

## INTRODUCTION

MARCH 19, 1987. On the front lawn of a church in Santa Rosa, California, several dozen people—including me—gathered to welcome the Northwest Coast section of a national caravan of Central American refugees and solidarity workers. The refugees were undocumented immigrants who were at risk of being deported from the United States to face violence in their home countries and, by traveling with them, the solidarity workers sought to provide a measure of protection. The refugees were undocumented because they were part of a mass displacement of civilians that had been generated by civil wars between left-leaning insurgents and right-wing governments in El Salvador and Guatemala. Victims who fled to the United States were rarely able to get visas to enter legally and so were undocumented. Although they could apply for asylum after they came to the United States, such petitions were generally denied due to U.S. military and economic support for the very governments the refugees had fled. So, to raise public consciousness about the violence being perpetrated in Central America, U.S. involvement in that violence, and Central Americans' need for refuge, Central American and U.S. solidarity workers had resorted to such tactics as organizing caravans and establishing sanctuaries for Central American asylum seekers. Participants in such activities ran legal risks. Undocumented Central Americans could be detected and deported, while U.S. citizens could be prosecuted on migrant-smuggling charges, as had occurred the previous year in Tucson, Arizona. Nonetheless, the mood that March

day was defiant. As the caravan arrived, honking loudly, its hosts clapped and chanted, “Stop the war in El Salvador!”

A doctoral student in anthropology at Stanford University, I had come to join the caravan on its last leg, as it returned to San Francisco after having departed almost a month earlier. I was doing dissertation research regarding the U.S. sanctuary movement, a grass-roots network of congregations that had declared themselves “sanctuaries” for Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees. I had chosen this research topic because of both my academic interests in social change and my own commitment to human rights. I had come that day to understand and document the caravan’s efforts to overcome divisions between those directly affected by wartime violence and those living in U.S. communities seemingly distant from the conflict. I also was available to assist by translating at events.

After caravan participants and hosts filed into the church, one of the Central Americans presented a *testimonio*, or “testimony,” a firsthand account of persecution and violence, “in which speaking subjects who present themselves as somehow ‘ordinary’ represent a personal experience of injustice . . . with the goal of inducing readers [or listeners] to participate in a project of social justice” (Nance 2006:7; see also Padilla 2012). Speaking in Spanish, a Salvadoran caravan participant told a harrowing story. He had been in his ninth-grade classroom when the Salvadoran army entered his school and took away five of his classmates. He stopped going to school and moved to the countryside for greater safety. When three of his uncles were killed, he decided to leave El Salvador. Despite the life-threatening situation he faced in El Salvador, he was deported several times by U.S. officials. After his mother and siblings received death threats, he also took the risk of making one return trip to El Salvador of his own volition, to help them escape to the United States. The speaker concluded by emphasizing the importance of ending U.S. military aid to El Salvador.

Though the *caravanistas* dispersed, first to sleep in the homes of local hosts and then to continue on to their next destination, the *testimonio* that was recounted at this reception lingered. Across time and space, this testimony invoked young students who had been abducted, uncles who had been assassinated, the terror of death threats, and the urgency of the young man who spoke. His words posed a challenge: Would social justice be achieved in Central America? Would the violence that led him and others to leave El Salvador be acknowledged? And would those affected by civil war and human rights

violations be able to secure refuge in the United States? These questions are still with us today.

### **Re/membering and Dismemberment**

The political and legal dynamics that shaped the caravan that long-ago March day also affected a generation, as Salvadorans who fled the devastation of the 1980–1992 Salvadoran civil war faced legal and other challenges in the United States. During the 1980s, Salvadorans who entered the United States were regarded by U.S. officials as economic migrants, despite the war in their homeland. By the 1990s, a decade of advocacy resulted in legal remedies for these asylum seekers, yet the 1992 peace accords jeopardized their abilities to qualify for these remedies. Many were not able to obtain residency until the early 2000s, while others remained undocumented or had only temporary status. For young people, who immigrated to the United States as children and grew up there, the circumstances were particularly stark. Those who were able to become U.S. citizens resolved their immigration situation but often were left with questions about the civil war, the relationship between national events and their family's history, and their places in both the United States and El Salvador. Those who were noncitizens remained vulnerable to deportation, as even lawful permanent residents could be removed if convicted of crimes. And those who were undocumented or had only temporary legal status faced uncertain futures in the United States and often had only dim memories of El Salvador, their country of legal citizenship. This book examines the experiences of such young people, focusing on the power and limitation of the nation-based categories of membership that they encountered, embraced, or rejected. In particular, I explore young people's efforts to *re/member*, that is, to negotiate their *membership* within the United States and El Salvador, while also deepening *memory* of Salvadoran social history, political violence, and immigrant experiences. Public accounts of individual life histories, such as the testimony recounted during the 1987 caravan described above, were key to such forms of *re/membering* as individuals experienced being exiled, whether physically, legally, or socially, from the multiple homes they had occupied.

