Reinventing the Left(s) in El Salvador and Nicaragua: Revolutionary Legacies, Movement-State Negotiations, and Competing Projects of Governance

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As examples of leftist "pink tide" governments in Latin America, the administrations of the FMLN in El Salvador (2009-2019) and the FSLN (Sandinistas) in Nicaragua (2006-present) have seldom been studied, despite constituting the contemporary political manifestations of two of the most frequently studied cases of revolution. The revolutionary leaders of the 1980s attained state power through democratic elections during the 2000s, while their popular bases formed a diversity of social movements in democratic contexts. But after roughly a decade of leftist rule in the two countries—punctuated by electoral defeats in 2018-19 that jettisoned the FMLN from political power, and the Sandinista government's use of brutal repression to quell peaceful popular rebellion in 2018, ending all semblances of democracy—it was clear that the left was in crisis. In consonance with regional trends, I argue that this "crisis" of the left also marked its *reinvention.* In both organizational and ideological terms, social movements grounded in revolutionary traditions but nourished by "new" discourses of collective liberation (including feminism, environmentalism, peace building, and autonomy) are reinventing not only "leftist" politics, but democratic politics more generally, and forging innovative practices that illuminate new horizons for social change. My extensive ethnographic fieldwork demonstrates how and why these practices and horizons look quite different in the two countries, but also how movement-led *projects of governance* are now at the forefront of leftist politics. In El Salvador, the FMLN's relative openness enabled movement-state negotiations leading to "critical collaboration" and "co-

governance" on certain issues, cross-party cooperation at local levels on others, and a downward displacement of political power toward social movement actors on still others. In Nicaragua by contrast, the Ortega regime's authoritarianism closed all spaces for negotiation and demonized autonomous movements, leading to movements' efforts for "self-managed" projects of governance in certain sectors. While myriad obstacles and contradictions—including "NGO-ization", state authoritarianism, various sources of violence, and internal movement hierarchies—continue to threaten popular agendas, post-revolutionary leftist politics in Central America are increasingly feminist, environmentalist, and movement-led, as well as more flexible and autonomous vis a vis traditional political structures, and more internally egalitarian.

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Preface

The questions that gave life to this dissertation first began haunting me about 14 years ago as I lived and worked in El Salvador alongside Salvadorans who had suddenly demobilized when their political allies, the leftist FMLN party, assumed the executive branch of government in 2009. I thought there seemed to be a momentous opportunity being lost by social movement organizations and activists in not attempting to push the new government toward the sort of deep, radical change that I had understood so many of us to be working for. At that time, I felt myself an intimate part of the struggles of organization such as the CCR and CRIPDES and SHARE to make El Salvador more equitable and just (see chapter 2), and though I am more distant from those organizations now, I hope that this work contributes to the types of thinking, dialogue, and action that can contribute to making any corner of this world more equitable, just, and ecologically harmonious.

While my experiences, reflections, and collective work with the Salvadoran people have guided me during every step of this process—even from afar in both spatial and temporal terms—this work falls inevitably short of capturing the richness and complexity of the experiences and struggles that I have tried to give voice to in El Salvador and Nicaragua. Nevertheless, if it weren't for the countless meetings, conversations, assemblies, workshops, demonstrations, speeches, visits, arguments, and deeply human relationships that I've had the privilege to be a part of for the last decade and a half, this work would not exist. Following the late Dean Brackley S.J., the Salvadoran people truly broke my heart, something for which I will be eternally grateful.

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I give deep thanks to my family: to my brother Jimmy for instilling in me an autonomous spirit, to my dad Jim and mom Beth, for modeling lives of love and service. I only wish my mom was still here to see this, as she was the one who always knew that I was actually writing a book when I first came home from El Salvador.

And finally, Sarah, thank you for saying thank you all those years back on the side of the road. This is for you. I can’t imagine my life with anyone else.

1.0 Introduction: Reinventing "What is to be Done?"

Anyone who has seriously grappled with the pain and possibility, the injustice and joy, the conflict and cooperation that simultaneously characterize human existence on this planet has asked the question of "what is to be done?". Whether in the darkest reaches of our mind, in hushed whispers by campfire light, or in packed townhalls in front of elected officials and fellow citizens, we want to know what is to be done. We want to know how to orient our action to achieve our objectives; whether to enact or rescind policies, regulate or liberate business, stop or make war, to reform the system or tear it down and start again, or to ask better questions that may provide us with better answers.

Indeed, the question of what is to be done immediately begs further questions. As soon as we ask what we should do to achieve our objectives; we are bombarded with sub-questions: Who are *we*? What are *our* objectives? Who is trying to do something else? How effective are *they*? Can *we* negotiate with *them*? Must we fight them? Or must we flee from them? Can we leave each other alone? We may get bogged down with these questions or we may take them for granted and return again to the primary question: what is to be done?

It just so happens that one of the most famous people to ask the question of what is to be done had a fairly compelling answer for a good many people for the larger party of the 20th century: Vladimir Lenin, inspired by Karl Marx, argued for the creation of a revolutionary vanguard party that would violently overthrow the existing regime, spark rebellion among the willing masses, and subsequently usher in a communist utopia. It didn't go quite like this in Russia

in 1917,[1] but the Bolshevik revolution seemed successful enough that myriad movements around the world in the 20th century tried to emulate the Marxist-Leninist model to some degree.

Among the most successful emulations of the Marxist-Leninist model occurred on the slender Central American isthmus in El Salvador and Nicaragua (Beck 2018). Both of these countries passed through revolutionary processes in the 1970's and 80's in which initially small, committed groups of organic intellectuals developed military strategies that either toppled an authoritarian regime in conjunction with mass insurrection (Nicaragua in 1979) to usher in a decade of democratic-socialist rule, or led to a protracted civil war in which large swathes of the country were controlled by socialist guerrilla armies which would have easily overcome that country's military juntas if not for the US's overwhelming support for the existing regime (El Salvador from 1980-1992).

In the early 1990's the revolutionary experiments in these countries were eclipsed by structural trends at a world-systemic level toward democracy in the political arena (already instituted by the Sandinistas in Nicaragua) and by global capitalism—as opposed to nation-state capitalism—in the economic realm (Robinson 2003). The immediate response to the question of what is to be done by revolutionary forces turned from "overthrow the bourgeoisie" to "win democratic elections" while the long-term objective still ostensibly remained to use state power to usher in a socialist society. But such lofty objectives seemed increasingly far-fetched during the 1990's as a "neoliberal" phase of capitalism enabled capital to flow around the globe relatively free of state regulation, searching for the cheapest labor, the lightest tax burdens, and the weakest

[1] See Rabinowitch (2007) for an account of how starkly the path to revolution in Russia in 1917 diverged from what had been written by Lenin in *What is to Be Done* in 1902.

environmental regulations. El Salvador and Nicaragua became attractive sites for global investors as right-wing parties enthusiastically implemented free-market policies in line with the global "hegemony" of neoliberal ideology, while the already poor and marginalized majorities of these countries—many of whom had invested their precious few resources and abundant hope in the revolutions of the previous decades—became more destitute and desperate, as they were told that there "was no alternative" to the new system.

In El Salvador, the former guerrilla army Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) had become a minority, if still very significant socialist party that vied for municipal governments and ever-more seats in the Salvadoran legislature through the course of the 1990's and early 2000's. For its part, the once-revolutionary governing party of Nicaragua, the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN, or "Sandinistas"), also maintained its leftist ideology and began rebuilding its mobilizational power by democratic means after being voted out of power in 1990, but also had begun secret negotiations with right wing forces to one day return to political power. These parties' maturations as democratic forces developed in line with the economic and political exhaustion of the neoliberal model. By 2006 in Nicaragua, and 2009 in El Salvador, the FSLN and FMLN had attained executive political power through elections.

Such a sea change in fortune for leftism was not uncommon in Latin America during this time. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Latin America was the site of unprecedented social and political transformations as a "pink tide" swept the region. Inspired by the legacies of 20th century revolutionary struggles (the red part), informed by global discourses of liberal democracy (the white part that tempers the red), and dispossessed by the economic policies of neoliberalism, populations across the Latin American region elected leftists to state power in country after country. By 2009, three fourths of the region was governed by parties who either explicitly

considered themselves socialists, or who at the very least, rejected neoliberal orthodoxy that privileged the free market over the social and economic demands of local populations (see Appendix 1, figure 1).

I witnessed firsthand this transformation from right-wing, neoliberal governments to more progressive or socialist ones in El Salvador, where I lived and worked with a variety of grassroots and international solidarity organizations from 2006-2012. In 2009, the FMLN won presidential elections through an alliance with political outsider and former journalist, Mauricio Funes. It was the first time that a left-wing government controlled the state in El Salvador's history. Being present for this transformation, I saw firsthand people's collective hope that change would be possible; that El Salvador as a country could address its deep-seated problems of poverty, inequality, corruption, and violence, and move toward social justice, true peace, and sustainable development. This hope existed in many sectors of society, but especially in sectors of the population historically identified with the left. Many of these people were my friends and colleagues given my work from 2006-2009 with an international solidarity organization called the SHARE Foundation, which supported rural social movement organizations associated with the FMLN. From my standpoint, it seemed that the arrival of the FMLN to state power would be an amazing opportunity for there to not just be *confrontation* between leftist social movements and the central government as had occurred in the decades since the Peace Accords of 1992 when the right wing had controlled the state, but *collaboration* across the state-society divide in efforts to construct social justice in El Salvador.

But two dynamics quickly became evident: first, the presence of an FMLN-aligned president in no way meant that change was suddenly going to happen or would even be possible in El Salvador on many issues, including violence, corruption, social inequality, and the firmly

entrenched neoliberal economic model. Second, the leftist social movements whose members had been my friends and comrades for three years, had *demobilized*. They ceased to push their radical demands. They ceased to engage in dramatic collective demonstrations of their power. They seemed to mute their passion to change the country. They seemed to sit back and just wait, hoping that a government "on their side" would do what was necessary to change the country.

On one hand, I was disappointed and perplexed, but on the other had I now had a broad and engaging research question: how do social movements respond when their allies come into power? More importantly, how can social movements best interact with an ostensibly allied government to pursue their objectives? Even more broadly, and joining various intellectual streams of modern social science, how can we best understand the relationship between people and government? Between state and society? And returning to our original starting point, what is to be done? As social movements whose allies have democratically won elections within a larger context of global capitalism, what is to be done?

1.1 Summarizing What is to Come: Revolutionary Legacies, Movement-State Negotiations, and Reinventing the Left(s):

The 2009 electoral victory of Mauricio Funes in alliance with the FMLN in El Salvador and Daniel Ortega's 2006 presidential victory on behalf of the Nicaraguan Sandinistas signaled these groups' full transformation from revolutionary movements to political parties in alliance with diverse social movements on the left (Wright 2010; Almeida 2014). However, the policy options of these administrations were greatly constrained by powerful global economic interests, corruption, and weak institutional capacity. Further, in El Salvador, rampant gang violence limited

the FMLN's agenda, while in Nicaragua the Sandinista government enacted beneficial social programs but also moved significantly toward authoritarianism. In these similar yet distinct contexts, I asked how various social movements on the left interacted with state institutions controlled by their former revolutionary comrades, as well as how more recent movements (not necessarily forged during the countries' revolutionary moments) interacted with these governments.

Ultimately, I argue that during this time, diverse social movements of civil society *reinvented* leftist politics (Motta 2013) as they attempted to negotiate their agendas with ostensibly sympathetic state and partisan institutions. Over the ten years that the FMLN was in power in El Salvador (2009-2019) and during the period of Sandinista rule in Nicaragua from 2006-2017 (the period in which my study is bounded due to a steep descent into authoritarian repression in the country beginning in 2018) social movements in the two countries became more feminist, more environmentalist, more egalitarian, and in broad strokes, more willing to exercise strategic autonomy in relation to the traditional leftist political structures, the FMLN and FSLN. These trends in movement practice, visions, and values constituted a reinvention of leftist politics given the changing relationship between movements and parties on the left, as well as the fact that there were now projects of governance—or attempts to manage social relations—that were not exclusively led by parties, but by grassroots social movements on their own terms.

On certain issues in El Salvador, movement-state negotiations led to novel collaborative relationships and movement-led projects of governance that have yielded real fruits (see chapters 4, 6, and 8). On other issues—in both countries—movement-state negotiations took place in bad faith due to authoritarianism and intransigence by the parties, lack of capacity or strategy by movements, or due to unaccountable supranational powers. And in Nicaragua, those movements

not willing to tow the party line—such as feminists, environmentalists, and human rights organizations—did not even enjoy the opportunity for bad-faith negotiations, but rather have suffered demonization, marginalization, and then beginning in April 2018, violent state repression.

At a substantive level, this dissertation is about how and why movement-state interactions across various movement sectors and territories in the post-revolutionary leftist-controlled countries of El Salvador and Nicaragua are different, as well as how and why they reveal important similarities. More broadly I situate these interactions both within regional trends in movement-state dynamics on the Latin American left, as well as within global patterns of movement activity and social transformation. I demonstrate that case studies within and comparisons across El Salvador and Nicaragua showcase dynamics that constitute new knowledge around dialogic interactions between society-based social movements and state-based institutions, theories of civil society and the state, and social change at local, national, and global levels. These insights can be marshaled to orient strategic social movement activity aimed at emancipatory social change when allies are in power, though this knowledge can also be of use to groups seeking to construct more just social relations in any political context.

In my research design, I compare seven distinct movements (from feminist, environmentalist, peasant, and urban peace-building sectors) across the two countries to show how territorially and historically contingent ideological traditions, ecological factors, organizational structures, and political-economies shape movement-state dynamics in advantageous political climates. This research breaks new scholarly ground by providing a critical appraisal of the dynamics of power and conflict *within* parties and movements of the left in Central America as they administer democratic states constrained by global capitalism. Of additional substantive importance, the study's comparative design highlights how two countries that are so frequently

bestowed with importance by the rates at which they are compared as historical examples of revolutionary experiments (Beck 2018) are equally important in providing insights regarding the contemporary interplay of movements and ostensibly sympathetic state apparatuses; this despite the fact that studies of El Salvador and Nicaragua as examples of governments of the Pink Tide are rare, and explicit comparisons between the two are non-existent on this subject matter.

Theoretically, I draw on political and social theory, literature on social movements in the global north and south, as well as post-colonial, post-structural, and feminist theory to highlight how the practices of marginalized collective actors in their interactions with state institutions are transforming leftist politics and strategies for social change. That is, I analyze ordinary peoples' and activists' practices and perspectives on their own terms, as well as based on the specific political, cultural, and social histories of Latin America and the larger global south. This analytic commitment and critical, pluralist theoretical framework facilitate two important avenues for inductive theorization. First, I understand the most important concepts that guide my study—social movements, social change, democracy—to themselves be in constant flux and transformation, as actors' struggles inform and shape them in dialogic fashion (Markoff 2015). Second, I problematize Eurocentric, state-centric theories of state-civil society relations (which typically posit that society is exclusively dependent on the state, and that society should be strong so as to benefit the state) to theorize many of the varied collective practices of social movements and ordinary people as *projects of governance*, or instances of attempts to govern and manage social life (Steinmetz 1999), and to recognize certain activities of the state as corruption, "criminality", or economic wealth hoarding, as opposed to uncritically accepting the state as the sole source of governance and rule (Bamyeh 2009; Krupa and Nugent 2015).

Methodologically, I employ participant observation and semi-structured interviews in an engaged and reflexive ethnographic practice that focuses on the practices and perspectives of social movement participants, and alleged beneficiaries of social movements in their territorialized contexts. However, I do not simply take these perspectives of movement participants (frequently "movement elites") at face value, but rather search out alternative accounts of territorialized movement activity by non-activists or ordinary people, as well as by agents of state institutions so as to problematize dominant accounts. In terms of reflexivity, I follow insights from influential scholars of urban sociology in the US such as Waverly Duck (2015) and Victor Rios (2011) in foregrounding my own social positionality vis a vis the field and its inhabitants. Importantly, I apply these methodological insights not only to urban fieldwork sites, but also to semi-urban and rural ones, where the majority of my fieldwork took place.

My dissertation is thus able to contribute to interdisciplinary knowledge in four ways. First, it demonstrates that in contrast to state- or elite-centric analyses, it is a diversity of social movements that are reinventing leftist politics, democracy, and governance itself. Each movement I interrogate is reinventing the left in its own way in its own territory, which sometimes even includes rejecting the "left" label altogether or working together with self-proclaimed non-leftists. They are contributing new, nuanced points and concepts to the spectrum of movement-state interactions (see figure 3). And though some of the varied and divergent movements for social transformation that I research are often understood negatively through traditional, class-centric analyses —dubbed NGOization, identity politics, particularistic, fragmented, etc.—I demonstrate that many of these non-class-based movements are deepening democracy, forging new forms of global and local change, using international aid to moving toward engaged autonomy with state and partisan forces, innovating in agro-ecology and other forms of localized economic

sustainability, and even crossing partisan lines to transform the social fabric of violent territories. In broad strokes then, the post-conflict "fragmentation" of movements in Central America (into feminist, environmentalist, urban, indigenous etc.) is not necessarily, or always, a problem to be overcome. Rather, it is simply a representation of the diversity of social groups and demands that characterizes civil society.

While the foregoing may suggest I take a purely optimistic, or even romantic perspective on the practices of movements and their "reinventions" of politics, the second significant contribution of my dissertation derives from my highlighting the problematic hierarchies, resource imbalances, and interpersonal conflicts that characterize the internal workings of these same movements. That is, by privileging the perspectives and practices of ordinary people on their own terms—both activists of territorialized movements and non-activists in these same territories—I provide a view "from below", that interrogates "deep politics" (Hagene and Turid Gonzales 2016) or those understandings, power dynamics, and resource struggles which are seldom seen, heard, or analyzed. The discursive conflicts, power struggles, and individualisms that permeate movements and communities are just as significant as the innovative reinventions that are occurring at the same time. These ambiguous, sometimes contradictory processes shape people, communities, and movements—benefitting some individuals and organizations while ruining others —and form the foundations of interactions between movements and state institutions. Tracing these processes also means tracing expressions of cultural-political struggles (Alvarez et al 1998) over the meanings of concepts not only between ideologically opposed forces, but also within social structures or organizations populated by people with similar ideologies but profoundly different degrees of power, voice, and resources. Indeed, concepts such as revolution, democracy, and the left came under serious dispute in El Salvador and Nicaragua as the left

governed these two countries and those organizations and individuals who had once considered themselves allies and comrades in the past, became competitors or enemies.

Third, I employ a conceptual-methodological innovation to more effectively and holistically understand my analytic subject. I utilize the concept of the *movement territory* to interrogate the practices and visions of social movements and their participants not just in their historical, organizational, and sectorial context, but also in their *territorial* context. I posit that while national differences are fundamental for movement comparisons, a comparative study across the local subnational territories in which diverse movements operate further elucidates how historical legacies are themselves distributed territorially. A movement territory framework not only expands many movement scholars' traditional focus on social movement organizations (SMOs), but also incorporates the analytic advantages of the concept of the social movement community (Staggenborg 1998) with its analysis of multiple organizations, informal networks and relationships, and movement opponents or detractors, to situate these collective actors' relations in their territorial context. A movement territory comparative framework thus shows how efforts for social change are shaped by historical, ideological, and ecological factors that are specific to distinct territorial spaces in which movements operate, thereby shaping the contours, practices, and visions of social movements, as well as their prospects for success.

Fourth and finally, I argue that strategic autonomy vis a vis state and partisan actors best facilitates pursuit of movement objectives. This may look different in different contexts and in different territories. Not all movements do it, and there can still be "movement successes" without it, but across the seven movement territories, and the two countries that I have researched for this dissertation, my most compelling contention theoretically, and with the biggest relevance for practical struggles for emancipatory social change is that movement actors are most effective when

maintaining strategic autonomy—albeit engaged if feasible—from parties and state institutions, even those of an allied political ideology.

The rest of this chapter proceeds as follows. I provide the theoretical-substantive context for this research design proceeding form the purely theoretical to the regional Latin American level down to the importance of comparing El Salvador and Nicaragua in terms of the relations between social movements and the state apparatus in a context of global capitalism. I then provide a more detailed overview of my positionality, methodology and data. Finally, I set forth a brief outline of the chapters in the rest of the dissertation.

1.2 Theorizing Governance, Social Change, and State-Movement Interactions in Contemporary Latin America

Scholarly attention to the relationships between rulers and ruled across time and space is a significant source of knowledge on social and political change, state formation, and democracy (Markoff, 2015; Tarrow, 2011). While significant gray zones characterize the boundaries between the analytic constructs of "state" and "society" (and the movements therein) (Abrams 1988; Auyero 2007), this distinction helpfully frames a series of dialogic relationships and struggles among actors with differentiated access to the formal, centralized sources of political power (Mann, 1984).

A focus on state-society interactions makes particular sense in Latin America, where the state has never achieved full control over its territories and populations (Centeno 2002). It is porous and uneven in institutional terms; an often-tenuous set of claims to political domination that exists in competition and dialogue with other collective claimants that contest its sovereignty, such as

indigenous groups and organized criminals (Krupa and Nugent 2015). Given the state's frequent absence or dereliction, Latin American peoples have often self-organized to meet their own needs and create their own meanings from the broad arenas of non-state based civil society.

With the advent of democratization in Latin America in the 1980's and early 90's, ordinary people's self-organizing benefitted from the nominally successful enshrinement of civil and political rights such as free elections, freedom of expression, political organization, and assembly, including the right to protest. Many groups took advantage of this unprecedented opportunity to organize themselves into social movements and advocate for further transformations of their societies (Almeida 2007; Levitsky and Roberts 2010; Markoff 2015; Stahler-Sholk, Vanden, Becker, 2008) The process continued as many movements exercised their newfound civil and political rights to mobilize for even broader and deeper demands including socio-economic, cultural-identitarian, and sexual and reproductive rights, as well as the right to "monitory power" over the decisions that elected officials were making even after and in between electoral contests (Keane, 2009).

By the late 1990's and early 2000's, many citizens in the region were engaging in contentious social movement activity that rejected neoliberalism and led to a wave of socialist-inspired governments—called the "Pink Tide"—that spurred a "second incorporation" of previously excluded or marginalized groups into social, political, and economic citizenship (Silva and Rossi 2018). Internally, movements increasingly used more horizontal organizational structures based in communities, workplaces, and affinity groups to practice the sorts of democratic outcomes they sought to foment in larger societies (Stahler-Sholk, Vanden, Becker 2014). In general terms then, many movements were deepening democracy by dispersing power more equitably throughout society and across state-society constructs, or by empowering

individual citizens vis a vis their local municipalities, and impelling democratization through the restructuring of public administrative apparatuses (Goldfrank, 2011; Wright, 2010). As such, Latin American movements have not simply resisted the dispossessions (Harvey 2005) and expulsions (Sassen 2010) associated with the onslaught of global capitalism, but have actively created alternatives to these forces, sometimes even instantiating their own *projects of governance*, which seek to re-make the relations that make up the social world (Steinmetz 1999). This conceptual decentering of political power away from the state enables us to apprehend those cases when—due to state absence, incompetence, or incoherence (Poulantzas 1978; Krupa & Nugent 2015) coupled with popular action—there is a dispersion of power downward so that governance is exercised in more direct and localized ways by ordinary people (see chapters 4, 6, and 8).

To be sure, Latin American (and other "weak") states play an ambiguous and contradictory role in the processes of trans-local (di)assemblages and conflicts over discourses, resources, including in competition and conflicts over which projects of governance will prevail. States are frequently understood to have little autonomy to resist the impositions of global economic forces, and consequently, to no longer be the sole targets of social movement activity as they do not wield all legitimate decision-making power in a context of global capitalism (Smith & Weist 2012). On one hand then, social movements have pushed the limits and "overflowed the channels" of state-based democratic practice through innovative actions, discourses, and interactions with other actors out of creative necessity in adverse scenarios (Markoff 2019, Alvarez et al 2017), often resulting in novel and increasingly autonomous projects of governance. On the other hand, state-society interactions that occur within the context of formal state-based processes are still frequently of utmost importance for social movements, particularly by serving as *transmission belts* for the

conflicts and struggles over the sorts of decisions that can be subjected to democratic deliberation, and the outcomes of these decisions themselves (see chapter 6).

1.3 The Gray Zones of Movement Strategies under the Pink Tide

Scholars' have paid frequent attention to various aspects of the radical and social democratic leftist governments of the Latin American "pink tide" (Cameron and Hershberg 2012; Ellner 2014; Levitsky and Roberts 2011; Weyland 2013; Weyland, Madrid, and Hunter 2011), as well as the social movements that brought these governments to state power and constituted their social bases (Ballve and Prashad 2006; Ross and Rein 2013; Silva 2009), relatively few scholars have investigated the *interactions* between leftist social movements and state institutions controlled by leftist political parties. Studies that do so typically utilize one of two dichotomies to frame these interactions. The first is that of confrontation and cooptation (Dangl, 2010; Prevost, Vanden and Oliva Campos eds., 2012) in which movements either see their struggles and discourses absorbed and neutralized by ostensibly sympathetic state institutions (cooptation) or keep their struggles in the streets and maintain their radical agendas (confrontation). While such a binary may apply in some countries—such as Nicaragua (see chapters 3, 5, and 7) and Ecuador—where governments have provided movements with little space to maneuver between confrontation and co-optation (Becker, 2013; Zaremberg, 2012), many movement-state dynamics in the region play out in the broad "gray zones" (Auyero, 2007) between these heuristic poles.

As George Ciccarriello-Maher (2013) demonstrates in the case of Venezuela, for instance, popular movements harnessed their explosive constituent power from below to force the Chávez government to radicalize an initially reformist project and reconstitute state power. In similar

fashion, Evo Morales's Movimiento al Socialismo party in Bolivia grew out of the popular rebellions that toppled neoliberal governments in the 2000s to then collaborate with diverse movements in implementing new forms of plurinational citizenship and communal democracy (Cameron, Hershberg, and Sharpe, 2012). However, in both Venezuela and Bolivia, state attempts to institutionalize the vehicles of popular power led to setbacks in revolutionary goals and reductions in movements' strategic power vis-à-vis state institutions (Fernandes 2010; Oikonomakis and Espinoza 2014).

Indeed, given the difficulties of transcending such verticalist political logics when the left has been in power in Latin America and the perceived failures of revolutionary processes in the twentieth century which relied too heavily on vanguardist political structures, many movements now pursue greater autonomy from established political actors. Providing thus the other empirical pole in the dichotomy between vanguardism and autonomy, some movements—like the Zapatistas and other indigenous movements—are constructing more horizontal (non-hierarchical) social relations in territorialized efforts to resist and replace dominant political and economic structures with more autonomous forms of self-governance (Holloway, 2002; Motta, 2013). Importantly though, autonomy need not always mean disengagement from formal political institutions. Rather, some movements increasingly work "within and against the state" to transform the bureaucratic and authoritarian tendencies of the state itself (Ciccariello-Maher, 2013). Other movements maintain their own agendas and autonomous spaces while engaging the state tactically and strategically through "cautious negotiations" that further movement demands while avoiding co-optation (Conway, 2013; Ross and Rein, 2013; Stahler-Sholk, Becker, and Vanden, 2014). Cultural studies-based work has interrogated how the "traditional" social movement tactics of protests, demonstrations and other contentious or confrontational activity has intersected with

more formal mechanisms of participation set up by leftist governments (though increasingly by right wing ones as well) whereby social movements are increasingly engaged in "uncontained" activism that overflows the categories of both classic social movement repertoires and governmental participatory institutions (Alvarez et al 2017).

This dissertation draws on and contributes to these literatures to explore the more nuanced movement strategies and interactions that are increasingly prevalent in the Latin American region in order to illuminate the fluid "gray zones" between confrontation and cooptation as state-movement relations under the left, and between vanguardism and autonomy as competing strategies of the movement left.

1.4 Comparing El Salvador and Nicaragua amid Global Capitalism

As the world economic system transitioned from state-led development paradigms toward more globally integrated, and transnationally-linked capitalist accumulation strategies in the latter decades of the 20th century (Robinson 2014), many grassroots social movements reorganized popular struggles to resist the onslaught of the "neoliberal" economic policies that opened up their countries to transnational dispossession and jeopardized newly obtained social and political citizenship rights (Almeida 2007; 2014; Harvey 2005; Robinson 2014; Silva 2009; Sassen 2010). Opportunities for anti-systemic demands and campaigns were further augmented by the increasingly palpable limits to surplus accumulation under the new global capitalist regime, and the concomitant decrease in the legitimacy of national-level democratic institutions (Smith and Weist 2012). Literature informed by world-systems, social movements, and cultural geographic frameworks have thoroughly documented the waves of resistance to neoliberalism over recent

decades, and also how these resistance movements led to the arrival to state power of various left-leaning and socialist governments (Almeida and Perez Martin 2022; Ellner et al 2022; Mudge 2018). Progressive governments born of popular struggle became common in Latin America, where a "pink tide" of radical and social-democratic governments made progress on deepening democracy (Cameron 2012; Goldfrank 2012; Baiocchi 2017.) redistributing wealth through social programs and incorporating previously excluded constituencies across various political frameworks and geographies (Ellner et al 2022; Silva and Rossi 2018; Yashar 2005).

Within literature on the contemporary Latin American left, the Pink Tide governments of Central America—those of El Salvador and Nicaragua—have received relatively less scholarly attention than their south American counterparts, continuing an ongoing imbalance in academic work on the Latin American region (Binford and Santiago 2004).[2] This scholarly gap is surprising given the fact El Salvador and Nicaragua are often compared to each other because of the strength of their revolutionary movements in the 1980s (Beck 2018), and because now in the 2000s, their past revolutionary leaders returned to power through democratic elections. My comparison of these two countries' contemporary leftist governments and their respective interactions with ostensibly allied social movements hinges significantly on the revolutionary legacies of the past and how these legacies intersect with contemporary national and transnational contexts in both political and

[2] Important exceptions include Almeida (2014), Spalding (2014), and Silber (2010). Much work on Central America has focused on these countries' war-torn pasts and transitions to democracy and free-market economies. Less has been written on contemporary movements for social change and the region's leftist governments, and almost nothing has come out on forms of interaction between the two, save Almeida's conceptual analysis of "social movement partyism" within his larger explanation of the variations in intensity of resistance to neoliberalism across Central America in the 1990s and 2000s (Almeida 2014).

economic terms. I first distill the similarities and differences between the two countries in national historical perspective across four variables related to their revolutionary legacies, and then compare the two countries in general movement-party terms during the period of post-revolutionary neoliberal democracy, and then during the administrations of the democratic left.

1.4.1 Distinctions in Revolutionary Legacies

A comparison of El Salvador and Nicaragua's revolutionary legacies hinges on the distinction that the Nicaraguan Sandinistas were successful in their revolutionary bid for state power in 1979, and the Salvadoran FMLN guerrillas were not; they signed Peace Accords with the Salvadoran government in 1992 bringing the twelve-year civil war to a negotiated close. The legacies of the revolutionary Sandinista state for the Nicaraguan state apparatus itself, for the Sandinista party, and for larger Nicaraguan society cannot be underestimated. By the same token, the direct and indirect effects of a protracted civil war—with multiple outside interventions—had dramatic impacts for the Salvadoran left and for larger Salvadoran society. While the Sandinista party and the FMLN were very similar in their use of a vanguardist, Marxist-Leninist internal structure and ideology—albeit with significant factional and ideological differences internal to this structure and ideology (see below)—there were four crucial differences between the Salvadoran FMLN and the Nicaraguan FSLN that have generated other significant differences in the two countries, and particularly for each country's leftist politics as they pertain to the focus of this dissertation. These variables are: (1) the revolutionary vanguard's relations with the masses, (2) the profiles of actors within the state who survived the post-conflict transitions, (3) the role of US intervention in each country's insertion into global capitalism, and (4) the interrelated dummy variables of gang activity and migration to the US. I first detail the divergent expressions of these

four variables, and then briefly trace the two country's leftist movement-state-party trajectories through the assumption of state power by leftist forces by democratic means in the 2000s.

1.4.1.1 The Vanguard's Relations with the Masses

During the latter portion of the 20th century, social movements in Nicaragua constitute an "exceptional case" in the Latin American region (Puig 2015). There had been no longstanding tradition of popular organizing in Nicaragua in the mid to late 20th century as there had been in most countries of the region, and so when the FSLN was first created in 1961, it remained small in adherents and relatively simple in its organization.[3] As the Somoza regime progressively decomposed during the mid-70's, the FSLN's numbers increased, such that its initially meager armed guerrilla struggle eventually combined with popular insurrection supported by a diverse

[3] In the course of the 1970's, the party went through internal divisions that resulted in three distinct internal tendencies which competed for control of the strategic direction of the larger organization: the Guerra Prolongada Popular (GPP, Prolonged People's War) which was influence by the Cuban Revolution and Maoist thinking around building popular power in rural areas; the Tendencia Proletaria (Proletarian Tendency) which was more oriented toward organizing and awareness-raising among workers; and the Tendencia Tercerista/Insurreccional (Tertiary or Insurrectional Tendency) which proposed an inter-class alliance that would facilitate popular insurrection primarily in urban settings and the centers of political power (Puig 2015). These divisions are not as consequential for this dissertation as they did not extend to social bases among the Nicaraguan population, but rather were relevant primarily only to Sandinista leadership prior to the triumph of the revolution in 1979. In El Salvador by contrast, the five competing factions or political military organizations (PMO's, see chapter 2) of the FMLN maintained complex military, political, and base organizational apparatuses for up to 20 years in the cases of some factions. This led to important factional legacies on the Salvadoran left up through contemporary times (Sprenkels 2018).

coalition of social forces to topple the crumbling Somoza dictatorship on July 19, 1979. In the resulting vacuum of power, the Sandinista vanguard—composed of a nine-person directorate—assumed state power and control of the armed forces, though it allowed the existence of non-Sandinista forces (a "loyal opposition") within government structures. It also moved quickly—both in the immediate runup and aftermath of Somoza's fall—to *create* the grassroots social organizations necessary to not just support the incipient revolutionary state (Puig 2015), but to constitute the new foundations of a revolutionary civil society to meet the population's basic needs (Nuñez et al 1988). The FSLN thus went about instituting and mobilizing trade unions, agricultural cooperatives, literacy brigades and public health structures that would provide the bedrock of a new socialist civil society. Grassroots social organizations on the left in Nicaragua were thus, from their inception, dependent on the FSLN. This meant that revolutionary directives from the Sandinista state in the 80s were implemented as faithfully and effectively as possible by grassroots bases,[4] but also that movements' autonomous development would be severely curtailed in the future when the FSLN lost state power (Puig 2015).

While the Sandinistas had created the grassroots movements that helped them attain and maintain revolutionary power beginning in 1979, popular organizing and grassroots movements *preceded* the revolutionary vanguard of the FMLN in El Salvador. Indeed, beginning in the 1960s and achieving a powerful mobilizational capacity by the early 1970s, a diversity of leftist social movement organizations proliferated across the rural territories and urban sectors of El Salvador (Almeida 2008). While many grassroots organizations were peaceful and took advantage of the

[4] This included the democratic election of FSLN directorate member Daniel Ortega to the presidency in 1984, the country's first honest election since 1932 (Close 2016; Walker and Wade 2016)

Salvadoran regime's nominal (if hollow) openness to reform during the 1970s, numerous guerrilla armies—connected to grassroots "mass organizations" involved in protests and demonstrations—also crystallized in the mountainous countryside. By the mid 1970's four distinct guerrilla groups operated in El Salvador, some of them focusing on rural organizing, others on military preparedness and terrorist attacks, and still others on urban kidnappings (Ayala 1996). In 1980, after the assassination Oscar Romero, the Catholic Archbishop of San Salvador and outspoken champion of the poor and oppressed in El Salvador, and the military's massacre of hundreds of civilians during his funeral, the country's guerrilla groups banded together to form the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional FMLN (Montgomery 1995). With the late adhesion of the Partido Comunista (PC, Communist Party, which hastily sought to marshal its own guerrilla army after having held out hope for an electoral path toward revolution), to the FMLN, the coalition's leadership planned a "final offensive" that would topple the US backed authoritarian-military regime of El Salvador by 1981.

This was not the case however, as the incoming Reagan administration vowed to "not let Nicaragua" happen again and augmented military and economic support to the Salvadoran regime (Montgomery 1995), while the FMLN's own internal divisions were frequently to blame for its lack of coordination across war fronts (Ayala 1996). Though all subscribing to a Marxist-Leninist ideology and using a vanguardist leadership structure, in practice, the five factions of the FMLN had substantially different political-military strategies and ways of relating to the "masses", different supply routes and international support chains, and in most instances, a considerable degree of mistrust for other factions (Ayala 1996; Wood 2003; Viterna 2013). Leaders of the five factions periodically met to plan additional strategic actions after the 1981 final offensive failed, but the revolutionary triumph of Nicaragua was never repeated in El Salvador. Over the course of

the 80s, the PC faction formed an alliance with some leaders of the Fuerzas Populares de Liberación (FPL, Popular Forces of Liberation) to successfully appropriate the larger FMLN apparatus, shepherding it into peace negotiations and the post-conflict transition. In sum, a vanguardist process of organizing the masses in Nicaragua led to a dispersion of movement organizing in the post-revolutionary period, the relative dispersion of the vanguard itself in revolutionary El Salvador led to a broad array of relatively strong and autonomous social movements in the post-conflict period that were characterized by ideological and strategic diversity, if also disputes.

1.4.1.2 The Profiles of Post-Conflict Actors in the State

As Ortega and the Sandinistas prepared for the 1990 elections in a vastly changed country due to the US-backed Contra War and economic embargo, they knew that electoral defeat of the revolutionary program was a distinct possibility. As a way to retain a degree of power in the state apparatus should they lose, the Sandinistas spent considerable energy and resources professionalizing both the police force and the bureaucracy (Cruz 2011). So when Ortega gave up political power to Violeta Chamorro and the right-center UNO coalition after losing the 1990 elections, the Sandinista party also bequeathed the country a relatively professionalized police force and bureaucracy, both of which also retained significant linkages with base-level Sandinista communities and organizations (Cruz 2011). The community-based police force of Nicaragua has frequently been held up as a regional model for other countries to follow (Zaremberg 2012).

In El Salvador by contrast, the profiles of individuals within the state who wielded the levers of political and military power during the 1980s were largely criminal, corrupt, abusers of human rights (Cruz 2011; Rabe 2011), as they had been throughout most of the country's

authoritarian history (Ching 2014). Many of these same people remained in the state through and after the Peace Accords of 1992. The formal, UN facilitated peace process saw the publication of a Truth Commission that signaled state and paramilitary security forces as responsible for 85% of human rights abuses during the country's civil war. An Amnesty Law in 1991 essentially sought to ensure the "forgiving and forgetting" of human rights abuses, thereby enabling criminal state agents to remain in government after the Peace Accords. This was true in the security forces (despite the fact that the most repressive bodies such as the Treasury Police were disbanded) as well as in political parties, where members of the now-governing Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA, Nationalist Republican Alliance) political party had been responsible for much death squad activity (Cruz 2011, Rabe 2011).

1.4.1.3 US Intervention and Insertion into Global Capitalism

Given Sandinista revolutionary power in the 1980s in Nicaragua alongside the El Salvador's status as a client state of the US during this same period, the two countries embarked on vastly different state-led economic projects. The Sandinista revolutionary state sought to construct a mixed economy in which popular sectors would be privileged by way of initiatives such as land reform, cooperativist production, and generous social welfare programs. The Sandinistas also sought to forge commercial trading relations with countries across Cold War divisions, though this was almost immediately stymied by the US embargo and its sponsoring of the terroristic Contra War against the Sandinista government and its social bases (Walker 1987). Nicaragua was thus forced fully toward the Soviet bloc, and by the latter half of the 80s, food and fuel shortages combined with Contra attacks on key economic infrastructure had devastated Nicaraguan society. Nicaragua did not embark on a stark and accelerated path of implementation

of neoliberal economic policies until 1990 with the arrival of the Chamorro government (Robinson 2003).

During the same time period, El Salvador essentially became a client state of the Reagan administration. Over the course of various military-civilian juntas and governments in the decade, and despite frequently fraught negotiations over arms provision amid human rights abuses (Ching 2016), US economic aid and institutional support—under the rubric of "democracy promotion"—successfully reshaped the Salvadoran state-economy nexus. US aid incentivized the Salvadoran economy to become export-led, and more fully inserted into transnational chains of production and accumulation. In the course of the 80s it went from a landed oligarchy-based economy to a transnationally connected, export-led economy that was managed by a US-cultivated, transnationally connected elite, housed in the ARENA political party which won elections in 1989, and managed to use the peace process to subordinate all democratically alterable political decisions to the hegemony of the incipient neoliberal model (Robinson 2003), a classic example of a polyarchic political system (Dahl 1971). Compared to Nicaragua then, El Salvador had a ten-year head start on the implementation of neoliberal policies and the concomitant evisceration of state-level protections enshrined during the national-populist incorporation of popular classes during the 1960s and 70s (Almeida 2008).

1.4.1.4 US Emigration and Gangs

Finally, the fact that a pluralist, though relatively centralized, socialist revolution triumphed and governed in Nicaragua throughout the 80s in ways that attempted (often successfully) to benefit the country's lower socio-economic classes meant that members of these classes not only largely remained in Nicaragua, but actively collaborated with revolutionary programs. The Nicaraguans who did flee the country during the 80s were upper middle class, and

wealthy sectors who while not formally persecuted by the Sandinistas, felt that they no longer belonged, or who had much of their wealth and property confiscated for being cronies of Somoza's (Walker and Wade 2017). These groups settled in close proximity to similar groups from Cuba, such as in Miami, where an anti-communist community of Latin American emigres was already strong. This elite migration happened legally, in relatively small numbers, and did not create lasting patterns of migration from Nicaragua to the US.

In contrast, El Salvador's civil war saw peasants, poor and working classes, as well as large sectors of the middle classes become targets for government and death squad repression. Many rural poor either fled the countryside to settle in the slums of large cities (such as in La Chacra on the outskirts of San Salvador, see chapter 8) joined the guerrillas outright as they had "no other way out" (Goodwin 2001), or if they had the means, fled to the United States, particularly to urban metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles and San Francisco. In these contexts, many young Salvadorans joined existing gangs, or began their own in survival strategies created largely by Black and Mexican/Chicano youth already persecuted by police. Of great consequence then, the migration patterns forged by Salvadoran refugees of the 80s consolidated routes and transnational kinship networks that continue to generate emigration from El Salvador to these same locations—and others—in the US. There is no comparable dynamic in Nicaragua. In the present day, if poor Nicaraguans seek a better life in another country, they typically do so in neighboring Costa Rica.[5]

[5] It is worth mentioning that by 2023, Nicaraguans were migrating to the US—both legally and illegally—in much larger numbers than ever before due to both political repression by the Ortega-Murillo regime and to worsening economic prospects.

In summary then, Nicaragua's revolutionary state of the 1980s left the country a leftist political force that was highly centralized (albeit with significant internal divisions) with dependent and relatively weak social movements, a relatively professionalized bureaucracy and police force, a sudden, uneven, and quite detrimental insertion into the global economy in the early 1990s, and a civilian population which still resided within the national borders. While in El Salvador many of the same corrupt politicians and criminal human rights abusers retained control over important levers of formal political power into peacetime. Concomitantly, leftist political forces organized loosely in the FMLN, but with a strong, diverse social movement base went through additional rounds of fragmentation as the country transitioned from war to peace. Due to its US-backed staving off of revolutionary triumph, the Salvadoran state and economy also had a ten-year head start on the implementation of neoliberal economic policies, which had the effect of inserting the country gradually but rather completely into the global economy. Finally, war time emigration to the US meant that some young Salvadorans joined gangs, committed crimes, and were deported back from California to El Salvador in the early 1990s at the war's end. The combination of criminal elements in the state who could accrue political power by fighting internal enemies, the sudden arrival of US-cultivated gang members, and the social dislocation brought on by civil war, turned El Salvador into a center for gang activity, state repression, further emigration to the US, and a thoroughly trans-nationalized society. Nicaragua had, none of these factors, but did enjoy a significantly re-constituted police force as a beneficial revolutionary legacy. These differences have played substantial roles in shaping the divergent trajectories of the relationships between leftist controlled state apparatuses and diverse leftist social movements in El Salvador and Nicaragua in the 21st century.

