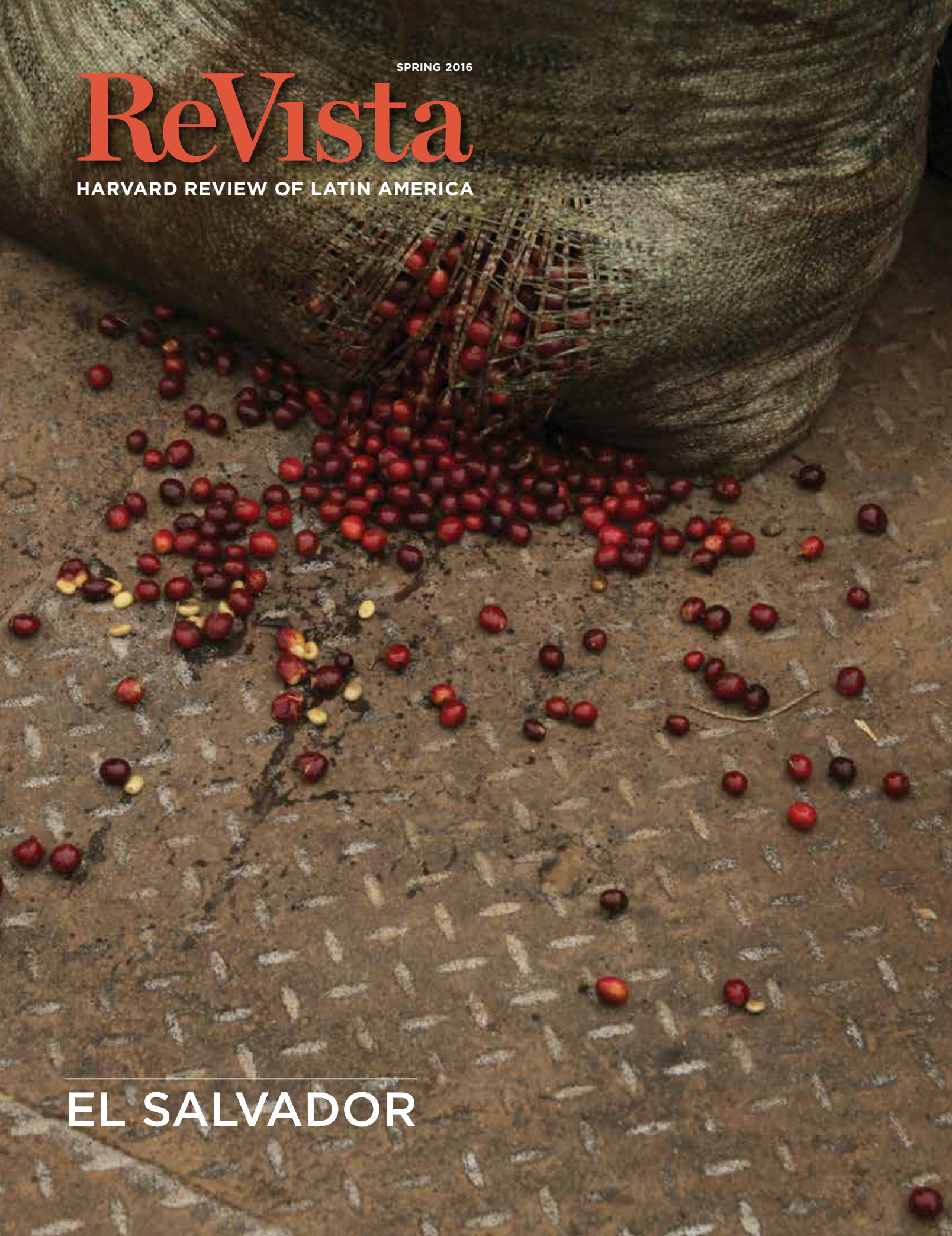


SPRING 2016

ReVista

HARVARD REVIEW OF LATIN AMERICA



EL SALVADOR

Beauty and Bullets

I had forgotten how beautiful El Salvador is. The fragrance of ripening rose apples mixed with the tropical breeze. A mockingbird sang off in the distance. Flowers were everywhere: roses, orchids, sunflowers, bougainvillea and the creamy white izote flower—all against the hovering presence of the majestic San Salvador volcano.

I had forgotten how hospitable Salvadorans are. On my most recent trip in November 2015, the lapping of the ocean and the sea breeze at La Libertad an hour from the capital revived memories of my first trip to the country in 1975. I was making my way through Latin America (without a backpack) on \$10 a day. I would look longingly along the beach at the fish menus in tourist restaurants, much too expensive for my budget. One day, a local woman with two children suggested I buy fish at the market. When I protested that I didn't have a place to cook, she invited me home and made delicious fried fish and plantains. I ended up staying with her family for a few days.

I had returned frequently as a reporter to El Salvador to cover the civil war, but I never saw the family again. I couldn't reconcile the cruelty and pain with the warmth and kindness I experienced on an everyday basis. I had seen too many children's coffins, interviewed too many grieving mothers. I had trembled too many times myself. When the bombs went off during Archbishop Óscar Romero's funeral service, I happened to be standing in the church tower, next to a revolutionary priest, half-expecting a sniper's bullet to end our lives. I had watched as the four murdered churchwomen were unearthed from their shallow grave. I will never ever forget the smell, the smell of death.

I will also never forget how I suggested to a nun friend that she get into a photo I was taking and the next thing I knew four nuns had dropped to their knees to pray and every professional photographer on the scene pushed me aside to get what became an iconic shot. I was a witness to history, a role I feel strongly today as I explain the war experience to the postwar generation.

I had come back once before to El Salvador after the war for a reunion of journalists who had covered the war. I wanted to go to La Chacra, a shantytown where I had visited with Archbishop Romero in 1979. Too dangerous, I was told; the gangs now controlled the neighborhood (see story on p. 78).

El Salvador now has the highest homicide rate in the world. When I told people I was doing an issue on the Central American country, the response immediately focused on gangs or violence. No, I would reply, we've already done *ReVista* issues on violence and organized crime. And I instructed the authors and photographers in these pages not to center their articles on violence, but to show how violence is transversal, how it permeates every aspect of the society.

But perhaps I shouldn't say every aspect. During my November trip, friends, authors, photographers, people I knew and people I didn't, organized parties and lunches and gatherings of fascinating people—and trips to the gang-dominated neighborhood. I always had the feeling people were looking out for me, taking care of me. The hospitality doesn't change and neither does the country's exuberant landscape. I am thankful for both and especially for the energetic collaboration of Salvadorans and others that made this issue a reality and, hopefully, a thoughtful and accurate reflection on El Salvador today.

June C. Erlick

VOLUME XV NO. 3

David Rockefeller Center
for Latin American Studies

Director

Brian Farrell

Executive Director

Ned Strong

ReVista

Editor-in-Chief

June Carolyn Erlick

Copy Editor

Anita Safran

Publication Interns

Isabel Espinosa

Gabriela Farrell

Design

Jane Simon Design

Printer

P+R Publications

Contact Us

1730 Cambridge Street

Cambridge, MA 02138

Telephone: 617-495-5428

Subscriptions, Back Copies and Comments

jerlick@fas.harvard.edu

Website

revista.drclas.harvard.edu

Facebook

ReVista, the Harvard Review of Latin America

Copyright © 2016 by the President and

Fellows of Harvard College.

ISSN 1541-1443

ReVista is printed on recycled stock.

This issue of *ReVista* is made possible
through generous support of

Santander Universities Global Division.





ReVista

HARVARD REVIEW OF LATIN AMERICA

SPRING 2016

VOLUME XV NO. 3

Published by the David Rockefeller Center
for Latin American Studies
Harvard University

EL SALVADOR

FIRST TAKE

Twenty-Four Years Later *by Héctor Dada Hirezi* 2

PUBLIC POLICY, PUBLIC POLITICS

El Salvador's Future *by Carolina Avalos* 8

Beyond Polarization in 21st-century El Salvador *by Carmen Aída Lazo* 11

Beyond the Political Pendulum *by Luis Mario Rodríguez R.* 14

The Salvadoran Right Since 2009 *by Manuel Andrés Meléndez* 16

PERSPECTIVES

Postwar Kids *by Carlos Dada* 20

Zika and Abortion *by Jocelyn Viterna* 24

Indigenous Rights in El Salvador *by Leonel Antonio Chevez* 28

ART AND ACTION

Performing El Salvador *by Claire Breukel and Mario Cader-Frech* 33

Roque Dalton *by James Iffland* 36

Reimagining the Future *by Federico J. Rivas* 38

THE PAST IN THE PRESENT

Transitional Justice in El Salvador *by Mary Jo McConahay* 42

The Convulsions of War *by Jack Spence* 47

A Search for Justice in El Salvador *by M. Brinton Lykes and Nelson Portillo* 51

Salvadoran Refugees in a Honduran Camp *by Steve Cagan* 54

A Nation at War with Itself *by Michael S. Serrill* 60

Photojournalists in a Cauldron of Violence *by Bill Gentile* 66

REMEMBERING ROMERO

San Romero de América *by Lorne Matalon* 70

Remembering Romero *by Gene Palumbo* 76

The Boy in the Photo *by June Carolyn Erlick* 78

THE DIASPORA

The Legacy of War *by Sofía Jarrín-Thomas* 82

A Personal View from the Diaspora *by Caroline Lacey* 84

Beating Stereotypes *by Marta Castillo Ramos* 86

The Migrant Architecture of El Salvador *by Sarah Lynn Lopez* 88

Santos y Sombras/Saints and Shadows *by Muriel Hasbun* 90

Entre el Amor y la Distancia *by Kimberly M. Benavides* 92

in every issue

BOOK TALK

The Politics of Memory and The Memory of Politics

A Review by Andreas Huyssen 94

Recycled Wars

A Review by Alberto Salcedo Ramos 96

To Build or Not to Build?

A Review by Alberto Vergara 97

BUILDING BRIDGES

Mapping Childhood Malnutrition in Chiapas,

Mexico *by Maggie Cochran* 100

online

Look for more content online at
revista.drclas.harvard.edu



ON THE COVER

The Spilling

By Mauro Arias

MAURO ARIAS @MAUROARIASFOTO

Twenty-Four Years Later

The 1992 Peace Accords and El Salvador's Reality Today **BY HÉCTOR DADA HIREZI**

IT WAS MIDNIGHT IN MEXICO, NEW YEAR'S Eve, 1991. Friends gathered in our home together with my family, marking the beginning of another year of exile from El Salvador. Shortly after midnight, the phone rang. A top Mexican government official was on the line, calling to tell me that the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) and the Salvadoran government had reached an agreement to end the conflict. The agreement would be signed in mid-January in Mexico. We celebrated: the end of the war was an achievement. And it might mean the possibility of returning home.

The new peace negotiation had worked when others had failed. The basic idea was not to repeat the attitudes and policies that had made so many attempts at dialogue—since 1984—useless and fruitless. The Cold War was in its final days, and both sides' inability to win the war had led to this agreement.

Despite our joy, we had some lingering doubts about whether the terms of the

Mexico City. Salvadoran government representatives and guerrilla commanders spoke about the importance of the agreement and the necessity to confront the causes of war. My colleagues and I listened with surprise as President Cristiani acknowledged that one of these causes was that El Salvador's citizens had been deprived of full democratic participation and economic development. It was the first time that a member of the economic elite—and in this case, the President of the Republic—had acknowledged these facts. The speeches of the guerrillas also sounded hopeful as they agreed to participate in the process of democratic political competition; that is, they would give up the political power of the gun to seek the political power—always limited—of the ballot box, and try to foster social change through electoral means.

This January 16, 2016, Salvadorans celebrated the 24th anniversary of the signing of the Peace Accords that ended the 12-year-old civil war. The devastat-

long time. Traditionally, El Salvador has had a high level of inequity. Since the 19th century, the concentration of land in the hands of large landowners dedicated to agro-exports had generated a strong division of classes in the heavily rural country. Efforts to industrialize in the 1950s to promote the substitution of imports did not manage to alleviate the situation. Tensions grew sharper. Since 1931, the country had been dominated by a military regime beholden to the interests of the agrarian oligarchy, which in turn put itself at the service of U.S. policy in the context of the Cold War.

