Transnational Activism and National Action: El Salvador’s Anti-Mining Movement

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Using the case of the anti-mining movement in El Salvador, this paper analyzes the ways in which national level networks adapt and deploy resources mobilized through transnational alliances in order to build a domestic resistance movement. It explores strategies and frames through which local community groups, environmental rights organizations, epistemic allies, and the Catholic Church leadership, each with their own set of interlinked transnational alliances, stitched together a reform coalition that fueled national policy change. Using analysis that extends beyond upward and downward scale shifts to include horizontal shifts in ideas and repertoires, this work highlights the kinds of resources that local organizations extract from transnational allies. It identifies different types of international nongovernmental organizations, including one variation (the domesticating INGO) that is particularly well adapted for national level collaboration. Arguing for the utility of a politically embedded campaign analysis, this study explores the intersection between social movements and formal politics, giving special attention to critical junctures when electoral calculations foster elite realignment and national policy change.

Introduction

For almost two decades, neoliberal market reform advanced steadily in Central America. These reforms were particularly deep in El Salvador, where successive ARENA governments moved quickly to privatize banks, electricity and telecommunications, liberalize trade, streamline business processes, and dollarize the economy. DR-CAFTA, the Dominican Republic-Central America free trade agreement with the United States, consolidated this reform by encasing the economy in a series of durable rules regarding trade, investment, property rights and dispute settlement procedures.

A number of Salvadoran civil society organizations and movements resisted these changes, questioning the pace and direction of economic reform. Looking for ways to enhance economic

1 Field research in El Salvador in July-August 2010 was conducted with support from the College of Liberal Arts and Science of DePaul University. Emily Thenhaus provided research assistance. This study forms part of a larger project on CAFTA politics in Central America that draws on interviews conducted in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica between 2003 and 2010. The author thanks Mimi Keck and Bill Smith for generous and constructive commentary on an earlier version of this work.
security, preserve livelihoods, and protect communities, these sectors mobilized to resist, evade and escape these market disciplines. As political space opened in the aftermath of the 1980s civil war, these popular sectors constructed fluid networks and sought out transnational alliances to bolster their efforts.

For much of this period, these mobilizations were defeated. Pro-market elite coalitions were forceful, enjoying strong international support and a broad electoral base during the long period (1989-2009) of ARENA governance. Yet recurring experiences in market resistance left an organizational trace on which successive mobilizations built. As popular support for market reform waned in El Salvador, prior policies were called into question. When FMLN candidate Mauricio Funes won the presidency in 2009 after two decades of ARENA dominance, a new coalition of political forces emerged, one less inclined to endorse full market orthodoxy.

This study explores the ways that local resistance movements interlaced with transnational networks to slow neoliberal reform and advance adjustments in the market model. It forms part of a larger analysis of reform and resistance in Central America, which builds on Karl Polanyi’s (2001 [1944]) construct of the “double movement.” Using the case of the anti-mining movement in El Salvador, this paper analyzes the ways in which a national level network adapted and deployed resources mobilized through transnational alliances in order to build a domestic resistance movement. It explores the bridging and bonding techniques (Putnam 2000) through which local community groups, environmental rights organizations, epistemic allies, and the Catholic Church leadership, each with their own set of interlinked transnational alliances, stitched together a reform coalition that fueled national policy change.

The paper demonstrates how tightening political competition fostered elite realignment and, at least temporarily, derailed the market opening in the mining sector. Four sections make up this analysis: (1) a brief discussion of alternative multiscaler mechanisms that link domestic and

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2Karl Polanyi’s (2001) analysis of this “double movement” in 19th and early 20th century Europe presents resistance to the “self regulating market” as less class-based and ideological than heterogeneous and self-protective (see pp. 158-70). My work borrows from this approach.
transnational social movements; (2) a six-part analysis of the connections between an emerging anti-mining alliance in El Salvador and the transnational networks with which it collaborated; (3) a discussion of the way shifts accumulated in national level politics leading to domestic policy change; and (4) the conclusions, which summarize theoretical observations drawn from the study.

Although this study argues that transnational networks made a significant contribution to this resistance movement, local organizations are not presented as passive receptacles of transnational direction. They are understood as active agents involved in the work of constructing transnational alliances and borrowing strategically from the transnational repertoire. This work identifies not only upward and downward scale shifts but also horizontal shifts in resources, ideas and repertoires. It highlights the kinds of resources that local organizations extract from transnational allies and identifies a type of international nongovernmental organization (the *domesticating INGO*) that is particularly well adapted for this process. Arguing for the utility of a *politically embedded campaign analysis*, this study explores the intersection between social movements and formal politics, giving special attention to *critical junctures* or periods when shifting electoral calculations foster elite realignment and national policy change.

1. *Boomerangs and Domestic Conduits*

In *Activists Beyond Borders*, Keck and Sikkink pioneered the concept of a “boomerang” to map a prominent pattern in transnational activism. The boomerang was described in the following way:

>“When channels between the state and its domestic actors are blocked, the boomerang pattern of influence characteristic of transnational networks may occur: domestic NGOs bypass their state and directly search out international allies to try to bring pressure on their states from outside” (1998, 12).

Although sometimes found in formally democratic countries, boomerang patterns often occur in non-democratic settings, “where governments are inaccessible or deaf to groups whose claims may nonetheless resonate elsewhere” (p. 13). In these cases, governments may be more
responsive to external pressures from international organizations or powerful states than to their own citizens. Boomerang patterns have been identified in campaigns for human rights, environmental protection, women’s rights and indigenous rights; they have been found less successful in campaigns for social justice and economic change (della Porta and Tarrow 2005, 6).

As formal democratization advanced in Latin America in the 1990s, large-scale episodes of state violence abated and space for rights monitoring and social mobilization expanded. The blockage between civil society organizations and the state loosened, creating new possibilities for organized publics to advance their cause directly. Formal and informal mechanisms developed, allowing local actors to exert more pressure on their own state apparatus through candidate placement, campaigns and elections, lobbying, issue education, media outreach and coalition building. The boomerang pattern remained significant, particularly for minority sectors or rights-based movements with limited political capital, but was joined now by other processes reflecting the shift in political opportunity structures.

This study highlights one of these alternatives, the *domestic conduit variation*. This national-transnational linkage mechanism also involves strategic, multiscaler resource leveraging as in the boomerang pattern, but now with the direction reversed. In this second process, domestic groups use information, material resources, frames, and symbols, some of which were constructed through participation in transnational networks, to pressure their own states for reform. Instead of depending on transnational allies to press for home state reforms using exogenous processes, they use domestic political instruments themselves, assisted by resources from transnational campaigns.

Movement transnationalism could thus play a role in two kinds of multiscaler linkage processes, as represented in Figures 1 and 2 below. In the *classic boomerang*, local organizations collaborate with transnational allies to engage external actors (including other states and international governmental organizations), to apply exogenous pressure for change on the local state. The *domestic conduit* variation traces interactions between local organizations and
transnational networks that strengthen domestic coalitions in their struggle to influence home states directly. In theory, a full linkage cycle, involving the simultaneous or sequential operation of both processes, could exercise stronger influence on the state than either pattern operating alone.

