The Obstacle is the Way: Resilience in the Lives of Salvadoran Immigrants in the United States

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Historical Overview

The early history of El Salvador is closely linked to the history and development of the Central American region. Smaller than Spain in surface area, the isthmus of Central America (162,000 sq. miles) is composed of an impressive chain of volcanoes and tropical forests that stand against the Caribbean Sea on the north and the Pacific Ocean on the south (Woodward, 1999). El Salvador is the smallest and most densely populated Central American country—At 8100 square miles, El Salvador is roughly the size of the state of Massachusetts. Over 85% of Salvadoran are mestizos of mixed European and indigenous ancestry, 12% are White, and roughly 2% are of Mayan/Pipil ancestry (Cheney, 1990).

El Salvador's stunning natural beauty and spring-like climate sit in contrast with socio-economic problems stemming from a complexity of geographical, economic, social, and political issues. The country's earthquake-prone mountains and valleys, patchy arid areas, deforestation, and lack of navigable rivers, along with a history of colonialism and racial injustices, have contributed to astonishing poverty, inequality, limited economic development, and social unrest (Perez-Brignoli, 1989). The Central Intelligence Agency (2018) ranks El Salvador's homicide rate as one of the highest in the world.

Prior to Spanish colonization, Mayan and Pipil civilizations had developed important diverse settlements, including sophisticated hierarchical societies and organizations, in the highlands of Guatemala and El Salvador. In El Salvador, the

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Mayan urban centers of Casa Blanca and Tazumal experienced significant growth in the fifth and sixth centuries and, over the course of several migrations starting in the ninth century, the Pipil peoples arrived at the central region of El Salvador from Central Mexico. El Salvador's San Andres settlement, a Pipil urban center, flourished as an important civic and political center between the tenth and eleventh centuries (Bello-Suazo, 2008; Woodward, 1999).

Christopher Columbus landed on Central America's Caribbean coast in July of 1502. After several explorations into the region, Spanish colonization is said to have started around 1520 along two fronts—one from Mexico and the other from Panama. Hernan Cortez led the Spanish front in Mexico and overtook El Salvador in 1519. With the arrival of the Spanish in the region, deadly epidemics, including those of smallpox, pneumonia, bubonic plague, and dysentery, began infecting and killing the Mayan and Pipil peoples. By 1525, Hernan Cortez's forces had defeated the Mayans and Pipiles and overtaken their major urban centers in Guatemala and El Salvador (Lopez & Jovel, 2008; Perez-Brignoli, 1989).

During the second part of the sixteenth century, the provinces of Chiapas, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica came to form and be known as the *Kingdom of Guatemala*. Economic, religious, and military powers resided in Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala, which had been established as the capital of the *Kingdom*, contributing to the establishment of centralized governance as a political practice in the region. Because the region also lacked mineral resources (e.g., gold, silver), economic development and power relied on trade, slavery, and the exploitation of indigenous people through physical labor and the seizing of land and animals by the Spanish (Lopez & Jovel, 2008; Perez-Brignoli, 1989; Woodward, 1999).

Landholding, labor laws, and the exploitation and slavery of indigenous and African people are entwined throughout the social and economic history of Central America. In fact, the attitudes and beliefs behind *repartimiento laws*, which mandated labor from indigenous men, led to pervasive paternalistic and colonial beliefs about indigenous and African people as lazy, needing to be forced into labor, and/or being content living in poverty (Lopez & Jovel, 2008; Woodward, 1999).

By the eighteenth century, Central American society reflected a hierarchical organization. On the one hand, the Creole class maintained power through economic control embedded in landholdings, agricultural production, and related business, while Ladinos or mestizos, Blacks, and/or mulattoes represented, for the most part, the laboring or working class; and indigenous groups remained in isolated communities on the fringes of mainstream societies (Peñate, 2008; Woodward, 1999).