Democratic participation was very limited; however, military authoritarianism managed to coexist with elections. Rampant electoral fraud became the instrument to prevent the opposition from gaining more power than what the system would tolerate in order to maintain its stability. This system came to be known as "limited democracy." A poignant example occurred in 1972, when Napoleón Duarte, the Christian Democratic candidate, lost the presidency through electoral fraud. A U.S. diplomat congratulated me on the electoral success of the party and said that he was sure we party members were intelligent enough to understand why we could not take over the government we had earned at the ballot boxes. Thus social and political conflicts continued to escalate, sadly leading many youth to take up arms to make the changes they considered impossible to achieve through fair elections.

On October 15, 1979, a coup took place in the midst of great social convulsion. Reflecting on the triumph of the revolutionary Sandinista Front in Nicaragua, a group of young Salvadoran military men decided that the Armed Forces needed

This January 16, 2016, Salvadorans celebrated the 24th anniversary of the signing of the Peace Accords that ended the 12-year-old civil war.

agreement responded to what the country needed. The reason for this uncertainty was that since 1989, the right-wing ARENA government of President Alfredo Cristiani had followed the policies of the so-called Washington Consensus, which meant that the ability of the state to deal with post-war demands was going to be limited.

On January 16, the peace accords were signed in Chapultepec Castle in

ing conflict had left at least 70,000 dead. While this is a very serious toll on a country with fewer than six million inhabitants, it was not the only drain on the nation: its citizens suffered internal displacement, emigration, families broken apart and profound transformation of social relationships.

The conflict arose amidst domestic problems—with additional external influences—that had been brewing for a



Top: Labor Day protest for decent pay
Bottom: View of the Bulevar De Los Héroes
in downtown San Salvador

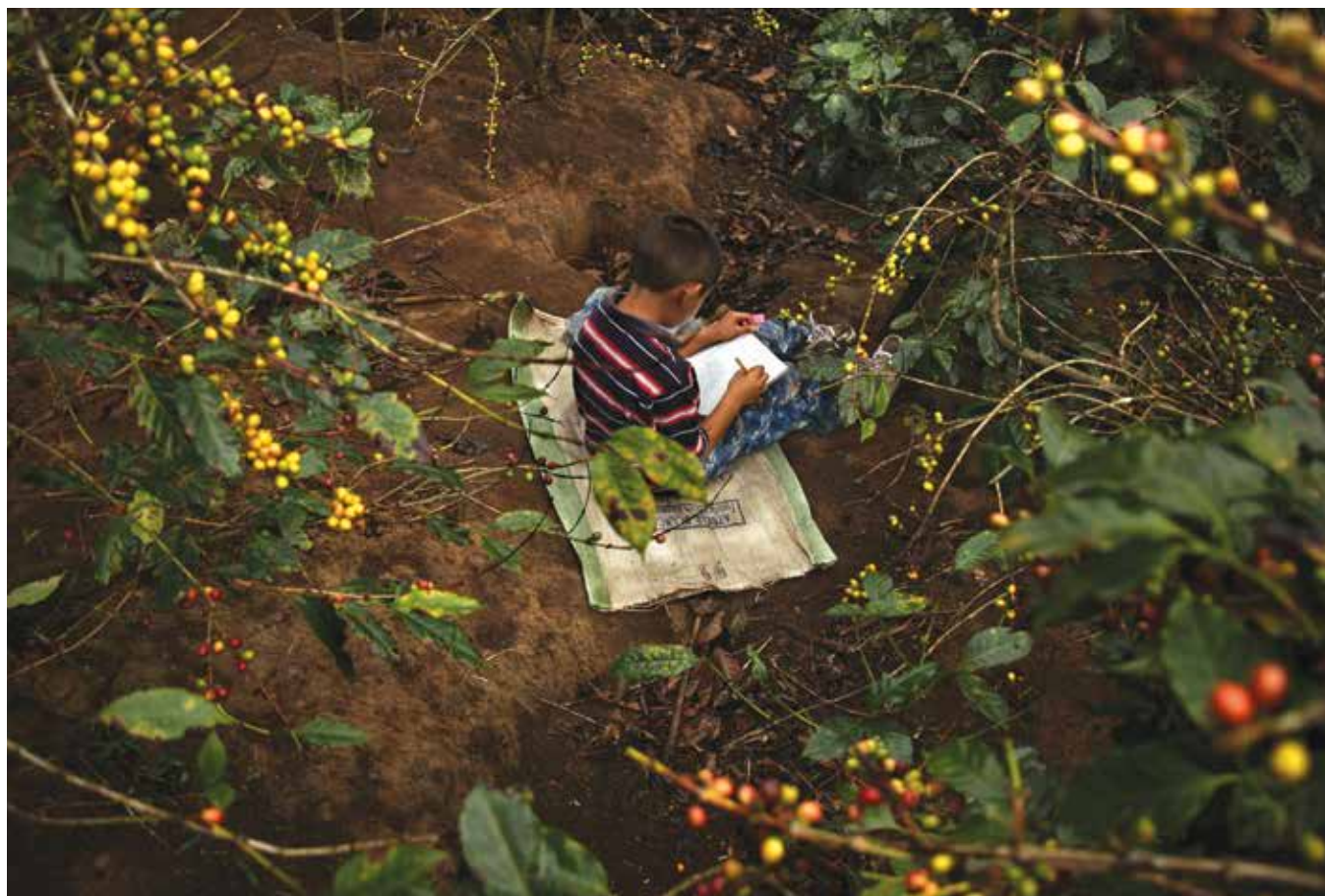
to abandon their role as guarantor of the status quo and instead become the representatives of change in favor of democracy and equity. They invited several civilians, including myself, who were bent on avoiding a civil war, to collaborate in this transformational effort. The Archbishop of El Salvador, Monseñor Óscar Romero, was hopeful about the attempt (several of us who made up the new government were members of Catholic organizations). However, very quickly the possibilities of achieving these transformative goals became remote, despite efforts to promote them (subject for another article!). The original vision of reformism working to construct democracy yielded to pressure from the United States, which framed the proposals in the 1979 coup declaration—agrarian reform and nationalization of the banks and foreign trade—in terms of a counterinsurgency war. The military solution was assumed to be a governmental goal, and talk of reform merely became an instrument to that end. A bit later, the assassination of Monseñor Romero on



March 24, 1980, ended all prospects of action for those of us who wished to avoid such a bloody war. Looking back, we can say today that we did not fathom how much power was behind those who stood in the way of reform with social participation. On the frontlines were the most veteran Army officials, largely dependent on the dictates of the U.S. government, which acted in the context of the difficult circumstances of the Cold War. The

confrontation between guerrilla groups and the armed forces—in tandem with a compliant section of the Christian Democratic Party as the administrative head of the government—was the dominant reality for almost an entire decade.

Now twenty-four years have gone by. What kind of assessment can we make? In the first place, one important step is that all legal barriers formerly set for ideological reasons have been eliminated in



A boy does his homework in a coffee field.

the electoral process (this was precisely one of the causes of the armed conflict). This has required changes on the part of both principal actors: the FMLN had to give up the idea of establishing a “dictatorship of the proletariat” and to make the transition from an armed political organization to a legal political party. ARENA (established in 1981 with an armed component of the so-called death squads) had to agree to stop its policy of excluding and eliminating the “reds,” and also to cast aside its paramilitary components. The electoral practice of democracy has made much progress since the peace accords, and election results have been respected. The greatest test came in 2009 when ARENA had to turn over the government to the FMLN, marking an unprecedented alternation of political parties. In spite of continued polarization between the two major parties, we

have entered a period of peaceful political, party-based competition, without making any judgment about how much of this has happened because of democratic conviction or because of the simple acceptance of reality.

Since 1989, the property and business-owning right and the political party-based right—it is difficult to distinguish the two—had controlled the executive, legislative and judicial branches, managing the state as their own patrimony. In 2009, the FMLN won the presidential election with candidate Mauricio Funes, a journalist with no prior political militance. Although the FMLN won the largest bloc in the Congress, it did not have a clear majority nor did it control the judicial branch. The loss of the top position of the executive branch represented an important change for the right because it lost its capacity to control, and its party

(ARENA) had to take up the role of main opposition party (a role it had played once before during the government of President Napoleón Duarte between 1984 and 1989). It was also an important change for the left; its challenge was to transform its electoral victory into the realization of its aim of generating greater social equity and—above all—to get used to governing within the rules of a system that it had always conceptually rejected. Moreover, it had to build on the foundations left by twenty years of government by a party with ideas very different from its own.

Electoral alternation made people feel freer to express their opinion; subjects came up in public opinion that had previously been hidden or discussed by only a very small number of people. Awareness about the need for the independence of different government bodies, as well as the demand that state officials act with



A rose hangs on the wall of the El Salvador Civil War Memorial in a park in San Salvador. The memorial displays the names of many thousands of known victims of the nation's decade-long Civil War.

honesty and transparency, began to have daily media and conversational presence among an increasing number of citizens. Indeed, people who enjoyed almost unrestricted control of government bodies have discovered—at least in their discourse—the need for the separation of powers and transparency in the operation of government institutions. The issue of corruption—which is not new and which at some moments of the recent past might have been much worse than now—was introduced into the public discussion without the repressive responses of the former regimes. Democracy is advancing, although some people consider that open discussion is a synonym for instability or that a difference of opinion between state bodies is a sign of lack of democracy. Certainly, I do not claim that everything has been achieved; I'm merely pointing out that progress has been made; that it

needs to be defended; and that we can build upon it to deepen the democratic experience in El Salvador.

What the left-wing FLMN, now in government, has found most difficult to confront is the inheritance of ARENA in the social and economic areas. Last year, El Salvador had the highest homicide rate in the world (104 per 100,000 inhabitants); inequality continues to be very high despite six years of governments on the left (official statistics don't exist to measure this because of the lack of reliability in household surveys); only three out of every ten people have a job in the formal sector; the economy is growing at two percent (as it has for the last twenty years); the inherited model has not been substantially modified. Since 1989, a model based on neoliberalism (or the Washington Consensus, thus named because it grew out of a consensus of

international financial institutions) has reigned, based on the hypothesis that open markets guarantee an improvement in productivity in the economy and the rise in exports becomes the basis of accelerated economic growth; the withdrawal of state intervention in economic affairs is necessary for the success of this type of neoliberalism—as Ronald Reagan said, the state cannot be part of the solution because it is the problem; the concentration of income is thus a prerequisite to stimulate investment; and the positive evolution of the economy will result in the reduction of inequality. Nevertheless, implementing this model did not work because, as I've said on several occasions, the hypothesis does not work in practice. Yet the policies and legislation established to support this hypothesis are still on the books (see *Las apuestas perdidas*, elfaro.net).

The FMLN government has tried to alleviate this situation by increasing subsidies to the poorest. These do reduce the needs of this sector, but they do not resolve the problem of income disparities. Moreover, these subsidies have not been accompanied by effective policies for economic growth that would generate dignified employment. Even if the government did come up with coherent proposal for such a necessary change in the economic model, it lacks the legislative majority to get it approved. Moreover, even if such a measure were somehow approved, public finances—with their chronic deficit—would hamper implementation because of lack of adequate resources. And then there's the fierce opposition from the business class; in addition, given the lack of clarity about its direction, the government cannot count on the backing of citizens to counteract the power of those who benefit from the existing situation, thus further increasing its weakness.

Public security is the area Salvadorans consider the most deficient. The roots of the violence lie in the past. The decision to reduce the capacity of the state to intervene in social and economic problems has had serious consequences in our national life. The armed conflict destroyed many of our social structures and the counter-insurgency carried out its own type of profound property redistribution. These two forms of destruction meant that in the post-war period, the state needed to do a restructuring for which it did not have the capacity; the reliance on a purely market economy created an extremely individualistic vision that conceived the market as a force capable not only of guaranteeing economic growth, but also of fomenting new harmonious relations among social groups.

