

Introduction

Writing Women into Nation, War, and Migration

During the brief span of the last three decades, El Salvador has been witness to some of its most defining political, social, and economic transformations, including a twelve-year civil war dating from 1980 to 1992, a postwar neoliberal project of national reconstruction and modernization, and the mass emigration of Salvadorans to neighboring and international destinations such as the United States. All of these processes have undoubtedly transformed El Salvador and opened new questions regarding national identity, citizenship, and ethnicity. These changes, however, have also generated a new focus on gender given the instrumentality and the unprecedented numbers of Salvadoran women who have been involved in these developments, participating in what have traditionally been considered male enterprises, such as armed revolution, postwar democratization, and migration.

In this book, I engage this gendered history through the optic of cultural production, specifically what I refer to as “trans-Salvadoran narratives”—Salvadoran and U.S. Salvadoran texts dating from 1980 to 2005. Here I explore how the primarily allegorical representations of women in these narratives bring into focus women’s actual roles and agency within the context of these interrelated national and transnational occurrences. Viewing this interplay within literature brings to the fore the implications such depictions hold for rethinking wider-reaching issues. What insight can be gained from these representations regarding the gendered dynamics of a Salvadoran national identity that is continuously being redefined and articulated? How do these portrayals of women speak to the construction of gendered ethnicities in and outside the

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nation, in particular Salvadoran-American identities? And in broader terms, what can they tell us about the multiple intersections of gender, literature, nation, and identity?

An initiating factor of this recent history of Salvadoran women's participation in public life was the country's civil war, the culmination of a long past of social, political, and economic polarization instituted and perpetuated by a dominant oligarchy and sustained by military repression.¹ In the years leading up to the war, Christian-based and grassroots initiatives aimed at changing the then-current system were deemed "subversive" by the state, making them a prime target of the government's military forces. Human rights violations such as disappearances and political assassinations escalated while economic conditions continued to deteriorate. Given the milieu of Cold War politics and the triumph of the Nicaraguan Revolution in 1979, U.S. intervention in El Salvador also significantly increased. Under President Carter, the U.S. government approved a military aid package totaling 5.7 million dollars, eleven times more than the annual aid the country normally received (Montgomery 131), which kept El Salvador's struggling economy afloat but also continued to fund the country's oppressive military regime. Lacking other alternatives, El Salvador's militant left, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), adopted a strategy of popular insurrection and armed struggle. Consequently, by 1980 the stage was set for a civil war that took a greater toll on the country than any other event prior, claiming the lives of more than 75,000 Salvadorans and forcing several tens of thousands to flee from their homes.

Among other effects, the civil conflict led to the weakening of patriarchal social and political structures that governed Salvadoran society, allowing women the possibility of integrating themselves, in different capacities and at various levels, into a public sphere from which they traditionally had been excluded.² The unparalleled involvement of Salvadoran women during this moment of national crisis was a significant turning point in the country's history in that it not only marked women as visible and necessary participants in national endeavors but also functioned as an important catalyst for women's mobilization with regard to gender equality and civil rights in the postwar years. Whether because of necessity or deeply rooted political beliefs, women of all ages and from different class and ethnic backgrounds participated in the war. Although many campaigned and rallied on behalf of the right, as Marilyn Thompson's "Las organizaciones de mujeres en El Salvador" details, these were a small minority in comparison to the mass mobilization of women under the left's project of popular and armed insurrection. It is estimated that

women comprised sixty percent of the popular front and thirty percent of all armed combatants (Vásquez, Ibáñez, and Murguialday 21). Women adopted dynamic positions in and outside the home as activists, military leaders, and in the case of many rural peasants or *campesinas*, sources of support and protection for insurrectionist troops. They became, in essence, what Vásquez et. al term *mujeres-montañas*, the metaphorical mountains that sheltered and aided El Salvador's guerrilla forces.