*Re/membering* is made necessary by the *dismemberment* associated with civil war, displacement, emigration, the denial of legal status, and removal. By deploying the term *dismemberment*, I bring together two meanings of *dismember*: (1) not remembering or erasing, and (2) the breaking apart of bodies,

polities, and nations. Dismembering thus refers to the separation of persons from history, the literal injury or destruction of bodies,<sup>1</sup> the embodied nature of structural violence (Farmer 1996), and the denial of membership, either by forcing people to flee their country of citizenship or by preventing them from being granted membership in the country where they reside. As individuals are dismembered, so too are nations whose citizens go elsewhere or that are made up of people who officially do not belong (Coutin 2007). It is sometimes hard to discern the violence of such processes, as the very state practices that define individuals as outsiders—practices such as surveillance and requests for identity documents—can become so common that they are taken for granted (Coddington 2011). Such erasures of dismemberment obscure the histories through which people become deportable or crime becomes rampant or police adopt authoritarian measures.

Thus, through dismemberment, histories are repressed or distorted.<sup>2</sup> Examples of such erasures of knowledge abound.<sup>3</sup> Regarding South Africa, Martha Minow (1999) and other scholars (e.g., Wilson 2001) have examined how the extent of atrocities committed by the apartheid regime was publicly denied. Regarding Argentina, Diana Taylor (1997) developed the notion of percepticide to describe the ways that, during the 1976–1983 dirty war, Argentine military rulers “disappeared” people in broad daylight, while also discouraging the general populace from “knowing” about or acknowledging the reality of the disappearances. Taylor writes that the military repression was “a performance that ‘disappears’ its audience” (61). Even as instances of state repression were erased from public knowledge, accounts of the dangers that alleged “subversives” posed to the Argentine nation circulated widely and were cited to justify the role that the Argentine military assumed in public life. “Not knowing” is therefore made possible through a public performance of a void, the knowledge that cannot be permitted to circulate. And regarding responses to state terrorism, the movement to make truth commissions and international criminal courts key components of democratization derives in part from the need to set the record straight about human rights violations (Hayner 1994; Kaye 1997; Roche 2005).

In the United States, the scapegoating of immigrants for crime, terrorism, cultural change, and the nation’s economic woes is another example of historical erasure.<sup>4</sup> Leo Chavez has identified the popular myth that there is a “Latino threat” that jeopardizes the United States through illegality, overpopulation, pollution, and disease (2008; see also Inda 2006). This myth ignores the fact that “illegal aliens” were produced historically, as changes in U.S. immigration

law and policy forbade the presence of certain people, while creating opportunities for others to legalize (Ngai 2004). Even noncitizens who are in this country legally are on “probation,” so to speak, in that their legal status can be revoked if they are convicted of certain crimes or if they fail to meet paperwork deadlines and presence requirements (Kanstrom 2007; Motomura 2006). Border enforcement has given rise to a burgeoning detention-center industry (Welch 2002), pushed border crossers into terrain where they face increased risks (Nevins 2002), and made the journey for undocumented migrants both more expensive and more deadly (Andreas 2012). These enforcement practices *naturalize* borders, citizens, and aliens, that is, they treat them as naturally existing, rather than socially and historically constructed phenomena.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast to dismemberment, re/membering not only reveals these histories but also makes it possible to draw connections between them. Children who immigrated during the 1980–1992 Salvadoran civil war experienced multiple forms of violence, including bombings, battles, the assassination of family members, displacement, separation from loved ones, and immigration policies that forced many to hide their presence while living in the United States as unauthorized immigrants. Emigration exiled young people from the lives and places they had occupied before, creating profound disjunctures that they subsequently sought to understand, overcome, or, in some cases, reinforce.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, emigration transformed nations, dispersing the Salvadoran citizenry, altering neighborhoods in the United States and elsewhere, creating new understandings of ethnicity and nationality, and reconfiguring the spaces that young people left behind and joined. For youths, such rapid reconfigurations entailed erasures—of knowledge, memory, history, and being. Indeed, some of the most profound erasures occurred in the 1990s and 2000s, when youths who grew up in the United States were deported to El Salvador, thus reproducing (but in the reverse direction) the family separations that they had experienced as children (Dingeman-Cerda and Coutin 2012). Such displacements, erasures, and traumas have been both countered and exacerbated through various forms of re/membering (Schwab 2010). Youths revisit their own pasts, students organize on behalf of the undocumented, activists forge new relationships with the Salvadoran state, Central American writers record their communities’ histories, and state officials seek to incorporate diasporic citizenries. These strategies, with their complex effects and gaps, reshape nations, citizens, and membership.

