



MIGRANT SECURITY: 2010

Refereed proceedings of the national symposium titled
Migrant Security 2010: Citizenship and social inclusion in a transnational era

Hosted by the
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Faculty of Arts
The University of Southern Queensland

15-16 July 2010

On the lands of the Giabal and Jarowair

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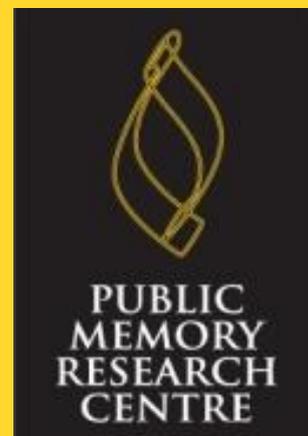


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**Public Memory Research Centre
Faculty of Arts, University of Southern Queensland**

The symposium convenors would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians,
the Giabal and Jarowair, on whose land this meeting takes place.
We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

The national symposium ‘Migrant Security: Citizenship and social inclusion in a transnational era’ was hosted by the University of Southern Queensland’s Toowoomba campus on the 15th and 16th July 2010. The symposium attracted delegates from across Australian universities, as well as delegates from New Zealand, the United States and Europe. In addition, presentations and papers were provided by governmental and non-governmental bodies affiliated with the provision of services for migrants and refugees. The conference proceedings that follow offer a selection of some of the over seventy papers presented during the two days of the main symposium. Each of the papers included in the proceedings have been double peer-reviewed in their entirety, prior to acceptance in this online collection.

Migration has been central to Toowoomba’s history for thousands of years, with a major Indigenous meeting place located close to the city. More recently, Toowoomba has welcomed large numbers of African refugees from various backgrounds. Indeed, twenty five per cent of Toowoomba’s overseas population has arrived within the last decade. The new presence of these visibly different and culturally diverse groups has prompted large proportions of the city to recall and to question the historical and contemporary nature of whiteness and blackness in the Darling Downs region and south-east Queensland. As such, it was particularly apposite that the symposium was hosted at the University of Southern Queensland.

The symposium probed new formulations of migrants’ experience of community and individual security through their engagement with civic life. It drew particular attention to the changing nature of belonging in modern societies, and the implication of this for citizenship. Contributors proved especially interested by the various forms of insecurity that prevented migrants from attaining a sense of inclusion and belonging, and how local and transnational networks might mitigate this. Key themes that are explored in the proceedings include the nature of inclusive education, the role of interculturality in the modern society, and ways to develop meaningful forms of cultural security and social.

Rethinking Resentment: Political memory and identity in Australia's Salvadoran community

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Abstract

The paper questions how former refugees from El Salvador have settled in Australia, and particularly in metropolitan Queensland. It is positioned at the intersection of history and citizenship studies, and addresses the lack of research into the effects of remembered social upheaval on migrants' settlement in Australia. The paper uses qualitative data from interviews and online blogs to interrogate the nature of migrants' engagement with El Salvador, and, significantly, the impact on their conceptualisation of Australian liberal democratic values and civic society.

The community remains highly politicised, and is connected with both local and global contacts. Since fleeing El Salvador's civil war in the 1980s, Australia's Salvadoran community has developed in a markedly different manner to the much larger communities in the United States. Salvadorans in Australia use transcultural rhetoric to justify their engagement with Australian politics and multiculturalism. Democratisation in El Salvador has had a profound impact on Australian Salvadorans' identity, with key implications for their engagement in multiple civic societies. Whilst their ongoing contact with home communities in El Salvador has declined, there has been a re-assertion of the transnational Hispanic identity of the radical Left, which draws on migrants' pre-migration memories of social conflict.

Keywords

Multiculturalism, civic participation, Salvadorans, political participation.

THE SALVADORAN MODEL

Australia's Salvadoran community offers a case study of a politicised group that experienced serious social trauma prior to their emigration. Most pertinently, it provides an exemplar for long-term Australian immigrants who experienced social and political violence, and are digitally literate. The Salvadorans are particularly noteworthy, as many community members continue to identify with transnational sentiments and a sense of historical injustice, applying this in Australia after decades of settlement.

This paper uses the Salvadorans to argue, firstly, that transnational political identification and frameworks of morality may be reinforced by the progressive 'ethnicisation' of migrant identities (undermining the aims of Australia's multicultural policy framework). The paper argues that migrants frequently draw on formative historical and social memories to transfer anti-capitalist frameworks of radical resistance to Australia. Finally, the paper argues that the low to medium density population of groups such as Australian Salvadorans suggests a new model for civic engagement. Whereas Salvadorans in the United States retain an interest in reproducing authority in their former homes, Australian Salvadorans lack the requisite social capital for this. Instead, they are focussed on the application and enactment of what they perceive to be transcultural norms in wider Australian society, informed by past experiences.

