U.S. SOLIDARITY WITH LATIN AMERICA: THE FORMATION OF A POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

By

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To my son, Coley Charles Dyer Slade

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Introduction

I was sitting in a white plastic chair that squeaked with every move. Around me, on the red dirt earth, sat a broad circle of these white chairs with occupants from the U.S., the UK, and Colombia. Twelve of us amidst the group were in this location for the first time, a small Colombian community called La Toma located in the Southwest of the country. Sitting between La Toma residents we heard them detail their stories of State violence fueled by the U.S., of building local mechanisms of resistance, of anger, sorrow, and hope. We were on a "delegation" organized by an Afro-Colombian woman through the non-profit organization Witness for Peace. The goal of a delegation is to develop U.S. residents' awareness of the impact of U.S. imperialism through hearing and witnessing people's firsthand experiences and to foster "solidarity."

In La Toma, after listening to the stories, a community band started playing music and community members encouraged us to get up and dance. Energized by our small cups of tinto, a small, concentrated cup of coffee, we each stood and together our group of twelve and about 20 community members began to move together, creating an odd compendium of dance moves. We danced until the band used up the town's daily allotment of electricity and Francia Mina Marquez, a La Toma community member and 2021 Colombian Presidential candidate, led us to view the hydroelectric dam that was killing the town's fresh supply of fish and water. Something happened within these moments of listening, dancing, sharing food and drink. The group of twelve expanded its boundaries. It was no longer a group of twelve but now encompassed the community of La Toma, and likewise La Toma expanded its boundaries to encompass the group of twelve. Residents from across the Americas formed new connections, both intellectual, affective, and relational.

This dissertation is about these connections and how they can foster a shift in U.S. residents' political consciousness, how U.S. activists involved in transnational campaigns have become conscious of their own relationship to, and role in, influencing political projects both nationally

and internationally. In many ways, it is about how people became aware of and chose to contest U.S. empire. Throughout my research I sought to uncover how U.S. residents from the 1980s to the present became interested and involved in Latin America solidarity work, a relatively small field of transnational organizing that has fluctuated both in size and public awareness over the decades. How did people in the U.S. come to understand and engage with issues in other countries, when from the outset, they were seemingly unimpacted by the issues they were advocating for? Or said differently, what made people start to care about issues that were once distant from their everyday realities and consciousness? These questions were driven by my own personal involvement in solidarity work and general efforts to "try and get people to care". Then in mid-2020 when hundreds of thousands of people began regularly participating in public protests after the murder of George Floyd, an unarmed black man, by a police officer these questions burned with more intensity. Though Floyd's murder was preceded by multitudes of similar injustices, it ignited a tipping point for Black Lives Matter protests in the U.S. which have been accompanied by international mobilizations in solidarity. The emergence of larger protests populated by those who are unaffected by the issue at hand, following a well-publicized incident, has historically occurred in U.S. Latin American solidarity movements, including the well-known murder of three Jesuit nuns that sparked the 1980s Central American solidarity movement. The emergence of public manifestations generates questions about what is happening between larger public uprisings, the "off-stage" actions that are building to larger mobilizations (Scott 1985).

What are the avenues through which people become politically aware that then lend themselves to larger mobilizations? And how do people understand their own political consciousness? Moreover, how does this happen on a transnational scale? In the U.S. as racial injustices began to gain more public and media attention, activists from countries across the globe reflected calls for Black Lives to Matter in their own local protests. From Colombia to France, protesters waved posters emblazoned with Black Lives Matter phrasing (Taub 2021). Yet, as the U.S. public's attention was drawn to the many ways Black Lives are systematically harmed and disenfranchised within the U.S., an analysis of how the exportation of militarized and extractive economic projects abroad continues to harm already colonially marginalized populaces, was absent. How then do people become aware of transnational political connections about which

there is little public awareness or discussion? What are the fissures through which people begin to fracture the hegemonic narratives that inform their lives?

To answer these questions, I decided to focus specifically on activists who have been involved in U.S. Latin American Solidarity campaigns that focus on the impact of U.S. policy outside of the U.S. — or things that can be invisible to those living within the U.S. I began identifying research participants through my own relationships and involvement with the non-profit organization Witness for Peace which led me to activists involved in other organizations or unaffiliated work. I conducted 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork, attending NGO events, some non-profit meetings, informal hangouts between activists, and conducted 30 semi-structured interviews, most of which turned into multiple chats digging into peoples detailed life histories. In order to extrapolate how both history and personal circumstances informed people's political consciousness I selected interviewees who entered into U.S. Latin America solidarity from the 80s onward but had mostly been impacted by the direct campaigns for which they mobilized.

As such, research participants in this study are a small, racially, and generationally diverse subset of activists who became involved in U.S. Latin America campaigns in different periods of time marked by variant socio-political landscapes, from the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s, the emergence of anti-globalization movements in the 1990s, to the present moment marked by the entrenchment of neoliberalism, the rise of populist right, and increasing distrust in the State. They range from 18 years old to their mid-80s and live scattered across the Americas from California to Colombia. Some immigrated from Latin America or had parents who did a generation before. Most were largely unaware of U.S. connections with Latin America until later in life. However, the majority are middle class, have a college education, did not grow up in a politically active household, and were seemingly unimpacted by U.S. policies abroad.

Though a small subset of U.S. activists and activism today, they are representative of a larger demographic group of U.S. residents who are unaware of issues that may not directly impact them and/or have been taught by popular media and mainstream educational systems that U.S. hegemony is “normal” and that there is little they can do to change it. Through an examination of the life histories of these activists and the organizations and communities they have participated in, this project addresses both how those seemingly untouched by a political issue become

politically mobilized, and how those who are personally impacted begin to understand how they can affect change. As such, though I'm only focusing on a specific subset of activists, I believe some of my findings of how people develop a political consciousness, such as the role of liminality and *communitas*, can be more broadly applied to other activist settings.

Figure 1. Map of Latin America (Lizard Point, 2021)

U.S. activists have a protracted history of involvement with transnational campaigns with Latin America such as organizing against U.S. intervention in Cuba, protesting the exploitative practices of U.S. companies like Coca-Cola, Drummond, and Chiquita banana in Colombia, and calling for an end to U.S. military aid in Nicaragua (Gill 2009; Smith 1996; Striffler 2019). Though these campaigns have varied in size, goals, and consistency, the long-term and diverse history of transnational engagement between the regions makes U.S. Latin America activism a

key site to examine how political consciousness arises and changes overtime. In examining how U.S. activists have become involved in U.S. Latin American solidarity movements since the 1980s, this project works to uncover the multidimensional reasons individuals' political consciousness changes, from interpersonal relationships, affect, to the political economic context of the time. This research examines how racially diverse, middle class, and well-educated activists involved in U.S. Latin American Solidarity began their journey to understanding what constitutes U.S. Latin America solidarity, and how, for some, solidarity becomes more than just a set of actions or ideological framework, but a political framework enmeshed in their understanding of self and the world and framed by the extant political economic context. In an age of "alternative facts" when people increasingly refuse to believe information that contrasts with their worldview, and political apathy and disempowerment can seem commonplace, it is imperative to understand how and why peoples' political consciousness changes. Moreover, in today's globalized world in which local realities are connected to transnational politics and policies, understanding how political consciousness forms at the juncture of the transnational and personal experiences is critical to interpreting emerging forms of resistance and activism. The activists in this study provide a window into how well-educated, previously apathetic or disempowered people in the U.S. begin to develop a political understanding and be mobilized into action.

While trying to find the root of political consciousness development, I found that what I was researching was inherently about relationships and the meanings that are woven between people who are envisioning and working towards a better world. While the dissertation provides insight into how and why both those who benefit from race and class privilege, and those who do not may develop an awareness of their political surroundings, it is inherently a story of human connection, disconnection, empowerment, and faith. It is a story of how people who knew little about politics and whose whole lives have been enmeshed in the blowback of political decisions made in the U.S. have found themselves impassioned about changing systems and policies that they view as creating harm. It is a story of emotion, liminality, and faith in a sense of justice and social change.

1.1 Research Questions

International solidarity efforts have been a feature of U.S. politics since the nation's foundation. Efforts have focused on Native American rights, abolition, women's rights, anti-imperialism, Pan Africanism, labor, and larger overarching political projects such as communism or socialism (Ross 2014). Each historical iteration of international solidarity reflects Cooper's (2005) argument that empire, and in this instance the U.S. empire, is a site of contention and ongoing relational encounters. Likewise, the history of U.S. Latin America solidarity has been defined and redefined overtime by the myriad of relationships and interactions that have undergirded it. U.S. solidarity with Latin America has a deep history rooted in opposition to U.S. policies throughout the Americas and U.S. attempts to exert control.

The participants in this study became aware of U.S. interference in Latin America during distinct moments of history. Some began to develop an awareness during the 1960s and 1970s when a strong left flourished in the United States that overtly questioned U.S. imperialism. Others began to develop an awareness during the 1980s and the emergence of the Central American solidarity movement which focused on ending U.S. influence in the region. These activists came of age when the human rights framework was becoming the primary way through which people campaigned to the State, and Congressional policy advocacy and media outreach were key activist tactics. As the Central American solidarity movement waned at the beginning of the 1990s, neoliberalism and its focus on individual responsibility and decreased governmental regulation began to shift the landscape through which activists understood solidarity. Many people born in the 1980s and 1990s who had never witnessed or experienced any positive impacts of governmental advocacy began to develop an increasing distrust of the State and imagined solidarity on a different scale, embodied through personal relationships rather than large scale protests or well-organized campaigns.

While these changes occurred in the U.S., the landscape in Latin America continued to shift. In the countries in which the activists in this study were most involved, Honduras, Colombia, and Guatemala governments increasingly turned to free trade and opened up land, often historically occupied by Indigenous and Afro Descendant populations, to foreign companies and interests. Riding the tails of Cold War counterinsurgency violence, government militaries and para state

forces continued to rely on violence and fear to displace communities who lived on valuable, read profitable, land. As violence continued to dismantle and reorganize social life for many across Latin America, the U.S. government and corporations shifted to more covert tactics and policies to reach their goals. At the same time, public awareness and interest in the U.S. moved from Latin America to the Middle East after the post 9/11 focus on the war on terror. As a result, unlike the 1960s and 1980s, U.S. awareness about Latin American politics markedly declined. Though a myriad of other solidarity campaigns did emerge following the end of the Cold War, such as a large transnational movement in solidarity with the Zapatistas in Mexico, and around Plan Colombia in the early 2000's, these mobilizations were not quite as large or well-known in the U.S. outside of already politicized activists. Though this began to shift under the Trump presidency and his focus on immigration, most attention remained on the U.S. Mexico border, and not the political conditions that spoked migration or how U.S. economic and military policies helped craft them. The absence of widespread awareness or focus on political affairs in Latin America as well as a social movement drawing attention to U.S. imperialism, combined with increasing distrust of the State has shifted how people imagine and enact solidarity. Through an examination of both the similarities and weaknesses of how people have developed a political consciousness overtime and the myriad of historical factors that influenced their path, this project reexamines how solidarity with Latin America is conceptualized today and why. I demonstrate how many contemporary activists focus on individualized consciousness raising is connected to the entrenchment of neoliberal ideology and increasing distrust in the State to enact necessary reforms.

As such, the fundamental question that drove this work was an inquiry into the multi-factorial, socio-economic, political, and emotional influences that may converge to generate a change in U.S. residents' political consciousness and spur political engagement with efforts to change U.S. policy in Latin America. In the U.S. today there is a complex matrix of non-profit organizations, church groups, and university programs that provide educational, travel, and policy advocacy focusing on the U.S.'s connections with Latin America, including corporate relationships, U.S. policy, immigration, and the U.S.-Mexico border. A myriad of people participant in these wide-ranging programs from upper class, white U.S. citizens to working class undocumented immigrants. Despite the breadth of people and places that discuss U.S. Latin American

relationships, these organizations often lack a depth of focus and/or intermix discussions of U.S. relations with Latin America with other foreign countries with quite distinct historical contexts. For those organizations that do solely focus on Latin America, many of their advocacy projects focus primarily on events that are occurring within the U.S. For example, today a myriad of non-profit organizations exists that both campaign for changes to the immigration system in the U.S. and provide direct relief to immigrants, yet most of their work does not focus on shifting the dynamics (such as U.S. economic and military policies) that cause people to migrate in the first place. Indeed, relatively few organizations focus solely on how U.S. corporate, economic, and military policies impact people specifically located in Latin America. Or said differently, few focus on issues that aren't witnessed or publicized in the U.S. Yet, it is these organizations, or moreso the people that work within them and move between them, that could provide the most insight into how people get politically activated on issues that either do not directly affect them or about which they feel disempowered or apathetic. As such, this research project focuses primarily on the people and activists who have been involved in U.S. Latin America solidarity work since the 1980s who focus specifically on the impact of U.S. influence in countries across Latin America. Activists that populate these organizations are currently racially diverse, often middle class, well-educated and have come to U.S. Latin America solidarity activism through a wide variety of paths. In looking at this cross section of activists, many of whom became and/or stayed involved in solidarity work when a widespread movement did not exist, I am simultaneously examining the potential foundation of future social movements, the political subsoil built from consciousness raising.

Despite this, as this research continued it became obvious that my overarching research question could be distilled to an even broader framework that wasn't specific to U.S. Latin America solidarity. Rather, what I found was that this research is inherently about the experiences that shape and mold how people come to understand their place in the world and what they can do as individuals to enact change. I quickly found that there was no consistent “aha” moment that enlightened people in the U.S. and led them to immediate involvement in U.S. Latin America solidarity. Moreover, few people came to activism. Instead, most people’s foray into U.S. Latin American relations was a winding journey of slowly developing an awareness about the world

around them, becoming involved in other activist causes, and then stumbling into Latin America solidarity work.

1.2 Literature Review

Throughout this dissertation I draw from scholarly literature that discusses political consciousness, affect, and the overarching concept of solidarity. Each chapter examines how people developed an awareness of the world around them framed by unique historical time periods and differing personal experiences. Though U.S. Latin America solidarity seems impossibly broad geographically, for how can an understanding of solidarity with Honduras be the same as Colombia, my research indicates that though U.S. activists' ideas of solidarity may be influenced by the original country that got them involved in the work, there are overarching similarities in how people came to a political consciousness regardless of the specific country in which they are involved. I draw from three main bodies of scholarly literature in order to understand how U.S. residents' awareness and understanding of solidarity with Latin America develops, including works on political consciousness, affect, and solidarity.

This project is specifically concerned with how people develop an awareness on issues in which a broader public consciousness is overwhelmingly lacking. A variety of scholars have examined how broader socio-economic and political conditions can inform the development of political consciousness, particularly the rise of a new left in the United States, the Vietnam war, and the influence of Asian and African anti-colonial movements have informed U.S. residents political understandings and actions (Appy 2015; Massie 1997; Young 2006). Research indicates how a dominant political consciousness about governmental policies can be crafted through well-organized state proliferated narratives that draw on historical and emotional appeals to shift political sentiment (Krupa and Nugent 2015; Mitchell 1991; Saramifar 2019; Tate 2015). Similarly, scholars have shown how local personal and community relationships can define the limits of acceptable political talk and influence subsequent action (Swidler 1986; Norgaard 2011; Zerubavel 1997). These studies indicate how political and socio-cultural environments can inform political thinking. Building off of these studies, my project furthers this research by assessing the multitude of factors that inform how a leftist political consciousness emerges across time. However, rather than focusing my study only on objective moments of political

shifts within society, such as during widespread social movements or revolutions, this project encompasses historical moments when visible manifestations of U.S. Latin America solidarity were absent. As such, it underscores how both overarching socio-political and economic settings inform political thinking as well as how subjective experiences and interpersonal relationships during periods of quiescence influence paths to solidarity work. In order to deepen an understanding of the role of subjective experiences on political consciousness, I pay particular attention to the role of liminality (Turner 1969), periods of flux, and how moments or events of instability in people's lives can begin to generate a shift in political consciousness.

In addition to liminality, throughout my research affect continued to arise as a central tenant that informed people's political understandings. Unlike the fleeting sense of emotion, affect is an embodied reaction to circumstance or information that lingers even after the stimuli has passed (Gould 2009). It is a deeper felt reality. A variety of scholars have begun to pay attention to how emotion influences political consciousness, demonstrating that emotions can inspire political action by mobilizing feelings of shame (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Emotion can inspire moral shock and facilitate the formation of salient identities that activists want to maintain (Calhoun 1991; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polleta 2001; Gornick 1977; Tate 2007; Smith 1996). Scholars have argued that "all dimensions of political life have an emotional component" (Tate 2007, 146) and have shown how emotions can both undergird and shatter political ideologies (Ahmed 2014; Gornick 1977). Building on these approaches, this project demonstrates how various historical contexts and institutional intermediaries can evoke affective reactions that lead to different understandings of solidarity. Instead of contending that affect is a critical factor for shifting someone's political consciousness, I locate it within both historical and institutional settings to demonstrate how the convergence of both structural conditions and interpersonal relationships can inform people's thinking.

In underscoring the myriad of factors that work to shape political consciousness and understandings of solidarity, I try to move away from locating a concrete definition or judgement about solidarity practices and rather examine the meaning that people who claim "to be in solidarity" derive from the term. Indeed, scholarly literature on solidarity underscores how the meaning of solidarity has differed over time. The notion of solidarity initially emerged in 1864 as

part of the international labor movement when the International Workingmen's Association[1] decided to use the idea of solidarity as its foundation (Padover 1971). Initially, solidarity referred to a horizontal relationship that transcended differences of race, ethnicity, nationality etc., and was used to organize class-based collective action in which those who participated sought mutual benefit. While this type of solidarity is still practiced today by labor unions, definitions and understandings of solidarity have expanded to include forms of collective action that are not rooted in class-based camaraderie or even horizontal relationships. Because a multitude of understandings of solidarity exist today, some have turned to a broad definition of the idea and understand it simply as "unity or agreement of feeling or action, especially among individuals with a common interest; [or] mutual support within a group" (Mor 2013, 12). However, this definition privileges the role of "feelings" to determine what solidarity is and overlooks how individuals and groups' specific actions contribute to or undermine collective goals. In order to overcome such expansive definitions of solidarity, other scholars have parsed out different "types" of solidarity. Enrique Dussel (2007) argues that the type of solidarity depends on how "others" are perceived. This perception influences people's relationships and responsibilities to those with whom they are in solidarity. However, Dussel's understanding of solidarity obscures the fact that many seek relationships of solidarity with those with whom they have something in common, be it mutual political goals or a shared understanding of their own exploitation. Jessica Mor (2013) argues that one type of solidarity is "project solidarity" which covers joint political action around a specific cause. Others might call this political solidarity (hooks 1984; Scholz 2008). Sally Scholz (2008) differentiates ideas of social solidarity in which a community is united over some shared characteristic (identity politics), political solidarity in which a community is united for social change, and civic solidarity in which people feel obligated to protect those in their community by providing basic services. While Scholz captures the variety of ways laypeople may understand solidarity, her definitions are premised on an idea that people share a sense of camaraderie, and the type of camaraderie defines the type of solidarity. This understanding elides tensions that may exist within solidarity groups, presupposes a fictional harmony, and ignores the motivations that inspire individuals to engage in a solidarity project in

1. The International Workingmen's Association was a transnational organization born to unite a variety of left-wing groups in the 19th century into an international workers group. Karl Marx was a well-known member of the organization (Padover 1971).

the first place, beyond a simple feeling of camaraderie. In addition, by separating out political solidarity as a single type of unity, she inherently denotes all other forms as apolitical, despite solidarity's characteristically political connotation. Conversely, Remes (2012) describes solidarity as "mutual and reciprocal", not based solely on empathy but on mutual political bonds.

When taken together these theorists demonstrate the many variations of solidarity that exist as well as how it can vary based on time and place. Likewise, Dana Frank (2012) demonstrates through her own personal experience how conceptions of solidarity can change, and underscores the fact that solidarity is processual, built, and rebuilt overtime. This research echoes Frank's contention and instead of focusing on what solidarity is or should be for those living in the North, examines how those who proclaim to be enacting solidarity understand it and how this understanding is shaped by the underlying political culture of the time.

So then, with these diverse theorizations on solidarity, what then is it? There is a deep complexity to this question. There is an ideal— what solidarity should be. There is collective engagement of solidarity— how it is practiced in a particular moment in time. And then there is the personal— each individual's own understanding of what solidarity is and how it should be practiced. The solidarity ideal, what solidarity should be and how it should be practiced is heavily influenced by the personal. Moreover, as this dissertation charts, individualized beliefs about solidarity are informed by how people come to a political consciousness.

This ideological dialogic complicates my own ability to outline a solidarity ideal because it is influenced by my own journey political consciousness. My academic readings, my personal experience, and my teachings and experiences within the U.S. Latin American solidarity community. Who am I to say what solidarity should be? Should it focus primarily on advocacy to the State? Should it focus on education or creating new imaginings of alternative systems? Should it be both? Should it take place in people's daily lives or is solidarity only something that is constructed as a collective? The answers to these questions should come from those who are at the forefront of the struggles for change. Those who are experiencing the impacts of U.S. policy in their daily lives. However, if we piece together the demands of advocacy projects of those most impacted, we can come to a clearer idea of what solidarity is not.

It is not charity. It is not a singular donation that leaves the giver feeling guilt-free and accomplished. It is not just material. It is not just about abolishing systems or constructing new ones. It is not just a feeling. It is not a feeling of connection or pity or empathy. And it is not just knowledge, knowing what is happening but failing to do anything about it. It is not just a belief or a worldview, a way of understanding the world. It is different from allyship or charity in that individuals see themselves as embedded and consequential within the same systems they wish to change.

With these deductions we can more clearly see what solidarity is.

Solidarity is material and affective. It is seeing or feeling humanity's connections and working to construct social systems that allow for everyone to flourish. The affective connection people feel inform how they wish to construct the material. And the material world informs affective connections. Solidarity is built from and informs a dialectic of understanding and action, of felt emotion and its material applications.

This is a broad outline of solidarity. Absent from this definition are specific tactical and strategic plans. Solidarity is more than a tactic or a strategy, though it is often confused as such. Rather it is underscored by how people define, understand, and enact their relationship to a broader community. The tactical embodiment of solidarity shifts and is informed by the historical moment. Yet, the underlying features that differentiate solidarity from charity or allyship remain the same. As such, rather than focus on the tactical manifestations of solidarity, this work focuses on how it is understood— how people begin to develop a new understanding of their relationship to a broader global community.

This ideal is not held by everyone. Nor is it always practiced. But it can be crafted. This dissertation focuses primarily on U.S. Latin American solidarity activists who don't believe solidarity is charity but have a deeper understanding of what it is and how it should be practiced. As I chart how people come to a political consciousness, I will also demonstrate how their view of solidarity is created and how it aligns or differs from the above articulation. In focusing on how peoples understanding shifts, as influenced by their standpoint, this project unveils how the

individual view of solidarity informs the collective and how the collective compares with the ideal.

Based on these tenants, I understand solidarity as a mutual commitment between groups of people, who may experience the same or differing levels of oppression and privilege, and who are united to create change that will benefit both parties. This commitment is rooted in a deeper understanding of the socio-economic and political causes of the problem. Unlike a "charity" framework, solidarity works to undo the systems that create the need for charity in the first place. However, this is one of many understandings of solidarity that has been enacted overtime. Moreover, even if an understanding of solidarity remains similar, the tactics that animate it may differ. Indeed, the multiple strains of solidarity the above theorists demonstrate reflect the varying socio-political and economic environments in which they developed. My research continues to unveil how contemporary conceptions of solidarity have shifted among U.S. activists involved in Latin American solidarity campaigns and the strengths and weaknesses of current day approaches.

Drawing from this literature, throughout this dissertation I detail the main aspects that I found were consequential for developing political consciousness in varying historical contexts—moments of liminality, institutionally structured conceptions of community, and affect. Rather than emphasize that one of the above aspects is more important or even the most central component for developing a political consciousness, I instead contend that when combined, each works together to gradually shift consciousness by reframing their view of the geopolitical landscape and their role in it. How and when each of these factors converges can influence how people understand solidarity and the subsequent tactics, they believe will be effective at creating social change. For some, after many years of involvement, the concept of solidarity becomes deeper than an ideological framework or a set of actions. It becomes a guiding framework and belief system through which people make sense of themselves and the world. As such, in setting out to examine how people develop a political consciousness I ended up stumbling upon how people make sense of and find meaning in their lives.

1.3 Methods, Research Site, and Participants

While my systematic data collection took place primarily during 2020 and 2021, my seven years involved in this work previously have indubitably influenced my findings and their presentation. Though some might be loath to admit it, I like all researchers, and those highlighted within this project, have been influenced by my own personal experiences and the context in which they were framed. It was my own stumble into U.S. Colombia solidarity work in 2013 that began my path towards both academia and this project. With one short trip to Colombia and a master's thesis on the impact of U.S. military and economic policies in Colombia, I became "hooked" on activism focusing on U.S. Latin America solidarity. Both before and during graduate school I was deeply embedded in organizational work, particularly with the Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective, traveling to Colombia, providing accompaniment, organizing speakers' tours and events in the U.S., and participating in countless meetings to plan, organize, and grow the organization. This project was molded by my time spent in these events —spent exhausted, frustrated, underpaid (unpaid), and often like we were spinning our wheels to accomplish little, but impassioned. Time spent deeply engaging with other activists who felt very similar to myself and who continued to do the work. It is these activists, and of course their compatriots in South America, who inspired this dissertation. How do people become conscious about these issues and why do they continue engaging the same tactics even when it seems as though they are not working? The answer at first seems simple, because they must, but it is really a much more complex amalgamation that defines the political culture of this time. Instead of just answering the question of why, I also hope to answer the how—how we got to this place, and perhaps more importantly, how things are beginning to shift.

For some, my deep involvement with the activists and organizations in this study would signal a fallibility of research design, an inherent bias that could not be overcome. Yet, as others before me have demonstrated, engaged ethnography can lead instead to uncovering a richness of ethnographic detail that might otherwise be missed (Tate 2007). Moreover, it can also produce a more collaborative project that is beneficial not just to the researcher's career, but also to those who participated in the study.

Though many might assume that my involvement in U.S. Latin American Solidarity would curtail any critical analysis, it is actually quite the opposite. In fact, I know that many of my critiques are also held and openly discussed by those within them and have been for many years. This information is not only important for my analysis, but also prevents me from any ethical confusion over whether I should discuss these critiques. Any solidarity readers will not be shocked to read these critiques and instead, hopefully will find them organized in a more useful space. Furthermore, my engaged approach also led to richer conversations and interviews between those who participated in this study. While some I interviewed, I had already known for years, others I had only shared emails with. However, knowing of my work in this community, participants felt comfortable detailing intimate life stories with me and their understanding of this work. On many occasions, interviewees explicitly made mention that it was my years of experience in this community that made them comfortable speaking with me at all. Through these conversations and people's recognition of my existence in this circle I was also able to identify the more concretized "site" of my fieldwork. Since what might be considered U.S. Latin America solidarity takes place transnationally through a variety of mediums including governments, non-governmental and nonprofit organizations, and personal relationships or networks, a study on U.S. Latin America solidarity could have a seemingly endless scope. Conversely, studying solidarity through just one organization or network is also limiting.

The site of this study, instead, is a community that is bounded by the internal recognition of one another, yet unbounded by place or organization. As noted earlier, I choose to focus on this specific community because of its focus on U.S. impact within countries in Latin America. This seemingly amorphous but very real community was made most clear to me during my interviews when I was granted an immediate recognition based on a presumption that I understood and was trustworthy enough to share personal details with because I had been a part of this community for so long. Though one cannot locate this community in a particular setting or even through a multi-sited scope, it exists nonetheless in people's recognition of one another and within the common sites-both online and physical- they find themselves in. I found this community on Zoom calls with participants across the Americas, through in-person gatherings, email chains, WhatsApp groups, and in-person conversations. It existed through and outside of non-profit organizations and personal relationships. It is a community and a field site of interpersonal

connection and disconnection, certainly influenced by the specific locality from which people came but not bound by it. The bounds of this community were often delineated by organizational and personal affiliations and relationships, and like other anthropologists, I certainly did not speak or interact with everyone within the community. However, throughout my research I attended events and interviewed people from a variety of non-profit organizations including SOA Watch, The InterReligious Task Force on Central America (IRTF), Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective, NISGUA and others who were unaffiliated and unemployed by a specific organization but attended events and volunteered with a variety of campaigns or organizations. I began identifying activists[2] to interview and collect life histories from through my personal network with Witness for Peace. From here, activists recommended others I should speak to who presently were or historically had been involved in solidarity work through other organizations or modalities.

In order to ensure my research participants were representative of who participated in this type of U.S. Latin American Solidarity since the 1980s, I gathered life histories from nine people who became involved in U.S. Latin American Solidarity in the 1980s and were representative of activists who weren't directly impacted by U.S. policies (such as immigrants) but were involved in the Central American solidarity movement, white middle class and often religious. I also collected twenty life histories from people who became politically conscious and/or mobilized to activism about U.S. impact in Latin America throughout the 1990s, early 2000s, and within the past five years. Nine of these activists identified as People of Color and eleven were white. Five interviewees immigrated to the U.S. as children or young adults and/or were first generation immigrants from across Latin America, including Colombia, Haiti, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic. Everyone I interviewed was currently middle class, though some had more financial comforts than others. However, about a quarter of interviewees grew up in working class households and communities. Notably, the majority of activists who agreed to participant were

2. For the purposes of this study, I use the term “activist” to refer to individuals who have been engaged in a variety of efforts to generate more awareness of and action around the detrimental impact of US policy in Latin America. These actions may include traveling to Latin America to meet with other activists, organizing or participating in educational and protest events, working within or volunteering for an NGO, and/or participating in direct actions. Most individuals also self-identify as activists. I use the term only to refer to individuals who have been involved in a myriad of different events and generally have been involved in the work for at least two years, but most have been involved for six or more.

not from Latin America but spent most of their lives in the U.S. There is also a rich network of Latin American immigrants who spearhead and support a variety of campaigns in the U.S. from those involved in local organizing efforts and/or more popular international organizing efforts such as the Central American Solidarity movement. Immigrant activism has been and continues to be a central component of U.S. solidarity work (Perla 2009). In not focusing heavily on immigrant activism specifically, my intention is not to elide or undermine their importance and role in solidarity campaigns, nor oversimplify their own road to developing a political consciousness. Rather, my goal was to illustrate how people who had spent most of their lives in the heart of empire and had never previously understood or fully experienced the impacts of U.S. imperialism became and stayed politically aware and active in U.S. solidarity work. In doing so, these findings could be used as a roadmap of how to politically activate others who, to their current knowledge, feel unimpacted by both local and transnational issues.

The demographics of U.S. activists who have been politicized and active in various U.S. Latin America solidarity campaigns has shifted over the years. U.S. solidarity organizations such as those I followed for this study, have historically been populated by white, middle class, U.S. citizens. However, over the past decade this has slowly been shifting. People of color and immigrants are increasingly being employed by these organizations, sitting on their boards, and attending events. I aimed to choose interviewees who were representative of this shift. In addition, in choosing interviewees from varying historical periods, the 1980s to the present, who have been impacted by U.S. policy in Latin America differently, either not all or intimately, I am able to compare how different historical settings and life experiences may inform political consciousness differently. Each of these interviewees, and all those who are employed by, attended events, or traveled on delegations have unique stories that animated their path to political awareness. Despite these differences, the majority of the activists in this study did not come to U.S. Latin America solidarity during large public and well-popularized movements countering U.S. influence in the Americas. As such, they provide insight into how people become politicized about issues that lack widespread knowledge and the consciousness raising experiences that occur during periods of relative quiescence.

Finally, my research took place as COVID-19 quarantines and societal adjustments began. Being embedded in these activist circles before COVID allowed me to see how the pandemic shifted things within organizations, and oftentimes didn't. While life during COVID has altered how people move through the world around them, the transnationality of U.S. Latin America solidarity work allowed for some things to stay the same. In fact, one of the primary ways U.S. activists "get together" has always been via online interfaces. Many organizations have employees across North and South America and as such conduct meetings and hold webinars all online. Though COVID did not leave all areas of this work unimpacted, in many ways my ethnographic research would have been the same COVID or no COVID.

Ultimately, my methodology of being embedded in a site that is inherently transnational, allowed me to better focus on the meaning of the practice of solidarity. This mirrors the contributions of other embedded ethnographies whose key contributions are also "the focus on the construction of meaning by participants and the critical examination of practice rather than simply outcomes" (Tate 2007, 12). Moreover, it allowed me to see how the experiences that lead to a shift in political consciousness do not occur in a single moment or through a singular medium, but rather build, fluctuate, and morph overtime in a never-ending process of change.

1.4 Outline of Chapters

This dissertation is organized to mirror what the process of developing a political consciousness about U.S. policy in Latin America might look like. Instead of arranging content chronologically looking at solidarity from the 1980s onward, this work centers the role of relationships, connections, and personal experiences that can lead people down a path of solidarity work.

Chapter two outlines the barriers people face to come to a political consciousness about U.S. influence in Latin America. By providing a brief overview of the history of U.S. influence in the region, this chapter discusses the role of U.S. empire and imperialism in dictating normalized conceptions of U.S. influence abroad. Often, U.S. exceptionalism dominates narratives about both domestic and international foreign policy. Conceptualized as unique, inherently better, and oftentimes altruistic, narratives of U.S. exceptionalism inherently denote the nobility or selflessness of U.S. interference abroad and mask or elide the real impacts of such policies and

the historical circumstances that facilitate different socio-economic and political realities in various abroad. The many layers of hegemonic narratives about U.S. influence that people must pierce help explain why coming to a new political consciousness is such a long multi-faceted journey. Furthermore, in examining the obstacles people must overcome to develop a new political consciousness, this chapter unveils how solidarity is inherently understood as political dissonance and direct confrontation with hegemonic narratives that center U.S. empire and the material political realities that sustain them.

Chapter three examines the initial experiences and moments of awakening-or liminality- that act as catalysts for the development of political consciousness. While sometimes these events are informed by obvious moments of societal upheaval, more often they are defined by subjective stumbles into personal discomfort or awareness. Yet, whether a stumble or a fall, these moments of shift result in an experience of liminality that allows for an emotional and logical flexibility or curiosity generative of a change in political understanding. This chapter explores the types of experiences that have crafted this initial political liminality and how they were influenced by the historical context of their happening. From coming of age during the civil rights era, going to college during apartheid, to marrying and moving during a focus on immigration each initial experience of liminality is grounded in the political context of the time, as well as the individuals' standpoint among them. This chapter explores how the context informs peoples experience, the meaning they draw from it, and their perception of what they can do next.

Chapter four examines how people's initial shift to an increasing political awareness can be further developed by individuals' engagement in a variety of societal institutions. After liminal events, many people seek out opportunities to satiate their new political curiosity. My research has shown that organized religion, family, and non-profit organizations have consistently acted as touch points or pillars that both refresh and undergird liminal flexibility and influence how people view the world around them. Within these societal institutions, people can begin to deepen and expand their understanding of community, who they are connected to, directed by the experiences and relationships they continue to develop. As views of community expand, so too can overarching feelings of *communitas,* a sentiment of connection and responsibility to others.

These shifts continue to reframe political consciousness. In examining these sites, this chapter highlights the importance of communal connection in facilitating political awareness.

Building off of chapter four, chapter five examines how affect- often crafted through specific institutional experiences- impacts how people understand U.S. Latin America Solidarity and conversely how U.S. Latin America Solidarity informs how they view themselves. In looking at the emotional habitus of group and event settings, I detail how affect can be channeled to encourage people to reconceptualize the bounds of their imagined community. Informed both by collective experience and individual standpoint, affect when channeled effectively can support consciousness raising activities and inform the lens through which people interpret themselves and politics.

Chapter six shifts from a discussion of how people develop a political consciousness to how activists today enact their understanding of solidarity. I first explore how solidarity has been enacted over time- the specific actions, practices, and behaviors that people attribute to "being in solidarity" and how they have been framed by the unique socio-economic and political settings in the U.S. from the 1980s to the present. I then merge into a discussion of how the meaning that animates these tactics has changed overtime. I underscore how activists' tactical choices are related to how they understand and identify what they believe they are resisting as well as how the entrenchment of neoliberal capitalism and a rising distrust in the State has informed their conceptualization of resistance.

Finally, chapter seven foregrounds the experiences of those who have been involved in U.S. Latin America solidarity work for many years, often decades to examine how their ongoing involvement is intertwined with their understanding of solidarity. In looking at what solidarity is and has been in the lives of what I call "long-termers', this chapter details what solidarity is, not theoretically or even in practice, but in meaning. I unveil how solidarity can become a worldview, grounded in a faith of how the world should be and in one's own recognition of their responsibility to contribute to the creation of their idealized world. In looking at solidarity as a worldview and faith we can see both how ideas surrounding what it is are contextualized by historical and individual circumstances and why people dedicate their lives to "being in solidarity" often at great personal sacrifice.

Overall, this dissertation charts the path from nascent political understandings to a conceptualization of solidarity that is embedded in people's identity and worldview. I demonstrate how historically structured moments of liminality, *communitas* and affect have impacted how people come to understand solidarity today. Each of these overarching concepts is framed both by historical circumstances, the political culture in the U.S. and counties in Latin America as well as people's individualized personal relationships. I have sought to interweave these factors throughout the dissertation. Moreover, this research demonstrates that even in the absence of a current widespread U.S. Latin American solidarity movement in the U.S., one with thousands of participants that can be quickly mobilized for protest or public demonstrations, people continue to be politicized. The mechanisms through which people continue to be politicized act as a subsoil through which larger social movements are born and they inform how people understand and try to build social change.

These findings are useful for scholarly inquiries into political consciousness, solidarity, affect and social movements, and ideally useful for activist pursuits as well. Though throughout this dissertation I use the terms solidarity, activism, and political consciousness frequently, today the popular use of these words has both diluted and wrung out their meaning with overuse. Their presumed meanings can mask the deeply personal, intimate, and relational journey that underwrite experiences and relations to these words. Moreover, they can mask their political salience, or what people mean when they employ the terms. So, though I will continue to use these terms throughout this dissertation, I hope to embed in them a deeper connotation, one built of experiences, relationships, emotions, and the inherently political complexities of life. As I will demonstrate throughout this dissertation, the participants in this study underwent a slow process of awakening to the realization that the intricacies of being human and connecting to others is always political. Yet, the way they enact this understanding, and the effectiveness of their tactics has varied overtime. In looking at the emergence of a political consciousness about U.S. imperialism and empire, I am examining how in different periods of time people who are in a "spatially discontinuous, culturally varied, and politically uneven space [may converge] into a unit of political mobilization" (Cooper 2005, 241).

CHAPTER 2

Hegemony's Obfuscation

Greg Grandin (2007) argues that "though Latin America has played an indispensable role in the rise of the United States as a global power, it elicits little curiosity from its neighbor to the North" (1). Indeed, despite long serving as "a workshop of empire, the place where the United States elaborated tactics of extraterritorial administration and acquired its conception of itself as an empire" (Grandin 2007, 2) very few within the United States who lack Latin American ancestry are aware of the complex history of the U.S. in Latin America. Since the early 2000s introduction to the War on Terror, much waning U.S. public interest in Latin America shifted to the Middle East as did discussions of the outgrowth of U.S. empire and imperialism. If U.S. public awareness of Latin American is low though, general public awareness of the U.S. as an empire, one that seeks to expand its tentacles of economic and political control across the globe, is even lower. This landscape of little interest in Latin America, fed by and built on opaque or absent understandings of U.S. empire and imperialism is the field of obstacles through which people must navigate to develop a new political consciousness. It is one often laden with shock, disappointment, and many exits along the way that offer a return to the comfort of a previous worldview. In order to understand the significance and difficulties of developing a political consciousness surrounding U.S. imperial influence in Latin America, this chapter explores why many in the U.S. are unaware in the first place. Today especially, the climate of U.S. activism focuses heavily on domestic issues and often fails to connect national campaigns to international issues. In examining the barriers to developing a political awareness, this chapter also examines what solidarity can look like and how it relates to political dissonance amidst hegemonic norms.

It was 2017 and I was standing in a backlogged customs line in a U.S. airport. I had just returned from a preliminary research trip to Colombia in which I had met with a variety of Colombian activists and began discussing the possibility of me doing a project on U.S. activist solidarity with Colombian activists. After a few weeks of listening to activist's stories of repression as they tried to counter military encroachment and economic dispossession, ideas of the potentialities and limitations of solidarity swirled in my head. What was solidarity in the first place? Bunched

up in the customs line for U.S. and Canadian residents I was listlessly and impatiently waiting for the line to move, as was everyone else. An hour passed and we were shuffled this way and that as customs officials tried to figure out how to ease the backlog. Those of us who were hopefully still holding our bags gave up and plopped them comfortably on the floor. Those, like myself, who were in line alone began to engage in idle chatter with our fellow waiters. I settled into a conversation founded in our disdain for customs-line inefficiency with a younger-mid thirties white man. What began as small talk turned into a philosophical conversation about the role of government and the efficacy of capitalism. Complaints about customs inefficiency prompted my line-buddy to confess his belief in the arguments of Ayn Rand's famous novel *Atlas Shrugged* (1957). Perhaps one of her most famous works, *Atlas Shrugged* is a dystopian fiction set in the U.S. that advocates for capitalist enterprise and little to no governmental regulations for businesses. It is often referenced among conservatives as an almost guiding theoretical framework that illustrates the harms of governmental regulation and inefficiency.

I remember listening as this man exposed the same tenants of individualistic capital extractivism that the activists in Colombia I met with were trying to counter. As I stood, the line seemingly endless, and my feet and mind tired, I debated how to engage with him. Should I argue? Should I put on my anthropologist hat and listen with questions interspersed in the middle? I ended up somewhere in-between eventually goaded into a more confrontational discussion when he asked me from where I was returning. When I said Colombia, he was quick to respond with a stereotypical comment about drugs and Latin American "backwardness". His response was typical of folks uneducated or simply uncaring about the U.S.'s neighbors to the South- a response I have received many times. It is a response that is founded in hegemonic narratives of U.S. exceptionalism and superiority that elides the history of colonialism and continued violent economic extraction- the same barriers people face on their way to politicization as the line finally began to quicken our conversation met an abrupt end, but I remember my body was buzzing with energy-frustration but also excitement. This conversation was why discussions of solidarity and political consciousness were so important. Because his views and understanding of capitalism and U.S. prestige were far more common than a critical or historical understanding of U.S. engagement with Latin America or the world more broadly.

As I stood in the customs line, officially between the U.S. and the rest of the world, I was amidst the contradictions and contestations of anti-capitalist sentiment and extreme neoliberal ideology. My conversation with my line-buddy was my slow re-introduction to the dominance of capitalist and U.S. exceptionalism thought found in the U.S. As I was called forward to formally re-enter the country, I was struck by the difficulty of building solidarity-not just because of geographical boundaries, language differences, or even barriers to travel, but because of the simple, or not so simple reality that U.S. hegemony and exceptionalism dominates many people's thinking in the U.S. Building solidarity, building political consciousness isn't just about creating a basic educational awareness or even witnessing different realities. Rather it requires a deep unraveling of the material and ideological hegemonic layers that undergird U.S. exceptionalism and imperialism.

2.1 History of U.S. influence in Latin America and U.S. Solidarity

Édouard Glissant once stated that "the West is not the West. It is a project, not a place" (1989, 17). The West has been materially and ideologically crafted over generations of colonial and neo-colonial interventions. To build and support this project, the U.S. has intervened broadly across the globe, yet its close proximity to Latin America has rendered it as a key testing site for U.S. policies (Grandin 2011). This long history of engagement is often masked from public view in the U.S. While this dissertation is not a comprehensive history of U.S. solidarity or influence in Latin America, this chapter provides an exceptionally brief overview of U.S. intervention in the region and the beginnings of solidarity campaigns to help frame the historical relationship between the Americas to uncover the strands of connection that many people begin to stumble upon on their path to political consciousness. The elision of these facts from public knowledge is part of how the West is made.

Throughout its history the U.S. has intervened both militarily and economically throughout Latin America in attempts to gain and consolidate its control over the region. For example, the 1823 Monroe Doctrine and the 1904 Roosevelt corollary to the doctrine declared that the U.S. and only the U.S. has the right to colonize and intervene in Latin American affairs. Moreover, the corollary claimed that the U.S. could intervene "simply if it disapproved of the way a Latin American country was handling its affairs" (Chomsky 2021, 33). The U.S. has engaged this

doctrine countless times including its invasion and occupation of Nicaragua from 1912 to 1933, the invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1916, Plan Condor, the orchestration of the 1954 coup in Guatemala, to the billions of dollars it has spent throughout the 20th century first against communism and then the "war in drugs" just to name a few (Binford 1996; Chomsky 2021; Colby 2011; Grandin 2011; Tillman 2016). For example, Plan Condor was a joint military and intelligence operation between South American governments from 1973 to 1975. Supported by the U.S., participants used shared intelligence to target, torture, and murder anyone who seemed to threaten capitalist economic and political interests. The operation relied on counterinsurgency tactics that blurred the lines between enemy and innocent civilians. The bloody conflict further entrenched U.S. hegemony and secured interests. At least 60,000 people were disappeared as a result. Participants included Argentina, the United States, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia, Brazil, and later Ecuador and Peru (McSherry 2005).

From outright invasions and occupations to clandestinely training rebel forces and funding militaries, the U.S. has sought to, and often succeeded in orchestrating Latin American governments to support U.S. economic and political interests in the region, to the detriment of large swaths of the population, particularly Indigenous, Afro Descendant, and working-class residents. These historic campaigns are emblematic of U.S. imperialism, marked by the corpus of military and economic strategies it uses to gain control over foreign governments to benefit the maintenance and expansion of its empire. In response to these assaults on national sovereignty throughout Latin America, a myriad of social movements has emerged in the South and mounted campaigns with varying amounts of success countering U.S. imperialism and reclaiming autonomy[3]. Acknowledging U.S. imperialism and replying to Latin American activists' calls for change, coalitions within the United States have created a variety of campaigns calling national attention to and demanding a change in U.S. policies.

3. For example, the revolutions in Cuba and Venezuela were aimed at addressing national social and economic inequities supported or instituted through US imperial sway. While these examples are perhaps the most extreme, a variety of other movements and political parties have emerged throughout the region, embodying both local ideas for change while eschewing imperial influence, from the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, MAS in Bolivia and many others.

