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Cultural Logics of Belonging and Movement: Transnationalism, Naturalization, and U.S. Immigration Politics

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Cultural logics of belonging and movement:

Transnationalism, naturalization, and U.S. immigration politics

ABSTRACT

In the United States, unprecedented high numbers of naturalization applicants, the adoption of restrictive immigration policies, changing demographics, and the 1996 presidential election coalesced in the mid-1990s to make naturalization simultaneously a high priority and problematic. Salvadorans who had immigrated during the 1980s and who were still struggling for the opportunity to naturalize were caught up in these dynamics. A juxtaposition of their struggles against exclusion and of naturalization ceremonies' rhetoric of inclusion elucidates complex and paradoxical connections between naturalization and transnationalism.

[immigration, naturalization, transnationalism, politics, identity, the United States, El Salvador]

As a nation of immigrants in which nativism flourishes (Higham 1974; Sánchez 1997), the United States has long had a complex relationship with the migrants who enter its territory. Migrants are desired as laborers but are excluded from certain public benefits (Calavita 1996; Huber and Espenshade 1997), praised for contributing to society but suspected of maintaining disparate loyalties (Calavita 2000; Chavez 2001; Starn 1986), seen as evidence that the United States is superior to other nations yet condemned as a challenge to national sovereignty (Sassen 1996), and both celebrated and denigrated for weaving diverse cultural heritages into the national fabric (Johnson et al. 1997; Perea 1997). In the mid-1990s, these tensions came to the fore in searing debates over where to place legal and other boundaries around those who would be included in the nation. In California, Proposition 187, which required educators, physicians, and other service providers to identify and report suspected illegal aliens, was overwhelmingly approved by the California electorate (see Martin 1995). In 1996, Congress passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), which stiffened border enforcement and made it more difficult for undocumented immigrants to legalize their presence. Other restrictive immigration measures, such as denying citizenship to the U.S.-born children of undocumented immigrants, were also considered (Chock 1999). At the same time, these more restrictive immigration policies, unprecedented numbers of naturalization applicants, changing demographics, and the 1996 presidential election coalesced to make naturalization a national priority (Baker 1997).¹ Thus, in 1996, President Clinton launched Citizenship USA, a drive to naturalize one million legal permanent residents in a single year. By the mid-1990s, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) was holding mass naturalization ceremonies in which as many as 2,000–5,000 legal permanent residents simultaneously took the oath of citizenship. Both the adoption of restrictive measures and the celebration of naturalization shed light on the meanings of exclusion from and inclusion in the U.S. polity.

These seemingly contrary trends—the adoption of restrictive policies and the promotion of naturalization—are linked to what scholars have described as a disjuncture between the realities of global interdependency, on the one hand, and the official models of incorporation in countries such as

the United States, on the other hand (Guarnizo 1998; Portes 1997). The adoption of restrictive policies may be a response to the increased international movements of persons, goods, and ideas that accompany globalization. As financial systems and labor markets become global, corporations move to take advantage of differentials in labor costs and workers move from capital-poor to capital-rich countries to take service-sector and other jobs (Hamilton and Chinchilla 1991; Harvey 1989; Kearney 1986; Menjívar 2000; Ong et al. 1994; Sassen 1991). Migrant workers become, in a sense, resources for their countries of origin. Not only do many send remittances to family members back home (Menjívar et al. 1998), but they also become a focus of transnational political organizing with some potential to influence policies in both their countries of residence and origin (Guarnizo 1998; Itzigsohn 2000). Naturalization drives can be key to such organizing, as naturalization confers voting rights and can further ethnicity- or nationality-based politicking. Nonetheless, in the United States, official models of naturalization presume that immigration consists of leaving one society and joining another (making a “clean break”; cf. Smith 1998; Yngvesson 1997) and that naturalization creates equivalent and generic citizen-subjects. Moreover, for migrants’ decisions to naturalize to be seen as voluntary (and therefore legitimate), one has to presume a sort of free market of citizenship, in which migrants select the nation whose social system best permits them to develop their personal talents. Such presumptions ignore the international relationships and inequities that propel migration, downplay the incommensurability of migrants’ histories, and legitimize immigration systems that constitute some migrants as illegal and therefore exploitable (Jenkins 1978; but see Delgado 1993).

To examine the seeming disjuncture between transnationalism and nation-based forms of membership, I juxtapose the U.S. immigration history of Salvadorans and the celebration of Americanization, choice, and nation-building that characterized mass naturalization ceremonies held in Los Angeles in 1996 and 1997. Many Salvadorans wanted to naturalize but, in part because of the adoption of more restrictive policies in 1996, were not eligible to do so. These two contexts are interlinked in numerous ways. Salvadorans—among whom I have been doing fieldwork since the mid-1980s—began entering the United States in large numbers following the onset of the Salvadoran civil war in 1980. A relatively recent and initially largely undocumented immigrant group, Salvadorans experienced the difficulties of living in the United States without legal status or with temporary legal status (for instance, permission to remain in the country while an asylum application was pending). These migrants’ experiences of exclusion led many to desire not only legal permanent residency but also naturalization, as a means of guaranteeing their rights in the United States, securing the ability to travel internationally (particularly, to reenter the United States if they left), acquiring a greater po-

litical voice, and improving their ability to petition for the legalization or immigration of family members. During the mid-1990s, Salvadoran community organizations in the United States therefore promoted naturalization and voter registration on the part of eligible immigrants. Immigrants’ anxiety over their legal rights—an anxiety that was widespread during the mid-1990s because of California Proposition 187 and IIRIRA—fueled these naturalization drives and was one factor leading to record numbers of naturalization applicants during that period. Despite the political context, the naturalization ceremonies that actually produced large numbers of new citizens during that time attributed naturalization to immigrants’ desire for Americanization, their choice of the United States over their country of origin, and the need of the United States to be renewed through immigrants’ enthusiasm and “new blood.” Examining the rhetoric of the ceremonies therefore reveals the disconnect between the assumption that naturalization is about Americanization, choice, and nation-building and the broader context that led immigrants to naturalize in large numbers—and that also prevented some would-be citizens from naturalizing.

By juxtaposing Salvadorans’ struggles for U.S. residency with the rhetoric of mass naturalization ceremonies, this article makes three contributions to analyzing the disjuncture between transmigration (Schiller et al. 1995) and national membership. First, though they seem incommensurable, national forms of membership can be put in service of transnational goals. Thus, Salvadoran activists’ promotion of naturalization and voter registration sought not only to increase Latinos’ political clout in the United States but also to affect U.S. immigration policies in ways that would aid El Salvador. Moreover, given the trends toward dollarization and dual nationality in Latin America and increasing dependency on migrant labor in the United States (Portes et al. 1999), naturalization can be a way of furthering international integration rather than merely transferring migrants’ allegiance from one nation to another. Second, this juxtaposition suggests that immigrants’ full legal inclusion is limited by the forms of personhood that citizen-subjects can recognizably assume. Naturalization ceremonies celebrate the creation and incorporation of new citizen-subjects, but these subjects are created by (ritually) erasing histories and rendering difference generic. Such moves may contradict both migrants’ understandings of their own identities and the ethnicity- and nationality-based organizing that promotes (and seeks to benefit from) naturalization. Third, although it presumes the sovereignty and choice-making capacity of both the naturalizing subject and the nation-state that naturalizes, naturalization can be linked to a lack of alternatives and to interdependency. Thus, individuals may naturalize not only out of a desire to become Americans but also because they feel that, as noncitizens, their rights are in jeopardy. As this article will

demonstrate, although the disjuncture between nation-based forms of membership and transnational linkages is profound, there are also ways in which each of these cultural logics serves or is redefined by the other.

My analysis begins with the case of Salvadoran immigrants, focusing on how the politics of immigration reform prioritized and defined naturalization for some would-be citizens. Next, I examine the ritual and rhetoric of naturalization ceremonies, identifying disjunctures between the broader context that fueled the celebration of naturalization in the mid-1990s and the models of subjecthood, nationhood, and citizen-state relations that were ritually enacted as new citizens were produced. Finally, I reexamine these disjunctures, linking my analysis of the case of Salvadorans and the rhetoric of naturalization ceremonies to the literature on the gap between national memberships and global interconnections. This reexamination reveals that, although the logics of national membership and of global interdependencies are at odds, transnational interconnections can promote and be furthered by individuals' placement in the very national membership categories that deny these interconnections.

Migration and exclusion: The case of Salvadorans

Migration from El Salvador to the United States is a good example of both the ways that global forces compel movement and the ways that nation-based categories restrict membership. Migration between El Salvador and the United States is embedded in geopolitical, economic, and sociocultural ties between the two countries. Perhaps the most significant of these ties is U.S. support for the Salvadoran government during the 1980–92 Salvadoran civil war. During the 1980s, the Reagan administration defined the conflict in El Salvador as part of a broader struggle between communism and democracy and provided over \$1 million a day to assist Salvadoran forces in their fight against guerrilla insurgents. Some observers attribute the prolongation of this conflict, which soon reached a military stalemate, precisely to U.S. support. By 1985, political violence had displaced 27 percent of the Salvadoran population (Kaye 1997), and reports published during the mid- to late 1980s estimated the Salvadoran population in the United States at 500,000 to 800,000 (Aguayo and Fagen 1988; Ruggles et al. 1985), and even as high as one million (Montes Mozo and Garcia Vasquez 1988). In addition to military support, investment and development aid from the United States to El Salvador has been extensive (Hamilton and Chinchilla 1991). As Saskia Sassen (1989) has pointed out, investment and development aid facilitate migration by displacing workers from their traditional occupations, paving the way for ties between potential migrants and potential employers (e.g., U.S. managers who might seek nannies or other workers) and familiarizing workers with the country from which investment

or development aid originates. Such ties have also forged strong social and cultural connections between the United States and El Salvador. In short, geopolitical concerns, capital flows, the transnationalization of labor markets, cultural diffusion, and social interconnections have contributed to migration from El Salvador to the United States.