LEAVING EL SALVADOR

A strong sense of historical injustice continues to exist in contemporary El Salvador, based on an entrenched oligarchy and long-term structural poverty. These tensions erupted violently during the country's civil war, which lasted from 1980 to 1992. During this period, right-wing government forces sought to end a left-wing insurgency led by the 'Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional' (hereafter, the FMLN). Throughout the war, the United States was closely associated with the government forces, and was implicated in a number of human rights violations that remain seared into emigrants' memories.

Large numbers of displaced persons fled El Salvador during the hostilities. Many sought the comparative wealth of the United States. Significantly, those Salvadorans who settled in the United States occupied a position of legal ambiguity that amplified their sense of vulnerability. Classed as economic migrants, their traumatic experiences were rarely accorded public recognition. However, a

number of Salvadorans also resettled in Australia, where they were afforded refugee status. Most of these had been based temporarily in Costa Rica, where they had lived in the local community as recognised refugees. Australian officials flew from Mexico to interview refugees for potential resettlement, leading to significant numbers eventually being granted access to the country under the Refugee/Special Humanitarian Programme.

The first Salvadorans arrived in Australia in 1983, and about 1,200 refugees were accepted in the following three years (Immigration Museum 2009). Henceforth, private sponsorship would rapidly accelerate the Australian community's growth, and the population more than tripled within five years. In 2006, there were approximately 20,000 Salvadorans living in Australia (although this number does not take into account return migration). Most now live in Sydney and Melbourne, with about a quarter of the national population based in south-east Queensland (Sanchez-Castro & Gil 2009). These numbers stand in sharp contrast to the approximately three million Salvadorans currently in the United States. Yet, those in Australia were afforded a limited public recognition of their trauma and grief, and have not been viewed through a predominantly economic or utilitarian prism (as was the case in the United States).

Very little research has been carried out regarding Salvadorans' settlement in Australia, beyond analyses of early intervention strategies (see Pittaway 1991; Santos & Webber 2009). Langer, writing in the 1990s, asserted in a number of articles that Australian Salvadorans had successfully 'become ethnic' and had relegated politics 'to history' (Langer 1990: 9). This paper argues that such a position misrecognises the complexity of social memories and the function of ethnicity for migrant groups. Indeed, migrants' experience of democratic transition in Australia has been obscured by the predominant multicultural paradigm, with its scholarly emphasis on ethnic identities and the practical desire to facilitate access to social welfare. Langer's position has been further undermined by the communication revolution caused by the internet. Opportunities to communicate instantaneously across international borders, and to receive regular information from sympathisers across the world, have transformed the relationship between ethnicity and local space. This paper argues that new opportunities now exist to enlarge multiculturalism's meaning beyond the public emphasis on ethnicity in order to accommodate transnational political sentiment

and coalitions of interest that are based in multiple localities.

PAN-HISPANIC SENTIMENT

There has been a lack of research into the effects of Australian immigrants' historical memories. Historians, such as Neumann (2004) and Tavan (2005), have engaged with migrants' social memories and the role of the past in Australians' welcome to them. However, scholars have not yet fully investigated how narratives of former civil conflicts are reconstructed in Australia (although important work has been conducted by Hage, 2003). This is noteworthy, since refugees and migrants find themselves physically isolated from the institutions that are designed to affect reconciliation in their former homes. This has important implications for how emigrants experience democratic transition, since they are excluded from the national conversations that occur in their absence. Previously, it may have been sufficient to assume that local supports and engagement with Australian civic society would engender a gradual settlement process that was orientated towards Australian citizenship norms. The new era of transnational technologies and social movements means such an approach is no longer credible.