Throughout the first half of the 20th century large sectors of the left in the United States including members of congress, the NAACP, participants in the civil rights movement, churches, and the anti-imperialist league all united to contest direct U.S. military intervention in Latin America, primarily in Haiti and Nicaragua. At the same time, prominent scholars and activists across the Americas, such as W.E.B. Du Bois and José Martí, were already postulating theories of decolonization. In fact, David Luis-Brown (2008) has demonstrated how a variety of authors from Cuba, the U.S., and Mexico had developed a "hemispheric citizenship" (17) in their writings, challenging and questioning U.S. empire and imperialism and their impacts on local political and racial relations. However, the onset of World War II stymied the beginnings of transnational solidarity movements across the globe, including North-South relations (Striffler 2019). After the war, and with the beginning of decolonization struggles across Africa and Asia, solidarity movements began to focus even more deeply on addressing U.S. empire. U.S. activists began to work towards a new vision of liberation influenced by the anti-colonial struggles of the Third World. Foreshadowed by earlier the works of early 20th century scholar-activists, this solidarity was animated by more than U.S. activists' desire to end U.S. interventionism and was linked to more critical analysis of global race and imperial relations as well as strategies to work towards joint liberation. For example, in the 1960s Black activists in the United States sought to learn and ally with Cuban revolutionaries in their struggle against U.S. imperialism and hegemony. Cuba served both as a political training ground and an inspirational example for U.S. activists engaged in their own struggles for liberation at home. Moreover, U.S. activists who returned from Cuba interrupted the Cold War consensus, complicated the reigning narrative opposing capitalism and communism, and acted as a counter-hegemonic mouthpiece, voices of support for the revolution and its successes (Striffler 2019, Goose 1993; Young 2006). In these ways, solidarity between the U.S. and Cuba was underscored by the mutual benefits activists from both countries received from participating.

However, as violence across Latin America intensified in the 1980s and 1990s and neoliberal ideology emphasizing the free market and corporate power dominated the economic and political landscape, analyses and enactments of solidarity began to shift and reflect ideas that focused on individual educational awareness. Unlike the more overt manifestations of violence enacted by State and para state forces throughout the 1970s and 1980s, as neoliberalism became entrenched

across the Americas, the U.S. enacted a new set of unseen imperial tactics, controlling foreign governments through economic support laden with conditions that directed governmental policies. Under these circumstances "in which struggle is less clear cut, where collective action aimed at large-scale social transformation seems not to be present, and where power operates in more subtle ways than the blatant physical oppression" (Binford 2008, 180) understandings of what solidarity is and how it should be enacted shifted.

As the landscape of power shifted transnational cross-coalitions of activists and organizations continued to organize with some successes. For example, in the 1990s a radical social change movement emerged from the Zapatistas in Mexico. After years of organizing, the movement, which "had begun as an armed insurgency initiated by the Ejercita Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (EZLN)" officially debuted on January 1, 1994, the first day of the North American free trade agreement (NAFTA), a transnational accord between the U.S., Mexico, and Canada that slashed tariffs, would take effect (Khasnabish 2013, 67). The Zapatismo movement organized to contest colonialism, imperialism, and the corrupt Mexican state. It quickly caught the attention and imagination of activists worldwide. Though confronting NAFTA was a part of the movement's platform, activists connected it to a wider critical analysis of imperialism and capitalism. Khasnabish (2013) argues that Zapastismo inspired a more romantic revolutionary ideology in people that made them feel as if they too could create more change and thus drew them to the movement. Despite this, the kind of politics in which Zapatistas engaged did not seek to build broader coalitional power aimed at taking over the state. Instead, Zapatismo focused on building locally sustainable alternatives (Andrews 2011; La Botz 2014; Olesen 2004). However, scholars have argued that the failure to develop a national strategy to confront neoliberalism severely delimited their ability to do so (La Botz 2014; Stahler-Sholk 2007). This did little to stymie the interest of international activists who were interested in how they could implement Zapatismo in their own communities (Andrews 2011). In fact, "It was the strategy of creating local, liberated, inclusive, democratic spaces that existed outside of neoliberalism (and the

messiness of national politics) that made the Zapatistas so popular with the solidarity left beyond Mexico" (Striffler 2019, 101).[4]

While some campaigns in the new neoliberal era emphasized more revolutionary ideas, others focused on more simple shifts to U.S. policy such as ending U.S. aid. For example, in Colombia intensified violence between leftist guerrillas and right-wing paramilitaries rooted in historic economic and political inequities began to draw the attention of U.S. activists. The U.S., keen on preventing the fall of its strongest ally in the region to leftist guerillas, developed a plan with Colombia to revive the Colombian state through militarized action, known as Plan Colombia, a 1.3-billion-dollar U.S. aid package whose main focus was on strengthening the Colombian military (Isacson 2010).[5] Since 2001 and the U.S.-Colombia joint initiative of Plan Colombia, the United States has contributed over $11 billion in mostly military aid to Colombia. Discursively, the United States media has targeted the Colombia's leftist guerillas and narco-traffickers throughout this initiative, but realistically marginalized groups in Colombia have received much of the impact. Throughout the conflict, social movements and participants within them have been maligned by the Colombian and U.S. government's attempts to say that they were created and/or overrun with guerillas, and as such have no political merit. Plan Colombia not only aligned with U.S. interests to propagate United States ideology in the region, securing more allies for foreign trade, business, and resource extraction; it also benefited the military industrial complex by justifying the expansion of the U.S.'s military reach and budget (Tate 2015)

4. US solidarity with Zapatismo manifested in a variety of ways. Like previous solidarity movements, activists provided accompaniment, popular education, and still wrote human rights reports. However, a perhaps deeper solidarity emerged through the international encuentros thrown by Zapatistas that created a space for collaboration and joint learning between international activists. These encuentros fostered (and still do) transnational learning opportunities through which activists can learn more about both Zapatismo, other international struggles, and the tactics activists use to work for change. After exiting these spaces, activists can return home and apply their new knowledge to their local setting, building liberation from the ground up, as molded by the Zapatistas own focus on local autonomy.

5. After the backlash from the Central American solidarity movement, US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), operation forces within the US military that focus on Latin America, had lost some of its relevancy and subsequently its budget. Though SOUTHCOM used the "war on drugs" context to justify an increased budget in the 90s, Plan Colombia provided the perfect impetus to secure more funding (Tate 2015).

Though Colombian refugees that had moved to the United States to escape the violence were already working to create more visibility about Colombia in the U.S., activists did not start paying attention in mass until Plan Colombia began gaining more media attention. As Colombian activists began to underscore the abuses the Colombian military committed with U.S. funds, U.S. activists rose in solidarity to call for an end to U.S. military aid. However, the solidarity movement was quite small and did not resonate with a larger coalition of the left in the United States.

These are just a few examples of U.S. policies and impacts in the region and the campaigns to contest them. They are examples of how the U.S. has sought to create the West, and how people have pushed back against this project. Yet, despite the longevity of some form of U.S. Latin America solidarity throughout the twentieth century, these campaigns have almost never been at the forefront of public imagination. They have each attracted the attention of a fluctuating number of activists, some campaigns larger than others, but have often still escaped the awareness of average U.S. citizens. Unlike the Civil Rights movement and Vietnam war protests that were televised in most homes, North-South solidarity has often operated under the radar of the mainstream media. With little media attention, few widespread protests, and an underlying lack of public awareness about the impacts of U.S. policy on Latin America, U.S. Latin America solidarity provides an interesting site to examine how people develop a political consciousness on an issue about which popular awareness is lacking. At the same time, the ever-changing relational dynamics of solidarity, marked by shifting economic and political climates across the Americas, have directed both U.S. and Latin American activists' conceptualizations of solidarity in enlightening ways. In looking at both the similarities and differences that awakened people's awareness of U.S. influence in Latin America, this dissertation demonstrates both overarching factors that influence political consciousness overtime, that can fracture hegemonic narratives and the project of the West, as well as how different historical moments can create opportunities or barriers for deepening political engagement.

2.2 How Empire Obscures

While much of the above history of U.S. interference in Latin America is obscured, developing a political consciousness is much more than simply raising awareness about an issue. One of the

biggest hurdles U.S. Latin American Solidarity activists faces for building change is getting people to care, fracturing people's sense of apathy, and engendering them with tools of awareness and action. For many, this requires a complete shift in their worldview born through the rupture of previous hegemonic realities. Other international campaigns or protests, such as campaigns to end hunger in various obliquely described countries in Africa, provide relief aid to victims of natural disasters, or even calls to hold foreign authoritarian governments accountable to international law focus on an external "other" that needs assistance or needs to change. However, in many U.S. Latin America solidarity campaigns the focus is not on a distant pitiable "other" but rather U.S. residents own government and society. Developing a political acuity that both understands why U.S. policy needs to be changed and in which people subsequently feel empowered to do so, requires a unique set of shifts in political consciousness and conterminously comes with a variety of additional challenges. As a result, today U.S. Latin American solidarity efforts remain quite small. Most of the non-profit organizations included in this study estimate their support-base to be within the tens of thousands. Of course, there are many more thousands of people who work outside of these organizations and are still working for change. Nevertheless, compared to the between fifteen and twenty-six million people who participated in the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests (Buchanan, Bui and Patel 2020), or the 332.4 million people who lived in the U.S. in January 2022 (U.S. Census Bureau), tens of thousands of people, even hundreds of thousands of people is a meager number of those who are trying to build anti-imperial U.S. Latin American solidarity. Unlike other nationally based protest like the Black Lives Matter movement, the number of U.S. residents involved in U.S. Latin American solidarity continues to remain small because of the unique challenges it faces.

Within the U.S., the political landscape has constructed hegemonic narratives of U.S. exceptionalism that undergird ideas and practices of U.S. empire. U.S. exceptionalism encompasses the idea that the U.S. is not only the "best" country in the world but that found within this perfection are the unique qualities and attributes of technological prowess, capitalist production, and general health and quality of life. The concept relies on ethnocentric value-laden judgements that often situate other countries within narratives of "backwardness" and underdeveloped. In order to first begin to develop a consciousness of why U.S. policy needs to

change, people must first develop a willingness to explore ideas beyond these narratives and be open to the reality that U.S. exceptionalism is a myth.

At the root of U.S. exceptionalism are deeper motives for U.S. control and expansionism. U.S. exceptionalism is used to obscure or mask U.S. imperial motives, or said differently, intentions to spread its empire. An empire itself can be loosely defined as a compendium of States and territories loosely controlled or policed militarily, economically, and/or politically through a central authority (Lutz 2006). While "many states have attempted to extract extraterritorial profit or exert foreign influence... the notion of 'empire' is reserved for the systemic and extensive desire and effort to have, in Michael W. Doyle's words, "influence over the periphery's environment, political articulation, aggregation, decision making, adjudication, and implementation, and usually with the collaboration of local elites" (2004, 40) (as cited in Lutz 2006, 594). The ultimate goal and intended result of these articulations is the subsequent strengthening of the imperial power, the U.S., through the redistribution of both material economic resources and political and social power. Catherine Besteman (2020) has outlined how these regimes of material and social inequality are kept in place through a system that she denotes as "militarized global apartheid" in which the U.S. through a variety of direct and indirect governmental and corporate proxies has extended its tentacles of power across the globe. Other scholars of U.S. empire have demonstrated how the U.S. has built and maintained its empire both through direct invasion and governmental control (such as in Nicaragua in 1912) through the imposition of economic policies and corporate impositions (Harvey 2003, Hardt and Negri 2000), and through the establishment of its over 800 military bases across the globe (Lutz 2009).

Today, despite rising public awareness about global and national inequalities (Devlin and Moncus 2020), widespread public conversation linking global inequalities with U.S. empire and imperialism is still largely lacking. Even in emerging leftist conversations amidst youth who are questioning the legitimacy of capitalism, an analysis of the mechanisms of capital accumulation are largely removed from their relationship to imperial projects of control and dominance (Jones 2021). I do not intend to imply that conversations of empire and imperialism are absent from many activist circles in the U.S. (though in some domestic campaigns they certainly are), rather I

am emphasizing how empire and imperialism are absent from mainstream layperson understandings. This absence is in many ways a product of U.S. imperialism and hegemony which works to obscure or covertly mask the workings and impacts of empire.

Indeed, in the U.S. imperial motives are often masked through narratives of U.S. exceptionalism. Under these narratives, the U.S. isn't "invading" another country, it is "bringing them freedom." New trade deals are not exploitative or tilted to favor the U.S. but are aimed at bringing other countries "forward". It is a mask of saviorism through which the U.S. seeks to shield its deeper motives. Moreover, it is also a narrative that undergirds the type of empire the U.S. seeks to build, one that "entails a concert of equal, sovereign democratic American republics, with shared interests and values, led but not dominated by the United States" (Grandin 2007, 2). Within this empire make-up the U.S. is less an aggressor and more a guiding parent, instructing its children how to behave. Though still infantilizing towards other countries and cultures, the idea of the United States as an innocent parent simply encouraging its children to grow works to excuse or gloss over its many harms as bumbling mistakes with good intentions. For example, Lila Abu-Lughod (2013) has demonstrated how public narratives within the U.S. painted Afghani women as inherently oppressed, indicated by their practices of veiling or covering, to help justify the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. She argues that these narratives of saviorism helped paint an image of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan as one that would bring freedom and liberation to women. While underscoring both the falsity of this idea as well as the complex historical, political, and social reasons that women wear coverings, Abu-Lughod simultaneously demonstrates how the media works to craft and maintain hegemonic narratives that mask or justify U.S. intervention and involvement abroad. In reality, when given a choice, many women continue to wear coverings. Moreover, as of 2021 In Afghanistan and Pakistan more than 71,000 civilians have been killed as a result of this war (Watson Institute 2021). This example is just one of countless many that illustrates how the hegemony of U.S. empire is masked behind narratives of "freedom".

This is the landscape through which people, unaffected[6] by and unaware of U.S. empire and imperialism must navigate, or moreso exit out of in order to journey to a new political consciousness. Said differently, the thick normalization of U.S. exceptionalism and empire acts as a profound boundary for the generation of a new political consciousness particularly for U.S. Latin American solidarity campaigns. Whereas other international campaigns or charity drives can use and enliven people with narratives that play into ideas of U.S. exceptionalism and empire often emphasizing a pitiable nation in need of help, Latin American solidarity campaigns not only cannot use these narratives but are in fact working to change them. As a result, campaigns usually do not and cannot draw on simplistic nationalist sentiment or ideas about "being a great American" or "making America great" as this framing implicitly relies on beliefs in U.S. exceptionalism. As such, activists face a double bind. They must both de-normalize hegemonic narratives about U.S. power and influence and find the tools and narratives to do so that can appeal to a broad populace while simultaneously not relying on the same narratives of U.S. exceptionalism that they are trying to overcome to energize people. However, overcoming hegemonic barriers and figuring out framing complexities are just two of the barriers activists face.

While hegemonic narratives of U.S. empire and imperialism are dominant, at the same time, the impacts of empire and imperialism are often intangible and obscured from public view. Unlike the stark images that flooded U.S. media in the 1960s and 1970s of the Vietnam war, there are no such images for many the many realities people are facing in Latin America. The tactics of U.S. empire have shifted in response to public outcry. The U.S. has often moved beyond the well-visibilized militarized attempts at maintaining and controlling empire. Rather, it relies on a compendium of tactics such as providing military aid, training, ideological teachings, and corporate maneuvers (Gill 2007) that often go unseen and are difficult to create a concise story and narrative through which to activate people. It offers many a layer of protection and blindness against global realities. At the same time, while these issues remain distant to many, national problems can feel very pressing and more easily conquerable. For example, one activist I interviewed, Jeanette, noted that "I think especially with international work a lot of people don't

6. I use "unaffected" with caution as everyone is ultimately impacted by US imperialism and empire. However, some are much more affected or harmed by empire than others.

see the dividends of it immediately. And I think this is why they are deterred from it. They think it this long process of symbolic work, when actually you can have really significant material gains, like preventing wars. There are a bunch of things that come from international solidarity work that people don't automatically see or understand." Helping people see the unseen and understand the value and importance of international solidarity work is yet another barrier that activists face. Because people involved in campaigns often don't understand their direct impact, they can easily become disempowered or never attain any sort of empowerment in the first place. Moreover, often Latin America as a region receives very little attention in U.S. media and other regions or wars draw far more U.S. scrutiny and attention.

Combined each of these challenges compiles to create what can feel like overwhelming obstacles for shifting consciousness. Hegemonic narratives of U.S. exceptionalism, framing challenges, the mental distance of struggles in Latin America combined with national issues and/or media attention on other regions complicate shifting political consciousness in the heart of empire. The nature of U.S. Latin American solidarity campaigns is that they often act as a mirror reflecting the U.S.'s own social problems and governmental ills, a mirror that many don't want to look into.

This is why coming to political consciousness does not happen overnight, after reading a single book, or even through a unitary international encounter. It can take years, and truly never ends. Rather, it is an ongoing process of unlearning and relearning that counters and unwinds deeply embedded narratives about the U.S. The complexity and multi-faceted nature of this process is also why an examination of how people come to a new political consciousness is so necessary. The U.S. general populace's lack of awareness of U.S. empire and impact in Latin America is more than just a lack of information. It is a result of how empire obscures, and a reflection on the difficulty of coming to consciousness within the heart of empire. In unveiling how people move past these layers of obscurity, we also reveal the fractures and ruptures in empire, fissures that could constitute greater opportunities for resistance and change.

2.3 Political Dissonance as a Step to Solidarity

The geopolitics and political economy of U.S. empire that is actively obscured from the view of many within the U.S., is conversely seen and experienced in crystalline clarity by many across Latin America. Not only do residents across the South have many firsthand accounts of and experiences with U.S. imperialism, they also hold a variety of conflicting and generative views and analyses of how to confront and change varying regional impacts and dynamics of U.S. empire and the systems that support it.[7] The goal of this dissertation is not to chart or explicate each one of these initiatives, but rather to examine how people in the U.S. come to encounter and support varying initiatives themselves. As the rest of this dissertation will demonstrate, many activists within this study had radicalizing experiences when they met with activists from various countries within Latin America. However, these transnational encounters were preceded by and ultimately facilitated by a variety of preliminary experiences that first opened people up to the possibility of and desire to travel or meet others from the South. Said differently, people experienced a variety of incidents that began to fracture perceptions of U.S. exceptionalism that were previously foundational to their worldview.

This dissertation specifically focuses on political dissonance that runs counter to ideas that support U.S. hegemony and empire, or anti-imperialist transnationalism. Other forms of transnationalism and even solidarity can and do focus on "top-down" problem solving that relies solely on governmental intervention or focuses on charity models of giving. Anti-imperial transnationalism does not necessarily completely eschew advocating for governmental reforms or mutual aid systems of charity, but it does reject both the ideological and material justifications foreign governments use to intervene in other country's affairs. Rather, it advocates for more national autonomy and particularly works to elevate the voices and alternatives put forth by colonially marginalized peoples. This dissertation focuses explicitly on people who have been moved to anti-imperial political dissonance. Despite this, today, especially with the rise of the populist right and a myriad of global and domestic governmental disenchantments, people have a variety of understandings of what might constitute political dissonance. For example, the individual I spoke with while waiting in the customs line might understand political dissonance

7. MISSING CITATION INFO.

as dissent against capitalist regulation and governmental intervention. However, I focus specifically on ideas that contest dominant hegemonic narratives that center U.S. empire and capitalist praxis. Said differently, I am interested in how people begin to develop and understand counter-hegemonic understandings that have emerged from and center historically marginalized populations-those who have long felt and contested the impacts of U.S. empire, work to combat it, and whose material and ideological attempts to build change are often silenced or undermined on national and international scales.

Because the impacts of U.S. empire and economic and military influence are purposefully obscured from U.S. public view, realizing the reality of U.S. empire and developing a beginning sense of anti-imperial political dissonance, can be the first step to shifting political consciousness. Even when films, websites, or other media outlets begin to illustrate the personal costs of U.S. influence, when viewed from the comfort of their own home or phone, these realities still seem like a distant world, one in which the individual cannot exert influence. Studies have demonstrated the profound difficulty in altering someone's worldview, as well as the overwhelm individuals feel by the daily barrage of disheartening news stories. Rather than invigorate or radicalize, feelings of overwhelm can lead to disempowerment and decreased political engagement (Gallup and Knight Foundation 2020). As a result of the purposefully obscured nature of these political alternatives, coming to a new political consciousness or a political dissonance that rejects the hegemonic norms of U.S. exceptionalism and empire can be a multi-step and ongoing process.

While the process of forming some political dissonance is founded on preliminary experiences that begin to encourage the individual to question accepted norms and consider alternative possibilities, many times travel and personal face-to-face interactions with activists in Latin America as well as witnessing the direct consequences of U.S. empire can help completely rupture any remaining notions of U.S. exceptionalism. These experiences and the myriad of political, affective, personal, and historical components that underlie them will be discussed throughout the rest of this dissertation. However, of important note is that though a direct personal encounter with those from Latin America or personally witnessing the impacts of U.S. empire can rupture the veil of U.S. exceptionalism and empire, witnessing, or the encounter itself

is often not the most salient factor for people's politicization. Witnessing isn't inherently radicalizing. In fact, it can work to concretize and support old political understandings rather than build new ones. Rather, it is the framework through which people are guided to understand a transnational encounter that is most poignant. A politically dissonant framework or worldview is built and supported by liminal moments, cultural institutions, personal relationships, and affective reactions that work to eradicate the conceptual distance between those across the Americas. When supported by such a framework then a transnational encounter can foster a political dissonance that can (and often does) help cement a worldview in which solidarity is a critical component of being a good person in the world. Moreover, a direct personal encounter or witnessing of the impacts of U.S. empire simultaneously reinjects a realization of the deeply personal and human consequences of these realities. No longer is it just a meme or a news story. It is a lived, breathed, felt experience. The personal relationships and experiences that people build with this transnational encounter help unveil and explain a giant geopolitical system that may have previously felt intangible and unmovable.

Political dissonance that counters hegemonic narratives often simultaneously leads people to develop an understanding of solidarity that is built on the notion that the material conditions that underlie hegemonic notions of U.S. empire must change. While understandings and enactments of U.S. solidarity with Latin America have varied overtime (see chapter six) this dissertation is specifically interested in a solidarity that is animated by the belief that deep structural reforms are needed to address social problems and that forms of charity, such as one-off donations, are not enough to build change nor is it the main type of support communities on the frontlines of building change are asking for. The specific mechanisms through which people believe they can address structural issues may vary, but the most basic sentiment that animates people's desire remains the same. For many, this understanding of solidarity emerges as the framework through which they know the world shifts. This consequential shift is connected to and embedded in the fracturing of mainstream hegemonic narratives as well as rising distrust in the material systems that sustain them. In this way, political dissonance to hegemonic narratives is a fundamental feature of solidarity. Similarly witnessing and/or directly encountering and interacting with people or situations in Latin America that embrace counter - hegemonic ideals is often a salient

tool for crafting solidarity transnationally as it works to bridge both the physical and ideological distance between U.S. residents and the realities of U.S. empire.

The rest of this dissertation will explicate how liminality, *communitas,* and affect, each bridged and constructed by the unique historical moment and personal relationships of the individual, foster a counter hegemonic political consciousness and desire to engage in actions thought of as solidarity. Each of these processes is indelibly linked to the other, slowly chipping away at hegemonic norms and replacing them with alternatives. Sometimes they involve witnessing realities counter to the ones they themselves experience, traveling to Latin America, or stumbling upon a new set of friends and personal relationships that encourage a different type of thinking. They are often fraught with complexities, of feeling betwixt and between, like being stuck in a customs line between Ayn Rand devotees and Colombian activists who counter her every sentiment. Each of these processes is needed in its own unique way. In unveiling both the complexities and entanglement of shifting political consciousness I hope to elucidate the many ways that people can become more politically aware and active.

CHAPTER 3

The First Step: Passages to Activism

3.1 Introduction

It was 2013 and I was being shuffled between fellow passengers on the stuffy walkway of the ramp leading up to the airplane in Miami airport. I had my just-purchased back-packing sack and was dressed in casual blue jeans and a t-shirt determined to look the part (whatever this may mean) of a U.S. backpacker. The plane was headed to Cali, Colombia and would carry me out of the United States for the first time in my life. I was traveling on a Witness for Peace delegation to learn about the impacts of U.S. policy in the region. While my brother kindly offered to pay for my plane ticket, I used student loan money to pay for the delegation. In his enthusiasm for my first international trip, my brother used his frequent flyer miles and bought me a first-class ticket. As the stuffy cabin air flowed through the lungs of each passenger, I sat in a comfy first-class seat and was served a mimosa mid-flight. I vividly remember feeling comfortably out of place as the champagne bubbles danced in the back of my throat. 24 hours later, I was surrounded by a group of 12 fellow travelers engaging in a preliminary exercise organized by Witness for Peace staff to teach individuals about privilege. After my first and only first-class flight I was quickly thrust into the realities of how my whiteness, class, and gender have structured my life in the 2000s. This was a marked experience in my life. It was, what I will call, liminal. However, though this space marked a transitional period in my life — the beginning of my own entre in activism — it did not arrive out of nowhere. I did not awaken one day and decide to go to Colombia. This decision was shepherded in by a variety of seemingly small moments throughout my life, moments that fostered a curiosity and openness that led me to a choice that had a marked impact on my life.

This chapter is about the small, often unseen moments in U.S. activist's lives. As I will demonstrate, these initial moments begin to foster an emotional and political flexibility within people that is conducive to understanding and interacting in the world around them differently. Though obvious moments such as directly encountering the contradictions of one's privilege

while traveling, might serve as clear on-ramps for forays into activism, this chapter highlights the events or moments that are hidden in the interpersonal minutia of people's everyday lives. While the opportunity to travel to a foreign country, attend a protest, or get involved in a non-profit organization might randomly occur in people's lives, it is meaningless if not taken. Moves to activism are undergirded by a variety of small everyday realizations that are often not easily apparent or even examined in social movement research. At the same time, the development of a political consciousness does not happen in a vacuum but is informed by the politics and socio-economic conditions in which a person begins to become aware. In situating personal experiences within a broader historical overview of the political culture of the U.S. from the 1980s to the present and key events that occurred throughout Latin America that were instrumental in shaping understandings of U.S. solidarity, this chapter demonstrates how both personal and historical particularities of liminality inform political consciousness. The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate how subjective experiences are framed by historical possibilities that can create opportunities for shifts in political consciousness. For example, just because a large social movement exists, does not guarantee that people will become involved or develop a deeper consciousness about an issue, though it may increase the probability of a precursory awareness of an issue. Similarly, the lack of a social movement does not preclude people from raising their consciousness. However, as many scholars have demonstrated (Krupa and Nugent 2015; Maskovsky and Bjork-James 2020; Saramifar 2019; Tate 2015), the dominant political landscape and socio-economic setting can inform how people make sense of and assign personal and political meaning to their knowledge and experiences. Likewise, the specific contents of what liminality might look like and how it is understood is historically contingent. In looking at how personal experiences intersect with historical circumstances, this chapter draws attention to experiences that are foundational for fostering political awareness, and how they help create a political flexibility or questioning- a liminality-that can lead to a path of future activism. As I will demonstrate, these foundational liminalities are framed by the historical setting in which they occur and personal circumstances such as race and class.

3.2 Liminality

Drawing from Van Gennep (1960), Victor Turner (1969) famously theorized on the concept of liminality, detailing how coming of age ceremonies can act as a social in-between, a period when

people step outside of society and then later re- emerge fully embedded. These liminal periods can work to uphold existing social structures and integrate people within them. They can also act as “anti-structures” that, when contrasted with the existing social order, might make apparent social ills and provide an avenue for their transformation. Of the anti-structure, Sutton-Smith argues: “The normative structure represents the working equilibrium, the anti-structure represents the latent system of potential alternatives from which novelty will arise when contingencies in the normative system require it. We might more correctly call this second system the proto-structural system [he says] because it is the precursor of innovative normative forms. It IS the source of new culture.” (Sutton-Smith 1972, 18-19). The anti-structure found in episodes of liminality can be generative not just of personal reflection but of new cultural norms.

Similarly, Ann Swidler (1986) argues that when a society is not experiencing a significant shift or stress such as war, famine, etc. culture exists as background noise in the hum of people's minds. It's norms, customs and expectations are largely unquestioned or even considered. Yet, during societal upheaval some may begin to pay more attention to cultural expectations. “In unsettled times, such as political crises, economic collapse, or massive military defeats, “culture takes a more explicit, coherent form when people are reorganizing their strategies of action or developing new ones” (Swidler 1986). What Swidler and Turner are calling attention to is the broader field of force through which both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives circulate. Seeking explanations for how a population comes to view power as legitimate without the direct use of violence Antonio Gramsci proposed the idea of cultural hegemony. He argued that hegemony was the “spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (Crehan 2002, 102). Through mechanisms such as churches, media, and schools the ideas and activities of the ruling class as well as the social practices that work to maintain their rule become common sense. This “common sense” is hegemony. Expanding on Gramsci’s theory, Raymond Williams has argued that hegemony, “is a whole body of practices and expectations, our assignments of energy, our ordinary understanding of the nature of man and of his world. It is a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in society, a sense of absolute… But this is not, except in the operation of a moment of abstract analysis, in any sense a static system” (Williams

1973, 8). Hegemony not only saturates notions of common sense; it becomes an embodied practice and is not easily cast aside. As such hegemony operates to both reproduce the material categories of disparities as well as their ideological justification (Crehan 2002). However, the uncertainty and flux present within liminalities make them sites where these commonsense notions are questioned.

As such, periods of flux can challenge common-sensical understanding of the world and allow more space for counter-hegemonic alternatives to emerge. If hegemony "constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, *a sense of absolute*…" (Williams 1973, 8) then liminality disturbs the conception of the absolute. Within liminal moments social structures are understood differently, as malleable. Indeed, when discussing social movements in Bolivia Carwil Bjork-James (2020) showed how "liminality, *communitas,* and embodied affect allows for emotional flexibility to reinterpret political order" (144). However, most research focuses on liminal periods during objective times of upset like war or large social movements. This can de-emphasize the role of subjective unsettledness that emerges at varying times in people's lives and can impact the development of their political consciousness. However, I have found that subjective events experienced by an individual play a profound role in fostering an openness to a future larger liminal event. These seemingly minor events constitute fractures in hegemonic understandings that can unveil a broader field of force to people and spark a greater inquisitiveness and awareness of the complicated workings of power. In order to understand the subjective experience of liminality, this chapter calls attention to both overarching historical events that frame people's liminal experiences as well as individual's own raced and classed experiences. Feminist theorists have long emphasized that an individual's standpoint in society can influence their experiences (Haraway 1988; Collins 1990; Hartsock 1997). While my research echoed this, it also underscores how historical circumstances including the political and economic context inform what liminal experiences looked like and how they open space for new ways of understanding and acting. Everyone I interviewed detailed at least one event that began to spur deeper questions about the world around them. The longer people were involved in activist work, the more stories of continued awakening they had. Notably, at least one event occurred long before the time in which people began activism work but often continued to occur

throughout people's lives. All happenings were influenced both by the contingent historical setting and people's personal lives.

3.3 Lives of Liminalities

This chapter draws primarily from life history interviews I elicited throughout my research. These interviews often took place in multiple sittings, over hours of reflection, cups of coffee, and budding enthusiasm from interviewees. Though I collected over 25 life histories, I have chosen just five to highlight, each which takes place under different historical, classed, and raced standpoints from the 1980s to the present. The activists whose stories that I highlight have been or are currently involved in U.S. Latin America solidarity work through their engagement with non-profit organizations, churches, or personal networks and focus on the impact of U.S. policies across various countries in Latin America. While some have been personally impacted by U.S. policy in Latin America, others had never experienced or were even aware of a U.S. presence in the region. These narratives illustrate the importance of both the historical setting, and the overarching political culture of the time, as well as the individual's distinct realities. Moreover, these individualized accounts demonstrate how foundational liminalities begin to shift people's distinct subjectivities.

When I began most of my interviews, I prefaced the conversation noting that I was interested in how and why people got involved in Latin American solidarity work. Most people I spoke with were active in specific advocacy efforts with one country in Latin America and were eager to reflect on the path that led them there. This excitement often led people to dive straight into the conversation-unprompted by a question- to a tale of how they were involved in solidarity work and how their involvement was sparked by a critical moment in their lives. While often fascinating, these stories didn't explain why. I was left with a story of when someone got involved and what they did, but not why. Why did they feel compelled to seek out this work? What ethical or moral code guided them? To answer these questions, I found I had to go much deeper into their past. I began collecting life histories from everyone I interviewed. Diving into the depths of their childhood, I asked interviewees what their lives were like. When did they become aware of the greater political sphere around them? Did their parents talk politics in the home or watch the news? Were their friends' activists? Each question led to another. I was

constructing puzzle pieces of their lives, deciphering what the personal and historical setting was when they first became aware of the world around them- or when they first became aware of its imperfections. What we, both researcher and interviewees inadvertently stumbled on, was that for most people there was a moment in which something began to shift and a political awareness or at least the desire for an awareness began to grow. I heard the phrase “I hadn't realized this until just now” over and over again. Each interviewee was suddenly more aware of the story of their life. Meanwhile, I was aware that in each of these moments they described something else was happening, a minute period of flux- a period of liminality.

Whereas most scholarship on liminality emphasizes liminal periods as seemingly obvious periods of flux- puberty, large scale social movements, coming of age rituals- what I found was a series of what I call mini or foundational liminalities, events or everyday occurrences that are slightly different than everyday reality, and provide the cultural flexibility for people to view things in a new way. These events are individualized, informed by their own context, and begin a process of developing a political consciousness that enables people to embrace a full liminal period later in life. If a bigger, more externally obvious liminal event is like a pressure valve being released, then these mini liminalities are the pressure that builds up over time.

When analyzing for foundational-liminalities, I found that most took place outside of a U.S.-Latin America solidarity context but were still framed by the extant political narratives and culture in which they occurred. Furthermore, they were heavily influenced by the individual’s own standpoint-their understanding of race, gender, and class that existed when the liminal event took place. Following Edith Turner (2011) I found that these liminal events were marked either by a sense of a “rite of passage” or by someone's marginal status in society. However, instead of demarcating an entire phase of life as liminal such as “puberty, middle age” etc., I locate the specific emotional and political flexibility characteristic of liminality in concrete events of people's lives. Many of these smaller liminalities occur as people witness a reality that was previously unknown or distant from their everyday lives. These initial encounters with alterity, of direct experience and witnessing, provide the individual data that is uncontestable. It is not a secondhand account potentially open for interpretation, but direct personally witnessed evidence that different social and political realities exist that don't align with the person's current view of

the world. Such an encounter or witnessing experience is not necessary for a small liminality. In fact, some liminal moments arise simply when people learn new information from a peer, teacher, or book. However, for those ensconced in class, race, and national privileges, in circumstances in which hegemonic norms have a stronghold in daily life, directly witnessing something that contests perceived normalcy can be a powerful tool to break through or crack accepted norms.

Throughout the rest of this chapter, I highlight the personal stories of five U.S.-Latin America solidarity activists whose foundational liminal events were framed by different historical periods in the U.S. as well as varying personal class and racial realities. Each activist had a foundational liminal moment at a distinct period of U.S. history and U.S. involvement in Latin America. I use these unique narratives to illustrate overarching patterns I found within people's journey to political consciousness including the central role of foundational liminalities and how the extant political culture informs experiences and paths towards other liminal events.

3.4 James – 1960s and 70s

When I spoke with James, he was in his mid-60s living in Arizona with his wife and working for a small but well-known U.S. - Latin America solidarity organization. He was a white middle class male with a slight southern drawl and a fondness for his own family history. Many times, throughout our conversation he would trail off into a tale about his ancestry, connecting his historical knowledge with his present understanding of self. He didn't get persistently involved in U.S. - Latin America solidarity work until the early 2000s. Despite this, the experiences that led him to his activist career started in his childhood, a childhood that took place and was molded by events in the 1960s and 70s. James noted that:

> I think between 11 and 16 while I was in [1970s] Alabama, I was just questioning everything. But I had realized that not all religious people believed bad things and I saw this with my parents. But I had stopped taking things at face value anymore.

The 1960s was a marked period in U.S. political culture. Following WWII, a new left had emerged within the United States to combat injustices of both race and class nationally and internationally (Goose 2004). Inspired by the struggles that were taking place in Asia, Africa as

well as the Vietnam War, an anti-imperial, anti-colonial spirit motivated much of the left. It united diverse factions and further inspired civil rights and desegregation movements in the states. The New Left encapsulated a diverse array of groups and causes, and "what linked these movements was the importance they placed on the dignity of each individual and the right of every American to full citizenship" (Goose 2004, 16). However, "as the Vietnam war escalated in the mid-1960's, cold war liberalism fractured, and multiple radical movements came forward" (Goose 2004, 16) movements for black power, women's rights, and against the Vietnam War began to fracture the unity of the left developed at the start of the 1960s. Some elements of the New Left aligned with the Democratic Party while others remained more radicalized. In addition, a new more conservative right emerged that united traditional rightest economic beliefs with social conservatives. Though the coalition of the New Left was relatively fleeting in the United States, the successes of the union changed the political atmosphere of the nation. Despite the short-lived unity of the New Left, it accomplished two major tasks. First, they created more space for marginalized voices. Secondly, that space became encoded in law, through what Van Goose calls the "rights revolution", marked by the Civil Rights act and the Voting Rights Act. These changes in politics and law were accompanied by a change in culture, differences in how we speak, behave, and what we assume. Most markedly, Goose (2004) contends that outright white supremacy was no longer legally or culturally permissible.

James' first foundational liminal moment occurred within this context in the early 1970s. As racial tensions of the 1960s still simmered yet no longer made daily news, and a growing conceptualization that everyone deserved basic "rights" became more mainstream. James was just beginning to learn about the world around him and still possessed the naive assumption that the Civil Rights movement and changes of the 1960s had eradicated all vestiges of racism and social inequity. His liminal moments marked a shift away from these simplistic understandings.

In a long, circular way, getting excited about certain points of his life, the readings and the experiences that informed his journey, James told his story. His father was a preacher in a Baptist church. Though he noted that his parents weren't really political, their experiences with religious politics in the church stood out in his mind. He grew up with religious morals structuring his life. Because his father was a preacher, he moved a lot growing up, almost every two years. Each

church placement was in a rural setting, and he reminisced about walking in the woods. He remembered fondly the simplicity of his life, marked by a clear lack of political awareness or worry about the world around him. Before he was eleven, he was encapsulated in a comfortable reality brought on by a peaceful childhood in a white economically comfortable family. He knew about race. “I was around black people… But I didn't really get that they were black” he said. Nor did he understand the political or economic impact of being black in the post-civil rights era. This all changed when he was eleven.

> When I was 11, we moved to Alabama and that was huge, huge for me. My dad took a pastor position in Crossville, Alabama...We moved there in summer of 1970. What was going on there...so this was the first time as how I understand it, that there was going to be an election for governor in which black people would be ugh sic* [able to participate] and they would have a say in the democratic process. The governor was George Wallace. So anyway, when I moved there…. first of all, people knew that my dad’s family was a union family, that they had fought for the union [during the civil war]. So anyway, there were ads on the TV in which he would talk openly about the black bloc and don't let the black bloc decide this election. Again, it's the 1970s and the civil rights movement of the 50s and 60s was coming to fruition, you know with full participation on some levels. And the place we went to was just very very racist… The KKK was active in the area. I mean it was a really really difficult time. I mean it was a good time. I loved the land. So, there were good things, but the racism was just extreme. So, I had to hear about that [racism] every day and I got in fights constantly because of, I dunno, well first of all it’s an all-white community...and people knew that mom and dad were not voting for Wallace. So, racism, hearing really vile racist stuff was an almost daily occurrence. And I also knew that not everyone felt that way.

James’ family’s relocation to Alabama constituted a first major shock in his idyllic view and experience of the U.S. Prior to moving to Alabama, he had very little recognition or understanding of the different experiences and realities that a Black and white person might have in the U.S. When thrown into the racial tensions of 1970s Alabama his naivete was quickly replaced with shock at how Black people were treated and the resistance white people showed to shifts towards more equality. Witnessing, encountering racist actions and having a reality alternative to his own thrust into his view was a critical aspect of this liminal experience. Notably he contrasted his own reality with that of the external political environment. He emphasized that though it was taxing for him to realize racist realities, it was also “a good time” as he got to experience and live near nature. Conversely, he notes that it was a “really really difficult time…. [because] the racism was so extreme. James’ recognition of the distinction

between his own reality and the broader socio-political atmosphere constituted one the first fractures in his previously untainted view of the U.S. His experiences while he lived in Alabama continued to deepen this fracture. James continued his story saying:

> But what really happened, when I was 15, the last year we were there, a black family tried to move into the town limits and what happened, the chairman of the deacon of our church, Mr. Yancy...who was also a descendant from a union family. He had a family, and he hired a family, a black family, sharecroppers and you know the sharecroppers' situation was not a good situation. However, unlike a lot of sharecropper situations the family lived in a decent house, and they had a pretty decent situation in comparison to other sharecroppers. And for two weeks people would go by there and throw bricks through their windows. People shot bullets through their windows. And my father would go and visit them and sit with them because when he was there people wouldn't do that. But they lasted about two weeks and after that they left town. And the other thing that happened during that time was my father took me down a mountain to the valley and showed me some fields that had been burned. He explained to me what had happened. The farmer, who was a white farmer, hired black workers and the issue wasn't that he hired black workers, people did that all the time. The issue was that he paid them a good wage. So anyway, that had a huge effect on me. That made me think that whatever version of Christianity [people believed here], because this was in the bible belt... was not a very viable version. And we, within a year had taken a church in Illinois and I thought that I was moving to a land free of racism, but I found out differently. But the time in Alabama was formative in unfortunately a pretty traumatic way.

This event fully ruptured James' conception that everyone who practiced Christianity treated people, all people, equally and with kindness. He repetitively witnessed events that illustrated the different reality many others experience. This ongoing encounter with occurrences outside of his typical purview shattered a trusted framework that James used to make sense of the world and began a process in which he would start to reassess other hegemonic narratives that had a dominant role in his life, such as narratives on capitalism, race relations, and U.S. governmental policies. Though James did not personally suffer from racial discrimination, the realities of race in the 1970s U.S. interjected itself in his life in a unique way, acting as a springboard that would begin to propel him to a new political consciousness. In the United States "the Civil Rights movement… cemented a whole range of tactics and strategies into the public imagination that were barely visible even a decade earlier, including large protests and marches, sit-ins, boycotts, and civil disobedience" (Striffler 2019, 48). But for James, though he knew of race and racial

tensions, to him they were “over there”, somewhere else, or even swept away and healed in the Civil Rights movement.

From his liminal experiences in Alabama, James was introduced to a reality other than his peaceful childhood. It was the first time he began to see the world differently, as imperfect. Moreover, it was the beginning of his journey questioning U.S. exceptionalism and perfectionism. These foundational ruptures fractured his conception of the U.S. as a perfect place to live and the shift in this presumed hegemonic understanding constituted a shock to his belief system. To him, the unequal treatment of local farmers because of the color of their skin was juxtaposed against the touted religious values of the town. The contradictions of ideological convictions versus actual practices were thrown into stark relief. The world, the U.S., was no longer what he knew. What else then, might be different?

> I think at the age of 17 I decided I was Christian pacifist anarchist. Well, I like to read, and you know after having been through all of that in Alabama I was trying to figure out a lot of things and believe me it took me a long time and I still haven’t quite figured out. But I was definitely kind of lost and trying to figure it out.

James underscores the liminal impact of these events by highlighting how it drove his instinct to question the social structure, people's actions within it, and his own role. He notes an underlying sentiment of feeling “apart,” separate from the contradictions that drove seemingly religious people to treat others with harm. This moment began a process of realignment in which James' nature to question grew. It wasn't a moment that was societally structured or that was the result of large overt socio-political shifts. Rather, these foundational liminalities were interwoven into his everyday life, unique to his own experiences and worldview. These events helped set the stage for a series of moments and decisions that led to his current job. Each of these instances snowballed into a shifting worldview, one that forms the bedrock of his extant notion of solidarity. As his experiences began to fracture dominant hegemonic narratives found amongst white people in the U.S. about race and religion, they simultaneously began to reorient his worldview away from a narrative that centered U.S. idealism and exceptionalism. While seeing the harm of domestic U.S. politics, he began wondering how things could be different. Without understanding or denoting it as such, James began toying with ideas of solidarity-what it was, how it could be enacted, and its role in changing harmful politics.

In college he was introduced to Marxist literature and the socialist party. He became involved in some anti-apartheid work. Later he held a job in a factory with co-workers who were primarily migrants. For the first time he really saw migrant workers as humans. Then he backpacked for a bit in Mexico and became more aware of Latin America. When he went back to school, he studied religion and learned liberation theology. A series of opportunities taken, books read, and relationships made led James to the path he was on when I spoke with him. Each of these experiences was liminal for James in different ways. They continued to fracture hegemonic narratives and eventually began to propose others- ideas that centered historically marginalized populaces when building change and directly confronted the U.S. empire. However, it happened slowly sometime imperceptibly. A political consciousness does not emerge overnight. A conception of solidarity that counters U.S. empire is composed of many moments, years, experiences, and relationships. Even in his thirties and forties James says he still wasn't fully politicized. Yet soon all the threads would come together. While serving as an interim pastor, he met his first wife and moved to Tucson with her. Here the contents of his earlier politicization began to come together, all sparked by his liminal experiences in Alabama.

Though seemingly happenstance, his experiences were framed both by the historical context in which they occurred and the myriad of personal relationships (which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter six) that guided him along his path. It was his parents who taught and normalized different social values than the racism he witnessed in Alabama, friends in college that introduced him to the Socialist party, and Migrant workers who became friends who each pushed him along a path of political development. Each of these relationships either overtly encouraged or tacitly supported how James came to make sense of his liminal experiences. At the same time, James' shock at seemingly religious people's reaction to Black people receiving equal treatment with whites was informed by how his parents had taught him religious morals and by his understanding of racial relations in the U.S. in which he assumed, as Goose (2004) has noted, that displays of white supremacy where no longer socially acceptable. Had James witnessed the same occurrences in the 1950s or had his parents taught him a different interpretation of his faith, his experience may not have been liminal at all. Moreover, when compared to the victories the "rights revolution" had obtained and James' basic understanding that the U.S. was now an equitable place, overt events of racial discrimination were even more

shocking. As such, these events were liminal to James because of his raced and classed standpoint in the U.S. political climate which was concurrently framed both by his personal relationships, particularly his family, and his basic understanding of the political atmosphere of the time. Upon learning that the political and economic reality for Black people in the U.S. was not what he imagined or what the media exposed, he began to question what other hegemonic narratives might be untrue.

3.5 Kathleen – 1970s and 80s

Like James, Kathleen's journey to a political consciousness was a series of small and personal hegemonic ruptures. However, whereas some of James' more formative moments were framed by the shifting racial tensions of the 1970s U.S., many of Kathleen's foundational liminalities took place amidst the 1980s when Latin America drew more public awareness in the U.S. and new forms of political dissonance were developing. Throughout my multiple chats with Kathleen, I could hear the wind blowing in the background. It was the thick of COVID-19 and multiple zoom meetings were a common feature of daily life. Kathleen used our phone calls to step away from her work in the ministry and into the sunlight. When we spoke, she was in her 60s and had been involved in U.S. Latin America solidarity work for decades. Like James, she was white and grew up as she noted “privileged, “ without much economic or racial strife. The beginning of her consciousness raising began as a kid when she heard about the Civil Rights movement on TV. Like James, the political and social dimensions of these events only faintly registered with her. It was far away and detached from her own reality. Instead, it was a slightly whimsical decision she made as a 14-year-old to become a vegetarian that would eventually place her on a path to politicization.