Migration between El Salvador and the United States also exemplifies the gap between global forces that compel movement and nation-based categories that restrict membership. Although their movements are embedded in processes that transcend national boundaries, Salvadoran immigrants have been treated by the U.S. government as members of a single nation—El Salvador—and therefore regarded as aliens. Because of the difficulties of obtaining visas, most Salvadorans who immigrated to the United States during the war years did so without the permission of the U.S. government. The Reagan administration defined these migrants as deportable economic immigrants rather than as persecution victims who deserved asylum in the United States. In 1986, only 2.6 percent of the asylum applications filed by Salvadorans were approved, in contrast to higher approval rates for applicants fleeing communist countries.² By the early 1990s, continued human rights abuses in El Salvador and the *American Baptist Churches v. Thornburgh* (ABC) lawsuit, which charged that the U.S. government discriminated against Salvadoran and Guatemalan asylum seekers, garnered Salvadorans the right to apply for asylum under special rules and 18 months of Temporary Protected Status (TPS), followed by several years of Deferred Enforced Departure Status (DED). These temporary statuses, however, did not permit recipients to leave and reenter the United States (without first obtaining special authorization from the INS), become legal permanent residents, naturalize, or petition for relatives to immigrate. In the mid-1990s, restrictionist sentiment in the United States grew, producing IIRIRA, which made legalization more difficult for undocumented immigrants.³ The approximately 300 thousand Salvadorans and Guatemalans who had applied for political asylum through the ABC settlement agreement found that they were not only unlikely to obtain asylum (because of peace accords that ended civil conflict in both countries) but other avenues of legalization also were closed or greatly restricted. In 1997, Congress passed the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA), which restored these migrants' eligibility for a form of legalization known as suspension of deportation.⁴ Nonetheless, according to one estimate from the INS asylum division, it could take as long as 20 years to adjudicate all of the applications for U.S. residency under NACARA. In the meantime, these applicants are still aliens who lack permanent membership in the U.S. polity.

Their experiences of transnational migration and legal exclusion have shaped Salvadoran immigrants' senses of their actual and desired positioning within the United

States. My description of their understandings is based on fieldwork conducted in Los Angeles between 1995 and 1997, a period when restrictionist sentiment peaked and immigration reform was implemented. Fieldwork entailed observing the legal services programs of three major Central American community organizations in Los Angeles, attending some 129 proceedings in U.S. immigration court, following Salvadoran immigrants' campaigns for legal permanent residency, and interviewing 90 legal service providers, community activists, and Central Americans with pending legalization claims. Here I draw on interviews with members of the latter two groups. The activists were predominantly Salvadorans who had supported popular struggles in El Salvador, immigrated during the civil war, and participated in solidarity work in the United States. Most activists were legal permanent residents or naturalized U.S. citizens; a few of the younger activists were U.S.-born Salvadoran college students. Most of the activists also were men, although I made a point of seeking interviews with Salvadoran women who had assumed leadership roles in the solidarity movement or in advocacy work on behalf of Central American immigrants. I met Central Americans with pending legalization claims through community organizations and through several immigration attorneys who worked for nonprofit organizations. Most of these interviewees had immigrated to the United States during the civil war and had applied for political asylum through the ABC settlement agreement. A few had immigrated too late to qualify for the ABC settlement or had missed application deadlines. Some interviewees with pending cases had sympathized with the left during the civil war, a few with the right, and most with neither side in the conflict. My sample of individuals with pending legalization claims was fairly evenly divided between men and women; most did low-income work in construction, child-care, housecleaning, the garment sector, and the service industry.

Regardless of their prior political affiliations, Salvadoran interviewees feared that they would never be regarded as full members of the U.S. polity. Citing the passage of California Proposition 187 and widespread anti-immigrant sentiment, interviewees complained that Latinos were being blamed for social problems that were not of their making. To illustrate the obstacles that Latinos faced in securing acceptance, several interviewees told me of a local mayor whose Hispanic appearance and dilapidated vehicle had led INS officials to conclude that he was an illegal alien. Interviewees linked immigration and racial discrimination to economic marginalization, noting that immigrants and Latinos (categories that they saw as interconnected) took the lowest paying and least desirable jobs. Interviewees who had held professional positions in El Salvador described the economic deprivation they had suffered on immigrating. Gregorio Orozco, who had been a professor in El Salvador and who, at the time of our interview, worked as a janitor in

Los Angeles, saw marginalization as spatialized along class and racial lines. Describing Latinos as "second-class citizens," Gregorio criticized the overcrowding and disrepair of buses and other public services in his neighborhood of North Hollywood, as compared with Beverly Hills. Overwhelmingly, interviewees characterized restrictive immigration policies and anti-immigrant sentiment as directed against minorities in general rather than immigrants in particular.

Although they feared that it might not secure their *full* inclusion in the United States, interviewees saw naturalization as potentially strengthening their ties with their communities of origin. Thus, paradoxically, naturalization, which is accomplished by formally renouncing ties to another state, can reinforce transnational connections. Interviewees—most of whom stated that they would like to naturalize, if permitted to do so—said that they wanted U.S. citizenship to gain the freedom to travel internationally, the ability to petition for undocumented relatives, the right to vote, and better retirement benefits. Some pointed out that, as legal residents or U.S. citizens, they would be better connected to families and communities abroad than they were as asylum applicants who jeopardized their applications if they left the United States. One asylum applicant stated, "The day that I receive [legal permanent residency] papers, that very day, I'm catching a plane to go to El Salvador again. It's been 11 years since I've seen my parents." Few interviewees saw legalization primarily as choosing the United States over El Salvador. Even those who saw their futures in the United States depicted this vision as a *de facto* reality rather than as an overt choice. For instance, one ABC asylum applicant told me, "I think that if I have been living here for 12 years, I work here, I pay my taxes, then I live *here*. I don't have anything to do with El Salvador. I have to do with here, where I work, with this country."

Moreover—and consistent with the globalization literature's emphasis on the forces that compel movement—most interviewees suggested that they had had no alternative but to immigrate and then to seek permanent residency and U.S. citizenship. Given the violence and economic devastation of the Salvadoran civil war, it is not surprising that many interviewees characterized migration as a necessity. One activist, for example, insisted, "We [Salvadorans] didn't want to be here just because we want to, [because] we love the United States, or just because you can go to Disneyland. . . . So you came here for a necessity. Either, you leave your country, or you're going to be one of the statistics of the deaths." Interviewees also stated that the difficulties of living without papers had made them apply for TPS and political asylum.⁵ One asylum applicant, for example, explained why he had applied for TPS instead of remaining undocumented: "It was not a question of choosing or not choosing, it was something that had to be done. Because one couldn't be hidden forever." Both activists and nonactivists noted that the more restrictive immigration policies adopted in

1996 had sharpened distinctions between U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents and had made naturalization necessary to safeguard legal rights. As one Salvadoran asylum applicant put it, "The way things are going, in the future, the [legal permanent] residents will be treated like illegals."

Although naturalization has largely been construed legally as a transfer of allegiance, interviewees' descriptions of their relationships to the United States and to El Salvador articulated an *additive* model of citizenship. According to this model, national membership is not exclusive, individuals can acquire multiple citizenships, and these multiple ties can be both meaningful to individuals and manifested through social practices and relations. Thus, as they sought to acquire permanent residency and citizenship in the United States, many interviewees (but not all—see above and see Mahler 1998) also maintained an identification with El Salvador. One member of a Salvadoran organization that is promoting citizenship and civic participation commented, "Becoming citizens, we don't lose anything. We remain Salvadoran at heart." Such comments depicted legal citizenship as a formality that could leave other measures of membership and identity untouched. Interviewees suggested, for example, that regardless of legal citizenship, "Salvadoran-ness" was an immutable fact of nature, conferred by birth on Salvadoran soil, relationship to Salvadoran family members, and having Salvadoran blood.⁶ One young man (who was a naturalized U.S. citizen) told me, "A Salvadoran is born, not made. Being Salvadoran is your culture, your family, your grandmother who is still in El Salvador and who writes all the time." These comments suggest that interviewees, many of whom hoped one day to naturalize, saw U.S. citizenship as *adding to* rather than replacing their national allegiances. In fact, El Salvador permits dual citizenship, so naturalization does not strip Salvadorans of their former allegiance—although not all interviewees were aware that this is the case. Such dual (or multiple) identities and affiliations are common among recent immigrants, who, regardless of their geographic mobility (Popkin 1999), orient their lives around multiple local and national realities (Goldring 1998; Guarnizo 1997, 1998; Schiller and Fouron 1999; Smith 1998).