1.5 Dynamics of Post-Conflict Social Movement Partyism in El Salvador and Nicaragua

Interestingly however, *similarities* between party-movement relationships on the left in El Salvador and Nicaragua were more pronounced than their differences during the post-conflict period of neoliberalism and democracy of the 1990s and 2000s in which the left was in opposition. The dominant conceptualization of the relationship between leftist parties and their allied movements during this time throughout Central America has been that of "social movement partyism". According to Paul Almeida (2014), social movement partyism entailed a dynamic whereby leftist movements and parties "lined up alongside one another" and collaborated in relatively equitable fashion to resist neoliberal policies and ultimately work for the party to attain state power. However, Almeida does not question his movement elite informants' accounts of the horizontal nature of this relationship between movement and party. In practice, the party continued in a vanguard position in the post-war/transition periods, leveraging its historical authority and power vis a vis aligned social movements to ensure that these movements remained in a subordinate position to the party and that movement activities were beneficial to the party's political interests, a relation which I call *instrumentalization* (see chapters 2 and 3). In El Salvador, the FMLN party's instrumentalization of aligned social movements has been shown to have generated a deep sense of disillusionment with the party leadership on behalf of the popular bases, even before the FMLN assumed state power (Moodie 2010; Silber 2011; Sprenkels 2018). In Nicaragua, disillusionment with the FSLN's post-revolutionary practices led to the departure of many Sandinista leaders and their creation of the Movimiento Renovador Sandinista (MRS, Sandinista Renovation Movement) political party, as well as a sudden host of strong and autonomous feminist movements (Kampwirth 2008).

There is one important factor that does separate the Salvadoran and Nicaraguan lefts in the post-conflict, pre-state power context, and which again stems from the revolutionary state legacy in Nicaragua and its absence in El Salvador. Namely, Ortega's relative consolidation of internal power on the left, and his quest for a return to formal national power impelled him to form a pact with the right-wing leader, Liberal Arnoldo Aleman, something that only became clear years later (Close and Deonandan 2004). By way of constitutional amendments, they agreed to transfer previously independent state institutions such as the courts and the electoral authority into the hands of partisan officials, and also concentrated more power in the executive while generally making political life more difficult for parties outside the duopoly (Close and Deonandan 2004; Lopez Castellano 2013). While power-sharing and hoarding seemed to be the most evident motive for the pact, many Nicaraguan analysts also point to the common interests of Aleman and Ortega in avoiding the threats of an independent judiciary given Aleman's gargantuan corruption scandals, and accusations against Ortega for sexually abusing his step-daughter. In all public spaces below the level of the party's preeminent leaders, however, extreme polarization remained the order of the day between Liberals and Sandinistas, in the same way that enmity continued to characterize the relationship between the FMLN and the dominant right-wing party in El Salvador, ARENA.

1.6 The Left in Power: State and Movement Practices and Interactions

From 2009 to 2019 in El Salvador, two successive elected FMLN governments institutionalized many "welfare-state" social programs aimed at responding to the devastation of ARENA-implemented neoliberal policies in the twenty years before, sought to combat corruption (though largely unsuccessfully we now know), acknowledged the role of the Salvadoran state in

past human rights abuses, and institutionalized new avenues of citizen participation in public policies—seemingly undeniable successes for social movements on the left. However, the uneven effects of insertion into the global economy, epidemic social violence, bitter struggles with the political right—which controlled the main levers of the judicial apparatus and used partisan coalitions to scuttle much of the FMLN's legislative agenda—as well as the FMLN's own instrumentalization of many allied social movements have constituted obstacles for the gamut of social movement objectives and interest.

Sandinista rule since 2006 has led to similarly beneficial social welfare programs, particularly in the provision and quality of education, health care, infrastructure, and rural development. However, official statistics on indicators such as poverty and unemployment differ markedly from those of independent research outlets. There are also charges of similar levels of corruption by the Sandinistas as those that characterized previous Liberal governments. Formal mechanisms of citizen participation have been superficial at best, and vehicles for purely partisan patronage at worst (Zaremberg 2012), and in general, there is much less internal heterogeneity in the Nicaraguan state than is to be found in El Salvador.

Once assuming power in 2006, Ortega and Aleman's pact was geared towards enabling some conservative politicians to share in political power under the Sandinista banner, while allowing elite business interests—both national and transnational—to continue operating unchecked. Over the years, Ortega has gradually consolidated almost total control over the state apparatus in what constitutes a novel authoritarian regime guided by the same sort of personalistic rule that has characterized the majority of Nicaraguan regimes historically (Close 2016). There has been outright voter fraud in numerous elections, a blatantly partisan packing of the judiciary, and a withdrawal of the legal credentials of one of the primary opposition parties, the MRS (Walker

and Wade 2017). In the presidential elections of 2016, Ortega won the presidency with his wife, Rosario Murillo, now serving as vice president, leading to denunciations of dynastic rule reminiscent of the Somoza years, and with many now referring to the government as the "Ortega-Murillo regime". Still, Walker and Wade (2017) assert that Sandinista rule in the globalization age—for all its contradictions—has enabled Nicaragua to begin "emerging from the shadow of the eagle" to the north.

The assumption of state power by the FMLN in El Salvador and the FSLN in Nicaragua drastically changed the way that leftist movements and parties interacted. A vanguard model of party-led resistance to neoliberalism in times of pseudo-democratic peace ("social movement partyism") was replaced by a whole host of other interactions and tendencies, as well as power struggles at various levels, and ideological disputes (one of the most prominent revolving around what even constitutes a "leftist" political project). So while it is often assumed that such amenable political opportunity structures would make it easier for social movements to pursue their agendas (Tarrow 2011), and in some cases this is true, these scenarios have presented movements with a host of new challenges that have transformed the left as a whole. While some of these changes are similar across the two countries, others are starkly different.

In broad terms, we can say that leftist state power in El Salvador deepened certain democratic practices, especially in terms of the FMLN's relative openness to negotiations with independent social movements, albeit amid a host of parallel authoritarian tendencies. These movement-state negotiations are most clearly exemplified by feminist movements' practice of critical collaboration whereby social movement organizations work alongside state institutions in the formulation, implementation, and oversight of public policies (See chapter 4). In other movement sectors, such as violence prevention and local environmental management, such

critically collaborative movement-state interactions are incipient due to independent movement power and state openness. In El Salvador then, it has been possible for social movements to practice engaged autonomy with state institutions, pushing their own projects of governance in attempts to re-make social relations according to their self-defined interests.

Leftist rule in Nicaragua on the other hand, has undoubtedly moved Nicaragua farther from democracy in almost every typically employed category, except for those in which we look exclusively at the practices of self-managed civil society-based movements. These groups are certainly empowering themselves and non-state organizations/institutions on their own autonomous terms—in large part due to the total closure and intransigence of the Ortega regime, and thereby laying the groundwork for further dispersion of power across state-society divides in the future. In this sense then, the gray zones between the dichotomies of confrontation vs. cooptation and vanguardism vs. autonomy are quite limited in Nicaragua while they are quite large in El Salvador.

1.7 Participatory-Action Research from Life: Positionality, Methods, and Data

I lived in El Salvador from 2006-2012, where for the first three years, I served as a link between various transnational solidarity organizations based in the US, and their grassroots Salvadoran social movement counterparts. I then worked for three years with a grassroots violence prevention program in the urban slum of La Chacra, in the capital city of San Salvador, the site of my fieldwork for chapter eight. Witnessing first-hand the demobilization of many of the social movements I worked with as a result of the FMLN's assumption of state power in 2009 impelled me to interrogate what alternative movement strategies may look like in response to political allies

assuming state power. Beginning in 2014 I did interviews and participant observations over the summers in four different territories of El Salvador, and beginning in 2015, I did the same in one territory in Nicaragua (as well as with strategically chosen activists in two other territorially grounded movement sectors). I chose these territorialized movements because they seemed to be strong or effective in terms of obtaining at least some of their objectives. I sought to sample from various movement sectors (environmental, peasant, violence prevention etc.) that I hoped would provide me with as diverse an understanding of movement-state interactions as possible, and to analyze them in their historical and territorial context.

I seek to practice participatory action research (Fals-Borda 1987) with my research participants by attempting to research questions they are interested in contributing to answering while also sharing the results with them in hopes that they may helpfully guide future movement action. I have fully carried out this process with feminists in Suchitoto (described in chapter 4) but for the rest of the movement participants across the other movement territories, I still have to share my findings with them, and hope to do so in-person soon. At that point and upon their feedback, I would look forward to incorporating their reactions and suggestions in a book manuscript based on this dissertation. Indeed, my relationships with people in El Salvador and Nicaragua (more so the former than the latter I must admit) are not only what impelled me to do this research in the first place, but also what allowed me to do it in such an intensive, thorough, and participatory way (see chapter 2, section 2.2.1 for an illustrative story in this regard).

I did the majority of the fieldwork in Nicaragua in October and November of 2017 but also during shorts visits in 2015 and 2016. My fieldwork in El Salvador occurred during weeks or month-long visits from 2014-2019, with most of my interviews happening during March and April of 2018. I have a total of 98 interviews from El Salvador and 24 from Nicaragua. Interviews and

field-notes have all been transcribed and coded with MAXQDA for various relevant conceptual and substantive themes. Names of interviewees have been changed to protect their privacy and safety, except in those cases in which interviewees expressly wished that they be directly identified. In those instances, I have included both first and last names.

A final brief methodological note: as my access to research participants was primarily facilitated by my previous contacts in both El Salvador and Nicaragua—which were clustered in social realms associated with national social movements and international solidarity organizations—it was relatively easy to speak with prominent activists and "movement elites". I found it much harder to gain access to non-activists, or people who would be critical of the movements I was interrogating. Still, I spent the time necessary to do so, though the numbers of non-activists and "ordinary people" I interviewed are still less than those of activists. I am confident that the various perspectives I was able to sample have provided me with as broad a view as possible of the movement activity and movement-state interactions that are the subject of this dissertation.

1.8 Outline of the Rest of the Dissertation

The rest of this dissertation proceeds as follows. In chapter 2, I explore the historic, land-based peasant movement of eastern Chalatenango in the northern mountains of El Salvador which can be considered a sort of control case that exemplifies typical understandings of movement-party-state relations in Central and Latin America, especially as theorized by Almeida (2014) as social movement partyism. I show that when the FMLN came to power, the local grassroots social organization the Association for the Development of Chalatenango, (CCR), along with the national

organization of which it is a chapter, the Association of Rural Communities for the Development of El Salvador (CRIPDES) *demobilized*, ceasing to engage in contentious protests and was also *decapitated*, meaning that many of its leaders went on to work in government positions for the FMLN. With these two tendencies in mind, I argue that it makes more sense to speak of the *instrumentalization* of organizations like the CCR (and its mother organization, CRIPDES) by the FMLN, across the temporal phases of their relationship—including before the FMLN was in power—than to see the movement assuming a subordinate role to the party only after the party came into state power. Instrumentalization as a concept provides more leverage to understand the historically subservient role of closely allied social movements to the vanguardist FMLN apparatus, though in this chapter I also show how there is a significant degree of disputes and heterogeneity within and beyond the CCR as well in the movement territory of eastern Chalatenango.

In chapter 3, I look at the cooperativist sector in the remote, rural Miraflor region of Nicaragua, which mirrors Chalatenango in ecological and social terms, and in terms of its instrumentalization by the Sandinista party, but where cooperatives are the primary mode of social organization as opposed to peasant guilds and federations. Here, cooperatives evince a delicate balance of business and voluntaristic mindsets as they strive for beneficial relations with outside clients and funders (including state institutions) while also relying on their own self-management of social services due to government absence.

In chapter 4, I look at feminists in Suchitoto, El Salvador where their practice of critical collaboration serves as an example of *co-governance*, the autonomous interaction of social movements with allied government institutions, and the clearest example of a movement relation that explodes the dichotomies of vanguardism vs. autonomy and confrontation vs. cooptation. The

findings and theoretical contributions of this chapter serve as a sort of ideal case for movement-state interactions on the left in Latin America in which movements and state institutions share the responsibility of governance. I argue that in Suchitoto governance of gender politics is ultimately movement-led, constituting an example of a *project of governance* that is successfully remaking social relations as a result of movement—as opposed to state—activity.

In chapter 5, I look at feminists in Leon, Nicaragua, who in stark contrast to their counterparts in El Salvador, practice self-management of their feminist agenda, engaging in no interactions with state institutions or outside funders given the lack of political opening by the government to their cause.

In chapter 6, I turn to environmentalism in the coastal zone of El Salvador, where a group of internal migrant peasants from the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP, Revolutionary People's Army) faction of the FMLN came to environmental causes empirically, as a result of their lived experiences on ecologically lush but inhospitable terrain. They experienced a variety of movement interactions with FMLN governments, oscillating among confrontation, negotiation, and self-management due to the introduction by the FMLN of a controversial tourism project in their territory.

In chapter 7 I briefly explore environmentalism in Nicaragua where I initially sought to research the anti-canal movement in Rivas, but due to a lack of time and good contacts ended up focusing my energies elsewhere in my research design. I do argue that the confrontational momentum of the anti-canal movement throughout the country paved the way for the civic insurrection of April 2018, and use this disjuncture to explore the dispute over the meaning of the term "left" in Nicaragua under the reign of the Ortega-Murillo regime.

In chapter 8 I explore a community-based violence prevention and peace-building movement in the urban territory of La Chacra. I analyze this grassroots group's interactions not just with local benevolent state institutions—in which it is a gatekeeper and holder of knowledge that is useful to the state—but also with practitioners of violence, both gangs and state security forces. While there is evidence of the movement's autonomous interactions with other actors, its project of governance is still objectively weaker than the projects of actors who are willing to wield violence, including both the gangs and the state. Although this is the final empirical chapter in this dissertation, this is the chapter in which I first developed the concept of "projects of governance" and where I most systematically employ it.

Finally, in chapter 9, I provide concluding remarks that review each empirical chapter's substantive and theoretical contributions to facilitate comparisons across movement sectors, sub-national territories, and national political contexts. I show that my analytic focus on movement territories and practices effectively substantiates a normatively positive assertion that the country's left(s) have been *reinvented* whereas an analytic focus on leftist parties would lead us to a more despairing "left in crisis" conclusion. Finally, I reiterate the ways that this dissertation's findings can be useful to social movements working for progressive social change in any political context.

2.0 The Legacies of Political Military Organizations: Instrumentalization and Multi Scalar Struggle in Post-Revolutionary Chalatenango,

Rugged, mountainous, and historically inhabited by poor peasants, the eastern portion of the department of Chalatenango is the quintessential "liberated territory" that Salvadorans on the left speak of with pride in remembering the revolutionary triumphs of the FMLN during the 1980's. The area had been a bastion of the Fuerzas de Liberacion Popular (FPL), the strongest of the five factions of the FMLN in both breadth of territory held during the war, and number of adherents (Montgomery 1995). And while it is accurate to describe the FPL as one of the five *factions* of the FMLN, Sprenkels (2018) more precisely conceptualizes these factions as *political-military organizations* (PMO's) because each of them had both armed branches that employed various strategies of guerrilla warfare and also parallel mass organizations that were involved in contentious protests prior to the onset of total repression of civil protest in El Salvador in the late 1970s.[6] When civil protest became untenable at this point, the mass organizations began operating clandestinely as networks of civilian supporters for their aligned military forces during the war years (Montgomery 1995; Sprenkels 2018).

[6] Even by the early 1980's (particularly after the failure of the first "Final Offensive" in 1981 and the subsequent, controversial deaths of Cayetano Carpio and Ana Mélida Montes in 1982, the FPL's leaders during the 1970's and early 80's), the FMLN was led by an alliance between the FPL and the Partido Comunista (PC), whose leaders effectively sidelined commanders from the other factions from many strategic decisions (Viterna 2013; Sprenkels 2018).

2.1 Political-Ecological History of Eastern Chalatenango

During the Civil War of the 1980's, the FPL's political-military apparatus implemented a Maoist inspired "people's republic" in Chalatenango, creating alternative institutions in the territory, while defending it from the aggressions of the US-backed Salvadoran government (Sprenkels 2018). The FPL's "counter-power" institutions of health, education, and local governance drew heavily upon, and contributed to, already existing networks of community organization that had proliferated in the territory of Chalatenango in the 1960's and 70's . The strength of these community organizations drove a unique history of civilian responses to civil war. In the first half of the 1980's, residents of Chalatenango traversed the mountains essentially at the sides of the FPL guerrillas. This led to brutal massacres of many civilians by government forces, frequent "night flights" (guindas) through the mountains to evade state military forces under the guerrillas' guidance, and the eventual decision by the FPL in 1984 that residents of Chalatenango be relocated from the forested mountain battlegrounds and guerrilla camps to refugee camps in neighboring Honduras.

Coordination between leaders in the refugee camps and the FPL subsequently gave rise to the Comité para la Repoblación de Chalatenango (Committee for the Repopulation of Chalatenango, CCR), a regional chapter of the national level, CRIPDES (find original meaning of acronym in Sprenkels) created by the FPL in the late 80's to facilitate the "repopulations" of refugees who had been displaced by the war. As the end to the war was being negotiated beginning in the late 1980's, CRIPDES coordinated the return of five regional peasant groups--including the Chalatenango communities united by the CCR—that operated in territories previously held by the FPL. The four other FPL regions whose populations were being "returned" to their lands by CRIPDES included the southern "Bajo Lempa" portion of San Vicente (see chapter 6), the

southern portion of the department of La Libertad, Suchitoto (see chapter 4), and the Aguilares/El Paisnal region, both of these latter in the north-central part of El Salvador.

CRIPDES provided crucial coordination between refugee camp structures and international bodies such as the UN High Commissioner's Office on Refugees, and at a more clandestine level in the case of Chalatenango, between the refugee camps and the FPL command structure. Contrary to the public discourses of those refugees who returned to east Chalatenango near the end of the war (the first repopulation was in 1987) and claimed that they simply "had the desire" to "return to their places of origin" (this was the narrative constantly provided to visiting delegations that I provided interpretation to), the decision for these populations to return was a strategic calculation by the leadership of the FPL as part of the FMLN's larger strategy for consolidating a beneficial post-war scenario for itself.

In preparation for negotiations for peace, the FPL leadership sought to situate "its people" in specific territories of El Salvador to strengthen its position at the bargaining table with government officials (Sprenkels 2018; Viterna 2013). Viable social bases of citizens to be incorporated into a newly-reconfigured national state provided the FMLN political structure with considerable legitimacy in negotiations toward a peace agreement (Sprenkels 2018). Despite myriad challenges, that loss of additional life and immense collective sacrifice, the strategy of returning people to lands in eastern Chalatenango was ultimately quite successful for the FPL and its social bases, as well as for the larger FMLN. This was evidenced at a national level by the FMLN's relative wins in negotiating advantageous terms in the Peace Accords of 1992 (Lauria-Santiago and Binford 2002; Sprenkels 2018; Viterna 2013), and at the local level, by the contemporary cohesion of many of the repopulated FPL communities with their still vibrant and dense social organizations (Silber 2011).

The period immediately before and after the Peace Accords in 1992 was also a period that enabled the CCR to consolidate as a formal organization in the region and for its members to revitalize national level connections to other FPL regions through coordination within CRIPDES and the FMLN party in the new emerging contexts of peace negotiations and then post-war rebuilding. But perhaps most importantly, the CCR was instrumental in supporting newly repopulated communities to attain basic social services. Initiatives spearheaded by the CCR in eastern Chalatenango in the late 1980's and early 1990's included the creation of communities themselves (houses, roads etc.) out of the destruction left by the war, further implementation and consolidation of alternative structures of health care and disease prevention, and the training and professionalization of formerly popular education teachers.

Importantly for CCR leaders and members of these repopulated communities, this rebuilding work was made possible by the considerable unity and solidarity of the local populations. An example of this social solidarity that was frequently cited by my research participants was the use of "communal days" to organize community members' labor for strategic purposes. On these days, families would send a certain number of members to participate in work that would be done on the house of a particular family, or on larger community projects such as the construction of community water systems. According to one of my research participants, people participated in communal days out of "pure altruism and a desire for the common good" which they had internalized during the strife of the civil war.

2.1.1 Post-War Chalatenango from a Critical Perspective

So while the CCR was responsible for important social service provision and public advocacy on behalf of the repopulated communities of eastern Chalatenango both immediately

before and after the signing of the Peace Accords, the organization and its adherents were still confronted with serious social problems in the post-war context. Ex-combatants of the FMLN were forced to find new ways of life and livelihood in a fragmented society that was ill-equipped to foster genuine opportunities for equitable economic prosperity or social justice for historically marginalized populations. By the late 1990's, the organized communities of eastern Chalateanango were being assailed by a strong force for social disarticulation: immigration. As a result of the poverty and lack of employment opportunities more and more young people were migrating to the US, leaving families separated and communities disjointed and further stratified by transnational accumulation circuits (Silber 2011).

As for ex-combatants, their war-time insurgent networks had a determinant role on their economic prospects and social relations as they strove for employment opportunities or other clientelist benefits through former comrades situated higher up in political and economic hierarchies in the post-war context (Viterna 2013). Sometimes these connections enabled people to get jobs as nannies, security guards, or as project managers in non-profits connected to the FMLN. But still most ex-combatants lived in situations of precarity and poverty. Indeed, as Sprenkels' points out in his analysis of these dynamics once the FMLN came to power in 2009, very few former FMLN combatants could afford to not vie for a government position—even if only as a driver or a janitor—given the socio-economic deprivation that characterized many FMLN communities in the post-war period.

So despite some seemingly positive results for the FMLN in the war through a global liberal lens (a transition to democracy in which they were a competing political party, abolition of repressive security forces, legally enshrined rights to rural land etc.) many ex-combatants of the FMLN were still deeply disillusioned with the outcome of the war for a variety of reasons. Some

of the most ideologically committed militants lamented that they had not managed to radically transform the country along socialist lines. Many more certainly shared such revolutionary disappointments, but their true sources of grief were the loss of so many friends, family, and comrades during the violence of the 80's. These two factors combined with the ongoing economic struggles in FMLN communities left many militants constantly grappling with the question of whether or not the struggle had been worth it. Finally, some ex-combatants were also critical of the FMLN leadership as a whole in the post-war period given the fact that the party had retained its war-time internal command structure even after its transition from guerrilla army to political party. By retaining a vanguardist internal hierarchy that relied on a small cadre of revolutionary organic intellectuals who had directed the FMLN's civil war efforts to now direct its electoral and political strategies, FMLN leadership estranged portions of its bases who had hoped for democratization of the party alongside the democratization of the country. So while I argue below that the FMLN's arrival to state power in 2009 exacerbated processes of disillusionment and socio-economic stratification among its bases, these processes did not begin then, but much before, especially in the post-war moment when the FMLN transitioned from being a coalition of guerrilla armies to an opposition political party.

2.2 Social Movement Partyism in the Anti-Neoliberal Era: Protests, Mining, and Revolutionary Legacies

Though the post-war period provoked profound reshaping and rethinking of social life in the communities of Eastern Chalatenango, those people with direct participation in the CCR and its activities—committed leftist "double-militants" (Almeida 2014) or those who were militants of

both the FMLN party and an aligned social movement such as the CCR)—still maintained a clear sense of what "revolutionary" goals and practices entailed in the post-war context of right wing rule from the early 1990s-2009. In this period, working for "revolution" according to the approach of the CCR meant focusing on community organizing—recruiting and training more militants to their cause— who would then be organizers themselves as well and FMLN supporters. The greater the number of leftist militants, the more likely it was for the FMLN to win democratic elections at all levels of government, and the more powerful would be the protests and other contentious actions that the CCR promoted to resist the neoliberal agenda of ARENA governments.

In this sense that the goals of movements such as the CCR were so deeply and intimately intertwined with the goals of the FMLN, and that even the militants of one were the exact same militants of the other led Paul Almeida to describe this dynamic as social movement partyism, or a truly equitable and horizontal relation between party and movement in which the two work together for common goals in a harmonious way. While this may sufficiently describe the movement-party relation in these actors' spheres of public performance in the anti-neoliberal years, I argue that this concept in fact obscures the entrenched hierarchy through which movements such as the CCR were always subservient to the FMLN party (and the FPL apparatus before that), and also imputes an analytic and material distinction to movement and party that obviates their mutual imbrication as always having been "tied up together", since the time of the initial founding of the FPL political-military organization in the early 1970's.

Nevertheless, as part of a formidable leftist coalition that included both partisan and social movement elements, the CCR participated prominently in national actions and campaigns to halt the implementation of neoliberal economic policies during ARENA's four consecutive presidential administrations from 1989-2009. These protest campaigns included demonstrations to

secure the approval of land reform measures stipulated by the Peace Accords in the mid-1990s, the right to have their popular education teachers and processes validated by the Ministry of Education in the late 1990's, resistance to the privatization of the pension system in 2002, the "white marches" against the privatization of the health care system in the early 2000s, and resistance to the privatization of the national telecommunication system in 2006. (Almeida 2008; 2014).

The CCR's participation in these anti-neoliberal protests was coordinated through CRIPDES. For its part, CRIPDES was an affiliate of a still broader anti-neoliberal front, the Movimiento de Resistencia Popular 12 de octubre (MPR-12), which brought together peasant groups such as CRIPDES alongside unions, cooperatives, and urban neighborhood associations. The MPR-12 was one of the most militant and vocal organizations in the country's anti-neoliberal protests of the 1990s-2000s (Almeida 2014; Villeda 2012). All of these organizations also drew on a broad international support system that was first created and consolidated along factional lines during the war years of the 1980s. As alluded to in the opening chapter, I was a direct participant in these international support networks from 2006-2009, as Delegations Coordinator for the SHARE Foundation in which I actively supported the CCR and CRIPDES' work to resist neoliberalism by connecting their struggles transnationally to supporters in the US, both by leading delegations of US citizens to El Salvador, and by mobilizing US citizens to advocate with their own government on behalf of Salvadoran counterparts.

An illustrative example of both the CCR's engagement in contentious anti-neoliberal protests and my own involvement in such campaigns came in 2007. While working for the SHARE Foundation, one of my primary responsibilities was to coordinate "delegations" of US citizens to visit the communities and regional organizations who were members of CRIPDES, as it was one

of SHARE's historic counterpart organizations, as it had been aligned with the FPL during the war In this capacity, I spent much time in Chalatenango working with leaders of the CCR to organize these delegations and support the coordination of various transnational advocacy efforts of CRIPDES' anti-neoliberal agenda in El Salvador.

During the morning of a September 2007 visit to the community of Ignacio Ellacuria to plan for the proximate arrival of a delegation, I received a call from the SHARE office in San Salvador. I was informed that the top leaders of CRIPDES had been arrested on charges of terrorism for their participation in a peaceful demonstration in the town of Suchitoto in which dozens of organizations and thousands of people had protested a right-wing proposal to privatize the public water system. Apparently, the national-level CRIPDES leaders and some of their close associates had been singled out by police, arrested and apprehended, and immediately spirited away toward San Salvador.

I finished up the meeting in Ellacuria quickly in order to make the two-hour drive back to San Salvador to support whatever activities would be necessary to accompany and free the political prisoners. As I was about to leave, two women, who I had only briefly met in previous meetings, approached me: Maria and Claudia. Maria was a seasoned veteran of community organizing in Ellacuria and the larger CCR region, and someone I had worked with on a previous delegation visit. Claudia, at 17, was an active youth organizer, particularly around historical memory campaigns. They were also interested in participating in the efforts to free the comrades from CRIPDES, and so the two of them rode with me back to San Salvador to meet with other folks from CRIPDES and additional allied national and international organizations.

During that day and night, Maria, Claudia, and I worked with dozens of other folks to hassle authorities, make calls, and sit out front of the various holding cells that the CRIPDES

leaders were being transferred to and from. The CRIPDES leaders were freed a week later, and after months of court appearances and hearings, their trumped-up terrorism charges were finally dropped. Meanwhile, the ARENA government ceased to pursue its attempts to privatize water after its proposal had been met in Suchitoto by a multitudinous protest, making it overwhelmingly clear that citizens would not allow such a process to proceed.

This account is one that can serve as the foundation for telling the stories in this dissertation in three ways. First, it provides an example of the actions of the Salvadoran left during its anti-neoliberal apogee, from 1989-2009 when the conservative, right-wing ARENA party—political vehicle of the transnational capitalist class fraction (Robinson 2003) of the Salvadoran elite—found itself opposed by a unified left comprised of the social movement and the leftist FMLN party. So not only were multi-sectoral protests against the right-wing implementation of neoliberal polices (Almeida 2014) powerful and occasionally effective, but CRIPDES and its affiliated organizations were crucial elements of these protest campaigns as evidenced by official authorities' targeting of this organization's leaders for arrest and incarceration in the context of the Suchitoto protests against water privatization in 2007.

Second, this account provides a window into how my previous life as an activist in El Salvador directly facilitated this dissertation. Through my work with SHARE, I engaged in transnational activism that enabled me to build trust with organizations and relationships with individuals who would later become the foundations of this dissertation. Maria and Claudia were two of the most important collaborators in my research on the work of the CCR in eastern Chalatenango under FMLN rule. Both women have participated in multiple interviews with me and have also connected me with other key informants. These connections were the direct result of trust that I had built with them in previous years of our "shared" struggle in El Salvador, or at

the very least, my clearly positioning myself on the side of *their* struggle, as I cannot truly claim their struggle to be equally my own, being a white, upper middle-class, gringo man.

Third, and most importantly, once the FMLN achieved state power in 2009, these two women proceeded in diametrically opposed directions in their relationship to the FMLN, to state institutions, and to the practice of gender-based social struggles. After having come from a shared and unquestioned common struggle in the anti-neoliberal age—they even had a mentor-mentee relationship before—they now work for social change in El Salvador in very different ways. Their disagreements and divergent paths of activism serve as a microcosm of the competing visions and strategies of those activists who at one point would have all simply and proudly identified as militants of the CCR, of CRIPDES, and of the FMLN.[7]

These divisive competing visions of social change and of what the FMLN means and represents within communities and base organizations constitute the dynamic and contested content of the revolutionary legacies to which I refer throughout this dissertation. The contestations around revolutionary legacies are particularly pronounced in places like Chalatenango where people still live in the territories where war was waged and are—as in many of my movement territories—profoundly shaped by the insurgent networks that defined their social lives during war times. Importantly, I bring the voices of young people into these discussions to show how childhoods and adolescent times in refugee camps and warzones, as well as coming of age in post-

[7] Maria and Claudia went on to be friends and confidants of mine during my life working in El Salvador and subsequently as people who greatly facilitated my research and who I would consider to be co-researchers similarly to many other research participants in other movement territories.

war settings shapes emergent conceptions of revolutionary legacy—how people grapple with the meanings of revolutionary struggle, human loss, new contexts, and old power structures.

Despite the CCR's participation in national level economic and social policies, their work was consistently grounded in local analyses and issues which constituted the organization's mística (Stahler-Sholk et al 2008) or spiritual mission or reason for existing. The CCR's history of organization, popular struggle, and "return" to defend native lands still loomed large in the consciousness of the residents of Chalatenango, and in the work of the CCR. The most important and illustrative example of contemporary struggles against neoliberalism and for land-based claims in Chalatenango during the anti-neoliberal years was the struggle against mining. Beginning around 2005, when the Canadian mining company, Pacific Rim, first secured permission to "explore" the area for gold, the population and social organizations of eastern Chalatenango aggressively resisted the company's activities in their territory. Led by the CCR, hundreds of residents blockaded access roads to the lands coveted by Pacific Rim and sabotaged or destroyed machinery that the company had left close to communities in the course of 2005-06. These actions as well as the testimonies of a number of my interviewees reflected the collective sentiments of this territory's inhabitants that after so many comrades and family members had sacrificed their lives to establish and maintain control over their land during the Civil War, "it would be impossible" for a foreign mining company to displace the people, contaminate the land and water, and "take the profits with them", according to Leonardo, a historic leader of FPL special forces who now resides in the remote town, and CCR bastion close to the Honduran border. In 2008, he insisted to a delegation of US citizens that the inhabitants of Chalatenango would have no problem returning to armed struggle to safeguard their rights to retain and work their precious land and resources. Indeed, the struggle against mining was a unifying force for communities and

organizations both in Chalatenango and throughout the Salvadoran left. The anti-mining movement demonstrated how struggles for land and freedom continued being relevant in a democratic context (Spalding 2018), and also how leftist movement and partisan forces could work together to resist the onslaught of neoliberal economic forces (Almeida 2014).

In summary terms then, the structural historical moment of neoliberal democratic globalization provided organizations such as the CCR with opportunities for anti-systemic organizing to resist neoliberalism and to provide the communities of eastern Chalatenango with certain basic services, despite difficulties associated with post-war reshaping of social life, and ongoing struggles for an economically dignified existence. Crucially, in the region of eastern Chalatenango, these basic services and peoples' access to land itself was jeopardized by the threat of foreign metallic mineral mining in their territory which re-unified their base organizations around a common cause much like it had been during the war years. It was amid this complex local context in eastern Chalatenango that El Salvador's historic elections of 2009 loomed on the horizon. During this electoral cycle, every elected seat in the country was up for grabs and given the apparent exhaustion of the neoliberal economic model and the concomitant political project led by ARENA, the FMLN seemed to have a legitimate shot at gaining power across local and national branches of government, including in the Presidential Palace.

2.3 Instrumentalization as Demobilization and Decapitation: From Strength in Opposition to Weakness under FMLN Rule

Along with other repopulated communities and leftist bastions across El Salvador, residents of the communities of eastern Chalatenango rejoiced when the FMLN won presidential

elections in 2009 through an alliance with outsider candidate and journalist Mauricio Funes. Grassroots groups such as the CCR and other NGO's across the region that had historically seen their struggles as wrapped up in the political success of the FMLN—first during its revolutionary days of armed struggle, and then during the post-war period of neoliberal democracy—hoped that the party's arrival to executive state power would translate into a rollback of neoliberal economics on one hand and policy-based solutions to chronic problems of unemployment, poverty, and social violence on the other. While there were some policy wins for leftists under the FMLN—including more investment in health care, education, and violence prevention; co-governance with feminist organizations in certain areas of gender politics (Burridge 2020); an eventual ban on metallic mining (Spalding 2018); and the long-awaited construction of fortified levies along the Lempa River (see chapter 6)—what the FMLN government meant for the party's aligned social movements in practice was further subordination to the party apparatus through demobilization and decapitation, within the larger pattern of the party's instrumentalization of its aligned movement organizations.

2.3.1 The FMLN's Instrumentalization of the CCR

In contrast to dominant literature on movement-state relations under the left in Latin America, neither social movement-partyism (Almeida 2014), nor a dichotomy between cooptation and confrontation (Prevost, Vanden, Oliva Campos 2012) can adequately account for the social dynamics that went on in Chalatenango during the ten years of FMLN rule in El Salvador. Only in the early 2020's has literature begun to assess the tensions and divergences beyond dichotomies (cooptation vs. confrontation and vanguardism vs. autonomy) in movement-party/state relations

on the Latin American left in the context of the Pink Tide (Ellner et all 2022). Rather, we should understand the CCR's subordinate role to the FMLN while it held state power as a continuation of a relationship of instrumentalization in which the CCR has let the FMLN leadership "call the shots" on socio-political strategy, as it had done during the previous periods of civil war and post-war right-wing rule. Following Sujatha Fernandes' work on urban movements in Venezuela (2011), a relationship of instrumentalization entails partisan or government actors utilizing the discourses, actions, or very existence of various civil society groups for its own specific purposes, typically at the expense of the declared objectives or interests of the societal group. The was undoubtedly the case with the FMLN-CCR relationship, as the intermediary organization that officially linked the FMLN and CCR—CRIPDES—was itself created by the FPL leadership and continued serving its function of organizing vehicle of the rural civilian masses in its territories in the post-war period. The FMLN's arrival to state power was significant for its relationship with allied social movement organizations because it transformed how the now-governing party would utilize its instrumentalized movements.

Instrumentalization of movements under FMLN government was characterized by two parallel and interlocking processes: demobilization which refers to movements' cessation of contentious activities and grassroots organizing, and decapitation in which movements leaders were absorbed into government positions. Both processes resulted in the weakening of the movement left in the interest of strengthening the party/government left. However, as suggested by the origins of the CCR and CRIPDES—as public-facing extensions of the FMLN party (return to John's article on overflowing channels for movement-party references)—these organizations had always seen themselves as part and parcel of the FMLN's larger structure, and so their institutional distinctions in the post-war period should be understood as a strategic and operational

maneuver. A degree of formal institutional separation permitted a distribution of political vs. societal organizing responsibilities. That organizations such as the CCR would take a back seat to the party vanguard, as representatives of the masses, was not unusual nor unexpected for committed leftist militants, as they clearly understood the role of the CCR as an organizer of the masses and as a link between the party and the masses.

2.3.1.1 Demobilization in Chalatenango

With the FMLN in power, there was a total cessation of contentious activities by the CCR and its national-level umbrella organizations, CRIPDES and the MPR-12, as well as by the vast majority of other leftist SMO's, particularly those that had always served as fronts or public wings of PMO's. This moratorium on protests occurred despite the FMLN's continuation of most of the policies associated with a neoliberal economic model which had provoked such high levels of contention under ARENA governments of the 1990s-2000s. Though it was largely an unspoken mandate, social movement organizations like the CCR clearly understood that they were not expected to engage in resistance to their own allies, no matter what their "allies" did. Indeed, among my Salvadoran research participants, there was unanimous agreement across all movement territories that demobilization had occurred among movement organizations once the FMLN assumed state power.

The CCR's (non-) activity was emblematic of this process as it no longer implemented classic repertoires of social movement contention during FMLN administrations. For instance, the CCR's national-level resistance to metallic mineral mining became muted and shifted scales to local and transnational levels. As it had already essentially declared victory in its own region by expelling the prominent mining company, Pacific Rim, it began training other local movement organizations that operated in the places that Pacific Rim had transitioned to, such as ADES in the

neighboring department of Cabañas. By 2016, the CCR had focused its local anti-mining work on the creative—if legally contested—strategy of working with ideologically aligned local governments to institute municipal bans on mining (Spalding 2018).

The CCR, CRIPDES, and the MPR-12 also joined the Mesa Nacional contra la Minería (National Roundtable Against Mining), a coalition of grassroots organizations, Salvadoran environmentalist non-profits, and international support groups which focused its attention on transnational advocacy against mining. In particular, the group attempted to gain international support from allies in the US, Canada, and Europe to pressure decision-makers in the International Center for Settlements of Investment Disputes (ICSID), a subsidiary of the World Bank, to rule against Pacific Rim it its lawsuit against the Salvadoran government for not having granted the mining company its mineral extraction permissions as it had lobbied for. The ICSID ended up ruling in favor of the Salvadoran government in 2016 in a huge victory for the anti-mining movement (Spalding 2018).

And while these were all very interesting and innovative strategies to continue propelling the struggle against mining, none of them openly questioned the FMLN government's lack of prioritization of a national-level mining ban that would have been legally feasible and politically possible, especially during the 2012-2015 legislative cycle. The lack of contentious, national activity against mining issue reflected a demobilization of movements such as the CCR and its movement allies relative to their activity prior to the arrival of the FMLN to state power.

So while the CCR was still active on issues of mining at transnational and local levels, its activity on other nationally significant "neoliberal" issues—such as water, free trade, and agricultural policy (capitalist agriculture vs. food sovereignty etc.) was almost nonexistent. The ideal for many organic intellectuals of the left would be that a directly aligned or integrated

SMO/PMO such as the CCR would implement a strategy of critical support in its relation to a potentially revolutionary/transformative ruling government (Ellner ed. 2014). But in the eastern regions of Chalatenango, the CCR's support of the FMLN was not so much critical, as unconditional. Its degree of demobilization often even precluded normal organizing and strategizing, as I describe below.

Few of my interviewees were as eloquent on the topic of the CCR's demobilization as Lucio Amaya who was the Coordinator of Youth Organizing for the CCR from 2008-2010. Lucio contrasts the times of resistance to neoliberalism prior to 2009 with what came after the FMLN assumed state power saying: "in that (previous) moment, both sectors were on the same side: social movement and political party; (they were) opposition. Now, when the political party with whom the social movement historically identifies transitions to become government, there is a breakdown. A breakdown that was perhaps not as clear at the beginning, but that generated issues and differences between the government and the social movement…"

He continues this line of analysis from the perspective of social movement organizations such as the CCR, saying: "now, you can no longer go around so openly saying, look the government is the problem—now you cannot say that! Now you are the government—your party! In those days, being the opposition was so easy. That is the problem. I think that in any country, being the opposition is easy. To be the government and to have responsibilities is something very complicated."

Lucio's comments reflect both the historic shift that leftist forces underwent in becoming divided between those partisan actors that "became government" and those social movement actors who could no longer simply draw on a constant oppositional discourse and practice, as well as the

uncertainty that social movements experienced as they attempted to navigate this novel context of demobilization.

While critiques of demobilization were frequent among my research participants, many folks understood demobilization of social movements such as CRIPDES and the CCR under FMLN governments as politically astute, and downplayed the possibility that such a shift in strategy may undermine peasant movements' strategic, long-term goals. Maria, who had been one of my main contacts in Chalatenango as a worker for SHARE from 2006-2009 stated revealingly that, "with the Frente (the FMLN) in power, we no longer have to protest. We can simply talk to them. Why would we protest when they will listen? Protesting is for when you are not being listened to. Protesting is also to reject a government, and this is the government that we support. In the past we have protested to have this!"

The tensions between seeing demobilization as normatively positive given the need to support "our government" and the felt need to advocate for the historical interests of the oppressed and marginalized of Chalatenango were in evidence in the words of Maxima, a high ranking leader of the CCR during the mid 2010's. Maxima recalled fondly the CCR's political advocacy work against the "projects of death" of past neoliberal governments, such as mining, free trade agreements, and the privatization of water. She also initially discussed candidly how when the FMLN came to power the CCR's "political" work "decreased" from contentious street protests in coordination with other CRIPDES regions, to the simple "writing of communiques" in favor of the approval of new laws that would protect the rights to water, food sovereignty, and affordable medicine.

But when I asked her to describe in more depth how the FMLN being in government impacted the intensity of social mobilizations, she began to fumble and seemed unwilling to delve

into such analytic territory, stating revealingly, “We see that we have let many things pass by because it (the government) is of the left,” and with that, she brought that line of questioning to a close. The lesson was clear: there were elements of FMLN government policies that Maxima did not agree with, but as president of the CCR, she did not feel comfortable detailing a potentially condemnatory critique of the organization’s allied party.

It was not just the absence of protests that characterized the CCR’s relative demobilization under FMLN governments, but also the absence of proactive community organizing and movement strategizing. Particularly critical of this tendency was Amos, a historic leader in a small community in the territory of eastern Chalatenango, and someone I had considered a friend and confidant since around 2007. Amos was an influential leader of the CCR from 2006-2008, when I worked closely with the CCR on behalf of SHARE. Amos was a mid-range officer in the FPL, spending his youth and early adulthood strategizing and fighting alongside comrades who later became legislative deputies, ministers, and ambassadors in the FMLN government. In the mid 2010s Amos sat on the Board of Directors of CRIPDES but was never economically well-off and spends most of his time tending his cornfields and cattle while reserving ample time to discuss important topics with friends and acquaintances. In 2015, the long-time community leader accused the CCR and CRIPDES of having lost their strategic vision under the FMLN governments, and of transforming into an “operational organization” that functions based on “projects” that come from foreign funders—(an example of the NGOization of social struggle in El Salvador; see chapter 4). Amos stated explicitly that “the FMLN commands CRIPDES about what and when and to protest.” He felt that CRIPDES had been “glued to” the mandates of the party and the mandates of its international funding, as opposed to “the realities of the people”, particularly since 2009. He went on to describe how this was not the role of a social movement, “to just be receiving orders, like a

servant", but rather that a social movement should be "orienting the party toward the struggles of the people." In specific reference to the time period in which the FMLN came to power, he states, "Social movements are dispersed. There seems to be a type of anesthesia that…is beneficial for the FMLN—to not have a strong movement."