> I had a good friend who had become a vegetarian… But David became a vegetarian and I also started just thinking about the fact that if there was no need to eat animals to survive. Why do it? You could be perfectly healthy and not eat animals so why would I do that if I didn't have to.

This small decision, though not fully liminal, helped facilitate many future hegemonic fractures and a reorganization of Kathleen's worldview. When speaking about this decision she emphasized that it wasn't a political choice but a moral decision. Yet still her friend's decision

sparked a line of questioning and thinking that diverged from the mainstream of meat eating. Seemingly small, this decision led Kathleen to choose the vegetarian dormitory when she went to college, which unknowingly, was a hub of activism on campus. Surrounded by peers who were engaged in a variety of activist causes, Kathleen began to get involved as well. From her peers, she learned about the farmworkers movement to get fair wages, the anti-nuclear movement, and majored in economics where she read Marxist theory. Each of these experiences and knowledge building opportunities slowly began to chip away at normative hegemonic narratives of U.S. exceptionalism, of the oft perpetuated narrative that everyone in the U.S. has equal opportunities, and of the primacy of capitalism. However, unlike James whose experience in Alabama was overtly disruptive to his worldview and constituted a clear hegemonic fracture, these experiences were smaller and built upon one another like a rock slowly chipping away at a crack in a glass window.

Moreover, each of these experiences were facilitated and strengthened through the personal relationships she developed with her fellow dorm- mates who began to widen her political consciousness, as did the economics professor who taught her Marxist theory. While these relationships were critical for her political expansion, ironically it was her childhood friendship with David that set the stage for her to live in an activist dorm and socialize with students who were active in the U.S. left. In this way her relationships with others both led to liminal moments and her liminal moments then connected her with more people who facilitated and undergirded her political consciousness. Just as James' father helped facilitate his initial liminalities, so too did Kathleen's personal relationships.

Each of these relationships and experiences, these chips in hegemony, eventually led her to live in Tanzania, Spain, and Nicaragua, experiences she says were monumental for her politicization. Smaller, almost imperceptible experiences and shifts in political consciousness facilitated opportunities that would radically fracture and reorient Kathleen's worldview. Meanwhile, while Kathleen began to engage with a series of people and places who would mold her politicization, in the backdrop continued economic and political shifts in the 1970s U.S. framed the understanding of her experiences.

Kathleen entered college in 1974 and graduated in 1978. The years in which she began her foray into activism were framed by the fracturing of the New Left in the United States, heightened Cold War politics, and various economic crises that rocked the country. A year after she graduated, in 1979, Jimmy Carter gave his famous speech summarizing many people's sentiments of the time. He called it a crisis of confidence.

> It's clear that the true problems of our nation are much deeper -- deeper than gasoline lines or energy shortages, deeper even than inflation or recession … We've always believed in something called progress. We've always had a faith that the days of our children would be better than our own. Our people are losing that faith.

Carter characterized social unrest as a lack of faith in change. Indeed, social understandings and movements were shifting. However, for Kathleen, this time was not marked by a lack of faith, but a lack of awareness. Decades of organized and sometimes unified social movements had begun to operate in silos, each focusing on an independent cause and few working together (Goose 1993). However, for Kathleen this was the only type of organizing she had ever known. Her awareness of the world around her was fostered not by one unified campaign, but a variety of disparate organizations and causes. Though impassioned by calls for change for farm workers and within the anti-nuclear movement, it wasn't until she traveled abroad that she was able to make and understand overarching connections between forms of disenfranchisement and power relations locally and globally. For Kathleen, this occurred when her economics major took her to Tanzania to study. Her time in Tanzania shifted her perspective.

> In terms of opening my mind to how the world is-fascinatingly diverse … and how much we have in common … I had a deep learning about how It is to be "the other." A privileged other. I was a white person in places that had been colonized by white people and in South Africa, obviously where apartheid still ruled. I was very much privileged. I was always a very small minority

Kathleen's trip to Tanzania introduced her to the realities of colonialism, but perhaps even more so to a realization of everyone's humanity. This realization constituted a rupture, a fracture from her previous understanding and existence in the world. For one of the first times, she felt outside of an overarching political system. In feeling outside of or different from the mainstream, she simultaneously recognized how she was inextricably a part of it. It is an odd position to describe,

both feeling outside of or different from one's surroundings while simultaneously recognizing the weight of your presence and decisions. While her previous hegemonic understanding of the world and her position in the world was ruptured, she was concurrently introduced to the beginnings of ideas of solidarity- both a recognition of one's role in the political surroundings and subsequent actions to ameliorate or eliminate harms. This intensive liminal rupture was facilitated by Kathleen's previous experiences and relationships in college and with other activists. However, it was her experience outside of the U.S. that helped cement a hegemonic rupture and introduce an alternative. As was for many others coming from places of privilege, international travel, witnessing a new reality outside of the U.S. often provoked deeper hegemonic ruptures.

About a year after returning from Tanzania, she moved to Spain, inspired by a continued interest in alternative political and economic theory, particularly ideas of anarchism and her boyfriend who also wanted to travel to Spain. Here in our conversation, she regaled me with a brief history of Spain, of its political uniqueness with its brief dance with anarchism. When I asked her why she chose Spain, she highlighted this unique history and added that her boyfriend at the time was also fascinated by this history and wanted to travel to Spain. His companionship helped ease travel fears, but her decision to travel to Spain was motivated more by her political interests. Indeed, the relationship didn't last. He returned to the U.S., and she stayed in Spain. Though the relationship didn't last, it was clear that it contributed to her continued politicization. Kathleen noted that "I'm not sure I'd have gone without companionship, but I wasn't driven there [Spain] by him." His companionship provided Kathleen with a dose of comfort that supported her trip to Spain and more liminal moments. Just as her childhood friendship and college acquaintances and professors had informed her decisions and political understandings, so too did this fleet romantic relationship. While in Spain she became fluent in Spanish and deepened her understanding of political ideologies that were not often openly discussed in the United States.

After a year and half in Spain. Kathleen returned to the United States to live in San Francisco. It was now the early 1980s and the Cold War narrative- that communism (or any alternative to capitalism) anywhere was a threat to the U.S. had been entrenched in the U.S. imaginary since the 1950s. At the same time, Latin America began to re-emerge in public discourse and political

conversation. Brandishing its newly minted counterinsurgency tactics acquired during the Vietnam War, the United States now employed them to support right-wing dictators throughout Latin America to demobilize both armed and ideological resistance. Counterinsurgency strategy relies on a corpus of tactics that work to bend popular society to the political will of those in power through terror, psychological operations, and direct and indirect violence like torture and kidnappings (Network of Concerned Anthropologists 2009; Nordstorm and Martin 1992). This strategy didn't differentiate small farmers from armed threats or Indigenous communities from guerilla strongholds.

So, while some political limits were breached in the United States from the 1960s onward and others built anew, repression in Latin America, particularly in the Southern Cone, intensified. What emerged next was the framework still used by many international and national organizations today, the human rights framework.[8] The emergence of human rights has inextricably altered both how activists' campaign for change and their understanding of how change happens (as will be discussed in Chapter six). It also impacted how activists across the Americas found common ground on which to unite. The growing interest of the U.S. left in third world anti-colonial struggles of the 60s allowed more space to question U.S. global hegemony. However, as right-wing repression grew across Latin America, people had to turn their attention to survival. For many this shift was marked by the U.S.-backed coup in Chile in 1973 and the subsequent regional imposition of Plan Condor which created a regional infrastructure for enacting terror and extinguishing alternative political visions such as socialist projects.

8. A historical overview of human rights discourse reveals that its rise to prominence was not the result of a teleological formation, but rather the confluence of a variety of historical and political events (Moyn 2010). Though the terminology of rights has been tossed about throughout history, the meaning of human rights today is distinct from that of its past. Today the discourse is most frequently used to challenge or subvert state laws and is seen as a mechanism that should ideally operate on an international scale unbounded or regulated by cultural, political, economic, or geographical distinctions. Human rights abuses are highlighted by non-profit organizations and governments to both condemn and justify policy decisions or foreign interventions. Oftentimes, calls of "human rights abuses" are decontextualized from the overarching political and economic situation that prefaced their occurrence. Their depoliticized nature has been used by organizations as well as Indigenous and Afro-Descendent peoples across the Americas to claim legal representation and rights from governments.

Figure 2. Operation Condor (TeleSUR 2020)

In many countries across Latin America the left was fractured, either due to ideological differences, or state violence and repression. In South America especially the rise of violently repressive dictatorships worked to hobble and disorganize previously vibrant social movements. As such, a strong transnational solidarity movement was more difficult to build. However, some links already existed between the Americas that were less affected by violent repression-religious connections. Faith based communities, primarily Catholics, were key factors in mainstreaming the human rights framework. Catholic missionaries' history of proselytizing and working across the Americas had created a network of connections between Latin American communities and

religious groups. Upon witnessing the violence that was sweeping the Americas, missionaries began using the human rights framework to discuss what they had seen. Because of the framework's depoliticized nature that seemed less grounded in a specific ideology and more inspired by concrete assertions of "rights", it was more palatable to the broader religious community as well as the secular public. As a result, left-wing Catholicism became a key linchpin in U.S. Latin American Solidarity movements throughout the latter half of the 20th century. At the same time as religious groups employed human rights language, the U.S. government, particularly the Carter administration, was trying to regain the faith of much of the populace who were increasingly distrustful of the U.S. government due to the failures of the Vietnam War as well as the Nixon scandal. To do so, the Carter administration adopted the language of human rights in an attempt to regain some moral ground while ceding little power or investing much money into real reforms (Moyn 2010). More activists then began using human rights language in attempts to be understood by U.S. policy makers.

The human rights framework soon became the modus operandi for U.S. activists to express their concerns especially during the 1980s Central America solidarity movement. While the left in South America was being ravaged by the repressive tactics of covert assassinations, disappearances and torturing, the left in Central America continued to build counter-hegemonic campaigns led by guerilla groups. In El Salvador and Nicaragua left-wing guerilla groups worked to take control of the State and institute economic and political reforms that would redistribute material and social resources to much of the population. These campaigns drew the attention of many within the U.S. Some have argued that the media attention as well as Reagan's frequent mention of events in Central America attracted more attention not just to the violence in the region, but the U.S.'s role in it (Smith 1996). Moreover, as insurgency and counterinsurgency forces displaced communities who then fled the violence in the South, many displaced people began to migrate Northward, arriving in the U.S. to seek refuge from U.S. fueled terror. Upon seeing migrants arrive and hearing of their stories, some individuals and churches began to create a network of hosts for fleeing immigrants.[9] The U.S. refused to grant asylum to these immigrants, but local U.S. residents and churches took up the mantel, accepted immigrants into

9. Jim Corbett, a church goer of the Quaker faith from Arizona, began an impromptu sanctuary movement, housing immigrants who were fleeing the impacts of US policies in Central America for the United States.

their homes, and in doing so blatantly contested U.S. policies. “By early 1983, more than forty-five churches and synagogues had declared public sanctuary…An entire clandestine communication and transportation network- a new underground railroad-was up and running” (Smith 1996, 69). What began as a religious reaction grew into a political movement that involved people from all walks of life, often led by “moral outrage, religious obligation, emotional passion, and personal commitment” (Smith 1996, 168).

When Kathleen returned from Spain and settled in San Francisco, she began Seminary school and got involved in the Sanctuary movement. From refugees she learned more about what was happening in Central America and from other friends and colleagues she learned of an opportunity to travel to Nicaragua with a new organization called Witness for Peace. These connections would take her on a life-changing trip to Nicaragua. Notably though, when she discussed why she got involved with Sanctuary work in San Francisco she said:

> I got involved with the Central America refugee work that was going on because by then I spoke Spanish. And there was a lot of work going on in the San Francisco area because that was one of the places where people who were fleeing the rise of the military governments of Central America, especially from El Salvador Guatemala.

She referenced the high volume of refugees to the area and her Spanish speaking ability as though this naturally predicated her involvement in the work. Of course, though, there were and have been many others in similar situations who did not “naturally” engage in this work. Indeed, Kathleen's emerging involvement in U.S. Latin America solidarity was not a “natural” occurrence, rather it was ushered in by a myriad of foundational liminalities and historical circumstances that slowly directed her towards a political understanding in which, to her, assisting with the Sanctuary movement was just “what you do”. Kathleen's happenstance decision, informed by a friendship, to become a vegetarian led her down a path of increasing political awareness and involvement. Overtime, these myriad experiences both fractured her previous worldview and replaced it with one in which addressing the harms of U.S. politics, rather than ignoring them, was normalized. In Nicaragua she said solidarity “very quickly became far more personal because I was living with and walking among people who became really important to me and trying to understand what it meant to share their lives. And so, a piece of solidarity became a very personal commitment to do that to share their lives and to walk with

them as far as I was able." As Kathleen traveled and experienced different environments, her understanding of solidarity continued to develop. First, while in Tanzania, solidarity became ensconced in her worldview, in a view in which she saw how she was connected to people across the globe, connected through historical legacies of colonialism and extant policies of continued exploitation. When in Nicaragua, she began to explore the ways in which solidarity could be enacted. More than a worldview, solidarity became about walking alongside people in their struggle when able, and in doing so demonstrating both support and drawing international attention to what needs to change - U.S. empire. Kathleen's shifts in political consciousness were inextricably tied to her view of solidarity. As she experienced more hegemonic ruptures and her political worldview shifted from one in which U.S. dominance and norms weren't questioned to one in which they were, solidarity both as a worldview and practice became a centralized guiding notion. In this way, her understanding of solidarity was built through the cracks, ruptures, and ultimate shattering of hegemonic norms. It was the sprig of grass that emerged through a crack in the concrete, that over the years turned into a wild field.

While her liminal experiences helped lead her to her politicization, the historical circumstances in which they occurred, as well as her individualized circumstances and personal relationships, also enabled her to find avenues through which she could engage her new learnings. As U.S. supported violence continued across the Americas and Left-wing Catholicism helped popularize the human rights framework, Kathleen's own religious affiliation, connections, and liminal experiences led her to participate in the Sanctuary movement. The convergence of Kathleen's individualized circumstances with the historical setting that made Catholicism a key link between U.S. Latin America solidarity during this time positioned her amidst opportunities for activism that would continue her politicization. When she returned to the States the presence of a social movement, the Sanctuary movement, provided her an opportunity to apply both her knowledge and political understandings in a practical manner. She didn't return with new understandings and no avenues in which to engage in action. Rather, just as the historical setting informed her liminal experiences, it also influenced what she did with them.

When she returned to the U.S. after six months in Nicaragua, she continued a career in the seminary then began a career in Unitarian Universalist parish ministry where she continued

enacting her commitment for the next 40 years, working with immigrants, having kids, and preaching. Her early foundational liminalities, becoming a vegetarian and moving into an activist dorm in college triggered a domino effect, a series of relationships that bred political opportunities and enlightenment that supported a future life of activism. Did her childhood decision to become a vegetarian solidify a path to future activism? Certainly not. However, even though her decision to become a vegetarian was not the largest politically consequential decision she made, it did, in a happenstance manner, support her future politicization by placing her in dorm surrounded by fellow leftists. This helped her expand her knowledge base and find more opportunities for political engagement (including many experiences that were much more consequential). Becoming a vegetarian was not a prerequisite for her future politicization, but perhaps it did unintentionally facilitate a quicker introduction to new ideas. Together, Kathleen's personal experiences coalesced with the broader political culture of the 1980s and helped facilitate an internal conviction that U.S. imperialism needed to end, and political opportunities through which she could enact this conviction.

3.6 Aleja – 90s and 2000s

The changes that began to emerge during Kathleen's journey to politicization had become normalized for activists of Aleja's generation, of my generation, a generation born in the late 80s or 1990s amidst the intensification of neoliberalism and rising distrust in the U.S. government. Aleja, who immigrated to the United States from Colombia as a child, developed her political thinking while the wars in the Middle East raged on, the U.S. elected its first Black President, and the COVID-19 pandemic hit. When I spoke with Aleja, Joe Biden was running against President Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election and massive Black Lives Matter protests were erupting across the U.S. in response to yet another police killing of a black man, George Floyd. Throughout our conversation, Aleja and I remarked on current events, reflecting on how Trump's time in office, marked by continual racist remarks, comments about "shit hole countries", and a massive undertaking to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border had thrown the U.S.'s relationship with Latin America back into public awareness. For Aleja, a young Latina woman in her early 20s, Trump's presidency was the culmination of the political and economic context in which she grew up, marked by the rise of the global right and the ongoing dominance of neoliberal economics.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, Aleja's formative years, the United States was focused on the consolidation of neoliberal ideology, free market policies that emphasize individual responsibility and privatization over community care and State regulation, and corporate economic power. As jobs were outsourced, and the war on drugs and terror began, the economic divide between average workers and CEOs continued to grow (Klein 2007). At the same time, human rights discourse and identity politics flourished.[10] Unlike the lively demonstrations of the 1960s and even the 1980s in which activists sought to organize a critical amount of people to draw public attention, organizations now sought to attract large amounts of pencil pushers, letter writers who would flood politician's offices with letters and petitions in the hopes of evoking change. Solidarity could be done from the comfort of your own home and/or operated through professionalized non-profit organizations. With the rise of the professional human rights organizations from the 1970s onward, and a focus on the development of non-profit organizations rather than movements the tactics activists began to rely on became seemingly apolitical, or not involved with or in direct support of specific systems of rule or political parties. For those who grew up within the human rights framework, it is often imagined as the only option. Despite this, some national and transnational social movements emerged with significant public visibility and protests in the late 1990s and early 2000s, including the global justice movement, Occupy Wall Street, and anti-Iraqi war efforts, each trying to underscore the globally inequitable political and economic relations. While these movements sought to illustrate the connections between domestic and international U.S. policies, and certainly had successes raising awareness, overtime the activists who filled them began shifting their focus to other causes.[11]

Nevertheless, the entrenchment of both human rights language and neoliberalism dramatically altered how people understood and enacted solidarity. While this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter five, what Ale's story helps illustrate is how the liminal moments that helped craft her

10. New Social movements that emerged in the US in the 1960s shifted organizing demands from a focus on class-based concerns to a focus on organizing around shared culture or (often externally imposed) identities. For example, Kaufmann defined identity politics as "the belief that identity itself—its elaboration, expression, or affirmation—is and should be a fundamental focus of political work" (1990, 67)

11. Some have argued that it was the decentralized nature of these movements, developed purposefully so as not to mimic hierarchal power arrangements, slowly led to the movements decline.

political awareness were framed by these same historical circumstances. Scholars have demonstrated the individualizing power of both neoliberalism and human rights language (Brown 2018, Moyn 2010). Neoliberalism's emphasis on personal responsibility combined with depoliticized human rights language that often disconnects personal harm from its structural causes has promulgated a sense of individual and political isolation in which community well-being is overlooked for the benefit of the individual. Meanwhile, the emergence of identity politics shifted organizing narratives from a focus on the redistribution of resources and class concerns to the rights of subsets of people who are seen to have the same identity (Touraine 1988; Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Critiques of identity politics have illustrated how they can overemphasize the idea of a shared culture between an externally demarcated identity (Brown 1995) and can lead to an over-focus on concerns of representation regardless of political affiliation rather than emphasizing material redistribution and alternative political projects (Fukuyama 2018). While these dynamics shifted how people understood and sought political change, mainstream media narratives and events also shifted where activists in the U.S. focused their organizing efforts. The Central American solidarity and sanctuary movement of the 1980s had slowly fizzled out and media attention largely shifted from Latin America to the Middle East and the "war on terror."[12] As a result, public awareness and organizing around U.S. influence in Latin America decreased. At the same time, the methodology through which the U.S. exerted its power across Latin America became much less overt than the past. Unlike the Central American solidarity movement in which U.S. funds were clearly connected to massacres and violence, in response to growing public awareness, governmental officials began to shift how funds for military training were allocated through more obsequious back channels and contractors that are harder to hold accountable. The absence of a clear connection makes raising public awareness more difficult. Moreover, as a result of the State enacted violence since the 1960s, many social movements across the Americas were decimated. As such, even when activists garnered the attention of people in the U.S. to "be in solidarity" it was much less clear who people were in solidarity with and what exactly solidarity meant without a concrete campaign or target. Ale was

12. Campaigns around Latin America did continue, such as the transnational solidarity movement with the Zapatistas in Mexico, campaigns focused on corporate power and control (often falling under the global justice movement). However, these campaigns did not draw quite as much attention in the media as did the Central American solidarity movement, even though they were known by already politicized activists.

born into this world, in which the individualized was normalized and little awareness circulated about Latin America. It was the same world I grew up in and I knew it very well.

Ale grew up in a primarily white, middle-class family in rural northern Virginia. Surrounded by whiteness and economic comforts her family didn't talk politics or local events. They especially didn't talk politics about her home country-Colombia. Though she grew up in Virginia she was born in the bustling city of Medellin. Despite this, there was little discussion in her home about Colombia or Latin America in general and Ale grew up unaware of the complicated relationship the U.S. has with its southern neighbors. Her mom and her moved to the U.S. when she was two. After arriving in the States her mom met and eventually married her (white) stepdad. They settled into white middle class Virginia and rarely, if ever discussed how they stood out - how Ale's olive skin tone made her a target for bullying in school, or how she always felt the quiet humming tension of not quite belonging.

Yet, aside from this tension she had little political awareness throughout most of her youth. “Like even when I was in high school, I would say oh I hate politics. I hate politics so I hate government like this is my worst class, you know. I like science, math.” Unlike James’ childhood which was framed by at least a passing awareness of the Civil Rights movement, a very public campaign that called on the State to institute positive changes in people's lives, when Ale was growing up, she did not witness any mass movements or seemingly positive political achievements instituted by the government. As a result of both a lack of discussion in her home as well as the general absence of a widespread social movement that generated public awareness and caught her attention, she developed a conceptualization of politics as something that did not impact her and was instead a burdensome imposition. Despite her loathing of governmental politics, a sixth-grade teacher sparked her interest in environmentalism. This small nudge began a series of events that would begin to shift Aleja's politicization. Though seemingly small, for it did not result in a marked difference in Aleja's worldview, this shift in interest was a foundational liminality because within this experience her idyllic view of the world shifted. Complacency and disinterest in how people function in a society was replaced with a profound concern for pollution and addressing the harm humans enact on the planet. For the first time, Aleja believed that what she did and what others did had a large impact for it influenced the

future of the planet and the human species. This idea constituted a fracture in her previous understanding of the world and her role in it. She no longer perceived her presence as inconsequential to the broader world around her. It seems small, simply learning about environmentalism, but really, it constituted an important chip in her worldview, a liminal moment through which she began to reframe her understanding of her own positionality and role in the world. It took her outside of the world she thought she knew and placed her in a new reality that highlighted human connections and the human-earth relationship. This slight shift was actually a crucial steppingstone for a future view of solidarity. Moreover, it helped facilitate future liminal moments that would continue to fracture her previous worldview and the hegemonic ideas that structured it.

Aleja became fascinated by humans' impact on the environment, particularly via pollution, and channeled her concern into an intensive focus on recycling. She introduced her parents to the idea and pressed her household to maintain proper recycling procedures. She identified a problem and viewed herself as an agent who could help change it. A subtle, but clear shift in subjectivity. From this passion she decided she wanted to be an environmental scientist. She went to college to pursue a degree in science.

> I think that's where that you know, I was like really stuck to this, I really convinced myself I was going to be an environmental scientist. I had nothing to do with politics and I never wanted to talk about it. I never want to learn about it, like that was none of it was of interest to me. And I didn't think it's important to my life and so it was, it was like through my colleagues and in college and through this people's climate march where I was like, wait a second since everything like politics is exactly what I'm concerned about winning.

Despite taking up a scientific pursuit to avoid politics, her path to environmentalism led to her politicization. Aleja took science classes and hated them, but she also began to get involved in climate activism on campus. This work led her to the People’s Climate March in 2014. It was here, seeing thousands organized together advocating for change, that she realized that politics was not boring or unrelated to her life, but intimately connected to what she wanted to do. When she returned from the march, she continued to immerse herself in climate justice struggles, advocating to block the construction of a pipeline and growing in her awareness of the political issues surrounding climate change. Her friends, rather than professors, were her primary

teachers. “I always say that, I honestly always say that it's like I learned more from my friends and like fellow organizers than I ever did like right paying hundreds of thousands of dollars to get this degree at a university.” From these friends she learned about a solidarity trip to the Philippines designed to connect youth to climate justice activists transnationally. She decided to go. This decision had monumental impacts on her politicization. After two weeks in the Philippines, learning of the impacts of U.S. intervention and speaking with other activists, Aleja came back and said she was completely radicalized.

> You know the conversations are different [in the Philippines] people aren't like, oh look we're environmental activists and we're trying to help save, you know, the bunny. It is like no, people, they're trying to survive, you know, and so … it was just like really eye-opening to get out of Virginia, get out of the Virginia organizing bubble and understanding the way that people talk about environmentalism in their country. Because it's not even environmentalism, this is survival.

In the Philippines, just like in her sixth-grade science class, Aleja 's subjectivity shifted as her previous understanding of the world continued to rupture. She now located herself amidst much more complex webs of power. Notably, Aleja’s liminal events ruptured her previously individualized conception of social change. Like James and Kathleen, witnessing or encountering alternatives played an important role in continuing to fracture the hold of hegemony. Prior to her trip to the Philippines Aleja had a variety of other foundational liminalities that slowly began to show her cracks in her worldview, to rupture hegemonic ideas about domestic and international U.S. policies. The glass was already cracked. Her trip to the Philippines helped shatter it. She was shocked at Phillipino organizing tactics because they differed from the individualized conceptions of organizing normalized by neoliberalism and human rights discourse. Whereas her previous organizing efforts focused on a singular issue de-contextualized from larger systems, like a pipeline that would disrupt people's lives, in the Philippines she witnessed how activists understood and connected a singular project to the overarching frameworks of power, such as neocolonialism and capitalism. Seeing these connections as well as the intimate impacts they had on people's lives, ruptured the veil of individualized neoliberal thought that previously animated her understanding of and engagement with activist work. It was a hegemonic fracture that struck at ideas of neoliberalism. For the first time, Aleja began to understand how local activist causes and projects were connected to global

systems of power. As such, the historical context of the normalization of neoliberal thought both framed Aleja's previous understanding of activist work and consequently impacted what her liminal moment looked like, which was an awakening away from atomized understandings of change.

Upon her return to Virginia, she paused her local climate activist work, questioning its model. Shortly thereafter, a friend suggested that they go to the World Social Forum. It was here, while perusing the event pamphlet, they happened upon a film about resistance in the Aguan valley in Honduras. After an hour and twenty minutes of watching the screen flicker and dance in front of her, Ale had stumbled upon a new passion. "And I was like crying something I was like, oh my god, like it was like a fire lit up inside me like I have to do something type a thing." The fire was a hegemonic rupture, the outgrowth of old ideas being replaced with new understandings. It was a physical experience of liminality. The film detailed the struggle for land in the Lower Aguan in Honduras. Like other Latin American countries, Honduras has been heavily impacted by U.S. influence over the past century. More recently, the U.S. supported and sanctioned a coup in 2009 that removed President Manuel Zelaya. Then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had admitted that following the coup the U.S. and U.S. alliances worked to ensure that Zelaya would not return to office. The U.S. then continued providing Honduras aid, much of which was directed to security forces who were using violent force to quell protests (Holland 2014). The U.S. government and U.S. corporate interests have since continued swaying Honduran political decisions to support U.S. interests. For example, "In 2013 Honduras adopted a proposal to create Zones for Economic Development and Employment (ZEDES), promoted by a U.S.-based think tank called Seasteading Institute that was founded by Milton Friedman's grandson" (Besteman 2020, 44). ZEDES created a legal framework through which foreign companies could gain control over sovereign Honduran territory and exploit its natural resources, frequently by first forcefully displacing previous inhabitants. This deepened the U.S.'s involvement with Honduran oligarchs to further U.S. business interests. At the same time, as U.S. funded and trained troops in Colombia intensified interdiction efforts in Colombia, as well as violence against innocent civilians, narco traffickers shifted drug-trafficking routes to Honduras. "As Honduras became a transit state for cocaine trafficking, narco-gangs operating with impunity added another level of violence as they commandeered rural areas as transit zones and demanded local complicity. They

headline-catching migrant caravans of displaced people moving north from Honduras in 2018 are one outcome of an economic and political system firmly caught in the grip of narco-gangs, a narco-linked oligarchy, climate change displacement, and heightened militarization back by the United States" (Besteman 2020, 44). In short, U.S. aid and corporate influence and recommendations spurred displacement and violence in Honduras while benefiting the coffers of large corporations. The film that Ale watched unveiled just a snippet of the impacts of this violence on people's daily lives as well as how they were resisting. It was her introduction into the impacts of U.S. imperialism, that unbeknownst to her at the time, had long fanned the flames of violence and economic precarity in her home country of Colombia.

I spoke with her about four years after this revelation. After she had lived in Honduras for two years accompanying and organizing alongside Honduran organizations advocating for Indigenous land rights, women's rights, and an end to U.S. imperialism such as COPINH (Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras**)** and MADJ (Movimiento Amplio por la Dignidad y la Justicia). By the time we spoke she had helped found an organization focusing on U.S.-Latin American solidarity, and after she became board chair for the organization Witness for Peace.

An interest in environmentalism led Ale to a college, a climate march, a trip to the Philippines, and finally a trip to the World Social Forum at which she learned about resistance efforts in Honduras and found U.S. Latin America solidarity work. For James, Kathleen, and Aleja, something seemingly happenstance, a family move, a friend inspiring you to become a vegetarian, or a sixth-grade teacher lecturing on environmentalism acted as a foundational event that led to a future path of activism. Each of these small instances shifted their understanding of the world, their own subjectivity within it, and opened up the possibility for a new politicization.

These moments, events, and trips detailed above were foundational liminalities that fractured the common sense or hegemonic narratives directing people's understandings at the time. However, they were not happenstance. Historical and individual circumstances bolstered and directed each to the potential of future activism. James was shocked when he witnessed the fallacy of a "post racial reality" and the cruelty of the post-Civil Rights era reality. Kathleen was surrounded by a community of activists and organizers at college who were not stymied by the U.S.'s seeming

“crisis of confidence” but wished to change it, and Ale was motivated after witnessing another model of activism in the Philippines that was rooted in a transformational reform of the global economic system-and not individualistic neoliberal tendencies. The extant political culture intersected with peoples individualized circumstances to shape their experience of liminality. In each of these respective stories, the dominant hegemonic narratives about race relations, the U.S., and neoliberalism were contested in the minds of these individuals for the first time. These instances constitute liminalities not just because they were different from day-to-day realities, but because the “absolute” through which they made sense of the world had shifted.

3.7 Travel

James, Kathleen, and Aleja's experiences were each structured by different historical time periods and personal relationships. They all experienced small liminal moments hallmarked by new learnings, new relationships, and small fractures of hegemonic norms. Each of these shifts helped facilitate another, opening them up to the possibility of taking a different approach or opportunity. However, in addition to each of these small shifts, most people of privilege in this study also had a larger moment that constituted a clear and full hegemonic break, often framed by a moment of international encounter through a trip, a film, or a personal interaction. These interactions, encounters with individuals who were previously perceived as “others”, help strip away narratives of division and replace them with humanized understandings that bridged the gap between the activist and the other. While smaller liminal moments helped fracture hegemonic norms, these instances of personal encounters broke them wide open, particularly structured travel trips organized by non-profit organizations with the intent to radicalize and politically educate people. How travel can act as a consequential political tool has been examined by many scholars. Theorists have explored what has motivated people to travel highlighting how transnational solidarity travel can be inspired by affect, motivation to fulfil archetypes of masculinity, find adventure, or engage in revolutionary action (Babb 2011; Butler 1997; Goose 1993; Tate 2015). They have also examined how people's encounters with others across the globe, constructed under the guise of solidarity, can inform both radicalized political understandings (Khasnabish 2013) or feed into ideas of radical orientalism (Wu 2013), i.e., romanticized and idealized projections of the other that are not conducive to deeper political understandings and change. Gary Adler (2019) has further examined both the strengths and

weakness of how structured trips designed to alter the political consciousness of participants can work to introduce new ideas and concepts. He demonstrates how pre-constructed trips work to create a period of liminality for participants that can push them to new political understandings. These theorists all demonstrate how and why travel can encourage political change and/or foster political entrenchment depending on how and for whom the trip is structured (Tate 2015). I will also more deeply explore how group dynamics and affect inform political thinking during travel in Chapter five. However, while international travel can be significant for shifting people's political consciousness through intense experiences of liminality, for many people the choice or opportunity to travel would not have occurred if not for previous, seemingly smaller liminalities that began to rupture their existing hegemonic realities and leave them open to exploring alternatives. These events, James' childhood experiences in Alabama, Kathleen's activist college dormitory, or Ale's involvement in climate activism in school, presented each individual with knowledge, relationships, and oftentimes the future connections that would present them with the opportunity to travel. In this way, international travel, James's trip to Colombia, Kathleen's trips to Tanzania, Spain and Nicaragua, and Ale's to the Philippines, was not the beginning of shifting political consciousness. Though a clearly visible force for shifting thinking, focusing solely on travel experiences obscures the critical reasons why people choose to travel in the first place. It elides half of the journey.

Moreover, as these narratives suggest, each of these individuals was primed or open to the potentiality of a hegemonic rupture. They were already questioning norms within the U.S. and sometimes U.S. policy abroad. Ideas of U.S. exceptionalism and empire were already splintering in their minds, waiting for the final blow. This receptivity made their international travels and transnational encounters with others more consequential. When traveling, the ideas they were already questioning-what is the U.S. role abroad? How are people building alternatives and resisting? What is my role? Became tangible. No longer were they abstract theoretical ideas or considerations. When confronted with real people in living their everyday lives - lives that no longer seemed so separate - the intangibility of U.S. empire was made tangible. Just as witnessing local relations or the enactments of resistance began to rupture hegemonic understandings - witnessing firsthand the impacts of U.S. empire, hearing the emotive voices of those whose daily lives outside of the U.S. were still touched by U.S. influence, helped complete

the fracture of an old worldview and begin constructing a new one. Within this simultaneous fracture and subsequent reconstruction of a worldview, ideas of solidarity, of countering U.S. empire, start being encoded.

For example, Stuart a white middle-aged man who was one of the founders of No Mas Muertos, an immigrant aid and advocacy organization that provides basics such as water to immigrants crossing the desert, reflected on his experience working in Nicaragua. Stuart traveled to Nicaragua in 1984 with the nascent nonprofit organization Witness for Peace. As the Contra war raged between the leftist Sandinista government and U.S.-backed right-wing forces, Witness for Peace began organizing short term and long-term trips of U.S. residents to witness and report back on violence, and perhaps pause potential aggressions from Contra forces with their presence. Stuart was a "long - termer" who lived in Nicaragua for six months working alongside communities who were impacted by the war. Though his politicization started long before he traveled to Nicaragua, his experience in the country was profound. He equated it to "almost another conversion experience"

While in Nicaragua, Stuart experienced a variety of dramatic and memorable events-from challenging a U.S. warship from a small shrimp boat that was illegally entering Nicaraguan waters to standing aside community members who had just been attacked by contra forces as their homes smoldered in the distance. Ultimately though, that Stuart's sometimes dramatic and personal experiences in Nicaragua were significant for his politicization is not surprising. Throughout his time in the country, he lived squarely outside of U.S. society and social norms, witnessed firsthand the impact of U.S. policies, and met and worked with Nicaraguan who were trying to build a social and political alternative. This transnational encounter not only ruptured any remaining elements of ideas of U.S. exceptionalism and empire but also illustrated potential alternatives. He was thrust into a hegemonic fracture, a liminality with a clear alternative worldview waiting for him, one that hinged on ideas of solidarity that underscored the need to confront empire and do so by walking directly aside those impacted by it. As we spoke, he detailed how his time in Nicaragua began to shift his understanding of solidarity.

> It was a real important shift that started to happen in my term as a long-termer… [my view of solidarity started as] this kind of notion of this superhuman [North American]

> presence would deter violence. By necessity the longer that we were in Nicaragua the more… it became less true because we were all over the place. There wasn't a line where the Contra were on one side and us on the other and they weren't going to attack… [Overtime] the riskiness of accompaniment, walking with people, learning from people, became our idea of solidarity. It wasn't this superhuman idea that bullets bounce off of American's chests. And that became a whole new lens for understanding solidarity and a way of critiquing and being self-aware of the many ways in which North Americans with the best of intentions have not been helpful to the people of the developing world or have overestimated their role or existing on a level of control. You know all of the ways we stay in control and end up not being very helpful to those we want to walk with.

Stuart's experiences witnessing and "walking with" Nicaraguans impacted by the war, his time abroad was helped reorient his idea of solidarity and made clear the ways other forms of "solidarity" might actually invoke harm. It continued to rupture previously normalized notions of U.S. superiority. These ruptures are indicative of the liminality of his time in Nicaragua and clearly show how it was meaningful for his political consciousness. However, while significant for his politicization, what was also significant were the small, often imperceptible moments of his life before he took this trip, the moments that led him to say yes to traveling to a war zone. It is these moments that this chapter seeks to underscore. Because, though not as overt or shocking as an abrupt hegemonic fracture facilitated through travel, the small liminalities, moments of uncertainty and questioning are what make the larger ruptures possible.

Travel acts as a more pronounced opportunity for people to step outside of society, experience a marked liminality, and fracture previously accepted norms. Said differently, it is an obvious opportunity for political consciousness raising. However, the liminality offered by international travel would perhaps not be taken or experienced as deeply without people's prior, "smaller" liminal events that began to crack the surface of hegemony. These events demonstrate that one doesn't have to physically step outside of a society to begin to distance oneself from norms that structure it. For people who have experienced the comforts of class, race or other privileges international travel can act as a radicalizing force if it unveils conditions and realities that have previously been obscured. Physically witnessing, experiencing, or speaking with those who have experienced U.S. empire can slice through the layers of hegemonic understandings that may remain and create space for a new worldview. However, much of this might be unlikely without previous experiences that predisposed people take the opportunity to travel. Moreover, it would

certainly be impossible if people lacked the material resources to travel. As such, travel can be a politicizing tool for those who are privileged both because this opportunity is financially feasible and presented by a variety of preliminary liminal events that made people open to travel, and because it helps clearly reveal realities that were previously obscured. Yet, for others who are not coming to a political consciousness from a place of class and race comfort, international solidarity travel might not be as consequential or as shocking. They need not witness U.S. empire abroad when they have already experienced the harms of U.S. policy domestically.

However, even for those to whom solidarity travel does not shatter hegemonic narratives of U.S. empire, it can still provide critical educational content by introducing alternative ways of living and resisting. It can introduce counter-hegemonic narratives that build people's awareness and concept of solidarity beyond an initial shock. For example, Jeanette a daughter of the Haitian diaspora who grew up in the United States, began to develop ideas of solidarity at an earlier age through her relationships within her local community that focused on mutual support and care. Moreover, as a Black woman whose father was a part of the Haitian diaspora, she held more awareness of the U.S.'s history of harmful domestic and international policies, and a continued interest in learning more. As such, when she traveled to live in Venezuela, it was unlikely that the experience would radically shift her worldview or result in a shocking hegemonic rupture-she was already politicized. While not as dramatic as Stuart's experience then, Jeanette's was still politically meaningful and informative. While in Venezuela she learned the intricacies of how another socio-economic system operates and impacts people's daily lives, how cooperatives can function, and the role of the media in disseminating political ideas. Her politicization grew but did not begin with international travel.

As such structured international travel can spur a large hegemonic rupture through which people begin to significantly alter their worldview or it can serve as an opportunity for continued political consciousness raising for those who are already politicized. Indeed, people's own standpoints within society influence what experiences may be liminal as well as what coming to a political consciousness looks like.

3.8 Race and Class – Marginal Liminality

For James, Kathleen, and Aleja a shift in their understandings of race and class played a fundamental role in their politicization. Both James and Kathleen overtly referenced how their experiences framed their understanding of whiteness both locally and globally. And all three noted how their economic comforts, not worrying about food, housing etc., framed their experiences and gave them the time and space to devote to thinking and learning. Coming to terms with their own reality as white people or in primarily white communities was foundational for developing their political awareness. Their class comforts- the fact that they weren't facing economic scarcity also gave them the mental space to grapple with these realities, and most likely influenced where they lived and who they interacted with in the first place. For these activists, foundational liminalities were sites that showed them an alternate reality where people did not possess the same racial or class buffer. However, for People of Color, immigrants, and/or those who struggled financially, liminality operated differently. Rather than being a site of political awareness raising, liminal moments were often situations that alleviated social or economic precarity and presented people with new political possibilities and/or opportunities to press for social changes.

While James, Kathleen, and Aleja experienced their liminalities in the context of safety, this is certainly not true for all who engage in U.S.-Latin American solidarity work. In fact, many had their foundational liminalities while being, as Edith Turner (2011) said, on the "margins of society." Feminist scholars have demonstrated how race, gender, class, and other standpoints influence how people experience the world and its interstices of power relations (Collins 1990; Haraway 1988; Harding 1991; Hartsock 1997). Drawing from this work, I illustrate how various standpoints concomitantly influence the type of liminal event that take place and what it looks like. Within the margins, liminality acts differently. Whereas for those who knew only of class and race comforts liminal events acted as their first window into lives of precarity, for others these realities were all they knew. Learning of social insecurities was not liminal, it was reality. Instead for those who already experienced aspects of precarity, I argue that moments of liminality were not marked by a growing awareness but instead were moments in which people realized or were introduced to the idea that they could organize for systemic change and/or felt safe enough to do so.

3.9 Monica

Monica grew up in 1980s Medellin, Colombia in a household in which political discussions (even if not noted as such) were woven into daily life. Without using the specific terminology, her family members spoke of U.S. imperialism, state violence, and simultaneously of community care. Her family was a working-class family and as such, she was familiar with a sense of economic precarity. As we spoke, she recounted how her family and neighbors practiced community care. If a neighbor couldn't pay a bill, her family would help out, and vice versa. This, she said, was her first experience with solidarity. Though never wealthy, the community took care of one another.

However, as she grew up, violence and conflict in Colombia intensified. By the time she went to college to become a medical doctor in the late 1980s, right wing paramilitaries were carrying out "social cleansings," killing any who contested the reigning narrative of political power. Colombia was not immune from the State violence and repression that increased throughout Latin America in the 1970s and 80s. As a result of previous import substitution policies governments across Latin America, including Colombia experienced a wave of debt in the 1980s (Gill 2004). At the same time, in Colombia the historic left-wing guerilla group the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)[13] began what would become a failed negotiation process to demobilize. As part of the process, the FARC formed a political party known as the Patriotic Union. However, as the party rose in popularity from 1984-1988, affiliates and members were systematically murdered, and their alternative political vision silenced (Dudley 2004). The rise of right-wing violence against leftist political alternatives and increased economic precarity led many on the left to question State authority and fed a growing list of left-wing insurgencies (Hylton 2006).

At the same time, the drug trade from Colombia to the United States grew. As a result of the seeming precarity of the Colombian government, a key U.S. ally in the region, as well as the

13. The FARC formed in 1964 as a peasant collective informed by communist ideology, intent on addressing the vastly unequal distribution of wealth in Colombia. Though originally created as a defensive organization to protect peasant landholdings, it eventually adopted increasingly violent tactics against both large-landowners, wealthy city dwellers, and the same small farming population they claimed to protect.

growth of the drug trade, the United States began to intensify its economic and military relationship with Colombia. The Andean Initiative, enacted in 1989 between the U.S., Colombia, Bolivia, Peru was exemplative of this new relationship. The $2.2 billion program focused heavily on rural militarization and the criminalization of coca growers who often had no other economic opportunities to make ends meet. However, if countries failed to comply with U.S. conditions, they could lose their annual certification and subsequent U.S. aid, funding that was needed by many countries due to their already precarious financial situations (Tate 2007). Yet, rather than increase the physical and economic security of Colombian residents, these policies intensified precarity and failed to address both the historic and present-day unequal distribution of resources and political power that drove violence in the country. Moreover, they created a thick fog of silence amidst many in Colombia who feared for their safety if they were to mention even informally what could be perceived as a dissenting political sentiment. This indirect censorship fueled by State and para-State violence created an air of magical realism, described in previous decades by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Periods of seeming tranquility were punctuated by episodes of extreme violence. Calm could not be trusted, nor could neighbors, friends, or acquaintances. This ever-present threat of violence fed distrust between neighbors dismantled social fabrics, activist networks, and weakened resistance (Gill 2016; Taussig 2003). Colombia in the 1980s and 90s developed a political culture marked by silence and violence.

This is the context in which Monica came of age in Colombia. She grew up knowing of the negative influence U.S. policy had in her country, even though she may have been unaware of the names of specific policies. However, despite her own awareness, the air of insecurity and violence in which she lived prevented her from applying her awareness to political action. For example, in her first year of medical school in the late 1980s, eight students were murdered for speaking out for various social causes. At the height of these murders, the school decided to shut down for months only reopening when officials deemed it “safe”. As Monica recounted this, her voice had a tenor of intensity, rising as she reflected on the fear that gripped the student body. When the school reopened, she said, it wasn't the same. There was a new air of silence and fear that befell the university. She was afraid to talk politics, afraid to say the wrong thing to the wrong person, to make herself a target.

> I was scared to death. I was also in the situation of being from a poor family and trying to make it and in school and medical school being so demanding. So, I would say I entered like a pause in my 'doing' active things. Until I came to the U.S., and I was able to resume that part of my life because I was safe. It is safe.

She eventually completed her degree and moved to work in a rural town in Colombia. Though she has paused in "doing activist work" her political beliefs continued to deepen. She read, had rich conversations, and witnessed firsthand the corruption of the small town in which she worked. Though her consciousness grew, it didn't shift. Her political beliefs remained largely the same, but her knowledge on the topics grew.

One day, goaded into a date by some friends, she met a man from the United States who was in town doing interpretation work for a mining company. They fell in love, married, and eventually moved to the United States. After about a year of learning English and working at a free medical clinic that provided services to other immigrants, Monica began to slowly dive into activist work, applying all of the political ideologies she had learned and experienced during her time in Colombia. As I asked her to recount this time in her life she paused, hesitating over the realizations she was having in the current moment. "Can you send me this recording?" She said. I am realizing things I hadn't before." What she stumbled upon as we chatted was one of her own foundational liminalities. For her, moving to the U.S. and adjusting to life in the States was liminal, not because it demonstrated a dramatic alternative political reality about which she was unaware, but because she was safe: "I didn't know I had to be away from Colombia to heal and that's what I found here … It's safer, there is oxygen."

