Title
Burning Memory: Amnesty Against Justice? Historical Memory and Continued Polarization in Postwar El Salvador

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5tk7v8g2

Author
Horton, Megan Rose

Publication Date
2015

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation
Burning Memory: Amnesty Against Justice?
Historical Memory and Continued Polarization in Postwar El Salvador

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in

Latin American Studies

by

Megan Rose Horton

Committee in charge:

Professor Christine Hunefeldt, Co-Chair
Professor Milos Kokotovic, Co-Chair
Professor Nancy Postero

2015
The Thesis of Megan Rose Horton is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Co-Chair

Co-Chair

University of California, San Diego

2015
EPIGRAPH

No se puede cosechar lo que no se siembra.
¿Cómo vamos a cosechar amor en nuestra República, si solo sembramos odio?
- San Oscar Arnulfo Romero
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature page........................................................................................................ iii

Epigraph................................................................................................................... iv

Table of Contents..................................................................................................... v

Acknowledgements.................................................................................................. vi

Abstract of the Thesis .............................................................................................. viii

Introduction............................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 1: Historical Overview .............................................................................. 10

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework ........................................................................ 51

Chapter 3: The Savage .............................................................................................. 81

Chapter 4: The Victim .............................................................................................. 119

Chapter 5: The Savior .............................................................................................. 148

Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 169

Appendix A: Persons interviewed for this study ...................................................... 172

Appendix B: Original Spanish from interviews....................................................... 180

References.............................................................................................................. 209
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members for all their support over the past 2 years. Misha Kokotovich, without whom I never would have had a thesis topic, thank you for always being there to discuss everything El Salvador-related and give me much needed insight. Christine Hunefeldt, thank you for taking a chance with an unknown student and always wanting the best out of all your students. Nancy Postero, my theory and human rights guru, thank you for being not only a wonderful advisor, but also a compassionate person. I am deeply grateful for the academic guidance and contributions from all of you.

I would also like to thank my Latin American Studies cohort- Vero, Eli, Sara, Daniel, Christa, Claudia- as we have been through this whole crazy process together- Adelante compañero@s. And a special thank you to Brittany Wright, graduate coordinator, who has helped motivate me throughout the thesis journey. Also within the UCSD community, I would like to thank my friends at IR/PS, who have made these years much more fun. Additionally, to the educational community at the Dimensions of Culture program, who have enriched this past year and helped me grow academically and professionally.

In conducting this study, I would like to thank all those who I had the pleasure of interviewing. Despite differences in perspective, each of you is unique, intelligent, and your opinions are what make the country what it is. Thank you for letting me into your worlds, however briefly. An additional thanks to my community of friends in El Salvador, many of whom I’ve known for almost 10 years now. You make going back to
San Salvador always feel like going home. To Juan and Maria- thank you for opening your home to me in July, and for your continued friendship over the years.

Beyond the walls of academia, I would like to thank my family for all their support. To my mother in particular- thank you for your unconditional love and support, throughout the hardships and anxieties. To my hermanas del alma- Tedde, Colette, Rosie, Erin, Laura, Danielle, Helene- my time in El Salvador started with you, and man, have we been through it all. I truly cherish our friendships and love you all. To the team at Fe y Alegría Zacamil- to all the students and teachers, Héctor, and Paty- you made my three years living in El Salvador mean something tremendous, an indescribable, amazing, difficult, wonderful time. To the team at CEJIL and all the human rights defenders who I have gotten to know over the past 5 years- thank you for opening my eyes to the world of human rights litigation, for all your strength, you are amazing people who are fighting for the rights of other amazing human beings. *No dejen de ser una inspiración y un ejemplo de la dignidad para todos los seres humanos.*
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Burning Memory: Amnesty Against Justice?
Historical Memory and Continued Polarization in Postwar El Salvador

by

Megan Rose Horton

Master of Arts in Latin American Studies
University of California, San Diego, 2015

Professor Christine Hunefeldt, Co-Chair
Professor Milos Kokotovic, Co-Chair

This study looks at the different collective memories towards the human rights violations that occurred during the Salvadoran Internal Armed Conflict. I argue that these divisive memories have contributed to ongoing polarization and a lack of reconciliation in postwar El Salvador. Utilizing Maurice Halbwachs’ term and theory of collective memory, in El Salvador these memories have grouped along Civil War lines. Those who adhere to the right-wing discourse, and were generally in favor of the Armed Forces during the war, have tended to adhere cling to the “forgive and forget” option of transitional justice. Those who are left-wing, and may have either been in favor of the
FMLN guerrillas during the war, or who were victims or family members of the military’s atrocities, have tended to champion the “prosecute and punish” option. This study analyzes perspectives and memories of and towards the victim, the victimizer, as well as outside forces that were a part of the Armed Conflict. This study is based on 5 weeks of intensive interviews and participant observation in San Salvador, El Salvador, as well as continued monitoring of Salvadoran news throughout 2014 and 2015. Through this analysis, I found that despite polarization, there are no clear-cut lines of who falls into each category, and collective memory still remains entrenched in the Armed Conflict.
Introduction

“Terror is the taproot of Guatemala’s past and stalks its present”

In the 1980s, Central America was embroiled in Civil Wars. From the Contra War in Nicaragua, to the decades-long terror in Guatemala, repression stalked the region. As Linda Green (2004) above described Guatemala’s situation, the case of El Salvador is no different. In the war between the leftist guerrillas (FMLN) and the Salvadoran Armed Forces (supported and trained by the United States) repression was the *modus operandi*. Similarly to Guatemala, fear was the motor of oppression, and it was used to silence any opposition (Green, 2004). Then in the 1990s the wars ended, “peace” was achieved, and the international community moved on in its fight to save other countries from their own atrocities. The political landscape changed to a budding democracy, with the two major political parties emerging from the Civil War context. Violence re-appeared in new forms with transnational street gangs vying for power and control in the chaotic postwar society. Yet the legacy of the gross human rights violations of the Armed Conflict still permeates Salvadoran society, and the question remains if national reconciliation has been achieved.

As the year 2013 came to a close, the polarizing issue of amnesty re-surfaced onto the national scene. In September, the Salvadoran Supreme Court agreed to review the Amnesty Law of 1993, which prevents the prosecution of human rights violations that occurred during the Armed Conflict. Two weeks later, on September 30, *Tutela Legal del Arzobispado de San Salvador* (the human rights and legal aid office of the Catholic
Church in El Salvador) was abruptly and arbitrarily closed by the Archbishop of San Salvador. *Tutela Legal* was created in 1982 by Archbishop Rivera y Damas to continue the church’s effort to protect human rights (previously championed by murdered Archbishop Oscar Romero). After the war ended in 1992, *Tutela Legal* continued its work in defense of human rights, and began fighting for justice for some of the violations that occurred during the war, such as the case of the Massacre at El Mozote, which was brought before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2012. The initial reasoning behind Archbishop Escobar Alas’ closure of *Tutela Legal* was that that the organization’s work was no longer relevant. The Archbishop said that the war is long over and therefore the office was no longer necessary (Wilkinson, 2013). The Archbishop’s words echoed those of many others who believe that the horrors of the war’s human rights violations are in the past, and therefore the victims and organizations, such as *Tutela Legal*, only serve to bring back the painful memories of the past. However, with the closure of *Tutela Legal*, there was immediate public outcry. Those opposed to the closure are many within society who believe that the legacies of the atrocities have not been properly dealt with, and support *Tutela Legal*’s fight for justice. The Archbishop then backtracked days later, amending his reasoning for the closure, stating that it was due to financial irregularities and corruption within the organization (Neier, 2013). The conflicting rationales over the closure raise suspicions over the Archbishop’s motives.

Weeks after *Tutela Legal*’s closure, the human rights organization *Asociación Pro-Búsqueda* was attacked. In the early morning of November 14, 2013, gunmen

---

*a* After *Tutela Legal del Arzobispado*’s closure, almost all its employees re-grouped and resumed their work, founding the new organization *Tutela Legal Dra. Maria Julia*
entered the *Pro-Búsqueda* office, removed computers and equipment, and set fire to the files (Wilson, 2013). Founded by Jesuit priest Jon Cortina in 1994, *Pro-Búsqueda* is an organization dedicated to finding children separated from their families during the Salvadoran Armed Conflict. Along with reuniting disappeared children with their families, the organization has also brought cases against the state of El Salvador before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. The attack against *Pro-Búsqueda*, particularly in its style, echoed a violence characteristic of the Armed Conflict. Though the culprits remain unknown, prestigious Salvadoran reporter Carlos Dada poetically and emotionally reflects the thoughts of many Salvadorans:

> We still do not know who did it, but it is not difficult to guess: **the cruel, the wicked, the torturers, the assassins, the kidnappers of children.** Those who keep the bodies hidden so that the officially amnesiatic public will call them heroes. Those who before lived to cause fear. Today it is them who are scared. Scared that we know what they did. That the harm they did in their moment of history is irreparable. That the official history will change. It was them (Dada, 2013).¹

Both *Tutela Legal* and *Pro-Búsqueda* have extensive documentation of the human rights abuses from the Civil War, and have been dedicated to defending human rights and fighting for accountability and justice for decades. The Salvadoran Armed Conflict, which lasted from 1980-1992, left roughly 75,000 people dead or disappeared. The Truth Commission Report emitted by the United Nations as a part of the 1992 Peace Accords, reported some 22,000 denunciations of gross violent crimes, including mainly complaints of extra-judicial executions, forced disappearances, and torture (Betancourt, Planchart, & Buergenthal, 1993). *Tutela Legal* alone had files containing the documentation of some 50,000 cases of human rights abuses, including 80% of the cases included in the Truth Commission Report (W. Medrano, personal communication, 8 July 2014). The
documentation at both organizations bears witness to the abuses perpetrated. The incidents with both organizations, so soon after the Supreme Court’s admission of the Amnesty Law for review, raise suspicions over motive. The incidents themselves also focused attention on the Amnesty Law itself: its purpose, its effects, and its divisiveness in the postwar period. These incidents serve as a point of departure from which to look at the polarizing effects of the human rights violations that occurred during the conflict, and how they have been dealt with in the postwar years.

Along with these incidents, we also see many contentious battles for memory throughout the country, especially in the past few years. In particular, the naming or re-naming of places after leading figures from the years of conflict has generated some controversy. In November 2012, a newly built boulevard connecting San Salvador to next-door Santa Tecla, was renamed “Bulevar Monseñor Romero” after the slain archbishop. In re-naming the boulevard, officially it was a contest for the best name, yet leftist President Mauricio Funes chose the name of “Monseñor Romero”, though it never appeared in the contest (Alas, 2012). In March 2014 the country’s international airport was re-named after Romero as well. This name change had to go through the national Legislative Assembly, where the measure passed with 54 votes, yet all members of the ARENA faction did not vote on the issue (Corvera, 2014). Re-naming these places after Monseñor Romero, while demonstrating a dedication to the soon-to-be Saint, resistance, particularly from the right, indicates a division over Romero and how he is remembered today. There was also a proposed name change for a major street in San Salvador in November 2014, to be named after Major Roberto D’Aubuisson, founder of the ARENA party and named in the Truth Commission Report as responsible for ordering the
assassination of Monseñor Romero. There is also a roundabout in the San Salvador suburb Antiguo Cuscatlan named after D’Aubuisson, yet the 2014 proposed street name change caused uproar. Opponents of the deceased right-wing leader organized on social media under the banner #NingunaCalleLlevaráTuNombre (No street will carry your name). The proposed change was abandoned by the San Salvador mayor’s office when its political party changed (ARENA to FMLN) in May 2015.

These selected name changes are but a few examples of the many sites of memory throughout postwar El Salvador. As Pierre Nora (1989) termed them, these lieux de mémoire serve as physical sites of memory, where memory is activated and brought into the public sphere. These physical sites of memory represent the division and polarization in society over the different meanings of whom the sites represent. Former Human Rights Advocacy Coordinator for the US-based NGO the SHARE Foundation, Bethany Loberg, has been in El Salvador witnessing these debates over the past few years. She describes the situation:

> Just in terms of the polarization… you see it in a lot of different ways… Some of the just obviously symbolic ones in society are just like the way that for so many people, Romero is still such a huge inspiration and legacy, and then, yet, you have the monument to Roberto D’Aubuisson, or when you go and meet with representatives of ARENA, it’s in the salon dedicated to him, and some of them will even…deny that Roberto D’Aubuisson had anything to do with Romero’s assassination, and even though it’s…very well documented, and so just… the symbols in society (B. Loberg, personal communication, 30 June, 2014).

As Bethany referred to, much of the polarization regarding the war and the human rights violations that occurred has become manifest within the two major political parties: ARENA and the FMLN (right-wing and left-wing, respectively).
The polarized political perspectives are the result of different, and also polarized, collective memories of the Armed Conflict, and particularly of the human rights violations that occurred during the war. Collective memory, the memory of different groups within society, is a social construction, which frames how the past is viewed (Halbwachs, 1992). In the case of El Salvador the right and the left have developed different collective memories of the war and its atrocities, based on each ideology’s needs in the present. The right’s collective memory has focused on anticommunism and the primacy of the Salvadoran homeland, utilizing the history of the 1932 massacre of “communist” peasants as the basis for its staunch conservative policies (Sprenkels, 2011). The left has focused on the legacies of extreme inequality, dictatorship, repression, and the need for a people’s power to fight against the oligarchy who control the country (Sprenkels, 2011). While there have been variations and multiple memories within each ideology, in the postwar period “the two traditions each have characteristics of an official story, they are now hegemonic, in the sense that they offer widely accepted (and rarely questioned) explanations for their audiences” (Sprenkels, 2011, p. 269).²

Though much of the divisions within the political parties are based on the ideological divisions that emerged before and particularly during the Armed Conflict, I argue that the human rights violations during the war, and how they were handled in the immediate postwar period, have contributed to this political and societal polarization. Gross human rights violations, committed by the Salvadoran state as well as the FMLN guerrillas, left scars upon much of the population. In the immediate postwar period, there was a Truth Commission to bring the atrocities to light, and a blanket Amnesty Law to put the truth back in the dark past. I argue that the differing perspectives and collective memories of
the human rights violations that occurred during the Salvadoran Armed Conflict have contributed to a continued polarized country and have prevented reconciliation in El Salvador.

Chapter 1 provides a detailed look at the history of El Salvador. As the memory of the past can change for the needs of the present, it is necessary to look at what is considered to be the basic history of the country, so we can then look at the different perspectives of that history. Chapter 2 provides the theoretical framework for analyzing the collective memories. It utilizes theories and discourses of transitional justice, collective memory, and critiques of Human Rights Discourse. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are the heart of the research and are where I present my findings. Utilizing the Human Rights Discourse metaphor of the Savage-Victim-Savior (which will be explained in Chapter 2), the findings chapters each utilize one aspect of the metaphor. In these chapters I present differing Salvadoran perspectives. As this study is about the collective memories of Salvadorans, the main purpose of these chapters is to present their different views. I put the interviews into conversation with each other to analyze and critique the different collective memories and current realities based on those memories.

This research was conducted in San Salvador, El Salvador for five weeks in the summer of 2014. I utilized a qualitative approach in the field, conducting qualitative interviews with persons from various organizations, political parties, and media outlets. As the topic of my research is complex and non-quantifiable, intensive interviews and participant observation were the necessary method. I employed the “snowball” technique finding persons to interview, beginning with a small group of contacts, who then were able to give me the contact information and/or introduce me to others who could be
beneficial to this research.\textsuperscript{b} I had previously lived in San Salvador from 2006-2009, and therefore had a network of friends and former colleagues who were able to connect me with many others to interview. There were three difficulties in finding persons to interview during my time in San Salvador. The first was the time constraint: I only had five weeks to set up and interview people. Because of this constraint, I was unable to travel outside the capital to get their perspectives. A second difficulty was the security situation in the country. Travelling both within San Salvador and outside the city was difficult because of the extreme levels of violence the country faces. This prevented me from going into many communities, particularly marginalized communities. The third difficulty was a general lack of access to the economic elite. Most of my contacts come from grass roots and human rights organizations, and are not the elite. Without any, or with unresponsive, contacts within those circles, it was difficult to obtain more interviews from the economic elite and the political right. In all, I was able to interview 24 people, 22 of them in San Salvador (2 human rights attorneys were interviewed in person outside the time I spent in El Salvador). There were significantly more males interviewed, 16 men while only 8 women. I attribute much of this to the fact that in El Salvador, the majority of leadership positions are still held by males. Therefore, when I interviewed lawyers, politicians, or the higher-ups in organizations or media outlets, these persons were predominantly male. I interviewed persons from a variety of age-ranges. Three interviewees were under thirty years old, eleven were in their thirties or forties, and an additional eleven were over fifty years old. On the economic spectrum, I asked each interviewee was asked to self-identify their economic class. Four were upper class; five

\textsuperscript{b} For more information on this technique see Taylor and Bodgan, 1998.
upper-middle or professional; nine middle-class; three working-class; with five identifying with lower class or poor. Finally, on the political spectrum, a little more than half of the interviewees were left-wing (13 total), five were center, and five were right-wing. A list with all those interviewed and their basic information can be found in Appendix A.

This study utilizes the qualitative interviews to go in-depth into how Salvadorans view their past and current reality. The findings chapters principally utilize their own words, as the study is looking at their collective memories. Through these interviews, I look at the issues related to the human rights violations of the war, the Peace Accords and Amnesty Law, and how all three elements have been dealt with and looked at in the postwar decades. It does not look to answer many of the debates, but simply present the different memories on each side of the polarizing issues. El Salvador never ceases to be a small yet infinitely complex country, and this study provides testimonial insight into these complexities.

<sup>†</sup> The interviews, and quotes from these interviews, represent the personal opinions of the interviewee, and do not represent the official positions of any political party or organization that the person belongs to.
Chapter 1: Historical Overview

Y que mis venas no terminan en mí
sino en la sangre unánime
de los que luchan por la vida,
el amor,
las cosas,
el paisaje y el pan
la poseía de todos.
-Roque Dalton

The current polarized climate in El Salvador is a complex one, rooted in the history of the country. The 20th century was marked by systematic repression and human rights abuses under the banner of defending the *patria*, against those who would threaten the power of the oligarchy and the military. The historical legacies of marginalization and repression are vital in understanding the current situation. This chapter not only will present a brief history of the country, but will weave in the histories and testimony of those interviewed for this study, as well as documented testimonial literature, in order to present how the major events are remembered and described, forming a part of the collective memory of the country.

1.1 The Coffee Era, Growth of the Oligarchy, and the Matanza

The roots of the armed conflict of the 1980s lie in the social and economic inequalities established around the turn of the century. Coffee became the major cash crop in the mid-1800s, and the coffee industry developed into a large-scale commercial enterprise, making immediate and pressing demands on the existing pattern of land use and ownership, as well as having far-reaching social implications (Browning, 1971). This new “golden grain” thrived on the rich volcanic soils prevalent in the western departments of Santa Ana, Sonsonate, and Ahuachapán, which coincidently were also the
areas with the largest indigenous population. In order to improve Salvadoran society and increase coffee development, in 1881 and 1882 the government imposed a series of privatization decrees, in which communal forms of property were eliminated throughout the country as an impediment to agricultural development and economic growth (Paige, 1997). These laws were essentially geared towards indigenous peasants, and effectively evicted indigenous communities from their ancestral lands. The land became concentrated in the hands of an agrarian elite, and the peasantry became landless and was forced to work the land of the oligarchy (Lindo-Fuentes, Ching, & Lara-Martinez, 2007). The economy began to be controlled by a dominant, agrarian elite that was made up of interrelated family groups known as the “Fourteen Families” (Paige, 1997). The specific number of families is incorrect (fourteen refers to the fourteen departments that make up El Salvador, with one family controlling each department), since estimates range from twenty-five to two hundred families. Whatever the exact number, the point is the same: an extremely small and interrelated group, with its roots in the nineteenth century, controlled the wealth of El Salvador, and in particular the entire system of coffee production: land, processing, and export, and frequently finance and industry as well (Paige, 1997). This development of the agrarian elite and the landless peasantry at the end of the 19th century is the foundation for the inequalities that exploded in the 20th century.

This oligarchy not only became dominant economically, but also became entrenched in the government after the 1880s, and state-oligarchic relations became interdependent. The principal leaders were recruited from the elite social strata, and they ruled in a manner that served the interests of the oligarchy, regardless of whether or not it was beneficial for the nation (Baloyra, 1982). At the time of the turn of the century, the
main political issue was to find the best way to protect the coffee planters, which also included the development of security forces to protect coffee interests (Lindo-Fuentes, 1990). The Rural Police, which would become the National Police, was created by decree in 1884 in the western coffee growing areas; in 1912 the National Guard was created. Both forces were to patrol the countryside, protect the private property of the oligarchy, and deal with unruly peasants, who occasionally rebelled against the landowners (Browning, 1971 and Montgomery, 1995). A third security force, the Treasury Police, was created in 1936, yet the task of all three forces over the decades was the maintenance of security, particularly to protect the landholdings of the coffee oligarchy.

While the profits of the protected oligarchy in the first two decades of the 20th century grew, the living conditions of the average Salvadoran deteriorated. Salvadoran social critic Alberto Masferrer (as cited in Montgomery, 1995) questioned, “So what good does it to make money from the sale of coffee when it leaves so many people in misery?” (p. 33). Amongst this marginalization, various working-class organizations began to form, including labor and political associations, trade unions, and in 1930 the Communist Party of El Salvador (PCS).

The Great Depression would exacerbate the inequalities and tensions broiling up in the countryside. Tensions were also exacerbated by demographics: in 1932 El Salvador had approximately 1.5 million people, with a population density of nearly 200 people per square mile, giving it one of the highest population densities in the Americas (Lindo-Fuentes, Ching, & Lara-Martínez, 2007). Additionally, the western- coffee growing areas of the country were where the majority of the country’s indigenous
population (20% of the total population) lived, most of who were poor, working peasants (Lindo-Fuentes, Ching, & Lara-Martínez, 2007).

Coffee represented 90% of the country’s total exports, and when the stock market crashed, bringing down the price of coffee, the burden fell on the workforce (Lindo-Fuentes, Ching, & Lara-Martínez, 2007). Describing the situation of the peasants in the countryside, Miguel Mármol (PCS leader and labor organizer) stated that they were “being treated like slaves, by slaveholders on plantations and estates, starvation wages, arbitrary and inconsistent wage reductions, massive unjustified firings, evictions of tenant farmers, systematic refusal to lease land, worsening of working conditions of the tenant farmers, destruction of the crops of unruly peasants by burning the sown fields or letting loose all the livestock on them to graze, to closing of all pathways across the plantations and estates- direct and fierce repression by the National Guard in the form of imprisonment, expulsions from homes, burning of houses” (Paige, 1997, p. 108). The countryside was boiling over, and these were the conditions for the 1931 presidential election, in which the winner Arturo Araujo promised to take dramatic steps to alleviate the situation. However, the social, political, and economic situation continued to deteriorate, and Araujo could not gain the oligarchy’s support (Montgomery, 1995). On December 2, 1931 Araujo was overthrown in a coup, and General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez assumed the presidency in the coup’s aftermath. This coup also increased popular mobilization, particularly in the coffee-growing areas of the country (Dunkerley, 1985). The unrest and mobilization of the largely indigenous peasants continued in the western- coffee growing areas of the country.
After apparently fraudulent municipal elections in early January 1932, in which the PCS had purportedly won some municipalities, unrest in the countryside came to a head. The PCS, with Augustín Farabundo Martí as its leader, decided to organize a popular uprising. As Mármol (1972) described in his testimony of the events of 1932, it was the Party’s responsibility to lead the popular masses in order to avoid imminent danger. The masses could not go alone into combat. It was not a communist uprising that was planned, but the PCS felt there was going to be an insurrection no matter what, and therefore decided to participate and plan the popular uprising. The plot was discovered by the government, and PCS leaders Martí, Luna, and Zapata were arrested and subsequently executed. The rebellion broke out anyway in the late night of January 22, and resulted in an unorganized and uncoordinated uprising centered in the western highland, coffee-growing areas, with the towns of Izalco and Juayúa in the department of Sonsonate being taken by the masses (Montgomery, 1995 and Dunkerly, 1985). The rebels were poor peasants, mostly Indigenous, and they targeted symbols of local power, such as government buildings and military garrisons, as well as businesses and homes of landowning elites, killing fewer than one hundred people until the uprising was quelled on January 25 (Lindo-Fuentes, Ching, & Lara-Martínez, 2007). Lindo-Fuentes, et al. (2007) summarize the uprising in their meticulous study of the events: “the 1932 rebellion was caused by the pressures that commercial coffee production imposed on the western highlands and its peasant residents. Issues of land, labor, local political control, market fluctuations, racism, and militarism converged into a highly volatile situation that eventually exploded in open revolt” (p. 28). Yet it is the aftermath of the rebellion that would become the turning point in Salvadoran history.
The uprising was viewed as an indigenous, communist rebellion, and the military government reacted extremely to these groups to maintain order in the western-coffee-growing areas: over the course of the next ten days to two weeks, the soldiers and paramilitary units killed on a massive scale of retribution for the insurrection (Lindo-Fuentes, Ching, & Lara-Martínez, 2007). The campaign was against peasants and indigenous peoples, not simply against those who participated in the uprising: all Indians with machetes were deemed guilty of subversion and executed without question (Dunkerley, 1985). Allegedly 985 people alone were killed in one day in the town of Nahuizalco (Dunkerley, 1985). The total body count of the military campaign ranges between ten to thirty thousand people, with the vast majority being innocent victims (Lindo-Fuentes, Ching, & Lara-Martínez, 2007). The number killed contains such a range because the archival record in El Salvador is silent on the events, or at least no documents have been released to the public (Lindo-Fuentes, Ching, & Lara-Martínez, 2007). The massacre also devastated the indigenous communities and demolished political dissent (Moodie, 2010). This systematic killing of peasants became known as the Matanza (slaughter). Not only did this massacre quell the masses, but it also decimated the Communist Party, which would take decades to rebuild itself. And although the rebellion itself was not simply a communist uprising, it would become labeled as such by both the left and the right in the decades following, and the destroyed town of Izalco would become legendary as the site where “communism in El Salvador was defeated.” Despite the quashing of the “communist rebellion,” the oligarchy would continue to be fearful of the threat of communism.
The Matanza stands out as a central point in Salvadoran history for many reasons. It is the single worst episode of state-sponsored repression in modern Latin American history (let alone Salvadoran history), and has been a “festering wound on the country’s psyche ever since” (Lindo-Fuentes, Ching, & Lara-Martínez, 2007, p. 61). Salvadoran poet Roque Dalton would write in his poem “Todos”, “We were all born half dead in 1932/ we survived but half alive/ each one with a count of thirty thousand dead.” The government tried to omit the events from the official history for the next decades, as the events of 1932 were rarely taught in schools, and until 1967, they were rarely mentioned in political speeches or debates (Lindo-Fuentes, Ching, & Lara-Martínez, 2007). However, not only was 1932 seared into the memories of the Salvadoran people for generations, the revolt and bloodshed created a fearful oligarchy willing to cede political power to Martínez, thus beginning five decades of military rule (Diskin & Sharpe, 1986b). The rebellion proved to the oligarchs that rural workers and peasants composed a useful but dangerous class of people, who had to be tabulated, classified, watched, and regulated in the future to prevent them from rebelling once again (Binford, 1996). The result of the Matanza left the oligarchy the political peace it desired, but at the cost of the military tightening its grip on the government (Leonard, 1991). With the dominance of Martínez, a politico-economic realignment took place: the oligarchy yielded a modest degree of state intervention along with military control of the government while maintaining a veto on economic policy (Dunkerley, 1988). The military took political
d Martínez was ousted in 1944, which allowed a brief political opening. The military seized that opening and its official candidate, General Salvador Castaneda Castro, won the presidential elections held that year. Upon attempting to have himself re-elected in 1948, Castaneda Castro was removed from office. From 1948-1979 the armed forces maintained its one-party rule of the presidency.
control, but it was through an alliance with the oligarchy, which maintained their economic dominance over the country, with the doctrine of anti-communism uniting the two.

1.2 Economic and Political Opening, 1950s-1960s

The successive military governments after Martínez was ousted in 1944 continued in their alliance with the economic elite, and maintained repression of opposition and dissent. The decade of the 1960s saw a time of economic expansion for the country. The agro-export economy grew to include cotton and sugar, the industrial base grew, particularly for manufacturing light products, and the Central American Common Market (CACM) began, which promoted an import-substitution model, and which constructed new regional integration opportunities (Moodie, 2010). Both the CACM and industrial growth in the region were heavily promoted by the United States and its Alliance for Progress, urging autonomous, industrialized states in the Americas, which would build liberal democratic societies (Dunkerley, 1985). After the shock of the Cuban Revolution, the US wanted to prevent “another Cuba” and felt that the way to do so would be by promoting economic development in the region. Yet it was the same economic elite who reaped the benefits of this expansion. The beneficiaries of the cotton boom, the sugar industry, the expansion of insurance and banking industries, and the industrial growth were in general the same inter-connected families of the coffee oligarchy (Binford, 1996). What emerged was a small, highly concentrated sector within the oligarchy, which economically controlled the entire country and did not challenge the military-oligarchic alliance (Lungo Uclés, 1996). By the end of the decade, the Alliance for Progress and related programs, which were designed to develop the economy, combined with regional
pressures (including the four-day long “Soccer War” in 1969 between El Salvador and Honduras over land and population issues), ended up only aggravating the economic disparities in the country.

While the economic opening only increased the inequalities in the country, it did result in a slight democratic opening. With employment in the industrial sector rising slightly, unions began to form. More significantly, the number of university students quadrupled between 1960 and 1971 to more than twelve thousand students, which is also indicative of the growth of the middle class (Moodie, 2010). The Catholic Church in particular became active in organizing in the country, developing peasant unions (such as the FECCAS) and Christian Base Communities to bring the new doctrine of Liberation Theology to the masses.° Opposition parties began to form, particularly the Christian Democratic Party (PDC), whose leader José Napoleón Duarte was elected mayor of San Salvador three times from 1964-1970. The PDC did not break too far with the traditional oligarchic stance, as it was firmly anti-communist, but it did draw much of its support from the growing middle class: urban professionals, white-collar employees, as well as some campesinos (Dunkerley, 1988 and Baloyra, 1982). However the PDC’s main goal of actual liberal democracy contrasted to the traditional oligarchy’s concentration of power.

In response to the growing support for the PDC, paramilitary forces began to appear. The most infamous was the Organización Democrática Nacionalista or ORDEN (order), which was created in the 1960s to counter the rural political organizing of the PDC and was also utilized as an instrument for landlord suppression of peasant unrest in

° FECCAS- Christian Federation of Salvadoran Peasants
the countryside (Diskin & Sharpe, 1986b). ORDEN was founded by General José Alberto “Chele” Medrano, the chief of the National Guard, with the assistance of US Special Forces, and worked closely with the Salvadoran national security agency ANSESAL (Diskin & Sharpe, 1986b). ORDEN was a 50,000-100,000 person strong mix of informants, vigilantes, and executioners, and was the origin of the death squads that would come to terrorize the country in the coming decades (Dunkerley, 1985). It is evident that the economic elite was fearful of what the slight political opening of the 1960s could mean for the country and their power. While there was not yet an armed insurgency (the first guerrilla group would form in 1970), the formation of ORDEN and the ever-present National Guard in the countryside are representative of the oligarchy’s violent resistance to any threat to their economic hegemony. The security forces also represent the continual fear of communism that has pervaded the country since the 1932 uprising. Salvadoran author Manlio Argueta fictionalized and characterized the sentiments of the security forces in his novel One Day in the Life. Though a caricature, the voice of “the authorities” echoes that of ORDEN and the National Guard:

…the Salvadoran has the predilection for communism, since 1932…in 1932, the communists didn’t even win and they were already violating the people, the rich, well the hatred of this people is with the rich; we were born with envy inside… And we are here precisely to avoid envy, to exterminate it with bullets, decisiveness and firmness. We are preparing ourselves more and more because communism is coming. Our foreign teachers don’t let us alone even for a minute. They say that we need to be willing to die for liberty and democracy…The teacher makes us yell: “Who is the worst enemy of democracy?” And we all respond: “The people” (2011: 101-102, 75).²

This section characterizes the attitudes of the security forces towards the people, particularly in the countryside. 1932 and the threat of communism remained present, and
the military-oligarchic alliance was poised to maintain its control over the people through repression if necessary.

1.3 Election Fraud, Further Repression, Birth of the Revolutionary Movements

By the 1970s, the military-oligarchic political model was in crisis. With the political openings in the 1960s and the development of opposition parties, the model encouraged political activity while but showed no signs of letting these groups take part in the national government. For the 1972 presidential elections, various opposition parties formed a coalition, the National Opposition Union (UNO), in a full-fledged attempt to win the presidency, with José Napoleón Duarte as its presidential candidate. UNO had a simple platform for the 1972 elections, stating “We merely intend to start the country down a different road from that which it has followed for so long and which as brought it to such grave and overwhelming difficulties” (Mongtomery, 1995, p. 63). In reality the elections were a test to see if the military-oligarchic powers would allow the country down a path toward actual democracy (McClintock, 1998). The government failed the test. It became apparent during Election Day that Duarte was carrying San Salvador and likely to win the election. Francisco Mena, the son of an army officer at the time, recalls his father’s account:

…the army was called in, the officers were called in and asked to protect democracy, and that there was a danger coming to El Salvador, and again, as officers…they were called to protect democracy…So they went in, changed the ballots, and the day after…Molina was declared the president” (F. Mena, personal communication, 3 July, 2014).

The UNO coalition was made up of the PDC, the MNR (Revolutionary National Movement), and the UDN (Nationalist Democratic Union).
Fearing unrest, Molina offered a re-count, but Duarte insisted on a new election. The government reacted by convening the National Assembly and electing Molina as president (Montgomery, 1995). A small group of outraged young army officers staged a two-day rebellion in San Salvador that was quickly defeated, and Duarte, who had supported the rebellion, was arrested, tortured, and exiled in its aftermath (McClintock, 1998). The 1972 elections shattered the political opening and a path towards democracy.

The electoral fraud of 1972 marks another turning point in Salvadoran history. The original design of the military-oligarchic alliance excluded the possibility of defeat and assumed that the official party would eventually be able to include the burgeoning middle-class (Baloyra, 1982). However, with the oligarchy’s economic dominance and the military’s continued repression, the middle-class developed their own political ideologies which included real participatory democracy, not one in which the official party always had the power. The fraud destroyed any attempt at a political center that had been emerging and only polarized the country further, leaving a radical situation in its wake.

Against the backdrop of political unrest, the general situation in the countryside had only worsened. In the late 1970s approximately 78% of the country’s arable land was in the hands of the top 10% of the landowners, who used the land for cash crops, and hired peasants at extremely low wages (Bonner, 1984). In describing the plight of the campesinos, Bonner (1984) writes:

To survive, peasants coax corn, beans, and vegetables from the depleted soils of their plots, frequently situated on seemingly vertical hillsides. They don’t own the land; they only work it as sharecroppers or renters. More than 90 percent of these parcels are smaller than twelve acres, but twenty-two acres are necessary to provide subsistence for a family of six,
the average size of a Salvadoran family. But those with even tiny plots are fortunate; nearly half of all Salvadoran peasants have no access to any land (p. 19).

Archbishop Monseñor Romero perfectly articulates the situation of poverty that characterized 1970s El Salvador: “The root of all violence is institutional violence…the situation in the country is lamentable, particularly among peasants and slum dwellers. The rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer” (Bonner, 1984, p. 43). While the countryside was feeling the effects of the pressures of the decade, in the aftermath of the fraudulent elections, Molina searched for ways to reinforce his authority in the capital as well, and found a scapegoat for his “law and order” and “anticommunism” campaign in the National University of El Salvador (UES). The university was arbitrarily closed for extended periods, and professors, students, and administrators were arrested (Montgomery, 1995). The fraudulent elections and the repressive aftermath, particularly in the university, convinced many that there was no alternative to armed struggle.

The first guerrilla group to form was the Popular Forces for Liberation (FPL) in 1970. Its leader, Salvador Cayetano Carpio, former leader of the PCS, left the Party because he advocated for mass military struggle, and the PCS was resistant at the time (McClintock, 1998). The FPL advocated for a prolonged popular war strategy, was generally of the Marxist-Leninist ideology, incorporated large numbers of workers and peasants into the organization, and was mostly active in the northern departments of Chalatenango and Morazán (McClintock, 1998). Other dissidents left the PCS, including one group that evolved into the Revolutionary Army of the People (ERP) following the fraudulent elections in 1972. The ERP utilized a more short-term foquista strategy influenced by the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutionaries, and had its stronghold in
Morazán (McClintock, 1998). One of the main leaders of the early ERP was Salvadoran poet and writer Roque Dalton. However, Dalton’s insistence on the need for a political ideology led to him be accused of treason as a CIA agent, and he was executed by the ERP, allegedly on orders by leaders Joaquín Villalobos and Jorge Meléndez, on May 10, 1975 (Montgomery, 1995 and Dunkerley, 1985). The Dalton family, as well as many others, contests Dalton’s involvement in the CIA. According to his son, Juan José Dalton, “…my father… far from having an attitude of cooperation with the CIA or those whom he considered his enemies, had a brave and patriotic attitude from out our point of view” (J.J. Dalton, personal communication, 10 July, 2014).³ Villalobos himself later described the assassination as a “mistake, an error, and an injustice,” but refused to take responsibility for it (Osorno, 1999).

Dalton’s execution led to a split in the ERP, with many leaving to form another force, the National Resistance (RN), which would adopt as its guerrilla organization name the Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN). The smallest guerrilla group that would form was the Worker’s Revolutionary Party (PRTC), founded in 1976. The final group to join the armed struggle was the PCS itself. Though it had been committed to an electoral path towards revolution (particularly given its history in the Matanza), through the brutal repression of the 1970s it changed its policy (Montgomery, 1995). In October 1980, the five guerrilla groups, despite their differences, joined together and formed the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN). During the next decade, the five groups were coordinated under the FMLN, yet each group maintained its own leadership and structure. The FMLN was also allied with a civilian force, the Democratic
Revolutionary Front (FDR). This consolidation of the guerrilla groups in 1980 brought about the official beginning of the civil war.

Yet even before the war broke out, the decade of the 1970s saw increased repression against the civilian population, which led many to join the armed struggle. On July 30, 1975, more than 2,000 National University students in San Salvador marched in solidarity with students who were protesting in Santa Ana. The National Guard opened fire on the demonstrators and left at least thirty-seven dead and dozens were disappeared (Montgomery, 1995). Mirna Perla, who escaped the National Guard by jumping from a bridge, described the scene,

Look… we didn’t carry weapons, I had two rocks, nobody was armed. We didn’t imagine that tanks and G-3 rifles would be waiting for us; this time, the army, the Armed Forces, had planned the repression and participated with their combat troops and weapons for a regular War… I want to insist that the decision to massacre us was that of President of the Republic Colonel Arturo Armando Molina, with the approval of the yes men of Ministers, they talked of a communist plot (Rico Mira, 2003, pp. 121, 126).^4

The use of forced disappearance also marked the protest. Many mothers and family members of the disappeared began to organize after the protest. As Blanca García, whose mother was one of these new women human rights organizers, describes,

At that moment of 1975… a rather cruel massacre occurred against the students of the National University. And this is practically the origin of the Mothers Committee… the Mothers Committee is called the “Committee of Mothers and Family Members of Detained and Disappeared and Political Assassinations of El Salvador Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero. All these characteristics through the years of the war and of conflict, well were the rallying cry of the Mothers Committee… (the security forces) grabbed people from civil society simply for suspecting that in that moment they were subversives. And subversives is what they called a person who was against the government, who wanted reforms, wanted changes in Salvadoran society… (they grabbed) people
indiscriminately without reason (B. García, personal communication, 16 July, 2014).  

Though this is but one instance of government repression, it is indicative of what occurred throughout the country in the 1970s. However, Salvadoran society continued to organize in response to the repression.

By the 1977 presidential elections, the oligarchy and the military were back on the same page, and official candidate General Carlos Humberto Romero was elected, though fraud was widely assumed. During his tenure (until October 1979), the country saw rising mass demonstrations and protests, government repression, left-wing kidnappings, occupations of public buildings, labor strikes, and death-squad murders (Montgomery, 1995). General Romero increased repression against the “communist threat” throughout the country. For the government, and particularly ORDEN and ANSESAL, that threat included labor organizers, students, social activists, priests, nuns, catechists— all those who were organizing to seek some sort of change against the oligarchy. Right-wing death squads also emerged, which were organized by the extreme right within the military, and generally financed by the oligarchy (Diskin & Sharpe, 1986a). One death squad donned the name “Maximiliano Hernández Martínez Anti-Communist Brigade,” showing clear reference to the desire to wipe out all subversives as the dictator had in 1932. Human rights abuses became commonplace, including: arbitrary, unmotivated arrests by secret police or military agencies; widespread and systematic use of physical and psychological torture; kidnappings; arbitrary and indefinite detention of prisoners; use of illegally obtained confessions extracted through torture or intimidation; official refusal to provide information about detainees; judicial corruption; extremely poor prison
conditions; systematic impunity for human rights violators; government antagonism toward humanitarian, human rights, and relief agencies; intimidation and harassment of prisoners and their families (Booth, Wade, & Walker, 2010). The Romero regime’s repression, combined with the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua in July 1979, forced an attempt at reform in order to prevent the guerrillas from gaining ground.

General Romero was overthrown in October 1979 in an expected coup carried out by a movement of junior officers. The new government sought legitimacy after the chaos of General Romero, and included opposition civilians (PDC members) in a Junta with military officers. It was also a reformist government. “The night of the coup, the conspirators released a proclamation that denounced the ‘ancestral privileges’ of the ‘dominant classes’ and promised ‘an equitable distribution of national wealth’ by reforming agriculture, the tax system, social services, and labor laws” (Stanley, 1996, pp. 133-134). Though the new government’s lofty reforms could not be carried out to completion, the coup marked the collapse of the oligarchy-military alliance, as the landed oligarchy found themselves to be the target of the reforms (Paige, 1997). The new government’s goal was to curb repression, however the military “high command had no incentives to restrict the repressive violence that both the private sector right and the hardliners in the security forces saw as necessary” (Stanley, 1996, p. 155). By January 1980, the original civilian members of the reform Junta resigned, setting the stage for the increase in repression in 1980.\(^8\)

\(^8\) New civilian members would join the Junta, including José Napoleón Duarte who joined in March 1980, and would become the leader of the Junta in December 1980. Yet the civilian elements of the Junta never had control over the army, which continued its repression.
1.4 The New Church and its Influence in El Salvador

With the Second Vatican Council (known as Vatican II) from 1962-1965, and the Medellin Conference of Latin American Bishops in 1968, the doctrine of the Catholic Church began to change, which would have serious effects in El Salvador. Among the many changes that took place within the Church as a consequence of these events was the emergence of a preference for the poor. Liberation Theology, as it was termed, called on the Church, instead of preaching that the poor will be rewarded in heaven, to fight for the rights of the poor here on earth and to denounce the injustices that face the oppressed (Montgomery, 1995). This included the development of Christian Base Communities (CEBs), which became a very popular means of spreading the word in El Salvador, and with the CEBs, the masses began to participate in collective actions and demand justice for their own lives (Montgomery, 1995). Unsurprisingly, Liberation Theology, the CEBs, and the priests who supported them were unpopular with the Salvadoran government. Between 1976 and 1977 more than twenty-five Catholic priests were imprisoned, tortured or murdered (Moodie, 2010). A popular propaganda slogan for the repressive forces at the time was “Be a patriot, kill a priest.”

It was the assassination of one priest in particular that had an immediate effect on the Catholic Church in El Salvador, further radicalizing it towards the preferential option for the poor. On March 12, 1977 Jesuit priest Rutilio Grande was shot near the town of Aguilares, just north of the capital. Grande, along with being a proponent of Liberation Theology, was also a close friend of the newly selected Archbishop of San Salvador
Oscar Arnulfo Romero. Though the new bishop began as a conservative, Grande’s assassination transformed Monseñor Romero into an unwavering supporter and advocate for the poor and the oppressed in El Salvador.

During Monseñor Romero’s time as archbishop, he transformed the Salvadoran Church into a vocal opposition to the official repression and the refusal of the government to implement needed reforms (Montgomery, 1995). Monseñor Romero became known as the “Voice of the Voiceless,” particularly during his Sunday Masses, which were transmitted via radio throughout the country. During his homily, Monseñor Romero would consistently read the documented names of the persons who had been killed, assaulted, tortured, or disappeared (Montgomery, 1995). As Montgomery (1995) so accurately states: “Its (the Church’s) increasing vocal opposition to and condemnation of official repression and the refusal of the government to implement desperately needed reforms; its unequivocal support for the right of the people to organize themselves to demand better wages and working conditions; and its criticism of the oligarchy for its political intransigence and complicity in repression- all brought down on the church the wrath of the government and oligarchy alike” (p. 96). Romero’s public denunciation of the increasingly concerning situation in El Salvador earned him no friends within the government or the economic elite, yet he was the strongest voice for the repressed Salvadoran people.

