblo catch up, share time, and enjoy food together.

## **Conclusions**

This chapter discussed the ways commerce transformed after Spanish colonization. The economy depended on the exploitative labor of Indigenous people and their dispossession of land. These exploitative labor practices led to the diminishing populations of Indigenous people, and disrupted their cultivation practices, and religious ceremonies. In the aftermath of colonial economies, the elite class in El Salvador wanted to pursue the values of capitalism. This led to the rise and fall of coffee mono-agriculture during the 1910 and 1920s. During this period the elite class gained political power, while creating greater wealth disparities and dispossessing rural campesinas/os of their communal lands.

Prior to the 1990s yucuaiquinenses depended on agrarian lifestyles. With limited schooling opportunities families depend on their children to cultivate the land. With the advent of roads and cars during the 1960s, Yucuaiquin experienced commercial success with their crops. When the public was built, this opened up educational opportunities for children in Yucuaiquin, and past the 1990s people stopped depending on farming and agriculture as job opportunities. Since maiz has been an integral crop in Yucuaiquin, El Molina acted as a place where women connected, shared time, and sustained relationships. For girls and women, cooking and informal ventas (sales) have been ways to supplement and support their families' incomes. In these ways, cooking and food have been ways girls and elders build relationships and pass down family traditions.



In John Ripton's "Export Agriculture and Agrarian Crisis: Salvadoran Peasants and the Global Market," he argues that El Salvador is "one of the most open economies in the world" and people experience the greatest wealth disparities.<sup>299</sup> In El Salvador, one of the major aftermaths of colonialism is the opening of markets and exports. This led to changing cultivation, trading, and religious ceremonies. Ripton holds in tension the promises of globalization for "cheaper and more accessible food" at the expense of the "small producer who suddenly finds that his product has no value."<sup>300</sup> In Yucuaiquin, these consequences are palpable. The generations of cultivators ended and more than ever people struggle to access labor opportunities for their day-to-day expenses. The following chapter touches on the realities of globalization, in which people become the exports and depend on remittances for survival.

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<sup>299</sup> Ripton, "Export Agriculture and Agrarian Crisis," 102.

<sup>300</sup> Ripton, "Export Agriculture and Agrarian Crisis," 102.

## VIGNETTES

### *Si tuviera fe del tamaño de un grano de mostaza*

*Si tuviera fe del tamaño de un grano de mostaza eso me dice el señor / Tú le dirías a las montañas muévanse, muévanse, muévanse / Tú le dirías a las montañas muévanse, muévanse, muévanse / Y las montañas se moverán Se moverán, se moverán / Y las montañas se moverán se moverán, se moverán.*

*If I had faith the size of a mustard seed that's what the Lord tells me / You'd say to the mountains move, move, move, move / You'd tell the mountains move, move, move, move, move / And the mountains will move, move, move, move / And the mountains will move / And the mountains will move, move, move, move.*

*This corito speaks to faith— a faith that only needs to be the size of a mustard seed.*

*Vanessa German, a poet, performer, and artist once asked “Did God make strength strong enough?” I ask myself, are yucuaiquinenses and salvadoreños strong enough? Am I strong enough? Is our bandwidth wide enough? Are the bonds that join us strong enough to hold?*

*Alone no. Nobody is strong enough alone. The only thing that makes strength stronger is more people. The more people, the more strength.*

*What is important about recognizing the ways people are torn apart, is making interpersonal choices that bring people together. That is the redemptive power of convivencia; we get to choose to build relationships, because together is how we find healing.*

### *La Atolera*

*The first bus comes into Yucuaiquin around six in the morning, and people are lining up to buy their atol before heading to San Miguel.*

*Just up the street from the bus stop is Silvia Gutierrez. For fifteen years Silvia has been making and selling atol. She's got it down to a science, but she wasn't always this coordinated. Fifteen years ago, she needed to make extra money for her family. Since many women in Yucuaiquin depend on selling food for their livelihood, Silvia decided to start selling atol. Silvia's first step was to learn how to make atol.*

*When Silvia was eight years old her mother and father moved to the United States and left her with the responsibility of raising her siblings. She was not worried about cooking the best meals or keeping the house tidy. Silvia's priorities were that her siblings ate, attended school, and had a roof over their heads. When Silvia married her husband, Milton, she felt like she was starting at square one. Her suegra (mother-in-law) taught her how to cook and clean; how to take care of a household. So when Silvia wanted to learn to make atol, she asked her suegra for help. Silvia's goal was to make the atol tastier than her suegra's.*

*At first Silvia observed how her suegra prepared the atol. Silvia accompanied her suegra to el molino at four in the morning to grind the maiz. They left the maiz soaking overnight in water. They woke up at four in the morning to gather leña to make a fire to cook the maiz. She watched her suegra stir the pot with a ladle. "No puedes parar de menear porque si no se te pega el atol en la olla<sup>301</sup>." Her suegra added the sugar, salt, and water to her liking. There were two batches; atol tipico and atol chuco. Next time, Silvia took the lead and her suegra observed her progress.*

*Fifteen years later, Silvia wakes up at three thirty every day to start the process. By five forty she's finished preparing the atol and starts setting up her puesto outside her home. She sets a table outside with two containers filled with hot atol, little plastic bags for to-go orders, and her basket with change.*

*The sun is barely starting to peak over the horizon. The only light source is coming from the inside of her house.*

*Silvia strikes up a conversation with all her customers. These people are her friends, fellow church members, or faithful customers. She asks them about their children, follows up on their sick family members, and touches base for church activities. While she catches up with them, she's quickly pouring atol into a plastic bag. She asks if they want pan frances or aiguate<sup>302</sup> to accompany their atol, and most people say yes. There are some customers who tell her "the*

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<sup>301</sup> You have to keep stirring if not the atol will stick on the pot.

<sup>302</sup> Crushed pumpkin seed seasoning

*usual” or who don’t have to say anything and she starts preparing their order. Some people don’t pay her, and tell her they’ll come back later with the money. People pull up in the cars and pay from the window, and others drive up in their motorcycles and drink their atol on the go. Everyone who walks by says “salud” or “buenas.”*

*People who visit from the U.S, will buy atol every day. Silvia always knows how’s visiting. Sometimes visitors will bump into old friends and decide to meet up the following morning for atol. Silvia intentionally sets up chairs outside for old friends to catch up. For the people who stay to eat she has artisanal bowls for them to drink from.*

*Most days Silvia is the one selling, but she’s trained everyone in her family to cook atol. Her husband Milton claims he makes it better than Silvia. They all learned in case they needed to step in one morning.*

*When she gave birth to her youngest child. Valentin, her daughter Kenya stepped in for three months. At fourteen years old Kenya was waking up at three thirty to prepare the atol. She learned to start the fire, stir the atol, pour the boiling hot atol into the containers, set up the puesto, and sell all before going to school.*

*While Silvia sells atol, her family sits next to her when they get the chance. If her husband has not left for work, he sits to drink his atol. Her nine-year-old son, Valentin, nestles next to her to drink his atol and he has a method. He eats his atol chuco in an artisanal bowl. He grabs pan frances and cuts it up into little pieces. Once he’s placed the pan frances into the bowl he pours the aiguaste on top.*

*These traditional foods are passed down from one generation to the next. Silvia learned from her suegra and taught her children. Silvia’s story is an example of how in Yucuaiquin most food is made from scratch. Silvia buys the maiz in bulk and sees the process till she sells the atol.*