Massive migration has turned into the main solution for those who have not found opportunities for a dignified life in the country. The emigration of citizens, mostly poor and lower middle-class people, has alleviated social costs for the state. Family remittances have become the largest income source for thousands



Above: Beatification of Romero. Opposite page: Women wash clothes in a dirty river.

of households, and also the primary source of foreign exchange (remittances are equal to about 80% of exports of goods and services). However, massive migration generates a rupture of social relationships, from the family to the society as a whole—a society which has already experienced breakdown because of the effects of the armed conflict and the transformations of property during the war and post-war period. Moreover, the easy flow of remittances stimulates negative attitudes toward work and makes people see the solution to their problems outside the country.

The violence of the gangs—originally only juveniles—arose as a result of the extension of the Californian-Salvadoran *maras* a little after the end of the civil war. In a situation of social breakdown and lack of opportunities, the gangs became a spurious form of integration. Paradoxically, they kept growing while El Salvador was experiencing an unprecedented construction of democracy. Today, they are an omnipresent actor in national life, affecting economic activity and citizen coexistence, with undeniable control over several territories in the country.

Twenty-four years after the signing of the peace accords, the outlook is not

bright for us Salvadorans. The reality is quite complex. On the one hand, there has been undeniable democratic progress; at the same time, however, the main political parties are still in the process of democratizing themselves internally and do not appear prepared to discuss how to resolve national problems. And they do not give the population at large a sense of where they are headed. Meanwhile, gang violence seems to be turning into generalized social conflict, with increasingly violent confrontations with public security forces. Faced with this situation, citizens are eager to participate in the search for solutions. The peace accords ended the civil war. We were not capable of adequately confronting the post-war period. Now we need to resolve deep problems with serious determination, channeling our energies into finally creating a democratic, equitable and peaceful El Salvador.

Héctor Dada Hiresi is an economist and has worked for the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL, its Spanish acronym). He has taught at universities in El Salvador and Mexico. A Catholic lay activist, he has been involved in party politics and has held several public posts.

PUBLIC POLICY, PUBLIC POLITICS



Carolina Avalos [El Salvador's Future](#) • Carmen Aída Lazo [Beyond Polarization in 21st-century El Salvador](#) • Luis Mario Rodríguez R. [Beyond the Political Pendulum](#) • Manuel Andrés Meléndez [The Salvadoran Right Since 2009](#)



Boys roughhouse as they play ball in their neighborhood.

El Salvador's Future

A Pending Quest for Social Justice and Equality **BY CAROLINA AVALOS**

IN 2005, I MET MARÍA CHICAS. THE GAZE OF THIS young woman reflected the harshness of her life in Torola, one of the poorest municipalities of Morazán. For the first time in her life she had become a beneficiary of the government-run poverty alleviation program aimed at women and their families. Chicas and her family were participating in Red Solidaria, a conditional cash transfer program (CCTs), and the first program targeted to the poorest families in rural areas in El Salvador. The design of Red Solidaria (now Comunidades Solidarias) was based on the best practices and evidence-based results of Bolsa Familia (Brazil), Oportunidades

(Mexico) and Familias en Acción (Colombia).

Like the majority of participants in the 32 poorest municipalities, at first María Chicas did not believe in the truthfulness of the program. Nevertheless the applicants went through the motions, took the interviews and then signed the participation and responsibility agreement. In the short term, the program emphasizes poverty alleviation through cash transfer, an amount sufficient to ensure the participants' regular school attendance and health checkups. In the long term, the objective of the program is human capital accumulation.

For me, women and men are equal, and I've educated my husband this way. ... Because I have a head (own thinking) and I can also decide ... this is what I've learned in the program.
—María Chicas, Caserío Agua Zarcas, Torola Morazán (2008).

The program has had a positive impact on education and health, as well as empowering and increasing the self-confidence of women through its training component, according to the impact assessment conducted by FUSADES and IFPRI between 2007 and 2010. This

positive impact demonstrated by these programs in Latin America, along with the development of policy instruments, created an opportunity for promoting and strengthening social protection systems in various Latin American and Caribbean countries—policies that are both effective and aimed at achieving sustainable human development.

Twenty-four years after the signing of the Peace Accords, social justice and equality is a pending quest in El Salvador. The twelve-year civil war tore apart the social fabric and eroded social cohesion in this small country of Central America. However, it is important to recall that inequalities and high levels of human poverty were key reasons for the war.

There have been five democratic elections since the war ended that have included the FMLN as a political party, resulting in three consecutive right-wing governments of the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) (1994, 1999 and 2004) and two left-wing governments of Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) (2009 and 2014), thus providing political alternation. These governments have undertaken economic and social reforms in a complex political scenario, characterized by increased polarization and systematic political confrontation between ARENA and the FMLN. They have shaped the way the country faces the challenges of good governance, building and strengthening public institutions and sound public policies that address the main social, economic and environmental issues, and all of these in the context of globalization. This article focuses on the social dimension of public policy and reforms.

Social policies during the first twelve years of the post-conflict period in El Salvador were strongly influenced by the structural adjustment programs and liberalization reforms known as the Washington Consensus. An important reform in social security was the shift of a pay-as-you-go pension scheme to individual retirement accounts privately managed by the Pension Fund Administrators after the Chilean model. This 1998 reform sought

to lighten the fiscal stronghold that the old system had on public finances. Nevertheless, the transition costs of the reform remain a fiscal burden; very low coverage of the population (20 percent) has not improved; multiple systems coexist (i.e. Armed Forces), and the economy contains an extensive informal labor market which, according to the International Labour Organization, encompasses 65 percent of the active population. The political debate about social security and pension systems, of problems such as fragmentation, low coverage and lack of sustainability, continues to be postponed.

Other social reforms have focused on primary education and health and basic infrastructure, redirecting public spending towards services that help the poor. In 1991 the government implemented EDUCO, a decentralized community-oriented strategy that reached the poorest rural communities of the country; this helped expand six-fold the coverage of primary education in five years. Education reforms (i.e. curricular) were carried out between 1995 and 2004, and a long-term National Education Plan for the 2005-2021 period, the result of a national consultation process, was put in place. In 2015, the country achieved the educational Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education. The most urgent challenge now is to ensure the physical safety of students and teachers in schools, and to achieve quality education, as well as longer-term pre-school and secondary-school coverage.

The health-care system has been characterized as being highly centralized and fragmented; a public sector brings together different health-care service schemes—for the general population, for teachers and armed forces, among others. The Ministry of Public Health now covers eight out of every ten Salvadorans in the country; the Social Security Institute covers the formal sector workers, among other entities. In 2009 the National Health Reform was launched. Its goal was to achieve equality and universal access to health-care services, based on a primary care approach, as well as the promotion of

social and community involvement. However, this reform must overcome the existing institutional weakness. Although the process of change has been implemented at a slower pace than planned, it has contributed to the improvement of key indicators, such as the reduction of maternal mortality.

Despite these modest but important advances in education and health, these sectors faced very limited—below the Latin American average—budget allocations. In El Salvador, the public social expenditure as a percentage of GDP in 2012 was 14.8 percent. Education and health averaged 4 percent each. Social protection expenditure as a percentage of GDP was a paltry 4.8 percent (El Salvador government data).

Poverty and inequality persist as a common denominator in El Salvador, as well as in other countries of Latin American and the Caribbean. We need to put a human face to the more than 35 percent of families living in multidimensional poverty in El Salvador. The Garcías, the Riveras, the Mejías face a variety of hardships like the following: eight out of ten of these families live in crowded conditions, face underemployment and job instability and have no access to sanitation; three out of ten of their children do not attend school and six in every ten are fearful of attending school because of insecurity (Multidimensional Poverty Measure, government and United Nations Development Programme).

While other Latin American countries began expanding social assistance programs to cover a segment of the population excluded from formal social security net years ago, El Salvador did not implement its first targeted program designed to alleviate poverty, Red Solidaria, until 2004. The impact assessment and the program's positive results encouraged the new left-wing government to maintain the program. The program incorporates rigorous design, implementation and accountability, based on several management tools: targeting mechanisms (geographic and individual), registry of beneficiaries, information systems and



A cow grazing in a grassy plot in San Salvador contrasts with upscale housing.

monitoring and evaluation. This system served as a model for the Social Protection Universal System launched by the government in 2009.

The Social Protection Universal System gained further legal support in a broader law passed in 2014. This Development and Social Protection Law establishes a system that protects, promotes and ensures compliance with the basic rights of the individuals. The system also establishes criteria for targeting the poor and vulnerable population and expanding the programs. Instead of defining target groups or individuals according to parameters of vulnerability, poverty and exclusion, the law lists programs, many of them without impact assessment, casting doubts about their effectiveness. Another weakness is the absence of a strong institutional architecture to ensure its effective implementation. A third drawback of the law, and a serious one, concerns the lack of clear funding provisions, as no percentages or fixed monetary resources were set by the legislators.

Despite all these efforts at designing laws, policies and programs, the government's capability to meet the goals of poverty reduction and social exclusion has fallen short. The results of the Multidimensional Poverty Measurement presented by the government and the United

Nations Development Programme in 2014 are a clear indication of this situation.

Social protection can and should contribute to inclusive economic growth through investment in the workforce, with a particular focus on socially disadvantaged groups, expanding their chances of entering the labor market in equal conditions. Greater investment in health and education will also enhance opportunities among the more vulnerable, while aiming at sustainable and equitable growth that in the long run will reduce poverty and the need for social assistance.

Institution-strengthening, long-term consistency of social policy implementation and the factoring in of external shocks—such as instability in the price of commodities and the effect of natural disasters—must be considered in the efforts to speed up the implementation of sound social policies that will shorten the path towards development. In the case of El Salvador, the context of political and social violence, past and present, has an important impact that has to be taken into account. While people like María Chicas from Torola and her children have benefited from social protection programs, they should also have the opportunity to generate their own income and live a sustainable life with dignity and full rights.

The challenge in El Salvador is to craft a country-oriented vision of development shared by all. Most importantly, we need to place people squarely at the center of the development process. The economic reforms for a sustainable and equitable growth must aim at improving productivity and widening economic opportunities, particularly for young people entering the labor market for the first time. Last but not least, progressive fiscal and taxation policies should contribute not only to distribute income, but also to offer citizens a genuine equality of opportunities.

So finally, 24 years after the peace accords were signed in Chapultepec, what are the unfulfilled expectations of the people of El Salvador? I believe that the first wish of my fellow Salvadorans is the longing for real peace and true reconciliation after the civil war. Only after achieving it, can we, as a society, aspire to face the many challenges before us and build a better, more cohesive and just country for all.

Carolina Avalos is an economist and international social policy advisor and former President of the Social Investment Fund in El Salvador. She was a 2015-16 Central American Visiting Scholar at the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies.



Beyond Polarization in 21st-century El Salvador What Is Different? **BY CARMEN ÁIDA LAZO**

MY FATHER WAS A CIVIL ENGINEER WHO WORKED for the government during the civil war years. He specialized in roads and had to spend several days a month traveling to remote places in El Salvador.

I was 10 in 1986, and I remember my mom asking my dad several times when he returned home at the end of the day: “Tell me, did those communist *guerrilleros* stop you today?” and my dad used to answer: “No, the *muchachos* (the boys), they didn’t stop us and they didn’t do anything wrong.”

My mother was convinced that if the Farabundo Martí Liberation Front (FMLN) guerrillas won the war, El Salvador would become like Nicaragua or Cuba. In contrast, my father always expressed a more progressive political point of view: he felt a sense of empathy for the guerrilla; I guess he believed they were fighting for a legitimate cause.

These family conversations led me to constantly wonder what the differences were between this so-called left and right that made my parents differ so much in their political views. What were both sides—and their international allies—really fighting for? What values were they supposed to be defending?