In his final Sunday Mass, Monseñor Romero gave a direct appeal to the armed forces:

---

b No relation to General Carlos Humberto Romero.
I would like to make a special appeal to the men of the army, and specifically to the ranks of the National Guard, the police and the military. Brothers, you come from our own people. You are killing your own brother peasants when any human order to kill must be subordinate to the law of God which says, ‘Thou shalt not kill.’ No soldier is obliged to obey an order contrary to the law of God. No one has to obey an immoral law. It is high time you recovered your consciences and obeyed your consciences rather than a sinful order. The church, the defender of the rights of God, of the law of God, of human dignity, of the person, cannot remain silent before such an abomination. We want the government to face the fact that reforms are valueless if they are to be carried out at the cost of so much blood. In the name of God, in the name of this suffering people whose cries rise to heaven more loudly each day, I implore you, I beg you, I order you in the name of God: stop the repression! (Romero, 1980)

Though prior to this sermon death squads had already targeted Monseñor Romero, this passionate appeal turned out to be his death sentence. The next day, on March 24, 1980, while celebrating mass, he was assassinated, thereby silencing the most forceful voice for justice in the country (Montgomery, 1995). Yet his assassination did not silence the poor and marginalized. An estimated fifty thousand people gathered the following week for Romero’s funeral, only to have snipers shoot at the crowd, resulting in forty deaths and two hundred wounded (Moodie, 2010). This extreme violence against the Church in the government’s attempt to silence any sort of opposition only served to radicalize much of the general population: by 1980 the civil war had begun.

1.5 Civil War Begins

On October 15, 1979, a bloodless coup took place, overthrowing President Romero, and ending five decades of military rule in the country. Successive juntas composed of the military and civilians (including the PDC’s Duarte who headed the junta from 1980-1982) replaced the dominant military rule. Yet many viewed the civilian elements of the junta to have little to no power, especially considering the continued state
violence. Death squad activity continued and increased in 1980, with one of its most vocal proponents being Major Roberto D’Aubuisson, a neo-fascist hardliner who frequently took to the television airwaves to denounce and name “communists.” In particular, D’Aubuisson is consistently named as the person who ordered the assassination of Monseñor Romero. After Romero’s assassination, then US Ambassador to El Salvador Robert E. White called D’Aubuisson a “psychopathic killer” (Pyes, 2010). Yet, with his vocal anti-communist views, D’Aubuisson would become extremely important for the politics of the war, as we will see.

By October 1980 the guerrilla forces had united under the banner of the FMLN and in January 1981 launched their “Final Offensive,” which turned out to be simply the beginning of the war. Though launched at the most appropriate time, with the most public sympathy for the FMLN and a generally unprepared military, the January offensive was uncoordinated and did not lead to an overthrow of the government. However, the FMLN regrouped and began to control territories throughout the country, including parts of Chalatenango and Morazán. The drive of the guerrilla forces reinforced anti-communist attitudes in the waning Cold War.

Though the economic elite had been excluded from the military-PDC junta, they were still a dominant force in the country. According to interviews conducted by Jeffrey Paige (1997), the majority of the elite saw no connection between economic inequality and the war, and that it was a small group of terrorists who caused the war. A very small minority of the oligarchy, led by Orlando de Sola, even openly backed the death squad massacres of the early 1980s and urged a return to a Matanza-style way of settling things (Paige, 1997). Although the de Sola faction was not the majority, the oligarchy in
general felt that the nation was fighting for its life against communist terrorists. One element that the oligarchy did share during the war was unmitigated, undiluted hatred of Duarte (Baloyra, 1982). The oligarchy’s lack of support for the PDC civilian element of the junta contributed to the PDC’s failure to gain control of the war-torn country.

Economic policy was the main reason for the economic elite’s split from the junta governments. The economy in the 1980s plummeted, mostly due to the war. The junta attempted an agrarian reform with three phases, beginning in 1980. Phase I affected properties larger than 500 hectares, Phase II was initially to affect properties between 100 to 500 hectares but was revised to properties between 245 and 500 hectares, and Phase III was aimed to transfer agricultural land directly to the cultivators (Lungo Uclés, 1996). The junta also made reforms in other areas. It nationalized the banking system in order to reduce the oligarchy’s control of it, and it also created the Instituto del Café (INCAFE), which was supposed to modify a structure in which large producers and processors controlled the three phases of coffee production: agricultural, agro-industrial, and export (Lungo Uclés, 1996). The establishment of INCAFE led to a ten-year struggle between the government and the coffee oligarchy, and the land reforms, with the oligarchy fighting against them, were ineffective at decreasing the oligarchy’s economic power (Lungo Uclés, 1996 and Dunkerley, 1988). Furthermore, the implementation of the land reforms escalated the violence in the countryside. The reforms, which were intended to modify the country’s economic structure and break the oligarchy’s control over the economy, ended up failing and caused the economic elite to reunite in order to regain control of the government.
When Reagan won the US presidency in November 1980, the Salvadoran elite was delighted. On election night when Reagan triumphed there were feasts and dances in the homes of the Salvadoran oligarchy (Diskin & Sharpe, 1986a). The oligarchy felt that Reagan would get down to business and not be worried about such “trivial” things such as human rights. To an extent, this was true. As Reagan took office just after the January Offensive, he assumed a different stance from the Carter administration. Reagan felt that Carter’s weakness had permitted communism to make advances, particularly in Latin America, and he was determined to restore the US’s image and strengthen its forces of “freedom” (Leonard, 1991). Reagan was convinced that since Nicaragua had already fallen to communism, El Salvador would be next, and then Guatemala, and Mexico, until communism reached the United States. This Domino Theory, however likely or unlikely, was the impetus for Reagan’s diplomacy with El Salvador, which took the form of a blank check for the Salvadoran military (Bonner, 1984). Over the course of the war, between 1980-1992, the US would give an estimated $1.2 billion in military aid to El Salvador (Dunkerley, 1994). Yet human rights abuses continued, and now the Salvadoran military had the full support of the United States.

The Salvadoran Armed Forces began to change with this stimulus from the US. Most importantly, the number of troops doubled from ten to twenty thousand in order to meet the needs of the war (Lungo Uclés, 1996). Additionally, the military began restructuring troops and developed mobile elite battalions, which specialized in counter-insurgency, including the Atlacatl, Atonal, Beloso, and Bracamonte Battalions. These battalions were intended to create smaller mobile units independent of the regular army, and to utilize training from American advisors (Lungo Uclés, 1996). The elite battalions
took up the cause of anti-communism learned from both their military leaders as well as their training in the US or at US bases (such as in Panama). The US armed the Atlacatl and other battalions’ troops with the most effective weapons available and trained them, and it also disseminated a paranoid anticommunist ideology that reinforced preexisting fears and justified the use of any and all methods used to defeat the enemy (Binford, 1996). It was these elite battalions, as part of the Salvadoran military strategy, that were responsible for some of the most gruesome and emblematic human rights abuses of the war.

It was during the December 1981 army offensive in Morazán that the Salvadoran military, in particular the Atlacatl Battalion, produced one of the most shocking atrocities of the war, that continues to be illustrative of the repression of the armed conflict. Considered by the armed forces to be a guerrilla stronghold, Morazán was a priority in the military’s scorched-earth tactics. On December 10-11th, as a part of its “Hammer and Anvil” operation, the Atlacatl Battalion descended upon the town of El Mozote (and the surrounding villages). Rufina Amaya, the only survivor from El Mozote, describes the events of the day:

From the helicopter a lot of soldiers got out and they entered where we were. They brought two-sided knives, and they pointed at us with the rifles. Then they locked the men in the chapel… As the chapel was in front (of where we were), through the window we could see what they were doing with the men. It was ten o’clock in the morning. They had them with their hands tied and blindfolded, and (the soldiers) were standing on top of them; they had already killed a few. To those they decapitated them and threw them out of the chapel. At twelve noon, they finished killing all the men and they went to get the girls to take them to the hills…

At five in the afternoon they took me with a group of 22 women. I was the last in the line… When we arrived at the house of Israel Márquez, I
could see the mountain of dead people that they were machine-gunning. The other women were holding onto each other to scream and cry. I fell to my knees remembering my four children. In this moment, I did a half-circle and I hid behind a small apple tree…

The soldiers finished killing that group of women without realizing that I had hid and they went to get another group. Not until seven o’clock in the evening did they finish killing the women. They said, “now we have finished” and they sat down in the street almost at my feet. “Now that we have finished with the old men and women, now all we have left is the large number of children that are still locked up”… (then) I could only hear the screams of the children that they were killing…” (Amaya, Danner, & Consalvi, 1996, pp. 15-17).

Rufina also testified to overhearing two soldiers discussing the killing of the children. While one mentioned that while the orders were to not leave anyone alive because they were guerrilla collaborators, he did not want to kill children, the other responded, “We have to end with all of them, you know that. That’s the coronel’s order. This is a scorched earth operation and we have to kill the children too because they will ask the count from us… It’s what we have to do” (Amaya, Danner, & Consalvi, 1996, p. 71).

The Salvadoran military massacred 498 people in the village of El Mozote alone, and a total of almost one thousand in the entire operation including the nearby hamlets (Case of the Massacres of El Mozote and Nearby Places v. El Salvador, 2012). The El Mozote massacre was neither the first nor the last massacre in El Salvador, but it was the first to garner international attention (Binford, 1996). El Mozote was also the largest massacre in contemporary Latin American history. This horrendous event highlights the tunnel vision of the military during the war, and the lengths they would go to in order to defeat the “communist threat” in El Salvador.

---

i Total executions number 967 as documented in the Judgment of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights
Also in 1981, as a reaction to the growing leftist guerrilla threat and the policies of the PDC-led junta, a new political party emerged which would be influential in the country for decades to follow. Three existing organizations joined forces for the creation of the National Republican Alliance (ARENA): The Broad National Front (consisting of private business associations, anti-reform groups of coffee growers and cattle ranchers, young executives, a women’s association, and a right-wing nationalist youth organization); the old ORDEN network; and the civilian death squad network led by Roberto D’Aubuisson (Diskin & Sharpe, 1986b). As one of its founding members Gloria Salguero Gross describes it,

It was really, well they were fighting here, the leftists, Marxists, Leninists… so it was necessary to found a party with the power to counteract all that situation. So we founded the National Republican Alliance and our leader who headed everything was Roberto D’Aubuisson (G. Salguero Gross, personal communication, 29 July, 2014).8

The ideology of ARENA was based on the belief in the sanctity of individual effort and by extension the protection of the individual’s right to acquire, retain, and use property (Binford, 1996). Montgomery (1995) describes ARENA’s creed as a mixture of neo-Nazi and US Republican principles, and that “Republican” was specifically “chosen in honor of the Republican Party in the United States” (p. 157). ARENA also utilized the Cold War mentality and discourse of the time to define itself as vehemently anti-communist. ARENA can also be viewed as the first serious and openly partisan political vehicle of the oligarchy since the 1930s (Dunkerley, 1988). With the 1979 break

---

8 The suggestion to found ARENA had come from the US’ New Right, which also provided the newly founded ARENA with political support, lobbying support on Capitol Hill, and instruction on US methods of political campaigning (Montgomery, 1995, p. 157).
between the military-oligarchic alliance, the oligarchy had been excluded from policy making. The creation of ARENA allowed the economic elite to not only be involved in the process, but also gave it the opportunity to take control of the government.

Though ARENA had support on Capitol Hill, the US Government feared its extremism, particularly that of its leader D’Aubuisson. In the 1984 presidential elections, the US-backed PDC candidate José Napoleón Duarte over D’Aubuisson, and Duarte proved the victor. D’Aubuisson remained the president of the Legislative Assembly (a position he had been elected to in 1982), but with the election of Duarte, the US increased its aid to El Salvador and the war persisted. The armed conflict settled into a rhythm of low-intensity conflict without the widely publicized massacres that had been pervasive from 1979-1983 (Dunkerley, 1985). Duarte’s presidency however was characterized by massive corruption, and was overall underwhelming, as he was unable to pass any concrete programs to deal with economic, social, and political problems. More importantly, despite being General Commander of the Armed Forces, he had very little control over the High Command, and was thus unable to control the security forces or the war itself (Booth, Wade, & Walker, 2010). One of the most publicized examples of this is the 1987 assassination of the president of the NGO Human Rights Commission of El Salvador, Herbert Anaya Sanabria. Anaya was vocal about denouncing the human rights abuses that continued throughout the 1980s in El Salvador. He knew his work was dangerous, as his daughter Rosa Anaya remembers, but was determined to continue it:

And well my dad was a public figure… that was his role because well… and even to us himself he would say, “for what am I going to burn another person? I leave the position and it’ll stay open. Someone else will be put at risk. And for me, I’m already screwed, they already tortured me, I’m through…” And well, his testimony says it… one of the phrases that made
him famous later, “the agony of not working for justice is worse than the certain possibility of my death. This last part is only an instant, and the other consists of my whole life.” Then if that just gives you an idea… of the intensity of the moment. At the end, that intensity is given by history, not necessarily by the person. It’s just what that person was willing to do in their moment (R. Anaya, personal communication, 8 July, 2014).

Throughout the armed conflict, human rights defenders continued to speak out against the injustices they were facing. The assassination of Herbert Anaya, whose killers remain officially unidentified, was such a shock in the waning years of the war that the peace talks that Duarte had begun with the FMLN were called off by the guerrillas.

For the 1989 presidential elections, ARENA began to regroup. However, two factions within ARENA were vying for dominance within the party. One faction was tied to the old landed oligarchy and military cliques, and the other technocratic faction to the emergent financial, industrial, and commercial interests (Robinson, 2003). During this period of factional infighting, the organization FUSADES (the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development) was created to champion the neoliberal project and allow private sector leaders to organize and provide political and financial support for ARENA. The technocrats emerged victorious and nominated Alfredo Cristiani as ARENA’s presidential candidate. Despite D’Aubuisson’s continued influence in the party, Cristiani represented a break with ARENA’s association with death squads, which was necessary in order to have international acceptance (Montgomery, 1995). Cristiani’s victory also signified the change in direction of the Salvadoran economy, from an agrarian economy to one focused on new emerging sectors such as banking, maquila factories, and other neoliberal projects. With the fading Cold War, and George Bush now in the White House, the US supported Cristiani’s bid for
president, which succeeded. One June 1, 1989, José Napoleón Duarte handed over the presidential sash to Cristiani, an extremely significant moment for the beginnings of the consolidation of democracy and an end to military influence over the government.

William Robinson (2003) argues that this change to a more neoliberal economy in El Salvador was championed by the United States. Although one goal of the United States in El Salvador during the 1980s was to fight against the communist threat, it also wanted to bring the country into the global economy and society based on neoliberal lines. Robinson (2003) explains,

US strategy was aimed as much at transforming the landed oligarchy and its praetorian state as it was at defeating the popular uprising. US intervention sought to remove the obstacles that the local state and the elite placed on the country’s transformation and rearticulation to world capitalism… A key component of the intervention strategy was to achieve the hegemony of capital in Salvadoran society. The goal was to build up the private sector in civil society, redefine the relationship between the state and capital, and transfer key functions and resources from the government to private capital (pp. 88, 90).

In particular, the US encouraged the formation of FUSADES, which not only developed a web of private-sector organizations, but also played a critical role in concentrating the power of the technocrat faction of ARENA (Robinson, 2003). The split already existed within ARENA, but the “US intervention converged with the activities and the emergent projects of distinct Salvadoran agents, particularly with those of reformist middle class sectors and of the New Right” (Robinson, 2003, p. 91). However, this economic shift would not have been possible without the war itself. Robinson argues that the US’ intervention would not have been accepted by the elite if had not been for the FMLN threatening their survival. This forced them “to rely on US intervention and to accept, however grudgingly, the terms and conditions that accompanied that intervention”
This neoliberal victory for ARENA was also a victory for the United States and its global economic policies that were grounded in neoliberalism by the early 1990s. Cristiani’s Presidential victory allowed ARENA to enact sweeping neoliberal reforms in the country in the coming years, including trade liberalization, devaluation of the currency, privatizations, the lifting of subsidies, the promotion of non-traditional exports, and the expansion of free trade zones and maquiladoras (Robinson, 2003). This consolidation of the neoliberal agenda of ARENA would be influential particularly in the postwar years.

1.6 The Road to Peace

After Cristiani’s election, peace talks began. However, due to renewed attacks against the left in October, negotiations stalled. On November 11, 1989 the FMLN launched a surprise offensive in the capital, holding parts of San Salvador for two weeks. The Armed Forces responded the only way they knew how: with repression. On November 16, the Atlacatl Battalion entered the Jesuit University of Central America (UCA) and killed six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter. The perpetrators attempted to make the crime appear to have been perpetrated by the FMLN by writing guerrilla propaganda on the wall, merely beginning the military cover-up for the killings (Center for Justice and Accountability). These Jesuits, led by University Rector Ignacio Ellacuría, had also been outspoken opponents of the war and the abuses that had occurred. They had been involved in trying to mediate the dialogue between the FMLN and the government. Because of this involvement, during the November offensive, the Armed Forces chose to view them as part of the “communist threat” and ordered the assassination of these “intellectual leaders” of the guerrillas (Whitfeld, 1994).
The November offensive proved decisive for the end of the war: it showed that the FMLN were still militarily powerful, that the Salvadoran Armed Forces were weak, and the murder of the Jesuits proved that the “professionalization” of the army to respect human rights was an illusion (Montgomery, 1995). Essentially, it demonstrated a military stalemate that could only be resolved by political negotiations. The Jesuit case also prompted international outcry. At a fundraising lunch in Chicago, President Bush was heckled about the incident:

A woman in the audience shouted at him, “Why are we sending money to El Salvador? … Why are we killing priests in El Salvador?” The President responded, “The answer is- we’re not. Now you be quiet. And here’s the answer to your question…We are supporting El Salvador because it had certifiably free elections. President Cristiani is trying to do a job for democracy. And the left-wing guerrillas must not take over El Salvador” (Whitfeld, 1994, p. 81).

With the failing Soviet Union, and the Sandinistas no longer in power by 1990, the Cold War rationale for continued US support against communism was no longer applicable. These factors, and the military stalemate, as well as the new elite’s desire to get back to business, pushed the Cristiani government and the FMLN into peace negotiations.

Over the next two years, both sides met, along with the support of the United Nations, to hack out a peace agreement. The United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) was formed to maintain the peace in the country, as well as an official Peace Commission (COPAZ) to implement the agreements. Amongst the myriad of contentious issues involved in the negotiations, human rights issues became prominent, not only because much civilian blood had been shed by both sides, but because “the UN officials involved recognized that a durable peace needed to address the most important root causes of the conflict, including human rights violations” (Arnson,
The final Peace Accords, signed January 16, 1992 at Chapultepec Castle in Mexico City by representatives of the FMLN and the Salvadoran Government, officially ended the war. During the negotiations one of the most difficult issues dividing the two sides was the question of military impunity for human rights abuses. According to Retired General Ernesto Vargas, one of the signers of the Peace Accords, a general amnesty law was a part of the discussions since the first talks in 1987, while others dispute this (E. Vargas, personal communication, 3 July, 2014). However, as Cynthia Arnson, a prominent Latin Americanist scholar, remarked at the time,

> It is crucial to note that human rights abuses of the scale and duration of those in El Salvador have been possible only because those who ordered and carried out such abuses have enjoyed a total impunity guaranteed by the state. Laws and practices that shield those who have committed human rights violations from exposure, investigation, and prosecution are, therefore, likely to reproduce a new cycle of abuses (Arnson, 1992, p. 87).

In the end, the question of amnesty did not appear in the final Peace Accords. The Accords did however include a broad scope of reforms for the country. The Accords mandated demilitarization; reduced the size of the Armed Forces; limited their role to territorial security; eliminated the three security forces and replaced them with a National Civilian Police (PNC) to be comprised of former members of both the Armed Forces and the FMLN; legalized the FMLN as a political party; provided for judicial and electoral reforms; addressed economic and social issues; and mandated an independent truth commission for the investigation of gross human rights violations and an ad-hoc commission to review and purge the army of its most serious human rights violators (Montgomery, 1995 and Dunkerley, 1994). The cease-fire became official on February 1st, 1992, and was never broken. Demobilization was accomplished, despite minor
difficulties in compliance. Yet by the end of the twelve-year armed conflict, an estimated 75,000 lives had been lost.

In March 1993 the Truth Commission Report was published.\(^k\) While highlighting 34 illustrative cases including the assassination of Monseñor Romero, Herbert Anaya Sanabria, and the Jesuits, the massacres at El Mozote and Sumpul River, FMLN executions of mayors, among others, the report concluded that there were 22,000 documented human rights abuses: 60% involved extrajudicial executions, 25% involved disappearances, 20% involved torture, and some involved more than one form of violence (Betancourt, Planchart, & Buergenthal, 1993). The report also attributed 85% of the acts of violence to State agents, with 5% attributed to the FMLN, and most controversially, the report named the individuals assumed responsible for the violations (Betancourt, Planchart, & Buergenthal, 1993). The report also made various recommendations, including judicial reforms, reparations for the victims, and that prosecution of the perpetrators should not yet take place due to the incapability of the Salvadoran legal system. The report was extremely important for bringing the abuses to the light of day. However, by identifying the names of the perpetrators, it would become polarizing. The Report acknowledged that in the peace agreements, both parties made it clear that it was necessary that the “complete truth be made known”, and the Report emphasized that the whole truth cannot be told without identifying the perpetrators, as “not to name names would be to reinforce the very impunity to which the Parties instructed the Commission to put an end” (Betancourt, Planchart, & Buergenthal, 1993). The number of abuses

---

\(^k\) Officially titled: Report on the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador, from Madness to Hope: The 12-year War in El Salvador
attributed to State forces, combined with the fact that the Report named names, set the stage for the justification of amnesty that would follow.

Five days after the publication of the Truth Commission Report, the General Amnesty Law for the Consolidation of Peace was passed through the ARENA-controlled Legislative Assembly. This law gave full amnesty to all perpetrators of human rights violations that occurred during the armed conflict. At the time of its enactment, there was common support for it, given that both sides committed atrocities during the war. The right argued that without amnesty, the peace process could not move forward. While the Truth Commission did recommend that prosecutions against perpetrators should not take place, the level of general amnesty was viewed by some to be too broad (Dolliver, Kanavel, & Robeck, 2013). The Amnesty Law also was a contributing factor in a split within the FMLN. While some, particularly those named in the Report, such as Joaquín Villalobos (leader of the ERP), feared that without amnesty, they could not be integrated into the new political system; in the end, the FMLN party declared itself to be against the Amnesty Law (Valencia Caravantes & Peña, 2014). Nonetheless, the Amnesty Law was enacted and remains today, over twenty years later.

There were in fact 3 amnesty laws passed in El Salvador. The first amnesty law, passed in 1987 in conformity with the Esquipulas II Accords, gave absolute amnesty to all persons who committed crimes prior to October 22, 1987 in which no fewer than 20 persons were involved, mostly geared towards the release of political prisoners (ICRC, 2015). The second amnesty law was called the “Amnesty Law for National Reconciliation” of January 23, 1992, and was passed so that members of the FMLN could return to civilian life and be able to enter the political arena. This law also provided some measure of accountability, stating that those who would be named in the Truth Commission Report were not to benefit from the legal protections provided by the law (Aguilera, 2012). The final amnesty law of 1993 trumped the others, and gave “Full, absolute and unconditional amnesty…to all persons who in any way participated in the commission of political crimes, common crimes related to these political crimes, and common crimes committed before January 1, 1992” (Aguilera, 2012).
1.7 Post-War Years

The first post-peace agreement presidential elections took place in 1994. The FMLN participated in the elections, but did not nominate anyone from their ranks for president. Instead, Rubén Zamora became candidate for the CD-FMLN (combined Democratic Convergence party coalition with the FMLN) against ARENA candidate Armando Calderon Sol. The elections were dubbed the “elections of the century” due to the full political spectrum participating for the first time, and they were the culmination of the peace process (Montgomery, 1995). Calderon Sol emerged victorious, and continued ARENA’s neoliberal policies.

One, perhaps unsurprising, aspect within the political arena in the postwar years was the split that occurred within the FMLN. There were various causes of the split, such as disagreement over the Amnesty Law, as well as the internal rivalries between the different groups that comprised the guerrillas. Now as a political party these rivalries and disagreements forced some to leave the party. The most prominent departure was that of Joaquín Villalobos, former leader of the ERP. Lorena Peña (2009), a prominent female guerrilla fighter for the FPL and now diputada in the Legislative Assembly, lamented:

Since the signing of the peace accords I mentally prepared myself to fight against the oligarchy and the sectors from the right that would try to boycott and fight us, but I had not prepared myself for the fact that within ourselves, inside the FMLN, there would be doubts, sabotage, confusion, and division. And a crack appeared in our ranks that finally became a chasm, a minority stayed on one side, and luckily the majority was able to jump over the crack and keep going (p. 225).10

The minority that left the FMLN political party was mostly comprised of former ERP guerrillas, with the PCS and FPL rising to prominence within the FMLN in the postwar years.
Nonetheless, over the next fifteen years, ARENA would control the presidency, further deepening the neoliberal reforms in the country and radically restructuring the economy (Moodie, 2010). The post-war elections have been characterized by recriminations and hostility between ARENA and the FMLN, particularly with ARENA’s mobilization of mass media propaganda to create a politics of fear in the 2004 and 2009 presidential elections (Montoya, 2013). ARENA continues to begin each of its campaigns in Izalco, as the town represents the triumph over communism (from 1932).

As NGO worker Francisco Mena describes,

All you have to do is look at the social media and follow certain hash tags or certain Facebook pages, and just the amount of hate that’s around it, and it’s not hate based on 2014, it’s hate based on the Cold War, so it’s a lot of Cold War vocabulary, you know, communist… the same thing goes for people from the right, death squad lovers, etc., etc. So a lot of it is used… None of it is based on things they disagree with right now, you know, a lot of it is just eighties and early nineties situations that happened, and they continue to be brought up every time we have elections around here (F. Mena, personal communication, 3 July, 2014).

The wartime language that continues to be utilized shows that the political parties in particular remain in a civil war mindset and continue to utilize wartime discourse to instill fear in society.

As the Civil War mentality persists in post-war politics, Salvadoran gang members in the United States (primarily members of the Mara Salvatrucha or MS-13 and the 18th Street Gang) began to be deported to El Salvador, and the gangs began to flourish in the post-war climate.\textsuperscript{m} While the gangs have not been solely responsible for the

\textsuperscript{m} In 1996, two immigration laws were passed in the US, which increased deportations: the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996. These laws made deportation of legal non-residents much faster and more frequent by considering increasingly minor criminal
increase in violence, they became the scapegoat for the government. The Flores and Saca governments (1999-2004 and 2004-2009 respectively) imposed *mano dura* (iron fist) policies in response to the violence, which only served to increase the violence. After a sharp and sustained increase in the levels of violent crime since 2000, the murder rate peaked at 71 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in 2009 (El Salvador Overview, 2014). The high homicide rates are even more troubling when one looks at the fact that this country the size of Massachusetts has only around 6 million people, with roughly 50% under the age of 23 (Censos Nacionales VI de Población y de Vivienda 2007, 2009).

Under the first FMLN government in 2012, in an attempt to reduce homicides and go against *mano dura* policies, a gang truce was agreed to, which resulted in a statistically lower amount of homicides, 39.6 homicides per 100,000 people in 2013 (El Salvador Overview, 2014). However, by mid 2014, the truce had unraveled, and it appeared that the extreme amount of violence in El Salvador had returned to frightening normalcy, and the year ended with a homicide rate of 61 per 100,000 inhabitants (Valencia, 2015).

Additionally, emigration also increased exponentially in post-war El Salvador, and by 2010 there were an estimated 1.6 million Salvadorans living in the US, with others living in other countries throughout the globe (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). By 2010, an estimated 1 in 5 Salvadorans lived in the United States, the majority of whom were of working age (between 18 and 54), without high school diplomas, and about 52% were men (Terrazas, 2010). These immigrants’ remittances to El Salvador, which in 2013

\[\text{(Indepen... Immigration Policy)}\]

\[\text{n This is the highest homicide rate since 2000. In the immediate postwar, the homicide rate reached a record high of 139 per 100,000 inhabitants (double the rate during the war) (Kane, 2014).}\]
totaled $4.2 billion, have significantly aided the Salvadoran population and the fledgling Salvadoran economy (Remittances Received by El Salvador, 2013).\textsuperscript{6}

With the struggling economy and growing violence, the FMLN gained in popularity and became the largest political party following the 2000 municipal and legislative elections (Booth, Wade, & Walker, 2010). In 2009, after 20 years of ARENA governments, the FMLN finally and democratically won the presidency. The FMLN chose center-left candidate, television reporter Mauricio Funes as its candidate. During the campaign, Funes distanced himself from the traditional FMLN platforms, and reassured the business community that he would not overturn significant neoliberal reforms including dollarization and CAFTA. The 2009 FMLN victory was also significant as it showed the consolidation of democracy in the country with the passing of the presidency to the opposition party group. With this change in government, the discourse relating to the human rights past in El Salvador also began to change. On the anniversary of Romero’s assassination in 2010 President Funes asked for forgiveness on behalf of the state, and has since done the same for El Mozote and other massacres (Cárdenas & Solórzano, 2010). Funes also asked for forgiveness from the nation’s indigenous population for the decades of persecution and attempts at extermination, including the 1932 Matanza (Presidente Funes pide perdón a comunidades indígenas por persecución y exterminio de otros gobiernos, 2010). These official acts, relating to the

\textsuperscript{6} The topics of post-war violence, citizen insecurity, gangs, and immigration are extremely important for understanding the current situation in El Salvador, however are beyond the scope of this study. For more information see Moodie (2010), as well as a vast number of studies from NGOs including WOLA, Inter-American Dialogue, and the Woodrow Wilson Center.
human rights violations of the Civil War, have again brought the debate back into the national spotlight.

The 2014 presidential elections, however, proved once again how divided the country remains. The electorate was effectively split 50-50 between the FMLN and ARENA, with the FMLN candidate, former FPL comandante Salvador Sánchez Cerén narrowly edging out ARENA candidate Norman Quijano 50.11% to 49.89%, a difference of a mere 6,364 votes (El Salvador’s Election: An extraordinary result, 2014). The results were not official until a few days after the election, and on election night, ARENA’s Norman Quijano made a bold statement, calling on the military to intervene to defend democracy. This appeal to the military alarmed much of the population, as it immediately brought back the civil war mentality, and for many was reminiscent of the 1972 fraud. To its credit, the army remained in the barracks and the democratic process concluded peacefully.

The issue of amnesty has also not gone away since the passing of the Amnesty Law in 1993. Local human rights NGOs, often with the support of international NGOs, have continued to push for the government’s need to address the human rights violations that were perpetrated during the Civil War. Most prominently, human rights organizations were able to bring a variety of cases to the Inter-American Commission and Court of Human Rights (autonomous legal bodies of the Organization of American States). Key cases among these are: the Romero case, the case of the murdered Jesuits,
as well as a handful of cases on children disappeared during the war.\textsuperscript{p} Yet the case that has garnered the most attention, or at least ended up having the most fortunate timing, was that of the Case of El Mozote and Nearby Places v. El Salvador. In its judgment of October 2012, the Inter-American Court on Human Rights ruled that the Amnesty Law is incompatible with the American Convention, in that it prevents the investigation and punishment of the grave human rights violations that were perpetrated in the case and cannot continue to represent an obstacle to the investigation of the facts of El Mozote and the identification, prosecution, and punishment of those responsible in El Mozote and in other cases of grave human rights violations that may have occurred during the armed conflict in El Salvador (Case of the Massacres of El Mozote and Nearby Places vs. El Salvador, 2012). As a signatory to the American Convention, El Salvador has the responsibility to comply with the Court’s judgment.

Utilizing the judgment, in September 2013 the Sala de lo Constitucional (the Constitutional Court of El Salvador, hereafter: Sala) decided to admit the Amnesty Law of 1993 for review. As of this writing, the Sala is still debating the issue. To repeal the law would open the door to prosecutions of those named in the Truth Commission Report, as well as others implicated in human rights abuses during the Civil War. To uphold the Amnesty Law maintains the status quo. The divisions over the Amnesty Law and what will become of it are central to the debates over memory of the violations and repression that occurred during the Armed Conflict.

\textbf{Conclusion}

\textsuperscript{p} The cases regarding disappeared children that received judgment from the Inter-American Court are: The Case of Serrano Cruz Sisters v. El Salvador, Case of Contreras et al. v. El Salvador, and Case of Rochac Hernández et al. v. El Salvador
The 20th century in El Salvador was filled with repression and bloodshed, from the Matanza through the armed conflict of the 1980s. The economic elite’s utilization of the army or security forces in order to protect their interests, as well as the continued use of the “fight against communism” throughout the century, are vital to understanding the country’s history and continued legacies. The turning point moments of the El Salvador’s history, such as 1932’s Matanza; 1972’s electoral fraud; 1980- which saw the murder of thousands including Monseñor Romero; El Mozote in 1981, are also the most brutal moments, or were ones that forced armed resistance. It is these moments that stand out, as well as the continued use of repression and violations of human rights, that continue to affect Salvadoran politics and society today. It is the memory of and the different perspectives towards these moments of repression and abuse of human rights that are polarizing forces.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Recordar: Del latín recordis, Volver a pasar por el corazón
-Eduardo Galeano

This study looks at the different perspectives and collective memories of Salvadorans about the gross human rights violations that occurred during the Internal Armed Conflict, and how these perspectives and memories continue to come into conflict with one another in the public sphere. This chapter will look at various discourses related to the elements that form these perspectives and memories. It will begin by looking at the process of transitional justice: how going from a repressive authoritarian regime to a new democracy shapes not only the political structure, but also contributes to shaping the internal discourse of past abuses. The chapter will then look at collective memory theory as relevant for this study. Classic collective memory theory, along with more recent theory connecting memory to post-repression societies, will serve as the foundation for understanding collective and historical memory. I will then discuss major elements of human rights discourse, specifically critiques of the modern Human Rights Discourse, which will provide a framework for post-Civil War El Salvador and the major issues that are still present decades after the official abuses ended.

2.1 Transitional Justice

Countries emerging from authoritarian rule, or from a civil war, into a democratic government are unable to do so overnight. In El Salvador’s case, it had to overcome the effects of both fifty-year long repressive military rule, as well as a bloody and polarizing Civil War. As Kimberly Theidon (2013) states: “after the conclusion of the fighting of a war, the telling of the past begins” (p. 6). The process of dealing with the abuses of the
recent past is termed transitional justice. Priscilla Hayner (2011), in her review of truth commissions, poignantly poses the questions raised during the time of transition:

At these transitional moments, a state and its people stand at a crossroads. What should be done with a recent history full of victims, perpetrators, secretly buried bodies, pervasive fear, and official denial? Should this past be exhumed, preserved, acknowledged, apologized for? How can a nation of enemies be reunited, former opponents reconciled, in the context of such a violent history and often bitter, festering wounds? What should be done with the hundreds or thousands of perpetrators still walking free? And how can a new government prevent such atrocities from being repeated in the future? (p. 3).

Yet the post-war society must confront these questions. Particularly important is the question of how to treat the victimizers and deal with the victims. Common transitional justice responses include: trials or legal prosecutions of the perpetrators, what is traditionally referred to as “justice”; truth commissions, which attempt to bring to light and into the public domain the human rights abuses that took place, committed by the government forces or by other groups; memorials, which serve as physical markers to remember what happened; public education, shaping how the new generations view the past repression; reparations, paying money to the victims and/or their families, or symbolic reparations by making amends; amnesty, official pardon for perpetrators so they may take part in the new society; or any combination of these responses. Regardless of which response is chosen, the ultimate goal of transitional justice is reconciliation for the society that was divided by the atrocities.

A common choice in thinking about transitional justice puts it in terms of memory: forgive and forget or prosecute and punish. Noted political scientist Samuel Huntington focuses on these two choices as being the only options for new democratic governments responding to the violations of the previous regime. For Huntington,
Amnesties are an important tool in the transitional process. As he states, “the creation of a democratic system always involves compromises among the politically powerful groups as to what that government can and cannot do… To reject amnesties…is to exclude the most prevalent form of democratization” (Huntington, 1991, p. 217). Amnesties are a part of the “forgive and forget” option. Through impunity, perpetrators from both sides are allowed a fresh start in the new democratic society, so that the country does not become entrenched in the past. The other side of that coin is that forgiveness is supposed to take place alongside amnesty: forgiveness from the victims, so that they too can move on in the reconciled society.

On the other side is the choice to prosecute and punish. This is the diametric opposite of amnesty, as it involves trials of those responsible for the abuses, which can take years, keeping the dialogue of the past in the present. Huntington (1991) argues that if a country chooses this option, trials must happen immediately after the abuses, or after the war. The rationale being that immediately after the abuses take place, there is political support for punishment, as victims and much of society are still outraged. For Huntington (1991), “In new democratic regimes, justice comes quickly or it does not come at all” (p. 228). Yet in his recommendations for what to do in transition, he posits: “the least unsatisfactory course may well be: do not prosecute, do not punish, do not forgive, and above all, do not forget” (p. 231). Is the best option to really do nothing except remember so that violations are not repeated in the future? Regardless of the answer, even for Huntington, the memory of the past abuses is clearly a central tenet of transitional justice.
The opposing choices can be very valid for transitional societies. Hannah Arendt (2005) underlines that “Forgiving is the only strictly human action that releases us and others from the chain and pattern of consequences that all action engenders…” (59). Arendt (1998) continues from the side of the victimizers, “Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would… be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever…” (p. 237). According to Arendt, for both victims and perpetrators, the act of forgiveness is the end to a cycle, a release for both parties. Arendt (1998) adds, “The alternative to forgiveness, but by no means its opposite, is punishment, and both have in common that they attempt to put an end to something that without interference could go on endlessly” (p. 241). Maintaining the same choices as Huntington, Arendt argues that one or the other (or perhaps both) must happen, or else the past can never be placed in the past.

While Huntington and Arendt evaluate the two basic options of transitional justice, Martha Minow (1998) is more explicit in her assessment: “…no response can ever be adequate… Yet silence is also an unacceptable offense, a shocking implication that the perpetrators in fact succeeded… Legal responses are inevitably frail and insufficient… But inaction by legal institutions means that the perpetrators prevailed in paralyzing the instruments of justice” (p. 5). In rejecting only the two choices, Minow argues that in transitional justice, there are two extremes: vengeance and forgiveness, yet most responses lie in the middle. However, states and actors within society must be careful of not going to these extremes. It is easy to see why vengeance is not a desirable
extreme: it can escalate the violence, or if it is dealt with in trial form, retributive trials are most certainly not always just in their outcomes.\(^9\)

For this study’s purposes, Minow’s discussion on forgiveness is most applicable.\(^6\) Minow describes forgiveness as a healing way of dealing with past abuses. “Through forgiveness, we can renounce resentment, and avoid the self-destructive effects of holding on to pain, grudges, and victimhood. The act of forgiving can reconnect the offender and the victim and establish or renew a relationship; it can heal grief; forge new, constructive alliances; and break cycles of violence” (Minow, 1998, p. 14). Forgiveness is on the other end of the spectrum from vengeance not because of what it represents in theory, but how it is utilized in practice. Minow (1998) argues that forgiveness should not take the place of prosecutions or “justice”, however in practice it is tied to amnesty and to furthering institutional amnesia. Forgiveness is tied to forgetting in the traditional choices. For Minow (1998), forgetting is the “anathema in response to mass violence” as it gives the perpetrators the power to silence history (p. 16). Furthermore, in most cases forgiveness is forced upon the victims: they are told they are required to forgive and forget in order for the entire society to move on. If they do not forgive, the implication is that they are not invested in the democratic patria.

\(^9\) The Nuremberg Trials after WWII were the first time that perpetrators of mass human rights abuses were taken to trial for crimes against humanity. While an important historical landmark, they are also associated with victors’ justice, therefore even from the first landmark trials, human rights law and tribunals are enmeshed in the politics of the moment. The Eichmann Trial in Israel also an example of how retributive justice is easily criticized. Arendt and others questioned the method in which Eichmann was tried by a clearly biased nation.

\(^6\) Robert Meister also discusses the issue of forgiving and forgetting. His arguments will be explored further in this chapter, in Section 2.3 Human Rights Discourse
This imposition or requirement of forgiveness is a central way for transitional governments to urge society to move forward towards reconciliation. However, prominent human rights activist Aryeh Neier argues from the victims’ point of view: “When governments or their representatives ‘usurp the victim’s exclusive right to forgive his oppressor,’ they thereby fail to respect fully those who have suffered (Minow, 1998, p.17). Minow (1998) continues this argument.

Forgiveness is a power held by the victimized, not a right to be claimed. The ability to dispense, but also to withhold, forgiveness is an ennobling capacity and part of the dignity to be reclaimed by those who survive wrongdoing. Even an individual survivor who chooses to forgive cannot, properly, forgive in the name of other victims. To expect survivors to forgive is to heap yet another burden on them (p. 17).

During a civil war, an entire population suffers from ever-present violence. Yet the victims and their families are unique in their suffering. Is it just to demand their forgiveness? Linda Green argues that in Guatemala, which also enacted an amnesty law after its civil war, the amnesty prohibits the possibility of forgiveness, and that some sort of “settling of accounts” must take place in order for the consolidation of the new democracy (Green, 2004). So perhaps a better question is, does this forgiveness need to be linked to forgetting?

As mentioned in the previous chapter, an element of the Salvadoran Peace Accords for ending the Civil War was a Truth Commission for the investigation of gross human rights violations that occurred during the armed conflict. This was to be the country’s main way of dealing with the atrocities that had been perpetrated by both sides. Hayner (2011), who extensively evaluated the truth commission processes throughout transitional countries, defines them as follows:
A truth commission (1) is focused on the past, rather than ongoing, events; (2) investigates a pattern of events that took place over a period of time; (3) engages directly and broadly with the affected population, gathering information on their experiences; (4) is a temporary body, with the aim of concluding with a final report; and (5) is officially authorized or empowered by the state under review (pp. 11-12).

For Theidon (2013), the main purpose of a truth commission is to collect testimonies from as many individuals as possible, in order to make clear “the truth” of what happened. Truth commissions then publish an official report based on the testimonies, which usually includes recommendations for the new government on how to proceed in the transitional process. One of a truth commission’s main goals is to educate both national and international audiences about the violent past as a means of ensuring non-repetition (Theidon, 2013). The idea is that through the dark information being brought into the light of day, and into the public sphere for discussion and debate, that the divided country may be able to reconcile.

While many victims and outside observers advocate for truth commissions, the investigation process, as well as the outcome of the final report, are not without their problems. One worry is always that the testimonies themselves will be distorted, as they are coded and processed into evidence (Theidon, 2013). Another more troubling effect is that victims are re-traumatized. Theidon (2013) argues that in the Peruvian case, people were “traumatized” as a result of the data coding process, as this coding simplified the complex moral and political situations under which abuses occurred. Macias (2012) argues that in the case of the Chilean Torture Commission, while producing a national story of torture, the process of accounting for torture constituted a re-imprinting of the Foucauldian biopolitical power on the tortured bodies the commission represented.
“...the accounting of torture resembles torture, for in both the torture and the accounting, the body is deprived of voice and can only speak what the subject and the nation demand” (p. 127). This argument notes that through the act of testifying to the truth commission, torture is re-inscribed on the bodies of the victims. Essentially, both Theidon and Macias argue that through having to re-tell their stories, victims are re-victimized by the process.

The re-telling of stories by perpetrators is also a point of contention. These confessions can be particularly disturbing, as they describe from the victimizer’s point of view, the details of state violence. From those who, during the transitional justice process, wish to have the full truth be told, these confessions are appealing. However, as Leigh Payne (2008) points out, many times these confessions “are merely accounts, explanations and justifications for deviant behavior, or personal versions of a past” rather than an attempt to apologize for their acts (p. 2). Additionally, as seen in many cases including the Salvadoran case, the transitional regime focuses on suppressing dialogue on what happened, from both sides, both victim and perpetrator, in order to move on and promote reconciliation. Yet, Payne argues that the stories of the victim and the perpetrator are needed for the transition to democracy. This is, what she labels, “contentious coexistence”: “a conflictual dialogic approach to democracy in deeply divided societies” (Payne, 2008, p. 3). Though the stories come from polarized positions, they both need to be heard for the consolidation of democracy. Payne (2008) argues, contentious debate enhances democratic practices by provoking political participation, contestation, and competition. Through the processes it makes possible public challenges to prevailing antidemocratic attitudes, behavior, and values in society. Contentious coexistence, in short, offers a more realistic understanding of dialogic practices in democracies, as well
as a better alternative to reconciliation processes that suppress political talk (p. 3).

Therefore, not only are truth commissions an important element for transitional justice because it gives the victims and their families a chance to go public with their stories, but they can also offer a chance for perpetrators of state violence to have their voices heard as well. If these stories are not told in a truth commission capacity, they still need to be heard and debated alongside the stories of the victims within a national discourse on the past, and should not be relegated to oblivion.