Figures 1 and 2: Boomerang and Domestic Conduit Patterns

Figure 1: Boomerang

Figure 2: Domestic Conduit

Relationships between local and transnational networks are complex, beginning with the definitional problem. Campaigns that appear to be transnational may, in effect, be disguised national ones if overly dominated by actors from one state; purported local organizations may in fact be little more than outposts of external organizations if actually directed from abroad. With the flow of external resources playing such a critical role and the tendency of network brokers to wear hats as representatives of both internal and external actors, differentiation between local actors and transnational ones in order to delineate their respective roles can be challenging.
When authentic national and transnational networks are distinguishable along conceptual and observable lines, the relationships that emerge are frequently laden with tension and do not necessarily produce synergistic cooperation (see for example, Bandy and Smith 2005, 237-240; von Bülow 2009; Edelman 2008; Andrews 2010). This conflict may be particularly acute when transnational networks link across the global North and South, where unequal access to power and resources replicate hierarchies that undercut the purportedly shared commitment to change (Petras 1997; Pearce 2010). Study of transnational activism requires on-going attention to patterns of conflict and competition as well as cooperation.

In spite of these problems, transnational alliances also prove quite durable at times, and INGO links with local groups are often mutually reinforcing. Struggles to pursue collaboration without sacrificing independence and authenticity may be attenuated through cultivation of inter-subjective understanding and solidarity, or negotiated based on strategic calculations of mutual gain. Transnational networks offer space to explore the relationship between universalistic principles that connect across boundaries and the kinds of particularisms of place that commonly energize local groups and authenticate a struggle. The concept of “convergence space” (Cumbers, Routledge and Nativel 2008, 192-197) captures this process of on-going dialogue, as does an abundant literature on “frame bridging” and “brokers,” who articulate connections across difference (Tarrow, 2005; Smith 2008), and “grassrooting vectors,” and “imagineers,” who “represent the connective tissue across geographic space” (Cumbers, Routledge and Nativel 2008, 196).

2. Anti-mining movement in El Salvador

Market architects in El Salvador introduced various reforms to encourage foreign investment after the war, including a new investment law in 1999 and the 2000 creation of PROESA, an investment promotion agency. The Ley de Integración Monetaria, approved and implemented in a matter of weeks at the end of 2000, ushered in dollarization; the reduced exchange risk for
investors was expected to catalyze a new round of foreign investment, which had slowed following bank, telecommunications and electricity privatization in the 1990s.

One promising area for new foreign investment was gold mining. Metal mining was not entirely new in El Salvador, but production had languished during the war years and some old concessions had lapsed. The ARENA government re-wrote the mining law in 1996, and followed with further encouragement in the 2001 Código de Minería, which reduced mining royalties from 4% to 2% (Henríquez 2008, 28).

Interest in mining-promotion in El Salvador followed a Latin American regional trend in extractive sector expansion. With active encouragement from the World Bank, governments relaxed and redefined mining regulations, privatized ownership, and adjusted tax provisions to encourage new investments (See Fox, Onorato, and Strongman, 1998; Sánchez Albavera, Ortíz and Moussa, 2001). Generous terms drew investor attention to Central America, and rising gold and silver prices created an incentive for exploratory work. By 2006 eight international gold mining companies had established a presence in El Salvador (Dirección de Hidrocarburos y Minas, Ministerio de Economía, Anuario Minero Nacional 2006, as cited in Henríquez 2008, 19). Exploration drilling soon verified commercial quantities of gold and silver, and the push to pioneer was on.

In 2005, a national anti-mining network consolidated to counter the process. Over the next five years, this movement drew on international alliances to help orchestrate a national confrontation over the future of the industry. My research suggests the significance of several sets of actors, particularly a local resistance network with strong ties to affected communities; a group of tenacious advocacy organizations focused on environmental and social rights; an emerging network of activist-oriented researchers and specialists; a religious network, ultimately led by Catholic Church bishops, who undertook a doctrinally-based policy intervention to thwart the mining advance; and an expanding cluster of interconnected international allies and INGOS that
supported their work. As mining opponents made inroads into public opinion, political support for mining eroded and elected officials realigned, now with opposing forces in the lead.

a. National resistance network

Transnational networking builds on national actors who provide vital grounding for collaborative activities (Tarrow 2005; see also Hochstetler and Keck 2007; Rodrigues 2004). Local affiliates construct a shared interpretation of an issue around which diverse groups can mobilize, and they disseminate evidence of wrong doing on which a campaign builds. In his study of anti-mining conflicts in Peru, Guatemala and Honduras, Keith Slack (2009) found anti-mining coalitions commonly link two sets of local actors: community groups, that focus on the physical or sociological dislocation in nearby towns caused by mine development; and national environmental organizations, that highlight long-term environmental costs and help identify sustainable alternatives.

Launched in September 2005, El Salvador’s Mesa Nacional Frente a la Minería Metálica (henceforth, Mesa Nacional) was composed of thirteen organizations that had long been active in neoliberal resistance movements). The Mesa Nacional played a critical brokerage role, linking across community, environmental, human rights, activist research and religious organizations. Brokerage work was facilitated by a prior history of neoliberal resistance collaboration shared by many of these organizations and, in some cases, an historical association with the FMLN, the dominant opposition party.

3 The local communities from the proposed mining region were represented by the Asociación de Comunidades Rurales para el Desarrollo de El Salvador (CRIPDES) and several of its affiliates from “repopulated communities” such as the Asociación de Desarrollo Económico y Social, Santa Marta (ADES). High profile national-level organizations included the Unidad Ecológica Salvadoreña (UNES), an activist-oriented environmental organization, and the Fundación de Estudios para la Aplicación del Derecho (FESPAD), a legally-oriented human rights organization that gave special attention to economic, social and cultural rights (Moreno et al 2009). Research support was provided by the Centro de Investigación sobre Inversión y Comercio (CEICOM). For a full list of Mesa Nacional members, see Henríquez (2008, fn. 15, p. 29).

4 The extent and current meaning of the FMLN relationship was variable and difficult to specify. Leaders of resistance-oriented organizations often described this connection in tactical terms, and they sometimes expressed skepticism about the deals, trade-offs, and political calculations made by FMLN national leaders. Nonetheless, the FMLN had brokerage capacity that encouraged linkages among resistance-oriented
Most of the Mesa Nacional affiliates represented communities located in or near the “Gold Belt.” An area identified as resource rich by mining companies during the exploration process, the Gold Belt ran across northern El Salvador, crossing a mountainous zone where conflict during the civil war had been intense. Some communities in the departments of Chalatenango, Cabañas, and Morazán had a long history of organizing around land rights; this area also included communities where liberation theology had flourished and sparked social action (Wood 2003, 89-99). Military sweeps and scorched-earth campaigns in the early 1980s dislocated communities throughout this region but proved unable to wipe out rebel forces. Protection provided to fleeing residents by sectors of the FMLN sometimes forged a durable alliance and reinforced local resistance.

As the war intensified, thousands of refugees from the zone scattered across the border to Honduran encampments, particularly at Mesa Grande. The need for strong organization during the subsequent return and the repopulation of “guerrilla towns,” even as the war continued in 1987 and 1988, often deepened community solidarity. Smith-Nonini’s (2010) study of grassroots healthcare initiatives in two repopulated communities highlights their organization, autonomy, and solidarity. The postwar period, which brought demobilized guerrillas home but offered little in the way of basic government assistance, reinforced the local commitment to self-reliance and crystallized antagonism to the central government in these scattered outposts of civic rebellion. Built around small-scale agricultural production, these communities emphasized traditional ideas about the primacy of land and water, food cultivation for local needs, collectivism, and reciprocity.