In the postwar period, characterized by both a tenuous process of national reconstruction and continued international migration, women's involvement in national and transnational developments has been equally imperative and noteworthy. Following the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992, El Salvador began a new phase of neoliberal reconstruction characterized by free-market enterprise and open "democratic" elections. Rather than national rehabilitation, however, such reforms have led to the exacerbation of existing oppressive economic and political conditions accompanied by an increase in social disparity and violence. For women, the adoption of this neoliberal model has resulted in advances in the form of employment opportunities and the founding of a feminist movement as well as setbacks.³ Similar to Karen Kampwirth's observations regarding feminism in postwar Nicaragua, the new struggles of women for liberation and rights in El Salvador has provoked a conservative backlash characterized by the staunch reaffirmation of women's expected gender roles and repeated attempts to stifle the limited political presence and influence women acquired through their earlier activism in popular and armed movements ("Resisting the Feminist Threat").

Parallel developments and conflicts mark women's participation in Salvadoran migration and as indispensable members of a growing Salvadoran-American community in the United States. Prompted by the economic instability and the violence of the 1980s, thousands of Salvadorans fled the country, seeking refuge in neighboring Central American regions as well as international destinations such as Mexico, Canada, Australia, and the United States. The migratory flow initiated during this period of mass upheaval has continued into the postwar era and, along with the establishment of transnational enterprises, has become an important component of El Salvador's new neoliberal reality and process of national reconciliation. According to the 2007 United Nations Human Development Report on El Salvador, more than a fifth of El Salvador's population resides outside its borders, the majority in the United States. Salvadoran women have not only predominated in these migratory flows and immigrant communities but, in some cases, have also been pioneers.⁴ They have assumed new roles as economic

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providers for their families and as contributors to transnational financial and cultural developments, leading to a new sense of independence and an uneasy renegotiation of traditional social norms. As with the civil war, migration has also become an avenue for women to ascertain alternate forms of agency and to rethink their subjectivity.

Read together, the narratives that inform this study—broadly defined to include testimonials, novels, and poems that relate stories—elucidate a nuanced portrait of this dynamic history of Salvadoran women’s participation in national and transnational endeavors. In all of them, women appear as pivotal characters and are a vital component of both their narrative and ideological frameworks. However, precisely because they constitute vital components of *literary* texts—crucial spaces for cultural representation, national imaginings, and identity construction—these depictions of women also afford a broader understanding of the Salvadoran nation and its transformation due to and following the war. Thus, one of the main arguments of this book is that the portrayals of women in these Salvadoran and U.S. Salvadoran narratives also function as a gendered lens through which we see the continuous redefinition of the Salvadoran nation and its subsequent rearticulation as a transnational space. This is a process characterized by both contradictions and conflicts and by the forging and/or renegotiation of gendered, migrant, and ethnic identities.

My claim regarding this interrelationship between women and nation is premised on the fact that in these literary representations, Salvadoran women are posited as either national allegories or portrayed in nationalistic roles such as that of “republican mothers.” These symbolic depictions underscore a key connection between how the nation is imagined and how women are imagined within it. Equally imperative is the fact that I analyze these figurative portrayals of women in both Salvadoran and U.S. Salvadoran texts. Rather than view these as two separate literatures, I consider works produced in and outside El Salvador as part of the same body of dialoguing narratives that I call “trans-Salvadoran,” as they bring into focus El Salvador’s burgeoning transnational reality. In positing this notion of “trans-Salvadoran,” I draw on Nestor García Canclini’s noted observation that the process of transnationalism is one in which the mark of the “original” nations is maintained (48).⁵ The discursive interchange established between Salvadoran and U.S. Salvadoran works is one that transcends El Salvador’s imagined and geographic borders (and to a lesser extent those of the United States). Still, the particularities to which these texts speak regarding women’s agency, nationhood, and the elaboration of individual and communal-based cultural identities continue to be “anchored” in El Salvador.