*As Silvia sells atol, she builds a community across Yucuaiquin. She brings people together to enjoy breakfast. She catches up on life with community members. She finds out the latest gossip watching people walk up and down the street. She buys bread from the panero, who passes by on his motorcycle every day energetically shouting “EL PAN!” She earns money for her family while continuing the tradition of women in Yucuaiquin who start their own business. She makes sure people have food before they go to work, that visitors have a place to meet and talk with old friends, and that her son has breakfast before heading to school.*

*Her work starts at three thirty and ends around eight as the final streaks of darkness leave the sky. She almost always sells out.*

### ***Transportation during the war***

*Recently, my mom brought a souvenir of a toy bus as an altar item to our church. At first, she did not know why she brought it. I started to ask her questions like “when did you ride the bus in El Salvador?” She said her most vivid memory of riding the bus was back and forth from San Miguel and Yucuaiquin during high school. I followed up by asking if the buses ever got hijacked or burned? Her face completely shifted; she had an epiphany. She smiled, like she wanted to cry, and said “de la que Dios me salvó.”<sup>303</sup> Other buses to and from San Miguel were burned or hijacked by the guerrilleros, but never when she was on the bus. The one time she can remember the guerrilleros and militaries had a confrontation in San Miguel, by coincidence, she decided to stay home in Yucuaiquin.*

*De la que Dios nos salvó.*

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<sup>303</sup> God saved me from that one

### ***First time cooking frijoles***

*When Tancho graduated from high school, her family decided she should stay home and help her mom with los haceres.<sup>304</sup> The war was in its beginning stages. Her parents worried if she worked outside of Yucuaiquin, they were putting her life at risk. Tancho wanted to be a nurse; she dreamed of giving patients IV's. However, her parents became her fear. Tancho thought it was best to stay home and support her mother in taking care of her family and their home. From the age of eighteen, Tancho learned to cook everything under the sun: tamales, pupusas, carne, sopas, tortas, arrozes. Her mother never explained how to cook, her mother just expected Tancho to observe, experiment, and learn.*

*The first time Tancho cooked frijoles, her mom asked her to have them ready by the time she returned from work. Tancho's mom gave her no instructions, only high expectations, and left for the day. In Yucuaiquin, most homes have a separate room where women cook with an hornilla.<sup>305</sup> In una olla de barro she poured the frijoles and water to slowly cook over the fire. Frijoles<sup>306</sup> are a staple in the salvadoran diet. Frijoles are a testament of steadfastness, because they take hours to fully cook. Over the next couple of hours, Tancho checked in on the frijoles to see if they still had fire and cooked at the right pace. By the end of the day, she proudly served her family a tasty serving of sopa de frijoles. For many years Tancho was responsible for cooking for her family and taking care of the haceres. Through all the practice she honed her craft and knows how to cook most traditional food.*

*In the midst of war and instability, food became a serving and taking care of her family. Even after she moved to the United States cooking continued to be a staple in her life. Tancho lived in East Boston and Revere, two neighborhoods filled with salvadoran families. At her local church, she will cook traditional food to fundraise money or for special events. Members will seek her out because her food is unmatched. During holidays she will make food to make money and because she knows people miss eating these foods in El Salvador. For semana santa she will prepare tortas, for thanksgiving she makes panes con pollo, and for christmas she prepares assortments of rice, meat, and vegetables. Even if she isn't selling food, whenever people come over she will offer all kinds of foods, fruits, and drinks.*

*Tancho expresses her warmth and love through cooking and serving people food. People are always flowing in and out of her house to purchase her delicious meals. Tancho doesn't run a formal restaurant or follow specific recipes. Like the women in Yucuaiquin, she needed to make more money for her family so she did what she knows best: feed people.*

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<sup>304</sup> Housework

<sup>305</sup> Similar to where they cook pizzas

<sup>306</sup> Kidney beans

### ***Cooking tortillas at home and visiting Katy***

*In Yucuaiquin, there are always fresh tortillas in a household. Tortillas are a staple of the daily diet (el pan de cada día).<sup>307</sup> This means every couple of days women will go to El Molino to grind down maíz until it's a fine consistency. Before electric molinos, or molinos de nixtama, women used to leave the maíz soaking overnight and in the early morning walk to el molino with their huacales filled with maíz. They placed their maíz on steady rocks and used another rock to beat down the maíz until it reached a fine consistency. The electric molino makes the job less physically taxing, but women still wake up early and wait their turn to grind down their maíz. Women will walk to el molino about once or twice a week, since they make the tortillas in bulk.*

*My last memory of making tortillas was a weekend my family came to visit from Virginia. My mom, known for making the best pupusas in the family, had just finished making them for our relatives. When I noticed there was leftover masa, queso, and chicharrón, I asked her if I could make a couple. This was my moment to show off, to let everybody know “yeah, not only can I make tortillas but I can make pupusas.” I’ve always felt a woman’s hands were sacred. With their hands, I see them cook and clean—truly maintain and head a household. I don’t know why it felt so instrumental for me to make these pupusas and tortillas. I felt like I was affirming my womanhood, my Latinidad, my familial bonds. I cannot place the weight of all those roles and parts of my identities on tortillas and pupusas, but it is an honor to learn from my mother’s hands, to do the sacred work of cooking and feeding people. Everyone praised me for my enthusiasm to learn to make good tortillas and pupusas. They were impressed by my technique and when they saw que la tortilla se infló/when they saw the tortilla inflate.*

*I learned to make tortillas with my grandma, she taught me how to gently move my hands, how to flip them on the comal using my hands, and enjoy them with some cuajada/cheese. I’ll always hear her voice when I’m preparing them. It’s a moment where the past and the future collide: I see her making them, and I see myself in the future teaching my family how to make them. Our hands hold us together, even when we’re apart.*

*In 2023 when I visited Yucuaiquin I stopped by Katy’s house. Her mother and father loved my grandmother and took care of her when she was sick. I knew Katy’s mom would be making tortillas, because she told me to meet her at el molino. I was too tired to wake up so early, so I stopped by when she was already making them. Katy pulled up a couple of chairs and we all sat by the hornilla as her mom made tortillas for the whole family. She made the biggest tortillas I have ever seen in my life. She shared how people suggested she use a mold to get the perfect shape, but she knew how her family liked the tortillas. She knew there were women in the pueblo who made tortillas for sale, but she liked making them herself. She was used to moliendo her whole life. The same way jalar agua es vida, moler es vida for women. In their hands lived the sustenance of their families. In their hands lived a way to bring people together through food.*

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<sup>307</sup> Our daily bread, a reference to the biblical verse that says “give us our daily bread.” (Luke 11:3).

**CHAPTER 3—**  
**EMIGRATION:**  
**LOS MUROS CAEN<sup>308</sup>**

**Introduction**

Histories of water, commerce, and labor in Yucuaiquin are incomplete without attention to migration. There is an irony of exploring *convivencia* in a chapter that focuses on family and community separation. At its core, *convivencia* arises out of physical presence and a felt sense of connection to land, people, and the divine. How has separation disrupted and shifted *convivencia*? What does this mean for families and communities that have been forced to choose migration for survival? How has El Salvador transformed into a nation whose major export has become its people? This chapter will discuss transnational migration and *convivencia* in the recent and contemporary history of yucuaiquinenses: the experience of those who remained, the experience of migration itself, and the experiences of those in diaspora.

From personal accounts, both undocumented and documented people living in the Greater Boston area share their perspectives of leaving home and the consequences they faced in the U.S. U.S. migration policies act as a systemic force that has disrupted community ties for salvadoreños. Emigrants with Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and undocumented status remain uncertain of when they will see their family members again. Migration reveals the ways salvadoreños contend with survival and make decisions that have compromised their ability to be in conversation and community with the people they love most.