A new political and organizational structure emerged in the early nineteenth century. On September 15, 1821, under a short-lived annexation with Mexico, the Central American provinces declared independence from Spain. Under a federalist model of organization, five states made up the new republic, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, while Chiapas opted to be part of Mexico. Spain did not formally recognize Central America's independence until after 1850, following repeated failed efforts to overthrow its government. Nonetheless, lack of stability, poverty, and economic decline engulfed the newly formed nation and established the tone for decades to come (Dominguez, 2008; Perez-Brignoli, 1989).

The Federation of Central America

The republic adopted the official name of the Federation of Central America. However, the isolation of each state and the disproportionate distribution of the population limited the implementation of a federal republic. The First Congress elected Manuel Jose Arce, a Salvadoran *liberal*, as the Federation of Central America's first president who served during a tumultuous time of civil war and a declining economy. Conflicts between conservatives and liberals dissolved the Federation in March of 1839 in the midst of the civil war. Opportunism and arbitrariness at the hands of charismatic, authoritarian, and strong-minded individuals ruled the day and emerged as a pattern of leadership for the region focused on individual interests (Dominguez, 2008; Perez-Brignoli, 1989).

In the 1870s, with an improved economy largely based on the export of coffee, the *liberals* began a series of reforms and consolidated power among a few landholders and merchants. El Salvador's government confiscated lands belonging to the church and ensured that the church lost its power. The government then privatized confiscated lands to become part of the exportation of coffee and engaged in the expulsion of indigenous people, who fled to urban centers. New laws (1877) ensured forced seasonal labor from November through April among the now landless indigenous groups, a practice that lasted until the 1930s (Flores, 2008; Perez-Brignoli, 1989).

The confiscation of lands coupled with legislation (1881 and 1882) that eliminated common lands and communities made El Salvador's proletariat the fastest growing working class among the Central American states. At the same time, a reduced number of landholders owned most of the arable land and practiced despotic forms of management. Politically, El Salvador remained unstable and the government became the target of several coup d'etats (1890, 1895, and 1898; Flores, 2008; Perez-Brignoli, 1989). By the end of the 1800s, 14 families owned most of El Salvador's farm land, and banking industry, and controlled trade (Cheney, 1990).

Modern El Salvador

In the first half of the twentieth century, authoritarianism and paternalism remained evident in Salvadoran politics and government. As such, from 1913 until 1927, the presidency of El Salvador rotated from members of the Melendez-Quiñones family to another. The business elite continued to benefit from state-organized oppression though their coffee export businesses suffered from the economic crises of 1897 and 1908, and World War I. Also, during the Great Depression of 1929, El Salvador's coffee exports declined from $16 million in 1928 to less than $5 million by 1932. Poverty spread widely and with it greater discontent among the landless indigenous people, which began to demonstrate openly against the government (Cheney, 1990).

A short-lived enlightenment of sorts took place during El Salvador's Pio Romero Bosque's presidency between 1927 and 1931. President Romero Bosque passed

labors laws, permitted unions to legalize, and guaranteed freedom of the press and fair elections. President Romero Bosque was succeeded by Arturo Araujo in 1931, who brought socialist inclinations into the presidency, as well as an inability to manage the country's growing economic crisis. As a result, the business elite and landowners grew uneasy with Araujo's socialist inclinations and methods. Later in the same year, Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez, Araujo's vice-president and minister of war, deposed Araujo with a coup d'état and named himself president with the support of landowners (Perez-Brignoli, 1989).

A few years earlier, in 1925, Agustín Farabundo Martí had established the Salvadoran Communist Party. For the first time since El Salvador's independence, people had begun to identify as either from the *left* or *right*, and the indigenous people and laboring classes of El Salvador found a voice and agency to their concerns and pent up energies in Martí's rhetoric of seeking social justice and equality through an uprising of the laboring class. Soon, the laboring class would take up machetes and sticks in an uprising against the government. In response, in 1932, Salvadoran military forces, under president Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez, carried out what came to be known as *La Matanza* (The Slaughter), which resulted in the killing of an estimated 15,000–30,000 citizens, mostly mestizos and indigenous people living in the western provinces of El Salvador. *La Matanza* almost wiped out the entire indigenous population of El Salvador; those who survived it gave up their Nawat language, dress, and customs, and quickly assimilated mestizo customs and the Spanish language to survive further persecution from Salvadoran military forces (Cheney, 1990).