Imagining Women in and beyond El Salvador

As Benedict Anderson has effectively argued, print culture provides a means by which people not only construct the nation but also perceive themselves as part of that same “imagined community.” Trans-Salvadoran narratives allow for an understanding of how the Salvadoran (trans) nation has been imagined, contested, and redefined during the civil war and in the subsequent postwar period. Such imaginings, as well as the nationalist discourses that facilitate them and on which they depend, are heteronormative and fundamentally gendered (McClintock 89). As such, men and women come to occupy specific roles in the national imaginary, which may or may not be symptomatic of their actual participation in national enterprises. Following Jean Franco, one of the prevalent ways in which women are “plotted” in the “master narrative” of nationalism is as an allegory of the nation, a conceptualization grounded in other symbolic renderings of women that emphasize their link to nature or territory.⁶ Women are similarly often cast as “republican mothers,” as is the case within nineteenth-century nation-building projects in Latin America. Relegated to the domestic space and beholden to their husbands, women were responsible for not only reproducing but also educating the future citizens of the nation (Pratt, “Women” 51).

The portrayals of women that characterize the trans-Salvadoran narratives I examine work in tandem with, as well as in response to, these traditional forms of female representation and agency. The perseverance of such figurative uses of women calls attention to the similarly gendered discourses that operate in Salvadoran nationalist and transnationalist enterprises of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. However, it also is suggestive of the noteworthy use of such symbolic appropriations in communicating a broader national reality. In her well-known examination of Latin American foundational fictions, Doris Sommer posits that nineteenth-century romances constituted allegorical representations of the nation, emphasizing the mutually reinforcing and interchangeable relationship between heterosexual coupling and national consolidation. Although not all of the figurative representations of women in Salvadoran and U.S. Salvadoran narratives function as allegories, they nevertheless attest to a similar reciprocity that exists between the ways Salvadoran women are “plotted” and how the Salvadoran nation is imagined. In other words, by revealing how Salvadoran women have participated in and have had their lives impacted by recent national and transnational developments, these literary depictions also afford insight regarding a changing Salvadoran nation.

In many Salvadoran narratives, women continue to function as national allegories—whether they represent a Salvadoran nation in conflict

and in need of liberation or a postwar nation in transition and decline. Within U.S.-Salvadoran texts that discuss migratory movements and identities, women become the nation left behind by male migrant “heroes” or a nation that must redefine itself in light of its new transnational reality and the incorporation of so many of its citizens into U.S. society. An insistence on women’s roles as “republican mothers” likewise persists in many of these narratives, though refashioned in alternate ways by the discourse of revolution and that of neoliberal progress. Within the left’s project of armed revolution, the notion of individual maternity may have been replaced by a collective or “revolutionary maternity,” as Ileana Rodríguez suggests, yet the function of this female role remained the same: to bring into being and to ideologically shape the citizens of a future liberated nation (163). Under neoliberalism, the stressing of women’s domestic duties as wives and mothers has remained paramount and is a telling development given the rise in Salvadoran women’s participation as “reproducers” in the national and global labor markets.

One can read the recurrent use of women as either national allegories or “republican mothers” in these narratives as exemplary of the problematic way in which women are, once again, symbolically appropriated by nationalist discourses yet “denied any direct relation to national agency” (McClintock 90). In keeping with El Salvador’s recent history and women’s actual participation in the public sphere, however, another reading is possible and more apt. Civil conflict and migration, as well as neoliberal restructuring, have all, to a certain extent, undermined the public and private divide that has been instrumental in regulating women’s roles and restricting their access to male national power. Although perhaps not to the same degree as men and with somewhat serious limitations, Salvadoran women have been and continue to be “public players.” Many—though not all—of the depictions of women rendered in these narratives underscore the centrality and agency women have acquired in national and transnational enterprises while also showcasing or affirming their marginality.