Another close friend and confidant from my time as a SHARE employee and collaborator with the CCR, Claudia, levels biting critiques of the demobilization and acquiescence of the CCR and CRIPDES under FMLN rule. She made specific reference to the ways that these historic organizations have forsaken their revolutionary ideals for socialism, collective liberation, and equality in favor of fomenting processes by which the communities of Chalatenango have "become comfortable" waiting for "handouts".

Claudia's clear, raw critique of the instrumentalization of the CCR dovetails with Amos's in positing that the FMLN "uses the social movement to carry its flag" and tells movements what to promote and struggle for. In contrast, she thinks that the party should comply with what the movement demands, and that a true social movement "comes from below" and "should never permit anyone to tell them what agenda to have."

But perhaps demobilization was most palpable to me in my fieldwork in 2014 when I attended a meeting of the MPR-12 as a participant observer. I was lucky enough to be there for a presentation by Edgardo an ostensibly independent, organic intellectual who led a workshop for the MPR-12's participants on El Salvador's national-level political and economic context. In what I perceived as an unplanned aside, he spent the last portion of the workshop lambasting the organizations of the workshop's attendees for not having had any sort of strategy to "critically support" FMLN governments and to deepen processes of social change in civil society with the help of an allied state. This intellectual's analysis of the lack of strategizing by the FMLN's allied

movements was entirely consistent with the perspectives of some of my more critical research participants in the CCR region, such as Lucio and Amos, and thoroughly substantiates the thesis that demobilization of allied movements under FMLN governments meant not just a cessation of contentious activities but also a limiting if not a total hold on strategizing and organizing by movement organizations under FMLN administrations.

2.3.1.2 Decapitation: State Absorption of Movement Leaders

In addition to demobilization, the other tangible expression of the instrumentalization of aligned social movements during FMLN governance was what Anabel called "decapitation", a process in which the FMLN and the two FMLN presidents had "cut off the heads of the movements" and had them begin working for various agencies of the FMLN-run government apparatus at national, departmental, and municipal levels. Often understood (though imprecisely and vaguely) as "cooptation" in both activist and academic circles, this specific process was a function of the larger instrumentalization relation in which historic hierarchies and power imbalances between party and movements were intensified upon the party's arrival to state power. With the FMLN controlling the central government, the party and movements were no longer only divided by function and import—a hierarchy common to Marxist-Leninist revolutionary movements—but as Lucio points out—now by the state-society divide as well. Now in control of the state, the party would lead and consolidate the revolutionary process, with the social movement masses in a supporting role. In practice, this meant that the party recruited the most capable, ambitious, and trusted movement leaders to work inside the government itself.

Consistent with such an analysis, Claudia contended that decapitation was not contrary to the will of the movement leaders who went into government service but that they gladly took these (relatively lucrative) position as "repayment" for their years of struggle. At a larger strategic level,

she understood decapitation as a ploy by the FMLN party to keep groups such as the MPR-12, CRIPDES and the CCR from "being in the streets." Claudia's view was however the minority among my research participants in Chalatenango, who largely viewed decapitation as a positive byproduct of the FMLN's victory in elections.

Claudia diverged sharply from her neighbor and former mentor Maria, for instance, who, as a long-time trusted leader in her community, had almost immediately been tapped to work in the FMLN municipal council of the town of Chalatenango beginning in 2010. She then went on to work in a post for the Departmental Government of Chalatenango in 2014 and was "elected" (see below) to a position on the Departmental Council of Chalatenango in 2017. Maria thought that the fact that she and other community leaders were now participating directly in governance meant that "this is now a true government of the people. We are there (in the government), and we are here (in the communities). This is what we have been struggling for all these years." Her appraisal of decapitation not only spells out clearly how the democratic conquest of state power had come to serve as a stand-in for revolutionary transformations in the post-war period, but also that loyal FMLN activists understood the movement-party relationship as having come to its maximum expression of success under FMLN governance.

In the case of Maxima, a leader of the CCR in the mid 2010's, her hesitancy and brevity regarding the CCR's lack of movement strategies on delicate issues under FMLN governments was strikingly contrasted by her loquacious praise of the CCR's "contributions" of leaders to government roles at both the municipal and national level. In her view, the CCR should be proud of how the party so frequently chose its leaders to fill government offices and saw the "migration" of the CCR's leaders to public posts as a sign of the leftist government's legitimacy. Maxima stated boastfully in 2015 with reference to localized decapitation: "We always have our best alliances

with the FMLN mayors. The mayors are born in the CCR. Some of them have been part of this great organization, and that facilitates efforts to work with them." Many other research Maria and Maxima, Fernando, a historic leader in the community of Guarjila, stated that, "the social organizations have contributed many leaderships—as much at the municipal level as in the (national) government institutions. So that makes it a government truly committed to the people and ensures that government officials come to the people."

Providing a more measured and balanced appraisal of decapitation was Lucio, who himself embodied the decapitation process. Indeed, he ceased his work as the Coordinator of Youth Organizing for the CCR in 2010 because he was recruited by the newly FMLN-controlled Ministry of Labor to take a job in their municipal office in the town of Chalatenango, capital of the department of the same name. He said that he had initially sought to maintain his close connection to the communities and to the work of the CCR, but that this "commitment lasted about a year, and then I was absorbed by this work." By the time I interviewed him in 2018, he described spending most of his time attending disputes around the implementation of labor law and participating in media efforts to diffuse state messages and to engage with citizens around their labor concerns. In a particularly sobering observation, Lucio admitted that during the FMLN's time in state power, social movement organizations such as the CCR simply "became weaker", as many CCR leaders and workers such as himself—as with other SMO's—had been "absorbed" by FMLN government institutions over the course of ten years of rule.

In material terms, the process of decapitation led to further divides between individuals who managed to benefit from the party's transition to formal executive power, and those who did not succeed in securing a government job or who rejected such a possibility for ideological or other reasons (despite being committed leftist activists). Those who attained such jobs—who were

already those most connected and trusted by party structures—became even more invested, both materially and materially ideologically, in the FMLN state-based project.

So while the FMLN party and its aligned social movements had already struggled with problematic hierarchies, clientelism, and power-grabbing (Sprenkels 2018), these phenomena were exacerbated when the FMLN came to state power, and a large swathe of the Salvadoran state's resources flowed through FMLN channels. The way that state power and resources reshaped social relationships in FMLN communities and organizations was best demonstrated in my field work through the case of Maria, who steadily climbed the ranks of FMLN held-government structures while also expanding her role in her home community (in interesting contrast to Lucio, who became fully absorbed into the FMLN-held Department of Labor after leaving his job with the CCR). Maria worked on connecting her home community's Board of Directors and Women's Committee more directly to financial opportunity for projects through municipal and departmental government agencies, and also encouraged the community's organizational structures to "return the favors" to party officials by showing up at events, assemblies, and participating in voter recruitment activities during election cycles.

The reciprocity-based logic of "returning favors" also applied to Maria herself in her relationships with members of the women's committee in Ellacuría. Indeed, according to various non-women's committee community members, and consistent with a political clientelism framework (Hagene & Gonzalez 2019), Maria's election to the Departmental Council of Chalatenango in 2017 was the result of her having provided the women's committees in Ellacuría and other neighboring communities with preferential access to party resources in preceding years—access that was forcefully critiqued as bald-faced corruption by numerous of her fellow community-members.

The ability of certain community members such as Maria to ascend to more formal and powerful roles within state and party structures while still straddling the state-society divide and increasing access to state resources for controversial purposes led to heightened divisions in many FMLN communities. Indeed, young people in particular in Maria's community—such as Claudia and David—no longer saw her as a reliable, trusted leader as they had prior to FMLN governments. They now saw Maria as a self-interested, close-minded political broker, who with a few other prominent community leaders (including her husband) in fact discouraged authentic participation by the rest of the community in collective social processes. For instance, David provided me with a detailed account—subsequently corroborated by others—of how he had arrived to the community wide election for a departmental representative in which only 36 people (including himself) of almost 400 possible voting community members were present. He stated that close to 30 of those there were members of Maria's women's committee and "they all dutifully raised their hands" when it came time to cast votes for their leader and benefactor, giving Maria an easy victory as community representative to the Departmental Council of the FMLN. The only disputes about her win came in response to the process itself in which David and two others abstained from voting and walked out of the assembly itself given the lack of legitimate popular participation by the community in the vitiated electoral exercise.

This account of events was not disputed by Maria or others who had been present. For her part, Maria stated that only the women she had been working with had seen the event/election as important enough to attend, and that engagement and participation—"to do one's part for the community" in her words—was something she had tried to instill among her fellow organized women. She thought that it was a shame that so few people had come to participate, but she emphasized to me that everyone in the community had been informed of the election and had the

opportunity to participate. According to David however, the fact that so few had participated in the election demonstrated that information was not being properly shared with all community members. Furthermore, he conveyed that many people were intentionally "staying away" from organizing and electoral processes internal to their community, the larger CCR movement, and the FMLN party as these processes simply solidified the ongoing power of those few leaders who were already in good standing with the party. The ability of folks like Maria to serve as political and economic brokers between party-stewarded resources and economically marginalized communities exemplifies how decapitation not only meant the weakening of movements by the exit of movement leaders to government posts, but also how some movement leaders inadvertently used their government posts in ways that weakened authentic community-based organizing processes themselves.

In sum, the FMLN's arrival to state power in 2009 precipitated the demobilization of aligned social movement organizations (formerly components of PMO's) such as the CCR and its larger umbrella organization of CRIPDES, as well as the decapitation of movement leaders whereby they were absorbed into paid work for the government, leaving many movements without their most capable leaders, or changing the way that leaders led. The FMLN's ascendance to state power also exacerbated the social and economic stratification of double-militants—that had already been occurring since the Peace Accords (Sprenkels 2018; Viterna 2013)—according to their proximity to government and party resources either directly through state employment or indirectly through a political broker such as Maria. Those individuals at community levels who had been well-positioned within leftist networks and had not voiced significant critiques of the party had even more opportunities and capacity to centralize socio-political power and economic resources. Demobilization, decapitation, and deepening clientelism combined to weaken the

movement side of the instrumentalized relation between party and movement as the FMLN ruled during the 2010s.

2.4 Blaming the Party: Disputes and Dissent Within and Beyond the CCR

The perspectives of those who had become disillusioned as a result of demobilization, decapitation, and clientelism under FMLN governments reveal both an intimate understanding and a sophisticated critique of the FMLN's instrumentalization of the CCR. Interestingly, only two of my research participants (Claudia and Amos) rejected the efficacy of the instrumentalization relation itself, in that they posited that movements should be autonomous of the party and not subordinate to it all. However, most critiques of movement-party relations revolved around the FMLN's actions, not those of the CCR. That the CCR was not typically the object of critique implicitly revealed that even among folks with a critical reading of certain aspects of the movement-party relation, the already-existing subordination of the CCR to the FMLN was itself beyond reproach. Critiques by disgruntled militants—a majority of my sample population by 2018—coalesced around three topics: the FMLN's lack of "listening" to the people/movements; the FMLN's imposition of internal candidates; and the FMLN's treatment of any militant's critique of the party (or of the party-movement relation) as treason to the larger leftist cause.

2.4.1 "They Don't Listen": The FMLN's Distance from the People

As already described, the FMLN retained a rigid vanguardist internal hierarchy even through its time as an opposition party in the post-war period. Fluid communication and dialogue

with its grassroots bases had never been a strong point, but the disconnect between national leadership and militants in leftist movements and communities deepened as the FMLN governed from 2009-2019. An experiential account of the relation between FPL leadership and its social bases in Chalate from war-time through the transition to democratic competition is particularly helpful for contextualizing this topic.

Amos, the critical community leader and one time leader of the CCR, describes this process in vivid terms. He remembered the dream of the FPL in the 80's as one of "forming a new popular government with a more social focus at a national level. That was the dream of power." Describing what became of the FPL, and by extension of the FMLN in the aftermath of peace, Amos recounts that the FMLN's top leaders left the communities, entering "into a different political scenario" (that of political bargaining) where the "real feeling" (of the struggle) began to deteriorate. But he reserved his harshest words for when the FMLN came to state power in 2009, saying this was when party leaders have "become comfortable" and ascended to a "new social class" which is far away from the realities of the people. Echoing the analyses of Bamyeh (2009) and Michels (1918) regarding how the assumption of state power reshapes leaders' psychology and transforms them into a new oligarchy (respectively), Isabel believes that high level FMLN leaders' ascension into an elite political class when they assumed state power "made them change," as they began concerning themselves only with "negotiations with the right-wing, with the business owners, with the judges…". His personal evidence of this phenomenon was that "they (top FMLN leaders) won't even talk to you as they drive past in their nice cars…" as had occurred one time in his community. He did clarify though, that he didn't feel betrayed by this slight, just disappointed, that an old comrade-in-arms turned politician hadn't had time to say hello to him.

Some younger activists, whose principal experience with the FMLN had occurred while the party wielded formal executive power, were much sharper and critical in their words, not having had decades of experience with the historic leaders of the FMLN the way Amos had. Elena, a technical worker with the CCR from 2018-2020, said simply that "as a party, they have lost contact with the people. And many people who fought in the war for the FMLN say that the party no longer listens to them." Similarly, the other semi-young activist David (who still recalls the repopulation of eastern Chalatenango in the late 1980s) claims that "normal, common people need to make demands, proposals; they need to speak, and the party is not letting the people be protagonists…"

But the more historicized perspectives of long-time militants, such as Esteban Cruz, provide even more useful detail about how these communicational channels could and should work. Esteban felt that the party's lack of listening was just one aspect of a larger communicational challenge in which the party was not properly informing its social bases, or what party militants refer to as "base committees" (as opposed to the community boards of directors which are the community organizations with which the CCR works). Esteban said, "The base committees (of the party) are so important, they are the voice of the people. Any information that comes to the municipal level (and which originally emanated from the party's national leadership) has to be passed down to the base committees. And that is a challenge for the party, a big challenge… the base committees must be informed, they must be trained, to do their analysis; their own analysis, and that they come to their own conclusions, and that they make suggestions at the municipal level, and the national level, and that they (their suggestions) be taken into account…".

Esteban's words suggest that the party has the appropriate structures in place to facilitate a dialogic flow of information between the base committees and the party leadership, but that

information has simply not flowed in either direction. His words also imply that even when the base committees undertake analyses (of social reality) it is not necessarily permitted to be "their own", but rather base committee analyses are likely influenced or even determined by the formal party "line" that "comes down" from the leadership. Regardless of whether these analyses are authentically created at the grassroots level or not, Esteban believes that party leadership has been unable to take these analyses and perspectives into account when they create and implement their larger political strategies. It is important to note that in contrast to the total critiques of the FMLN's instrumentalization of its aligned movements (such as those by Claudia and Amos) Esteban never explicitly demanded that the FMLN's movements and bases be autonomous from the FMLN but rather that the communication simply needed to improve; the grassroots needed to be informed and listened to in a much more authentic and proactive way such that they were being truly valued by party leadership.

When I asked in various ways how the people and the social organizations and movements such as the CCR and CRIPES could potentially work differently to change this relation to the party, Esteban never ceased to refocus his analysis on the party and on electoral processes; that the CCR needs to "continue working" in ways that would lead to the FMLN's future success in elections. He incorporated social movements' actions and roles in his analysis but in a way that did not destabilize the instrumentlization relation. Rather, even when signaling out the need for "decisions (by the party) to be made in consensus with the people" he saw the primary result of this deficiency being the FMLN's poor performance in the 2018 municipal and legislative elections, as "the people did not get out to vote." In contrast to highlighting the possibility that social movements themselves demand more accountability and communication from the party or seek to carve out a new relation with the party, Esteban sees people's electoral abstentionism as

the only logical result of the FMLN's behavior. His analysis eviscerates the CCR and other similar social movements of any agency for recreating a relationship with their aligned FMLN party.

2.4.2 "He Who is Most Obedient…": The FMLN's Imposition of Internal Candidates

The FMLN's lack of listening to community and movement voices was most tangibly expressed and exemplified according to my research participants by the party's imposition of the candidates who would run for elected positions against candidates of other parties. Indeed, when Esteban enumerated his critiques of the FMLN party—in order of importance—the very first one was the lack of internal elections for candidates, a practice which had become normalized in the first few years of FMLN administrations. He described this as a significant change from "what used to be done before… there used to be elections to select the candidates to run for office, there were internal elections, elections for that. But that ended, because the party entered into contradiction… people that they (party leadership) didn't like would get through (as candidates for office). So they got rid of that (internal elections) and just starting naming (candidates)."

Similarly, Amos contended that the FMLN leadership lost interest in participatory democracy within party structures as they began to wield formal state power. He described how instead of making a candidate or representative out of the person most loyal to the people and the communities, "They (the party) look for the person who is most loyal to a sector of the party, he who is most obedient…most interested in searching out a personal objective (through the party)." Isabel proceeded to provide numerous examples of the FMLN "handpicking" candidates for legislative elections in municipal and legislative elections in Chalatenango despite resistance from broad sections of the communities.

For his part, David decried the fact that it's "always the same people with political positions and serving as leaders… the same people for their whole lives." When I asked him to clarify if he meant at national levels or local levels, he emphasized that it was at both scales, and that for him the most egregious example locally was that of Maria, as already described. Indeed, the lack of participatory democracy within FMLN structures was substantiated across multiple other interviews both as a practice by the FMLN and a source of discontentment among the bases: the imposition of candidates hollowed out the FMLN's legitimacy and was cited as one of their biggest sources of militants' disillusionment with the prospects of the left's ability to foment social change. And as previously mentioned by Esteban, the FMLN's lack of listening as expressed by their imposition of electoral candidates ultimately led people to actually abstain from participating in elections at all, whether at national levels such as in the municipal and legislative elections of 2018, or in the community-level election in Ellacuria in which Maria breezed to victory with a questionable community quorum.

Finally, and consistent with FMLN leadership's attempts to maintain vanguardist control over the party as a whole, as well as its aligned movements and community bases, it was entirely intolerant of internal critiques. Speaking from her own experiences in her community of Ellacuria, and in national level party structures and leftist movements as a younger activist, Claudia stated, "you cannot be critical anymore, if you say that the party is wrong, or is screwing up…they call you right wing—of ARENA." Indeed, across my interviewees in Chalatenango and in other movement territories, activists who were loyal to the FMLN regarded public critiques of the party as "playing into the hands of the right-wing" while those activists who were critical of party leadership lamented that there was no space for public critique, even of a constructive variety. Those who seemed to straddle this line—by detailing constructive critiques to me during

interviews—did so in private, from a place of trust with me that I would not use such critiques in a way that would be harmful to the leftist cause in El Salvador. Whether I have complied with their wishes or not will ultimately be a matter for them to decide.

2.5 "Shoring up the Lines of the Left": the Brief Specter of Strategy Shift

What came from all this dissent and disillusionment? People expressed their frustration among trusted friends and confidants, but also at the polls. The FMLN suffered a dramatic loss in the legislative and municipal elections of March 4th, 2018 (as described in introduction). This was followed by much handwringing, excuses, and conjectures followed by another dramatic loss in 2019, this time in presidential elections, to the party's former member and ally, Nayib Bukele.

While there was pointed if numerically insignificant opposition to the instrumentalization of the CCR by the FMLN from within a small minority of its own ranks—(by people such as Claudia who were then labeled as traitors and right-wing) from the beginning of the FMLN's rule (in 2009), as well as from (ostensibly independent) organic intellectuals (such as Edgardo in 2014 described above) this subordinated relationship to the FMLN was not openly questioned in formal CCR spaces by established participants until 2018, after the FMLN's devastating loss in municipal and legislative elections. At this crucial point, it seemed to me that there may have been enough elements and popular demand within the CCR (especially among younger, up-and-coming leaders) to push the organization toward more autonomous strategies that would see it moving away from a subordinate relationship to the FMLN.

I was present at a CCR Board of Directors meeting in March 2018—just one week after the FMLN's defeat at the polls—in which such strategic matters were being discussed. In addition

to myself, there were two other non-members of the CCR Board present for the meeting: a representative from one of the CCR's most important European funders, and an appointed member (as opposed to a member elected from the communities such as Maria) from the FMLN's Departmental Council of Chalatenango. The main objective of the meeting was to analyze the social reality in the wake of the FMLN's defeats in the interest of orienting the organization's action in the short term, but perhaps unsurprisingly, the meeting's discussions revolved around what the party and the CCR had done wrong in the years before the election.

A number of CCR workers (the majority of whom were in their early 20s) posited scathing if diplomatic critiques of the CCR's complacency in past years and demanded that it carve out a "new" more explicitly anti-neoliberal and anti-hierarchical path for itself in which it would be more independent of the FMLN. But these critiques were posited primarily by young folks, who, though formal workers of the CCR and therefore members of its Board of Directors, were on the periphery of the decision-making process of the organization as a whole which was largely subordinated to clear, if informal FMLN party mandates. Nevertheless, it was significant that the critiques were being voiced at all. Indeed at one point, a young woman in her 20's, Elena, stated that the CCR needed to advocate for more "socialist policies, as I am told it once did, even if the FMLN no longer has that interest…" and was promptly told to "quiet herself in these meetings" by the FMLN's Departmental Council representative. To be sure, the meeting was characterized by tension, strong words, and a mix of retrospective self-criticism, calls for loyalty to the larger struggle of the Salvadoran left, and demands for new directions for the organization and party, especially in terms of listening to its younger members and activists.

Later that same day, after the morning's contentious meeting was over, I conducted an interview with a top CCR leader at the time, the relatively young woman, Violeta. She seemed

both physically and mentally exhausted by that point in the afternoon but provided me with a short interview that would define my understanding of the CCR's prospects in the wake of the FMLN's electoral defeat of 2018. When I asked her to comment on the divergent opinions expressed at the meeting that morning, she stayed true to the line of the CCR and of the FMLN by consistently defining the strategic goals of the CCR as a function of the electoral success of the FMLN. Analyzing the impacts of the FMLN's electoral defeat, she said, "with these results we are left quite bad off as a social movement, but now we will just have to work harder as a movement, advocate more…as a social movement, we maintain the struggle to continue working so that the Frente (FMLN) continues advancing, and so that it can rise back up from this fall it has had right now…" Even as I used somewhat leading questions (on one hand in an unethical manner, but on the other hand to make my own positionality explicit) to push her to think of these critiques in the context of the possibility of changing the CCR's strategy itself—that is to look critically and creatively inward as a movement—she never failed to bring the conversation back to the actions of the FMLN, and to see the role of the CCR as being in service of the FMLN's political project. This was the case even despite the very bitter experiences that Violeta had had in recent months in the relationship with the FMLN in which she felt that she and the rest of the CCR had been tricked by FMLN leaders into mobilizing its bases for an activity for the presentation of a municipal candidate that they did not actually support. Despite this particular betrayal and other disappointments with the party, Violeta again professed to stay true to the FMLN, and implicitly, to maintain the CCR in a subordinate and instrumentalized role; this was the historical path of course. As she had said at the beginning of the interview, "the (parameters of the) struggle is set" and were not to be altered by her.

However, by the end of our conversation and after my specific marshalling of some of the critiques presented at the meeting, she did eventually propose a more critical and movement-led form of instrumentalized relationship with the FMLN. Violeta reformulated many of the critiques already forwarded by herself and other younger members of the CCR into concrete demands that could potentially be furthered by the CCR in the new context in which the party had been so resoundingly defeated at the polls. She said: "We as a social movement are going to demand to the party that they listen to the people, and that they address some of the complaints of the people, and that they have to make changes in the party, change up the leaders, changes to how they are going to do politics, so that they work for the people, not for their own personal interests." With those statements she suggested that the CCR as an organization and as a social movement would be taking into account the most critical perspectives that had been posited by its members and grassroots supporters both that morning at the meeting and in other private and public spaces. She even admitted that she agreed with many of the critiques, and while she echoed the need for the party to "listen more to the people" she never went so far as to critique the foundational hierarchy of the instrumentalization relation itself (as Amos and Claudia had been), in which the CCR was subservient to the FMLN.

Nevertheless, I left the country in April 2018 curious as to whether this moment would be one in which the CCR might evolve in its movement strategy vis a vis the FMLN, or whether it would continue in a subordinate instrumentalized relationship with the party. This moment of critical inflection proved to be short-lived. By March of 2019, when I returned for another brief research visit, it was clear that instrumentalization had continued, and likely had been further strengthened by the imminent arrival of a new "enemy" government—this time led by former FMLN mayor of San Salvador, Nayib Bukele, who had won presidential elections the week before

I arrived to the country, with a new party he had created, Nuevas Ideas (New Ideas). This seemed to make CCR militants even more concerned with "shoring up the lines" ("cerrando filas") of the left, and recruiting new members to the cause.

In this context, I made a special effort to interview the two most vocal young critics from the CCR's Board of Directors meeting from the previous year: Elena and Josue, in order to gauge their understanding of any strategic shifts in CCR activities. In response to my questions—in separate interviews—about whether or not the CCR's strategy had changed as a result of recent electoral defeats and collective discussions internal to the CCR, both of them declared that it most certainly had. However, I soon found that these strategic changes were still not meant to change the instrumentalization relation, but rather to fortify it. These young CCR workers substantiated their organization's changes by citing their renewed emphasis in the past year on community organizing and critical consciousness-raising, especially among youth, moves which they wholeheartedly supported and were excited to be leading. elena commented that the focus on grassroots awareness-raising with youth was "what needed to have been done earlier, throughout the FMLN governments", but that had fallen by the wayside. Josue specified that in this new round of "political schools"—as he called the awareness-raising efforts with youth—they were taking care to not foreground any type of partisan interest or ideology. Implying that the partisan affiliation of the CCR with the FMLN had been discredited or "burned" among many youth in Chalatenango, he said, "We try not to go with the partisan stuff, but rather with just looking at the needs and interests of the people in general, and how we can organize ourselves to address those needs."

Alongside their understanding of a return to grassroots organizing and non-partisan, political formation for youth as a strategy shift for the CCR, both Josue and Elena echoed the

CCR's formal line in understanding the organization's struggle as one that was in service of the electoral and political success of the FMLN; something that could essentially be measured by the FMLN's performance at the polls. Elena responded to my question about how the CCR and CRIPDES could work differently to better pursue the movement's goals saying "If we want the party to grow again, we have to go back down to the grassroots and work there, listen to the people, teach our history, because there are still so many young people who do not know our history…"

In this sense then, my final research visit in March 2019 found no evidence that the CCR had changed its strategy vis a vis the FMLN, but rather that the CCR had become newly dedicated to return to the grassroots to promote the work of youth and women's organizing and to do so in an apolitical way, such that people might one day come back around to leftist ideals despite the exhaustion of the FMLN-led leftist ideology among many young people. So regardless of any discord within the CCR during 2018 regarding its movement strategies, the CCR had returned back to what I would consider its "comfort zone" by 2019: a relationship of instrumentalization with the FMLN in which both entities were back in opposition, planning to organize the grassroots to resist a neoliberal and neo-populist government that was set to formally take state power.

2.6 Conclusion: A Critical, Territorial Framework for Interrogating Movement-State Interactions in Post-Revolutionary Central America

In this chapter, I have described how the initial emergence of the CCR as a regional chapter of CRIPDES—an organization meant to be a public front organization for the FPL faction, or political-military organization (PMO) of the FMLN—defined its subsequent pathways and collective practices in the post-war period. As an informal appendage of the FMLN party, the CCR

was instrumentalized by the party in a variety of ways depending on the larger political context. During the 20 years of right-wing ARENA governments, the CCR collaborated with the FMLN and other leftist social movement organizations to mobilize large-scale protests to neoliberal economic policies implemented by ARENA and to organize grassroots communities to support and vote for the FMLN. Once the FMLN finally did win presidential and legislative elections in 2009, the CCR drastically shifted its activity. It demobilized by ceasing its grassroots organizing and contentious protests aimed at resisting the neoliberal model—even when elements of this model were still being implemented by the FMLN—and also became decapitated, in that many of its leaders went to work for FMLN-run government agencies. I have demonstrated how the processes of demobilization and decapitation—as expressions of the instrumentalization relation under FMLN governments—contributed to deepening the disillusionment and socio-economic stratification among grassroots CCR and FMLN militants that had been ongoing since the end of the Civil War in 1992. Finally, I have shown that even by 2018, when the FMLN had become so distanced from its grassroots movements (such as the CCR) and communities (such as those in eastern Chalatenango) that many longtime FMLN supporters chose to not vote for the FMLN in municipal and legislative elections, that the CCR still did not substantively change its relationship with the FMLN. Rather, the organization returned to grassroots organizing to attempt to rebuild the party's bases for future attempts at regaining political power.

As the first empirical case in this dissertation, this chapter serves as a control case for movement strategies when their partisan allies come to power at the national level. In general alignment with much literature which demonstrates the prevalence of "cooptation" of social movements with allies in power (Prevost, Vanden and Campos 2014), this chapter shows how the cooptation tendency can be more precisely conceptualized through a focus on historical

relationships of instrumentalization between parties and movements that are expressed through tangible processes of demobilization of social movements and the decapitation of their leaders by aligned political parties. The subsequent chapters in this dissertation will highlight movement strategies that *deviate* from this most common of tendency, both in El Salvador and in other Latin American countries where leftist parties came to power.

But beyond laying the conceptual foundation for this dissertation, this chapter also provides the analytical and historical foundations as well. In analytic terms, I have used a particular social movement organization—in this case the CCR—as an entree into a movement territory; a geographic space with particular historical, ideological, cultural, and political characteristics that significantly shape the contours and possibilities of movement activity. Such an analytic focus allows me to engage not just with formal, active members of SMOs, but also with SMOs' dissidents and opponents, and with other organizational actors operating in the same territory. In this sense, an analytic focus on movement territories facilitates additional contextual knowledge for understanding how and why certain efforts for social change are effective or not within their specific territories.

Finally, this chapter evinces the salience of the lens of "historical memory" in recently post-revolutionary countries such as El Salvador and Nicaragua, a lens which will be important throughout this dissertation. We have seen how CCR participants—and dissidents—in the movement territory of eastern Chalatenango deploy their memory of past struggle in the Civil War of the 80's to navigate understandings of the present, especially the intersections between the legacy of "popular power" that was so prevalent during the 70's and 80's in the movement territory of eastern Chalatenango, and the influence of new phenomena such as the country's insertion into global accumulation circuits, the gradual disarticulation of formerly close-knit communities, and

the ways that the FMLN's exercise of democratic power from 2009-2019 contributed to further disillusionment in the communities of Chalatenango. One of the recurring questions that research participants felt the need to answer of their own volition (I never asked it directly), was if "the struggle (the Civil War of the 80s) was worth it". Regardless of how participants responded to this question based on their analysis of the present, they all continued to be inspired by that historical struggle. The ongoing strength of historical memory enables residents of Chalatenango to continue dreaming and believing in the power of community-based social change, and to be motivated to do their party for such change. Indeed, one of the most vocal critics of the CCR and FMLN in my sample for this chapter was David, and even he felt the need to finish his interview saying, "the FMLN belongs to the people. It belongs to the people who have struggled for so long and so much for a better life… I continue to be of the FMLN (despite its problems) because I feel like I still haven't done my part for the party, or for the people. Yes, for the people." The dream of what the FMLN represents continues motivating many people in Chalatenango to do their part for the larger "people" in the region and country.

3.0 Between the Plantation and Self-Management: Cooperativism and Disunion in the Miraflor Region of Nicaragua

In my initial visit to Central America as a study abroad student in 2004, it was Nicaragua, not El Salvador, that first captured my heart. It was the one country in the region that had experienced a successful national revolution and the country where I had built the deepest relationships, even in just the two months that I had studied and lived there. And while I had spent most of my time in 2004 in the capital city of Managua, my visit to the tiny community of Sontule, in the ecological preserve of Miraflor, in the northern department of Esteli, had made the revolutionary struggle of the 80's very tangible to me. That community and its people sparked my interest in how the ideals of the Sandinista revolution were being reformulated and implemented in new ways in the present. Given these past experiences in Sontule, this community served as the headquarters for my interrogation of the movement territory of the "Miraflor".

Due to my pre-existing contacts and knowledge in the Miraflor region, I was able to interrogate the space as a *movement territory* in the same way that I explored movement territories in El Salvador: I began with an examination of a specific, collective effort for social change that had seemed to be successful in pursuing its objectives, and proceeded to explore how historical, ecological, and cultural factors shaped the social and organizational contours of this effort, its prospects for success, and its interactions with state institutions governed by its ostensible political allies. The collective effort for social change that I researched in the Miraflor was that of cooperatives, undoubtedly the strongest type of organization that existed in this region of the country given the Sandinista government's emphasis on creating cooperatives during the 1980s,

as well as cooperatives' abilities to adapt to shifting economic and political contexts in the decades that followed.

A focus on cooperatives in the Miraflor also made sense because by the time I did serious fieldwork in Nicaragua, I was motivated by an investigative focus on a specific type of interaction between movements and states that I found most interesting and novel in El Salvador: namely "negotiations" between movements and state institutions. An interest in movement-state negotiation derived from my discovery of a particularly successful type of negotiation between movements and state institutions in El Salvador, that of "critical collaboration" between feminist groups and state institutions whereby movement leaders participate as equals with state officials in the formulation, implementation, and oversight of public policies (see next chapter). Critical collaboration portends a level of autonomy for movements in which they construct a relationship with governance bodies whereby they can "support what is good and critique what is bad." During my field work in Nicaragua, I wanted to see if this sort of relationship might exist between any movements and state institutions in Nicaragua.

I hypothesized that perhaps in the cooperativist sector of Nicaragua there would be more space for a collaborative relation with Sandinista government agencies due to the non-confrontational nature of the cooperativist sector (in contrast to the country's feminist and environmental movements, see chapters 5 and 7) and their historical connection with and derivation from the Sandinista Revolution of the 1980s. I also thought Miraflor cooperatives' relative distance from the center of political power in Managua (and the national government's concern with complete loyalty from grassroots sectors) but proximity to a municipal government solidly controlled by the Sandinistas (in Esteli), could present opportunities for dialogue and negotiation between movements and local state institutions.

During a total of three months from 2015-2017, I researched the three cooperatives that currently operate in Sontule: one male-dominated, coffee-focused cooperative that had been created directly by Sandinista operatives sent from Managua in the early 80s; another male-dominated coffee cooperative that split from the first over disputes over leadership and internal decision-making processes after the democratic defeat of the Sandinista Revolution in 1990; and one entirely made up of women who had "seen the benefits" of cooperativism as practiced by the men in their community and wanted to form their own. I did a total of 18 interviews regarding the cooperative sector in Nicaragua, 5 of these with non-profit and academic experts in this substantive area (in both Estelí and Managua), and 13 with members of the various cooperatives in Sontule.

Ultimately, I found that cooperatives in Miraflor engaged in no truly autonomous negotiations with state institutions the way that some feminist organizations did in El Salvador, but rather exemplified a Nicaraguan form of *instrumentalization* of movements by the leftist party, albeit one that was much more implicit and politically distant, compared to what I had researched in Chalatenango, El Salvador. Indeed, the cooperatives of Sontule *longed* for more contact with government institutions in hopes that such interaction might result in tangible benefits to their efforts for social change, but they typically felt ignored by public institutions. The interactions that did occur between cooperatives and local state institutions were largely engineered by the state for its interests, though these sometimes converged with the cooperatives' interests as well, particularly in the case of the women's cooperative. Additionally, I found that the three cooperatives in Sontule differed greatly among themselves in terms of political and economic vision, while also practicing varying degrees of *self-management*, a movement tendency which was much more pronounced in Nicaragua than in El Salvador (see Ch. 5)

3.1 The Emergence of the Jose Benito Cooperative in Sontule, Miraflor

The Miraflor territory, which corresponds to the internationally recognized ecological preserve of the same name, is characterized by lush, mountainous terrain, sparsely populated rural communities, much agricultural activity (coffee, cacao, and basic grains as well as cash crops well-suited for the area's high altitudes and cooler temperatures including potatoes and cabbage), and a strong affiliation with the FSLN. But for all its beauty, it still suffers from myriad social and economic problems that local residents feel stem from the fact that the region's development has never been a priority of local government administrations, not even those of the FSLN.

For decades the region has suffered from a lack of sufficient health and educational facilities, and most of the region—including the community of Sontule, where I did most of my research—still has not been incorporated into the country's electric grid. Transportation is a constant source of uncertainty for the region's inhabitants as busses run infrequently, inconsistently, and roads themselves are primarily dirt, with occasional portions shored up by gravel. Those communities that are close to rivers, such as Sontule, become practically inaccessible during portions of the rainy season, as busses and cars are forced to make a three-hour loop from Esteli—the closest large town—to avoid a river crossing, making the journey far from the simple, 45-minute affair during the dry season. Simpler still would be the construction of a bridge across that small river which "would make everything different here" according to Lucia, a founder and leader of Sontule's women's cooperative.

Before being enshrined as a natural preserve in 1990, the Miraflor region was a Sandinista bastion during the Revolution of the 1980's and was consolidated as such through the intentional creation of a dense network of agricultural cooperatives and cooperative style social structures which would be the bedrock of a new socialist society (Nuñez 1988). Rural areas such as the

Miraflor would also be the focus of the Sandinista state's agrarian reform process which appropriated land from wealthy landowners, nationalized it, and redistributed it to newly formed local cooperatives (Enriquez 1990; Walker and Wade 2017). To ensure the success of cooperative organization and the loyalty of cooperative associates in remote rural regions such as the Miraflor, Sandinista officials sent hand-picked operatives to create and lead these groups. Thus, it was outsiders to communities such as Sontule who were tasked with consolidating the new revolutionary social structures alongside those inhabitants who already resided in these areas.

By 1983, the agricultural cooperative of Sontule was thriving. Named after Jose Benito Diaz Jimenez, an Estelí native who was killed in the war that toppled the Somoza dictatorship in 1979, the cooperative had 40 associates who utilized government credit and machinery to produce coffee and cacao for sale on the international market, and a host of other agricultural products for local consumption. The "Jose Benito"—as it is still known—also served as the primary social structure in the community, doubling as a local governance body and as a link with outside entities both economically and politically. Ernesto, one of the founders of the Jose Benito was a trusted Sandinista representative who had been sent from Esteli to help lead the cooperative in Sontule, He recounts:

> "We founded the cooperative with two objectives: to strengthen the defense of these lands, and to facilitate agricultural production. But the cooperative was not alone, rather it had a population alongside it. 400 people [in Sontule] who said 'we support this cooperative because it is giving us work, and because it is making us known at the national and international level as something that is not just to have basic goods for the community but

also to strengthen the work of the community—health care, education, and to support the youth who are growing up fast…"

The three founding members of the Jose Benito that I interviewed all emphasized these aspects of the cooperative: that it enabled increased agricultural production (including for international markets), that it supported social service provision for the community through political relations with larger revolutionary structures, and that is also managed military defense of the lands and resources.

But already by 1984, the Jose Benito's ability to balance cooperative agricultural production with military defense of the territory was tested by aggressive military enemies: "Contras" (counter-revolutionary forces) who had been financed and trained by the Reagan administration began coming across the Honduran border to commit terrorist attacks against communities loyal to the Sandinista Revolution (Walker and Wade 2017). Given the Miraflor's already strong network of cooperatives and Sandinista-affiliated communities, the region was a primary target of Contra attacks (Walker 1987). Though Sontule's agricultural cooperative was ostensibly prepared to serve as the first line of military defense, their small numbers and minimal weaponry often put them at the mercy of the Contra fighters who according to Sontule residents would occasionally mobilize up to 500 fighters to sweep the Miraflor region. The Jose Benito's building was burned to the ground three times in as many years in the mid 1980's, though with the help of international supporters and donors, as well as the Sandinista government's Rural Development Bank, it was rebuilt again each time. Many cooperative associates and their family members were killed, kidnapped, and raped in the context of these attacks as well, experiences which are still routinely remembered and denounced in current conversations.

Indeed, my first night in the community of Sontule in 2004, I heard the tale of the community's periodic ravaging by Contras from Doña Amada Flores, the matriarch of a three-generation family of around 12. Verbose, wise, and the caretaker of a crucial node in the Sontule region's network of self-management, she would come to be like a grandmother to me during my time living in Central America from 2006-2012 and would later be one of my most important research collaborators in the Miraflor region. But that first night, Amada told me of how her husband, an associate of the Jose Benito was killed by Contras in 1985, and how her daughter was kidnapped and raped by them that same year and was "never the same again".

Other residents' accounts of Contra attacks were similar. Oscar, who lived down the dirt road from Amada, and who was only a teenager during the 1980's, remembers that those times were "frightful" and that "sometimes we would be picking coffee, and we would be notified from another area that they [the Contras] were coming. We would grab our guns and take cover, while civilians would run down to the rivers as far as they could make it, closer to Estelí… and after 10 years of that, many of them didn't come back [to the community] anymore. Only the most resistant of us stayed here until the end [of the war]."

Despite frequent Contra attacks and the general difficulties of attempting to construct a more democratic-socialist society in the wake of a sultanistic[8] political regime and on the remains of a semi-feudal social structure (Enriquez 1990; Goodwin 2001), the Jose Benito cooperative continued as the primary community organization in Sontule through the 1980s, and "did very

[8] Deriving from the work of Max Weber, a sultanistic or neopatrimonial authoritarian political regime refers to a form of personalistic domination in which coercion by the dictator combines with distribution of patronage and offices to "clients" to ensure their loyalty. Such a regime is typically predicated on and reproduces depoliticized and demobilized masses as well as weak economic elites that are dependent on the state (Goodwin 2001).

well", according to Oscar. "Even in times of war, we made money, and even as we paid back loans from the State Development Bank, we did well."

But by the end of the 1980's the Reagan administration's support for the contras and its campaign of economic sabotage had taken a toll of the Nicaraguan population, who suffered from chronic shortages of food and basic goods and lived in constant fear of Contra attacks in the countryside. Additionally, the Nicaraguan economy faced structural difficulties resulting from attempts to build a mixed economy amid an emerging global economic system (Robinson 2003) including a tendency to still privilege traditional agricultural exports by authoritarian decree (Colburn 1984) alongside a revolutionary project that caused a labor shortage for the cultivation of those very products (Enriquez 1990). Amid grave socio-economic difficulties and political mismanagement, the revolutionary state's sponsorship of elections in 1990 resulted in the defeat of Daniel Ortega by the US-backed liberal coalition leader, Violeta Chamorro. The Chamorro government's swift implementation of a packet of shock policies to insert the country into an emerging global capitalist order had grave consequences on the rural agricultural sector which had been run along cooperativist lines for almost a decade (Enriquez 1990; Robinson 2003).

This moment of socio-political and economic upheaval at the national level exacerbated already existing tensions and division among associates of the Jose Benito. As mentioned above, the cooperative itself had been founded by militants and technicians of the Sandinista party who were outsiders to the community of Sontule. This same small cadre of Sandinsta operatives went on to lead the cooperative throughout the 80's serving in all the important administrative and strategic positions, while natives to the community remained rank and file associates. There did not seem to necessarily be an intentional plan to marginalize Sontule inhabitants from leadership of the cooperative, but neither was there an explicit strategy to incorporate and train them as

leaders. In practice, the fact that the outsider Sandinista militants were proficient in reading, writing and math—and some were even "big professionals" such as engineers and agronomists—while the Sonutle inhabitants were entirely illiterate, was the crucial factor.

Oscar was one of the Sontule natives who had joined the Jose Benito as a young man—probably in his late teens, he recalls—with cautious hope in the revolutionary ideals of socialism and cooperativism brought from Managua. He hoped it would be true that "everybody in the community would benefit" from collectively organized agricultural production, but he admitted his skepticism as to how things would function "without the landowner at the top…we thought it would be difficult for poor people to manage thousands of acres of land". According to his account, when the time came to institutionalize the cooperative in 1983, those in control of the process were the Sandinista loyalists, "all of whom knew how to read and write, and had studied, while we here [Sontule natives] were isolated. They [the Sandinista operatives] had come from Managua or from Estelí, or Las Jobas (another community close to Estelí), but we had all been all alone here, and that's how it happened, sincerely, with my heart in my hand… they were people who controlled us like we were nothing, we felt like they would get us all confused, and practically we couldn't [understand anything]…" He recalled how during those crucial years of the Revolution, these Sandinista cadres, "practically lived in the leadership positions [of the cooperative], and it was like a dictatorship, and you couldn't get them out of there." He gave elaborate examples of how the four or five primary outsider Sandinistas would rotate in the various leadership positions while Sontule natives were perpetually left out of the cooperative's decision-making and financial processes.