El Salvador's 'Museum of the Word and Image' provides one case study of how Australians from El Salvador may engage with ongoing debates of historical and contemporary injustice (*Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen*, 2010). The museum establishes a framework and narrative of Salvadoran history, through an extensive online digitised collection that ranges from movies to photographic images and memoirs. It is dedicated to creating a reflective space and a visible testimony to Salvadorans' collective pasts (albeit primarily for those living within the national borders). Publicly recognising the divisions of the past, it is designed to facilitate Salvadorans' engagement in their country's history by fighting 'against the chaos of memory loss.' (*Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen*, cited in Rodríguez 2006: 4)

The museum's narrative is emphatically nostalgic and evocative of loss, but is also suggestive of a continuum of national historical purpose. As such, it seeks to create a coherent framework from diverse exhibitions that range from images of 1930s Salvadoran feminists to excerpts from leftwing Salvadoran existential poets and images titled 'The War for Peace'. The aim is 'to foster a society that ... has a sense of placement and belonging.' (*Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen*, 2010). The

very large proportion of Salvadorans who live overseas means that no conceptualisation of belonging or community can be achieved without incorporating the overseas 'Departamento 15' (Rodríguez 2005).¹ Crucially, therefore, the museum helps to include emigrants in the recently emerging narratives of democratic transition in El Salvador.

Emigrant communities had nurtured grievances against the right-wing ARENA government (which had remained in power after the civil war until 2009), given its opposition to public commemorations of the conflict. The discursive space now occupied by the online museum is shared by emigrant groups, who seek to perpetuate and memorialise memory of the losses. A clear narrative of ongoing conflict continued amongst politically active Australian refugees, based on absolute terms of moral certainty. In an open letter in 2009, Australian refugees claimed that '[t]en Salvadorans are assassinated each day, [a situation that is] tolerated by the state justice and public security bodies. State officials are implicated in homicides. The unilateral amnesty legislated by ARENA is a false instrument for the protection of criminals' (FMLN Australia 2008). This certitude was reinforced by the validation they found in the gradual formation of local emigrant community structures – although political attitudes remained circumspect at the start.

Rather than simply reflect on events in El Salvador, emigrants began to locate their grievances in Australia. Areas, such as Brisbane's West End and Wacol, witnessed a series of Latin American forums from the late 1980s. Groups, such as 'Resistance', were comprised of leftwing academics, community activists and (often) musicians. Many such groups identified with the refugees' presumed political identification, and sought to offer support and validation to them. Community members were frequently wary, however, and unsure of conventions of liberal democratic expression in Australia. Over time, they learnt the norms governing public space and political expression, but vehemently rejected models of community activism based on subjective political negotiation. Whilst grateful to well-meaning Anglophones, one community member commented that in El Salvador 'there is no choice [regarding political identity]. You have to be one side or the other. If you are in the middle, you will be caught in the crossfire.

¹ El Salvador is administered through 14 local government areas or 'departments'. The term 'Departamento 15' is used to signify the country's large emigrant population.

The best thing is to take sides'. (Interview B 2010, pers. comm., 1 August)

Emigrants' social memories were framed by a broad empathy with pan-Hispanic sentiment. For many, Salvadoran identity was understandable through a prism of radical Hispanic experience, which had been central during the turbulent 1970s and 1980s in Latin America. This political and moral framework subsequently informed their ability to interact with local Anglophone Australians. However, it also proved fundamental to managing the guilt many felt at leaving El Salvador (Hage 2003), a sensation that was progressively reinforced as the right-wing government characterised them as 'subversives' (Landolt, Autler and Baires 1999: 304). Such frameworks of engagement (with Australian and wider Salvadoran communities) provided a moral impetus to organise beyond the boundaries of their designated ethnic community.

This engagement focussed initially on Australian student groups (which were strongly involved with Latin American Solidarity movements that ranged from anti-Pinochet protests to support for Nicaraguan Sandinistas). This contact helped to inform new generations of political and social actors in the migrant community. There was little opportunity for capacity building projects within the low density Australian community. Instead, new leaders associated Australian attempts to improve social inclusion with social justice campaigns elsewhere in the world, connecting localities that featured in their diverse social imaginary.

This sense of Solidarity was enacted in a number of ways. Salvadorans were at the heart of regular ongoing trips by Hispanic Australian youth leaders to Cuba, for example. Sentiments of Solidarity also produced an Australian volunteer movement that regularly sends groups to Venezuela, in order to provide electoral support for Hugo Chavez' Bolivarian revolution. Very clearly this provides an ongoing framework for anti-American imperialism, validating the community's social memories. One Australian Hispanic, Roberto Jorquera, is active in the pro-Chavez 'Brigades to Venezuela' movement. As with other community commentators, his views are projected in online and local forums. Jorquera is also a regular contributor to websites such as *Direct Action*, the *Australia-Venezuela Solidarity Network*, and the influential *Green Left*. The notion of Latin American Solidarity (so vital to the formation of an early public presence in Australia) has been further reinvigorated by the internet. Blogs, but also iconic radio such as the Civil War *Radio Venceremos*, are now available online. Not

only does this provide information, it supports the cultural milieu previously lacking for migrants.