Frame-bridging with activist-oriented environmental organizations layered in ecological principles and knowledge, allowing the movement to align the claims of various publics. Over time, frame bridging advanced toward frame transformation, as environmental concerns became

activists and helped to shape discussion of alternative policies. Although itself forged out of different organizations during the 1980s civil war, and periodically splintering in the postwar era, the party retained a solid core of militants and sympathizers that provided a bridge to social movements.
the anti-mining movement centerpiece. Focus on damage to communities located near the mines expanded as questions arose about the impact acid mine drainage in the regional river system and the release of other contaminants in the Lempa River watershed, the major source of the nation’s water supply. Prior organizing around water rights by environmentalists had already identified water shortages and contaminated water as important national concerns (Haglund 2010).

b. Grassroots community transnationalism

Tarrow (2005, 101-02) identifies three ways in which a movement can expand beyond the local level: through “relational” mechanisms (trust networks), “non-relational” means (mass media, internet), and through movement brokers (“mediated diffusion”). The origin stories presented by Salvadoran anti-mining leaders contain references to both relational and broker mechanisms (Belloso 2010; Rivera 2010). In explaining the initial linkages of their movement to cross-border networks, several community depictions focused on personal relationships and contacts forged out of their wartime refugee experience in Honduras, highlighting elements of relational networking. Conventional brokerage networks, built out of conscious frame-building exercises in cross-regional resistance gatherings, were also identified as a tool for cooperation and information sharing.

The wartime refugee experience in Honduras, which involved whole families and endured up to a decade for some, built grassroots, bi-national ties that contributed in a distinctive way to transnational activism. Relationships between dislocated Salvadorans and Honduran sympathizers forged a sense of connection anchored in lived experience. Salvadoran refugee children were born in Honduras, or lived through much of their childhood there; parents and grandparents were buried at the refugee camp in Mesa Grande. The subsequent return of these refugees to El Salvador and the repopulation of their communities at the end of the 1980s left behind a layer of

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5 For discussion of frame bridging and frame transformation in the environmental justice movement, see Faber (2005).
cross-border connections on which future alliances could build. Return visits were organized, even after the camp was dismantled, to keep these memories alive.

According to Bernardo Beloso (2010), Vice-President of CRIPDES and Mesa Nacional leader, these connections facilitated cross-border information sharing as new issues emerged. With no prior experience in gold mining, Salvadoran community activists claimed they were initially uncertain about how to respond to the prospect of mines opening in their region. Interactions with Honduran resistance activists reportedly convinced them to be skeptical. Beloso explained:

“This [exchange with Honduran activists] helped us to open our eyes. We asked them, does mining help there or not? We need jobs. Mining, they said, would be here only five, seven, eight years, it depends. It brings maybe 100 jobs, but 50 will be only during measurement and construction. In one year, those people will be without work. Experts from outside will be brought in to fill jobs after the building is done.”

Convinced that mining would bring no real local employment benefits, these community activists honed in on the costs, particularly the loss of land available for agriculture, breakdown of community cohesion, and, increasingly, health dangers associated with the industry.

Activists in Honduras, where gold mining had developed quickly following mining law reform in 1998, had begun mobilizing several years before. Their campaign focused on two open-pit mines, San Andrés (Santa Rosa de Copán) and San Martín (Valle de Siria), and highlighted both population displacement and environmental contamination (Stark 2009, 125-26). Honduran anti-mining forces received important support from Catholic Church leaders, with Cardinal Oscar Andrés Rodríguez leading a protest march in March 2002. On-going community complaints about contamination of local water sources, including a cyanide spill at the San Andrés mine that killed fish in the Lara River, led to repeated marches and demonstrations coordinated by local government and church officials. With conflict escalating, the Honduran government suspended new mining permits in July 2004, a position sustained by the Mel Zelaya administration prior to his ouster in July 2009.
Visits by Salvadoran community activists to the Valle de Siria in Honduras offered first hand exposure to community health complaints. Similarly situated in terms of social and economic power, residents of the town adjacent to the mine were identified as trusted counterparts; this “attribution of similarity” fostered processes of “emulation” (Tarrow and McAdam 2005, 128).

The Hondurans’ description of damage to skin, vital organs, and developmental delays associated with exposure to mine waste was perceived as credible; rejection of these claims by mine officials was interpreted as a display of arrogant indifference to the well-being of the poor. These direct experiences reinforced the resistance to gold mining among Salvadoran community activists, who brought back educational materials and organized meetings throughout their networks to share their observations (Rivera 2010). Interactions between Honduran, Salvadoran, and subsequently Guatemalan anti-mining coalitions helped to identify commonalities and shared vulnerabilities. These links were reinforced by the cross-border migration of gold mine capital and of mine waste flowing through interconnected water systems passing inexorably across national borders.

c. Mediated diffusion and regional organizing

In addition to the “relational” mechanisms that built on personal connections between community activists in neighboring countries, contentious mining politics spread through “mediated diffusion” that employed purposeful bridging processes undertaken by movement brokers. Information sharing over the internet (“non-relational mechanisms”) plays a well-documented role in building transnational networks (della Porta et al 2006, 92-117), but social movement theory also emphasizes the usefulness of international gatherings where brokers can perform coalition building in person (Brown and Fox 1998).

Many of the transnational networks active in Central America have had a regional focus, reflecting gradations of Central American identity and shared histories across recent decades. The collective experiences of war and civil conflict during the 1980s, with violence spilling over

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6 See, for example, the Mesa Nacional blog on Oct. 17, 2008 about the youth delegation traveling to Valle de Siria, at http://esnomineria.blogspot.com.
from war zones into neighboring territory, mobilized human rights and peace-building networks that connected across borders within Central America. Region-wide natural disasters, including mudslides, flooding, drought, and hurricanes, such as Hurricane Mitch in 1998, and subsequent reconstruction projects fostered cross-border civil society collaboration, in part at the behest of international donors (Gass 2002).

Repeated episodes of “regional neoliberalism” also inspired regional resistance. “Regional neoliberalism” involved ambitious projects of cross-national market development that entailed simultaneous structural reform throughout the region (Spalding 2008, 324-27). Two significant examples occurred in the early 2000s: Plan Puebla-Panamá, a Mesoamerican infrastructural development project sponsored by the Inter-American Development Bank; and DR-CAFTA, a free trade agreement between the US and Central American countries to which the Dominican Republic was subsequently added. The shared experience of engaging regional development initiatives encouraged cross-border organizing within the affected region. PPP and CAFTA functioned as “condensing symbols” (Tarrow 2005, 73), which galvanized opposition and consolidated regional resistance networks.

Beginning in 2001, the Foro Mesoamericano por la Autodeterminación y Resistencia de los Pueblos gathered activists from hundreds of organizations from southern Mexico and Central America for information gathering and concerted strategizing (Spalding 2007). Using a forum that rotated from country to country, organizers shared responsibility for a sustained campaign against “megaprojects” of highways, ports, and electrical networks that would deepen Mesoamerican integration into the global economy. The 2002 announcement by US President George W. Bush of a free trade negotiation between the US and Central American countries expanded the target and intensified the opposition.