As an analytical concept and a social practice, re/membering makes at least four contributions to understanding migration and social violence. First, by

providing access to subjective experiences, re/membering reveals commonalities in the violence of war, poverty, crime, exile, emigration, criminalization, and deportation. Both in the United States and under international law, political asylum has been reserved for individuals with a well-founded fear of being persecuted due to their race, religion, nationality, social-group membership, or political opinion (Bohmer and Shuman 2008; Smith 1989). In contrast, individuals who are fleeing dire economic circumstances or criminal violence have been subjected to deportation if apprehended (Harris 1993). Such distinctions depoliticize economic deprivation and citizen insecurity, while also creating the potential for explicitly political violence to be turned into something else, at least discursively.<sup>7</sup> Importantly, re/membered accounts highlight not only the indirect impacts of violence on those who are exposed to its effects, but also the violence that is intrinsic to securitization and border control (Mountz 2010). Individuals are not intrinsically “illegal” or deportable; rather, they have to be made to be so (Dauvergne 2008; Ngai 2004). This redefinition is accomplished through a series of actions and omissions, such as bureaucratic delays, denying asylum to alleged “economic immigrants,” and distinguishing between generalized and direct violence. Violence thus takes both mundane and dramatic forms (Arias and Goldstein 2010), a theme that is further developed in chapter 1.

Second, in that they address both membership and memory, re/membered accounts reconnect subjects to national communities. Personal stories stand in for those of a broader community (Cho 2008) and thus potentially can overcome “gaps between certain official versions of the past (history) and under-represented understandings of the past (memory)” (DeLugan 2012:107; see also Darian-Smith 2007; DeLugan 2010). Even though history has been seen as objective and memory as subjective, the two are linked in that “memory is what establishes the relationship of the individual to history” (Visweswaran 1994:68). In fact, because numerous legal processes require individuals to produce personal narratives, biographies are both the substance of testimonies *and* products of law, though they take different forms in different contexts. Asylum applicants produce affidavits recounting their experiences of persecution, individuals seeking a suspension of deportation detail the extreme hardship that a potential removal would cause them, and naturalization applicants must demonstrate their “good moral character” over the five years (three in the case of those who are spouses of U.S. citizens) that they have been legal permanent residents. “Biographies” in the form of criminal records or arrest histories can also be used to disqualify individuals for particular statuses. In

the case of deported 1.5-generation youths—that is, those who immigrated as young children and who therefore share characteristics of both first-generation immigrants who are born outside of the country and second-generation immigrants who are raised in the United States (Abrego 2011; Kim et al. 2003)—the securitization of immigration law has made de facto membership both salient and elusive. This theme is explored further in chapters 4 and 5.

Third, re/membering is temporally complex in that it entails revisiting the past with an eye toward achieving a more just future. Re/membering suggests that far from being inert, the past haunts the present. Avery Gordon defines haunting as “an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known” (1997:xvi). Re/membering such unresolved social violence is a creative process, one that involves “putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible” (22). Re/membering is thus akin to *archaeology* in that it excavates the historical layers that underlie current realities, making it possible to reconnect historical conditions (such as violence that provokes emigration) to what might otherwise appear to be intrinsic individual characteristics (such as illegality). Chapter 4 explores this process further by detailing the uncanny repetitions through which denials of asylum during the 1980s left some Salvadoran youths vulnerable to deportation in the 2000s. Re/membering such historical conditions is also generative in that revisiting “the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place” makes it possible to produce “a countermemory, for the future” (22). Thus, alongside historical repetitions are differences that appear through attention to *generation*, a theme taken up in chapter 2, which examines the lives of 1.5-generation and second-generation migrants growing up in the United States, and chapter 3, which analyzes youth activism.

Fourth, re/membering highlights ways that both memory and membership are spatialized through presence, absence, and return. By fixing origin and nationality, law has the power to pull individuals to particular territories, to make them disappear from others, and even to place them outside of nations altogether, thus exiling them from “homes” in multiple senses (McGuire and Coutin 2013). Temporal calculations of presence and absence are therefore also spatializations. Additionally, to the degree that Salvadoranness in the United States has been defined in relation to an origin elsewhere, youths who strive to find and/or produce their own identities often *return*, whether literally or figuratively, to their countries of origin.<sup>8</sup> Whether legally present or unauthorized, noncitizens occupy an ambiguous zone between societal membership and legal exclusion,<sup>9</sup> with the result that those who are removed through deportation

are key members of U.S. families and communities. In fact, Kanstroom (2007) writes of the de facto deportation of U.S.-citizen children and spouses who accompany deportees. Re/membering engages such spatialization in that it both seeks legal recognition of the de facto forms of membership that youths who are not (or not yet) citizens already practice *and* challenges racializing exclusions to which even citizens are subjected (de Genova and Ramos-Zayas 2003), themes developed in chapters 3 and 4. Thus, young people's accounts of their own lives compete with more dominant interpretations, in which, for example, the violence that compelled them to emigrate is defined as poverty or in which the marginalization they experienced in the United States is defined as a likelihood that they will become criminals. These competing interpretations of origins and trajectories make the space and time "before" emigration one of flux and conditionality. Exploring this alternative understanding of origin as one of movement rather than stasis gestures toward futures in which multiple memberships might be acknowledged.