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<sup>308</sup> The walls fall down



## U.S. Policies Criminalizing Immigrants

The U.S migration policies starting in the 1990s created harmful narratives about refugees fleeing war in El Salvador. Due to these harmful narratives, the U.S migration policies have systematically targeted salvadoreños and caused family separations. In October 1981, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) “charged that the United States was not living up to its responsibilities as a signatory to the UN Protocol.”<sup>309</sup> The Ronald Reagan administration did not want to admit that “millions of tax dollars” were being used to fund the violent military in El Salvador.<sup>310</sup> This meant from 1983 to 1990, “only 2.6 percent of salvadoreñ[e] asylum applicants were successful.”<sup>311</sup> Since the U.S law did not see people from El Salvador as asylum seekers, this led to other societal constructs defining emigrants: economic migrants, illegal aliens, rapists, drug lords, gang members, etc. Denying the salvadoreños asylum meant denying the violence and atrocity they faced in El Salvador. During the war, the Reagan Administration signed The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 which started the process of writing law and policies that criminalize emigrants.<sup>312</sup> This act criminalized hiring undocumented workers and expanded the resources of the Immigration and Naturalization Services.<sup>313</sup> This act along with others like the 1990 Immigration Act during the Bill Clinton Administration, expanded deportable offenses, targeted immigrants, and pressured the U.S. Attorney to deport undocumented immigrants.<sup>314</sup> In October 1994, Operation Gatekeeper

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<sup>309</sup> Maria Cristina, Garcia, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. Accessed April 19, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central, 73.

<sup>310</sup> Garcia, *Seeking Refuge*, 74.

<sup>311</sup> Garcia, *Seeking Refuge*, 74.

<sup>312</sup> Leisy, Abrego, Mat Coleman, Daniel E. Martínez, Cecilia Menjivar, and Jeremy Slack. “Making Immigrants into Criminals: Legal Processes of Criminalization in the Post-IIRIRA Era.” *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 5, no. 3 (2017): 694–715. <https://doi.org/10.14240/jmhs.v5i3.105>, 697.

<sup>313</sup> Abrego, et. al, “Making Immigrants into Criminals,” 697.

<sup>314</sup> Abrego, et. al, “Making Immigrants into Criminals,” 697.

militarized the border placing more immigrants in danger of injury, death, and arrest.<sup>315</sup> The Clinton administration also passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act in 1996, which continued to expand “aggravated felonies,” functioned retroactively so “infractions committed years prior” could lead to deportation, and “restricted judicial discretion.”<sup>316</sup>

In 1990, during the George H. W. Bush Administration, Congress passed Temporary Protected Status (TPS). TPS is given to a country if there are temporary circumstances (like an armed war) that prevent their nationals from returning safely, or if the country is unable to handle the return of its nationals.<sup>317</sup> TPS is temporary, does not lead to permanent residency, and is not based on individual cases.<sup>318</sup> Later the chapter will go more in depth on TPS, because this policy has particularly affected salvadoreños.

By 2005, during the George W. Bush Administration, Operation Streamline gave people arrested in the U.S. southern border a criminal charge.<sup>319</sup> During the Obama Administration, the Secure Communities (S-COMM) program expanded with the purpose to deport “dangerous criminals.”<sup>320</sup> The position of the administration was “Felons, not families.”<sup>321</sup> However, there is “no evidence that it affects violent and property crime rates.”<sup>322</sup> The Obama Administration was particularly harsh on employers who hired undocumented people and arrested people for immigration-law violations.<sup>323</sup> For immigrants detained at the border, they could be deported

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<sup>315</sup> Natascha Elena, Uhlmann, *Abolish ICE*. 1st ed. OR Books, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvq4bxmx>, 25.

<sup>316</sup> Uhlmann, *Abolish ICE*, 20-21.

<sup>317</sup> Cecilia, Menjivar, “Temporary Protected Status in the United States: The Experiences of Honduran and Salvadoran Immigrants.” Center for Migration Research, The University of Kansas, 1.

<sup>318</sup> Menjivar, “Temporary Protected Status,” 1.

<sup>319</sup> Abrego, et. al, “Making Immigrants into Criminals,” 701

<sup>320</sup> Alex, Nowrasteh, “Obama’s Mixed Legacy on Immigration.” Cato.org, January 25, 2017. <https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/obamas-mixed-legacy-immigration>.

<sup>321</sup> Uhlmann, *Abolish ICE*, 36.

<sup>322</sup> Nowrasteh, “Obama’s Mixed Legacy.”

<sup>323</sup> Nowrasteh, “Obama’s Mixed Legacy.”

with no due process or a proper hearing, with a permanent marking on their immigration record which affects opportunities for residency and citizenship in the future.<sup>324</sup>

In 2018 the United States carceral state, under the Donald Trump Administration, expanded the detention centers punitive treatment of immigrants.<sup>325</sup> The U.S. Attorney's Office adopted a “zero tolerance policy” “for improper entry” by an immigrant and or asylum seeker.<sup>326</sup> Anyone who entered the U.S. without papers or a visa would be “detained and criminally prosecuted.”<sup>327</sup> This resulted in the separation of families at the detention centers.<sup>328</sup> Since there was “no system established to track families who were separated,” reunification and identifying children was challenging.<sup>329</sup> In these detention centers, adults and children experienced various degrees of sexual, verbal, emotional, and medical abuse.<sup>330</sup> Moreover, immigrants facing deportation were not “entitled to an appointed lawyer,” which means that children, and often children who do not speak English, have to represent themselves in court.<sup>331</sup> As a result, “more than 80 percent of children who represent themselves in court are deported.”<sup>332</sup> This meant children who cannot speak have to represent themselves in court.<sup>333</sup>

## Family Separations

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<sup>324</sup> Uhlmann, *Abolish ICE*, 36.

<sup>325</sup> Nina Ivanovna Patrikian, “Migrant Detention Centers in the United States and the Treatment of Children – Do the Practices Violate International Conventions and National Law?” (dissertation, 2020), <https://repositorio.ucp.pt/bitstream/10400.14/37122/1/202599469.pdf>, 25.

<sup>326</sup> Patrikian, “Migrant Detention Centers,” 25.

<sup>327</sup> Patrikian, “Migrant Detention Centers,” 25.

<sup>328</sup> Patrikian, “Migrant Detention Centers,” 25.

<sup>329</sup> Patrikian, “Migrant Detention Centers,” 25-26.

<sup>330</sup> Patrikian, “Migrant Detention Centers,” 29-30.

<sup>331</sup> Uhlmann, *Abolish ICE*, 5.

<sup>332</sup> Uhlmann, *Abolish ICE*, 5.

<sup>333</sup> Uhlmann, *Abolish ICE*, 5.

There is robust scholarship about the salvadoreña emigrant experience. This section will focus on the systemic forces causing family separations, and the accounts of parents and children on the challenges and the effects of maintaining trans-national families.

Very often, families cannot reunite because of their undocumented status in the United States or because family members only have TPS. Right now, the only pathways to citizenship in the U.S. are through marriage to a U.S. citizen, being claimed by a citizen child of 21 years or older, a citizen parent or guardian, an employer-sponsored green card, or a self-sponsored employer green card.<sup>334</sup> With TPS, people cannot sponsor family members or “receive settlement aid nor qualify for public assistance benefits.”<sup>335</sup> Salvadoreña emigrants crossing the border without a visa or papers know the undocumented life that awaits them in the U.S. Yet, people continue to cross and leave family members behind.