The annual meetings of the Foro Mesoamericano helped to introduce activists across the region to each other so they could “see how the shoe fits over there” (UNES 2004). As attendance grew and sub-themes became more numerous, specialized mini-forums and spins offs
developed, offering more focused discussion of specific issues within the master framework of neoliberal resistance. The Foro reached its organizational peak in 2004, the year when the CAFTA agreement was officially completed and signed by its seven member states.\(^7\) That same year, Central American anti-mining activists spun off their first regional meeting, launching an annual gathering that culminated in the formal constitution of the Alianza Centroamericana contra la Minería Metálica in Las Cabañas on May 21, 2007. Denouncing metal mining as a “nefarious activity” that negatively impacted the right to life, health, food sovereignty, and natural resources, their Declaration called for an “incorruptible struggle” against metal mining throughout the region (Declaración 2007).\(^8\)

Interpersonal cross-border connections being built at the local level and the bridging work undertaken by regional brokers facilitated a process of “diffusion,” i.e., the “transfer of claims or forms of contention from one site to another” (Tarrow 2005, 32; see also Giugni 2002). Salvadoran activists appropriated and adapted frames deployed by neighboring resistance movements where contentious mining politics was a step ahead. Although the national adaptation of ideas, strategies, repertoires and resources deployed at the transnational level is commonly referred to as a “downward scale shift,” cross-regional learning had a stronger horizontal dimension than the upward-downward construct implies.

El Salvador’s Mesa Nacional provided an organizational vehicle through which transnational learning could be diffused and local information disseminated. With two paid staff, monthly press conferences, friendly coverage from the small run Diario Co-Latino, and a blog (esnomineria),

\(^7\)The V Foro Mesoamericano held in San Salvador in July 2004 brought together 1,747 participants in a three-day forum funded by OxfamAmerica, Pan para el Mundo, NOVIB, Share, and Desarrollo y Paz (Canada) in a forceful denunciation of this neoliberal victory (Spalding 2007, 96). The gathering was organized and directed by national hosts; UNES, FESPAD, and CRIPDES, all founding members of El Salvador’s Mesa Nacional Frente a la Minería Metalíaca, were tasked with coordinating workshops and synthesizing comments in reports to the plenary, thereby playing regional brokerage roles.

\(^8\)The Mesa Nacional and two of its members subsequently affiliated with the Observatorio de Conflictos Mineros de América Latina (OCMAL), a continent-wide network monitoring mining conflicts, particularly in the Andes, that was launched in Oruro, Bolivia in March 2007. OCMAL had registered 133 mining conflicts in 15 Latin American countries by August 2010 (www.olca.co/ocmal database).
the Mesa Nacional set up shop in an office building shared with CRIPDES and the Sister Cities project. The 2008 “repertoire of contention” included organized marches (with the symbolic internment of Pacific Rim), petition campaigns (collecting more than 10,000 letters), and radio “sociodramas” focusing on government trickery and company abuse.

d. Alternative epistemic communities, or “In [our] scientists we trust”

In the meantime, gold exploration advanced in El Salvador. Commercially viable deposits were identified, with Canadian company Pacific Rim, holder of the exploration license for the El Dorado project in Las Cabañas, taking the lead. Having acquired an exploration concession in 2002, Pacific Rim bid for an extraction permit in 2004. The first step in the process required the company to produce an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). A feasibility study was to follow, demonstrating, among other items, legal rights to the land on which the mine would be constructed.

Preparing to challenge the petition on environmental grounds, the Asociación de Desarrollo Económico y Social (ADES), a community development association in the repopulated town Santa Marta, contracted Robert E. Moran, a US-based hydrologist and geochemist, to produce an evaluation of the El Dorado EIA. Thus began a process of layering in rival scientific and expert analysis to expose the environmental problems posed by mining.

Following two decades of government and corporate experience in mining, Moran had begun collaborating with non-profit organizations in 1996, “tired of the half truths” that characterized consultant reports for the industry (Moran 2010). In 1998 he published “Cyanide Uncertainties: Observations on the Chemistry, Toxicity, and Analysis of Cyanide in Mining-Related Waters” with the Mining Policy Center (now Earthworks). The activist networks forming around mining hazards brought him a string of consulting invitations from alternative development and environmental coalitions in Latin America. Beginning in Honduras in 2001, as the conflicts around the San Andrés mine erupted, Moran rotated through eight Latin American countries over
the next nine years (and more than two dozen assignments in other parts of the world). In several cases, scrutinized mines were subsequently closed or extraction permits were suspended.9

When approached about the El Dorado environmental impact assessment, Moran was in the middle of an assessment of the controversial Marlin Mine in Guatemala, and he agreed to extend his regional work to El Salvador. Moran’s El Dorado report, released at a public gathering in October 2005 in the Las Cabañas capital city of Sensuntepeque, questioned the quality of the preparatory work done by Vector Colorado, the US-based consulting company that prepared the EIAs for both El Dorado and Marlin Mine.

Among the many deficiencies he cited, Moran targeted inadequate discussion of remediation measures to be taken in the event of a cyanide spill, residual hazards posed by tailings solutions produced in the cyanide detoxification process, insufficient base-line research on current water levels and quality, and missing financial guarantees to cover compensation in the event of mine disaster. In addition, Moran denounced the public feedback and community consultation processes stipulated in Salvadoran mining regulations. The community was given only 10 days to respond to the single copy of a complex and confusing 1400-page report. Adding insult to injury, they were required to consult the document at the environmental ministry office in San Salvador—no photocopying was allowed. In area after area, Moran noted how far short the EIA fell relative to the standards and safeguards that governed mining permit processes in the US and Canada.

Moran’s assessment was the opening salvo in the resistance network’s effort to mobilize support from an alternative epistemic community of scientists and experts. As Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) reminds us, scientific subcultures are communities

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9 Moran received a doctorate in Geological Sciences from the University of Texas, Austin in 1974. He worked six years in the Water Resources Division of the US Geological Survey, followed by twenty years as a hydrogeologist for private clients, including mining companies. After he shifted to community contracts, his CV notes projects in eight Latin American countries (Honduras, Peru, Argentina, Chile, Guatemala, El Salvador, Bolivia and Colombia) as well as other regions of the world and the US. See Moran (2005a, 2005b) for his research reports on mining projects in Guatemala and El Salvador.
of knowers that are constituted both socially and historically. In bidding for authority, expert actors bargain with other actors in an often-conflictual strategic game where outcomes are fluid and winning coalitions are temporary (Dunlop 2000). The relationship between knowledge and power, following Michel Foucault, has increasingly become a subject of critical inquiry. In their study of the way “universals” in neoliberal economics and the legal human rights agenda migrated between dominant intellectual and policy centers in the US and Europe and such circles in Latin America, Dezalay and Garth (2002, 8) locate epistemic communities in national and international “fields of power.” Küttting and Lipschutz (2009) advance this inquiry, focusing on the way the knowledge debate informs disputes over environmental governance. Power webs shape the way knowledge is variously absorbed, challenged, redefined, and deflected, and even what counts as worthy information.

In the Salvadoran mining case, a host of authorities in the ministries of economy and environment had endorsed mining development and granted initial rounds of approval, backed by experts at international financial institutions and consultants at firms like Vector that validated specific projects as low risk. The resistance network now counterattacked by mobilizing its own set of authorities who offered a strikingly different assessment of the environmental risks.