Such internal divisions during the 80's were, perhaps unsurprisingly, not even mentioned in the accounts of the Sandinistas who had come from outside Sontule to form and lead the

cooperative.[9] Rather, they referred to these times as the times "when we were all unified. Yes, we had problems too—we were at war! But all of us in the community shared a common struggle, a common objective," according to Arturo, one of these outsider founders of the Jose Benito. So while both the founding leaders and the Sontule natives agreed that their cooperative was successful during the 1980s, and that Contra attacks were their greatest challenge, the structure's internal hierarchy only was a problem for those at the bottom of it, though the consequences of that hierarchy would come to be larger problems for the community in the decades to come.

In sum, this section demonstrates how instrumentalization of grassroots organizations by their affiliated political party played out during the initial phase of the Sandinista Revolution during the 1980's in the Miraflor region of Nicaragua. In order to enact the policy measures outlined in the agrarian reform of 1982, the central Sandinista government sent loyalists with professional skills in agronomy, finance, and politics to found and lead cooperatives in productive rural regions of the country such as the Miraflor. Natives to these areas became members of these multi-faceted cooperatives which were meant to be the bedrock of a new socialist society, but strict hierarchies between outsider Sandinista leaders and local peasant associates of the new cooperatives endured through the 1980s. Despite these internal tensions, cooperatives such as the Jose Benito—in coordination with the Sandinista army—were relatively successful in defending their lands and agricultural processes against the Contras' military and economic attacks. But in

[9] Though one of the most heralded aspects of the Sandinista Revolution was its "literacy crusade" in which the country's illiteracy rate was cut from 50% to 13% during 1980 and the Sandinista government won an award from the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for the best program of its kind in the same year (Walker and Wade 2017), the crusade was evidently not implemented with enough speed or thoroughness to mitigate the literacy-based hierarchies that characterized the Jose Benito cooperative.

abstract terms, and consistent with the FMLN's process of instrumentalization of grassroots organizations in El Salvador during the 1980s, the Revolutionary party *created* the types of grassroots organizations that would best serve its revolutionary strategy and ensured that the leadership of these organizations would be loyal to the larger party structure. In the remote areas of the Nicaraguan countryside, cooperatives' exogenous origins generated created a sort of path dependency for subsequent political contexts in which cooperatives would be all too happy to continue being instrumentalized by the Sandinista political party. But the problematic hierarchies internal to the Jose Benito would also contribute to the rise of divergent movement paths—disobedient cooperative children, as it were (to employ the metaphorical lexicon used by Arturo below)—who refused to be loyal to the original process of instrumentalization and its designated movement structure of the Jose Benito cooperative.

3.2 Multiple Cooperatives and Cooperative Economics amid Neoliberal Democracy: Balancing Global Capitalism and Local Self-Management

Due to a combination of the Reagan administration's destabilization campaign against the Sandinista government and the revolutionary state's own internal difficulties (see Robinson 2003 and Walker and Wade 2017 for summary accounts and more bibliography), the Nicaraguan population narrowly handed an electoral victory to Violeta Chamorro, the leader of a coalition of liberal and conservative political forces, in the country's 1989 elections. Daniel Ortega peacefully handed over power in a truly unique (and un-Leninist) instance of a government who had come to power through revolutionary force ceding power through democratic elections. The defeat of Sandinismo caused waves of worry to spread throughout Nicaragua's rural agricultural producers

who became concerned that the policies and benefits of the Sandinista agrarian reform would be reversed. As a result, some cooperatives' associates opted to "cash out" their share in revolutionary cooperatives and take their economic chances as individual producers or workers. In Sontule, about half of the Jose Benito's members—and all the Sontule natives who were associates in the cooperative—had left by 1991. Some of these "dissidents" proceeded to sell the land that had been distributed to them as their share of the cooperatives' holdings upon their exit.

Arturo describes this departure of associates from the Jose Benito as resulting from these people's "fear of change". He said that "once we were in peace, the people became divided, and some wanted to just grab their own piece of land… we said we won't have anyone here against their will and so we gave them their piece of land…" But in describing how this process was for him and the other longstanding members of the Jose Benito, he evinces a sense of betrayal, first comparing the departure of associates to a broken friendship. He says on behalf of the loyal founders of the Jose Benito in reference to those associates who left the cooperative with the end of the Sandinista government, "for us it is difficult when you find that your friend no longer wants to be your friend, you feel a hole in your heart when he tells you that he no longer wants to accompany you, when the idea was for all of us to walk together…"

But Oscar remembers this moment with humble pride, saying "Those of us who were natives to this land all left [the Jose Benito]. We were the ones who met and said no, we're going to resolve things ourselves, however we can, like the example of the indigenous tribes of the [Atlantic] coast: one alongside another. They [the indigenous tribes] don't even meet with

politicians, and never let people from anywhere impose anything on them,[10] and we decided that we liked that, and so we said 'no'. We're going to do our own things, however we can…" The juxtaposition of these perspectives on the same phenomenon clearly demonstrates the divergent experiences of the process of instrumentalization of cooperatives by Sandinismo in the Miraflor countryside. The outsider Sandinista founders of the Jose Benito felt betrayed by friends who were no longer willing to walk together along the worn path of verticalist instrumentalization, while those natives who had lived in the shadow of the literate founders of the cooperative suddenly felt liberated by their autonomous decision to strike out on their own toward whatever end awaited them. While it was undoubtedly a division in the cooperative's organizational structure that may have diminished the effectiveness of the community's cooperativist goals, it signified a new process of emancipation and self-management by people who had felt previously manipulated by outside political forces, even if within the same community-based structure.

Only a few years after their departure from the Jose Benito, Sontule residents like Oscar began seeing that there was still money to be made on the international market through the cooperative production and commercialization of coffee, now of an explicitly fair-trade variety. So those former dissidents of the Jose Benito who still had some land got together to form the Vicente Talavera cooperative named after an associate of the Jose Benito (who was an outsider from Estelí it is worth mentioning) who was killed in a Contra raid in 1986, but who according to Oscar, "was the one who could really bring everyone in the community together. He's the one the people would listen to…" This new dissident cooperative would also produce coffee, and also

[10] For a representative account of Atlantic indigenous groups' rejection of the impositions of the Sandinista Revolution see Hale (1994).

became federated with PRODECOP, the same second-tier cooperative that the Jose Benito had been federated with since 1991 in the wake of the neoliberalization of the Nicaraguan economy.

When describing the emergence of "the Vicente", Arturo strayed from his use of the friendship metaphor to employ one of a family saying that as the Jose Benito, "We were like the mother, the founder. We are the mother of the other cooperatives [in Sontule]." However, he felt that the mother's children were straying too far. He asked rhetorically, "What is happening today? There is no longer strength in the community. The Jose Benito continues working as the pioneer of organization, but the others [cooperatives] are only thinking of developing themselves individually. So the children are forsaking their parent because our idea was that the three organizations [the Jose Benito, the Vicente Talavera, and the women's cooperative, the Nuevo Amanecer; see section 3.2.2] could all be working towards the same ends…"

Again, in stark contrast to the view from the leadership of the Jose Benito, Oscar as a member of the Vicente said, "Up until now, it has gone well for us, because we have worked everything out inside [the Vicente], and we can still get along with the others [the Jose Benito]… we have known them for years, maybe we grew up with some of them, but that was all why the division happened, after six years together, we said no more, we can do this ourselves."

And soon after that, in 1995, the women's cooperative emerged as the wives, sisters, and daughters of the associates of the Jose Benito and Vicente Talavera recognized how beneficial cooperatives could be (see section 3.2.2).

3.2.1 Cooperativism between Capitalism and NGOization

In great contrast to cooperatives in El Salvador, and in contrast to seemingly similar rural organizations in Chalatenango, El Salvador—in terms of the instrumental relationship with their allied political party—I found no evidence that Sontule's cooperatives were ever directly involved in any protest activities during the neoliberal period.[11] Rather cooperatives in Nicaragua, and particularly in Sontule, seemed exclusively focused on their economic activities. As opposed to being organized into larger federations that facilitated public advocacy or protests such as in El Salvador, local Nicaraguan cooperatives such as the Jose Benito and Vicente Talavera were members of orgnizations that they called "second-tier cooperatives" which were legally instituted as non-profit organizations and facilitated the sale of cooperatives' goods—whether coffee, cacao or other products—on international markets. Indeed, the male cooperative associates that I spoke with in Sontule evinced a focus on the business aspect of their work, that often overshadowed their descriptions of the "associative" or affective aspect of the cooperatives, in which a communal mindset was meant to keep them united and focused on how their cooperative might contribute to the development of their community as a whole. Rather, the associative, communal aspect was typically understood as a means to the end of individual financial profit.

[11] Salvadoran cooperatives were often organized into broad-based federations (such as CONFRAS) who were frequently just as focused on contentious claims-making and traditional sorts of movement activity (protests, demonstrations, political advocacy etc.) in alliance with other movement actors such as unions, peasant organizations, and the left political party, FMLN during the neoliberal period, as they were with the commercialization of their products on local, national and international markets (Almeida 2014).

Indeed, an understanding of cooperative activity in Nicaragua as having two "pillars"—one focused on business, and the other focused on voluntary, communal association—was most eloquently posited by Rene Mendoza, a Bolivian agronomist who had come to Nicaragua to support the revolution in 1981. Still living and working in the country as an agricultural consultant with the Winds of Peace Foundation, Rene's understanding of cooperatives in Nicaragua was historicized, grounded, and theoretical.[12] Rene described in the abstract what so many Sontule cooperative associates had described in practical terms: cooperative membership enables associates to obtain benefits that would otherwise be impossible individually. He tempered a glorified understanding of rural Nicaraguan cooperatives, saying that "these are economic organizations first and foremost. They are non-capitalist only when they organize their production and profits equitably, which they are mandated to do [according to Nicaraguan law], but do they always do this? Of course not."

In fact, Rene typified the overarching mindset of cooperative participants in Nicaragua as still corresponding to the "hacienda", the social and economic system that reigned in the country's colonial days and up through the Somoza regime. That is, even in the 21st century under ostensibly democratic Sandinista governments, cooperatives operated according to a top-down organizational structure with *jefes* (bosses, though often there is the rotating of a few people at the jefe level, as in Sontule), and *mozos* (workers). Legally mandated committee structures within the cooperative that are meant to ensure a distribution of power (such as of administration, credit, or education)

[12] I also spoke with many other experts on cooperatives in both Esteli and Managua, including professors at the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA) in Managua, the Center for Global Education (CGE) in Managua, and the Universidad Autónoma Nacional de Estelí.

often are not respected, utilized, or "only exist on paper" according to Rene. True decision-making and financial power is wielded by a *cupula,* or small inner circle, of the cooperative. Rene and other knowledgeable informants assured me that there are instances of cooperatives with a more egalitarian ethos, but I did not come across any instances of this in my own fieldwork on cooperatives in Sontule.

Indeed what stuck out to me the most was not even so much the business aspect of cooperatives, but the non-profit aspect, especially as cooperatives do not simply survive based on the sale of their products. They also must obtain projects from international donors to ensure the viability of their organizations. In this sense they are no different than many movement organizations in the Global South. They tailor their work and their performance to the needs, demands, and conditions of a foreign donor, which has its own set of interests. When foreign sources of finance dry up, the cooperatives suffer in terms of making up their operating and production costs. For example, the second-tier cooperative, the UCA Miraflor, to which the women's cooperatives in Sontule belongs, was originally founded in 1995 with the express mission of creating a legal mechanism capable of executing projects from international donors on behalf of local cooperatives in the region. Associates and leaders of the Jose Benito frequently talked of the need to leverage their relationship with PRODECOP, their second-tier cooperative, which facilitates the sale of their products on the international market, to create alliances between themselves and with donors in fair trade coffee consuming countries of the global north such as Canada, the US, and Sweden.

3.2.2 Toward Self-Management: Communal Aspects of Cooperativism

However, this "other pillar" of cooperativism understood as voluntary association and collective work for the common good so strong during the revolutionary days of the 1980s was evident in Sontule in other ways, not necessarily through formal cooperative activities. Rather, the ubiquity of a cooperativist mindset had become apparent to me in my frequent visits to the community over many years of living in the region and over the three months of doing formal ethnographic field work between 2015-2017. Given the lack of access to reliable transportation, health care, and certain basic goods, people necessarily relied more on the goodwill of one another to make ends meet. At the most basic level, neighbors frequently lent one another basic food staples and tools, or bartered among themselves for various goods. The single community store generously provided credit to families who periodically lacked access to cash. Older women still practiced traditional forms of medicine and healing. On that same first night that I stayed with Doña Amada in 2004 for instance, for the first half of her hour-long account of the Sontule's struggles with the Contras during the 80's she did a vigorous "sobada" (healing massage) on the ankle of a neighbor's 11-year-old boy. He winced and moaned as she worked his ankle with her hardened hands, but the next day he was walking back out to the fields with his father to help harvest potatoes.

On another night, this time in 2017, a young woman stopped by Doña Amada's house at night, selling coffee from a cooperative located in a nearby community. Doña Amada couldn't pay for as much as she needed but bartered a portion of the remaining cost with baked goods and dried beans (as well as a hot dinner) and promised full payment upon the woman's next visit. But beyond the economic interaction, the young woman stayed and shared information from the communities she had visited in past days. She and Doña Amada ended up strategizing around how they could

bolster public opinion among the women in cooperatives in the surrounding communities about the need for more frequent communication and physical visits to their communities from representatives of their second-tier cooperative, the UCA Miraflor, located in Estelí. This visit demonstrated how practices of mutual aid—whether through healing, lending, bartering, or social companionship—enabled people in Sontule and similar communities to better self-manage their community. They had little support from formal government agencies, but through what people could volunteer for one another, social and economic cycles of reciprocity kept the community churning.

Such practices dovetailed with what Rene Mendoza had called "silent movements" during my first conversation with him in 2015. He had talked of the myriad social relationships that operated loosely along cooperative and kinship lines in the Nicaraguan countryside but were outside the formal structures of cooperatives. Indeed, metaphorically below and in contrast to the hierarchical formalities of cooperatives, he described a new mentality coalescing around decentralization of power and leadership, and a tendency toward more "autonomous thought" in small producers who struggled to reconcile the demands of business with a cooperative mindset. For Rene these silent movements—in which people do things at night, on foot, in ways that are imperceptible to NGO's and government agencies—are "where the left is now". Not only are these social relations and activities largely imperceptible to most outsiders, but they are also "uncontrollable" according to Rene. In a poignant foreshadowing of what would come in April 2018, Rene said that these new sorts of movements "are conquering small spaces, until one day they will erupt."

So despite the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990, the country's subsequent swift insertion into global economic circuits, and the departure of many associates of the Jose Benito

cooperative, the ethos of cooperativism had been firmly entrenched in the mindsets and practices of residents of Sontule. Indeed, upon seeing that cooperativism would still be beneficial and even lucrative during the neoliberal period, former dissidents of the Jose Benito formed their own cooperative, drawing on the same second-tier cooperative as the Jose Benito in order to sell organic, fair trade coffee on international markets to distant, foreign consumers. Furthermore, the women of Sontule had formed their own cooperative as well. Despite the divisions that occurred, cooperativism survived the neoliberal period in Sontule and even flourished, at least numerically, and at least philosophically, as rural producers (both men and women) came to understand cooperativism—as both formal economic practices and a social ethos—as their best chance of economic prosperity, social dignity, and exercising control over their own lives.

3.3 "The Only Land We Have is What's Around Our Necks": Sontule's Women's Cooperative and Relations with the Sandinista Party State

In 1995, women from Sontule formed the "Nuevo Amanecer" (New Dawn) cooperative. But this would be a much different kind of cooperative than both the Jose Benito and the Vicente Talavera. Not only would it be exclusively populated and run by women, but it would also not be based on the international sale of coffee, itself predicated on land ownership, as not a single woman in the community had any land in her name. I clearly remember the moment from the meeting that my undergraduate study abroad group had with the women of Nuevo Amanecer in 2004, when one of my classmates had asked what the women grew on their land, assuming they did in fact hold land given their status as a cooperative. After the question was translated by our Nicaraguan guide, one of the founders of the cooperative, Lucia, responded swiftly with righteous indignation,

"Land!? Ha, the only land we have is what's around our necks!" referring to the dirt that was caked on their bodies from the dry November weather, and the fact that they could only seldom bathe given the lack of running water in the community. The other women laughed heartily, but in the moment, few of us students got the bitter joke about how gender injustice—even during the revolutionary period—had impeded women from benefitting directly from the Sandinista government's agrarian reform process and the concomitant creation of cooperatives.

From its founding, the women of Sontule focused on the affective and associative aspects of their cooperative such as leadership trainings, awareness-raising around women's economic and social rights, and sexual violence, while also discerning how they might harness their cooperative for some sort of financial gain. By the early 2000s, the women of Nuevo Amanecer had begun economic initiatives around eco-tourism by which study abroad groups such as the one I had participated in, stayed in the homes of Nuevo Amanecer members and the women were paid directly for their food, shelter, and hospitality services. The women's cooperative's "monopoly" on eco-tourism—as it was understood by one member of the Vicente Talavera—was a point of contention among the community's male cooperative associates. Men across both coffee cooperatives though that the women should be doing a better job of making sure that visitors who were brought to the community through outside organizations were able to experience "community tourism as opposed to just family tourism" in the words of Arturo. In blunt terms, men seemed envious of the women's ability to make good money "simply" by doing affective care work for tourists, while their labor in the coffee fields and markets was so arduous and uncertain.

But the women of Nuevo Amanecer were not content to simply rely on the occasional group of eco-tourists or students, as such visits to the community were not frequent enough to constitute reliable sources of income. Rather, by the time, I arrived to do research in Sontule in

2015, the women of Nuevo Amanecer were consolidating plans to begin production of organic fertilizer and were actively seeking out funding opportunities to implement the project.

As already mentioned, cooperatives in Estelí had very little interactions with state institutions in the post-revolutionary period—not even in terms of contentious claims-making on right-wing governments. Rather, cooperatives' direct relationships with state institutions in the post-revolutionary period began quite recently when Sandinista governance began again at the national level in 2007. In recent years, these interactions have been increasingly directed through a newly formed state institution, the MEFCCA (Ministry of Family, Communitarian, Associative, and Family Economy). The MEFCCA was inaugurated in 2012 to "support and channel" the economic capacities of those cooperatives it deems to be a part of the "popular economy" which exists largely outside the formal economy. The creation of the MEFCCA and its mission to incorporate cooperatives into the formal Nicaraguan economy was the brainchild of one the Sandinista organic intellectual: Orlando Nuñez, a sociologist who had been an architect of the agrarian reform of 1982. Nuñez produced a study for the Sandinista government in the late 2000's that demonstrated that 75% of the country's employment, and 43% of its GDP comes from economic networks associated with the "popular social economy" (families, communities, cooperatives, and other sorts of associative economics). He proposed that the government needed to attempt to harness and further expand (or "dynamize") these activities, providing government officials with the data and analysis to justify the creation of the MEFCCA.

In 2016, after exhausting other potential funding opportunities such as through the UCA Miraflor, Nuevo Amanecer began navigating a process of reception of a lucrative $10,000 MEFCCA project which they hoped would enhance their incipient attempts to produce and market organic fertilizer to be sold in neighboring communities. While the women had already decided

among themselves that they wanted to produce organic fertilizer, they had had little role in creating their actual "business plan" which was largely provided to them by city-based MEFCCA technicians through a series of meetings in Sontule (two of which I was able to observe), and workshops that the women attended in Estelí. These meetings were characterized by a palpable disparity in power between the rural women of Sontule, and the well-educated and well-dressed technicians from the MEFCCA who were sent there to teach them about budgeting, finances, and market analyses. The women tried to act and say whatever they thought appropriate in order to secure the $10,000 for their project. They knew it was a huge sum of money, and that they could not let it slip by, despite some members' lack of understanding of, or confidence in, the "business plan" that they only had a marginal role in formulating.

In my subsequent conversations with the women, they expressed a considerable degree of hesitancy and pessimism regarding their chances of successfully executing their fertilizer commercialization project, but assumed they would receive assistance throughout the process from the MEFCCA technicians. Indeed, through my conversations with the technicians, I learned that this was also their aim: they planned to "promote" cooperatives such as Nuevo Amanecer: to fund them, train their members in budgeting and financial administration, ensure that they got "their legal papers in order", connect them to services in local municipalities, and to eventually integrate them into larger regional, and (trans-)national economic networks.

The women's cooperative's support from the MEFCCA is significant because in the past, Nuevo Amanecer had been forced to seek outside funding from "international cooperation" to fund its projects of awareness-raising and education for its members. With this aim, they had joined the second tier cooperative, UCA Miraflor—essentially a non-profit that connected small-scale producers to international actors—upon their founding in 1995 in order to access and execute

projects from foreign donors. And while the Sandinista government did not disband or persecute those second-tier cooperatives involved in international commerce (as it had done with various other international NGOs) the founding of the MEFCCA meant that state institutions would seek to be the primary funders, administrators, and patrons of local-level, "popular" economic activity in places like Sontule. Supporting community-based cooperatives would no longer be the terrain of international donors, nor of NGO-like second-tier cooperatives, but rather of the Sandinista state.

This account depicts the Sandinista government's attempt to break many popular groups' dependence on international players, but also how such government efforts constitute an instrumentalization of civil society through verticalist political logics that subordinate independent social movements, and in this case, economic initiatives, to the party-state. At the same time however, many of the women themselves—particularly the cooperative's leaders—expressed deep gratitude to the Sandinista government for its generous financial support and felt that this was the appropriate way for state institutions to relate to community organizations; that "no other government had ever been worried about supporting women's cooperatives in the countryside," according to Delia, one young associate of Nuevo Amanecer.

So while this cooperative-state relationship is undoubtedly an attempt at state instrumentalization of an emergent cooperative, it also constitutes a redistribution of wealth and power from the state toward society that can be understood as consistent with a process of dual power construction. It is also an example of how a group of women—only a minority of whom identified as feminists at all—managed to access crucial state financial and technical resources from a leftist state in order to pursue their own objectives. Though the larger Nicaraguan context of state repression and persecution of independent social movement leaders is horrendous and

should be condemned, the sorts of economic redistribution described here should not be lightly dismissed, especially in a region and community that had scarcely ever been able to access such significant financial support for locally-led and run projects. That this project was led by women is all the more significant in a country in which women's empowerment is so difficult given the government's conservative stance on women's rights (one that is shares with its powerful allies in the hierarchy of the Nicaraguan Catholic Church). To be sure, the fact that this particular project was able to receive government support indicates that it did not challenge government interests, but rather bolstered them, and also attests to the women's creativity, hard work, and capacity for self-management.

3.4 "I Don't Believe in NGOs Anymore": Environmental Conflict and the Discourse of Collaborative Management in the Miraflor

There was one additional way in which relationships between state institutions and local civil society organizations of the Miraflor emerged and evolved during my field work in the region: around the management of the rich ecosystem of the Miraflor itself. As the Miraflor had been a "protected environmental area" according to national and international protocols since 1995, there were various requirements for how the land and its natural resources were to be managed. During the neoliberal years of right-wing governments during the 1990s and early 2000s', the area was managed through a practice of "co-management" ("co-manejo") in which the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARENA) was charged with working together with local NGOs to manage the area, (first the UCA Miraflor, and then another NGO, the Foro Miraflor). However, by all accounts that I encountered in my fieldwork, co-management did not result in an

adequate management or protection of land, water, or natural resources. There were many reports of illegal deforestation, use of toxic fertilizers and pesticides, and informal agreements among MARENA officials, NGO workers, and local landowners to allow the latter to infringe on environmental laws in exchange for cash kickbacks.

Across community residents in Sontule there were complaints about the failures of co-management and how this public-private arrangement had led to the deterioration of local ecosystems and the lack of faith in those NGO's who had allegedly been on the frontlines of enforcement of local environmental protections. Amada seemed disgusted that I had even asked the question around management of the Miraflor, saying "the large landowners do what they want with this land. And us? We can only try to survive…" Oscar, a founder and leader of the Vicente Talavera cooperative described how he had been a "Forest Guardian" in the employ of the "Foro Miraflor", the first NGO responsible for managing the area in the early 1990s. He stated that he had directly witnessed his higher-ups receiving funds to "give the impression that they were doing conservation," while in practice, they allowed large agriculturalists to "chop down as many trees as they wanted to plant more potatoes, to have more space for their cattle, and (send) all the refuse into the streams…"

Arturo, one of the founders of the Jose Benito cooperative summarized many such accounts with a broader analysis:

> "We have not seen any advances in the management of the protected area in 20 years. We've only gone backwards. If the NGOs were really worried about the environment, they would have already united together to work on protecting the Miraflor… but it is we, the small producers in the Miraflor who have really brought forth an interest in protecting the

> Miraflor, but practically, there have been narrow, outside interests that have come, and they haven't been worried about uniting among themselves, to be able to sit down with the mayor and promote some conservation project that would be feasible for the people who live in the zone. But rather what has happened is that people with money are fighting among themselves with a vision to make even more money for themselves, while disrespecting the laws of our Nicaraguan state…"

He continued, providing a bleak depiction of the region's environmental destruction saying, "the Miraflor is no longer the Miraflor that we once knew before. Now it is being deteriorated, now it is a reserve of contamination, too many chemicals are being used [in agriculture], and you can see the deterioration everywhere you look, the contamination, the filth, a lost lagoon…" For Arturo, the most disappointing example of environmental destruction in the territory was how the once-famous Laguna de Miraflor—which had been a source of pride for the region's inhabitants, and an indicator of the pristine nature of the region—was now little more than a "puddle in the ground". Arturo blamed NGOs writ large for the failure to protect the Miraflor's most emblematic feature, as well as for the region's descent into environmental and organizational disarray more broadly. He outlined a plan for saving the region but had little hope for it, saying: "for me, I think that all these organizations need to unite and sit down with the Mayor and decide what to do with the Miraflor, because right now it is abandoned…but at the same time, myself as Arnulfo, I don't believe in NGO's anymore."

Again, this lack of faith in NGO's particularly as a result of having been complicit in the environmental degradation of the Miraflor was widespread across my interviewees, though most of the people I talked to—as members of one of the Sontule cooperatives—still had vested interests

in the success of the NGO-like second tier cooperatives of the UCA Miraflor and PRODECOP, and evidently separated these NGOs from the ones with ”outside, narrow interests” (such as the Foro Miraflor) who had been responsible for the ongoing deterioration of the protected area during the previous 20 years.

3.4.1 Toward Collaborative Management: A New Form of Instrumentalization

Toward the tail end of my research in 2017, I discovered that Sandinista officials in the municipal government of Estelí had been planning a new strategy to revive protection of the Miraflor. Partly due to the growing discontent with the region's environmental degradation but perhaps more significantly as a result of government desires to augment public control over rural production in the Miraflor—similar to the instrumentalist logic undergirding the MEFCCA's attempts to harness the economic capacities of small cooperatives such as Nuevo Amanecer—Sandinista officials in Estelí were preparing to institute a new practice for the management of the Miraflor protected area: *collaborative management*. While this shift in strategy apparently entailed only a minor semantic change, the collaborative management model would actually entail considerable changes in the correlation of power in the Miraflor region.

Ostensibly, collaborative management would mean that municipal government and local social organizations would collaborate to manage the Miraflor Protected Area, as described by employees of the UCA Miraflor in Esteli, Nemarcy and Silvia. They both seemed rather excited and nervous that they would be involved in meetings with officials from the municipal government and the local university to work on new guidelines for the Miraflor's protection. But after those initial interviews, I didn't think much of this "shift" to collaborative management given how similar it seemed to the old practice of co-management.

It wasn't until I spoke with some a public official involved in the process, Dario, the Academic Dean of the Interdisciplinary Regional Faculty (FAREM), the local Estelí branch of the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua (UNAN) in particular, that I realized that collaborative management was a concept that had been introduced by the Sandinista state and which sought to expand the role of the state and all of its relevant institutions in the management of the Miraflor. Despite its monicker suggesting its independence from other state institutions, my interview with Dario revealed that the FAREM was anything but autonomous from the national Sandinista party-state. As the lead public representative of the FAREM, Dario indicated that the FAREM would be the entity that had been tasked by national Sandinista leadership with coordinating the Miraflor's transition toward the new model of collaborative management. "Yes, the FAREM will be in charge of it…" he emphasized when I asked him to clarify the FAREM's role in the shift toward collaborative management.

Most notably, given my analytical concern with relations between local state institutions and grassroots organizations such as cooperatives, the Dean seemed only superficially interested in the role of local social organizations in the collaborative management model. Rather, he thought that the most important priority for a successful transition to collaborative management was that all the state institutions come together to manage the zone properly. Such "appropriate management" would require "putting the house [of the state] in order". Only in response to a specific question of mine did he acknowledge the topic of coordination with civil society organizations in the communities—which only included the two NGO-like second tier cooperatives, UCA Miraflor and PRODECOP—and mentioned that this issue would "need to be worked on". He was obviously much more concerned by the complications that would arise in negotiations with the five municipal governments that all had territory within the Miraflor region,

as well as with the public institutions (MARENA, land use and natural resources, roads, electricity, water etc.) that had important interests and responsibilities in the Miraflor. Dario felt that the main issue regarding non-state actors would be negotiations with the large landowners of the Miraflor who were engaged in extensive potato production and cattle raising and who would require their own "private sessions" for negotiations. Interestingly however, Dario manifested that any tensions with these landowners could be easily resolved behind closed doors because, as he put it, "we all know each other".

Thus, for the leader of the collaborative management process, it was consolidation of state control over a relatively remote territory and negotiations with well-known landowners that would be the keys to making the Miraflor region both economically productive and ecologically sustainable. Despite the government's discursive emphasis on collaboration with local grassroots organizations then, these groups would be quite peripheral to the process. And true to this disconnect between discourse and practice, it was almost an afterthought at the end of our interview—throughout which the Dean had emphasized the role of state institutions—that he again tried to highlight that the new model would indeed be a "community system of management." In practice, the FAREM-led process of "collaborative management" of the Miraflor protected area between state and civil society organizations would be another instance of the Sandinista party-state's instrumentalization of grassroots organizations. In this case, the role of community organizations would be to serve as little more than window-dressing at meetings and signatories in documents to substantiate the state's collaborative management discourse. State institutions themselves planned to exert increasingly thorough control over the region's land, resources, and societal actors.

Ordinary people that I interviewed in both Esteli and Sontule who I asked about the management of the Miraflor as a protected ecological region were utterly cynical and disinterested with the transition to collaborative management if they were even aware of it. Arturo mentioned in passing that he was aware that there was a university trying to gain control over the Miraflor, and Ernesto also made it clear that he was aware that there was some change afoot, but they both gave the process little credence. They seemed to feel that large landowners would continue doing as they pleased with the land and resources—which meant continued deterioration—and that they, as members of coffee-producing cooperatives, would simply have to continue ensuring that their crops stayed organic to guarantee their ability to sell on international fair-trade markets.

So might "collaborative management" have signified a new model for state-civil society relations and the basis for "ecologically sustainable development" for the region of Miraflor, and eventually in other parts of Nicaragua as the Dean purported to hope? Might it be similar to critical collaboration in Suchitoto, El Salvador (see next chapter), in promoting more horizontal relations between state and societal actors in the formulation of policies and in the management of (the) public good(s)? Many community members of Sontule indeed longed for such a relationship, but in the case of Arturo for instance, lamented that their lack of unity made their concerns irrelevant to a government that had the best intentions of "bringing good projects to every corner of the country." Arturo said that as cooperatives and as community organizations, the local government "must listen to us… because it has been developing good projects and it has committed to bringing these projects to every corner of the country, so here we are waiting. But the key is the community, and that's where our problem is, we are in disunion…" Arturo thought that only if the three cooperatives could unite in a common front to make demands together with other cooperatives in the region would the municipal government listen to them.

While I was unable to return for additional research to verify an answer to the question of whether or not the transition toward "collaborative management" of the Miraflor might lead to more equitable negotiations between movement organizations and local government institutions, I would hazard the guess that no, this turn toward collaboration was merely discursive in nature. The Sandinista party-state had already made clear its intentions to instrumentalize societal organizations—be they cooperatives, NGOs, or other groups—for its own purposes of consolidating political power and incorporating economically profitable activities into state-managed networks. For its part, the community of Sontule seemed mired in long-standing power struggles that would likely impede it from constructing a common agenda with which to address municipal government institutions from a place of relative autonomy.

3.5 Conclusions from Cooperatives in the Miraflor

Even if a community like Sontule, or a region like the Miraflor would have managed to build a coalition of organizations to made demands on government agencies, it would seem that the authoritarian tendencies of the Sandinista government (in this case to privilege coordination within the state as opposed to between the state and social organizations; and also to institute the "collaborative" relationship in the first place) greatly curtails these possibilities for collaboration, even in local and municipal contexts, and even on issues with relatively low political combustibility, such as the management of the Miraflor region. That is, practices of horizontal negotiations between societal and government actors that could resemble critical collaboration seemed highly unlikely.

So despite what some people in the community of Sontule stated, a high number of cooperatives does not necessarily translate into more effective community organization. In conceptual-analytic terms, cooperatives on their own are not a strong indicator of representative community structures per se in terms of facilitating truly democratic practices or authentically engaging with community-wide needs. With that said, cooperatives were still the closest thing to a representative community structure in Sontule and in similar communities throughout this region. In terms of relations with state institutions, cooperatives were either too mired in their own economic activities or too busy competing with other cooperatives for community control to exert power "upward" toward the state. The one cooperative that did actively engage state institutions—the women's cooperative, in its relation with the MEFCA, received important financial support for its own economic initiative, but at the expense of being instrumentalized by the larger state apparatus that had an interest in incorporating local initiatives into large regional economic networks. Despite the Sandinista party state's intent to appropriate and instrumentalize local social organizations—who had fallen out of the party's orbit or emerged organically outside its control in the post-revolutionary period—cooperatives in Sontule also gave rise to incipient practices of mutual aid and self-management, as people drew on a cooperativist ethos to more effectively and justly manage social relations and distribute basic services in their communities.

4.0 The Horizon of Critical Collaboration: Feminist Co-governance and Movement-State Negotiations in Suchitoto, El Salvador

With this chapter, I move on from cases of instrumentalization—the baseline, control tendency, or most normal movement-state interaction under leftist governance in Latin America—to explore a movement strategy that destabilizes the dichotomies of confrontation vs. cooptation/instrumentalization as well as vanguardism vs. autonomy. I explore a group of feminist and women's organizations in the semi-urban movement territory of Suchitoto, El Salvador to demonstrate how these organizations constructed autonomous engagement with FMLN-held government through what they call *critical collaboration,* where they worked alongside government officials in the creation, implementation, and oversight of policies around gender relations and violence against women. In this chapter, I ague that critical collaboration is an instance of "co-governance" and provides a horizon for more equitable and emancipatory relations between social movements and state institutions.

An underused concept for understanding strategic, autonomous movement engagement with sympathetic state institutions is "co-governance," an elusive dynamic in which movements and states share sociopolitical power in order to govern together (Alvarez, 2017). In contrast to "governance," in which civil society actors are shaped into "market citizens" that can assume the implementation of policies formulated by distant technocrats, co-governance entails open-ended, grassroots participation in negotiations with state actors around all aspects of governing processes, including formulation and oversight of policies. Co-governance is a particularly helpful frame in pink-tide countries that are more "social-democratic" than "radical" (Ellner 2014)—where the reconstitution of national states has not been politically feasible and both governments and

movements have pursued emancipatory change by way of incremental reforms to inherited political structures.

According to Alvarez (2017), co-governance was quintessentially exemplified by participatory budgeting, whereby collaboration between neighborhood associations and local officials of the Workers' Party in Porto Alegre, Brazil, enabled individual citizens to deliberate and direct allocation of portions of municipal tax revenues within restructured municipal apparatuses (Goldfrank 2011). As participatory budgeting was diffused across Brazil and the world, however, it was separated from grassroots control (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2017) and appropriated by state agencies seeking to garner legitimacy (Cameron, Hershberg, and Sharpe 2012). We thus learned how co-governance had the potential to generate radical transformations only if and when movements retain their autonomous, constituent power in interactions with the state. In such cases, co-governance can "deepen" democracy by distributing political power more equitably through both a restructuring of public administrative apparatuses and the empowerment of citizens in relation to these new apparatuses (Goldfrank 2011).

Feminist movements—understood as political projects that collectively empower women (Ferree 2012)—have been at the forefront of deepening democracy in Latin America in their reshaping of state institutions and societal norms regarding gender and sexuality (Horton 2015). Though uneven, this progress increasingly occurs as a result of feminist movements' combining "autonomous" and "institutional" strategies so as to retain their collective self-determination in relations with parties and state institutions, while simultaneously building women's individual and collective autonomy in society (Horton 2015; for global trends, see Ferree 2012). In parallel fashion, scholars no longer see feminist movements' collaboration with states solely as a "neoliberal trap" in which state actors "outsource" their responsibilities to the "third sector"

(Alvarez 1999). Rather, they recognize that these collaborations constitute important "movement work" that furthers feminist goals (Alvarez 2009), notwithstanding the risks of becoming "subcontractors of the state" (Keane 2009).

In this chapter, I analyze an instance of feminist co-governance in El Salvador, where feminist movements have instantiated collaborations with state institutions administered by the leftist FMLN which held the executive branch from 2009 to 2019 (though never a governing majority in the Legislative Assembly). This was a historic political shift that created an advantageous political opportunity structure (Tarrow 2011) for the country's leftist movements. Though many Salvadoran movements had already been a pathway of instrumentalization in their relations with the FMLN (such as the CCR in chapter 2) and far fewer into confrontation, a "middle road" had already been forged by feminist movements in Suchitoto who engaged in what they call "critical collaboration" with state institutions. Critical collaboration entailed feminist movements' working alongside government bodies in the formulation, implementation, and oversight of public policies addressing violence against women, the defense of women's rights, and gender equality in community development. This movement strategy preceded the arrival of the left to state power and increasingly (though unevenly) "went national" under FMLN administrations in El Salvador.

I posit that critical collaboration constituted an instance of co-governance that pushed feminist transformations while also deepening democracy in El Salvador. Because of its basis in intensive grassroots organizing among women, the subsequent autonomy of feminist organizations in their interactions with state and partisan institutions, and crucially, feminist organizations' strategic sharing of technical and financial capacities with "weak" state institutions, critical collaboration as co-governance iteratively remade certain state institutions into more flexible, responsive systems of social management. Critical collaboration slowly transformed the "male"

state (MacKinnon 1982) toward a more nongendered apparatus, while empowering organized women and feminists to share in practicing more equitable forms of governing gender (Brush 2003).

In what follows I explore how these transformations occurred at the local level in Suchitoto and how they have become possible at the national level under FMLN governments. I also interrogate tensions within the feminist movement, as well as critiques from other sectors of the left that complicate my analysis. Ultimately, I argue that, despite its contradictions, critical collaboration has permitted feminist movements to engage leftist governments in the pursuit of emancipatory ends without losing their autonomy. It also establishes a promising horizon for other movement sectors interested in autonomous strategies vis-à-vis sympathetic governments.

4.1 The Trajectory, Strategies, and Dilemmas of Suchitoto's Feminist Movement

About 30 miles northeast of San Salvador lies the semiurban municipality of Suchitoto. The urban center sits above the banks of the man-made reservoir of Lake Suchitlan and is surrounded by rural communities across varying geographies of wooded hills, rocky plains, and lakeside farming plots. The city's colonial infrastructure largely survived the destruction of the country's civil war, though much of its surrounding rural area was ravaged. There was particularly heavy fighting between the FMLN guerrillas and the U.S.-backed Salvadoran military in the mountainous area of Guazapa to the south. All five of the guerrilla factions that made up the FMLN laid claim to military strongholds in the mountains of Guazapa, which at only 25 miles from San Salvador was the closest guerrilla staging ground to the capital.

Despite the presence and intermixing of the FMLN's five factions in the Guazapa and Suchitoto region, only the Fuerzas Populares de Liberación (Popular Liberation Forces—FPL) and the Resistencia Nacional (National Resistance—RN) enjoyed significant social bases in the region that enabled them to build territorial popular power in the area during and after the war. In most other "liberated territories" (FMLN wartime strongholds), there was typically only one dominant faction that controlled and defended the region and its people (Viterna 2013). In Suchitoto, the factional diversity and grassroots power-sharing between the FPL and the RN led to a strong capacity to negotiate within leftist forces, as well as a tolerance for ideological pluralism more generally. These tendencies strongly shaped postwar social movements in Suchitoto and the formal political institutions with which they interacted.

In the postwar period, four feminist organizations have consolidated in Suchitoto. These organizations operate in the context of a *social movement community* (Staggenborg 1998) in which they often work in coalition, and are sustained by overlapping networks, relationships, and loyalties that make up the local feminist movement more generally. The feminist social movement community of Suchitoto is one of the most powerful civil society sectors in the municipality. According to various actors—within and outside the social movement community—organizations of that community even assume functions of governance, particularly in violence against women (VAW) but also in local development. Critics allege that it is feminist organizations' financial support for the municipal government that enables their disproportionate influence over both formal and informal governance processes, while many of the women participants attribute their power to their movement's capacity for both electoral and contentious mobilization. I show that critical collaboration as feminist co-governance in Suchitoto as both a social movement strategy and a movement-state relation derives from three conditions: (1) the local state's "weakness" and

the movement's concomitant ability to leverage funding (through international aid chains) to buttress the state's capacities; (2) the grassroots strength and personal/economic autonomy of women in the area; and (3) the organizational and ideological autonomy of feminist organizations that mediates the grassroots power and the financial/technical leverage.

4.2 The Emergence and Contours of a Popular Feminist Social Movement Community

Despite its basis in diverse popular movements and organizations, the FMLN consistently relegated women's issues to the realm of "special interests" during the war years, citing the need to unify around the more urgent socioeconomic goals of its cause and to the political-military demands of their daily struggle against the Salvadoran military regime (Viterna 2013). When the Peace Accords were signed in 1992 and the FMLN became a formal political party, pent-up feminist demand that had simmered within the FMLN's political-military organizations for a decade—nourished by the transnational feminist discourses of that moment (Horton, 2015)—burst forth. Numerous women commanders broke away from the party's androcentric and internally authoritarian political culture to form their own organizations able to foreground women's rights, needs, and interests (Viterna 2013). Women of the RN in particular were convinced that pursuing gender equality would be "incompatible" with remaining inside the FMLN structure (Candelaria Navas 2012).

In Suchitoto, women leaders from the RN founded the Concertación de Mujeres (the Concerta), which fomented processes of organizing and awareness raising that led to the emergence of additional organizations in the territory. These included the Asociación para el Desarrollo de las Mujeres, founded by women of the FPL, and the Asociación de Parteras Rosa

Andrades (the Parteras), also of the RN, which provided women with services in midwifery and sexual and reproductive health. These organizations were committed to working for the collective empowerment of women, and in Suchitoto this meant forging critical collaboration—an explicit focus on autonomous interactions between their organizations and government institutions (Herrera et al 2012). Indeed, the struggles of women and their incipient organizations were no longer "subordinated to the military-political struggle of the FMLN," according to Morena Herrera, a former upper-level commander in the RN, a native and resident of Suchitoto, and a founder of the Colectiva Feminista para el Desarrollo Local (the Colectiva), which has operated out of Suchitoto since the mid-2000s. She describes this historical moment as one in which women's and feminist organizations "had their own agendas and didn't ask permission of anyone."