For the new democratic governments, truth commissions can also have negative consequences. Richard Wilson, in analyzing the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, argues that these commissions are “instruments for the smuggling of atrocities and its victims into the landscape of the democratic transition and for the neutralization of the potential conflict that these legacies may produce” (Macias, 2013, p. 115). Through the publication of the report, the abuses can be put firmly into the past, and the effects of the systematic abuses are neutralized. Meister (2011) emphasizes that though truth and reconciliation commissions allow victims the chance to speak, in repeating their experiences, they are once again seen only as victims or tortured bodies, and this is how the new, transitional nation-state is able to legitimize itself. Both Wilson and Meister underline that through Truth Commissions, regardless of the system of past human rights violations, the new government becomes validated, as it has now demonstrated its commitment to uncovering the truth: all at the expense of the victims and their testimonies.
While there have been around 40 truth commissions around the world, some notable ones stand out. Argentina’s National Commission on the Disappeared (CONADEP) in 1983-84 was the most prominent early truth commission in Latin America. It’s full report, entitled *Nunca Más*, included the results of over 7,000 statements. The military regime had granted itself amnesty upon ceding power in 1983, but with the publication of the report, the civilian government repealed the amnesty and the results were turned over to the prosecutor’s office (Hayner, 2011). Though successive governments pardoned many officials, by 2009 1,400 people had been either charged or were under investigation for crimes committed during Argentina’s dirty war (Hayner, 2011). South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1995-2002) is considered one of the most successful truth commissions. Instead of only receiving testimony, this TRC also held special televised hearings, and the entire process was continuously monitored by the media (Hayner, 2011). Also unique about South Africa’s TRC is that it granted amnesty for politically motivated crimes for those who fully confessed. This exchange of truth for impunity allowed much that could have gone uncovered to be brought to the light of day, and fostered a dialogue for the new inclusive democracy. Finally, the Commission for Historical Clarification (1997-1999) provides another example in neighboring Guatemala. This truth commission took El Salvador’s experience into account and decided not to name perpetrators. It also incorporated data from the Catholic Church’s Recovery of Historical Memory Project (REMHI) report, which had collected thousands of testimonies, particularly in indigenous areas. Most importantly, this Commission concluded that genocide of Mayan groups had occurred (Hayner, 2011).
Why did El Salvador choose to form a Truth Commission? The experiences of the Southern Cone of Latin America established the precedent of uncovering “the truth” of military regimes’ dirty wars, and provided a backdrop to the Salvadoran peace negotiations (Arnson, 1993). El Salvador provided a unique opportunity to the United Nations to negotiate a peace accord, with human rights being a central factor. Latin America expert Cynthia Arnson (1993) describes the outcome:

...El Salvador’s Truth Commission represents the first time since the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials following World War II that foreign, rather than national figures, investigated past episodes of violence in a sovereign country. The precedent suggests that, where political polarization has been so extreme as to preclude the convening of an impartial panel of national actors, the international community can play a vital role in seeking to establish accountability” (p. 5).

The international community, led by the United Nations, believed that the Truth Commission, made up of foreign experts in human rights, would be a way of providing a more objective look at the past systematic violations. While the Commission’s recommendations may have been reasonable, the simple fact that the Report named the perpetrators of specific crimes provided the final impetus to the passing of the Amnesty Law for the Consolidation of Peace. This became the transitional justice combination for El Salvador: bringing “the truth” to the light of day, and then proceeding to give impunity to all perpetrators of human rights violations. Arnson emphasized that the international community was looking to establish accountability in El Salvador. Was that accomplished?

2.2 Memory

As Minow, Theidon, and countless others have emphasized, one of the most divisive issues for transitional governments is that of memory. Both within the
traditional choice of forgive and forget vs. prosecute and punish, as well as for those who reject that framework, what to do with the memories of the victims and the perpetrators is controversial, particularly because those traumatic memories continue to shape the nation long after the war has ended.

Memory is commonly thought of as an individual process. However, there is also collective memory. Maurice Halbwachs coined the term, and though his theories on collective memory have been much criticized and analyzed since he first published his work in the first half of the 20th century, their essence is vital to this study. Halbwachs (1992) argues that though memory is performed by an individual, it is a social process: while one person does the act of remembering, the individual relies on those around him or her to recall the memories. Halbwachs (1992) explains:

…the greatest number of memories come back to us when our parents, our friends, or other persons recall them to us…it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories… for they are recalled to me externally, and the groups of which I am a part at any time give me the means to reconstruct them, upon condition, to be sure, that I turn toward them and adopt, at least for the moment, their way of thinking (p. 38).

These different groups within a society are what Halbwachs terms, the “frameworks of memory”: family, religion, class, etc. They are the groups that an individual belongs to. “It is in this sense that there exists a collective memory and social frameworks for memory; it is to the degree that our individual thought places itself in these frameworks and participates in this memory that it is capable of the act of recollection” (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 38). This idea that the frameworks of memory- the groups that an individual is a part of- shape the memory of an individual, and therefore memory is a social
construction, is extremely valuable when looking at how the memories of the past can be conflictive and divisive.

Halbwachs is also clear that the collective memory of the past, especially particular or emblematic events of the past, is reconstructed based on the present-day reality. “Collective frameworks are…precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of society” (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 40). Not only do social groups construct collective memory, but also the memory of the past can easily change utilizing the needs of the present. Postwar society, whether it is the side that looks back or the side that chooses only selective memories from the war, bases its multiple collective memories on the political and social reality of the present. What is chosen to be remembered, or how it is remembered, is not based on the actual history of the armed conflict, but of the purpose that memory serves.

That brings us to a final element of Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory: there are many. “Just as people are members of many different groups at the same time, so the memory of the same fact can be placed within many frameworks, which result from distinct collective memories” (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 52). Individuals belong to different groups. Different groups have different collective memories, as the frameworks evoke different memories within the individual. While this is the state of memory, in a country such as El Salvador, these memories come into conflict. Michael Rothberg (2009) asks: “What happens when different histories confront each other in the public sphere? Does the remembrance of one history erase others from view?” (p. 2). As many
of the groups, such as the political parties, religious groups, and family experiences have their roots in the armed conflict, collective memories in El Salvador are polarized.

Halbwachs distinguishes between collective and historical memory. He states, “historical memory can only reach us through historical records”, that “history is the remembered past to which we no longer have an ‘organic’ relation… while collective memory is the active past that forms our identities” (Olick & Robbins, 1998, p. 111). For Halbwachs, history is distinct from memory, particularly the collective memory, and historical memory only represents the past in a more rigid and condensed way, whereas collective memory is a “richer portrait” of the past (Halbwachs, 1980). However, subsequent scholars have tended to blur the lines between the notions of historical and collective memory. Martín-Cabrera (2011) discusses that in post-Franco Spain, there has been a “struggle for the recuperation of historical memory” and Jelin (1994) utilizes the term this way as well, that the demand for justice plays a role in “the construction of a historical memory.” Osiel (1997), in examining mass atrocity and the law, plainly combines the two concepts by using the term “shared historical memory.” Sprenkels (2011) incorporates the elements of collective memory when he states: “the recent academic work on historical memory in Latin America is focused on the dichotomy between the proposed forgetting in the official history and a fight for the truth and justice…” (p. 255).<sup>8</sup> In particular, the Guatemalan REMHI report is clear in that it’s job is to recover the historical memory, through testimonies of the victims, of the truth of what happened during the country’s 36-year civil war (Oficina de Derechos Humanos del

---

<sup>8</sup> Original Spanish: “…la producción académica reciente sobre memoria histórica en América Latina se centra en la dicotomía entre el olvido propuesto en la historia oficial y una lucha por la verdad y la justicia…”
Arzobispado de Guatemala, 1998). These examples show how the usage of the term historical memory has changed since Halbwachs discussed it in relation to collective memory. In Latin America especially, the term *memoria histórica* or “historical memory” incorporates these new meanings: it implies collective memory, a collective memory that other groups try to suppress, a collective memory of the traumatic events and of gross human rights violations. For the purpose of this study, I will be utilizing this understanding and usage of “historical memory,” as that is generally what people are referring to when they use the term *memoria histórica*.

While not mentioned by Halbwachs, one of the frameworks of memory is at the level of the nation. How a nation collectively remembers its past is necessary for constructing its future. Ernest Renan conversely describes that forgetting is an essential part of nation building. Renan (1996) describes,

> Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for (the principle of) nationality. Indeed, historical enquiry brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations… Unity is always effected by means of brutality… (p. 45).

While Renan is principally referring to European nations, the same principles are applicable to the Americas and El Salvador in particular. The Civil War was a rupture within the nation, with each side attempting to unite the country through the use of violence and brutality. The result of the bloodshed was the creation of a democratic nation. Ricoeur (1999) reinforces Renan’s argument, and adds “collective identity is rooted in founding events which are violent events” (p. 8). Renan would argue that to create and unite this new nation, the violence of the past should be glazed over. The
essence of a nation, according to Renan (1996), is a soul, consisting of two things: having a common legacy of memories and the desire to live together. This soul that makes a nation is therefore “large-scale solidarity” - it presupposes a past where society has made sacrifices, and contains an expressed desire to continue a “common life” (Renan, 1996). Yet I ask, what happens when, utilizing Halbwachs, different groups have different collective memories of the glorified past, and different visions of the present nation? Is it still a nation, or is it a polarized and divided nation? Are there elements within the new nation that get to have a louder voice about the past?

To provide some insight into the last question, Michel Foucault relates memory struggles, particularly related to which memories prevail, to struggles of power. “Since memory is actually a very important factor in struggle (really, in fact, struggles develop in a kind of conscious moving forward of history), if one controls people’s memory, one controls their dynamism. And one also controls their experience, their knowledge of previous struggles” (Foucault, 1975, p. 25). Foucault stresses that it is a battle for history, for which version of history will be told, with the goal of repressing what he calls “popular memory.” The struggle is “to propose and impose on people a framework in which to interpret the present” (Foucault, 1975, p. 28). In line with Halbwachs, Foucault also argues that the interpretations of the past, and the memory of the past, are based on the struggles in the present. Arguably, those who have the most power in the new nation are the ones in control of that memory. Yet, as Foucault mentions, the “popular memory”, or other collective memories, continue to struggle to be included within the official narratives.
Another major figure in the development of collective memory theory is Pierre Nora, who focused on the physical aspect of memory. Nora would seem to concur with Renan’s argument that forgetting is necessary in the formation of a nation, since Nora (1989) argues that there are no longer “milieu de mémoire, real environments of memory,” and that only “lieux de mémoire, sites of memory” remain. Nora concurs with Halbwachs’ idea of collective memory, an individual’s memory being evoked and constructed by society. However he emphasizes that this memory is not spontaneous, because through history it has been diluted. However, through the deliberate creation of “sites of memory,” collective memory can be preserved. These “sites of memory” can be archives, monuments, museums, festivals, and the commemoration of anniversaries—physical markers that also distinguish group membership in society (Nora, 1989). Nora (1989) highlights “the truth of lieux de mémoire- that without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep them away” (p. 12). For Nora, the nation has no general memory, however through physical sites of memory, collective memory is activated and brought into the public sphere.

Other scholars have added on to Nora’s theory of lieux de mémoire, particularly as these sites of memory relate to the memory of past repression or abuses. Steve Stern’s version is what he terms memory knots- “sites of society, place, and time so bothersome, insistent, or conflictive that they move human beings, at least temporarily, beyond the ‘normal habits’” (Stern, 2004, p. 121). For Stern (2004), there are three dimensions of memory knots: sites of humanity, sites in time, and sites of physical matter or geography. Sites of humanity are particular groups of people, who organize and project particular kinds of emblematic memories into the public sphere. Sites in time are events and dates,
which may serve as memorable focal points in history. The final dimension, sites of physical matter or geography, are most akin to Nora’s “sites:” they are physical places or artifacts, museums, monuments, films, photos, etc. that evoke memory around a divisive past. Stern’s extension of *lieux de mémoire* beyond the merely physical into history, as well as the actors who actively promote collective memory, is an important dimension and builds off of Halbwachs’ original theory. Through these different dimensions of “memory knots,” different collective memories are developed and reinforced within the specific frameworks.

Elizabeth Jelin, in her studies of memory after state repression, also builds on Halbwachs, Foucault, Nora, and Stern. Jelin (2003) reinforces Halbwachs’ argument that memory is a social construct, and that memories are developed and acquire meaning within specific frameworks in the present. She also adds that what is remembered or forgotten is also in relation to future expectations (Jelin, 2003). Jelin (2003) additionally focuses on the narrative aspect of collective memory:

> Memory as a narrative social construction involves studying the narrator and the institutions that grant or deny power to the voice of the narrator and authorize him or her to speak… Thus, taking language as a point of departure, the road takes us to encounter conflicts over the representations of the past, centered on and reflecting struggles for power, legitimacy, and recognition (p. 23).

How events are remembered and talked about involves the power, not only of the individual, but also of the other elements of society. The memories of certain events or figures come into conflict, as these moments of repression can be extremely divisive. These points of conflict in the public sphere allow us to look at the struggles that Jelin emphasizes. She also emphasizes a familiar dichotomy: memory and oblivion, with
oblivion’s institutionalized manifestation being amnesty. Though they seem to be opposites, Jelin (1998) points out that “both are an integral part of the process of building identities, both at the individual and collective levels” (p. 24). Reinforcing Renan’s essence of a nation, they are both part of the collective memory (or memories) of society, even though they may be in conflict with each other.

Jelin also builds off of Stern’s sites of humanity dimension within “memory knots.” In borrowing from sociologist Howard Becker’s notion of a “moral entrepreneur”- “enterprising moral leaders or social agents who, often out of humanitarian motivation, mobilize their energies for the sake of a cause they strongly believe in”- Jelin coins the term “memory entrepreneur”- those “who seek social recognition and political legitimacy of one (their own) interpretation or narrative of the past. We will also find them engaged and concerned with maintaining and promoting active and visible social and political attention on their enterprise” (Jelin, 2003, pp. 33-34). These “memory entrepreneurs” can be everyone from human rights activists, victims groups, political groups (from the right as well as the left), all those who push for their interpretation of the past. They are also tied to Halbwachs’ traditional notion of collective memory: the groups the represent and advocate for each have their own collective memory, their own version of the past, which they are advocating for. These memory entrepreneurs are necessary to the production of memory, as they “try to ‘materialize’ the meanings of the past in different cultural products that are conceived of, or can be converted into, ‘vehicles for memory,’ such as books, museums, monuments, films, and history books” (Jelin 25). In examining “vehicles for memory,” as well as sites in time (specific dates, commemorations, and anniversaries), there are likely to be
disputes or conflicts over them, as they are ways in which memory entrepreneurs try to embody memories. The memory entrepreneurs’ demands for official recognition of these *lieux de mémoire* may generate conflict with those whose memories are in opposition (Jelin).

Are remembering and forgetting complete opposites? Or is memory an element of forgetting? Paul Ricoeur (1999) analyzes the ethical questions of memory and its counterpart. He questions whether there is a “duty to remember;” that duty implies a transmission of the meaning of past events onto the next generation who construct the future (Ricoeur, 1999). Ricoeur seems bothered by the overwhelming tendency that history, and therefore memory, is told by the victors, and therefore he arrives at the conclusion that the duty to remember is to remember the history of those who suffered, particularly those who suffered at the hands of the victors (Ricoeur, 1999). Nonetheless, Ricoeur also raises the question: is there a duty to forget? He goes beyond the traditional choice and resolves, “the duty to remember is a duty to teach, whereas the duty to forget is a duty to go beyond anger and hatred” (Ricoeur, 1999, p. 11). This conclusion seems to be within Minow’s spectrum between vengeance and forgiveness and provides a different perspective on forgetting.

The final element of collective memory that I will discuss is the trope of postmemory. While not necessarily what Halbwachs would consider to be part of traditional collective memory, postmemory is a social construction as it is the passing on of traumatic memories to the second generation, as Ricoeur (1999) discussed in his question of the duty to remember. Though the individuals who embody postmemory did not live through the events, “the descendants of survivors (of victims as well as of
perpetrators) of massive traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous generation’s remembrances of the past that they need to call that connection *memory*” and therefore the memories themselves are transmitted to the next generation(s) (Hirsch 105-106). Hirsch (2008) sees this transmission of memory as a consequence of traumatic recollection. The narrative memory that Jelin highlights is also of importance to postmemory: it is through the re-telling of the traumatic stories to the next generation that the effects of the trauma continue into the present, even after those who lived through the events have passed away (Hirsch). I argue that the opposite, that of forgetting, is also very much a part of postmemory. When the memories are not told to the descendent, it nullifies the importance of the traumatic events in society in the present, and for the future.

2.3 Human Rights Discourse

When listening to stories about wars in general, a common thing to hear is “we did what was necessary” or “there are rules in war.” Due to this rationale, it is assumed that human rights violations simply tend to happen. These sentiments are articulated best by Giorgio Agamben (2005) in his theory of the state of exception. The state of exception is the ability to set the law aside, a state of emergency, and it is built into liberal notions of sovereignty. When the state perceives this state of emergency, it has the legal right to ignore its own laws and international law to do whatever is necessary to protect itself (Agamben, 2005). Agamben emphasizes that the state of exception is particularly difficult regarding civil wars. “Because civil war is the opposite of normal conditions, it lies in a zone of undecidability with respect to the state of exception, which is state power’s immediate response to the most extreme internal conflicts” (Agamben,
2005, p. 2). In theory, the state has a choice of whether or not to enact the state of state of exception during a civil war, which is this zone of undecidability. With the state of exception, the zone of undecidability is an uncertain, ambiguous zone, where extrajudicial proceedings and procedures become law, where “juridical norms blur with mere fact” (Agamben, 2005, p. 29). The state has the discretion to interpret facts as laws (e.g., priests are communists and therefore are a threat to national security) and utilize extrajudicial ways of handling the situation. Even in democratic states, the state of exception has become one of the essential practices of contemporary states, and therefore with the choice, the state in crisis will enact it (Agamben, 2005). This is because, in the zone of undecidability, it is the state that has the sovereign right to decide and choose the facts and justifications to enact the state of exception. Since it is the state, it will always only opt for the state’s interests. It seems that liberal, democratic states are on the razor’s edge balance between constituents pushing for things on one side, and violence and mob rule on the other. The state is in an inherent tension and must balance against the people. However, for Agamben (2005), that razor’s edge is always defined. That tension is not a tension because the state’s power has the state of exception written into it, and can always enact it whenever it feels necessary. Agamben’s theory is controversial, yet what is of value to this study is that certain sectors believe that the state of exception did or does exist, and how this belief affects their perspectives, memories, and current actions.¹

¹ Agamben’s State of Exception is particularly criticized in relation to the timing in which it was released: post-September 11th. In this period, the US’ War on Terror was in full swing, invoking the state of exception in relation to everything from the Patriot Act to Guantanamo. The rationale being the suspension of civil liberties in order to protect the nation from terrorists. As Mark Danner wrote in 2011, “We are living in a state of
Another major figure who examines what happens once the period of mass violence has ended is Robert Meister (2011). Meister’s work is a critique of the Human Rights Discourse that became globally prominent after the Cold War. He describes “Human Rights Discourse (HRD)- capitalized as a proper name, to designate the transformation of Auschwitz-based reasoning into a new discourse of global power that claims to supersede the cruelties perpetrated by both revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries during the previous two centuries” (Meister, 2011, pp. 3-4).

Meister’s main critique is that after the violence, human rights violations, or genocide is over, this HRD puts that evil firmly in the past. However, for Meister (2011), the HRD is truly about the transitional time- “when evil has ended but before justice has begun” (p. 10). Or perhaps said even better, “Human Rights Discourse is an intermessianic…secular theology in which former victims, and those who have inflicted or benefited from their suffering, await a final judgment that some hope and others fear will never come” (Meister, 2011, p. 12). The evil past is over, and society has achieved closure, symbolized by reconciliation, and the slogan “never again!” Yet Meister (2011) emphasizes that this type of reconciliation includes the perpetual waiting for “justice”: “now is never the time for historical reckoning” or dealing with the past (p. 48). This echoes Arendt’s argument, that forgiveness or punishment must take place for the society to move on. However, though the evil is placed in the past, it is still not dealt with concretely, and therefore according to Meister, reconciliation and justice are continuously postponed.

---

The criticism especially relates to whether or not the state of exception is simply a justification for the suspension of civil liberties.
Within a particular society, there are various levels of persons involved in the HRD, each with their own implications and motivations. There is clearly the victimizer who perpetrated the evil. Then comes the victim, who gets to claim a “moral victory.” This focus on the bodies of victim and victimizer is precisely the problem with the HRD, as it does not focus on the systems and structural problems that enabled the atrocities to happen in the first place. This allows those who benefitted from the system, but were not directly responsible for the atrocities, to keep their gains and be “reborn” in the new reconciled postwar society (Meister, 2011). These beneficiaries are one type of bystander, who in general as Daniel Goldhagen (1996) specifically targets, are persons who allowed the evil to happen and many of whom came out on top. These beneficiaries no longer have to worry about the evil past (as again, it is firmly in the past), and they have become productive members of the reconciled, postwar society.

How the discourse treats victims in the new society is also greatly troubling. As Meister (2011) describes,

The new social compact is an implicit agreement to treat unreconciled victims, who still equate the beneficiaries with perpetrators, as a truth threat that may once have been legitimately feared but must now be repudiated. Those unreconciled victims who remain are compared to “extremists” on the other side whose reactionary embrace of violence plays on the fears of beneficiaries that they will be victimized in their turn. The political effect of recent Human Rights Discourse is thus to marginalize those on both sides who are still willing to fight on… In a still recovering nation, former victims of the old regime cannot attempt to win without challenging the consensus that the historical evil is truly past (pp. 24, 29).

Unreconciled victims are accused of undermining reconciliation, and beneficiaries who speak or act out on their fear of these victims are accused of “blaming the victim,” and both sides threaten the new society that is supposed to have moved on from the atrocities
of the past. Yet the farce of reconciliation is also extremely troubling to Meister. He argues that “the social melodramas of reconciliation allow continuing beneficiaries of injustice to pity victims without fearing them, because the victims’ grief is now disconnected from their sense of grievance” (Meister, 2011, p. 70). These two sides that Meister criticizes raises the question (within Minow’s spectrum), after evil, is there too much memory, or not enough?

One of Meister’s final criticisms of the HRD is the involvement and responsibility of the international community, particularly of Western states. Auschwitz and the Holocaust served as the binding moment for Western civilization to make sure that something so unthinkable could never happen again. Looking at the genocide of Auschwitz imbued a moral duty within the global community, symbolized by Western countries, to put the human (bodies) over the political (system, structure). Meister (2011) calls this the “primacy of the global over the local, which was once the basis of a directly political imperialism, is here ostensibly humanized…” (p. 48). The international community now has the “responsibility to protect” in the face of mass atrocity. This is especially true after the mass genocide in Rwanda, when the international community did not intervene. The experience of Rwanda showed many that if the international community simply sits by and does nothing, millions of people may die. Since 2005, the United Nations has developed protocols for the “responsibility to protect” against genocide, which states that both states and the international community have the “responsibility for protecting populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing, and their incitement” (Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, 2015). Many academics agree that the international
community should intervene, as genocide ends up happening when no one intervenes (Goldhagen, 2009). Yet what does this responsibility imply? As emphasized, it places primary importance to the bodies of victims being killed over the structures that allowed the killing. Is the international community responsible or responsive to the needs of developing countries confronting atrocities?

Makau Matua, who focuses his own critique on the Savages-Victims-Savior (SVS) metaphor that the HRD has become, echoes many of the elements of Meister’s critique. The SVS contains three elements: the savage, who is the state that enacts the human rights abuses; the victims, who are powerless innocents who have been abused by the primitive state; and the savior is the West, specifically the white West, who comes in to free the victims from tyranny. Matua is very critical of the SVS metaphor as a whole, as well as its different components. Firstly, he finds that the HRD itself is Eurocentric, and continues the colonial project, in which certain actors are superior and others inferior (Matua, 2001). Related to this colonial legacy, “the SVS metaphor results in an ‘othering’ process that imagine the creation of inferior clones… ‘Savage’ cultures and peoples are seen as lying outside the human rights orbit, and by implication, outside the regime of political democracy” (Matua, 2001, p. 205). The major problem with the SVS that Matua addresses is its “inadequacy, incompleteness, and wrong-headedness” (p. 209). With its Eurocentric view and lack of different cultural understanding, the SVS metaphor within the HRD has major failings in practice for transitional states.

The first element of the metaphor is the savage, typified by the primitive state that abuses the human rights of its citizens. Yet, Matua (2001) argues, “the state is but the scaffolding underneath which the real savage resides” (p. 220). Who are the real
savages? According to Matua, it is the dominant class or political interests that control that state and make it the public expression of their particular cultural vision: the culture is the real savage. I would argue that there is an element of Meister in this argument as well, as it is not the state, per se, but the system and the structures, formed by the dominant groups within the country. In order for the savage state to change into a civilized, democratic society, it is urged to adhere to western, human rights norms. Many times, western countries (particularly the United States) utilize human rights as a tool of foreign policy against non-Western states, so that they end their savagery (Matua, 2001).

One can easily see the colonialist view of the savage state in this metaphor. Yet one can also ask again, who is the real savage? Is it the military massacring towns of civilian peasants? Is it the foreign (Western) government funding that military? Is it the structural inequalities that led it to happen? Or is it the bystanders and the beneficiaries that allowed it to happen?

The second element is the victim, the soul of the metaphor. In the HRD, the victim is portrayed as helpless, innocent, unable to defend him or herself; and many are poor, uneducated, very old or very young, and most certainly marginalized (Matua, 2001). This representation of the victim also ties into the colonial messianic ideology that the “native” is weak, powerless, and destitute and in need of saving (by the West). While I do not wish to diminish the abuses committed against any victim, particularly in the Salvadoran case, I most definitely do not consider them to have been powerless. Many were student activists, peasant organizers, union members, priests, mayors, political figures, members of a higher economic class, or simply peasants who happened to live near guerrilla controlled areas and gave them tortillas, all of which were a death
sentence by either the Salvadoran state, its agents, or the FMLN. Yet placing them into
the box of innocent victim is too simplistic a category, and takes away their agency as
human beings when they were alive.

Luis Martín-Cabrera (2011) elaborates on the fact that the victim, and human
rights discourse in general, has become depoliticized, focusing on victims as innocent
bodies. He describes,

As an anti-political project, human rights discourse not only effectively
conceals the fact that the majority of the people swept up in the military
raids were political militants and union leaders, but it also obscures the
connection between these acts of violence and the economic reforms that
the dictatorships, backed by the United States, sought to impose in the
Southern Cone. By reducing these militants to their victim states- “mere
life” without political agency- human rights effectively dissociate
suffering from its political and economic motivations (Martín-Cabrera,
2011, p. 214).

While Martín-Cabrera is discussing the case of the Southern Cone, it is almost
indistinguishable from the situation of El Salvador. In discussing how female Chilean
victims of torture are reduced to their status as victim, and their experience as only one of
torture, loss, and death, the problems that Meister discussed become apparent. It is again,
only the physical bodies of the victims, and their status as victims, that is of importance
to the HRD; disregarded are the other experiences of these persons, as well as the
political and economic situations that led to their victimization.

The final component in the metaphor is the savior. The savior has been present in
the other two aspects as well, as it is from their colonial view that the metaphor itself was
developed. With the Eurocentric model of “universal” human rights, the Western world
has continued to push its values and expectations onto other developing nations. Matua
(2001) argues, “Universalism is an essential attribute of their (the Western states’

validity. This validation comes partly from the conquest of the ‘primitive’ and his introduction and delivery to ‘civilization’” (p. 234). That “savior-colonizer” psyche remains, with the Western states retaining their superiority and continuing their “othering” of the savages. In the SVS metaphor, the savior is represented at three levels. The first is the intergovernmental level, exemplified by the United Nations. The UN serves as the world’s peacekeepers, to quell unrest, or negotiate peace treaties. The second level consists of Western states, in most recent years typified by the US. “The United States is now the major determinant of ‘international peace and security’ and the spokesperson for the ‘welfare’ of humanity” (Matua, 2001, pp. 239-240). The third level consists of the international NGOs (INGOs) such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. According to Matua (2001), this is the most important element of the savior metaphor, as they are the human rights movement’s foot soldiers, missionaries, and proselytizers. INGOs have also been important in the creation of local NGOs around the world, particularly in the “savage” countries. However it is the apolitical and moral dimension of HRD that allows the savior to sweep in to save the victim. It “is precisely what allows for its mobilization in order to justify military interventions and the use of force to prevent suffering” (Martín-Cabrera, 2011, p. 212). The “responsibility to protect” claims only moral superiority, that it is not involved in the local politics that led to the abuses. Yet, is the savior an apolitical force?

The savior is never as clear-cut as the metaphor makes it seem. Utilizing Michel Trouillot’s words, the SVS discourse places all three elements into the “savage slot.” As Trouillot said, there is no “other,” the victim (as well as the savage abuser and the civilizing savior) are not isolated beings (Trouillot, 1991). This is essentially Matua’s
argument, that the human rights discourse should abandon the binaries and open itself up to a multi-cultural, cross-contamination of cultures in examining human rights.

**Conclusion**

Matua’s criticism of the SVS metaphor provides the framework from which the findings chapters will proceed. Utilizing the problems inherent to transitional justice, human rights discourse, and with the conflicts that arise with collective memory in the public sphere, I will take a critical look at the perspectives, collective memories, and current realities of the savage, the victim, and the savior.
Chapter 3: The Savage

Este es el país de la eterna impunidad.
-Ricardo Vaquerano

The categories of savage, victim, and savior in El Salvador’s Civil War are still remembered and used as such today. Who belongs to each group varies according to how each group is remembered and viewed is based not only on the experiences of the Armed Conflict, but by the present as well. As Halbwachs understood, the collective memory of the past is reconstructed based on the present-day reality. This chapter will look at the figure of the savage in its various forms, and how different people who belong to a variety of groups, view the figure of the savage.

3.1 Military as Savage

According to the SVS metaphor, the savage is typified by the primitive state that attacks its innocent citizens. During the Civil War, the Salvadoran Armed Forces epitomized the savage. Also linked to the Armed Forces were death squads, who were responsible for at least “817 victims of abductions, disappearances and executions that occurred between 1980 and 1991” (Betancourt, Planchart, & Buergenthal, 1993). The cruelty of the Armed Forces is still remembered vividly today. Blanca García, whose mother was one of the founding members of Co-Madres describes:

My four older brothers were exiled from here… because they were accused of being subversives, because they collaborated a lot with the youth awareness organization, to protest against the Armed Forces that indiscriminately recruited young people… So that was totally against the rights of any person, and especially the young people. They were insistent on seeing only one point of view of reality that was happening in that moment, which was to protect the government… that the subversives were destabilizing society… And on the contrary, well, they were killing and persecuting the youth (B. García, personal communication, 16 July 2014).
Blanca and her family continue to be a part of Co-Madres, and continue to denounce the actions of the Armed Forces during the Armed Conflict. For her, they were the source of the pain and conflict for her family, the group that disappeared her uncle and two of her cousins, and forced her brothers into exile.

The matter of disappeared children has also been a campaign for the Salvadoran human rights community. Three cases regarding the forced disappearance of children during the Armed Conflict have been brought before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, all with the judgments concluding that the State was at fault for these disappearances. The organization Pro-Búsqueda has been at the forefront of this issue.

Pro-Búsqueda was founded and began to receive reports from all over the country. And that’s when they realized, or they begin to suspect that this has to do with a systematic pattern at the national level, because cases come in from San Vicente, Usulután, from Cabañas, and from Morazán primarily, which were the zones where operations with the most conflict during the War. So it coincided that where there were strong military operations under the military doctrine of scorched earth and of counterinsurgency, with the immediate reaction battalions, trained in the United States, they realize that where these operations occurred is where the largest number of forced disappearances were reported (R. Rugamas, personal communication, 7 July 2014).

The emphasis on systematic pattern of forced disappearance, particularly during scorched earth campaigns, demonstrates that the violations were planned, coordinated, and justified by the Armed Forces. Pro-Búsqueda, along with the Comité Nacional de Búsqueda (CNB- a governmental organization that searches for the disappeared children), principally views the Armed Forces as those responsible for the disappearances, though the military has continuously denied the practice.

While many continue to view the Armed Forces as the ultimate savage during the war, with time, some of those views have become a bit more nuanced. Héctor
Rosemberg, who currently works for the CNB and whose brother was disappeared during the war, describes:

The Armed Forces, because they were on the side of the State, because they were on the side with those who have, they have always been seen as the victimizer… I think that all positions that generalize are damaging. Knowing the current reality that they live in… the military… for me, yes they are victimizers, because they had the control and the power then, and they caused 90% of the human rights violations, that you can’t deny, right? But that they all have the same level of responsibility? Well of course not. I see now an ex-member of the Atlacatl Battalion in a place in the country… and I see how he lives in a cruel situation of extreme poverty. Or that is, of affectation, not only for what he lived, but what he did is too big, and is now practically at a level of mental disorder. But it’s a very very difficult mental health situation of abandonment, of abandonment on behalf of his same comrades. So one begins to understand a situation, well, perhaps he was also a victim in a certain sense, right, but how talking the same about a high-ranking officer, a colonel, a general, who only commanded… and now has a good pension, he’s retired, maybe he lives abroad, or he has a good situation here in the country, and well, that is a very complex situation (H. Rosemberg Aparicio, personal communication, 4 July 2014).

For Hector, there is no denying that the abuses happened and who was responsible for them. However, there is an underlying possibility that the victimizer can also become a victim. Though the members of the military clearly perpetrated thousands of human rights violations, it was all on orders from above that the foot soldier had to carry out. The effects of being a savage can turn some into victims themselves. Theidon (2007) in her research on Peru in the aftermath of the Shining Path asks the question: “How are these men after what they have done? (p. 473). In post-war Peru, as well as in El Salvador, the ordinary men who fought for both the army and the guerrillas find themselves straddling “the divide between victim and perpetrator,” and that it is “not only violence suffered but violence inflicted that requires reckoning in the aftermath of war” (Theidon, 2013, pp. 255, 252).
Hector and many others I interviewed also spoke of the continued power of, not
the military itself, but of the powerful members of the military during the Armed
Conflict.

Many of the protagonists of these events [the human rights violations], are
alive and still have an important political weight. Some are possibly, not
visible political operators, but they are voices that have moral authority
within their organizations… Many of these people continue making
political decisions. Many of them are economically powerful… Many of
them possibly should be in jail. They are active politicians (R. Vaquerano,
personal communication, 2 July 2014).4

With the Peace Accords, the military was supposed to give up much of its power in the
country, which for the most part has happened. But that does not mean that the
individuals who were in power have given theirs up. Though they have retired from
military life, they continue to be active in the country. Most recently, two former
generals ran for office in the Legislative Assembly on the ARENA party ticket: General
Manuel Ernesto Vargas (also interviewed for this study), and General Juan Orlando
Zepeda, who was Vice-Minister of Defense in 1989, was named by the Truth
Commission as involved in the murder of the Jesuits, and is being brought to trial in
Spain for this crime. In the municipal and legislative elections of 2015, General Vargas
became a diputado for the ARENA party in the Legislative Assembly. Therefore, it is
evident that the individual military-victimizer’s power is still an important factor in
present-day El Salvador.

What is clear is that the Armed Forces are viewed as the savage by many in El
Salvador. But how do members of the military, or those who support them, view
themselves? As victim or victimizer, or neither? One soldier describes the Armed
Forces as “an institution so perfect that the only thing it needs to work are people who
want to work” (Flores Cruz, 2009, p. 91). Former soldier Flores Cruz describes an operation that he was involved in:

The history begins like this: many years ago a big operation was developed in the zone... carrying out the dominant maneuver, Hammer and Anvil... This history, deserves to be called an error or a costly experience and people suffered the consequences in the moment they occurred, but in the future they would be considered “victories” (Flores Cruz, 2009, p. 69).

Flores Cruz’s words are confusing on the subject of “errors,” but one can ultimately determine from his writing that regardless of what happened, it was a victory because the enemy was defeated. Though his testimony is almost like propaganda for the military, it is also one of the only sources from the side of the military. I also interviewed General Vargas, who was a prominent military figure during the war: he was commander of the Atonal Battalion, later was commander of the eastern-zone, and was involved in the peace process, and one of the signers of the Peace Accords on behalf of the Armed Forces. Though not named in the Truth Commission Report, according to the online newspaper El Faro, “In his record some human rights violations are attributed to him while he was head of the military detachment in Morazán, in 1986” (Peña, 2015).

Though in my interview with General Vargas was he extremely mum on the subject of the actions of the Armed Forces during the war, in other interviews he has criticized the actions of the Truth Commission.

The Truth Commission went beyond its mandate... They didn’t have to act as judges and especially not mention names. They had to tell the truth of everything that we did, but not investigate, or stage a trial in their heads, judge and sentence. That wasn’t its role (Valencia & Peña, 2014).
These silences may demonstrate that there is no denying what happened from the military. Only that the military does not wish to be held accountable. By criticizing the Truth Commission, General Vargas contradicts the peace process that he was a part of.

The military also has many supporters from civil society. One woman I interviewed, Maritza Herrera Rebollo, whose father (then Minister of Education) was killed by the FPL in 1979, describes herself:

> Look I’m militaristic, did you know that? … So, I always admired the military because my dad would take us to see the military parade, you know… My dad had many military friends, and good people. Decent people, right? (M. Herrera Rebollo, personal communication, 21 July 2014).

Along with admiring the military, Maritza also mentioned, “the only thing that the Armed Forces did was defend the country from the guerrillas” (M. Herrera Rebollo, personal communication, 21 July 2014). It is important to note that this statement comes with a large amount of bias, as the guerrillas assassinated her father. Yet the assertion that the military was just defending the country in whatever actions they did emphasizes Agamben’s state of exception. The state, or its agents, has a choice of whether or not to ignore national and international law. Because the guerrillas were threatening the state’s interests, regardless of how despotic the state was, the military chose to defend it by any means necessary, and therefore enacted the state of exception. However for many, particularly the victims of abuses committed under the rationale of the state of emergency, “… you can’t justify a massacre, these sexual abuses that were committed in El Mozote, El Sumpul, La Quesera, that was a scorched earth pattern that killed everything that moved. So in this tiny country, such brutality…was committed… and
that is not invented because the people say so. There are people who lost all their loved ones” (W. Medrano, personal communication, 8 July, 2014).  

Of all the typical identities of the savage, perhaps no other individual person in El Salvador exemplifies the characteristics better than former Major Roberto D’Aubuisson. He could be considered, as Steve Stern labels it, a memory knot: a site of humanity so bothersome or conflictive, that practically everyone has an opinion about him and those opinions are in opposition to each other (Stern, 2004). The Truth Commission Report, though heavily criticized by the military, is regarded as a mostly definitive statement of what occurred during the war. The published Report specifically identified D’Aubuisson as the person who “gave the order” to assassinate Monseñor Romero (Betancourt, Planchart, & Buergenthal, 1993). Also in the Report is a section dedicated to the death squads, and in particular to the death squad that D’Aubuisson organized. The report states:

Former Major D’Aubuisson drew considerable support from wealthy civilians who feared that their interests would be affected… They were convinced that the country faced a serious threat of Marxist insurrection which they had to overcome. The Commission on the Truth obtained testimony from many sources that some of the richest landowners and businessmen inside and outside the country offered their estates, homes, vehicles and bodyguards to help the death squads. They also provided funds to organize and maintain the squads, especially those directed by former Major D’Aubuisson” (Betancourt, Planchart, & Buergenthal, 1993, pp. 126-127).

The Truth Commission Report provides evidence that it was not simply D’Aubuisson who was a crazed anti-communist; much of the economic elite was involved in financing the death squads. As Matua (2001) stated, “the state is but the scaffolding underneath which the real savage resides” (p. 220). It is not simply independent actors choosing to
commit the atrocities, but those within society who enable the atrocities to occur, either overtly (as in this case) or covertly (as a bystander). The D’Aubuisson case may shed some light onto the question, were the bystanders really bystanders (as Meister describes), or were they active participants and can be labeled “savage” themselves?

The Truth Commission though is a more “sterile,” objective document. How do different people view D’Aubuisson in the present? Damián Alegría, FMLN diputado in the Legislative Assembly and former guerrilla fighter concurs with the Report:

We know the history of Roberto D’Aubuisson, and in the 70s he took over the ANSESAL archives…and with that he organized the Death Squads. They had information and they themselves took part in the operations to kill a ton of the opposition. So, who bet on the war? It was the right and it was D’Aubuisson in particular who gave the right the expectation that with the war they could win. The common phrase in those years was, “if in 1932 we had to kill 30 thousand, now we have to kill 300 thousand to stop this revolutionary wave.” So they were the ones who pushed the country to war (D. Alegría, personal communication, 9 July 2014).^{12}

In this statement, Diputado Alegría is putting much, if not all, of the blame for the war on the right and specifically on D’Aubuisson. He also notes the 1932 legacy: the memory of the Matanza remained in the memory of the victimizer as a way of defeating communist threats. For those who view D’Aubuisson in a negative light, in line with the Truth Commission Report, he represents a sort of mastermind behind some of the most heinous crimes committed during the Armed Conflict. Francisco Mena, whose father was in the military in the 1970s before defecting to the ERP in 1980, re-tells his father’s story:

My dad was at meetings where D’Aubuisson would…present his plan to assassinate the priests and…say they needed to act…faster, and they needed to act more intelligently, people were beginning to talk, and he presented this list of 11 priests and on that list, number one was Monseñor Romero. And he would say… “once we kill this dog, the rabies will
both Diputado Alegría and Francisco Mena’s opinions of D’Aubuisson clearly align with
the findings of the Truth Commission Report. They both assert that D’Aubuisson was
responsible for organizing death squads and ordering the assassinations Monseñor
Romero and many others.

However, this is not the only collective memory of D’Aubuisson. His son, also
named Roberto D’Aubuisson, was a diputado in the Legislative Assembly, and is the
newly elected mayor of El Salvador’s second largest city Santa Tecla. He describes the
accusation from the Truth Commission as, “it’s a myth… my father died in the grace of
the lord and here his name remains in that grace” (Bernal, 2015).13 Not only is his son a
proponent of his innocence, but also the ARENA party (which he founded) officially
does not recognize D’Aubuisson’s guilt in ordering the assassination of Monseñor
Romero. The President of COENA, Jorge Velado, stated that there is no proof that
D’Aubuisson was guilty of Monseñor Romero’s death (Castro, 2015).14 One of the other
founders of ARENA with D’Aubuisson, Gloria Salguero Gross, describes him in an
unsurprisingly positive light.

Look, for me, Roberto D’Aubuisson was an authentic nationalist who
loved the country… I never saw him do anything incorrect, right? That is,
I think that in that moment, the truth is that… there were people, well,
from the Democratic Party in the United States that wanted to favor the
left in El Salvador. And so…they also invented a ton of things against
Roberto, and Roberto suffered a lot, he suffered persecution… But in the

---

13 COENA is the Nationalist Executive Committee (Comité Ejecutivo Nacionalista) which
is the highest authority of the ARENA party.
end, he demonstrated that he really was a nationalist in word and deed (G. Salguero Gross, personal communication, 29 July 2014).

Regardless of what he is accused of having done, for Salguero Gross, it is a matter of nationalist pride: everything he did (though she never saw him do anything improper) was for El Salvador.

One interview that I conducted sheds the most light on how the right, and the ARENA party in particular, continues to view D’Aubuisson. ARENA Diputado Mario Valiente had a lot to say about his party’s founder.

Megan: Coming from abroad, like me let’s say, there’s a certain narrative that is told about D’Aubuisson and ARENA, how it was founded and everything. So I’d like to know your opinion about this polarizing character, no?

Diputado Valiente: I have him here [he signals to the poster of D’Aubuisson on the wall of his office]... To begin with, I want to make clear to you that of D’Aubuisson, I hold him in deep respect, and I hold him with much gratitude... When the conflict began more seriously... with the coup d’état in October of ’79, the country entered a leadership crisis... we didn’t know where to go. The conflict was now practically in the cities. There were bombs, killings, kidnappings. And of course the army reacted. Many people felt attacked, reacted... civilians in that moment. The figure of D’Aubuisson emerges at the beginning of the eighties. Well, the history you already know, he was a major in the army, he had a lot of information... because he was intelligence chief of the army. So he had the information of who were the civilians that the army, if not controlled, at least collaborated with to supposedly maintain order. Maintain the status quo in that moment... Anyway what he did is already done. People wanted to tarnish his image, which was logical in a political war... you have to defame the enemy.

Me personally along with many other people, we are convinced that D’Aubuisson never would have ordered the assassination of Romero... Why do I tell you that D’Aubuisson never would have made the mistake of killing Monseñor Romero? Because it was a total and absolute blunder! Or, aside from the ethical or moral reasons, as with any assassination, the man was sufficiently intelligent with brilliant political judgment, that he never would have created a martyr for the left. I am convinced that the
FMLN did it. Completely convinced (M. Valiente, personal communication, 10 July 2014). It is interesting to look at the way D’Aubuisson’s supporters talk around some of the human rights abuse aspects. Apart from rejecting that he ordered Romero’s assassination, it is mostly a silence about the death squads. Or, as Valiente put it, “what he did is done,” while at the same time deflecting, stating that in a war, it is natural to try to destroy the image of your adversary. It is also interesting to note in Diputado Valiente’s interview how, as opposed to Diputado Alegría’s interview that blames the war on D’Aubuisson, Valiente puts the blame on the guerrilla, and that D’Aubuisson only utilized his networks (ANSESAL) to maintain the status quo. Despite what is widely considered to be known or accepted as fact about D’Aubuisson, many people from the right and the ARENA party in particular, maintain their own collective memory of veneration.