TRANSNATIONAL ELECTIONS

It is important to question how historically conditioned transnational sentiment affects immigrants' involvement in social movements based in their former homes. This is particularly significant given the dearth of prior research on the nexus between disaggregated citizenship and communities' location. Seminal American works, such as Michel Laguerre's (1998) *Diasporic Citizenship: Haitian Americans in Transnational America*, were written and researched prior to the communication revolution and the internet. Academic debate has paid relatively little attention to the manner in which transnational sentiment and contact with former homes inform political processes of democratisation. The lack of research is all the more noteworthy given the interest in migration and securitisation that followed the '9-11' terrorist attacks in New York.

The opportunities provided by real time communication have transformed relationships between community and place. The former Salvadoran belligerent group, the FMLN, has had a global strategy to marshal support since the 1980s, and actively targets emigrant communities for funds (Landolt, Autler and Baires 1999). In 2001, for example, FMLN leaders in Salvador explicitly urged 'Australian activists to travel to El Salvador to act as international observers' ('El Salvador' 2008). More generally, May Day marchers in all the main Australian capitals continue to have an FMLN contingent, and sausage sizzles and BBQs raise money for the FMLN throughout the year. It is the process of participation that is most important however, with former migrants desperate to maintain the moral affirmation secured by public meetings. New technologies have heralded improved opportunities for more direct contact between the FMLN's political leadership and its sympathisers worldwide. They have also facilitated access to improved information, with interested Australian Salvadorans holding monthly video conferences with elected FMLN politicians, at which they request clarification and information on policies of interest (Interview A 2010, pers. comm., 5 May).

Much of the FMLN's success in Australia, and internationally, can be attributed to its organisational structure of autonomous cells. This was endorsed by Australia's key liaison body, which declared that it believed in 'a

non-authoritarian, non-hierarchical and non-patriarchal form of ... solidarity with Latin American grassroots movements in resistance and struggle' (LASNET 2010). Not only does this echo the historical and wartime experiences in El Salvador, it is firmly aligned with the much larger American communities that use the internet to meet, organise and fundraise.

Various FMLN politicians have toured Australia, and lower level contact between sympathisers is relatively constant. In 1997, for example, the Legislative Member and former combatant Maria Chichilco toured Australian capitals to consolidate the country's various Solidarity Committees. Speaking to key themes of 'dignity' and 'justice for all', she was strongly critical of 'the ... continuing human rights abuses by the government' as well as 'a failure ... to prosecute those accused of ... human rights abuses during the civil war' (Chichilco, cited in Jorquera 1997). She drew a line from past to present, helping to define community boundaries by existential questions of personal morality and politics. Ethnicity as a Salvadoran, in terms of family origin, was insufficient for membership in this active community.

Whilst politicised members of the Australian community are very proud of the arrival of FMLN representatives, much more research is needed on how migrant groups have reacted to the FMLN's transition from a belligerent group to a democratic party. Blogs suggest there is generally a focus on empathetic and moral issues, rather than specific questions of political negotiation and compromise. This is partly related to the nature of the formation of textual comment on internet blogs, which often encourage clear cut judgements amongst like minded-individuals. Community members state they do follow political decisions when possible, and recognise the necessities of political negotiation (Interview B 2010, pers. comm., 1 August). They are equally unequivocal that this is a process to pursue a moral requirement, and is not an end in itself.

For migrant communities to perpetuate this focus, historical memories must remain applicable to contemporary experience. In one example, the recent formation of a 'Commission for the Disappeared' by the new Salvadoran President, FMLN member Mauricio Funes, was widely reported online and in the Australian community. At its launch, the Minister for Foreign Affairs 'explained the importance of ... the historical memory of the country. [He said] "Forgetting is laying the groundwork for other boys and girls in our country to continue being [forcibly] disappeared"' (Martinez, cited in 'FMLN Creates Commission for the

Disappeared' 2009). The significance of this historical memory is widespread, as Salvadoran emigrants negotiate life narratives in both Australia and in El Salvador. A particularly significant consequence is the altered processes by which perceptions of ethnic and political difference are formed within Australia.