The most common case of family separation is parents leaving behind children. Drawing on the book “Sacrificing Families: Navigating Laws, Labor, and Love Across Borders” written by Leisy J. Abrego and the dissertation, “The Impact of the United States Immigration Enforcement Regime on Salvadoran Immigrant Fathers in the United States and Deported Fathers in El Salvador” written by Jose Alfredo Torres Jr., this section will present the motives and realities of living in a transnational family. Abrego opens the book by making the argument that the “transnational family strategy is, at its core, a response to economic circumstances.”<sup>336</sup> The economic motive is due to the lack of labor opportunities in El Salvador, the cost of sending children to school, and the difficulty accessing basic necessities (i.e., water, food, clothes,

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<sup>334</sup> “Become a Citizen,” Become a Citizen | Homeland Security, accessed April 30, 2023, <https://www.dhs.gov/become-citizen>.

<sup>335</sup> Menjivar, “Temporary Protected Status,” 3.

<sup>336</sup> Leisy J. Abrego, *Sacrificing Families: Navigating Laws, Labor, and Love Across Borders*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2014. Accessed April 19, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central, 2.

sanitary supplies, etc). On top of those economic motives, people choose to flee the violence and destruction caused from war, gangs, and oppressive government.

When parents leave, teachers notice their children's behavior change immediately.<sup>337</sup> Teachers notice: grades dropping, kids becoming quiet, and rebellious.<sup>338</sup> Abrego spoke with children in various situations: from children benefiting economically<sup>339</sup> to children still living under-resourced.<sup>340</sup> The children who fared well financially were more likely to participate in extracurriculars<sup>341</sup> than the children still fending for their lives.<sup>342</sup> For the children benefiting, they were less likely to desire migrating to the U.S. The remittances their parents sent opened up doors for their education.<sup>343</sup> Although these children did not admit that separation was “worth it” they did “danc[e] around the words.”<sup>344</sup> The children struggling financially and living in dangerous neighborhoods did see a future for themselves in the U.S with their parents.<sup>345</sup> However, they still asserted family separation was not worth it.<sup>346</sup>

Abrego continuously comes back to the question “is separation worth it?” This is a question that emigrants and their family members grapple with all the time. It is the kind of question that haunts people; eats them alive. When they wake up early to go to work in the U.S. or right before children take exams in El Salvador. As birthdays, anniversaries, deaths, and graduations pass people ask themselves: Is it worth it? The distance hardens people, because they live in constant loss and absence. But they continue sending and receiving remittances — making due. Of course, there is a difference between surviving with or without a family present.

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<sup>337</sup> Abrego, *Sacrificing Families*, 160.

<sup>338</sup> Abrego, *Sacrificing Families*, 160.

<sup>339</sup> Abrego, *Sacrificing Families*, 165.

<sup>340</sup> Abrego, *Sacrificing Families*, 167.

<sup>341</sup> Abrego, *Sacrificing Families*, 165.

<sup>342</sup> Abrego, *Sacrificing Families*, 167.

<sup>343</sup> Abrego, *Sacrificing Families*, 172.

<sup>344</sup> Abrego, *Sacrificing Families*, 184.

<sup>345</sup> Abrego, *Sacrificing Families*, 171.

<sup>346</sup> Abrego, *Sacrificing Families*, 184.

The experiences of the children in Abrego's book make it clear that "if given a viable alternative, most families would choose to remain together."<sup>347</sup> For the children and parents there is a "mismatch in timelines."<sup>348</sup> For the children, time goes by much more slowly than for the parent.<sup>349</sup> This leads into the differing ways the parents talk about family separation. Abrego discusses how parents are more likely to hide "details of their sacrifices so as not to worry their children."<sup>350</sup> Parents believed "things would have only been worse had they stayed— even when they had suffered tremendously."<sup>351</sup>

Jose Alfredo Torres Jr. focused on the fathers and their children in his dissertation. He conversed with undocumented fathers in the U.S. with children in El Salvador or with deported fathers in El Salvador with children living in the U.S. With these stories, Torres Jr. explicates the complexities of mixed-status families. These fathers spoke about how immigration laws affect their ability to "see[k] employment opportunities, a higher education, and housing in the U.S."<sup>352</sup> The economic and housing struggles in tandem with inability to move freely "redefined the meanings they attached to their fathering roles and responsibilities."<sup>353</sup> This was particularly hard for fathers who grew up without father-figures and became dads to fulfill what their parents could not.<sup>354</sup> Since these fathers parented from far away they struggled to provide financially,<sup>355</sup> discipline their kids,<sup>356</sup> and remain emotionally present.<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Abrego, *Sacrificing Families*, 189.

<sup>348</sup> Abrego, *Sacrificing Families*, 2.

<sup>349</sup> Abrego, *Sacrificing Families*, 2.

<sup>350</sup> Abrego, *Sacrificing Families*, 2.

<sup>351</sup> Abrego, *Sacrificing Families*, 184.

<sup>352</sup> Jose Alfredo, Torres, "The Impact of the United States Immigration Enforcement Regime on Salvadoran Immigrant Fathers in the United States and Deported Fathers in El Salvador," 2021. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3sf0z7gw#main>, 27.

<sup>353</sup> Torres, "The Impact of the United States," 80.

<sup>354</sup> Torres, "The Impact of the United States," 83.

<sup>355</sup> Torres, "The Impact of the United States," 81.

<sup>356</sup> Torres, "The Impact of the United States," 82.

<sup>357</sup> Torres, "The Impact of the United States," 82.

The fathers signal a difference between the U.S. and El Salvador: “in El Salvador we’re taught to be emotionally connected to their parents” while children raised in the U.S grow up “emotionally distant and detached from their parents.”<sup>358</sup> The fathers perspectives differed since everyone's experience of parenting and raising a family is so different. In interviews and conversations with yucuaiquinenses, it becomes clear that people share experiences of growing up very close to their families when they have physical proximity. In Yucuaiquin, as in the pueblos other fathers emigrated from, cousins and distant aunts and uncles lived on the same streets. With such a small pueblo, everyone knows each other and lives within walking distance from relatives. This adds to the complexity of family separation and challenges people's ability to express and live their familial values.

Family separations highlight how salvadoreños have been forced to make survival and safety decisions that sacrifice the physical unity of their families. The family separations leave emotional and psychological baggage for all members of the family who live in limbo. As people contend with migration, U.S policies, and separation they must also make decisions about what it means to be in convivencia when they are miles apart in a post-war context.

### **A Post-War Context: Chalatenango**

Salvadoreños have been contending with, healing from, and living in post-war realities. How do individuals heal in a post-war reality? How do people build and sustain a community in a post-war reality?

Anthropologist Irina Carlota Silber lived in Chalatenango for over a year with the rural campesines. She developed the idea of “post-war disillusionment” to describe the aftermath of war in Chalatenango, and specifically focused on the “gendered experiences and responses to

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<sup>358</sup> Torres, “The Impact of the United States,” 93.

social and interpersonal violence in El Salvador's recent history."<sup>359</sup> Drawing on her accounts of people living Chalatenango, displaced refugees, and deportees, this section will explore the ways chalateques (gender neutral term for people from Chalatenango) are contending with and trying to live the values of convivencia post-war El Salvador.

During the war, many salvadoreñas fled to refugee camps in Honduras in search of safety. These refugees were misunderstood by Hondureños and the UNHCR. Despite their displacement, Molly Todd argues they are historical and political agents.<sup>360</sup> During their time living in refugee camps, these salvadoreñas practiced educación popular to combat illiteracy.<sup>361</sup> This supported their ability to use performance and protest pieces –songs, poetry, theater sketches, marches, sit-ins, and hunger strikes– to “denounce the salvadoran government and military.”<sup>362</sup> All these forms of protest and placemaking, reflected the ways people engaged in community building and healing practices during their experiences in displacement. These salvadoreñas continued a part of the fabric of El Salvador's history and lucha (struggle).