While labor unions expanded in El Salvador and benefited individuals such as artisans and railroad workers, social mobility among the poor remained vastly limited. Education was often last in government funding. A few Salvadorans found social mobility by joining the professional armed forces, including the National Guard, which served as a repressive arm of the government (Perez-Brignoli, 1989).

The post-World War II economic boom contributed to an increase in the price of coffee throughout the 1950s. In turn, El Salvador expanded programs in health, housing, and social security. The country also achieved greater economic diversification by beginning to invest in cotton production. Industry growth contributed to rapid urbanization where part of the laboring class began protesting against the government's unjust, repressive, and violent practices. Because fair distribution of wealth and social mobility remained lacking, many jobless and landless Salvadorans continued to migrate north, across the border into Honduras and settled in uninhabited lands. This contributed to escalating tensions between the Honduran and Salvadoran governments that culminated in the 1969 War of 100 Hours, given that 4 days after El Salvador had launched an attack against Honduras, the Organization of American States successfully intervened and negotiated a peace treated (Moran, 2008; Perez-Brignoli, 1989).

With the global rise of petroleum prices and the decline of coffee prices, the economic boom ended in 1973. By this time, the old liberal order in El Salvador was showing clear signs of deterioration and, with the spread of communist ideals throughout Latin America following Fidel Castro's successful revolution in Cuba in

1959, protests among the laboring class demanding social change had become increasingly difficult to suppress. In contrast to Costa Rican leaders who in the early twentieth century met demands for social change with new progressive laws, Salvadoran landowners and business leaders disregarded these demands for social change and justice as communist rhetoric and continued to hand down power to the military, who violently suppressed the laboring class and perpetuated a system of social exclusion. The persecution, kidnapping, torture, and death of priests, university students, politicians, labor leaders, and peasants at the hands of military and paramilitary groups contributed to the rapid growth of guerrilla groups (Cienfuegos, 2008; Perez-Brignoli, 1989).

In October 15 of 1979, with the support of the US government under President Carter, who was interested in breaking the patterns of violent repression, revolt, torture, and death, civilians joined military forces in an effort to overthrow Salvadoran government led by Carlos Humberto Romero. A year later, the installed Revolutionary Government Junta began falling apart, after many of the civilians abandoned the Junta due to military resistance to sharing power (Cienfuegos, 2008; Meyer, 2012).

By the start of the new decade, guerrilla groups, organized labor, grassroots organizations, and anyone who was a sympathizer, or appeared to be, with any of these groups were targeted by a wave of violence and repression orchestrated by the ruling class and a segment of the military forces. In 1980, death squads operated freely. On March 24, 1980, these groups assassinated San Salvador's Archbishop, an outspoken advocate for the poor, Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero, while officiating mass (Cienfuegos, 2008; Hernandez, 2008). Over the next few months, leaders of the political opposition, including those of the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR, its Spanish acronym), Social Democrats, and Christian Democrats were kidnapped and assassinated. In response, guerrilla forces—five groups in all, unified under the command of the Farabundo Mart National Liberation Front (FMLN, its Spanish acronym; Moodie, 2010; Perez-Brignoli, 1989).

On January 15, 1981, the United States began to provide military, including firearms, and financial assistance to the Salvadoran government to fight the increasing guerrilla insurgency. This was the start of a 12-year civil war that would result in the first massive exodus of Salvadorans to the United States. It is under these dire circumstances that this author, Ernesto, migrated to the United States. After securing US visas with the help of one of the owners of the newspaper where Ernesto's mother worked as a buyer, Ernesto and his sister, Cristina, both teenagers, moved to San Francisco, California. They were among the over one million Salvadorans that ended displaced across the globe, but primarily in the United States.