To obtain permanent residency, counter restrictionist immigration policies, and promote the well-being of their families and communities in El Salvador, Salvadoran immigrant community organizations promoted naturalization, voter registration, and alliances with other ethnicity- and nationality-based groups in the United States. At numerous meetings of community organizations in 1996 and 1997, I heard activists urge Central Americans to encourage eligible relatives to apply for naturalization. At a meeting with ABC class members in 1996, a staff member of the Association of Salvadorans of Los Angeles (ASOSAL) explained this strategy. The speaker told those present that "20,000 people became citizens here in Los Angeles last month" and that individuals from ASOSAL had gone to the swearing-in

ceremonies to register the new citizens to vote. He stressed, "We can't vote because we aren't citizens yet, but this is a way for us to register our opinions and to increase our impact."⁷ The staff member noted that one of the people who went along to register voters had never applied for TPS or DED and "didn't have a single paper, not even a social security card. But, by registering voters, this person had an impact." Another ASOSAL staff member reinforced the speaker's analysis, commenting, "We need Salvadorans who are citizens. Those who are citizens are key to our efforts."

As they promoted naturalization and voter registration, Central American community groups also engaged in ethnicity- and nationality-based organizing. Several organizations, for example, floated the idea of asking the Los Angeles City Council to name a particular neighborhood in Los Angeles Little El Salvador or Little Central America. Like Korea Town, Chinatown, and Little Tokyo, such an ethnicization or nationalization of public space would legitimize Central Americans' claims to local—and thus legal—residency. Similarly, some community organizations have sought to institutionalize the annual Central American Independence Day parade. Like Take Back the Night marches or Catholic and Protestant processions in Belfast (Feldman 1991), parades can claim both territory and time. Both of these claims are explicit in an ASOSAL staff member's description of the Central American parade: "[Mexico]'s independence is on the 16th, and only the Central American countries are on the 15th. And in East L.A. [the Mexican community], they focus on that date, and on this side, where the Central American community supposedly is, we focus on the 15th." Similarly, another activist stressed the importance of "institutionalizing certain dates for our community. . . . Within a few years it would be good if there were a couple of days that were recognized in the city as 'Days of So-and-So.' So that we can succeed getting these celebrated in the schools and elsewhere." In fact, because of the efforts of a new organization, the Salvadoran American National Association (SANA), the L.A. City Council has declared August 6, *el día del salvadoreño*, Salvadoran Day. Activists also sought to create Salvadoran voting blocks and to identify Salvadorans who could run for public office.

Securing immigration benefits for the U.S. Salvadoran population was, at least in part, a transnational political strategy. Claims to space, presence, and membership rights not only sought to increase Central Americans' political clout in the United States but also to affect El Salvador. During the 1980s, Salvadorans sought refugee status in the United States both as a means of preventing deportations and to obtain U.S. recognition of human rights abuses being committed in El Salvador. Activists hoped that such recognition would make it difficult for the U.S. government to send assistance to the Salvadoran government and that, without such assistance, the war would end with either a negotiated

settlement or a guerrilla victory. After the signing of peace accords, community activists continued to seek legal residency, but as immigrants rather than as refugees. Activists argued that permanent residency would prevent potentially destabilizing mass deportations and permit Salvadorans to continue to support their family members and home communities by working in the United States. This argument was made not only by Salvadoran activists but also—and perhaps more remarkably—by Salvadoran officials. Well aware of the economic significance of the U.S. Salvadoran population, which in 2000 sent \$1.7 billion in remittances to El Salvador, Salvadoran officials have also urged U.S. officials to grant permanent residency to Salvadoran immigrants and have encouraged Salvadorans to take advantage of legalization opportunities such as ABC and NACARA.

The immigration strategies pursued by Salvadoran immigrants, activists, and officials are far from unique. Researchers have noted that discrimination has led migrants to identify with their countries of both residence and origin (Goldring 1998; Schiller and Fournon 1999) and to naturalize as a means of securing rights in the United States (Guarnizo 1998). Like that of El Salvador, the governments of other countries of emigration (such as Mexico, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic) have encouraged their citizens to legalize in the United States (Foner 1997; Guarnizo 1997) and have lobbied the U.S. government for immigration benefits for their citizens (Popkin 1999). At the same time, these governments have redefined citizenship in ways that permit their citizens to have dual or multiple allegiances and have developed policies and programs to incorporate émigrés into national life “at home” (Goldring 1998; Guarnizo 1997, 1998; Guarnizo and Smith 1998; Landolt et al. 1999; Smith 1998). The prevalence of such strategies suggests that sending states are defining émigrés as resources that can provide much needed infusions of U.S. dollars and can sometimes influence U.S. policies vis-à-vis their countries of origin (Guarnizo 1998). These processes, which, according to some scholars, make states transterritorial (Goldring 1998; Guarnizo 1998; Schiller and Fournon 1999; Smith 1998), have given naturalization new meanings. Rather than signaling a clean break in allegiance from one country to another, naturalization can add a national affiliation to preexisting ones, preserve migrants’ abilities to remit, and give sending countries a voting constituency through which to influence U.S. policy makers. Why then, did naturalization become a national priority in the United States even as restrictive immigration measures were being adopted? What does naturalization mean to the receiving nation?

Naturalization as a national priority

In the mid-1990s, a number of factors converged to make naturalization a priority in the United States. First, by mid-1995, most of the 2.7 million individuals who legalized

through IRCA had completed the five-year residency requirement that made them eligible for citizenship (Paral 1995). Second, restrictive immigration measures, such as IIRIRA and other reforms that limited noncitizens’ access to public benefits may have spurred the naturalization of immigrants who otherwise would have remained legal permanent residents (Paral 1995; Sánchez 1997).⁸ Third, community organizations around the United States promoted naturalization through drives that included lessons on civics, assistance in completing applications, and preparation for examinations and interviews (Immigrant Policy Project of the State and Local Coalition on Immigration 1996). Fourth, the Mexican government considered and eventually adopted constitutional changes that permitted dual nationality (Guarnizo 1998). This development encouraged Mexican immigrants, who have traditionally naturalized at lower-than-average rates, to apply for U.S. citizenship. Fifth, in 1992, the INS instituted a green card replacement program. Some green card holders may have chosen to naturalize rather than to replace their green cards (Immigration and Naturalization Service 1999).

By 1995, the INS was facing a processing backlog of 700,000 naturalization applications (Immigrant Policy Project of the State and Local Coalition on Immigration 1996), and applicants were experiencing waits of six months to more than a year between submitting their applications and taking the oath of allegiance (see also NatzNews 1998). Immigrant rights groups complained that the INS was directing too many of its resources to border enforcement and too few to naturalization. In response to these pressures, President Clinton launched Citizenship USA, an effort to naturalize one million citizens in 1996. As part of this effort, the INS streamlined its naturalization procedures, exempting certain elderly legal permanent residents from English language tests, holding citizenship interviews at community organizations’ offices, and generally promoting naturalization. This naturalization drive was successful, as 1,044,689 individuals were naturalized during 1996. In contrast, during the previous five years, the average number of individuals naturalized per year was 357,037 (Immigration and Naturalization Service 1999). The naturalization drive was not uncontroversial, however. Republican Party leaders accused Clinton of simply trying to create more Democratic voters before the November 1996 presidential election. Errors in the processing of applications—such as its failure to review the criminal records of all naturalization applicants—led the INS to reexamine its procedures, limit the entities authorized to fingerprint individuals filing INS forms, and revoke some new citizens’ naturalization (Wilgoren 1998). Community organizations came under fire for allegedly completing and mailing in voter registration cards for individuals who had not yet naturalized. The 1996 election of Loretta Sanchez to the U.S. House of Representatives was (unsuccessfully) challenged by her opponent, Robert

Dornan, on the grounds that some of the votes Sanchez received were cast by immigrants who were not yet naturalized. In 1997, the number of individuals naturalized dropped significantly, to 598,225, even though the number of naturalization applications filed in 1997 was 1,412,712, up from 1,277,403 in 1996 (Immigration and Naturalization Service 1999).

This overview of naturalization trends, in conjunction with the foregoing description of migrants' legalization strategies, explains why naturalization came to be a national priority, albeit a controversial one. It does not convey, however, how the ceremonies that actually produced new citizens addressed the anxieties regarding racial and ethnic discrimination, migrants' rights, and international interdependency that, in part, fueled these ceremonies. I therefore turn now to the rhetoric of these ceremonies, noting the remarkable *absence* of explicit reference to the broader political context in which they occurred. In essence, the issues that concerned Salvadorans who desired to naturalize disappeared within the ceremonies themselves. Despite this absence, the ceremonies' attention to diversity, valorization of choice, and insistence on the sovereignty of the receiving nation suggest that, like Salvadoran immigrants' struggle against legal exclusion, these ceremonies were part of broader debates over the meanings of difference, membership, and the nation. The contrasts between the logics of belonging put forward by Salvadoran interviewees and by U.S. officials during these ceremonies illustrate the disjuncture between transnational migration and nation-based models of membership.