During the Reconstruction era from 1993 to 1998, the country underwent a process of repopulating communities because of the sheer number of people who fled and relocated.<sup>363</sup> Chalatenango experienced reconstruction through “new roads, electrification, cement-block houses, and an array of gender-specific community micro-enterprise projects<sup>364</sup>” Silber highlights the tension between international aid projects<sup>365</sup> and the realities of people asserting they live

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<sup>359</sup> Irina Carlota Silber, “Mothers/Fighters/Citizens: Violence and Disillusionment in Post-War El Salvador” 16, no. 3 (2004): pp. 561-587, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0953-5233.2004.00356.x>, 561.

<sup>360</sup> Molly, Todd, *Beyond Displacement Campesinos, Refugees, and Collective Action in the Salvadoran Civil War*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014, 4 & 6.

<sup>361</sup> Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, 175.

<sup>362</sup> Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, 155.

<sup>363</sup> Irina Carlota, Silber, *Everyday Revolutionaries: Gender, Violence, and Disillusionment in Postwar El Salvador*, n.d, 16.

<sup>364</sup> Silber, *Everyday Revolutionaries*, 16.

<sup>365</sup> Silber, “Mothers/Fighters/Citizens,” 565.



“peor que antes” (worse off than before).<sup>366</sup> Scholars like Silber, Miguel Gutierrez Jr, Susan Bibler Coutin, and John Ripton agree that globalization and post-war efforts in El Salvador take the form of mass-migration and remittances. Ripton explicates how the Salvadoran government “embraced emigration and remittances as a development strategy.”<sup>367</sup> Emigrant labor “keeps the nation afloat” because people living in El Salvador “rely on the economic remittances and capital of their migration kin in order to survive.”<sup>368</sup> This creates unstable economies for people and pueblos that rely on remittances, because of the criminalization and deportation of emigrants in the U.S.<sup>369</sup> Another unstable form of economic activity post-reconstruction, has been international aid and NGOs. Women in Chalatenango call out these efforts because of their corruption and unequal distribution of development projects.<sup>370</sup>

With failed aid, exploitative globalization, neoliberal efforts, and the criminalization of emigrants, how do rural campesino communities like Chalatenango contend with these systemic forces? Chalatenango has a history of politicized campesines, combatantes, and participants in educación popular. In the post-war reconstruction period they created and participated in repopulation efforts, NGOs, womens projects, directivas (executive directives), and development projects. Chalateques wanted to support people in learning the necessary trades and labor skills to become self-sufficient. International and local organizations like CORDES and CCR (Coordinadora de Comunidades en Desarrollo Chalatenango) used “community organization in order to contribute to economic, political, and social development.”<sup>371</sup> There was a large

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<sup>366</sup> Silber, “Mothers/Fighters/Citizens,” 566.

<sup>367</sup> Ripton, “Export Agriculture and Agrarian Crisis, 103.

<sup>368</sup> Silber, *Everyday Revolutionaries*, 16.

<sup>369</sup> Susan Bibler, Coutin, “Exiled Home Through Deportation.” In *Exiled Home: Salvadoran Transnational Youth In The Aftermath Of Violence*, 129–64. Duke University Press, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.2307/J.Ctv11g96sk.8>, 134.

<sup>370</sup> Silber, “Mothers/Fighters/Citizens,” 674.

<sup>371</sup> Silber, *Everyday Revolutionaries*, 79.

emphasis on organizing local government and involving Chalateques<sup>372</sup> in deciding what to do with funding and aid.

There was a strong presence of women in local organizations from the secretary representative in CCR to the women in directivas. The women who participated in CCR were more heavily involved in local and national political education and activism.<sup>373</sup> The women in directivas had regional meetings once or twice a year for larger celebrations like Women's Day.<sup>374</sup> Women hosted more community-based meetings at casas de mujeres (women's centers), churches, classrooms, open spaces, etc. In these monthly meetings, women talked about birth control, water and latrine hygiene, and political campaigns.<sup>375</sup> Six single mothers worked in an arts-and-crafts workshop.<sup>376</sup> They crafted artisanal art and leather goods to sell through an internal solidarity-linked market.<sup>377</sup> In these intimate spaces, women shared “horror stories” with one another and found similarities in each other's stories.<sup>378</sup>

There were many projects and initiatives in Chalatenango, but unfortunately the organizations dwindled down. Many of the chalateques describe the ways the NGOs blame the people and the people blame the NGOs.<sup>379</sup> The people searched for economic opportunities and also for spaces to share their stories. Chalateques emphasized the importance of remembering — they organized spaces for “exchang[ing] stories, danc[ing], listen[ing] to their historical leaders, and watch[ing] a play depicting war.”<sup>380</sup> In everyday interactions, like playing cards, people shared wartime stories.<sup>381</sup> All these exchanges and testimonios reveal the ways convivencia is

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<sup>372</sup> People from Chalatenango

<sup>373</sup> Silber, *Everyday Revolutionaries*, 81.

<sup>374</sup> Silber, *Everyday Revolutionaries*, 81.

<sup>375</sup> Silber, *Everyday Revolutionaries*, 81.

<sup>376</sup> Silber, *Everyday Revolutionaries*, 52.

<sup>377</sup> Silber, *Everyday Revolutionaries*, 52.

<sup>378</sup> Silber, *Everyday Revolutionaries*, 53.

<sup>379</sup> Silber, *Everyday Revolutionaries*, 13.

<sup>380</sup> Silber, *Everyday Revolutionaries*, 67.

<sup>381</sup> Silber, *Everyday Revolutionaries*, 56.

tied to sharing stories with another — especially as a form of healing and truly seeing one another. For widowed or abandoned women, it was particularly challenging to find these spaces where they felt safe to openly share and heal their wounds.<sup>382</sup> It is important to note that reconstruction is not only about fixing infrastructure that was destroyed or trying to play catch up with “developed countries,” but more so about creating safe spaces for people to share their stories and experiences to ultimately reimagine a healed community.

### **A Changing Pueblo**

Turning back to Yucuaiquin, this section will demonstrate effects of mass-migration, remittances, and separation on a rural pueblo. El Salvador's economy depends on remittances. The residents in La Union, along with San Miguel and Morazan, receive the highest remittance rates in the country with the largest number of emigrants.<sup>383</sup> Abrego describes remittances as “obligations and often the expression of deep emotional bond.”<sup>384</sup> The people who left Yucuaiquin have impacted the infrastructure, jobs, economic activity, and overall daily life in the pueblo. These sections will discuss ways people living in Yucuaiquin are contending with remittances, change, and transnational connections. In addition, this section, along with the vignettes, will explore how yucuaiquinenses living in the U.S. adapt to a new life and remain connected to their home.

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<sup>382</sup> Silber, “Mothers/Fighters/Citizens,” 576.

<sup>383</sup> Pablo, Acosta, “Intra-Household Labour Allocation, Migration, and Remittances in Rural El Salvador.” *The Journal of Development Studies* 56, no. 5 (2019): 1030–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2019.1626832>.

<sup>384</sup> Abrego, *Sacrificing Families*, 11.