Outside Suchitoto, many feminist and women's organizations remained within the FMLN's formal orbit (Candelaria Navas 2012), as did most movements in other social sectors, such as campesinos (i.e. CRIPDES and the CCR in chapter 2), unionists, students, and environmentalists. As described in chapter 2, the FMLN had expressly created grassroots organizations that it could instrumentalize for its political purposes in which only semantic or strategic distinctions differentiate movement and party organizations and many individuals practice doble militancia, active membership in both the party and allied social movement organizations. Paul Almeida (2014) called this dynamic "social movement partyism" in the Central American context. He complicates this concept, however, by showing how the FMLN began focusing on electoral concerns at the expense of grassroots movement building as it became consolidated as a political party. Furthermore, this consolidation exacerbated the already stark disparities in political power and socioeconomic status between the commanders-turned-party-leadership of the FMLN and its popular bases (Sprenkels 2018). Thus, while the FMLN retained

a discursive focus on popular empowerment, collaborated with aligned movements in resistance to neoliberal economic policies, and made significant electoral gains through the 1990s and 2000s (Almeida, 2014), internal hierarchies persisted within the FMLN structure, and popular movements were increasingly subordinated to the party.

Nevertheless, for El Salvador's first free and fair elections in 1994, the FMLN was the clear choice for all sectors of the left—"old" and "new" currents alike—including feminists in Suchitoto who had diverged organizationally from the FMLN political structure but were still undergirded by socialist ideologies of collective liberation that had been nurtured within the FMLN. From the FMLN's initial municipal victory in Suchitoto, women of the feminist social movement community endeavored to "support the good" that the local FMLN government did and "critique what was bad" to prioritize their own movement objectives. Herrera and the women of the Concerta were at the very first negotiating tables in the Suchitoto municipal council, with the specific goal of ensuring adequate representation for women in that space.

By the late 1990s, critical collaboration as a strategy of the local feminist movement had yielded significant fruits. A 50–50 quota for men and women on the council was municipal code, and informally the women's organizations began naming one specific representative to the council. The year 2000 saw the approval of a municipal gender equity policy in Suchitoto, the first of its kind in the country. This policy mandated strict protocols on cases of violence against women and gender-equitable hiring practices internal to the municipality (Herrera et al 2012).

The establishment of La Colectiva Feminista in Suchitoto in the mid-2000s further consolidated the feminist social movement community. At a discursive level, it imbued that community with an explicit—if controversial—*feminist* frame for much of its work, as the three original organizations had operated only according to frames of "holistic" care for women and "in

defense of women's rights." Also, while the other three organizations were exclusively embedded in the local grassroots communities of Suchitoto, the Colectiva began extending the model of critical-collaboration–based local development to municipalities across the country. It also led the formation of national platforms such as the Agrupación Ciudadana por la Despenalización del Aborto (the Agrupación), a broad coalition of organizations that (still) seeks to chip away at El Salvador's total criminalization of abortion and legalize it under four minimal conditions, including when the pregnancy endangers the mother's life, when the fetus has no chance for survival outside the uterus, and in cases of sexual violence or trafficking.

To be sure, the Colectiva's "feminist" frame and its national leadership on abortion rights have generated tensions within the Suchitoto social movement community. Some women in the territory do not identify with what they consider to be the "extremist" connotations of feminism or the "antilife" implications of abortion rights legislation. Despite these rifts, and perhaps ameliorating them to an extent, the Colectiva has greatly strengthened the women's social movement community, particularly by making it more technical in its project proposals and execution. Because of its extensive contacts with international aid chains, the Colectiva provides organizations interested in working on the rights of women with access to funding and technical training. As a result, the Colectiva and the feminist movement of Suchitoto as a whole have become increasingly institutionalized (Tarrow 2011) as well as national—and sometimes international—referents for feminist struggle.

In broad strokes, then, the coordination across the four organizations in the Suchitoto social movement community and the grassroots organizing and cooperative economic activity of ordinary women in the communities of Suchitoto is best understood as undergirded by an ethos of *popular feminism*, a commitment to activism by women in the popular sectors to combat gendered

hierarchies and violence regardless of ideological differences (Lebon 2014). Thus, while many women in the Suchitoto social movement community subscribe to socialist ideologies cultivated within the FMLN, others seem more influenced by postwar liberal ideologies of individual rights and freedoms, others "reject ideology" altogether in favor of "women's rights" writ large, and many activists in the Colectiva consider themselves to be radical feminists, it is a flexible and practice-based spirit of popular feminism that unites them around concrete activist projects.

Within Suchitoto, the feminist social movement community works to foment the individual and collective autonomy of women—in both sexual-reproductive and economic terms. Eva Martinez, a leading member of the Concerta, describes her organization's territorial work as focused on: "empowering women, so they discover the leader that they have within them and a vision for a future in which society is more just." The Concerta's provision of direct services and opportunities for economic empowerment—such as micro-credit banks and cooperatives—is accompanied by informal or popular education processes (formación) that enable the women to "understand their rights so that they can defend them . . . and exercise them," Eva says.

Other non-leader but organized women agreed that the Concerta's and other organizations' "formation" processes have had a transformative effect on culture and socialization processes in the territory, making women more practically empowered to denounce abuse and more economically autonomous—both individually vis-à-vis male partners and collectively with other women. Juana, a participant in a Concerta-supported communal bank in a rural community west of Suchitoto, emphasizes the collective economic benefits: "The support that the Concerta has given us has been productive… Since they [women leaders of the Concerta] have been here, we have had support. If they were not advocating for all of this [through political negotiations, fund-raising, etc.], we wouldn't be in this development that we are in." Improvements in gender equity

in the social fabric of the communities of Suchitoto are even palpable among women such as Ofelia from a populous rural community to the south of Suchitoto, who have never attended an activity sponsored by a women's or feminist organization and "dislike the term 'feminism'" but still recognize that the women's and feminist organizations' work in the communities has likely contributed to the reductions in violence against women as well as greater gender equity in household work.

Even the cultural aesthetics of the territory are imprinted with the women's social movement community's effective struggle for rights and empowerment. Many of the houses in the urban center and in the surrounding communities bear the Concerta's prominent, stenciled stamp of a torogoz (the Salvadoran national bird) with the words "In this house, we want a life free of violence toward women." The Concerta also sponsors local "alternative markets" on weekends and operates the city's Woman's House, where women can come to report violence or abuse, find refuge, and obtain health, financial, and counseling services. The Woman's House also sells many products of the Concerta's economic initiatives for women, such as their signature indigo-tinted clothing line, which can be found in stores and on bodies throughout the country.

4.3 The "Scaling-Up" of Critical Collaboration

Localized critical collaboration preceded FMLN presidential administrations, but feminist movement leaders "took it national" in 2009 when the FMLN won presidential elections through its alliance with the journalist Mauricio Funes. The FMLN's basis in popular organizing and its commitment to social transformations combined with Funes's novelty as a critical political outsider to present social movements on the left with unprecedented openings to push their

agendas. Women's and feminist movements were among the most aggressive in harnessing these opportunities as they formed a coalition—with prominent participation from Suchitoto leaders such as Herrera and Martinez—to negotiate their previously existing feminist agendas with officials in national level state institutions.

These negotiations led to concrete feminist gains, in institutional terms, in two areas: The first area—most directly the result of critical collaboration—entailed the formulation, approval, and implementation of multiple national-level policies to promote gender equity: the Special Integral Law for a Life Free of Violence for Women, which drew on elements of Suchitoto's municipal laws regarding gender equity and violence against women, and the Equality, Equity, and Eradication of Discrimination against Women Law, which prohibited sex- and gender-based discrimination in public and private institutions. Finally, a new Political Parties Law required that women make up 30 percent of candidates for popular election.

Second, and somewhat controversially, both the Funes government (2009–2014) and the subsequent—purely FMLN—government, led by the former FPL guerrilla commander Salvador Sánchez Cerén (2014–2019), incorporated numerous feminist activists into leadership and decision-making positions in state institutions. For example, Sandra Guevara, long-time director of Las Mélidas, a feminist offshoot of the FPL, served as Minister of Labor and Social Welfare for both FMLN administrations. Other state agencies such as the National Records Center and even the Technical Secretariat of the Presidency had feminist activists in high-level positions. The FMLN also transformed the National Women's Institute from a marginalized, defunded shell to a dynamic state institution staffed by feminists from movement organizations who implemented new policies regarding gender equity—including within state agencies—and established substantive programs to empower women in economic, legal, reproductive, and psychological terms.

FMLN governments have cooperated in furthering important institutional feminist movement work, and party leaders have consistently invoked progress for women as evidence of their empowerment of popular sectors. However, the FMLN's efforts to empower ordinary people (not just women) have been hampered by multiple factors. Principal among these has been a constant if frequently subtle destabilization campaign by the Salvadoran right with the backing of U.S.-led international agencies (Goodfriend 2019). For its part, the FMLN has struggled to transcend the clientelist and verticalist logics that characterize its internal structure (Sprenkels 2018) and to allow both their aligned movements and more autonomous ones (such as the Suchitoto feminists and many environmental groups) to push them farther to the left.

Thus while critical collaboration by feminists brought important policy advances on some issues, it was unable to sway the FMLN leadership with regard to more controversial feminist demands, as exemplified by the party's wavering and ultimately hollow support for the abortion rights campaign led by the Agrupación and the Colectiva. Still, in contrast to those feminist groups—such as Las Melidas and others—whose leaders were absorbed into the ranks of government as movement "contributions" in support of the FMLN's state-based project, feminists who adhered to critical collaboration retained their leaders and fashioned "scaled-up" (Tarrow 2011) iterations of strategic, engaged autonomy in their interactions with national state institutions to further their emancipatory agendas regardless of government directives. To do so, they drew on practices institutionalized in municipalities like Suchitoto.

4.4 Critical Collaboration as Local Movement Strategy with State Institutions

One of the main ways in which feminist organizations transform the state is through legislation and policy on violence against women (Ferree and Martin 1994). However, a primary obstacle faced by feminist movements in Latin America after achieving the passage of such legislation is ensuring its implementation, enforcement, and oversight (Horton 2015). The popular feminist social movement community in Suchitoto has focused on and excelled in these areas, demonstrating its ability to co-govern with state institutions on gender politics.

During FMLN administrations, feminist activists themselves provided training in non-revictimizing methods of attention to women victims of violence to relevant state officials (at both municipal and national levels), such as police officers, judges, health care personnel, and teachers. This training ensured that individual state agents and broader state institutions complied with new requirements pursuant to gender equity. Technicians of the Colectiva typically staffed these training sessions, though the other three women's organizations, along with the municipal government, were all signatories to the larger project of which they were part.

Activists of Suchitoto's feminist social movement community have also worked with local state officials to create and maintain a municipal-level Round Table on the Prevention of Violence Against Women in which the four women's organizations, the municipality, the local police, public health agencies, judicial bodies, and local schools are all represented to ensure compliance with the Special Law on Violence against Women. Observations of these meetings and interviews with women who participated revealed how feminist organizations exercise leadership in the co-governance relationship around violence against women in terms of both moral-political authority and access to financial and organizational resources.

During one of these meetings, the male police officer who was present on behalf of the Unidad de Atención Especializada para Mujeres Victimas de Violencia (Unit for Specialized Attention to Women Victims of Violence—UNIMUJER-ODAC) in Suchitoto provided numerous excuses for his office's lack of expediency in recent cases of sexual violence. He cited a malfunctioning internet (its data entry systems are online), a malfunctioning landline phone, a lack of officers to attend to violence against women given traffic accidents and murders, and some officers' lack of the appropriate training. After various concrete suggestions from the other women in attendance as to how to deal with these obstacles, the municipal representative of the "Gender Unit," Concepción (Conchi) Serrano, urged him to ask the people around the table for help: "Here you have a great network to help you with all of these issues and problems." Echoing Conchi's implicit analysis that the women's organizations and municipal representatives were better equipped to deal with violence against women, Beatriz of the Colectiva suggested that the UNIMUJER-ODAC could even ask the Round Table to petition the Policía Nacional Civil (National Civil Police—PNC) to treat their local needs with the importance they deserve.

While civilian movements may not typically be well equipped to assist state institutions with financial or technical issues, they are in Suchitoto, especially with regard to violence against women. This imbalance in material resources runs parallel to a disparity in political-moral authority on these issues: the women's and feminist organizations of the Round Table are the protagonists, the sources of expert knowledge (and capital) and the principal monitor of the co-governance of violence against women in Suchitoto. They even seem to have more influence with the national leadership of the PNC than do its own rank-and-file police officers or even municipal workers.

Conchi claims that this movement-state relation demonstrates that the women's organizations are taking on work that "ideally" should be done by state institutions. She even calls the women's social movement community the "second municipality" and considers it "unsustainable" because of its reliance on international cooperation. Eva responds to such critiques saying that on issues such as prevention and attention to violence against women "We are training state officials to do their jobs properly and are forming professionals to assume these strategic positions in the state once they are ready." This has indeed happened as women such as Conchi, who were formed in the feminist organizations of Suchitoto, have assumed positions in local (FMLN) governments in the region. In general, feminist movement leadership in co-governance around violence against women has resulted in safer, more empowered women in Suchitoto and a state-society matrix that has become more attuned to gender equity because of collaborative relationships with leftists in political power.

The relationship between the feminist social movement community of Suchitoto and the PNC under the FMLN at the national level showcases the flexibility and autonomy of critical collaboration as a movement strategy. An integral part of the oversight of violence-against-women protocols by the feminist organizations has been the training of police officers on prevention and on attention to victims, which has spanned two FMLN presidential administrations and the terms of five police chiefs. The Colectiva has also worked with national-level police officials to create an institutional policy for dealing with sexual abuse that occurs internally within the police, and which was inaugurated in 2016.

However, in 2012, after years of coordination between the Colectiva and the PNC, President Funes named a military official, Francisco Ramón Salinas Rivera, head of the PNC. At this point, the relationship turned contentious and the *critical* element of critical collaboration

came to the fore. After much internal debate, leaders of the Colectiva and the feminist social movement community of Suchitoto, along with leaders from other feminist and human rights organizations in the country, mobilized in San Salvador in front of the central offices of the PNC to denounce the militarization of a civil police force the establishment of which had been one of the principal achievements of the civil war, according to FMLN ex-combatants. The protests were unsuccessful—Salinas Rivera stayed on as chief of police—but this was an instance in which feminist organizations found no space for collaboration with state institutions and had no recourse but the struggle in the streets. Importantly, they knew that engaging in street protests against an incoming chief of police could scuttle all the accumulated efforts at collaboration with this institution over recent years. However, according to Herrera, the Colectiva's strong relationships with high-level female officers in the PNC apparently quelled the incoming general's concerns about collaborating with the same women who had been "in the streets yelling at him" the week before. Critical collaboration with the PNC in training sessions on violence against women and the development of the UNIMUJER-ODAC's infrastructure (for which the Colectiva had obtained the financial resources) continued. Members of the Colectiva maintain that they coordinated very effectively with the general until he was removed a year later, given that his appointment had indeed been unconstitutional.

4.4.1 Critical Collaboration for Gender Equitable Community Development

Feminists in Suchitoto extend critical collaboration to other state institutions on various issues surrounding community development. A primary example of the feminist community development that has resulted from critical collaboration is the project executed jointly by the Concerta, the Colectiva, and the municipality. With funding obtained by the Colectiva from the

Basque Country, this project improves the physical infrastructure and administration of 15 community-based water systems in the Suchitoto area. The Colectiva and the Concerta work with the community water boards on local organization and administration, while the Suchitoto municipal public works committee handles legal requirements and infrastructure improvement. Leaders of the Colectiva have facilitated relationships between the local community boards and the rural agency of the national public water provider to enable the communities to receive technical assistance and allay their well-founded suspicions that the water agency may be complicit in attempts to privatize community water systems. The Colectiva has also been instrumental in negotiating with the Ministry of the Environment for permits for the water systems' implementation in ecologically fragile communities.

As on issues of violence against women, some critics charge that feminist nongovernmental organizations are doing the work of the state in ensuring water provision to rural communities. A Colectiva technician involved in the water project, Yoselyn Guardado, acknowledges the validity of this "state-sub-contracting" critique but counters that "not taking away this work from the state wouldn't resolve the problem either!" She offers the example of her own community, Zacamil II, where "we would still be waiting for a water system . . . were it not for the organizations that have played an important role as channels and means for resolving these needs for the people." She goes on to explain that the Colectiva's role in the water systems has made the distribution of workloads and decision-making power in the improvement and administration of the water systems more gender-equitable.

The water systems project reveals how feminist organizations' strategy of critical collaboration can link highly organized communities to leftist-controlled state structures in autonomous ways to promote feminist community development, in this case in governance of the

most vital of substances for human life. Yet the question that remains is how exactly the women's social movement community of Suchitoto has accumulated and maintained such power and influence with state institutions. What is their leverage?

4.5 Complicating Critical Collaboration: Social Bases, Partisanship, and Leverage

The public discourse of the women's social movement community is that their local success derives from the movement's basis in women's community organizations. These organizations enable the women's social movement community to mobilize large numbers of people for contentious or electoral purposes, determining the fortunes of parties while maintaining its independence in interactions with parties and state institutions. It has managed to avoid pledging allegiance to any party because its organizations leverage the power of strong social bases to negotiate with external actors.

According to Vilma Coreas, a founder of the Parteras and collaborator with the Concerta, the influence of the women's social movement community stems from its ability to use informal negotiations resulting in "letters of commitment" first to ensure that local candidates are sensitive to women's movement issues and then to hold them accountable once in office. She asserts, "We put the politicians there, so they have an obligation to listen to us… And we put them there because we know them." She thus suggests that the social bases of the women's organizations are strong enough not only to determine the selection of candidates in the first place but also to guarantee that they will win. She goes on to describe the relationship between movement organizations and state institutions as being "like a chain": movement organizations can influence the municipality, and then movements and municipality advocate with national-level institutions. The key is that

"changes come due to organization from below… You have to always be organized so that things work out well for you higher up."

But Vilma also hints at a more exchange-based interpretation of women's organizations' capacity for mass mobilization whereby individual women mobilize for the women's and feminist organizations as payback for the myriad economic benefits the organizations provide: loans from micro-credit programs and income from Concerta-associated jobs (in its restaurants or shops) and from participation in its affiliated cooperatives and communal banks. Seen cynically, this may seem to be a democracy-eroding, NGOized form of clientelism. However, it can also be understood as a form of reciprocity that emerges from a "communitarian lifeworld" (Hagene and Gonzales, 2016). Women who have received benefits from an organization are willing to "pay it back," according to Vilma, by participating in its activities.

However, this reciprocity occurs in the context of social relations that are stratified according to network location within the feminist social movement community (Viterna, 2013). Leaders such as Corea, Herrera, and Martinez have a higher economic status, more frequent and intensive political participation, and even the ability to coin concepts such as "critical collaboration"—qualities that position them well "above" ordinary women members of the movement. Thus, critical collaboration should be understood as a discourse and practice of "movement elites." Ordinary members of the women's movements of Suchitoto—who receive economic benefits and participate in rallies or protests—espouse localized views of community development and gender equality that privilege women's concerns over partisan ones but do not participate in the negotiations with state institutions that constitute critical collaboration. Indeed, ordinary women sometimes express resentment at the economic and social status enjoyed by the movement leaders, though they also express gratitude for the benefits that accompany the

movement strategy their leaders enact. Despite these tensions, ordinary women's expressions of popular feminist convictions and their felt responsibility to movement organizations that have empowered them economically result in the constitution of mobilized social bases upon which movement leaders can negotiate.

There is another valid explanation for the feminist social movement community's ability to engage in critical collaboration with state institutions: that both local government and national institutions' motivation for negotiating and collaborating with the feminist social movement community is financial. This critical explanation was most forcefully posited by Javier, a long-time militant of the Asociación de Desarrollo Municipal PROGRESO, a historic peasant organization in the Suchitoto territory that is a chapter of CRIPDES (see chapter 2) and originally created by the FPL. He sees the influence on the municipality of the feminist social movement community as a result of the feminist organizations' sharing of project funds with the municipal government. To be sure, neither Colectiva personnel nor the municipal government hide the fact that the Colectiva obtains lucrative development grants in which the municipal government is a partner and joint executor. But for Javier—and for other activists outside the feminist social movement community—such financial arrangements constitute a tool wielded by the Colectiva to bend the municipal government to its will in ways that marginalize or "ignore" other organizations and movement sectors.

Javier considered this dynamic particularly evident in the municipal elections of March 2018, in which, "as always," the women's organizations had preferential access to spaces for informal negotiations with the local representatives of the FMLN. Unsurprisingly for him, the feminist social movement community publicly lined up alongside the preferred candidate of the party leadership, the incumbent Pedrina Rivera of the FPL faction. Despite Pedrina's factional

heritage, PROGRESO opposed her candidacy, as did the historic peasant guild associated with the RN, the Comité de Reconstrucción y Desarrollo Económico-Social de las Comunidades de Suchitoto (Reconstruction and Socioeconomic Development Committee of the Suchitoto Communities—CRC). Both guilds sought to promote their own candidates. While the FMLN leadership tried to maintain the traditional informal negotiations for local candidates, PROGRESO and the CRC banded together to call for formal internal elections. The party finally acceded to their request, though with only four days to spare before the election. For Javier, this made the process a superficial sham since there was no time for oppositional forces to organize. Pedrina narrowly eked out a win in the internal election and then triumphed in a landslide against candidates from other parties in the formal election.

In spite of the plausible validity of Javier's claim that feminist organizations' financial support for the municipality marginalizes other leftist actors, it makes sense that these economic incentives play a role in the municipal government's close collaborations with the Suchitoto feminist social movement community. State institutions—especially those that are relatively "weak"—would be wise to meet certain demands from society in order to accrue both financial and technical capacities, particularly around the globally relevant field of gender equality. While the Colectiva's fundraising with foreign donors implies assuming "calculative dimensions" that position it in the gray zone between movement and market-based activity (Thayer, 2017), its accrual and distribution of economic resources is highly strategic. By providing financial and legitimation opportunities to state institutions, it ensures the success of the critical collaboration strategy across various issues as money from international aid chains buttresses Salvadoran state institutions' ability to cogovern gender-equitable development in certain areas.

Still, we must also contextualize Javier's (and others') critiques by framing them within their larger Marxist analysis that feminist (or other "non-class-based") movements are misguided in that they "take away strength" from the class struggle, which should be everyone's priority, according to Javier. In a particularly nuanced argument, however, Marina, a community organizer at the CRC, and a former comrade of many of the women in the Concerta, thought that it was not necessarily bad that some women had formed their own women's organizations, the problem being a lack of will to coordinate with other sectors on "transversal" issues. Javier and many others, however, were much more sweeping in condemning the feminist movement for "disarticulating other organizations" as its privileged relationship with the municipality prevents other sectors from participating in "a permanent dialogue around the development needs of the municipality."

4.6 Conclusions from Suchitoto: Co-governance as Horizon of State-Society Transformation

Critical collaboration as co-governance highlights several practical and theoretical insights in the context of the left's experiences of state power in Latin America. Most practically, local and national government institutions must be significantly open to the possibility of restructuring public administrative apparatuses along emancipatory lines based on substantial critical input from social movements. Leftist control of the state is a necessary but not sufficient condition to this end, as various leftist governments in the region have proven opposed to negotiations with movements that disagree with them on the correct path to socialism in the twenty-first century. In the case of the FMLN, its resounding defeats in municipal and legislative elections in March 2018 and presidential elections in February 2019 revealed decidedly popular discontent among social bases

that rejected the party's oligarchic tendencies upon assuming state power and its limited openness to more ambitious social movement demands.

One of the FMLN's significant—if partial—openings was, however, toward feminist movements. As exemplified in Suchitoto, those feminists that merged autonomist and institutionalist currents with popular feminist social bases and diverse forms of leverage managed to critically collaborate with government officials to further agendas that preceded and exceeded those of FMLN governments. In such instances, in which revolutionary reconstitution of the nation-state is off the table, movement leverage with ostensibly allied state and partisan actors—whether electoral, contentious, financial, or all three—is crucial. While movements should undeniably be wary of financial leverage that comes from "dependence" on foreign funders and that can push them toward market logics as opposed to movement agendas (Thayer 2017), international aid can also be received in consonance with movement goals and values to ensure movement autonomy, sustainability, and success even when relations with the state go awry.

Theoretically, a "state sub-contracting" framework for understanding critical collaboration as co-governance reifies the functions of the state and robs social movement organizations of the possibility of more effectively and democratically managing social goods on the basis of their local knowledge and sectorial expertise (Bamyeh 2009), particularly when the state is weak and fiscally unsustainable. Critical collaboration has led to nominally successful co-governance of gender politics in Suchitoto, for instance (despite ostensibly "unsustainable" NGO dynamics) and seems to suggest a more viable model for promoting gender equity than exclusively state-led initiatives. In this way, co-governance constitutes a strategy for social movements to transform the male, Christian fundamentalist, and bureaucratic-authoritarian foundations of the Latin American state-society matrix to empower self-organized social movements on their own terms. While such a

power shift is not necessarily the stated objective of the popular feminist social movement community of Suchitoto, it is the effect of critical collaboration: an incremental but radical remaking of certain elements of the state in the long run (Ferree, 2012) into more flexible, responsive, and feminist mechanisms of social management.

As the Latin American lefts continue reinventing themselves for future rounds of struggle, critical collaboration suggests that movements—feminist or not—may become more effective as their strategies derive increasingly from popular power, on one hand, and engaged, strategic autonomy in relation to state and partisan forces, on the other, including ideologically allied ones.

For the purposes of this dissertation, critical collaboration constitutes a compelling "third way" between instrumentalization and confrontation as well as between vanguardism and autonomy, demonstrating that movements can indeed construct their own agendas and interactions with ostensibly allied state institutions that will most effectively spur the pursuit of their self-defined objectives, without losing their autonomy and without losing out on benefits that can accrue from interacting with state institutions. That is, it is possible for grassroots organizations to critically collaborate with ideological aligned state institutions if and when those organizations are able to leverage resources, power, and influence in order to make it in states' interest to collaborate with them, even when that collaboration entails being critiqued by groups that should ostensibly be subordinate within a traditional state society theoretical framework. The movement strategy, and movement-state relation of critical collaboration is another important point along a spectrum of movement state interactions that destabilizes the dichotomies and zero-sum choices that frequently characterize scholarly work on Latin American social movements.

5.0 Empirical Feminism and Self-Management: Mujeral en Accion en Leon, Nicaragua

In this chapter, I swing back to the left side of the movement-state interaction spectrum to directly address the inverse of confrontation: self-management. Akin to autonomism, and theoretically grounded in anarchy and anarchism, self-management is an option for movements who have no opportunity to collaborate with (or even be instrumentalized by) government institutions. It entails ordinary people taking governance into their own hands, managing social relations in ways that do not rely on states, law enforcement agencies, or outside economic actors. In Leon, Nicaragua, in the course of the mid 2000's, self-management of gender politics became possible because it became *necessary* under the allegedly left-wing governments of Daniel Ortega—still the supposed standard bearer of the Sandinista revolution—who marginalized and demonized feminist movements. In response to the total criminalization of their cause, and the labeling of feminism itself as a "foreign" and "destructive" ideology" by the Sandinista government, a relatively small collective of feminist activists in the historic colonial city of Leon sought to protect women's sexual and reproductive rights through direct community-based support for women victims of violence and a volunteer-based model of self-management of their activities. In contrast to a reliance on the concept of confrontation when movements develop an antagonistic with a leftist government, we must also acknowledge the possibility of movements' autonomous self-management of their activities.

5.1 Recent Nicaraguan History from a Feminist Perspective

The triumph of the Sandinista Revolution on July 19, 1979 was one of the most transcendental moments in recent Latin American history. It showed that spontaneous urban insurrection could combine with organized guerrilla warfare to not simply bring down a corrupt and unpopular authoritarian regime, but also to usher in a revolutionary government that could prioritize popular education, free health care, the formation of rural cooperatives, democratic governance, and a mixed economy, even in the face of a systematic and violent US campaign for social and economic destabilization. Led by Daniel Ortega, the Sandinista government's commitment to democracy and popular participation through the 1980s eventually led to its relinquishing of power to the Liberal, Violeta Chamorro, in 1990, who led a coalition of opposition forces to begin implementation of a neoliberal restructuring of Nicaraguan society and economy (Robinson 2003). In retrospect, it appears that as a result of this defeat, Ortega began prioritizing the pursuit of power over democratic-socialist ideals, as by the end of the 90's, he had brokered a power-sharing deal with Arnoldo Aleman, the main Liberal strongman and former president, to put independent state institutions under partisan control in order to mutually shield themselves from prosecution; Aleman from corruption charges connected with embezzlement of international donations after Hurricane Mitch in 2001, and Ortega from sexual abuse charges against his stepdaughter (Close 2016; Walker and Wade 2016).

Upon winning elections in 2006, the Ortega-led Sandinistas returned to state power, and began bringing various state institutions and societal actors under partisan control (Close 2016). This process has led to a tumultuous relationship with independent social movements (Zaremberg 2012), particularly with the environmental movement—which crystallized around resistance to the Interoceanic Canal (see chapter 7)—and the country's feminist movement. It was the issue of

sexual abuse and violence that served as the original detonator and continuing wedge between the Nicaraguan feminist movement and the Sandinista government, a stark departure from the situation in El Salvador as described in the previous chapter.

In the wake of the Sandinistas' electoral defeat in 1990, many women leaders left the official Sandinista party ranks to found their own women's organizations in order to work on issues such as reproductive justice (Randall 1994), but it wasn't until 1998—when Daniel Ortega's stepdaughter, Zoilamerica Narvaez Murillo accused him of sexual abuse and rape—that this rift became irreconcilable. This national scandal saw women's and feminist organizations taking Zoilamerica's side, while loyal Sandinistas, including the victim's mother, the now-Vice President Rosario Murillo, accused Zoilamerica of being a mentally unstable seductress. To this day, women's leaders condemn the government for covering up incidences of violence against women, and critique it for furthering a vacuous and "traditional-religious" sense of gender equality based on women's role in the family, legislative quotas for women, and the growing influence of Murillo herself in the government and country. For its part, the Sandinista government alleges that feminism is a foreign ideology that disrupts families, and that feminist organizations "prey on the people's poverty" to serve their own political ends of unseating a revolutionary government.

Within these "mainstream" feminist movements in Nicaragua then (many of whom have been in open confrontation with the Sandinista government), there are two variants: those organizations that are interested in national-level work centered in Managua, and those organizations and activists that have turned toward more local and territorialized work in their respective municipalities. I analyzed this latter type of organization, where I spoke with three feminist activists from the Mujeral en Acción collective in Leon in 2017.

5.2 Empirical Feminism and Self-Management: Mujeral en Accion in Leon, Nicaragua

In many ways, Leon is similar to Suchitoto, as both places were strongholds of revolutionary forces during the 80s, and both enjoy vibrancy as cultural and tourism hubs in contemporary times. But while Suchitoto enjoys four strong feminist and women's organizations with considerable international financing and local grassroots bases, Leon has only Mujeral, which is not a traditional social movement organization at all, nor even a legally established one at that. Rather, Mujeral is an informal collective that seeks to be a flexible group structured by non-hierarchical "horizontal" relations (Stahler-Shalk et al 2014) whose actions are self-financed by its members (some of whom run businesses in the city). It accompanies women who have been victims in cases of sexual violence (perpetrated by both domestic partners and formal health care providers), and it privileges interventions in the socio-cultural fabric of Leon through workshops and presentations in the city and territory, and on social media. Relations between Mujeral and the municipal government of Leon also parallel national dynamics, as a ruinous falling-out between the Sandinista municipal government of Leon and Mujeral was precipitated by impunity around a case of sexual violence perpetrated by a high-level administrator at the Leon headquarters of the UNAN against a female student.

But it would be too simplistic to transpose global and national-level flows of ideas around feminism and women's rights onto the local scene of Leon. For instance, when I questioned Mujeral activist, Silvia, about government declarations that women like herself were deluded by foreign conceptions of gender, she responded that she considers herself to have come to feminism "empirically", as a result of the gendered abuses she had experienced and observed in her own life. She explained that if people from other countries have facilitated some of the theoretical frameworks she now uses to understand those empirics, it doesn't change the content of the

gendered violence and injustices in Nicaragua, nor the need to struggle for women's rights and gender equality.

When describing Mujeral's work in comparison to that of large NGO's, Silvia imbues her analysis with deeper emotional content, pointing out that "we are all working (with Mujeral) in a volunteer capacity and that is for love of activism, for love… I like to give it the word love because I think that without love, you can do nothing, and in our case, we wouldn't be able to maintain our work without it…" With this statement, she raises up the humanistic element of voluntary association that is so crucial to Mujeral's practices of self-management, but that can be lacking in any hierarchical, bureaucratic structure.

Silvia proactively addresses both the theoretical implications of her statements about Mujeral's work and its comparative implications within Nicaragua, assertively distinguishes the work of Mujeral from that of the institutionalized, state-based Left in Nicaragua, saying:

> "I have never belonged to the Frente Sandinista, my family never belonged to the Frente Sandinista, but I know that in theory, the feminist movement comes from the Left; that in Latin America, and in Nicaragua, it was the Left that opened the doors for feminism in the 80's. But I think that I'm really anarchist in that sense… (laughing)… It's because I hate governments, and I hate this one… it may be utopic to think that things will be solved without the state, without governments, but the left in Latin America is full of nothing but *machos* (misogynist men)… So here, I and many others don't feel welcome in the so-called Left. Here there really is no Left, here what we have are neoliberal governments that are all entirely right wing…"

With these statements, Silvia suggests that if the best outcome a state-based approach to social change can provide is an authoritarian, androcentric regime like that of Daniel Ortega, then anarchist thinking and practice—which entails self-management and *disengaged* autonomy in relation to state institutions—seems a much more effective and morally coherent option.

At both an operational and philosophical level then, Mujeral is explicitly based on ideas of "self-management" (or autonomy) in their work on violence against women in which they draw on local networks of neighbors, friends, and progressive entrepreneurs—as opposed to local or state agencies—to shelter survivors of sexual violence, and to finance their work to raise awareness among youth and adults. Such strategies have frequently been lumped into the category of "new social movements" and dismissed by some scholars for being an unfortunate trend that does not explicitly challenge formal structures of economic and political power (Ellner et al 2022). But Mujeral's quest for autonomy in relation to state institutions was not necessarily a strategic choice influenced by outside thinkers or funders, so much as a necessity for operation, given the government's closure toward feminist claims and its actual persecution of feminist activists and organizations in certain moments. Feminists working with Mujeral acknowledge how difficult it is to work for feminist change without the support of the government or international funders, but seem to have assumed their independence as a badge of honor. One of the founders of Mujeral, Janet, claimed that "we don't want judicial personhood… we don't want to become an NGO. With self-management and volunteerism, and with what people want to contribute, we will do as much as we can."

While it is hard to measure the effectiveness or strength of an organization such as Mujeral en Acción as it prioritizes cultural change alongside informal and frequently clandestine activities in favor of women victims of violence, what is significant for the research design of this

dissertation is that Mujeral represents a novel and unique movement strategy for progressive organizations under leftist governments in El Salvador and Nicaragua. As the recent historical record shows, not all Left governments of the Pink Tide have been sympathetic to all causes associated with contemporary Leftisim. Indeed, movement sectors aligned with the Left, but considered "New Social Movements" such as feminist, environmental, and indigenous groups have often entered into confrontation with Leftist government who see their "new" agendas as detrimental to government attempts to consolidate power and ameliorate class-based inequalities. But far from resigning itself to confrontation and opposition, and in line with the Zapatistas of Chiapas, and myriad other indigenous, feminist, and urban-based movements across the region in recent decades (see Markoff et al forthcoming), Mujeral en Acción has channeled its confrontation with the Sandinista party-state into the pro-active construction of alternative ways of self-managing social relations on their own terms.

5.3 Co-Governance and Self-Management as Horizons of State-Society Transformation

The three cases of feminist and women's activism described in the past three chapters chapter illuminate a number of practical and theoretical insights as leftist forces learn and reinvent themselves as a result of experiences of state power. Theoretically, feminist social movement organizations have the potential to effectively and democratically manage particular social goods/fields based on their local knowledge and sectorial expertise (Bamyeh 2009) in a variety of situations. The existence and content of movements' relations with state institutions as they pursue this social management is a crucial variable. Given FMLN governments' openness to working

with feminist organizations, critical collaboration has led to nominally successful co-governance of gender politics in Suchitoto and suggests a more viable model for promoting gender equity than exclusively state-led initiatives would. In Leon, Nicaragua the state was absent and hostile in the terrain of gender politics and the local feminist collective thus practiced total self-management of their own more "autonomous" strategy. In Sontule, cooperatively organized women were able to access valuable financial support from the Sandinista party-state state for their economic projects in part because they avoided contentious issues around reproductive justice altogether. In all cases, women's and feminist movements navigated complicated relationships with leftist governments to most effectively pursue their objectives on their own terms, contributing to the incremental but radical remaking of certain elements of the state and society in the long run.

So whether called "self-management", "political independence" (Munck 2022), "autonomy of the organizations of the popular masses" (Poulantzas 1980), horizontalism (Stahler Sholk et al 2014), or little a-anarchism (Markoff et al forthcoming) what is clear from the cases presented in this chapter is that social movements from below must be able to self-organize, self-manage, and leverage their own resources in order to construct strategic relations with state institutions (themselves a series of social relations), even ostensibly allied ones. Looking ahead to new rounds of struggle, as movements (feminist or not) learn to strengthen themselves to construct co-governance with leftist state institutions of the present and future, it is more likely that social and political change will be put at the service of truly emancipatory ends.

6.0 "Overflowing Channels of the Left": Global Accumulation and Communal Agro-Ecology (As Competing Projects of Governance) in Coastal El Salvador

With this chapter, I explore the environmentalist movement sector under FMLN governments in El Salvador and in the following chapter, address environmentalists' conflict with the authoritarian Sandinista party-state as harbinger/galvanizer of civic insurrection and repression in Nicaragua. As intimated above, environmental causes—so frequently associated with leftism—have presented leftist governments of the Pink Tide in Latin America with exceedingly complicated choices and bitter conflicts with social movements. Whether in hydrocarbons and mining policy, or in infrastructure and tourism projects, governments are often faced with dilemmas that pit a country's prospects for economic development (and government royalties) against the seemingly intangible benefits of environmental conservation and local control over resources and ecosystems. How do environmental movements and left parties negotiate the tensions around development paradigms that prioritize the extraction and commercialization of raw natural resources—often called "extractivism"—when the left holds political power in Latin America?

As the Latin American pink tide ebbed and seemed to largely subside by the end of the second decade of the 21st century (though we are seeing a leftist revitalization in Bolivia, Honduras, Brazil, and Colombia), the limits and contradictions of the region's leftist projects of governance had become clear. Scholars have underscored corruption, clientelism, authoritarianism, distance from grassroots bases, and subjugation to global economic imperatives—including dependency on extractivist development paradigms—as contributing to leftist governments' loss of legitimacy and ultimately, of formal political power (Ellner ed. 2020;

Goldfrank 2017; Gonzalez 2019). Various studies have interrogated struggles against extractivism, related policy dynamics, and these struggles' implications for analyses of global political economy (Ellner ed. 2021; Gudynas 2021; Spalding 2018), but few have done so by analytically focusing on the complex interactions between leftist governments and their allied social movements. Further, those studies that focus on these interactions typically highlight the dichotomous tendencies of cooptation or confrontation (Prevost, Vanden, Oliva Campos 2012), and have not paid attention to the gray zones (Auyero 2007) between these two heuristic poles in which many movement-state interactions play out under the Latin American left (see Ellner et all 2022 for a crucial exception that is ameliorating this trend).

In this chapter, I analyze the meso-level interactions between movement leaders and allied state functionaries that constitute "transmission belts" by which constraints and opportunities are channeled in ways that shape prospects for social change at national, sub-national, and global levels. Such an analytic focus is consistent with a global epistemology framework that highlights how specific groups of actors interact at meso-levels in the context of globally shifting discourse and resource flows without assuming a priori that any particular global process determines the direction or content of those interactions (Bamyeh 2019). In particular, I shed a critical light on national-level leftist projects of governance in Latin America as they are subjected to global, anti-environmental constraints while simultaneously being challenged and overflowed by movement-based, agro-ecological action from below. In theoretical terms, the analysis that follows, shows that 1) the disciplining effects of global economic constraints are filtered through the "transmission belts" of meso-level interactions between low level state official and high-level social movement leaders, both entrenching and challenging various hierarchies and relations along the way; 2) leftist parties' attempts instrumentalize (or "coopt") "allied" movements' efforts to resist detrimental

external impositions also impelled these movements to innovate in their political and agro-ecological action; and 3) these innovative, localized agro-ecological practices combine alternative/subaltern local and trans-local knowledge to present a path away from the anthropogenic destruction of global capitalism and toward more sustainable climate futures and deeper democratic political structures, though such a pathway is anything but assured.

6.1 Conceptualizing Projects of Governance and the Anthro-Shift

Questions around the scope of democracy in Latin America over past decades have been particularly contentious in the realm of environmental protection and resource management, or more broadly, in terms of delineating the relationship among state, society, market, and environment. Environmental sociologists have spent much time attempting to provide the most useful theoretical frameworks for understanding the society-environment relation, and while I do not mean to weigh in on these debates, I draw on a useful concept which has recently emerged from them: that of the *anthro-shift*. As opposed to overly deterministic environmental sociological frameworks such as treadmill of production or metabolic rift perspectives, and equally opposed to more optimistic, but increasingly unrealistic frameworks of ecological or reflexive modernization theories, the integrative theoretical approach of the anthro-shift seeks to empirically investigate the ways in which interactions across different constellations of state, society, and market forces remake the relationship between society and environment over time (Fisher and Jorgenson 2019).

A focus on the anthro-shift enables us to identify and analyze multiple attempts to remake the relationship between society and environment, or more broadly, to manage the relations that make up the social world, and how such attempts needn't always come from the state or market.

Across Latin America and the world, many collective, community-based actors are attempting to implement their own alternative projects of governance (Steinmetz 1988; Krupa and Nugent 2015) to these ends. Projects of governance enacted by community-based social movements propose more localized ways—and in the case described below, expressly ecological ways—to manage their territories and solve their self-identified problems to fundamentally recreate the relationship between society and environment. Importantly, projects of governance from below often attempt to draw strategically on support from state institutions while navigating the state's seeming irrationality and incoherence, especially across differentiated state institutions (Poulantzas 1978).

By merging a world-systemic, critical globalization approach (Robinson 2008) with a movement-state interactionist lens from political sociology (Goldstone 2003), and cultural perspectives on Latin American movements (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998) within a larger theoretical framework of the anthro-shift (Fisher and Jorgenson 2019), I show how territorially inflected meso-relations between movements and state institutions shape global dynamics regarding struggles over the management of vital natural resources. In this chapter, I apply this theoretical framework to empirical data collected ethnographically on the work of one grassroots, environmentally focused social movement organization in coastal El Salvador, the Asociación de las Comunidades Unidas para el Desarrollo Socio-Económico del Bajo Lempa (ACUDESBAL).

From 2014-2019 I made frequent visits to the Bajo Lempa to research the work of ACUDESBAL in the novel political context of having their ostensible political allies, the FMLN, in state power. During this time, I collected 24 interviews with ACUDESBAL workers and ordinary people (non-activists) in four different communities of the Bajo Lempa region, and accumulated hundreds of hours of lived experience in the area, including participant observations of numerous ACUDESBAL meetings and workshops. Many of ACUDESBAL's participants—

especially its founding members—are longtime friends and colleagues of mine at this point. By 2019, I had joined the Board of Directors of Voices on the Border, a non-profit organization based in the US but with staff in El Salvador who work closely with ACUDESBAL (and other grassroots organizations in the Bajo Lempa) to promote equitable, environmentally conscious development.

6.2 The Bajo Lempa Territory: Political-Ecological Contours

On the southeastern Pacific coast of El Salvador, the San Juan del Gozo peninsula sets off the Bay of Jiquilisco from the eastern banks of the widening mouth of the River Lempa just before it enters the Pacific Ocean. Here, the territory known as the Bajo Lempa, "the Lower Lempa" encompasses fertile flood plains and mangrove forests that are now the homes to numerous small, poor farming and shellfish harvesting communities. Historically the site of massive floods, droughts, and tropical storms, recent decades have seen it become a climate change hotspot as global sea rise has transformed portions of coastal mangrove forest buffer zones into desertified beaches, and rampant agrochemical use by large landowners has contaminated watersheds. It is ecologically fragile yet exceedingly attractive to transnational investors given the fertility of the soils, the abundance of its waterways, and the beauty of the landscapes (Davila Medina and Acosta 2021; Navarro 2017; Voices on the Border 2014).