3.2 FMLN as Savage

While in the SVS metaphor, the savage is typically the state’s actors who perpetrate abuses, in the Salvadoran case, we must also look at the FMLN. Though only 5% of the human rights violations were attributed to the FMLN, it still entails a number of victims, and provides that they were victimizers.

Persons aligned with the right within El Salvador are typically, and unsurprisingly, critical of the FMLN. ARENA Diputado Mario Valiente is direct in his criticism of the FMLN.

---

v In this section I will be looking exclusively at the FMLN guerrillas, not the post-war FMLN political party.
I think that the conflict hurt us a lot economically, not only in material loss… infrastructure, that is, the FMLN’s war was not exclusively against the army, it was against the economy… The idea really was to create the conditions of the country, that supposedly should have existed before the conflict, generate them so that there would be more poverty, that would be more unemployment, and more people without hope… that without doubt were to establish in the country another Cuba. Not only because they agreed with their ideology, their objectives, but also the way of controlling the population, through the stomach (M. Valiente, personal communication, 10 July 2014).16

Valiente is adamant that the FMLN wasn’t on the side of the poor, but that they wanted to destabilize the country even further, in order to ignite their revolution. Therefore, for Valiente, the FMLN wasn’t just fighting the Salvadoran military, but it was a savage against the economy, the Salvadoran livelihood, and all of the Salvadoran people.

The FMLN guerrilla army is also viewed as savage by others in society, by those who would typically be considered to be more sympathetic to the revolutionary cause.

Wilfredo Medrano, lawyer for the El Mozote case at Tutela Legal Dra. María Julia Hernandez describes the organization’s cases:

Why yes, there are archives from both sides in the conflict. There are files in which the people only tell you, who was responsible for the death of your family member? They tell you, troops from the Armed Forces. Members of the National Guard. On the other side here there were… the guerrillas… Many displaced people that live here in Lourdes, there are about 300 from El Mozote. In San Miguel, in San Francisco Gotera. These people lived poorly in Morazán, but they had their milk, their cows, their house, their land, and then suddenly are left without anything. To go begging in the streets, asking for food … I mean to tell you that the people have a lot of different thoughts, they blame the FMLN. Why did they have to go to the mountainous zones? Because of that the people suffered. They are right but also in a conflict, those who direct the war have to know that the civilian population…doesn’t have a reason to be a military objective (W. Medrano, personal communication, 8 July 2014).17

This testimony from Wilfredo provides a nuanced look at the FMLN as savage. He continues to place emphasis on the military as ultimate victimizer, but also doesn’t let the
FMLN off the hook: Tutela Legal has archives that identify the FMLN was involved in the abuses. He also discusses the issue of persons who were displaced during the war. The guerrilla presence and activity in the countryside, particularly in Morazán, Chalatenango, and San Vicente, made the civilians in those areas targets for the military. Many times, as Gloria Salguero Gross mentioned, if the civilians helped the guerrilla, the army would not react kindly. Nonetheless, as Wilfredo mentioned, it is logical to place some blame on the FMLN for making them targets. In the eyes of the military, it turned them into communists who needed to be eradicated, and in many cases they were.

Another Salvadoran who has a unique view of the FMLN as victimizer is Juan José Dalton. Dalton, who had been living in Cuba, joined the FPL in 1978. This is three years after his father, renowned Salvadoran poet Roque Dalton, was accused of being a spy and assassinated by the ERP in 1975. Juan José Dalton’s view of the FMLN as victimizer is not an umbrella viewpoint: he fought with the FPL, was wounded in battle, and continued to work for the FPL from Cuba until the end of the war. At the same time, another faction of the FMLN killed his father. Dalton is adamant about the fact that Joaquín Villalobos and Jorge Melendez, both leaders of the ERP, were responsible. For Dalton, Villalobos and Melendez are the victimizers, though not the entire ERP nor FMLN. Now that the FMLN is in the presidency, he is critical of Melendez’ continued presence in the government.

The FMLN maintains Jorge Melendez as one of the current government’s principle civil servants, that is to say it maintains impunity. In the case of my father they don’t want to recognize that this person, Jorge Melendez, is one of those responsible for the death of my father. He’s currently Presidential Secretary for Vulnerability Issues. That is to say, he is one of the closest, principal characters to the president… Obviously they say its about maintaining political alliances, but we come back around: in order
to maintain political equilibrium you forget about justice. So, what kind of democracy are we founding in this country? It’s contradictory, right? You are representing the people’s interests and to the people you are giving them impunity and that is damaging for the process (J.J. Dalton, personal communication, 10 July 2014).

This statement echoes views about the continued influence of military officials, and in this case, guerrilla leaders. For Dalton, it is appalling that Melendez has an important role in the government, and it sets a bad precedent for the country based on impunity.

For former members of the guerrilla, the FMLN during the war is naturally remembered differently. FMLN Diputado Alegría remembers:

I remember the words of Mauricio Funes when he said, at last...those who were seen as victimizers are going to be recognized as victims, because that’s what they were, because all the past right-wing discourse was that the guerrillas were the victimizers, the horrible people who had laid siege against the country, which in reality it was the state violence that made many people need to defend themselves, and they joined the guerrillas and defended themselves in the war. Well, there was violence from both sides, but in the case of the people and the FMLN the revolutionary violence was plainly justified because there was state violence against the people in general... But what is a war without deaths? (D. Alegría, personal communication, 9 July 2014).

Alegría again places the blame for the war on the state and the military. He also completely justifies the actions used by the FMLN. Joaquin Villalobos, ERP comandante and signer of the Peace Accords, is clear on his position regarding the violence used.

“There are no good or saintly wars, all wars are essentially bad, it doesn’t matter if they are fought in the name of liberty, of God, or of justice” (Villalobos, 2000, p. 17). He continues to describe the FMLN’s actions:

The guerrilla violence was a response and initially a consequence of the absence of democracy, but it also served as a provocation factor that set off a chain reaction of further violence on behalf of the government.
According to the Truth Commission report, the violations comprised only 5% of the cases. The quantitative aspect is not linked to the choices, but to who had the power, and the guerrilla couldn’t commit more violations because it didn’t have as much power.

With the war established, the violence up to a point responded to similar patterns on both sides, and it was a way of winning objectives in some cases, or as extreme ideological acts in others. In both situations the human consequences were on another level. The guerrilla in reality invented its own war principles and rules, as it is not a state nor a conventional army subject to the Geneva Convention (Villalobos, 2000, pp. 28-29).²¹

Villalobos clearly understands that many of the FMLN’s actions were not permitted under international law, and he recognizes that there were human rights violations. Yet he justifies them and rationalizes that in comparison to the military, it was not that much. However, he also emphasizes the fact that if the FMLN had had more power, they would have committed more abuses. For both Alegría and Villalobos, whatever actions the FMLN took during the war were necessary to confront and defeat the ultimate savage of the Armed Forces.

As D’Aubuisson is the symbolic savage on the right, on the left, Salvador Sánchez Cerén has emerged as the representation of FMLN violence.²º Sánchez Cerén was comandante of the FPL during the war. However it is likely that much of the attention to him as victimizer is due to his political rise to power, and the fact that he was recently elected president with only 50.11% of the vote. A casual, passing encounter I had while watching a World Cup game is typical of the discourse on the new president. I was sitting next to a young girl of about 20 years old, and she began asking me about

²¹ In the past, other FMLN comandantes could have emerged as the ultimate left-wing victimizer. Particularly Joaquín Villalobos, Cayetano Carpio, and Shafik Handal. Yet with Sánchez Ceréns presidential victory, the discourse in 2014 was focused on him as FMLN victimizer.
what I was doing in El Salvador. I mentioned to her the subject of my research, without going into too much detail; that it is about the legacies of the human rights violations from the war. She immediately responded, “well yes, even our current president is an assassin” (anonymous, personal communication, 13 July 2014). This view is not uncommon. Typically, right-wing politicians are quick to label Sánchez Cerén as victimizer:

Well, the president, he confessed to having killed I don’t know how many thousands (G. Salguero Gross, personal communication, 29 July 2014). 22

Human Rights Lawyer Wilfredo Medrano adds:

Well in this case the current president … was guerrilla commander then… in a chain of command … he had responsibility. Nobody can say that he didn’t know about an execution, about an operation. A battalion commander can’t say that he didn’t know what his men were talking about. It’s a lie. It’s difficult. There are always commands. It’s a lie that has been said by many soldiers, no, if there are commands, there’s responsibility, there’s the sergeant, there are the lieutenants, and not everyone is sealed the same to not say anything. What always happens is that there’s complicit silence (W. Medrano, personal communication, 8 July 2014). 23

Medrano’s analysis of Sánchez Cerén is particularly important. While the politicians call him an assassin, he is not named in the Truth Commission Report. However, that does not mean that he was not involved in abuses. Medrano emphasizes the chain of command as rationalization that naturally Sánchez Cerén was an active participant.

Maritza Herrera Rebollo utilizes this chain of command to place the blame for her father’s 1979 assassination completely on Sánchez Cerén.

The FPL didn’t like my dad. My dad was threatened, Megan. And the whole leadership knew… And who was in that leadership? Mr. Sánchez Cerén… and all the others, how do you think that he wasn’t going to know? So I say, to the whole world, a guerrilla is an assassin. It’s not just with my dad. There are people that say to me, ‘you’re just resentful
because of your dad.” No! It’s not that! It’s not that! Going back though, the FPL was a group of people, and among those people was Sánchez Cerén, and whether he wanted it or not, but he was always amongst those who distinguished themselves as being the most wicked… He even killed his own people because he believed they were spies. No way! (M. Herrera Rebollo, personal communication, 21 July 2014).24

Leading up to the 2014 presidential election, Maritza created an advertisement, or “spot”, most akin to an attack ad against Sánchez Cerén. Its contents are quite illuminating to her feelings, and how the memory of her father’s death continues to shape her life. In the “spot”, she speaks directly to Sánchez Cerén:

You who has caused such destruction, you can’t, you shouldn’t be the future of my homeland! I refuse to accept that the person who ordered the death of my father and of so many Salvadorans wants to be President of the Republic. I ask God to enlighten our people so that in the next elections they make the knowledgeable decision to look towards the future and leave you where you belong, in a past full of violence and death to which we should never return (JRN SantaTecla, 2013).25

Maritza not only rejects Sánchez Cerén as President, but also expresses the desire to keep the evil, violent past in the past. In this “spot” Maritza essentially accomplishes two contradictory actions. On the one hand, the act of creating the “spot” in order to attack Sánchez Cerén demonstrates an element of unreconciled victimhood. As Meister (2011) argued, these unreconciled victims present a threat to reconciliation. However, at the same time, Maritza urges the country to keep the violent past in the past (by not voting for Sánchez Cerén). She uses her own victimhood as an example of being able to put the past away, though there has been no “historical reckoning” (Meister, 2011). For Maritza, Sánchez Cerén’s potential election goes against everything that has been worked for since the Peace Accords, as it allows the savage to govern the country.
Naturally, many within the left and the FMLN political party defend Sánchez Cerén’s actions as Comandante. FMLN Diputado Alegría explains:

A part of the right has that view; they accuse Salvador Sánchez Cerén as being responsible for many deaths during the war. But what really happened is that, the Armed Forces, the Salvadoran government with the help and resources from the United States government, because they used the tool of infiltration, and they definitely infiltrated…almost all the organizations [of the guerrilla], and what the FMLN did was follow a procedure that in many cases was painful, to try to get rid of that infiltration (D. Alegría, personal communication, 9 July 2014).

This emphasizes again the fact that Sánchez Cerén and the FMLN did what they did only because they had no choice, that it was all for the revolutionary cause. Alegría also blames the US for instilling doubt in the FMLN through the use of spies: he implies that Sánchez Cerén is mostly accused of extrajudicial executions (as Maritza and others elude to), that they were only of “infiltrators,” which for the guerrillas is justified.

When looking at the two groups who represent the savage, there are many parallels. Each side blames the other as the party responsible for causing the war. By deflecting the blame, it also deflects the responsibility over what happened once the war started. Both sides rationalize the violence and human rights abuses committed, because it happened in a state of war that only happened because the other side initiated it. Essentially, both sides in a sense utilize elements of the state of exception to rationalize their actions. The Salvadoran Armed Forces set aside both national and international law in their fight against the “terrorist” guerrillas. The FMLN, while as a non-government entity, could not actually enact a state of exception, it did do so in principle. As Villalobos mentioned above, the FMLN as a guerrilla force and a non-state power did not see itself as adherent to the Geneva Convention and invented its own war principles.
regardless of international law. However, according to international humanitarian law, both sides in a civil war must adhere to international standards: a guerrilla force can cause a death of other combatants, but not of civilians (G. de León, personal communication, 23 April 2015). It is also important to look at how within each side, there is a continued influence of those who are considered emblematic victimizers: from the military high command, to D’Aubuisson’s son, and the FMLN (particularly FPL) leadership. Many “savage” individuals continue to have significant power. As Maritza’s spot said, she wants to put the violent past where it belongs: in the past. But is that possible when many victimizers continue to be key figures in El Salvador? This corresponds with Meister’s (2011) critique of HRD: when the evil is placed in the past, it has not been dealt with correctly, and reconciliation is postponed. Yet it is clear that people throughout Salvadoran society continue to view the former Armed Forces and FMLN guerrillas as “savage” and their representatives are still extremely active in the present, which appears to be a contradiction within the post-war transitional justice and reconciliation project. I would argue that this polarization in collective memory of the savage, and the continuation of the Armed Conflict’s main actors in the political realm, demonstrate a lack of reconciliation, that the past is clearly not firmly in the past.

3.3 Amnesty for the Savage

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the issue of the Amnesty Law of 1993 continues to be a dividing force in El Salvador. Though amnesty is a common transitional justice response, its presence in El Salvador, particularly due to the timing of its passage and its, in essence, nullification of the Truth Commission Report, provokes continued polarized views towards it. I include the different perspectives towards the Amnesty Law in this
discussion of the savage because that is what the Law represents: impunity for the victimizer.

To begin with, there is extensive debate regarding the development of the Amnesty Law in the first place, particularly whether or not it was a part of the Peace Accords negotiations. In an interview with *El Faro*, General Vargas maintains:

> The General Amnesty Law was passed because the different sides agreed to it. It was always like that. We were all clear that we wanted peace or justice—something impossible, something that would never have happened in any conflict that had our dimensions—, or we wanted peace and the building of a new El Salvador (Valencia & Peña, 2014).

Certain individuals within the FMLN, particularly the ERP faction, coincide with Vargas. ERP *Comandante* Joaquín Villalobos is explicit in his analysis:

> The crisis shaped by the disaster of the negotiations between the president and the FMLN general command, was resolved by an informal negotiation before the final accords, between Cristiani and myself… These meetings… became an accord that went forward. The author [Villalobos], representing the ERP, adopted an accord that included: [amongst other articles]… The passing of amnesty, simultaneously with the publication of the Truth report, to avoid legal consequences (Villalobos, 2000, pp. 40-41).

Villalobos’ testimony coincides with the succession of events after the Peace Accords. However, others involved in the peace process, particularly Ruben Zamora, argue that while the First Amnesty Law of 1992, that of National Reconciliation, was negotiated, the General Amnesty Law of 1993 was never a part of those negotiations (Valencia & Peña, 2014). Despite Villalobos’ argument, the FMLN of 2014 tends to have different views. *Diputado* Alegria believes, “well, it was illegal. That is, it was a law that the Cristiani government imposed, worried that all the soldiers would be taken to jail, that they were involved in war crimes” (D. Alegria, personal communication, 9 July
For Alegría and many of his FMLN counterparts, the Amnesty Law is protection and impunity for the savage military. Yet regardless of whether or not the Amnesty Law was part of official or private negotiations prior to the Peace Accords, what is clear is that it is not included in the final Accords. Human Rights Ombudsman David Morales explains,

It’s not true that the Amnesty Law is the foundation of the Peace Accords as many sectors claim. Amnesty isn’t considered in any of the Accord’s texts. Moreover, the Chapultepec Accords talks about exemplary trials of human rights violators from both sides… It was an outline for ending the conflict, immediate, strong institutional reforms in the security and military systems, a meeting with the acknowledgement of the truth and the compensation for victims, including justice according to the recommendations of the Truth Commission, and the transfer to a more modern and democratic institutionality that would generate judicial reform, electoral reform, and the judicial reform that also came from the Peace Accords (D. Morales, personal communication, 18 July 2014).

Regardless of when or how it was thought of, the law was passed through the Legislative Assembly on March 20, 1993.

What these differences of perspective towards the creation of the Amnesty Law demonstrate is that the debate over amnesty continues. These debates are not only about the Law itself, but are about almost every aspect of the law, from its conception to its continued effect on the population. Amnesty laws can be a perfectly rational response for a newly democratic system, as Huntington (1991) presented: they can provide a fresh start. General Vargas describes the process,

We had to choose between justice and peace. Because…in ending a conflict you can’t have both… We decided for amnesty… To avoid the cycle of vengeance, the key is in justice or forgiveness. That was my question… Between individual guilt and collective responsibility… In time, justice and peace should coincide… But in the immediate time frame it is necessary to put an end to the violence… But whichever one of the two you pick, you will always find a magic word call the price of peace.
There is a price to pay for peace. You can want to pay it or not. There is the dilemma that still follows us, amongst it all, because what is the problem that I find having lived through this? That after 22 years, the whole world has 22 years to think, but I didn’t have these 22 years, I had year zero. You all had 22 years to analyze. But not me… I had to decide in that moment. If I was wrong, I was wrong. But the proof is that I wasn’t wrong, there hasn’t been one single shot since the ceasefire. There hasn’t been one political death since the ceasefire" (E. Vargas, personal communication, 3 July 2014).  

General Vargas illuminates the key struggles for transitional justice. He sticks to the traditional options and maintains that the decision is never an easy one as there is always a price to peace, but he believes he made the right decision in negotiating amnesty, as that was the right decision at the time.

Many within El Salvador have the view that the Amnesty Law was necessary to begin the transition to democracy. Former President Armando Calerdón Sol defends it: “It was necessary. We all had to reconcile ourselves. Forgive ourselves. Even today it remains necessary. To break it would be an error” (Valencia & Peña, 2014). ARENA founding member Gloria Salguero Gross adds,

The reality is that the amnesty is necessary to complete the Peace Accords. Without it, they wouldn’t have been achieved. Because there were two sides…the guerrilla and the military. Because also for as much as the guerrillas say… Well, you couldn’t have had amnesty if they all didn’t have to go to jail. All those who were negotiating. The guerrillas didn’t want to go to jail. And on the other hand, the military, but the military was just complying with their job of defending Salvadorans and the national territory. So it is very different. So I think that, for me the

---

x Moodie (2010) discusses one example where Vargas’ statement may be not entirely as clear-cut as he makes it out to be: in 1993 former FMLN leader Francisco Velis was shot in the head as he walked his daughter to school. Cristiani emphasized the “state of unexception,” that it was simply a random killing, attributed to the growing delinquency in the country. FMLN leaders pointed out that it looked like a death-squad killing. And ONUSAL (the UN Observer Mission to El Salvador) condemned the killing as a blow to reconciliation (pp. 51-54)
amnesty should remain. That’s my very personal opinion (G. Salguero Gross, personal communication, 29 July 2014).33

Diputado Nelson Guardado, of the center-right GANA party, adds,

Political vengeance or wanting to point out the electoral-political shades to one side or another, it’s not worth it because in the end it’s the whole country that will be affected. They law was passed, it was passed with difficulties for some, for others it’s the best; it doesn’t matter whether or not it’s the best. What’s important is that things aren’t repeated. And that’s where we need to be building bridges to the future (N. Guardado, personal communication, 10 July 2014).34

For those who support the Amnesty Law, it was necessary in order to put the past in the past, and reconcile as a newly democratic country. One can also see in Gloria Salguero Gross’ words, that without the Amnesty Law, the guerrillas would have gone to jail. She notes that the military was only defending the country, so it’s a different situation: the Amnesty Law isn’t for the military; it’s for the guerrillas. Either way, all three politicians believe that the Amnesty Law remains an essential part of post-war El Salvador, and has avoided the continuation of war violence.

Yet for many in El Salvador, the Amnesty Law was and continues to be a significant barrier. For some, it is an authoritarian legacy. “The validity of the Amnesty Law is a tremendous authoritarian legacy because it formalized impunity in El Salvador” (R. Rugamas, personal communication, 7 July 2014).35 From a more legal perspective, Human Rights Ombudsman David Morales describes the impact of the Law:

The impact of the Amnesty was very profound in consolidating the system of impunity that was already…very strong… So, effectively the amnesty closed all possibilities… Amnesty Laws are, as we know, necessary at the end of armed conflicts, it’s provided by international humanitarian law. But there is also a very clear guideline, already defined by the International Red Cross and international human rights courts, that that
standard is not applicable for grave human rights violations (D. Morales, personal communication, 18 July 2014).36

Morales concurs with General Vargas and Huntington (1991), in that he agrees that amnesties are sometimes necessary. However, he is clear that international law does not allow for human rights violators to be included in those amnesties, and therefore, the Salvadoran Amnesty Law went beyond its mandate.

Others agree with Morales’ position. Evangelical activist Eliberto Juárez includes his position on the Amnesty Law:

There’s a problem with that law. Because in that law, what they make sure is that for all the events during that time, there’s amnesty. But there are events that weren’t even fully part of war. So, if you are going to make an amnesty on the violence during a war, it’s one thing. But to include everything during that time period, that is the problem where the Jesuit priests fit in. Those who want to include it as a war crime but it isn’t a war crime. Intellectuals, good people… people working for faith. You don’t find them taking up arms, they were asleep in their rooms; that is not a war crime. So I think that there is the problem. We can’t include in the law everything that happened during that time... That isn’t a war crime, it’s a human rights violation and those who ordered it should pay, right? (E. Juárez, personal communication, 11 July 2014).37

Both Morales and Juárez emphasize the fact that, though amnesty may have been needed, it should not be absolute.

For victims of the human rights abuses, the critiques of the Amnesty Law are even more personal.

With the passing of the Amnesty Law, what happens? All the assassins are set free… With the Amnesty Law…the whole world is going to live happily and in peace; those who have been assassins and developers of so many massacres, they can live happily. But the victims, the mothers whose children were killed, who returns them? So…it’s terrible for the mothers, for the mothers who day in and day out are those who never saw the body of their child, they didn’t get to bury them, they are not happy because their children were assassinated. It’s an even bigger problem and trauma for the mothers whose children were disappeared. Because they are
constantly thinking, what could have happened with my son? Is he in another country? Could he be here in El Salvador? … Could he be in an institution or something? What is my son suffering? It’s a constant anxiety…and at the same time there’s the hope that at any moment they will find that person. So, we don’t want a peace like… That’s why I tell you, the whole policy of forgive and forget, now it’s a new society- that doesn’t exist, that’s not how it is. And the right-wing governments, that’s the policy they have had. Things that we don’t agree with… Because we need them to take responsibility for the crimes against humanity so that it can be a kind of consolation, of relief for the mothers … And that these cases are brought to trial, so that they are at least morally sanctioned for all the assassinations (B. García, personal communication, 16 July 2014).  

Blanca (of Co-Madres) rejects General Vargas’s dichotomy of “peace or justice.” She also rejects the notion of reconciliation on the basis that with the victimizers free, enjoying life, the victims remain questioning what happened to their loved ones. For Blanca and many victims, they are seeking the other side of the dichotomy: justice, or at least the truth.

The Amnesty Law and its continued validity is simply a continuation of the impunity that has consistently reigned in El Salvador. Attorney and member of the Governmental Ethics Board, Salvador Menéndez Leal, states: “In El Salvador, nobody is brought to trial. It’s the empire and kingdom of impunity” (S. Menéndez Leal, personal communication, 22 July 2014).  

*El Faro* reporter Ricardo Vaquerano virtually creates a slogan for the country: “this is the country of eternal impunity” (R. Vaquerano, personal communication, 2 July 2014). What the Amnesty Law does show is that the “savage” in El Salvador *does* live in impunity, however not all in society agree this should be the case.

### 3.4 Forgive the Savage and Forget?
The divisiveness over the Amnesty Law brings up, not only General Vargas’s dichotomy of peace or justice, but of the two traditional choices as Huntington (1991) articulated: forgive and forget or prosecute and punish. This chapter will discuss the former, with the next chapter looking at the latter options. As already mentioned by many of the people interviewed, the Amnesty Law was supposed to serve to allow the country to forgive and forget. The idea goes back to Renan’s “What is a Nation?”-forgetting is necessary to create a unified, democratic nation. As Jelin (1998) stated, oblivion’s institutionalized manifestation is amnesty, which can be a part of the process of building both individual and collective identities. As General Vargas stated, “to avoid the cycle of violence, the key is in justice or forgiveness” (G. Vargas, personal communication, 3 July 2014). El Salvador as a country, with the end of the war and the Amnesty Law, attempted to urge society to forgive, forget, and move on in the new democratic society.

For many, this ability to forgive and forget was a challenge. In her “spot,” Maritza Herrera Rebollo remembers, “like many Salvodorans, I swallowed my pain so that peace could reign in our homeland. We wanted to pay with the pain of our past for a better future for our children” (JRN SantaTecla, 2013). In our interview I asked her why the victims who are more right-wing, why don’t we hear a lot from them? Her response included a level of pride: “It’s because on the right we’re more aware of that, of forgiveness. On the right the people…it’s that we have a different concept of respect for the dead, because it’s part of respect” (M. Herrera Rebollo, personal communication, 21 July 2014). For Maritza, that is the position, that is what she was expected to do, out of
respect for the dead and for the future of the country. I also discussed with Maritza her own process of forgiveness:

Megan: And were you able to forgive?

Maritza: Yes, look, after that I was very happy, for me it was a kind of therapy. You are like that. Look, for me after that day, Megan, I felt,

Megan: The day of the ad?

Maritza: Uh huh, the day of the ad, I achieved what I, since I was 17 years old, I wanted to do. God made it happen, for me it was a gift from God.

This response is illuminating: it appears that she was finally able to forgive the FPL and Sánchez Cerén for the death of her father. However, it was not on the timeline that was expected of her. It took over 30 years to do so, and it wasn’t until she made the “spot” confronting Sánchez Cerén that she felt a sense of relief.

However, it is not just the right who has promoted “forgive and forget.” Rafael Molina, professor at the National University, describes the left’s role:

I’m going to begin with forgive and forget, because forgive and forget has also been the discourse of the left in power. Not of leftist organizations, that should be clear. But of the left-wing politicians… That is to say, forgive and forget doesn’t only have to deal with the right, correct? So, forgive and forget for 20 years, has its effect... Because, if you look from the government’s point of view, yes it is forgive and forget. They denied that there was a massacre at El Mozote. So, the right has had much more to do with [that policy] because how many monuments to historical memory do we have? That the central government has built, we don’t have any… Just one from the mayoral government and the organizations. The one in Mozote is private as well. And by private I mean that the organizations have come together to build that monument (R. Molina, personal communication, 16 July 2014).

Rafael, while rejecting the political left’s desire to remember, prosecute and punish, also utilizes the examples of monuments to demonstrate the desire for historical memory.
These lieux de mémoire are ways that local initiatives, particularly through victims organizations, have been able to salvage historical memory, because as Rafael states, the national government from both parties has not made an effort to move beyond “forgive and forget.” Attorney Salvador Menéndez Leal agrees with Rafael’s perspective that forgetting isn’t just a right-wing policy.

It’s that silence is impunity’s cousin… Forgetting isn’t just the victimizer’s theory. It’s also the victims’. Because sometimes remembering hurts. So forgive and forget is a theory of the sectors interested in the area of impunity. Truth and justice and reparation in social sectors interested in building a nation and a future (S. Mendendez Leal, personal communication, 22 July 2014).  

Menéndez Leal emphasizes that it is not only the victimizers who want to forget, because remembering is a difficult process. Yet he also contradicts “forgive and forget” and echoes Green (2004) that a new democracy should be built upon truth and accountability.

While Maritza and Rafael discuss how it has been a, more or less official, policy to forgive and forget, other victims view this practice differently. Rosa Anaya, daughter of human rights leader Herbert Anaya who was killed by a death squad in 1987, is explicit in her accusation of how the past has been treated:

Rosa: It’s that there really have been great, enormous, conscious efforts to erase our memory.

Megan: By whom?

Rosa: By the people in power, or better said, by those who control. History is written by the winners, quote un quote, and…in this case those who win have the resources to control the masses and the information. And we’ve achieved very little, although there are efforts to recover the memory, officially our new generations don’t know much about the background of the war. And that’s what makes…them be vulnerable to whatever stupid thing and they think it’s valid (R. Anaya, personal communication, 8 July 2014).
For Rosa and others, the silence about the past has been forced upon society, and particularly the victims. This brings us back to Minow’s (1998) argument, that “forgiveness is a power held by the victimized, not a right to be claimed” (p. 17).

Utilizing Maritza as an example, though she did feel that she needed to forgive, it took her 30 years to do so, and therefore was able to do it on her own time. However for many other victims, the government has forced the process on them, and many do not wish to forget. While one side of the traditional choice is “forgive and forget,” I argue that this aspect of the choice is flawed: there is an aspect of forgiveness, or at least required forgiveness. However, in El Salvador, though there has been an attempt to forget, on both sides of the conflict this hasn’t happened. Therefore the choice could be, “forgive, forget, and move on”, seguir adelante.

The policy of forgive and forget has also, in a way, backfired for certain sectors of society. It has contributed to many perspectives and experiences of the Armed Conflict staying in oblivion and not being heard. General Vargas laments,

General Vargas: The truth of the conflict is still not known from the full point of view. Here only one version is known.

Megan: And what version is that?

General Vargas: The government, the Armed Forces, the military…the death squads, the massacres, that’s all they talk about! But the other is what I lived what I saw, what I participated in; did that exist or didn’t it exist? And if it existed, well where is it? How is it? (E. Vargas, personal communication, 3 July 2014). 47

Former Soldier Flores Cruz echoes this,

I know that many soldiers died for this cause and that now nobody remembers the sacrifice that they made, even though many left their wives, their mothers heartbroken, their children with the hope that they would return and they never did, today they are widows, orphans and
defenseless mothers that our country has a large number of. By reflecting
on the progress that our homeland has experimented with and that we
currently enjoy, it’s thanks to those men who in their time gave up their
lives to achieve it (Flores Cruz, 2009, p. 117). 48

Many could argue that the side of the government and the Armed Forces during the war
was covered up more because of the human rights violations that were perpetrated on a
much more massive scale than that of the FMLN. However, as Leigh Payne (2008)
argues, both the stories of the victim and the perpetrator are needed for the transition to
democracy. Without the stories of the victimizer, there is no dialogue, only one side of
the story. In the case of El Salvador, the side of the victim is much more prevalent, both
within the country and internationally. Yet as General Vargas and Flores Cruz mention,
no one knows their side, so they shouldn’t judge. There were many people within the
Armed Forces who died for the cause, and they were Salvadorans as well who deserved
to be recognized and have their story told.

Rosa Anaya tells an anecdote that exemplifies this struggle over “whose
memory?”

I remember when we were going about with the human rights directive
stuff, and we did conferences and all that… One time in a classroom a
friend of mine said to me, “look,” she said, “it’s not that we don’t believe,
I have asked, and every time that I’m with my family I’ve asked what
happened, they lower their voices and tell me that we don’t talk about
these things.” So, there’s a level of self-guilt of not knowing how to tell
the new generations what happened. Or at least what we saw, what we
were witnesses to. Nobody has the absolute truth. And they still owe me
the history of the victimizer. That is, I don’t have that vision. I have what
I have heard and I know what happened to the victims. But I don’t know
what was going through the head of the victimizers, how they got to be
where they were, that is to say, we defend ourselves or they kill us. How
is it that they said here or we kill them or, or, or, I don’t know. There had
to be a reason that permitted brother to go against brother… They owe that
part of history because I don’t know it (R. Anaya, personal
communication, 8 July 2014). 49
Because much of the history and memory is not discussed, the story is not complete.

Even as a victim, Rosa wants to know that history, as it is part of her country as well, and can help the dialogue within society between victims and victimizers. As Rosa mentions, there had to be a reason for Salvadorans to kill each other, and that discussion needs to be heard from both sides of the conflict.

As seen in the first half of this chapter, the war-time perspectives of the savage continue, and seem to be ingrained in people’s and society’s memories. These biases may contribute to the lack of dialogue on the past. Francisco Mena explains his theory,

> There is not only a lack of knowledge, but I think a lack of humanity in how we look at these issues. When we use words like communism or rebels, when we use words as insurgents, we dehumanize people and we really look at them as bad guys, and you know, I think we have to be actively involved in going beyond those words (F. Mena, personal communication, 3 July 2014).

Since the savage consists of primitive actors, it is difficult to look at these individuals or groups as fully human, as they were involved in atrocities against fellow citizens. Yet, as Francisco describes, that is exactly what Salvadorans need to do to be able to move past and get beyond the polarization.

### 3.5 Current Savages

It is impossible to ignore the current violence that reigns in El Salvador. It is one of the most violent countries in the world, and over the past decade the homicide rate has soared. As Ellen Moodie (2010) describes, many, particularly urban Salvadorans, began “to talk of the ‘peace’ as ‘worse than the war’” (p. 2). Many people blame the gangs for all the violence. Others relate it to a symptom of a culture of impunity. Are the two contexts of violence linked?
General Vargas does not see a link between the war violence and the current violence. I asked him plainly,

Megan: There are legacies of the conflict, no? And there are some that say that the impunity of that time is related to the current impunity with gang violence. Do you see that link? Or would it be different?

General Vargas: I don’t see it as mechanically, because it can’t be like that. Common sense tells me that, first: every country has levels of impunity. Even in the United States we have the death of Kennedy, we have the death of… so much that hasn’t been able to, and you can say that they are unpunished states (E. Vargas, personal communication, 3 July 2014).

For General Vargas, impunity is everywhere, even in the United States. Yet other countries don’t have the same violence problem that El Salvador faces. Therefore it’s not a direct link based on impunity.

However, the majority of the people I interviewed saw a link; a legacy of the war violence that has influenced the current epidemic levels of violence.¹ Human rights attorney Gisela De León is clear on this regard.

Megan: With the legacy of so much violence and so many human rights violations, what are the legacies of the war, of that period of violence?

Gisela: … El Salvador, I think that the statistics aren’t like this any more, but until recently…the homicide levels that existed in the country were so high that they were considered at the level of an epidemic. I think that…this has to do, or is a direct consequence of the levels of impunity of the war. Simply because those who committed human rights violations weren’t punished, they think they can keep doing the same, and many who are involved in other kinds of groups that commit acts of violence were involved in the war. And it’s like nothing happened, they feel completely free to keep doing it, no?

¹ The United Nations a society as suffering from epidemic levels of violence when the homicide rate is above 10 per 100,000 inhabitants. Since 2000 the average homicide rate has been 52.7, and has never gone below 36 per 100,000 inhabitants (Valencia, 2015a)
Megan: How would you react if a person said, “but the levels of violence are a result of the gangs and not previous actors?”

Gisela: Well, because the gangs are also a result of the war. That is, the people who are now in the gangs were kids that, many were left alone, a product of the war violence, or they were left alone because their parents had to migrate as a consequence of the war, so that is it. I also think that the gangs are another product of those super high levels of violence during the war and the impunity that still exists (G. De León, personal communication, 9 May 2014).51

From this perspective, the violence and even the gangs themselves were born out of the war, and the conditions of the war.

For others, not only is the current violence a legacy of the Armed Conflict, but the there is also a link between the actors of the past and the present. Lawyer for Pro-Búsqueda, Roberto Rugamas, explains:

So I think that the existence of the gangs...particularly is not the only violent phenomenon because there is also organized crime, that was allowed to pass within the institutions, to contaminate them, and also the possibility that it is increasing the crime statistics and they play with this socially. Especially at election time is when one most realizes it... that there are powerful groups who have the capacity to harness delinquency to generate homicide statistics, to paralyze cities, mass transit, rent, extortion and those things. So, really it’s like seeing a ghost or various ghosts that are a producing current criminal activity... And all those patterns of terror are still used, like forced disappearance, massacres, and executions of people. So it’s like the patterns are being repeated, patterns that many said after the demobilization, both sides had criminal structures- the death squads, also some cells within the guerrilla- so I think they’re still here. (R. Rugamas, personal communication, 7 July 2014).52

Hector Rosemberg agrees:

Many of the behaviors of the gangs…are an almost calculated product of the conflict, right? Disappearances, dismemberment, threats, persecutions…everything, right? And extermination groups still exist as well, and they remind us of the death squads, that act in the same way: at night, hooded, in groups, with large guns… So, it’s a link…it’s a violent situation that…it has its roots from before the war, the war gave it a form, and now the gangs are the same, it’s an effect of the situation of extreme
inequality, right? In this country you join a gang or you leave the country. Those are the alternatives for the youth. So there is a link (H. Rosenberg Aparicio, personal communication, 4 July 2014).53

Both Roberto and Héctor see the similarities in the pattern and style of violence. To them, it cannot be a coincidence, particularly in the death-squad-like killings. Others see the FMLN as the link:

Well, and they were assassin delinquents and everything else. I have friends, coworkers who keep the papers where they extorted them, that said, “you have this estate, you have to pay so much.” Bakeries, stores… I know a ton of people…that were extorted by them… Who then were the teachers of the gang members? The guerrillas. The guerril… that is my current way of seeing things, Megan. Because, because the truth is that, for me it’s like that, right? And they have destroyed the country, right? (M. Herrera Rebollo, personal communication, 21 July 2014).54

Maritza (who’s father was killed by the FPL) sees the pattern as descending directly from the guerrillas to the gangs. Again, the perspective of the current savage echoes the perspectives towards the wartime savage.

Another legacy from the Civil War can be seen in the postwar police and security apparatus. These authoritarian legacies are a part of the fight against the postwar violence, yet react similarly to wartime patterns.

Rafael: One of the authoritarian legacies…allows for the possibility of military soldiers within the area of public security… So that is one of the most present legacies that we have in Salvadoran society.

Megan: More with mano dura and everything, correct?

Rafael: Of course! That is, the most evidently present authoritarian legacy, we don’t call it authoritarian legacy but we call it mano dura, repression of justice, etc., is mano dura or the thought that through violence you can solve one of the current, structural problems that El Salvador has, like poverty, inequality, that through violence we are going to reduce delinquency. Because also…the gangs are a real security problem…and one of the security problems, I think the main one, is that the homicide level here in the country is rising… So, the legacies that we
bring from public policy of security, right? It’s a culture of control through repression (R. Molina, personal communication, 16 July 2014).\footnote{In 2003 President Francisco Flores launched the \textit{mano dura} plan, followed closely by President Tony Saca’s \textit{super mano dura} plan. These strategies made it a crime to be a gang member, accused thousands to youth of “illicit association” (simply looking or acting like a gang member,) and large-scale arrests, which filled the jails beyond capacity. President Funes in 2009 authorized military deployment to the most violent communities (Beltran, 2011)}

I would argue that \textit{mano dura}, along with more recent laws, utilize the state of exception as a law enforcement tool.\footnote{In 2003 President Francisco Flores launched the \textit{mano dura} plan, followed closely by President Tony Saca’s \textit{super mano dura} plan. These strategies made it a crime to be a gang member, accused thousands to youth of “illicit association” (simply looking or acting like a gang member,) and large-scale arrests, which filled the jails beyond capacity. President Funes in 2009 authorized military deployment to the most violent communities (Beltran, 2011)} They allow the military to enter into the public sphere again under the guise of “policing” in order to save society from itself, or from the savage elements of society. However this action, not only seems to depart from the reforms of the military implemented with the Peace Accords, it also reverting back to the prior status quo of utilizing violence to counter violence.

Both Moodie (2010) and Zilberg (2007) have commented on how one of the Civil War’s legacies was the development and explosion of the gangs in El Salvador. Zilberg (2007) notes, “while gang violence is presented as a new post-civil war… phenomenon, the stories surrounding it are haunted by cultural formations of meaning and modes of feeling attached to that war” (p. 42). She asks the question: “who is mirroring whom?” (p. 50). For some, such as Roberto and Hector, the gangs’ patterns of violence mirror the death squads. For others such as Maritza, they resemble the guerrillas. Even further, the PNC (National Civilian Police) have come to work with authoritarian tactics, resembling the military savage during the Armed Conflict. Zilberg’s (2007) conclusion on the contemporary savage is precisely the conclusion that can be made of the entire discussion on the savage as a whole (as well as the victim and the savior as I will discuss in the next chapters): “Whatever claims are made in contemporary El Salvador for drawing clear
analytic distinctions between political and social violence, derived as they are on the periodization of the civil war - before, during and after - that war refuses historical boundaries and functions as a past ever present; the contestation over the painful Real of violence” (p. 50).

3.6 The Future of the Savage

It is clear that the perspectives towards the “savages” of the Civil War continue to vary: the different collective memories of the savage are divisive and polarized. The continued validity of the Amnesty Law, on the one hand, was able to silence some of the debate, in order for the country to progress as a unified society. However, for many, this has only stifled discussion and democracy.

One development of the savage since the Civil War is the role of the Salvadoran Armed Forces and its path to neutrality. FMLN Diputado Alegría emphasizes,

I think that the best evidence that the army changed was, first when they didn’t make a stink with the arrival of a left-wing president like Mauricio Funes. But even more was giving the commander in chief power to Salvador Sánchez Cerén, a man who clearly was a guerrilla, he was a previously a guerrilla commander. With Mauricio they could still say, “well, he’s a civilian who wasn’t involved in anything.” But in the case of Salvador Sánchez Cerén evidently they are giving command to someone who was guerrilla commander and who could still have that predisposition, right, but it wasn’t like that. The act of giving the mandate as is constitutionally appropriate wasn’t a problem for them. Before there was an electoral dispute, hearing how ARENA called the Armed Forces to rebel against the government, and the Minister of Defense said, “No. We respect the people’s decision.” That is an important signal, that we can say “we are happy that we have also achieved the transformation of the Armed Forces into a professional Armed Forces that are under civilian control” (D. Alegría, personal communication, 9 July 2014).56

The mere fact that the military has stayed silent shows clear signs of a changed “savage.” However, Election Night 2014 for many was a scary reminder of the past. As the
presidential election was almost a 50-50 split, the victor was not announced until days later. In his speech on election night, ARENA candidate Norman Quijano warned against possible fraud:

… we are not going to allow a Chavez or Maduro of Venezuela-style fraud. We are in El Salvador! We have our re-count, where with clarity it will be established that through this process we have won! To all the Salvadoran people, to all the Salvadoran people, to the international community, to the international observers, and above all to those compatriots who have given us this victory, we ask you to be alert and awake, to make sure that what the Salvadoran people have decided today is fulfilled… We have decided to defend this victory that we have built together. They will not steal this victory from us. We will fight if necessary, with our lives, but democracy, we will (inaudible). From this moment, more than one million three hundred thousand compatriots that are with us in this victory, are on the war path to defend this victory. This country demands governability. And you can’t have governability with a bought and corrupt Electoral Tribunal… Our Armed Forces! Our Armed Forces are ready and waiting this fraud that they’re fabricating. They can’t play with the will of the people. They can’t disrupt the foundations of our democracy. They can’t steal a legitimate triumph for my homeland, from you all. Dear compatriots, thank you very much, and go defend our victory! (Djblue503, 2014).

When I asked NGO worker Francisco Mena if this action seemed familiar to him, his response reinforced the positive changes that the Armed Forces have made since the Civil War.

Megan: You mentioned in 1972, that the army was called in to protect democracy. And hearing what happened with Norman Quijano the night of the election and it was so contested still, he did something similar. Do you think that that is all related? Or is it just using similar vocabulary?

Francisco: No, I think… for a moment they forgot that the army didn’t work for them anymore… When I say army it’s probably more than anything the higher ranking officers that made the decisions. I think we need to separate that part of high ranking officers with the army that we currently have in El Salvador right now. I think they are probably the only institution that has followed the Peace Accords closest to what the spirit of what the peace accords were. They really don’t play nearly as important a role as they did in the past. And although our army is far away from being
considered perfect… our army is much better than the army we had during the war… So, the higher ranking officers or the ones that are retired, those are a different breed. And a lot of them work with ARENA. So they still haven’t understood that things have changed, and I think it was in relation to that… and then… when he says it, like oh yea! “And the army!” You know, “we are asking you to be vigilant, because there’s a fraud in the making.” That was terrible. When I heard that, it was just, I mean, I can’t explain to you what I felt when that happened. And it wasn’t from my ideological perspective, it was just I couldn’t believe that we were, in such a violent country where violence is the main issue we continue to struggle with, for him to come out for a violent solution to this was just, it was disheartening, it was just, I was just so disappointed, I was just angry, just a whole bunch of feelings. I couldn’t believe that I was hearing that. And… for a second there, ARENA forgot that the army didn’t work for them anymore, and… I think that the one positive thing is that the army did nothing, and that is a really interesting, positive thing in all of this. It shows that the army is no longer what it used to be. And that’s hopeful I guess (F. Mena, personal communication, 3 July 2014).