## **Driver Services**

In the advent of new roads one of the most lucrative business opportunities became driving services. Many people in Yucuaiquin do not have the resources for a car, and it is hard to maintain a car because of the kinds of terrains and dust the car travels through. Most driving in and out of Yucuaiquin will opt for a motorcycle. This leaves a gap for people who need rides, especially if they need to travel beyond San Miguel. In Yucuaiquin, the most well-known drivers' businesses are: Milton Gutierrez, Kevin Emaña, and Los Hermanos Herrera. This section will focus on Milton Gutierrez, because he is a family friend and I shared time with him in El Salvador.

One of the stories Milton shared with me was how he was able to evade being recruited for the war. He, along with many young men and boys, did not want to become a soldier. So each person found ways to hide, flee, and lie to avoid participating in the war. Growing up, Milton played soccer and his coach warned his teammates when the recruiters came to town. This way Milton stayed with family and friends in other towns when the recruiters came by Yucuaiquin. Since Milton remained in Yucuaiquin, he testified to the transformation throughout the past 30 years since the war ended, particularly because of the amount of people who migrated to the United States.

Milton worked various construction jobs during his adulthood, but when his children were born he wanted to share more time with them. These construction jobs limited his time in Yucuaiquin, and most weeks he stayed far from home for long stretches of time. A year before he quit his full-time stable job, he was already starting to give people rides. He saw the need for rides in Yucuaiquin and a job opportunity that kept him closer to home. He sold his old car and used the money to buy a microbus that fit more people.

Milton's business has been very successful over the past ten years. People constantly need rides into San Miguel for doctor appointments and mandados (errands). But the biggest reason his business boomed is because of the people visiting from the U.S. Especially during Christmas, new year, semana santa (easter week), and las fiestas patronales (patron saint festivities), people will visit Yucuaiquin to celebrate and share time with their friends and family. Milton gives people rides to and from the airport, and he also gives rides if they want to visit other parts of the country. The people returning from the U.S., are often visiting the country with means for the first time. As kids they lived through impoverishment and war, so they did not enjoy the beautiful and tourist-oriented parts of the country. Especially since President Bukeele's administration, Milton feels much safer driving around the country. Milton's older son, Alex, is learning the ropes from his dad. He aims to be able to drive around the country without GPS like Milton, to one day know El Salvador like the palm of his hand.

### **Constructing a New Landscape**

When yucuaiquinenses started to settle in the U.S, they took on projects to remodel and construct their family's houses, completely altering the landscape and infrastructure of Yucuaiquin. Prior to the 1980s, yucuaiquinenses constructed their houses from natural materials such as adobe,<sup>385</sup> palma, bambú, and maiz.<sup>386</sup> Yucuaiquinenses used these natural materials because they cultivated them in their own lands. People cultivated the maiz, cut down the bambú and palmas, and created the adobe mixture for their houses. Adobe was a mixture of mud, tusa (corn husk), and zaquate (corn stalk or stem). During the summer, families created the adobe mixture and poured them into brick molds that dried under the warm sun. Yucuaiquinenses call

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<sup>385</sup> Explained in the paragraph

<sup>386</sup> The houses were made from palms from a tree called "palma escoba," bamboo, and corn.

houses constructed from these natural materials — palmas, bambú, and maiz — ranchitos or “little ranches.” These houses had dirt floors, roofs made from palmas, and no electricity. Most families did not have the economic means to buy materials like cement, bricks, or iron. Family members and vecinas/os helped each other construct their houses. They hauled water from El Zapote in order to create the adobe mixture, and carried materials to houses before the roads or cars.

During the war, when family members started to emigrate to the U.S., with the money they saved up, they started to remodel and construct new houses for their family members living in Yucuaiquin. If families lived in houses made from adobe, the process usually started with *repellando* (plastering) the exterior, or *rending* the exterior walls with cement and sand. Remodeling and building houses with materials like cement, bricks, and iron took a long time because people did not save up money all at once. As family members saved up more and more money they slowly bought materials and paid for labor. During and post-war, people hired paid labor from men who knew how to construct houses –this created labor opportunities for men. This labor was usually passed down from generation to generation– fathers brought their sons on the job and taught them the trade.

The kinds of houses in Yucuaiquin highlight the wealth disparities in el pueblo. The people who continue to live in ranchitos during the 21st century most likely do not have family members sending remittances from the U.S. While other yucuaiquinenses living in the U.S. who have generated wealth build more elaborate houses in Yucuaiquin – almost as a status symbol. Another marker of wealth and status in houses is sanitary services. People with more affluence install toilets with running water, while other families continue to use latrines in their backyards with holes in the ground.

For family members living in the U.S., constructing, remodeling, and maintaining houses have been ways of taking care of their family members. These new houses literally have changed the physical landscape of Yucuaiquin. For people born before the 1980s, walking around they now see a completely new pueblo. For those who can afford to build and remodel new houses, living conditions have changed drastically. These new houses resist weather conditions, house more people, and enable people to install electricity. These houses reflect the way living conditions and the infrastructure of el pueblo change directly because of migration and remittances. The new houses also reflect the ways labor opportunities in Yucuaiquin are directly tied to transnational connections between community members.

### **Fiestas Patronales 2021: Bringing San Francisco to Revere**

One of the most important celebrations and traditions in Yucuaiquin is the fiesta patronal or patron saint festival. Yucuaiquin has deep Catholic roots, and their patron saint is San Francisco. On October 4th, they celebrate el Dia de San Francisco (the day of Saint Francis). In 2021 yucuaiquinenses living in the Greater Boston area celebrated in their backyards. The fiesta patronal reveals the ways yucuaiquinenses have contended with and adapted to systemic forces like colonization and massmigration.

In 2005, Sebastián Chaskel wrote “From Yucuaiquín To Somerville: Religious Beliefs And Traditions Of A Transnational Community” for his class in Tufts University. In this assignment, Chaskel explored the origins of San Francisco in Yucuaiquin, the traditions that people participate in leading up to and during the fiesta patronal, and the ways yucuaiquinenses in Somerville — Yucuaiquin’s sister-city — continue their traditions. This section will focus on the ways people use the fiesta patronal as new ways to convivir in diaspora.

The origin stories of how San Francisco became the patron saint of Yucuaiquin vary depending on who you ask.<sup>387</sup> Chaskel interviewed various members of the St. Benedict's Church in Somerville and received different versions of a similar story. During my time in Yucuaiquin, I too heard similar stories about a Saint who continued reappearing, so people believed it was "God's will for them to create a temple at the place where the image was found."<sup>388</sup> The community built their houses around the temple, which is where the church is in present day.<sup>389</sup>

Starting in July, people gather every day to take a sculpture of San Francisco to different homes (this is called La Demada).<sup>390</sup> The Saint is carried in a wooden box strapped to someone's chest (like a bookbag).<sup>391</sup> During the evening, there is an open invitation for people to gather at the respective home and honor San Francisco with *velorios*,<sup>392</sup> feasting, fireworks, and dancing.<sup>393</sup> The cultural dance performed is called "el baile de la partesana"<sup>394</sup> and the religious dance performed is called el baile de los negritos (the dance of dark-skinned people).<sup>395</sup>

Religiously, the dates of the patron saint festival are from October 1st-4th, but in order to attract tourism and make profit people start celebrating on September 28th.<sup>396</sup> During the two weeks, Yucuaiquin is filled with *ventas de comida*, *bailes*, *cuetes*, etc (food sales, dances, fireworks).<sup>397</sup> Each day the town celebrates something different like the day of young people, the day of commerce, the day of sports, etc.<sup>398</sup> Many yucuaiquinenses shared with me that they have such fond memories of these celebrations from their childhood. The fiestas are a time when

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<sup>387</sup> Sebastián, Chaskel, "From Yucuaiquín to Somerville: Religious Beliefs and Traditions of A Transnational Community." Tufts Digital Library, April 2005. <https://dl.tufts.edu/pdfviewer/0p096k39c/wp988x08g>, 14.