Before the Salvadoran civil war of 1980-1992, the area was the exclusive terrain of wealthy landowners who planted sugarcane, cotton, and some coffee in the higher altitudes. After partial land reform processes associated with pacification efforts by Salvadoran military-civilian juntas in the 1980s, and the Peace Accords signed in 1992—which formalized a truce between the Salvadoran government and the rebel FMLN armies—large swathes of this area were appropriated

from previous owners, nationalized, and then redistributed to demobilized ex-combatants of both the FMLN guerrilla army-turned political party, and of the Salvadoran military (Nueva Esperanza Support Group 1999; Montgomery 1995; Sprenkels 2018). Members of the Ejercito Revolucionario Popular (Revolutionary Popular Army, ERP) faction of the FMLN—who had been dominant in the northeastern Morazan department of El Salvador during the war—and their families became the primary beneficiaries of land offers on the Usulutan department side of the river in the newly opened Bajo Lempa region. People both traumatized and hardened by collective struggle and war brought their pre-existing structures of internal organization, their social consciousness, and their international contacts to bear on emergent settlements along the fertile but untamed flood plains of the lower Lempa river (Nueva Esperanza Support Group 1999).

The poverty and dense organization of the zone's internal migrants combined with the harshness of the ecological conditions and the general spirit of international assistance toward El Salvador to make the Bajo Lempa a recipient of many international aid projects beginning in the 1990s. Large scale sugarcane and cotton production still predominated in much of the region but these accumulation strategies increasingly had to contend with the communities and agricultural plots now managed by poor, leftist, internal refugees who instituted new ways of relating to land, politics, and the local wealthy class, with substantial support from international donors and solidarity groups (Nueva Esperanza Support Group 1999). Over time, additional micro-waves of internal migrants settled in the territory of the Bajo Lempa, and now at present, there are essentially two sorts of communities in political-ecological terms in the Bajo Lempa: the close-knit, refugee communities located in the floodplains of the Lempa whose inhabitants had been comrades in arms together and extended kin from their time during the war in Morazan; and the more internally heterogeneous mangrove communities, in which distinct groups of internal migrants have come

from various parts of the country in different moments to comprise less socially cohesive communities. This paper is based on voices of people living in three floodplain communities—La Canoa, Amando Lopez, and Nueva Esperanza—and in two mangrove communities, El Chile and La Tirana.

Floodplain communities are situated on relatively fertile lands and their residents typically practice family-based agriculture of corn, beans, some rice, and many fruits and vegetables. A few of these communities have even formed cooperatives to facilitate collective cultivation of commercially profitable crops such as plantains, sorghum, sugarcane, or cacao. Mangrove communities by contrast, exist essentially on sandbars that form the banks of the "*canones*" or sprawling fingers of the estuary, Bay of Jiquilisco. Their residents have problems accessing fresh water and they rely on dugout canoes for both transportation across the *canones* and for their economic livelihood: a sustainable gathering of estuary creatures such as crabs, shrimp, clams and other mollusks from the mangrove waterways. This harvesting provides for family consumption, sale outside the community, and promotes the health and balance of the local ecosystem.

By the mid 2010's, evidence began emerging of the deleterious impacts of climate change on the fragile area of the Bajo Lempa, particularly on the mangrove ecosystem corridor. Various studies showed that not only biodiversity was being lost in the mangroves of the Bajo Lempa, but that dozens of meters of mangrove coastline itself were being eroded away as sea levels rose (Navarro 2017; Voices on the Border 2014). Between 2000 and 2015, around one hundred fifty feet of mangrove forest was lost, turning forests that once served as buffer zones for hurricanes and floods, into desertified beaches methodically being overtaken by the rising sea. Local environmental abuse exacerbated the deterioration of ecological conditions, especially in the form of rampant use of toxic agrochemicals by large landowners—especially industrial sugarcane

farmers—which contaminated watersheds and unleashed an epidemic of kidney failure across both mangrove and floodplain communities alike (Davila Medina 2019).

Environmental factors such as flooding and watershed contamination have played a prominent role in shaping local residents' activist priorities, but historical-political characteristics have also been crucial in this regard. Of particular importance for those residents of floodplain communities in the Bajo Lempa, the ERP—their popular-military organization of affiliation during the Civil War—was only one of five competing factions within the FMLN, and this faction ended the war in political conflict with the two factions (Fuerzas Populares de Liberacion, FPL, and the Partido Comunista, PC) , who coalesced to take control over the FMLN structure as peace was consolidated in the early 1990's (Sprenkels 2018). As a result of disputes with FPL and PC leadership over what the structure of the FMLN should be in the post-war period, the undisputed ERP leader—Joaquin Villalobos—departed from the FMLN soon after signing the Peace Accords (Sprenkels 2018). His bases and former ERP militants now located in the distant, marginal lands of the Bajo Lempa mirrored their leader's distance from FMLN leadership—if not from the party's underlying values—by creating organizations that have exercised a modicum of autonomy vis a vis the FMLN political party in the post-war period when compared to those social movement organizations that were derived from the FPL or PC factions of the FMLN (such as CRIPDES and the CCR described in chapter 2). While ERP militants are numerically the largest population bloc in the Bajo Lempa region, it is not the only faction with representation. Communities associated with the (FPL) were dominant on the other side of the Lempa River, in the department of San Vicente, where a present-day, San Vicente chapter of CRIPDES—a national organization of peasant communities in regions with FPL bases operates in virtual lockstep with FMLN partisan directives. Similarly, two communities aligned with the Partido Comunista (PC) (Ciudad Romero

and El Zamorano) sit in the middle of a sea of ERP communities in the main population corridor of the Usulutan side of the Bajo Lempa, and formed their own social movement organization, the Asociación Mangle (The Mangrove Association), which showed its direct linkages and subordination to the FMLN party when it was decapitated when the FMLN assumed state power in 2009 as all of its leaders immediately went to work for the government.

6.3 The Emergence and Work of ACUDESBAL from the 1990s to 2009: Resistance to Neoliberalism, Conquest of Basic Services, and NGOization

As more international aid began flowing into the Bajo Lempa region in the mid to late 1990's it became clear to local residents that the formalization of their organizing and advocacy efforts into a legally established non-profit organization would be of their utmost strategic interest. In 2002, the Association of United Communities for the Socio-Economic development of the Bajo Lempa, ACUDESBAL, was founded to unify the communities of the Usulutan side of the Bajo Lempa around proposals, agendas, and interactions with outside actors. The communities' most immediate objective with their new organizational vehicle was to facilitate coordination of actions and advocacy work with state institutions and international aid agencies around the building of levies for the Lempa River, which flooded periodically due to strong seasonal rains and mismanagement of the hydroelectric dam further upriver. By way of ACUDESBAL, the communities of the Bajo Lempa made national headlines in the early 2000s by leading annual "Marches for Life" in which they would march for three days from the Bajo Lempa to San Salvador to protest outside the presidential palace and Legislative Assembly, calling for quick construction and fortification of the levies alongside the banks of the river Lempa. These marches earned the

communities of the Bajo Lempa a well-deserved, national reputation for being organized, militant, and willing to challenge both entrenched power structures and geographic constraints in the pursuit of the changes they wanted to see for their communities.

ACUDESBAL's struggle for levies along the lower portion of the Lempa river connected the organization's two primary objectives: to provide their constituent communities with basic services, and to resist neoliberalism as a broad packet of social and economic policies. From 1989-2009, these neoliberal policies were systematically implemented in El Salvador by consecutive right-wing presidential administrations of the Alianza Republicana Nacional (National Republican Alliance, ARENA) political party. In the Bajo Lempa, ACUDESBAL militants viewed levy construction as a responsibility that only could have been provided by the state given the project's magnitude and associated cost, and which would have ensured community members' basic safety in the face of the relatively predictable natural phenomenon of flooding given the region's geography. But it was ACUDESBAL's own discursive framing of the issue and their contentious advocacy for change that imbued this campaign with national significance. ACUDESBAL and its regional, national, and international allies used ARENA governments' dereliction of state duties to fortify the levies as a rallying cry to resist neoliberalism as a hegemonic ideology at both a national and global level (Almeida 2008; 2014).

ACUDESBAL's public agenda included participation in additional national-level campaigns against neoliberalism and its Salvadoran proponents—primarily expressed through the ARENA political party, its allied business associations, and international financial institutions. Through extensive coalitional work, ACUDESBAL participated in protests, marches, and forums that resisted ARENA-led initiatives to privatize public pensions, the telecommunications system, health care, and water (Almeida 2014). ACUDESBAL was particularly active in national

resistance campaigns to explicitly extractivist projects—deemed "projects of death" by popular movements across the country—such as metallic mineral mining (Spalding 2018), which though not directly proposed for the Bajo Lempa region, would have caused environmental contamination all the way down the Lempa and would have set a worrisome precedent for the country. But ACUDESBAL was also concerned with other organizational and immediate needs in their territory beyond advocacy for levies and resistance to neoliberalism writ large.

Many people talk about how they had nothing when they first came to the Bajo Lempa region as refugees from Morazan, and that the entire area was "simply wilderness", according to Alfonso, one of the founding members of ACUDESBAL. With the organizational support of ACUDSBAL, who itself was financially supported by international donors, community members worked arduously to secure their basic needs and services such as housing, water, electricity, roads, schools, and basic health care. A quintessential example of their "auto-constructed" (Holston 2007) efforts to meet basic needs was their financing and construction of an independent water system for the region. Supported by foreign activists and scientists that had been recruited by ACUDESBAL leaders, local Bajo Lempa residents successfully created a system that piped in fresh water from 12 miles north, given both the local water sources' contamination from past rounds of agricultural use and the public water agency's implicit—and assumedly ideological informed—refusal to extend the public water system to the ex-combatants of the ERP now living in the Bajo Lempa.

6.3.1 NGOization and Other Critiques

Simultaneous to ACUDESBAL's anti-systemic social movement activity against neoliberalism and in favor of their own community's basic needs during the 90's and 2000's, a

parallel and somewhat contradictory process was playing out in the organization's strategic visioning, planning, and material choices. According to Bajo Lempa residents who worked with the organization during these decades, as the organization became increasingly reliant on funding from international aid groups (such as German, Dutch, and US agencies), their agenda became relatively less radical, less concerned with community organizing, and more focused on securing measurable outcomes of increased economic stability for nuclear families.

Indeed, some community members, activists, and ex-ACUDESBAL workers I interviewed suggested that ACUDESBAL's growing financial dependence on external institutions directly inhibited the pursuit of a community-based, anti-systemic agenda for which it was founded. These folks alleged that by the mid 2000's, ACUDESBAL had contracted "proyectitis", as cleverly described by Andres of the community of Nueva Esperzanza, in which the organization had developed the tendency to sacrifice its historic work in community organizing, and public advocacy in order to apply and execute fleeting, one-off, "development" projects at the behest of international funders.

On one hand, such a critical analysis from local activists suggests a process of "NGOization" in which the organization's status as an "anti-systemic" social movement organization (SMO) was contradicted by its apparent accountability to outside funders as opposed to local community members and a radical organizing project (Choudry and Kapoor 2013; Roy 2010). On the other hand, we can see ACUDESBAL's gradual evolution toward more of an NGO than a grassroots anti-systemic movement as a strategic, intentional process by which ACUDESBAL leaders and militants tailored their specific, local interests around community organizing and alternative development to global trends in NGO financing on topics such as feminism, youth organizing, micro-credit, and food sovereignty (Alvarez et al 2017; Thayer 2017).

This merging of local needs with transnational (financial) opportunity structures enabled ACUDESBAL to maintain financial solvency and a loyal network of international funders despite a series of tumultuous circumstances during the 2010's as described below.

In summary terms then, the structural historical moment of neoliberal democratic globalization provided organizations such as ACUDESBAL with opportunities for anti-systemic organizing to resist neoliberalism and to provide the communities of the Bajo Lempa with certain basic services. These achievements were accompanied by contradictions however, including a tendency toward a more NGO like structure that seemed to distance the organization from its initial focus on grassroots organizing and an anti-systemic agenda. It was amid this complex local context in the Bajo Lempa that El Salvador's historic elections of 2009 loomed on the horizon. During this electoral cycle, every elected seat in the country was up for grabs and given the apparent exhaustion of the neoliberal economic model and the concomitant political project led by ARENA, the FMLN seemed to have a legitimate shot at gaining power across local and national branches of government, including in the Presidential Palace.

6.4 Hopeful, Strategic, and Stagnant: Demobilization Under the FMLN, 2009-2014

Along with other repopulated communities and leftist bastions across El Salvador, residents of the communities of the Bajo Lempa rejoiced when the FMLN won presidential elections in 2009 through an alliance with outsider candidate and journalist Mauricio Funes. Grassroots groups such as ACUDESBAL and other NGO's across the Bajo Lempa that had historically seen their struggles as wrapped up in the political success of the FMLN—first during its revolutionary days of armed struggle, and then during the post-war period of neoliberal

democracy—hoped that the party's arrival to executive state power would translate into a rollback of neoliberal economics on one hand and policy-based solutions to chronic problems of unemployment, poverty, and social violence on the other. While there were some policy wins for leftists under the FMLN—including more investment in health care, education, and violence prevention; co-governance with feminist organizations in certain areas of gender politics (Burridge 2020), an eventual ban on metallic mining (Spalding 2018), and the long-awaited construction of fortified levies along the Lempa River—what an FMLN government meant for the party's aligned social movements' activities in practice, was demobilization.

Demobilization—as one of the two pillars of the instrumentalization process described in chapter two) is the process by which social movement organizations (SMOs) and activists lower the intensity of their political claims-making activities and discourses, or when, in practical terms, an SMO becomes "a shadow of itself" (Davenport 2015). When an SMO demobilizes in a democratic context—that is, not as the result of government repression—the organization typically deprioritizes grassroots organizing and ceases to be involved in contentious actions such as protests (Davenport 2015). Indeed, indices of protests often serve as a helpful and easily measurable proxy for social movement contention, and in this conceptual and empirical terrain, the absence of protests provided a clear indication of demobilization. For example, if we were to apply Almeida's (2014) research design—which explained varying indices and locations of anti-neoliberal protests across Central America during the 1990's and early 2000's—to the years of the Funes administration in El Salvador, we would simply have no data to work with, as there were no significant anti-neoliberal protests to analyze.

That ACUDESBAL demobilized when the FMLN assumed executive power in 2009 was a unanimous sentiment across the leftist activists of the Bajo Lempa that I interviewed. The only

difference among interviewees was whether they viewed demobilization as normatively positive or negative. Typically, those activists with more ideological or material proximity to ACUDESBAL thought it was positive while those more "independent activists" were critical of the demobilization tendency. For instance, when I questioned Carlos, a teacher and independent activist from the community of Amando Lopez about the impacts that the FMLN's arrival to power had on leftist social movement activity in the country, he said "I have the impression that since the government of Funes, the social movements have fallen asleep a bit. We still don't have a water law (that would guarantee universal access to the vital liquid) and the law to prohibit mining cost us so much (time, effort, and lives)."

Similarly, Andres, the now-independent activist from the community of Nueva Esperanza, who had previously worked with ACUDESBAL, responded to a similar question from me in 2018 with a more territorialized account that organically incorporated the term of demobilization itself. He said, "all the demobilization that has happened here (in the Bajo Lempa), it is because the FMLN has come to power. You understand me? I mean if the Frente (the "Front", a colloquial term for the FMLN) is there, ah it's ok, it's good… (in reference to neoliberal economic policies…) Because I remember, we (ACUDESBAL) were more active when the ARENA governments were in power."

The demobilization of social movements upon the arrival of a leftist government to state power is of course not surprising, as activists frequently understand a tendency to scale back contentious activities under a sympathetic government as strategic. This point was furthered by ACUDESBAL militants such as David, during our interview in 2014. When we addressed the topic of demobilization, he rhetorically wondered why groups such as ACUDESBAL would ever engage in protests under an FMLN government as these would contribute to "destabilizing our

government", especially in the first years of a new administration. In a similar vein, a high level leader of ACUDESBAL and resident of La Canoa, Eduardo, agreed that ACUDESBAL and other organizations no longer organized protests and other contentious activities under the FMLN, but forcefully declared that as ACUDESBAL, "We have always maintained our agenda. We never forgot the changes we wanted to see… but at the beginning (of the administrations of the FMLN) we wanted to give them an opportunity to make good on their promises."

But for those activists who were militants of ACUDESBAL during ARENA administrations but who left the ranks of the organization during the FMLN's years in power—such as Andres and Carlos—their departure was the result of ACUDESBAL allowing this window of opportunity for the FMLN to come through on its promises to remain forever open. The fact that ACUDESBAL never sought to hold the FMLN accountable for its transformational changes was a breaking point for many of these more critical and now-independent activists. Estela, an ex-militant with ACDUSBAL who began dedicating her time to family self-sufficiency through agro-ecological practices around 2017 when I interviewed her, recounted a conversation she had with Eduardo, a top leader of ACUDESBAL, and her longtime friend and comrade in arms during the war: "I said to Eduardo just the other day… don't you think that we should be promoting these issues the way we did in the past? To keep pushing on the ban on mining, on regulating the sugarcane fields, on the water law? Don't you think we have stagnated? And he said 'yes, maybe you're right Estela.'"

Importantly for the comparative purposes of this dissertation, the demobilization of ACUDESBAL under FMLN governments was distinct from that of the CCR in Chalatenango. For the CCR, demobilization was part of a larger already-existing relationship of instrumentalization with the FMLN party through its historical linkages to the FPL leadership which was still

ensconced in the upper echelons of the now-ruling party. The FPL *created* the CCR and other similar peasant organizations to facilitate the "repopulation" of FMLN controlled lands in Chalatenango by its supporters and to further its local community organizing agenda in the postwar period. The ERP however—with its militaristic cum liberal-minded leader, Joaquin Villalobos—was excluded from the power-broking agreement between the FPL and PC to forge the command structure of the FMLN during the late 1980s which would endure to the present. The ERP also never created or cultivated strong base organizations that would further democratic political interests during peace time. Rather, former ERP militants migrated across the country (from Morazan in the north to the Bajo Lempa in the southeast) with only their own internal organizational tools and structures, only some of which were inherited from an ERP that became with the signing of the Peace Accords. So the emergence of ACUDESBAL as an organization was the result of endogenous processes in the internal refugee communities that responded to territorial needs and problems in the Bajo Lempa as opposed to mandates from national-level political structures. ACUDESBAL was not instrumentalized by the FMLN in the post-war period the way that the CCR was despite ACUDESBAL's participation in many similar protest campaigns. This organization only went through demobilization once the FMLN came to state power, as opposed to also being decapitated in having its leaders leave to work for the government. By not having direct linkages to the FMLN—only informal, ideological ones— and also given the specific ecological conditions in the territory, ACUDESBAL would pass through a very distinct and perhaps more complicated during the FMLN's time in executive power.

6.5 From Demobilization to Transnational Conflicts by Meso-Level Interactions: The Millenium Challenge Account in Coastal El Salvador

In empirical terms, the complexities of the demobilization of ACUDESBAL in the communities of the Bajo Lempa are best exemplified through the dynamics associated with the implementation of a Millenium Challenge Corporation grant in the coastal zone of El Salvador beginning in 2014. The Millenium Challenge Corporation (MCC) was a flagship program of the United States Aid for International Development (USAID) under the administration of George W. Bush and was initially unveiled in 2005.[13] The MCC was considered (by its architects) to be a cutting-edge novelty in the realm of international aid due to its requirement for shared accountability between the donor country and the recipient country. Despite its ostensibly "shared" nature, the weight of accountability fell heavier on the recipient country of MCC grants, as they were required to demonstrate substantial progress across a variety of specific indicators in the broad domains of "economic freedom" and "ruling justly" as defined and measured by USAID to ensure continued financial flows from the MCC.[14]

The MCC grant that was allocated for the coastal zone of El Salvador in 2014 (after the successful implementation of a first MCA grant in northern El Salvador from 2006-2011) was meant to spur a process of sustainable development and eradication of poverty by investing a total of 77 million in three strategic areas over five years: logistical infrastructure, human capital, and enhanced investment climate. Known colloquially as "Fomilenio 2", available information on the

[13] See https://www.mcc.gov/about for an overview of the aid model itself.

[14] See https://www.mcc.gov/who-we-select/scorecard/fy-2019/SV for an example of a "scorecard" used to rank countries such as El Salvador in their progress in the various MCC priority areas.

project's investment priorities[15] suggested that it's true intent was to promote infrastructure projects that would facilitate the region's continuing insertion into transnational accumulation circuits of tourism and non-traditional agricultural exports (Robinson 2008).

In this sense then, the tourism-focused development project of Fomilenio 2 is best understood through the lens of extractivism, a process by which raw natural resources are extracted from developing countries to be processed elsewhere to be sold on the global market (Gudynas 2021). While tourism projects may not typically be conceived within the extractivist paradigm, I argue that they should be, given that tourism-based development typically displaces local control over natural resources in favor of their appropriation by wealthy capitalists, whether nationally or globally positioned.

Though extractivism is commonly understood as an integral part of the packet of neoliberal economic policies in Latin America, it has been a dominant accumulation paradigm in Latin America for centuries and did cease to be so simply because leftist governments assumed state power in the 2000's (Gudynas 2021). The extraction and exploitation of natural resources for global accumulation was a reliable way for leftist governments of the early 21st century to generate dividends despite the need for changes in their rhetoric and political values in relation to such practices (Ellner (ed.) 2021). Indeed, as Mudge (2018) demonstrates in the case of center-left governments in Europe, and as Gonzalez (2019) and Gudynas (2021) have argued in studies of the Latin American pink tide governments in specific reference to extractivism, globalizing forces and national-level political and financial imperatives often impel leftist or left-leaning governments to moderate their otherwise potentially radical, socialist, or revolutionary policy proposals to

[15] See El Salvador Investment Compact |Millennium Challenge Corporation www.mcc.gov

ultimately push and implement economic policies that are part and parcel of the neoliberal canon (Zibechi 2010; Rivera Cucicanqui 2012).

So it was that consecutive FMLN governments—first led by outside journalist Mauricio Funes from 2009-2014, and then by the historic guerrilla commander Salvador Sanchez Ceren from 2014-2019—enthusiastically accepted and implemented the two MCC projects in El Salvador. FMLN state officials heralded both projects as opportunities to pursue their priorities of ameliorating poverty and unemployment through sustainable development and large-scale infrastructure projects that would be largely financed by outside investment.[16] And while such statements seemed to conflict with past statements by FMLN officials about how projects that allowed foreign access to vital resources (such as water, metallic minerals, or health care) were "neoliberal" and solely enabled outside investors to enrich themselves at the expense of local Salvadorans, such discourses largely disappeared once the FMLN held state power. That such "neoliberal" policies and projects suddenly become "opportunities" when leftist parties assume state power shows both the disciplining effects of state power itself (Krupa and Nugent 2015) and how leftist parties' moderation in the interest of maintaining state power can separate them from their revolutionary ideals and grassroots supporters (Michels 1911; Sprenkels 2018). Political moderation and acceptance of extractivism by the FMLN put already demobilized activists of SMO's such as ACDUDESBAL in an even more complicated position as the discursive and material effects of Fomilenio 2 manifested in their communities.

[16] See Sánchez Cerén recibe el alivio de Fomilenio II (elfaro.net)

6.5.1 A New Possibility for International Funding for ACUDESBAL

While the framework and implications of Fomilenio 2 seemed to clearly position the development project within the "neoliberal" category of economic policies, the leadership of ACUDESBAL, as well as other similarly leftist organizations, were initially willing to allow the architects of the project an opportunity to implement it in a way that would benefit their communities' interests. Specifically, ACUDESBAL did not propose to resist Fomilenio 2, but rather, at the behest of FMLN allies already working within the state apparatus, and in alliance with other SMO's and some lower-tier state agencies, ACUDESBAL endeavored to design and submit a proposal to the MCA to secure funding to enhance its already-existing community-led development priorities for the Bajo Lempa region.

Speaking in 2018, but remembering back to 2014, Eduardo, a leader of ACUDESBAL, stated: "When Fomilenio 2 started, we drew on the trust we had with the new government, which was of the Frente, and we wanted to believe their word. We said, ok, if you're going to develop the coastal marine zone of El Salvador, hopefully you will help us resolve a few of the problems that we have identified. Let's try this…" Eduardo went on to describe the broad coalitional space in which relevant actors drafted a sweeping series of community-led development projects to be presented to Fomilenio 2 for funding. Those at the table for the drafting of the funding proposals included a long list of leftist social movement organizations[17] and municipal governments on both sides of the Lempa River,[18] internationally recognized environmental NGO's, relevant

[17] The Mangrove Association, ACUDESBAL, CRIPDES, CORDES, CONFRAS, an unnamed guild of artisan fisherman, and various local agricultural cooperatives.

[18] These included Jiquilisco, Tecoluca, Zacatecoluca, and San Luis la Herradura.

governments agencies such as the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Public Works, Ministry of Civil Protection, the CEL, and even a representative from the Technical Secretary of the Presidency.[19] After months of meetings, the project proposal laid out a comprehensive agenda: to construct irrigation matrices and local marketplaces; to provide technical assistance and credit to local farmers, entrepreneurs, and cooperatives; and to pool public resources from various government agencies to protect coastal and mangrove ecosystems for conservation and low-impact tourism.

Eduardo talks of being a part of all the planning meetings, and even a member of the representative commission that formally presented the group's proposal at the Presidential Palace. He was hopeful that their proposal would be approved, citing the high-level decision makers who had already been part of the drafting of the proposal, and the fact that one of the President Funes' mandates was "to come and do this type of work, to come and listen to the people, and come up with proposals for real change." Eduardo continues the story saying,

> "Two months later we met again (with representatives of the Salvadoran president) to discuss their response to our proposals. The surprise for us was that the government of the United States had not approved—had not accepted a *single* one of our proposed projects. But still we thought there was hope, and we said to the President's representatives: 'the government here (of El Salvador) is with us right? If the government from up there (the

[19] This agency had been created by Mauricio Funes to provide his most preferred advisor, influential Keynesian economist Alexander Segovia, with an opportunity to be ever at his side. During the Funes government of 2009-2014, this was likely the most influential institution within the state apparatus.

> US) doesn't accept this, you all can put forth the money and support the proposals?' But ultimately the response was no. And so, we asked them: 'if we are here in representation of four coastal-marine municipalities, if we are the organizations that are with the communities, and they don't accept a single one of our proposals, how is it that Fomilenio 2 is going to come and eradicate poverty here in the coastal-marine zone? If that was the objective of Fomilenio 2…."

Eduardo then describes a series of "strong" discussions between the coalitional space he was a part of and the President's representatives, discussions which led to a total rupture between the two groups. High-level officials in the FMLN government—much higher level than mid-level managers who had been involved in the drafting of the proposal itself—claimed that the dialogue with representatives from the Bajo Lempa had turned into an "ideological space"; that the Bajo Lempa contingent was defending "interests that were not those of the country as a whole", and that there was no way to negotiate with them. In response to that posture by the government, according to Eduardo, "We "marcamos cancha" (drew a line in the sand) and said that if the communities are not going to have direct participation, if they're not going to be benefitted by the project, then we are in opposition to Fomilenio 2."

From what I can surmise based on subsequent similar accounts from leaders of other social movement organization such as CRIPDES and Voices on the Border, this falling out between the coalition of Bajo Lempa organizations and municipal governments on one side, and national-level state officials tasked with the implementation of Fomilenio 2 on the other, occurred in mid-2014. Soon after this, ACUDESBAL began to facilitate "informational forums" in the communities of the Bajo Lempa territory in which they warned of Fomilenio 2's total disconnection from the

interests of normal people in the zone, and its possible detrimental environmental impacts on the region. These forums led to a rapid rise in critical consciousness around the impacts of Fomilenio 2 and myriad calls from individuals in the Bajo Lempa region to resist the mega-project, as I detail in the next section.

Eduardo's account demonstrates that ACUDESBAL's trust with allies in FMLN-held state institutions led them to believe that their priorities and values of ecologically sustainable, community-led development could be furthered by the otherwise neoliberal-seeming project of Fomilenio 2. These hopes were unceremoniously dashed through a series of negative interactions with their alleged allies now ensconced in the state apparatus, leaving ACUDESBAL and other leftist organizations, militants, and local governments, with little other option than to attempt some sort of opposition to the project. But the potential efficacy of such opposition had already been undermined by ACUDESBAL's and other leftist organizations' exhaustion of political capital in their initial effort to secure funding through Fomilenio 2. In this sense, the tenuous possibility of state-based funding for otherwise anti-systemic organizing initiatives served as an insidious form of social movement cooptation (because the disingenuous action by the state led to the demobilization) that crystallized at the meso-level of interactions between social movements and state institutions when the left controls the state (Prevost, Vanden, Oliva Campos 2012). The transmission belts of knowledge and resources that flowed between leftist social movement leaders and low-level state bureaucrats affiliated with the FMLN in the Salvadoran state initially facilitated a flow of knowledge that seemed to provide an economic opportunity for allied movements, though this opportunity was eviscerated by the structural veto power of global capital as manifested through the US government-funded MCC, and transmitted through state-movement interactions among disempowered allies on the Salvadoran left.

6.5.2 Sparks of Resistance from Below

Though I wasn't aware of ACUDESBAL's pursuit of that financial opportunity through Fomilenio 2 until 2018,[20] I knew since the beginning of my formal research in 2014 that leftist activists' perspectives on Fomilenio 2 were exceedingly complicated. On one hand, people felt that demobilization was the order of the day. In a particularly revelatory quote, an older, seasoned activist from Nueva Esperanza, Rosa, who professed to have always focused her activist time on community structures, said: "There used to be resistance, but once the Frente came into power… "Fomilenio is coming… Ah Fomilenio, yes that's ok ('si esta bien'). There was a big influence, like it or not, by the FMLN in the second-level organizations like ACUDESBAL, and that influence has also come down into the communities."

Rosa's analysis reveals the sense that people in the Bajo Lempa were complacent regarding the warnings that Fomilenio may jeopardize aspects of their communal livelihoods—and that organizations such as ACUDESBAL were inadvertently contributing to such complacency. There were other perspectives however, that were fully oppositional to the prospects of Fomilenio's implementation. In contradiction to Rosa's sentiment that people were accepting of Fomilenio

[20] Jose told me about it late one evening while seated at his kitchen table in his house in La Canoa, only after many extended conversations and interviews with him in the preceding years; years after he had begun calling me "compa" (short for compañero, or comrade in leftist circles of El Salvador), suggesting that I had won his political trust, and only after much diplomatic prying on my part about what seemed to me like a surprising lack of resistance to Fomilenio 2 from ACUDESBAL. It is my speculation that few non-leader activists in the Bajo Lempa region were aware of the funding proposal that was submitted by ACUDESBAL in conjunction with its state-based and societal allies to Fomilenio 2 at the beginning of 2014.

because the FMLN was administering the project, Alfonso, one of the founding members of ACUDESBAL, and resident of La Canoa declared, "I expect the people of the Bajo Lempa to rise up and defend the lands they shed blood for against the foreigners and the right-wingers who are behind Fomilenio 2."

Consistent with the implications of Alfonso's expectation of resistance were accounts from both ordinary community members as well as activists throughout the Bajo Lempa region that Fomilenio 2 would lead to the appropriation of their land by outside investors, as well as to water scarcity and deforestation as new hotels and golf courses would come to occupy strategic territories and consume vital resources.[21] These worries were certainly fostered by the forums that ACUDESBAL, Voices on the Border, and CESTA were organizing across the territory, in which these organizations presented their research on the possible environmental effects of the projects on the region.

During my interviews in mid-late 2014, I found fears of Fomilenio's impacts to be particularly pronounced in mangrove communities. In an interview that year with Arturo, then president of the community board of the mangrove community of La Tirana, he expressed his understanding that Fomilenio 2 would threaten the "privatization of our livelihoods" for residents of the mangroves. Arturo did not believe that Fomilenio 2 would bring employment and

[21] According to a report published by Voices on the Border in 2014 called "Tourist Development in the Bay of Jiquilisco," communities such as La Tirana and El Chile are among the 20% of Salvadoran communities that are still not connected to public systems of water and get their water from wells or other informal sources. The report provides an extensive discussion and voluminous quantitative data to show how an influx of tourist projects, and especially of golf courses, would occupy the vast majority of already-scarce hydric resources in the Bajo Lempa territory, leaving area inhabitants in even more precarious situations of "hydric stress."

development to their communities. Rather, like many others in his community, he worried that their precious natural resources—the flora and fauna, as well as the mangrove ecosystems themselves—would be destroyed or appropriated by foreign investors who would be the real beneficiaries of the aid program.

Jonatan, the president of the community of El Chile, another mangrove community even further east of the mouth of the Bay of Jiquilisco, and closer to pristine beaches known for their beauty and abundance of wildlife such as tortoises, asserted that communities like his are not taken into account by state institutions when "mega-projects" are negotiated and approved. For Jonatan, the absence of representatives from the Bajo Lempa in negotiations around Fomilenio 2 was even more egregious given the project's direct and detrimental impacts on "ignored communities" such as his. He professed his desire to speak directly with the members of the Legislative Assembly—"the ones who supposedly represent us and make laws in our name".

Fearing government inaction regarding an imminent appropriation of their land from outside investors aligned with the architects of Fomilenio 2, Jonatan worked with other community members under the guidance of ACUDESBAL to try to convince all El Chile residents to refuse to sell their lands to outsiders. But despite his small group's best efforts, and the efforts of other leaders and NGO workers, "the population was divided" in mangrove communities such as El Chile and La Tirana according to Jonatan. Here, some residents were hoping that the development project would bring viable employment and investment opportunities, and still others had already sold their land to outside investors, portending a vested interest in the realization of the project.

But the desire to resist Fomilenio was still strong among many residents of mangrove communities, and as a result, by the end of 2014, a group of community boards of directors threatened by the implementation of Fomilenio 2, and supported by ACUDESBAL, CESTA, and

Voices on the Border, had coalesced into a new group, the Association of Mangrove Communities in Defense of Territory (ACOMADET), which purported to both raise awareness in the communities around the threats to their way of life posed by mega-projects such as Fomilenio 2, and to present a proposal to national-level government agencies for community-based "co-management" of the mangrove forests around the Bajo Lempa and Bay of Jiquilisco.[22] Though ACOMADET never formally presented such a proposal to any government institution, nor was able to actually establish its own judicial personhood, its existence combined with the sorts of perspectives already cited here, demonstrated that leaders in both mangrove and floodplain communities at least *attempted* to resist Fomilenio 2 by both critiquing its seeming promotion of a neoliberal, extractivism development model and by forwarding their own ideas around community control over local resources. Additionally, many also expressed their desires to formally resist Fomilenio 2 through "claims-making actions" (actos reinvindicativos") such as marches and protests against Fomilenio 2, a prospect that caused great worry in the ranks of mid-level FMLN officials in the Secretary of Citizen Participation when I directly shared such sentiments with them during interviews.

While contentious resistance to Fomilenio 2 may have *seemed* likely, particularly from local anti-systemic movement organizations such as ACUDESBAL, there were never any public protests or outward resistance to Fomilenio 2. This was the case because community members of the Bajo Lempa and militants of ACUDESBAL ultimately refused to "destabilize their

[22] The concept and practice of "co-management" by local communities and government agencies of valuable, delicate natural ecosystems is both well-documented and on the rise around the world, including in Latin America, in countries such as Colombia, Chile, and Costa Rica. (Amigos de la Tierra 2007).

government", and because another more sinister factor had arrived to not just demobilize them, but to destabilize their very lives.

6.5.3 Gray Zones of Violence: From Gang Incursion to Community Dissolution

As if the arrival of the FMLN to state power combined with the unsuccessful attempt by ACUDESBAL and other organizations to secure funding for their own projects through Fomilenio 2 were not enough to demobilize community resistance to this neoliberal development project, an additional demobilizing factor emerged: the arrival of outside gang members to the communities of the Bajo Lempa. Seemingly in chronological lockstep with the crystallization of the *possibility* of organized resistance to Fomilenio 2 on behalf of communities in the Bajo Lempa (during mid to late 2014), gang members from beyond the region began arriving to the area to establish territories (canchas or "fields" in local parlance) and recruit local members into their ranks. While gang activity had been a source of epidemic levels of violence, fear, and social conflict in many areas of El Salvador since at least the early 2000's (Wolf 2017; and see chapter 8), the communities of the Bajo Lempa had remained free of this destructive social dynamic, in large part due to their remote geographic location and the strong social networks that structured the communities.

But the sudden incursion of gang members and activity in the communities of the Bajo Lempa—with their practices of rent extortion under pain of death and open warfare with police and rival gangs—sabotaged community-organizing processes throughout the territory for at least two years. Indeed, after an intensive round of ethnographic fieldwork in 2014, I was advised by trusted local informants to not even visit Bajo Lempa area in 2015 and 2016 given the violence being unleashed by gang members, and eventually also by police, soldiers, and para-state officials against suspected gang members in the area. In my subsequent visits in 2017 and 2018,

ACUDESBAL workers and other activists spoke of a total stoppage in their organizing processes during the previous two as their physical travel from one community to the next had been impeded and threatened by warring participants in rival gangs—the 18th street gang and the MS-13. In addition, some community members had been forced to flee the communities altogether—and often times the country itself—as a result of threats by gang members against they or their families.[23]

By the end of 2016, as a result of what amounted to a low-scale social cleansing campaign by state and para-state security personnel, there was little gang presence in the floodplain communities (gang members had either been killed or had fled on their own), though gang members did hold on to power in a few mangrove communities, such as La Tirana, where there was less unity and organization compared to their floodplain counterparts. Again, using local folks' warnings to protect my own safety as an indicator, I was able to do extensive research in the floodplain communities during 2018 but was still advised against entering La Tirana given the ongoing violence in that community. At that point, violence in La Tirana, was occurring primarily between gang members and police, though such violence increasingly claimed "civilian" victims,

[23] In a tragic but fascinating coincidence, one of the founders of ACUDESBAL had been forced to flee the community of Amando Lopez with his family and ended up in the remote community of Sontule in the Miraflor region of Nicaragua, the geographic locus of chapter 3 of this dissertation. After getting over my shock at the smallness of the Central American world, I interviewed him during my visit to Sonutle in 2017 and lament I have not fully incorporated his perspective—on both Sontule and the Bajo Lempa—into this dissertation. Suffice to say for now, he had a very dim perspective of organizing processes in Sontule and the larger Miraflor region compared to what he had been a part of through ACUDESBAL in the Bajo Lempa, before the arrival of the gangs that is.

or those who were not formal gang members nor police or their informants. This violence ultimately led to the veritable dissolution of La Tirana.

When I joined the Board of Directors of Voices on the Border in June of 2019, one of the first reports that I received was that the community of La Tirana—where Voices had been investing time and resources to strengthen internal community organizing processes—had "fallen apart". The Executive Director of VOCES, and long-time community organizer and educator in the Bajo Lempa region explained how the police had come in the middle of the night and set fire to the house of a family suspected of collaborating with the gang members who had managed to take control of a large chunk of the community's land and population. It had been the house of Marisol, who had always helped the community board of directors (still headed by Arturo) and made food for visiting delegations with unshakeable charisma and enthusiasm. She and her family subsequently fled the community to parts unknown of El Salvador or to other countries. By mid-2020, roughly half of La Tirana's population had fled, including all of those community residents and leaders, such as Arturo, who had promoted resistance to Fomilenio 2 and had been threatened by gang violence, police violence, or both. Simultaneously, according to ongoing virtual communication with Voices on the Border staff, large tracts of the community's land that had been vacated by emigrants was being bought up by a local oligarch and sugar baron, who was assumed to be planning to implement tourism projects with funding from Fomilenio 2.

Meanwhile in El Chile, which I was able to visit in 2018, the transfer of land from locals to outsiders had seemingly happened with much less coercion and gang-state violence. According to my main contact in the community, Jonatan, who was no longer the president of the community due to a shift in local political power away from those aligned with NGO's such as ACUDESBAL and Voices on the Border, the community's transformation into an investment-ready series of

properties was nearly complete. He said: “If we see now who are the owners of the beach terrains, we don’t see a single peasant there, not a single fisherman, not a single egg-collector. We see wealthy men who have come from others places to appropriate this land. And when they buy the land, they promised to bring employment, but when the time comes, they bring workers from other places…”

Though it would be impossible to prove causation between the arrival of gang members to the Bajo Lempa and the abandonment of resistance to Fomilenio 2 in mangrove communities, there is a direct correlation between the destruction wrought by gang and state violence across the Bajo Lempa region from 2014-2018, and the passage of coastal and mangrove lands into outside investors’ portfolios. In hushed whispers and only among others of trust, some Bajo Lempa residents will speculate that the arrival of the gang members to the area was part of a larger strategy by the wealthy local oligarchs to disarticulate community organizations, such as ACOMADET, and the local community board in La Tirana, whose resistance to Fomilenio 2 posed a threat to transnational circuits of accumulation facilitated at a policy level by Fomilenio 2, even after many other community leaders—especially in the floodplains—had already been pacified through the organizational demobilization of ACUDESBAL. What is undeniable regarding Fomilenio 2 is that a complex, interlocking web of social, political, and economic—expressly anthropic—factors coalesced to block the possibility of community-led resistance to the mega project, thereby weakening communal agency to forge alternative climate futures in opposition to the accumulation logic of global capitalism.

6.6 Toward Food Sovereignty, Agro-Ecology, and Peasant Autonomy

ACUDEBAL's demobilization under FMLN governments along with its internal and external tensions—especially its reliance on international funding and discourses—coalesced to obligate the leaders, communities, and organizational structures associated with ACUDESBAL to reinvent themselves (Motta 2013) during FMLN administrations from 2009-2019. This reinvention saw ACUDESBAL transform from a militant SMO focused on resistance protests and policy advocacy to one more concerned with cultural and ecological change within the communities where it operates. In the theoretical terms of Erik Olin Wright (2003), it shifted its focus from symbiotic transformation—change that would be engineered through interactions with the state—to interstitial transformation—change that addresses the fabric of social (and ecological) relationships themselves. From around 2018 onward, ACUDESBAL and many activists and community boards associated with it began to forge a series of more localized, autonomous, and trans-locally linked practices around social organization and agro-ecology processes, outside the logic of partisan, state-based politics. ACUDESBAL's and other group's recent reinvention signals dynamics in which the organization and its activists are "overflowing the channels" (Markoff 2019) of the established (formal) Salvadoran (and Latin American) leftist political projects.

Since around 2017—after the vanquishing of the threats posed by gangs—ACUDESBAL has come to focus its work on more explicitly interstitial strategies of social change: organization of youth and women's groups who have goals of local transformation, scholarship programs for students, and a large array of agro-ecological projects for communities, cooperatives, and individual farmers, which can be encapsulated in a programmatic and discursive focus on "peasant autonomy".

ACUDESBAL has always represented communities and people who construct alternative social development models that are deeply rooted in local claims to land use and management of local natural resources. Both present day and ex-militants of ACUDESBAL are deeply committed to ecological sustainability given the extent to which they recognize themselves as co-dependent with the natural world as a result of their carving out their lives in the territorial milieu of the Bajo Lempa and of the large impacts that the natural world has on their prospects for a dignified life. But as it became clear to residents of the Bajo Lempa and to ACUDESBAL as an organization that their ecological causes were not being prioritized by the FMLN—with the most dramatic example being that of Fomilenio 2—their environmental work increasingly began to take place outside and independent of the political orbit of the FMLN.

As an example of ACUDESBAL's commitment to ecologically sustainable models of localized development, the organization's president, Eduardo, had this to say in 2018 about the organization's work with agriculturalists in the territory:

> "The people's awareness-raising process is advancing slowly. The people have been led to believe that without agro-chemicals, their crops won't produce anything. Well, we (ACUDESBAL) have gone about demonstrating that this is not the case… We work on productive diversification. We're interested in farmers' parcels having fruits, vegetables, basic grains, greens, herbs, chickens, turkeys, ducks, pigs—so that you will see everything in a parcel—enough to maintain a family—enough. And what does that bring? The ability to not depend on supermarkets, to not depend on agro-chemicals, but rather to depend on your land. And that is what we call food sovereignty—it's like the alternative to the conventional model, which—even though the government is FMLN right now—we say

with clarity, that the government is complicit in facilitating a capitalist model of agriculture."