For Monica, her liminality wasn't marked by a shift in awareness, but a shift from precarity to safety. This safety was not just physical but constituted a relief from the constant psychological tension of feeling under threat. "There is oxygen" she said. She could breathe. And it was a breath she didn't even realize she needed. While Monica lived in Colombia, a sense of precarity and underlying fear or tension was her norm, her day-to-day reality. Yet, when she moved to the United States she was thrust into a new normative reality. Within this transition Monica progressed through a foundational liminality, a healing and reorientation to the world around her that was key to her future years of activism.

With this new mental space, she was able to end her “pause” and find ways to engage her political consciousness with concrete action. She emerged from her liminality feeling motivated and enabled to embody her political beliefs openly. What shocked her as we spoke was her own realization of why this internal shift took place. While she was living it, it was “just life”. She assumed she was just adjusting to a new country, finding work, and learning a new language. She was assimilating. But what was actually happening throughout her first years in the States was an extended liminality, a shift in how she now viewed her place in the world, as safe, as able to embody her political values.

Though emerging from different circumstances than the liminalities of James, Kathleen, and Aleja, Monica's experience still possesses the same liminal features-she was introduced to a different reality than she had previously known and, as a result felt compelled to explore a new avenue of understanding and acting in the world, activism. Not only was her liminality framed by race, class, and nationality, but also by the historical moment marked by the rise of violence and precarity in Colombia and the deepening influence of U.S. policy in the region. Said differently, the expression of Monica’s political awareness was muted in Colombia as a result of a specific convergence of historical events, a debt crisis, the failed demobilization of the FARC, the rise of right-wing paramilitaries, and the imposition of militarized U.S. policy that fed existing precarity and violence. These conditions created a political climate in Colombia in which voicing political ideologies, especially those that could be perceived as a threat to dominant power relations, was dangerous. When Monica moved to the U.S. and entered a new political climate and a safer environment she was finally allowed to express and reflect on her political views. These circumstances show that Monica's liminality didn't happen “on the margins”, but rather as she merged away from precarity to safety and comfort. Isaac, though framed by different personal events, told a similar story.

3.10 Isaac

Isaac was born to immigrant parents and grew up in the late 1980s and early 1990s in California. Though he had a secure immigration status, his parents did not. His mom migrated from Costa Rica and his dad was from Colombia. As a result of their experiences growing up and while migrating, conversation in his house about U.S. interference and imperialism in Latin America

was commonplace. He grew up aware of U.S. influence in Latin America because his parents and extended family lived its repercussions. At the same time, his own experience was one defined by the precarity and ostracization of being from an immigrant family.

When I spoke with him on another typical Covid-19 quarantine day, I could hear him rustling papers in the background. With a kindness, but also a weighted tiredness to his voice, he explained how he had been busy recently keeping lookouts for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) vehicles in the Raleigh, NC area. When spotted, the team of lookouts would alert local immigrants of the checkpoint or patrol. It was a game of whack-a-mole. The alerts worked until officials in the vehicles figured out they were being watched and moved on. In between his long nights and days, I was lucky to speak with him.

Isaac was a pastor and activist now, but he hadn't always been the person on ICE watch. Rather, he was the one being watched. As we spoke about his journey to activism he reflected on the unspoken undertones of his childhood, the threat of deportation. He causally recalled his family's wariness of police, of their unnarrated desire not to be stopped while driving. He didn't know or perhaps understand their immigration status growing up, but he did grasp that it affected their lives and the ease, or lack thereof with which they moved through the world. For him, a slight sense of precarity, with both class and immigration status, was his normal. He didn't question it. He, as he said “just focused on getting by, not changing it yet. Just surviving.”

Despite his acceptance of his own precarity, advocacy for social change was not foreign to him. In fact, he was introduced to activism as a young child, though its goals were motivated by a much different ideological standpoint than his work today. Isaac attended his first protest when he was seven years old. With his mom, he stood outside of an abortion clinic as she condoned women’s’ decision to enter. He recalled this to me hesitantly, confessing “I still don’t know what to do with that experience.” His mom was led to this protest by her interpretation of the Catholic faith, the same faith that led Isaac to his activist work today. Though his mother's and his divergent interpretations of religion gave Isaac pause, he still credits his Catholic upbringing as one of the most impactful influences towards his path to activism today.

After high school, grounded in his religious ideals, Isaac decided to attend college and seek out ways to stay involved in his faith. For the first time, through a Catholic group on campus he began to volunteer, working with the homeless ministry and building houses in Mexico. Though he was offering up his time for free, he didn't define his work activism, or even inspired by his religious calling. Instead, when reflecting on this time he noted simply I thought it was “just stuff you should do”. For him these opportunities seemed almost a “natural” or presumed behavior. Though he began to expand his sphere of volunteerism throughout college, he wasn't yet involved in immigration activism in the U.S. He was no longer living in his childhood home, but the memory and weight of constant precarity still followed him, like a shadow clinging desperately to its subject as the sun sets. This sensation, this shadow still felt “normal”. It clung closely to him, and he hadn't yet stepped into the sunlight to unveil an alternative way of existing.

It wasn't until he moved to North Carolina to pursue Seminary school that things began to change. While in school his religious views and interpretations began to morph, deepening their tentacles and connecting themselves to all aspects of Isaac’s life. His interpretation of religious morals became central to how he contextualized the world around him and how he should interact within it. As he described it, he can't untangle what motivations are compelled by religious sentiment or not because, to him, his beliefs have become so enmeshed in his worldview, it is just who he is. While this entanglement of self with religion deepened within him, Isaac learned about ICE, their actions in North Carolina, and the emotional and physical violence they were inflicting on the local immigrant population. He quickly got involved in efforts to protect immigrants from their reach.

When I asked him why he chose this time to get involved in immigration work, he answered in a straightforward no-nonsense manner, as if it was common sense. “I didn't want things that happened to me to happen to others.” It was a simple response, born out of the cardinal rule of Christianity to “treat others as you would like to be treated”, but the seeming simplicity of the answer elides its true complexity. The real question was why at this moment did he get involved in immigration struggles and not in the past? Why now? He identified a problem and, as he said, “thought I should do something about it.” I contend that he was ready to make this shift into

immigration work because he had progressed through a liminality. As more time passed in which he was out of his household, he moved further from a sense of precarity and simultaneously deepened his understanding of the same system that harmed him. Finally, he was presented with the opportunity for activist work, and led by his faith-based morals to engage. The convergence of all of these factors was liminal. As Isaac told his story, it was clear that this moment marked a shift in the orientation of Isaac's future life.

Notably, this liminality was different from James, Kathleen, and even Aleja's. Like Monica's liminal period, there was no clear start or end date. Rather, the shift from precarity to action has amorphous boundaries, formed from the minute moments of everyday life that aren't marred by insecurity, fear, or disempowerment. Yet, though different in its time length, Isaac's entre into immigration work, nearly 20 years prior to our chat, was a foundational liminal moment. Removed from perpetual insecurity and on a path of continued religious development, Isaac was introduced to a new way of engaging in activist work. In college his religious activism was motivated by the religious normalcy of helping others. It was "just what you do". Yet, with this foundational-liminality, his impetus for activism was beginning to shift. He became motivated by a sense of recognition of himself in others. To him, this work was still "just what you do". But the "why" behind action had begun to change. It was no longer motivated by a simple desire to emulate the actions of others within his religious community, but by a deeper knowledge about systems of oppression and a feeling of empowerment that he could change them.

Throughout our conversation he was careful to historically situate things. He even said that "The times of the day influence thinking of things and conflicts". It was clear the circumstances of his life also influenced his actions. While in NC he was moving through a liminality, finally transitioning away from a gnawing sense of insecurity to a new determination that he could and should do something to prevent others from feeling the same. We spoke decades after this liminality and Isaac was deeply embedded in immigration work in North Carolina, coordinating efforts for ICE watches, advocating for reforms, and helping organize the local sanctuary movement, including hosting people at his church. He went from building houses in Mexico to rooting himself locally. Like the others whose stories I've mentioned, Isaac's foundational liminal event didn't concretely redirect his life, but acted as a strong current pushing him in the direction

of activism. While getting involved in anti-ICE work was foundational for Isaac, there were a myriad of other small moments and realizations that informed his story. He was guided by religion, family, his education, and personal circumstances. Through all of this he reached a moment that was clearly different from his past, a moment in which he was presented with an alternative that he chose to explore. It is this opening, this slight shift that I recognize as a foundational liminality.

3.11 Summary

Like James, Kathleen, and Ale, Isaac and Monica's experiences were framed by the historical context-violence in Colombia and anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States. However, their foundational liminal moments were not when they were introduced to the realities of race and class precarity-they had already experienced them-but when they were given enough time, space, and safety to merge their political experiences with action for change. For individuals in more marginal circumstances, foundational liminality isn't necessarily about them acquiring new knowledge about situations of precarity. Instead, these liminalities are marked by people's recognition of greater comfort and /or the potential to produce a reality alternative to what they have experienced. It is recognition that the hegemonic absolute under which they live their lives is not the only option. For this reason, "marginal liminalities" often occur, not on the margins, but rather as people are shifting out of more marginal circumstances.

Of important note, is that who is considered to be in "marginal" circumstances can vary overtime. Said differently, a situation of marginality is constructed both through historical and personal circumstances. Moreover, race, class, and/or nationality are not all determining of one's experience with marginality. For example, Ale, a person of color, grew up with class/financial comforts. Though she was bullied, she didn't grow up aware of larger socio-political issues that supported her bullying (white supremacy). Her liminal experience wasn't marginal, it was one of coming to awareness. Her story is illustrative of the fact that being a person of color, an immigrant, growing up working class, or being in any position of marginality does not guarantee an automatically expanded political consciousness. However, for those who do, their foundational liminal experiences may look different from those who have never experienced the political reality of which they are coming to learn.

3.12 Conclusion

By examining people's subjective experiences of increasing political awareness, this chapter has demonstrated how historical circumstances and one's standpoint amongst them can create varying types of liminal experiences. Often spurred by witnessing or encountering an occurrence an individual was previously unaware of or blind to, these liminalities begin to awaken the individual to a new reality or type of existing in the world. Raymond Williams (1977) calls these states "structures of feeling" in which people feel "an unease, a stress, a displacement, a latency" (130). I call these moments foundational liminalities to call attention to the potential political shifts that are found within these events.

For those who are safe and comfortable like James and Kathleen, their foundational liminalities help create awareness and begin to rupture hegemonic ideas about U.S. exceptionalism and the role of the U.S. abroad. Overtime, this awareness can build, snowballing to a shifted worldview in which solidarity or confronting injustices by addressing the root cause becomes a guiding tenant in people's belief system. This new worldview often that leads to action. Conversely, for those who live in situations of precarity, like Monica and Isaac, their foundational liminalities are about safety and security. Whereas, they have always been aware to some degree because they have lived these precarities, it is a shift to safety- moving out of feeling in survival mode that allowed activism to surface. While some degree of surfacing awareness was present in marginal liminalities - awareness of the potential of alternatives, of language to describe one's experience etc.- and would be fostered later on, it was the material and psychological conditions of safety that allowed this awareness to emerge.

This data demonstrates that race, class, nationality, and historical context certainly influence the specific event(s) that may spur the introduction of the emotional and political flexibility that will lead to a future of activism. However, there is also an underlying similarity between both rite of passage and marginal events. Most simply, they are different from the individual's daily life. They stand apart from either the blanket of security or the current of insecurity normalized within people's daily lives. The introduction of difference opens a brief window showing the possibility or the existence of a different world. It is liminal. And it is foundational.

To understand these subtle shifts in political awareness, I advocate for a shift in the scale under which liminality is understood from large objective events to personal subjectivities. Scholars have demonstrated how “unsettled times are opportune moments for ideological work, for meaning-making that problematizes reality” (Adler 2019, 168). However, unsettledness is often associated with large societal fluctuations or even intentionally structured periods designed to shift people's thinking (Adler 2019). This research demonstrates how moments of unsettledness, though contextualized by the historical setting, often sit at the intersection of unintentionally experienced personal circumstances and events. In these moments of difference “participants unfix (transform) the future from a knowable thing to a malleable thing” (Rosario 2014, 1). These experiences shake people out of their previous social comfort and lack of awareness and/or begin to craft a sense of safety that allows people to explore alternative ways of being or new imaginings.

However, a shift in political consciousness isn't like hitting a switch. It is a process. Foundational liminalities are like pushing a current along the path to change. It is not a given that people will continue on this path. This next chapter discusses the impact of various societal institutions in facilitating peoples continued political growth.

CHAPTER 4

From Liminality to Communal Connection

4.1 Introduction

This chapter begins to examine how the societal institutions of family, religion, and organizations continue to mold people's political consciousness by influencing their view of community, bridging the ideological distance between U.S. residents and "others" constructed through narratives of U.S. exceptionalism. As ideas of division begin to dissolve, new conceptions of *communitas,* or responsibility and connections to others can emerge, forming the foundation for new understandings of solidarity. I witnessed both the dissolution of ideological distance as well as deep personal connections between people who would otherwise be divided by life circumstances but were brought together by experiences molded by each of these societal institutions. For example, in 2019 I sat in the corner of a brightly colored home during a Minnesota summer. It was a warm night, filled with the heat of the black, white, and brown bodies milling around the house, and the vibrations of English and Spanish chatter echoing off the walls. Over twenty non-profit board members, family, friends, and employees occupied the house as we closed out a week-long organizational planning meeting in which activists strategized on the hopes and goals of U.S. Latin America solidarity campaigns.[14] As the night wore on, the space transitioned from one of informal conversation to a room filled with the sounds of drums and soulful singing. An Afro-Colombian activist, Daira, was regaling us with her musical prowess. For the past few weeks, she had been touring the Midwest to draw attention to Colombia and her efforts to redevelop seed sovereignty[15] and ancestral practices. Daira was displaced from her home in Colombia in 2001 after receiving increasing death threats for her

14. I say movement because the conversations weren't delimited to the organization itself-or the deep strife that existed within it-but were focused on the overarching goals of changing US policy in Latin America.

15. Seed sovereignty is the basic right for farmers to reuse seeds from planted crops. As industrialized agriculture has come to dominate agriculture marketplaces, large companies such as Monsanto have patented and retained the rights over seeds. This control over the seedscape forces farmers to buy new seeds every year, rather than reuse seeds from new crops. A myriad of other complexities have also emerged from corporate control of seeds including debates over who has rights to the seeds and plants when seeds blow from one property to another.

work trying to legally gain the title to land that had historically been occupied by Afro-Descendant populations. Large businesses, particularly the palm oil industry, were keen on usurping the land to expand production and their profits they used threats and violence to try and make the local population retract their claim over the land. Daira fled to Bogota after seven people in her community were murdered and she continued to receive death threats such as "Shut up or we will cut off your tongue and gouge out your eyes."[16] From Bogota she has continued organizing for land sovereignty for her community and works with several organizations that emphasize reclamation of Afro-Descendent culture and history that has been erased by centuries of violence. In addition, she sings as a mode of resistance, to lift spirits and heal. Her voice had a musky tenor, and she sang with a force that vibrated outward, sweeping everyone up with her. At one point, she grabbed Elsa's hand, a slim white woman who was nine months pregnant, and twirled her in a circle with a look of both closeness and affection.

Elsa and Daira had known one another for years. I remember noting the intimacy of this moment, of the look of deep appreciation that Elsa held for Daira, thanking her for the smile. She needed to smile. In the past few months her father had died, the organization through which we were meeting had threatened to fire her and suspend her healthcare benefits (and they would shortly after this trip), and the national board of directors was pinning growing discontent between the organizational workers and the board on her. However, within the organization she was known for her steadfastness to the work, her self-sacrifice, and her skills as an organizer. I remember wondering often, what brought her here and more so, after perpetual mistreatment, what kept her here? Her ongoing involvement could no longer be explained by continued moments of liminality. It was much more. Unlike Daira whose life was and continues to be intimately impacted by U.S. imperialism, Elsa's reality was ensconced in the protections of whiteness, middle class, and U.S. citizenship. Though Daira's experience didn't guarantee her solidarity work, it certainly facilitated her awareness of the connections between the U.S. and Latin America. For Elsa, however, her involvement in U.S. Latin American Solidarity was a story of liminal awakenings and of organizations, family and religion that bound her to Daira both through an intimate personal connection and a broader view of community. This chapter explores

16. Much of this information was collected through my personal interactions with Daira as well as interviews completed by the Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective (2019).

how foundational liminal events can become molded into more long-term activist involvement by societal institutions. In focusing on activists like Elsa throughout this chapter, those who have not been personally impacted by U.S. imperialism, my intention is not to overemphasize their importance in U.S. Latin American Solidarity, or downplay the role of Latin American activists on the frontlines, but rather to demonstrate how those who aren't directly impacted by U.S. policies abroad can become politically conscious and thus act as a willing base that Latin American activists can call on to support their campaigns.

None of the events or moments experienced by the activists discussed in Chapter three gave them a clear path to U.S. Latin America solidarity activism. Their foundational liminalities fostered an emotional flexibility that encouraged each to reassess the world around them. Yet, each could have continued on with their lives aware of a new dimension of others' political realities, but not engaged with efforts for change. However, this was not the path they chose. After some initial foundational liminalities, people often begin to seek out other opportunities for continued educational development or activism and/or find themselves among like-minded friends who lead them to other opportunities. Each foundational liminality and moment of emotional malleability and political questioning led to and supported another. Overtime, these moments created a scaffolding built of growing awareness and political understanding. Drawing from this base of knowledge, people felt encouraged to seek out or be open to opportunities that prefaced their involvement in U.S. Latin American solidarity. I found three key societal institutions that act as linchpins and/or guide rails directing people to a deeper involvement with activist work— religion, non-profit organizations, and family. Throughout this chapter I use the term family to refer to the adults, whether biologically related or not, with whom people grew up in their household. Religion refers specifically to institutionalized belief systems represented and upheld by systematically controlled doctrines, such as Christianity and Islam. Finally, non-profit organizations are those whose main goal is not to turn a profit but generally to address a social problem. While non-profits can be affiliated with governmental bodies, those included in this study were all non-governmental. These institutions, or more so the people within them, outline people's moral and ethical codes and present them with opportunities for deeper social engagement.

As such, this chapter examines how the bounds of communal identity and *communitas* are developed within these institutions, or by the people within them, and impacts the continued growth of political consciousness, as well as how different historical time periods have informed the dominant institution through which people develop a consciousness. Within the confines of these institutions people form personal relationships that subsequently impact their sense of self as bound up in a broader community. These relationships and the moral and ethical guidelines they impart are a critical piece of emerging political consciousness about U.S. policy in Latin America. As people begin to see their connection to others across the globe they begin to develop or expand a conception solidarity that is rooted in confronting global systems of power, often rooted in U.S. influence that harm others. Sometimes, peoples first experience realizing their interconnectivity with others across the globe occurs when they meet a foreigner or travel abroad. However, such an encounter with perceived alterity does not guarantee that people will then develop a feeling of closeness or sense of *communitas.* In fact, depending on the circumstances the opposite can happen. Rather, what this chapter shows is how societal institutions can provide a framework through which people interpret their encounter. This framework, an ethical or moral guidebook for understanding alterity and one's place in the world outlines conceptions of community belonging and ultimately, solidarity. Eventually, such frameworks may elicit in people a sense of *communitas* in which ideas of solidarity and community become intertwined.

Throughout this chapter when using the term community, I am referring to how people conceptualize who they are connected to politically and personally. For example, conceptions of community can include a limited circle of people defined by geographical location and/or ideological likeness or can be more expansive to include people from across the globe with differing ideological viewpoints. Whereas community refers to who people feel or believe they are connected to, communitas refers to a sentiment of equality between members of a community that can animate feelings of personal responsibility to others.

4.2 *Communitas*

That moment in the warm Minnesota home, as twenty gazes watched while Elsa smiled and Daira sang, the reason we were all there, why we all stayed seemed simple. The reason was in

this moment, the connection, the community, the fun. However, this space didn't emerge by accident, everyone in the room had a role in crafting it and the sentiment that buzzed through the air. Scholars have theorized on the sentiment that emerged in this space, calling it *communitas* — a sense of community and togetherness that emerges as a group partakes in a ritual behavior (Turner 1969). Theorists have assessed how *communitas* can arise after a period of liminality and can either work to reinscribe cultural norms (Turner 1969) or act as sites of struggle (Eade and Sallnow 1999). Others have examined how a sense of community stoked during times of mass protest can inform individualized conceptions of self, bind protesters together and provide momentum for change (Calhoun 1991; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polleta 2001; Gornick 1977; Grandin 2011). However, scholars often foreground periods of objective societal shifts or mass protests rather than assess how connections of community and *communitas* are developed in the mundane experiences of everyday life. While still accounting for how historical shifts in the U.S. and Latin America inform political thought, this chapter examines the role of institutions in influencing moments of liminality and the resultant ideas about who is included in the bounds of community and how community members should be treated. This chapter will demonstrate how family, religion, and organizations can shift the bounds of who people imagine are in their community and simultaneously imbue a new sense of *communitas* that generates a feeling of responsibility towards community members. Each of these factors, both conceptions of community and a sense of care towards community members is central to shifting political consciousness.

Indeed, scholars have shown how personal surroundings and institutions influence political engagement (Norgaard 2011; Swidler 1986; Zerubavel 1997). These surroundings and relationships impact what is considered normalized behavior and ideological beliefs. For example, Mills (1959) and Eliasoph (1998) have demonstrated how interpersonal conversations can help or hinder how political consciousness forms, impacting the “quality of mind necessary to grasp the constant interplay between our private lives and the political world” (Mills 1959, 13.). Similarly, Eviatar Zerubavel (1997) shows us how individuals are socialized to care about certain issues and disregard others. “In other words, [people are taught] what to ignore” (Zerubavel 1997, 47). Similarly, Carbonella (2008) has demonstrated how the diverse cohorts of

U.S. soldiers during the Vietnam War helped facilitate and sustain " new forms of heterodox political imagination" (185).

Building off these works, my research contends more specifically that people are taught what to care about or what to ignore through their engagement with societal institutions and the people within them that help craft the boundaries of who people see themselves connected to, or their community, and the sense of equality with and personal responsibility to members of this community, *communitas*. Whereas previous research has illustrated how and to whom institutions craft a political resonance to influences subsequent political action (Butler 2009; Greenhalgh 2008; Rosaldo 1980; Tate 2007, 2015), this project specifically explicates how politicization is undergirded by narratives of community and *communitas* built through the relationships people form in different societal institutions.

Gary Adler (2019) has examined how intentionally crafted unsettledness or liminality can foster ideological and practical change in individuals. Yet, few have examined how the content of liminal events can inform the resultant feeling of *communitas* that may emerge. Rather, liminality is depicted as a uniform state. Whereas chapter two illustrated how and why the content of liminality can change, this chapter focuses on the resultant feeling of *communitas* that emerges from the guidance of different institutions and how these feelings influence consciousness. In addition, it demonstrates how conceptions of self or personal identity are embedded in and influenced by understandings of community. This chapter will demonstrate that who people identify as belonging in their community is influenced by the content of liminal experiences and with whom they take place.

With this understanding, if we return to the warm Minnesota home, the sound of bongos and the slosh of drinks, we can see much more at work than *communitas.* We see the role of relationships, the rise of non-profit organizations, and of course the history of U.S. interference in Latin America that made this meeting space possible.

4.3 Family

It would be remiss to overlook the role of family in facilitating political awareness. For the purposes of this study, I understand family as the adults, whether biologically related or not, living in people's households while they are growing up. For most, these adults were biologically related parents with an occasional uncle or more extended relative involved. As discussed in Chapter two, personal circumstances influence the potential foundational liminalities in life. If we remember James' story—how his father was a pastor who took him to witness the burnt fields tended to by black workers—we can see the role both religion and family played in his life. His parent's religious morals and actions shepherded him into a new phase of questioning. James' story was not unique. Everyone I spoke with referenced their parents and their moral influence in some way throughout our interviews. Some waxed poetic while remembering passed mothers or fathers; some detailed how uncles helped politicize them through dinner table conversation; and others reflected on how different their current politics were now from the rest of their family.

Indeed, scholars have demonstrated how families, and the internal dynamics and moral narratives demonstrated in the home or private sphere, influence understandings and actions in political and civic life (Asad 2003, S. Bjork-James 2021, Lakoff 1996). Franz Fanon (1967) contended that "the family represents in effect a certain fashion in which the world presents itself to a child" (141). How families enculturate values and political ideologies is deeply consequential for people. My research echoes these theories, but instead of finding family as a site where political continuity is produced (Richard and Rudnyckyj 2009), I have found that often the values, whether attached to a specific religious belief system or not, parents and blood relatives imbricate in their kids can (and for this study, frequently) result in divergent political understandings. I contend this is a result of how individuals applied their taught morals to their understanding of community, specifically who is in their community and what their responsibility is to them. Families, for better or worse, are the first communities most people are thrust into. Overlooking their role in politicization elides a key feature of the development of political consciousness.

As James' (and many others) story indicate, family-close blood relatives that generally live within the same household- can facilitate an individual's first foundational liminal event.

However, like the political and emotional flexibility that these events create, the role of family doesn't end after people leave their homes. I have found that people continue to reference ideals, morals, and even the political landscape of their home when discussing their journey to a political consciousness around U.S. policies in Latin America. In this way, family does more than facilitate foundational liminalities; it also can create a constant moral or political buzz in the background of people's political consciousness. As people continue to develop their own awareness, they still reference their understanding with what was present in their household, sometimes noting how different their political ideology is, or sometimes wondering if it fully embodies the generous morals displayed in their home. Family acts as a touchpoint and/or a stable framework to which people compare their politics.

Though some activists in the U.S. today were born into family lineages of career organizers, labor unionists, or communist party participants, most people who I interviewed did not have a familial referent who dedicated their lives or even a portion of their waking hours to activist work. In fact, the vast majority of my interviewees had conservative or apolitical households, and many offered a slight chuckle when reflecting on how their political understandings had diverged so greatly from their parents. It is clear that one does not have to have a leftist family to develop a political consciousness associated with leftists' ideals.

However, though few were from politically active households, no one I interviewed faced perpetual familial confrontations, threats, or obstruction of their interests or developing consciousness. Even when parents or other family members had differing views, the individuals were still allowed to explore, travel, read, and learn about their new political interests. Of course, this wasn't true in all households, but for my interviewees this non-contested space allowed them to continue to grow their political consciousness without an additional boundary.

In this atmosphere of uncontested questioning, people often applied the values they watched or were taught by their parents to the new information they were learning at various foundational liminalities, even if the resultant political consciousness diverged from that of their parents. For example, when speaking of how his childhood framed his understanding of the world John said: "So, my mom always has been very religious and... this was an important reference for me to understand."

He continued by noting that through this religious (Christian) understanding he was taught about the importance of charity and "loving thy neighbor". Though throughout his over sixty years of life, his political learnings strayed from his mothers, but he continued to use this basic religious framework as a referent for understanding who he was connected to and his responsibility to them to develop his own politicization. Mark too mentioned the critical role his mother played in developing his moral compass:

> My mother...was the one who talked to me about the importance of accepting that everyone is equal regardless of their race or religion. And you know she herself had never traveled at all, but she, if there is any person that helped shape me as a child and a young adult it was probably my mother...Even though politics weren't really discussed that much.

Both Mark and James' mothers helped frame their view of who was in their community. Though amorphous in their early iterations, these initial formulations of community that seemingly encompassed "everyone" helped frame growing political consciousness. These accounts of familial influence were not unique. Everyone noted, at least once, how family either directly molded their moral framework or didn't stop them from pursuing their own interests.

When Gail Phares returned from living in Central America for six years in the 1960s and saw her parents for the first time she said:

> I scared the heck out of my dad. [she chuckled lightly]. I'm sure my dad ended up thinking that for sure I must be a communist because I was so anti-American, you know, so angry about what I was seeing.

Her parents were shocked by her new politicization, but they did not interfere or refuse to let her continue on her path.

For some, their home setting offered up more than just a moral or ethical foundation for their politicization; it actively demonstrated both the politics and actions of what they would come to understand as tenants of solidarity. For example, in Monica's working-class family in Medellin, Colombia her mom had an open-door policy. If the neighbor down the street was hungry and didn't have food, they would bring them a sandwich. Her family taught and demonstrated a

conception of community that included most in their working-class neighborhood and enculturated in her an idea that community members take care of one another. As we spoke, Monica referenced these situations as her first understanding of solidarity, even if it wasn't so named.

In each of these scenarios, we can see how family can both facilitate underlying liminal events and/or lay the tenants and morals that people will continue to reference while developing their own political understanding of the world. Of course, these familial underpinnings do not guarantee that people will ever develop a political awareness about Latin America, or one that is different from their families. I do not claim that certain types of familial experiences can predict people's activist involvement, rather, that familial interactions cannot be ignored because they play a role in forming underlying ethical frameworks. They can overtly teach and/or demonstrate political actions, lay a foundation of religious thinking, and/or begin to foster an individual's sense of their place in the world. They are the first community that people are surrounded by, and they teach the first lessons of what is or should be ethical, moral, or political. The ideas that are implanted by families can then be developed by other cultural institutions such as religion and non-profit organizations in a manner that supports deeper politicization. If we return to Gail, and her shocked parents after her radicalizing trip in Central America, we can see ironically how her family laid the foundation for this radicalization. She grew up in a religious home, and it was religion that would eventually lead her to activism.

4.4 Religion

Scholars have demonstrated how religious ethics and morals can be politicized and used to support varying political projects (Bean 2014; S. Bjork-James 2021; Jeffreys 2012; Mamdani 2005). This section demonstrates how the application of and political understandings derived from religious teachings are deeply informed by the religious community people are embedded in, and the ways in which the community models and discusses the application of religious ideology. As mentioned in chapter two, in the 1980s left-wing Catholicism emerged as a central mobilizing force in U.S. Latin America solidarity campaigns, particularly for white middle class people who were previously unaware of U.S. influence in Latin America. As such, this section focuses mainly on how the interpretation of Christian values has directed the political

consciousness of a particular subset of activists who were previously untouched and unaware of U.S. foreign policy in the 1980s. During this time period, marked by the Central American solidarity movement, religion was one of the primary modes of mobilizing white middle class participants. Though the prominence of religion as a consciousness raising tool for the left decreased over the next 30 years, I still found that varying organized religions, from Catholicism to Ifa, played a role in outlining activist's moral framework and broadening their conceptions of and responsibility to a broader community. Notably, while I found the politicizing role of Catholicism was important for white people in and before the 1980s, I also found that organized religion was still consequential for activists who got involved in U.S. Latin America solidarity work within the past ten years. Particularly, within this study activists of color and some white activists referenced religious communities and teachings as foundational experiences that taught them new ways to engage with and understand their connections to others. As such, I contend that the factors that undergird religious interpretations and their role in politicization-personal relationships and conceptions of community- are consequential in any religious context and time period. In this way, organized religion can inform people's consciousness because it can facilitate both ideological understandings and experiences that reframe people's conception of community to incorporate a broader swath of humanity. While expanding the boundaries that define who people view as part of their community, some interpretations of organized religion can also craft a feeling of *communitas,* or a sentiment of togetherness and connection that generates a sense of responsibility towards others within the community. Both this enlarged view of community and a sense of *communitas* and responsibility towards others are pieces that facilitate an expanded political consciousness.

At the same time, different historical economic and political contexts can situate religion as a dominant or less consequential factor in consciousness raising. For example, left-wing Catholicism's prominent role in mobilizing white middle class activists in the 1980s was intertwined with the historical context of the U.S. (the entrenchment of human rights language and the Cold War narrative) as well as the specific situations developing in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Catholics' long history of missionary work in Latin America created a network of transnational personal relationships that undergirded activist work and provided information to U.S. counterparts about political violence occurring in the region. As the political

culture in the U.S. slowly began to be defined by the human rights framework, violence across Latin America intensified and missionaries, priests, and nuns, witnessed firsthand the impact of this violence, the air of insecurity and fear, and the role of U.S. policies. Though Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala were all experiencing unique conflicts, throughout the Cold War, to the U.S. government they all represented a similar threat, the potential spread of communism. Today, religion doesn't act as such a critical linchpin for U.S. Latin American Solidarity campaigns as it did in the 1980s. Though morals imparted through religious beliefs do still inform peoples consciousness, religion is not the primary institution through which people have deepened their involvement in U.S. Latin American Solidarity work since the 1990s. As subsequent U.S. generations became increasingly secularized, religion lost its prevalent consciousness raising role. However, prior to the 1990s, especially in the 1970s and 80s religion, particularly left-wing Catholicism, played a critical role in mobilizing the consciousness of people, primarily white people across the United States. The prevalence of religion as a consciousness raising tool was grounded in a variety of political and economic shifts in both the U.S. and across Latin America.

4.5 Historical Context

By the end of the 1970s U.S. resident's faith in U.S. power and hegemony was changing due to a variety of global events including the Iran hostage crisis, skyrocketing oil prices, and the Vietnam War. In a bid to rebuild U.S. citizens' faith in its government and exert U.S. dominance, Reagan decided to make Central America a primary target through which the United States could "prove itself" (Smith 1996). As a result, the U.S. began to focus much of its Cold War anti-communist efforts on fighting proxy wars in Central America. The Sandinista revolution of 1979, in which socialist forces overthrew U.S.-backed dictator Anastasia Somoza, made Nicaraguan a perfect fit for the United States' Cold War narrative. However, after emerging from Vietnam the U.S. government was hesitant to engage in another military battle. Instead, it relied on the tactics of low intensity warfare, both working to control the country economically and support the Contra guerilla forces who were trying to overthrow the Sandinista government. Initially, the United States tried to economically control Nicaragua by preventing their ability to ship and receive goods. "The CIA also created a special Latino American commando force called 'Unilaterally Controlled Latino Assets' (UCLAs). 'Our mission was to sabotage ports,

refineries, boats, bridges, and to make it appear that the Contras had done it," explained one Honduran UCLA (quoted in Kornbluh 1987, 29). In January 1984, CIA-sponsored commando teams mined all of Nicaragua's major harbors in an attempt to disable international trade" (Smith 1996, 39). Simultaneously the U.S. worked to support the destabilization of key infrastructure and terrorize civilians, inhibiting their ability to produce needed crops for export. The CIA continued to funnel aid to the Contras, even when it was illegal, in hopes that this funding would help them destabilize the country and overthrow the Sandinista government.

While these events unraveled in Nicaragua, El Salvador, like much of Central America, was also reeling from the 1970s oil crisis. Though then President Arturo Armando Molina made attempts to ameliorate the situation by initiating large-scale agrarian reforms, his measures largely failed due to opposition from the landed elite. Instead in 1977, General Carlos Humberto Romero, took rule after winning suspiciously fraudulent elections. His new military government enacted state of siege policies across the country, violently repressing any protests or counter-hegemonic narratives. As repression continued, Salvadorans turned to the only option they had left, taking up arms. Fearing a complete civilian insurrection, a military junta took control of the government and ousted General Carlos Humberto Romero in 1979. Fueled by the desire to prevent the spread of communist or socialist forces, the U.S. government supported the military junta both verbally, financially, and through the continued training of Salvadoran troops. Meanwhile, the military junta continued to govern El Salvador with a violent hand. In response, in 1980 five leftist organizations that were already working to combat the government's violence, united to form the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional [FMLN). Salvadoran troops and U.S. money focused on eradicating these guerillas, however, they saw little difference between the guerillas and civilians who the guerillas were often trying to protect. For many in the United States the FMLN was a revolutionary inspiration who further propelled U.S. residents' desire to participate in acts of solidarity.

The third country that generated the most attention in the U.S. was Guatemala. Guatemala had been amidst a civil war since the 1960s, with much U.S. intervention. Like the wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador the battle was largely being fought between landed elites and more marginalized groups over the socio-economic direction of the nation. The United States had played a heavy

role providing military aid, training, and influencing Guatemalan politics in their support of coups and military dictatorships (Grandin 2007). In addition, it had strong economic ties and an interest in the country as evidenced through the presence of the United Fruit Company (Bucheli 2005). In 1982 when General Efrain Rios Montt took power, the Reagan administration subsequently increased military aid to the country. The U.S. sent Special Forces troops to train Guatemalan forces in the art of counterinsurgency tactics, and the military received a boost in new equipment. Essentially the U.S. aided the Guatemalan military to commit what has since been deemed a genocide against the Guatemalan people.[17]

Figure 3. Map of Central America (Abbott 2020)

Throughout each of these struggles, U.S. missionaries and faith-based groups in the States helped spark the U.S. movement to end its interventionist policies. While in Nicaragua missionaries witnessed the violence of U.S. policies, were radicalized, and then returned to the States to

17. For a more in-depth overview of the history of Central America and US influence see Chomsky (2021).

inform other U.S. residents what was happening that wasn't being detailed by mainstream media. Upon their return, faith-based leaders and activists formed a variety of organizations and campaigns that intersected to create a contiguous movement against U.S. policies in Central America. However, these missionaries were also motivated by a particular interpretation of the Catholic faith, one that was grounded in a newer ideology known as Liberation Theology. Liberation theology founded in the Catholic faith, emphasizes a "preferential option for the poor." Developed in Latin America and inspired by neo-Marxist thought, Liberation theology foregrounds the experiences of those who are politically and economically oppressed. Moreover, it proposes that it is an individual's religious duty to address the root causes of poverty and inequality. After the rise of Liberation Theology in the 1960s, many within the Catholic faith began to reassess the role of religion and apply its tenets to address social ills. This ideological shift deepened the predisposition for Catholic missionaries to embroil themselves in political upheavals across the Americas. As liberation theology continued to grow in popularity, many Catholic priests and nuns traveled to Latin America to learn about the theology and devote their time to enacting its principles. These connections became critical for shifting political consciousness. Steve Striffler highlights this in his statement that:

> This Latin American embrace of liberation theology, in turn, fueled an ongoing and related process of politicization among U.S. religious actors, a process which was stimulated by both anti-colonial movements and the broader questioning of U.S. foreign policy surrounding Vietnam. It subsequently intensified as increased repression brought greater numbers of Latin American refugees to the United States (where they were often hosted by people of faith). (2019, 55)

For an older generation of white U.S. Latin American solidarity activists, this history of religion was interwoven in their personal stories of coming to political consciousness. Religious teachings and their interpretations were embedded in their moral compass and understanding of the world. Moreover, the relationships they developed in faith-based sites, from churches to nunneries, guided them to an expanded consciousness and anchored them to activism even when it was not an easy path. To demonstrate how the religion-directed experiences and values can become enmeshed in people's subjective political consciousness, I draw on the narrative of Gail Phares, a long-time U.S. Latin America solidarity activist. Though the specifics of Gail's journey to consciousness are unique to her, I found the same tenants that undergirded how she interpreted

her religious experience among all my other research participants who noted religion as a facet of their politicization, regardless of the time period. Particularly, for U.S. Latin America solidarity efforts that emerged in the 1980s, much of it's white, Middle-class base was mobilized through religion, specifically left-wing Catholicism. While Gail's story certainly doesn't represent all activists engaged during this time, especially Latin American immigrants, the experiences, and moral values that her engagement with Catholicism led her to is illustrative of a broader trend found within a similar U.S. Latin activist demographic during the 70s and 80s.

4.6 Gail

Gail, in her early 80s when we spoke, was one of the first people I met when I began to get involved in solidarity work. Despite generational tensions that arose throughout the years, she has shepherded a multitude of people into paths of activism. She is white, middle class, and at almost every event she attends she encourages all in attendance to link hands in a circle, introduce themselves, and/or sometimes sing a song or pray-a ritual of togetherness that has often reminded me of my childhood days sitting in uncomfortable church pews. When I interviewed Gail, it was before the ravages of the pandemic hit and we sat comfortably in her living room. I had been in this room many times before for parties and fundraisers for the non-profit organization Witness for Peace. Gail co-founded the organization back in 1983 and had been passionately involved for the past 40 years. She, like everyone, is a person ripe with contradictions. She is warm but can be quick to anger. She is passionate and opinionated. She is powerful and empowering. Our interview was one of many she has given throughout her life. As a well-known figure in U.S.-Latin America solidarity circles she has been referenced in many books and interviewed for many projects. Yet, her first step into this activism was guided by religion.

Gail was born into a conservative home in 1940s North Dakota where politics weren't really discussed but religion was central. She went to a Catholic high school where a visit from a Maryknoll nun sparked her interest in joining a nunnery. After graduating she went straight to join the Maryknoll nunnery. “I really just wanted to help people" she said of her motivation. And the nunnery seemed like the way to do so. During her time in training, she went to New York and was surrounded by women who had been in Korea, Japan, all over the world. “They were

very progressive liberated women" she noted, insinuating how the community surrounding her began to slowly inform her thinking. She was no longer amidst a family that gave little attention to politics; she was surrounded by women who, as she said, "knew why the revolution in China was necessary". They were radicalized. Notably though, their radicalization also followed pacifist trends developed throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. While they recognized and wanted to address social issues, they wanted to do so non-violently. This was a religious trend that also extended outside of the Catholic faith. For example, "the tradition of the historic peace churches-the Mennonites, Quakers, and Brethren in Chris-also contributed to the growing religious focus on peace and justice…and carried forward a commitment to pacifism, social service, and simple living with an increasingly sharp focus on third world development… " (Smith 1996, 139). At the same time, in the Catholic church, Vatican II had begun. Vatican II was a three-year meeting (1962-1965) between thousands of Catholic bishops. During this time, church officials reassessed the role of the Catholic church in modern life and how people should enact their religious faith. In fact, most who I interviewed who were strongly influenced by the Catholic faith mentioned Vatican II. According to Gail, because of Vatican II "people began to question things. I remember reading those documents and thinking wow… It questioned the idea of hierarchy, and it questioned the difference between faith communities." Surrounded by the buzz that Vatican II was creating in the church, as well as nuns whose travels had deeply informed their political views, Gail began to move from a basic desire to "help people " to an analysis of what this help should look like and why it was needed.

After some time in training in New York, the Mother Superior asked her to go to Nicaragua. She gladly accepted, first studying Spanish for six months in Mexico. In Nicaragua, she taught at a school near a gold mining town. For the first time, she witnessed people who were suffering from malnutrition because they were not being paid enough money to afford food. As discussed in Chapter two, witnessing and this international travel played a significant role in the formulation of Gail's political consciousness. As she witnessed and experienced this new reality, she began to develop an acute awareness of economic class, something about which she had "no awareness whatsoever...I began to question things...I remember asking why we were teaching in this school, couldn't our students who graduated teach there and couldn't we do something else?" She noted that her thinking was heavily influenced by Vatican II, but also the emergence of the

theory of popular education by Paulo Freire, which she learned from her peers. Foundational to this theory was the idea that as Gail noted, " people already know a lot...so we began to ask people questions instead of just teaching them. We were still referred to with a lot of deference." In this simple statement Gail unveils how her worldview and concept of solidarity was beginning to change. Guided by this religious framework and her cross-cultural encounter, Gail began both to understand the variant socio-economic conditions in which people lived and develop an idea of what "help" might look like. She began to conceptualize solidarity.

Gail spent three uninterrupted years in Nicaragua, time that was foundational both for her religious training and her politicization. Though she was still being trained in the nunnery, the Nicaraguan peasants she taught spoke to her with deference. She occupied a position of power within an international hierarchy, but within the religious hierarchy she didn't yet have the authority to question or advocate for herself or others. She says she learned to "sit back and listen", to collect and assess information. After her time in Nicaragua, the Mother Superior told her she was now going to Guatemala where she would use her well-honed listening skills. This shift was notable. Her time in Nicaragua was marked by the Somoza dictatorship, but she says she felt safe. However, when she went to Guatemala in 1965, "it was tense… there had been a revolution". The United States had helped overthrow a democratically elected president who threatened U.S. economic interests, specifically the power of the United Fruit Company.

In Guatemala she was placed in an upper-class school, a place where she said she didn't think Maryknoll sisters belonged. However, her mentor, Margie Melville, helped develop a program that brought these upper-class kids to teach literacy and health in rural areas. Students got to live with and meet indigenous peoples and get to know them as people. Essentially, she said, they began a program to radicalize upper class youth. At the same time, liberation theology was emerging as a concept through which people were as Gail said, "theologizing not from France or Germany, but from the reality of Latin America". Questioning was a theme that arose richly within the Catholic faith, and within those who surrounded Gail. The students she taught, her peers in the church, all were questioning their known reality and how religion structured it.

Gail's time in both Nicaragua and Guatemala were marked with a multitude of foundational liminalities, of being betwixt and between embracing a new understanding of the world and the

shadows of old conceptualizations. Within these moments of liminality, Gail's conception of community was shifting, of who was in it and how its boundaries were shaped by global power dynamics. She previously had very little awareness of Indigenous and peasant peoples' lives in Nicaragua and Guatemala. However, as she lived and worked among them, not only did she become aware, but she also began to see how her life as a nun, a U.S. citizen, and as a human stripped of all artificially constructed classifications, was connected to theirs. Said differently, she began to incorporate them into a widened view of community. As her conception of community grew, the interpretation of Catholicism promulgated by fellow nuns simultaneously led her to a sentiment of *communitas,* of equality with and responsibility for those within her community. Together, this new view of community and feeling of *communitas* resulted in Gail's increasing politicization. In this way, religion, the experiences it facilitated and the ideological framework it provided to interpret these experiences was foundational for shifting political consciousness.

However, the ideological framework Catholicism provided at the time was grounded in a particular historical moment and Gail's fellow nuns' acceptance of more radical interpretations of the faith, particularly Liberation theology and the decisions prompted by Vatican II. Before Vatican II and Liberation Theology, many within the Catholic faith framed religious understandings through a hierarchical lens that emphasized difference and power. Religious rituals stressed exclusion between Church officials and laypeople. For example, Church services were often held in Latin rather than local languages, and Priests faced away from the congregation during communion. The Vatican II strove to redirect the Catholic faith to be more inclusive and interactive with laypeople. It began to strip away hierarchical notions that Church officials were closer to God and became more accepting of religious freedom (Poggioli 2012). At the same time, liberation theology directed people to use their faith to address the root causes of inequality. Not everyone in the Catholic faith readily accepted these shifts. In fact, it sparked much debate and discontent. However, Gail’s surrounding community did. Gail's understanding of what she was witnessing in Guatemala and Nicaragua, and her own role in shaping people's experiences, was guided by these religious teachings. She was slowly being politicized, not just by what she was witnessing in Central America, but by the religious framework through which her peers taught her to understand what she saw. Her time deeply involved in the societal

institution of religion, of the Catholic faith, was not influential simply because she was taught sterile religious teachings, or simply because she traveled abroad. Rather, it was the people, the community built around her that provided her a guiding framework through which to interpret her experiences. This framework emphasized everyone's humanity, connectivity, and individual responsibility towards those who are suffering. At the same time, it also began to unveil how the US played a role in fostering inequities abroad. Said differently, the framework Gail's community provided her began to impart within Gail a deep sense of *communitas* which would shortly become melded into her ideas of solidarity.