Though the past clearly has not remained in the past in El Salvador, it appears that at least the typical wartime savage has been able to transform out of the category.

**Conclusion**

Is the real savage, as Matua (2001) argues, the culture of a country? El Salvador has a long history, one might say its entire history, of bloodshed and brutality. The Armed Conflict was exceptional in this respect. The different collective memories of the Armed Conflict’s savage(s) continue to be an ever-present point of division within politics and society. The wartime savage may have transformed itself into a different type of savage, but the country is no less violent. There are no simple answers to the question, “who is the real savage?” Each group has its own perspective, and those memories and perspectives show no sign of becoming less polarized and continue to be based on the past.
Chapter 4: The Victim

No basta buscar filosóficamente la verdad; hay que procurar filosóficamente realizarla para hacer la justicia y construir la libertad.
-Ignacio Ellacuría.

The heart of the SVS metaphor is the victim. As I have previously mentioned, the SVS metaphor holds victims as weak, powerless, and in need of saving. Yet the victims of El Salvador’s Armed Conflict were not powerless people without agency. This chapter will look at the figure of the victim, the victim’s experience during and after the war, and how the victim’s situation has changed in El Salvador.

4.1 Wartime Victim

From my interviews, the testimonies of two women who told me the stories of their families exemplify the fact that the victims were anything but powerless. One interview is with Blanca García, whose mother was a founding member of Co-Madres, the organization of mothers and other female family members of persons who were disappeared, tortured, or assassinated during the war. While telling me the story of the organization, she also highlights the risks that her mother and family took while speaking out against the disappearances during the war.

All through the war we suffered persecution… In ’84 the death squad came to my house… When the death squad arrived…they grabbed my mom who was pregnant, and they kicked her in the stomach, also with the rifles against her uterus they told her that they wouldn’t permit the birth of another guerrilla from this family… And my mother was bleeding. And even still they were going to take her, likely to kill her. But, thank goodness the neighbors didn’t let it happen. All the neighbors united… and didn’t let the van leave… So we grabbed a little suitcase and we left, we might have taken 10 minutes. Two hours later we had fled… But two hours later they told us that the death squad had returned, and if we had stayed there, they would have killed us (B. García, personal communication, 16 July 2014).
Denouncing the injustices and repression of the government brought the death squads to their house. Yet Blanca’s mother, sister, as well as Blanca herself, refused to be deterred and continued to be active in Co-Madres.

The other case is that of Rosa Anaya: her father, Herbert Anaya Sanabria, was the president of the Human Rights Commission, an independent NGO that documented and denounced the human rights violations. She describes the experience when her father was first sent to jail:

For us, when they captured my father in ’86, we were… witnesses of the development of a page in the history of this country… And my mom was at his side… she was the one who did the more clandestine work… The work that he did… within the prisons, after he had been tortured, after they had taken his father in because they also took my grandfather, and they told him that they had my mother carved up… all along those lines, and even still to make the decision to not give up and continue the struggle, for me that’s very important (R. Anaya, personal communication, 8 July 2014).²

Rosa’s father was killed by a death squad in front of her in their driveway in 1987. Yet her family’s response was not to remain silent: they went into exile for several years in the United States, and her mother, Mirna Perla became an outspoken activist, who became a Supreme Court Judge after the Peace Accords. The testimonies of Blanca and Rosa show the hardships and abuses that victims and their families faced during the Armed Conflict. However these women also illustrate the fact that many victims during the war were specifically targeted for their activism; they were not innocent sheep awaiting slaughter. They were organizing and denouncing the “savage” government’s actions. Yet for both women’s families, the violent actions of the military or death squads did not deter the families and survivors from continuing their work.
As mentioned in the previous chapter, the side of the victimizer is rarely heard in El Salvador. Along with that perspective, the voice of other victims also seems silenced. Maritza Herrera Rebollo, whose father was killed by the FPL, discusses this tendency to forget the victims on the right:

Why do they think that those of us who have had economic possibilities don’t feel, because that is how they criticize us I think. Why don’t they see each person who had family members [who died] on the right? We also suffer. How many people, friends, whose cousins, whose uncles, whose grandparents died? ... I won’t repeat names… but I know many stories of people like that, who were left without their parents, without their family (M. Herrera Rebollo, personal communication, 21 July 2014).³

Why is it that the victims on the right, or those who have more of an economic advantage, are not remembered as victims? They tend to not be included when we think of the “victims” of the Armed Conflict. Even if the FMLN is seen as a “savage,” its victims seem to be forgotten in the broader discourse of the war. I argue that this element of forgetting the victims on the right is a part of the “forgive and forget” trope. As the victims on the right were also those who were supposed to go along with “forgive and forget,” their suffering has been put in the past, as Maritza also mentioned in her “spot” against Sánchez Cerén. It was something that had to be done in order to move on in the new democratic state. However, of all the victims from both sides, it was mostly the ones from the right that did this; the victims on the left have tended to continue their activism in the postwar years, and therefore have continued to be remembered as victims. It goes back to Payne (2008), in that not only are the perspectives and memories of the victimizers needed for the consolidation of democracy, but also the voices of all the victims. The “victim” is not simply one entity with one story with one single victimizer:
there are many victims with many stories and different victimizers. These stories are also
needed in post-war El Salvador.

During my interviews, when I asked about “victims” with persons who generally
associated with the more savage elements of the war, the responses were both
illuminating and slightly confusing. I asked General Vargas, as he is associated with
being a victimizer:

Megan: And do you think that the victims of the repression…have been
able to move on after the conflict? … How do you see it? The victims on
both sides?

General Vargas: It’s that, that’s why I tell you, the immediate violence is
not stopped through justice. History doesn’t tell us that. If we don’t do
that… We aren’t the only case. We didn’t invent it. Here there are
suppressed histories and unilateral truths (E. Vargas, personal
communication, 3 July 2014).

When asked about his opinion on the victims from both sides, he returns to his discussion
of how amnesty was needed. However, he also mentions how there are “suppressed
histories”- referring mostly to how nobody knows his side of the story. Yet most striking
in General Vargas’ answer is his evasion of the question of victimhood, avoiding any
reference to him as victimizer, who perhaps created or had an effect on victims.

I also asked ARENA founding member Gloria Salguero Gross about how she
viewed the “controversial elements” of the war, such as assassinations and massacres.
She responded,

Look, for me on one hand I’m an enemy of violence…. At that time, what
happened was that the agrarian reform took away all the properties, where
all the owners had security… When the agrarian reform came, the
Salvadoran territory became no-man’s land… It was a very sad time.
They confiscated all of my land. It was extremely hard, extremely hard.
I’ve had an intestinal problem since then… So Salvadorans kept leaving
[to the U.S.], right… But I want to emphasize that: agriculture here has
practically ended (G. Salguero Gross, personal communication, 29 July 2014).\(^5\)

While I asked her about assassinations and massacres, Ms. Salguero Gross turns the question around, and plays the victim herself. That the PDC’s Agrarian Reform of the early 1980s was horrible for her and her family (who were the owners of coffee plantations). She laments that also because of the Agrarian Reform, many campesinos were forced to flee to the US. Yet she does not mention that this was also due to the fact that the war was heavily concentrated in the mountainous, rural areas, and the military was targeting the peasants in the countryside and this also was a factor for the increase in emigration. Similarly to General Vargas, Ms. Salguero Gross did not actually answer my question, however her response is eye opening. Despite the existence of tens of thousands of civilians who were victims of the war, those who lost their coffee plantations are also victims of the Armed Conflict, at least according to one member of the economic and political elite.

Of all the victims of the Armed Conflict, none is more symbolic than Monseñor Romero. He typifies Stern’s (2004) “memory knot” as he is a person whose life and death are focal points in the memory of the war. Similarly to the emblematic victimizers of D’Aubuisson and Sánchez Cerén, there are many different collective memories of Monseñor Romero. Most common is that of veneration. Human Rights Ombudsman David Morales described him at a hearing on the case of Monseñor Romero before the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights:

Monseñor was characterized for his exceptional episcopal leadership, signaled by the preferential option for the victims of injustice, inequality, oppression, and grave human rights violations that happened in El Salvador… Monseñor is the symbol of the fight for human dignity, which
he practiced with a profound Christian love as an exemplary follower of Jesus. His word was liberating and he bravely opposed the most powerful (Caso 11.481- Monseñor Romero, El Salvador).

Roberto Cuellar, who worked with Monseñor Romero in the early days of Socorro Jurídico del Arzobispado, which would become Tutela Legal del Arzobispado, also highlights:

For me his is an outstanding man, supernatural for his leadership. I don’t know saints, but I don’t know another archbishop that put himself in favor of the poor, with all his might, all his strength and all his thoughts… Even more for his historic role. I’m very happy that the Salvadoran Government… has gotten the United Nations to recognize March 24 as the International Day for the Right to Truth.aa It is an extremely important symbol. They have placed it on the most important human rights agenda, because that day will be celebrated in Uganda, in South Africa, in Thailand, all over the world… In all those places Monseñor Romero will be remembered (Valencia, 2015b).

This reverence of Romero is not just among those who worked with him or even Catholics. Evangelical activist Eliberto Juárez adds:

The voices of justice came from Romero… A man very devoted to the Gospel… looking for alternatives. But Romero also understood the global dimensions of the war in El Salvador (E. Juárez, personal communication, 11 July 2014).

For many in El Salvador, Romero was and continues to be, “the voice of the voiceless” and a saint in their eyes.

A development that happened after my time in El Salvador, in February 2015 the Pope declared Monseñor Romero a martyr and in May 2015 he officially becomes Saint Romero. With this new official recognition, many who previously may have been against Romero have changed their discourse to a more favorable tone. I asked Diputado Nelson Guardado of the center-right GANA party:

aa March 24 is the anniversary of Monseñor Romero’s assassination.
Megan: I saw in the news on GANA’s website that GANA supported the change in the airport’s name [to El Salvador International Airport “Oscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdamez”].\textsuperscript{bb} So I would like to see if GANA has a policy regarding historical memory.

Diputado Guardado: That isn’t politics…but we believe…first, that the airport here has been known as Comalapa since it’s construction. Adding the name of Monseñor Romero- Monseñor Romero is one of the bishops we had who certain segments of the population tie him to a leftist tendency, and the left took him as a political…flag… And that’s not right. The priest wasn’t of one or another tendency, he was a religious leader… So we believe that he should be congratulated, as he should be, for his accomplishments during his lifetime… I think that people have merits that deserve recognition… He is a national leader, a Latin American leader, and a person known in the Vatican… and a national pride for us Salvadorans (N. Guardado, personal communication, 10 July 2014).\textsuperscript{9}

\textit{Diputado} Guardado emphasizes that Monseñor Romero was simply a religious leader, he was not political, and therefore because he was a leader who draws positive attention to El Salvador, he deserves to be recognized.\textsuperscript{cc} Even ARENA official discourse has acknowledged Romero’s sainthood.

Muyschondt [the former vice-president of ideology for ARENA]… recognized the “cruelty” in the assassination of the Salvadoran bishop, and he discerns that the decision of the Pope to beatify Romero is because of this. “Definitely the cruel way in which Monseñor Romero was assassinated while saying mass is something unheard of, and we respect the decision of the Vatican” (Bernal, 2015).\textsuperscript{10}

Muyschondt’s response is essentially a contradiction, yet demonstrates what ARENA / Diputado Valiente highlighted in the previous chapter: Romero’s assassination was cruel and therefore deserves to be recognized by the Vatican. It is expected that ARENA would deny that its founder ordered Romero’s assassination. With Romero’s

\textsuperscript{bb} The name of the airport changed in honor of Monseñor Romero in March 2014.\textsuperscript{cc} However, it should be noted that Diputado Guardado, while responding to my question about the airport name, did not answer my question regarding GANA’s policy of historical memory.
canonization on the international stage, it is natural that the ARENA party, and individuals within the right, have no choice but to join the bandwagon in favor of Romero, at least in public discourse.

However for some, Romero continues to be a thorn in their side. Diputado Valiente explains,

I didn’t like him because, with the influence he had, and I listened to his speeches—“...I command you to stop the killings!” But he only referred to the police, to the National Guard, to the army, or the death squads... What I never heard, and this is why I didn’t like him, was hear him tell the guerrilla, “You stop! Everybody stop!” That is, it was only this side… That on this side there were no victims, only victimizers. So they were dogs, that’s what they called us. That is, these are dogs and on the other side are people... So, with that, the guerilla, the FMLN, still wasn’t able to get the people to rise up after Romero’s funeral. The people didn’t rise up. That’s where the urban guerrilla basically ended, but the 12 years of Armed Conflict that El Salvador had, began. The day of Monseñor Romero’s funeral they went to the mountains (M. Valiente, personal communication, 10 July 2014).11

Maritza Herrera Rebollo, staunch ARENA supporter, adds,

Them with their Romero, I’m tired of Romero, goodness! That man must be happy in his grave. Because look how they make t-shirts... Romero here, Romero there, and they themselves must have killed Romero. Everyone says so. Because look, if you analyze what we lived in that time, that’s not what [history] says... It must make Major laugh, that they accused him of that, but maybe the people... there are many things that the popular voice begins to say and it becomes truth. That’s what I think happened (M. Herrera Rebollo, personal communication, 21 July 2014).12

Both Diputado Valiente and Maritza highlight their perspective that Romero only was the voice of the left, of the victims of the death squads and the security forces, but not the voice of all the victims. Diputado Valiente seems to even blame Romero’s assassination

---

11 Maritza is referring to Major D’Aubuisson, that he must be laughing that he is accused of killing Romero
and his funeral for the war itself. Martiza also echoes Diputado Valiente’s previous statement: it must have been the FMLN who killed Monseñor Romero- they created their own martyr.

Monseñor Romero is a polarizing figure in El Salvador today. The fact that both Romero and D’Aubuisson are the emblematic victim and victimizer, respectively, is no coincidence. The different collective memories of each figure are representative of how different groups remember the war itself. If one views Romero with admiration and D’Aubussion with loathing, it is clear how that person views the Armed Conflict, and vice versa. However, with Romero officially becoming a saint, it is interesting how the discourse is beginning to change. Nevertheless, both Romero and D’Aubuisson continue to be memory knots, and points of contention in the national collective memory.

4.2 The Victim in Postwar El Salvador

While during the Civil War there was an attempt to silence the victims’ voice, in the postwar period many victims and their families had the hope that their voices would be heard as a part of the new democratic society. The first instance of this was with the Truth Commission Report. The Truth Commission itself had many limitations, such as the short time of its mandate, the fact that it named the perpetrators, etc. However, many view it in a positive light for the impact it had on the victims. I asked human rights attorney Gisela de León about the Report:

Gisela: No, I think that it did have a very important impact, and…it’s one of the tools we have used in the cases. But what I think happens is that truth commissions have a distinct sense of what seeking justice is… In the

---

ee At Romero’s funeral, the plaza in front of the Cathedral was full of thousands of mourners. From the rooftops of the surrounding buildings, state agents opened fire on the crowd, causing panic and killing perhaps up to 50 people.
specific case of the Salvadoran Truth Commission, what it was able to
do… with the limited resources and limited time that it had, was
establish… exemplary cases… and that is something that you don’t see in
other truth commissions. The Salvadoran Truth Commission names those
responsible, and… I think that it is important, but it’s not the same,
knowing the names and knowing the truth, and I think that the truth is not
complete until the people are really subject to a process and penalized (G.
De León, personal communication, 9 May 2014).13

For Gisela, though it may not have been perfect, the Truth Commission Report had an
important impact, not only for the victims to be heard officially for the first time, but also
because it continues to be used as a tool in human rights litigation, particularly before the
Inter-American System of Human Rights. However she does emphasize the fact that for
her and many other human rights attorneys, though the perpetrators are named, the truth,
or the right to truth, isn’t complete until justice has been served. Attorney Salvador
Mendendez Leal adds:

The Truth Commission did an excellent job in my opinion… [however,
because of the Amnesty Law]… the Truth Commission Report was
discredited, first that the members of the commission had assumed
juridical functions when they had investigative functions. Second, that
they had gone beyond their mandate, that they had leaned more towards
one side… and they showed the process of the Truth Commission Report,
which had been an obligatory part agreed to by both sides (S. Menendez
Leal, personal communication, 22 July 2014).14

Menéndez Leal emphasizes the fact that the Truth Commission did its job, as mandated
by the Peace Accords, however its findings were nullified by the Amnesty Law, because
of the fact that the Amnesty Law cut off any potential impact of the Truth Commission
Report. One can also look at the Truth Commission as being an impetus for the Amnesty
Law, as the Law was passed five days after the publication of the Report. The naming of
perpetrators was a significant source of controversy that the Amnesty Law rectified
through impunity.
Others view the Report in a less than positive light. Academic Rafael Molina views it as part of “forgive and forget.” “Our Truth Commission was about forgive and forget… I think that the Truth Commission only served to end the war, nothing more” (R. Molina, personal communication, 16 July 2014). While Menendez Leal views the Amnesty Law as that which stifled the Truth Commission Report and the Peace Accords in General, Molina sees the Truth Commission as a part of the general process of forgive and forget: the Report laid out the facts, which would then be forgiven and forgotten. Even further than Molina’s criticism, General Vargas stated that the Truth Commission went beyond its mandate (as mentioned in the previous chapter, and as Menéndez Leal mentions as those who critique the Report). Consequently, while for many, the collective memory of the Truth Commission Report had a positive effect on post-war society, for others it was unhelpful to a society that was trying to move on, forgive and forget.

Despite de León’s positive view of El Salvador’s Truth Commission, I argue that the effects of the Report within El Salvador are more aligned with Menéndez Leal and Molina’s perspectives. While the Report was able to denounce the systematic violations that occurred during the Armed Conflict, as Menéndez Leal emphasizes, the effect was amnesty. The Amnesty Law effectively nullified the official recognition of victimhood in the immediate postwar years.

Theidon (2013) and Macias (2012) have argued that the act of re-telling experiences, particularly in truth commission settings, can re-victimize and re-traumatize the victim. I asked victims’ family members about this. Blanca García of Co-Madres responded emotionally,

Megan: So why is it important to tell your story so much?
Blanca: In El Salvador there hasn’t been any kind of reparations, no psychological attention… I’m going to give the example of Co-Madres. There are many of the mothers, who every time the subject of their children comes up, they re-live the drama of the assassination, of the torture, that their children or family members were subject to. But this also takes away the pain they have. And every time they go accepting it a little more… Because it’s a way of feeling a relief of such a weight, of so much bad information that she has in her head, and in the end it’s a way of healing as well… When the death squad came to my house, I…was so psychologically affected that I heard loud noises all the time and I felt that it was the death squad coming to kill us. And I was able to overcome it little by little… So in the end finding the history, telling it, it’s a way of denouncing all the cruelty that the army here in El Salvador and the ARENA right-wing government committed. And it’s a way of expressing yourself and accepting the information and trying to have it not stay in your body in a negative way (B. García, personal communication, 16 July 2014).

For many of the madres, re-telling their stories is a way of feeling better, to remember their loved ones, even though the process itself is painful, it is needed. They feel that their stories need to be told, and that the horrible truths shouldn’t just be held inside themselves. Rosa Anaya provided further insight with her typical candor:

We all need spaces however they may be. It’s painful to re-tell history. But I remember Rufina Amaya (the only survivor of the massacre at El Mozote). That woman never said no to anybody…Ever! Because it’s a way of knowing that what you lived wasn’t of your own invention… And I tell you that here there are so many people who will never tell you what has happened. But those who have been able to go through that process, it’s not to re-victimize themselves, but that they have found that in that process a personal way of healing. Even more, we’re utilizing it because… when one sees a foreign face, you can have the biggest cry of your life… and you know what? I’m never going to see you again. Nonetheless, I know that you are going to respect what I’m telling you, because you have come with that intention. That is… it’s your job to listen. Imagine that, what a luxury! Hahaha… So of course how am I not going to take advantage of that opportunity? And many people do it in that sense… They don’t tell me though, because I’m Salvadoran (R. Anaya, personal communication, 8 July 2014).
While Rosa rejects the re-traumatization through re-telling, she also illuminates a nuance for El Salvador. While victims, such as Rufina Amaya and Rosa’s own family, have felt the need to re-tell their painful stories, it is more often than not in the presence of foreigners. There is a need to tell their truth to the world, but not to their own compatriots.

Why is this? How is it that victims can re-tell their stories hundreds of times to foreigners (the savior trope), yet within Salvadoran society, the testimonies are much less heard. Rafael Molina believes that it is because of the policy of forgive and forget. “Not talking at all about the deaths… leaves a mark…and…dehumanizes you” (R. Molina, personal communication, 16 July 2014). The Guatemalan REMHI report can also shed some light on this. In Guatemala, as in El Salvador, “the political repression took away from the people their right to speak” (Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado de Guatemala, 1998, p. 23). With the right to speak taken away during the Armed Conflict, it has been difficult to begin to tell what happened, particularly for a victim’s personal experience of trauma. Though the Truth Commission was a first step, the amnesty that followed and the policy of forgive and forget, I argue that it was made more difficult for victims to tell their stories in a Salvadoran setting. However, as Blanca and Rosa describe, the stories need telling. The audience then became white foreigners, many who came to El Salvador (like myself) to learn about the war and its continued effects. By re-telling their stories to people whom they would likely never see again, victims were allowed to unload their painful stories and denounce the truth of what happened to them. All the while not having to worry about the complexities of the role of the victim in postwar El Salvador.
The re-telling of testimonies has not been responsible for the re-traumatization of victims. However, Molina alluded to a different kind of re-victimization: the state’s official non-recognition of their victimhood, and its denial that many of the events ever happened at all. International human rights attorney for the El Mozote case, Gisela de León explains, “It was a case in which the Salvadoran government, even the United States government, had denied for years that the massacre occurred, even during the first years of litigation before the Commission, the State maintained that the massacre had never happened” (G. de León, personal communication, 9 May 2014).\textsuperscript{20} Héctor Rosemberg of the CNB explains how the government’s denial has affected the victims,

Megan: You said that the State had denied the disappearance, the fact that children were disappeared during the war. What effect did that denial have on the families?

Héctor: Well…many effects. The people are already victims of the violent situation that they lived through in that time. And that to a family someone comes and tells them, “look, maybe your son never existed” or “your son, could be somewhere, he was in the war, but maybe you didn’t take care of him” so it’s a situation that we call re-victimization. It’s that the State…re-opens the wound, but to keep hurting it, not to help. Even to leave it worse than before, right? (H. Rosemberg Aparicio, personal communication, 4 July 2014).\textsuperscript{21}

Not only did the non-recognition of the facts silence the victims, but it also served to re-open the wounds of the past. The postwar government seemed to go even beyond the policy of forgive and forget, by questioning the credibility of the victims themselves.

Human Rights Ombudsman David Morales provides unique insight into the re-victimization and continued effects of the human rights violation of the Armed Conflict.

Megan: Do you think that the fact that so many human rights violations occurred during the conflict had an effect on the country? In society, politics, everything?
David Morales: Of course it has an effect in the different areas. It’s unacceptable that... the people who suffered the most atrocious crimes of the conflict are now in a condition of profound discrimination and social exclusion... That is a dynamic that denies the democratic principles on which the Constitution is based... It can’t be an effective and real democracy if it liberally discriminates against a sector of the population in that way. Also, I think that it also prevents the construction of a true identity as a people, in the sense that it doesn’t allow for the reconstruction of our history... that in the case of El Salvador, maybe the most important thing to address is the measure of non-repetition of these actions in the future. The chain of massacres and human extermination of the rural population, in the first four years of the Armed Conflict is a tragic repetition of the genocidal history of 1932. And I think that our recent history clearly demonstrates that if we deny history, if we discriminate the victims, and we protect the repressors, and bury everything in oblivion, this type of tragedies of state terrorism, we are probably condemning ourselves to repeat that history. El Salvador did it just 50 years later. So we have that tragic demonstration... The victims that don’t receive recognition to their right to truth, justice, and reparation, are being victims of human rights violations today (D. Morales, personal communication, 18 July 2014).

Morales emphasizes that the victims, who were marginalized during the war, continue to be marginalized in the postwar, democratic society, which goes against democratic principles. He also attributes much of the violence of the war to the legacy of the 1932 Matanza. The recognition of victimhood has never existed in modern El Salvador, and therefore the victims continue to be unreconciled victims, which violates their human rights in the present. This threatens the idea of “never again,” as such atrocities have already been repeated in El Salvador. Morales also discusses Salvadoran identity, and how the marginalization of a large sector of the population (victims) prevents a unified Salvadoran identity. Ricouer (1999) argued that the collective identity of a people has its roots in the founding, violent events of the past, in contrast to Renan (1996) who believes that the violence should be glossed over. Morales believes that this violent history needs to be remembered for the collective identity of the Salvadoran people. In El Salvador,
there has never been any kind of reckoning or forgiveness to end the “chain and pattern of consequences” that the successive waves of repression have continued (Arendt, 2005, p. 59).

4.3 The Victim Remembers

Through their testimonies, even if they are told primarily to foreigners, the victims attempt to break through this re-victimization of negation, and remember. This is the other side of Huntington’s (1991) traditional choice: for the majority of victims that I witnessed and interviewed in El Salvador, it is necessary to remember and not forget the injustices that happened. Former guerrilla radio director “Santiago,” now the director of the Museum of the Word and Image (MUPI- a museum dedicated to historical memory), explains why this memory is important in postwar society:

We consider a postwar society like ours that looks towards the future and that wants to build a future that is different from the past; we consider that in the practice of citizenship of rights of building values, the topic of memory is indispensible (C. Henríquez Consalvi, personal communication, 24 July 2014).23

This repeats the typical, idealized, democratic society that both sides strive for. For those who adhere to the policy of oblivion, forgetting is necessary to move on in the postwar, democratic society. For the other side, typically the victims, remembering is what is needed.

As Foucault (1975) argued, popular memory depends on who controls and holds the power in a nation; therefore different collective memories must struggle to be included within the official narratives. In the immediate postwar years, the policy of forgive and forget repressed much of the popular, collective memories, particularly from all the different victims. However, in recent years, there have been more concerted
efforts to bring those memories into the national dialogue (and not simply have the stories
told to foreigners). The digital newspaper *El Faro* is one of the high-profile forums for
these memories. Journalist and editor at *El Faro*, Ricardo Vaquerano, explains their
strategy:

We think that Salvadorans need to know the recent history of this country, their…past has been hidden by the official history for a community of people who have suffered so much, and… two thirds of the population live in misery, they live in poverty. And these are the people that don’t know what happened during the Civil War… *El Faro* puts a lot of emphasis on trying to investigate, to process… and to divulge that information so that it is known who was involved in the war, what participation they had, and so that the people also understand the phenomenon of violence and marginalization of exclusion, in which we currently live. We think that there is a relation between the historical violence of this country, including if we go back to even 1932 and the military dictatorships… and the Civil War, we can find explanations of why this country lives violence in the way it does. That is to say, apparently without any solution, the majority of all crimes remain in impunity… And at *El Faro* we think that this country could change, and that our purpose as journalists is to help people to have the necessary information so that they can promote those changes. We see ourselves like that, as a tool for society to make a type of revolution (R. Vaquerano, personal communication, 2 July 2014).

Vaquerano reiterates what David Morales, Salvador Menéndez Leal, and others have
stated: that the historical memory of El Salvador, particularly the history of repression,
goes back to 1932 (and even before), and that these legacies, histories, and memories
need to be told so that Salvadorans can know their own history, and have more than just
the master narrative which has glossed over the memories of extreme violence and
repression.

When asking about historical memory while conducting this research in El
Salvador, I found myself framing the question differently with people of the left than of
the right. With more leftist interviewees, I tended to use the words historical memory
(memoria histórica) without thinking twice. Yet when I interviewed more right-wing persons, I found myself framing the questions in terms of “perspectives” and not using the words historical memory. Halfway through my time in El Salvador, during an interview with professor Rafael Molina, I realized why I self-censored myself.

Rafael: There’s a polarization that the historical memory of the left tackles. Nonetheless, there is no interest on behalf of the right to recover their historical memory. Also because the right thinks that historical memory belongs to the left.

Megan: The term itself?

Rafael: The term historical memory… the people don’t treat it as if it’s everyone’s, or that it should be everyone’s. Or it has to be a memory that’s a consensus through dialogue. So, historical memory-leftist. So, it’s one of the problems that El Salvador has for why memory… of the other side, of the right, isn’t advanced… And also, another problem is… for 20 years of the right… they didn’t worry… they didn’t care to have a historical memory of the right because they had the economic power… (R. Molina, personal communication, 16 July 2014).

The term “historical memory”- because it implies remembering a certain collective memory that sectors traditionally aligned with the right have wished to gloss over- has become politicized. It goes back to Foucault (1975), that it is a battle for history with the goal of repressing popular memory. Historical memory is that popular memory, the testimonies, memory, and history of the victims of repression and violence (on both sides). While the FMLN, as discussed in the previous chapter, is not an innocent bystander, due to the proportions of human rights violations, it has been able to claim historical memory as its own. ERP commander Joaquín Villalobos is explicit about that in his book:

The wounds left by the atrocities that were committed by both sides in a multi-dimensional conflict, make the process of reestablishing a common identity complicated. Keeping in mind that the war ended without winners
or losers, El Salvador has as a fundamental challenge in which it should tackle its recent history… The Right has forgotten its victims in order to govern and the left remembers them as a strategy for getting into the government. The theme of cultural history is empty and plagued by polarizing forces, with false moral visions, that conceal the energies of political vengeance in the majority of cases (Villalobos, 2000, pp. 73-76).

Villalobos argues that the left’s appropriation of the victims’ collective memories was a political strategy. Whether or not this actually occurred, what can be observed in El Salvador, as well as in my interviews, is that the FMLN and those aligned with the left have no problem talking about the war, its victims, and placing themselves in that context. On the right, in my interviews people were much more evasive on such questions, and it is evidently not part of the ARENA strategy.

Regardless of whether or not it is a political strategy, remembering for many is an important part of postwar society. However, it is not simply remembering:

I don’t think that you need to talk about the past in the sense of remembering just to remember. We aren’t eager for vengeance. We are working to recover the past in the sense of for the future. And in a positive way. That is to say…the only wounds that can be reopened in El Salvador are the ones that were left poorly closed. When I tell you that they need to repeal the Amnesty Law, but for some that could reopen wounds. Yes. But only the ones that were left poorly closed (S. Menéndez Leal, personal communication, 22 July 2014).

Along with Minow (1998) who argued that transitional justice solutions need to be in the spectrum between the extremes of vengeance and forgiveness, Menéndez Leal underscores that memory in El Salvador is not for vengeance purposes, as some postwar governments may have alleged, but instead to be able to build a better, democratic postwar society. The Amnesty, institutionalized oblivion, was to “heal the wounds”; yet
as is pointed out, those wounds were poorly healed and therefore need to be re-opened and remembered by Salvadoran society at large.

Menéndez Leal’s statement on “poorly healed wounds” illustrates the government’s attempt at forced reconciliation after the war. As forgive and forget was the strategy, reconciliation was imposed on the victims in El Salvador. However, as Neier (in Minow 1998) and Minow (1998) point out, the power to forgive is held by the victim, not the state or the victimizer (in this case the state was the main victimizer). As Minow (1998) emphasized, “to expect survivors to forgive is to heap yet another burden on them” (p. 17). Therefore, the forced reconciliation did not heal the wounds; it only allowed them to fester. In my interviews, there was much discussion of the Salvadoran Supreme Court’s current revision of the Amnesty Law. Some, such as General Vargas, said the revision doesn’t matter. Others firmly believe the Amnesty should remain, and others vice versa. However what the discussion on the Amnesty Law in 2014-2015 does demonstrate is that the debate still exists. Over twenty years after the end of the war, the Peace Accords, the Truth Commission, and the Amnesty Law, the debate is still raging. This points me to agree with Menéndez Leal’s assertion that the wounds of the past were left poorly closed.

The silencing of the past, without official apologies or even official recognition of the human rights violations of the Armed Conflict, has been a major point of contention among victims groups, and contributed to their continued suffering and organization after the war ended. The ARENA party governed the Salvadoran presidency for twenty years, from 1989-2009. The election of Mauricio Funes as the first FMLN president in 2009, was not only an important step for democracy, but the discourse on past human rights
abuses immediately began to change. In his speech on election night, Funes invoked Monseñor Romero and said that Monseñor would be the guiding light of his presidency (Funes, 2009). This is an extreme and instantaneous change from the twenty years of ARENA rhetoric denying or evading the issue. While Villalobos (2000) contends that the FMLN’s appropriation of the victim has been a political strategy to come to power, Funes was successful and throughout his presidency continued to ask for forgiveness on behalf of the state in many cases of gross human rights violations from the war. On the 18th anniversary of the Peace Accords in 2010, Funes recognized the state’s involvement and asked for forgiveness for the human rights abuses of the war in general, saying, “I ask forgiveness from the children, the youth, the women and men, the elderly, priests and nuns, farmworkers, workers, students, intellectuals, political opponents and human rights activists” (Valencia, Caravantes, 2010). Funes would also go on to do this with Monseñor Romero and the victims of the El Mozote massacre.

In the El Mozote case, the change of official government policy had an effect on the international stage. Gisela de León, who litigated the case before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, describes the change:

In El Mozote I think there was a difference... There we met directly with the President. And even before the hearing of the case there was a public act of recognition of responsibility in which the President participated directly and there have been advances in some of the reparation measures, such as the adoption of...community measures such as streets and things of that nature, for the family members. He also recognized El Mozote as a historic site, which gives more relevance to El Mozote within El Salvador. Because it seems to me that here there was an interest that came from higher up, and it was accomplished (G. de León, personal communication, 9 May 2014).
One of the most interesting facets of this change in policy was the presence of David Morales on the side of the state. Morales had begun his career with Tutela Legal, had worked with Gisela de León on the El Mozote case on behalf of the petitioners, the victims of El Mozote, before the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. When Funes became president, he named Morales as the Director of Human Rights for the Ministry of Foreign Relations of the Salvadoran government. Morales literally switched sides, which signaled a significant change in government policy towards the El Mozote case, and the past human rights violations in general.

I asked David Morales, now Human Rights Ombudsman, about this change, not only of the change of the table he sat in at the Court, but of the government as well:

Megan: You arrived at the Inter-American System as a petitioner, but then with your work in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs you moved to the other side of the table. So how was that experience for you, and to be with the same cases but on the other side?

David Morales: At first it was weird, haha, personally, but no, I think that it was possible because the positions weren’t incompatible… With the change in government, in 2009, there was a change of position, and they invited me…to participate in the construction of the new position. This position was to try to reverse the historical and anti-juridical position of denial that the State of El Salvador had maintained until then. And the efforts of the new position, first at the international level, were in plainly accepting the authority of the Commission, accepting the obligatory nature of the recommendations of the Commission and the Court. Also to ask for forgiveness from the victims for the events and for how they were treated in the prior international processes, and to try to push through compliance processes…on an internal level…

Now, there were some positive advances… that have a historical relevance of being the first time that advances were taken in order to try to comply with obligations. But of course it still isn’t enough… That historical debt hasn’t been minimally settled, except in the first steps of reparation, which are important, but they’re only the first way in which the State should speed up the steps of course. Because many of the victims are older adults, and many have already passed away, no? In conditions of
abandonment and without seeing any reparations. However, the State maintained itself as a state that kept failing to fulfill completely its obligations regarding investigation and justice… Unfortunately, within the State of El Salvador, the institutions responsible for the administration of justice didn’t have the will to advance the compliance that they are responsible for (D. Morales, personal communication, 18 July 2014).30

While Morales is proud of the work he accomplished within the government, he is not timid about pointing out the faults within the state. His words demonstrate a clear desire to have been able to do more for the victims, but politics prevented the state’s full attention to the victims.

How was this change in government policy viewed by the victims themselves? I asked both Blanca García and Rosa Anaya about the change.

Megan: With the change of government to Funes in 2009, he began to do acts of recognition. And now with Sánchez Cerén, he’s doing further steps. But what do you think about it? Do you think it was important? Was it enough?

Blanca: Well, for us, at the beginning it was a great joy… Because it’s … the first leftist government in our country. There becomes a hope, that this government is going to be different, that it will take the victims demands seriously, of bringing clarity to so many killings and disappearances. So, with Mauricio Funes asking for forgiveness it’s been a small opening, but a very important one (B. García, personal communication, 16 July 2014).31

Rosa candidly responded: "Uyyyyyy, it was extremely important. But never enough” (R. Anaya, personal communication, 8 July, 2014).32 Héctor Rosemberg, of the CNB, while similar to Rosa, is more critical of the FMLN in its actions of recognition and forgiveness.

The State accepting this responsibility…for the family members, for the victims, is already a kind of reparation… And that was very important… Its like re-vindicating that struggle and making worthwhile to the family members everything that they have lost… It was different from what was done at other moments that was very damaging to the families in general, and was very difficult. There is still a bad feeling towards the State.
Although... now it has a different attitude, it will always be seen as the State. Even though it’s leftist now, it will always be seen... taking into account that those involved now pertained to the guerrilla. There are cases of disappearance in which the guerrilla was directly involved, as the cause. So, the topic is a bit complicated, and it needs to be looked at without ideological lenses in order to really enter and really work it, to not have the mindset that it’s about a color. This topic isn’t about party color, whether it’s the right or the left, it’s a topic for the country what should look for the truth, justice, and reparation for the families (H. Rosenberg Aparicio, personal communication, 4 July 2014).

Rosemberg’s remarks discuss much of what Villalobos pointed out: that historical memory and the recognition of past atrocities doesn’t need to be along party lines, that the FMLN committed atrocities as well, for which it has not directly apologized. For Rosemberg, what matters beyond official acknowledgement is that the state finally can be on the side of all the victims.

All of this official recognition, remembering, and forgiveness on behalf of the state are important steps, which are not denied by any of my interviews. However, both academic Rafael Molina and attorney Salvador Menéndez Leal pointed out one possible problem if the state’s only actions remain at this level. “The repetition of forgiveness, without a reparation program, is a double victimization. If I ask you for forgiveness but I don’t offer material and moral steps to heal your wounds, in the end it’s re-victimizing” (S. Menéndez Leal, personal communication, 22 July 2014). All the victims I interviewed want more than simple recognition. The victims’ memories are too strong and too painful, and are compounded by decades of re-victimization through the official policy of denial. There is no one simple solution, and it must be between vengeance and forgiveness, as Minow (1998) articulated.

4.4 The Future of the Victim
Many people in Salvadoran society are very aware of the continued effects, even towards the future, of the human rights violations committed during the Civil War. Hector Rosemberg of the CNB explains,

The wounds are there, right, in society, in all of those of us who were there, and...it gets transmitted generationally, depending on how I lived it, and from where I lived it, I’m going to pass it on to the new generations. So I can say, the right has a...young person in it’s organizations, and his parents told him what the guerrilla did, that’s their vision, but they don’t tell the other side, they don’t know how it was viewed (H. Rosemberg Aparicio, personal communication, 4 July 2014).  

Attorney at Pro-Búsqueda, Roberto Rugamas, further describes this transmitted trauma,

And then the Mauricio Funes government arrives, and it begins to talk about the topics, but... it doesn’t go beyond talking to take action. And I think that is a result of a greater consciousness process, and of recognizing that the effects are passed on to current generations. That is one of the bigger objectives that we had in the Rochac case...we presented testimony about trans-generational damages... We discovered, for example, that the rupture of social ties generates a double traumatization that leaves you uncomfortable in your community, in your family, and without knowing even if it’s because of victimization as a result of crimes against humanity during the war (R. Rugamas, personal communication, 7 July 2014).

This goes back to Ricouer (1999) and Hirsch (2008) who discuss how collective memories are transmitted to the next generation. Hirsch’s (2008) theory of postmemory is exactly what Rosemberg and Rugamas discuss: the traumas of the past are so painful, and they are told to the next generation who then take on those traumas as their own, which makes them a type of victim. However, without the telling of those stories, it also has victimized both the victims and society at large, as silence invalidates the experiences of the past. Ricoeur (1999) argued that there is a duty to teach and remember, along with

---

35 The Rochac case deals with 6 children disappeared during the Armed Conflict, between the years 1980-1982, whose whereabouts remain unknown. Pro-Búsqueda took the case before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2014.
a duty to go beyond anger and hatred by forgetting. However, forgetting doesn’t need to be absolute silence on the past. There is a sense of the need to restore or recuperate historical memory for the future generations.

When you talk about these topics, you come off as someone who is living in the past. But it’s that, you have to send that message, that the past and the present, the present and the future, they’re interconnected! And we can’t aspire to build a society if we don’t take into consideration we where come from. What we have been through. That’s why it’s important to work on historical memory, collective memory, especially with the young people. In order to do that generational transfer (S. Menéndez Leal, personal communication, 22 July 2014).37

For Menéndez Leal, rather than being an unreconciled victim, it is a connection for the new generations to know the difficulties of the past in order to build a new society in the postwar era. Postmemory doesn’t necessarily then mean victimizing the new generation, but rather the transference of historical memory to improve the country for the future, as it is all connected.

What is clear in El Salvador is that the memories of the violent past are still alive and well. Certain events or “vehicles for memory” (as Jelin would say) can evoke discussion on the past, particularly if they are regarding a controversial figure. The proposal to name a San Salvador street after D’Aubuisson in 2014 caused uproar and the clash over history was in the news for weeks, and the municipal government was pressured to withdraw the proposal. Particularly, every time there is an election the war is brought up, mainly for the purpose of bringing up old fears and hostilities, to gain electoral advantage (Montoya, 2013). The memory of the Matanza is utilized by ARENA, which begins each electoral campaign in Izalco, one of the primary sites of the massacre in 1932. MUPI director “Santiago” remarks, “That gives you ...a sign of how
these memories are being utilized,” as Izalco symbolizes the site where communism was defeated (C. Henríquez Consalvi, personal communication, 24 July 2014). Yet with the transmission of historical memory to future generations, a clearer and more detailed picture of the violent past is also passed on, so that the utilization of the past as a weapon of fear is diminished.

As Matua (2001) and Martín-Cabrera (2011) emphasize, the trope of the powerless victim is a misrepresentation that utilizes colonial ideologies. In El Salvador, the victims had, and continue to have agency, memory, and a voice. Though there was an attempt to silence those voices during the Armed Conflict and in the postwar period, they have carried through. In most of my interviews I simply asked them to give me their last word on the legacies of the Armed Conflict. In relation to victims, Rosa Anaya and David Morales had the most inspiring responses, with which I wish to close this chapter.

Rosa answered:

Look, I could tell you what many people are going to tell you, the classic about the violence… But I think that also a bigger legacy was being able to have examples of people who decided in the worst circumstances, to make their situation better. And I think that we can learn a lot from that, because now we complain: that life I don’t know, that everything’s going bad, that the government, here, there. But who really is saying, “I’m contributing” something? … Very few people talk about the positives that that moment left us, and more me it’s that. That the people did superhuman things, really in order to survive physically and emotionally. So that their kids could survive emotionally… And now…if I’ve learned anything from those years of war, it’s that you can survive in that circumstance. Always and when you don’t close yourself in the bubble, and you try to do something different… In the worst conditions you can get the best out of people. There’s nothing more miraculous than that, I think (R. Anaya, personal communication, 8 July 2014).

Morales emphasizes Rosa’s claim about the inspiration from the victims.
Positive legacies, maybe the most evident one...is the victims’ struggle. Not only for their survival, but for their rescue of the truth. And their demand for the reparation of injustice. I always give the example of Rufina Amaya, the survivor of Mozote because I say she was a humble woman from a remote little Salvadoran town, from the little town of El Mozote in the northern department of Morazán, who was literally able to defeat the biggest powers in the word. Rufina Amaya lost all her children assassinated in the massacre and a large number of her family members... hundreds of people including her children were exterminated in front of her. And the El Mozote massacre was denied from the beginning by all the powerful people. The government denied it, President Duarte, the Armed Forces high command denied it, the United States Embassy in El Salvador denied it. Later the high representatives of the US government denied it before Congress in order to guarantee the continued military aid to the Salvadoran government... Those who had the political power and power of weapons, buried the massacre. And Rufina Amaya was there... she was able to overcome the situation of death in which the massacre was immersed, after the massacre she was denouncing it...that the massacre happened. And Rufina’s testimony spread throughout the world. Now the massacre is unquestionable... Rufina’s struggle, that brought down the powerful who wanted to lie and deny the history, it’s the struggle of many mothers, of many grandmothers, of many children who have been from the communities recovering the historical memory (D. Morales, personal communication, 18 July 2014).