Naturalization ceremonies

I first attended a mass naturalization ceremony in February 1996, when Salvadoran community activists asked me to join them outside the Los Angeles Convention Center to help newly naturalized citizens register to vote.⁹ In nine ceremonies taking place over three days, some 30 thousand new citizens were naturalized. Imagine the setting. The already clogged freeways that converged near downtown Los Angeles were further congested by as many as 5,000 naturalization applicants and their family members attempting to arrive for an 8:00 a.m. ceremony. After parking in crowded parking structures, candidates raced to the proper convention hall, a huge facility usually used for conferences or trade expositions, where they lined up at a doorway labeled *New Citizens*. Security guards checked their appointment notices and directed accompanying family members to the visitor section, which was partitioned off by yellow security tape. The new citizens were ushered to their seats, where each found a little U.S. flag and a booklet containing a copy of the citizenship oath and the U.S. Constitution. The only decoration in the room was a giant U.S. flag, and the only signage pointed to the restrooms. Soon, the new citizens

were directed to turn in their green cards at one of the numbered tables that lined the walls of the room. Meanwhile, family members in the visitor section strained with video cameras to glimpse the applicants. This part of the process took over an hour, as the 2,000–5,000 candidates for citizenship filed up to the tables and back to their seats.

Suddenly the tedium was interrupted by the sound of a gavel. A court clerk announced, "Please rise, this court is now in session." A motion to admit the candidates to citizenship was quickly made by an INS official and granted by a judge, and the new citizens cheered, applauded, and, on cue, waved their flags. The oath of allegiance was administered, and the judge and an INS official made remarks. Any members of the armed forces who were naturalizing were singled out for commendation. The new citizens watched a video extolling the United States, and an INS official led all present in singing the national anthem. The clerk led the new citizens in the pledge of allegiance, and the ceremony concluded. The visitors were ushered out so that the new citizens could receive their naturalization certificates, after which they emerged from the convention center to face well-wishers, vendors hawking souvenirs, and volunteers carrying clipboards with voter registration forms.

During 1996 and 1997, I attended ten such naturalization ceremonies at the L.A. Convention Center. Although this may appear to be a small sample, these ceremonies were fairly standardized, and I found that there were occasions when the same judge officiated and gave the same speech that he or she had given previously. Six judges presided over these ten ceremonies: a white woman, a Chinese American man, and four white men. One was the son of an immigrant, another was a naturalized U.S. citizen, and two stated that their families had been in the United States since the signing of the U.S. Constitution. As rituals, these ceremonies—like the term *naturalization* (Anderson 1983:145)—were remarkable. They fluctuated between the tedium of bureaucratic processing and the mysticism of a religious conversion. To examine how these rites produced citizens—and the nation—I turn now to the rhetoric of the ceremonies themselves. I focus on (1) how ceremonies tried to create similarity out of difference; (2) ways that ceremonies contrasted "birth" and "choice" as two methods of becoming American; and (3) how ceremonies configured nations as members of an international community. These three problematics emerged as central themes within the ceremonies and also are germane to broader debates over the degree to which immigrants assimilate, the bases for conferring citizenship, and the relationship between immigration and national sovereignty.

Identity and difference

One focus of naturalization ceremonies was the meaning of diversity. Diversity is linked to the disjuncture between transnationalism and the nation-state in that, if migrants

are transnational beings—as Salvadoran interviewees asserted—then presumably they maintain some degree of foreignness, adding U.S. nationality to their preexisting allegiances. On the other hand, state-based categories of membership have traditionally been assumed to be exclusive, and in the United States, “difference” has taken the form of a private ethnic affiliation rather than a public national one. According to Greenhouse, negotiating the public and private meanings of *difference* requires

the mythicization of identities—for example, ethnic and racial identities—as categorical personifications of “difference.” This mythic operation, which in the United States makes key differences generic, and generic in the same way, is what makes a construction such as “the melting pot” (for example) conceivable. [1996:217; see also Chock 1995]

Applying this insight to the conferral of citizenship through law rather than through birth suggests that in these ceremonies naturalization privatized, homogenized, and tamed what might otherwise be characterized as disruptive foreign differences and thus created generic public citizens (see also Asad 1990; Gilroy 1987). In other words, naturalization—in the United States, at least—is simultaneously a ritual denaturalization, a stripping away of the public, legal character of difference defined as membership in a foreign state. Such denaturalization reconstitutes difference as private and therefore as a source of commonality or something that everyone has. Naturalizing difference makes it possible for foreigners to acquire new and equivalent legal personae.

Officials at these ceremonies frequently remarked on the diversity of the new citizens. For example, scanning the crowd, one judge commented, “I see that many of you come from so many different countries around the world.” This remark suggested that difference is transparent, something that can be read or seen by any observer. In contrast, an INS official who addressed those assembled described diversity through statistics, stating, “You represent 123 nations throughout the world. This is the testimony to the diversity of our nation, and especially the Los Angeles area. That’s when you consider that there’s approximately one hundred eighty-eight countries throughout the world. You represent over three-fourths of the nations.” This official’s use of the term *represent* was significant. This term suggested both that protocitizens’ public personae were linked to their citizenship and that the nations that were represented (three-fourths of the world) were convinced of the superiority of the United States, an idea that will be explored further below.

Diversity and difference seemed to be a source of anxiety to some officials. While giving instructions about how to turn in green cards, one official commented, “The American way is to do things in order. If we wanted mob violence, we wouldn’t become citizens.” Through his use of the term *we*,

this official seemed to be speaking for the new citizens, much as a teacher speaks for students (e.g., “We don’t throw our pencils on the floor now, do we?”). Moreover, given that these ceremonies occurred only four to five years after the L.A. riots (see Gooding-Williams 1993), references to mob violence evoked the alleged potential disruptiveness of diversity (see Greenhouse 1996). Echoes of the Rodney King incident were also clear in the following comment from a judge: “Today, we have, right here in southern California, one of the most important challenges that this country has ever had. And that is, how do we get along?” Commenting that “southern California is so different from when I was a boy,” the same judge noted that the second largest population group of many nations was found in Los Angeles rather than in the territories of those nations. By drawing attention to the diversification of Los Angeles rather than the Americanization of immigrants, this judge implied that the United States might be colonized instead of colonizer. Urging the new citizens to “love their differences,” this judge depicted southern California as the experiment on which the fate of the world depended: “If we cannot live here in southern California, the world is never going to progress. It will continue in its old ways, and civilization will never raise its [standards].”

Given such anxiety about the potential disruptiveness of diversity, one task of naturalization ceremonies was to make difference a source of unity. To accomplish this task, officials told immigrants who had formerly “represented” their nations that their public allegiance was now to the United States. Differences—which officials listed as consisting of language, culture, and foods—were relegated to a domestic sphere, to be remembered and passed on to children. Once in the private sphere, these differences were homogenized and made part of both familial and national heritages. For example, one judge told the new citizens that when a Muslim immigrant had married his daughter, it had added to his family’s traditions. The judge then jumped from his family to the nation, stating, “[This is] just another extension of what we’re doing here today. We’re bringing new people, we’re bringing new strengths. We’re gonna blend them together.” As *heritages*, differences became a source of unity. One judge explained that everyone has “an American story. They’re all interesting, they’re all different. . . . [But] each illustrates the same principle.” The unifying principle of these stories, the judge elaborated, is “why we came.” By defining new citizens according to their allegedly unified motive for immigrating—namely, the search for a better life—instead of their different national origins, naturalization ceremonies erased both difference and history. Such erasures were explicit in judges’ comments. To give but one example: “Would it make any difference whether they [my ancestors] came from Vietnam, from Japan, or from Mexico, Canada, Yugoslavia? I don’t see why. They’re all Americans.

... It doesn't matter where they come [from], it does not matter when."

Erasing difference and history made it possible for judges to define the public sphere as an arena of equality. Judges evoked not only Rodney King but also Martin Luther King Jr. One judge, for example, predicted that the children of immigrants would "seek a world in which nobody cares what nation you are, nobody cares what your religion is, nobody cares what your skin color is, nobody cares about those things. What they care about is what kind of person you are." Of course, the very necessity of such a quest suggested that, in fact, public life was not characterized by equality. A judge raised this possibility by telling the new citizens two anecdotes from his childhood that were related to discrimination. The first anecdote described how the judge's parents had punished the judge's brother for showing disrespect to an African American man who was a trash collector, and the second recounted how the judge's parents had reprimanded the judge himself for failing to intervene when other boys wrote the letter "J" on the vehicle of a Japanese American man during World War II. The judge used these anecdotes not to warn new citizens that they might encounter discrimination but, rather, to demonstrate that the United States values equality. Through such anecdotes, judges invoked the construct of the citizen who is "equal before the law" (Collier et al. 1995) and therefore legally identical to every other citizen. Officials at naturalization ceremonies depicted such public equality or sameness as a means of overcoming divisiveness. One INS official, for example, told the new citizens, "You are a unit of new citizens. Take that unity back to the community."¹⁰

The emphasis of naturalization ceremonies on public equality defined citizenship as generic—a claim that contrasts sharply with Salvadoran interviewees' fears that they would never be regarded as fully American. Judges and officials stated, for example, that one person's citizenship was interchangeable with that of another. For instance, officials assumed the authority to speak for the U.S. citizenry as a whole, saying, "On behalf of the citizens, I congratulate you." Officials also implied, through the use of terms such as *we* and *fellow citizens*, that their own citizenship was no different from that of the new citizens. Immediately after administering the oath, one judge told the new citizens—who had previously been characterized by *diversity*—to take a moment to "congratulate each other, your neighboring citizens!" Difference had been made alike through naturalization. The generic nature of this likeness was made clear by one judge's attempt to overcome the impersonality of the mass ceremony. Stating that he wished he could greet every new citizen individually, he told his audience that if one of them ever met him in the street after the ceremony, that person should walk up to him and say, "Hello citizen!" The term *citizen* would be sufficient to name both the judge and the person the judge had naturalized. Another judge ritually

created generic citizenship by having all of the new citizens yell out the names of their places of origin on the count of three. When this produced an unintelligible shout, the judge explained, "That little exercise illustrates a point, and that point is that no one person was able to shout out the other. And when you shout out your names in unison, it all blended in. And that's what America is all about." As the public voice of the new citizens is blended and rendered homogeneous, it is only in private (where no one else is shouting) that differences can be articulated.

