"When Home Won't Let You Stay:" How Climate Change is Driving Migration in Central America

Alejandra Gallardo
College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, AGALLARDO001@CSBSJU.EDU

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“WHEN HOME WON’T LET YOU STAY:”
HOW CLIMATE CHANGE IS DRIVING CENTRAL AMERICAN MIGRATION

INTRODUCTION
• Climate change acts as a “threat multiplier” that amplifies social and inequities.
• As the impacts of climate change worsen, we expect to see a greater number of people migrating.
• Agriculture-dependent communities have already experienced deepening poverty with recent warming.
• Migrants are some of the most vulnerable people because of their lack of access to social and financial capital.
• The ideology behind “climate refugees” is problematic. How do we change that narrative?

Research question: To what extent does climate change influence human migration in Central America?

METHODS
Original research — Central American Delegation Trip:
I collected a week’s worth of fieldnotes from my participation in a delegation trip in November 2019 with a grassroots organization in Minneapolis called COPAL MN (Comunidades Organizandos el Poder y La Acción Latina). The delegation explored the impacts of climate-related displacement through meetings and dialogue with civil society organizations, municipal officials, and families at the frontlines of displacement. Community narratives were constructed based on testimonies by respective region.

CONCLUSION
• Environmental migration is multicausal.
• Climate change cannot be isolated as a sole driver of migration, but it does act as a threat multiplier that exacerbates the intensity of rainfall and temperature in the dry corridor.
• Currently, there are no international frameworks or processes being implemented to protect climate-displaced people.
• Testimonies of conflict with national police coincide with narratives of Indigenous people and water protectors around the world with a priority to protect the interest of extractive multinationals during the climate crisis.

“you only run for the border when you see the whole city running as well”
From “Home,” poem by Warsan Shire

NUEVO GUALCHO, EL SALVADOR
• In 2015, drought cost nearly $100 million in lost corn and bean harvests.
• Increased irregularity and unpredictability of extreme weather events.
• Narrowing of the wet season and decrease in river levels in the past 10 years.

“ariculture doesn’t get abandoned because it’s agriculture, it gets abandoned because of the conditions [in the countryside], and that’s what we need to transform,” says Wilfredo Rubio, adviser to the minister of agriculture in El Salvador.
• High rates of migration in youth populations because they seek education and employment in urban areas.

“Running from the Sun,” poem by Líadh Robertson

ENVIROMENTAL JUSTICE IS OUR CALL-TO-ACTION AGAINST THE ONSLAUGHT AGAINST HERETIC, OPpressive, & TOXIC OPPRESSIONS THAT THREATEN TO SUBMERGE OUR HOMES

CENTRAL AMERICAN DRY CORRIDOR
The Dry Corridor — the tropical dry forest region on the Pacific side of Central America — is characterized by its irregular rainfall and extended four-month dry season. These regions (mainly Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua) are highly susceptible to climate change.

GUAPINOL, HONDURAS
• “The river was like chocolate water,” says Juana.
• Mining corporation, Inversiones Pinares, dumps wastes in the Guapinol River.
• Water became unusable for those living downstream of the mining operations.

“Sometimes the water from the mining is not fit to drink,” says Juana. “We used to bathe in the river, but now we can’t drink it.”

CONFLICT
• They raped our women, beat civilians — and if we tried to interfere — we’d get death threats, kidnapped, tortured, and killed,” says Leonel George, a human rights organizer from Tocoa.
• Police wounded locals in the struggle for land and defense of the territory.

“THE TEARS ON MY CHEEKS, IS THE ONLY WATER FOR MILES... I DON’T KNOW IF I’LL BE HAPPY THERE, BUT I’M NOT SAFE HERE.”
From “Running from the Sun,” poem by Líadh Robertson