### **Youth Migration between the United States and El Salvador**

The idea for doing the research for this book was inspired by interviews that I conducted in 2000–2001 with 1.5-generation Salvadoran migrants. At the time, I was conducting interviews with Salvadorans who had pending applications for U.S. residency. Although most of these interviewees had migrated as adults, I had occasion to interview young people who had immigrated as children and grown up in the United States. I was immediately struck by the differences between their experiences and those of other interviewees. For example, in contrast to accounts of adult migrants who described El Salvador as the place in which they had lived, worked, or studied, a recently naturalized 1.5-generation Salvadoran woman who had never returned to her homeland described El Salvador as "this fabled place. It's like enchanted. It's like, it's like a fantasy to me. . . . There's a large part of me that is still there . . . living." Another 1.5-generation Salvadoran woman, who had a pending application for U.S. residency, felt that her lack of permanent legal status in the United States and her lack of memory of El Salvador made her unreal: "It's like—there is nothing. There is nothing here, there is nothing there. . . . You're just walking around, and you're just, you're like invisible to everything else. Everybody else is solid but you're not." These interviewees' descriptions of El Salvador, a place to which they felt tied by birth and perhaps also (in the case of the second speaker) by potential future deportation, highlighted both the power and in-

accessibility of origin. The first speaker imagined El Salvador as “enchanted,” whereas the second speaker thought of it as a void. What did El Salvador mean to youths who were Salvadoran citizens but who primarily knew the United States? And how were these meanings produced?

These questions about origin, status, and belonging resonate with the experiences of other immigrant communities in the United States. It is not uncommon for 1.5-generation youths to be pulled between nations, feeling that they are both here *and* in their country of origin, while also fearing that they belong in neither place (Boehm 2012; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ávila 1997; Zavella 2011). Immigrant families from multiple nations have experienced marginalization and social exclusion, particularly due to their legal status, with even U.S.-citizen children of migrant parents worrying about the deportation of family members (Dreby 2012, 2015; Gurrola, Ayón, and Salas 2013; Jefferies 2014). Many migrant children have had to endure separations from family members, violence in their country of origin, or trauma while en route to the United States (Abrego 2014b; Boehm 2012; Foner and Dreby 2011; Jaycox et al. 2002; Ong 2003). As well, Salvadorans who have migrated to other countries, such as Canada or Costa Rica, have encountered discrimination, have struggled with the ambiguity of their identities and social locations, and have sometimes turned to historic examples of resistance—such as the 1932 peasant uprising that gave rise to mass killings of indigenous people in El Salvador, or even the Salvadoran civil war—for inspiration in overcoming such challenges (Carranza 2007; Hayden 2003). These commonalities suggest that the material recounted in this book speaks to the circumstances of other immigrant groups as well.

At the same time, across these commonalities, the experiences of 1.5-generation and second-generation Salvadoran youths who came to the United States during the 1980s and 1990s are also unique in several key ways. First, as detailed further in chapter 1, there is a historical specificity to the events that led them and their families to emigrate. Young people were particularly affected due to forced recruitment, frequent university closures, bombings that drove civilians out of rural communities, and death-squad activity against suspected dissidents. The pages that follow will recount numerous instances of social violence, including those of a Salvadoran college student who saw photographs of the Salvadoran civil war and came to understand these images as part of his own history, a boy who found a hand in a garbage dump in his hometown and did not consider that out of the ordinary, a woman who only learned from her cousin that her mother had almost been killed during the

war, a child who witnessed an execution and then played with the corpse, and young people who want to understand the relationships among such events, their lives in the United States, and their connections to El Salvador.

Second, the unique legal history of Salvadoran immigrants to the United States poses in a particularly stark fashion what are wider dilemmas surrounding memory and membership. During the 1980s, Salvadorans who fled to the United States without authorization were told that the violence that they had experienced was not political, that they had not been “singled out” for persecution, and that they could return safely to their homeland. Many remained in the United States anyway, avoiding apprehension if possible. In 1990, Salvadorans were allowed to apply for Temporary Protected Status (TPS), which had been newly created by the Immigration Act of 1990. Additionally, in 1991, a class-action suit that was settled out of court gave Salvadorans and Guatemalans the right to *de novo* asylum hearings.<sup>10</sup> These two remedies resulted in temporary statuses that did not authorize Salvadorans to petition for their relatives to join them in the United States or to travel to El Salvador to visit family members but did allow recipients to remain in the country. Then, in 1997, passage of the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA) enabled Salvadorans and Guatemalan TPS recipients and asylum applicants to seek legal permanent residency on the basis of the lives that they had created in the United States instead of on their need for refuge. This was an important development, given that peace accords were signed in El Salvador in 1992 and in Guatemala in 1996, thus largely placing asylum out of reach. Yet interim NACARA regulations were not issued until 1999, with the result that most applicants could not obtain residency until the 2000s. This long legal struggle denied membership to Salvadorans for many years while also denying legal recognition of the conditions that had caused them to migrate in the first place.