Notably, it is the reworking and undermining of the same traditional constructs of women as national allegories or as “republican mothers” by these writers that allow for this inclusionary and likewise diversifying image to emerge. Representing El Salvador by way of its rural and indigenous women in testimonial narratives of the 1980s highlights one of the country’s most oppressed yet crucial populations during the national conflict. Female protagonists, be they ex-guerrillas or divorced elite housewives who refute or “pervert” the notion of “republican motherhood” in Salvadoran postwar fictions of the 1990s, bring into focus women who are marginalized for not conforming to

expected gendered norms. The portrayals of migrant women laboring in garment factories as well as the quest of second-generation daughters to understand their parents' traumatic past of war reveal the feminization of the Salvadoran migrant nation in U.S. Salvadoran narratives produced in the early 2000s. Far from replicating what Chandra Talpade Mohanty signals as the construct of Third-World women as a homogenous group, the figurative depictions of women elaborated in these trans-Salvadoran narratives invoke the "historically specific material reality of groups of [Salvadoran] women" (259). In so doing, they also constitute "counter-narratives" of nation, as Homi Bhabha suggests, that underscore El Salvador's homogenizing and nationalist "fictions" based on racial, class, and gender differences.

An Emergent Salvadoran (Trans)Nation

An engaging and revelatory view of Salvadoran women's lives is but one aspect of the national "story" elaborated through the symbolic portrayals of women in trans-Salvadoran narratives. As with women's participation in the public sphere, the civil war and the mass migration it spurred also marked a significant turning point in El Salvador's history, giving way to the country's reconfiguration as a "transterritorial nation." The contours of and accessibility to this expanding national space—in effect, a burgeoning transnational community—are still in contention. Cultural and economic ties, including the investments of migrants in local businesses in El Salvador and the familial remittances they send, have made migrants a leading financial resource for their sending country. In spite of this, migrants' rights as Salvadoran citizens, including their ability to vote, remain undecided.⁷ Compounding this situation further are the added effects of increased deportations back to El Salvador of undocumented immigrants and gang youth as well as the complexities of women's involvement in migration and transnational enterprises.

At the same time, identities defined within and across national and ethnic lines as both Salvadoran and Salvadoran-American are taking shape within this emergent community. El Salvador's postwar process of national reconstruction not only has yielded critical views of the new neoliberal reality but also has posited anew questions of identity. In the wake of the war, ex-guerrillas and ex-soldiers, whose subjectivities were defined in reference to the left or right's political projects, have become disenfranchised subjects in search of new ways of belonging and surviving. Migrants, women, sexual minorities, gang youth, and children occupy a similarly precarious position within Salvadoran society. The marginal

status of these others and the new struggles many of these groups have initiated for political representation and basic civil and human rights (women are among the most vocal of these groups) in the postwar period contest official versions of Salvadoran nationhood and identity premised on exclusionary practices and definitions of citizenry.⁸ In the process of broadening what it means to be Salvadoran, these “second-class” citizens are also giving way to alternate communal and individual identities that emphasize the importance of gender difference, sexuality, ethnicity, and migrants’ experiences and contributions.

Despite residing outside El Salvador, the politics of identity formation for Salvadoran immigrants and second-generation Salvadoran-Americans is also largely rooted in Salvadoran nationhood and history, recalling Stuart Hall’s observation that although cultural identities are always in process, they “come from somewhere” (394). Continuing to perceive oneself as Salvadoran—a notion exemplified by the maintaining of emotional, financial, and nationalistic bonds with El Salvador—is an indispensable aspect of the Salvadoran immigrant reality. It provides many Salvadorans living in the United States with a means of ameliorating their feelings of homesickness as well as sense of displacement and alienation as foreign others. For 1.5 and second-generation Salvadorans whose contact with El Salvador has been limited or is nonexistent, establishing a connection with the country from which their parents migrated, including its indigenous roots, and understanding the past of war that prompted such moves are necessary steps in their process of self-individuation as Salvadoran-Americans, and to a larger extent as Latina/os of Central American descent. As is characteristic of the works by the U.S. Salvadoran writers included here, there is also a strong impetus among this group to delineate a more inclusive notion of Salvadoran community, undermining narrow ideals of nationality in both El Salvador and in the United States.