While in Guatemala, Gail continued to witness and learn of U.S. imperialism firsthand. At the same time, the U.S. was embracing counterinsurgency warfare in Vietnam, and it was training troops in Guatemala to fight guerrillas[18] who were mobilizing to combat the U.S. installed dictatorship (Manz 2004; Weld 2014). She said she was just "appalled at what I was witnessing. I couldn't believe what I was experiencing. They killed thousands of people just trying to get to a few hundred guerrillas. I was in my 20's and I got very radicalized...the students I worked with began to question everything, including me." Here Gail acknowledges the role that both witnessing, and community played in her politicization. However, what was left unsaid was why witnessing and her interactions with students was so radicalizing. Neither guarantees politicization. People witness events both directly and through the news on a daily basis and yet still are not politicized. What was radicalizing then for Gail was how what she witnessed - seemingly indiscriminate attacks on the masses - contrasted so deeply with the worldview she was developing, a worldview taught to her by her surrounding community, both fellow nuns and Nicaraguans. Killing thousands of people was the antithesis of recognizing everyone's humanity and working to improve people's lives. Seeing such destruction was radicalizing because the reasoning behind the violence was non-sensical according to her worldview. Important for her future conception of solidarity, Gail's worldview also began to become increasingly disenchanted

18. Though denoted "guerrillas", most killed and displaced during Guatemala's dirty war were Indigenous peoples who were scapegoated as being a part of the resistance. In fact, many have referred to this war as an Indigenous genocide. (Manz 2004).

with U.S. empire. The layers of U.S. exceptionalism were peeled back leaving her with a deep cynicism of the U.S.'s impact abroad.

This came to a head in 1968 when Maryknoll missionaries held a meeting in Guatemala City to discuss what the missionaries should do if the army attacked the villages they were in. Someone in the group reported this meeting to governmental officials and as a result, Maryknoll became suspected by the government. Everyone in the group had their passports taken away and soon, Gail was on a plane back to the U.S. After six years away, she returned "so angry at what she had seen. I stopped speaking English. I didn't want to be in the U.S. ever again."

For Gail, her experience as a Maryknoll nun provided her the opportunity to expand her political consciousness. While in New York, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Guatemala she had a variety of foundational liminalities that fomented in her a new understanding of the world. Although Gail's story is unique in terms of her travels, her journey to U.S. Latin America solidarity through organized religion is not unique at all. For many in this study who were politicized both in the 1980s and within the past 10 years, religion provided opportunities for radicalization and/or widening conceptions of community and community responsibility that were foundational for their future moves to activist work. Religious values crafted a moral and ethical compass that guided how people understood the world and their role in it. However, it wasn't just the religion that naturally imbued people with ethics that led toward activism, rather it was the people in the religious community and their interpretations of the faith that directed new political understandings. Scholars have demonstrated how religious values can be interpreted and used to invoke and justify harm (Jeffreys 2012; Mamdani 2005). More influential than the religion itself were the people within it who helped foster Gail's interpretation of Catholicism- her religious community. From the radicalized nuns she met in Maryknoll, New York to the Sisters and communities she met in Guatemala to the students she met in Nicaragua, each walked her along the path of continued radicalization. Vatican II, Liberation theology and popular education were key to her understanding of the role of religion — it wasn't to proselytize or condemn, it was to address root causes of inequity. However, her acceptance of these tenants was not a given. Vatican II and even liberation theology were controversial among Catholics. They contested long standing norms and power arrangements within the church. "Not everyone accepted the tenants

of Vatican II". Yet, those surrounding Gail, those with whom she spent her days and years did. Gail's community both helped form her political consciousness while at the same time subsequently shaping her own conception of who was included in this community. From an apolitical religious family in North Dakota with little conception of how their lives interconnected with the lives of others across the Americas, Gail was thrust into relationships and situations that grew her view of community.

As the Vatican II tore down ideological divisions between faiths, it simultaneously expanded the community individuals found within it. At the same time, while Gail was in Nicaragua and Guatemala, her experiences of liminality, of learning and communal growth fostered in her a *communitas* that viewed people across the Americas as her equals, and thus provoked a sense of responsibility, bounded in a humane connection, to help subvert systems that caused them harm. This feeling of *communitas* is what evoked in her such anger at U.S. policy and a drive to change things. It was not just that she witnessed and saw the harm of the policies. It was not just that she knew they were wrong. It was because she felt connected to those who were experiencing these harms in a new way. Her religion didn't foretell the inevitability of this connection, but it did provide her with the community, the relationships, the material experiences, and ideological foundation that led her to a political consciousness that outlined connections between the Americas and her own role in supporting or changing things.

Most to whom religion was a key facet in their politicization did not have as clear a path to U.S. Latin America activism as Gail did. Yet, for those for whom religion was consequential the same features were present in their story. Whether through travel, Sunday school or individualized learning, religion began to inform their consciousness through its explication of moral guidelines that broadened people's understanding of who belonged in their community and thus was deserving of equal treatment. At the same time, while decreasing the conceptual divides between humanity, religion could also facilitate a feeling of *communitas* or connection that gave rise to a sense of responsibility to care for others. This new responsibility and way of relating to others resulted in a shift in political consciousness. For Kathy, a white woman who trained in the nunnery in the 1980s, religion led her to her first protest through her fellow sisters. For Chrissy and Isaac, two latinx activists who got involved in activist work in the 2000s, religion and

religious organizations were some of their first experiences doing community work and began to lay an ideological foundation underscoring humanity's connection to one another and an individual's responsibility to care for one another. Similarly, for Jeanette, a black activist who got involved in activist work in the 2000s, religion and activism were intertwined. Her religious values undergirded and inspired her activist work, even before she was consciously aware of their connection. And for many others-regardless of race or class, religion laid the ideological moral foundations about how others should be treated. These shifts in understanding were facilitated by the personal connections people developed in their religious environment. Religion acted as a steppingstone on a path to developing an understanding of solidarity that went beyond the bounds of some religious interpretations and led them to work in nonprofit organizations. Though each story is unique, the theme is the same opportunities for liminalities were fostered or squelched by surrounding communities. Psychiatrist Laurel Williams has said "if you don't have a community to reach out to then your hopelessness has no place to go" (Weeks 2020, 40). For Gail, and for each person I spoke with in this study, community, and a feeling of *communitas provided* people an avenue through which, not only to learn, but also to channel, grow, and develop their political understanding. What people did with their new experiences, how they understood them and acted from them was influenced by how particular communal experiences directed politicization.

Yet, the ideals they learned via foundational liminalities in religious teachings rooted them to a continued path of politicization. Even if people were no longer active in the church, they still carried with them the faith and the principles they learned through it. Gail left the nunnery, but she never renounced her religious beliefs and practice. Instead, she, like many others, found another way to channel these beliefs into actions.

After Gail left Guatemala, she returned to Maryknoll New York and finished her college degree. She got a BA and an MA in three years, studying community organizing and Latin American studies. She knew" we" needed to change U.S. policies and she decided that to do that she didn't need to be in Maryknoll anymore. She left the nunnery after finishing her BA. She knew she wanted to "change things" but as she said, "... had no idea how to change things". She taught some college courses, met her husband Bob, and had two daughters. She had begun to develop a

new political consciousness but was unaware of how to apply it. This would begin change as the Central American solidarity movement emerged. As she built her life in the U.S. in the 1970s, violence in Guatemala was increasing. After traveling to Mexico to meet with friends, one suggested that Gail organize a tourism boycott to Guatemala. As a result of this suggestion in 1981, in her early 40s, Gail helped found the nonprofit organization NISGUA, the Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala. To combat U.S. support for the dictatorship in Guatemala, she helped organize speaker's tours, learned how to work with the press, advocate to congresspeople, and coordinate with other non-profit organizations. Through this experience she found that those who seemed most effective in advocating for change and awareness were people within the faith community "because they had a long base of support of common ordinary people. So that was the beginning of my understanding of how to change things." The experiences Gail had in Central America the 1960s and 70s, opportunities that were presented to her through her religion, constructed in her a political consciousness that drove her deep involvement in the 1980s Central American solidarity movement.

In 1982 her family moved to North Carolina. "The first thing I did was go to the NC council of churches, and I said what do you think of having an Inter-Faith Task force on Central America here in NC? And they thought it was a great idea. And at the same time, the Salvadorans were being trained at Fort Bragg, so people were aware, they knew that something was happening in Central America." Gail went to key contacts within each denomination and asked if they wanted to be on the steering committee for this task force. Everyone said yes. At this time the U.S.-fueled war in Nicaragua was in the news. Right-wing rebel groups funded by the U.S. were trying to overthrow a democratically elected president. Their attacks had taken the lives of many innocent civilians (Smith 1996).

By the end of the year the North Carolina Task Force had organized their first trip to Nicaragua. Gail helped coordinate and encourage thirty people, grounded in faith, to travel to Nicaragua, visit a number of villages impacted by the war, and report back to folks in the U.S. The last village they went to be El Porvenir. As Gail recalled: "You could see the contra command center from the village. And they had been lobbing mortar shells in this village. And they stopped, apparently, they knew, they could see us there, and they stopped shooting. They had hit a couple

of these houses...And one of the houses they had hit, they had just taken the daughter and granddaughter off in an ambulance and the grandmother was shaking, as you can imagine … before we leave Jeff Boyer comes up with the idea that all it takes for the shooting to stop is to have Americans here so we should organize a vigil. So, we would start asking people, you know what do you think?"

Though Gail notes that Jeff Boyer came up with the idea, truthfully it was the grandmother whose house had just been mortared. She begged the delegation to stay so the violence wouldn't continue. Guided by communities in Nicaragua who were asking for support as well as ideas of religious pacifism, when the delegation returned Gail and others began forming Witness for Peace, a non-profit organization that would go on to mount a successful coalitional campaign against U.S. interference in Nicaragua and later begin campaigns to adjust U.S. policy across the Americas, including Guatemala, Honduras, Cuba, Mexico, and Colombia. For Gail, the journey to co-founding two organizations focused on changing U.S. policy in Latin America began through religion, through a desire to help people, through a faith-based family, and through surrounding communities and historical circumstances that continued to guide her to what she called "radicalized" politicization or what we would call solidarity. Religion and the community that taught her religious tenants provided Gail a framework through which to understand others, a framework that highlighted human connection and the necessity of communal care. As Gail witnessed U.S. policy violate this framework and harm her community members, she felt a growing necessity to address this harm, to advocate for actions that aligned with her vision of how the world should work. She felt a growing need to be in solidarity.

Gail's path to politicization through religion is unique in the obvious role religion played in framing her experiences. Though most who develop a political consciousness about U.S. policy in Latin America through religion do not have such extreme experiences as Gail, I chose her story because it clearly illustrates how peoples' relationship to their religious community informs their political views. Gail's religious community was composed of other nuns enmeshed in the local realities of U.S. fueled economic and political violence in Central America and guided by Liberation theology, the Vatican two, and popular education. For others, their communities were composed of youth groups, college groups, or even family. Within these groups people were not

just taught religious values, but who they applied to or who deserved to be included in their community. As such, religion can lay the foundation, or plant the seeds from which future activism can fruit. When Gail returned to the U.S., she did not immediately spring into a life of activism, but later began to apply her new political consciousness when she found concrete avenues through which she could take action. Over the years her connections with other nuns dwindled, but the impact the experiences had on her consciousness remained. Even if people did not always stay closely connected to these communities or even the faith, the values, and ethical guidelines they developed continued to act as touchpoints, a framework people referenced when deciding what to do with and how to understand new information about global politics. Involvement in a religious faith does not guarantee a political consciousness that encourages activist work. Rather how one's surrounding community interprets and facilitates people's application of the faith acts as a larger determinant of someone's politicization.

Stories like Gail's are what prefaced and helped form the Central American solidarity movement, a broad swath of U.S. organizations and activists dedicated to ending U.S. economic and military influence in Central America in the 1980s. Within this movement, religion played a more obvious role in directing white middle class activist's radicalization. Whereas, in more recent episodes of politicization, religion has had more subtle influences, often undergirding or inspiring people's political ideology and inspiring them to join a non-profit organization.

As Witness for Peace emerged so did a litany of other nonprofit organizations focusing on U.S. influence in Latin America. Each had slightly different tactics, but many during this time were founded by people of faith. The same communities that people found in churches now began to emerge in nonprofit organizations. As non-profits mushroomed and became more secularized, they also began to act as a primary institution through which people were increasingly politicized.

4.7 Organizations

As neoliberal economics and ideology began to take root across the globe, non-profit organizations proliferated to fulfill the role of social services once provided by the state and campaign for policy changes. As a result of socio-economic changes that supported the explosion

of NGOs, following the 1980s these organizations acted as key sites that facilitated the expansion of people's conception of community and feelings of *communitas.* While some activists in this study who became involved in U.S. Latin American Solidarity work post 1990s still had foundational liminalities as a result of religion for those who deepened their involvement in U.S. Latin America activism in the 1990s and onward nonprofit organizations were most frequently the key cultural institution that stewarded their involvement.

If we return to the story of Elsa mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, we can see the role of nonprofit organizations in her politicization. That night in Minnesota she was surrounded by a community of activists from across the Americas, however this wasn't always her story. She grew up in a white middle class and politically progressive household. Her dad was a sociologist, and her family was one of a few progressive people in a racist Indiana town. Because her family was already more politically aware than most around her but wasn't yet participating in any organized actions. When she graduated college[19] she didn't have monumental aspirations, she simply wanted to travel. This desire moved her to pack up her car and, using money she had saved, backpack around Central America. In order to fund her continued travels, she got a job with a company that organized service-learning trips for college students. These programs bring groups of students to various countries to complete projects intended to help the local community-construct schools, gardens, etc. Many scholars and activists alike have highlighted the problems with these trips including a lack of consultation with local community members, the creation of projects that aren't useful to community members long-term needs and thus are left to wallow when groups return home, and the continuation of a white savior complex that benefits the students' resumes and personal development at the expense foreign communities (Lasker 2016; Mostafanezhad 2016; Smith 2016; Swidler and Watkins 2017).

19. Colleges and Universities also arose frequently throughout my research as a notable stop along people's journey to a political consciousness. These spaces provided opportunities for educational experiences either through on-campus organizations or a memorable professor or two. However, unlike the other institutions noted above, higher education did not generally play a role in fostering people's sense of community or *communitas.* Gary Adler (2019) calls these spaces "feeder organizations" that "feed" other organizations like non-profits interested individuals. My research supports this conclusion. While higher education can present people with opportunities-for travel, for alternative viewpoints, and for information-they often do not facilitate the production of *communitas* that roots people into a shifted political consciousness.

Elsa became aware of these issues firsthand, witnessing abandoned projects that were of no benefit to communities. After a couple years in this position, she decided to pursue graduate school, and a degree in International Human Rights. She wanted to learn more about other options of international development that didn't seem to benefit foreign volunteers more than the local communities they claimed to help. During this time, she also worked for the UN. Through each of these ventures she learned what *didn't* work, what principles and actions didn't align with her underlying ethical compass, and what organizations continued to not "feel right." When speaking of her time at the UN she noted that:

> It was just gross, honestly, the level of elitism … how much of a show it was. I was there for the 50th declaration of the signing of the International Declaration of Human rights and it was just like a giant party and very elite … and I was like, is there going to be some sort of reflection about how it's going?

For Elsa, her time at the UN disrupted her previously held narratives about the moral efficacy of the UN. It was bookended by a series of liminal moments that unveiled the lack of power and /or political will officials within the UN had to evoke the type of change she thought was meaningful. Continuing the discussion of her work with the UN she said

> A huge part of our work was to bring in people to give testimony. So, they would be talking about policies, and we'd bring in people from communities living in extreme poverty to talk about what policies would actually be helpful and what wouldn't. So, we'd do all this work to bring in people from um the outskirts of Nairobi or some of the communities surrounding Rio and it would be this huge deal with people following them to the airport because they were going to talk to the UN … and then they'd get there, and we couldn't convince diplomats [to listen to them] … I mean diplomats would be like, I'm coming in and giving my two-minute speech, I need to be one of the first two people and then I'll be leaving. I mean there wasn't a priority of actually listening to them. … It was super disappointing what was actually happening there. And in even a broader sense, I felt like my entire education around you know like international development, international aid, you know all that language about what we're doing to address inequity or oppression in the world which is you know completely flawed. The sense of like `we develop communities in this like Western way to be functional with the U.S. or whatever`. And not only is that not sustainable for anyone but it's also just continuing to prioritize U.S. systems, U.S. power.

While talking about her past she clearly alluded to her political consciousness of the world around her. Her understanding, her framework for the world was one in which the U.S.

dominated economic and political power interests globally, often at the expense of others. As we continued talking, she compared the UN's projects to the flawed volunteer-student projects she once helped organize. She emphasized that each of these models made communities more dependent on external aid, and instead of supporting local economies or ways of living were making people more dependent on States. "I just had a lot of trouble finding work that was authentically meant to represent communities and what they actually wanted and then follow up with the right level of support." As we spoke, she radiated a security in her political worldview and in her conviction about how organizations should approach change. This was the Elsa I always knew, someone who possessed a deep complicated analysis and could easily communicate it to others. But she wasn't born this way. She herself said she went through "a lot of phases" of understanding. After outlining how her past jobs didn't align with her political convictions I paused and asked her if she felt that her current political consciousness was developed and aided by the fact that she was able to see the impact of supposed efforts of change on communities they were purported to help. She enthusiastically responded in the affirmative, noting that it wasn't just that she was able to see the impact once, but many times through different trips and organizations. Her journey of finding a job that "felt right" and aligned with her political convictions was a series of witnessing and learning what didn't work-failed projects and misrepresentation, of seeing U.S. travelers get more out of volunteer trips than the communities they are supposed to be working with, and of witnessing firsthand the machinations of the UN. Importantly all of this occurred through organizations, the organization planning student travel, and the UN. Within these communities she never felt like people, their actions, or understandings, fully aligned with her nascent ideas about why social change is needed and what it should look like. Though she knew these manifestations of change didn't fit her view, she also didn't know what did. It wasn't until she happened on another organization, an NGO, that she found a model that fit. It was the organization Witness for Peace Midwest (WFPMW).

When she came upon a job offering at Witness for Peace Midwest, she found something different-a different community. After graduating from her master's program, she and her husband moved to Wisconsin for his work. She began searching for a job herself knowing only what type of work she *didn't* want to do. While working at a sandwich shop, she came across a job offering at WFPMW and gave it her all to try and get the position. Witness for Peace

Midwest is a regional affiliate of the National Organization Witness for Peace and the Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective. Their organizational model focuses on changing U.S. corporate and governmental policy in Latin America through consciousness raising in the U.S. and policy advocacy. They have organizers across the Americas from the U.S., Colombia, Honduras, to Cuba. Inspired by the teachings of liberation theology and Paulo Freire's popular education, they work to transform the minds of U.S. residents by bringing Latin American activists on delegations throughout the U.S. to speak on the impacts of U.S. policy, and U.S. residents to Latin America to witness firsthand the impacts of U.S. policy. When Elsa began working with the organization, she was still learning about their model of activism but from the start she felt it was something different than what she had previously experienced.

She went on her first delegation after working for the organization for two months. It was a training delegation. "It was a super powerful trip...I remember it so clearly [meeting an activist in Colombia]." Elsa had traveled broadly across the Americas, yet in our conversation-now two hours in- this was the first trip she went into detail about. The structure, the experience, the memories were different for her. Instead of arriving in Colombia with a group of U.S. residents who thought they were going to teach people how to change to be more like the U.S., they were there to learn. At the UN and the student learning trips she organized there was an unspoken hierarchical relationship between those perceived as "needing help" and those perceived as "helping". These relationships were undergirded by global power dynamics derived from a normalized conception that Western culture and power was inherently better and built on the erasure of the historical dynamics through which they acquired dominance, i.e., colonialism, violence, and exploitation of other countries. Conversely, the delegation through WFPMW showed Elsa an alternative model of interacting with and understanding her relationship with people who lived outside of the U.S. Rather than presuming a hierarchical relationship in which U.S. residents held all of the knowledge and resources, this delegation focused on the agency and power of activists in Colombia. This experience began to widen Elsa's conception of community to include activists and organizers across the Americas, people with agency, power, and knowledge rather than helpless victims. Steve Stiffler and Aviva Chomsky depicted a similar situation when discussing a campaign between U.S. and Colombian residents in the 2000s to hold a U.S. owned coal mine in Colombia, Cerrejon, accountable for environmental damage,

displacing local communities and a variety of other human rights abuses. They argued that “For northern activists, the coal campaign not only taught them about the realities of 'Third World poverty,' but highlighted the connections between, on the one hand, the poverty and violence experienced by communities and unionists in Colombian coal regions and, on the other, the comfortable lifestyles enjoyed by North Americans. The recognition of such connections is, in a sense, the difference between seeing Colombians as poor people in need of charity versus working with them as allies in a common struggle for social justice” (Chomsky and Striffler 2008, 196). Elsa's experience was not unique, but representative of how organizationally structured events and trips can widen political consciousness by introducing people to new views of community.

After reminiscing about this trip, she spoke of how, just a few weeks on the job, two other activists dropped Daira, the activist singing in the Minnesota home, off at her house. Daira had arrived from Colombia to stay in the U.S. for a while so the death threats against her would die down. Elsa said she remembered thinking “This is so completely weird that this is part of my job”. What was once weird to her had long been normalized by the time we spoke. While her conception of community shifted, so too did her understanding of her responsibility to others in this community, or *communitas.* This shift did not happen immediately, but slowly through her continual engagement with WFPMW and the people who she met through the organization, people like Daira. The people she met confirm her previous suspicions about the harm of U.S. policies abroad. For example, when asked what Daira would tell the people of the U.S. she said:

> I would say that the people in Colombia are suffering. We do not need weapons or military bases or more of these militarist policies being imposed on us. We need our children to be educated. We need people to have their land, to have houses and to have options. We need opportunities for a better country. When all the young people are sent to the army, how are we supposed to be able to escape this war and the war mentality? What are they going to learn there? They are going to learn to kill—kill their own countrymen, their brothers, and their sisters. You have already done enough. We need to be able to rise up from the ashes and construct our own history and our own process. (Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective 2019, 1)

Daira emphasized the need for autonomy and for an end to meddling U.S. policies that prevent such autonomy. While this confirmed what Elsa already believed, the organization also presented

her with a new way of relating to and enacting communal responsibility, not through service-learning trips or catering to disconnected diplomats, but through direct relationship building with activists in Latin America, through hosting threatened activists in her house, learning from them and highlighting their demands.

These are two of many examples of how Elsa's experience with the organization slowly began to change her understanding of the world around her. She was not the only one. When speaking of their time in non-profit organizations, people noted changes in politicization ranging from basic education about the U.S.'s role in the world to even deeper realizations about themselves and their understanding of community that eventually resulted in leaving relationships, friendships and marriages. They spoke of an emerging political consciousness that was intertwined with their own identity — the way they saw themselves in the world and their connections with others (discussed more in Chapter six).

In this sense, different organizational sites help foster an expanded political consciousness not just by shrinking the circle of "what people are taught to ignore" (Zurubavel 1997) on a community perspective but, also, by allowing and encouraging people to stop repressing underlying feelings and understandings of themselves. For Elsa, her entrance into the organizational world of WFPMW allowed her to develop amorphous feelings and understandings about international development techniques that didn't seem to work into a new more concrete analysis about U.S. imperialism and ways to subvert it.

In this way, organizations help facilitate a shift in political consciousness. This institutional space can provide people with a new sense of communal and individual identity that deeply informs the way they view themselves in the world. Alicia Garza, Co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement and organization has said:

> There are some who argue that you don't need organizations to be a part of a movement. I find this misguided and ahistorical. Every successful social movement in history was undergirded by organizations: the suffrage movement, the anti-apartheid movement, the anti-war movement. Even in the age of technology it is a fallacy to believe that organizations are unimportant or unnecessary. (Garza 2020, 201)

Elsa's trajectory of involvement with organizations is illustrative of the prominence of organizations in the development of political consciousness. As Elsa's story demonstrates, not all non-profit institutions help generate a more expansive political consciousness. As other scholars have aptly demonstrated, non-governmental organizations can also easily perpetuate the same global power dynamics they purport to confront (Lasker 2016; Mostafanezhad 2016; Smith 2016; Swidler and Watkins 2017). What Elsa found at WFPMW was a different communal understanding of both the world and the individuals' role in change. Being surrounded and immersed in this understanding directed her own political thinking.

Organizations can help funnel interested individuals into a deeper engagement and understanding with the issues, however, whether or not people stay involved and what this involvement looks like, depends heavily on how organizations frame things and facilitate a community space. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the cultural institutions of family, religion, and non-profit organizations have acted as critical sites for continuing the development of political consciousness. After initial foundational liminal events have generated a greater emotional and political flexibility, individuals are more open to and/or actively search for opportunities for continued political edification. These cultural institutions act as guideposts that can continue to move people along a path of continued politicization.

Yet, in each of these institutions, it is not just the educational awareness they foster about U.S. influence in Latin America that leads people to deeper understanding and commitment. Rather, these surroundings shift consciousness by realigning the boundaries of who people perceive is in their community and creating a sense of *communitas* that generates a sense of care and responsibility for others. This sense of *communitas* creates a new political consciousness as it shifts people's worldview to conceptualize how U.S. policies impact others abroad. As conceptions of community begin to widen and knowledge about U.S. empire grows, people increasingly begin to question normalized political structures that have previously informed their lives. In conversations, people often highlighted this shift in thinking by underscoring the

emotional impact of these reckonings (as will be discussed in the next chapter) as well as an almost indescribable impulse to "do something" about it—to be in solidarity. However, these impulses towards solidarity were often more than just desires to take action. Moreso, they were underscored by a sentiment that inaction was ludicrous; that having the knowledge which they now possessed as well as a new understanding of their connections to others meant that they had to act in ways that work to change the problematic political structures they just learned about.

Previously scholars have similarly noted how periods of collective action and politicized communal experiences can generate "insurgent individualism" or individuals' recognition of their own political power, relevance, and influence. We see this in the stories detailed above. Greg Grandin argues that "insurgent individuality…[is] deeply rooted in the institutions and experiences of mass radical politics" (Grandin 2011, 182). This research demonstrates that insurgent individualism does not only develop in periods of mass mobilizations but can also emerge during periods of relative quiescence when it is facilitated by different societal institutions. Critical for the development of insurgent individualism are liminal experiences supported and cultivated through a surrounding community (whether it be familial, religious, or non-profits) that both teach and demonstrate an alternative way of thinking and being in the world. When these experiences resonate with an individual's pre-existing moral and/ethical framework for understanding the world, an individual may begin to develop a new broader sense of community and an understanding of *communitas* that undergirds a feeling of care for this community. As a result, even when a mass movement isn't present, people can still develop a sense of insurgent individualism that primes them for involvement in future campaigns. In this sense, insurgent individualism is also connected to a conceptualization of solidarity. As people begin to understand their own political power and connection to others, if/when supported by various societal institutions, they can be encouraged to use their political power in ways they view as beneficial to the community.

While a mass movement is not necessary for the development of insurgent individualism, as Grandin (2011) notes, institutions have been critical for fostering *communitas* and political awareness, yet the dominant institution has varied overtime. Variant historical, political, and economic circumstances have influenced the dominant or primary institution. Familial moral

values consistently laid a foundation for ongoing political growth fostering both moral and sometimes ideological framework and flexibility that undergirded their continued inquisitiveness. For many white people involved in U.S. Latin American Solidarity in the 1980s, religious communities were often responsible for introducing them to a deeper political awareness on the issue. This was directed both by the primacy of religion in the U.S. at this time as well as the long history of missionary work that linked religious communities across the Americas. After the rise of neoliberal ideology and the flourish of non-profit organizations of the 1990s, many who became more involved in solidarity work no longer arrived there through religious connections, but instead through non-profit organizations.

Overall, whereas chapter two discussed seemingly happenstance events framed by history, this chapter has discussed how societal institutions can act as steady guiding touchpoints that people reference when making decisions. This perpetual reminder and overarching view of a globally connected community is critical for ongoing development of consciousness, of U.S. empire, and finally of solidarity. However, despite my identification of a series of intermittent connections and underlying motivations for involvement (religion, organizational, familial), few mentioned or referenced the desire to be “the” movement. In fact, there was little recognition that a movement, a U.S. Latin America Solidarity movement exists. Whereas there is an awareness of a community (via the institutions) - and involvement in this community keeps people active, few mention being involved in a set of ongoing coordinated campaigns. While *communitas* can be developed in these spheres to broaden people's understandings of who is in their community and what their role is, it doesn't necessarily encompass a conceptualization of a social movement. This next chapter will discuss how affect impacts understanding of community and their resultant political consciousness.

CHAPTER 5

The Effect of Affect

5.1 Introduction

The light from the setting sun cascades in through the crack of the closed blinds in my bedroom. It's early 2021 and Covid -19 quarantine has become a norm in my life. The floor groans with my back as I pace back and forth rocking my 10-month-old son to sleep. I pause, quietly praying he won't open his eyes, and adjust my wireless headphones. They are streaming Witness for Peace Southeast 's first virtual reflection circle, part of their virtual Caravan for Justice, on Indigenous Sovereignty and Climate Justice. While my body is in Wake Forest, North Carolina holding my son, I am also with about 20 others in a virtual space, folks from across the United States, Colombia, and Guatemala. Voices in Spanish, English, and indigenous languages detail the current threats to their land and how they are resisting, how they appreciate this space to share the struggle. The zoom meeting is being shared through Facebook Live and on the screen, you can only see the faces of folks who have their screens on. Their backgrounds are of plain white walls, the woods through which they walk, and a series of paintings hanging on a wall. Each speaker has a different intonation, a different cadence, but a similar story — their land is being robbed from them, polluted and destroyed by the government, by multinational corporations, by capitalism. Midway through the two-hour presentation the moderator pauses and asks everyone to join in a collective breath “to ground us”. They lead us through a breath. “Breathe in peace, hope, strength, breathe out all that doesn't serve us in this space, white supremacy, Capitalism. Breath in, breathe out.” they say first in Spanish and then in English. I breathe slowly, closing my eyes and daring to sit down hoping my son doesn't wake. I peek at the screen midway through the two-minute exercise. Others have their eyes closed, their shoulders rising and falling in unity. The speaker before the break had spoken of a collective breath, of resisting through breathing and being together. Here we were practicing it. When the exercise ended the Indigenous panelists were presented with a new question about how they are resisting. All speak of communal efforts. But one Indigenous man, from the Musica people of Colombia, his face shrouded by the dark night of his background, speaks of a community larger than those who live

on the land. “We are all Muisca” he says. “Protecting mother earth doesn't just impact Indigenous peoples, it impacts us all. We are all Muisca.”

What was happening in this space was more than just sharing information. The breathing exercise, the calibrated pauses of speakers, the words and invocation of community wasn't just cultivating knowledge, it was cultivating emotion, trying to pull people together through an affect of connection, togetherness through virtual space. Though we were separate in space, in location, the affective pull tried to bring us together in struggle. Affect was central.

The last chapter discussed how cultural institutions help channel liminalities and play a profound role in shaping conceptions of community and *communitas.* Similarly, intentionally and unintentionally, organizations and the people individuals surround themselves with produce and manage affect in ways that both expand political consciousness or feed into existing conceptualizations of global politics. This chapter demonstrates 1) how affect is consequential to political understandings, 2) how the emotional habitus of a group and the existence of an intellectual framework shape whether affect will shift political consciousness and 3) how affect works to shift political consciousness and develop a sense of solidarity through how it informs views of global community. Overall, I argue that when combined with an intellectual framework, affect can be mobilized to shift conceptions of imagined community and create a sense of solidarity transnationalism.

5.2 The Affect of a Dog

The sky, reflected off of the murky river was crystalline blue and framed by the greenery overhead. There were 10 of us wading through the water to the shoreline and a small town in the Southwest of Colombia that had lain empty for weeks after its inhabitants were displaced by armed actors who wanted to control the river route. We were on a delegation with Witness for Peace, a nonprofit organization that seeks to educate folks residing in the U.S. about the impact of U.S. foreign and corporate policies in Latin America so as to encourage them to take political action. The organization's educational methodology includes taking groups of people on delegations to witness the impacts of U.S. politics first-hand and to speak with those who are directly affected. On the river, damp with sea spray, we are witnessing the impact of U.S. military aid, the war on drugs, and neoliberalism. But what we see is an empty town. Of the

group of 10, there are 4 white women and 2 women of color from the U.S. With us are two Colombian activists who are working with the displaced community to reclaim the land and two Afro-Colombian men from the community who will be our guides through the empty roads. They told us they hadn't been back home for a month, fearing it wasn't safe. But with this international group they felt comfortable briefly returning and checking on things.

As we wade through the water, a lithe brown dog splashes through to greet a community leader, Andre, and our main guide. He is giddy with excitement, jumping up and lavishing him with licks. Andre smiles and tells us this is his dog. He had to leave him behind when they were displaced because where they were staying in the urban city didn't allow for dogs. We all nodded. Later we would discuss how the dog followed us through the town, always at his owners' side, how he cried miserably as we left, how he tried to swim out to the boat to come with us. Later, as a group of delegates, we discussed the facts of the town, how its hollow homes were connected to U.S. actions, but when we talked of the dog, faces and demeanors softened, frowned, felt. It was as though through him the group could see the grief of displacement, of separation, through him they could connect Andre's story and his words to affect. And it resonated deeply.

Throughout my research I traveled on seven delegations and attended over 30 non-profit events. On each trip and at each event information was shared about events in Latin America and the U.S.'s role in them. While facts elicited reactions, it was emotional appeals, the personal stories, tears, and whining dogs that generated the most reactions and follow up conversations- frowns, shoulders slumping, tears. Oftentimes reflection wasn't focused on processing factual information but people's emotions. Every trip, every event had tears, shock, anger, empathy, sympathy, or disgust. In speaking with people after trips and in interviews I found that these emotions were deeply influential to how people understood what they were learning or witnessing. It was clear that "Political projects are not only the result of coalitional organizing, ideological mobilization, and critical deliberation. They are predicated upon affective, ethical, and sensible capacities that are often ignored as consequential to the analysis of politics" (Mahmood 2005, xiii). Moreover, it was not just the type of emotions that arose-anger versus

sadness- that impacted resultant political horizons, but how they were channeled and molded by an organization—or more specifically the people within an organization, into affective realities.

The importance of affect in social movements has been both contested and ignored by scholars. Some have avoided a discussion of affect to paint actors as rational (Cohen 1985; della Porta and Diani 1999; Touraine 1988) and others have argued that affective sentiment is not long-lasting enough to encourage long-term change (Tate 2015). Early scholars of social movements ignored discussions of affect and argued that "most political movements and revolutions are set in motion by social changes that render the established political order more vulnerable or receptive to challenge" (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996, 8). Scholars focused instead on large scale political and socio-economic factors that may provide a political opportunity that makes people open to change. Even activists have historically contested the power of affect to shift political realities. For example, Assata Shakur (2001) famously said that "Nobody in the world, nobody in history, has ever gotten their freedom by appealing to the moral sense of the people who were oppressing them" (139). Despite this, more recently affect has re-emerged as a central component of study with numerous scholars indicating how affect can influence political orientations and imaginings (Maskovsky and Bjork-James 2020; Brown 2018; Castoriadis 1994; Gould 2009; Tate 2007). In fact, many scholars have demonstrated that affect is a central component of people's lives and can be manipulated to craft a sense of group and individual identity in social movements and inform protest tactics (Calhoun 1991; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polleta 2001; Gould 2009 Gornick 1977). Instead of placing political opportunities and affect at odds, this research shows how they are intertwined. I build off of Mahmood's assertion that "ethical practices and affective attachments undergird distinct political projects" (Mahmood 2005, xiii). I locate the foundation of "distinct political projects" in people's political consciousness.

I draw from scholars who view affect as more than just a fleeting emotion or feeling. Deeper than the seemingly cerebral location of emotion, affect is "the experiences of bodily energy and intensity that arise in response to stimuli impinging on the body" (Gould 2009, 18). It is a visceral reaction that is carried by the body long after the stimuli has passed. For example, an emotion such as fear is often demonstrated when someone screams. After the frightening object

has receded, the scream ends. Unlike this emotional reaction, an affective reaction is built deeper in the body, lives long after the scream, and becomes encoded in how an individual will react to the same stimuli in the future. Perhaps as a result of this experience, the individual now actively works to avoid circumstances which could lead them to encounter those same scary stimuli. This seemingly simple response could actually result in more significant changes to how they organize and lead their daily lives.

As this example indicates, affect is carried and moves through the body. As such it is not just crafted discursively but emerges and is cultivated through action and material surroundings (Richard and Rudnyckyj 2009). In this way affect is a "form of conduct; a means through which people both conduct themselves and conduct others by structuring possible courses of action" (Richard and Rudnyckyj 2009, 61). Simply put, it is embodied.

Conceptualizing affect as an embodied reality, an ongoing lived reaction to a stimulus, opens up new avenues of inquiry into how affect informs and becomes embedded in social practices that influence political realities. For example, in elucidating how embodied affective reactions have been central for the normalization of neoliberal practices, Richard and Rudnyckyj (2009) show how "particular affects enable certain types of… [global connections] and foreclose others" (59). They demonstrate how affect is both produced and produces. Similarly, Gould (2009) in looking at the rise and fall of ACT Up, demonstrates how affect plays a central role in determining what people think is politically possible and the resultant tactics people use to rally for social change. Affect has also become embedded in political slogans. The 2017 feminist strike that emanated from Argentina boasted the hashtag #NosMueveElDeseo: desire moves us. Veronica Gago (2020) has argued that in highlighting desire, strikers simultaneously politicized it. "By naming the impulse of movement, we explicate the subjective place where we locate political force" (Gago 2020, 31). In noting this she underscores how the political can emanate from the subjective and the subjective is often affect-based. Said differently, it can become a felt sense of solidarity.

This felt reality cannot be disconnected from material conditions. For example, many have demonstrated how institutions and organizations try to craft specific affective reactions to influence political behaviors (Dejordy and Barret 2014; Tate 2007, 2015). How and to whom

institutions craft a political resonance influences subsequent political action both through activism and policy creation (Butler 2009; Greenhalgh 2008; Rosaldo 1980; Tate 2015). Scholars have also shown how the institutional manipulation of affect can justify policies or create a sense of disillusionment if individuals learn that abusive practices have been masked through dogmatic attachments to emotions (Bourgois 2001; Gornick 1977; Saramifar 2019; Weiss 1997). In short, affect, organizations and political understandings are all intertwined.

Gary Adler (2019) has highlighted these connections in his work demonstrating that the structure and content of NGO crafted group trips to Mexico creates different affective reactions and subsequent political understandings among travelers. While useful, Adler's work focuses solely on the impact of a solitary trip and does not consider how other factors, such as race, class, gender, or other personal and cultural political events influence people's reception to new ideas. I see events and experiences, trips, local gatherings, etc. as one factor of many that informs political consciousness. Foundational liminal events begin to foster an awareness of political alternatives and cultural institutions begin to grow and channel this expanded "political horizon" (Gould 2009) into a conceptualization of community that informs political actions and understandings. Throughout these processes, affect plays a critical role in shifting peoples' allegiances and political understandings. In fact, affect itself is a key component in fostering a new sense of *communitas,* or felt connection to others. While a sense of *communitas* has an affective component, it is also more than just affect. Rather, it is affect combined with an intellectual understanding of a topic that is honed and molded by someone's surroundings. Educational awareness and personal experiences that are oftentimes products of cultural institutions can help people feel a sense of *communitas,* but these experiences do not happen in sterile emotionless environments. In looking at how affect is but a puzzle piece in paths to political consciousness, it is clearer how people's past and present liminal experiences may also influence both their affective reactions and how they channel them.

In situating affect within specific experiences to see how it informs political consciousness, I am essentially looking at how varying emotional habitus' (Kane 2001), or the socially framed affective disposition of a group, influences politicization. The disposition of a group is influenced by the individuals within it, and the historical and socio-political context. Likewise,

emotional habitus' are “historically contingent requiring us to investigate the practices that generate, stabilize, reproduce, and sometimes transform them” (Gould 2009, 36). Echoing this, I see it as extremely fluid, constantly made and remade by different people depending on the circumstance of an event, a setting, and/or the historical context. As such, affect can breed both progressive and right-wing political consciousness. Indeed, scholars have demonstrated how neoliberal driven disenfranchisement has spurred an increase in right-wing populism animated by anger and fear (Maskovsky and Bjork-James 2020). Affect is not inherently progressive, but rather the political goals it is mobilized to support vary depending on historical circumstance, a person's surrounding community, and how or if an intellectual framework is used to channel affective reactions. As Tate (2009) has argued, scholars need to assess “the collective processes that channel the subjectivities mobilized into action” (53). Tate emphasizes how the broader political culture can inform the tactics activists use and frame public receptibility to activist campaigns. This chapter considers how the mobilization of affect is intertwined with - impacts and is impacted by- both broader political culture and more intimate interpersonal group dynamics. Through a deeper examination of emotional habitus as framed by both historical and personal circumstances, we can see how affect impacts how an expanded political consciousness is made, maintained, or left fallow. Drawing from an archetypal story, I illustrate the multiple layers that inform how affect is crafted, experienced, and understood. In doing so, I illustrate how affect can encourage new forms of political consciousness that constitute new ways of understanding the self within the global community or reinforce ideas of transnational separation and alienation.

5.2 Anita

Anita was a white middle class woman in her late 70s. At the time of our interview, I'd known her for about three years after meeting on a delegation to Colombia. She was living in San Francisco, CA at the time of her interview and though she was currently sidelined by Covid-19 mandated public health restrictions, previously she had actively attended protests and was active in a variety of progressive non-profits in her area. She spoke with a warm energetic voice, and I frequently had to remind myself of her age, to me she seemed about 50 years younger. She grew up in Chicago, Illinois in a Republican household with little talk of politics. Like many others, her mom's religious values deeply influenced her moral compass. “Mom’s understanding of the

teachings of the Christian gospel was a belief that God is Love." Anita identified with that. She had a variety of liminal experiences growing up and college eventually led her to a two-year stint with the Peace Corps from 1966-1968. Her time traveling with the Peace Corps channeled her nascent political understandings into full-fledged, what Anita called, "radicalization." Using Anita's story, this section demonstrates how the convergence of a variety of factors including historical circumstances, individual history and experience, and an organization/group's emotional habitus, all impact an individual's affective reaction to their surroundings and subsequent political understandings.

The Peace Corps as an organization provides a semi-structured framework and opportunity through which U.S. residents can travel to foreign countries and witness and interact with cultures, politics, and individuals to whom they had not been previously familiar. As such, it has the potential to be a site of politicization or a deeper inculcation into U.S. imperialism. Like other sites, its potential to radicalize or to support hegemonic norms was directed by both historical circumstances and the people within the organization with whom Anita surrounded herself. The Peace Corps was established in 1961 by President John F. Kennedy with the professed intention to "help the people of interested countries and areas in meeting their needs for trained workers" (JFK Library). Anita first learned of the Peace Corps while she was in college and felt that it melded with her desire to, as she said, "do good." Before she began volunteering, she inherently trusted the U.S. government and believed that it acted in the best interests of people across the globe. When we spoke, she noted that when she was deciding whether or not to volunteer with the Peace Corp she remembered Kennedy's speech- "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country" and said it resonated with her. Her faith in the U.S. government combined with her simple desire to "do good" led her to the Peace Corps and two years in Chile.

Anita began her volunteering in 1966 when the Peace Corps was still in its early foundations. While the Vietnam war was waged in the background, she was placed in Santiago, Chile where she says she began "waking up to the role of my country." It happened both slowly and all at once beginning from the moment she arrived in Chile. In 1966 Chile was governed by President Eduardo Frei a U.S.-supported diplomat. In attempts to continue to exert sway over the region,

the U.S. spent 2.6 million dollars to support Frei's electoral campaign in 1964 (National Security Archive 2004). The intent was not only to get Frei elected but to ensure that the CIA could "achieve a measure of influence over [the] Christian Democratic Party" (National Security Archive 2004), Frei's political party. Frei's election into office was a success for United States foreign policy in its attempts to secure foreign leaders who more readily accepted U.S. hegemony and would be susceptible to the imposition of policies benefiting U.S. capitalist interests. However, within Chile leftist dissent, marked by anti-imperialist ideology, that, as Anita said, "encompassed many ideologies and parties including socialist, communist, and others on the side of the working class and the poor," continued to grow and civilians organized to reclaim more political power. Their success manifested in the 1970 election of socialist Salvador Allende into the Presidential office. However, Allende was not submissive to U.S. interests and the U.S. would help overthrow him in 1973. The U.S.-backed military junta that took control after the coup against Allende began a period in Latin America marked by intense and U.S.-supported right-wing violence and repression of socialist and other anti-capitalist alternatives that had been growing over the past decade. Plan Condor was a hallmark policy of this period, the result of which was hundreds of thousands disappeared, murdered, and tortured across Latin America (McSherry 2005). Anita began and finished her two years of service prior to Allende's election and these subsequent waves of repression. During those years (1966-68), the left continued to grow and develop anti-imperial analyses that were critical of U.S. intervention abroad, and the capitalist interests such interventions sought to impose. When Anita arrived in Chile she was greeted with this sentiment as well as a marked example of the failures of a U.S. organization, the Peace Corps, to consult with or show any interest in those with whom she thought they were there "to help". As she said:

> Soon after our arrival, the Peace Corps arranged a meeting with our Chilean counterparts, people who were already doing the same kind of work we would be doing, teaching the arts in poor communities as a means of community development. At the meeting, instead of giving us a friendly welcome, our future colleagues looked surprised to see us, confused about our role, and not happy. We found out the next day the local teachers hadn't been informed or consulted. We suspected that, like many Chileans, they were critical of the US role in Chile and therefore of the Peace Corps. Maybe they also saw us as a threat to their own jobs. We were, after all, 'free labor', while they were being paid for their work. It was so ridiculous and poorly done. After the meeting, we waited several weeks for our assignments, and eventually were told to go out and find something else to do.

After thinking she was going into a structured program to "help people" she quickly learned that who they were supposed to be helping barely knew they were coming. Right away the idyllic image of "do-gooders" from the States coming to work with impoverished others was ripped away and began to set Anita on a slow path to defiance, a walk towards beginning to challenge her own country and her role in supporting her country's foreign policies. Not only did the Chileans barely know the Peace Corps group was arriving, they already had local projects they were working on and did not seem to need the help of outsiders. Immediately, Anita began questioning the positive propaganda she had been taught about the Peace Corps and its goals. After the failed meeting with the local partners, they were originally supposed to work with, the group of Peace Corps volunteers proceeded to find their own projects to work on throughout the rest of their time in Chile. As this group of volunteers focused on the arts, Anita found work in various projects— doing "music therapy" in a Santiago psychiatric hospital, cataloguing in a university music library, and singing in a local music group. For Anita, the lack of structure and consultation represented the U.S. government's first failure and aroused her suspicions about the intended role of the Peace Corps. However, her consciousness raising continued throughout her time in Chile.