Officials at naturalization ceremonies depicted the transformation of national diversity into generic citizenship as a quasi-mystical experience. The new citizens, judges suggested, were united by a feeling, a unique sensation, almost a spirit. One judge, who was himself a naturalized citizen, described this feeling as follows: "I felt from the outset, as I believe you feel, that unique sensation of freedom upon the taking of the oath. I saw, as I believe you will see in succeeding years, that the promise of America is not empty. It is real, it is vibrant, it is challenging. It reaches out and embraces you all." The transformation from legal permanent resident to citizen, in other words, had been animated by a spirit: the promise of America. Officials' remarks emphasized the transformative nature of naturalization ceremonies. Now that the new citizens had partaken of this spirit, they were reborn and could proselytize to others. One judge recommended that the new citizens "continue this feeling, to foster it to your children and your friends." Such references to a mysterious feeling experienced during naturalization suggested a conversion, a sense of Americanness, and a spirit that united all present with each other, officials, and other citizens. Judges frequently referred to new citizens' presumed high emotions (e.g., "You ought to be very, very happy, very emotional now"). Officials also expected the new citizens to remember the date of their naturalization, much as one remembers a birth date. One official invited the new citizens to "imagine, if you will, how your lives will be changed by your new citizenship." The most concrete example of this change that officials could provide, however, was that with citizenship, those present could vote and serve on juries.¹¹ To understand officials' references to the spirit that allegedly unites new citizens, it is necessary to examine how officials contrasted citizens by choice with citizens by birth.

Blood and choice

Like diversity, choice is central both to naturalization ceremonies and to the disjuncture between transnationalism and nation-based membership categories. The literature on globalization emphasizes the structures in which migrants are situated and tends to depict migrants "as passive subjects, coerced by states and marginalized by markets" (Smith 1998:201). Although Salvadoran interviewees did not depict themselves as passive, these migrants did emphasize

that, because of political and economic difficulties in their countries of origin and legal restrictions in the United States, they had no alternative but to migrate and then seek legal status. In contrast, the ability to make choices is central to naturalization as a legal process. Choices that are coerced rather than freely taken are not legal, and the citizenship oath itself concludes “I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion, so help me God.” Defining new citizens as people who can choose makes it possible to recognize them as subjects of liberal law who have the capacity to realize their human potential through the rights and protections afforded by national membership (Collier et al. 1995). Ceremonies’ emphasis on choice also speaks to mid-1990s debates over measures of worthiness. Advocates of restrictive immigration measures argued that migrants exhibited illegitimate forms of agency, that migrant women, for example, sneaked across the U.S.–Mexico border to have U.S.-citizen children and collect welfare (see Perea 1997). Some also questioned whether the mere fact of being born on U.S. soil made the children produced through “illegitimate” agency deserving of U.S. citizenship (see Chock 1999). In contrast, by emphasizing the *mutuality* of choice (new citizens and the nation choose each other), naturalization ceremonies suggested that the naturalizing citizens had demonstrated their worthiness and that, far from compromising national sovereignty, incorporating the deserving reinvigorated the nation.

During ceremonies, officials emphasized that naturalized citizens were both equivalent to and different from citizens by birth. Citizens’ equivalency derived from their common generic citizenship. Officials stated, for example, that there was “only one class of citizens” and that those who spoke English with an accent were no less American than other citizens. Their difference lay in the means by which each had acquired citizenship. One judge used the analogy of adoption to explain this distinction: “I compare this to, perhaps, a child born in a family, a child by birthright is within the family. Then there are those children who are as a matter of course outside the family, but adopted into the family. . . . You are the adoptees of this country, and this country has adopted you. You really have adopted this country.”¹² Officials left no doubt in new citizens’ minds about whether adopting or being born into U.S. citizenship was superior. One judge, who stated that it is the naturalized citizens who were held in the “highest esteem,” explained, “We [citizens by birth] do not have to do anything, we do not have to make a decision. However, you have made a choice. . . . You made an active choice to give up your citizenship of birth and to join us.”¹³ The fact that they had to make this choice, officials suggested, meant that the new citizens would not take their citizenship for granted: “You chose to come here. So when you compare myself to yourself, for all those citizens who were born here. We were given that birthright. We take everything for granted.” In contrast, offi-

cial explained, new citizens were filled with “the immigrant spirit” that made them “totally different from those people who remained here for years and years and years and forgot.” New citizens were therefore, according to officials, the most authentic Americans—“much more American,” as one judge put it—in that their lives encapsulated the history of the nation.

In valorizing *choice*, officials also indicated that to naturalize, those who chose U.S. citizenship had to first be judged and found deserving. In other words, naturalization gave not only immigrants but also the nation a choice in allocating citizenship. Judges frequently praised naturalizing immigrants for having traveled distances, overcome obstacles, and made sacrifices. Such comments defined citizenship as a reward that immigrants earned, in contrast to the gift that the native-born received regardless of their worthiness.¹⁴ The example set by individuals who had earned citizenship allowed officials to reaffirm the United States as a land of opportunity in which dreams could be fulfilled. Stories of the self-made man (and at the ceremonies I attended, it was always a man) abounded during these proceedings. Judges recounted their own family members’ immigration experiences, such as an immigrant coming to the United States with nothing and later becoming a professor at an Ivy League university, or a father who came to the United States with nothing, sold fruit in the streets for a living (a practice that has now been criminalized—see Rocco 1997:119), and launched nine children on successful careers. One judge explained the lessons of such stories: “No one in America is going to tell you artificially what your utmost achievement can be. We are empowered to defeat naysayers who say we can’t do it. Because we can. We can, because we are Americans. In America, that old saying, ‘The sky’s the limit,’ is truer now than ever.” Amidst such celebrations of opportunity and self-sufficiency, however, appeared veiled warnings against applying for welfare. One judge, for example, admonished the new citizens to teach their children “to never ever think first of someone else taking care of them.”

By demonstrating their worthiness and choosing to naturalize, immigrants reproduced the history of the nation. One judge connected the rebirth of citizens to the rebirth of the nation, commenting, “Immigrants meet the challenge of this country we live in from the day of its birth until today.” Another judge depicted new citizens as a renewing force: “We welcome your fresh appreciation of what citizenship in this country really means. We welcome your zeal, your eagerness, and your determination to become good loyal citizens. You are indeed a stimulating force, which cannot help but bring a new luster to the image of America.” In such comments, the *we* of fellow citizens is replaced with a *we*–you distinction, according to which the old citizens are associated with a somewhat tarnished America that the new citizens can polish. This judge went on to equate immigration with a blood transfusion, stating, “New citizens are the

new blood of America, and we need it." It is interesting that the nation needs immigrants' blood, which presumably would be foreign. Once naturalized, however, this blood is seemingly purer or stronger than native blood. From whence does this need for new blood arise?

A nation of immigrants

The apparent dependence of the United States on continual transfusions of immigrant blood is, in these ceremonies at least, connected to the complex claim that the United States is a nation of immigrants—a claim that ignores both forced immigrants, such as enslaved Africans, and Native Americans, whose "citizenship" has been "reserved." According to the "nation of immigrants" construct, the erasure of previous public difference and the choice for the United States produce a clear-cut shift in new citizens' allegiance. As R. C. Smith notes,

In the citizenship model, membership in a nation state and in the national political community are seen to be coterminous and exclusive; one can be a member of only one state and nation at a time. . . . Given this definition of membership in a community, immigration necessarily involves an "uprooting" (Handlin 1951) and "clean break" with the country of origin. [1998:199]

Clean breaks make naturalization a rebirth of sorts, giving new citizens a quasi-biological connection to the United States (Bauböck 1994; Stolcke 1997). The infusion of new citizens' blood, of those who can be self-made men, affirms that the United States is a land of opportunity and therefore superior to other nations. As a "nation of immigrants," the United States is presumed to be the top choice of deserving individuals who could have chosen to stay in their country of origin or to go elsewhere. According to this logic, immigration occurs not because of global interconnections that compel movement but, rather, because the distinctiveness of the U.S. way of life draws those who can appreciate the opportunities offered by this nation. The United States is thus an experiment, even a model for others, but still simply one among an array of nations that offer potential migrants different options.