<sup>388</sup> Chaskel, "From Yucuaiquín To Somerville," 16.

<sup>389</sup> Chaskel, "From Yucuaiquín To Somerville," 16.

<sup>390</sup> Chaskel, "From Yucuaiquín To Somerville," 17.

<sup>391</sup> Trancito del Carmen, personal communication, September 2022-June 2023.

<sup>392</sup> There are different styles of "velorios" – but it implies that people are up all night praying

<sup>393</sup> Chaskel, "From Yucuaiquín To Somerville," 17.

<sup>394</sup> A partisan is a weapon: a spear

<sup>395</sup> Chaskel, "From Yucuaiquín To Somerville," 18.

<sup>396</sup> Trancito del Carmen, personal communication, September 2022-June 2023.

<sup>397</sup> Trancito del Carmen, personal communication, September 2022-June 2023.

<sup>398</sup> Trancito del Carmen, personal communication, September 2022-June 2023.



everyone comes together and people from surrounding towns visit to pay tribute to San Francisco.

El baile de los negritos is a crowd favorite, and this tradition dates back to Pre-Colonial times. While in Yucuaiquin, I asked elders about the origin story of this dance and why it is called “el baile de los negritos.” Nobody gave me a clear answer. Father Calix offered a theory for Chaskel, he said that the people who needed the dance the most were the impoverished campesines.<sup>399</sup> They relied on the winter showers to bring forth vegetation for harvest, and since they worked the field, they were darker skinned or negritos.<sup>400</sup> The campesines danced in joy and celebration because of the rain for their crops.<sup>401</sup> El Baile de la partesana “resembles the fighting between the Spanish and the Indians.”<sup>402</sup> This dance is not only performed during the fiesta patronal, yucuaiquineses also perform this dance during cultural celebrations in Yucuaiquin and around the country.

The significance of the dances has evolved: from signifying the importance of the rain in a cultivating community to the provisions and blessings San Francisco realizes. Now, with people living abroad, the dances’ meaning continues to evolve. The evolution of the interpretation of the dance reveals the ways people are contending with the systemic forces shaping the local community.

The impact of San Francisco and las fiesta patronal are seen in the U.S. In October 2021, Father Nelson Santos organized a trip to Boston for yucuaiquineses living in the Greater Boston area to see San Francisco sculpture. With the church's fundraising efforts, Father Nelson Santos was able to travel to Boston with San Francisco and collaborate with local Catholic churches to

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<sup>399</sup> Chaskel, “From Yucuaiquín To Somerville,” 20.

<sup>400</sup> Chaskel, “From Yucuaiquín To Somerville,” 20.

<sup>401</sup> Chaskel, “From Yucuaiquín To Somerville,” 18 & 19.

<sup>402</sup> Chaskel, “From Yucuaiquín To Somerville,” 18.

practice la demandas, los velorios, repartiendo comida, and los bailes.<sup>403</sup> The feasts and dances were also live streamed on Facebook for yucuaiquinenses all over the world to see. Every day, San Francisco was brought to a new home where people gathered and shared food together. Some people see each other every week at church and others may have lost ties over the years. But, San Francisco and the traditions of fiestas patronales brought people together. Most days, there were so many people gathered they sat outside on lawns, sidewalks, and driveways.

The fiestas patronales reveal the ways yucuaiquinenses, both in El Salvador and the United States, have contended with migration and family separation. Religion and rituals continue to bind and bring them together. They can all look at the same Santo that brings consoling, healing, and promise. What does convivencia look like when you are miles away from your motherland and cannot return? Placemaking on the streets of Chelsea, Revere, and Somerville while you stream live on Facebook, sing, dance, shake chin chins,<sup>404</sup> and pray.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the difficulties of remaining in community even as salvadoreños contend with post-war realities and emigrants flee. The influx of remittances transformed many pueblos. The infrastructure and landscape of pueblos drastically changed in the 21st century. In the context of the histories of convivencia, salvadoreños saw the transformation of their community and familial ties. The post-war reality became transnational migration, and people either chose to remain connected or grew apart. Those living in diaspora either chose to continue practicing traditions and customs or let them disappear into the ether.

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<sup>403</sup> Las demanas, wakes, food distribution, and dances

<sup>404</sup> Salvadoran instrument

The idea of ending a history of convivencia with transnational migration seems contradictory. Transnational families are filled with stories and leyendas (legends) hidden within plain sight – people hide their pain and loss. They experience the fight to remain and the burden of walking away, as well as the constant tension of trying to remain connected while miles apart. Ultimately these sacrifices point to the fact that convivencia is a choice – a choice to remain in a relationship, a commitment to provide financial support, and to pass down traditions and customs. Through historias – histories and stories – families heal. When people share their lived experiences and struggles – whether they remain or flee El Salvador – they remain connected.

## **VIGNETTES**

### ***Los muros caen***

*What a bold statement.*

*The walls fall down. The barriers fall down. The distant borders fall down.*

*The different time zones disappear.*

*In my church, we used to walk around the entire building singing and dancing to this song.  
People declared God had the strength to bring down towering and heavy walls.*

*The miracles that seemed impossible; the prayers that never felt answered.*

*What happens when churches filled with transnational and undocumented families sing and  
declare “los muros caen?”*

*Year after year DACA recipients are teased by politicians.*

*TPS holders continue in limbo.*

*Parents wait years for their children to turn 21 to declare them citizens.*

*The years wear you down. The false promises create calluses in your heart.*

*But then on Sunday you sing and dance “los muros caen.”*

*Y eso tiene que servir para algo.<sup>405</sup>*

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<sup>405</sup> And this has to mean/do something.

### **Letter Writing**

*When Tancho arrived in the United States in 2000, she moved in with her sister Teresa. Teresa lived on Cottage street in East Boston, what has been referred to as the armpit of Boston. The small apartment had a small kitchen and living room and two small bedrooms. The apartment was slanted, filled with pictures of family members left in El Salvador, and always had a fresh batch of tortillas. Teresa lived with her boyfriend and her toddler Jamie. They all shared a room so Tancho had a space of her own. A week after moving to Eastie, Tancho found a job in Back Bay at a floristeria/florist shop. Teresa took her to Maverick Station on the blue line, a ten-minute walk from their house and explained how to get to her new job. In el pueblo, Tancho had barely ridden in buses and cars. All of sudden when she walked down the stairs in the station and heard all the loud noises she started to cry. The loud intercom saying something she couldn't understand, all the bustling people running to catch the train, the strange doors she thought would trap her, and the zooming train unloading fast-paced people. She had never been on a train, she had never been outside of her home in Yucuaiquin for this long. All these firsts she was experiencing bubbled up. She learned her new route to work and made it on time. Here she met people from all over Latin America. She thought they sounded, they pronounced words differently than her and called the same thing by different names. Even if she sometimes struggled to understand their accent, she felt comfortable with them knowing they were speaking the same language.*

*Although she was separated from her family by what felt like infinite miles, Tancho wanted to remain in communication with her loved ones. She needed their words of encouragement. When she arrived in Eastie, she wrote a letter to her parents letting them know she was safe. This started an on-going letter writing relationship. Her grandfather could not read or write, but he always had something to say. When Tancho was younger, she would ask to write his correspondence. He would ask her to read what she wrote to ensure it was exactly what he wanted. When she moved away, her grandfather lost his writer. He found someone else to help him read Tanchos' letter, and write back exactly what he wanted to say to her. These letters sustained Tancho, to this day she still has her favorite letters from her grandfather.*