Through the early 1980s, government and agrarian reforms were either delayed, erased, blocked, sabotaged, or met with repression under the Constituent Assembly dominated by extreme right political parties. By 1983, the financial support from Salvadorans living in the United States to their families in El Salvador also prevented the collapse of the Salvadoran economy (Cienfuegos, 2008). Under President's Reagan, US aid exceeded $600 million in 1985, playing a crucial role in cementing President Duarte's power, whom had been elected in June of 1984, and weakening

the guerrilla's capacity to engage in warfare. In 1987, Costa Rican President Oscar Arias was awarded the Peace Nobel Prize for leading the region in drafting and putting into motion a peace accord. By the time the peace accords were signed in January 16 of 1992 in the Castle of Chapultepec in Mexico City, the 12-year civil war had taken the lives of at least 75,000 Salvadorans. The latter figure represented roughly 20% of El Salvador's population at the time. The 12-year civil war was the genesis of the first massive exodus of Salvadorans seeking jobs, refuge, and peace primarily in the United States (Cienfuegos, 2008; Moodie, 2010; Perez-Brignoli, 1989).

Though experts recognized the Salvadoran peace accords as one of the most significant political achievements in the Western Hemisphere, in her book, *El Salvador in the Aftermath of Peace: Crime, Uncertainty, and the Transition to Democracy*, Ellen Moodie (2010) reported how Salvadorans described the years following the accords as "being worse than the war" (p. 40), particularly in urban areas. In the following two decades, transnational criminal and violent organized groups with origins in the United States, such as the Mara Salvatrucha or MS-13, began terrorizing Salvadorans with a new wave of unpredictable and more sinister violence. In a post-war era, many Salvadorans lacked a readiness for anxiety, which they had developed during the 12-year civil war, making their exposure to unpredictable violence unbearable.

In addition to sociopolitical conflicts, El Salvador has been plagued by a number of natural disasters, including the earthquakes of 1986 and 2001, and Hurricane Mitch in 1998. According to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), these natural disasters left over 1100 people dead, destroyed more than 150,000 buildings and other infrastructure, including schools, bridges, homes, and water systems, and exacerbated Salvadorans' anxiety and widespread trauma (The American National Red Cross, 2018; USAID, 2018). The combination of political and economic instability, gang violence, extortion, international drug trafficking, separated and broken families, internalized endemic violence, trauma, and the enduring unjust social and economic structures remained factors in yet a second exodus of Salvadorans to different parts of the world, but once again primarily the United States (Moodie, 2010).

Despite significant challenges, Salvadorans living both in El Salvador and abroad abound with courage and resiliency. In recent years, Salvadorans living in the United States have supported the Salvadoran economy with remittances of $4 billion annually, demonstrating a capacity to become an integral part of new communities abroad and offer support to those left behind (Cohn, Gonzalez-Barrera, & Cuddington, 2013).

Migration and Settlement Patterns

Estimates on the demographics of Salvadoran immigrants to the United States during the late 1980s and early 1990s are unclear. Overall, it has been estimated that during this time, at the midst of the civil war, the approval rate for Salvadoran asylum applications was less than 3% (U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants,

1986). In Los Angeles alone, the Salvadoran-born population went from 50,000 to 250,000 throughout the 1980s (Suro, 1998). With the passage of President Reagan's Immigration Reform and Control Act in 1986, some 140,000 Salvadoran refugees became eligible to obtain legal status in the United States (U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2013). By the middle of the 1990s, across the United States, around five hundred thousand Salvadorans have become recipients of some form of temporary legal status. Once these temporary permits expired, Salvadoran holding these expired permits were able to stay permanently in the United States either through amnesty or asylum (Suro, 1998).

At the end of the last decade, a new immigration pattern began emerging among minors fleeing gang-related violence in El Salvador. Unaccompanied minors are children who travel without any documents or caregivers with the intent of crossing into the United States from the Mexican border. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement reported that between 2011 and 2016 the number of Salvadoran-born unaccompanied minors traveling from El Salvador across Guatemala and Mexico into the United States rose from 3678 to 20,117. By the end of the fiscal year 2017 for the US government, the number of Salvadoran-born unaccompanied minors that had been apprehended while crossing the Mexican–US border since 2012 had reached over 67,000 minors. Overall, 229,495 unaccompanied minors mostly from Central America's northern triangle, Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador have been apprehended by US authorities shortly after crossing the US border between 2012 and 2017. In 2017, roughly one third of unaccompanied minors were girls and approximately 69% were adolescents between the ages of 15 and 17 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2018).