Raymond Williams argues that any given cultural process contains within it both “residual” and “emergent” elements that “are significant both in themselves and in what they reveal of the characteristics of the ‘dominant’” (121–22). In keeping with Williams’s theorization, the figurative representations of women and the trans-Salvadoran narratives examined here evince “residual” elements linked to “dominant” discourses of female agency and nationhood. However, they also encompass “emergent” elements that are suggestive of new meanings, values, practices, and relationships. Beginning with Salvadoran testimonial narratives from the 1980s, spanning postwar fictions of the 1990s, and continuing with the stories of migration and ethnic incorporation into the United States told in U.S. Salvadoran works, these trans-Salvadoran

narratives delineate the contours of an emergent Salvadoran transnational community or (trans)nation in constant transformation. Within this imagined space, neither national sentiments nor partial practices are completely set aside or eroded: all the while, new notions of female subjectivity, transnational action, and cultural identity are contested and posited.

For many of El Salvador's politically committed writers, the polyphonic qualities of testimonial writing—engaging the popular and giving voice to an otherwise silenced collective subject by way of a narrator and interlocutor—provided them with an effective means of communicating the predicament of El Salvador's people during the civil conflict. Previously silenced groups such as rural peasants and women became central, as did the violence and the economic repression they suffered because of El Salvador's oligarchic government and its military forces. As an important ideological weapon and integral part of the left's revolutionary project, these testimonial works likewise emphasized an alternate view of a "liberated" Salvadoran nation and supported the need for armed insurrection. Hence, revealing the plight of rural and urban women in these testimonial works opened a space for counterhegemonic discourses of Salvadoran nationhood and citizenship. Conflicting portrayals of women in Salvadoran postwar fictions evidence not only the variable tensions that surround women's political endeavors with regard to representation and gender equality but also the many searches for identity and political voice (both at the individual and communal levels) that characterize El Salvador's tenuous process of reconstruction. Far from depicting a peaceful and improved postwar society, these narratives point to the imposition of a dominant social and political order marked by neoliberalism that has given way to a precarious reality plagued by violence, injustice, and growing economic disparity. The Salvadorans who inhabit this disaffected world—ex-soldiers, ex-guerrillas, migrants, and women—continue to exist on the edge of the mainstream, destabilizing the fiction of an all-inclusive Salvadoran nationality.

U.S. Salvadoran narratives produced during the same period (1990s–2005) attest to the ways in which mass international migration has affected women's gendered roles as well as the conceptualization of Salvadoran national identity. By depicting women as the wives left behind, as journey takers, and as financial mainstays for their immigrant communities and families, these texts call attention to the redefinition of El Salvador as an imagined transnational community. Through the portrayals of second-generation Salvadoran-American women, these works underscore the forging of new Latina/o identities of Central American origin in the United States. Although they dialogue with

Salvadoran texts, these U.S. Salvadoran narratives also form part of an existing and growing body of U.S. multiethnic literatures. As such, they introduce a Latina/o identity and voice that has been relatively unheard and that has not been previously explored in the same way. They allow for a rethinking of what it means to be Latina/o within the scope of recent waves of immigration from Latin America as opposed to only in reference to established groups such as Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cuban-Americans.

Representing *salvadoreñas*

The trans-Salvadoran narratives included here and their organization across the five chapters that comprise this book follow the periodization of Salvadoran women's public participation in and outside El Salvador over the last three decades and parallel their movement from the point of origin, El Salvador, upward to the United States, and back again, if only through the search for the past that characterizes U.S. Salvadoran texts. The first two chapters allow for a significant and fundamental exploration of the ways in which the civil war created new opportunities for women and redefined them and society, thereby laying a foundation for what would be the future tensions and struggles confronting women in the postwar period. In parallel with the social and historical processes that influenced them, the testimonial works analyzed posit women as allegories of the nation or as "republican mothers" yet in novel ways also capable of transforming and challenging such depictions of women and their lack of national agency. Manlio Argueta's testimonial novels, *Un día en la vida* [*One Day of Life*] (1980) and *Cuzcatlán: Donde bate la Mar del Sur* [*Cuzcatlán: Where the Southern Sea Beats*] (1986), the focus of Chapter 1, relate the social reality of the civil war as experienced by *campesinas*. Through the use of testimonio, Argueta emphasizes the important ways in which rural women became unexpected protagonists in the history of the war—ultimately transforming the conflict as well as themselves. Crucial to this rendering are its allegorical dimensions, in which women are indicative of a Salvadoran peasant nation that has indigenous roots and is, to a certain extent, feminized and empowered. This view of rural female agency and El Salvador stands in contrast to the traditional and exclusionary model of nationhood upheld by the Salvadoran oligarchy and in many respects the one envisioned by the left.