The Mesa Nacional membership included a research center, CEICOM, which produced and distributed mission-driven publications written either by its own staff members or consultants. A second member, UNES, combined research and activism on a number of environmental issues including the costs of free trade agreements and the protection of water rights. While largely directed by local experts, these networks periodically incorporated specialists from U.S. or European universities with experience in the mining sector. Collaboration with external experts allowed Salvadoran resistance networks to tap the cultural capital possessed by thickly credential scientists from the Global North, making it more difficult for mine defenders to dismiss their work.
In quick succession, Moran’s review was supplemented by the work of other experts from the opposition camp. This cluster of expert reports challenged the adequacy of El Salvador’s environmental review process, both in terms of risk assessment and citizen engagement. It questioned the economic benefits and development impact of mining, and raised a red flag on the country’s institutional and regulatory capacity. The construction of rival expert assessments provided an additional tool for resistance networks seeking to counter the monopoly knowledge claims of mining promoters. The availability of alternative expertise derived, in part, from years of prior support provided by a set of development and social justice oriented international non-governmental organizations.

e. Religious communities, a variant

Neoliberal resistance networks are often small, attracting only a fraction of the total population. If they aspire to influence the direction of national life, they must cultivate multiple alliances and build broader coalitions. In times of extreme volatility and crisis, when established authority structures are in question, anti-neoliberal alliances may be able to expand their influence quickly and successfully challenge a neoliberal regime (Silva 2009). In the absence of a disarticulating crisis and other key conditions, the process of constructing a reform coalition may be long and hard. The job requires a capacity for both “bonding” (connecting with socially homogeneous others) and “bridging” (building connections with those outside or beyond their social network, producing a heterogeneous alliance) (Putnam 2000, 22-24). In the Salvadoran case, the anti-mining coalition found a critical ally in the upper echelons of the Catholic Church, a

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10 UNES leaders collaborated with Florian Erzinger, an environmental science and development studies specialist from the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, Switzerland, to produce El Lado Oscurito del Oro (Erzinger, Gonzalez, and Ibarra 2008); Dina Larios de López, a Salvadoran geochemist and hydrogeologist and professor of geology at Ohio University with a specialization in acid mine drainage, co-authored “Riesgos y posibles impactos de la minería metálica en El Salvador” with CEICOM (López, Guzmán, and Mira 2008). Other academic specialists were contracted directly by INGOs; Thomas M. Power, an economist at the University of Montana, for example, wrote Metals mining and sustainable development in Central America, a 2008 Oxfam research report that, reviewing academic and policy literature, showed the weakness of the link between mining production, economic growth and development. 11 Robert E. Moran’s 2010 resume, for example, listed Oxfam, Friends of the Earth, Christian Aid, Greenpeace, the International Development Research Center, Diakonia, Heinrich Böll Foundation, and Pax Christi, among others, as funders for his consulting and research reports on Latin American cases.
generally conservative political force. These loose networks constructed around shared objection to metal mining allowed the movement to expand its influence and recruit beyond its base.

“Liberation theology” as a religious orientation had been severely weakened in El Salvador by years of warfare and official church hostility. Some sectors of church activists retained the call, however, particularly in faith-in-action nodes and resistance communities. Cáritas, the Catholic Church’s official international relief, development and social service agency, promoted advocacy on issues such as access to water, climate change, dam construction, mining, health and prisons in El Salvador. Leaders of this organization became active participants in the anti-mining coalition; Cáritas-El Salvador was one of the Mesa’s founding members.

Networking with Cáritas organizations elsewhere in Central America, Cáritas El Salvador leaders worked to persuade Salvadoran bishops of mining dangers through peer consultation, bringing in bishops from Honduras and Guatemala, countries where church leaders were already in the forefront of anti-mining coalitions (Jones 2010). Church officials in El Salvador were initially reticent. The archbishop of San Salvador (1995-2009), Fernando Sáenz Lacalle, was a politically conservative Opus Dei member, and the Conferencia Episcopal de El Salvador (CEDES) over which he presided was a badly fractured body. When they ultimately pronounced on the issue, however, their comunicado, “Cuidemos la Casa de Todos” (“Let’s take care of Everyone’s Home”), provided clear testimony of transnational learning, stating:

“*The experience of our brother and neighboring countries, which have permitted gold and silver mining, is truly sad and lamentable. The bishops of those nations have raised their voice. We also wish to pronounce on this issue, before it is too late*...(CEDES 2007).

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12 The hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church and its formal lines of authority distinguish this organization from the kinds of networks that normally populate international social movement and civil society theory. Syncretistic characteristics of the Church, however, suggest elements of dialogue and “convergence space” in which local and international actors within the Church negotiate strategies of cooperation and alignment. In this sense, discussion of the Church as a special kind of INGO, one that both domesticates and globalizes, may be useful.

13 See Cáritas El Salvador at caritas.org/worldmap/latin_America/elsalvador.html <August 19, 2010>
The bishops declared that “this class of mining causes irreversible damage to the environment and surrounding communities,” with resulting health problems, water and subsoil contamination, and harmful effects on vegetation, agriculture, livestock and fish. In a small and densely populated country like El Salvador, the effects would be widely felt. Metal mining in El Salvador, they concluded, “should not be permitted.”

Trained as a chemist at the Universidad de Zaragoza in Spain, Archbishop Sáenz Lacalle remained un-persuaded by company claims about cyanide evaporation and the detoxification processes associated with “green mining.” Under his leadership, the bishops’ comunicado was signed by all eleven CEDES members, a rare expression of unity among El Salvador’s often divided bishops. Bonding processes, built along doctrinal lines with fellow Central American bishops, facilitated bridging connections, which linked top Church officials with more ideologically radical resistance activists at home.

The Salvadoran bishops’ position not only echoed the concerns of other Central American bishops, it also anticipated the environmental pronouncements issued only a few days later at the V CELAM conference of 160 Latin American bishops in Aparecida, Brazil. The “Care for the Environment” section of that CELAM declaration concluded:

“Today the natural wealth of Latin America and the Caribbean is being subjected to an irrational exploitation that is leaving ruin and even death in its wake, throughout our region. A great deal of responsibility in this entire process must be attributed to the current economic model which prizes unfettered pursuit of riches over the life of individual persons and peoples and rational respect for nature...A similar warning must be made about resource-extraction industries which, when they fail to control and offset their harmful effects on the surrounding environment, destroy forests and contaminate water, and turn the areas exploited into vast deserts.” (CELAM 2007, n.p.).

Concern about the moral and ethical meaning of environmental destruction has long roots in various religious traditions, Catholicism among them (Jenkins 2008). Pope Benedict XVI, colloquially labeled the “Green Pope” in some media reports, made the protection of nature and the ecological health of the planet a central theme in several pronouncements, particularly when speaking with young people (Koenig-Bricker 2009; Benedict XVI 2010). This kind of messaging within Catholic Church networks encouraged attention to the disconnection between global economic processes and environmental sustainability.
Although the Catholic Church’s reach in El Salvador had tended to decline over time, as elsewhere in Latin America, Catholicism remained the dominant religion in the country.\(^\text{15}\) In addition, the Catholic Church consistently received the highest institutional trust scores, with 41% of Salvadoran respondents indicating “much” confidence in this institution in 2008 (versus 7% for businesspeople, 6.5% for political parties and 6% of the national legislature), a figure that rose to 47% in the 2009 survey (IUDOP 2008, 57; 2009, 54). The call by the Salvadoran bishops for greater environmental protection, in keeping with pronouncements from other church authorities in Central America and beyond, presented the mining industry with a serious challenge.