Third, immigration enforcement, which escalated in the mid-1990s, had a particularly strong impact on Latino youths in the United States, including Salvadorans. Restrictive federal legislation that was passed in 1996 stiffened the immigration consequences of criminal convictions and foreclosed many other avenues of legalization, with devastating consequences for Salvadorans and other migrants. Deportations to El Salvador, a country of approximately six million, skyrocketed from 3,928 in 2001 to 37,049 in 2013, making El Salvador the fourth most common destination for removals from the United States (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2011; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement 2013). With these escalated deportations, once again, family members were being separated, as deportees left behind parents, siblings, and

children. Once again, deportees were subjected to violence, in this case, by gang members, security guards, and sometimes the police. And once again, this violence was largely considered apolitical in nature and therefore not grounds for asylum in the United States.

Fourth, while immigration from El Salvador to the United States had existed previously, dramatic increases when the war began in the 1980s meant that Salvadoran children who immigrated then were the first large-scale generation of Salvadorans to be raised in the United States. The 1.5-generation migrants and their U.S.-born counterparts were socialized in U.S. schools, formed part of the fabric of U.S. neighborhoods, and sought to create new definitions of Salvadoranness in the United States (Baker-Cristals 2004a). There is a story neither of straight assimilation nor of a transnational identity, though it shares features of each (Menjívar 2002; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut and Portes 2001). Rather, the 1.5-generation and second-generation Salvadoran and Central American activists, organizers, writers, artists, and students whom I interviewed described an effort to create a new space and public presence for members of their generation, one distinct from their parents' generation and from that occupied by other ethnic and racial groups in the United States. Youths emphasized the need to move away from the issues of refugee rights that defined earlier Central American struggles (including the 1987 caravan) to instead focus on such concerns as access to higher education, media imagery associating Salvadoranness with gangs, and the quality of inner-city schools. In this sense, Salvadoran youths were like other immigrant children, who found it important to establish political and social agendas that differed from those of their parents' generation (Kasinitz, Mollenk, and Waters 2004). At the same time, youths sought to distinguish themselves as Salvadorans and Central Americans from Chicanos or Latin Americans more generally. Thus, Salvadoran youths sought to generate their own identities, create new institutions, and secure public recognition in a specifically U.S. context.

I should note that, in examining the experiences of 1.5- and second-generation Salvadorans, I use the term *youth* to convey both a particular life point (the formative stage in which one anticipates or has recently gone through the transition to adulthood) and a loosely bounded generation (individuals who were children during the Salvadoran civil war and its immediate aftermath). In this sense, I am attempting to consider both "the effects of historical period" (that is, immigrating during the civil war) and "generation-since-immigration" (that is, being part of the 1.5 and second generation of Salvadoran immigrants) (Telles and Ortiz 2008:283). At the same time, I do not

want to overemphasize homogeneity, given that “‘generation’ can perhaps be more accurately conceived of as a spectrum of different life experiences” than as a clearly bounded category (Boehm 2012:115). I suppose I also use *youth* to signal the fact, generally speaking, that I am from the same generation as their parents, the cohort who immigrated as adults during the civil war. Indeed, as I interacted with interviewees, I found myself thinking that many were in the same age range as my undergraduates and were just a bit older than my own children. At the same time, *youth* has analytical significance for this project, because it was the potential discrepancy between being born in El Salvador but raised in the United States that created the conundrum that is the focus of this study. As Sharika Thiranagama explains, “Youth as an ‘age span’ has a particular charged valence within . . . the shuttling back and forth between experience, relations, structures and selves” (2011:45). Likewise, Cal Morrill and colleagues define youth as “a socially constructed category located in liminal social spaces, at the blurred boundaries between ‘childhood’ and ‘adulthood’” (2000:526, citations omitted). Salvadoran immigrant youths’ accounts of shuttling across such blurred boundaries reveal how nations, persons, and histories are remembered and reassembled in the aftermath of violence.