Judges sometimes treated both naturalization and the space of the convention center qua courtroom as metonymic with the nation (see also Coutin 2000).¹⁵ One judge, for instance, commented, "What we have in this room is this country itself. This is the United States of America right here in this room. This is what we have from border to border, ocean to ocean." In this comment, the space and populace of the nation were equated with the room and assembly, respectively. This positive rendering of diversity can be read against another judge's comment that large numbers of people from many nations reside in southern California. Although a courtroom and naturalizing citizens could be equated with the country, such contrasts suggested that

southern California might be becoming the territory of other nations. This latter possibility, which resembles the notion of "trans-territorialization" put forward by scholars of transnationalism, was largely unremarked, however, given the celebration of Americanization that predominated in naturalization ceremonies. The spatialization of the courtroom as the nation in certain ways paralleled the spatialization of identity that permitted and forbade naturalization itself. For example, to naturalize, immigrants had to be physically present in the United States, just as, to naturalize, candidates for citizenship had to be physically present in the courtroom when the oath was administered. "Presence" was clearly a legal construct, as indicated by an official's warning that if the new citizens accidentally sat in the visitor section during the ceremony, they would not be naturalized and would have to attend another ceremony to be sworn in.

Officials conveyed the meaning of the "nation" to the new citizens in part through a music video that was shown during the ceremony. The video featured the music of the Lee Greenwood country-western song "God Bless the U.S.A.," accompanied by images of national greatness. The video began with a shot of a white man (Greenwood?) sitting on a tractor in the middle of a field and looking pensive, as Greenwood sang, "If tomorrow all the things were gone I'd worked for all my life, and I had to start again with just my children and my wife" (Greenwood and McLin 1993:244)—a situation that was probably not unusual among immigrants. The video continued with shots of national monuments, landscapes (coasts, mountains, prairies, and fields), citiscapes, fighter jets, the U.S. flag, the moon landing, and the Olympic torch. The only people who appeared—and their appearances were brief—were astronauts on the moon and disembarking from the space shuttle, the man on the tractor, and Bruce Jenner winning the decathlon. The near absence of people in the video was striking, given judges' speeches about the meanings of ethnic and cultural diversity. The U.S. flag was a recurring image—the one that was planted on the moon was replicated by the small flags that the new citizens waved and the giant flag that adorned the wall of the convention center. By celebrating such national achievements as placing people on the moon, winning world sports competitions, and conquering territory, the video suggested that new citizens had joined a truly great nation. Moreover, the lyrics, which celebrate the freedom that would allow a man who has lost everything to rebuild his life, reiterated the notions of opportunity and progress that were explicit in officials' speeches. The moon landing, with the planting of the U.S. flag, evoked continued expansionism, the last frontier.¹⁶

By advocating patriotism, naturalization ceremonies told immigrants who to root for in the future.¹⁷ The words of the oath of allegiance depicted naturalization as transferring new citizens' loyalties exclusively from one nation to another: "I hereby declare on oath that I absolutely and

entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or a citizen." Yet some of the loudest applause in the ceremony occurred when INS officials enumerated the top five nations represented in the ceremony. When Mexico—which was number one at all of the ceremonies that I attended—was announced, the applause grew to a crescendo of loud cheering.¹⁸ Such public and national partisanship, much like Salvadoran interviewees' discussions of citizenship as additive and naturalization as furthering transnational ties, would seem to contradict the "generic" nature of naturalized citizenship.

Officials also used immigration itself to suggest that immigrants were "voting with their feet" for the United States over their countries of origin. One judge, for example, commented, "This country has all of that [freedom, opportunity] to offer to its people. And that's why people keep coming to the gates of our country asking to enter it." In words reminiscent of the American Jeremiad (Bellah 1975; Bellah et al. 1985; Bercovitch 1978), judges described the United States as "a beacon for truth," "that shining example of democracy on earth," and something that "lights up the earth." These comments implied that the rest of the world would like to come to or even be the United States, if only it could. Judges also connected immigration to manifest destiny. One judge credited immigrants with having spread the country "from coast to coast," and another instructed citizens, "You have become a citizen of a country that is still growing to the fulfillment of its destiny." These comments linked the growth of the national populace through immigration to territorial growth and national mission. This mission, according to judges, was "to build a more perfect America. And hopefully, solutions to peace on earth." Naturalizing citizens and thus incorporating and disarming difference could be seen as part of efforts to Americanize peoples, markets, and territory abroad. One judge urged immigrants to "be infectious, like a disease" in convincing others to emulate the United States—a comment that acknowledged the possibility of resistance, however misguided, to Americanization.

Despite lofty rhetoric about equality, inclusiveness, and choice, naturalization ceremonies hinted at structures of state power that defined identity and that might be responsible for record rates of naturalization. In requiring residents to turn in their green cards, for example, officials reminded their audiences that these documents were government property rather than individual possessions. Clearly, the government that could issue or recall such documents could also confer or deny particular statuses. By celebrating the rights that new citizens would acquire on naturalization, judges emphasized that the state grants rights through social membership. After idealistic speeches, each ceremony ended with these words: "Ladies and gentlemen, please be seated and await further instructions regard-

ing the distribution of your certificates. This court session is now adjourned." Such references to the *need* to document citizenship link these ceremonies to the broader context—including other, less celebratory court hearings that deny status and order immigrants deported—in which these rites occurred. To conclude, let me return to these disjunctures in light of such linkages.

National disjunctures and linkages

Naturalization ceremonies put forward logics of migration, membership, and the nation that are linked in complex ways to the models that Salvadoran immigrants and activists have developed in response to human rights violations and economic problems in El Salvador and to legal exclusion in the United States. Sameness–difference, choice–nonchoice, and sovereignty–interdependency are key to these logics. First, during naturalization ceremonies, officials ritually erased public, legal elements of difference to constitute new citizens as equivalent juridical subjects of the United States. In this multicultural formulation, difference could be celebrated as a source of commonality, a background, a presumed shared history of immigrating to the United States in search of a better life. "Difference" was also relevant to Salvadoran interviewees, who, like recent migrants from other nations, suggested that as categories, "citizen" and "American" connote whiteness and that, regardless of their legal citizenship, members of ethnic minority groups would always be seen by some as less than full citizens. Moreover, Salvadorans, including Salvadoran officials, expressed or promoted dual identities, according to which, rather than being a clean break, naturalization adds U.S. citizenship to migrants' preexisting Salvadoran nationality.

Second, the emphasis on choice during naturalization ceremonies suggested that the United States simply attracted immigrants as a matter of course because of its superior way of life. The fact that migrants had made the choice to naturalize and that the United States had agreed that they were deserving affirmed the mutual wisdom of the relationship being formed between new citizens and the nation. "Nonchoice" (which does not mean a lack of agency) was key to Salvadoran migrants' accounts of migration and of their subsequent quest for legal status. These accounts demonstrate an awareness of the structures and relationships that shape human action. Thus, migrants attributed their original entry into the United States to political violence, economic necessity, and the need to support family members in El Salvador. Their decisions to apply for legal status and their desire for as-yet-unobtainable U.S. citizenship were linked at least in part to the exclusion they experienced as noncitizens. Furthermore, Salvadoran migrants' and officials' campaigns for U.S. residency for the Salvadoran immigrant population stressed ongoing social, political, and

economic ties between the United States and El Salvador, including the U.S. need for immigrant labor. This logic links migration to interdependency, rather than solely to individualistic quests for opportunity and self-advancement.

Third, naturalization ceremonies depicted continued immigration as demonstrating the superiority of the United States as a *sovereign* nation. If the best and the brightest sought out the opportunities that the United States offers when they could have chosen to remain in their countries of origin or to migrate elsewhere, then clearly, the United States was the best among an array of nations from which migrants could choose. Such an account of migration would seem to justify U.S. efforts to spread its way of life to other countries through modernization and democratization. "Interdependency" was key to Salvadoran interviewees' models of movement and belonging. In fact, Salvadoran officials' and activists' immigration-related strategies characterized the dispersal of the Salvadoran citizenry in ways that resembled scholars' use of the term *transterritorialization*.¹⁹ In other words, instead of representing a loss of Salvadoran citizens, migration made El Salvador transnational, provided it with a source of remittances, and gave Salvadorans greater potential to influence U.S. policies vis-à-vis El Salvador. In contrast to naturalization ceremonies' emphasis on distinct citizenries and competing national systems, these strategies focused on transnational ties and multiple and overlapping allegiances.

Despite these disjunctures between naturalization officials' and Salvadoran interviewees' logics of belonging and movement, juxtaposing these logics reveals ways that nation-based categories of membership can serve transnational ends. One such connection is that although legal status officially defines an individual as a member of a particular nation, individuals may seek such status to better access resources in both their country of residence and of origin. Both U.S. immigration law and international law pertaining to migrants presume that individuals have a single, clear-cut nationality (Bosniak 1991; Marrus 1985). Nonetheless, studies of migrant communities have noted that these groups span borders and attend to multiple national realities (Hagan 1994; Kearney 1998; Levitt 2001; Rouse 1991). *Transmigration* was coined by Schiller et al. (1995) to refer to the way that, rather than leaving one society and joining another, migrants now develop and maintain ties to multiple societies. Hometown associations (Popkin 1999; Smith 1998) have received particular attention as examples of institutions that are key to transnational identities, and border studies has emerged as a field that examines transnational zones that both supersede and are defined by national boundaries. Consistent with my argument here, some have suggested that, regardless of their transnational orientations, migrants seek legal status not only as part of the settlement process (a process that may include coming to identify with their new country of residence) but also as a form of

political expediency (Hagan 1994). Migrants need legal status *both* to access those opportunities that, in the United States, at least, are restricted to citizens and to legal permanent residents *and* to obtain travel documents that permit them to further develop their connections with their countries of origin.