I believe our conflict was largely viewed as part of the Cold War; after all, in 1981, former U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig recommended increasing military assistance to El Salvador to “draw a line” against the Soviet communist advance in Latin America.

Peace accords were signed in 1992, and after 20 years of consecutive right-wing ARENA party governments, the first left-FMLN government was democratically and peacefully elected in 2009. After decades of speculating about what chang-

es the left would bring to our country, we finally were witnessing a major transition. Time had finally come to contrast right- and left-wing policies in El Salvador in practice.

Now, after more than six years of the left in power, what is different in El Salvador? In my opinion, not that much has changed. Indeed, the left-wing government so far seems to have more similarities than differences with its right-wing predecessor—particularly with the last ARENA administration. For the last six years, the FMLN government has delivered orthodox left-wing rhetoric, while at the same time continuing with most economic and social policies from the previous right-wing governments. Many Salvadorans are disappointed; others are relieved; and some others think the lack of radical acts is just a façade, and that the risk of becom-



ing a Venezuela or Cuba-style country is still real. What are the manifestations and consequences of this continuity? And why have there not been major changes?

With 103 homicides per 100,000 citizens, in 2015 El Salvador became the most violent country in the Western Hemisphere. Almost 6,700 Salvadorans were killed in 2015, and as I'm writing this article in the first days of 2016, on average 24 people are being assassinated every day. Our death toll is nowadays as high as it was during the civil war years. Crime and violence has become the theme that overshadows all other topics: it is present in every single public policy discussion in our country and in our everyday life; it is considered by almost everyone as the obstacle that if not tackled, will erode any social or economic investment. Moreover, violence has probably become the main driver of migration.

Despite escalating violence, the policies implemented by the left have not been substantially different from those carried out by previous right-wing governments. The FMLN government continues to prioritize symbolic short-term actions with no measurable long term impact. Moreover, it has failed to articulate a strategy to systematically address the root causes of violence and other social problems. The persistence of political polarization has impeded reaching agreements with the right-wing opposition—ARENA—in key issues such as the security strategy.

The left's most daring foray into controlling violence was a truce with the gangs initiated by the first FMLN government of President Mauricio Funes in early 2012. However, the country's second FMLN administration under President Salvador

Sánchez Cerén in January 2015 repudiated the truce. The press had revealed that—with the complicity of President Funes—gang leaders secretly received concessions during the truce in exchange for a covert pact to curtail homicides, mainly among gang members. To say the least, it was a shady and unsustainable deal and one that many believe only helped to strengthen the gangs. Once the truce officially ended, homicide rates immediately bounced back. Since then, the government has reacted by escalating repression and increasing taxes for additional resources to combat crime and violence.

Economic policy is another area where little has changed. From the beginning, the FMLN government announced it would maintain dollarization, one of the most emblematic economic legacies of the ARENA administrations.

Although the government's official discourse is more supportive of small and medium enterprises than large firms, the government has tried to maintain close relations with the most important businessmen in the country. Nevertheless, new taxes, public verbal scolding of the private sector, the generalized perception of increased bureaucracy that undermines the business climate and rumors of a potential reform to the private pension system have created constant and increasing frictions between the government and the business community in El Salvador. Although the government claims that it has created dialogue spaces in which private sector participation is encouraged, a constant criticism is that thus far such spaces have not brought tangible results.

These tensions—and crime and violence—may have provoked a larger impact on investment climate than the actual economic policies implemented over the last six years. Moreover, although ideologically the FMLN government is aligned with Venezuela and its Chavista revolution, in practice—and for practical reasons—it has kept close ties with the U.S. government. In fact, El Salvador is one of the four countries worldwide that belong to the first set of the Obama administration's Partnership for Growth initiative. In 2014, El Salvador

entered into a second agreement with the MCC (Millennium Challenge Corporation) aimed at reducing poverty through economic growth.

One relevant economic change is that over the last years the government has gotten bigger. Since 2009, government income has increased 40% and public sector employment has grown by more than 33,000 people. Although government size is not bad or good per se, and a fiscal analysis is beyond the scope of this essay, there is widespread and increasing concern regarding the sustained increase in public expenditure and public debt. The deterioration of the fiscal situation has led to the downgrade of El Salvador in the international credit ratings.



The last ARENA administration introduced transfer programs aimed at poor households (free seed packages, lunch for children at public schools and conditional cash transfers). The FMLN government has expanded those programs, although they're still modest, compared—for example—to generalized subsidies. But besides these unilateral transfers, there have not been major changes in the implementation of social policy. El Salvador continues to be a country with very low levels of human capital, far from the aspirational discourse of equality of opportunities. On average, Salvadorans have fewer than seven years of schooling. Research on educational quality shows that our country is among the worst performers in international standardized tests.

There have not been substantial efforts to change this reality. Most poor Salvadorans believe that migrating to the United States is their only opportunity to escape

poverty and violence, and help the families they leave behind.

Many expected that a left-wing government would be more committed to combat corruption, but that didn't happen. The institution in charge of supervising transparent use of the public funds (*Corte de Cuentas*) continues to be irrelevant, and the government recently promoted a law that would limit the capacity of the judiciary to investigate illicit enrichment of public servants. Impunity is not exclusive to the left; it has been an endemic and entrenched characteristic of those in power in our country. Definitely, this hasn't changed. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that thanks to the involvement of civil society, access to public information has improved over the last years.

El Salvador is one of the few countries in the continent with a strong bipartisan tradition—like the United States—which means that for better or worse, the way to gain political power in our country is through the two major parties, ARENA and FMLN. This two-party system has its pros and cons: it provides stability, but it also concentrates power in the party elites and perpetuates polarization. Both parties have been chronically reluctant to advance the necessary reforms to increase internal democracy. ARENA—probably because of losing the two last presidential elections—has taken some initial steps to become a more open party. We'll hopefully see the same trend in the FMLN in the coming years.

Finally, the FMLN has adopted the autocratic vices of former ARENA administrations. It has passed laws in the Congress in a non-democratic manner (by “negotiating” with congressmen and minority parties in order to get the neces-



sary votes for some laws, it has passed laws “overnight” without the proper analysis and discussion); it has continued selecting key officials and negotiating with them on the basis of political calculations, instead of merit.

Why has so little changed? It's mostly because the margins of maneuver of our small, open and fragile economy are very limited. This narrows the policy alternatives of any government. In addition, there has been a tendency to prioritize short-term policies, instead of pursuing structural long term reforms.

Thus, the definition of “left” and “right” has become more aspirational than practical in El Salvador. Unlike other left-wing governments in Latin America, our leaders lack the economic resources for pursuing an autonomous agenda.

Nevertheless, exaggerating the differences continues to be a useful strategy for both parties. Moreover, since the FMLN and ARENA are finding it difficult to articulate a clear narrative of what they propose, they instead rely on a strategy of discrediting one another. They define themselves not by what they are, but by what they are not.

This strategy appeals to the extremes of each party. In El Salvador, about one third of voters are unconditional FMLN supporters, and a similar percentage is unconditionally loyal to ARENA with the rest being swing voters who usually vote based on specific proposals and results, rather than Cold-War rhetoric.

As a Salvadoran, my invitation to my fellow citizens is to become part of this third group—of the group that can force the two parties to go from the pamphlet right-versus-left discourse to a more

pragmatic approach in which finding and implementing solutions to the critical needs of people and to specific problems is at the center of the national discussion. Although we all may have an ideological preferences, we cannot be uncritical of the propositions of the parties that are supposed to defend those ideologies.

To the extent that this swing group grows, the parties will have to reshape their out-of-date narratives. Besides, the evidence has shown that, to a great extent, the behavior of both parties when in power is not that different: they both display autocratic tendencies and cronyism, and they both exploit political polarization to their advantage. They both also have great people, truly committed to the development of El Salvador.

Is one party promoting more democracy than the other? Do their policies aim at strengthening our institutions? Are they focused on implementing long-term programs for enhancing human capital and facilitating equality of opportunities? Are they truly committed to combating corruption? All these questions nowadays are much more important and have more content than simply asking: are they pursuing right- or left-wing policies?

Thirty years have passed since I started wondering what was the true meaning of left and right in El Salvador. Now I understand that in spite of different aspirations and values, reality has limited the ability of the left to depart from previous ARENA administrations. This provides a unique opportunity for our society to adopt a less ideological and a more pragmatic approach to our most pressing problems.

This will definitely require the evolution of both ARENA and FMLN—an evolution that will be driven by more conscious voters who are no longer beholden to the traditional right-left propaganda.

Carmen Aída Lazo is the Dean of Business and Economics at ESEN, El Salvador's foremost business university. She received her Master's from the Harvard Kennedy School Master in Public Administration/International Development Program in 2005.



Beyond the Political Pendulum

A New Type of Political Consensus? **BY LUIS MARIO RODRÍGUEZ R.**

IN 1994, PERUVIAN WRITER MARIO VARGAS Llosa asked David Escobar Galindo what he thought was the most transcendental change in El Salvador between the elections held before the peace accords and the elections to be carried out that year, the first in which the former guerrillas—the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN)—had ever participated. Escobar, member of the El Salvador government commission that had negotiated the peace accords, replied with his typical insightfulness that Salvadorans “now don’t know who will win the elections.” The uncertainty of the electoral outcome, in contrast to the certainty of the previous thirty years in El Salvador because of scandalous frauds, is one of the principal requirements for all electoral contests anywhere.

The Vargas Llosa interview in El Salvador came two years after the 1992 signing of the peace accords. History had shifted with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. In nearby Nicaragua, the ruling revolutionary Sandinistas were swiftly weakening, and in El Salvador, the candidate of the political right—represented by the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA)—had defeated the Christian Democrats at the polls.

That political context pushed the armed actors to negotiate. Frank dialogue, with the United Nations as witness, led to a political pact with more relevance even than the 1821 declaration of independence. The signing of the peace accords took place at the emblematic Chapultepec Castle in Mexico City on January 16, 1992.

FMLN negotiator Salvador Samayoa, who signed the peace accords on behalf of the former guerrillas, said that from that date on there would be an “explosion of consensus” (Samayoa, 2002). As a result of that historical event, a good portion of El Salvador’s democratic institutions

began to experience new life. The Armed Forces became subordinate to civil power; the electoral commission underwent a profound transformation; the way in which Supreme Court judges were elected was modified and an Attorney General



The alternation of power was needed to consolidate the peace accords and increasingly, with more and more conviction, the political parties recognized the possibility of alternation as a stabilizing factor in Salvadoran politics.

Office for Human Rights was established. The protagonists of peace accepted electoral democracy as the best mechanism for distributing political power. Between 1994 and 2015, fourteen elections have been held in El Salvador: five presidential and nine congressional and municipal.

Yet it took until 2009 for the FMLN to win the presidential elections, defeating the right-wing party that had governed the country for the previous twenty years.

However, during the two-decade period in which the presidency had remained in the hands of one party, the FMLN exponentially increased its quota of political power, both in the legislative assembly and in local races. Maintaining presidential power within one party caused the democratic transition that began in 1992 to be seen as limited. The alternation of power was needed to consolidate the peace accords and increasingly, with more and more conviction, the political parties recognized the possibility of alternation as

a stabilizing factor in Salvadoran politics.

At the same time, the country’s historic polarization kept fear alive about traumatic changes in government that would recklessly swing from one ideological current to another. Fear of what irreconcilable differences could bring was inherited from the pre-democratic society and had endured in the period following the signing of the peace accords, hindering the country’s transition to a new democratic society. However, both in 2009 and 2014,

the political parties accepted the popular will without much fuss. Mauricio Funes and Salvador Sánchez Cerén, respectively, won the elections without the principal opposition party or de facto groups’ boycotting the legitimacy of both electoral processes. Thus, despite the narrow margin in the election results in both elections, 2.56% in 2009 and a mere 0.20% in 2014—the narrowest difference between two presidential opponents in the history of elections in Latin America—the losers accepted the decision of the courts processing challenges of the election results.