After Anita's rocky start, the remainder of her time in the country deepened her emerging suspicions about the U.S.'s goal in the country and its foreign policies in general. She was surrounded by politically liberal Peace Corps volunteers, (many of the male volunteers had joined to get deferments from the military draft) and by the ubiquitous criticism of the U.S. and the Peace Corps itself in the left press and on the graffitied walls of Santiago. She wasn't sure it was correct to call volunteers "CIA spies," but she was beginning to wonder if the Peace Corps was, as volunteers had been assured, "totally separate from the State Department," and she definitely supported the demand, "Yanqui, Fuera de Vietnam!" Being a musician and a recently graduated college student, Anita was disappointed to find that left/liberal university students and cultural workers were distant if not outright hostile, not only to the Peace Corps but to Peace Corps volunteers as individuals. Nevertheless, the politics and music of these peers and would-be friends were a strong influence on her. It made sense then, that after some months in the country, she and a few other volunteers formed a small music group that, as she said, "performed songs which had become popular during the US folk music revival of the '40s, '50s and '60s— from

Pete Seeger to Joan Baez. “Essentially these were U.S. protest songs,” she pointed out. As chapter four discussed, her surrounding community and the accepted political talk within it continued to mold her thinking.

Over the course of the two years, several incidents occurred which continued to shape Anita’s thinking. One example was an invitation from a small politically left TV station to her music group to perform live on TV. The group agreed to sing their usual folk music repertoire and everything went fine. Or so they thought. Only afterwards did they learn that during the live broadcast, the station had superimposed anti-war messages over their faces as they sang, including images of U.S. planes carpet-bombing Vietnamese villages. Right after the performance, Anita says:

> We got a call from the Peace Corps jefe who had watched it on TV at home...of course the Peace Corps was furious. We were kind of happy, though we felt a little uncomfortable because we hadn’t been in on it … Another time the Peace Corps office was also broken into and red paint like blood had been poured over all these documents. And the Peace Corps was constantly in the leftist press being accused of being spies.

In another example, her music group was invited to perform at a university sponsored music festival in Santiago. While they were waiting their turn to perform, friends came in and informed them that some anti-Peace Corps troublemakers were threatening to prevent them from singing. They were advised to leave for their own safety.

> So, we escaped out a back doorway. Rather, most of us escaped. Actually, my boyfriend at the time was roughed up before he could get on the bus that was our transport out of there. They dragged him away and prevented him from getting on the bus. They tore his jacket and such. There were a few hours of concern as we waited before he showed up, shaken, but okay.
>
> I guess the biggest, most telling incident happened during my second year when one of the volunteers, more political than I was, decided it would be a good idea to sign and circulate a petition among the volunteers in Chile against the Vietnam War. There was at the time a very broad coalition of anti-war groups in the U.S. calling for negotiations with the North Vietnamese to end the war. They bought a 2-page spread in the New York Times demanding ‘Negotiations Now!’ Our idea was to add volunteers’ signatures to this statement with a little preamble saying, ‘We are Peace Corps volunteers, and we are finding it hard to work for peace here in Chile when our country is making war in Vietnam'. So, we did that. We were about to send the petition to volunteers around the

> county, when the Peace Corps got wind of our plan. We were summoned first to the Peace Corps office and then to the US ambassador's office. 'The ambassador was clear, telling us if we continued with our plan, we were at risk of being sent home, back to the U.S. For the men especially that meant the possibility of being drafted. And, in fact, one volunteer in Southern Chile, who wrote a letter to the editor of his local newspaper opposing the war, *was* sent home. His mother received a call from his local draft board before he had even arrived on her doorstep.

Conceding to this threat, the group decided to hold off on sending the letter and debated their next steps. Anita detailed that, "subsequently, some volunteers in Ecuador, with connections to liberals in Washington and to editors at the New York Times, managed to get the Peace Corps to back off of their threats on the grounds of our right to free speech. But the message had been sent. Our belief in the separation of the Peace Corps from U.S. foreign policy and the State Department had been shattered."

While Anita was feeling emboldened to confront her country's foreign policies for the first time, and its broader place in global relations, authority figures swiftly told her to cease these actions or else face repercussions. Youthful empowerment was quickly shut down through governmental threats. For some this might result in silencing, for others defiance and continued politicization. For Anita, it was the latter. Affect and her community connections helped direct her response. At first glance, it could seem that these experiences speak for themselves, that anyone who had been through something similar would be radicalized. It is clear that Anita's experiences unveiled a different view of the Peace Corps and the United States than she had been previously taught.

However, the rupture of her previous view of the U.S. was also facilitated by a new emerging conception of *communitas.* When she first went to Chile, she had constructed a clear demarcation in her mind between U.S. citizens and "others", specifically foreign "others" who needed and desired U.S. aid. This demarcation was initially ripped away upon first meeting the "others" with whom the Peace Corp volunteers were supposed to work and continued to be remolded and shifted throughout her time in Chile. Anita's shifting conception of community and her role amidst this community (or *communitas)* was enabled through the mobilization of affect. Her experiences in Chile were more than just intellectual exercises in discovery, and her shifting political consciousness was more than just the grand sum of everything she witnessed. Rather, her politicization developed through the affective reactions and framework within which she

processed and understood her experiences. This framework and her subsequent politicization would guide her future understanding of solidarity as a worldview that confronts U.S. empire.

The affective spectrum that Anita experienced while in Chile was broad and helps illuminate the variety of affects that can and do inform conceptions of *communitas.* Anita first experienced shock at the Peace Corps' failure to set up a proper program. Later she experienced visceral fear and disbelief both towards the threats and dislike of the Peace Corps by local leftists and towards the Peace Corp itself because of how bureaucrats treated volunteer's political stances. Finally, she was left with anger, frustration, and bitterness towards the U.S. government. These affective reactions guided Anita's emerging political consciousness about U.S. geopolitical relations and her own role within them. Throughout our interview Anita's voice tenor and cadence echoed the affect she felt almost sixty years ago when these events first took place. In fact, in some ways the way she told her story, and remembered it with crystalline clarity was more illustrative of the role of affect than the experiences themselves. Throughout our conversation as I tried to learn more about her early experiences prior to the Peace Corps, she continued jumping ahead in time, recalling with energetic force how her political worldview was turned upside down. She would refer to her own previous naivete contrasting it to the realizations she had while in Chile. She referenced old newspaper articles, memorabilia, and a scrapbook that she had kept from this time. It was clear that these years were critical for her current political consciousness and that she still felt them with a deep affective energy. Anita's hunger to tell her story and the affective weight that it carried was not unique. In fact, almost everyone I spoke with thanked me for the opportunity to speak about their journey to their political consciousness. Moreover, they told their experiences with a similar energy, one that was deeper than simply recounting a historical narrative but was filled with meaningful affective realities. This energy, the way I sensed it through time and space, indicated the presence of affect, not just emotion. Gould argues that "to get at affect requires sensing, tuning in to, attuning to the transitions in bodily capacity and to the potentialities thereby generated" (Gould, Barron, Frodge 2019: 5). Even when not in the same location as people during interviews or events, I could often still feel the shift in energy, hear it in voices, and/or see it in how people's bodily composure changed. People's political consciousness didn't emerge through sterile experiences because experiences aren't inherently sterile. Rather, it is the affective dimensions that contour and chisel the edges of events and make

them comprehensible within a larger communal and historical context that begin to frame political consciousness.

Affect is a key part in shifting political consciousness because it creates a desire to make sense of itself (Gould 2009). However, as Anita's story illustrates, the emotional habitus of an organization or community directs how people "make sense" of affect. For example, arguably if the Peace Corp as an institution could have swayed Anita's affective and political understandings it would have done so in a manner that directed her to continue to support U.S. interference abroad. However, unwittingly, program officials placed Anita with others who had a different political consciousness and facilitated her ability to live and work amongst Chilean leftists who were critical of U.S. imperialism. Her intellectual and affective experiences with these people framed her politicization, her ideas of community, and ultimately her ideas of solidarity. The emotional habitus of the Peace Corps then, was created and molded by the small group of people Anita interacted with and it fueled her political understandings and future actions.

Affect then isn't consequential solely because it exists. It is consequential because of how it can work to shift peoples understanding of community and their own role in broader geopolitical relations. Anita's experiences, her affective reactions to them, and the emotional habitus of the group encouraged her to reframe her understanding of the U.S. and its role across the globe, specifically Chile and Vietnam. Anita began her journey into the Peace Corps believing that the U.S. only wanted to help foreign nations and that the Peace Corps was not a mechanism of U.S. imperialism. However, by the end of her time in Chile she said she felt that the Peace Corp was just an arm of the State Department, trying to build political alliances in foreign places to support U.S. interests. Moreover, what had become clear to her was that the oft propagated narrative of "helpless foreign victims" who needed the U.S. to "save them" was a U.S.-backed lie. What really needed changing was U.S. policy. These realizations were bound up with Anita's shift in her conceptualization of community. Whereas, before the Peace Corps she understood the world through a framework that pitted a U.S. community against a foreign "other", throughout her time in Chile this differentiation was discarded and replaced with a new conception of community that did not hierarchically place the U.S. above others and instead found Anita seeking and finding community with others who also desired change. In this way, affect is consequential to the

development of political consciousness in how it shapes people's conception of a broader global community and their role in it. As Anita's conception of community shifted so too did her felt understanding of *communitas,* of who she was connected to across the world and what her responsibilities were to those people. This sentiment of *communitas* became intertwined with her understanding of solidarity and political responsibility. As a member of a broader global community and as a citizen of U.S. empire, she began to see the responsibility she had towards confronting and ameliorating the impacts of empire abroad. No longer did she view herself as a U.S. citizen who could and should travel abroad to "help others". Rather, she saw herself enmeshed in the webs of U.S. power and influence that often created the conditions from which people needed such "help".

Anita's experience was framed by the Vietnam war, rising repression of left-wing activists in Latin American, and the leftist Peace Corp volunteers with whom she spent her time in Chile. The Vietnam War provided Anita an avenue through which she could see the connections between U.S. interference abroad. Moreover, her peers' attempts at resistance to the war while in Chile both created affective reactions and showed her how to channel them. Her peers helped mobilize her frustration, dismay, and disappointment at U.S. foreign policy, not just in Vietnam but in Chile. In doing so they aided in shifting Anita's political consciousness by morphing affect into political understanding.

Indeed, Anita could have had a much different experience abroad had she been placed within a different group of Peace Corps volunteers at another moment in time. Of course, a trip abroad through the Peace Corps certainly doesn't guarantee the widening of someone's political consciousness. The historical setting, experiences and operating emotional habitus of the group all impact the potential radicalizing power a trip may have. Anita's experiences were framed by both the U.S.' s ongoing interference in Latin America, as well as the presence of strong leftist social movements in both the U.S. and Chile. The existence of these movements and more widespread awareness and distrust of U.S. foreign policy increased the chances that Anita's social circle, which included both U.S. and Chilean citizens, would hold a more critical understanding of U.S. intervention and foster such an awareness in Anita. Indeed, Christian Smith (1996) has demonstrated that the widespread attention to Central America in 1980s

political discourse in the U.S. created more opportunities for both popular awareness and dissent. It is clear that the presence of a social movement in the U.S.[20] no matter the historical moment, increases potential for the expansion of political consciousness by raising the chances that people will be acquainted with the political information and/or encounter someone who is. However, while more mainstream awareness and discussion on a topic increases the potential for people to engage, even in times when a widespread social movement was lacking people were more likely to develop an awareness if their surrounding community, friends, family etc., had an awareness and openly discussed or enacted their political beliefs through some form of activism. As such, this research underscores the important role community plays, regardless of historical context, in fostering a shift in political consciousness. For example, Anita's experience was book ended with heightened affective states— shock and anger—that the emotional habitus of her Peace Corp peers help channel into a new conceptualization of a global community.

5.3 Community and Affect

Though Anita's experience is unique to the time period, I found that the role of individual affective reactions was consequential for political consciousness no matter when they got involved in activist work. However, just because an affective reaction is present does not mean that people's political consciousness will automatically shift. Instead, I found that, as indicated with Anita's story, how a group molded affect to either reinscribe or shift people's view of community was a key determinant of whether or not consciousness shifted. Said differently, when affect is elicited without a new intellectual framework through which people can make sense of their reaction, it is not necessarily a useful tool for politicization. Yet, when coupled with an intellectual framework that is propagated and supported by the surrounding group, affect can be mobilized as a tool that shifts the bounds of “imagined community”, by removing conceptual barriers between “distant others" and creating links between people based on their political understandings.

20. I mention specially the US and not countries in Latin America, because US residents are more influenced by the dominant narratives they experience daily in their own surroundings, i.e., the US. Moreover, there are numerous examples of strong social movements existing in Latin America, such as in Colombia at the current moment, yet their existence doesn't seem to impact general political awareness in the US.

The dual role of affect and an intellectual framework was evident throughout my research. In some events each played off of the other, while in others it was clear that one was missing. While it was often affective understandings that resonated with people more than intellectual knowledge, both were needed for politicization. For example, on one delegation after meeting with a myriad of communities impacted by neoliberalism a delegate said: "I get it now, it's not just economics or free trade, it's life or death. It's people's lives."

To her "just economics or trade" was the cerebral academic understanding of global trade policy that was disconnected from peoples' lives. Hearing that free trade or neoliberalism harms people was much different than feeling it, than meeting with people for whom the impacts were felt, hugging them, seeing their tears, and hearing the personalized stories of individuals and communities whose lives were threatened because of an economic system. In this statement, she subtly connotes the difference between intellectual knowledge and embodied affect, of knowing the facts versus feeling them, understanding them viscerally. She clearly connotes the role of affect; however, it is affect linked to an intellectual framework, knowledge about neoliberalism. The link between affect and factual knowledge is what propelled the individual to "get it", to shift her consciousness.

Within these trips and events like the one described in the opening vignette, people are doing more than witnessing the impact of policies or cerebrally absorbing new information. They are also experiencing an affective reaction. When combined, the intellectual framework and affective reaction can help eliminate conceptual divides that demarcate "far away others" and instead form the intellectual links that recognize connections in a global political setting. In this way, it is not just the information that generates a widened political consciousness, but how the affective dimensions of the information start to remold understanding of community and simultaneously of *communitas,* of one's responsibility to the community. I argue that this is deeper than the overarching formation of collective identity as "collective identities, in fact, are nothing more or less than affective loyalties" (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polleta 2001, 418-19). Rather, this shift to a sentiment of *communitas* is formed through a fundamental shift in people's worldview, in their recognition and understanding of the political power structure in which they live and their role in it. This is more than an affective realization, but one born of affect,

intellectual information, and heralded and supported through liminal moments, cultural institutions, and personal community relationships.

Of course, not everyone's experiences through travel or event participation are generative of a change in political consciousness. If an affective dimension was not present, if an event was dry and businesslike with a brusque overview of facts and current events in Latin America, I could see people's faces glaze over, their cameras turn off. They were not moved. Oftentimes, these same people would not show up for another event.

At other times, affect was elicited but the event/trip and those in attendance did not provide an intellectual framework through which to channel the shock or pity or shame that was evoked. People in Latin America were painted as victims, often powerless and pitiable with little to no information given about the global economic and political dynamics that led to this, or how local activists and communities were also organizing for change. From these events or trips people often emerged with the general sentiment of "those poor people." And notably, when discussing their understanding of the event/trip with them these attendees would frequently refer to "those people" — a people apart from them, distant in both space and mind. After these types of events or trips, I collected a variety of statements that indicate their continued conceptualization of a distant other. Some of these phrases include: "Those people, I just can't imagine. They have it so hard;" "it's just so sad;" "I have such good memories of… The many poor ones"

In these situations, affect produced or reproduced distance. Without an intellectual framework through which connections between a global community were highlighted, differences were centerfold. People were not inserted into the same political or economic sphere. Instead, they were kept separate, distant others living in two seemingly very different worlds. Not all affect is the same— how it is channeled matters. When affect is present without an intellectual framework through which to channel its meaning, often people grabbed onto an understanding of the situation using a framework they were already most familiar with—a framework of victimization and othering. In this way "Not all affect matters, [or is politically consequential] and the aim must be to distinguish feltness that is politically barren and feltness that nurtures particular, collective modes of relating over time" (Markham 2019, 477). Affect can be productive of new forms of politicization or reconstitutitive of former ways of knowing

depending on how or if it is linked to an intellectual framework. Indeed, the rise of right-wing populism across the globe as people's disenchantment with neoliberalism grows underscores how affect can be and is mobilized by both the left and the right. It is not inherently progressive or harmful. What lies in affect is potential. The desire to make sense of the intense embodied reaction of affect imbues in it a capacity to be harnessed by projects of both the left and the right. This potentiality makes affect both an ally and a threat for consciousness raising depending on how and by whom it is mobilized. It can be harnessed to contest facts and logic, or it can be utilized alongside facts to support consciousness raising and demonstrate alternative ways of thinking. Because of this potential, whether or not activists on the left choose to use affect as an organizing strategy, people must still be aware of how it may be being used by others.

Adrienne Maree Brown (2017) contends that:

> I have come to believe that facts, guilt, and shame are limited motivations for creating change, even though those are the primary forces we use in our organizing work. I suspect that to really transform our society; we will need to make justice one of the most pleasurable experiences we can have. (33)

In settings in which affect was aroused but disconnected from an intellectual or even a joyful framework the arousal of affect played into a narrative showing a simplistic “spectacle of suffering” (Arendt 2009) in which the “sufferers” were as seemingly distant and apart from the realities of those in the space. We can see this distance in how people verbalize their understanding of the situation using language that distances the sufferer from the individual. For example, “those people” is used instead of Colombian activists or the specific names of activists. This mental and affective distance allows sufferers to “become an undifferentiated mass” and produces a “politics of pity” which elides people's own agency. Affect without a robust intellectual framework and a group and/or leaders that guide and teach this framework does not produce a markedly new political consciousness. Similarly, a dry presentation of facts without an affective component also does not produce a felt understanding that deepens into a widened political consciousness. However, when the components are combined and individual affect is fostered by both a group emotional habitus and intellectual framework, people can develop an alternative political consciousness. In this way, affect when combined with an intellectual framework can reframe the bounds of imagined community.

These connections are deeper than sentiments of pity or sorrow for distant suffering others. Instead, they are founded in similar political ideologies. For example, Anita's time in Chile morphed her understanding of Chileans from one of helpless sufferers to one of fully agental people, many of whom contested U.S. imperialism. As Anita's conception of community widened, it was founded on a similar, though basic political sentiment, that U.S. imperialism was bad. Of course, many of the political specificities in which Anita and her new expanded community might differ are erased and simplified. However, through one similar overarching understanding built through affect, a new concept of community is formed. I call this conceptual location of oneself amidst global political and economic dynamics and the subsequent shift in imagined community, solidarity transnationalism. This conceptualization shifts a former ideological vision in which people perceive a "a world divided in two: a homogenous mass of poor, Third World humanity, cut more or less from the same cloth, on the one hand, and an aggregation of struggling Western individuals, each unique, each working to fulfill her potential, on the other" (Binford 1996, 6) to one in which people begin to erase this conceptual divide and understand how people are linked through policy. Importantly though, this conceptualization of solidarity transnationalism does not erase conceptions of difference between themselves and others, nor is it necessarily a deep academic or ideological relationship. Rather, it is a starting point through which people can begin to enter into a reconceptualization of how they are connected to others across the globe. In proposing this idea, I do not intend to recreate previous errors of transnational studies that "overstates the internal homogeneity and boundedness of transnational communities, overestimates the binding power for individual action, overlooks the importance of cross-community interactions as well as the internal divisions of class, gender, region and politics" (Wimmer and Glick 2003, 598). Instead, I propose that this term can be used to better understand how different transnational meanings can "take actors in very different political directions and alliances" (Wimmer and Glick 2003, 598). For Anita, her slow recognition of solidarity transnationalism led her to forego her previous alliances with the US government and begin to relate more to her Chilean peers. Winifred Tate (2015) similarly depicts how traveling through different institutional bodies, governmental or non-governmental, can influence political understandings and affiliations, forming what she calls competing solidarities. The concept of solidarity transnationalism expands Tate's observations to further encapsulate how people's political worldview and understandings of solidarity begin to shift depending on

the historical context and group dynamic. Moreover, it expounds on the fundamental role a shifting understanding of *communitas* plays in people's political consciousness.

5.4 Applying Affect to Action

While community and an intellectual framework was relevant for stoking political consciousness no matter the time, historical context was extremely consequential for how or if people channeled their new awareness into activist activities. This will be discussed more in Chapter six however it is important to note because even if affect is developed and present with an intellectual framework, if there are not long-term opportunities through which people can channel their awareness, then affect is seemingly inconsequential in the moment, even if people do develop a new conception of solidarity transnationalism. For example, if we return to the virtual event described at the beginning of the chapter, the calls of unanimity and equity issued from the Indigenous Colombian activist, and of the deep breathing exercise led by the Latinx host that united attendees in breath, we can see that affect was mobilized. However, how were attendees directed to engage their affective responses? At the end of the event the host listed off a few basic ways to "take action", by signing a petition or calling a congressperson and/or attending other events hosted by the organization. Yet, aside from these individual and quickly completed tasks, there were no broader modes of suggested involvement. The organization didn't provide ways for attendees to keep in touch with one another, consistent meeting times, or calls for protests in the streets. In short, though the event mobilized both affect and intellect, attendees were left without long-term ways to stay involved. I found that the lack of long-term opportunities for deepened engagement, or movement building, was common for many activists who developed a political consciousness in the 1990s and beyond. For example, Jeanette, an activist who grew up in the 1990s, was politicized in her teenage years as a result of coming to understand her own identity as a daughter of the Haitian diaspora and through local community relationships in her working-class neighborhood that prefaced communal care. When she went to college some professors directed her towards local (located in Los Angeles) organizing activities that emphasized education. She began teaching popular education workshops at her own high school that focused on U.S. history with Latin America and worked with an organization through which she did local organizing and research. After college she received a fellowship and moved to Venezuela for one year. However, after the year she continued to live in Venezuela, traveling

back and forth between there and multiple locations across the Americas for about six years. When she returned to the U.S. she continued her involvement in a variety of organizations, focusing heavily on education, abolition, and international solidarity. However, throughout her history of activist engagement she had to constantly seek out opportunities to apply her political consciousness. There was not a widespread and well publicized social movement in the U.S. focusing on U.S. policy in various countries in Latin America that presented readily available activities and swept up her consciousness into action. There were and are a myriad of diverse organizations, but no movement. Similarly, Kathy, a white middle class activist who began her U.S. Latin America solidarity work in the 1990s, said when she began to learn more about U.S. policy in Latin America she had to actively search for ways to get involved. When we spoke in 2021, she noted that this had not changed.

Conversely when Anita returned to the U.S. from her travels, she returned to larger more organized social movements to plug into- the Anti-Vietnam war efforts as well as the emerging women's movement- with protests, ongoing meetings, and trainings. Though these movements didn't focus specifically on U.S. Latin America solidarity, they allowed for continued consciousness raising. The seeds of awareness that were planted in Chile were allowed to fruit. This wave of consciousness raising led to her involvement in many future U.S. Latin America solidarity campaigns such as the Central American solidarity movement. Conversely, many activists who developed an awareness of U.S. influence in Latin America after the 1990s were presented with few opportunities through which to engage their new knowledge. Perhaps their consciousness was raised, but what then were they to do with it? Some, like Kathy and Jeanette actively sought out ways to be involved, perhaps reflecting the depth of their affective reactions and personal motivations for change. Others, however, might continue attending events and signing petitions, but with a lack of other ways for long-term involvement they turned to more inward facing local or national activist efforts, such as Black Lives Matter or local environmental efforts that don't necessarily connect with transnational efforts or concerns. These dynamics illustrate how affect can be consequential for political consciousness raising but does not guarantee political mobilization. Rather, how or if affect is mobilized is historically contingent, informed by the political opportunities available, as well as how people imagine what resistance looks like and how it should be enacted, as will be discussed in the next chapter. For many

activists in this study, the political consciousness affect has helped raise lays a fruitful subsoil from which a future social movement focusing on U.S. Latin America solidarity could emerge, but which currently does not exist.

Notably absent from this discussion of affect is the affective reactions Latin American activists have about US solidarity. While this study doesn't focus on the politicization of the activists in Latin America with whom U.S. activists claim they are "in solidarity with" it is important to note that Latin American activists do have affective reactions when discussing the idea of U.S. solidarity. When meeting with U.S. activists either in the U.S. or in various countries across Latin America, I witnessed Latin American activists having a range of affective reactions including profuse joy and cathartic relief when telling U.S. activists their stories and feeling heard, as well as anger at the systems of violence U.S. activists can represent. For example, in 2016 while meeting with a feminist organizing group in Medellin Colombia, I was bouncing ideas for my future research project off of a Colombian activist who focused on mobilizing victims of State violence. I asked him what he thought of U.S. solidarity. He straightened in his chair and raised an eyebrow. With a terseness to his voice, he said "You mean like Plan Colombia and the violence it brought?". I responded quickly, noting his rising anger, and ameliorated his concerns by shaking my head no and explaining that I was interested in grassroots solidarity efforts that focused on things like unveiling the harm that Plan Colombia has caused to more people in the U.S. His demeanor quickly changed once more, and he said that "we need more of that type of solidarity". At other times, I have been hugged, cried on, and greeted with profuse thank yous. Each of these types of interactions reveals an affective connection to some idea of people who are engaging in "solidarity", whether it be harmful or productive. In this way, some Latin American activists may share a sentiment of affective connectedness with U.S. activists. However, it is not the central factor that inspires them to engage in transnational tactics. Affect can be one key mobilizing factor for U.S. residents because it highlights a connection with a more global conception of community and thus shows them the importance of transnational solidarity. Yet, for many in Latin America who live the impacts of this global connection through displacement, violence, and devaluation of their labor, they don't need affect to illustrate connection. They have lived it. Moreover, for Latin American activists, transnational campaigns and connectedness are just one tactic used strategically to try

and garner attention and create more pressure on international bodies and governments to hear their concerns and enact needed reforms. As such, they don't need to feel the same level of affective connection as U.S. activists in order to mobilize U.S. action and press for their goals. So, while affect may be beneficial in politicizing U.S. residents and leading them to U.S. Latin America solidarity campaigns, it does not need to be equally shared between U.S. and Latin American activists. Rather, its importance lies in how it aids in a reconceptualization of community and responsibility to those within the community, for those who seem untouched by an issue.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the essential role of affect in expanding political consciousness. After experiencing foundational liminal events that begin to broaden the sense of community, many since the 1990s have then turned to organizations to continue learning and/or explore their new interests. Organizations and group affect play a critical role in how new politicized subjects are made to understand their own relationship to the broader geopolitical community. Affect is both purposefully cultivated and incidentally arises. Because affect generates a desire to make sense of itself (Richard and Rudnyckyj 2009) it can be used as a political tool to expand political consciousness by shifting peoples understanding of community and *communitas.* However, it must be made legible and contextualized to be molded in a productive manner. This chapter has shown that a group dynamic or emotional habitus, an individual's own previous personal experiences, and the presence or lack of an intellectual framework through which to channel affect all impact how affect will be incorporated into someone's political consciousness.

How affect is cultivated can bridge both conceptual and political distance between people across the globe or emphasize it through a spectacle of suffering. "Affective states are what temper and intensify our attentions, affiliations, investments, and attachments" (Richard and Rudnyckyj 2009, 27). Boltanski (1999) argues that the representation of suffering is connected to the possibility of action against it. He contends that a closer proximity to suffering can produce a familiarity that can be more easily transformed into a deeper understanding and action. In this sense the distance created by a "spectacle of suffering" is erased. However, my research shows that erasing physical distance is not enough. Though being in the same room with Latin

American activists who have had their life threatened can surely produce a strong affective reaction, if it is not channeled in a productive manner, the distance of suffering still exists. At the same time, distance can be erased without being in the same physical vicinity. It can be erased with a simple breathing exercise interspersed within an event that merges both an intellectual framework and meaningful "affective management techniques [that] shape the situated subjects who enact global networks" (Richard and Rudnyckyj 2009, 63).

As such, the mobilization of affect evokes an emotional transnationalism between different communities (Williams 2018) that is central to the meaning-making exercises embedded in forming a political consciousness. However, depending on the both the emotional habitus of the group and the existence of an intellectual framework, the type of emotional transnationalism can vary- situating an individual in a different relationship relative to people in Latin America- either outside of and apart from the world and economic and political systems in which Latin American communities live, or inside of and connected to people across the Americas. However, if affect is cultivated through a group dynamic and an intellectual framework a type of, what I call, solidarity transnationalism can emerge in which people begin to broaden their understanding of a global community and locate themselves amidst the same economic and political dynamics that might cause harm to others. Said differently, it begins to facilitate solidarity. This shift in imagined community, informed by affect, was a key piece to people's politicization in this study and, I contend, helps lay the subsoil for the emergence of a future social movement in the U.S. As others have noted, affect is not only present during large scale social uprisings, but can operate along a continuum, from subtle personal affective reactions to collective engagements. "This continuum is important because it allows one to recognize the diversity of collective action that could occur due to emotions" and does not discard the importance of minute interpersonal reactions for facilitating political consciousness (Sin 2009, 92).

While this chapter has argued that affect is a central component that influences how a political consciousness develops and has demonstrated how organizations can funnel affective reactions into both counter-hegemonic and hegemonic understandings, I do not contend that affect is enough to create long-term change. Affect left fallow and unapplied to tactical or organizational decisions is just affect. This next chapter begins to shift the focus from individuals who are

developing a political consciousness about U.S. policy in Latin America, to those who have decided that they want to be in "solidarity" with folks across the Americas. In order to understand how activists who operate within current day U.S. Latin America solidarity campaigns conceptualize how political change happens, the next chapter discusses how understandings of solidarity have emerged and impacted tactical decisions.

CHAPTER 6

Solidarity Today: How We Got Here and What Does It Mean

We were a group of 12 in a small community in Northwest, Colombia. I was one of two white people in the travel group organized through the non-profit Witness for Peace. After a long day of meeting with Colombian activists, some delegates had wandered off to their sleep mats scattered around the sturdy wooden house lent to them by the local Colombian community in which they were staying. About five delegates remained, standing languidly around a hot kitchen after a warm meal as the dark of night began to creep in between the wooden slats of the home. Casual chat and reflection about the day echoed around the home. Until I floated the question "what is solidarity" to the group and unintentionally provoked a heated discussion about what actions constitute solidarity. People's ideas were marked by their own standpoints in the world, informed by class, race, and careers. A black man in his early 30's with a job in public service argued that his conception of "solidarity" was completed by just going on the trip. His presence, his conversations, his physical demonstration that he cared was the best type of solidarity he could provide. A young Native American woman responded angrily. How could this possibly be solidarity, witnessing and returning to the U.S. do nothing? She likened it to witnessing the harm colonialism has inflicted on Native American communities in the U.S. and doing nothing. Others agreed and instead argued that the trip, while important, was a starting point, and that their work must continue back in the United States through policy advocacy and educational awareness. The conversation was deep and reflective. It ended when the electricity was shut off for the day and we each scattered to our respective cots, or to smoke a cigarette on the ledge of the structure and ensure the friendships crafted during the trip were still intact. However, a consensus on what solidarity is and how it should be enacted was never reached.

Throughout this dissertation, I have demonstrated how foundational liminalities, a sense of community, and affect can widen political consciousness and leave people wanting "to be in solidarity" with people in Latin America. But what does "being in solidarity" really mean in this current moment? This chapter begins to shift the focus from assessing emerging political consciousness to analyzing understandings of solidarity that exist among those who have

currently been more involved in U.S. Latin America solidarity work for at least a year, either having worked or volunteered for a non-profit and/or regularly attending events. In order to understand how people conceive of solidarity today, this chapter assesses how people make sense of current tactical choices, or, said differently, how people differentiate between actions that they understand as "being in solidarity" and those that are not. I locate U.S. activists' extant understanding of solidarity within the historical framework of decades of U.S. Latin America solidarity in order to understand how current conceptions of solidarity have been influenced by past practices and political and economic contexts. In highlighting trends I found in my research, I do not wish to reify all U.S. solidarity activists by contending they all share the same understanding. Moreover, though not the primary focus of this research, it is important to note that activists across Latin America who work with U.S. activists may also have divergent understandings of solidarity and experience U.S. "solidarity" differently. Notably, for activists in Latin America, transnational solidarity campaigns are just one tactic they employ amidst many through which they seek to reach their goals. In order for U.S. activists to effectively implement tactics that align with Latin American activists' goals, an ongoing assessment of their experience is needed. However, that is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Rather, this chapter focuses on how the varying social, economic, and political contexts of activists across the Americas, especially the U.S. can inform how U.S. activists understand solidarity and make tactical decisions. This reflective process is critical for contextualizing how activists come to understand what actions constitute resistance and how certain modes of resistance become normalized overtime.

Instead of seeking to solidify a definition of solidarity, this research focuses on how the meaning of solidarity to activists themselves animates activist tactics. In his overview of U.S. Latin America solidarity, Steve Striffler (2019) illustrated how the political and economic landscape of both the United States and the specific country in Latin America in which a campaign focuses have both informed tactics and their effectiveness. Though this dissertation focuses predominantly on activists within the United States and their journey to a political consciousness, it is critical to emphasize that all calls for solidarity and campaigns have emerged from the agency and actions taken by activists and/or communities in Latin America. The primary tactics U.S. activists and organizations use today to confront and draw attention to U.S. influence in

Latin America include accompaniment, advocacy efforts to reform U.S. policy and raising the awareness of the general population in the United States. These tactics have each emerged in different historical moments framed both by events in the United States and Latin America. In order to understand how activists make sense of their tactics today and how they have remained the same or diverged from their historical meanings, I will review how and why some tactics have emerged since the 1980s. Drawing from this historical framework, I then examine how activists today imagine resistance and how this imagining impacts tactical decisions. I argue that neoliberal rationality (Brown 2018) often leads activists to focus on individual reform over collective mobilization and has influenced how activists both understand and practice solidarity today. In examining the meaning that animates activists' tactical choices, this chapter looks beyond the tactics themselves as manifestations of solidarity to the underlying assumptions and understandings that motivate tactics in the first place.

6.1 Central American Solidarity Movement

The Central American solidarity movement in the 1980s lay the foundation for many tactics U.S. activists use today. As U.S. supported violence continued against leftist governments intensified in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, U.S. citizens began to take notice and developed a movement campaigning for an end to U.S. economic and military support in the region. Within the movement activists developed a corpus of non-profit organizations, each often possessing a specific country or campaign focus, yet all intersecting with a broader movement of the left that contested U.S. interventionism at the heels of the Vietnam War. While some organizations and campaigns did draw attention to the potential liberatory work activists were working towards in Central America, the overall thrust of the movement focused more on ending specific U.S. policies than on sharing tactics and strategies across borders used to construct projects of mutual liberation. This was strikingly different from U.S.-Cuba solidarity projects in which U.S. citizens were inspired to act in solidarity because they believed in the revolutionary potential of Cuba.

Instead, much solidarity that formed throughout the 80s was built under the human rights framework and underscored the victimization of Central Americans rather than their potential radical ideas and projects. This is notable not simply because the human rights framework was beginning to fully take hold, but also because of the race, class, and nationality of those in the

United States who were taking part in the solidarity movement. White, middle to upper middle class U.S. citizens were suddenly more aware of Central Americans than they had been in since the 1960s. However, their interest in the lives of Central Americans began at a point in which they became victims. In fact, much of the specific history of the communities, individuals, and even the politics of countries were subsumed under the language of victimhood, and a subsequent lack of agency or control (Binford 1996). While this was arguably both practical and perhaps one of the few options left at the time, "pragmatic or not, the practices that dominate human rights reporting reproduce the effects of an ideological vision that is dominant in the West of a world divided in two: a homogenous mass of poor, Third World humanity, cut more or less from the same cloth, on the one hand, and an aggregation of struggling Western individuals, each unique, each working to fulfill her potential, on the other" (Binford 1996, 6). As such some solidarity within this time period, not only simplified and deprecated the lives of those who were not in the West, it also perpetuated a normalized assumption that "this is just the way the world works" without contextualizing how histories of colonization, global economic policies, and particularly in the case of Central American solidarity, U.S. economic policies created and perpetuate these conditions. While this mode of organizing was initially shocking and motivating throughout the Central American solidarity movement, continued reports of violence simply supported decontextualized assumptions. Moreover, the reports lost their significance and their mobilizing ability as people became desensitized to them. However, activists during this time were also critical for setting a path that would define future policy advocacy. They "developed a repertoire of political tactics focusing on congressional lobbying that continue to shape how advocacy groups approach human rights policymaking today" (Tate 2015, 60). Though the revolutionary force behind these tactics is debatable, they certainly had long-lasting effects on how solidarity was imagined through policy lobbying as well as the specific tactics activists use to draw congress people's attention.

Despite these weaknesses, the movement is still hailed as relatively successful both because of expanding political opportunities in the U.S. due to Reagan's continued hardline focus on Central America and subsequent media coverage that provided enough visibility of events in Central America to prevent feelings of apathy from taking hold in U.S., and because of Nicaraguan immigrants and the direct links between U.S. and Nicaraguan residents that

facilitated the development of a campaign. The reasons for its success are critical for understanding how the context in which solidarity operates has changed from the 1980s to the present and influences the successes of solidarity movements. Christian Smith (1996) argues that for the Central American Peace movement to succeed, expanding political opportunities were key. He demonstrates how social movements need both grievances, political opportunities, and strong organizational structures in order to prevail. As such Reagan's continued hardline focus on Central America and subsequent media coverage provided enough visibility of events in Central America to prevent feelings of apathy from taking hold in U.S. residents. In addition, Smith (1996) argues that the country was still under the veil of "Vietnam Syndrome" an extreme dislike of U.S. foreign interventions. This combined with partisan disagreements over the situation in Central America, as well as continual scandals (it was revealed that the CIA had mined Nica harbors, release of CIA freedom fighter's manuals, and Pysops manuals, and finally the Iran-Contra affair) provided enough media coverage and political leverage to maintain a campaign against U.S. involvement.

The country-focused campaigns and organizations that emerged throughout the Central American solidarity campaign worked as part of a larger movement on the left, with a strong religious impetus, to draw attention to the impacts of U.S. policy in the region. This movement had much more momentum than solidarity movements with Latin America of the past and the present. However, despite the successes and limitations of the movement, scholars have argued that the decentralized and reactive movement was not built to last (Smith 1996; Striffler 2019). While the decentralization of the movement endowed in it a force and seeming omnipresence, it was also its greatest weakness in terms of ensuring its longevity. This can easily be seen today as many of the organizations born during the Central American solidarity movement, WFP, NISGUA, CISPES, continue their work but without a broader connection to a unified movement. Despite this, The Central American solidarity movement both influenced and foreshadowed the problems transnational solidarity work faces today. In addition, it trained thousands of U.S. activists "into the philosophy and methods of disruptive grassroots activism and disruptive political rebellion", methods that activists would take with them and employ in future solidarity movements (Smith 1996, 377).

6.2 Tactics Through the Years

The Central American Solidarity movement solidified three mainstay tactics for continuing U.S. Latin America campaign, including policy advocacy, educational travel to the country the campaign focuses on, and accompaniment.

6.2.1 Travel and Policy Advocacy

Today, non-profit organized and structured travel is a common tactic used by a variety of U.S. based solidarity organizations. These trips seek to educate travelers through their own firsthand witnessing of the impacts of U.S. policy abroad. Unlike religious or college sponsored "service-learning trips," groups involved in this form of travel don't go to "help" people across the Americas through short term construction or other community projects. Instead, these groups go to learn.

Organized solidarity travel has roots in the 1960s with the U.S. - Cuba solidarity movement which sought to support the Cuban revolution, contest U.S. imperialism, and educate activists in the U.S. Activists made connections between those who were colonized the world over and oppressed groups in the United States, drawing inspiration from their tactics and analysis in support of liberatory struggles (Young 2006). Travel through the Venceremos brigades made these connections possible and simultaneously informed future generations of activists. The Venceremos brigades were trips in which U.S. citizens illegally went to Cuba in support of the revolution. Primarily led by Students for Democratic Society (SDS), these brigades were composed of energized individuals, often youth, who were inspired by the revolution and were responding at the time to Castro's call to come and cut sugar cane. They provided U.S. residents an opportunity to travel to Cuba to learn more about the revolution and repay this hospitality with their own labor. Moreover, "At a time when activists were frustrated by an inability to end the Vietnam War, the trips to Cuba offered people an opportunity to practice hands-on solidarity" (Lekus 2007, 63). Reflecting on his experience on one of the first Brigades that went down to Cuba, Michael Kazin said:

> For six weeks, we expressed our solidarity by cutting sugar cane at a camp in rural Havana province. Seventy Cuban Young Communists, most of whom spoke pretty good English, lived and worked with us … None of us Yanqui radicals had ever before wielded

> machetes, let alone to chop down ten-foot-high stalks with sharp leaves without damaging the sugar deposits that lie near the ground. We must have been the least efficient *macheteros* on the island. But, of course, our real reason for being there was to make a political point, as the almost daily coverage we received in *Granma*, the Communist Party organ, made clear: the same young Americans who fought for civil rights and protested against the Vietnam war were now showing that they were *compañeros* of the Cuban revolution too … The practice of solidarity turned out to be a good deal of fun. (Kazin 2015, 1)

Kazin underscores the political messages these trips were meant to send to Washington. For him, solidarity was physical, more than just his presence in Cuba, but the physical act of cutting sugar cane. Though travel has continued to be a mainstay tactic, it has changed from its form during the Venceremos brigades in which travelers often labored alongside Cubans and built connections through shared labor. Instead, solidarity travel today focuses primarily on "witnessing" the realities of others' lives and hearing their story directly from them. The content of the travel experience began to change during the Central American Solidarity Movement, a shift that began to take place after Gail Phares and Jeff Boyer led a faith-based group of people to Nicaragua. Unlike the youthful Venceremos Brigades of the late 60s, this group was primarily composed of middle-class church goers, professors, and retirees who all were primarily white. The day after the group arrived, they received word of a Contra attack nearby and subsequently traveled to the area to collect testimonies. While visiting the community, the delegates noticed the cessation of fire from Contra forces. When I spoke with Jeff he recalled the trip viscerally, nearly 40 years after it took place. He remembered the grandmother whose daughter and grandchild had just been taken to the hospital after the attack, who begged them to stay. He recalled his guilt at leaving. Without words, he recalled how he was moved to "be in solidarity" and push for a drastic change in U.S. policy. The revelation that a U.S. presence stopped the attacks coupled with requests from communities to return led Jeff and Gail to begin organizing consistent delegations of U.S. residents as well as long term teams of U.S. residents who would live amongst the communities and facilitate delegate trips. These actions were motivated by the premise that if U.S. citizens really knew about the impact of U.S. policy, they would campaign to change it. Furthermore, if their work educated enough people and encouraged them to act, then the government would have to take note. At the time of the Central American solidarity movement, the underlying premise that "if people really knew they wouldn't support it" was correct, and their work was largely considered successful. People in the U.S. held protests,

called, wrote, and visited their congress people, wrote letters to the editor, and worked with the media to offer truthful accounts of what was happening in Central America.

6.2.2 Accompaniment

In addition to the educational trips that emerged as a tactic during the Central American solidarity movement, U.S. activists also began accompanying threatened activists in Latin America to decrease the chance of violence against them. This tactic was named accompaniment and was one of the primary new tactics international activists developed during the Central American solidarity movement. Accompaniment includes both long term accompaniment in which international activists are present in a community for months at a time, and short-term accompaniment that lasts for days or weeks. Short term accompaniment includes delegations. Accompaniment is built on the premise that whatever the accompanier witnesses and documents will provide fodder for an international response (diplomatic or economic pressure), AND that those who may commit attacks against human rights defenders do not want the negative publicity and subsequent bad international image. In addition, activists contend that it provides protection, encourages, and supports more local activism by providing time and space (hope) for threatened organizations and activists to work, and inspires accompaniers to continue their activism. Accompaniment as a tactical focus continued to rise as many overt manifestations of civil conflict, including widespread violence and massacres shifted to less overt forms of social control such as a lack of social investment, few economic opportunities, and displacement caused by foreign investment. Moreover, the eradication of cohesive social movements and often leftist political parties left U.S. activists without a clear population to be in solidarity with. As a result, accompaniment grew as a tactical choice through which U.S. activists could at least identify organizations or communities with whom to demonstrate their support.

However, accompaniment is ripe with problematic contradictions. It arose as a reaction to the intensification and growth of right-wing violence against alternative political visions across the Americas. The indiscriminate attacks against civilians and the ongoing unraveling of the left meant that accompaniment as a tactic could, and still cannot protect everyone who needs it. Moreover, it is a stop gap measure that pauses but does not eradicate the threat. When accompaniers go home, Latin American activists are still left in a similar situation. At the same

time, the power of accompaniment often relies on the same national, raced, and gendered privileges accompaniers and the activists they accompany are trying to unmake. The key facet to accompaniment is that those who are accompaniers are primarily foreign individuals, most often white. "Colonial inequities of race, class, and nation, which are co-created and intertwined, are part of how accompaniment 'works'" (Koopman 2013, 1). The presence of foreign bodies is necessitated by the lack of humanity granted local bodies. In this sense, accompaniment "works" because different people (race, nationality) are valued inherently differently internationally, and it is only when those who are valued "more" get involved that the international community begins to care. Essentially it relies on the same global dynamics of inequity that it seeks to undercut. Despite, these weaknesses, activists across the Americas continue to ask for accompaniment in hopes that it will raise their international visibility and encourage their national government and supranational bodies to take action to address the system that causes them harm.[21]

Education

Education is at the heart of all of the above tactics. The concepts of travel, accompaniment, and policy advocacy are based on the assumption that if people in the U.S., including policy makers, learn of the detrimental impacts of U.S. policy, they would not permit them to continue. This presumes that people possess an inherent moral compass that would sway them to take action. It also assumes that people would know how to take action and apply their new information. The concept of education as a political tool deepened in the 1970s with the emergence of Paulo Freire's concept of popular education. Freire's model contends that people are more than empty

21. Sarah Koopman argues that the idea of accompaniment rests on the assumption of what she calls "passport privilege", the idea that a passport from a foreign nation (primarily Western nation) holds more protection than a local identity. Essentially, foreign and white bodies are worth more than local bodies and the murder of a foreign citizen would cause political upheaval between the two nations. As such, foreign bodies were (are) used to protect local ones (Koopman 2013). As such, international accompaniment exists due to a myriad of troublesome realities and can perpetuate the neocolonial encounter in which foreign lives have more power and voice. In addition, accompaniment also highlights greater issues of class and racial dynamics. Most foreign accompaniers are white and have the funds to travel. These demographics are starkly contrasted to the often poor, darker skinned, and politically powerless citizens they accompany. Moreover, they also create a perception of who is and who can be a "good" solidarity activist, someone who has traveled extensively to the other country, speaks the language, and maintains consistent contact with friends or partners. All things that require money, time, and education and that privilege certain classes, races, and genders over others.

cups to be filled with information, but that everyone possesses different facets of knowledge. As such, he proffered a model of learning in which everyone listens to and learns from one another. Many organizations and activists with the U.S. Latin America solidarity movement have tried to implement Freire's model by hosting local educational events as well as facilitating activists from Latin America to travel to the U.S. to speak on their realities in their country.