Conclusion

The victims of El Salvador’s Armed Conflict were not simply “‘mere life’ without political agency” (Martín-Cabrera, 2011, p. 214), innocent people reduced to the status of what happened to their bodies, as the trope of the victim in the SVS metaphor describes them. If anything, after the abuses, many of the survivors or the victims’ family members became more active against the repression or against the postwar silence. Now, over twenty years since the signing of the Peace Accords, the debates over what happened and

---

This is not to say that every victim became organized and told their story. There are still many victims of the Armed Conflict that have yet to come forward with what happened to them or their family. Much of that is due to the policy of forgive and forget in the immediate postwar years, and the continued climate of violence that El Salvador endures.
the memory of what happened to the victims continue to permeate Salvadoran politics and society.
Chapter 5: The Savior

The Salvadoran Civil War ended in a negotiated peace accord. After the FMLN’s 1989 November offensive, which demonstrated that the guerrilla was far from being defeated, and the assassination of the Jesuits, which demonstrated that the military had not been professionalized nor changed its cruel habits over the past decade, the United Nations and the United States stepped in to essentially force a negotiated settlement, which had previously been stalled. Both sides had made attempts to end the war, but it wasn’t until the white, Western savior intervened that an actual end to the war and an end to the atrocities was achieved. This chapter will look at the figure of the savior, with its colonial overtones, in the negotiated peace, as well as how issues surrounding this aspect of the metaphor have manifested in postwar El Salvador. Throughout, one must ask the questions, was there a savior in El Salvador? And has the country been saved and reconciled?

5.1 The Peace-negotiating Savior

As Matua (2001) explains, the United Nations exemplifies the SVS metaphor at the intergovernmental level, as it serves to quell unrest and negotiate peace treaties around the world. In 1992, the Salvadoran Peace Accords were a momentous occasion, not only for the Salvadoran people who had endured 12 years of civil war, but also for the UN itself. As Joaquín Villalobos (2000) explained, “For the United Nations it was one of the most successful peace operations of the present historical period” (p. 25). Héctor
Rosemberg of the CNB elaborates on how the UN-brokered Peace Accords were a historic, important step for El Salvador:

If we understand peace nothing more than ending the fighting, well then yes that peace was important in that moment. And it was, as the United Nations says, a model for the world. That since February 1, 1992…until now there hasn’t been a single shot fired for political reasons… wow! And that it’s been respected, quote unquote, because the death squads were still active at that time… But, in formal terms, the groups stopped. So for many that was very important, to be able to go out, and not have to hide yourself anymore, to not have to keep fleeing, to have a place… to settle down, was for many a big change in people’s lives (H. Rosemberg, personal communication, 4 July 2014).2

Not only were the Peace Accords an example for the world, but also they had an extremely important local impact, which was the end to official political violence in El Salvador.3 For the UN this peace process was the example for going forward in other countries, particularly El Salvador’s neighbor Guatemala where the UN brokered a peace treaty in 1996. Naturally there are obvious criticisms, yet many view the process in a positive light, along with the UN. MUPI director and former guerrilla radio director “Santiago” expressed: “There’s much to do, but I think that the Salvadoran peace process has many lessons to give other processes, right?” (C. Henríquez Consalvi, personal communication, 24 July 2014).3

The United Nations continues to view the Salvadoran peace process as a model for the world. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon visited El Salvador on the 23rd anniversary of the signing of the Peace Accords 2015. In a speech during his visit, he focused on the exemplary peace process as a way for other nations to look at how they

---

2 Héctor does mention the nuances of the peace, and that after the Accords, death squads were still unofficially active. Gang violence also began to grow post-1992. For further information on this post-war, unofficial violence, see Moodie (2010).
themselves can reconcile after the horrors of war. Mr. Ban stated, “In many troubled spots, people say: Our differences are too wide. The wounds are too deep. Peace is not possible… To all of them, I say: Look to the people of El Salvador. Peace is precious and peace is possible. That is El Salvador’s message to the world. That is your gift to humanity… The peace process pioneered a new generation of peace operations and profoundly shaped how the United Nations faces global challenges to this very day” (United Nations, 2015). This demonstrates the UN’s continued insistence that El Salvador’s peace and reconciliation process not only was a victory for the country, but for the UN itself as well, as it was the guiding savior of the Peace Accords.

However, the Peace Accords do have their faults, particularly in their postwar execution. A UN-delegation, ONUSAL, remained in El Salvador until 1995 in order to guide the process of implementing the Accords. While the process and the actual Peace Accords themselves are considered historic and to be an example for the world, how did they affect the victims of the human rights violations that occurred during the war? The Truth Commission was supposed to be the entity that addressed the abuses. Did the UN-sponsored process have real-life effects on the victims? I asked Blanca García of Co-Madres about it:

Megan: What characteristics does the end of the war have for you and for your family? Regarding the Peace Accords, how did your life change?

Blanca: Yes, well Co-Madres always asked for peace… So they were able to sign the Peace Accords…and that was an absolute joy for everyone at Co-Madres, for the general population it was a party… And after the Peace Accords, everyone felt a huge relief. They felt a peace. But, the pain of the victims, of all the family members, has never been erased. Because the fear of the Armed Forces, when one went out on the street they felt, even though the Peace Accords had been signed…
But new challenges also arise… Because the populations lived completely afraid, psychologically affected, there weren’t economic commissions… But at that time…as well as now, the people were so sad and have so many needs, the civilian population thought that when the Peace was signed, everything would return to normal… And the mothers began to feel the sadness that their children had been assassinated. Their husbands, their family members… So, after the Peace Accords, we’ve kept fighting using our own resources (B. García, personal communication, 16 July 2014).

Blanca emphasizes elements from the previous chapter: the fact that the victims’ fear, the pain, the sadness didn’t go away with the Peace Accords. While the UN intervened to stop the fighting, little to nothing was done in the postwar years to address the victims. Looking at it through the lens of the SVS metaphor, the number of innocent victims throughout the war, and the continued brutality against them (highlighted by the Jesuits’ assassination), brought in the United Nations to make peace. Yet the savior was not able to make a lasting impact on the victims. As Meister (2011) would put it, it is the “primacy of the global over the local” (p. 48). The UN did what was necessary for Central American peace, reacting to the international outcries against the brutality. Yet the realities of a postwar El Salvador, and an unreconciled victim, were not factored in to the process.

Not every victim I spoke with was a fan of the Peace Accords. Maritza Herrera Rebollo, whose father was murdered by the FPL, provides some interesting insight:

Why is it…that in other countries they only believe in their [the typical victims] stories? The Peace Accords went through because of the pressure from other countries… Look, sincerely, I never agreed with the Peace Accords, never! For me, the Armed Forces should have continued … because they [the guerrillas] were delinquents (M. Herrera Rebollo, personal communication, 21 July 2014).
To utilize Villalobos’ words, “the war ended without winners nor losers” (Villalobos, 2000, p. 73). Maritza clearly is against this fact. She blames the international community for forcing the Peace Accords. In her view, the Armed Forces should have continued fighting the “delinquents” until they were finished. When looking at this, it appears that for her and others who coincide with her viewpoint, something was compromised with the Peace Accords. The abuses of the Armed Forces were necessary to defeat the guerrillas, and with the Accords, those who had destroyed the country were allowed to re-enter the public and political spheres as legitimate actors. While this was brokered by both sides of the war, there is an inherent element of bitterness towards the international community, particularly the United Nations and the United States, for forcing the peace.

Matua (2001) also lists Western states as part of the savior metaphor, typified by the United States, which has fashioned itself as the “spokesperson for the ‘welfare’ of humanity” (p. 240). In the case of the US’ role in El Salvador, the idea of the US as savior becomes unraveled fairly quickly. Instead of being viewed as a savior, it is viewed as savage, as one of the contributors to the Armed Conflict. General Vargas explains how the US was involved in the cause of the war:

What were the causes of the conflict? The causes … were psychological at the beginning, and intervention was the other component. You had the Soviet Union and the United States… President Reagan said that Central America is the United States’ backyard… our security was threatening… Cuba is an aircraft carrier, Nicaragua is a beachhead, the communist expansion in Latin America: that’s what was going on at that moment. Good, bad, ugly, it… was the problem of the time (E. Vargas, personal communication, 3 July 2014).
Evangelical activist Eliberto Juarez provides a more simplistic view, “The United States screwed over our lives here. The United States…provided the guns and warplanes for the Armed Forces... So the United States played a bad part in that” (E. Juarez, personal communication, 11 July 2014). The role of the US during the war was as the savage, as it essentially bankrolled the Salvadoran Armed Forces. However, in 1989 after the November Offensive it changed its role and became the savior along with the UN, urging the Salvadoran government into the peace process.

The peace process, with the involvement of the US and the UN, was a complicated one. Did the savior have an effect besides the Peace Accords themselves? Attorney Salvador Menéndez Leal argues:

For me it’s important to tell you that probably in the Salvadoran case it’s an ironic and paradoxical, and more than anything contradictory case. Because the United Nations put it in the category of a model experience for conflict negotiation as a negotiated peace solution, but the forms of violence are just under new expressions... The actors of the war are there. So El Salvador is still, I think, in a more critical situation... I think it’s important to understand a few things. One, that El Salvador is not a model of anything. Two, that the letter of introduction from the United Nations is not so: they sell us as a model for negotiations and an alternative resolution of conflicts, and as an example at the international level... But it’s not true (S. Menéndez Leal, personal communication, 22 July 2014).

Menéndez Leal’s criticisms have their basis in the current, postwar realities of continued poverty and violence. When the intervention of the savior did little to change these realities, a critique is merited.

The United Nations, and the United States in particular, put a lot of energy into the peace process. One national figure emerged within El Salvador as representative of the peace: President Alfredo Cristiani. President of the country at the time of the negotiations and signing of the Peace Accords, he became known as the “peace
president.” As the Truth Commission Report explains, “It falls to President Cristiani- the peace president- and his government and the former insurgents, especially the former commanders of the FMLN, once again to play the leading role by setting a new course for El Salvador” (Betancourt, Planchart, & Buergenthal, 1993). Along with the FMLN leaders, the lasting postwar peace depended on Cristiani. Within El Salvador, Cristiani is also a polarizing figure, along with D’Aubuisson, Sánchez Cerén, and Romero. He continues to be a leading figure within the ARENA party.ii Yet even within ARENA there are some disagreements about Cristiani as the national savior. ARENA diputado Mario Valiente explains:

The peace NEVER would have been signed if D’Aubuisson hadn’t given his political support to Cristiani… And those were his words. “The peace will be signed! The guerrillas will return and they are Salvadorans like us, so it’s important for us to learn how to live in peace”… But who took the leadership, and was a leader, was Cristiani, with a different style. A person with different experience, from a different environment, with a smoother style, but not as strong, never as strong a leader as D’Aubuisson (M. Valiente, personal communication, 10 July 2014).9

Valiente holds D’Aubuisson in more esteem than Cristiani. This may have changed, as the ARENA party continues to try to change part of its image away from D’Aubuisson. Regardless of whether or not D’Aubuisson gave his blessing to Cristiani to sign the peace, Cristiani became associated with the Accords, and as the first ARENA president.

Others, particularly the victims and human rights attorneys, continue to have a negative view of the “peace president.” Blanca García of Co-Madres describes their urging of the peace process and Cristiani’s resistance:

Co-Madres always wanted peace… They were there [at the signing of the Peace Accords]… And there were many threats from President Cristiani,
poorly named the Peace President. He didn’t want to sign. But the United States demanded that he sign (B. García, personal communication, 16 July 2014).

For Blanca and the *madres*, Cristiani only signed because the US forced him to (as opposed to Valiente’s argument that it was because D’Aubuisson gave his blessing). Because of this resistance to the peace, the nickname is not earned. Human rights attorney Almudena Bernabeu also highlights the influence of the US on Cristiani:

> Cristiani is a bad person… very very very bad, very bad. Cristiani is one of the richest, if not the richest, men in El Salvador… Additionally, he’s a sinister character, politically situated in the history of El Salvador as a hero of the military and a hero of the United States. If you talk with the State Department, even with… McGovern of Massachusetts, they think that Cristiani was great, that he was the Peace President. It’s ridiculous (A. Bernabeu, personal communication, 20 October 2014).

Even democratic representatives in US Congress believed Cristiani to be the figure of the Salvadoran national savior. Yet Bernabeu counters his good deeds, claiming him to be involved in more sinister industries.

This glaring contradiction is needed when looking at Cristiani as the figure of the savior within El Salvador. From the Truth Commission putting the weight of the entire peace process on him, to allegations that he would never have signed if it weren’t for outside influences, it is a complex situation for a complex figure. From these different perspectives, I would argue that Cristiani acquiesced to the Peace Accords, in particular to the Truth Commission, as a means of legitimizing his government in the eyes of the international community. Additionally, the acceptance of the Truth Commission yet with no final word on amnesty during the peace negotiations also consolidated his domestic support from the military and anti-communist elite. The US as savior also needed a figure to represent the Salvadoran government’s change away from the savage. Cristiani
as an ARENA technocrat fit the bill. By showing, both to the US public and to the international community, that ARENA wasn’t the savage of D’Aubuisson but a neoliberal savior, the US legitimized its own change in role from savage to savior.

5.2 Postwar Savior

As discussed in the historical overview chapter, Robinson (2003) argues that the change from an agrarian economy to one focused on the global market and neoliberal capitalism was championed by the United States. Human Rights Ombudsman David Morales elaborates:

The Peace Accords in El Salvador…in…part are successful in the neutralization of the Armed Conflict, and the scenario in Central America at that time… The Cold War and the Soviet Bloc had just collapsed and the expansion of neoliberal economic policies were imposed, with the strong push of the United States in the freeing of markets, and the formalization of free trade treaties. So El Salvador had the historic opportunity, for the first time, to try to put in place a strong state and guarantee human rights, trying to break away from its history of dictatorships, repressive governments, and the insurgent stage. But there is no political will in El Salvador to do that. Neoliberal policies begin, which involve a further reduction of the state to its own weakening… And the agenda of the Peace Accords was impacted by that (D. Morales, personal communication, 16 July 2014).\textsuperscript{12}

With the end of the Cold War and through the last years of the Armed Conflict, the US was able to become a savior in El Salvador, not only through helping to end the war, but also to change its economy in a way that the US felt would be beneficial for El Salvador and the global economy. David Morales views the Salvadoran government’s adherence to the neoliberal model as lacking a strong political and economic stance of its own, and that this influenced the enforcement of certain aspects of the Peace Accords.
How the Salvadorans I spoke with view the postwar neoliberal economy is very much split according to party lines. ARENA diputado Mario Valiente describes the end of the process of the ARENA split in the 1980s and its result:

Well then, what has been achieved by the right uniting? Including uniting the support of the military politically speaking, which was achieved. And when Cristiani comes to power, the economy improved (M. Valiente, personal communication, 10 July 2014).\(^\text{13}\)

While FMLN diputado Damián Alegría disagrees with the neoliberal policies championed by ARENA and the US.

In 20 years of neoliberalism much of the government involvement that benefitted the population was destroyed… It was the phenomenon called outsourcing of the economy, we were more dedicated to services, there were setting up a model more in that direction. So when we come to power in 2009, we tried to fix all those things, but it wasn’t easy (D. Alegría, personal communication, 9 July 2014).\(^\text{14}\)

The neoliberal economic model, which has been in effect in El Salvador since Cristiani’s election in 1989, is like almost everything else in El Salvador- viewed multiple ways with different collective memories. Additionally, the US’ involvement in encouraging the economic shift is viewed similarly. Some, mostly from the right, view the US as a savior figure, who helped El Salvador out of the economic slump that resulted from the Armed Conflict. Others, mostly from the left, view the US as a savage figure, who forced the policies, which have resulted in a “new slavery of neoliberalism” (Peña, 2009, p. 235).

5.3 The Saved?

While the economy from before the war has changed because of the savior US’ encouragement, many of the structural problems from before the war remain. As Meister (2011) argues, the focus on the human rights abuses, on the victim and the victimizer, ignores the systems that enabled the atrocities to happen in the first place. This topic
came up in many of my interviews as an important point in postwar. Hector Rosemberg of the CNB, who has also worked with marginalized communities, relates it to the change to a neoliberal economy:

What happened was… that the peace was also a political agreement, perhaps not as economic as it was social… The talk about human rights was then a different policy. But the peace didn’t… get to the economic roots, to a re-composition of the economic system in a way so that the majority could have development opportunities… But the private sector, the business owners of this country, and the government were together… What they did… was the privatization… Sell everything so that all of them could rebuild the country, but for themselves, not for the majority (H. Rosemberg Aparicio, personal communication, 4 July 2014).15

I asked Rosa Anaya directly:

Megan: Do you think that the situation has changed since the end of the war?

Rosa: Yes, let’s say the context has changed. But the historical background of the causes of the war, they’re still intact… The political context has changed. What you can and cannot say has changed. But at the end it’s the same game… the game of exclusion, the game of poverty… No, it hasn’t changed… The context and the actors have changed… we can’t say that it’s the same situation as during the war, but there are many elements…that are the same as during the war (R. Anaya, personal communication, 8 July 2014).16

Evangelical activist Eliberto Juárez is more explicit in his view:

Exploitation continues; the abuse, the big companies stealing the taxes from the state. Many of the problems that led to the war are still around. So I think that the peace process was good. In terms of the reduction of guns, a little bit more ability to go out on the streets. But the factors of economic and political inequalities are still present (E. Juárez, personal communication, 11 July 2014).17

Juárez and Anaya see the fact that the Peace Accords were an important step for the country. Yet they did not address the situation of inequality that continues to plague the country. Though the political situation has changed, the economic and social conditions
that contributed to the war remain, even if they are in a different style. Attorney Salvador Menéndez Leal affirms, “My thesis is: that the conflict has assumed new expressions, but that its reasons and manifestations are practically intact… That twenty years after the war, the reasons for the war are still there” (S. Menéndez Leal, personal communication, 22 July 2014).  

Though others disagree, and have seen some structural changes in the postwar period. GANA diputado Nelson Guardado thinks that at least socially, things have changed:

The situation is such that in the end many citizens say, “What was the reason for the Armed Conflict if things are still similar?” Today we can discuss a postwar achievement, which is that there is more tolerance. There’s a little more dialogue, and at least now there is no killing for thinking or believing differently… There’s the emotion that you shouldn’t fight over ideas with bullets but with ideas. And I think that’s a good thing (N. Guardado, personal communication, 10 July 2014).

Unsurprisingly, ARENA diputado Mario Valiente argues that in the 20 years of ARENA rule, the conditions improved:

It’s true that the country got better. It’s true that the poverty rate went down, there was more employment, economic indicators grew, and the country was well positioned in the competitiveness and business indexes… But in the five years of the FMLN it has all gone down. The education level of students has gone down. And I think that it’s our fault. I think that it’s ARENA’s fault because in 20 years we should have done more, and we didn’t (M. Valiente, personal communication, 10 July 2014).

For Valiente, more should have been done during their time in power, seemingly so that the change in government wouldn’t be able to undo that progress.

Surprisingly, two right-wing women I interviewed had similar views on El Salvador’s progress since the war. Maritza Herrera Rebollo stated, “this country has
gone backwards. In the 1970s El Salvador was a thousand times better” (M. Herrera Rebollo, personal communication, 21 July 2014). Also asked ARENA founding member Gloria Salguero Gross directly about if things had changed:

Megan: And do you think the country has been able to overcome the situations that caused the Armed Conflict?

Gloria: Well, look, the reality is this: and I feel very very sad, because I did work for my country, since the first day I entered politics I have worked for my country in a transparent, adequate, and correct manner. But… we are worse off than in the ‘70s right now. It saddens me.

Megan: In what terms?

Gloria: I tell you, corruption everywhere. The former president… You know, the whole world knows he had a mistress (G. Salguero Gross, personal communication, 29 July 2014).

Placing the blame for much of the corruption on the FMLN and former President Funes in particular, emphasizing his alleged affair as evidence to the fact, Ms. Salguero Gross laments how what she worked for during her time in the Legislative Assembly has been dismantled by the FMLN government.

It is not for me to come down on any side of whether or not the situation in El Salvador is better or worse in the postwar years, nor the causes of those conclusions (be it the fault of ARENA, the fault of the FMLN, the fault of the United States, etc.). What is worth noting is that the perspectives on the postwar are viewed along ideological and party lines. Additionally, El Salvador is a country that still suffers from gross inequality and violence. El Salvador is trying to improve its infrastructure in an attempt to have a

---

\[\text{ii} \] Relating to inequality, from 1991-2009, the highest-earning 20% of the population have consistently held approximately 50% of the country’s income, while the lowest-earning 20% had consistently less than 10% of the country’s income (Bell, 2013). In March 2015 the country averaged 14 homicides a day (Valencia, 2015).
tangible effect on the population. A new highway was built and named after Monseñor Romero, along with the airport, which changed its name in his honor. Romero himself commented on changes such as these, and how they affect the inequalities. Whether or not progress has been made and how, that belongs to each group’s collective memory.

Yet Monseñor Romero may provide some insight:

Wealth is necessary for people to progress, we aren’t going to deny it. But a progress like ours, with the exploitation of so many who will never enjoy the progress of our society, is not evangelical poverty. What good are beautiful highways and airports, beautiful buildings full of spacious apartments, if they are only put together with the blood of the poor, who are not going to enjoy them? (Romero, 1979).

Meister (2011) argues that the reason Human Rights Discourse focuses on the bodies of the victim and the victimizer, instead of on the systems and structures that caused the atrocities, is that it benefits the bystanders. Those who gained from El Salvador’s Civil War, particularly those who gained from the shift to the neoliberal economy advocated by a savior United States, are allowed to be “reborn” in the reconciled, postwar society, and no longer have to worry about the evil as it is firmly in the past (Meister). Theidon (2013) emphasizes that sometimes “beneficiaries may have no blood on their hands or burden on their hearts (p. 365). Rosa Anaya was quick to criticize the Salvadoran bystanders during the Armed Conflict:

I think that we are denying ourselves of having participated in the process by action or omission… It can be… “It’s that I didn’t get involved in anything.” Ok, but not involving yourself in anything… or… you’re seeing them commit a massacre and better yet, “I didn’t involve myself in anything,” you are committing the same act just from another point of view. To go around saying “don’t do anything” is to continue the injustice. And you think that you aren’t involved, right? (R. Anaya, personal communication, 8 July 2014).
Rosa doesn’t focus on the beneficiaries, but simply the bystanders who, by not getting involved, allowed the atrocities to happen. Rosa aligns with Goldhagen (1996) and rejects that the bystanders have no blood on their hands, because for her they embody a form of savage.

It is also interesting to look at the economic elite, who could be considered the proto-typical beneficiaries. Due to El Salvador’s small size and population, the closer one looks at the economic elite, the more convoluted it seems to become. Human Rights Attorney Almudena Bernabeu explains:

It’s complicated that they [the high-ranking military officers] have benefitted a lot from the power that their belonging to the Armed Forces gave them to be able to gain economic merit. Not the majority, but there’s a small group of super millionaire military officers married to women of the oligarchy. For example, General Eugenio Vides Casanova kk… is Cristiani’s brother in law (A. Bernabeu, personal communication, 20 October, 2014).25

The economic elite, the beneficiaries, is tied to the military. It is specifically tied to some of those who were most involved in the atrocities of the Civil War. The connection between the oligarchy and the savage dates back to the 1880s when the government created rural police forces to protect the private property of the oligarchy (Browning, 1971). Throughout the 20th century, the oligarchy consistently utilized various military and police forces to protect their interests, including the National Guard, ORDEN, and other security forces, with the 1932 Matanza serving as a focal point of the extremes the

kk General Vides Casanova is former Salvadoran Minister of Defense, and is named in the Truth Commission Report for having knowledge of, and covering up, the murder of the 4 American Churchwomen in 1980. After the war he moved to the United States. In April 2015 he was deported from the US back to El Salvador, for the torture of Salvadoran citizens, the killing of the Churchwomen, and the 1981 killings of two Americans and a Salvadoran land reformer (Center for Justice and Accountability, 2015)
military government went to in order to protect the oligarchy’s control over the country and the economy. Bernabeu emphasizes that these links did not disappear, but have only become more nuanced, as now many of the connections involve intermarriage between the economic elite and the military. This simply begs the question raised by Rosa: are these civilian beneficiaries simply bystanders, or are they savage as well? At least through these connections, there are elements of the savage in the “saved” postwar democracy.

Also evident in the “saved” postwar democracy is extreme polarization and division that emanates from the Civil War, and I argue, is mostly based on the division over the human rights violations that were committed during the war. The political polarization is based on the two parties that were born out of the Civil War. The 2014 presidential elections provide the most recent example of that division. Yet the divisions go beyond politics and are present in many aspects of Salvadoran life. Lawyer at Pro-Búsqueda, Roberto Rugamas, illuminates the polarization:

The general situation in the country is a polarized one. Because there still exist positions that mutually dismiss, reject, repel, and attack each other. So I don’t see the ability to build a nation plan that involves all the individuals to be in dialogue… And this polarization isn’t only expressed in the political ideology sense where it is most visible. But it is also evident in such banal situations as soccer. Here everything has two faces. You’re for Barca or you’re for Madrid… Or you’re Catholic or you’re Evangelical. Or you’re MS or you’re 18th Street… So I think that we haven’t learned how to appreciate ourselves as people and to validate the differences. So it’s difficult for the situation in the country to progress while the eternal tension between opposites remains (Roberto Rugamas, personal communication, 7 July 2014).26

General Vargas explains why, for him, the country is so polarized:

Megan: Do you see society and politics still very polarized?
General Vargas: Well yes, undeniably so... There are two forces that don’t allow clear understanding, not within the forces nor between the forces. For what reason? Because they are two irreconcilable projects. They are two different visions. They [the FMLN] have... a vision... of government, as a democratic centralism. They have a vision of the economy, which is a centralist vision, more than private initiative. They have a vision of the dynamic in which class struggle is still present. It has a social control of the state, whose premise comes from Soviet socialism... So practically with this legacy, now we’re going to have to keep fighting all the time for the power of one system or the other (E. Vargas, personal communication, 3 July 2014).  

For General Vargas, the polarization, at least politically, will never stop because of the ideological differences, and there will always be two different groups who each have their own systems and visions of government. Youth activist Oscar Aleman is more critical of this ideological view:

I think that society is polarized because the people who are in power have manipulated it to how it is now... Polarization comes from there [the Armed Conflict], but mostly with the older people. Because I think that the youth are now more easily leaving behind what the party politicians tell them, the sweetness in their ear. So I think it also influences how they maneuver where the minds of the youth should be (O. Alemán, personal communication, 7 July 2014).  

Oscar sees the youth as a hope of departing from this polarization. Yet he also blames the older generation for indoctrinating the younger generations in their firm ideological views that originate from the Civil War.

The polarization in Salvadoran politics and society originates from the war, and the war’s different collective memories. Political parties utilize wartime language during campaigns to reconstruct the image of the wartime past to serve the needs of the political present (Halbwachs, 1992). As Halbwachs (1992) theorized, collective memories involve past events that form our identities. Therefore, it is natural for the Salvadoran Civil War to be the major event of the recent past, which has shaped the political and
societal dimensions of postwar El Salvador. Additionally, the theory of postmemory explains this continued polarization. The descendants take on the traumatic memory as their own, which continues the divisions in the new generations (Hirsch, 2008). Or, as Oscar explained, sometimes those memories are pushed upon the youth to continue the ideological divisions. The current polarization comes from the war, and from these divided collective memories, has contributed to preventing reconciliation.

Was El Salvador saved from its decade-long Armed Conflict, plagued by human rights violations and tens of thousands of civilian deaths? The UN and the US consider the Salvadoran peace process a success story: two ideologically opposed forces came together to end the fighting. While claiming reconciliation, the Peace Accords and actions in the immediate postwar years (particularly the Amnesty Law) put in place a framework that maintained the wartime societal and political polarization. The question remains, has there been reconciliation?

From a political standpoint, there has been at least some hope that reconciliation will be able to happen. FPL leader, signer of the Peace Accords, and current President of El Salvador, Salvador Sánchez Cerén, writes in his autobiography:

I said it in 2005 and I still maintain it today in the same terms. As the Peace Accords point out, reconciliation is a decisive value for the present and future of a nation and it will be very difficult to have reconciliation if

---

11 The interviews quoted in this part of the chapter are mostly from interviewees who identify politically center to left. The topic of reconciliation was not discussed as much in my interviews with persons from the right. Part of the reason for this is that I asked very open-ended questions and it did not come up. Those from the left were more open in the fact that they don’t feel reconciled. This goes into the debates of transitional justice: that while “forgive and forget” is a path to reconciliation, it cannot be forced, and that forgiveness lies in the hands of the victims, who in El Salvador have evidenced their continued fight for recognition on behalf of the state, and some form of justice and reparation.
those who committed grave damages to society are not brought to justice. I have confidence that that moment will arrive (Sánchez Cerán, 2008, p. 131). ⁲⁹

Though interestingly, and perhaps contradictory for some, Sánchez Cerén equates reconciliation with justice for the atrocities committed during the Armed Conflict. Academic Rafael Molina disagrees with Sánchez Cerén’s official position on reconciliation:

Right now they’re building a monument to reconciliation with some keys, with nonsense. The initiative came from the Ministry of Public Works, to build a monument to reconciliation. Right, but what reconciliation? Who has reconciled? ... What are they referring to with reconciliation? Because reconciliation for the left, I am sure, is forgive and forget. It’s forgive and forget because, if you notice, also in a speech of forgiveness from Sánchez Cerén, he beings to say, “well, forgive me for all the deaths, but they were necessary.” And he says it (R. Molina, personal communication, 16 July 2014). ³⁰

Even though the left-wing government is building a national monument to reconciliation, Molina believes that it is simply another expression of a false or imposed reconciliation.

He rejects Sánchez Cerén’s statement on reconciliation through justice as he is convinced that the FMLN still adheres to the policy of forgive and forget.

Others are similarly convinced that there has been no reconciliation, particularly on behalf of the victims. Lawyer for the El Mozote case, Wilfredo Medrano, explains his indignation,

And what reconciliation? Here the only thing that has reconciled… is the ex-combatants of the Armed Forces and the FMLN who go out to protest together… They could be the only ones who are reconciled… And the commanders are happy in the Legislative Assembly… In order for there to be a true reconciliation here there needs to be reparations, access to justice, comprehensive, moral reparations, compensation… why were they killed? We need to know where the over 10 thousand disappeared are (W. Medrano, personal communication, 8 July 2014). ³¹
Similarly to Sánchez Cerén’s official stance, Medrano argues that reconciliation must come through justice. Human rights attorney Almudena Bernabeu examines the victims’ lack of reconciliation:

The topic of reconciliation is…very interesting to analyze from the point of view of how do you aspire to reconcile if there is absolute exclusion of the victims at every opportunity to dialogue? They weren’t part of it… Even if you look at comparable experiences, in Guatemala… there always were victims’ tables and things like that… But in El Salvador, nothing! Nothing! … That is, in the peace process should have been seated… Ignacio Ellacuría, Segundo Montes, and Nacho Martín-Baró, even though they weren’t victims in the strictest sense… they could have talked for those who didn’t have a voice. Furthermore, it’s a failed peace process… And it’s a fraud… that is it’s maintained but it’s not. There’s no peace, there no peace whatsoever in El Salvador (A. Bernabeu, personal communication, 20 October, 2014).32

Bernabeu’s words are chilling, yet they illuminate the polarized and violent state in which El Salvador continues to live. In her opinion the peace process has failed in the postwar years. The conflict has taken on different dimensions- a political battle in the Legislative Assembly and continued wartime language in campaigns. The violence is no longer officially sanctioned, and society has become the victim of gangs and a climate of criminal violence. The savior figures of the UN and the US attempted to save the savages from committing further atrocities. Yet Bernabeu concludes that they haven’t been saved, as there continues to be no peace in El Salvador.

Conclusion

The memories of the war, and particularly of the human rights violations, continue to contribute to a polarized, unreconciled El Salvador. The savior attempted to put the savage and the victim into closed categories and to reconcile them through the

---

32 Ellacuría, Montes, and Martín-Baró were 3 of the Jesuits killed in 1989.
peace process. Yet, reconciliation is a very local process, and the roots and consequences of the atrocities were never dealt with on a national or local level. Therefore, the polarization along the lines of victim and victimizer, or those who ally with each group’s collective memories, continues to permeate the country and prevent reconciliation.
Conclusion

*Is it possible that the antonym of “forgetting” is not “remembering,” but justice?*

- Yosef Yerushalmi

Many say that El Salvador’s history is one of never-ending bloodshed and repression. Some view it as simply a culture of violence. Others choose to overlook some of the events in order to look at the successes and ways of moving forward as a country. While this study does not attempt to celebrate or reject these viewpoints, it is important to look at the different perspectives. The country is full of binaries: FMLN or ARENA, rich or poor, Real Madrid or Barça, MS-13 or 18th Street, victim or victimizer. Yet as this study has shown, within polarized views are myriad shades of gray. There are no clear-cut savages, victims, nor saviors. However what has continued to divide El Salvador are the polarizing collective memories of its own history. Much of this can be attributed to how certain turning point moments were handled both in the moment, and remembered or forgotten afterwards. Different groups have different collective memories of the events, and how those groups frame the memories continues to frame the current perspectives and realities. The human rights violations of the Armed Conflict, and the differing collective memories of them, are particularly the basis for division today.

Why do these collective memories need to be in a polarized situation? It is natural for different groups to have different, even divisive, memories of particularly traumatic events, yet why must they, in a sense, continue the conflict? In El Salvador, these memories appear to be competing in a zero-sum game, where only one memory can come out as that which all remember, as a part of the national identity. Michael Rothberg
(2009) offers a different argument of how memory should be viewed: that memory should be considered multidirectional, “as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing” (p. 3). Rothberg (2009) argues that the different historical memories should interact with each other, particularly in the public sphere, so that there is no more need for a constant struggle for different people’s and group’s identities. Rothberg’s theory provides insight to the Salvadoran situation. By sharing and accepting the different memories, instead of their competition, allows for the different experiences and histories to be shared and contribute more to the collective identity of Salvadorans. As Rosa Anaya stated in her interview, channeling Payne (2008), she doesn’t know the other side’s viewpoint because it hasn’t been told, but she wants to know and understand. While it is not necessarily a solution, multidirectional memory provides a different way of looking at the divisive memories so that, while they have the potential to polarize, through their interaction, they can contribute to shape the present and future in a dialogical manner.

Yet in 2014, these memories remained as opposed as ever. In the year I spent doing this research, it seemed like every week there was a new story about the human rights violations from the war, and the effects and divisions surfacing in the present. This consistent postwar turmoil has been focused over the traditional transitional justice dichotomy: amnesty or justice. As Kathryn Sikkink (2011) has emphasized in her work on what she terms the “justice cascade,” she reminds us, “transitional justice continues to be pursued for many years after the transition itself” (p. 142). This is no truer than in Central America and El Salvador in particular. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled in the El Mozote case that El Salvador’s Amnesty Law is incompatible with
the American Convention of Human Rights, and therefore it should be struck down. The Court also did this with the Peruvian Amnesty Law, and in 2009 Peru utilized the Court’s judgment, tried, and convicted former authoritarian ruler Alberto Fujimori of human rights abuses. Guatemala didn’t wait for a ruling from the Court, and in 2013 convicted former military dictator Efraín Rios Montt of genocide. Based on the Court’s ruling, El Salvador’s Constitutional Court is reviewing the legal status of the Amnesty Law. As Sikkink (2011) reminds us, “political realities are not permanent nor inevitable, but are constantly being reaffirmed or reconstructed through political discourse and activity” (p. 161). As the collective memories of these events continue to be influenced by the present, so do the effects of the events.

The apparently arbitrary closure of Tutela Legal and the attack on Pro-Búsqueda, where many of its files were burned, are simply two instances of how El Salvador’s violent, traumatic past is not lost in oblivion. The “justice cascade” may be arriving at El Salvador’s door. Nonetheless, it will be up to Salvadorans to choose how they handle the outcome: continue the divide or allow for the interaction of different memories in the outcome’s effects on the (still new) democratic society.

\[\text{nn} \text{ However the status of Rios Montt’s conviction has been stalled since the ruling on technical grounds.}\]
APPENDIX A

PERSONS INTERVIEWED FOR THIS STUDY

Damián Alegría
Diputado of FMLN party, Legislative Assembly
Male, 56 years old, middle-Class, left-wing

In the late 1970s, Alegría became involved in the social movements against the dictatorship. In 1978 he joined the Communist Party of El Salvador, in 1979 he took up arms. Alegría was mostly active in the Guazapa zone for the 12 years of war. After the demobilization, he and his wife started their own business, a small hotel in San Salvador. In 2009 he was elected to the Legislative Assembly representing the FMLN.

Oscar Alemán
National leader, Red Activista de El Salvador
Male, 22 years old, poor, left-wing

Alemán lives in the poor, marginalized suburb Soyapango, a city synonymous with violence. His father was active in the Salvadoran army during the war. Oscar was born in 1992, the year of the signing of the Peace Accords. He has become active in the youth organization Red Activista de El Salvador (El Salvador Activist Network), where he leads their work in political participation and street activism related to topics affecting Salvadoran youth.

Rosa Anaya
Project Coordinator, Catholic Relief Services
Female, 38 years old, working class, left-wing

Rosa comes from a unique family. Her parents met at the National University in 1975, and both participated in the July 30th protest, her mother (Mirna Perla) narrowly escaping with her life. Her father, Herbert Anaya Sanabria, became the president of the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador, an NGO. He was arrested in 1986, where he was tortured. He was released 9 months later. Yet in 1987 he was assassinated in front of his home when Rosa was 10 years old. In reaction to his assassination, the FMLN suspended peace negotiations. Rosa and her family were exiled in the United States for a few years after his death. After the Peace Accords Rosa’s mother became a more vocal force against the repression, and was elected magistrate of the Supreme Court of El Salvador in 2003 (the second woman in El Salvador to ever be on the Court). In her own work, Rosa has been involved in community development and nonviolence advocacy. She currently works for Catholic Relief Services, doing community outreach and working with active gang members to improve their communities and find more peaceful solutions.
Almudena Bernabeu  
Transitional Justice Program Director, Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA)  
Female, 42 years old, upper-class (lives in United States, Spanish national)  

An attorney originally from Spain, Almudena has been working with the CJA since 2003. She has been involved in many high-profile human rights case from the Americas. She is CJA’s lead attorney for the Salvadorean Jesuits Case in Spain. She was involved in the Rios Montt trial in Guatemala in 2013. Almudena is currently also involved in the Victor Jara case in US court, as his alleged assassin resides in Florida.

Juan José Dalton  
Director, ContraPunto  
Male, 58 years old, upper-middle class/professional, left-wing

Juan José is the son of renowned Salvadoran writer and poet Roque Dalton, who was a guerrilla fighter, killed by the ERP in 1975. Juan José grew up in Cuba, but returned to El Salvador and joined the FPL in 1979. During the war he was injured, and returned to Cuba where he remained active as a journalist and continued working with the FPL from abroad. After the Peace Accords he came back to El Salvador and has worked as a reporter. He is currently the Director of the small, digital newspaper ContraPunto.

Gisela De León  
Former Senior Attorney, Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL)  
Female, 37 years old, upper-middle class (lived in United States, Panamanian national).  
Political center

Ms. De León, a Panamanian citizen, has been a human rights attorney for over 17 years. She began her career in Panama, she worked on the Panamanian Truth Commission from 2001-2003, and got her masters in human rights at the University of Notre Dame in 2003. From 2003 to 2014 she worked as an attorney at the CEJIL, litigating human rights cases from throughout the Americas. In particular, she was the lead attorney for cases from El Salvador for 10 years, and was involved in cases brought before the Inter-American Commission and Court of Human Rights, including: the Case of Serrano Cruz Sisters, Case of Contreras et al, Case of Monseñor Romero, the Jesuits case, and the Case of El Mozote and Nearby Places. She is currently a consultant with the Panamanian Government.

Blanca García  
Member, Comité de Madres Monseñor Romero (Co-Madres)  
Female, 44 years old, lower class, left-wing

In 1975, Blanca’s uncle and two of her cousins were disappeared during the July 30th protest at the National University. From this date, her mother became extremely active in the new organization Co-Madres. The organization began in 1975 when the disappearances and political assassinations began en masse, as it was the mothers, wives,
grandmothers, sisters, etc. who began looking for their loved ones. As Blanca’s mother was so active in the organization, she and her sister grew up in Co-Madres, and were a part of the protests throughout the Armed Conflict. Also because of their activity against the repression, her four older brothers were exiled from the country. In 1984 a death squad came to their house, where Blanca, her mother and sister were barely able to escape. Both Blanca’s mother and sister have passed away, but she remains very active with Co-Madres.

**Nelson Guardado**
Diputado of GANA party, Legislative Assembly  
Male, 55 years old, upper-middle class, right-wing

Hailing from the northern department of Chalatenango, Guardado was originally elected to the Legislative Assembly as a member of the ARENA party. In 2010 the GANA (Gran Alianza por la Unidad Nacional) party was established as a conservative, right-wing party, and 12 ARENA diputados defected to the GANA party. Guardado was one of them. He is currently the Coordinator of the GANA faction in the Legislative Assembly, and President of GANA, Chalatenango.

**Carlos Henríquez Consalvi, “Santiago”**
Director, Museum of the Word and Image (MUPI)  
Male, 67 years old, middle class, left wing

Born in Venezuela, in 1970s Santiago travelled to Nicaragua to join the fight against the Somoza dictatorship. In December 1980 he went to El Salvador with the intent to found a guerrilla radio station for the newly formed FMLN. This radio station, *Radio Venceremos*, would broadcast throughout the war from the Morazán mountains. After the Peace Accords he stayed in El Salvador, and in 1996 he founded the Museum of the Word and Image (MUPI) to help conserve cultural and historical memory, particularly that of the war. He remains the director of the museum and continues to be active in the promotion of human rights and social justice.

**Maritza Herrera Rebollo**
Daughter of Dr. Carlos Herrera Rebollo, assassinated by FPL in 1979  
Female, 52 years old, upper-middle class, right-wing.

Maritza was born into an upper-middle class family in 1962. Her father, Carlos Herrera Rebollo, was active in the Christian Democratic Party (PDC) throughout the 1970s. He served as mayor of San Salvador from 1970-972. In 1977 General Romero asked him to be a part of his government, and Dr. Herrera Rebollo became Minister of Education under the military president. In May 1979 he was assassinated by the FPL. In the 1980s Maritza joined the ARENA party, and launched an unsuccessful campaign for a seat in the Legislative Assembly in 2011. In the run-up to the 2014 presidential elections, Maritza created a “spot” (akin to an attack ad) against Salvador Sánchez Cerén, claiming that he was responsible for the death of her father. The “spot” was pulled from airwaves
and Maritza was fined by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal for her “illegal campaign” against Sánchez Cerén (as the ad was not sanctioned by any party and it was considered offensive towards the candidate).

**Eliberto Juárez**  
Evangelical Activist, Casa Semillas  
Male, 39 years old, lower-class, center-left wing

Eliberto grew up in the western part of El Salvador, and grew up during the war. For him, what affected him most was the Armed Forces forced recruitment of boys as young as 12 years old. He remembers hiding with his friends from the army recruiters towards the end of the war. He currently works for Casa Semillas, an organization that is part of the Reform Christian Church’s World Renew program, focusing on training people to be socially conscious leaders in their communities.

**Bethany Loberg**  
Former Human Rights Advocacy Coordinator, SHARE Foundation  
Female, 28 years old, middle class (United States national, lives in El Salvador).

Bethany, originally from the United States, has been active in El Salvador since 2007 when she first came as a short-term volunteer. She has been living full-time in the country since 2010, and at the time of this interview, was finishing her time at the SHARE Foundation, working with Salvadoran organizations related to human rights, as well as North American groups who came to El Salvador to learn about the country. She currently works for the Salvadoran NGO FESPAD (*Fundación de Estudios para la Aplicación del Derecho*).

**Wilfredo Medrano**  
Attorney, Tutela Legal Dra. María Julia Hernandez  
Male, in his 50s, middle class, left-wing.

Wilfredo as an adolescent became politically conscious and active during the 1980s. He is originally from the northern department of Chalatenango where the war was very present. He came to study at the National University in 1984 and joined the social movement. For this he was captured and tortured, and fortunately released. In 1989 he began working with *Tutela Legal del Arzobispado*. He has been the lead lawyer from Tutela Legal on the Monseñor Romero case, as well as the El Mozote case, and represented the victims before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (along with Gisela de Leon from CEJIL). In 2013 Wilfredo, along with all the other employees, were arbitrarily fired from *Tutela Legal*. With the assistance and solidarity of other Salvadoran and international NGOs, the majority of the former employees have been able to continue their work, and founded the new NGO *Tutela Legal Dra. María Julia Hernández*. 
Francisco Mena Duarte  
Executive Director, CRISPAZ  
Male, 40 years old, upper-middle class, left-wing

Francisco was 7 when the war began in 1980. His father’s history has been very influential on his life and perspectives. His father was an officer in the Salvadoran army and trained at the School of the Americas. In 1972 he was involved in the electoral fraud. In 1979 he was involved in the young officers’ coup, ousting General Romero. His father was also friends with the Jesuit priests at the University of Central America (UCA), and from them began learning other realities in the country. In 1980, he was ordered to “clear” (essentially, massacre) the town of El Rosario to rid it of guerrillas. He refused this order. After this, his dad decided to leave the army and defect to the guerrillas, joining the ERP. His father’s story has very much influenced Francisco, as the family was forced into exile until the end of the war. He also grew up with the influence of the Jesuits and was very affected by their assassination. He is currently the executive director of CRISPAZ, an organization that works to bring solidarity, understanding, and education between North Americans and Salvadorans.