Current Demographics

Whereas El Salvador's population is 6,172,011 million people (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018), a recent report from the Migration Policy Institute revealed that approximately 2.1 million immigrants of Salvadoran origin reside in the United States, making them the nation's third largest community of Latin American origin (Migration Policy Institute, 2015). More than half of Salvadorans in the United States were born in El Salvador. It is estimated that around 64% of them immigrated to the United States before the year 2000.

Currently, first-generation Salvadoran immigrants make up the largest group of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) beneficiaries. TPS status was granted to approximately 217,000 Salvadoran immigrants in 2001, including the mother of one of the authors, after a series of earthquakes struck the country. In 2017, more than 195,000 Salvadorans in the United States continued to hold this protected status (Cohn & Passel, 2017). In addition, first-generation Salvadoran youth were the second largest group of DACA beneficiaries during the program's first few months in 2012–2013 (Migration Policy Institute, 2015). Less than one third of Salvadoran immigrants in

the US hold citizenship status and although the number of undocumented Salvadoran immigrants in the United States is unclear, recent analyses have identified this population as the second largest unauthorized immigrant community in the nation with Mexican immigrants ranking first (Migration Policy Institute, 2015).

In terms of geographic distribution, the Salvadoran population in the United States is primarily concentrated in the states of California, Texas, New York, and the District of Columbia-Maryland-Virginia area, with the city of Los Angeles having the largest overall number of Salvadoran immigrants in the United States (20%), and the Washington metro area having the highest concentration of Salvadorans (15%) as a percentage of their total foreign-born population (Pew Research Center, 2017). About half of Salvadoran immigrants in the United States report speaking English proficiently; still, the majority (89%) report speaking Spanish at home (López, 2015). With regard to education, immigrants of Salvadoran origin have been found to have lower levels of educational attainment than the overall US population although it should be noted that the numbers differ by immigrant generation. Specifically, second-generation Salvadoran immigrants (i.e., those born in the United States to Salvadoran-born parents) have been found to have higher levels of education than their first-generation peers (Migration Policy Institute, 2015). Approximately 89% of Salvadorans ages 16 and over are employed; however, only 10% work in professional or managerial positions (e.g., engineering, law, education, finances).

Although previous studies have found that Salvadoran men who are TPS beneficiaries earn approximately 13% more than those who are not TPS holders (Orrenius & Zavodny, 2015), the median annual income for Salvadoran households remains lower than that US households ($41,000 versus $50,000). In terms of religious affiliation, a large proportion of Salvadorans in the United States (42%) identify as Catholic. The second largest religious affiliation among Salvadorans is Protestant (37%; López, 2015).

The Post-migration Era

Although Salvadorans make up the third largest immigrant group of Latinx origin in the United States, only a few studies have conducted to better understand the specific challenges associated with their post-migration experience. Most of the current literature on Salvadoran immigrants in the United States has centered on (a) the role that family dynamics, cohesion, and conflicts play on every aspect of the acculturation and adaptation process of Salvadoran immigrants (e.g., Horton, 2009; Landolt & Da, 2005; Menjivar & Abrego, 2009), and (b) the importance of having a social support network for overcoming barriers in the post-migration era (e.g., Landolt & Da, 2005; Miyares, Wright, Mountz, Bailey, & Jonak, 2003). Most of these studies have focused on the increased risk of Salvadoran immigrants for a number of negative psychosocial outcomes. Although informative, risk-deficit research tends to miss the strengths and resources that have long helped "at-risk" communities thrive in the

face of adversity. Therefore, in this section, we will take a strengths-based approach to review the relevant literature on the post-migration experience of Salvadoran immigrant families and highlight internal and external sources of resilience.