\(f. \text{“Domesticating INGOs” and “The Allies”}\)

INGOs proved key strategic partners in the anti-mining campaign, operating both to pressure through international nodes (the classic boomerang pattern) and to amplify resources available to local networks in the “bring it home” approach (the domestic conduit model). For our purposes, it is useful to distinguish between INGOs that are adept at conventional boomerang politics and those well designed for domestic political alliances. Local networks may need different kinds of resources from their transnational allies in each of these processes. In the classic form, they need allies with deep knowledge of the rules and pressure points operating in international power centers such as the US government (to get aid flows cut to human rights violators, for example) and international financial institutions (to get loans to transgressive states suspended). For linkage processes in which local groups focus on building their case at home, on the other hand, domestic activists need transnational allies to support the acquisition of validating information from alternative epistemic communities, as we have seen, or funding to cover operating expenses and communication strategies. At the conceptual level, we might distinguish between *power node INGOs*, which emphasize the former roles, and *domesticating INGOs*, which emphasize the latter.

\(^{15}\)In an IUDOP (2008, 11) poll, 52% identified as Catholic, 29.5% as Evangelicals, and 17% as having no religious affiliation.
Unlike power node INGOs, which tend to be located in global cities and power centers, domesticating INGOs are characterized by their long-term presence in the periphery, close mission identification with local allies, and dense, multi-strand linkages with a durable set of partners. They may present themselves as active agents in local debates, organize and participate in domestic policy forums, and lobby government officials directly. Deeply knowledgeable of the local political scene, these INGOs are well positioned to “downward scale shift” and support the national policy work of their domestic allies. Although their relationship with national organizations is not friction free, tensions are normally carefully managed to minimize conflict and avoid costly ruptures.

El Salvador has 145 legally registered INGOs (Holiday 2010), some of which have deep roots and function in El Salvador as quasi-local organizations. The brutality of the civil war in El Salvador in the 1980s and debate about the US role in it sparked solidarity activism and cross-national bonds (Perla 2008), and a network of INGOs was built on that foundation. The return migration and repopulation discussed above was achieved with “accompaniment” from organizations like SHARE, CISPES, and the Sister Cities project. These domesticating INGOs had a non-transferable mission defined by work exclusively in El Salvador. They nurtured deep and enduring ties to local “communities in resistance,” working to validate their alternative development model and support these partners financially. Not focused on mining, these solidarity-based INGOs shared a strong commitment to Salvadoran sovereignty and opposition to neoliberal globalization, which they found destructive to the poor and vulnerable. Informally calling themselves simply “the allies,” leaders of these deeply anchored transnational actors coalesced around mining as conflict escalated, looking for ways to help their partners advance the cause (Sister Cities 2010).

A second group of domesticating INGOs was centered in the international development and human rights communities. The postwar peace process and repeated reconstruction efforts following natural disasters drew in an array of human rights, social justice, and development-
oriented INGOs from Europe and the US. Although there was considerable convergence in terms of goals between these organizations and their local allies, these INGOS had a formally geocentric mandate and global vision. As internationally recognized organizations with professional staff and funds to support campaigns, organizations such as Oxfam America financed conferences, research, public outreach, local projects and operating expenses. Though not defined by a country-specific mission, their long-term presence and dense, multi-layered project support tightly connected this group of INGOs to local networks.\(^{16}\)

These INGOs provided much more than financial support. A review of Oxfam’s engagement with the mining issue is illustrative. Oxfam America’s regional Central America, Mexico and Caribbean office was located in San Salvador, giving resident staff a bird’s eye view of emerging national issues. At the beginning of the decade, Oxfam America launched their global “Right to Know, Right to Decide” campaign challenging common arguments about the benefits of the extractive sector and calling for informed community participation in decision making about natural resource development (Ross 2001; Oxfam America 2009). Long supportive of the Foro Mesoamericano regional resistance movement and local NGO empowerment initiatives, Oxfam America was an early backer of El Salvador’s Mesa Nacional, providing important operational funds and early publicity (McKinley 2010). In addition to supporting local partners, Oxfam representatives also lobbied Salvadoran government officials directly, cultivating contacts in the Ministry of Economy and distributing the organization’s growing body of research on mining problems. As pressure built and the mining industry mounted its public relations counterattack

\(^{16}\)Evidence of such INGO support looms large on the websites of El Salvador’s neoliberal resistance-oriented NGOs and the covers of their many publications. The Mesa Nacional’s research affiliate, CEICOM, for example, lists five funders on its website: the Heinrich Böll Foundation of Germany, the Netherlands-based ICCO, Eusko Jaularitza of the Basque government, the Swedish DIAKONIA, and Oxfam America. In addition to these sources, CEICOM’s publications on the history of mining in El Salvador, the environmental and social problems it generated, and the processes involved in the ICSID case received financial support from the Spanish labor rights foundation Paz y Solidaridad, and two Salvadoran organizations, the Universidad Luterana Salvadoreña and ADES, themselves recipients of INGO funding (Henríquez 2008; Ramos 2009).
(discussed below), Oxfam America commissioned a public opinion poll in prospective mining communities to interrogate claims of community support (IUDOP 2007).

Research on transnational activism demonstrates that high levels of external support can be a mixed blessing; while providing needed support, transnational alliances can be damaging to local networks. Petras (1997), focusing on top-down service sector delivery by not-for-profits, has accused NGOs of introducing a new kind of colonialism and “deradicalizing whole areas of social life” (p. 6) in Latin America. Edelman (1998; 2008) found that intervention by external allies and funders can overwhelm a local group, disconnecting it from its membership base and its locally derived mission. Over-funding and hot light attention to some local actors combined with neglect of equally meritorious others can leave a wreckage of intra-movement competition and ill will (Bob 2005). Efforts by local coalitions to assert autonomy and set limits on external partners (Andrews 2010) respond to real contradictions. Indeed, Oxfam America has exercised power in the Andes in controversial ways in different contexts and across time (Lucero 2010). Even constructive partnerships are encased in power relationships, leading to periodic recalibrations and low-grade tensions.

At the same time, in settings where resources are scarce and confrontation means a lopsided battle with wealthy and powerful antagonists, multilayered collaboration with INGOs is often critical to the development and durability of popular resistance networks. Many INGO leaders, particularly those of the “domesticating” variety discussed above, are aware of the problem caused by top-down control, and struggle to navigate these shoals.17 In recognition of this conundrum, Jenny Pearce (2010) has called for a national-transnational commitment to “critical reflexivity” in order to promote on-going INGO dialogue about “the coherence of their internal dynamics with the values that they espouse” (p. 632).

17 During the CAFTA debate, for example, Oxfam America provided financial support for two rival Central American networks (Inciativa CID and Foro Mesoamericano) to avoid stifling discussion or intensifying competition by assisting only one (Spalding 2007).
3. *Bringing it Home: Mining Momentum Checked*

To advance their case, the mining companies adopted a two-part strategy to push the government forward. First came the carrot—a public relations push that emphasized the corporation’s good citizenship and environmentally friendly technologies. Second came the stick—the threat of costly legal action against the government unless it complied. Using guarantees provided under the newly implemented DR-CAFTA agreement, mining officials threatened to present a claim of “indirect expropriation” and demand full compensation for lost profits if the government halted the advance of the permit process.

The economic and environmental case was put forward in a 2007 report by Manuel Enrique Hinds, a former Minister of Finance during El Salvador’s market transition. Having worked with the World Bank during post-communist and market transitions of the 1980s, he brought the message of market orthodoxy home to El Salvador when he returned as an architect of market reform. Now defending the previous government’s decision to encourage gold exploration, his argument turned on two points: the country would derive important economic benefits from gold mining; and mining would be done without noteworthy environmental damage (Hinds 2007).