Now that the country has managed to break the pattern of one-party presidential control, new challenges have emerged. The FMLN administrations have shown both positives and negatives—lights and shadows, as we say in Spanish. Each of the candidates who became president has shaped the presidency through his distinct personality and history. Mauricio Funes Cartagena is not a FMLN militant

and wasn't when he ran for president. He maintained an erratic relation with the FMLN during the five years of his presidential mandate. The fact that he was not organically connected to the party gave him room for maneuver in decision-making. In the context of the political and electoral climate, he could decide how much weight to give to the FMLN party line in shaping his strategies. Despite moments of political wavering, in general, the former president counted with the support of the party for most of his presidency.

The current president, Salvador Sánchez Cerén, is a historic leader and founder of the FMLN. This fact alone is enough to explain his firm commitment to the leftist party. These close ties have been demonstrated by his support of his legislative bills by the FMLN leadership and its group in the legislative assembly, as well as by his own concrete actions to consolidate the party's political project.

For example, the minister of agriculture and the vice-ministers of economy and education are former executives of Alba Petroleum. This mixed-economy consortium made up of *Petróleos de Venezuela* (PDV Caribe) and ENEPASA, a communal association of FMLN mayors, has received Venezuelan soft-term loans since 2007. El Salvador is the only place where commercial relations have been established between the Venezuelan state and a business enterprise. In other countries that are members of Petrocaribe—the oil alliance of many Caribbean states with Venezuela to purchase oil with preferential payments—the relationship is between states. Several ministerial-level programs receive economic support from Alba Petroleum.

Alba Petroleum also financed FMLN candidates in the 2014 presidential campaign and in the 2015 legislative and municipal races. A study by the University of Salamanca in Spain showed how the ties of Alba Petroleum with a political party could result in social programs being used for political clientelism, that is, to obtain an electoral advantage for the FMLN (Ferraro and Rastrollo, 2013). A

similar case took place in 2004 when Taiwan allegedly financed the campaign of a right-wing candidate. The lack of regulation of campaign financing allows this type of irregularity.

The drop in international oil prices and the current political situation in Venezuela, with the opposition now in the majority in the National Assembly, might obligate the government of President Nicolás Maduro to revise the politics of soft loans, a step that could pose a problem to those countries benefiting from these favorable terms

Nevertheless, diverse evaluations of the six-and-a-half years of FMLN governments point to an improvement in the social sphere. Sustained effort has been made to improve dialogue between political parties through groups such as the Economic and Social Council, the Association for Economic Growth, and more recently, the National Council on Citizen Security and Coexistence, the National Council on Education and the Alliance for Prosperity. Access to public information has also improved and there is a greater degree of independence in government watchdog agencies.

However, the financial sustainability of the government's social programs, as well as their welfare-like nature, has been questioned. Although the participants in these spaces of dialogue recognize the effort involved in these social programs, they point out that implementation of these programs has not resulted in concrete actions to make the economy more dynamic and to resolve the problem of lack of citizen security. There has also been criticism of the area of government transparency and of the efforts of FMLN legislators to remove Supreme Court magistrates in charge of constitutional questions.

Four of these five magistrates were elected by the National Assembly in 2009 with the support of the two majority parties and the rest of the small parties, and since then, court rulings have begun to grant more independence to state institutions and to bring more transparency to the use of public funds, as well as guaran-

teeing a series of citizens' political rights through electoral reform. These decisions put an end to many bad practices that permitted manipulation of oversight institutions such as the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, the Supreme Court and the Attorney General's Office. Court decisions also did away with loopholes that allowed unmonitored executive use of funds and, in general, the rulings contributed to greater political dynamism and transparency.

The FMLN opposed several of these decisions. Together with three minority parties, it set up a commission to investigate the nomination of the four new judges in order to bring political charges against them. The coalition tried to reform the Law of Constitutional Procedures to block decisions on pending cases. In 2012, a serious institutional crisis developed when the coalition of parties rejected a court decision involving the appointment of Supreme Court magistrates. However, pressure from civil society caused the coalition to adhere to the Constitutional Chamber's decision.

Thus, the alternation of political parties in the presidency did not eliminate the tensions associated with a distinct form of governing. The arrival to power of a new political party generated anxieties that must be correctly managed. The current administration and the previous one mark the first time in El Salvador that a leftist party with socialist tenets has been elected, and expectations and fears, even now, have reached a very high level. Uncertainty and lack of confidence by business in particular and also by much of civil society have been justified in part because of the FMLN's past history and the ideological orientation of its proposals. Its vision of the economic and political system and its points of reference in Latin America forecast—and continue to suggest—incorporation into the ideological camp led by Venezuela.

It was also expected that relations with the United States might deteriorate, given the historical discourse of anti-Americanism of the official party, although both the Funes and the Sánchez Cerén administra-

tions have maintained close cooperation with the U.S. government.

Up until now, both the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court through its decisions, and civil society movements through their actions, have managed to ensure rule of law with the republican, democratic and representative state established in the Magna Carta. El Salvador has not joined the Bolivarian Alliance and the constitution has not suffered reforms in its irrevocable clauses. The country conserves a degree of liberty that guarantees fundamental constitutional rights to its citizens—although in a fragile manner and with implicit intimidation. However, the courses of action proposed by the FMLN congress held on November 6-8, 2015, may soon strain the

The country conserves a degree of liberty that guarantees fundamental constitutional rights to its citizens—although in a fragile manner and with implicit intimidation.

political balance as a result of the ideological antagonism expressed in the conclusions of this meeting.

The documents from this meeting elaborate the principles, form of organization and strategies of the FMLN (Arauz: 2015). The party reaffirms itself as a “hegemony of the left” and points to an “imperialist and oligarchical plan” to “destabilize” the current government. In response, according to the documents, the party seeks to do away with “neoliberalism” through the “de-privatization of strategic goods and services.” It also seeks to set up social and mixed public-private property and to do away with the dollarization of the economy (El Salvador’s national currency is the dollar).

The postulates of the party congress openly contradict the commitments of

the FMLN presidential and vice-presidential candidates during the March 2014 election runoff, in which they guaranteed, if elected, to respect the separation of powers, individual liberties, private property, the prudent and transparent management of public finances, and the promotion of dialogue. The contradiction between the candidates’ declarations and those of the FMLN party congress makes it difficult to stimulate a meaningful dialogue, which is necessary if the country is to progress.

The challenges for the FMLN, and certainly for Salvadoran civil society, are great. El Salvador must move from an electoral democracy to one in which independence of the executive, legislative and judicial powers is not merely a transitory characteristic. The institutionality of the government cannot be a battlefield on which “zero sum” political warfare is constantly being waged in obedience to the wartime dictum, “those who are not my friends are my enemies” (PAPEP 2015). The country needs structural and sustainable agreements with a new political consensus that would manage to overcome the current systematic difficulty to reach political agreement. In short, we need to do away with the pendular movement that keeps the country hanging between a recent past and a future that we have not yet finished constructing.

Luis Mario Rodríguez R. is the director of Political Studies of the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUSADES). A member of an advisory group for the United Nations Development Programme’s Project for Political Analysis and Prospective Scenarios (PAPEP), he was the executive director of the Salvadoran Private Business Association (ANEP) (1998-2004) and Secretary for Legislative and Legal Affairs of the Presidency (2004-2008). He holds a doctorate in law from the Autonomous University in Barcelona, Spain, and a master’s in political science from the Jesuit University in El Salvador.

The Salvadoran Right Since 2009

How ARENA Has Adapted to Survive

BY MANUEL ANDRÉS MELÉNDEZ

IN 2009, AS THE FMLN CELEBRATED ITS LONG-awaited first foray into the Casa Presidencial, El Salvador’s largest conservative party—the Nationalist Republican Alliance (Alianza Republicana Nacionalista, or ARENA)—was longing for the end of a terrible, no good, very bad year.

In March, following a drawn-out and deeply polarizing nomination process, ARENA lost its first presidential election since 1984. By November, a third of ARENA’s legislators had abandoned the party “in rebellion” and formed the Grand Alliance for National Unity (Gran Alianza por la Unidad Nacional, or GANA), stripping ARENA of both its so-called “granitic unity” and its narrow control over the Legislative Assembly. In December, while ARENA’s first major schism was still underway, *El Faro’s* Carlos Martínez reported that the party had accumulated more than six million dollars in debt. ARENA, concluded Martínez, had entered “its darkest hour.” In the months and years that followed, the party and its leaders conducted an “internal purge” of outgoing President Antonio Saca and his followers, became involved in at least two high-profile corruption investigations, and suffered a second consecutive presidential defeat.

For most well-established parties, such periods of defeat and instability are an occupational hazard. Incumbency—particularly in twenty-year doses—corrupts and deteriorates an organization. Whenever free and fair elections take place, even the strongest parties are routinely voted in and out of office. The internal cohesion, financial stability, and ideological coher-

ence of parties are all likely to vary with the natural ebbs and flows of their electoral fortunes.

But for the Salvadoran right, ARENA's woes amounted to a series of firsts in the country's democratic history: the first time that the right found itself fully in the opposition at the national level, unable to exert control over the presidency, the legislature, or the armed forces; the first time that fault lines among conservatives resulted in two major competing political parties; the first time that the left, backed by disenchanted *empresarios* (and, allegedly, by the Venezuela-sponsored ALBA consortium), was able to outspend the business-friendly right; the first time that conservatives' oldest and most effective rallying cry—that, if given the chance, the *Frente* would promptly launch a “communist” revolution in the style of Cuba or Venezuela—would have to come to terms with the realities of a largely un-revolutionary FMLN presidency. In short, ARENA (and the traditional right it embodies) arguably emerged from 2009 and its aftermath weaker than ever on at least four fronts: access to the state, organizational strength, financial clout and ideological coherence.

As a result, many observers expected ARENA to enter a long and challenging process of adaptation and recovery. A few went as far as to predict the end of the traditional right in its current incarnation. In July 2014, a long-time ARENA insider (who spoke on the condition of anonymity) recalled, with biblical flair, that many within the party leadership had braced themselves for “years of drought.”

In light of these somber predictions, what the right has achieved since 2009 is remarkable. A mere three years after its first presidential defeat, ARENA won the 2012 departmental and municipal elections in a landslide, securing more mayoralties (a total of 116) than the FMLN and GANA combined (111). Notably, ARENA carried 9 of the 14 department capitals, including a second consecutive term in San Salvador City won by an unprecedented margin. In the concurrent legislative elections, ARENA earned both more



Overlooking San Salvador: in the shadow of the ever present volcano.

votes (39.75%) and more seats (33 of 84) than either GANA (9.6% of the votes and 11 seats) or the FMLN (36.76% of the vote and 31 seats). Two years later, in the 2014 presidential runoff, ARENA secured 49.89% of the vote, just 6,500 votes shy of the FMLN. And in 2015, ARENA once again outperformed its rivals, securing more mayoralties, more congressional seats, and a larger share of the vote than either GANA or the FMLN. Just as important, the party has recovered much of its internal cohesion: with a small number of isolated exceptions (most notably a five-person congressional splinter in 2013), ARENA had successfully avoided new schisms or *en masse* defections since the original GANA rupture. ARENA, far from experiencing a political “drought,” has quickly reclaimed its position as El Salvador's most powerful electoral vehicle.

BORROWING FROM THE FMLN'S PLAYBOOK

To be sure, many of the secrets to ARENA's continued electoral strength are rooted in the party's long history. The legacy of the civil war—remembered by many as a war between the FMLN and the forces that ARENA embodies today—has allowed the party to develop a clear brand and long-lasting voter attachments. Since its beginnings in the early 1980s, ARENA has invested in an effective and professional territorial organization that now spans every corner of El Salvador. And the party's core constituents—tradi-

tional businessmen and their families—are small, intensely socialized and deeply loyal.