Similar to the concept of empirical feminism detailed in chapter 5, Eduardo's words exhibit one element of *empirical environmentalism*: a concern for protecting and managing natural resources sustainably due to empirical experiences that have convinced people that their basic human dignity and survival depends on such protection. By invoking a family-based, community-supported model of food sovereignty, Mario contextualizes how ACUDESBAL promotes localized practices of peasant environmentalisms that converge with globally circulating ecological perspectives and discourses around environmental protection (Cartagena Cruz from Almeida Cordero book 2015). That is, ACUDESBAL is one of many grassroots efforts around the world that is forging alternative social development models in their territory by drawing on both global discourses and local experiences and knowledge to contest dominant, capitalist models of land and resource use by enacting and practicing their own more sustainable claims to land and resources.

Importantly, according to Eduardo, these visions and practices of agro-ecological sustainability in the Bajo Lempa are implemented in tension with the "conventional" capitalist model of agriculture and resource use being promoted by the FMLN. For Eduardo, this conventional model was expressed through various agricultural aid programs which doled out one-season-use "terminator" seeds and agro-toxic fertilizers to small farmers, through large-scale, seemingly-neoliberal development projects such as Fomilenio 2, and also through FMLN governments' apparent lack of will or ability to regulate large-scale sugarcane production in the Bajo Lempa region.

While leftist militants and leaders such as Eduardo still largely identified with the FMLN political project, they increasingly realized that their territorialized context and needs would not be supported by their alleged allies in power. This realization combined with the more generalized disappointments and contradictions of FMLN governments led most activists in the Bajo Lempa region to begin prioritizing their local needs over allegiance to the FMLN, and to construct a critical distance from party imperatives on various issues. This distance became clear through the consolidation of community- and family-based agricultural model that constructed food sovereignty and local control over resources, especially as the ever-increasing intensity and harms of sugar cane production in the region directly jeopardize the pursuit of food sovereignty of ACUDESBAL's community bases.

ACUDESBAL's work to "defend life and territory", as has been their slogan since 2017, has crystallized around adaptation to the effects of climate change writ large with a special focus on resistance to unchecked sugarcane cultivation (Davila Medina 2019; Davila Medina and Acosta 2020). This advocacy work has become increasingly based on coalitions with other organizations and efforts within El Salvador and also on transnational connections across the Central American region. For instance, ACUDESBAL was instrumental in the founding of the Movement of Victims and Affected of Climate Change and Corporations (MOVIAC), a Central American wide network that resists development projects that have precipitated adverse climactic changes in the region such as metallic mineral mining and cross-national contamination of watersheds by textile factories (Navarro 2017). Most recently, ACUDESBAL has partnered with other peasant organization across eastern El Salvador and with environmental groups such as CESTA and Voices on the Border to begin the national coalition "Azucar Amarga" ("Bitter Sugar"), which has undertaken research and advocacy efforts to compel the new Salvadoran government—led by the

young, social-media savvy, neo-populist dictator Nayib Bukele—to effectively regulate the country's sugarcane industry and thereby mitigate the overwhelming health and environmental risks that the industry precipitates (Davila Medina 2019; Davila Medina and Acosta 2020).

Such coalitions have enabled ACUDESBAL to scale up their demands and claims both toward the Salvadoran state on certain strategic issues and toward more lucrative transnational funding agents in the US and Europe, though with decidedly uneven indices of success. While MOVIAC and Azucar Amarga have had little to no policy successes on the issues they have addressed, they have contributed to a growing national and global consciousness on the importance of government oversight of key industries, and on the ability of organized local communities and peasant agriculture to "cool the planet" (in the famous formulation of La Via Campesina) through agro-ecology and food sovereignty.

On one specific issue however, ACUDESBAL's support for a constituent community's attempts to protect and manage their local resources has been resoundingly successful. The community of Amando Lopez, a floodplain community with a strong community board of directors who had served in the ERP in Morazan during the war, utilized ACUDESBAL's institutional support to construct relationships of collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN) in order to enshrine a system of "co-management" (Amigos de la Tierra 2007) of its remarkably lush Gallery Forest along the banks of the Lempa River. This is one of the undeniable achievements of ACUDESBAL and its constituent communities in its recent years of focus on empirical environmentalism and peasant autonomy.

In summary terms then, ACUDESBAL's relative demobilization after the arrival of FMLN governments, the complexities of the implementation of Fomilenio 2 and the existential threats posed by gang-member incursions into their territory did not end the organization's work to bring

alternative development to the communities of the Bajo Lempa. Rather, their work, as well as the work of other independent activists and local communities in the region was *reinvented* to pursue more interstitial forms of social change that would not be conditioned by formal political parties or institutions. Importantly, this did not mean that ACUDESBAL fell out of the orbit of outside imperatives altogether. Their longstanding international connections and overwhelming reliance on foreign funding still shaped their work, but this should not be seen simply as a case of global cooptation of local autonomy or normatively negative "NGOization" (Thayer 2017). Rather these transnational linkages constituted a bi-directional, north-south transmission belt of ideas, discourses, and resources that enabled ACUDESBAL to pursue its objectives for community organization and food sovereignty in novel, and relatively sustainable ways over the course of three decades, even when its plans to access political and financial opportunities through partisan allies in state power went awry. That certain academic and activist discourses glorifying the work of "social movement organizations" such as ACUDESBAL coexist simultaneously with critical discourses—from other camps of more radical local activists or academics further to the left—that see such organizations as merely "NGOs" that stymy truly anti-capitalist organizing is not an analytical or theoretical problem to be overcome so much as an indicator of the complexity of the work of NGOized social movement organizations in the 21st century global south.

6.7 Conclusions from the Bajo Lempa

In the face of potentially destructive development projects such as Fomilenio 2 that sought natural resource-dependent, transnationally-linked accumulation and threatened to displace communities and turn natural risks into socio-economic and eminently anthropic risks,

ACUDESBAL seemed to provide the organized communities of the Bajo Lempa with a collective social vehicle to confront and combat these threats. It had ultimately been successful in collaborating with a sympathetic, leftist-led state to ensure the building of levies along the Lempa river and was part of the anti-mining movement that also gained success under FMLN governments, but Fomilenio 2 in the Bajo Lempa region ended up quite differently: ACUDESBAL did not end up trying to lead resistance efforts to an initiative that would possibly unleash such detrimental impacts on its communities. Rather, ACUDESBAL and other organization, including low-level state institutions, worked very hard to design and submit a proposal to the MCA, at the behest and in coordination with their FMLN counterparts and allies in government. This resulted in an even deeper demobilization of ACUDESBAL's affiliated communities than had already occurred simply due to the FMLN attaining state power. The few communities—located in the coastal mangrove zones of the region and who were already only loosely connected to ACUDESBAL and the FMLN political project—were effectively gutted and demobilized by gang violence in their communities, potentially in the service of investor networks seeking to appropriate land that could be developed under the auspices of Fomilenio 2. This sequence of events led to a *learning process* among residents of the Bajo Lempa and leaders and militants of ACUDESBAL in which the movement has reinvented itself to more explicitly pursue cultural, interstitial change—through specific objectives such as agro-ecology and food sovereignty—within its own communities and through trans-local connections, as opposed to contentious or symbiotic relationships with state institutions, politically aligned or not.

So while the prospects for this local project of eco-communal governance looks gray in the wake of the implementation of Fomilenio 2, the subsequent departure of the FMLN from political power, and the recent rise of a new, populist fascism under young social-media influencer-

president Nayib Bukele, there are clear analytical and theoretical insights to be gained from this empirical foray into the Bajo Lempa movement territory of El Salvador under FMLN governments.

First, meso-level interactions are extremely important in seemingly "transnational" conflicts over natural resources and extractivism. When analyzing the activity of social movements we should pay close attention to the relationships of movement leaders with low-level state officials, especially when they are operatives of an ostensibly aligned party. Such relationships serve as transmission belts for ideas, resources, discourses, opportunities and constraints that mediate global processes and local interests. By more specifically and critically tying movement-state relations under the left in Latin America to world-systemic dynamics, we can better understand both the prospects for social change across diverse contexts and how movements are dynamics nodes situated at various points along political-economic channels and networks.

Second, a state-based project of governance that is subordinated to transnational capital—even if administered by a "leftist" party—is incompatible with an eco-project of governance from below as instantiated by the community bases of ACUDESBAL in which agro-ecology, food sovereignty, and community organization guides social relations and contributes to ecological sustainability (Fenelon and Alford 2021). A capital-conditioned state by contrast, must see natural resources as production inputs or as assets to attract foreign investment to spur economic growth and contribute to overarching concerns with the maintenance of political power at various scales. Such a state project—even if "leftist"—is just as anthropocentric and anti-environmental as right-wing political projects (Bruno 2015; Smith 2017). Thus, in El Salvador as in Ecuador, Venezuela, or Bolivia, the institutional Latin American Left seems unable to incorporate environmental concerns into its projects of governance (Gonzalez 2019). They have been unable to escape the

extractivist logic of the state as most clearly demonstrated in El Salvador by the implementation of Fomilenio 2.

Third, the tensions between projects of governance on the left can be considered a "productive" one (to borrow the problematic use of Garcia Linera in Bolivia) only if and when the local, eco-communal project gains true protagonism and leadership in the state-society relation. Community activists, agro-ecologists, and ordinary people of the Bajo Lempa began overflowing the established channels of the institutional Salvadoran left (Markoff 2019) just as it was on the brink of losing state power (which it did in 2019). Nevertheless, community-based agro-ecological action in the Bajo Lempa continues to reinvent the relationships between communities, the natural world, and political power—with or without support from formal political institutions. Communities are demanding that national-level governments respect local practices to lead processes of climate change adaptation, local resource control, and democratic politics. In this way, eco-projects of governance from below contribute to a reinvention of leftist politics writ large both in El Salvador, in Latin America, and throughout the world. It remains to be seen if the institutional left—in El Salvador or elsewhere in the region—will be able to re-gain control over the grassroots flood toward more intersectional, non-hierarchical, and ecologically conscious expressions, or if these new currents will seek new political expressions (through institutional politics or not).

Fourth and finally, the reinvention of leftist politics represented by projects of eco-governance from below—such as those that are incipient in the Bajo Lempa—are contributing to a new phase of anthro-shift in which societal actors' attempts to construct harmonious relations with the environment reject state and market imperatives to put the environment in the service of economic accumulation. Communal agro-ecology from below thus illuminates a horizon by which

a more horizontal and peaceful relationship between humans and the natural world can be constructed. We might conclude that agro-ecological action along these lines is ultimately incompatible with western civilization's basis in human domination of nature and may be leading us away from the Anthropocene. Following the insights of indigenous cultures across the world as theorized by Fenelon and Alford (2021), such cultural, social, and political practices are illuminating a path toward a new, post-anthropocentric civilizational paradigm.

In the light of the other cases presented in this dissertation, this chapter on ACUDESBAL in the Bajo Lempa depicts an additional, further nuanced point on a spectrum of movement-government interaction. At this point, there is demobilization without instrumentalization, as well as attempts at negotiations with state actors (if ultimately unsuccessful), and movement learning that leads to a transition toward a *different* point on the spectrum—away from demobilization and negotiation and toward autonomous self-management. Though I argue that all of the cases present in this dissertation indicate aspects of movement learning and the reinvention of leftist politics writ large, this chapter most clearly demonstrates a community-led movement reinvention process in the course of a few short years during which the FMLN ruled El Salvador. The uniqueness of this case results from characteristics of the Bajo Lempa territory and the organized people who inhabit it: an ecologically lush but "wild" area which both enriched and threatened human communities; a local population that was largely united by broad ideological allegiance to a set of leftist values, but not quite as much to the political party typically understood to represent those values; a complex and multifaceted insertion into the larger global society and economy in which certain global actors buttressed local autonomy while other global actors sought to appropriate the region's bountiful natural resources. In summary terms, the local geography led ideologically committed but organizationally autonomous leftist activists to prioritize local environmental

concerns in a variety of ways over the course of two decades—experimenting with transnational, national, and local initiatives to ultimately reinvent themselves in the ways that most effectively promote their self-defined objectives.

7.0 The Anti-Canal Movement and the Descent into Authoritarianism in Nicaragua

Continuing with a focus on environmental movements, I attempted to interrogate one movement in this research design that resides fully on the right extreme of the spectrum of movement-state interactions, standing in total *confrontation* with its allegedly allied government. I refer to the Anti-canal movement in Nicaragua. Environmental organizations have long had contentious relationships with Daniel Ortega during his current reign since 2006, but many of these organizations became united, vocal, and militantly mobilized against the government due to its plans—first unveiled around 2012—to facilitate the construction of a Chinese-financed inter-oceanic canal to connect commercial and recreational shipping lines from the Pacific and Atlantic oceans across the southern corridor of the country. Ortega and the Sandinista party-state hailed the canal project as an opportunity for Nicaragua to assume an important role in global geopolitics and to catalyze strong and equitable economic growth. Environmental organizations, as well as large swatches of local populations who would lose their land or have their livelihoods transformed as a result of the canal construction mobilized in opposition to the project (Sanchez 2018).

The idea of constructing an inter-oceanic canal along the southern strip of Nicaragua has a long and complicated history that first gained traction in the mid-19th century as British and American imperialists vied for control and access across Atlantic and Pacific fields of geopolitics. Nicaragua—with its abundant waterways and large inland lake—seemed to present an ideal territorial opportunity to construct an interoceanic canal that would link the Atlantic and Pacific and expedite global commerce in dramatic ways. The beneficial promise that such plans held for Nicaragua became a part of the national imaginary in the 19th century as local liberal reformers

and democrats foresaw Nicaragua becoming a prosperous and cosmopolitan country as a result of foreigners' interest in their "privileged" territory (Kinloch 2015).

But amid imperial squabbling between the nascent American and over-reaching British empires, and internal conflicts among elites in Nicaragua, a former slice of Colombia became Panama and the new proposed site for an inter-oceanic canal. Nicaragua's claim as a privileged site in global commerce and politics vanished, and the idea of an interoceanic canal became mute in Nicaragua, though not forgotten. The idea was resurrected by Daniel Ortega in the 2000's as he sought Chinese investors to sponsor the project to compete with the Panama Canal and with US geopolitical control over that vital trade route in the Western Hemisphere.

Before having the canal's financing assured—and perhaps to assuage investors' fears about its legal and political feasibility in Nicaragua—Ortega worked with an obedient Nicaraguan legislature to pass Law 840 in June of 2013 which partitioned out the swathe of territory across southern Nicaragua that would be the future site of the inter-oceanic canal. Those individuals and businesses who had property in the decreed land would lose it, but would be appropriately compensated, while Chinese company HK Nicaragua Canal Development Investment Group (HKND), led by Wang Jing, was granted a 50-year concession to the land for the purposes of building the canal. Soon thereafter in 2014, grassroots groups across the country mobilized against the proposed project for its potential environmental impacts, and for the ceding of Nicaraguan lands to a foreign investor. Very quickly, a young peasant woman from a small town on the Caribbean coastal department of Nueva Guinea, Francisca Ramirez became the organic leader and spokesperson of the anti-canal movement, leading marches of thousands of people across the southeastern stretches of the country and periodically in Managua as well.

By 2015, it was obvious that the anti-canal movement was one of the strongest movements in the country. It garnered national and international media attention, as well as increasing repression from government forces as the magnitude and intensity of anti-canal marches across the country intensified. Coupled with media reports that emerged in 2015 casting doubts on Jing's ability to finance the project given his losses in the stock market crash in China during that same year it seemed that the Nicaraguan canal project may be stopped. By 2017, when I endeavored to research a territorialized instance of the anti-canal movement for this dissertation, the Nicaraguan government had been unable to verify its funding sources for the canal project, and had released—then attempted to cover up—an environmental impact and feasibility report that questioned the Nicaraguan canal's viability (Sanchez 2018).

Still, in order to cover my methodological and sampling bases I thought it made sense to get perspectives from the anti-canal movement for my project. As a strong, seemingly effective, and autonomous social movement in confrontation with the ostensibly leftist Sandinista party-state, it would provide a good contrast to my other Nicaraguan cases in the cooperativist and feminist sectors, as well as to my Salvadoran case of an environmental movement which had demobilized, attempted to negotiate with its government allies, and then retreated toward a more localized project of eco-governance. Given the enormity of Nicaragua (compared to El Salvador at least) and the geographic distance between my territorial focus on Esteli and the locus of the anti-canal movement in Nueva Guinea, I attempted to explore the anti-canal movement closer to the Pacific coast, in Rivas, in the southwestern portion of the country, a small city with surrounding municipalities that also would have been transformed by the construction of the canal.

A contact connected me with someone who she called a community organizer in the anti-canal movement, and someone who was involved with politics on the side as well. When I met

with Francisco Ortega (no relation to President Daniel Ortega) to interview him I could immediately tell that his primary function was that of a political broker for the Movimiento Renovador Sandinista (MRS), a political party formed by dissidents of the Sandinistas who sought to construct a more liberal and democratic Sandinismo that what the original party had become. Francisco was involved and passionate about the anti-canal movement but was more concerned with proving to me how popular he was in the communities surrounding Rivas where he took me on a tour to talk with folks who knew little about the canal, but much about interacting with Francisco and his friends (such as me in the moment) in ways that he appreciated. So due to a relative lack of time in Nicaragua, feeling like I had struck out on a true movement contact in Francisco, and my desire to focus as much research time as possible on Esteli and Leon, I desisted from incorporating Rivas as a true movement territory in my research design.

Nevertheless, comprehension of the anti-canal movement is crucial for an understanding of the civic insurrection that occurred against the Ortega-Murillo regime in April 2018. It was the canal movement that had demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that popular power in rejection of Sandinista policies around the environment were organized and intensifying. So when protests emerged in early April around the mismanagement of a wildfire in a natural preserve, and then in regard to a government plan to decrease pension benefits to balance the national budget at the IMF's behest, the Sandinista government seemed to fear a popular outpouring and responded to these relatively minor protests with disproportionate repression that was reminiscent of the authoritarian days of yesteryear. This state response only further galvanized the environmentalist and anti-austerity movements while also broadening the protests to other sectors of the Nicaraguan populace who had already been in quiet opposition to the Ortega-Murillo regime.

As the regime continued responding with repression, the country became embroiled in civil conflict. University students occupied their campuses, neighborhood groups erected street barricades to keep government forces out, and daily protests were frequently met with live rounds. A massive Mother's Day March on May 10th 2018, dedicated to the mothers who had lost children to government repression in past days, resulted in ten more death at the hands of state security forces. While independent human rights organizations attributed the lion's share of casualties to government security forces and their parallel shock forces, the government of Daniel Ortega attributed them—without evidence—to US-backed, coup-attempting agitators. By the end of 2018, protests had declined markedly, and despite diplomatic interventions by the Organization of American States (OAS) Ortega avoided being overthrown. His regime did however continue harassing, jailing, and torturing dissidents as it became undeniable to outside analysts that the current Sandinista government had become another despotic regime focused on maintenance of its own power and on the accrual of economic benefits for its inner circle.

7.1 The Struggle over the Legacies of the Sandinista Revolution

Despite militant social movement challenges borne of environmentalism to the Ortega-Murillo regime during 2018, its stranglehold on power seems as strong as ever at the time of this writing in early 2023. It was obvious to me during my research in 2017 that the once democratic-socialist Sandinista party had fallen into an authoritarian tailspin as ostensibly non-partisan state resources and infrastructure (such as school buildings and curricula) were being used as vehicles for Sandinista propaganda, public employees were coerced into speaking and acting in certain ways (in favor of national projects such the canal for instance), and opposition parties were being

outlawed. But the government' use of naked repression against unarmed civilians in 2018 and its ongoing persecution of dissidents (including priests, academics, and students) put Nicaragua in the unfortunate category of a country where democracy had eroded practically to the point of disappearance.

And yet, during my research, I had the sensation that there were just as many people who defended the Sandinista government at all costs because they sought to uphold the original Sandinista ideals, as those who resisted and denounced the Ortega-Murillo regime in order to uphold Sandinista ideals. So while memories of transcendent national processes will always be contested in terms of their contemporary meanings (Ching 2015), there are also clear material legacies of the Sandinista Revolution. One of the clearest is the sheer power of the current Sandinista party-state and its attempts to discursively frame itself as the contemporary manifestation of the continuation of that Revolution. At a more intricate organizational level, Ortega and his inner circle used the neoliberal years of the 90s and early 2000s to learn from the democratic errors of the 80s by consolidating power-sharing agreements with liberal political parties and business groups. The "Ortega-Murillo dynasty" now seeks to consolidate power over society and ensure that it never again is forced to relinquish control over the state. These current efforts are facilitated by both naked power ploys involving electoral fraud, heightened social control, and repression of critics, alongside more subtle social and cultural tactics such as its "clientelistic" social programs, or the fusing of religiosity, patriotism and the Revolution under the Sandinista banner (Close 2014; Walker and Wade 2017).

As described already however, there are other actors who want to keep the memory of the Revolution alive in other ways, by constructing power from below, by reinventing the values of the left, and by investing time, energy, and resources in fomenting non-state social organizations

such as cooperatives (as Sandino envisioned and attempted in the late 1920s). While these groups' (feminists and environmentalists) confrontational repertoires include classic tactics such as protests, demonstrations, and the leveraging of transnational contacts for advocacy work, in some regions of the country, environmental and feminist organizations are also being pushed toward "self-governance" in certain areas, given government inattention to issues such as violence against women, provision of social services, and environmental stewardship.

Indeed, a chance meeting in 2017 with an eco-feminist activist, Melba, from the northern regions of Nicaragua, led to a revealing conversation about the ongoing transformation and prospects of the left in Nicaragua. Melba spoke of a growing awareness that the Sandinista Revolution of 1979 occurred within a patriarchal and authoritarian political culture that only intensified upon the ruling party's return to political power in the 2010's. She felt that this awareness was causing the "values of the left to come into dispute", and that "we are seeing an old part [of the left] dying and a new part emerging, where we need to see a visionary, strategic, honorable, and horizontal leadership—to no longer do things how we used to…a new way to exercise power, a new way to construct political culture, and a repositioning of values." Referring to her territorial organizing work, she said, "In the Segovias, we have begun to talk about self-governance, and that is where the hope of the people is. We can no longer think about depending on the national government." While Melba's words and actions served to build those new forms of leadership and governance in the Segovias for many years, she was forced to flee the country in 2019 due to persecution from the Ortega-Murillo regime.

As the Sandinista party-state endures, perhaps the majority of people are simply trying to get by economically—with whatever political arrangements—and to have some meaning, control, and joy in their lives at the same time. Indeed, as Lula, the cook at the organizational

office/guesthouse where I stayed in Managua during my research visit of 2017 told me soon before I returned to the US, “The people support the government because they have been given things they have never had before: education, health care, a little bit of extra money in their pockets… and they are happy about it.” When I asked her about the strong movements in the country (feminists, environmentalists etc. before the repression of 2018 began) she made reference to a woman, Suyen, who had worked at the organization previously but who had left to work full time with the MRS. Lula said, “Suyen’s cause has no future… talking about democracy and human rights and all of that. The people don't care about that—those are things just for people with money.” She finished her thoughts saying, “The only way anyone will get rid of Daniel (Ortega) is with war.” Though that war has not come, a spontaneous civic insurrection did, and it was brutally put down, as many of its leaders are now in exile or remain in jail. It remains to be seen how the Nicaraguan population will navigate collective responses to the Sandinista party-state in the years to come, but what is certain for the parameters of this dissertation, is that the possibility of understanding the Ortega-Murillo regime as a leftist government operating in a democratic context and sustaining interactions with society-based social movements has ended. The analytic framework of this project no longer applies to Nicaragua; certainly as of April 2018, and perhaps even before while I was still doing research there in late 2017.

8.0 The Gray Zones of Red Zones: Contested Sovereignties and Community-Based Peace Building in Urban El Salvador

For the final empirical chapter of this dissertation, I continue exploring repression and violence, but now in the urban context of El Salvador, where gangs have controlled entire neighborhoods and sectors of the country since the early 2000s. This chapter focuses on the only truly *urban* movement territory in this research design, and is also the chapter for which I have the most empirical data given my prior life and work in the country, and how the resulting contacts opened up research opportunities. From 2009-2012, the majority of my work in El Salvador took place in the series of communities that is the subject of this chapter—La Chacra, a sprawling slum of around 30,000 people that sits on the sloping hillsides on either side of a polluted river in the southeastern pocket of San Salvador, the capital city of El Salvador. I worked with folks associated with the local Catholic church to begin an after-school violence prevention called the Open School, where we tried to provide young people with alternatives to joining the local gangs. By the time I left El Salvador in 2012, the Open School was functioning stably and successfully as a social program of the church, though gang and state violence was still rampant in the communities of La Chacra, as throughout the country. By the time I returned to do field work in La Chacra in 2014, the Open School was one component of a larger community-wide coalition of schools, churches, and social service providers called the United Table for Peace, which—peopled with my friends and former colleagues—became the organizational jumping-off point for my interrogation of the movement territory of La Chacra and the interactions between the United Table for Peace, state institutions, and crucially—gang structures as well—within the novel context of FMLN rule.

8.1 A Relational Framework for Understanding Governance, Violence, and Peace

How do epidemic levels of violence in Central America shape ordinary peoples' efforts for social change? How might grassroots efforts for social change illuminate horizons for more peaceful, democratic, and localized governance here, and in other world regions plagued by chronic violence between state and non-state actors?

Late 20th century understandings of democratic governance hailed the consolidation of functioning representative institutions as the harbingers of peace after civil conflicts, and even as potential signals of the end of conflict-ridden history. However, as decades of seemingly intractable social and political problems have endured under representative democracies, scholars have renewed their interrogations of how governments and/or citizens might better address corruption, state illegitimacy, economic inequality, and the social marginalization of broad swathes of humanity. The countries of Latin America provide rich laboratories for analysis of new and changing configurations of social order and political structures.

A particularly pressing concern for scholars, policy makers, and inhabitants of the Latin American region are the existence of territories that are "chronically violent". Though not technically "at-war", increasingly broad swathes of Latin America and the world are characterized by violent contests for sovereignty in which gangs, drug traffickers, rebel groups, or other armed, non-state actors exercise at least partial control over territories ostensibly corresponding to nation states (Arias 2017).

Studies of governance in Latin America have frequently analyzed these chronically violent contexts in which state weakness or absence empowers non-state actors and criminal enterprises to violently compete with the state for the right to regulate human populations in specific geographic territories (Davis 2010; Denyer Willis 2015; Arias 2017; Koonings and Kruijt 2007;

Rodgers 2009). This research on governance through a "violent politics" lens is typically divorced from more traditional studies of governance that analyze dynamics such as the consolidation of democratic institutions, social movement interactions with states, the emergence of "market" citizens as a result of neoliberalism, or the self-organized activity of ordinary citizens on their own terms, not simply as dependencies of state structures (Alvarez et al 2017; Fung and Wright 2001; Fahlberg 2018).

Save Fahlberg's (2018) study of the contributions of community-based organizations in Rio de Janerio to favela governance, scholars have taken relatively little notice of citizen participation and creativity in the governance of chronically violent spaces. Most literature on governance suffers from a state-centric bias (Alvarez et al 2017; Velazquez 2015) that imbues collective actors of civil society with analytical value to the extent that their activities strengthen either state prerogatives or capital accumulation. Analyses of governance amid violent politics on the other hand, typically examine the ways that ordinary people navigate low-intensity conflicts (Kalyvas 2006), or construct sense-making processes and survival strategies in criminalized urban spaces (Duck 2015; Rios 2011). In general, scholars have not adequately foregrounded how the actions of organized community members in violent contexts render them critical agents that build more democratic, participatory governance which may simultaneously provide the foundations for the construction of durable, "everyday peace"—or life affirming and enhancing values and structures—in local contexts (Barash 2014; Roque 2017; MacGinty and Richmond 2013).

In this chapter, I apply a relational framework—in which interpersonal processes are key in promoting, inhibiting, or channeling both collective violence and nonviolent politics (Tilly 2003: 20)—to a gang-controlled red zone of San Salvador, El Salvador. This focus on relations across distinct collective actors, with specific attention to grassroots, nonviolent politics show how

ordinary people's organized efforts contribute to a rethinking and remaking of local governance amid chronic violence. Importantly, I move beyond the binary analytics of most relational frameworks by analyzing interactions among the *three* sets of actors (not just two) at play in the zone under study: state institutions, gang networks, and self-organized, grassroots actors. I posit that all three of these collective actors pursue distinct "projects of governance" which seek to regulate civilian social life in specific ways (Steinmetz 1999). My analytic focus is on the local grassroots organization, the United Table for Peace—or *La Mesa*, in local parlance—and the contours of its attempts to "strengthen the social fabric" through a series of programs they understand to be "preventing violence" and "building peace". By interrogating the gray zones of power relations (Auyero 2007; Thayer 2017) that characterize la Mesa's interactions with state and gang projects of governance, I demonstrate how grassroots social organizations are involved in reshaping governance processes to make them more responsive to community needs and plans, even in violent contexts. That is, the struggles over politics, order, and social change in violent contexts cannot be understood by analyzing simply "violent politics", but rather must foreground the relations among violent actors and ordinary peoples' non-violent efforts for grassroots-led governance. In the conclusion I suggest that the efforts of la Mesa—in terms of both concrete socio-economic practices from below and strategic negotiations with state institutions—are also indirectly mediating conflicts between violent actors in the short run and reducing the likelihood of chronic violence in the long run.

8.2 Theorizing Contested Sovereignties and Projects of Governance

The state is no longer simply understood as the sole institutional entity that enjoys a monopoly on the legitimate use of force in a particular bounded territory (Weber 1978). Rather, the state is subjective and dynamic, highly differentiated internally, and frequently incoherent in its material and discursive expressions (Abrams 1988). By analytically "off-centering" states (Krupa and Nugent 2015) we recognize that the "state" is a series of claims to the right to rule and exercise legitimate authority; to control populations and territories that is founded on institutionalized violence and wealth appropriation by elites (Bamyeh 2009; Mitchell 1999; Tilly 1975).

In the Latin American context, this process of state formation and claims-making is uneven and incomplete (Centeno 2002). States must compete with other collective actors that challenge its claims to exercise sovereignty, or to legitimately collect rents and regulate life and death (Denyer-Willis 2015; Tilly 1985; Wolf 2017). Often, the claims and actions of state institutions constitute only *components* of projects of governance, and non-state collective actors such as indigenous groups, social movements, separatist communities, corporate enclaves, and organized criminals draw on, resist, or refashion various of these components in competing attempts to implement their own alternative projects of governance (Krupa and Nugent 2015) even if they do not always directly contest the state's exercise of violence.

Contests for sovereignty with non-state, violent entrepreneurs amid the intertwined crisis of global capitalism, have justified Latin American states' maintenance and strengthening of coercive operations in present state formations (Robinson 2008), alongside their embrace of democratic forms of rule characterized by citizen participation and attempts at legitimacy (Cameron, Hershberg, and Sharpe 2012). In ostensibly democratic states then, there is often a

disjuncture between the state's "right arm" (police, military, courts etc.), which represses "criminality", and perpetuates and exacerbates the violent responses of non-state actors such as gangs (Cruz 2016; Wolf 2017), and it's benevolent "left arm" (education, health, infrastructure etc.) which seeks to provide social goods and safeguard rights of citizens (Rios 2011).

Amid violent contexts and state incoherence, ordinary people struggle to exercise control over their daily lives, frequently through collective projects of governance from below that are characterized by more egalitarian and horizontal power relations than those of states and organized criminal networks given their local rootedness in networks of everyday life, and their frequent rejection of violence (Bamyeh 2009; Fahlberg 2018; Stahler-Sholk et al 2014; Zibechi 2010). An analytic focus on "projects of governance" provides leverage for obtaining a more complete picture of how multiple sets of actors negotiate, compete, and contest one another's attempts to govern, or exercise power through the management and distribution of social goods (Krupa and Nugent 2015). Analytically, boundaries between competing projects of governance are quintessential "gray zones" of power relations: contested sites where divergent discourses and practices encounter one another in fluid, changing ways, and where actors often assume roles that defy their public identities or taken-for-granted nature (Auyero 2007; Thayer 2017). In practical terms, gray zones are social spaces in which actors negotiate informally, and which enable them to reconfigure social relations around the practice of violence or peace. These relations among distinct actors and their projects of governance comprise a single *interaction order* (Duck 2015) in the territory of La Chacra in El Salvador. The interaction order establishes rules and codes that cut across the competing projects of governance to determine the ways in which ordinary people relate to one another, as well as to violent actors, in the configuration of interaction strategies that vary according to the actors present in distinct spaces or moments.

8.2.1 Positionality, Methods, and Analysis

From 2006 through 2012, I lived in El Salvador and worked on a variety of efforts with transnational solidarity and local social movement organizations, with the last three years of that time spent working in an informal violence prevention program—the "Open School"—in La Chacra, through the local Catholic parish of *Maria Madre de los Pobres* (Mary Mother of the Poor). In 2011, I chose to move to La Chacra to be a more integral part of the community that I was attempting to support in its efforts for peace. Since 2014, I have returned to La Chacra for at least a month a year to research the work of La Mesa. Many of its participants—especially its founding members—are longtime friends and colleagues of mine with whom I share the dreams and objectives of the Mesa, and at this point, I consider all of its members to be co-researchers of this study on their achievements, difficulties, and prospects. Thus, this manuscript is a product of participatory action research in which the research questions forwarded were initially posed by activists in La Chacra, and its conclusions will hopefully be of use for these activists' local campaigns for social change. Between 2014 and 2019, I collected 34 interviews with Mesa activists and ordinary people (non-activists) in La Chacra, and accumulated thousands of hours of lived experience in the area (not to mention my years of lived experience in the area prior to doing formal research there) including many participant observations of meetings of the Mesa, and participation in the Mesa's Whatsapp group for the past five years. My interviews and field notes were coded using MAXQDA for relevant themes.

8.3 Contested Sovereignties in the Urban Red Zones of El Salvador

On the morning of Sunday June 21, 2015, two Salvadoran soldiers were assassinated while on duty near the Terminal de Oriente, a hectic bus terminal and marketplace that buts up against La Chacra, on the southeastern edge of San Salvador, El Salvador. According to independent news outlet El Faro, two alleged gang members had murdered the soldiers, and then jumped into a get-away vehicle that took them a few hundred meters away to a steep, narrow alleyway leading into La Chacra, an expansive slum of some 30,000 people. Within an hour, state security officials had laid siege to the communities of La Chacra. Elite units of Groups of Police Reaction (GRP) and the Unit of Maintenance of Order (UMO) broke down doors to ransack houses they deemed suspicious, hiked along rooftops to check for escape routes, violently searched and detained young men on the streets of the communities, and at one point even fired shots indiscriminately. In the course of the next three weeks there were (at least) eight additional homicides—of both gang members and "civilians"—in the communities of La Chacra, and residents believe many of them to have been vengeance killings by companions of the slain soldiers.

Sequences of violence such as these had become distressingly common in El Salvador. In 2015 it was the most violent country in the world per capita and has been one of the most violent countries globally since the early 2000s (Kinosian & Albaladejo 2016). While gang activity, drug trafficking, and "extermination groups" that often target suspected gang members were responsible for most homicides, elements of Salvadoran state security forces became publicly responsible for an increasingly large proportion of homicides (Beltran & Scorpio 2016). In the wake of the collapse of an initially clandestine, government-brokered truce between gangs that led to a 2/3 decrease in homicides over 2012-13 (Roque 2017), the administration of Salvador Sanchez Ceren (2014-2019), rejected the possibility of any additional negotiations with gangs, and vowed to

eliminate gang members and their "associates" through a series of "extraordinary measures". The president and top security officials assured police and soldiers that they would face no remonstration if they shot suspected gang members "in self-defense", instructing them that the objective was to win back territory from the gangs.

With the advent of this ostensible declaration of state war on gangs Salvadoran society not only saw significant increases in homicides but also in the use of indiscriminate violence (Kaylvas 2006), by both state forces and gangs against one another and civilian populations. This signified a rupture in the codes and tacit rules that had previously been respected by the two rival sides and had made patterns of violence predictable and stable in places like La Chacra. A "consensus" around *sharing* sovereignty between the state and gangs (Denyer Willis 2015) gave way to a situation of *contested* sovereignty in which violent actors fought for control of territories and populations. By the end of 2016 however, state forces had largely "won" this contest in La Chacra, killing many gang members, and forcing others into exile or hiding.

In the following sections, I show how the community-based effort for peace building furthered by the United Table for Peace (*la Mesa*) positioned itself as a principal force in the processes and negotiations of governance in La Chacra both during, and in the wake of the violence of 2015-16. I first contextualize the interaction order that governs everyday life for inhabitants of La Chacra and provide an account of the emergence and consolidation of the Mesa. I then analyze the interactions that the Mesa had with various "benevolent", partisan, "left arm" state institutions as well as its complex relationships with violent actors, including gangs, and agents of the repressive "right arm" institutions of the state. Finally, I describe how the movement practices of la Mesa in La Chacra—with all their contradictions—illuminate a path toward peace in El Salvador

based on a model of grassroots-led governance that relies on empowered, local social networks and strategic negotiations with diverse actors.

8.3.1 The Interaction Order in La Chacra: Transnational Origins and Local Contours

The violence associated with the Salvadoran state's war on gangs tends to play out in urban and semi-urban "red zones", or those geographic territories that are under de-facto control of gangs. Such geographies—characterized by informal, auto-constructed housing, uneven provision of social services, overcrowding, and the prevalence of gang networks—initially consolidated as a result of internal migration patterns that saw rural people fleeing the violence of El Salvador's civil war of the 1980's and establishing makeshift dwellings on the outskirts of major cities. At the end of the civil war, these marginal communities were often the destinations of young Salvadorans who had fled with their families to the US during the war, had learned gang culture from Black and Latino gangs in metropolitan cities of California, and were deported back to El Salvador after accruing criminal records (Wolf 2017). Many of these deportees were members of the Mexican-dominated *Barrio 18* (named for 18th Street in South Central Los Angeles), or the newly formed, specifically Salvadoran gang: *the Mara Salvatrucha-13* (MS-13). The arrival of Salvadoran gang members from the US to the poor, over-crowded slums of San Salvador converged with the immediate aftermath of war, and the detrimental impacts of neoliberal economic policies (Almeida 2008) to precipitate a proliferation of gang activity, with the rivalry between the 18 and MS-13 as its most visible expression (Wolf 2017).

Soon, political parties found that instituting repressive policies aimed at combatting gangs was good for winning elections (Cruz 2016). These "mano dura" (heavy hand, or iron fist) security policies centered on the criminalization, mass incarceration, and indiscriminate repression of

suspected gang members (Wolf 2017) and were frequently modeled on US frameworks (Mackey 2018). A ratcheting up of state violence against gangs impelled gangs to augment the brutality of their own tactics, become more clandestine in public, ensconce their leadership in prisons, and adopt the "sustainable" industry of prolonged extortion of citizens and businesses as their preferred crime (Cruz 2016).

Of particular consequence for the interaction order in the zone of La Chacra, around 2013 (in the aftermath of the truce), the *Barrio 18* gang divided into two factions—the *Surenos* and the *Revolucionarios*—making it now three gangs that competed for territory and income in La Chacra (and the rest of El Salvador). So while the majority of the communities of La Chacra had been previously controlled solely by the 18th street gang writ large, by 2014, there were at least eight different "*canchas*" ("fields", or smaller jurisdictions) of competing cliques, belonging to the 18 Sureños, 18 Revolucionarios, and MS-13. The boundaries of gang territories are perhaps the most salient characteristics of social life in red zones as they constitute barriers to free movement for non-gang community members ("civilians"), potentially under pain of death, as gang members may suspect them to be engaged in spying if they cross cancha lines.

In La Chacra, the war-like violence associated with the Salvadoran state's "extraordinary measures" spiked in the middle of 2015, resulting in many deaths (of gang members, security officials, and ordinary people) and much emigration out of the communities. By 2017, homicide rates had dropped in La Chacra as throughout the country (Clavel 2018). National polls indicated significant majorities supported the state's blanket repression of suspected gang members and their associates and attributed the drop in homicides to this strategy. Among residents of La Chacra, my interviewees estimated that around 75% of people support the state's repression of gang members. Members of La Mesa however, forwarded an opposing analysis: that state security forces were to

blame for the root causes of significant ongoing violence, particularly in their criminalization of all young people in the zone. Relatedly, many Mesa participants and ordinary community members deploy a classic, if colloquial use of Auyero's concept of the gray zones of power (2007) by accusing police officers of being just as involved in criminal activities as gang members, saying that in many cases, police do not target actual gang members during their raids. Rather, they prefer to harass and repress non-gang members as opposed to those who may be their distant (or proximate) co-conspirators or rivals in the region's intricate criminal networks.

Jose Hernan is a 22 year old resident of La Chacra who was "formed" (received informal, popular education on values and social issues) in the liberation theology-inspired *Maria Madre de los Pobres* parish (which initially, was the primary motor of the Mesa) and who now works for ESPACIOS, (Social Spaces) a violence prevention program funded by the European Union and executed under the auspices of the municipality of San Salvador, which supported and collaborated with the Mesa. In March 2018, he described the situation in La Chacra as such:

> "Due to the extraordinary measures, there is no governability in the zone. They (the measures) have made it so that the gang members have intensified their criminal activities in the territory…and so the gang members' response to state repression includes more repression of the people. So these days it is the police who provoke violence, and the government validates that violence."

When I asked him to elaborate on how ordinary people respond to such violence, he said,

> "Basically, they are excluded in their own spaces. They cannot make use of the physical and social spaces where they used to be able to socialize… there are people who even stop doing their everyday activities out of fear of being caught in a shootout. Just recently certain areas (blocks 1 and 2) have been recovered, and people can pass through, but as soon as the police or soldiers show up, everyone goes running…"

Jose's comments reflect not only how violence structures social life in La Chacra, but also why violence declined in La Chacra since the post-truce, state-gang "warfare" of 2015 and 2016. Like other Mesa members, and some ordinary inhabitants, Jose credits the work of the Mesa in reducing violence and "recovering" (enhancing safety) certain communities ("blocks 1 and 2" in the Mesa's territorial-organizational framework) though these perspectives must be understood through broader historical and political contexts.

8.4 The Project of Governance of the United Table for Peace

At the beginning of 2014, a group of community leaders and representatives from local religious institutions began working on a zone-wide "violence prevention" plan for the 23 communities of La Chacra. The United Table for Peace, or *La Mesa* ("The Table") as they would soon call themselves, sought to access public and private funding to use community organizing and micro-economic development initiatives to "strengthen the social fabric". This was indeed a viable and strategic decision as consecutive presidential administrations of the left-wing FMLN had sought to balance their bellicose assault against gangs with the provision of technical and economic support to organizations working to counteract gang incorporation through programs

that would permit youth in red zones to pursue alternatives to joining gangs (GOES 2014). In the global non-profit field, international discourses around best practices for social development in the chronically violent spaces of Central America had incorporated "violence prevention" as a central frame for intervention in local communities (Wolf 2017).

Like many NGO and social movement project proposals in Central America, the Mesa's violence prevention plan included workshops in arts, crafts, theatre, graffiti, and other cultural activities; the operation of sports leagues; community organizing initiatives to teach youth "life values" such as self-esteem, sex education, critical thinking, and cooperation; trainings in occupational skills such as woodworking or computer programming, and infrastructural improvements to facilitate these activities. Local actors such as the *Maria Madre de los Pobres* church had been attempting to provide such opportunities for youth for years, though the Mesa represented the first attempt to articulate various local efforts and connect them to state-based sources of funding given the political-economic opportunity presented by FMLN governments (Tarrow 2011). Of further importance, the Mesa' violence prevention work would be based on community organizing in ways that would enable youth to avoid gangs in favor of individual and collective "life plans" that would facilitate broader processes of social change often stymied by violence.