This new message was accompanied by a vigorous media campaign to advance the idea of “green mining.” Ads on TV and radio announced the benefits of green mining technology, and protesters gathered outside the National Cathedral and the Oxfam office to denounce Church and INGO opposition as “anti-worker.” Collaborating with local mayors in the proposed El Dorado mine region, the Canadian mining company Pacific Rim developed a social investment portfolio

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18 Hinds received a MA in Economics from Northwestern University in 1973, and he served briefly as El Salvador’s Minister of Economy in 1979-1980. Following a stint with the World Bank in the 1980s, he returned as Finance Minister for four years during the Calderón Sol administration (1994-1999), and he helped to usher in dollarization under Francisco Flores (1999-2004).

19 The Hinds report projected that the development of four mines would increase tax revenues, generate substantial new employment and reduce the extreme poverty rate, all “without any environmental cost” since environmental damage associated with mining was much lower than that associated with other “normal” activities in El Salvador (Hinds 2007, 4). The methods and findings in the Hinds report were critiqued in Power (2008).
to demonstrate good citizenship and cultivate public support.\textsuperscript{20} Company representatives claimed to have secured the elusive “social license” provided by community approval.

Testing the claim that mining companies had consulted adequately with the affected communities and won local consent for these projects, Oxfam’s regional office commissioned a survey of attitudes toward mining in the region. In October 2007, IUDOP, a well-regarded public opinion polling institute located at the Jesuit-run Universidad Centroamericana (UCA), ran the survey in 24 municipios where mining exploration permits had been authorized.

When asked, “Do you consider El Salvador an appropriate country for metal mining?” 62% of those surveyed responded “no” (IUDOP 2007, 54). Cued to think about mining in relation to their own community, a modest majority (54%) disagreed with the statement, “The mining companies promote the development of the municipio” (p. 37). Concern was particularly pronounced when asked about impact of metal mining on the environment and the trade off with alternative economic activities. When framed in these terms, the majority indicated “much” concern about the damage that would be done to fishing (66%), agriculture (57%), livestock (59%), and ecotourism (53%). This concern was especially strong among women and better-educated respondents.\textsuperscript{21} These results suggested that the mining industry had failed to win the war of public opinion in the zone under exploration.

\textit{a. Critical junctures: politically embedded campaign analysis}

The relationship between movement mobilization, public attitudes, elite policy positions and policymaking activities of government officials is complex and frequently under-analyzed in social movement theory. Many social movement activists organizing around opposition to

\textsuperscript{20} See testimony by Pacific Rim Mining Company President and CEO Thomas Shrake (2010) during committee hearings on mining law reform in the Canadian Parliament, in which he discusses the company’s community eye-care and reforestation projects in El Salvador.

\textsuperscript{21} On ecotourism, for example, 57% of women indicated that there would be “much” damage to this sector if a mining project opened, whereas only 49% of men chose that response. In terms of variation by education level, 76% of those in the top grade classification (“superior”) indicated that there would be “much” damage to ecotourism, whereas 47% of those with less than a primary school education chose that response (IUDOP 2007, 53).
economic globalization consciously reject engagement with formal politics, even when they operate within representative democracies. These critics call for direct, contentious and participatory politics that is designed to change society, rather than routine and institutional politics, which they characterize as bureaucratized, professionalized and sterile (della Porta et al 2006, 199-231; Menser 2009). 22

Other activists and researchers have called for greater attention to social movement engagement with political institutions (Smith 2008, 231-42; Roberts 2008; Silva 2009; and von Bülow 2010). The rise of an electoral left in much of Latin America invigorated this discussion; many on the left in Latin American social movements came to see the state and political parties as significant, if not exclusive, mechanisms for achieving change. Research on these intersections requires us to not only bring the state back in but also attend to linkages between movements, parties, elections and public policy in the region. This kind of politically embedded campaign analysis highlights connections between social movement campaigns and domestic politics.

In the Salvadoran case, the sequential advance of several resistance movements coincided with the weakening of ARENA’s hold on political power. Paul Almeida (2008) documented a rising “protest wave” in opposition to health care privatization, and other mobilizations over environmental and water rights followed (Haglund 2010). Public support for a market economy trended downward between 1998 and 2007 in El Salvador, as elsewhere in Latin America (see Baker and Greene 2011), even before the US recession-induced losses at the end of the decade. Although public opinion data can be volatile and should be approached with caution, the annual Latinobarómetro poll indicated a fall off in support for a market-oriented economy in El Salvador across the decade. The percent of Salvadoran respondents who agreed with the statement, “A market economy is best (lo más conveniente) for the country” fell from 78% in 1998 to 52% in 2007 (Latinobarómetro 2009, 91). Likewise, the percent of respondents who agreed with the

22 In their survey of neoliberal resistance activists at the G8 protest in Genoa in 2001 and the European Social Forum in Florence in 2002, della Porta et al (2006) found generally low levels of confidence in political parties and national legislatures, although the degree of distrust varied by national delegation.
statement “A market economy is the only system through which to become a developed country” declined from 56% in 2003 to 47% in 2007 (p. 93).²³

The recent electoral shift to the left in Latin America is generally attributed to rising economic dissatisfaction with the neoliberal model, although controversy remains about the specific features at play (Stokes 2009; Baker and Greene 2011). El Salvador bucked the regional trend for several years, with continuous ARENA victories at the presidential level, in part through well-worked fears about “communism” and the hostility a left-victory would inspire in the US (Wolf 2009). By 2008, these fears had dissipated.²⁴ As Dinorah Azpuru’s (2009) study of ideology and presidential elections in El Salvador from 1994 to 2009 demonstrates, mean ideological self-placement had also shifted leftward. From its rightward peak of 6.89 in 2004 (on a ten-point scale, with 1 representing the extreme left and 10 the extreme right), mean ideological self-placement dropped to 5.3 in 2008, declining still further to 4.96 in 2009 (p. 124). By 2008, El Salvador’s mean ideology score was already one of Latin America’s lowest (furthest to the left, albeit with marked polarization), along with Uruguay (5.09), Bolivia (5.17), Venezuela (5.25) and Ecuador (5.37) (p. 123).

The FMLN still drew unrelenting hostility in some quarters, and it stumbled over internal divisions and poor candidate choices. Over time, however, the party’s electoral capacity grew. It achieved significant gains in the 2003 local and legislative elections. Learning from sweeping defeat in the 2004 presidential election, the party chose center-left, independent candidate Mauricio Funes as its candidate for the 2009 presidential election and won ample public approval for that selection. Funes, a popular journalist and political commentator, previously had a long-

²³ Note that support for a market economy rebounded in El Salvador in 2009 following the March election of Mauricio Funes. Agreement with the two above statements rose to 70% and 64%, respectively (Latinobarómetro 2009, 91, 93). Although further analysis is required to determine the cause(s) of this reversal, it may be those Salvadorans polled in 2009 were responding to the idea of a market economy that would be better regulated, as under the popular Funes administration, whereas participants in prior surveys responded to the idea of a deregulated market system, as pursued by the ARENA governments.

²⁴ Asked in an IUDOP 2008 poll whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement, “If the FMLN wins the elections, will El Salvador turn into another Cuba and will Venezuela have a strong influence?” 64% said they disagreed; the same percentage disagreed with the statement that a FMLN presidential victory would negatively affect diplomatic relations with the US (IUDOP 2009a, 131, 133).
running interview program on TV Canal 12, and was well known for his independent and critical style.