## Ethnography

My analysis of the relationships that 1.5-generation and second-generation youths have forged with the United States and El Salvador relies on ethnography, which I see less as a “research method” than as a way of knowing. As such, ethnography has much in common with the re/membering practices in which Salvadoran youths are engaged. For one, although anthropological approaches to ethnography have in the past assumed that individuals were part of clearly bounded cultural groups, this view has come into question. Writing in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (2004) described the anthropological problem of enumerating cultures and representing them. Now it is not clear what “a” culture is—a particular village? a region? a kin group? a nation?—nor is it clear how to bound the categories “Salvadoran,” “Central American,” or “youth.” For another, drawing on the work of Stephen Tyler, Strathern suggested that ethnographies produced knowledge by evoking certain responses in readers and therefore were evocative rather than representational. Likewise, testimonies disseminate knowledge by making listeners witnesses to the events that are narrated (Hirsch 1998) and thus to the collective realities that individual accounts convey (Arias 2001; Behar

1996; Beverley 2004; Nance 2006). Both testimonies and ethnography enable individuals to enter realities that are imagined as simultaneously whole and partial, representative of a collectivity and yet narrated from particular experience. Ethnographies therefore put forward truth claims by assembling the documentary record that makes them evident.<sup>11</sup>

The documentary record on which this book relies was assembled through interviews with migrants in Southern California and in El Salvador, discussions with officials and advocates who work with such migrants, and my own prior involvement in and research about legal and political advocacy on behalf of Central Americans. I met interviewees in various ways. I made announcements in Central American studies classes taught by my friends, as well as in large lecture courses. I met leaders of Central American student groups, who then referred me to their co-organizers. I consulted with Salvadoran youths who worked in community organizations. The legal staff at the Central American Resource Center (CARECEN) in Los Angeles helped me to locate TPS registrants who were 1.5-generation migrants. Some interviewees gave me names of relatives or coworkers. I sent out email announcements to list-servs for students who participated in the California Dream Network. And in El Salvador, I worked with the San Salvador offices of CARECEN Internacional and Homies Unidos to locate 1.5-generation migrants who had been deported.

Between 2006 and 2010, I interviewed 106 individuals, consisting of forty 1.5-generation and second-generation youths in Southern California; forty-one youths who had been deported and who were interviewed in El Salvador; and twenty-five nongovernmental organization members or immigrant rights organizers who worked with youths in California or in El Salvador. The age of the 1.5-generation and second-generation youths interviewed in the United States ranged from eighteen to thirty-seven, with an average age of twenty-five (most were in their twenties). Interviewees who had been deported were somewhat older, from twenty-two to sixty-nine with an average age of thirty-three. But when a couple of outliers (the sixty-nine-year-old and a fifty-two-year-old) are removed, all but two of the remaining deportee sample were in their twenties and thirties, and the average age of deportees interviewed drops to thirty-one. Interviewees included undocumented college students in the United States, deportees struggling to find their place within El Salvador, immigrant rights activists, poets, writers, student organizers, TPS recipients, gang violence prevention workers, newly naturalized U.S. citizens, Salvadoran officials who worked with deportees, and some Salvadoran youths born in the United States to immigrant parents. Interviews, which each lasted one to two

hours in duration, examined migrant youths' legal histories, that is, youths' lives in El Salvador, emigration to the United States, future plans, and returns to El Salvador (in some instances, as deportees). Interviewees' legal statuses varied and included U.S. citizenship, lawful permanent residency, TPS, asylum seekers, and undocumented. Approximately half of the U.S. interviewees were women, whereas, due to the difficulty of recruiting female participants, all of the deportees who were interviewed were men.<sup>12</sup> Follow-up interviews were conducted with about half of the U.S. participants at one to two years after the original interviews. These made it possible to track changes in interviewees' attitudes and circumstances. I also draw on interviews with ten 1.5-generation Salvadorans that I conducted in 2000–2001 as part of my earlier research, for a total “sample” of 116. Unless otherwise noted, throughout this book, pseudonyms are used for all interviewees.

Clearly, this sample is not representative of Salvadoran youths in the United States or of the broader population of deportees. Given that I accessed individuals through universities and community organizations, the U.S. sample is probably better educated, on average, than the broader population of Salvadoran youth. Nonetheless, this potential skewing has the advantage of including individuals who had already assumed leadership positions and who, through their own activism, scholarship, and, in some cases, business activities, were directly or indirectly helping to define what it meant to be Salvadoran or Central American within the United States. It is important to recognize, though, that there are many Salvadoran immigrant youths who were not able to attend college and who were working at low-income jobs. The experiences of several such individuals are discussed at some length in the pages that follow. Furthermore, those who were interviewed in El Salvador included numerous individuals who had not made it through high school and who faced such challenges as drug addiction, gang membership, and criminal convictions. While many deportees were also taking on leadership positions in their own workplaces and communities, others continued to be challenged in seeking employment and other opportunities. Interviewees' occupations varied widely and included professional positions (for instance, in universities or corporations), self-employment, blue-collar work (in construction or transportation), studying, and being unemployed. Each interviewee received a \$35 gift certificate or (in El Salvador) cash as compensation for participating.