Family Dynamics, Cohesion, and Conflicts

In an examination of family relations among transnational Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrant families, Menjivar and Abrego (2009) identified three types of transnational families that face particular post-migration challenges: (1) those who remain separated, (2) those who reunite after a long period of time, and (3) those who live together in the receiving country but are of mixed immigration status. Researchers noted that, among those families with parents and children who remain separated (e.g., parents live in the United States, while their children still live in El Salvador), feelings of resentment, anger, and guilt are especially prevalent. Specifically, it was noted that children who are "left behind" often experience emotional distress from the separation, and this is then expressed through anger and resentment toward their immigrant parents. As a result, immigrant parents may experience guilt and/or regret over their decision to migrate and leave their children behind. This sense of guilt has been well documented among Salvadoran immigrant *mothers*, in particular (Horton, 2009). However, researchers have also noted that children may be less likely to experience such negative feelings towards their immigrant parents when/if parents are able to consistently send remittances as these are seen as "proof that their parents continue to be committed to the family" (Menjivar & Abrego, 2009; p. 170). Indeed, researchers have often described *remittances* as evidence of the continuing obligations and commitment of Salvadoran immigrants to their family back in El Salvador (Horton, 2009; Landolt & Da, 2005). In 2012, the Pew Research Center reported that Salvadorans living in the United States send $4.2 billion in remittances to their families in El Salvador. This is the equivalent of 16% of El Salvador's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), representing the highest share in GDP among all Latin American countries (Cohn, Gonzalez-Barrera, & Cuddington, 2013).

Phone calls, letters, and care packages have also been identified as a proxy for parental presence among Salvadoran families who remain separated (Horton, 2009; Menjivar & Abrego, 2009). Their continued connection with family members in El Salvador, facilitated by advances in technology, has also been found to impact the ability of Salvadoran immigrants to overcome the different post-migration barriers they might face in the United States (Molina, 2008). This finding is consistent with this author's, Alejandra, personal immigrant experience. Although she was physically separated from her mother for approximately 5 years, Alejandra maintained frequent contact with her mother via phone calls and messages, which helped them both remain close and hopeful about the future.

Among families with parents and children who reunite after long periods of separation, the main challenge involves adjusting to their new family dynamics. Long

awaited family reunifications can be difficult to navigate and even problematic because individuals are faced with the task of learning to interact and get re-acquainted with family members they often have not had contact within years. Also, like those in families who remain separated, individuals whose families reunited after a long separation may experience resentment and anger over the separation or "abandonment." Using quotes from a qualitative study, Menjivar and Abrego (2009) demonstrated that, among Salvadoran and Guatemalan families, reunifications after lengthy separations can be "bittersweet, leading to moments of happiness as well as tension and disappointment" (p. 177). Lastly, researchers noted that for families whose members all live in the United States but are of mixed immigrant status (e.g., children are US citizens and parents are undocumented; one child is a US citizen and the other are undocumented), tension and resentment may arise because of differential access to resources and opportunities based on legal status. For example, undocumented children may resent their US-born siblings for being able to travel to their native country or feeling less restricted with getting a driver's license. Similarly, Landolt and Da (2005) investigated the specific dynamics and challenges of transnational families in two samples: Salvadoran immigrant families in the United States, and Chinese immigrants in Australia. Using case studies, the authors highlighted the complexities and similarities across transnational families, stating that "there is not only one type of transnational families, but rather a continuum of familial arrangements" (p. 647).

Acculturation Gaps The ways Salvadoran immigrants navigate acculturation gaps within the family unit also has an impact on both family dynamics and individual well-being. In a recent study, Jensen and Dost-Gözkan (2015) examined discrepancies between adolescent and parents' expectations for autonomy and parental authority in Asian Indian and Salvadoran immigrant families in the United States, and whether these predicted family cohesion or conflict. As hypothesized, results revealed significant differences among adolescent-parent dyads, such that, across samples, parents endorsed parental authority at higher levels, and reported later age expectations for autonomy. In addition, parents reported significantly more family cohesion than adolescents. When examining only Salvadoran dyads, results revealed positive associations between adolescent and parents' endorsement of parental authority, expectations for autonomy, and family cohesion. Also, researchers noted that *familismo,* or a strong attachment and sense of obligation to the family unit (e.g., Kuhlberg, Peña, & Zayas, 2010), and appreciation for parents' struggle might be better predictors of family cohesion in Salvadoran immigrant families than expectations for autonomy and parental authority. This finding falls in line with Ganas' (1992) conclusion that children of immigrants, including Salvadorans, fare better when they value and embrace their parents' or caregivers' communities and values instead of rapidly assimilating into or more fully adopting mainstream American values.