*After only a year of living with Teresa, Tancho decided to move out and find a place for her boyfriend, and soon-to-be-born daughter. They found a listing in Revere, a city right next to Eastie and moved out on their own. Before they moved out, Tancho called her grandfather so he could talk to her boyfriend. Her grandfather thought her new boyfriend was charming and would keep his granddaughter safe. One of the reasons she decided to move out was because her family member Tanchy was going to move in with Teresa. Tanchy was pregnant with her first daughter as well and needed somewhere to live.*

### ***Stories of Dreams Deferred***

*When Nelva was ten years old her mother, Mariolimpia, left for Boston, so she moved in with her Tia Consuelo. At age sixteen Mariolimpia forced Nelva to move with her to Boston. Nelva had dreams and aspirations for her life after high school. She wanted to move to Costa Rica and study nursing. In a matter of two months the passage was arranged, and Nelva started attending 11th grade in Sommerville public high school. She was living with her mother who had become a distant memory, and met her Tio Liovi who left when she was two years old.*

*Nelva came in February, half-way through the school year, in one of the most brutal winters. Her skin was not accustomed to the frigid winds. Her feet had never balanced on icy roads. Her body had never worn so many layers of clothing, and yet she was still freezing cold. Nelva came to the United States after 9/11. All of a sudden, universities charged undocumented people as international students. Her family barely attended school in Yucuaiquin, so college seemed impossible. In Yucuaiquin she had a clear picture of her future: warm Costa Rica. Now her future felt cold and bleak.*

*Nelva graduated High School and continued working at McDonald's, her first job. She worked in Brighton and struggled with English. At first, she only learned the names of things on menus, and then she started to learn other words related to cashier work. Slowly, she added more and more English to her vocabulary.*

*Moving to Boston allowed Nelva to forge new relationships with people like her mother and her Tio Livovi and his wife, Tia Nefri. She struggled with her mother at first because they had similar tempers. They fought and could not see eye to eye; Nelva missed her Tia Consuelo's warm and silly personality. But Tio Liovi and Tia Nefri became rocks for Nelva. Tia Nefri even connected Nelva with English classes. Whenever she needed anything she knew she could depend on them. Over the years, she learned to understand and respect her mother.*

*As Nelva reflects on the war, she states the biggest consequence of war is separation. Fathers leaving families behind to join the army, the guerrillas, or the United States. Children being raised by their grandparents. Never meeting your uncles and cousins because they moved away to a distant land. When people left, they came to the United States without papers. They could not travel back and forth, even if they wanted to. Nelva grew up with her cousins as her best friends, her tias and tios being second parents. She deeply felt the consequences of being separated, against her will, from the people she grew up with.*

*However, these deep wounds cut both ways. She wonders what would have happened if she had stayed in El Salvador. Would the maras (the gangs) have taken her? Would she have found a job? Would she have had enough money to survive? Here in Everett, she has family, a house, a stable job, and food on her table.*

*She wrestles with her past dreams and present blessings. She articulated a theory she never learned in class, but came to on her own. "No soy ni de aquí, ni de allá. Estoy en el medio. No me siento suficientemente americana, pero cuando estuve en Yucuaiquin, sentí las tendencias Americanas."*<sup>406</sup> *She feels in the middle, in a doorway between there and here. Where does she step? Where does she belong? Does she belong in the middle? And how does that make her feel?*

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<sup>406</sup> I am neither from here nor there. I'm in the middle. I don't feel American enough, but when I was in Yucuaiquin, I felt the American tendencies."

### ***The airport/the return home***

*Nelva returned to El Salvador in 2016, twenty years after leaving at the age of sixteen. Nelva said she left as one person, and returned as three with her two children, Samantha and Raymond. On the plane, when she finally saw tierra salvadoreña, her heart melted. She had planned the details of the trip, packed bags, gone through TSA, and boarded a flight, but nothing was real until she saw tierra salvadoreña. In an instant, all the emotions of twenty years of separation came flooding in.*

*When they stepped outside el vapor de la calor la inundó. Nelva saw her grandmother and could not believe she made the journey to San Salvador. Yucuaquin is a three-hour drive from the airport, and her grandmother was not leaving the house much anymore. Her grandmother made a big sacrifice to meet them in the airport, and Nelva was deeply moved. The airport pick-up is an integral part of coming home. Nelva, like many others, was separated from her family for decades. She hoped her grandmother would remain-alive until she got her papers so they could share an embrace. Nelva wanted her children to meet their great grandmother before she passed away. The airport is a place of reuniting, a place of relief, and a place of mending. The first thing her children noticed was that people were riding in the back of trucks. They were standing, with no care in the world, like they rode on the back of trucks every day. They screamed “mami, mira!”*

*Nelva realized this visit was not just about her coming home, but also her children learning about where she comes from. She shared stories of her childhood and adolescence with Samantha and Raymond, but now they were going to see Yucuaquin with their own eyes. She left El Salvador una persona y regresó con dos.<sup>407</sup>*

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<sup>407</sup> She left as one person, and returned with two more.



### **Facebook Live**

*Growing up I heard stories of el cuatro de octubre y fiestas patronales. My mom described classes getting canceled and people taking days off to celebrate. People from all over would come to Yucuaiquin to enjoy sales, food, dancing, and parades. All the streets would be closed off so the floats could travel through the town. I dreamed of walking behind the partesana with my candle. I wanted to wear a mask and perform el baile de los negritos. But, my classes were never canceled during October. I only got to see the photos on Facebook, and look forward to the day I could visit during this sacred week.*

*In October 2021, I happened to go home for a weekend to visit my friends and family. While my mom and I were driving back home we saw people gathered outside on a lawn. She explained to me that the Priest in Yucuaiquin organized with Catholic parishes and yucuaiquinenses for San Francisco to travel throughout the Greater Boston Area and New York City. This was my chance. I could finally participate and see the dances. Mi Tia Tancho is very involved in the local Revere Catholic church, so she knew all the information about where San Francisco was staying. She, along with other women, were cooking food every day for people to eat in the different houses.*

*On Sunday, right before I left for college I got to attend one of the caminadas with San Francisco. I was pressed for time, but I did not know the next time I would be able to experience this. I went to a house in front of my High School and met up with mi Tia Tancho. She is such a community organizer – making sure everyone was fed and taken care of, and that the plan was going according to schedule. She shared that they were trying to be extra careful and mindful because people called the cops on them at previous gatherings.*

*The priest led us down the street with San Francisco. My tia gave me a chin chin, and we followed a group of Yucuaiquinenses walking towards the host home. We sang, prayed, and meditated. I was overcome by emotions. I could not believe I was walking with my tia, hand-in-hand, through the streets I walked to get to High School. At the time, I did not know the term placemaking, but now I can see how we were reclaiming space in our streets. All this was streamed on Facebook, and later my family members enthusiastically sent me screenshots of my face on the stream.*

*This was one of those moments, where I felt like I was transcending time and space. I felt so present with my Tia and others as we walked down the streets I grew up on. And at the same time, I thought about how meaningful this must have been for my Tia Tancho who has not been able to return to Yucuaiquin. She got to have a piece of home in Revere. These are the moments when I feel so connected to my family members even though we are so far apart. These are the moments when I feel yucuaiquinensa even though I did not grow up there.*

*I did not grow up Catholic, but at that moment I was so grateful to San Francisco because he brought together all these yucuaiquinenses.*

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