Interviews coincided with and therefore described events of national and international importance, including the 2006 mass mobilization in the

United States on behalf of immigrants' rights, efforts to secure comprehensive immigration-reform legislation, the election of the first Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, or FMLN, the coalition that made up the guerrilla forces in El Salvador and that has since become a political party) Salvadoran president in 2009, advocacy surrounding the California and federal Dream acts (addressing the legal status and financial aid eligibility of undocumented college students), the passage of Arizona Senate Bill 1070 (which required noncitizens to carry identification and authorized Arizona police to question individuals regarding their immigration status), and the impact of the 2008–2009 recession and its sluggish recovery on immigrant communities. Interviews also discussed deeply personal issues, such as postponing marriage in order to maintain eligibility for a family-based visa, reunions with parents following lengthy separations, and the psychological impacts of being deported. When possible, I also participated in conferences, meetings, festivals, and other events organized by or about youths.

It is important to note that the biographical accounts that I elicited during interviews were not unlike those produced as part of broader efforts to re/member the histories of Salvadoran youths in the United States. It was common for students and community organizations to deploy individual testimonies as part of advocacy work. For instance, the Students United to Reach Goals in Education (SURGE), a student group at California State University, Los Angeles, occasionally put out calls for “testimonies” over its list-serv, and, during an act of political theater at the L.A. city hall in December 2007, it featured the personal stories of three students who were either undocumented or who supported educational access for undocumented students (see chapter 3). Such stories are more examples of *testimonio*. Other interviewees collected oral histories themselves, as part of a *memoria histórica* (historic memory) project designed to document the history and cultural life of Central Americans (see also Silber 2011). Although they were elicited during interviews, the narratives that I analyze here—and, indeed, the decision to participate in an interview—were linked to this advocacy work. For example, one interviewee, an electrician who had never attended college, likened being interviewed to marching for TPS renewal. For him, telling me of his experiences was a form of collaboration. Therefore, my own ethnographic activities cannot be set apart from the forms of re/membering that I analyze in this book. The narratives generated during interviews were also acts of re/membering.

I analyze interview material against the backdrop of other work that I have done, some of which—such as my short caravan experience—I bring forward here.<sup>13</sup> I became involved in Central American issues through the work of Salvadorans and Guatemalans who sought to publicize human rights abuses and mobilize U.S. solidarity workers (Perla and Coutin 2010). When the Salvadoran civil war began, I was an undergraduate student at the University of California, Berkeley, and, though aware of the conflict, was not particularly involved in solidarity work. I do recall participating in a dance marathon to raise funds for CISPES, the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador. The dance team that won the marathon's costume contest came as Ronald Reagan's domino theory, each dancer dressed as a domino with "Cuba," "Nicaragua," "El Salvador," or "Your backyard" written on his or her cap. Later, as a graduate student at Stanford, when I was homing in on Latin America as my area of research specialization, I attended meetings of the Stanford Central American Action Network (SCAAN), a group that, before my time, published an edited volume entitled *Revolution in Central America* (SCAAN 1983). I remember joining the Stanford contingent of a peace and freedom parade in San Francisco and chanting as participants marched through the streets. In 1984, I spent the summer in Colombia studying Spanish, and in 1985, I spent three months in Argentina, studying at a university in Buenos Aires and interviewing members of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, an organization made up of mothers who demanded justice for young people who had been disappeared during the dirty war in Argentina. My experience in Argentina deepened my interest in and commitment to human rights issues. When the 1985 Tucson sanctuary trial made national news, I realized that the sorts of concerns being addressed by the Madres were playing out in my own community, where Central Americans who were fleeing violence and persecution were not being granted refuge. I therefore decided to make the sanctuary movement the subject of my doctoral dissertation.

For me, the sanctuary research that took me to the 1987 caravan initiated over two decades of research focused on political and legal advocacy by and on behalf of Central Americans. In 1987–1988, I lived first in Oakland, California, and then in Tucson, Arizona, while doing fieldwork within the sanctuary movement. As part of my fieldwork, I participated in sanctuary coalitions, answered phones at the East Bay Sanctuary Covenant office, collected clothing and food donations, scheduled speakers, interpreted for doctors who offered free services to Central American refugees, documented asylum applications, attended