Salvador Eduardo Menéndez Leal  
Director of the Human Rights Masters Degree, University of El Salvador  
Full Member, Governmental Ethics Tribunal  
Male, 57 years old, middle-class, political center

Mr. Menéndez Leal has worked in a variety of legal and human rights organizations throughout his career. He was one of the founders of the Office of Human Rights after the Peace Accords, and boasts that he was the person who helped the first person who ever came to the office in 1992. He served most recently as the Deputy Human Rights Ombudsman, as well as Human Rights Consultant for the United Nations’ High Commissioner on Human Rights. He currently is a member of the Governmental Ethics Tribunal, an institution dedicated to transparency and fighting governmental corruption, as well as being the director of the Masters Degree in Human Rights at the National University.

Rafael Molina  
Doctoral Candidate in Political Science  
Consulting Attorney  
Male, 33 years old, middle-class, political center

Rafael is a Doctoral Candidate at the University of Salamanca (Spain). His research is focused on authoritarian legacies. He has his bachelors degree in political science from the UCA. He currently teaches for the Masters in Human Rights and Peace Education program at the University of El Salvador.
David Morales
Human Rights Ombudsman
Male, 47 years old, middle-class, center-left-wing

Morales began his career in human rights at *Tutela Legal del Arzobispado* in 1990. He would work for the Office of Human Rights for 10 years before he returned to *Tutela Legal* in 2005. At *Tutela Legal* he litigated both the El Mozote and Monseñor Romero cases before the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. In 2007 he left to work at FESPAD, until 2009 when he was asked to join the Funes’ government working as the Human Rights Director at the Ministry of Foreign Relations. In this capacity he represented the Salvadoran government at the hearing of the El Mozote case before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, where the state accepted its responsibility in the massacre. In 2013 he was elected Human Rights Ombudsman, the highest official on human rights in the country.

Angélica Rivas Monge
Attorney, Colectiva Feminista para el Desarrollo Local
Female, 31 years old, middle-class, left-wing

Angelica hails from Santa Ana, in the western part of El Salvador. She was born in 1983 and grew up during the Armed Conflict. Yet, Santa Ana was one of the few areas in El Salvador that did not experience much of the effects of the war. She remembers the Peace Accords as a hopeful moment. Angelica became a lawyer and now works with women’s legal issues and advocacy, particularly in the western part of the country.

Héctor Rosemberg Aparicio
Psychologist, Comisión Nacional de Búsqueda de Niñas y Niños Desaparecidos durante el Conflicto Armado Interno (CNB)
Male, 42 years old, Middle/upper-middle class, left-wing

Originally from San Salvador, Hector became aware of the politically-charged situation of the late 1970s at an early age on a personal level when his older brother was disappeared. His adolescence, having his most transformative years during the war, left its impact on him. He studied psychology, and worked with the Jesuit organization *Fe y Alegría*, as both a psychologist, and eventually director of one its educational centers for children and youth in the marginalized community of Zacamil (an urban suburb of San Salvador). In 2010 he joined the newly created National Search Committee for Children Disappeared During the Armed Conflict (CNB), and is the only psychologist on staff for the families searching for their disappeared loved ones, and for the families that are reunited.

Roberto Rugamas
Attorney, Asociación Pro-Búsqueda de Niñas y Niños Desaparecidos
Male, 27 years old, working class, left-wing
Rugamas was born in 1987 towards the end of the war in the San Salvador suburb of Quetzaltepeque. His parents were active in labor unions during and after the Armed Conflict. His mother, in particular, accompanied the demobilization of the FMLN in Guazapa, Chalatenango, and el Paisnal. Rugamas is currently a lawyer at the Asociación Pro-Búsqueda, and is involved in the litigation of cases of children disappeared during the Armed Conflict, most recently, the Case of Rochac Hernandez v. El Salvador at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2014.

**Gloria Salguero Gross**  
Founder of ARENA party  
Female, 73 years old, upper-class, right-wing

Along with Major Roberto D’Aubleisson, Salguero Gross helped found the ARENA political party in 1981. Elected to the Legislative Assembly as a Diputada in 1982. She served as the President of the Legislative Assembly from 1994-1997. She was also President of the ARENA party from 1995-1997. In 2010 she received the country’s highest award, “Hija Meritísima de El Salvador” in recognition for her extensive political career. Salguero Gross continues to be active in the ARENA party, and is currently the President of the Association of Female Salvadoran Parliamentarians and Former Parliamentarians (ASPARLEXSAL).

**Mario Valiente**  
Diputado ARENA party, Legislative Assembly  
Male, 72 years old, upper-class, right-wing

Valiente joined the ARENA party shortly after its founding in 1981. He was elected to the Legislative Assembly as a diputado for ARENA in 1991. Valiente has served in the Legislative Assembly since then, yet lost his seat in the 2015 legislative elections.

**Ricardo Vaquerano**  
Journalist and Editor, El Faro  
Male, 50 years old, middle class, political center

Vaquerano began his career as a journalist in 1993 at La Prensa Gráfica, one of the main newspapers in El Salvador. From 1998-2007 he was the editor of two sections of the newspaper, one entitled “Enfoques” (focused on investigative journalism), and the other national politics section. In 2008 he joined the digital newspaper El Faro where he is currently Editor. El Faro focuses on independent investigative journalism, particularly focused on justice, anti-corruption, and anti-impunity for the betterment of Salvadoran society.

**Mauricio Ernesto Vargas**  
Retired General, Salvadoran Armed Forces  
Male, 69 years old, upper-class, right-wing
General Vargas entered the Military School in 1963. He participated in the “Soccer War” with Honduras in 1969. During the Armed Conflict he was the Commander of the Atonal Battalion (one of the elite immediate reaction battalions), and became the Commander of the Eastern Zone. He represented the Armed Forces during the peace negotiations, and signed the Peace Accords in 1992. Now retired, he officially joined the ARENA party in 2014 (after our interview) and successfully ran for a seat in the Legislative Assembly. His three-year term as diputado begins in 2015.
APPENDIX B

ORIGINAL SPANISH FROM INTERVIEWS UTILIZED IN THIS STUDY

Introduction

1 Carlos Dada: Aun no sabemos quién lo hizo pero no es difícil adivinarlo: los crueles, los perversos, los torturadores, los asesinos, los secuestradores de niños. Los que mantienen escondidos los cadáveres para que un pueblo oficialmente amnésico les llame héroes. Los que antes vivían de provocar miedo. Hoy son ellos los que tienen miedo. Miedo a que sepamos lo que hicieron. A que el daño a su lugar en la historia sea irreparable. A que la historia oficial cambie. Ellos fueron.

2 Original Spanish: “las dos tradiciones tiene características de una historia oficial, ya que son hegemónicas, en el sentido de que ofrecen explicaciones ampliamente aceptadas (y poco cuestionadas) para audiencias significativas” (Sprenkels, 2011, p. 269).

Chapter 1 Historical Overview

1 Todos nacimos medio muertos en 1932/ sobrevivimos pero medio vivos/ cada uno con una cuenta de treinta mil muertos enteros.

2 … el guanaco tiene predilección por el comunismo, desde desde mil novecientos treinta y dos… el treinta y dos, los comunistas ni siquiera habían triunfado y ya estaban violando a la gente, a los ricos, pues el odio de este pueblo es con los ricos; nacimos con la envidia adentro… Y nosotros estamos precisamente para evitar las envidias, exterminarla a punta de bala, decisión y firmeza. Estamos preparándonos más y más porque el comunismo ya viene. Nuestros profesores extranjeros no nos dejan solos ni un minuto. Dicen que están dispuestos a morir con nosotros por la libertad y la democracia… El profesor nos pone a gritar: “¿Quién es el peor enemigo de la democracia?” Y respondemos todos: “El pueblo.”

3 Juan José Dalton: “…mi padre…lejos de haber tenido una actitud de cooperación con la CIA o con los que él consideraba sus enemigos, tuvo una actitud valiente y patriótica desde nuestro punto de vista.”

4 Mirna Perla: “Mire, … nosotros no llevamos armas, yo tenía dos piedras, nadie estaba armado. No nos imaginamos que nos esperarían con tanquetas y fusiles G-3; esta vez el ejército, la Fuerza Armada, había planificado la represión y participaban con sus efectivos y armamento de combate para una guerra regular… Quiero insistir que la decisión de masacramos fue del Presidente de la República Coronel Arturo Armando Molina, con la aprobación de la comparsa de Ministros, hablaban de un complot comunista.”
Blanca García: “A tal punto que 1975… sucedió pues una masacre bastante cruel contra los estudiantes de la Universidad Nacional. Y este es prácticamente el origen del Comité de Madres… el Comité de Madres se llama Comité de Madres y Familiares de Detenidos y Desaparecidos y Asesinados Políticos de El Salvador Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero. Todas esas características a través de los años de guerra y de conflicto, pues fueron la bandera de lucha del Comité de Madres… Agarraban a la gente civil solamente por sospechar que en ese momento eran subversivos. Y subversivos le decían a la persona que estaba en contra el gobierno, que querían reformas, querían cambios en la sociedad salvadoreña… a las personas indiscriminadamente sin ninguna razón.”

Rufina Amaya: Del helicóptero se apearon un montón de soldados y entraron donde estábamos nosotros. Traían unos cuchillos de dos filos, y nos señalaban con los fusiles. Entonces encerraron en la ermita a los hombres… Como la ermita estaba enfrente, a través de la ventana veíamos lo que estaban haciendo con los hombres. Ya eran las diez de la mañana. Los tenían maniatados y vendados y se paraban sobre ellos; a algunos ya los habían matado. A esos los descabezaban y los tiraban al convento. A las doce del mediodía, terminaron de matar a todos los hombres y fueron a sacar a las muchachas para llevárselas a los cerros… A las cinco de la tarde me sacaron a mí junto a un grupo de 22 mujeres. Yo me quedé la última en la fila… Cuando llegamos a la casa de Israel Márquez, pude ver la montaña de muertos que estaban ametrallando. Las demás mujeres se agarraban unas a otras para gritar y llorar. Yo me arrodillé acordándome de mis cuatro niños. En ese momento dí media vuelta, me tiré y me metí detrás de un palito de manzana… Los soldados terminaron de matar a ese grupo de mujeres sin darse cuenta de que yo me había escondido y se fueron a traer otro grupo. Hacia las siete de la noche acabaron de matar a las mujeres. Dijeron “ya terminamos” y se sentaron en la calle casi a mis pies. “Ya terminamos con los viejos y las viejas, ahora sólo hay esa gran cantidad de niños que han quedado encerrados”… Sólo se oía gritar a los niños que estaban matando.

Rufina Amaya: Tenemos que terminar con todos, vos sabés eso. Esa es la orden del coronel. Este es un operativo de tierra arrasada y tenemos que matar a los niños también o nos pedirán cuentas a nosotros… Eso es lo que tenemos que hacer.

Gloria Salguero Gross: “Había realmente, bueno estaban discutiendo aquí los izquierdistas, Marxistas, Leninistas… entonces hubo la necesidad de fundar un partido con fuerza para contrarrestar todo ese, esa situación. Entonces fundamos Alianza Republicana Nacionalista y el líder nuestro el que encabezó todo fue Roberto D’Aubuisson.”

Rosa Anaya: “Y pues mi papá fue la, una figura pública en ese… ese fue su rol porque pues… y incluso él mismo decía, “para qué voy a quemar a otra persona? Yo me voy a ir y el puesto va a quedar vacante. Alguien más se va a poner en peligro. Y a mí, ya me fregaron, ya me torturaron, ya pasé…” Y bueno, su testimonio lo dice, vea, cuando, una de las frases que se hizo famosa después de “la agonía de no trabajar por la justicia es más fuerte que la posibilidad cierta de mi muerte. Este último es sólo un instante y lo otro constituye la totalidad de mi vida.” Entonces solo eso te da una idea, digamos, de la
intensidad del momento. O sea, al final esa intensidad te da la historia, no necesariamente la persona. Sino lo que está dispuesta a hacer en su momento.”

10 Lorena Peña: Desde que se firmaron los acuerdos de paz me preparé mentalmente para luchar contra la oligarquía y los sectores de la derecha que intentarían boicotearnos y golpearlos, pero no me había preparado para que dentro de nosotros mismos, dentro del FMLN, surgieran las dudas, los sabotajes, la confusión y la división. Y una grieta apareció en nuestras filas y se convirtió finalmente en un abismo, una minoría quedó de un lado, y por suerte la mayoría logró saltar la grieta y seguir adelante.

Chapter 3 - The Savage

8 Blanca García: A mis hermanos mayores, que eran cuatro, los exiliaron de aquí… porque los acusaron de subversivos, porque ellos colaboraban mucho con la organización de jóvenes de concientización, para que protestaran contra la Fuerza Armada que reclutaba indiscriminadamente a los jóvenes… Entonces esto era totalmente contrario a los derechos de cualquier persona, y más de los jóvenes. Ellos, de bueno, tenían la imposición de ver de un solo punto de vista la realidad que estaba sucediendo en ese momento, que era proteger al gobierno, cuidar el gobierno, que los subversivos no estabilizaron a la sociedad, entonces eso es lo que manejaba el gobierno. Y el contrario era, pues que estaban asesinando, persiguiendo a los jóvenes.

2 Roberto Rugamas: …se funda Pro-Búsqueda y empieza recibir denuncias de todo el país. Y con eso se dan cuenta, o empiezan a tener sospecha que esto se ve tratado de un patrón sistemático al nivel nacional, porque entran casos de San Vicente, Usulután, de Cabañas, y de Morazán principalmente, que eran las zonas en donde había existido operativos de mayor embriagadura durante la Guerra. Entonces coincidía que donde se habían dado operativos militares fuertes de la doctrina militar de tierra arrasada, y de contrainsurgencia, con los batallones de reacción inmediata, entrenados en Estados Unidos, se dan cuenta que donde habían ocurrido esos operativos, es donde mayor número de desapariciones forzadas se reportaban.

3 Héctor Rosemberg: La Fuerza Armada del Ejército, por estar al lado del Estado, por estar al lado de los que tienen, siempre se ha visto como el victimario, y se ha catalogado así…yo creo que toda las posturas que generalicen igual causan daño. Yo conociéndolo ahorita la realidad que vive…los militares… yo, sí son victimarios, pues, porque son los que tenían el control y el poder en ese entonces, y son los causantes del 90% de las violaciones a los derechos humanos, eso no se puede negar, verdad? Pero de ahí hay que todos tengan el mismo nivel de responsabilidad, como que no pues. Yo veo ahorita un ex-miembro del Atlacatl en una zona del país, quizás occidente, y veo como vive en situación de pobreza extrema muy cruel. O es de, y una afectación, no solo de lo que vivió, sino de lo que él hizo, demasiado grande, y que prácticamente ya es nivel de trastorno… pero es una situación muy, muy difícil de salud mental ya de abandono, de abandono por parte de su mismo compañeros, pues. Entonces, uno llega a comprender alguna situación, o sea, quizás este también fue víctima en algún sentido, verdad, pero
como hablando mismo de un militar de alto rango, un coronel, un general, que solo mandó dirigió, y ahora tiene una buena pensión, que está retirado, quizás vive en el exterior, o tiene su buen chance aquí en el país, y entonces, es de, hay una situación muy compleja.

4 Ricardo Vaquerano: Muchos de los protagonistas de estos hechos [violaciones], están vivos y tienen un peso político importante todavía. Algunos son posiblemente no operadores políticos visibles, pero sí son voces que tienen autoridad moral dentro de sus organizaciones… mucha de esta gente sigue tomando decisiones políticas, son poderosas económicamente muchos de ellos… Muchos de ellos posiblemente deben estar en la cárcel. Son políticos activos.

5 Flores Cruz: “una institución tan perfecta que lo único que necesita para funcionar son personas que tengan deseos de trabajar…”

6 Flores Cruz: La historia inicia así: hace muchos años se desarrolló una gran operación en la zona… realizándose la maniobra que se denominó, Yunque y Martillo… Esta historia, merece llamarse errores o experiencias que cuestan caro y se padece en carne propia sus consecuencias en el momento en el que ocurren, pero en el futuro esto se considera “victorias”.

7 “En su historial le atribuyen algunas violaciones a los derechos humanos mientras fue jefe del destacamento militar en Morazán, en 1986.”

8 General Vargas: “La Comisión de la Verdad fue más allá de su mandato… Ellos no tenían que actuar como jueces y mucho menos mencionar nombres. Tenían que contar la verdad de todo lo que nos hicimos, pero no ponerse a investigar, montar un juicio en su cabeza, juzgar y condenar. No era ese su papel.”

9 Maritza Herrera Rebollo: Mire yo soy militarista, usted sabe? … Entonces, yo siempre admiraba a los militares porque mi papá nos llevaba a ver el desfile militar, fíjese… Mi papá tenía muchos amigos militares, y buena gente. Gente decente, verdad?

10 Maritza Herrera Rebollo: “lo único que hizo la Fuerza Armada era defender el país de la guerrilla”

11 Wilfredo Medrano: “…no se puede justificar una matanza, estas violaciones sexuales que cometieron en El Mozote, El Sumpul, La Quesera, que fue un patrón de tierra arrasada que mataron a todo lo que movía. Entonces en un país tan pequeño, tanta brutalidad que se cometió…y eso no es invento porque la gente lo dice. Hay gente que perdió a todos sus seres queridos”

12 Damián Alegría: Sabemos la historia de Roberto D’Aubuisson, que en esos años 70 se apoderó de los archivos de la ANSESAL…y con eso organizó los Escuadrones de la Muerte. Tenían información y ellos mismos hicieron los operativos para matar a un
montón de opositores. Entonces, quién apostó por la guerra? Fue la derecha y fue D’Aubuisson particularmente que le dio a la derecha una expectativa de que con la guerra podían ganar. La frase común que había en esos tiempos era, “si en 1932 tuvimos que matar 30 mil, ahora debemos de matar 300 mil para detener esta ola revolucionaria.” Entonces ellos fueron los que empujaron al país a la guerra.

13 Roberto D’Aubuisson, Hijo: “es un mito… mi padre murió en gracia del señor y aquí su nombre quedó en gracia.”

14 Gloria Salguero Gross: Mira, para mí, Roberto D’Aubuisson era un auténtico nacionalista que amaba el país… Yo nunca lo vi hacer nada incorrecto, verdad? Así es que, yo creo que en ese momento, la verdad es que, había como…del Partido Demócrata de Estados Unidos, que quería favorecer a la izquierda en El Salvador. Y entonces…se inventaron también un montón de cosas en contra de Roberto, y Roberto sufrió mucho, sufrió persecución… Pero al final, él demostró realmente ser un nacionalista. Y de palabra y de carácter.

15 Megan: Viniendo desde afuera, como yo digamos, hay una cierta narrativa que se cuenta sobre como de D’Aubuisson y ARENA, cómo se fundó y todo. Entonces quisiera saber su opinión sobre ese personaje polarizante, no?

Diputado Valiente: Aquí lo tengo (señala el poster de D’Aubuisson en la pared de su oficina)... Para empezar, quiero aclararle que yo a D’Aubuisson, le guardo un respeto muy grande, y le guardo un agradecimiento muy grande… Cuando el conflicto empieza seriamente, en el ’79 con el golpe de estado en octubre de ’79, el país entró en una crisis de liderazgo…no sabíamos por dónde íbamos. El conflicto ya estaba prácticamente en las ciudades. Habían bombas, asesinatos, secuestros. Y claro que el ejército reacciona. Mucha gente que se veía atacada reacciona… Civiles en aquel momento. Surge la figura de D’Aubuisson al principio de los 80. Bueno la historia usted ya la sabe, él era un mayor del ejército, tenía mucha información…porque fue jefe de inteligencia del ejército. Entonces él tenía la información de quienes eran los civiles que el ejército, si no controlaba, al menos colaboraban con el ejército para supuestamente mantener el orden. Mantener el estatus quo, vea, en aquel momento… De todos modos lo que él hizo ya está hecho. La imagen que le quisieron manchar, era lógico que era una guerra política… hay que denigrar al adversario.

Yo personalmente como mucha gente, estamos convencidos de que jamás D’Aubuisson hubiera ordenado el asesinato de Romero. Y cuando mueren los Jesuitas, D’Aubuisson pues ya estaba, ya no lo pudieron culpar." … Por qué le digo jamás hubiera cometido el error D’Aubuisson de matar a Monseñor Romero? Porque fue una total y absoluta estupidez. O sea, a parte de la razón éticas o morales, de cualquier asesinato, el hombre suficiente inteligente con un criterio político brillante, que jamás hubiera creado un mártir para la izquierda. Yo estoy convencido que el FMLN lo hizo. Convencísimos.
Mario Valiente: Creo que el conflicto nos dañó muchísimo económicamente, no sólo por las pérdidas materiales… la infraestructura, o sea, la guerra del FMLN no fue contra el ejército exclusivamente, fue contra la economía… La idea era realmente crear las condiciones del país, que supuestamente debería de existir antes del conflicto, generarlas para que hubiera más pobreza, que hubiera más desempleo… gente sin esperanza… que sin duda era establecer en el país otra Cuba. No sólo porque iba de acuerdo a su, a su ideología, a sus objetivos, sino que la manera de controlar a la población, a través del estomago.

Wilfredo Medrano: Por que sí, ahí hay archivos de ambos bandos en conflicto… hay expedientes que solo te dicen la gente, quienes son los responsables de la muerte de su familiar? Te dicen, efectivos de la Fuerza Armada. Miembros de la Guardia Nacional. Por el otro lado aquí fueron, ay, los guerrilleros… Mucha gente desplazada que vive aquí en Lourdes, hay como 300 de El Mozote. En San Miguel, en San Francisco Gotera. Esa gente vivía pobremente en Morazán, pero tenía su leche, sus vacas, su casa, sus terrenos, y de repente queda sin nada. Andar mendiendo en las calles, pidiendo para comer… Quiero decírte que la gente hay de diversas pensamientos, le echa la culpla al FMLN, de por qué se fue a las zonas montañosas, va, que por eso fue que sufrieron. Algo de razón tiene pero también en un conflicto tanto los que dirigen la guerra tiene que saber que la población civil no tiene por qué ser objetivo militar. Por eso hay leyes de la guerra, y yo creo que los militares son los primeros informan. Lo que pasa aquí es que deformaron todo, y dijeron “Este es la base social del FMLN. Acabémosla.” Como hay rótulos allí en El Mozote que… decía, Mata un niño, es un guerrillero menos.

Juan José Dalton: El FMLN hasta ahora mantiene a Jorge Meléndez como uno de sus funcionarios principales del gobierno actual, o sea que mantiene la impunidad. En el caso de mi padre no quieren reconocer que esta persona que está ahí es uno de los responsables del asesinato de mi padre, Jorge Meléndez. Es actualmente Secretario Presidencial para Asuntos de Vulnerabilidad. O sea, es uno de los principales personajes cercanos al presidente de la republica… Obviamente ellos dicen que lo mantienen por las alianzas políticas que han hecho, pero ahí volvemos: por mantener un equilibrio político, te olvidas de la justicia. Entonces, qué clase de democracia estamos fundando en este país? Es contradictorio. Verdad? Así es que querés representar los intereses del pueblo y al pueblo lo que estas dando es impunidad y eso es daño para el proceso.

Damián Alegría: Yo recuerdo las palabras de Mauricio Funes cuando dijo que, por fin… los que eran vistos como victimarios van a ser reconocidos como víctimas, porque fueron eso, porque todo el discurso de la derecha en el pasado era que los guerrilleros eran los victimarios, los terribles que habían asediado el país, vea, que en realidad fue la violencia del estado lo que hizo a mucha gente a defenderse, se fueron a la guerra y se defendieron ahí en una guerra, pues, hay violencia de ambas partes, pero en el caso del pueblo y del FMLN la violencia revolucionaria era plenamente justificada porque había una violencia del Estado contra el pueblo en general… Pero cuál es una guerra que ocurra sin muertos?
Joaquín Villalobos: “No hay guerras santas ni buenas, todas las guerras son esencialmente malas, no importa si se hacen en nombre de la libertad, de Dios, o de la justicia.”

Joaquín Villalobos: La violencia de la guerrilla fue respuesta e inicialmente una consecuencia de la ausencia de democracia, pero también funcionó como un factor de provocación que desencadenó mayor violencia por parte del gobierno. Según el informe de la CV las violaciones comprendieron sólo el 5% de los casos. El aspecto cuantitativo no está vinculado sólo a voluntades, sino a quien tenía el poder, la guerrilla no pudo cometer más violaciones porque no tenía más poder.

Establecida la confrontación, la violencia hasta cierto punto responde a patrones similares en ambos bandos, ya sea como medio de consecución de objetivos en unos casos, o como actos de extremismo ideológico en otros. En ambas situaciones las consecuencias humanas de la acción pasan a segundo plano. La guerrilla en realidad, inventa sus propios principios y normas de guerra, en tanto no es un estado ni un ejército convencional sujeto a la Convención de Ginebra.

Gloria Salguero Gross: “…bueno el mismo presidente, confesó que había matado a no sé cuántos miles.”

Wilfredo Medrano: Bueno en este caso está la actual presidente de… fue comandante guerrillero entonces… en una cadena de mando pues tuvo su responsabilidad. Nadie puede decir que no tenía conocimiento de la ejecución, de un operativo. Un comandante de un batallón no puede decir que desconoce lo que andan diciendo sus hombres. Es paja. Es difícil. Siempre están los mandos. Es paja que digan por la cantidad de efectivos militares, no, si hay mandos, está al cargo, está el sargento, están los tenientes, y no todos están sellados con la misma máquina para no hablar. Siempre lo que sucede que, hubo un silencio cómplice, va?

Maritza Herrera Rebollo: El FPL sí no querían a mi papá. Mi papá fue amenazado, Megan. Y eso sabía toda la cúpula…Y quiénes estaban en la cúpula? El señor Sánchez Cerén, y todos ellos, cómo crees que no iba a saber? Entonces yo digo, ellos en el mundo entero, un guerrillero es un asesino… No es que sólo con mi papá, hay gente que me dice que “sólo por su papá estás resentida”. No! Es que no es eso! No es eso! Volviendo, va. La FPL era un grupo de gente, entre ellos estaba Sánchez Cerén, que quiere eso o no, pero era de los que siempre se distingue de los más perversos… Mataba hasta su propia gente solo porque creían que eran gente de espías, va. Nombre.

Original Spanish: “Usted que tanta destrucción causó, no puede, ¡no debe ser el futuro de mi patria! Me niego de aceptar que él que ordenó la muerte de mi padre y de tantos salvadoreños aspire si quiera la presidencia de la república. Pido a Dios que ilumine a nuestro pueblo para que en las próximas elecciones tome la sabia decisión de ver hacia el futuro y dejarlo a usted en el sitio que le corresponde, en un pasado de violencia y muerte al que nunca debemos volver.”
26 Damián Alegría: Una parte de la derecha tiene esa visión, acusan a Salvador Sánchez Cerén de haber sido responsable de muchas muertes en el periodo de la guerra. Lo que ocurrió realmente es que, es de, la Fuerza Armada, el gobierno de El Salvador con la asesoría y recursos que le dio el gobierno de Estados Unidos, porque usaron la herramienta de la infiltración, y ciertamente infiltraron, casi a todas las organizaciones…y lo que hizo el FMLN fue seguir un procedimiento que fue doloroso en muchos casos, para tratar de erradicar esa infiltración.

27 General Vargas: La Ley de Amnistía General se aprobó porque fue pactada por las partes. Eso siempre fue así. Todos estuvimos claros que o queríamos paz y justicia -algo imposible, algo que nunca se había dado en ningún conflicto de las dimensiones del nuestro-, o queríamos la paz y la construcción de un nuevo El Salvador

28 Joaquín Villalobos: La crisis configurada por el fracaso de las negociaciones entre el presidente y la comandancia general del FMLN, fue resuelta por la existencia de una negociación informal previa, entre Cristiani y mi persona… Dichas reuniones… se convirtieron en un acuerdo que se llevó adelante. El autor, representado al ERP, adoptó un acuerdo que incluyó: [entre otros] …Aprobación de la amnistía, simultaneo con la publicación del informe de la Verdad, para evitar consecuencias jurídicas

29 Damián Alegría: “Bueno, fue ilegal. O sea, esa fue una ley que la implantó el gobierno de Cristiani, preocupado para que no se llevara a la cárcel tantos militares que habían sido, que estaban involucrados en crímenes de guerra”

30 David Morales: No es cierto que la Ley de Amnistía es el pie angular de los Acuerdos de Paz como sostiene algunos sectores, no? No está considerada la amnistía en ninguno de los textos de los Acuerdos. Es más, el Acuerdo de Chapultepec habla de juicios ejemplarizantes a violadores de derechos humanos de ambos bandos… Era una esquema de cese del enfrentamiento, reformas institucionales inmediatas fuertes en el sistema de seguridad y militar, un encuentro con el reconocimiento de la verdad y el resarcimiento de las víctimas, incluyendo la justicia de acuerdo con las recomendaciones de la Comisión de la Verdad, y el tránsito a una institucionalidad más moderna y democrática que generaba la reforma judicial, la reforma electoral, y la reforma jurídica que vino también que vino también con los Acuerdos de Paz

31 General Vargas: Teníamos que decidir entre justicia y paz. Porque …terminar un conflicto no se puede tener 2 a la par… Nosotros decidimos por la amnistía… para evitar el ciclo de la venganza, la llave está en la justicia o en el perdón. Era mi pregunta... Entre la culpabilidad individual y responsabilidad colectiva… En el tiempo, la justicia y la paz deben de coincidir. En el tiempo. Pero en inmediato es necesario poner fin a la violencia… Pero en cualquiera de las dos que usted tome, siempre va a encontrar una palabra mágica que se llama el precio de la paz. Hay un precio que pagar por la paz. Lo quiere pagar o no lo quiere pagar. Y ahí está el dilema que todavía se sigue entre los pensadores, entre todo, porque cuál es el problema que yo encuentro habiendo vivido esa
estaba tan fresca? Que después de 22 años, todo mundo tiene 22 años para razonar, pero yo no tuve estos 22 años, yo tenía el año cero. Ustedes tienen 22 años para analizar. Pero yo no… Yo tenía que decidir aquí. Si me equivoqué, me equivoqué. Pero la prueba es que no me equivoqué, no hubo un tan solo disparo después del cese del fuego. No ha habido una muerte política después del cese de fuego


33 Gloria Salguero Gross: La realidad es que la amnistía se da para poder lograr los Acuerdos de Paz. Sino, no se iban a ser logrados. Porque estaban los dos bandos…el guerrillero y el militar… Porque también por mucho que se diga los guerrilleros, … Entonces, tu no podías hacer la amnistía si ellos no hubieron tenido que ir a la carcel todos. Todos los que estaban negociando. Los guerrilleros no querían ir a la cárcel. Y por otro lado, los militares, pero los militares estaban cumpliendo con su deber de defender a los salvadoreños y al territorio nacional. Entonces era bien diferente. Entonces yo creo de que, para mi lo de la amnistía se debe de mantener. Esa es mi opinión muy personal.

34 Nelson Guardado: La venganza política o el querer señalar con tintes político-electorales a un segmento a otro, no vale la pena porque quien va a ser el afectado al final va a ser el país entero. Se dio la ley, se dio con sus dificultades de algunos para otros es lo mejor, no importa si tiene o si es lo mejor. Lo importante es que no se repitan las cosas. Y ahí deberíamos de estar construyendo los puentes hacia ese devenir futuro.

35 Roberto Rugamas: “La vigencia de la Ley de Amnistía es un legado autoritario tremendo, porque formaliza la impunidad en El Salvador.”

36 David Morales: El impacto de la Amnistía fue muy profundo en orden a consolidar el sistema de impunidad, que ya era…muy fuerte… Entonces efectivamente la amnistía cerró toda posibilidad.

Sí [ahora] que tenemos una ley de amnistía que ha perdido su fuerza jurídica en términos estrictamente legales. Pero un sistema judicial que se niega a cumplir con sus obligaciones. Y una Asamblea Legislativa que tampoco ha tenido ninguna voluntad a reformar la ley. Las Leyes de Amnistías son, como sabemos, necesarias al final de los conflictos armados, lo provee el derecho internacional humanitario. Pero también está muy claro el criterio, ya definido por la Cruz Roja Internacional y las cortes internacionales de derechos humanos, de que no es aplicable esa norma a las graves violaciones a los derechos humanos

37 Eliberto Juárez: Hay un problema con esa ley. Porque en esa ley, lo que procuran es que todos los eventos que se dieron en ese tiempo, hay amnistía. Pero hay eventos que no fueron propiamente de guerra. Entonces, si se va a hacer un amnistía sobre los fenómenos de violencia en un marco de guerra, es una cosa. Pero tampoco meter todo en
ese período de tiempo. Y ese es el problema donde cabe los sacerdotes jesuitas. Que los quieren meter como un crimen de guerra y eso no es un crimen de guerra. Personas intelectuales, personas de bien…personas trabajando en el marco de la fe. No les encuentran tomando armas, los cuales estaban dormidos en su habitación, eso no es crimen de guerra. Entonces yo pienso que ahí hay un problema. No podemos meter en esta ley los eventos sucedidos en el marco de tiempo. Sino la finalidad o el contexto de los crímenes. Eso no es un crimen de guerra. Es una violación de los derechos humanos y lo cual debe pagarse como la ley manda, no?

38 Blanca García: Con la aprobación de la Ley de Amnistía, qué sucede? Se deja libre a todos los asesinos… Con la Ley de Amnistía todos, entonces todo el mundo va a vivir feliz y en paz, ellos que han sido los asesinos y promotores de tanta masacre, pueden vivir felices. Pero las víctimas, las madres a las cuales asesinaron sus hijos, quién se los devuelve? Entonces, es de, esto es terrible pues, para las madres, para las madres día a día están las que, no vieron el cuerpo de su hijo, no lo enterraron, ellas no están contentas porque les asesinaron a sus hijos. Pero es mucho más el problema y el trauma de las madres que les desaparecieron a sus hijos. Porque ellas están constantemente pensando, qué habrá pasado con mi hijo? Estará en otro país? Estará aquí en El Salvador? … Estará en una institución o algo? ¿Qué estará sufriendo mi hijo? Es una zozobra constante… Y a la vez tiene la esperanza que en cualquier momento va a encontrar a esa persona. Entonces, una paz así no queremos… Por eso yo le digo, es de, toda la política perdón y olvido, hoy es una nueva sociedad- eso no existe, esto no es así. Y los gobiernos de derecha, esa política han tenido. Cosas que no estamos de acuerdo … Porque necesitamos que se asuma la responsabilidad de todas las crímenes de lesa humanidad para que esto sirva una especie de consuelo, de tranquilidad de las madres. Que su hijo fue asesinado y desaparecido, pero que al final ellos, se hizo un esfuerzo por querer encontrar paradero de esta persona. Y que sus casos se lleven a la justicia, para que por lo menos moralmente sancionen a todos esos asesinos.

39 Salvador Mendendez Leal: “En El Salvador, no se juzga a nadie. Es el imperio y el reino de la impunidad.”

40 Ricardo Vaquerano: “este es el país de la eterna impunidad.”

41 Original Spanish: “como muchos salvadoreños, me tragué mi dolor para que la paz reinara en nuestra patria. Quisimos pagar con el dolor de nuestro pasado un mejor futuro para nuestros hijos.”

42 Original Spanish: “Y como que la derecha tenemos más consciencia de eso, de perdón. En la derecha la gente no ha querido, como que tenemos otro concepto de respeto para el muerto, porque es parte del respeto.”

43 Megan- Y usted ha logrado perdonar?
Maritza- Sí, mire, yo después de eso bien feliz, para mi fue una terapia de decirlo. Usted es eso. Mire, yo después de ese día, Megan, sentí …

Megan- el día del anuncio?

Maritza- Uh huh, el día del anuncio, logré lo que, desde los 17 años quise hacer. Dios me lo permitió para mi fue un regalo de Dios.

44 Rafael Molina: Voy a comenzar por el perdón y el olvido, porque el perdón y olvido también ha sido discurso de la izquierda en el poder. No de las organizaciones de izquierda, que quede claro. Pero sí de los políticos de izquierda... Es decir, el perdón y olvido no sólo tiene que ver con la derecha. Verdad? Entonces, el perdón y olvido sí, de 20 años, tiene su efecto… Porque, si lo ves desde el punto de vista de gobierno, sí es perdón y olvido. Sí negaban que hubo masacre en el Mozote. Entonces, la derecha sí ha tenido mucho mucho que ver pues, porque cuántos monumentos de memoria histórica tenemos? … Desde el gobierno central, que hayan sido construido, no tenemos ninguno… Solo 1 de la alcaldía que está en un parque, el Parque Cuscatlán, que es, pero ese fue iniciativa de la alcaldía y de las organizaciones. Ahá…lo del Mozote también, es privado. O sea, privado me refiero a que organizaciones se han unido y han hecho ese monumento

45 Salvador Menendez Leal: Es que el silencio es primo hermano de la impunidad… Olvidar no es solamente una tesis de los victimarios. Es también de las víctimas. Porque a veces recordar le duele. Entonces el perdón y el olvido es una tesis de los sectores interesados en el área de impunidad. La verdad y justicia y reparación en sectores sociales interesados en construir una nación y un futuro

46 Rosa- Es que de realmente ha habido esfuerzos muy grandes, enormes, conscientes por borrar nuestra memoria.

Megan- Por parte de?

Rosa- Por parte de la gente en el poder, por aquellos que controlan, bien dicen, la historia es escrita por los que ganan entre comillas, y…en este caso gana el que tiene recurso para controlar las masas y la información. Y muy poco digamos, hemos logrado, aunque hay esfuerzos por rescatar la memoria, oficialmente nuestras nuevas generaciones no conocen mucho de las orígenes de la guerra. Y eso de lo que genera…que sean vulnerables a que digan cualquier estupidez pues y se lo creen porque es válido

47 General Vargas- La verdad del conflicto no se conoce todavía del punto de vista completa. Aquí solo se conoce una versión.

Megan- Y cuál versión es?
General Vargas- El gobierno, las Fuerzas Armadas, los militares...los escuadrones de la muerte, las masacres, es todo lo que se habla! Pero y lo otro que yo lo viví que yo lo vi, yo lo participé, existió o no existió? Y si existió pues dónde queda? Cómo queda?

Flores Cruz: Sé que murieron muchos soldados por esta causa y que ahora nadie se recuerda del sacrificio que hicieron, a pesar que muchos dejaron a sus esposas, a sus madres afligidas, a sus hijos con la esperanza que regresarían y nunca lo hicieron, hoy son las viudas, los hijos huérfanos y madres desprotegidas que tiene nuestro país en gran cantidad. Justo es reflexionar que el progreso que ha experimentado nuestro terruño y actualmente disfrutamos, es gracias a esos hombres que en su momento entregaron sus vidas por lograrlo.

Rosa Anaya: Me acuerdo cuando andábamos con la pila del directivo de derechos humanos, y que hacemos los congresos y todo esto… Una vez en un aula me dijo por cierto que después una compañera mía me dijo, “míralo” me dijo, “o sea, no es que nosotros no creemos, yo he preguntado, y cada vez que yo en mi familia he preguntado qué pasó, bajan la voz y me dicen que de estas cosas no se habla.” Entonces, hay culpa nuestra de no saber transmitir a las nuevas generaciones lo que sucedió. O por lo menos lo que nosotros vimos de lo que fuimos testigos. Nadie tiene la verdad absoluta. Y a mi me deben todavía la historia de parte del victimario. O sea, yo no tengo esa visión. Yo tengo lo que yo he escuchado y conozco lo que pasó a las víctimas. Pero yo no sé qué estaba pasando por la cabeza de los victimarios, de por qué llegaron donde llegaron. cómo fue que se, cómo fue que ellos toparon, igual que topamos nosotros, de decir o nos defendemos o nos matan. Cómo es que ellos dijeron aquí o los matamos o, o, o no sé! Jajaja. Algo tuvo que haber existido alguna razón que permitió que hermano contra hermano... Me deben esa parte de la historia porque no la conozco.

Megan- Mientras estemos hablando de la hora actual, no, hay herencias y legados del conflicto, no? Y hay algunas que dicen que la impunidad de esa época está relacionada con la violencia de ahora, con la violencia pandillera. Ve usted un enlace así? O sería diferente?

General Vargas- No lo veo tan mecanicamente. Porque no puede ser. El sentido común de la vida me dice a mí, primero: que la, no creo que haya país alguno donde no existan grados de impunidad. En los mismos Estados Unidos tenemos la muerte de Kennedy, tenemos la muerte de… tanta cosa que no se ha podido, que puede decir que son estados impunes.

Megan- Con esa herencia de tanta violencia y tantas violaciones de DDHH, qué son las herencias de esa guerra? De esa etapa de violencia?

Gisela- … El Salvador, creo que las estadísticas ya no son así, pero hasta hace poco tiempo El Salvador era, así los niveles de homicidios que existían en el país eran tal altos que se consideraba que tenía el nivel de epidemia. Yo creo que… esto tiene que ver, o es una consecuencia directa de los niveles de impunidad de la guerra. Justamente porque
esa gente que cometió esas violaciones de DDHH no les sancionó, creen que pueden seguir haciendo lo mismo, y mucha de la gente que ahora está metida en otro tipo de grupos que cometen actos de violencia, que estuvieron involucrados en la guerra. Y como no les pasó nada en ese entonces, entonces se sienten con toda la libertad de seguirlo siendo, no?

Megan- Cómo reaccionarías a una persona que dice, pero esos niveles de violencia son los resultados de las pandillas y no de las personas anteriores?

Gisela- Bueno, porque las pandillas también son el resultado de la guerra. O sea, la gente que ahora está en las pandillas son los niños que, que muchos se quedaron solos, producto de la violencia de la guerra, o que se quedaban solos porque sus papas tuvieron que migrar tuvo consecuencia de la guerra, entonces eso es. Yo también creo que las pandillas son otro producto de esos niveles de violencia súper altos que habían durante la guerra y de la impunidad que existe todavía.

Roberto Rugamas: Entonces yo creo que la existencia de maras y pandillas… a particular no es el único fenómeno de violencia porque también es el crimen organizado, se dejó que pasara dentro de las instituciones, que las contaminara, y que además posiblemente sea lo que más está aumentando las cifras de delito y juegan con esto socialmente, incluso en periodo electoral es cuando más se da cuenta… que hay grupos de poder que tienen la capacidad de movilizar delincuencia de generar estadísticas de homicidios, de paralizar ciudades, el transporte colectivo, de rentas, de extorsiones y esas cosas. Entonces, realmente es como ver un fantasma o varias fantasmas, que son las que están produciendo criminalidad actual… y sobre esos patrones de terror todavía que se utilizan como la desaparición forzada, las masacres, y las ejecuciones de personas. Entonces es como se vienen repitiendo los patrones que muchos dicen después de la desmovilización, ambos bandos conformaron estructuras criminales- los escuadrones de la muerte, también algunas células de la guerrilla, entonces y creo que siguen ahí.

Hector Rosemberg: Muchas de las conductas que tienen los pandilleros son una producción casi calcada del conflicto, verdad, desapariciones, desmembramiento, amenazas, persecución, todo verdad. Y aún que salen grupos de exterminio también, que nos recuerdan de escuadrones de la muerte, que actúan de la misma manera, de noche, encapuchados, en grupos, con armas fuertes… Entonces, es un hilo es una situación de violencia que…tiene sus raíces antes de la guerra, que la guerra nos da una forma, y ahora las pandillas iguales, es un efecto de una situación de desigualdad muy grande. Verdad? En este país te metes a las pandillas o te vas del país. Esa es la alternativa para los cipotes. Entonces hay un hilo.

Maritza Herrera Rebollo: Entonces, y eran unos delincuente asesinos y todo lo demás. Yo tengo amigos, compañeros de trabajo que guardan los papeles donde los extorsionaban. Que les decían “tienen que esta finca tiene que pagar tanto”. Panaderías, tiendas… yo conozco un montón de personas…que que los extorsionaban… quiénes fueron entonces los maestros de los pandilleros, pues? Los guerrilleros. Los guerillera…
eso es mi manera de ver actual, Megan. Porque, porque la verdad es que, para mí así es. Verdad? Y ellos han destruido el país. Verdad?

55 Rafael- Uno de los legados autoritarios…donde se posibilita la actuación de los militares dentro del ámbito de seguridad pública… Entonces eso es uno de los legados más presentes que tenemos en la sociedad salvadoreña.

Megan- Más con la mano dura y todo, verdad?