6.3 The Rise of Human Rights and a Critique of Solidarity

Despite the myriad of tactics, the U.S. Latin America solidarity movement has at its disposal, many scholars have questioned its efficacy since the emergence of the human rights framework and the deepening of neoliberal ideology. While the Central American Solidarity movement was largely hailed as a success for delimiting the amount of U.S. aid going to Central America as well as raising public awareness about human rights abuses, many subsequent campaigns, such as ending or decreasing U.S. aid, closing the School of the Americas, or confronting foreign U.S. corporate abuse, have not been as successful.

Some scholars have linked the perceived weakness of U.S. Latin America solidarity efforts to the rise of the human rights framework in the 1970s (Binford 1996; Striffler 2019; Tate 2007). The idea of human rights entered the international sphere long before it became the main way to advocate for change. Following World War II, the United Nations sponsored a Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, this declaration and ideology of individual rights was not absorbed by the majority of movements at the time. Instead, socialist and anticolonial forces "were more committed to the collective ideal of emancipation" (Moyn 2010, 1). Even in 1968, a year declared by the UN as the "International Human Rights Year", the idea of individual rights as the mechanism through which to counter injustices had not become the conventional mode of advocacy. It wasn't until the 1970's when other paths to liberation had seemingly failed, or were violently silenced, that human rights discourse began to emerge as the path to change. Alternative visions were fragmented and crushed through variously coordinated State sponsored and U.S. supported campaigns and massacres, such as Plan Condor, Plan Lazo, and the Mozote massacre[22] that often relied on counterinsurgency tactics to violently suppress anyone who

22. One of such crimes was the horrible Mozote massacre in El Salvador committed in 1982 between December 11th and 13th in which an estimated 1,000 civilians murdered in cold blood. The massacre was

upheld alternative visions or was accused of being associated with radical political parties. As counterinsurgency tactics blurred the lines between civilian and potential enemy, communities and organizations were unraveled through both violence and threat of violence that underwrote their daily lives and eroded communal trust and participation. As a result, Samuel Moyn (2010) argues that "far from being the sole idealism that has inspired faith and activism in the course of human events, human rights emerged historically as the last utopia-one that became powerful and prominent *because other visions had imploded*" [emphasis added] (4). Human rights discourse is not the penultimate of advocacy tools, but the last survivor as calls for socialism, communism, and other internationalisms were either violently or politically defeated throughout the globe. The same international political environment that led to the creation of the human rights framework also dramatically impacted the future and tactics of international solidarity movements. Steve Striffler underscores that:

> The dismantling of the Latin American left did not automatically ensure that human rights would carry the solidarity banner, but it made it more difficult, and in most cases nearly impossible, for a robust left internationalism to emerge. It effectively eradicated the Latin American side of left internationalism – the more radical and vibrant end -- while significantly limiting the avenues for subsequent political expression. The array of Latin American actors, organizations, and political currents that U.S. progressives were able to connect with were severely circumscribed, in effect limiting the boundaries within which the future of international solidarity would flow. (2019, 52)

The human rights framework relies on organizations "calling out" what they view as human rights abuses and asking the government or international bodies to respond in the appropriate manner. Unlike other internationalist frameworks that posit an alternative future that ameliorates abuses and injustices, calls for human rights are often reactive to specific abuses already committed by State actors. Scholars have contended that human rights language fails to highlight how injustices are caused by a certain political or social system. Instead, in calling out acts or

committed by the first "immediate reaction infantry battalion in the Salvadoran army" that was trained by US forces (Binford 1996, 1). The massacre received woefully little media attention. In fact, after a brief investigation by the US embassy it was argued that it did not happen. It was not until 1992 as the Peace accords from the civil war were being negotiated that the UN ruled that the US was responsible for a cover-up of the massacre (Binford 1996) Unfortunately, the solidarity movement had little success in bringing this atrocity to mainstream news. Binford (1996) argues that "El Mozote was a relatively successful example of liberal rural development theory put into practice, the kind of community about which USAID bureaucrats rhapsodize. This makes it all the more ironic that it was targeted for eradication by the Salvadoran military" (11-12).

policies as “human rights abuses”, this language delinks harm from a larger political system (Binford 1996; Moyn 2010; Tate 2007). Moreover, it elides “what people were fighting for or the intense emotions that drove them into conflict” (Gill 2016, 4). In addition, human rights language is used as reactionary recourse to respond to events, such as massacres, extrajudicial executions, and harassment, that have already occurred. Indeed, Steve Striffler (2019) contends that extant U.S. Latin American solidarity activists are so busy responding to the next threat that they do not have time to build an alternative plan. Rather than preventatively addressing the systems that are creating human rights abuses, this advocacy relies on violence first taking place.

Moreover, who is deserving of human rights and rights-based advocacy can also be problematic and relies on a politically contingent understanding of who is a “victim” (Gill 2016). Human rights claimants must be presumed and presented as “innocent” uninvolved in any seemingly political or criminal activity. This creates room for governments and international bodies to deny claimants and ignore violence or abuses by framing them as “justified” or self-inflicted. Overall, human rights language emerged as a result of continued repressive physical and economic violence across the Americas and “represented a form of internationalism that replaced older internationalist utopias, such as anticolonialism and communism, which emphasized collective self-determination and national sovereignty over individual freedom, and which underscored the importance of the state, rather than the supremacy of international law” (Gill 2016, 24).

These critiques of human rights language underscore how forms of resistance have been informed and/or encompassed by the hegemony of dominant political and economic systems, particularly neoliberal capitalism and the physical violence economic magnates rely on to gain access to resources, cheap labor and expanded markets. While activists today continue to use the human rights framework, I argue that there has been a slight shift in how those within this study understand both “human rights” and solidarity which informs their range of tactical choices and the meanings that animate them. In assessing how some activists understand solidarity today, I will demonstrate how the current political economic context of neoliberalism have informed conceptualizations of resistance as well as the tensions that exist within these understandings and how they continue to inform how people view solidarity.

6.4 Imagining Resistance-Meaning Making

White and green sticky notes covered the wall of a rental house on a warm summer day in Wisconsin. Fifteen bodies sat cozily squished into the room, strewn across couches, sitting cross-legged on the floor, sipping coffee, and breathing in the pungent waft of essential oils. I was on a week-long trip in 2019 with the organization Witness for Peace in which staff that resided across the Americas united for an intensive week of planning, imagining, and bonding for the next year. After this week, most interactions between the group would take place electronically. In this current coffee-fueled session, the group was imagining their future goals, far out future goals for 2053. This session was guided by a facilitator external to the organization who helped staff and volunteers crystalize sentiments and thoughts that underwrote daily conversations and actions. She was helping the group verbalize and name their goals and the purpose of their work. The ultimate goal the group decided on was that in 2053 the organization would no longer need to exist as it would have already helped achieve the goal of ending U.S. empire and imperialism. Their tactics, like many other non-profit organizations focusing on solidarity with Latin America, included accompaniment, delegations, policy advocacy, and educational events. However, the understandings that undergirded these tactics were much deeper.

After settling on a goal for 2053, the group was then instructed to list the main ways through which they could achieve the goal. In small groups, people wrote down key words and phrases. Then the whole group deliberated to choose five main phrases that represented the key methodology through which the ultimate goal could be reached. These were tacked to the wall hastily written in slanted letters on sticky notes. At the heart of the circle was the phrase "Revolutionize relationships with each other and earth to be able to survive, practice resiliency". This tenant represented the main methodology through which people imagined change could occur. It included all aspects of society from economic, political, and social systems. Activists imagined that if the foundation of these systems shifted, the relationships that undergirded them, so too would the overarching system. Revolutionizing relationships was both a tactic and a goal. From here, we were instructed to dig deeper into the other key phrases on the wall. What did they mean? How could they be achieved?

There were only a couple of hours in the day set aside for this exercise. The rest of the week and meetings were largely reserved for specific program planning and tactical discussions. This was a big picture conversation and there wasn't enough time. There was never enough time when the group got together. Debates emerged around how to properly verbalize goals and how to pare down overarching understandings. As words, phrases, and ideas were agreed upon they were tacked up on the wall in sticky note form until a circle of ideas surrounded the central goal. The terms "accompaniment," "speakers tours," or "delegations" were not on the wall. Though these terms were discussed in detail in more specific sessions throughout the week, they were not viewed as the central strategy to end U.S. imperialism, but rather tactics through which people could begin revolutionizing relationships. Accompaniment, education, delegations, while about changing U.S. policy, we're also inherently about doing so by giving people the opportunity to reimagine what the world could look like.

While this session was just one episode of activists imagining resistance, it is illustrative of a pattern of conversations and actions practiced by activists throughout my field work. This exercise was a practice of radical imagining, the collective social imagining of new ideas and enactments of social change (Khasnabish 2013). However, devoid from these conversations was a broader discussion of how activists understood U.S. imperialism and empire, or how their strategy of revolutionizing relationships intersected with the specific political climate in the countries where they were trying to "be in solidarity". Though activists explicitly mentioned imperialism, empire, and capitalism at events and even personal conversations between one another they spent little time explicitly unpacking how they understood what these terms meant. Instead, their conceptualization of the terms was insinuated in the context that surrounded their reference to them. For example, at an SOA watch event the MC referenced U.S. imperialism and then described U.S. military influence across the Americas discursively linking imperialism to U.S. military influence. At a Witness for Peace event discussing "the roots of migration" a speaker from the U.S. mentioned "the impacts of U.S. imperialism" when referring to a Honduran activist's discussion on how Honduran migrants are fleeing violence. They linked U.S. economic influence through both U.S. military aid and corporate meddling to the physical and economic insecurity Honduran migrants are forced to leave. Though never explicitly defined, the talk depicted a conception of U.S. imperialism as encompassing both economic and military

impact. In other instances, such as personal conversations between activists or at book club events, activists discussed U.S. imperialism without specifically using the word such as by examining how the U.S. exports or tests its military or economic strategies on various countries throughout the South for its own economic gain. These forums, events, and conversations unveiled an understanding of U.S. imperialism and empire rooted in both an ideology and a set of tactics that are designed to position the U.S. and U.S. economic interests at the global forefront in a manner that preys upon, extracts and harms other countries for U.S. benefit. However, most frequently, activists discussed the impacts of U.S. imperialism in a specific setting-Honduras, Nicaragua, Colombia-and often did not fully explicate the connections between U.S. imperialism from one country to another. To me, though it was clear over years of engagement that staff within the non-profit organizations I followed had a conception of what U.S. empire and imperialism are, their lack of public explication on their understandings and reflection on how their definition of the terms impacts strategy was problematic. Without a clearly delineated and agreed upon understanding of exactly what activists were combatting, it was difficult to engage in a strategic discussion of how their tactical choices could be effective at undermining the systems. Moreover, at public facing events, this understanding of imperialism and empire operated at the backdrop of conversations, meaning that most of the time event organizers and other activists in attendance assumed that everyone had the same understanding, or an understanding at all of U.S. empire and imperialism, which for many people who might be attending an event for the first time, might not be true.

While there was at least some discussion or reference to U.S. empire and imperialism, there was very little discussion on capitalism. What chatter did arise around the subject consisted of people identifying themselves as anti-capitalist or making joking quips about the harms or contradictions of trying to ethically make a living in a capitalist economy. Like U.S. empire and imperialism, it was clear that most of the activists in this study felt capitalism was harmful, but there was rarely a discussion of why or the mechanisms through which it worked. The key exceptions to this silence were on some delegations with Witness for Peace. As discussed in chapter five, the personal make-up of delegations greatly influenced the discussions delegates had throughout the trip. However, on at least half of the delegations I traveled on to Colombia with the organization either other delegates, WFP staff, or the Colombian activists we met with

brought up neoliberal capitalism and its impacts. This always often prompted a larger discussion about what neoliberalism is and how it specifically impacted those we were meeting with in Colombia. So, though capitalism was discussed and unpacked in attempts to teach and radicalize people who were not yet fully embedded into the U.S. Latin America solidarity community- through organizations or campaigns- between other activists who were already employed by or frequent volunteers within organizations there was almost a presumption that everyone had a similar analysis on capitalism. However, their failure to explicitly discuss this analysis prevented a deeper examination of the specific ways their tactical choices would combat capitalism. Instead, most activists were guided by unspoken presumptions. For example, the unspoken assumption about capitalism, based on conversations about its impacts in various countries in Latin America, was that it was harmful because those who upheld a capitalist economy were always looking for new markets resulting in the displacement of colonially marginalized populations, and an emphasis on “profits over people”. As such, the strategy of “revolutionizing relationships” would include both advocating for and instituting policies that pay people a livable wage and emphasize the needs and dignity of people over potential profits. However, the tactics behind how to actually do these things was not discussed. Organizations made continual attempts to pay staff living wages, but this always struck up against the non-profits continual financial precarity. Yet, with a more explicit conversation around activists' conceptions of these terms, perhaps they could more clearly outline their strategy and the concrete tactics they believe will create change.

Moreover, I found that the unspoken nature of these topics, even between non-profit employees led to a misunderstanding of people's individual politics. Throughout my interviews, I was told various times that people felt that they had more radical politics than the organization they were in. However, based on the conversations I had with folks, they didn't. Rather, because there was so little discussion on how people actually understood what they were fighting against and the specifics of how they were fighting it, people were unaware of how similar their political ideologies actually were, and how they diverged. Despite this, activists in this study, continued to highlight the importance of imagining as a tool of resistance, with vague allusions to what people were imagining as well as what these new imaginings were supposed to combat.

Whereas individualistic conceptions of "human rights" once supplanted more systematic alternative visions for social change-socialism, communism etc- now, a similarly individualistic proposition of imagining and generalized "awareness" about larger systems has been substituted for human rights. Greg Grandin (2011) has argued that the fragmentation of class consciousness was the result of the counterinsurgency fueled violence that marked the Cold War and was a victory for the right. Individualized human rights language embodied this victory. I contend that this new focus on "reimagining" and education is a step toward rebuilding what Cold War violence broke. Though it is still limited in many capacities, including its failure to actually identify alternative systems activists are working towards, it does begin to discuss the current systems (imperialism, capitalism) that cause human rights abuses in the first place. Said differently, it begins to re-politicize and contextualize why people are suffering from violence and economic insecurity. Perhaps, this slow path towards reclaiming the types of organizing that were decimated in the Cold War is not just indicative of present-day activists' weaknesses, but of the deep wounds, fragmentation, and historical erasure successfully instituted both during the Cold War and throughout the normalization of neoliberalism. Indeed, when I asked activists, across organizations, what their definition or understanding of solidarity was, very few people mentioned concrete tactics. Rather, most believed that imagining was a central component. For example, one Latinx activist who had been living and working in Colombia for over two years with a U.S. based NGO said that his time in Colombia learning about and working in solidarity:

> Showed him what an expanded moral consciousness looked like- including everyone and everything. Meeting with communities in Colombia highlights how shrunkin our [folks in the U.S.] moral consciousness is, to include just me. An expanded consciousness includes fellow humans, rivers, natures, and birds.

To him, solidarity wasn't just about actions, nor was it a vague ideological definition. Rather, a central component of solidarity involved his own reconceptualization of what he called "moral consciousness" and reimagining the animate and inanimate connections that link people together.

Monica, an immigrant from Colombia to the U.S. said that "solidarity is not about others, it's about you seeing yourself in those others". To her a piece of solidarity was about imagining a new and different connection and likeness to others than you already knew. Steve, a white male involved in the Central American solidarity movement and who was a long-term accompanier in

Nicaragua in the 1980s said that solidarity became a new lens through which to understand his role in the world, "... All in all, a way of critiquing and being self-aware". Like Monica, to Steve, solidarity was about imagining the self in a different relation to others through a process of internal reflection. As our conversations continued, they each explicated how this reimagining was a critical first step to deeper understandings of U.S. imperialism and empire. Monica reflected on her first experiences working within U.S. solidarity organizations with Colombia and being frustrated by white people who reified Colombians into a simplistic victim narrative. As a Colombian woman, this was something she set out to both change and better understand. Over the course of her involvement, she believed she had seen a shift, fueled by a reorientation of the self-amidst a broader global community. Similarly, Steve's experience in Nicaragua in which he witnessed U.S. bombs falling near Nicaraguan harbors, helped him reconceptualize his own role as a U.S. citizen in supporting U.S. imperialism. Seeing U.S. bombs fueled by his tax dollars, and hearing Nicaraguan's stories of how their lives had been impacted by such violence, made U.S. imperialism more than a distant idea, but a real lived reality for many. Within this understanding he realized he could either be silently complicit in violence or take an active stand confronting it. Each of these realizations and conceptions of solidarity was driven by their experiences as or with people from Latin America. Indeed, even activists in Latin America reference the importance of imagining a brighter future. Daira, the Afro-Colombian activist mentioned in chapter four as said that "When people are so violently murdered it affects the dreams and the hopes of the entire community—everyone is affected. I know that I, that we, must keep dreaming. When we stop dreaming then everything ends" (Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective 2019). Imagination or dreaming is almost tantamount to hope, a critical component for creating new systems—a belief that they can exist.

Emily, a white woman in her early thirties who worked with a non-profit organization that provides accompaniment in Guatemala (NISGUA) and is now a regional organizer said that in the past she has felt overwhelmed with everything that is wrong in the world and needs to be fixed, but overtime she began to understand things differently. To her, seeing the vastness of problems in the world was disempowering. She began thinking that it was "bizarre to think that we've built this cage around ourselves [of disempowering overwhelm] ...We have to reimagine...The current movement in the U.S. is reimaging". To her, reimagining was central to

escaping disempowerment and apathy. More than taking to the streets or policy advocacy, she contended that the heart of the U.S. Latin America solidarity movement in the U.S. presently is reimagining.

All of those referenced above had lived in Latin America at some time in their lives for at least one year, from Colombia, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Guatemala and each of these activists referenced imagining. They presumed that reimagining was a critical first step for self-awareness, empowerment, and future actions for social change. People had to view their connection to one another differently, through the lens of U.S. imperial power, to try and create structural changes. However, most did not discuss the specific political affiliations and goals of the activists and communities that they claimed they were in solidarity with across Latin America. In many ways, this conceptualization of solidarity is self-referential and centers the idea that to be in solidarity an individual must first shift their understanding of themselves. However, most conceptualizations of solidarity are self-referential in some respects, because to claim to "be in solidarity" people must first locate themselves as connected with others either as part of a broader struggle or through their location in similar life circumstances. These activists' identification of reimagining communal connections as a part of solidarity is not unique.

This meaning, the meaning of both imagining and building different types of relationships with people across the Americas is indicative of how activists have begun reconceptualize what resistance and solidarity look like in this current moment. Whereas previous episodes of U.S. Latin American Solidarity have foregrounded changing U.S. policy and more overt forms of protest, today activists seem to emphasize creating an educated populace through which they can "revolutionize relationships". I do not wish to downplay activists' engagement with other tactics. Organizations and individual activists continue to do policy advocacy, small protests, and lots of accompaniment. But activists within this study focused a large proportion of their time and effort organizing and advertising for educational events, trips, and materials-things that would encourage people to reimagine individually- rather than building alternative structures that could challenge State power. For example, at another meeting activists outlined the tenants of organizing they adhere to, as informed by Adrienne Maree Brown's (2017) "Emergent Strategy." The tenets were as follows:

- small is all, small is good
- change is constant
- there is always enough time for the right work
- never a failure always a lesson
- there is a conversation in the room that only these people at this moment can have- find it.
- trust the people
- move at the speed of trust.
- focus on critical connections more than critical mass-- build the resistance by building the right relationships. If you they become truly trustworthy, build resistance by building,
- less prep, more presence,
- what you pay attention to grows. (41)

Maree Brown's focus on shifting the scale of engagement is an attempt to counter activists feeling of rushed urgency. She encourages a reexamination of not just what people are organizing for, but how they are organizing, by building long term connections or rushed reactions. To her: “emergence notices the way small actions and connections create complex systems, patterns that become ecosystems and societies” (Brown 2017, 41). Following these principles many activists believe that “critical connections” are more important than the number of connections an individual builds. Fostering deep relationships that combat society’s alienation is seen as perhaps the strongest tool and tactic for organizing. “Small is all”. For example, one activist said at a book club event discussing “Freedom is a Constant Struggle” (Davis 2015) that he believes that “Fundamental change comes from small acts of resistance that reverberate…. We are a generation of raising awareness.”

This sentiment echoes Schumacher's argument in “Small is Beautiful” in which he outlines the dehumanizing nature of global capitalism and posits a return to small scale interpersonal relationships and better care for the environment. Like these activists, he posits education as a primary tool needed for change. Though Schumacher's book was published in 1973 others have demonstrated how “small is beautiful is an idea that keeps reappearing – the latest incarnations are farmers' markets, and local cafes baking homemade cupcakes – because it incorporates such a fundamental insight into the human experience of modernity” (Bunting 2011). Madeleine

Bunting (2011) argues that the reemergence of this idea stems from a yearning "for economic systems within our control, within our comprehension and that once again provide space for human interaction – and yet we are constantly overwhelmed by finding ourselves trapped into vast global economic systems that are corrupting and corrupt" (1). While this may be true, it also arises from the historical erasure of these ideas. Activists seem unaware that a focus on individual relationships has been proposed and enacted in the past. Nevertheless, this focus on shifting understandings of the world and people's relationships to one another is not just imagined as happening through clear overt tactical forms, but through everyday interactions with people across the Americas and with the environment.

Moreover, though not explicitly outlined by activists themselves, their understanding of social change both echoes and differs from theoretical conceptions of prefiguration and anarchy. Scholars on prefiguration describe it as the idea that people are strategically creating social change by enacting the world they wish to build (Boggs 1977; Yates 2015). Scholars have outlined prefigurative actions as taking place through both interpersonal interactions founded on friendships (Banerjea et al. 2018), widespread strikes (Gago 2020), and a variety of mechanisms of civil disobedience that simultaneously create networks of local communal support (Kelley 2008). Similarly, an anarchist disposition contends that change will most effectively emerge not just through the State or institutional level, but through grassroots modalities. Graeber (2004) contends that when speaking of anarchy,

> We are talking less about a body of theory…than about an attitude, or perhaps one might even say a faith: the rejection of certain types of social relations, the confidence that certain others would be much better ones on which to build a livable society, the belief that such a society could actually exist." (56)

Graeber (2004), like others, notes that imagination or the "imaginative identification with others" (35) that cuts across systems set on dividing and pitting people against one another can foment "counterpower". This power not only contests institutional power but can suck away its legitimacy. Theories on prefiguration and anarchy do not specifically detail how local changes can build to broader systemic upheaval. Indeed, such specifics would be counter to the principles of these concepts which prioritize historically and contextually based tactics that are built through group debate and consensus, not assigned, or predestined. While broad and at times

seemingly amorphous the concepts of prefiguration and anarchy have several binding tenants- 1) the idea that change should emerge from communal involvement and consensus 2) institutional or State mandated changes are not enough to shift the conditions of harm in which people live and 3) tactics and modalities will vary based on time and place.

While this seems small according to some anarchist thought, this is exactly how change happens. Or as Graeber (2004) notes,

> [S]ince anarchists are not actually trying to seize power within any national territory, the process of one system replacing the other will not take the form of some sudden revolutionary cataclysm—the storming of a Bastille, the seizing of a Winter Palace—but will necessarily be gradual, the creation of alternative forms of organization on a world scale, new forms of communication, new, less alienated ways of organizing life, which will, eventually, make currently existing forms of power seem stupid and beside the point. (40)

Indeed, by focusing on imagining, relationship-building and education activists in this study are engaging in prefigurative and anarchists' tactics that try to denaturalize existing systems of power, capitalism, and U.S. imperialism, making them seem" stupid and bedside the point ". Like anarchist and prefigurative thought, activists emphasize imagining as a critical tool for change. However, the similarities between anarchist and prefigurative theory and these activists' practices end there. Whereas scholars on anarchy and prefiguration offer varying vague and specific tactics of prefiguration, such as strikes, assemblies, and worker-run co-opts, most do not contend that prefiguration or anarchy ends with the act of imagining. Rather, imagining and education is the first step and moreover, should take place in a collectively generative environment. It is here that the theory on prefiguration differs from how many activists within this study were enacting it. Unlike the theory, activists often emphasized reimagining as both a means and an ends, and moreover, situated reimagining as an individual exercise.

For example, activists organize event in which people are to attend or travel to unlearn and relearn, but what they then imagine is put upon them as an individual exercise rather than a collective production. Khasnabish (2013) has outlined how collective or revolutionary versus individual or romanticized imagining can create different political understandings and actions. Individualized or romanticized imaginings call upon simplistic narratives of resistance and

requires very little from people who wish to participate. Conversely revolutionary imaginings take place in a collective environment. They are contested and generative and capture the full complexities of unique localities and historical moments. This type of imagining is not built from singular events but is generated from collective long-term engagement. Yet, as it currently exists, much U.S. Latin American solidarity currently doesn't have the infrastructure that can facilitate people's long-term engagement, such as monthly meetings, large assemblies, or broader forums that can connect attendees from one event to another. Without connecting people beyond one-off events or even engaging in well-practiced mechanisms of community support, these activists have diluted the power of reimaging by ending its production in the individualized mind rather than encouraging its growth in a collective environment.

As such, while prefiguration is the lynchpin that undergirds the meaning behind present-day tactics it is a muted, individualized conception of prefiguration rather than a collective embodiment. Like Schumacher's previous argument, it is similarly vague about how a focus on personal relationships can or will build to confronting global systems of harm perhaps because the tactic itself is expressed in individualized learning rather than collective discussions. Failing to extend the tactical scope beyond a focus on learning and reimagining which are indubitably critical aspects of change, precludes an examination and analysis of how to build widespread movements and structures-even grassroots structures- that can generate enough popular and governmental political will to shift power dynamics. This blind spot in how activists conceptualize change is connected to historical shifts that have influenced how people conceive of change.

6.5 The Centrality of Imagining

Just as the shift to human rights language occurred during an upsurge of violence throughout the Americas, activists' understanding of solidarity today has been impacted by shifts in the broader political economic context since the 1980s. I contend that these activists focus on individual reimagining is tied to the entrenchment of neoliberal ideology, the rise of identity politics and a decline in unions, increasing disillusionment with the State, and a general lack of awareness on U.S. impact in Latin America. While the human rights framework was solidified through its use

in the Central American solidarity movement, changes in mainstream socio-economic logic continued to inform how activists understood resistance.

In 1981 President Reagan took office in the United States and began a marked period instituting neoliberal capitalism as the mainstream economic ideology. Neoliberalism emphasizes the unfettered free market and privatization of previously state-provided services and has influenced organizing efforts across the Americas (Amoore 2005; Bandy 2004; Bennett 2005; Hale 2005; Kohl and Farthing 2006; Sawyer 2004). Since the ascendance of neoliberal policies in post-1980s Latin America, the lack of financial regulation has created both new spaces for democratic action that contest governmental policies and transnational economic systems, and competition for funding and publicity between movements of workers, the poor, and socially marginalized peoples (Hale 2005; Harvey 2003; Monbiot 2016; Povinelli 2001). As international and national businesses under neoliberalism continue to seek markets for their capital with fewer business regulations and more loopholes, they have used violence and intimidation techniques without repercussions against those who challenge their interests (Harvey 2003). For example, Colombians who refuse to give up their land to governmental and business interests face threats and assassination attempts from paramilitaries who, residents argue, are hired by those trying to take their land. As the political terrain in Latin America shifted under neoliberal interests, activism was desperately needed to underscore the economic connections to the socio-cultural situation. However, because of the entrenchment of human rights language that decontextualized "human rights abuses" from the socio-political conditions that cause them, organizing in the U.S. often did not focus on addressing overarching systems of harm. As Steve Striffler (2019) rightly says, "Subsequent generations of international solidarity activists not only inherited a narrowed political vision from the human rights movement but acquired an organizational infrastructure and analysis that has been ill-equipped to deal with the central concern of solidarity since the 1990s: neoliberal capitalism" (52). However, this does not mean that activists have not tried. For example, a collaboration of U.S. and Mexican Unions united to try and combat the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement which reduced tariffs between the U.S., Mexico, and Canada so that they were virtually non-existent. The agreement was created to benefit those who already had wealth, and largely aided large multi-national corporations over local industry. These alliances drew attention to the problems of free trade by highlighting how it benefits large

corporations over local workers, decreases labor protections, and hurts the environment. Moreover, they made questioning free trade more mainstream. Perhaps the zenith of this debate was the 1999 Battle of Seattle in Protesters from all over the globe blocked the World Trade Organization from holding its meetings in Seattle. However, though these campaigns attacked an aspect of neoliberalism, they failed to address the system as a whole, and the public attention the campaign garnered would have provided ample opportunity. Moreover, these campaigns have seen little success.

As the 1990s wore on and neoliberalism deepened its hold throughout the Americas, the Left in the U.S. continued to shift. Along with human rights language, identity politics surfaced as the primary way through which people made claims to the State for rights. As unions lost prominence during the Cold War context of the 70s and 80s, what scholars have termed "New Social Movements" emerged in their place. Unlike class-based organizing that focused on economic and material goals, New Social Movements politicized identities based on race, gender, sexuality etc, and used them as the basis on which to stake claims to the State (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Touraine 1988). The decline of unions and the rise of identity politics and neoliberalism shifted the landscape in which activists organized transnationally. Confronting the transnational impacts of neoliberal capitalism through an identity politics framework that does not address material concerns was both conceptually impossible (what is the unifying identity?), and practically ineffective. Critiques of identity politics have also contended that identity and culturally based advocacy to the State can lead to more State regulation and control over the said identities (Brown 1995).

As identity politics rose as the discourse of contention, neoliberalism shifted the terrain in which States and corporations were inflicting violence or controlling populations. Whereas, state and corporate violence was once more visible, under neoliberalism, governments and corporations justify control and exploitation of populations under the guise of multi-cultural narratives of inclusion and incorporation into the global marketplace (Hale 2005). At the same time, the normalization of neoliberalism has created what Wendy Brown (2018) terms neoliberal rationality which prefaces the individual over the collective. This thinking, Brown contends, has permeated individuals' understanding of the world. Though activists in this study often verbalize

an ideology that emphasizes collective values, their organizing strategy and relations amongst one another often still embodies neoliberal rationality that focuses on individual reform rather than collective action.

Combined, both this shift from individualized human rights language to individualized imagining is not happenstance, but as with other tactical choices, has been heavily informed by this rise and intensification of neoliberal capitalism. Activists focus on reframing how individuals conceptualize their connections to others rather than building concrete organizational or movement structures that could effectively change how people relate to one another reflects the fragmenting impact of neoliberal individualist ideology. Ironically, their emphasis on generating an awareness of communal connections focuses on reframing individual thought. This is both a result of and reflects the normalization of individualized neoliberal thought. Indeed, fostering a moral consciousness that considers community needs just as much as individual concerns may not seem so radical to these activists if neoliberal thought didn't permeate their sense of "normal" human relations. In addition, the focus on both imagining and revolutionizing relationships aligns with human rights ahistorical approach in which narratives of alternatives have been erased. Rather than studying and analyzing the success and failures of communist or Socialist governments and movements, activists instead reference imagining something completely new, a task that seems much more formidable. As the violence against anti-capitalist movements across 20th century Americas eradicated the opposition, it seemingly eradicated their memory as well.[23]

At the same time, activists' focus on raising awareness also reflects people's personal experiences of "becoming aware" and using this awareness to act. For some activists who came of age in the 1990s and 2000s the mainstream political narrative in the U.S. about the "war on drugs" and "war on terror" redirected focus from Latin America to the Middle East. When they did learn about U.S. impact in Latin America, their shock and dismay led them to believe that if more people knew the truth, they would take action to change things. In short, growing up in the absence of a widespread social movement and awareness of Latin America led many to presume

23. Notably though, activists who had worked or lived in Cuba or Venezuela did not emphasize the need to reimagine alternatives, but rather contended that these countries should act as models for what activists could achieve. They were more aware of capitalist alternatives because they had lived them.

that a lack of awareness is the central problem which when remedied will build to more concrete changes. Many also recognize that "Ordinary people in the United States are often uninterested in global political economy or feel helpless and overwhelmed when confronted with it" (Chomsky and Striffler 2008, 195). In focusing on awareness raising, these activists seek to spur both an understanding of the global political economy and how it is upheld by U.S. imperialism and empower people to change it. Unfortunately, the emphasis on awareness often does not transfer to concrete and empowering steps people can take to enact change.

Overall, just as waves of violence throughout Latin America in the 1970s, 80s and 90s that decimated political alternatives to human rights, the normalization of human rights language, neoliberalism, and identity politics greatly impacted how many U.S. activists understood tactical choices. For the activists in this study, many of whom came of age under the normalization of neoliberal thought, imagining alternatives and revolutionizing relationships plays into the socio-political shifts of the past few decades. With this understanding, the tactics of accompaniment, delegations, and educational events have a different meaning. They are employed both because they had been for so long, because activists in Latin America still ask for them, but also because they are viewed as key sites for revolutionizing relationships and understandings. Moreover, because of the entrenchment of neoliberal ideology, the shift from organizing that focuses on economic redistribution to identity politicization, and the dismantling of broader organizations such as unions that developed communal power, an individualized focus on reimagining and building deeper personal connections seems revolutionary to these activists.

Through this framework, accompaniment isn't just about providing safety and time for activists to do their work, it is also about activists across the Americas deepening their understanding of one another's realities, their humanity. It is about developing relationships across borders, class, race, gender - constructs employed to divide-and in doing so overcoming these divides. Delegations also serve a similar function yet also bring together folks from across the U.S. who might not otherwise meet. This understanding of accompaniment and delegations is similar to conceptualizations activists have had in the past; however, it is viewed as operating differently as part of a wider strategic plan. In the past, particularly during the Central American solidarity movement, accompaniment and delegations were used as tools to educate the U.S. populace and

then encourage them to return to the States and advocate for policy changes. While policy advocacy is still discussed on delegations, it is notable that it was not emphasized in my discussions with interviewees. Rather, instead of viewing accompaniment and delegations as tools that could support advocacy efforts to the State, activists highlighted these tactics as ends within themselves, sites that were more about raising consciousness among U.S. delegates than shifting U.S. policy. At the same book club event for "Freedom is a Constant Struggle" an activist highlighted this understanding saying that these events were for

> Developing your own imagination, but the nature isn't linear. Not a to b to c. It's about edifying yourself on the issues. I don't even think it's about Colombia if you're on a Colombia delegation … it's about getting just infected with the virus of active rejection and challenge. Is a form of agency to be empowered. Standing in rejection is agency … And it needs to happen from the ground up and from what I've seen in Colombia and Honduras that is what's happening.

Delegations and educational events are seen as building change through structured re-learning. For this activist, even imagining an alternative was viewed as resistance. Notably he mentioned that he learned about the importance of building better personal relationships and imagining from activists in Colombia and Honduras. At the time of this interview, he had lived and worked in Colombia for about two and half years. Though the activists he worked with also focus on policy advocacy to the Colombian government and international institutions, what he found most unique was how people organized themselves interpersonally. For him, he viewed the reorganization of personal relationships as foundational for creating a critical consciousness needed for future change. For example, at one event with the spoken goal of "integrating popular education into the classroom" another activist said:

> I think the work of raising people's critical consciousness and empowering them to take action through education is so powerful, such a powerful tool, a powerful self-reflection and collective reflection tool but it also holds challenges in a university setting and in our broader world.

She specifically denoted the importance of raising "critical" consciousness, implying an education that focuses on challenging hegemonic norms instead of reinforcing them. In this session, popular education was referenced as a tool of solidarity that could help counter US

imperialism through first fostering a greater understanding amidst college students that U.S. imperialism exists.

Activists I spoke with who mentioned this tactic also emphasized how they had learned this through their interactions with activists throughout Latin America who taught them this strategy. For example, one activist said that to him solidarity was about creating an "Awareness of various possible ways to do something different. Ways out. It makes a difference also understanding what people and other places are proposing and how they go about trying to get it."

Activists' focus on raising awareness and shifting interpersonal relationships led them to underscore education as a critical tactic for encouraging new imaginings. At an event exploring connections between spiritual and political struggle the guest speaker argued that a product of colonialization has not just been the enclosure of the commons, but the enclosure of minds, a colonization of minds that has left people feeling alienated and disconnected from one another. She then quoted intellectual and Pan-Africanist liberation leader Amilcar Cabral who said: "A reconversion of minds – of mental set – is thus indispensable to the true integration of people into the liberation movement."

Cabral was assassinated in Guinea in 1973 due to his political activism confronting African Colonialism. To the speaker at this event, he both advocated for and embodied tactics of political change that resonated with her. This specific event was part of an eight-week series that was dedicated to a philosophy of unlearning, relearning, and building community through both political and spiritual connections. It was a closed space led by Jeanette, a black woman in her early thirties who had been involved in U.S. Latin America solidarity work most of her life and whose paternal family were part of the Haitian diaspora. Of the small group of eight women, I was the only white person. The group met twice weekly via zoom to explore concepts of resistance and spiritually. The program was led by the tenants of the Ifa spiritual tradition, an African religion that emerged from Nigeria and was grounded in the personal realities of being a person of color amidst global systems of white supremacy (indeed participants lived across the globe). Most in the group knew little about Ifa, and I, as a white person, certainly could not understand the depths of being a person of color in this world. Yet, despite this we all found a mutual understanding in the desire to continue unlearning and "reconverting" our minds and

relationships to each other in a manner that was useful to the project of political resistance, or decolonization. An understanding of education as not solely information, but as a tool to decolonize thought and transform interpersonal relationships between people was a common theme at events and among activists. Education was not just viewed as ideological change, but as a tool that could lead to direct material changes. These beliefs reflect Grace Lee Boggs (1974) assertion that:

> For a fundamental reorganization of any society to take place, the eyes and hearts of those at the bottom must be opened to a new, more advanced way of human beings living together. Only then will they be able to exercise their previously unused initiative and creativity to bring about those many changes in oppressive relations which are visible only to those who see them from below. That is why revolutionists devote so much effort first, to exploring and creating advanced ideas, and then, to finding the ways by which these advanced ideas can be grasped by the masses of the people and thus transformed into a material force to change themselves and society… [Through this process activists strive to] "... establish a new unity between advanced ideas and the great masses of the people, a unity which is neither idealism nor materialism, but the truth uniting both. (126)

For many U.S. solidarity activists, encouraging new ideas and imaginings through which people could begin to revolutionize the relationships that undergird destructive systems was a central tactic. Franz Fanon argued that the colonizer creates themselves through the delineation of an "other" seen as different, barbarian, almost subhuman. In foregrounding the role of political education and counter-hegemonic learnings, activists reflect Fanon's understanding. If part of colonization and domination is constructed through the creation of an "other" then it must be deconstructed through education that eliminates this conceptual divide.

Activists focus on basic historical education as a tactic underscores the impact of both mainstream hegemonic education systems that do not teach this history of colonization, and how the normalization of both human rights language and neoliberal economics brought into power through waves of violence has erased popular memory of any alternative economic or social systems. Indeed, Aviva Chomsky (2021) has explicated how the historical erasure of U.S. policy impacts in Central America supports narratives that demonize and criminalize migrants while failing to address the impetus for migration. While the role of U.S. violence has been eradicated from popular memory in the U.S., at the same time, so have the modes of resistance that were violently suppressed. In many ways then, activists focus on history and education is important

for countering hegemonic narratives about U.S. exceptionalism and raising consciousness. Indeed, at an event discussing "50 Years of Imagining Radical Feminist Futures" Angela Davis underscored one of social movements greatest weaknesses is a lack of historical memory. Moreover, throughout my research, one of activists' greatest concerns was getting people to care about U.S. imperialism and impacts in Latin America. Their focus on education belied a belief that if people were aware they would work to change things. Reclaiming memory and history is a key step in crafting critical consciousness. In addition, this focus on education overcomes, or sidesteps the complicated power dynamics that accompaniment and delegations rely on in which only those with disposable income and citizenship status are able to travel. Contending that education is solidarity creates an avenue through which everyone can more equally engage.

However, focusing on education that only emphasizes U.S. violence and not on how communities and organizations have resisted or are resisting is not conducive to constructing alternatives. Moreover, perhaps the greatest issue with activists' intense focus on education, reimagining, and revolutionizing relationships is that the tactic ends there. They provide little instruction or structure that directs people on what to do with their new understanding. Outside of basic policy advocacy such as sending a quick e-mail to an elected official, activists do not discuss other tactics or strategies to influence State power, but instead underscore narratives of change emerging from the grassroots. Like other tactical motivations, these strategic understandings are deeply connected to the impact of neoliberalism and activists' distrust in the State.

6.6 Where is the State?

As power relations and their institutional representations have been reconfigured under neoliberal capitalism, the State has increasingly become a site of distrust among activists. A myriad of scholars have debated and analyzed how neoliberalism has influenced State formation and expressions of power across the Americas (Ballvé 2012; Gill 2016; Krupa and Nugent 2015). For example, scholars have assessed how the decentralization of the neoliberal state has influenced State power Colombia (Ballvé 2012; Gill 2016), how the boundaries of the State are formed and reformed based on ideological and material interactions between State actors and

civil society (Mitchell 1991), as well as the role state and nonstate institutions play in mundane processes of governance.

While the conclusions and theoretical content of some of these scholars differ, they all underscore both how the State itself and people's understandings of it fluctuate and are remade over time. Indeed, neoliberalism and the resultant redistribution of State responsibilities to private companies have influenced how people understand the responsibilities of and trust in the State. Scholars have outlined how neoliberal disenchantment has led to both left-wing social movements confronting economic precarity, such as Occupy Wallstreet, as well as right-wing populism including the election of Donald Trump in the U.S. and the rise of the right in Europe (Maskovsky and Bjork-James 2020). However, for many of the activists in this study who came of age in the late 1980s and 1990s the current terrain and its impacts on their conceptions of organizing are all they have ever known. Their neoliberal disenchantment has resulted in an often-unnamed move to anarchist ideology that emerges from a lack of trust in governmental institutions to bring about the change they desire.

As indicated by the focus on imagining, many activists define and understand solidarity on a different scale of engagement that is no longer solely defined by publicly visible tactics. As such, their resistance is less focused on external systems and instead emphasizes inward change or prefiguration. This sentiment was underscored by a Bolivian activist who when interviewed by a Western NGO, Terra Justa said:

> We need to move it away from the institutional, and also question a little the issue of why everything happens via institutional means. The commitment to solutions goes beyond "solidarity". It is about really working on the rights that are constantly usurped and violated by those who manage the global economy. An attempt has been made from the global South to speak instead of "solidarity of the peoples". *I am convinced that the organisation of peoples, the collective, is much more effective than the institutional*. How can we put in place mechanisms of solidarity and action which come more from people themselves? It's important too that 'solidarity' doesn't remain linked only to concrete actions on specific issues. *It needs to be a process of permanent reflection between people, which can sustain the space of solidarity over time* [emphasis added]. (Blog Post 2021)

This activist notes both the role of prefigurative imagination and relationship building that many activists in this study believe is central to an ongoing solidarity that is not delimited by specific actions or campaigns. Their focus on the interpersonal and relational nature of solidarity reflects a distrust in governmental institutions and a lack of faith that the State is an effective vehicle to bring about change. While activists in this study[24] do continue to focus on policy advocacy, they often do so without engaging in a broader analysis that maps out which congressional officials would be most effective and meaningful to target or how to get new officials elected. Instead, governmental advocacy efforts often seem perfunctory activists engage in them because historically U.S. Latin American social movements always have. Moreover, advocacy is frequently not tied to a larger campaign. Instead, it is enacted through singular urgent actions or Congressional meetings when Latin American activists are in DC. Despite a perfunctory focus on advocacy, many in my study didn't quite seem to understand the point. Unlike in the Central American solidarity movement, it rarely, if ever seemed effective in shifting U.S. policy in Latin America. These results, or lack thereof, of policy advocacy fed these activists disenchantment with the State and their increasing focus on education, relationships, and imagining as key tactics.

Though, like empire and imperialism, activists rarely engaged in discussions about how they conceptualized the State and how this understanding informed their policies, one conversation at a book club event was perhaps most illustrative of these activists' thinking. The book club was part of a four-session series discussing the book “Who Killed Berta Caceres” by Nina Lakhani (2020). Each event had about 30 attendees and discussed the life of Berta Caceres, an Indigenous Honduran activist who was murdered in 2016 in retaliation for her work trying to protect Indigenous land sovereignty, and the organizing strategies of the organization she co-founded,

24. Of important note is that I did not include activists who work within the Latin American Working Group or the Washington Office on Latin America, two organizations that do focus centrally on policy advocacy. Instead, my study focused on grassroots activists and organizations who both maintain long-term relationships with activists in Latin America. Though LAWG and WOLA have a base of activists in Latin America they work with, their relationships with governmental bodies and solitary focus on advocacy influence their narrative about situations in Latin America. They are unable to push the bounds of radical politics because they want to create policy recommendations that won’t immediately be ignored by congresspeople. By focusing on people and organizations who don’t operate under the same overt limitations, this study highlights how people's tactics are still informed by their understandings of the State, even if they aren’t specifically advocating to State officials for change.

COPINH. Within this session attendees were specifically discussing chapters that reviewed Bert's own engagement with the Honduran state and her history of running for political office in the country. The conversation then turned to how this was an example of grassroots organizing that both engaged with the State and sought to build alternative local models that didn't rely on State power. Attendees began voicing their opinions on the matter. One participant said they felt that political parties operating within a capitalist state are inherently corruptible, and thus can never fully be trusted. Another referenced Alexandria Ocasio Cortez (AOC), a U.S. democratic Socialist congress person publicly known for her more leftist politics. This person contended that AOC was working to pull the democratic party to the left and was an example of how even within the U.S. people "can work both inside and outside the system for change". Finally, a long-time affiliate of SOA Watch contended that the State is inherently violent. They noted the multiple tools that COPINH used to try and overcome or supplant State violence in Honduras, but ultimately asked "how do you overcome something that is inherently violent?"

This exchange reflected a larger trend among the activists within this study. Though some still saw the value of advocating to or trying to change the State structure, all seemed to view the State as an obstacle that needed to be overcome rather than a potential site of reform. As a result of these (often unspoken) views of the State, activists shifted their focus from trying to reform something that many saw was inherently broken to constructing an alternative from the ground up, something scholars have referred to as prefiguration and others might identify as anarchism. Most activists I spoke to and worked with included a concept of prefiguration in their understanding of solidarity, with education preceding prefiguration. They detailed a conceptualization of social change that aligned with anarchy, essentially contending that change would best emerge from a decentralized form of political organization in which communities develop their own rules. As such, they saw themselves as building change not just through overt tactics but also through their everyday relations with one another. To them, change emerged by building power outside of the system.