AUSTRALIAN POLITICS

It is crucial to question how empathy with El Salvador and transnational sentiments are enacted within Australia's multicultural policy context. The Latin American Solidarity Network (with whom Salvadorans' FMLN groups are affiliated) declared that their aim is to 'build bridges of struggle and resistance between Latin America, Australia and the whole Asia Pacific Region' (LASNET 2010). It is not simply a matter of recognising that Salvadorans empathise with anti-Americanism. This paper argues that their initial contact and coalition-building with New Left groups proved crucial to Salvadorans' gradual civic integration, as these issues were subsequently brought into the Australian mainstream. Thus, in Australia, American anti-imperialism and mining sentiment is translated into support for the Greens and Indigenous issues amongst the general Salvadoran community.

One example of a weekend visit to Hobart by senior FMLN politician, Jorge Schafik Handal Vega, demonstrates the process of transferral. Having been welcomed by community members, Handal Vega then met Terry Martin, former independent member of the Tasmanian parliament (who crossed the floor to oppose Gunns' pulp mill). He also met Lisa Singh, ALP MLA, who was the only ALP member to abstain on the pulp mill, and then went on to meet the key renegade trade union leader David O'Byrne, before finally dining with Bill Harvey (a Green's alderman for Hobart).

Very clearly, reciprocity of interest exists between radical Hispanic sentiment, trade unionism and environmentalism in Australia. For the purposes of the paper's case study, this is informed by events in El Salvador – where American mining companies now threaten the country's sovereignty and are believed to represent a continued form of American imperialism. In their website, Tasmanian Salvadorans draw the frequent motif that mining companies act as a proxy for American economic imperialism in Australia, and offers a similar foil for American cultural penetration (Busch 2009). This is not a unique example, and community sites typically redirect users to a variety of articles on connections between environmental exploitation and entrenched

local poverty, as well (crucially) as the power of communities to counter this.

Concern for local communities and environmentalism is also demonstrated by Hispanic support for Indigenous issues in Australia. Salvadorans do not regularly engage directly with the local Indigenous community. They do recognise the importance of the struggle however, viewing it as part of the history of Indigenous dispossession by white capitalists that is replicated throughout Latin America (Interview B 2010, pers. comm., 1 August). As such, Indigenous poverty is viewed as one function of capitalist imperialism and its alleged proclivity for reducing local communities' control of their resources.

Thus, ideas of historical justice and radical social memories come together in an informed support for certain causes in Australia. As a final example of the projection of these synergies in Australia, one Melbourne workshop run by Hispanic groups brought together key facilitators for a discussion in 2001 (LASNET 2009). These included a Columbian trade union leader, an anti-mining organiser from Bougainville, a 'Free West Papua' representative, an Aboriginal leader, and an anti-uranium activist. This makes a very clear connection between Indigenous peoples, environmentalism and support for community-based initiatives in Australia. Whilst it does so from the security of a widely-recognised 'Hispanic identity', experiences in Australia are seen as one part of a global movement that comprises multiple localities. Each of these possess intersecting local coalitions of interest. Within Australia, it is the space afforded by a sanctioned Hispanic ethnic identity that facilitated this.

The 2001 Melbourne workshop strongly evoked Bhaba's comment that 'political empowerment, and the enlargement of the multiculturalist cause, comes from posing questions of solidarity and community from the interstitial perspective' (2003: 3). For Australia's Salvadorans, this constitutes an ever-broadening coalition of transformative action situated simultaneously in both local and international contexts. The community was particularly gratified by Obama's electoral rally cry of 'Yes We Can', for example. One blogger rightly noted its origins in the 1970s American Latino/a slogan – *Sí Se Puede* – and continued to note that the slogan 'can only be transformative when "we" is in a constant process of widening' (Hardy 2009). A community leader made this even more explicit in an interview, taking overt pains to endorse the fight for Indigenous and women's rights (which have a long genesis in El Salvador's Left), but also endorsed less

conventional points of overlap – such as vigorous support for Queer Rights (Interview B 2010, pers. comm., 1 August).

CONCLUSION

The remembered experience of trauma in low density migrant communities has a clear impact on the manner in which forced migrant and refugees approach, conceive and engage with liberal democratic values in Australia's multicultural context. This is powerfully mediated by transnational sentiments that embed the Australian context in a dialogous relationship with events elsewhere.

There has been little historical research on the long-term impact of remembered violence and social trauma on groups' ability to engage with Australia's civic values. This paper has focussed on issues of social justice, but argues that there has been an over-acceptance of the ethnicisation of identity in Australian discussion of multiculturalism - to the detriment of investigation into perceptions of political and civic norms. Transnational identification, political or otherwise, need not be an impediment to local integration. Rather it facilitates migrants' conceptualisation of their place and social roles, above and beyond that of bounded ethnicities.

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