Moreover, Buckingham and Brodsky (2015) conducted a qualitative investigation of the ways Salvadoran immigrant families understand and navigate intrafamilial acculturation gaps, or differences in values, practices, or identifications between

two or more family members. Although previous research had associated gaps with problematic family dynamics, results from this study revealed that Salvadoran families engage in several effective and flexible strategies to navigate gaps, including collaborative problem solving, open emotional expression, empathy, humor, and putting family first, among others. The authors referred to these families as "remarkably resilient," emphasizing the benefits of applying a model of family resilience when seeking to better understand intergenerational gaps and conflicts among immigrant families. We will now summarize two case studies that exemplify the critical and protective role of family on the well-being and adaptation of Salvadoran immigrant families.

Case Study 1 Drawing from a larger qualitative study, Baily, Henderson, and Tayler (2016) presented the case of "Edwin," a 16-year-old Salvadoran immigrant, to highlight the challenges surrounding family separations and reunifications (e.g., difficulty acclimating to new family dynamics, feelings of resentment), and the factors that might help buffer their negative effect of the well-being of Salvadoran immigrant families. Edwin's mother had migrated to the United States when he was 7 years old, and they were separated for approximately 9 years although it is important to note that they maintained communication through other means. During the years that Edwin was separated from his mother, he was "passed between different family members" (p. 768) and had difficulty adjusting to the different parenting styles he was being exposed to. He also experienced several stressors outside of the family unit, including bullying at school and exposure to gang violence in his community. It is, thus, not surprising that, at the time of the interview, both Edwin and his mother reported some symptoms of depression, anxiety, and PTSD. However, the positive relationship Edwin had been able to maintain and further develop with his mother through the separation and upon their reunification appeared to buffer the negative effects of such symptoms on his functioning and adaptation to the U.S. Researchers concluded by highlighting the relevance of social support and resources at multiple levels, including familial, community, and institutional. We will revisit the topic of community support in a later section.

Case Study 2 Carranza (2012) presented a case study of a Salvadoran immigrant woman living in Canada, and her family members living in El Salvador and the United States. The case highlighted the influential role of the family unit on the way Salvadoran immigrants negotiate their resettlement and adaptation to North American countries. In particular, the role of *familismo* and connections with both immediate and extended family members were cited as a key source of resilience for Salvadoran immigrants. The author concluded by encouraging clinicians to be innovative and develop "inclusive practices" when working with transnational families. In the case presented, the author found teleconferences with the client's daughters, mother, and sister, to be especially beneficial in enhancing the client's psychological well-being, which had been impacted by family separation and traumas she'd experienced pre-migration.

Social Networks and Community Support

Indeed, a number of studies have highlighted the role of social networks and community support for the adaptation and well-being of Salvadoran immigrants. For example, in his report of best clinical practices with Salvadoran immigrant families, Kusnir (2005) noted that particularly beneficial interventions with this group will involve helping them “to utilize human resources in their community to build social networks, and to understand that sometimes causes of stress are also sources of resilience” (p. 264). Also, Miyares et al. (2003) highlighted social networks as a source of resilience in Salvadoran immigrant families. In this study, researchers documented the complexities of developing a sense of belonging to both the native and the host community in a sample of Salvadoran immigrant families in New Jersey. Using ethnosurvey data, researchers found that most Salvadoran immigrants maintained ties to El Salvador through social networks. In particular, many of the interviewees reported belonging to at least one social, political, or religious Salvadoran community group in the U.S. Researchers noted that such community support was beneficial in helping Salvadoran immigrants “overcome the interrupted circle” of transnationalism (Miyares et al., 2003, p. 82). Similarly, Landolt and Da (2005) found that Salvadoran immigrants often drew on social networks, such as church congregations and soccer teams, to aid in their adaptation process and to “reconstruct the torn social fabric of their lives” (p. 637), while Menjivar (2010) found that Salvadoran immigrants often rely on religious institutions for both emotional and instrumental support (e.g., financial assistance).