Chapter 2 examines the testimonial narratives of middle-class women who served as female militants or *guerrilleras* in the armed movement, an apt complement to Argueta's portrayals of *campesinas* in that they

underscore the actions and sensibility of women from a different class orientation and urban background whose decision to join the struggle was not motivated by necessity but rather by their political beliefs and orientation. Claribel Alegría and Darwin Flakoll's *No me agarran viva: La mujer salvadoreña en la lucha* [*They Won't Take Me Alive: Salvadorean Women in the Struggle for National Liberation*] (1987), Nidia Díaz's *Nunca estuve sola* [*I Was Never Alone: A Prison Diary from El Salvador*] (1986), and Ana Guadalupe Martínez's *Las cárceles clandestinas de El Salvador: Libertad por el secuestro de un oligarca* [*El Salvador's Clandestine Prisons: Liberty In Exchange for the Kidnapping of an Oligarch*] (1976) are clearly marked by a socialist rhetoric of class-based struggle leading to national liberation and relate the integration and perceived roles of women combatants. Women were expected to carry out their duties as loyal militants to the cause without forgoing their responsibilities as wives and mothers given that the understanding of nationhood promoted by El Salvador's leftist groups still promoted the role of women as physical and symbolic bearers of the nation. In these testimonial narratives, what surfaces alongside the innovative constructions of female subjectivity and militancy constructed by Alegría and Flakoll, Díaz, and Martínez is an alternate project of nation building and "republican motherhood" dictated by socialist ideals. In their attempt to espouse a more egalitarian view of female agency and nationhood, these texts also disclose the limitations of such propositions.

Chapter 3 is both a bridge and a jumping-off point for looking at women's endeavors following the civil conflict and the shifting national context in the postwar period. Contending depictions of women in Horacio Castellanos Moya's novel *La diabla en el espejo* [*The She-Devil in the Mirror*] (2000) and in the short stories "La noche de los escritores asesinos" [The Night of the Murderous Writers] (1997) by Jacinta Escudos and "Vaca" [Cow] (1999) and "Mediodía de frontera" [Midday Border] (2002) by Claudia Hernández are at once a poignant indictment of the failings of the neoliberal project of national reconstruction and a key space for exploring the new battles facing women. Like Argueta's testimonial novels, in Castellanos Moya's text women function as an allegory for the nation—one that is corrupt and steadily in decline. A direct correlation exists between women who refuse to behave properly—that is, assume their roles as faithful wives and dedicated mothers—and a fraudulent social and political neoliberal order. By contrast, the depictions of female subjectivity and agency in Escudos's and Hernández's stories offer a different perspective. Both of these authors challenge Castellanos Moya's limited and figurative use of women by problematizing and, in some instances, rejecting traditional notions of women as national allegories

and “republican mothers.” The search by these women for cultural and political representation is symptomatic of the broader quests for identity, at both the individual and communal levels, that characterize El Salvador’s postwar period.