Rafael- Claro! O sea, el legado autoritario más presente evidente, que no le llamamos legado autoritario pero le llamamos mano dura, represión de la justicia, etc., es la mano dura o el pensamiento de que a través de la violencia se va a poder solucionar uno de los problemas coyunturales, estructurales más bien que trae El Salvador, como son la pobreza, la desigualdad, a través de que la violencia vamos a disminuir la delincuencia. Porque también…ya realmente las pandillas y eso, ya realmente es un problema de seguridad… Y uno de los problemas de seguridad, creo que la principal, que se están aumentando las tasas de homicidios acá en el país… Entonces, los legados que nosotros traemos de la políticas públicas de seguridad, verdad? Es la cultura de control a través de represión.

56 Damián Alegria: Creo que las mejores demostraciones que el ejército cambió fue, primero que no hicieron lío con la llegada de un presidente de la izquierda como era de Mauricio Funes. Pero más aún con darle el bastón de poder como comandante general a Salvador Sánchez Ceren, un hombre que claramente fue guerrillero, fue comandante de la guerrilla en el pasado. Mauricio todavía podía decir, “bueno, este es un civil que no se metió en nada.” Pero en el caso de Salvador Sánchez Ceren evidentemente están dando el mando a uno que fue comandante guerrillero y que podía tener todavía esa predisposición, va, pero no la hubo, vea. El acto de otorgarle el mandato como corresponde constitucionalmente se hizo sin ningún problema…antes cuando fue la disputa electoral, escuchando como ARENA llamó a la Fuerza Armada a rebelarse contra el gobierno, y el Ministro de Defensa dijo “no. Nosotros vamos a respetar la decisión del pueblo.” Es que es un señal importante, que nosotros podemos decir “estamos contentos de que, hemos logrado también la transformación de la Fuerza Armada en una Fuerza Armada profesional y sometida al poder civil”

57 Original Spanish: …no vamos a permitir fraude al estilo chavista o maduro en Venezuela. Estamos en El Salvador! Tenemos nuestro propio re-cuento, donde con claridad se establece que este proceso nos hemos ganado! A todo el pueblo Salvadoreño, a todo el pueblo salvadoreño, a la comunidad internacional, a los observadores internacionales, y sobre todo a esos compatriotas que nos han dado esta victoria, les pedimos que estén alertas y despiertos, garantizando que cumpla con lo que el pueblo salvadoreño ha decidido este día. … Estamos decididos a defender esta victoria que la hemos construido todos. No nos van a robar esta victoria. Vamos a luchar si es preciso, con nuestra vida, pero la democracia, la vamos a (inaudible). A partir de este momento, más de 1 millón trescientos mil compatriotas que nos andan esta victoria, están en pie de
guerra para defender esta victoria. El país demanda gobernabilidad. Y no se puede tener gobernabilidad con un Tribunal Supremo comprado y corrupto… Nuestra Fuerza Armada! Nuestra Fuerza Armada está pendiente de este fraude que están fraguando. No pueden jugar con la voluntad de un pueblo. No pueden trastocar los cimientos de nuestra democracia. No pueden robarle un triunfo legítimo a mi patria, a ustedes. Queridos compatriotas, muchísimas gracias, a defender nuestra victoria!

Chapter 4- The Victim

8 Blanca García: A lo largo de toda la época de la guerra sufrimos persecución… En el ´84 el escuadrón de la muerte llegó a mi casa… Los escuadroneros cuando llegaron … agarraron a mi mamá, y que estaba embarazada, y le dieron patadas en el estómago, con el fusil…en el vientre le dijeron que no iban a permitir que ningún guerrillero más de esta familia naciera… Y mi mamá sangraba. Y aún así se la iban a llevar, lógico que la iban a asesinar. Pero, gracias a Dios la gente de la colonia no dejó. Toda la gente de la colonia se unió…y no dejaron ir al microbús … Entonces, agarramos un maletín y nos fuimos todos, lo más que nos tardaron era 10 minutos. A las 2 horas, nosotros huimos… Pero a las 2 horas nos contaron de que ya llegó la escuadrón de la muerte a la casa, y si nos hubiéramos quedado ahí, nos asesinaran.

2 Rosa Anaya: Nosotros cuando a mi papá lo capturan, en el ´86, pues ya estaba más de cerca…como testigos del desarrollo de una página en la historia de este país… Y bueno, mi mamá que a la par de él… era la que llevaba el trabajo más clandestino de apoyar… El trabajo que él hizo… adentro de los penales, después de que ha sido torturado, que han llevado a su papá también porque se llevaron a mi abuelo, que le dijeron que mi mamá que la tenían descuartizada… o sea que todo ese tema, o sea aún así tomar esa decisión de no ahuevarse y continuar la lucha, para mi fue como muy importante.

3 Maritza Herrera Rebollo: Porque creen que los que hemos tenido posibilidades económicas no sentimos, porque eso es nos que critican creo yo… Por qué no ven cada persona que tuvo familiares de lado de la derecha… Que también sufrimos. Cuánta gente, amigas, que sus primos, que sus tíos, que sus abuelos, murieron? … No repito nombres…pero yo sé muchas historias de gente que sí pues, se quedó sin sus papás, sin su familia.

4 Megan: Y creo que las víctimas de la represión, digamos, han podido seguir adelante después del conflicto? Sin tener cualquier tipo de juicio ni nada. No sé, cómo lo ves? Víctimas de los dos lados

General Vargas: Es que, por eso le digo, entonces por eso digo yo, no… la violencia inmediata no se detiene con justicia. Y la historia no lo dice. Si no lo hacemos, esto… Nosotros no somos el único caso. Nosotros no lo hemos inventado. Aquí hay historias sometidas y verdades unilaterales.
Gloria Salguero Gross: Mira, para mí yo soy enemiga a la violencia por un lado... En ese momento, lo que sucede es que como la reforma agraria quita todas las propiedades, donde todos los dueños tenían vigilancia... Cuando viene la reforma agraria, el territorio salvadoreños se volvió tierra de nadie... Fue bien triste esa época. A mi me expropiaron todo. Fue durísimo, durísimo. Yo he quedado con un problema intestinal desde entonces... Entonces siguieron yendo [a los EEUU] muchos salvadoreños, verdad... Pero sí quiero ser enfática en eso: aquí la agricultura prácticamente se terminó.

David Morales: Monseñor se caracterizó por su excepcional liderazgo episcopal, signado por la opción preferencial por las víctimas de la injusticia, la desigualdad, la opresión, y los graves violaciones de los derechos humanos que tuvieron lugar en El Salvador... Monseñor es el símbolo de la lucha por la dignidad humana, la cual practicó con profundo amor cristiano como ejemplar seguidor de Jesús. Su palabra fue liberadora y se opuso valientemente ante los más poderosos.

Roberto Cuéllar: Para mí es un hombre sobresaliente, sobrenatural por su condición de jerarca. Yo no conozco santos, pero tampoco sé de ningún arzobispo que pusiera a favor de los pobres todo su esfuerzo, toda su fuerza y todos sus pensamientos... Más que... su rol histórico. Me ha alegrado mucho que el Gobierno de El Salvador...haya conseguido que Naciones Unidas reconozca el 24 de marzo como el Día Internacional de Derecho a la Verdad. Es un símbolo importantísimo. Lo han colocado en la agenda más alta de los derechos humanos, porque ese día se va a conmemorar en Uganda, en Sudáfrica, en Tailandia, en todo el mundo... En todos esos lugares se recordará a Monseñor Romero.

Eliberto Juárez: Las voces de justicia vinieron de Romero... Un hombre muy apegado al evangelio, unas denuncias desde el evangelio, buscando alternativas. Pero Romero también entendía las dimensiones globales de la guerra de El Salvador.

Megan- Vi en las noticias del sitio web de GANA que GANA apoyó el cambio del nombre del aeropuerto [al Aeropuerto Internacional de El Salvador “Oscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdamez”]. Entonces quiero ver si GANA tiene una política acerca la memoria histórica.

Nelson Guardado- Eso no es como política...pero nosotros creemos...primero que aquí el aeropuerto es conocido como Comalapa desde que se construyó. El nombre que se lo puso de Monseñor Romero – Monseñor Romero es uno de los obispos que nosotros tuvimos... que ciertos segmentos de la población lo vinculó hacia tendencia izquierda, y la izquierda lo agarró como una bandera...política... Y eso no es correcto. El pastor no era de una u otra tendencia, era un líder religioso... Entonces creemos que enhorabuena que debería de ser, en vida como dicen los reconocimientos, a las personas... Creo que las personas que tienen méritos deben de reconocerse sus méritos y debería de ser en vida... Es un líder nacional, es un líder latinoamericano, es una persona conocido en el Vaticano...y para nosotros eso es un orgullo como salvadoreños.
10 Muyshondt (el ex vicepresidente de ideología para ARENA)… reconoció la “crueldad” en el asesinato del obispo salvadoreño y a su juicio la decisión del Papa de beatificar a Romero responde a esta causa. “Definitivamente la manera tan cruel en que fue asesinado Monseñor Romero mientras hacía la consagración es algo inaudito y respetamos la decisión del Vaticano.”

11 Diputado Valiente: No me gustaba porque, con la influencia que aquél tenía, yo oía a sus discursos- “…ordeno que paren los asesinatos!” pero sólo se refería a la policía, a la Guardia Nacional, al ejército, o a las escuadrones de la muerte… Lo que no nunca oí, y por eso no me gustaba, decirle a la guerrilla, “Paren ustedes! Paren todos!” O sea, sólo era este lado... Y aquí no habían víctimas, solo habían victimarios. Entonces eran perros, y así nos llaman a nosotros. O sea, que estos son perros y aquellos son personas… Entonces, así las cosas, la guerrilla tampoco logró que la gente, el FMLN, que la gente se levantara después del entierro de Romero. No se levantó el pueblo … Ahí terminó, básicamente, la guerrilla urbana, y ahí empezó los 12 años de conflicto armado que tuvo El Salvador. El día del entierro de Monseñor Romero se fueron a la montaña.

12 Maritza Herrera Rebollo: Ellos con su Romero, que yo estoy cansada de Romero, puchica! Ese hombre debe estar feliz en la tumba. Porque mire sacan camisetas… que Romero aquí que Romero allá, a Romero ellos mismos lo deberían matado. Toda la gente lo dice. Porque, mire, es que si usted se pone a analizar lo que vivimos en esa época, no es lo que dicen… Al Mayor risa le da. Que lo acusaron de eso, por eso quizás la gente… hay muchas cosas que, que la voz populis empieza decir y la hacen verdad. Eso es lo que creo yo que ha pasado.

13 Megan: Y la Comisión de la Verdad, por qué no tuvo un impacto?

Gisela: No, yo creo que sí tuvo un impacto…súper importante, y…es uno de los instrumentos que nosotros hemos usado en los casos. Pero lo que pasa es que las comisiones de la verdad tienen como un sentido distinto a lo que tiene que ver con obtención de justicia… En el caso específico de la Comisión de la Verdad de El Salvador, lo que pudo hacer…con los recursos limitados que tenía y el tiempo limitado que tenía, fue establecer…casos ejemplificantes…y es algo que no ves en otros informes de la comisión de la verdad. La Comisión de El Salvador nombró a las personas responsables, y …creo que es importante pero no es lo mismo que se les nombre y que sepa la verdad, y creo que de hecho la verdad no es completa hasta tanto las personas realmente son sometidas a un proceso y sancionadas.

14 Salvador Menéndez Leal: La Comisión de la Verdad hizo un trabajo excelente, en mi opinión… [sin embargo, por la Ley de Amnistía]…el Informe de la Comisión de la Verdad fue descalificado, primero se les digo que a los miembros que habían asumido funciones jurisdiccionales cuando ellos tenían funciones investigativas. Dos, que se habían excedido en su mandato, que se habían inclinado por una de las partes.
Rafael Molina: Nuestra Comisión de la Verdad fue de perdón y olvido… Yo creo que la Comisión de la Verdad sirvió para el fin de la guerra nada más.

Megan: Entonces por qué es importante contar su historia tanto?

Blanca: En El Salvador no ha habido una reparación de ningún tipo, ningún atención psicológica… Voy a dar el ejemplo del Comité de Madres. Hay muchas de las madres, que cada vez que ellas tocan el tema de sus hijos, vuelven a vivir el drama del asesinato, de la tortura, a que han sometido sus hijos o familiares. Pero esto a la vez saca el dolor que ellas tienen. Y cada vez se va asimilando un poco más, un poco más… Porque esto es una forma de ir sintiendo un alivio de tanta carga, de tanta información mala que tiene un su mente, y es al final una forma de ir sanando también… Cuando llegó la escuadrón de la muerte a mi casa, yo…estaba tan afectada psicológicamente que yo oía ruidos fuertes y yo sentía que era la escuadrón de la muerte que asesinarnos iba. Y lo fui superando poco a poco… Entonces al final encontrar la historia, darla a conocer, es con el objetivo uno, como denuncia de toda la crueldad que cometió el ejército aquí en El Salvador y el gobierno arenero de derecha. Y es una forma de ir expresando y que usted vaya poco a poco asimilando la información y tratando a modo de que en su cuerpo no quede de forma negativa.

Rosa Anaya: Todos necesitamos espacios como sea. Es doloroso volver a contar la historia. Pero yo recuerdo la Rufina Amaya. A esa mujer jamás le dijo no a nadie…Nunca! Porque es una forma de saber que eso que viviste no fue un invento tuyo… Entonces, para mi no es, como te digo es un tema de cada quien…y te digo aquí hay muchísima gente que jamás te va a contar lo que ha pasado. Pero aquellos que han logrado hacer ese proceso, no es para revictimizarse, sino que han encontrado en ese un proceso de sanación personal. Más bien les estamos utilizando, porque… uno ve una cara extranjera, te podes pegar la chillada de tu vida…y sabés qué? No te voy a volver a ver. Sin embargo, yo sé que vas a respetar lo que te estoy contando, porque has venido con esa intención. O sea…tu trabajo es de escuchar. Imagínate que lujo! Jajaja… Entonces, claro como no me voy a aprovechar esa oportunidad? Y mucha gente lo hace en ese sentido… A mi no me la cuente porque yo soy salvadoreña.

Rafael Molina: El no hablar absolutamente nada de las muertes… calan… y…te deshumanizan.

REMHI Report: “la represión política le quitó a la gente su derecho a la palabra.”

Gisela de León: era un caso en el que el Gobierno de El Salvador, inclusive el Gobierno de los EEUU, había negado que la masacre había ocurrido por años… inclusive durante el litigio ante la Comisión, los primeros años, el Estado seguía sosteniendo que la masacre nunca se había ocurrido.

Megan: Dijiste que el Estado había negado la desaparición, del hecho que los niños desaparecieron durante la guerra. Qué efecto tuvo esa negación con las familias?
Héctor: Pues… muy grandes. Ya la gente es víctima de toda una situación de violencia que vivió en ese tiempo. Y que a una familia le llega a decir, “mire, quizás su hijo ni existió” o “su hijo, puede ser tirado, estaba en la guerra, pero usted quizás se descuidó de él” entonces es una situación de que llamamos la re-victimización. Es que el Estado…vuelva a abrir más la herida, pero para seguir dañándola, no para ayudarle. Sino más bien para dejarla en peor estado de cómo estaba, verdad?

Megan: Cree que el hecho de haber ocurrido tantas violaciones de derechos humanos durante el conflicto todavía tiene un efecto en el país? Como en la sociedad, la política, todo.

David Morales: Por supuesto que tiene un efecto en los diferentes sectores. Es inadmisible que…las personas que sufrieron los crímenes más atroces del conflicto se encuentren en una condición de profunda discriminación y exclusión social… Eso es una dinámica que niega los principios democráticos en lo que está basada la Constitución… No puede ser efectiva y real una democracia que liberadamente discrimina a un sector de la población en ese sentido. Luego, creo yo que nos impide la construcción de una verdadera identidad como pueblo, en la medida que no permite la reconstrucción de nuestra historia…que en el caso de El Salvador, quizás con más fuerza debe atenderse como una medida importante de no-replicación de hechos en el futuro. La cadena de masacres y exterminios humanos a población rural campesina, en los primeros 4 años del conflicto armado son la trágica repetición de la historia del genocidio del 1932. Y creo yo que nuestra historia reciente demuestra claramente que si negamos la historia, si discriminamos a las víctimas, y protegemos a los represores, y enterramos en el olvido, este tipo de tragedias por el terrorismo del estado, estamos muy probablemente condenándonos a repetir esa historia. El Salvador lo hizo apenas en 50 años después. Entonces tenemos esa trágica demonización… Las víctimas que no reciben reconocimiento a su derecho a la verdad, justicia, y reparación, están siendo víctimas de violaciones a sus derechos humanos hoy.

Santiago: Nosotros consideramos que una sociedad pos-guerra como la nuestra que mira hacia el futuro y que quiere construir un futuro diferente al pasado, consideramos que en ese ejercicio de ciudadanía de derecho de construcción de valores, el tema de la memoria es indispensable.

Ricardo Vaquerano: Pensamos que los salvadoreños necesitan conocer la historia reciente de este país, su … pasado que ha permanecido oculto por la historia oficial para una comunidad de gente tan sufrida, y … resultaría que dos tercios de la población viven en miseria, viven en pobreza. Y es gente que no sabe qué sucedió en la guerra civil, no? … El Faro pone mucha énfasis en tratar de investigar, procesar información que investigue y divulgar esa información para que se sepa quienes hicieron la guerra, qué participación tuvieron, y para que la gente entienda también los fenómenos de violencia y de marginación de exclusión, que vivimos actualmente. Pensamos que hay una relación entre la violencia histórica de este país, incluso si retrocedemos hasta 1932, y la
dictaduras militares… y la guerra civil, podemos encontrar unas explicaciones de por qué este país vive la violencia como la vive. Es decir, aparentemente sin solución, la mayor parte de los crímenes de todo tipo quedan en la impunidad… Y en El Faro pensamos que este país podría cambiar, y que nuestra función como periodistas es ayudar a la gente tenga información necesaria para que ella misma puede promover esos cambios. Nosotros nos vemos así, como una herramienta de la sociedad para hacer un especie de revolución.

25 Rafael: Hay una polarización que abordó la memoria histórica de la izquierda. Sin embargo, no hay interés de parte de la derecha para que se recupere la memoria de ellos. Además porque piensa que una memoria histórica es de la izquierda.

Megan: El término en sí?

Rafael: El término memoria histórica… la gente no se apropió como que es de todos, o tiene que ser de todos. O tiene que ser una memoria que sea un consenso a través de un diálogo. Entonces, memoria histórica – izquierda. Entonces, es uno de los problemas que hay en El Salvador por el cual no se avanza una memoria… del otro lado, de la derecha… Y también otro de los problemas, es…por 20 años de derecha…no se preocupó … no les importa tener una memoria histórica de la derecha porque tenían poder económico… Sin embargo, tampoco es un tema relevante hasta que pidió perdón Funes, fijáte… comenzaron a saltarse las alarmas.

26 Joaquín Villalobos: Las heridas dejadas por las atrocidades cometidas por ambas partes en un conflicto de tales dimensiones, hacen muy complejo el proceso de restablecer una identidad común. Teniendo a cuenta que la guerra terminó sin vencedores ni vencidos, El Salvador tiene como reto fundamental la forma en que debe abordar su historia reciente… La Derecha ha olvidado a sus víctimas para gobernar y la izquierda las recuerda como táctica para llegar al gobierno. El tema histórico cultural está vacío y plagado de esfuerzos polarizantes, con falsas visiones morales, que esconden ánimos de venganza política en la mayoría de los casos (Villalobos, 2000, pp. 73-76).

27 Salvador Menéndez Leal: Yo no creo que hay que hablar del pasado en el sentido de estar recordando por recordar. No estamos en afán de venganzas. Estamos en función de rescatar del pasado un sentido de futuro. Y un sentido positivo. Es decir… las únicas heridas que se puede reabrir en El Salvador son las que quedaron mal cerradas. Cuando diría a usted que hay que derogar la Ley de Amnistía, pero que eso puede reabrir heridas. Sí. Pero sólo las que son mal cerradas.

28 Mauricio Funes speech: Pido perdón a los niños y niñas, jóvenes, mujeres y hombres, ancianos y ancianas, religiosos, campesinos, trabajadores, estudiantes, intelectuales, opositores políticos y activistas de los derechos humanos.

29 Gisela de León: Entonces en El Mozote yo sí creo que hubo una diferencia, …ahí nos reunimos directamente con el Presidente. Y inclusive antes de la audiencia del caso se
hizo un acto público de reconocimiento de responsabilidad en el que participó directamente el Presidente y han habido avances en algunas de las medidas de reparación, como la adopción…medidas comunitarias como calles y cosas así, para los familiares. También se reconoció El Mozote como un sitio histórico, que eso le da como otra relevancia a Mozote dentro de El Salvador. Porque me parece que ahí se había como un interés que venía de más arriba, y eso hizo.

30 Megan- Usted llegó al Sistema Interamericano como peticionario, pero ya con su trabajo en la Cancillería ya cambió del otro lado del mesa. Entonces cómo fue esa experiencia para usted, de ya estar en los mismos casos pero ya al otro lado?

David Morales- Primero era extraño, jaja, en lo personal, pero no, creo que fue posible porque no había una incompatibilidad de posiciones… En el marco del cambio del gobierno, se da en 2009, pues hay un cambio de posicionamiento, y se me invitó…a participar en la construcción del nuevo posicionamiento. Ese posicionamiento fue de tratar de revertir…esta posición negacionista histórica y anti-jurídica de, que había mantenido hasta entonces el Estado de El Salvador. Y el esfuerzo primero al nivel de posicionamiento internacional fue aceptar plenamente la autoridad de la Comisión, aceptar la obligatoriedad de las recomendaciones de la Comisión y la Corte, pedir perdón a las víctimas por los hechos y por el trato que se les dio en los procesos internacionales, y tratar de empujar procesos de cumplimiento, verdad, a lo interno…

Ahora, esto tuvo algunos avances positivos, y que tiene una relevancia histórica de ser la primera vez los avances que se dan en orden a tratar de cumplir obligaciones. Pero por supuesto todavía es insuficiente… Esa deuda histórica no ha sido saldada en lo mínimo, salvo en unos primeros pasos de reparación, que son importantes, pero que sólo son un primer camino en el cual el Estado debe acelerar el paso, por supuesto. Porque muchas de las víctimas están, son personas adultas mayores, y muchos ya se están falleciendo, no? En condición de abandono y sin haber visto la reparación. Sin embargo, el Estado se mantuvo como un Estado que siguió incumplimiento absolutamente sus obligaciones en materia de investigación y en la materia de justicia… Lamentablemente, al interior del Estado de El Salvador, las instituciones responsables de administrar justicia no tuvieron voluntad de avanzar en el cumplimiento de lo que tocaba sus competencias.

31 Megan: En 2009 con Funes, ya él comenzó de hacer unos ciertos actos de reconocimiento y todo por parte del Estado. Qué efecto tuvo ese, pues al fin de más de 20 años que el Estado reconociera los hechos, no? Pero qué efecto tuvo a ustedes?

Blanca: Vaya, para nosotros, al inicio fue una gran alegría. Por qué? Porque es el primer gobierno de derecha, perdón, de izquierda, el primer gobierno de izquierda en nuestro país. Se vuelve a una esperanza, que este gobierno va a ser diferente, que va a tomar en serio las demandas de las víctimas, el esclarecimiento de tanto asesinato, desapariciones Entonces, con la pedida de perdón de Mauricio Funes ha sido una apertura bien pequeña, pero muy importante
32 Rosa Anaya: Uyyyyyy, fue sumamente importante. Suficiente jamás.

33 Héctor Rosemberg: Aceptar el Estado esta responsabilidad, ya … para los familiares, para las víctimas, ya es una parte de una reparación… Y eso fue muy importante… Es como reivindicar esa lucha y hacer a valer a los familiares todo lo que han perdido… Diferente a lo que se hizo con otros momentos que fue muy hiriente para las familias, en general, muy difícil, todavía se guarda ese mal estar frente el Estado. Aunque … tenga otro comportamiento ahora, aún se le ve siempre como El Estado. Aunque sea de izquierda, digamos ahora, siempre se le ve… tomando en cuenta que hay que pertenecieron a la guerrilla. Casos de desaparición que la guerrilla estuvo involucrada directamente, como causante. Entonces, es un poco complicado el tema, y hay que tratar de desideologizarlo para poder uno entrar y realmente trabajar, pues, todos, no meterse en la cabeza como que este tiene un color. Este tema no es de un color partidario, que es de la derecha, es de izquierda, no, es un tema de país donde se debe de buscar es la verdad, la justicia, y reparar a las familias.

34 Salvador Menéndez Leal: Repetición del perdón, sin programa de reparación, es una doble victimización. Si yo le digo perdón, pero no le ofrezco…medidas materiales y morales que sanen sus heridas, al final esto es revictimizando.

35 Héctor Rosemberg: Entonces, las heridas están, verdad, en la sociedad, en todos los que estuvimos allí, y … eso se va transmitiendo generacionalmente, dependiendo de cómo lo viví, y desde donde lo viví, yo lo voy a transmitir a las nuevas generaciones. Entonces yo puedo decir, la derecha tenga un… joven de sus organizaciones, y sus papás le contaron de que hacía la guerrilla, es su visión, entonces, pero no cuenta lo otro, no saben como se vio.

36 Roberto Rugamas: Y después llega el gobierno de Mauricio Funes y se empieza hablar de los temas, pero…no se logran más que hablar tomar acción. Y a eso creo que tiene que ser resultado de un proceso de conscienciación mayor, y de reconocer que los efectos se trasladan a las generaciones actuales. Eso es otro de los grandes objetivos que tuvimos con el caso Rochac… presentamos un peritaje sobre daños transgeneracional… Descubría, por ejemplo, que el rompimiento de los vínculos sociales genera una doble traumatización que no te hace estar a gusto en tu comunidad, en tu familia, y sin saber incluso que se debe a una victimización de lesa humanidad durante la guerra.

37 Salvador Menéndez Leal: Cuando tú hablas de estos temas, pasa como alguien que está viviendo en el pasado. Pero eso es que, hay que mandar de mensaje eso… que pasado y presente, presente y futuro, están interconectados! Y no podemos aspirar a construir una sociedad si no tenemos en consideración de donde venimos. Por lo que hemos travesado. Por eso es que creo que es importante trabajarle la memoria histórica, memoria colectiva, sobre todo a los jóvenes. Para hacer esa transferencia generacional.

38 Santiago: Eso te da un, una señal de que esas memorias son utilizadas.
Rosa Anaya: Mira, puedo decirte lo que mucha gente te va a decir, el clásico de que la violencia … Pero creo que también el legado más grande fue poder tener ejemplos de la gente que decidió en las peores de las circunstancias, hacerlo mejor de esas circunstancias. Y creo que debemos aprender mucho de eso, porque ahora nos quejamos: que la vida no sé qué, que todo va mal, que el gobierno, qué aquí, qué allá. Pero quién realmente está diciendo, “yo estoy aportando a” tal cosa? … Muy poco hablamos de las cosas positivas que nos dejó ese momento y para mí es eso. Que la gente hizo cosas sobrehumanas, realmente para sobrevivir física- y –emocionalmente. Para que sus hijos sobrevivieran emocionalmente… Que ahora…si algo aprendí de esos años de guerra, es que podes sobrevivir en esa circunstancia. Siempre y cuando no te encerres en la burbuja, y trates de hacer algo diferente … Como en las peores condiciones, podes sacar lo mejor de los seres humanos. No hay cosa más milagrosa que eso, creo yo.

David Morales: Legados positivos, quizás el más evidente… es la lucha de las víctimas. No sólo por su sobrevivencia, sino por el rescate de la verdad. Y la demanda de la reparación de injusticia. Yo siempre pongo el ejemplo de Rufina Amaya, la sobreviviente de Mozote porque digo fue una humilde mujer de un caserío remoto de El Salvador, del caserío del Mozote en el norte del departamento de Morazán, que fue capaz de derrotar a los poderes más grandes de este mundo literalmente. Rufina Amaya perdió todos sus hijos asesinados en la masacre y un gran número de sus familiares…frente a ella fueron exterminados cientos de personas incluidos sus hijos. Y la masacre de El Mozote fue negada desde el inicio por todos los poderosos. Lo negó el gobierno, el Presidente Duarte, lo negó el alto mando de las Fuerzas Armadas de El Salvador, lo negó la Embajada de los Estados Unidos en El Salvador. Después lo negaron los más altos representantes del gobierno estadounidense ante el Congreso para garantizar la continuidad de la ayuda militar al ejército salvadoreño… Quienes han tenido el poder político y el poder de las armas, enterraron la masacre. Y Rufina Amaya estuvo desde que… pudo superar la situación de muerte en que quedó sumida la masacre…después de la masacre estuvo denunciando…que la masacre fue una realidad. Y el testimonio de Rufina se expandió por el mundo. Ahora la masacre es incuestionable… Esa lucha de Rufina, que derrotó a los poderosos que quisieron poner una mentira y la negación de la historia, es la lucha de muchas madres, de muchas abuelas, de muchos hijos que han estado de las comunidades rescatando la memoria histórica.

Chapter 5- The Savior

1 Joaquín Villalobos (2000): “Para Naciones Unidas fue una de las operaciones de paz más exitosas del presente periodo histórico” (pg. 25).

2 Héctor Rosemberg: Si entendemos la paz nada más como el cese al fuego, pues que sí fue importante esa paz en ese momento, pues. Y fue algo como bien dice las Naciones Unidas, ejemplar para el mundo. Que digamos, el primero de febrero del año 1992… desde ahí y adelante no se va a volver a disparar una bala por motivos políticos… puchica! Y que se haya respetado, entre comillas va, porque las escuadrones estuvo un poco actuando todavía en ese tiempo… Pero, en temas de manera formal, digamos, los
bandos parados. Entonces para muchos fue muy importante eso, verdad, salir, ya no seguir escondiéndose, ya no seguir huyendo, tener un lugar…donde establecerse, fue para muchos un cambio muy grande en sus vidas.

3 Santiago: Falta mucho, pero yo creo que el proceso de paz salvadoreño tiene muchas lecciones que dar para otro proceso, verdad?

4 Megan: Qué características tiene el final de la guerra para ti y para tu familia? En términos de con los Acuerdos de Paz, cómo cambió la vida de ustedes.

Blanca: Sí, es de, bueno, el Comité de Madres siempre pidió la paz… Entonces, se logró firmar los Acuerdos de Paz … y esto fue totalmente una alegría para todo el Comité de Madres, para la población en general fue una fiesta… Y después de los Acuerdos de Paz, pues toda la gente como que sintió un gran alivio. Sintió una paz. Pero, el dolor de las víctimas, de todos los familiares, jamás se ha borrado. Porque el miedo y el temor a la Fuerza Armada, cuando uno salía a la calle, se sentía, a pesar de que se ha firmado los Acuerdos de Paz…

Pero ahí, vienen los nuevos retos…porque la población vivía totalmente asustada, psicológicamente afectada, no habían comisiones económicas. .... pero en esa época… como ahora, había tanta necesidad y tanta tristeza de la gente, la población civil que creyó que cuando se firmara la Paz, todo iba a volver a la normalidad… Y las madres empezaron a sentir la tristeza de que sus hijos habían sido asesinados. Sus esposos, sus familiares…. Entonces, hemos, después de los Acuerdos de Paz, hemos luchado… poniendo nuestros propios recursos.

5 Maritza Herrera Rebollo: Que por qué … en otros países solo se creen lo de ellos? Aquí se dieron los Acuerdos de Paz porque presionaron otros países… Mire, yo sinceramente, no estaba de acuerdo con los Acuerdos de Paz, nunca! Para mi debería haber seguido la Fuerza Armada … es que ellos eran unos delincuentes

6 General Vargas: Cuáles fueron las causas del conflicto? Las causas …fueron causas psicosociales en un primer momento, e intervención en el otro componente. Estaba la Unión Soviética y estaban los Estados Unidos… presidente Reagan dijo que Centroamérica es el traspatio de los Estados Unidos… nuestra seguridad de la que se ve amenazada … Cuba es un portaviones, Nicaragua es una cabeza de playa, la expansión del comunismo en América Latina, eso es lo que se vivía en ese momento. Bueno, malo, feo, es .. el problema era que eso es lo que estaba.

7 Eliberto Juárez: Que Estados Unidos nos jodió la vida acá. Estados Unidos aportaba…las armas, para la Fuerza Armada, aviones de guerra…Entonces, Estados Unidos jugó un mal papel en eso.

8 Salvador Menéndez Leal: Para mi es importante decirle que probablemente el caso salvadoreño es un caso irónico y paradójico, y sobre todo contradictorio. Porque las
Naciones Unidas lo dan a la categoría de una experiencia modélica en cuanto a negociaciones en medio del conflicto a una salida política negociada, pero sin embargo las formas de violencia están bajo nueva expresiones... Los actores de la guerra están ahí. Entonces El Salvador está todavía, yo creo que en una situación más, más crítica... Yo creo que es importante entender varias cosas. Una, que El Salvador no es modelo de nada. 2, que esa carta de presentación de Naciones Unidas- no es tal. Nos venden como un modelo de negociaciones y como una resolución alterna a los conflictos, y como un ejemplo a nivel internacional...Pero no es cierto eso.

9 Mario Valiente: La paz NUNCA se hubiera firmado jamás si D’Aubuisson no le dio el apoyo político a Cristiani... Y esos fueron sus palabras. “La paz se va a firmar! Los trengos van a regresar y son tan salvadoreños como nosotros, más nos vale aprender a vivir en paz.”…. Pero quien toma el liderazgo, y fue un líder, fue Cristiani, con un estilo diferente. Una persona de otra preparación, de otro ambiente, con un modo más suave, pero no tan fuerte, nunca fue tan fuerte de líder como D’Aubuisson.

10 Blanca García: El Comité de Madres siempre pidió la paz... Ellas estaban ahí [en la firma de los acuerdos]... Y había mucha amenaza de Presidente Cristiani, mal llamado Presidente de la Paz. No quería firma. Pero él recibió exigencia de Estados Unidos para que firmara.

11 Almudena Bernabeu: Cristiani es una mala persona ... Muy muy mal, muy mal. Es Cristiani es uno de los hombres más ricos, sino el hombre más rico de El Salvador. Y todo el dinero que tiene Cristiani es ilegal. Y él ha hecho mucho... encima, es un personaje muy siniestro que los, políticamente ubicado en una manera en la historia de El Salvador, que es el héroe de los militares y el héroe de Estados Unidos. Si tú hablas con el Departamento de Estado, con ... el McGovern de Massachusetts, ellos piensan que Cristiani fue un gran, era el presidente de la paz. Es una cosa grotesca.

12 David Morales: Los Acuerdos de Paz en El Salvador...en... parte son exitosos en la neutralización del conflicto armado, y el escenario de aquel momento en Centroamérica... acaba de derrumbarse la Guerra Fría y el Bloque de Socialismo Real... y se imponía la expansión de las políticas económicas de corte neo-liberal, con la fuerte impulso de los Estados Unidos de la liberación de los mercados, y la formalización de los tratados de libre comercio. Entonces El Salvador tuvo la oportunidad histórica de, por primera vez tratar de aporstar un estado fuerte y garante de los derechos humanos, tratando de alejarse de toda su historia de dictaduras, gobiernos represivos, la etapa insurgente, pero no hay una voluntad del poder político y económico en El Salvador para esto. Entre los políticos neo-liberales que están más a la reducción del estado, a su debilitamiento... Y esta agenda de los Acuerdos de Paz se ve impactada.

13 Mario Valiente: Vaya, entonces, qué es lo que logró unir a la derecha? Unir, incluso, con el apoyo del ejército políticamente hablando, pues se logró. Y cuando Cristiani entra al poder, levantó la economía.
Damián Alegría: En 20 años de neoliberalismo se destruyeron muchas de las instancias del estado que beneficiaban a la población… Ocurrió el fenómeno que se llama tercerización de la economía, estábamos más dedicados a los servicios, estábamos más dedicados a los servicios, planteando un modelo más en esa dirección. Entonces cuando nosotros tomamos el gobierno en 2009… tratamos de corregir todas esas cosas, pero no es fácil.

Héctor Rosemberg: Lo que pasó fue…que la paz también al final fue un acuerdo político, no tanto económico ni social quizás… El hablar de derechos humanos, ya una policía diferente, era…otra cosa. Pero no… llega a una raíz económica, a una recomposición de sistema económico de manera de que la mayoría tuviéramos oportunidades de desarrollo... Pero la empresa privada, los empresarios de este país, el gobierno estuvo de acuerdo… Lo que hicieron … fue la privatización… vender todo para que cada quien, los que pudieran reconstruir en el país pero para sí mismos, no para la mayoría.

Megan: Crees que esa situación ha cambiado desde el final de la guerra?
Rosa: Sí ha cambiado, digamos el contexto. Pero el fondo histórico de las causas que originan la guerra, o sea, están intactas… Ha cambiado el contexto político. Ha cambiado el que podes y no podes decir. Pero al final el mismo juego sigue ahí… el juego de la exclusión, el juego de la pobreza… No, no ha cambiado … ha cambiado el contexto y los actores… y no vamos a decir que es la misma situación que durante la guerra, pero hay muchos elementos … igual que durante la guerra.

Eliberto Juárez: Entonces la explotación sigue dándose. El abuso, los grandes empresas robándose los impuestos del estado… Sí muchos de los problemas que condujeron la guerra siguen manteniéndose. Entonces, yo creo que el, las negociaciones de paz fueron buenas. En tanto hubo reducción de armas, hubo un poco más de viabilidad para transitar por las calles. Pero los factores de desigualdad económica, política, siguen estando presentes.

Salvador Menéndez Leal: Mi tesis es: que el conflicto ha sumido nuevas expresiones, pero que prácticamente sus razones y sus manifestaciones están intactas… Que 20 años después de la guerra, las razones por las cuales hubo guerra, están ahí.

Nelson Guardado: La circunstancia como que al final dice los ciudadanos “Y qué razón tuvo el conflicto armado entonces si seguimos muy similares?” Que hoy sí podemos hablar de un logro pos-guerra, es que hay más tolerancia. Hay un poco más de diálogo y aquí no, al menos los que se conoce ya no se asesinan por pensar diferente, por opinar diferente… Hay ese sentimiento que no deben de combatirse las ideas con las balas, sino ideas con ideas. Y eso creo que es bueno.

Mario Valiente: Es cierto que el país mejoró. Es cierto que las cifras de pobreza bajaron, hubo más empleo, crecieron los índices económicos, el país estaba muy bien
ubicado en los índices de competitividad y facilidades de negocios… Pero en los 5 años del FMLN han bajado. El nivel de educación de sirven vea, de los estudiantes ha bajado. Y yo creo que la culpa es nuestra. Yo creo que la culpa es de ARENA porque en 20 años hubiéramos hecho más, y no se hizo.

21 Maritza Herrera Rebollo: , este país ha retrocedido. En los años setenta El Salvador pues estaba mejor. Mil veces

22 Megan: Y creo que el país ha podido superar las situaciones que causaron el conflicto armado? …

Gloria Salguero Gross: Bueno, mira la realidad es esta: y yo me siento muy muy triste porque yo sí trabajé por mi país desde el primer día que entré en política yo he trabajado por mi país, en forma transparente, en una forma adecuada y correcta. Pero… estamos peor que en los 70, en este momento. A mi me da mucha tristeza.

Megan: En qué términos?

Gloria Salguero Gross: Yo te digo, corrupción por todos lados, el ex-presidente…Fijate que, todo el mundo sabe que él tenía una amante.

23 Monseñor Romero La riqueza es necesaria para el progreso de los pueblos, no lo vamos a negar. Pero un progreso como el nuestro, condicionado a la explotación de tantos que no disfrutarán nunca los progresos de nuestra sociedad, no es pobreza evangélica. De qué sirven hermosas carreteras y aeropuertos, hermosos edificios de grandes pisos si no están más que amasados con sangre de pobres que no los van a disfrutar? (Romero, 1979)

24 Rosa Anaya: Yo creo que es negar nosotros mismos de que tuvimos participación en el proceso por acción u omisión… Puede ser “…es que yo no me metí en nada.” Ok, pero el no meterse en nada…o…estás viendo que están haciendo una masacre y mejor, “yo no me meto en nada”, estás cometiendo el mismo acto solo desde otro punto de vista. Estar decidiendo no hacer nada para que continúe la injusticia. Pues hallas que no estás involucrado, verdad?

25 Almudena Bernabeu: Complicada… ellos (los militares de alto rango) han servido mucho del poder que les dio su pertenencia a las Fuerzas Armadas para sacar mérito económico. La mayoría no, pero hay un grupo muy pequeño de militares súper millonarios, casados con oligarcas, o sea, … el general Eugenio Vides Casanova…es cuñado de Cristiani.

26 Roberto Rugamas: La situación en general en el país es una situación polarizada. Porque todavía existen posiciones mutuamente que se descartan, se rechazan, se repelan, y se atacan. Entonces no veo como capacidad de construir un plan de nación que involucre a todos los sujetos que deberían de estar en el diálogo… Y esta polarización no
solo se expresa en el sentido político ideológico, que es como su mayor, donde sea visible. Pero también es evidente en situaciones tan banales como el mismo futbol. Aquí todo tiene 2 caras. O sos Barca o sos Real Madrid… O sos Católico o sos Evangélico. O sos de la MS o sos de la 18… Entonces yo creo que no nos hemos aprendido de reconocernos como personas y a validarnos las diferencias. Entonces la situación en el país es difícil que progrese, mientras se mantenga esta eterna tensión entre opuestos.

27 Megan: Usted ve la sociedad y la política todavía muy polarizados?

General Vargas: Pues sí, indiscutiblemente que sí… hay 2 fuerzas que no permitan el entendimiento claro ni dentro de las mismas fuerzas ni entre las fuerzas. Por qué razón? Porque son 2 proyectos irreconciliables. Son 2 visiones diferentes. Ellos tienen…una visión…del gobierno, como un centralismo democrático. Tienen una visión de la economía que es una visión centralista, más que iniciativa privada. Tienen una visión de la dinámica de la lucha de clases que se mantiene presente. Tiene el control social del estado, que son premisas que vienen desde el socialismo soviético…Entonces prácticamente con esa herencia vamos a tener que seguir bregando durante todo estos tiempos el dominio del poder de un sistema o del otro sistema en la situación actual.

28 Oscar Aleman: Creo que la sociedad está polarizada porque la gente que está en el poder lo ha manipulado a la forma que se llega a estar como está. … La polarización viene desde ahí, pero más que todo es con la gente mayor. Porque la juventud creo que ahora se deja de llevar más fácilmente por que los políticos partidistas les digan, el dulce en el oído. Entonces también influye como ellos maniobran para a dónde ser la mente de la juventud.

29 Salvador Sánchez Cerén: Lo dije en 2005 y lo mantengo hoy en los mismos términos. Tal como señalan los Acuerdos de Paz, la reconciliación es un valor decisivo para el presente y futuro nacional y muy difícilmente habrá reconciliación si aquellos que cometieron grandes daños a la sociedad no son sometidos a la justicia. Tengo confianza en que ese momento llegará (Sánchez Cerén 2008, p. 131).

30 Rafael Molina: Se están haciendo un monumento a la reconciliación con unas llaves, con una tontera. Surge esta iniciativa desde el Ministerio de Obras Públicas, hacer un monumento a la reconciliación, verdad, pero qué reconciliación? Quíenes se han reconciliado? … A qué se refieren con reconciliación? Porque reconciliación para la izquierda, yo estoy seguro que es perdón y olvido. Es perdón y olvido, porque, si vos te das cuenta y también en un discurso de un perdón de Sánchez Cerén, comienza decir, “bueno, eh, discúlpennme por todas las muertes que han habido, pero fueron necesarias.” Y él lo dice.

31 Wilfredo Medrano: Y cuál reconciliación? Aquí lo único que ha reconciliado…es los ex-combatientes de la Fuerza Armada y del FMLN que salen a protestar juntos… Ellos pueden ser los únicos que están reconciliados…Y los comandantes están bien en la Asamblea… Aquí para que hay una verdadera reconciliación tiene que ver una reparación,
acceso a la justicia, una reparación integral, moral, indemnizarlos… por qué los mataron? Saber donde están los más de 10 mil desaparecidos.

32 Almudena Bernabeu: El tema de la reconciliación es…muy interesante analizarlo desde el punto de cómo aspiras reconciliación si hay exclusión absoluta de las víctimas en toda oportunidad de diálogo? Es que no son parte ni fueron parte… Incluso si miras experiencias comparadas, en Guate… siempre hay mesas de víctimas y cosas… pero, en El Salvador, nada! Nada!... O sea, el proceso de paz se tenía que haber sentado… Ignacio Ellacuría, y … Segundo Montes, y Nacho Martín-Baró, a pesar de que no eran víctimas en el sentido estricto…hubiera sido hablar por los que no tenían voz. Encima se los carga, es un proceso de paz fallido…Y es una falencia… o sea el conflicto está sostenido pero está. No hay paz, no hay ninguna paz en El Salvador.
REFERENCES


JRN SantaTecla. (2013, October, 28). *Mensaje de Maritza Herrera Rebollo para*
Salvador Sánchez Cerén [Video file]. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPrRQZV6kZo


Montoya, A. (2013). The Violence of Cold War Polarities and the Fostering of Hope:
214