To summarize, although legal instability and exposure to violence have been frequently highlighted as a vulnerability for Salvadoran immigrants in the United States, themes of resilience appear to emerge in most investigations of the Salvadoran immigrant experience. In particular, the role of the family unit and other social support groups and affiliations, such as church congregations, appear to be instrumental in the development and adaptation of Salvadoran immigrants. This highlights the value of examining factors at multiple levels of the human ecology to better understand the ways Salvadoran immigrants navigate and overcome post-migration challenges.

Closing Thoughts

For decades, the attention that El Salvador and its people have received in the media and the literature has been limited, on the one hand, and negative on the other hand. Gang violence, natural disasters, and economic and political instability have too often been part of news headlines, as well as empirical studies and publications. Although sociopolitical factors have, from early on, shaped their experience, Salvadorans in El Salvador and in the United States have over and over demonstrated characteristics, both intrinsic and extrinsic, that have helped them thrive in the face of adversity. In this chapter, we sought to draw attention to the remarkable

resilience of Salvadorans, focusing particularly on the Salvadoran immigrant experience in the US context.

As previously noted, the literature on the Salvadoran immigrant experience is limited and characterized by several limitations. Most notably, these limitations include (1) small samples, (2) a lack of quantitative or mixed-methods research, and (3) a lack of research directly examining protective rather than risk factors for the well-being and adaptation of this population. The first two limitations—small samples and lack of quantitative/mixed-methods research—are perhaps best addressed together rather than separately. It is widely agreed that qualitative research provides details that go beyond what a quantitative measure could capture and facilitates in-depth understanding of social phenomena, including the Salvadoran immigrant experience. Although it is typical for qualitative research to be conducted on small as opposed to large samples, such sample characteristics—namely the small ranges of sample sizes—limit our ability to make inferences about the general Salvadoran immigrant population. Future research using a mixed-methods approach might allow us to examine data from different levels and help us achieve a more integrated understanding of the complex life trajectories of Salvadoran immigrants. In addition, more research ought to investigate the Salvadoran immigrant experience from a strengths-based approach, focusing on identifying multi-level contributors to the development and adaptation of Salvadoran immigrants in the United States. Currently, much of the research on vulnerable populations, including immigrants, centers around risk factors for negative psychosocial outcomes. Although informative, this approach does not fully capture neither the multifaceted nature of the immigrant experience, nor the strengths and tenacity of those who voluntarily or involuntarily (i.e., refugees) embark on a tumultuous journey to a better, more hopeful life in the United States.

We end with a note on the rescission of TPS. The authors of this chapter would like to draw attention to the US government's recent decision to discontinue the TPS program for several African and Central American countries, including El Salvador. As mentioned in the Migration Patterns section, in 2017, Salvadoran immigrants made up the largest group of TPS holders, followed by Hondurans, and Haitians. The majority of Salvadoran TPS beneficiaries have maintained residence in the United States for over 15 years—they have raised their US citizen children, have established their own businesses, contributed to the US economy, and made the United States their home. Although TPS was never meant to be a permanent or long-term solution to a faulty immigration system, the termination of the program without alternative options for the legalization of an estimated 325,000 migrants (Center for Migration Studies, 2017) has implications not only for the immigrant communities themselves, but also for the larger American society. A recent report found that "deporting all Salvadoran, Honduran, and Haitian TPS holders would cost taxpayers $3.1 billion dollars" and that "ending TPS for these three countries would result in a $6.9 billion reduction to Social Security and Medicare contributions over a decade" (Baran, Magaña-Salgado, & Wong, 2017, p. 1). It is our hope that government officials will legislate a permanent solution to avoid the deportation of these communities and offer them a pathway to citizenship.

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