Under these circumstances, ARENA President “Tony” Saca began to publicly distance his administration from some traditional party positions. One area where this division can be seen is in his emerging position on the mining concessions, which he began to question publicly in 2008 (López, Eduardo 2008).25 As the companies became insistent and electoral challenges loomed, Saca went further. In February 2009, on the eve of the March presidential election, the president called into a Catholic radio station program on the mining controversy and pledged that he would “not grant a single permit” (López Piche 2009). On the legal complaint that Pacific Rim threatened to bring against the government, Saca continued: “They are about to file an international claim and I want to make this clear: I would prefer to pay the $90 million than to give them a permit” (Ibid).

Saca’s anti-mining position coincided with that taken by Funes on the campaign trail. During a stop in La Cabañas of his “Caravan of Hope” a year before the election, Funes had declared, “As long as [the mining companies] fail to demonstrate that these projects do not contaminate the environment and [do not damage] the health of our population, we are not going to permit metal mining” (Redacción Diario Co Latino 2008). The official position of the FMLN, as declared in its campaign platform, was that the mining law should be reformed to ban metal mining outright (FMLN 2008, 19). ARENA candidate, Rodrigo Avila, in contrast, reportedly took no position on the issue (http://esnomineria.blogspot.com, March 11, 2009), leaving open the possibility that gold mining would advance under his administration.

Victory depended on the candidates’ ability to mobilize votes beyond their party base. Outspent by ARENA more than two to one (Rodríguez, Padilla and Torres 2009, 38, 35), the

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25Factors other than public opinion and electoral demands may have played a role in Saca’s rejection of mining. Internal tensions in ARENA, which ultimately led to a party fissure (the defection of a faction of ARENA diputados in Fall 2009 and Saca’s expulsion from the party in December), may have played a role, as might intra-elite disputes over mining vs. tourism investment alternatives.
Funes campaign depended heavily on a volunteer base of activists to mobilize support and get out the vote. The social movements and resistance organizations that had mounted campaigns against health and water privatization and in favor of labor and environmental rights were now organized into the “Concertación por el Cambio” coalition to support Funes’ election (Almeida 2009; Menjívar 2010). Although some social organizations supporting the Funes campaign were heavily populated by FMLN activists, many regarded themselves as independent. Their mobilization allowed the campaign to reach beyond core party activists to secure support from the critical wavering and undecided voter. The race got tighter in the final lap, but Funes received 51.3% of the total vote to Avila’s 48.7%, and El Salvador joined Latin America’s leftward electoral shift.

In the months that followed, Funes pledged to maintain the country’s de facto mining moratorium. The Mesa Nacional, working closely with FMLN allies, advanced a legislative proposal to ban metal mining, a measure that Funes promised to sign if approved (Quintanilla 2010). 26

4. Conclusions

This paper suggests three general observations about the way ideas, information, and conceptual frameworks from transnational movements are deployed by national networks in local neoliberal resistance struggles. First, in contrast with images of transnational actors sweeping in

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26 Following Funes’ election, two mining companies, Pacific Rim and Commerce Group, lodged official complaints against the Salvadoran government alleging “indirect expropriation” under CAFTA’s investment guarantees, and they demanded $170 million in compensation (Pac Rim Cayman LLC, Claimant, v. Republic of El Salvador, Respondent 2009; Commerce Group Corp, Claimant, vs. Republic of El Salvador, Respondent 2009). As the conflict shifted to the World Bank’s International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), affiliates of the Mesa Nacional sought out new transnational allies from “power node INGOs,” a set of organizations skilled at lobbying the US congress and Canadian parliament, preparing legal briefs for international dispute resolution processes, and targeting mining company shareholders to raise awareness of conflicts (Spalding 2010; CIEL 2011). As this issue came to a head in Washington, it also came to a head in Las Cabañas, where local anti-mining activists faced rising threats and violence. Three activists in the anti-mining campaign were murdered between June and December 2009, in a surge of violence that drew rising national and international attention (Steiner 2010; Anderson et al 2010).
to redirect the activities of social movements in the global South, this study emphasizes the ways that national movements actively participate in the construction of their transnational alliances. Linkages emerge out of lived international experiences with migration and displacement, and through relationships with similarly situated others who share a common struggle.

Transnational alliances may be regional, such as those framed by the European Social Alliance or MERCOSUR, suggesting that the scale shift detected in national-transnational networks may not always be upward and downward, but may also contain lateral or horizontal elements. Cross-border networks are constructed over time through regional alliances of activists who broker strategic and conceptual frames through horizontal networks emphasizing collaboration and shared responsibility. The breadth and fluidity of these brokered connections allow alliances to reconfigure around new campaigns as resistance targets shift. The efficiency costs of these periodic reconfigurations have to be balanced against gains that derive from this on-going capacity for renewal.

Second, alliances with INGOs, although frequently criticized by movement analysts for their deracinating and distorting qualities, provide vital resources and knowledge sharing that allow domestic networks to develop. Such alliances may work best when national networks collaborate with international organizations that are strongly invested in the local environment, like solidarity and development organizations with thin bureaucracies and a willingness to accommodate substantial partner autonomy (domesticating INGOs). Transnational activists from these INGOs may have a greater capacity to adjust to local dynamics and engage in the “critical reflexivity” that sustains local authenticity (Pearce 2010).

These INGOs also facilitate the dissemination of counter-hegemonic knowledge by supporting both local research capacity and collaboration with sympathetic outside experts. Just as the construction of alternative communities of knowledge plays an important role in mobilizing support beyond the initial core, so too do alliances with Church elites. Although not known for receptivity to local variation, organizations like the Catholic Church can play an important role in
building national popular resistance movements. Clearly Catholic Church leaders have varied widely on this question, but Church officials have been key actors challenging exclusionary consequences of inadequately regulated market systems in many Latin American countries. As a domestically rooted transnational actor, the Church is designed to translate global messages to local communities, and to connect these communities across the divide of class, ethnicity and gender. These agglutinative capacities allow the Church to become a powerful contributor to transnational-national networks and national policy reform.

Third, this study emphasizes the usefulness of politically embedded campaign analysis. Unlike some social movement research that focuses more narrowly on internal framing and brokerage within the national and transnational networks, this study attends to the connections between social movements and larger political processes underway. This approach allows us to explore tipping points or critical junctures in which a transnationally-connected national movement converges with a broader political recalibration to promote electoral transition, policy adjustment and local behavioral change.

As Keck and Sikkink remind us, social movement achievements are highly varied, including relatively simple effects such as raising awareness and adding new issues to a national agenda (1998, 25). At critical conjunctions, however, movements may have larger impacts on national or international policy. Changes in economic attitudes combined with new political alliances open space for adjustments in the neoliberal model. Connections between mobilized resistance movements and left political parties can advance a reform agenda through electoral transitions; as in this case, recalibration may even precede electoral transitions, as conservative and business-oriented political leaders attempt to avoid electoral penalty. The modest and piecemeal changes underway in El Salvador, although failing to inspire erstwhile allies on the left, may still help to tip the development direction away from market orthodoxy and toward a buffered model with “larger states that insure against exposure to world markets” (Stokes 2009).
In the end, the change achieved depends on the way these domestic dynamics intersect with larger processes in the global economy. As the Salvadoran case demonstrates, adjustments made in the local economic model can trigger challenges from those who stand to lose, and powerful international alliances may mobilize to prevent “reneging” on neoliberal commitments. Movement victories may be only partial or temporary. As several papers presented in this workshop attest, we need to continue refining our analysis of the factors contributing to movement success and defeat. Long-term change will require on-going transnational activism that supports both domestic reform and change in the international economic architecture.

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