Other factors have little to do with ARENA's leadership. The two consecutive FMLN governments, stained by lackluster economic results and soaring homicide rates, have been mediocre at best. Meanwhile, GANA has moved sharply to the political center (serving as the FMLN's critical ally in the Legislative Assembly) and failed to cultivate a competitive electoral coalition (the party's support has evened out at about 9 to 12% of the electorate). And the Supreme Court, in a landmark ruling against Unidos por El Salvador—the five ARENA legislators who attempted to form a separate congressional faction in 2013—banned elected officials from switching parties.

But it is also true that ARENA has actively—and successfully—pursued strategies that have allowed it to take advantage of these circumstances. Two have been particularly successful: focusing on local governance and leveraging civil society.

Alisha Holland, a professor of politics at Princeton University, has argued that the FMLN pursued a clear strategy in its path from the mountains to the presidency. Unable to stage a realistic presidential bid in the 1990s, the FMLN chose instead to focus on winning municipal elections, slowly building support *nationally* by governing well *locally*. The 2009 elections, contends Holland, were the culmi-

nation of this careful game plan.

Between 2009 and 2014, ARENA adopted an accelerated version of the FMLN's winning strategy. In 2009, as his party struggled elsewhere, mayoral candidate Norman Quijano—a dentist who had served five terms in the Legislative Assembly—won a surprise victory for ARENA in San Salvador. Like his campaign, Quijano's popular tenure at the helm of the nation's capital was defined by two traits. First, its relentless focus on addressing the tangible, everyday problems of local constituents. And second, its quiet indifference toward ARENA's traditional symbols, leaders and ideological commitments.

In the 2012 local elections—the first since the painful defeats of 2009—ARENA formulated much of its campaign around the Quijano model. In speeches and campaign platforms, candidates promised effective, results-oriented governance and quietly distanced themselves from the traditional party brand. ARENA incumbents touted their tangible achievements and carefully avoided partisan attacks; challengers attempted to unseat the FMLN by pointing to San Salvador as a model of what they had to offer. A beaming Quijano, now the symbol of good governance, appeared on TV spots across the country flanked by his party's local candidates. The strategy was a resounding success: it is, at least in part, what enabled ARENA to win the election by a landslide.

Quijano, who was comfortably reelected in San Salvador over the son of an FMLN wartime commander, quickly became ARENA's de facto 2014 presidential candidate. After an impressive showing, he went on to lose the election to then-Vice President Salvador Sánchez Cerén by fewer than 6,500 votes.

In addition to its focus on local governance, ARENA has embraced a second trademark of the FMLN: leveraging civil society to frame broader issues and rally widespread support at the national level. Since 2009, two groups of right-leaning organizations have played an increasingly visible role in Salvadoran politics. First, professional organizations, with the country's two most powerful and politi-

cally active business groups—the National Private Business Association (ANEP) and the Salvadoran Chamber of Commerce (Camarasal)—intensifying their advocacy of free markets and democratic “institutionality.” And second, a new wave of *movimientos ciudadanos* that have focused on democratic consolidation more generally. They include the Movimiento 300 (a group of young professionals with strong ties to ARENA) and, perhaps most visibly, the sprawling Aliados por la Democracia (a coalition of 126 organizations led by ANEP).

As many of their leaders are quick to point out, these organizations and movements are not ARENA. Nor are most of them formally affiliated with the party in any way. At the very least, however, the party has benefited from these groups indirectly: when civil society rallies popular opposition to actions that are closely identified with the FMLN, it is ARENA that tends to reap the electoral and political benefits. And for some groups, collaboration with ARENA is more intentional: the Movimiento 300, for example, has periodically provided the party with both campaign funding and fresh leadership.

THE REAL CHALLENGE: INTERNAL REFORM

These strategies have helped ARENA remain an electoral powerhouse. Yet there is more to parties than elections, and many of the difficulties that emerged in 2009—internal turmoil and ideological outdatedness, for example—continue to plague ARENA. In particular, the party must still fully address what may be its most important (and most challenging) task: changing the way it makes internal decisions.

At first glance, ARENA may appear surprisingly democratic. Its statutes establish that virtually any member of the party is free to compete for a nomination to elected office, both external (e.g. the Legislative Assembly) and internal (e.g. party president). Nominees are chosen from among the candidates by the party's General Assembly, a multitudinous body that serves as “the supreme authority”

within the party.

In practice, the General Assembly has often served a less ambitious purpose: to validate and legitimize the decisions of the National Executive Committee (COENA), a fifteen-member board that serves as ARENA's “maximum body for direction and administration.” COENA is responsible not only for presenting potential candidates before the General Assembly, but also for appointing most of its delegates. Whoever controls the Executive Committee, in short, controls the whole party.

In the past, COENA often served as a useful mechanism for different currents within the party to participate in critical decision-making. But as the Salvadoran right becomes ever less monolithic, competition for COENA is sure to become increasingly destabilizing: even as I write these words, three of ARENA's most visible leaders—Norman Quijano, the sitting party president Jorge Velado, and the former party vice president Ernesto Muyschondt—are locked in an unspoken struggle for control over the executive committee. If ARENA wants to avoid another GANA, it must further democratize its decision-making process.

Doing so will inevitably require the party to address campaign finance. ARENA has continued to rely overwhelmingly on the contributions of a small number of wealthy supporters. Reformists within ARENA should prioritize a funding overhaul because doing so could strengthen their negotiating position vis-à-vis these traditional donors and make meaningful internal reforms more sustainable in the long run. If designed and executed properly, a recent proposal to introduce membership fees (yet another tactic pioneered by the FMLN) would be a good first step.

Manuel Andrés Meléndez is a Research Fellow at the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUSADES). He was born and raised in San Salvador and holds an A.B. in Government from Harvard University. Follow him on Twitter at @manuelmelendezs.

PERSPECTIVES



Carlos Dada [Postwar Kids](#) • Jocelyn Viterna [Zika and Abortion](#) • Leonel Antonio Chevez [Indigenous Rights in El Salvador](#)

Postwar Kids

Pragmatism or Rupture? **BY CARLOS DADA**

IT'S NOT A GOOD TIME TO HAVE GREAT HOPES for Salvadoran politics, especially if you are a young Salvadoran. As I write this, in mid-February, the country is still debating the legacy of former President Francisco Flores (1999-2004), who died while under house arrest facing trial under charges of money laundering. At the time of his death in January, we were still learning that most of that money—\$15 million that Taiwan allegedly donated for the victims of two earthquakes in 2001—

had gone to finance his rightist party, ARENA.

Just a few days after the Flores funeral, the Supreme Court charged another former president, Mauricio Funes, from the leftist FMLN, with illicit enrichment—he was unable to explain a significant increase of income while he was in office. His bank accounts and properties have been frozen and he awaits trial soon.

Yet another former president, Antonio Saca (2004-2009), the last ARENA

president, is being investigated and questioned about a million-fold increase in his personal assets during his administration.

Even in a country as politically polarized as El Salvador, the accusations against these presidents raised doubts among the otherwise unconditional supporters of the two main parties that represent the political system's extreme right and extreme left, ARENA and the FMLN. Both parties grew out of the civil war that



devastated the country in the 80s, and both have controlled the political system since the 1992 peace agreement.

For the generation that fought the war, and the one that grew up during it, politics have just become a continuation of that war. In public forums, in Congress and the media, members of both parties constantly quarrel with their political foes and blindly defend their leaders, aware that any damage to their own side means a victory for the other. That's how politics have been practiced for the last 25 years. But politics have never been so discredited as they are now.

Enter the postwar generation. Those born during or after the war. Although also divided between left and right, they don't follow politics or defend their ideology with the same intolerance of those who embraced (or practiced) its more violent expressions in the 80s. The recent presidential scandals proved to them that corruption is not related to ideology. There are no good or bad sides; just good ideas and bad people. And a few good people too.

"The recent corruption scandals affect my faith in the system, of course," says Aída Betancourt, 26, a lawyer working at the local offices of the World Bank and a very active promoter of her generation's participation in public life. "It brings me hope. It makes me believe that there are some brave people outside the corruption rings and interests, namely the Supreme Court judges, sending these clear messages to stop corruption."

It's been 24 years since the war ended. Enough time for Aída's generation to grow up and become adults and demand their own spaces. And they are trying. At least some of them.

That is, some of those privileged enough to have an education, access to information, the urgency to change the country and their basic needs satisfied. Middle-class urban postwar kids with a social conscience. *Los posts*.

"My generation can be defined by the lack of the political fanaticism that the previous ones had," says Juan Martínez, 29, an anthropologist who researches gangs.



Opposite page: Students check cellphones at ESEN business university. **Above:** Elsy Melara, 27, has embroidered for big textile companies since her 16th birthday. Her embroideries sell abroad for more than 100 dollars while she gets paid one dollar. **Below:** a textile factory.

"You can see guys in ARENA publicly expressing their condemnation of Flores' actions, but they still declare themselves *areneros*. It's the same on the left. The Funesgate is a scandal. But they will remain leftists. Now we have some certainties about what these politicians do. They steal money from the people. We see these indictments as a step ahead, the democratization process is advancing."

These postwar kids almost speak a different language. They are more tolerant of ideological and sexual diversity, more skeptical about almost everything and curious and better connected with the rest of the world through social media. The guerrilla commanders, army gen-

erals or death squad leaders—hailed by my generation as war heroes—mean nothing to *los posts*.

"Yes, we are still politically divided by the same line that separates left and right," says Gerardo Calderón, 28, a social activist who brought the TED conferences to San Salvador and volunteered for many years building houses for poor people at an organization called TECHO. "But it would be weird, for example, to see an *arenero* from my generation hailing Roberto D'Aubuisson, No, we are not fanatics. We are pragmatic."

D'Aubuisson, an intelligence army officer and leader of the paramilitary death squads that killed, among others, Arch-

bishop Óscar Romero in the 80s, was also the founder of ARENA. He died shortly after the signing of the peace agreements. His supporters still revere him as the man who saved El Salvador from communism, treating him with a devotion usually reserved to founding fathers. Likewise, FMLN supporters and former guerrilla fighters treat those who led the revolutionary movement as unquestionable heroes. That is also changing.

But the *posts'* deliberate rupture from the past also caught them by surprise recently, when the Salvadoran police captured four retired army officers accused of killing six Jesuit priests 26 years ago. Thirteen officers, including a former vice-minister of Defense and several high ranking veterans of the war, are still at large. Spain wants to extradite them to face trial for the murders—five of the slain priests were Spanish citizens. These killings prompted the United States in 1989 to cut military aid to El Salvador and thus accelerated the negotiated end of the war.

The arrests, almost a quarter of a century after the killings took place at the campus of the Universidad Centroamericana, set off a political crisis. President Salvador Sánchez Cerén, a former FMLN guerrilla commander, called the leaders of all parties to an emergency meeting and promised them that the amnesty law passed alongside the peace agreement would be respected. Meanwhile, politicians were calling high-ranking officers to calm things down.

“This basically blew up in our faces,” says Aída Betancourt. “It made me realize that we don’t know what happened here.” The Salvadoran educational curriculum has a very small chapter on the war, and it’s basically studied like an ephemeral event. *Los posts* were never educated about the times when they were born.

That’s a big question for Gumercindo Ventura, 27, a college graduate who works at the family business in downtown San Salvador and admits not knowing much about the war. “I probably know more about European history than Salvadoran,



For the generation that fought the war, and the one that grew up during it, politics have just become a continuation of that war.

so I don’t feel that part of our history as my own. It’s a past that doesn’t belong to me.”

The lack of classroom discussions about the war is just part of the explanation. Another is the lack of interest of many of *los posts*. As Martínez, the anthropologist, explains: “We know that there were killings of priests, we know there was a war, we know that the Jesuits were murdered while the guerrillas launched an attack on San Salvador. Yes, we know all that. But why is that important to us? Why should we care? That is an ongoing conflict for the old ones. The war is still at the core of the fights among politicians that we want to break away with. It’s an old conflict. We don’t want to be part of it.”