Recognizing that legal status can better connect migrants to their countries of origin suggests that debates over whether or not transnationalism is rendering national forms of membership obsolete are misplaced. Regarding this debate, Soysal (1994) notes that in Europe, instead of being restricted to nationals, rights are increasingly being granted to individuals on other bases, such as their humanity (see also Bauböck 1994; Bosniak 2000; Hammar 1990) or their membership in a supranational entity, the European Union. In contrast, Wilmsen and McAllister (1996) argue that far from becoming obsolete, ethnicity and nationalism have been increasingly reasserted in recent decades. Immigration policies, which, in receiving nations, have tended to become more restrictive (Freeman 1992), have been singled out as phenomena that seem to defy the trend toward globalization (Cornelius et al. 1994). Some have attempted to reconcile these competing positions by pointing out that globalization simultaneously can strengthen local identities (Kearney 1995), as communities market themselves and their products as somehow unique or different from other areas (Maurer 1997), and can break down national boundaries, as distant groups are caught up in common structures and processes (Ong 1999). Robertson (1995) used the term *globalization* to convey the simultaneity of such seemingly incompatible events. Similarly, my analysis of U.S. immigration politics in the 1990s suggests that even national categories of membership can be given transnational meanings (see also Maurer 1998). Thus, restrictive immigration policies can derive from nation-based models of membership and of international relations while simultaneously making the acquisition of citizenship key to transnational organizing.

Given that legal status can facilitate transnational organizing efforts, "difference," which was a focus both of Salvadoran interviewees' criticisms of discriminatory policies and naturalization ceremonies' celebrations of Americanization, can both be erased in the acquisition of legal subjecthood and used as a basis for political organizing. With the rise of the modern nation-state, the more abstract citizen-state relationship replaced what had been a more concrete (in theory at least) subject-sovereign tie.²⁰ Citizenship therefore has a generic quality: All citizens are presumed to be in an equivalent position vis-à-vis the state as a legal entity (Collier et al. 1995; Coutin 1993). In the United States, immigrants who undergo naturalization acquire this generic and equivalent quality, even as their histories distinguish them from those who are citizens by birth. Naturalization mimics citizenship by birth, and vice versa, in that citizens by birth

are presumed to have accepted the authority of the Constitution (see Foucault 1977), as have naturalized citizens, and naturalization imbues new citizens with an identity or quasi-biological connection to the United States, as does birth.²¹ Nonetheless, as feminists and critical race theorists have pointed out, citizenship in the United States is never fully generic (see, e.g., Matsuda et al. 1993; Nelson 1984; Sapiro 1984; Williams 1991), given that legal citizenship does not guarantee equal rights to women, ethnic minorities, and other marginalized groups. In fact, both “whiteness” and “maleness” have been prerequisites for citizenship historically (Augustine-Adams 2000; Goldberg 2001; Haney López 1996; Salyer 1995), and the citizenship of economically marginalized individuals is sometimes questioned (Marshall 1950). Similarly, critical uses of the term *naturalize* draw attention to the ambiguity that is intrinsic to naturalization: That which is natural is supposed to be given or intrinsic, yet naturalization constructs as *natural* something that, originally at least, was not.²² If naturalized citizens *appear* to be the equivalent of citizens by birth, and if naturalization *appears* to turn alienage into commonality, then what happens to the differences that naturalization erases?²³ They become remainders that lead the authenticity of naturalized identities to be questioned but that also enable migrant groups to use ethnicity and nationality as a basis for political organizing. Such groups’ refusals to consign “difference” to the private sphere, where it becomes a source of commonality, challenges the requirement that public citizenship assume a generic form.

Recognizing the incommensurability of migrants’ histories gives the nation multiple pasts and positionings. Creating a nation requires simultaneously creating a national history (Anderson 1983). In the United States, this history centers on immigration. National histories celebrate the idea that beginning with the Pilgrims, immigrants have come to the United States in search of freedom and opportunity, and, through capitalizing on opportunity, have recreated the nation (Bellah et al. 1985; Bercovitch 1978). Within this narrative, immigration (and naturalization) is a mutual choice—immigrants choose the nation that offers them opportunity, and the nation chooses those immigrants who are capable of maximizing these opportunities (Chock 1991). For the arrival and incorporation of new immigrants to be considered a choice, however, both the nation and the immigrant must be sovereign beings (Bauböck 1994). Yet, migrants move because of political repression, economic dislocation, and family obligations (Hamilton and Chinchilla 1991; Kearney 1986; Menjívar 2000; Sassen 1988, 1989); they legalize, in part, to protect their rights in their countries of residence. Similarly, nations admit migrants, either officially or unofficially, because of a dependence on foreign, often unskilled, labor (Bach 1978; Jenkins 1978; Sassen 1991). It is therefore possible that both immigration and naturalization are fueled by the very condi-

tions—nonchoice, interdependency—that national narratives deny (Coutin et al. 2002).²⁴ Acknowledging this possibility means recognizing that alongside the nationalistic history of the United States as a nation of immigrants are other, less-celebratory histories, involving labor exploitation, racism, and foreign intervention. The “nation of immigrants” construct, for example, ignores the forcible migration–importation of African slaves, for whom naturalization consisted of being defined as natural beings outside the boundaries of civil society.²⁵

In sum, because the political struggles of the excluded and the ceremonies that award citizenship to the deserving are two moments within broader processes and logics of movement and belonging in the contemporary United States, there are deep interconnections between the notions of sameness–difference, choice–nonchoice, and sovereignty–interdependency that are linked to naturalization and to transnationalism, respectively. The dual or multiple identities that make migrants publicly different can be furthered by the acquisition of generic U.S. citizenship, which permits greater freedom of movement internationally.²⁶ The record numbers of naturalization applicants in the mid-1990s may have been partially due to community groups’ efforts to mobilize legal permanent residents and U.S. citizens as part of ethnicity- and nationality-based political campaigns. Indeed, it is likely that such campaigns had some impact on the 2000 elections, in which anti-immigrant rhetoric was replaced by Democratic Party efforts to pass the Latino and Immigrant Fairness Act (LIFA) and Republicans’ successful effort to pass the Legal Immigrant and Family Equity Act (LIFE).²⁷ Naturalization is not only a choice to acquire U.S. citizenship but also a response to a set of circumstances that, in the mid-1990s, included anti-immigrant sentiment and the adoption of more restrictive immigration policies. Nationality- and ethnicity-based organizing is significant not only to U.S.-based activists but also to foreign governments that have urged their nationals to seek legal status in the United States. Such strategies prevent potentially destabilizing deportations, create an empowered constituency that may have the ear of U.S. policy makers, promote the transterritorialization of states, and give other nations access to sources of remittances. Furthermore, prioritizing naturalization and authorizing other forms of temporary or permanent legalization may acknowledge U.S. obligations to and dependence on migrant labor. In short, there are ways that naturalization, which places individuals in national categories, serves transnational ends.

The complex and contradictory relationships between transnationalism and nation-based membership may be linked to the long-standing ambivalence toward immigration in the United States. Perhaps it is not surprising that restrictive immigration policies adopted in the mid-1990s were accompanied by a drive to formally include more foreign-born individuals in the nation. Prioritizing naturalization can be

seen as an effort to eliminate or domesticate the foreign, but it also can be viewed as an acknowledgment of the presence and the rights of those individuals, as well as of the needs of immigrant-sending countries. The adoption of restrictive measures was followed, after all, by discussions of some form of guest worker, legalization, or amnesty program. Yet, following the attacks on the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, there has been a renewal of caution and a return to more restrictive measures. It may now be more difficult for immigrants to assert a right to simultaneously be fully recognized members of U.S. society and maintain loyalties to and ties with their countries of origin. Clearly, this mix of acknowledging interdependency and mutuality, on the one hand, and of asserting national boundaries and rights, on the other hand, will play out differently at different historical moments.

Notes

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1. The high numbers of naturalization applicants were due in large part to the 1986 amnesty program, a component of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which permitted certain seasonal agricultural workers and individuals who had lived in the United States continuously and illegally since January 1, 1982, to apply for legal permanent residency. After five years of legal permanent residency, the individuals who legalized through IRCA became eligible to apply for naturalization.