Notably thoughts on policy advocacy and engagement with the State differed between generations and sometimes by race. Older generations, especially those who were active in the Central American solidarity movement placed greater faith and emphasis on advocacy to the

State. However, they also emphasized how activists today needed more training on policy advocacy techniques. For example, in my interview with Gail Phares she noted how the Central American solidarity movement acted as a training ground that taught her how to raise public visibility and advocate to congresspeople. However, younger activists in this study, those born in the late 80s and beyond, often had very little training and understanding of how or if governmental advocacy could be effective. This was compounded by their experiences growing up under neoliberal hegemony in which the State provided fewer social services and was often viewed as a site that produced harm. At the same time, in addition to more seasoned activists, often younger white activists were those who continued to emphasize policy advocacy, whereas People of Color questioned the point since the State advocacy seemed ineffective.[25]

Even those who questioned the current tactical focus on prefiguration and education, still referenced alternative anarchist tactics. For example, when speaking with Isaac, who was born into an immigrant family in the U.S., he sighed and said he no longer believed that education was the key to solidarity "because people just don't care". He didn't always think this, but after over 10 years of organizing for immigrant rights he no longer believed that people's actions would change if they just "knew better." To him resistance, solidarity and change was more physical and material. It was "putting your body on the line, voting, and sometimes financial".

Bryan, a black man in his early 30s, also expressed a similar lack of faith in current tactics. He lived and worked as a solidarity activist in Honduras for almost three years - from 2015 to 2018- and had practiced all of the above-mentioned tactics dutifully. At the time of our call, I had known him for four years but was often still struck by his seemingly endless fount of knowledge and introspection. He spoke calmly but energetically all the same with a tenor that easily swept one up into agreement. As we waded through a conversation whose breadth went from mental health to solidarity, we began to question the efficacy of today's tactics. "Chelsey, anyone who

25. It is important to note though, that though more activists preface prefiguration over policy advocacy, they continue to engage with and advocate to State structures, though often without strategic discernment. In highlighting activists focus on education, imagination, and prefiguration I do not wish to contend that it is the only tactic these activists believe in or use, but rather to note a trend in how they conceptualize solidarity and in doing so, unveil unseen aspects of solidarity work. Moreover, I also do not want to overstate or create a false image of a homogeneity of understanding of solidarity among these activists or agreement on tactics.

thinks they are working [the tactics] is fooling themselves." He didn't specifically decry the role of education, but he did denote the dire need to do something differently, insinuating that activist rely on education too much.

As Bryan and Isaac's opinions indicate, not all activists are in alignment about the meaning and resultant effectiveness of today's primary tactic of education. Despite this, the alternatives they mentioned, direct action and financial support still did not include advocacy to the State. Though more concrete than seemingly amorphous educational or relational goals, these tactics still were directed at working around the State rather than working within it, by getting specific people elected, or through it with policy advocacy.

A few activists also put equal emphasis on policy advocacy or electoral politics and imagination and prefiguration. However, these activists often focused on electoral politics as tangent to but not a specific aspect of their U.S. Latin America solidarity work. For example, they would support and advocate for specific candidates in local and national politics, independently call congress people or write letters, and /or campaign to their congress people over other issues. They completed each of these actions as independent individuals, unconnected to their employment or volunteer hours with an organization. More importantly, none of these actions were connected to a larger overarching campaign or strategic plan but were individualized and uncoordinated, reflective of neoliberalism's atomizing impact.

Activists focus on education, relationships, and reimagining reflect what James Scott (1985) might call "off-stage" tactics, everyday modes of resistance outside of blatant unrest and war. In his well-known work "Weapons of the Weak" Scott (1985) argues for a theoretical approach that does not over-emphasize the role of structural conditions and their ability to determine individual's actions. Rather he contends that seemingly unorganized actions can be the subsoil through which future more overt forms of resistance emerge. Wars, protests, and outbursts of social unrest do not spring up overnight but are built from often unseen daily actions that slowly shift the political terrain. Similarly, activists in this study, rather than engaging in many center stage tactics, focus on "off-stage" shifts, such as facilitating an educational awareness among U.S. residents that could make them more receptive to future large-scale social shifts.

From understandings on revolutionizing relationships, reimagining, education, and even policy advocacy the tactics that many U.S. Latin America solidarity activists use today have been molded by neoliberalism, an increasing distrust in the State, and an erasure of historical memory that elides previous modes of organizing used in the United States. Yet, perhaps even more problematic, these tactical understandings fail to learn from or engage with tactics used by other leftist activists throughout Latin America who seemingly share similar goals, the same activists U.S. Latin America solidarity activists often verbally insist they should and are learning from.

6.7 Conclusion

Clifton Ross (2014) argues that U.S. solidarity movements are currently at a time of dissonance in which they are struggling to reconcile the failure of the left and the pink tide, which he contends was just "soft neoliberalism" in Latin America. In order to develop a sustainable alternative to neoliberalism, he contends that activists must stop clinging to old ideologies and move forward with new strategies. This chapter has demonstrated how activists have begun to enact this directive but are hamstrung by their own entrapment within neoliberal rationality. By employing a diachronic approach that focuses on the meaning that animates tactics, this chapter has highlighted how U.S. activists' conceptualizations of what resistance looks like have shifted, even though tactics may look the same. In foregrounding how those who claim to be resisting understand resistance themselves I demonstrate why some tactical choices are made and continue to be instituted.

In looking at both practices and understandings of resistance it is clear that both the concept and practice of solidarity is not stagnant but fluctuates overtime. More than just overt tactics of resistance, U.S. activists today demonstrate an understanding of solidarity that is also a daily practice, embedded in unlearning harmful norms, teaching others, and treating others prefiguratively. Instead of viewing resistance only as public protests or policy advocacy, many activists in the U.S. today emphasize imagining or reimagining new social structures as a fundamental piece of resistance. In order to encourage others to imagine, activists foreground the role of counter-hegemonic education or what others have called "decolonization" work, "a generative and prefigurative process whereby we create the conditions in which we want to live and the social relations we wish to have-for ourselves and everyone else" (Walia 2011, 274).

In fact, prefiguration is perhaps the most common unspoken tactic activist's use. Activists' emphasis on more individualized shifts of consciousness and downplaying of advocacy to the State reflects the impact of the normalization of neoliberal thought and a rising distrust in the State. Moreover, activists' failure to conduct a strategic power assessment for policy advocacy further feeds people's distrust and lack of faith in the State. When a hastily planned action doesn't succeed, it is taken as more evidence that advocacy to the State is ineffective and a waste of time. While education and consciousness raising is certainly a critical step in creating change it is of little use if activists aren't outlining what people should then do with their new awareness. Even if these tactics are producing an educated populace, a critical tool and step when so few people have a political awareness about these issues, if they aren't creating organizational structures or avenues through which people can act on their new awareness it is difficult to build up to larger social or political change.

If following the lead of activists in Latin America such as the Movement Against Socialism's rise to power in Bolivia and COPINH's engagement with the State in Honduras, activists in the U.S. would use a multi-dimensional approach to try and reach their demands. Moreover, rather than singular urgent actions or protests directed at governmental officials, these tactics would be embedded in a long-term plan that increasingly raises the pressure on the State to enact changes. For example, in Colombia in 2021 a widespread coalition of organizations and activists across the country held protests and blockades for over two months to press for changes and had a variety of successes. These long-term actions came to fruition after years of organizing and are tactics that U.S. activists could and should learn from to better press for State reforms. While I do think that some activists are aware of this, despite their focus on prefiguration, I also contend that their hesitancy emerges both from an individualized neoliberal rationalization, but also a general lack of knowledge and understanding of how and why advocacy to the State could be useful. Without a thorough power mapping analysis of the junctures, splits, and opportunities that activists could exploit to press their claims, their perfunctory campaigns addressing governmental officials will continue to breed little change and feed continued State distrust. Instituting more opportunities to learn, analyze, and creating advocacy techniques towards the State would arguably benefit their strategy.

These tensions and contradictions that exist unveil the complexities of the field of force through and in which people try to resist. Indeed, as Grace Lee Boggs has argued:

> [T]he drive within anything to achieve its own potential creates conflict with its present state of reality which has become a fetter upon its continuing evolution. In order to resolve this contradiction, a struggle must take place. Out of the resolution comes a new unity. But this new unity in turn is only temporary, since within it a new duality or a new contradiction between the actual and the potential is emerging, creating the basis for further struggle towards a still higher form of existence. (Boggs and Lee Boggs 1974, 140)

As tensions and struggles fluctuate overtime, so too do activists' conceptions of solidarity and resistance. Built from the struggle for change, emerge new ideas of how changes comes.

CHAPTER 7

Solidarity as a Worldview

Five of us, four younger white women and a five-month-old baby cuddled in her mom's arms, were seated around a laptop in a small DC apartment on a cold December day in 2018. The voice of a Witness for Peace national board member echoed around the room from the zoom call with all of the organization's 20 staff and regional organizers. In the background, our phones buzzed feverishly as the call participants chatted via WhatsApp, discussing what we were being told and planning a reaction. The energy was high, angry, thick in the air. After a tumultuous past six months during which time new national board members usurped the organization, the board chair was announcing that at the end of the month the 30-year-old organization was shutting down its current operations and reassessing where the organization was headed in the future. The board fired all staff, leaving many who were living in Latin America wondering how they would get back to the United States and how they were going to pay their bills. The complicated dynamics of this event and those leading up to it could fill another dissertation on the inadequacy and harm of today's identity politics, but for this chapter what is of importance is everyone's reactions to the news of being fired. Of course, people were outraged and concerned about the personal material effects of being without employment, but what also filled the WhatsApp chat and the months after this call was a dedicated struggle to ensure the work of solidarity - accompaniment, educational events etc, could continue. When the call ended, the four of us in the room spent the rest of the day making an initial plan so that staff in Colombia and Honduras could stay in the country and continue working with local activists. Elsa, while feeding and soothing her young baby and dealing with a separate personal crisis back home, helped outline the finances necessary to continue the work. The WhatsApp chat continued to ping throughout the day, filled with righteous indignation and concerns about how staff should respond to Latin American activists' requests for accompaniment and support. By the end of the day, we had a working plan and the foundation of a new organization, the Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective, that would be built over the next year by former Witness for Peace staff and volunteers to provide the financial engine for work moving forward. We separated, some of us driving, some of us flying

back to our home states and returned to our electronic work sites knowing the work would continue. This chapter examines why, despite continual hardships and stresses, people continue to believe in and choose to act in ways that they believe are solidarity. I argue that for many who have been involved in solidarity long-term, solidarity becomes akin to a worldview, a faith in how the world should work.

Throughout this dissertation I have been careful to refer to "episodes" of U.S.-Latin America solidarity rather than an ongoing U.S.-Latin America solidarity social movement. Scholars contend that social movements are defined by their persistence over numerous campaigns, making demands on power holders, displaying worthiness, unity, numbers, commitment, and defining the limits of their engagement (Tilly 2004, Touraine 1985). Though social movements, such as the Central American solidarity movement, have developed among U.S.-Latin America solidarity activists, they eventually wither or change forms. However, despite the lack of a decades long U.S.-Latin America solidarity social movement I found that individuals who were involved in earlier campaigns or movements often remained involved even when the campaign ended. In fact, many activists I spoke with had been involved for decades, despite immense personal sacrifice. This chapter examines why long-term U.S.-Latin American solidarity activists dedicate portions of their lives for many years or decades, even when facing personal strife and seemingly few "wins". I found the reason behind peoples ongoing involvement is related to their conception of what solidarity is. For example, the group reaction to the mass firing detailed above in which activists continued to figure out how to do the work of the organization is exemplary of how these activists understood solidarity. Most people when fired do not keep working. Yet, for these activists, the work was of foremost importance, not the organization, or even the job, but "being in solidarity". This chapter explores the concept of solidarity beyond an examination of tactical approaches or even individualized meaning and instead examines how to some, solidarity becomes enmeshed in people's worldview. I argue that for many who have participated in solidarity long term, the concept becomes like a faith and a belief in a sense of justice, a framework through which they interact and understand the world and their own personal identity that cannot and is not easily cast aside.

Scholars have highlighted the affective and tactical ties that bind activists between periods of social movements. Hirschman argues that episodes of collective action can create a "social energy" that binds activists and can be harnessed in future moments (1988:8). Others have underscored how a sense of collective identity (Goodwin, Polleta, and Jasper 2001), similar experiences (Edelman 1999), and political understandings (Gill 2004) that have emerged in one social movement can serve as a bridge for future campaigns. Throughout my research I witnessed and heard activists speak of these links. However, I often found they still did not explain the almost compulsory need many activists felt to participate in U.S. Latin America solidarity work. Sharing a collective identity didn't explain why people would go into and stay in debt to be an activist, a shared experiential energy didn't explain why people would pour their time into campaign work at the expense of their marriage. And even united political goals and dreams did not explain why people would sacrifice their personal health and safety. This chapter looks beyond assertions of collective effervescence, politics, and even affect to understand why activists remain engaged in solidarity work long-term. For these activists, the "long-termers", solidarity is not just about meaning, affect, or politics. Solidarity becomes a worldview to which people devote themselves. In outlining solidarity as a worldview, I do not intend to diminish the material or political implications of the term. Solidarity is more than just a belief system; it is also how people enact this belief system in their relationship towards others. These interactions are inherently political. Rather, in underscoring solidarity as a worldview my goal is to depict how people's belief in solidarity, their understanding of their own political relationship to others across the globe, becomes a foundation through which they begin to base how they conduct themselves in society both individually and through their involvement in solidarity campaigns or social movements. Though the specific tactics that animate solidarity movements shift overtime as influenced by historical factors, people's foundational belief of solidarity as a worldview may remain the same and thus spur their involvement in various campaigns and tactical strategies.

While solidarity is material, the understandings that begin to animate people's view of themselves in the world does not change their own standpoint amongst it. It does not change the fact that U.S. residents have the privilege of U.S. nationality, that white people have the comfort of racial protection, that middle class people are economically secure. The knowledge or new worldview does not shift a person's relationship amidst the complex local, national, and globally

power relations. However, it can shift what they do with it. Are they compliant? Or do they advocate for change? What type of change do they advocate for? How do they believe change will come? And how and why does solidarity work to shift how people relate to others?

This chapter details how an emerging understanding of solidarity as worldview and faith is connected to people's understanding and experience of their racial identity. Whereas chapter one detailed how race impacts foundational liminalities, this chapter explores how race has informed long-termers experience of solidarity in a manner that becomes embedded in people's worldview.

7.1 Worldview

Throughout this chapter I will demonstrate how long-termer's understanding and experience of solidarity merges into a worldview. Following Saba Mahmood (2005) I do not presuppose that belief comes before practice, but rather people's experiences overtime, heavily informed by their understandings of their own racial identity, lead them to a particular belief system that undergirds their conception of self and the world around them. In equating long-term solidarity to a worldview my intention is to show how for some, solidarity is more than just an understanding or a set of actions. It becomes a framework for understanding themselves, the world around them, and acceptable actions with the world. More than an event, a campaign, or a trip, solidarity becomes a way of living. It is seen as an understanding of the world sin quo non, that is not necessarily impacted by the historical context. This faith allows people to keep believing even when they have seemingly few victories.

The year I was involved in discussions and deliberations surrounding the formation of the Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective, everyone I spoke with who was involved was often constantly stressed, frustrated that they were in this position, but simultaneously excited to be building something that valued worker’s input. At times, the constant worry became almost a joke, an expectation, a new level of normal. I was reflecting on this one day while speaking with Elsa over the phone. Of everyone who was involved in this time period Elsa was arguably facing the most intense struggle. Before the organization had fired everyone, they had attempted to fire Elsa just weeks after her father passed, and weeks before she was due to have her second child. After later “successfully” firing everyone, Elsa took the two head board members to court over

lost compensation and worker violations. She alone was carrying the financial, emotional, and personal burden of these stresses. At this time, she had been employed by Witness for Peace for about nine years and had experienced continuous personal and interpersonal stress because of her work. When talking to her while amidst another tumultuous time in the organization's history, I asked exasperatedly "why are you still with the organization after all you have been through?" She laughed and went on to explain that there just wasn't another organization doing the type of work the Witness for Peace does. She had become accustomed to a certain level of stress and constant crisis because, to her, the organization's work aligned with her conceptualization of solidarity. As she explained it, the personal strain of organizational politics was worth the important work that the organization did. Though her narrative relates specifically to Witness for Peace, I saw this dynamic repeated again and again with others who were a part of different organizations. Even after stating how draining working with an organization was, or blatantly confessing they wanted to quit and pursue another passion, most I spoke with involved in non-profit work didn't have any plans to leave because they viewed the work itself as too important.

What these activists demonstrated was not in fact an unwavering loyalty to their organization, but moreso, the undercurrents of how solidarity was intertwined in their lives. To them, their organizational labor was the best vehicle through which they could be in solidarity. Though these activists often tied their enactments and understanding of solidarity to a specific organization, what I found was that to them, solidarity or "doing solidarity" wasn't about an organization or even a concrete set of actions defining solidarity. As one activist said solidarity "isn't work, it isn't a job", and it was more than just a theory. Instead, it was tied deeply to their conception of themselves, their identity, and their view of the world. It was like a religion. "Far from being an ideational or intellectual stance, it affects the way people live and order their lives; their sense of personhood and self; their understanding of authority and its proper relationship to individual desires and capacities, and distinct conceptions of human flourishing" (Mahmood 2005, xv). Emerging from experiences, liminal moments and affective understandings, solidarity becomes embedded in long-termer's conception of self.

However, for long-termers in whom solidarity became akin to a worldview, it did not just develop after a single event or experience. Rather, this understanding emerged and continued to

develop overtime. To understand how and why solidarity becomes a worldview through which people understand the world and frame their sense of justice I return to the idea of liminality I discussed in Chapter three.

7.2 Liminality

Kathleen was a middle-aged woman who became involved in U.S. Latin America solidarity work in the 1980s. She had a matter-of-fact air about her when she spoke and interwove her knowledge about a wide variety of topics. During our second interview as we continued diving into Kathleen's rich life history, she hurriedly said “Once you know you can't unknow. You can choose not to act but you can't unknow it.” She said it matter-of-factly almost business-like after detailing the myriad of experiences she had that brought her to “know”. The knowledge that she was referring to were the global inequities built on generations of colonialism and imperialism. It was the knowledge that U.S. foreign policies cause harm, and that there are people suffering as a direct result of complicity and lack of awareness in the U.S. For Kathleen, as for other long termers, “Knowing” these global power dynamics was a critical part of coming to know themselves. However, as I discussed in Chapter five, especially for those who have not previously experienced oppression, as people discover these realities, they often have strong affective reactions first of which can be guilt, shame, or sadness. Within these liminal moments, people are divorced from their previous conceptualizations of the world and need an alternative framework. For long-termers, solidarity becomes the framework people grasp onto-a framework for both understanding and action. For long-termers, the uncertainty unearthed within experiences of liminality, pushes them to grasp onto a worldview that can instill a sense of faith in humanity and trust in a better world, the framework of solidarity.

While I found that liminal experiences were central to the formation of “solidarity as a worldview”, for most, one liminal experience was not enough to cement a long-term faith in solidarity. Rather, repeated liminal experiences were needed to continue to foster a conceptualization of solidarity that was enmeshed in people's understanding of themselves and the world around them. Said differently, people's belief and understanding in solidarity “is the product of outward practices, rituals… Rather than simply an expression of them” (Mahmood 2005, xv). However, whereas Mahmood focuses on how intentional acts can foster religious

sentiment, I instead argue that people's liminal experiences, both intentional and unintentional are framed by their identity, can inform an understanding of solidarity that is intertwined with a person's conception of self and their worldview. Instead of solely existing ideologically, as a theoretical framework for how to understand and engage with the world, solidarity for long-termers is inherently material, both informed by and subsequently informative of how they experience their position in the world. The coterminous material and ideological embeddedness of solidarity means that it is not something that people can just stop doing or being. As Emily, a younger solidarity activist who has been involved for ten years said "There's not space for ramping down. It is very all or nothing." She offered this tidbit as both a critique of U.S.- Latin America solidarity in which burn-out is an ongoing problem, but also as a reflection of the embodied and faith-like nature of solidarity. It is either who you are or not. You either believe or you do not.

Liminalities are a central component of arriving at the faith of solidarity-both marginal and foundational. Previous scholars have demonstrated how moments of liminality can create "anti - structures'' that can challenge existing societal norms and lead to change (Sutton-Smith 1972, Turner 1969). Building off this theory, this research demonstrates how multiple liminal events overtimes can lead to a permanent shift in the conceptualization of self as well as their worldview. Each liminal event, leaving people unsteady and/or affectively motivated, pushed people further towards the alternative framework of solidarity. However, it is not a uniform faith or set of actions. Rather it is an overarching framework for understanding and being in the world. How this framework is constructed is often influenced by understandings of race.

7.3 Identity and Solidarity

For long-termers a conception of solidarity a worldview emerges slowly overtime through a confluence of multiple liminal events and experiences. These experiences begin to form the scaffolding of solidarity-as-worldview through how they inform and become embedded into understandings of identity and perspective amidst broader geopolitical conditions. Particularly, throughout my research I found that racial identity and adherence to a faith greatly influenced whether people began to understand solidarity as a worldview. In this sense solidarity is both informed by and becomes a part of people's identity.

When I interviewed Elsa, identity was a common thread that emerged as she spoke. After getting married and moving for her husband's job she was known around town as the “chef's wife”. She noted that finding a job at Witness for Peace finally allowed her to express her own individual identity and the ethical understandings that underpinned her understanding of self and how she should move through the world. She emphasized that her whiteness informed her felt attachment and responsibility toward others. “I wanted to find a less harmful way of being white. Working with WFP was a way to do this”. For Elsa, she couldn't imagine not being a part of solidarity campaigns as it was intertwined with her identity of whiteness and class privilege. As a result, she felt that she can't exist in the world without being in solidarity.

James, a middle-aged white man expressed this same connection between solidarity, self-identity, and race. Throughout our interview he frequently mentioned coming to terms with his own racial identity and recognizing the “privilege” this granted him. At the time of our interview, he worked for a small non-profit called Alliance for Global Justice. When I asked him if he could ever imagine not doing solidarity work, he chuckled and said he could imagine no longer working for the organization but could never see himself halting solidarity work at a personal level.

> I don't like bullies. It is not about morals, it's about my own dignity and self-respect. I don't like the thought that people can do bad things right in front of you and get away with it.

To him, solidarity was about embodying the moral code through which he understood himself. Solidarity was a framework for action, and an ethical call to action deeply intertwined with his own self-identity. It was a way in which he could use his privilege to confront “bullies,” without which he would not be able to view himself positively. For both James and Elsa solidarity was an outgrowth of their perception of whiteness and acting in solidarity through working with an organization was their way to try and recraft and embody an idea of whiteness that was less harmful.

Whereas white people frequently came to enact and understand solidarity as a means to confront the harm they saw as the consequence of the construction of whiteness, many People of Color I

interviewed came to understand solidarity as a sense of community and protective belonging. For example, when I spoke with Chrissy, a Latina organizer who now works with the non-profit IRTF she detailed her journey to understanding her immigrant roots and the U.S.'s narrative on Latin America. Growing up she always felt slightly out of place. Her reality and knowledge of the violence many immigrants face was at odds with her peers' laissez faire view of the world. However, it took her many years to learn the connections between the violence immigrants and many in Latin America face and U.S. policy. Through this knowledge and the community, she developed within these learning sites she began to find a sense of belonging. Yet this occurred slowly and through a myriad of liminal experiences. It wasn't until her junior year of college when she wrote a paper on NAFTA[26] that she began to connect her personal life experiences with "the macro scale" of U.S. policy. Then, in 2007 she went to the annual vigil hosted by SOA Watch[27] at Fort Benning, designed to campaign for the closure of the School of the Americas and remember the lives of those killed by Latin America forces trained by U.S. troops. Here she said, "all compartments of her life came together". The precarious feeling of being "on the edge" or the outside, of feeling misunderstood was erased and replaced by a new realization of how her individual experience was connected to global dynamics, and more so, how people could unite to change them. At last, she felt whole and realized that solidarity advocacy was part of who she was. As we spoke about this experience, Chrissy herself happened upon this realization for the

26. The North American Free Trade Agreement was enacted in 1994 between the United States, Mexico, and Canada. It reduced tariffs between the nations so that they were virtually non-existent. The agreement was created to benefit those who already had wealth, and largely aided large multi-national corporations over local industry. As a result, a wave of outsourcing hit the United States resulting in deindustrialization and extreme job loss in manufacturing sectors. Simultaneously, in Mexico, it is estimated that about 1.4 million small farmers were put out of business and displaced as large landowners and corporations churned about goods and took their land (Judis 2008; Wise 2010). As a result, the US saw an influx in migration from Mexico due to job loss.

27. In the 1990s, activists who were part of the Central American solidarity movement and similarly inspired by the same abuses being committed by US aid and training in South America, began a campaign to shut down a US military facility located in Fort Benning, Georgia, the School of the Americas, that was responsible for primarily training Latin American military officers, many of whom were committing human rights abuses in the Central American dirty wars. A non-profit organization, called School of the Americas Watch, was created during this campaign to help propel the movement. To press their platform and draw attention to their cause, campaigners engaged in non-violent demonstrations in front of the school and acts of civil disobedience. What began as a small group of individuals standing outside of the school in 1990s has since progressed into an annual multi-day demonstration in front of the school in which activists from across the country unite, share analyses, and honor the victims of US-backed violence.

first time. I could hear the energy in her voice as she slowly unfolded and made sense of these pieces that still inform her life today.

However, this was just the beginning of Chrissy's journey. In 2018 she went to the Middle East on a solidarity delegation to learn more about the Israel- Palestine relationship. Here, with a vibrance in her voice, she said she had "the OMG moment, that this is global, it is not just happening to my people. It is happening to everyone." She saw that "each iteration of imperialism has been a clarification of the last one" (Interview 2021). Whereas in college she first understood solidarity in relation to herself and "her people", other immigrants, her as she said "omg moment" expanded this understanding from immigrant communities located across the Americas to then encompass communities across the world and the economic and political interests that unite them. For Chrissy, solidarity emerged first as a framework in which she understood herself and felt belonging, but it soon merged into a framework, a belief system through which she made sense of the world. However, it was more than just a worldview that could be easily cast aside, it became an embedded part of both her identity and her belief system.

When I asked her if she could ever imagine not doing solidarity work, she said it was a way of life and "you can't turn it off… What I'm fighting for is for some weirdo like me to feel whole" (Interview notes 2021). Like Elsa and James, Chrissy's experience, framed by both her race and nationality informed how she perceived solidarity. Moreover, her identity was embedded in her notion of solidarity. In many ways the two became inseparable. It was more than just tactics or theory; it was a belief framework and a lens through which she understood herself.

For Elsa and James, enacting solidarity was embedded in their view of how to be white in a white supremacist society. Solidarity was not just a job, or something done on the weekends, it was a way of understanding the world which for them included a view of whiteness as a construct that has and continues to do harm. As such, as white people, solidarity was about being white in a different, less harmful manner. Ideas of solidarity structured how they acted in the world, how they related to others.

For Chrissy solidarity was a way for her to both feel whole and help craft a sense of belonging for others. Her experience as a Person of Color and from an immigrant family led her to view

solidarity as a tool through which she could help craft a future in which other immigrants and people of color would not have to experience the same hardships. For each of these activists' race informed how solidarity became a part of their identity. Because of their understanding and experiences with their racial identities, solidarity became more than a job or an action. Instead, it was a guiding framework for how they should behave in the world and why, just like how a worldview provides a moral framework.

While race illustrates how varying standpoints can inform people's journey to a view of solidarity as a worldview and was most frequently mentioned throughout my research, race is not the only aspect of people's identities that led them to a conception of solidarity like religion. For example, I found that religion itself often led people to a view of solidarity that was embedded in their daily lives. Grounded in religious moralities, some described solidarity as a natural conclusion of their faith. If they were living the values they were taught, they would be in solidarity. Here, religion itself and solidarity become meshed. They are a part of the same moral framework and code. For some religious folks, religion and solidarity are the same, solidarity is just the outward expression of religious values. Kathleen, a white middle-aged pastor who had been involved in U.S. Latin American Solidarity work since the 1980s described how her views of religion and solidarity were enmeshed:

> It did not feel like there was a big division between personal life and vocational life because parish ministry is kind of 24/7, you're on all night, you're on call. You get these horrible calls, so your personal life and your vocational life tend to be pretty combined...It really is a lived identity. And likewise with parenting. It wasn't like I was a different person inside the house from outside the house right yeah, so. It [solidarity] Feels like it's just been my life.

For Kathleen, as with many other long-termers I spoke with, she could never stop" being in solidarity " because it was a framework that guided her decisions and actions. She viewed her work as a minister as solidarity, as was parenting. Solidarity was central to her identity in how it informed how she lived her daily life.

These personal narratives illustrate how these long-termers' understandings of solidarity were both informed by their identity while simultaneously becoming a part of their identity. Akin to a

worldview, solidarity now merged to these individuals' conceptions of self and became their moral compass. For long-termers solidarity becomes embedded in their worldview. When I presented my theory that for some solidarity becomes like a worldview or faith to Emily, a ten-year U.S.-Latin America solidarity activist, she responded in eager agreement, likening solidarity to religion or a spiritual practice. She said that.

> This idea of activism as religion I have described many times for myself, [even though she doesn't adhere to a faith group] … I think of my work for justice as my spiritual work. … I've also been starting to reach out to folks, kind of like movement elders who I think do a really good job of connecting their activism and spirituality in a non-Christian setting since I'm uncomfortable in that setting.

She referenced the historic connection between Christianity and U.S.-Latin America solidarity.

> This marriage of religion and work for justice is historic and not something new for our generation um but the issue for me, not considering myself a Christian, is how to plug in with that same sense of dedication and spirituality.

Even though Emily did not adhere to a mainstream religious faith, she wanted to channel the tenets of having a faith, what she noted as dedication and spirituality, to her solidarity practice. Earlier in the interview she even jokingly described solidarity work as cult-like, an unceasing focus and belief that an alternative world could exist. Emily's words highlight the embeddedness of solidarity into people's personal identity and worldview. I noted this convergence both throughout my interviews, at events that drew on religious symbolism or practices, and in people's personal descriptions of the connections between their identity and solidarity. Perhaps this was illustrated most clearly through an eight weeklong program I attended in 2021 entitled "In Spirituality and Struggle" that was focused on bridging spiritual beliefs with political practices of solidarity. Though grounded in the African religious tradition of Ifa, this program attracted many activists who knew little about the tradition but were still interested in exploring the connections between faith and political action. In fact, throughout the program guest speakers as well as the group leader emphasized the indelible connection between faith or spirituality of any kind and political action. Individual belief and action were not separate from the communal whole. Instead, they were intricately connected. Not only was solidarity understood as a political worldview, but to practice revolutionary solidarity, this program emphasized the need to expand

or at least devote time to an individualized spiritual practice or said differently honing your political worldview through personal reflection. Here, a view of solidarity that was enmeshed in your daily actions was not just something that could exist without regular maintenance and practice.

These events, interviews, and even activists' own reflections on the similarity between solidarity and a worldview provide a framework for understanding why people continue to stay involved in solidarity work. For these long-termers, solidarity is enmeshed in their view of themselves and the world. In marrying the concept of solidarity with their view of themselves, solidarity comes to act as a worldview. Like a worldview it is framed by historical circumstances that inform both experiences and how they are taught to make sense of them, and it speaks to people's desire for meaning in life by providing a framework for understanding. As a worldview, solidarity develops people's collective values and beliefs about the world as well as their role in. Moreover, solidarity as a worldview is grounded in experiences and practices that shape how and what they believe (Mahmood 2005).

Though the specific worldview of solidarity differs for everyone, one defining feature of this worldview in long-termers is marked by a belief in people. Their worldview and their identity become directed by the belief or a faith, that people can create a more equitable world and that they themselves share a personal responsibility to crafting this change. This belief can feel supernatural when despite evidence to the contrary, people continue to harbor a faith that through solidarity change is possible. Solidarity is both enmeshed in identity, a faith, and a hope without which people would feel as though they lost a fundamental part of themselves.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how for long-term U.S.-Latin America solidarity activists, solidarity can become like a religion. More than just a theory or a set of practices or actions, this research shows how solidarity can become a foundational piece of people's identity, enmeshed in their understanding of the world and their place in it. Built off recurrent liminal events that challenge people's worldview, these material experiences and realities become enmeshed in their identity and solidarity becomes more than a viewpoint. It becomes a worldview. For long-

termers solidarity becomes a belief in a system outside of themselves and a feeling of moral responsibility to engage in fixing a broken system. Once people begin understanding solidarity as a worldview it becomes difficult to stop believing. However, a belief in solidarity is not stagnant, rather it fluctuates, morphs, and shifts overtime as people continue to question and reflect on different tactical choices.

In looking at solidarity as a worldview we can see both how ideas surrounding what it is are contextualized by historical and individual circumstances and why people dedicate their lives to "being in solidarity" often at great personal sacrifice. Moreover, a conceptualization of solidarity as more than just a set of practices or beliefs, but as a framework enmeshed in understandings of themselves and their worldview helps explain why people continue to engage in U.S. Latin American Solidarity networks, even when no overarching campaign is present. For these long-termers solidarity has become a normalized guidebook for how to live their lives. It is no longer an external abstract ideology, but part of who they are.

While solidarity as a worldview helps explain why people stay involved in U.S. Latin America solidarity work despite the absence of concrete campaigns or social movements, it also explains why some activists don't question the tactics or strategies that frame how they conceptualize solidarity should be enacted. As Chapter five discussed, the tactics used and activists' understandings of them are heavily influenced by the extant socio-economic and political context. However, when solidarity merges into a worldview it can prohibit people from examining how the historical context is directing their view of the world. Said differently, when solidarity becomes a worldview, it becomes a normalized framework that can subconsciously animate tactics and beliefs. It begins to operate as a backdrop, coloring people's decisions and understandings without their full awareness of its influence. This normalized framework can preclude activists from reexamining contemporary power arrangements, and political and economic relations throughout the Americas in order to devise new strategies that can effectively push for changes. While this supports ongoing involvement in solidarity work, it can also result in the entrenchment of old tactics and strategies that are no longer effective. For example, both the U.S. and Colombia have different political, economic, and social landscapes in the 2020s than they did in the 1990s. As has been discussed, a variety of shifts including neoliberalism, the

entrenchment of corporate power and the rise of right-wing populism has shifted both the quantity of social movements and how they campaign. Moreover, within both governments sit new officials with new political understandings, alliances, and receptiveness (or lack thereof) to hearing and instituting activists' calls for change. These situations should inform how and to whom activists relay their claims for change - to corporations, certain government officials, or supranational bodies. However, without these analyses, or power mapping, activists' attempts at solidarity cannot be as effective. When solidarity becomes a worldview, a normalized almost subconscious framework for understanding and acting within the world, it can engrain in activists a sense that the tactics of the time in which they became politically conscious are the primary or best way of organizing for change. It can imprint a framework for enacting solidarity that may not always be effective. In this way, while solidarity as a worldview can cement people to a lifetime of involvement in U.S. Latin American solidarity work, it can also delimit tactical efficacy if activists do not regularly reassess and reanalyze how and why they conceptualize solidarity and how their tactical choices are informed by this understanding. As such, understanding that solidarity can become a worldview is useful not only for scholars who wish to understand why people stay involved in activist work, but also for activists themselves. If activists recognize that solidarity acts as a worldview it can serve as a reminder that tactical decisions should emerge from an external analysis of structural power relations, rather than solely from an internal conceptualization of what solidarity is and how it should be enacted.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

Towards the end of most of the interviews I conducted I asked whomever I was speaking with how I could make this project relevant and useful to ongoing activist work. I have endeavored to create a project whose use extends beyond the academic realm. Indeed, most everyone I interviewed noted the cathartic nature of reflecting on their experiences coming to a consciousness about the world around them and an excitement that someone cared about their activist endeavors. However, it was the solitary comment by Jeanette that stood out to me the most, for she echoed what I inferred from others but what they dare not say. “Give us hope. Paint solidarity in a positive light. Give people a reason to want to be in solidarity.” I responded with a yes of course and we went on to discuss how other academic accounts of U.S. Latin American Solidarity often paint a bleak picture and leave few concrete suggestions for how to improve the lackluster performance or even existence of a solidarity movement. However, scholars have also highlighted the dangers of over emphasizing the positive attributes of a situation and have instead noted the need to “tell horrible stories beautifully” (Tsing 2021).

Throughout this dissertation I have tried to present both critiques of U.S. Latin American Solidarity, but especially what it means and how it is understood by those who participate in it. In doing so, I have sought to shift the conversation about solidarity from theorizations on what it is or what its weaknesses are, to a deeper discussion around the meaning it holds for those who claim to be “in solidarity” and how people come to these understandings. Rather than a prescriptive diagnosis of the disconnects, tensions, and failures of solidarity, I have focused on building a descriptive account of how people come to certain views of solidarity in the first place. Is this a hopeful account? I'm not sure. For academics it encourages a reevaluation of the scale through which people conceptualize resistance and politicization. For activists it demonstrates the potential for a variety of sites, if constructed effectively to be conducive for shifting people's political consciousness, from an event, trip, or class. However, this work also demonstrates that one event or moment of liminality is not enough. Rather a shift in political awareness is an ongoing process of liminalities that stretch the bounds of what people imagine is

acceptable behavior or policy and what they can do to change it. Perhaps there is some hope in this viewpoint- it is never too late to shift someone's politicization and there are ample opportunities to do so.

In many ways this dissertations echoes some of the findings of Steve Striffler's (2019) historical review of U.S. Latin American solidarity. It shows how neoliberal impacted urgency has informed tactics, strategy and how ideas of solidarity have changed. But it also shows that affect or moral claims can have long lasting impact on individuals' political consciousness. To this point we agree at some continuing questions - how do we channel this into strategic political structures rather than individualized accounts and how do we create the time and space to do so?

8.1 Review of Chapters and Arguments

This dissertation has charted the journey from how people begin to develop a political consciousness about U.S. influence in Latin America to how long-term solidarity activists conceive of solidarity today. Chapter two first explored the barriers to coming to a political consciousness about U.S. impact in Latin America. Through detailing the impact of hegemonic narratives about U.S. exceptionalism, as well as the unique obstacles that come with developing campaigns and awareness within the heart of empire, this chapter illustrates why so few people are involved in U.S.- Latin America solidarity work as well as the importance of understanding the mechanisms through which people develop a new consciousness. Chapter three expanded the concept of liminality, examining how people experience liminal moments outside of objective societal unrest. What I deem foundational liminalities were critical for rupturing people's stable understanding of the world and opening up new space for political exploration. Marked by a subjective unsettledness in which people were presented with or witnessed an alternative reality to the one they usually experienced, foundational liminalities led people to future opportunities, decisions, and experiences that slowly shifted their consciousness.

Understanding the subjective experience of liminality is crucial for grasping how political consciousness changes. As this research has demonstrated, the content of all foundational liminalities is not the same but is influenced by the historical setting and by people's raced, classed, and personal circumstances. I contend that scholars can acquire a deeper understanding

of how political consciousness changes by shifting the scale in which liminalities are understood from objective societal events to subjective personal experiences, and by evoking a deeper examination of the context in which liminalities occur. Consciousness continues to shift, influenced by organizations, family, religion and affect.

As Chapter four demonstrates, after people begin to experience foundational liminalities, the initial political flexibility and/or safety people then feel often spurs them forward to embrace opportunities or learnings that might satiate a new political curiosity. Though chapter two discussed moments or events that were foundational for forming people's political flexibility, no one I spoke with mentioned a solitary event in their life as the key reason they became involved in U.S.-Latin America solidarity efforts. Instead, they referenced multiple points or moments that kept bringing them back towards a path of involvement. I found that these opportunities and teachings are most often guided by individuals within three main societal institutions, religion, non-profit organizations, and family. Informed and guided by experiences and relationships developed through these institutions people continue their politicization by developing a widened sense of community and an underlying sentiment of *communitas* that plants a sense of responsibility towards others in the community. In addition, which specific institution is most dominant often, though not always, depends on the time period in which people grew up and began to turn towards a path of activism.

In illustrating how societal institutions inform people's consciousness by teaching people the bounds of their community, this chapter expands both on ideas of liminality, *communitas,* and insurgent individualism. The community influence people find within societal institutions can lead them to increasing view themselves as politically consequential individuals. However, this can and does happen outside of periods of mass protests or objectively noted periods of societal shift. Instead, insurgent individualism can be developed through liminal experiences supported and cultivated through a surrounding community (whether it be familial, religious, NGO) that demonstrates and popularizes a new expanded view of community and someone's role in it. These moments of politicization are key sites that necessitate greater examination in order to fully explain how consciousness raising can lead to mass protests and/or determine the content and popular understandings of ideas about social change. As such, this chapter adds to studies on

resistance that indicate that political consciousness building, and defiance are taking place even when not blatantly visible through riots and uprisings (Scott 1985; Thompson 1993; Wardlow 2006). In demonstrating how consciousness raising continues outside of periods of mass social uprisings, this chapter encourages a deeper examination of the subtle actions, liminalities, and communities that work to shift political articulations (Abu-Lughod 1990; Mahmood 2005).

Chapter five examines the role of affect in people's politicization. Through highlighting an individual's specific story to politicization as well as the role of affect in different events, this chapter first contends that affect is consequential for the formation of political consciousness and cannot be ignored. It then details how group dynamics and the emotional habitus of the group or event in which a person is situated directly impacts people's own affective reactions. How affect is channeled by individuals within the group and the presence or absence of an intellectual framework influences if affect will lead to deeper politicization and if the politicization with support left or right-wing projects. Finally, I argue that affect contributes to politicization because it informs peoples conceptions of imagined community, producing either "distant sufferers" (Arendt 2009) or a group united by similar global political and economic situations. When combined with an intellectual framework and supported with group dynamics, affect can be mobilized to create an imagined community bound by solidarity transnationalism, or an overarching (often oversimplified) conceptualization of the global political and economic dynamics that link people together. Whereas, Boltanski (1999) argues that more focus should be given to how the "spectacle of suffering" is communicated because it influences how people conceive of others, in looking at the role of affect in peoples politicization, this chapter demonstrates that affective and intellectual framing doesn't just impact how people understand and relate to "the other", moreso it influences how people understand themselves as a part of or disconnected from political and economic dynamics that impact others. In short, affective reactions inform how people understand solidarity because they direct people to a certain understanding of imagined community.

Chapter six begins to discuss how activists who have been engaged in U.S. Latin America solidarity work understand solidarity today and reflect this understanding in their tactical choices. Despite the continuation of tactics that emerged in previous episodes of U.S.-Solidarity

work, conceptualizations of what constitutes solidarity have shifted. Today, activists believe reimagining is a key tactic that can facilitate others' political awareness of U.S. policy in Latin America. To encourage reimagining, activists emphasize education as a tool that can help others reimagine relationships both locally and globally and enact them in a manner that transforms overarching systems. In looking at how activists today believe social change will occur, this chapter shifts the scale of analysis from a focus on large-scale structural shifts that U.S.-Latin America solidarity may or may not have produced overtime to an assessment of the interpersonal and political understandings of activists that undergird tactical choices and how they have been influenced by distinct historical political contexts in the U.S. Of particular focus is how the entrenchment of neoliberalism and an increasing distrust of the State has informed how activists conceptualize resistance. I demonstrate how activists' more atomized and individualized understandings of change are connected to neoliberal sentiment's eradication of collective modes of resistance. Fueled by Cold War violence that resulted in the historical erasure of alternative modes of resistance and the eradication of unions, today's focus on reimaging elides the fact that alternatives to economic and political systems founded in capitalism already exist. In order to overcome the delimitations of neoliberalism activists currently operate under, I contend that they need to engage in a more systematic and collaborative discussion on how they conceptualize U.S. empire, imperialism, and the State as well as the specific political contexts in the countries in Latin America with whom they work. From this analysis, activists can more concretely outline what tactics would be most effective for developing the mode of change they envision. Overall, chapter six demonstrates that activists today focus on both relationships and reimagining as tactical choices. This has shifted the scale of how they conceptualize solidarity tactics. Not only does solidarity include large-scale protests and the historical tactics of accompaniment, delegations, and educational events, it also includes prefigurative engagements in which people work to embody the relationships they wish to see reflected in larger structural systems.

Finally, chapter six examines how overtime, the convergence of liminalities and people's understanding of their own identity can build to a long-term engagement with solidarity. For these activists, solidarity becomes more than a set of practices or ideology, but an embodied sense of how the world works and what an individual's role should be in it. It is like a worldview, a belief in something outside of oneself that simultaneously becomes embedded in someone's

conception of self. Equating solidarity to a worldview helps explain why people who are seemingly unimpacted by that which they campaign for, continue to engage in solidarity networks even when there is no overarching campaign and when at great personal sacrifice. Moreover, it begins to broaden understandings of solidarity as an external belief system or set of practices to an internal conceptual framework through which people understand themselves and the world.

8.2 Solidarity moving Forward

Overall, throughout this dissertation I have detailed how both developing a political consciousness about U.S. policy in Latin America and the resulting conceptions of solidarity are deeply personal, relational, and both affective and intellectual. Activists in this study developed a political consciousness by moving through foundational liminalities that initiated in them a sense of questioning and hunger for more information. Depending on the time period, the new political and emotional flexibility foundational liminalities fostered were then honed and developed by societal institutions, including family, religion, and non-profit organizations. The affective reactions and intellectual framework activists were given by their surrounding community or group helped cement new political ideologies built on a widened understanding of community and a concomitant responsibility to said community. However, how solidarity has been understood and enacted has varied overtime informed by dominant political trends in the U.S. and Latin America. For activists today who have been indelibly impacted by neoliberal rationality (Brown 2018), solidarity is primarily enacted through educational reform and reimagining, as well as some policy advocacy to the U.S. government. While the efficacy of these tactics is weak for pushing for structural reforms, they may help lay the subsoil for future large-scale campaigns. Indeed, activists for whom solidarity has become a worldview would be open to participating if the campaign continued to align with the understanding in social justice.

For academics I hope this lends itself to a deeper understanding of solidarity as a felt embodied experience that can be generative of new conversations about how resistance is imagined and enacted outside of large-scale social movements. For activists, I hope this highlights both ways through which they can work to shift people's political consciousness and areas in which their ideas of resistance aren't yet fully enacted. Harsha Walia (2011) has argued that activists must

"sustain a connection between the daily grind of community organizing and *broader left struggles*…to maintain an expansive political perspective and to stay inspired" [emphasis added] (99). Today, activists in the U.S. must continue merging the personal nature of solidarity with broader left struggles while continuing to embody their own prefigurative ideals. This will be no easy task but has been demonstrated time and again by activists across Latin America who continue to struggle, build, and institute anti-colonial changes. For solidarity moving forward, for struggle moving forward, activists and academics alike must continue to learn from our colleagues in the South, uniting, struggling, building, and feeling change.

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