Their problems are different and urgent. A quarter of Salvadoran youth

are *Ninis* —*Ni estudia ni trabaja*— they don’t study or work. Of those working, most have either informal or minimum-wage jobs, usually insufficient to cover a family’s needs. They live in the most violent country in the world, with the highest homicide rates of the planet. And most of the dead are young. The Salvadoran economy registers one of the lowest growth rates in the Americas, and around half of the national income comes from remittances and exports from textile assembly plants. Under these conditions, it is not surprising to read the polls: almost 80 percent of Salvadorans want to leave the country. According to a decade-old World Bank study, as much as half of Salvadoran professionals had already left the country by then. Manuel Orozco, a researcher on immigration and remittances at the Inter-American Dialogue in Washington D.C., says that those numbers may still hold, “particularly at a time when at least 30,000 Salvadorans have been moving out of El Salvador every year since 2010. There currently are more than 250,000 Salvadorans in the United States with a tertiary education, many of whom have now expanded their training and skills. Meanwhile in El Salvador less than 20% of the labor force

holds skills or a tertiary education.” The problem, of course, is that El Salvador is losing the intellectual and professional force needed to rebuild any society.

“How can you blame them?” asks Gerardo Calderón. “The country is what it is, and we don’t see politicians trying to solve anything. But it’s also our fault. My generation is the freest and better educated than any other. And yet, we are very comfortable living our privileged lives. We are not thinking how to take power or have any nuclear ideas. Our generational identity is to live the privileged lives that most young people in this country can’t.”

Certainly *los posts* are not protagonists of social movements as their counterparts are in Guatemala, where college students started the protests against corruption that ended last year with the imprisonment of President Otto Pérez. But they’ve had their moments.

Four years ago, a bill, known as Decreto 743, was passed by then President Mauricio Funes. It was designed to censor the decisions of the constitutional wing of the Supreme Court, widely regarded as the most independent branch of government. The bill was introduced by ARENA and voted in by the FMLN. Many young professionals, coordinated through social networks, went to the streets to protest. They were successful. Congress struck down the law.

Los posts could have seen this victory as a generational strength they could use to safeguard the democratic process. But for them it was a one-shot campaign. Nevertheless, *los posts* are slowly becoming part of the national conversation, although more and more their hopes sound like frustration.

“The more we know,” says Martínez, “the more it all seems hopeless. I think that even more difficult times will come soon. But I think it is our duty to try to decipher our problems and convert our academic knowledge into technological knowledge.” Martínez’ pessimistic views may be influenced by his daily work with gangs. But the numbers of Salvadorans emigrating confirm that it’s a widespread view.



A few days ago, I called Gumercindo Ventura, the economist who works at his family business. He answered the phone in Mexico. “I came here to look for a job,” he said. “I am leaving El Salvador as soon as I can.”

Carlos Dada is the founder and editor of El Faro, an online news site based in San Salvador. He is currently teaching a course on journalism and human rights at Yale University, while working on a book about the killing of Archbishop Óscar Romero and the death squads in El Salvador in the 1980s. He was a Cullman Fellow at the New York Public Library 2014-15, a Knight Fellow at Stanford in 2005 and is a member of the Cabot Prizes Board at Columbia University.

Opposite page: Young women learn hairdressing skills in vocational training financed by the Swiss NGO Brücke · Le pont (The Bridge).

Gay pride march in San Salvador; the sign reads, “Members of Congress, our love doesn’t hurt anyone; your hate does!”

Informal commerce in San Salvador.



Zika and Abortion

Reproductive Justice in El Salvador **BY JOCELYN VITERNA**

DON'T GET PREGNANT.

That was the essence of the recommendation the Ministry of Health in El Salvador made on January 21.

The statement that Salvadoran women should plan to “avoid getting pregnant this year and next” was issued in response to the rapidly spreading Zika virus, which experts believe may cause devastating neurological defects in the fetuses of pregnant women.

The unprecedented call for a two-year, nation-wide moratorium on births quickly garnered international attention, including front-page coverage on *The New York Times* (<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/26/world/americas/el-salvadors-advice-on-zika-dont-have-babies.html>). Progressive news outlets responded with disbelief, calling the recommendation “outrageous” and “offensive to women.” How could the Salvadoran state expect women to simply stop getting pregnant when access to family planning is “scarce,” Catholic teachings reject the use of contraception, and rape

is far too common? And what would the state offer already pregnant women now infected with Zika? Would they not consider relaxing the state’s absolute prohibition on all abortion?

To date, Salvadoran public opinion has been largely opposed to permitting abortions in cases of fetal anomalies, even when the fetus will not survive after birth. Yet as the very real possibility of raising a child with severe developmental delays becomes newly salient to thousands of Salvadorans dreaming of parenthood, and as the Salvadoran state grapples with questions of how it will care for a generation of Zika babies given its limited national resources, some activists have posited that this tragedy might be enough to change both public opinion and political will toward a loosening of abortion restrictions in El Salvador.

However, conservative pundits also met the government’s call to not get pregnant with indignation, asking why the Salvadoran government would focus

on preventing pregnancies rather than on killing the mosquito responsible for the virus’ spread, condemning pro-choice groups for taking advantage of a regional tragedy to pursue their political agenda, and professing the right to life of all unborn children, even those saddled with severe fetal anomalies due to Zika.

It is far from the first time Salvadoran women’s bodies have been politicized on the international stage. Beginning in the 1990s, Pope John Paul II’s global crusade against abortion inspired a group of elite Salvadorans to launch a local pro-life campaign. At the time, abortion in El Salvador was allowed in only three limited circumstances: when a pregnancy endangered the life of the woman, when a pregnancy was the result of rape, or when a fetus had abnormalities incompatible with extrauterine life. The new pro-life movement, together with the Salvadoran Catholic Church, sought to make abortion illegal in every circumstance, even when a woman’s life was in danger. They achieved this goal in 1997, when the right-wing ARENA political party used its legislative majority to enshrine an absolute prohibition of abortion into the criminal code. The revised criminal code also increased the penalties for abortion, and created a new category of abortion crime, called “inducement,” which promised jail time for anyone who somehow *facilitated* a woman’s abortion. Under these new laws, Salvadoran doctors feared prosecution not only for performing life-saving abortions, but also for not reporting to the authorities any patient whom they suspected of undergoing the procedure.

In 1999, the pro-life movement cemented its position as a powerful player in national politics by securing a major legislative victory: the passage of a constitutional amendment that defines



Pregnant women do not have the right to choice in El Salvador.



One out of every three pregnancies in El Salvador is to a girl younger than fifteen years old, according to a Salvadoran newspaper.

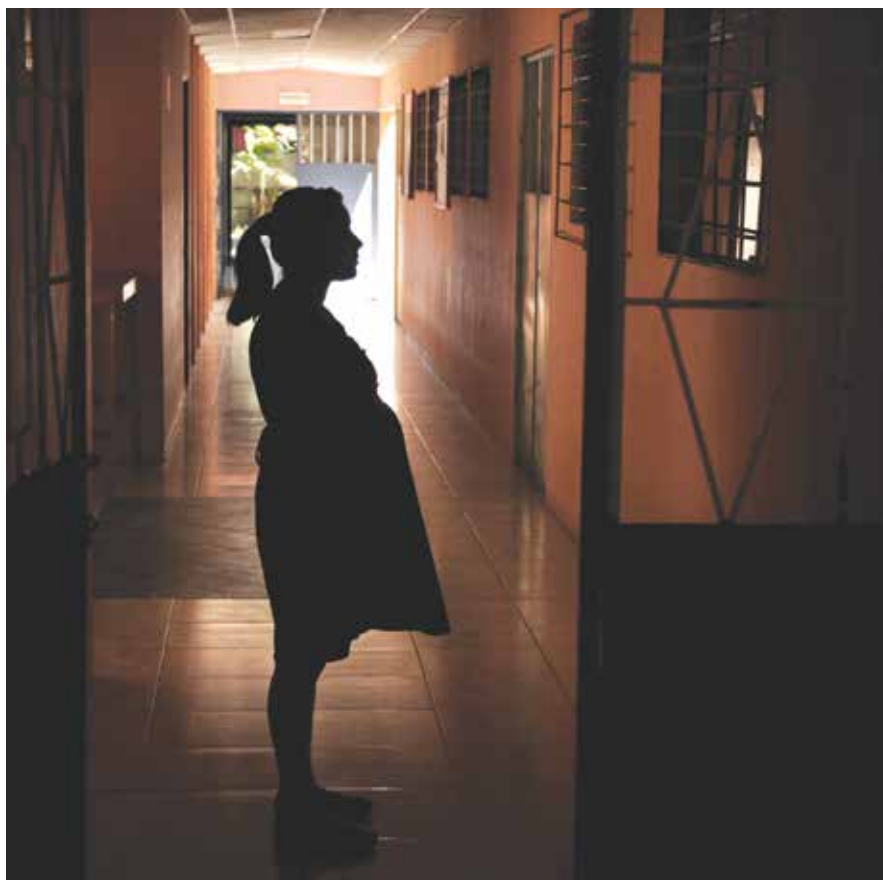
life as beginning at the very moment of conception. With the absolute ban now constitutionally protected, the Salvadoran pro-life activists turned their attention to the enforcement of anti-abortion laws. Salvadoran police heeded their call, and for the first time in recent history, Salvadoran women began to be arrested on suspicion of abortion. Most women found guilty of abortion received light sentences (community service, house arrest or time served during the trial), but a minority saw their initial charges of “abortion” upgraded to charges of “aggravated homicide.” These women, who in the majority of cases did not induce abortions but rather suffered from stillbirths, are currently serving



Photographer Mauro Arias made these portraits of adolescent mothers in El Salvador.

thirty- and forty-year jail sentences. Perhaps unsurprisingly, nearly all women prosecuted for abortion and fetal homicide live in poverty; women of financial means are able to access safe abortions when needed or wanted, through private hospitals, and without risk of incarceration.

The debate over El Salvador's absolute prohibition on abortion jumped into the international spotlight again in 2013, when a 22-year old woman known as "Beatriz" petitioned the Supreme Court for the procedure. At the time, Beatriz was only three months pregnant, and the mother of a young toddler. Beatriz had hoped for a second child, but she suffered from lupus, and the pregnancy was causing her kidneys to fail. Moreover, a series of ultrasounds confirmed that the fetus in her womb suffered from anencephaly, a birth defect in which large parts of the brain and skull are missing. The fetus would continue to grow and develop inside her uterus, but it could not survive outside of her body. The Health Minister, now serving under a left-wing FMLN president, publicly supported Beatriz' request for what at the time would have been a safe, first trimester abortion of a non-viable fetus. Yet the Supreme Court refused to act, and doctors were expected to protect the life of both Beatriz and her fetus. Beatriz' kidneys continued to fail. In her fifth month of pregnancy, she was hospitalized full time so that doctors could monitor her failing kidneys. She spent the next two months in a hospital bed, in pain, and away from her child, while the baby that she knew would die continued to grow in her stomach. It was not until the Interamerican Human Rights Court ordered the Salvadoran government to act that Beatriz, now at the start of her seventh month of pregnancy, was allowed to deliver early by cesarean section. Even at this point, she was denied the vaginal abortion that would have been safer for her precarious health than a cesarean surgery. The baby, born without a brain, died shortly after birth as expected.



Above: A baby sleeps in a San Salvador hospital; Below: a teenager awaits her child to be born.

The pro-life movement proclaimed the Beatriz case a victory: it ended with an induced, premature caesarean birth instead of a vaginal abortion. This, they argued, demonstrated how doctors can simultaneously prioritize the life of both the fetus and the mother. They had always acknowledged that the baby would not survive outside the womb, but they insisted that, for moral and legal reasons, the baby must be allowed to die naturally, at the hand of God, rather than be “killed” by abortion at the hand of people. They were largely dismissive of the pregnancy’s consequences to Beatriz’ life and health.

The pro-choice movement, which had accompanied Beatriz through the ordeal, was heartened by their sense that the case opened debate among Salvadorans about the powerful health risks imposed on women by the absolute abortion prohibition. However, they continue to lament the irreparable kidney damage suffered by Beatriz, which has to date resulted in constant pain and multiple medical treatments. Her life seems to have shortened by years.