church services and vigils, translated during public testimonies, observed asylum hearings, and interviewed more than one hundred movement participants. My 1993 book about the U.S. sanctuary movement detailed how movement participants drew on and reinterpreted law, culture, and their faiths as they created a means and a language of protesting violence in Central America. By the mid-1990s, I lived in Los Angeles, home to approximately half of the Salvadoran population in the United States, and I embarked on my second major research project: a study of the ways that Salvadorans and Guatemalans who had spent the 1980s seeking asylum devised new legal strategies in the 1990s, after the civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala came to an end. For that project, I also did fieldwork, which consisted of volunteering with the legal services programs of three Los Angeles–based Central American community organizations, observing immigration court hearings, attending protests and marches on behalf of immigrants’ rights, and interviewing activists, attorneys, and Central Americans with pending asylum applications (Coutin 2000). In 2000–2002, I turned to my third major project: a study of the significance of the Salvadoran population for El Salvador and for the United States. Through interviews with government officials, advocates, and migrants in Los Angeles, Washington, DC, and San Salvador, I analyzed how it was that, in a time of heightened immigration restriction, exceptions were carved out for Salvadoran migrants who, in the 1980s, had been regarded as undeserving of a legal status (Coutin 2007). For me, research was always a way to advance both knowledge and justice, in that I sought to document and make visible the experiences of groups (refugees, the undocumented) that have been marginalized in the United States.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout this book, I interweave snippets of such material both as a way to situate myself in the accounts and histories presented here and as part of the documentary process entailed in re/membering. Like youths who seek (or, in a few cases, want to leave behind) their own histories, I include prior moments of community history that I have experienced and that can contribute in some sense to the “record.” I also draw on literary and cultural sources (novels, performances) where appropriate. Such forms of knowledge or explication are part of the cultural production of Central American youths (Rodríguez 2009), and I employ them (but in abbreviated form) neither to further analyze nor to buttress my own claims, but rather to evoke. I therefore conclude this introduction with an account of one such experience, a dramatic production that exhorted audience members to explore and recount their own histories, in short, to re/member.



FIGURE 1.1 Dress left behind at El Mozote. Reprinted with permission of the Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen in San Salvador, El Salvador.



FIGURE 1.2 Actress Rocio Enriquez in *De la locura a la esperanza*. Reprinted with permission from William Flores. Photo from the play, *De la locura a la esperanza*.

## ¿Y la Suya? (and Yours?)

OCTOBER 24, 2009. With great excitement, I approached the Los Angeles Theatre Center to see a performance of the play *De la locura a la esperanza*, written and directed by William Flores. The play's title was the same as a 1993 truth commission report on El Salvador. Central American advocates had pointed out to me that it was hugely significant that this play, dedicated to recounting Salvadoran history, was being performed in such a key Los Angeles venue.

The play was accompanied by an exhibit from the Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen in San Salvador. The exhibit featured photographs of the civil war and artifacts from El Mozote, the site of one of the most infamous massacres in which, in December 1981, residents of an entire village had been killed, with the exception of a single survivor. I was particularly sobered by a delicate child's dress and toy on display in a case.

In the theater, I stood in line with Salvadorans speaking English and Spanish, and I saw people I knew from my work with community organizations. I took a seat inside and watched as the curtain rose to reveal a dress that resembled a shroud. The form took life as a woman—seemingly a ghost, evoking Rufina Amaya, the lone survivor of the massacre at El Mozote—recounted the history of her community:

Siento un poco de temor al hablar de todo esto, pero al mismo tiempo reflexiono que mis hijos murieron inocentemente. ¿Porque voy a sentir miedo de decir la verdad? Ha sido una realidad lo que han hecho y tenemos que ser fuertes para decirlo. [I am a little afraid to speak of all this, but at the same time, I reflect that my children died innocently. Why am I going to be afraid to tell the truth? What they have done is a reality, and we have to be strong to tell it.]<sup>15</sup>

Folk dancers performed scenes of courtship and village life. Then the army arrived, and a voice-over reminded audience members that the United States had supplied the Salvadoran government with more than \$4 billion in military aid during the war. In a chilling scene, soldiers destroyed the corn that village women had gathered, throwing stones and brutally stomping as the name of each child killed in El Mozote was read. After this destruction, the ghostlike woman lamented the loss, with great anguish. But the play concluded with a message of hope. A children's chorus sang:

Que canten los niños que alcen la voz, que hagan al mundo escuchar,  
que unan sus voces y lleguen al sol en ellos está la verdad  
Que canten los niños que viven en paz y aquellos que sufren dolor,  
que canten por esos que no cantarán porque han apagado su voz

[Let the children sing, let them raise their voice, let the world be made to  
listen  
let their voices unite and reach the sun, in them is the truth,  
May the children who live in peace and those who suffer sing,  
let them sing for those who will not sing because their voice has been  
silenced.]<sup>16</sup>

The woman concluded by emphasizing the importance of preserving history. She repeated, “Esta es mi historia. ¿Y la suya? ¿Y la suya? ¿Y la suya?” (This is my story. And yours? And yours? And yours?)<sup>17</sup> Once again, she froze at center stage, as though her moment to come to life had run out, and, behind a screen, her body disappeared, to be replaced once more by a shroudlike dress.

And, reader, what is *your* story?