2. The United States Committee for Refugees reported that between 1983 and 1986,

[asylum] applicants from Iran had the highest approval rate . . . , 60.4 percent, followed by the Soviet bloc countries, Romania (51.0), Czechoslovakia (45.4), Afghanistan (37.7), Poland (34.0), and Hungary (31.9). Among the countries with the lowest approval rates were El Salvador (2.6), Haiti (1.8), and Guatemala (0.9). [1986:8]

3. IIRIRA eliminated or restricted preexisting methods of legalization. Under the act’s regulations, asylum applications had to be filed within one year of applicants’ entry into the United States, individuals who petitioned for their relatives had to meet new deeming requirements, individuals who were illegally present in the United States and who left the country faced new bars to legal reentry, and the requirements for legalizing on the grounds that one has lived in the United States and established roots were heightened. See ACLU Immigrants Rights Project et al. (1996) for further details.

4. Winning a suspension case requires proving (1) seven years of continuous residency, (2) good moral character, and (3) that deportation would cause extreme hardship to the applicant or to a U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident relative of the applicant.

5. Of course, there may be a significant population of Salvadoran immigrants who do not seek or desire legal status. Given that I met most interviewees through community organizations that provided legal services to the undocumented, my sampling methods did not enable me to reach such individuals.

6. In fact, the U.S.-born children of Salvadoran citizens are eligible for Salvadoran citizenship, and my interviews with Salvadoran officials indicated that the Salvadoran government is eager to inculcate a sense of Salvadoran identity among U.S. Salvadoran youth.

7. This strategy is premised on the idea that new citizens and recent immigrants share certain opinions and perspectives and that if more new citizens actually vote, there is a greater chance of promoting policies that favor immigrants.

8. Welfare reform, which made even legal immigrants ineligible for most federal benefits, was adopted in 1996. That was the same year that California voters passed Proposition 209, which eliminated affirmative action. This proposal was followed in 1998 by the Unz initiative, which dismantled bilingual education in California.

9. This voter registration drive was activists’ response to anti-immigrant initiatives, such as California Proposition 187. Reasoning that immigrants would have more political clout if they could vote, numerous Central American groups, including ASOSAL, the Organization of Salvadoran-Americans (OSA), and the Central American Resource Center (CARECEN), sent volunteers—some of whom were undocumented—to help newly naturalized Spanish-speaking citizens fill out voter registration cards. These groups were not alone in seeking to register new voters. Representatives of both the Democratic and Republican Parties—including a man dressed as Uncle Sam—sought to register new citizens.

10. Such references to equality, unity, and inclusiveness might have been welcome to immigrants who had been targeted by Proposition 187, welfare reform, and other restrictive measures. One recently naturalized Salvadoran immigrant, however, assessed the ceremony’s message as follows: “The whole ceremony tells you you have the right to sit on the grass. Not, ‘Let’s change the country from the barrio on up.’ ”

11. Tomas Hammar (1990) argues that there are three gates through which immigrants pass on the road to naturalization. The first gate regulates entry into the country, the second gate regulates presence and social participation, and the third gate regulates full political rights. Using his terminology, before naturalizing, immigrants pass through the first and second gates, thereby securing almost complete social membership before obtaining citizenship itself.

12. As described by the judge, this adoption was mutual. It occurred not only because the parent country was in search of children but also because the children actively sought out parents.

13. Despite the oath of citizenship, naturalized citizens from countries that allow dual nationality might not, in fact, give up their citizenship of birth.

14. Because citizenship was depicted as a reward that immigrants had earned, it is not surprising that naturalization ceremonies in some ways resembled both graduation ceremonies and school assemblies. One official's comments to the new citizens made this analogy explicit: "It's always a happy occasion for us to be here. It's almost like a graduation ceremony." The flag-waving of the naturalized citizens reminded me of graduates who throw their caps during commencement. When giving instructions, officials sometimes treated the new citizens like schoolchildren. One official, for instance, announced to the new citizens, "We're going to be dismissing you by groups" and then had members of each of the designated groups rehearse this procedure by raising their hands when called. Officials also occasionally used infantilizing terminology, such as saying that they didn't want to have any "boo-boos" when the new citizens filed over to the INS tables, or asking the naturalizing immigrants to say, "Bye-bye, green cards!" Another official asked the visitors not to stand on their seats to take pictures during the ceremony. Certain elements of the naturalization ceremony, such as the pledge of allegiance, are also daily rituals in public schools.

15. As Shapiro notes, "Modern citizenship is situated primarily in the juridical network of the (imaginary) international system of state sovereignties. . . . The territorial state remains the dominant frame for containing the citizen body, both physically and symbolically" (2001:118).

16. In my experience, the crowd responded enthusiastically to the video. People sitting near me, for example, commented that the video gave them goose bumps.

17. Not surprisingly, naturalization ceremonies were unabashedly patriotic. Judges urged the new citizens to consider serving in the armed forces, to "stand tall" for the United States, and to practice patriotism on a daily basis. One man sitting near me was so moved by the ceremony that he resolved to bring his children the next time that someone in his family naturalized. The ceremonies were heavily publicized. Press crews filmed certain ceremonies, local papers covered these events in both English and Spanish, and at least one ceremony was transmitted to schoolchildren in the Philippines via satellite. Both officials and judges cited the many freedoms that U.S. citizenship provided, including freedom of movement, speech, and assembly. Officials' examples of how new citizens could demonstrate their patriotism—such as paying taxes, not littering, voting, and serving in parent-teacher associations—were surprisingly prosaic, given the lofty rhetoric about feelings, freedoms, and national missions. Nonetheless, the ceremonies inspired the crowd to cheer for the United States, on at least this one occasion.

In this sense, these rites were analogous to sporting events—particularly international ones. One judge, for instance, commented that the naturalization ceremony was "no different than my attending the opening ceremony at the Olympics in Atlanta just a couple of weeks ago, as I sat there and watched a parade of nations come by." This reference to nations reiterated the difference that naturalization could not quite overcome. Sports analogies were also clear in other aspects of the ceremonies, such as the images of the Olympic torch and Bruce Jenner in the Lee Greenwood video and the waving of national flags, which occurs during soccer matches as well as naturalization ceremonies. One official similarly instructed the new citizens to do the "immigration wave" by rising in turn when he called their sections. Of interest, journalists sometimes also use sports analogies to flesh out immigrants' allegiances. In one news story about the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, a journalist asked a young man who was applying for legalization whether he would root for a Mexican soccer team or a U.S. soccer team. See Coutin and Chock 1995 and Mathews 1986.

18. At the ceremonies that I attended, the other top nations were Vietnam, El Salvador, the Philippines, Korea, and Iran.

19. For instance, the Salvadoran vice president observed during a conference in San Salvador in August 2000, "We have become an emigrant people." An official in the Salvadoran Ministry of Foreign Relations similarly told me that El Salvador has become "a completely transnational society now" and that to confront this situation, every ministry was being required to develop a plan for addressing the needs of Salvadorans in the exterior.

20. On the corporality of the sovereign, see Kantorowicz 1957. I am grateful to Susan Sterett for bringing the relevance of this source to my attention.

21. Bauböck explains that the term *naturalization*

can be understood to define the receiving group as a natural one and to require that new members change their nature. . . . In France and England from the 14th to the 18th century the native-born are seen to be *natural* subjects of a sovereign and naturalization signifies a *natural* way of obtaining a similar status by residing permanently in a country, acquiring property and obeying its laws. [1994:44–45]

See also Stolcke 1997.

22. Feminists and critical race theorists, for example, have used the term *naturalize* to draw attention to the processes that make socially and historically constructed categories and practices appear natural and impossible to change. Thus, Yanagisako and Delaney define naturalizing power as "ways in which differentials of power come already embedded in culture. . . . Power appears natural, inevitable, even god-given" (1995:1).

23. The possible disloyalty or multiple loyalties of naturalized citizens and of other immigrants has troubled those concerned about large-scale immigration to the United States. The World War II internment of the Japanese (Salzer 1995; Starn 1986) and the post-September 11, 2001, questioning of Arab Americans' loyalties are cases in point. Diasporic peoples, who claim loyalties to deterritorialized nation-states (Basch et al. 1994; Bosniak 2000), have not always been well received by their countries of residence. Some analysts of immigration argue that the United States already tolerates and even encourages a degree of cultural and ethnic diversity that makes governance difficult. Peter Schuck and Rainer Münz note that in the United States

many restrictionists . . . fear that the country has lost its capacity to absorb migrants as a consequence of government multicultural policies, including bilingual classes aimed at reinforcing ethnic and cultural identities and affirmative action policies. . . . They argue that these policies, along with a cultural norm that legitimates the maintenance of group identities, is further fragmenting a society already divided along racial lines. [1998:xx]

24. I do not mean to suggest that migrants lack agency. See Coutin 1998 for a discussion of this issue.

25. I am grateful to Tom Boellstorff for reminding me of this form of naturalization.

26. Legal permanent residents also enjoy considerable freedom of movement internationally. To maintain their eligibility for naturalization, however, legal permanent residents must have been physically present in the United States for at least six months out of each year for five years. Moreover, legal permanent residents do not travel with the U.S. passports that may afford easier entry into certain countries.

27. LIFA had three provisions: (1) parity for beneficiaries of the 1997 Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act, (2) the restoration of 245(i), a program that permitted the recipients

of family visa petitions to adjust their status in the United States in exchange for paying a fine, and (3) updating of the registry date, which would have permitted the legalization of large numbers of immigrants. LIFE was more limited in scope and primarily benefited certain recipients of family visa petitions and members of class actions suits filed in relation to the 1986 amnesty program.

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