The last two chapters continue the discussions initiated in the previous three chapters while also showcasing the social reality of women as immigrants and second-generation Salvadoran-Americans in U.S. Salvadoran texts that form part of El Salvador’s cultural process and also constitute a new subgroup of U.S. Latino literatures.⁹ Chapter 4 centers on texts that portray the Salvadoran migratory experience, namely Mario Bencastro’s *Odisea del Norte* [*Odyssey to the North*] (1999) and the spoken-word poetry of Leticia Hernández-Linares. Debated in these texts is the role of women in migration and transnational community building, enterprises influenced not only by the legacy of war but also by current debates in El Salvador on migrants’ rights and women’s liberation. Bencastro’s text exemplifies this transnational reality through the portrayal of a male-dominated migratory process in which women constitute either disempowered migrants or dependent wives (allegories for the Salvadoran nation left behind). While speaking of the difficulties migrants confront as they negotiate their liminal status and ethnic categorization as Latinos in the United States through the gendered idealization of their homeland, this particular emblematic rendering of women is suggestive of the patriarchal underpinnings of Salvadoran migration and, by extension, transnational community building. In her chapbook of poetry, *Razor Edges of my Tongue* (2002), Hernández-Linares affords a more women-centered view of migration, highlighting the cultural and financial contributions of female migrants and the need to rethink Salvadoran identity in light of transnational familial ties, cultural practices, and ethnic-based individuation. Hernández-Linares’s poetic renderings evince an inclusionary understanding of female migrant participation and the struggles these women face given their gender and, in many cases, their undocumented status.

Marcos McPeck Villatoro’s Romilia Chacón mystery series—*Home Killings* (2001), *Minos* (2003), and *A Venom beneath the Skin* (2005)—is the subject of Chapter 5. By way of his depiction of Romilia Chacón, a Latina with both southern and Salvadoran roots, McPeck Villatoro not only redefines the allegorical representation of “woman as nation” that characterizes other trans-Salvadoran narratives but also, in many ways, moves away from it altogether. The result is a unique portrait of female agency and Salvadoran migration to the United States that addresses the construction of ethnic identities and gendered subjectivities. Romilia may be representative of the Salvadoran nation, but it is one that has been

incorporated into the United States, much like an immigrant population and its second generations that have begun to establish themselves as part of a U.S.-based multicultural landscape. Nevertheless, ties to the homeland remain crucial. McPeck Villatoro expounds the complexities of Salvadoran-American and, by extension, Central American-American identities through not only Romilia's performance of Salvadoranness but also her "detection" of El Salvador's hidden past of civil conflict and growing understanding of the diverse indigenous ethnicities that comprise the Central American region. Her pursuit of a Guatemalan-American adversary, although an integral aspect of this unearthing of history, also allows for a way of coming to terms with the traumas and lack of justice associated with such a past.

With its analysis of women in the broader context of an emergent "trans-Salvadoran" sense of nation, this book exemplifies the fact that "[w]omen are both of and not of the nation" as Norma Alarcón, Caren Kaplan, and Minoq Moallem write in the introduction to *Between Woman and Nation* (12). As such, this book seeks to add to debates regarding female agency and the positionalities of women within and beyond the Salvadoran national imaginary—one that is, likewise, in constant transformation. El Salvador's recent history, a complicated cross-section of national and transnational processes, affords a fruitful site of exploration for such questions, giving way to a nuanced and lacking discussion centered on Salvadoran and Salvadoran-American female subjectivities. Similarly, it expands current understandings of the gendered dynamics that mark civil war, neoliberal reconstruction, international migration, transnational community building, and the interrelationships that define these developments.

Engaging these matters by way of Salvadoran and U.S. Salvadoran narratives calls attention to a growing body of literary production that has received scant critical attention, with the exception of Salvadoran literature produced during the war (1990–1992). In so doing, this book also provides a needed intervention with regard to the analysis of Central American cultural production and identity. Women's literary portrayals in trans-Salvadoran narratives engage and contribute to a broader understanding of transnational Central American identities and that of Central American-American ethnicities within the broader scope of a U.S. Latino imaginary. The complex portrait of *salvadoreñas* that follows is thus an introduction, a preliminary point of departure, if you will, for burgeoning debates with regard to Central American and Central American-American notions of womanhood, nation, identity, and cultural representation.