After a high-profile visit by President Sanchez Ceren to La Chacra in 2014 meant to demonstrate his commitment to combatting inequality and violence, the Instituto Nacional de la Juventud (National Institute for Youth—INJUVE) began providing financial and technical support to the Mesa. INJUVE personnel facilitated the professionalization (Staggenborg 1992) of the Mesa by providing it with initial funding, training its members in administrative tasks, and even hiring youth participants to execute surveys and a socio-economic census of the zone's population to

inform subsequent funding proposals. Under INJUVE's tutelage, the experienced organizers and activists of the Mesa began focusing on community organizing, the promotion of cultural activities, job training, and micro-economic opportunities for youth. By March 2018, there were upwards of 120 youth organized into seven youth committees and other various groups under the auspices of the Mesa. According to Nelson Miranda in 2018, a leader of a youth committee, " if a young person is not organized these days, it is because they don't want to be… the opportunities are there…" When deciding how they will spend their spare time, young people in the La Chacra now have more options than they used to, and joining a gang no longer seems to be at the top of that list of options. He and other Mesa participants, as well as many ordinary people assert that the Mesa's opening of novel organizing and extracurricular opportunities for youth has played a decisive role in precipitating a steep drop in new gang affiliations.

Over time, Mesa participants have come to understand their work to organize youth around awareness-raising, cultural activities, and economic opportunities not simply as "violence prevention", but also as peacebuilding, the first step of which many see as "educating for peace" in their communities. Luis, a young inhabitant and organizer in La Chacra who is now employed by INJUVE to support the Mesa's initiatives, describes the Mesa's work in the following way: "This is a process of unlearning old ways and learning a new form of work, of relating to one another, a new form of educating for peace: being in solidarity with others, fomenting cooperation, and learning to grow as a zone, and not just as isolated communities." For Luis, these new forms of social relations include "tools of dialogue" which have enabled people across La Chacra—not just those youth at risk of joining gangs—to transcend personal, family, and territorial differences, thereby building peace at the most basic interactional levels that govern social life in the zone.

8.4.1 Reciprocity, Gate-Keeping with State Institutions, and Cross-Party Collaboration

For all the alleged merits that its participants expound, the Mesa's peace building work relies on complex and often tense relations with violent actors, as well as with those benevolent state institutions that support it. As the Mesa became stronger and more consolidated, INJUVE's support became increasingly—if implicitly—contingent on certain conditions that responded to the institution's partisan interests. INJUVE personnel began "inviting" Mesa personnel to FMLN-sponsored activities that would facilitate the Mesa's abilities to "network" and "fundraise" with other friendly state institutions. Some members of the Mesa understood their participation in such events as mandatory, and as evidence marshaled by INJUVE of that institution's success in violence prevention initiatives as opposed to providing due credit to the Mesa. To be sure, Mesa youth were frequently asked to attend populist, partisan, government activities across the country to showcase youth participation in government initiatives.

Jose condemned this practice saying, "INJUVE extracts the young people… The Mesa seeks to strengthen social cohesion, the social fabric, but it is takes (young) people out of their territory." He thought it particularly egregious that this "extraction" typically occurs on weekends, when youth could be organizing in their own communities. Other youth differed markedly however. Nelson felt that young community leaders benefit greatly by traveling to other places to network with other youth and state officials, and to showcase the youth organizing work that is done in La Chacra. Such a view has guided the Mesa as it continually accedes to INJUVE requests that youth such as Nelson participate in FMLN government activities outside la Chacra—even during crucial weekend timeslots—to maintain good relations, and financial flows from INJUVE.

On one hand, and according to classic understandings of urban clientelism, INJUVE serves as an institutional "broker" of state-based resources on contingent, potentially divisive terms

(Auyero 2000) that subordinate the needs of grassroots initiatives to the partisan concerns of state-based actors. Indeed, some Mesa participants think that state institutions see successful community organizing efforts such as that of the Mesa in La Chacra "as partisan leverage", by which the FMLN can translate its funding of successful violence prevention work into obligatory votes from project beneficiaries. On the other hand, these seemingly clientelist practices can be understood as an exchange-based relationship of reciprocity by which communities receive vital resources and services from partisan, state institutions, and are willing to "pay it back" by participating in these institutions' activities (Hagene & Gonzales Fuente 2016). In this particular case, Mesa participants—particularly long time FMLN activists—highlight how the FMLN has done more for their cause than any other party, and that their work for the construction of peace is best served by actions that keep the FMLN in power, including if this means lending support to state activities outside of their communities.

Such divergent perspectives illuminate the gray zones of socio-political power in contexts in which the state only has limited control. While the Mesa needs INJUVE to finance and facilitate its now expansive youth organizing projects, INJUVE needs the Mesa's local knowledge and legitimacy to execute projects in chronically violent spaces where gang members may consider state agents—with their possible links to repressive institutions—to be suspicious outsiders at best and enemy targets at worst. The Mesa has increasingly learned to harness their local embeddedness as leverage to serve as an empowered gatekeeper for state interventions in the zone. In large part, the Mesa's political pluralism and ability to further collective strategies despite partisan differences among members enables it to neutralize and redirect clientelist attempts by parties to manipulate the Mesa' work for political gain.

At a basic level, the Mesa has begun demanding that state institutions provide informal education processes along with the provision of material resources to ensure the transformation of collective mentalities and not just charity-based handouts. Also, during municipal electoral campaigns, the Mesa has begun asking candidates to sign "letters of commitment" to the Mesa to hold them accountable in supporting the Mesa's agenda should they win office and ensure that the Mesa is the entity that "sets the agenda" (Schwartz 2003) for development projects in the zone, regardless of the party that wins. That is, the Mesa now serves as the "gatekeeper" for state-based social assistance projects implemented in the zone. Dora recalls that before the Mesa became consolidated,

> "… a state institution would want to set up a health fair for instance, and they would decide where to set it up, and that was that… and often times the same communities would receive everything. Now they know to come to the Mesa, they present their proposal to us and *we decide* (her emphasis) in which zone or block it will be implemented… We coordinate so that (services) are provided to all blocks."

In a vivid example of this dynamic, Dora talks of a job fair that the Oficina de Planificación del Área Metropolitana de San Salvador (Office of Planning of the Metropoliticna Area of San Salvador, OPAMSS) wanted to set up in the community of El Coro, the most accessible and "well-organized" area of La Chacra. The Mesa decided however, that the fair should occur in La Quinonez, as according to Dora, "that is where we are currently attempting to re-strengthen the work with youth and community boards of directors." Dora explained that some officials in the

OPAMSS and other state offices have come to see the Mesa as being "too demanding" and "impossible to work with," though:

> "We tell them (state officials) that as the Mesa, we ask that they respect the organization that exists here in the zone. We will not allow them to come and impose themselves, to give out whatever they want. Here we have a process by which we do community work."

The Mesa used the same logic in their decision to obligate the municipal program ESPACIOS to operate its youth organizing and entrepreneurship programs in la Quinonez—again instead of the program personnel's first choice, El Coro. La Quinonez had seen many inhabitants flee and many state and social organizations cease work as a result of the surge of violence in 2015. The robust political and religious organizing processes that had existed previously in the community fell apart, and few people from the Quinonez had participated in the Mesa since. Importantly, the decision to assign the municipal administered ESPACIOS program to the Quinonez meant that when mayor (and now President) Nayib Bukele was expelled from the FMLN in 2017, subtle tensions emerged between youth organizers in the Quinonez now loyal to Bukele (and his adopted GANA party) given the benefits accrued through the ESPACIOS program, and more established Mesa personnel associated with both ARENA and the FMLN. This led to a territorial fragmentation in the Mesa's work during the tense electoral moments of 2018 as Quinonez organizers saw the Mesa as a potential political vehicle of the other parties. But as elections passed, so did partisan tensions around Bukele in the Mesa. Already accustomed to overcoming internal partisan divides and drawing on its acumen as the local referent for

community-based development, the Mesa successfully integrated an additional ideological force centered in a newly re-incorporated geographic territory.

While Bukele went from mayor of San Salvador to president of the country in 2019, the municipality of San Salvador passed into the hands of ARENA in 2018. In a moment of spontaneous political analysis that occurred during the Mesa's first meeting after the finalization of this electoral result in March of 2018, I posed the open question to the group as to whether the Mesa would still flourish under the auspices of an ARENA-led municipal government. Anabel, a Mesa veteran (and ARENA sympathizer it should be noted) dismissed my doubts categorically saying:

> "The Mesa will be here always, come who may (to municipal or national power). This is a project, like an infrastructure project—whoever comes (in to power) must execute it, inaugurate it; give to its leadership. And in this case that leadership is us, the Mesa. But we need to push, and always push, for that."

In a subsequent interview, Daniela addressed the Mesa's reputation as authoritative local gatekeeper in this new political context, explaining how the ARENA-led municipal administration is learning to deal with the Mesa's commitment to autonomous negotiations with state institutions to ensure that public assistance works are effectively implemented according to priorities set by the Mesa. In reference to Guillermo, the municipal representative who has begun attending Mesa meetings to coordinate municipal projects, she says:

> "He has a lot of political insight, so he has learned through working with the people in La Chacra—you have to give to Cesar what is Cesar's—and if you work, you will win over the people, but if you do not work, the people will be in charge of giving their response."

Daniela thus suggests that the people of the communities of La Chacra, as represented in the Mesa, have become "Cesar"—the sovereign rulers in La Chacra, to whom outsiders such as personnel from state institutions must provide respect, commitment, and work. To be sure, in its relatively short seven-year career, the Mesa has accessed funds from three constellations of partisan-controlled state institutions, successfully sustained internal collaboration across the same amount of political affiliations, and navigated the violence of contested sovereignties that assail its participants and larger communities. By using its local knowledge and power as a form of gatekeeping with state institutions it accrues leverages to "distribute" (or remake) state goods as opposed to succumbing to partisan machinations. This ultimate decision-making power regarding where and how state-based interventions are implemented in the zone both derives from its project of peaceful, localized governance and continues to strengthen the visions and practices that comprise it. However, the question remains as to whether the power to make decisions about state-based service administration in La Chacra and provide youth with organizing and micro-economic opportunities actually entails the accrual of much power at all—let alone the construction of peace—in a context of contested sovereignties.

8.4.2 Freer Movement? The Disputed Impacts of the Mesa

By all accounts—Mesa activists and ordinary people alike—the incorporation of young people into gang structures decreased markedly from 2016-2018. Cliques that used to have 10 or

15 members were now in single digits, according to inhabitants. In parallel fashion, the number of homicides in the zone dropped precipitously since its staggering heights in 2015-16. However, residents of La Chacra disagree as to why this has happened. When I asked Kevin, a young graffiti artist in la Quinonez if the work of the Mesa has contributed to the drops in violence and youth incorporation into gangs, he said, "No, never ever… They haven't done anything to improve the situation…" According to Kevin, "here in the Quinonez, the police are in charge—they have their post right there," and he pointed toward a nearby corner where the police had set up a small station in the wake of the repression of gang members in 2015. There are many people like Kevin who perceive little palpable effect of the Mesa's work in the zone and cite instead the fact that state repression literally eliminated many local gang members who had previously practiced violence in the zone.

Mesa activists however, (and some ordinary people as well) argue that it was the growing strength of the Mesa and their implementation of a project of governance from below that took advantage of the vacuum of power left in the zone after the death and exile of gang members which enabled a relative, everyday peace (MacGinty and Richmond 2013) to take hold whereby peaceful, life-enhancing values and structures could begin taking root and flourishing in spaces accustomed to violent domination. Not only did practices of community organizing and economic opportunities for youth mean that governance of local social life in La Chacra became more peaceful, but also youth were increasingly able to move more freely across gang boundaries, especially to the extent that they did so under the auspices of the Mesa. For all his criticisms of the Mesa, Jose Hernan, the worker with ESPACIOS and a Quinonez resident, admits that the work of the Mesa has contributed to the "recovery of physical spaces through the construction of social spaces." He thinks that the Quinonez (blocks 1 and 2) is now a place where ordinary people, and particularly

youth associated with the Mesa, can move with more freedom across the once-rigid gang boundaries that dissect it. This freedom is not absolute however, as even some Mesa youth have received threats to not cross gang territories boundaries due to their past or present actions or relations, their exact address, or other less than transparent criteria.

Still, it seems that gang members are beginning to see ordinary people in a new light as a result of the Mesa's work in the zone. When I asked Anabel how she could be sure that it was the work of the Mesa that had led to the reductions in violence and not the state's repressive "extraordinary measures", she replied that,

> "Here, we have had the awareness to involve those youth who would squander away their afternoons without doing anything. We have let the opportunities be known—and yes, it (the violence) has diminished a lot. Even the boys (gang members) don't even hang out where they used to hang out, and when the people go past them, they don't say anything."

Anabel asserts that the Mesa's work to reach out to non-gang member youth and involve them in community organizing processes not only keeps them from getting involved in violent behaviors, but also ensures that gang members feel less threatened by the ordinary comings and goings of fellow community members. Such perspectives suggest that given the role that the Mesa plays in governing local social order, gang members find fewer incentives to resort to violence, and that some people can move about more freely—if still fearfully—in the zone.

Despite many uncertainties, the Mesa has leveraged the power-laden gray zones of the interactions and processes by which public social goods are distributed to transcend political divisions and expand opportunities for governance tied to community-based peace building.

Ordinary people are increasingly able to utilize physical spaces and mobilize across neighborhoods with more freedom and less fear, suggesting a reworking of the social fabric whereby the apolitical, peaceful project of governance of the Mesa has ascendant power. Still, such power may prove more threatening to established violent actors with the passage of time (Fahlberg 2018), and in the short run, violent actors explicitly subordinate the Mesa to various, competing mandates. It is to the gray zones of such mandates that I now turn.

8.5 The Mesa's Relations with Violent Actors: The Gray Zones of Peace-Building

When I asked Francisco how the gangs shaped the work of the Mesa, he stated emphatically: "They (the gangs) define everything. If they come to us some day and say "No, look, you (the Mesa) are no longer going to meet.' We won't meet. Period. They have—they are the authority." Indeed, since the birth of the Mesa, participants from certain communities have received threats from gang members to not participate, presumably out of a fear that a local organization that seeks to "prevent violence", may also jeopardize—intentionally or not—their lucrative extortion rackets. That the Mesa operates only with the contingent permission of local gang cliques is a simple application of the rules of the interaction order to an organizational level: the Mesa must also respect gang norms, boundaries, and decisions regarding social processes. At the same time, the Mesa must also respect the state's right to wield deadly violence. The Mesa thus constructs, and walks, a fine line of neutrality between state and gang violence through what may seem like inaction, though I show how they combine strategic subordination, diffuse denunciation, and indirect mediation, strategies that have set the stage for negotiations with local gangs, and decreased the justification for, and prevalence of state repression in the zone.

8.5.1 Subordination Toward Negotiation: the Mesa's Relations with Gang Networks

The Mesa has consistently secured contingent permission from gangs for its operations, though this is an ongoing and dynamic process. In 2014, imprisoned gang leaders contacted Mesa leaders requesting information about the Mesa's plans after hearing of the group's emergence. A leader of the Mesa at the time not only provided the gang leaders with electronic copies of the Mesa's strategic plan for 2014-2019, but also phoned them in or the Mesa's next meeting. Participants present at this meeting described a moment of extreme tension in which various Mesa participants had their devices on speakerphone on the plastic meeting tables as they summarized the concrete activities the Mesa would undertake over the next five years. Meanwhile, chiefs from rival gangs in prisons in across the country listened. According to Dora, the gang leaders responded saying,

> "…that there was no problem with what the Mesa was doing, and that they (the gang leaders) were in agreement with it, but that nevertheless, we (the Mesa) would never take them down from where they were. They had a comfortable life and they would never let themselves be challenged—all of their luxuries came from that (violence-based extortion) and that wouldn't change."

We thus see that gangs do not intend to stop their violent practices, and that they don't see the Mesa's work as a threat to their economic livelihood: simply thinning their gangs' lower ranks by directing youth toward productive activities was not seen as a problem at all, but rather (according to other accounts) something that could in fact be beneficial for the communities in which their free gang members lived.

This direct, but relatively passive relationship with gangs has enabled the Mesa to operate, but has also been quite controversial, leading to the departure of some participants and severely limiting the efficacy of its work in concrete, territorialized ways. Key individual members have left the effort ostensibly due to the Mesa's implicit collective refusal to more strongly challenge the gangs' mandates. One woman who was a long time community organizer, and then a collaborator in the local school expressed to me in 2018 that she had left the space in 2016 because she wanted the Mesa "to stop avoiding the issues of the destruction that the boys (gang members) cause." She thought that the Mesa should talk to them directly, ask them to change their ways, and incorporate them in work toward peace.

Such a view has gained traction over time within the Mesa, especially as it became evident that gang leaders' initial response to the Mesa's strategic plan—that they had no problem with the group's work—was no longer totally credible. Particularly, some youth involved in the Mesa have indeed been threatened by gang members to not attend Mesa meetings because of having to cross gang borders, and this has scared other youth into not attending as well. Many of these youth still attend activities within their own home communities, or those activities financed directly by INJUVE or municipal programs in which they are transported outside La Chacra altogether. At the same time, some youth are increasingly willing to defy what they understand as relatively soft gang mandates to not cross into rivals' territories, especially as these Mesa youth become more respected and visible community organizers, trusted municipal workers, or the bearers of those "sacred identities" seen as non-threatening (Duck 2015).

Gangs' restrictions to people's physical mobility thus also limits the territorial articulation of the Mesa's peace building efforts. Despite (or because of) this, some participants believe that the Mesa's most important objective should be to push back against these rigid borders and

struggle to secure the free movement not only of youth associated with the Mesa, but of all residents of La Chacra. While Jose has suggested opening up cultural activities—such as dance or theatre--directly on the gang borderlands as a way to begin recovering those spaces for the Mesa and other ordinary people, the Mesa has been reticent to adopt strategies that entail such brazen action without prior permissions from gangs. Rather, as of 2019. Mesa participants have decided that they must speak directly with gang members in their communities to advocate for freer movement of non-gang member youth to ensure the vitality of their youth organizing processes. This would also allay those suspicions expressed by some Mesa members that some of their members were serving as informants for gangs in the wake of the collapse of conference calls with imprisoned leaders as a result of heightened security in prisons associated with the extraordinary measures of 2015. Due to the need for open communication with the local gang authorities, as well as the training of a number of Mesa members in peace building and conflict mediation at the Universidad de Centro America's (UCA) human rights program, and the Mesa's general strengthening and growing confidence in light of their successful activities, by 2019, they had endeavored to open up talks with gang members in the near future.

8.5.2 The Mesa's Relations with Repressive State Security Forces

In general, the Mesa's relations with the repressive institutions of the state's right arm are indirect, functioning similarly to ordinary people's relations to security forces. The relation is first and foremost social-psychological whereby long-term socialization processes unconsciously lead people to internalize the state's right to use deadly force (Krupa & Nugent 2015). This internalization is both empirically validated and problematized by everyday life in La Chacra, where incursions by repressive state security forces result in the indiscriminate detention, physical

abuse, incarceration, and assassination of both gang members and non-gang members alike. So while many people see these repressive security forces as the most frequent source of violence in the zone, they simultaneously look to these forces to target the "worst" of gang members: those who cannot be saved; those whose expected violence cannot be prevented.

Mesa participants like ordinary residents of La Chacra have a very human view of these processes, as it is their family, friends, and neighbors who are the victims of both government and gang violence. In a representative exchange, Daniela condemned state security personnel's repression of non-gang member youth for the simple possibility that they might be collaborating with their local gang members in some way (or in lieu of persecuting actually "guilty" gang members). But in this sort of conflict—which she likened to the country's civil war of the 1980s—"there will always be some innocent people who die, unfortunately". She went on to allude to the need for well-informed, selective repression of "… some boys who cannot be saved…" But she emphasizes the fact that, "the majority of kids—they don't deserve this," in reference to many non-gang member youth who suffer beatings, harassment, arbitrary detention and in the worst of cases, extrajudicial assassination. We can only assume she thinks of her 17-year-old son when discussing these delicate topics.

As a collective entity, the Mesa remains silent in the face of gross human rights abuses that they witness directly and that have been increasingly decried nationally and internationally by human rights organizations. On one hand, Mesa participants recognize the gray zones of the violence in their communities: neither state security forces nor gang members are innocent. Gang violence must be respected if one wishes to avoid falling victim to it, while state repression is seen as unfortunate necessity to forestall the periodically worse violence of the gangs. Furthermore, denouncing state repression publicly in La Chacra would amount to announcing oneself as a

collaborator with gangs in the eyes of state security forces, and thus being a proximate target of their repression. On the other hand, this silence is strategic, as it allows the Mesa to survive the interaction order so as to continue attempting to build everyday peace in the long run.

8.5.3 Marches for Peace and Indirect Mediation

Despite all of its work for peace, there is only one way in which the Mesa publicly and directly—if diffusely—denounces all forms of violence, and that is through its annual March for Peace. This massive march has quickly become a tradition for the communities of La Chacra, if only since 2014. During the marches, hundreds of people—including youth and kids—march through the streets of La Chacra holding banners and signs, chanting slogans, and calling for peace. They stop at periodic "stations"—in the tradition of the Catholic "way of the cross" that commemorates Jesus' passion and crucifixion—to have artistic presentations or hear speeches; and conclude the march with a concentration in a central meeting space for cultural activities.

Of utmost importance, the annual March for Peace has always been accompanied by a contingent of police offers solicited by the Mesa, though with the primary function of protecting those government functionaries that the Mesa has invited to participate, and who have occasionally turned up. Such relations with police have not come easily for Mesa participants. Every year without fail a lengthy debate precedes the decision, with vocal dissidents claiming that a police presence for the march could serve as an opportunity for gang-members to attack police and marching community members, or as a rationale for future gang attacks on community members they suspect of having relations with the police officers. To be sure, any sort of connection between residents of a red zone and the police can be grounds for threats or assassination by gang-members.

Maintaining this distance from police and soldiers in the eyes of gangs is a primary condition for the Mesa's operations.

Through July 2019, the marches have gone off without a hitch, and ordinary community members have become more and more committed to participating in the March for Peace to publicly show their support for peace in their communities, and to occupy those physical spaces they are so frequently excluded from. With the show-of-force implications lost on no one, the March winds its way across almost all the communities and gang borders that make a patchwork of La Chacra. Images of these marches reveal moments in which marchers are flanked on one side by gang graffiti (or even gang members themselves who exercise strict surveillance over the march), and police officers ostensibly "protecting" the marchers from the gangs on the other. That is, people who work to build peace in La Chacra must figuratively and physically walk between gang and state practitioners of violence.

As an element of the Mesa's larger agenda to build peace through non-violent governance of local social relations, this public though vague denunciation of violence represents the Mesa's indirect mediation between violent actors in the zone. On one hand, collective experiences of claims making for peace such as the March have contributed to imbuing Mesa participants with symbolic capital and confidence to embark on a path of direct dialogue with gang members. Simultaneously, these marches reveal to gangs the ways in which the Mesa has been able to negotiate—albeit indirectly—with repressive state forces: the Mesa has been able to use police for its purposes—as custodians of state officials—a practice that has ostensibly been deemed acceptable by gangs. On the other hand, the March for Peace makes an emphatic statement of the social power that the Mesa has accumulated: by strategically leveraging state resources, providing youth with novel opportunities, enabling freer movement of ordinary people, and giving ordinary

people a collective vehicle for social change the Mesa is facilitating a process whereby ordinary people can govern their own lives more than before, and more peacefully. So while the Mesa's status as a peaceful project of governance still affords it qualitatively less power and fewer means to pursue its ends when compared to actors that utilize violence and rent extraction— i.e. it doesn't seek to "defeat" or "eliminate" either gangs or state security forces—it iteratively refashions local social relations such that these other projects of rule needn't resort to violence so consistently; so that warring gangs and security aren't the only social forces in the communities; so that less youth join gangs, so that gangs lose local, social power, and so that security forces have less justification for repression. This process coheres as people become legible to violent actors not as always-already-suspicions pawns in conflicts for sovereignty, but as agents collectively forging peaceful, productive lives through Mesa activities.

8.6 Gray Futures: Building Peace While Navigating Violence

The United Table for Peace of La Chacra has become a relevant social actor that leads a peaceful project of governance that iteratively reshapes social relations in the zone, enabling people to reconstruct social bonds torn asunder by violence between gangs and state actors. These attempts at grassroots-led governance processes seek to disperse social power more equitably among ordinary people, through logics of persuasion and negotiation as opposed to coercion (Bamyeh 2009; Zibechi 2010), as well as across state-society constructs such that societal forces exercise more democratic decision-making power vis a vis left arm state institutions regarding local issues (Alvarez et al 2017). And while I follow historical examples from Colombia in suggesting that the Mesa's grassroots-led project of governance constitutes the only way that

everyday peace can be forged in a scenario of chronic violence (Karl 2017 pp. 63-94), the same Colombian example demonstrates that any trend toward sustainable or "durable" community-based peace is by no means guaranteed given the strength of latent, violent actors and their projects. The futures of grassroots-led projects for peace in El Salvador are thus as gray as those of Colombia of the 1960s, or of today. However, the increasing ability of the Mesa of La Chacra to strategically inhabit and leverage the gray zones enjoining it with violent actors to forward its own project of governance substantiates the prospect that peaceful governance amid chronic violence is best designed, implemented, and monitored by representative, legitimate, grassroots organizations—with state institutions in a subordinate role. Under such circumstances, ordinary people have greater control over their lives, and will make them more peaceful and democratic.

9.0 Conclusion: Practices and Visions Reinventing the Lefts in El Salvador and Nicaragua

In this dissertation I have brought together seven empirical chapters that each focuses on a specific effort for social change in a delineated movement territory in a Central American country governed by an ostensibly left-wing government during the 2010's. I have problematized and complicated the tired dichotomies (vanguardism vs. autonomy and confrontation vs. cooptation) that have come to structure most comparative studies of Latin American social movements in the 21st century. I have demonstrated that movements can fashion strategies that combine elements of traditional leadership structures and engagement with state institutions while engaging in these external interactions in autonomous ways that prioritize their own independent agendas as movements.

I have also demonstrated that when movements have their allies in power, they have many more choices than simply becoming "coopted" by their allied ruling party or continuing to confront it when that government does not comply with a radical agenda it may have espoused while in opposition. Rather, cooptation itself is frequently best understood as "instrumentalization" through which historical pathways of mutual imbrication between movements and parties often entail a modified but consistent relationship of party domination of movement once the party attains state power. Additionally, those movements who were not historically instrumentalized by their allied party can construct a variety of interactions and relationships with state institutions. These include critical collaboration as we saw in chapter 4 with the feminist movement in Suchitoto, attempts at coalitional funding acquisition as we saw with the environmentalist movement in the Bajo Lempa in chapter 6, or strategic gate-keeping through grassroots cross-party collaboration as seen with the peacebuilding movement in La Chacra in Chapter 8. Importantly though, all of these sorts of

more nuanced interactions with state institutions—which can helpfully be understood as "negotiations"—all occurred in El Salvador, where the leftist FMLN governments were relatively open to good-faith dialogue with allied movement sectors.

In Nicaragua by contrast, the authoritarian Sandinista party-state, led by longtime party boss and President since 2006, Daniel Ortega, with his wife, Rosario Murillo, in the Vice-Presidential position, foreclosed all possibilities for negotiations with social movement sectors that were not explicitly committed to being instrumentalized by the party. Rather, movements not willing to tow the party line have been marginalized, harassed, and condemned, and since 2018 outlawed, with their leaders persecuted, arrested, jailed, and sent into exile. But even before this dramatic break with the rule of law (after a long erosion of democratic processes and respect for civil rights in the preceding decade under Ortega's rule) non-instrumentalized movements such as the feminist movement in Leon were practicing self-management of its own agenda and operations without engagement with state structures and without even financial support from funders beyond its own collective. Even those movements who were open to being instrumentalized by the Sandinista party-state—such as cooperatives in the Miraflor—were also obliged to practice self-management of social service provision given their lack of incorporation into national and municipal-level networks of basic services.

As the foregoing suggests, national political contexts and histories played a powerful role in shaping the opportunities and constraints for the social movements under study in this dissertation, but I have shown that territorial factors played an equally, if not more determinant role in shaping movement strategies and engagements with state institutions. By employing the concept of the *movement territory* to guide my field work and analysis I go beyond typical studies of social movement organizations to interrogate how varying political and cultural histories,

ideological traditions, trans-local political economies, and ecological factors shape the collective subjectivities, networks, and movement visions present in a specific geographic space. The movement territory concept is particularly helpful for comparing and contextualizing movement strategies across disparate sectorial foci, geographic contexts, and national-political scenarios. An analysis of movement territories also enabled me to search out alternative, critical, and dissident accounts of movement activity that would have been unavailable to me had I only studied active participants or leaders of social movement organizations. By actively seeking competing perspectives and foregrounding conflicts among activists ostensibly on the "same side" I interrogate the "deep politics" which characterize and condition movement activity in the same way it does all human activity.

My illumination of a wide variety of movement-state negotiations and movement strategies under leftist governments is not meant to be purely descriptive in nature, though an attempt at an accurate accounting of this subject matter will hopefully be helpful to various audiences. Rather, this dissertation informs debates about how and why movements change their strategies over time and especially *how movements can be most effective*, especially when their allies are in power. In simple terms, movements are most effective when they maintain strategic autonomy from state and partisan actors—even allied ones—a finding that provides important nuance to the voluminous literature on political opportunity structures (POS). While most work in the POS tradition prioritizes analysis of the formal political structure and its various opportunities or lack thereof, I foreground movement strategy (and its basis in movement territory) in this relationship in order to privilege movement practices and audiences. I show that when movements are clear in their agenda, autonomous in their interactions with state actors as a result of leverage (whether electoral, contentious, or financial), flexible and open to learning over time, and strategic in their visioning

of what they can achieve in a the particular political structure, they will indeed be as successful as possible, and particularly so when the political structure is opportune. While few of the movements in this study "check all these boxes" listed above, their experiences with allies in state power have spurred learning processes for them to check additional boxes on a path toward greater strategic autonomy.

The learning processes that have resulted from movement-state interactions on the left in El Salvador and Nicaragua over the past 15 years or so has truly reinvented the left(s) in these two countries. What will continue to be under debate is whether this reinvention is positive, negative, or somewhere in between. It of course depends on where and how you look. In both countries the left's democratic rise to power ended with a slide into authoritarianism at the level of the state. In Nicaragua, this slide was the result of machinations by the ostensibly leftist party itself, whose erosion of democratic processes, corruption, clientelism, and bargaining with right-wing and conservative forces has provided it with a stranglehold on political and economic power.

In El Salvador, the FMLN also suffered from its share of corruption, clientelism, distancing from grassroots bases, and "betrayal" of leftist causes while in executive power for 10 years, but it never attempted to chip away at the democratic system itself. As a result, when it got unpopular it was voted out (in 2019) and was replaced by Nayib Bukele, a former FMLN mayor who has been the one who has sent the country reeling into populist, neo-fascism in which he has appropriated all branches of government under his newly created party, the free press has been silenced, and human rights have become a taboo topic (especially for alleged gang members who have been systematically killed or warehoused in newly-built "mega prisons"). Meanwhile, many Salvadorans celebrate their young, social-media savvy president and the fact that they have finally gotten rid of "the same (politicians) as always" (referring to the FMLN and ARENA). It remains

to be seen how long this authoritarian project will last in El Salvador but given the almost complete institutional dismantling of democracy by Bukele (not to mention the Nicaraguan example), Salvadorans will have a hard time using the ballot box to effect change should they ever feel so inclined.

But I prefer to look elsewhere for the left(s). The FSLN and FMLN administrations have caused the meaning of the left itself to come into dispute in El Salvador and Nicaragua, and if we look at the grassroots organizations, the communities that were the bases of the revolutions in the 1980s, and the youth who are becoming educated professionals forming new organizations for social change, then we see that the left is now more intersectional, more feminist, more environmentally conscious, more questioning of brute force, more critical of inherited hierarchies, and more distrustful of the "leftist" structures of yesteryear. Recalling back to the words of Rene Mendoza about silent movements in the Nicaraguan countryside that "do things at night, on foot, in ways that are invisible to the state and NGOs" he went on to say that "this is where the left is now…" suggesting that it was in a place of a seemingly silent gathering of force, "until one day it would erupt" in his words.

I remember asking myself back in 2016, when I was still at the beginning of my fieldwork for this dissertation, if it would be possible for this new, reinvented left—a left more based on intersectionality, self-management, and harmony with the rest of life on this planet—to actually find itself in the state, or to be compatible with those who would use the state to engineer a leftist society? Alas, I am no closer to a clear answer to this question. However, I am convinced that the answer will depend on the *negotiations* that will continue occurring between those engaged in collective efforts for social change grounded in local territories, and those who purport to rule in their name from the halls of formal political power.

Appendix A : Additional Tables and Figures

Appendix A.1 The Pink Tide in Latin America, 2010

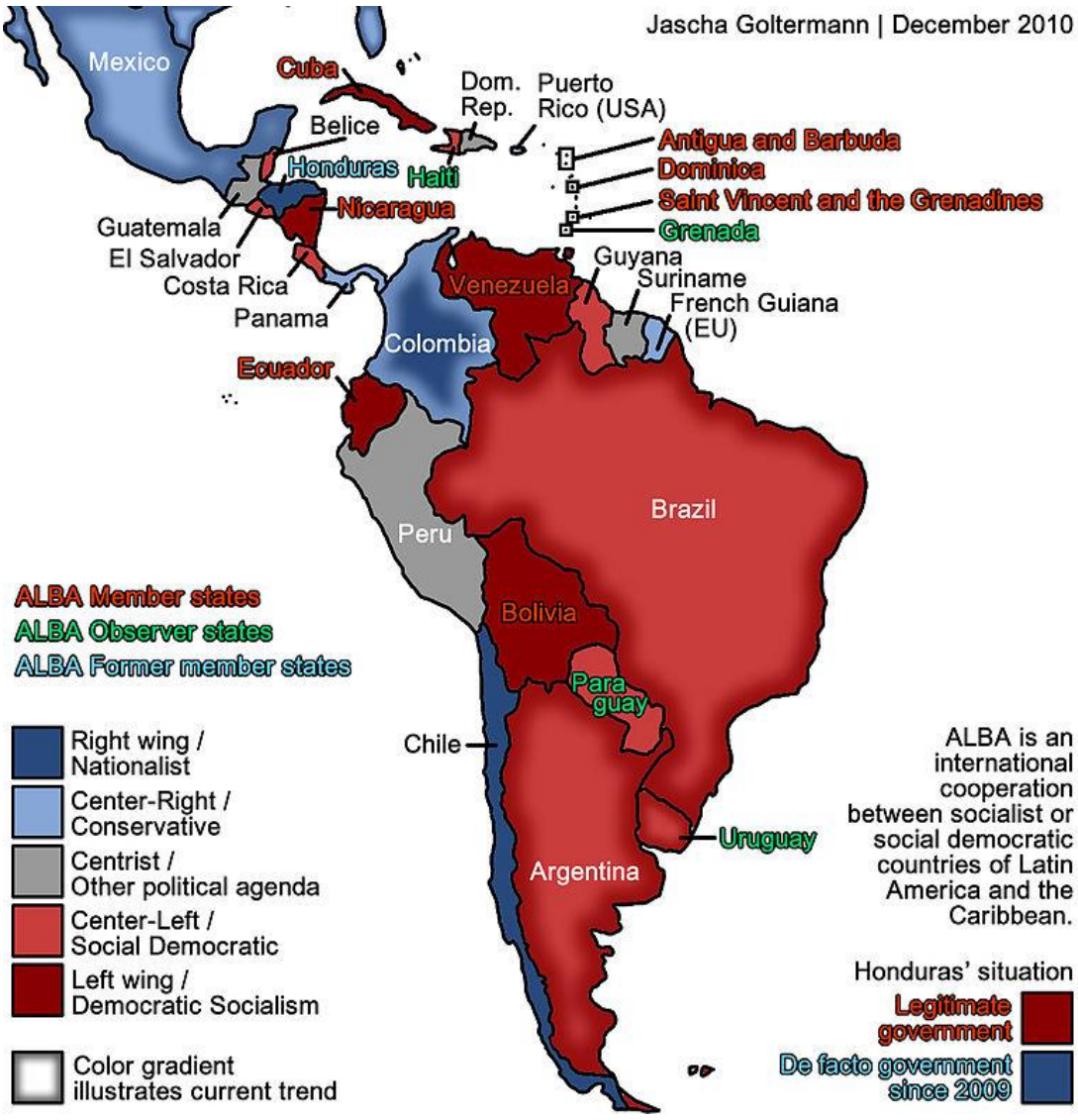

Figure 1: The "Pink Tide" of Latin America in 2010.

Appendix A.2 Spectrum of Movement-State Interactions

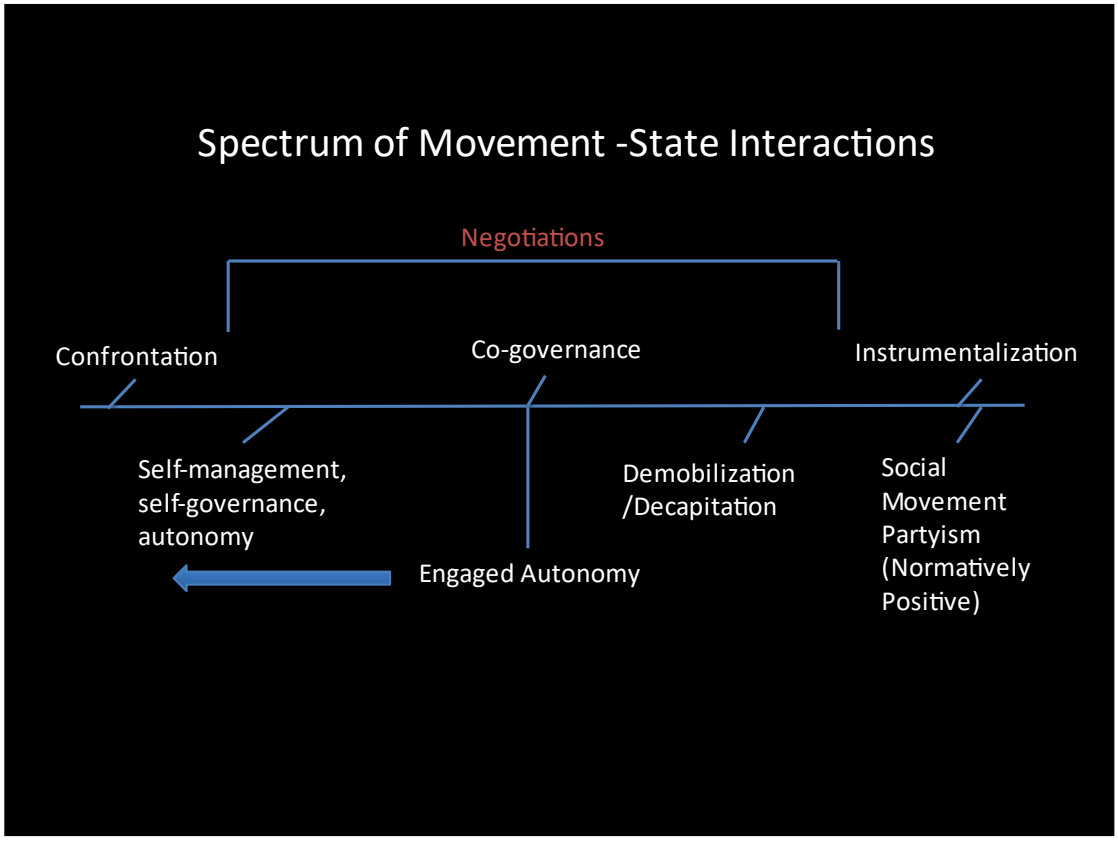

Figure 2: Spectrum of Movement-State Interactions

On this spectrum we see the various points along which movement-state interactions can take place, with the right side indicating a total conflation of movement and party through instrumentalization, or in the normatively positive terms of Almeida (2014), "social movement partyism". On the exteme left side we have confrontation in which movements militantly oppose the party in state power. In between these two poles, we have the various interactions that correspond to "negotiations" in my conceptual framework: demobilization and decapitation as subprocesss of instrumentalization, co-governance at the midpoint of the spectrum in which movements practice engaged autonomy and share governance with state institutions, and self-

management (or self-governance and automomy) as a form of passive confrontation “from below” in which movements atttempt to re-shape and manage social relations on their own terms without engaging with state institutions.

Appendix A.3 Movement Territory Concept Map

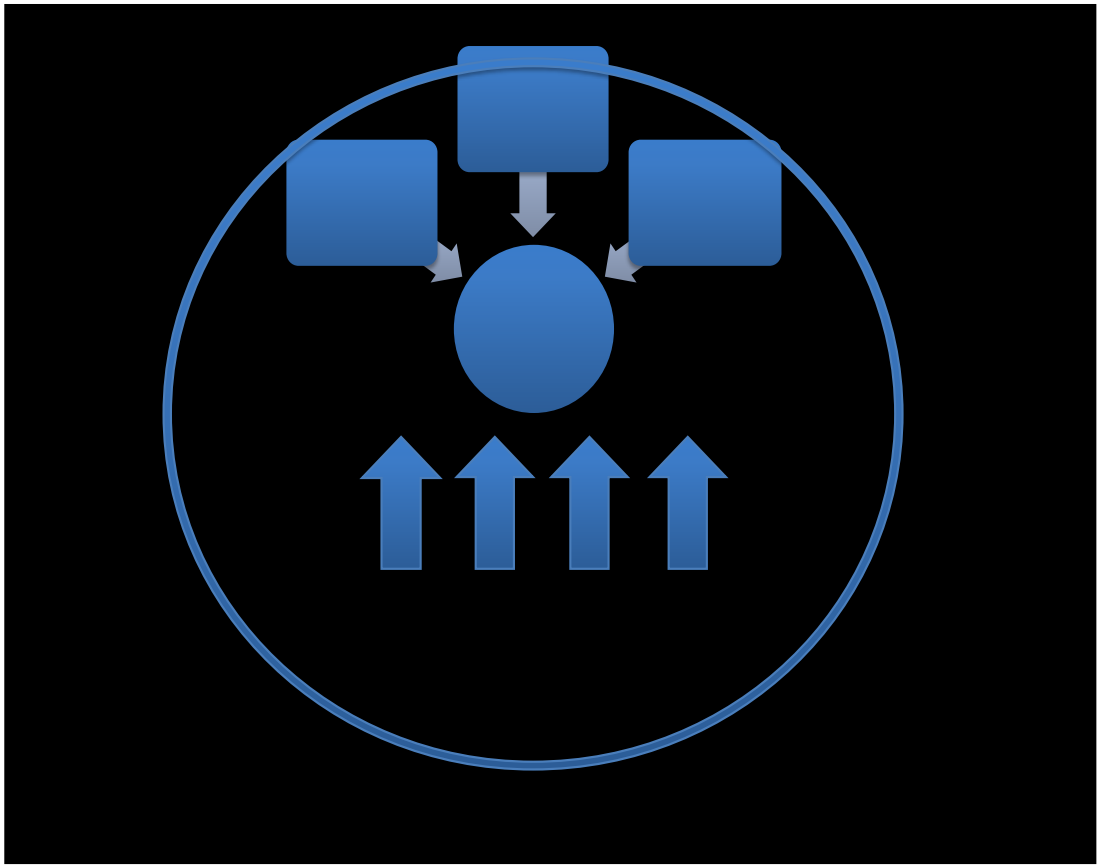

Figure 3: Movement Territory Concept Map

Appendix A.4 Movement Territories Data Table

Table 1: Movement Territories Data Table

Chapter	Movement Territory	Country	Movement Sector	Movement-State Interaction	Number of Interviews
2	Chalatenango	El Salvador	Rural Guild/SMO	Instrumentalization	17
3	Miraflor	Nicaragua	Rural Cooperatives	Instrumentalization, Self-Management	18
4	Suchitoto	El Salvador	Feminist SMOs	Co-governance	23
5	Leon	Nicaragua	Feminist Collective	Self-Management	3
6	Bajo Lempa	El Salvador	Rural Environmentalist SMO	Demobilization, Negotiations, Self-Management	24
7	Rivas	Nicaragua	Environmentalist Coalition	Confrontation	3
8	La Chacra	El Salvador	Peace-Building SMO	Negotiations	34

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