As the tiny *Aedes* mosquito spreads the Zika virus across Latin America, Salvadorans may again be forced to wrestle with the consequences of their absolute abortion ban. Zika appears to be linked to microcephaly, a congenital condition that prevents fetal heads from developing to normal sizes. Although mild cases of microcephaly may have no effects besides the small head, the severe cases of microcephaly typically associated with Zika prevent fetal brains from developing appropriately, resulting in serious congenital problems including delayed or absent speech and physical movements, severely inhibited intellectual functions, difficulty swallowing, hearing loss and vision problems.

A twenty-five year history of policing poor women’s reproduction nevertheless challenges progressive hopes that Zika may result in a loosening of abortion restrictions. As the virus spreads, economically well-off women will likely access safe, clandestine abortions, but they will be able to do so quietly, private-

ly, and without feeling any pressure to push the state for formal legal changes. Money buys reproductive choice in El Salvador. For women without financial means, decisions about their reproduction will likely remain in the hands of the state. What the state decides to do with its reproductive control of poor women’s bodies—whether it looks the other way as public health officials provide illegal but implicitly allowed abortion services to Zika-infected pregnant women, whether it allows poor women to be publicly demonized as moral and sexual deviants who “chose” to get pregnant despite the consequences, or whether it pushes for a legal, if temporary, increase in access to abortion—remains to be seen.

In many ways, the international media’s statements that contraception and sexual education are “scarce” in El Salvador belie reality. Family planning and contraception use are in fact widely available and widely accepted among Salvadoran mothers. This is clearly evidenced by dramatic drops in fertility over the past thirty years. Whereas a Salvadoran woman in the 1970s had an average of 6.3 births, this number had dropped to 3.9 in 1990, and to only 1.95 in 2014, well below population replacement rates (Population Reference Bureau, CIA World Fact Index).

The more important question is to whom contraception is accessible in El Salvador. Whereas the overall fertility rate has dropped a remarkable 42% between 2000 and 2014, the adolescent fertility rate dropped just 25% in the same time period (World Bank Development Indicators). And according to a Salvadoran newspaper, one out of every three pregnancies in El Salvador is to a girl *younger than fifteen* years old. (<http://www.laprensagrafica.com/2014/10/10/30-de-los-embarazos-en-el-salvador-son-de-nias-y-adolescentes>). These statistics match well with my own research. The women I interview frequently report small family sizes, but with a gap of many years between the first and second child. Family structures like these result from the fact that

women only gain access to contraception *after* having their first baby. Were young girls to enter health clinics or pharmacies seeking contraception, I was told, they would be denied contraception, and told instead that they should refrain from having sex. It is only after young girls give birth to their first child that the state enrolls them in family planning programs. The result is a low fertility rate, but an extraordinarily high rate of adolescent pregnancy.

Data points like these make clear that the Salvadorans most at risk for Zika-complications in pregnancies are teenage girls from poor families. Teenage pregnancies are already associated with a number of negative life course effects, including poor health, low education levels, low income levels, and greater likelihood of intra-familial violence. If the thousands of teenage pregnancies that occur every year in El Salvador are now complicated by the Zika virus and related congenital anomalies, the life chances of an entire cohort of young women in El Salvador—and their children—could be severely and negatively affected.

In a nation where women with ectopic pregnancies struggle to get an abortion to prevent their fallopian tubes from exploding, where women are forced to carry to term pregnancies in which they know the baby will die at birth, and where women are jailed for up to 40 years for fetal “homicide,” any expansion in the abortion law would be welcomed as a powerful victory for human rights by the international community and local feminist groups. Yet if expansions in abortion access are brought about by a mosquito, rather than by a real engagement with the reality of women’s reproductive lives, it would be a fragile victory for “reproductive justice.”

Jocelyn Viterna is Associate Professor of Sociology at Harvard University, where she teaches and researches about gender and social movements in Latin America. Her award-winning book, *Women in War* was published in 2013 by the Oxford University Press.

Indigenous Rights in El Salvador

The Legacy of a Great Lenca Woman **BY LEONEL ANTONIO CHEVEZ**



Above: The last Lenca queen. Opposite page: Chief Cheves at the United Nations.

THE STORY I WILL TELL YOU HERE IS OF A remarkable woman, the last in a centuries-long line of Maya-Lenca matriarchs and a living conduit of ancient traditions brought into the modern world. It is the story of a woman, a leader, a role model and a tribal person: the story of my grandmother Francisca Barbara Romero Gue-

vara, the *Comishauul* (Jaguar Matriarch of the Maya Lenca).

My grandmother came from the Lenca people, a pre-Columbian group of allied tribes in Central America. They are considered the first inhabitants of what is today Honduras, most of the territory of El Salvador, parts of Nicaragua and small

enclaves in Costa Rica. Some Lenca cave dwellings date back approximately ten thousand years, classifying the Lencas as existing since the Palaeolithic era.

The history of indigenous people in El Salvador has for centuries been one of dispossession, marginalization, persecution and murder. The Spanish invasions and colonization of the 1500s purposefully destroyed the structure of indigenous communities and tribes. What little autonomy and few lands had been granted by the Spanish Crown to the Lenca chiefs were then completely abolished after the birth of the Republic of El Salvador in 1821, whose leaders invoked the principle of equality for all and refused to recognize any ethnic diversity.

Going further, the Republic had explicitly declared that the indigenous people who once existed in that land had disappeared and were officially extinct. This meant that from then on, no Salvadoran could be acknowledged as an indigenous person, and El Salvador could never be accused of ongoing mistreatment of indigenous groups within its borders.

This was the world of my great-grandparents, the world of the 19th century that my grandmother learned about as part of the oral tradition, memorized and passed down to her by her parents and grandparents.

Born in El Salvador in the first decade of 1900s, my grandmother Francisca was the youngest of a family of five. Her father was Gabriel Sosa and her mother was Margarita Romero. Both parents had an unusual heritage. Sosa was half-indigenous Lenca and half-Sephardic Jew from a small cluster of secret Jews who had lived in eastern El Salvador since colonial times.

Romero was also half-indigenous and half-European. She was from the noble clan of the Lenca tribe known as the Tau-

lepa, which in pre-Columbian times ruled many lands. The Taulepa are known in the oral tradition of the tribal narratives as the Jaguar Clan, ruled by women who are celebrated as the founders of the kingdom and rich in ritual tradition.

When my grandmother was in her teens, an economic crisis hit El Salvador because of the devastating effect of the collapse of world coffee prices. In response to this crisis, in 1932, the indigenous people of the western part of El Salvador rose up demanding the rights of access to their ancestral tribal lands. Our clan was unable to join that uprising due to our distant location in the east at the opposite end of the country. As a gesture of support, my grandmother's grandfather gathered his militias and went across the country to support the uprising as a friend, not as a formal member of the Lenca tribe. Many of his men did not come back; he survived with multiple wounds and several pieces of shrapnel embedded in his body.

For the tribal leaders of the western part, the outcome was more final. The soldiers of the Republic captured them, executed them and in this way, the last nobles of those tribes came to an end. After the uprising, on January 22, 1932, forces of the Republic systematically killed between 35,000 and 50,000 indigenous people in a massacre called *La Matanza*. Persecution continued. Anyone wearing indigenous dress or having indigenous physical features was deemed guilty of participating in uprising and risked being murdered.

As a result, many indigenous people stopped wearing their traditional clothing or practicing their customs and culture for fear of death. Many did their best to assimilate into the general population. They adopted the mainstream language and Catholic religion, restricting traditional practices to the privacy of their homes. This was the virtual end of a distinctive indigenous culture.

Despite these prohibitions and fear of death, leaders like my grandmother and her parents kept their dual identity: a European way of life publicly and a blend of tribal culture and philosophy at home.



What little autonomy and few lands had been granted by the Spanish Crown to the Lenca chiefs were then completely abolished after the birth of the Republic of El Salvador in 1821, whose leaders invoked the principle of equality for all and refused to recognize any ethnic diversity.

In her case, my grandmother embodied three cultural heritages: the indigenous Lenca, the European and the Sephardic. She never made a formal distinction among her traditions and values. Instead, my grandmother saw these three sources of wisdom as one, something she referred to as “the ancient ways.”

Yet the indigenous traditions in her family were perhaps stronger than those of other members of the community, since she was never forced to attend a Catholic service or to become a Christian. In addition, to avoid political indoctrination she was never sent to school to receive a formal education. Today these two factors

would be seen as a disadvantage for a child; in her particular context, these factors were exactly what ensured that our grandmother maintained intact most of her ancient practices, values and world view.

When she grew up, life gave our grandmother only one child, my father. They lived in a country where the prohibition of indigenous lifestyle was still in force and this meant that my father could not fulfill his role as a tribal chief, a right given to him by virtue of his birth in our lineage.

When I was born in 1971, my grandmother was extremely pleased as she wanted me to grow up knowing our heritage and acting on it. When I was nine months old, my father separated from my mother and my grandmother took me under her care and stewardship.

Unlike my grandmother, who was kept away from schools and religion, I was obliged to attend school. However, I was not required to take religion classes or attend church services. My grandmother's view on literacy was that reading and writing would help me survive in this other world where oral tradition no longer holds the same dignity and power as does the written word.

Growing up I remember her with a big basket on her head filled with all kinds of goods, going to the villages selling fruits, eggs, flowers, herbs and many other things. She tirelessly roamed the region, buying and selling local produce to earn the money needed to buy my school books and uniforms. I grew up clinging to her skirt as we walked up and down the muddy tracks or the dusty roads during the two seasons of the tropical year.

Wider political events were to have another devastating impact on our people. During the 1980-1992 civil war, death squads and the army killed around 80,000 people in El Salvador. The civil war forced us to become internally displaced people. Suffering was not new to us; many indigenous families had been living under indentured semi-slavery since the birth of the Republic. The civil war was just another layer of instability and danger that would test our strength

and survival instinct.

I will never forget those days when we had to flee the shootings in our villages. Our grandmother was brave and decisive. Some nights when the shootings took place very near our makeshift hut by the Pan-American Highway, she simply embraced us and reassured us that the world was going to be okay.

In 1993 my grandmother heard that the United Nations had declared an International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. Let's remember that in 1993 a UN-mediated peace agreement had only just ended the 12-year-long civil war. Most of us were afraid, traumatized and unsure if the killings would restart if the UN observers were to leave.

Despite all this uncertainty and fear, my grandmother asked me to organize a plan. I was to gather members of the community to form a cultural committee in our village. She also requested my help in writing down as much as she could tell me of her oral tradition. Her vision during this time was extraordinary—she could see that this was the moment of transition, the chance to rescue our people's cultural heritage and preserve it for the modern world.

In November 1994, in a small community gathering, we proclaimed her the living *Comishauwal*. This title translates into English as Flying Jaguar, and was used by all her female predecessors who reigned over the Lenca people.

My grandmother asked me to craft a basic bill of cultural rights—an almost unbelievable idea for those of us who had lived for generations under prohibition. When I gathered our neighbors in the village and read the proposed bill to them, many were amused, others excited and some were challenged by the audacity of the indigenous family to act as a noble clan and enact cultural rights.

The people most offended by our public display of indigenous pride and intention to declare our own rights were the ex-military men—killing machines sitting idle during the transitioning years from war to peace. With our small cultural charter, we had become a target of their

unresolved anger.

Multiple death threats and subsequent attacks against our family escalated during the very fragile peace process implementation. I survived several shootings because my grandmother advised me to sleep in different homes that she negotiated as safe havens among her contacts. I remember once after one of those shootings, I was crying and telling her how afraid I was of her being killed by these armed groups. She simply told me that this time we were not going to back down.

I wrote a letter to the provincial governor reporting the attacks and my concerns. In it I highlighted our desire to celebrate our identity as part of the nation and not as separate groups. I wanted them to understand that we were not, as accused, a guerrilla group promoting communism. I never received acknowledgment of my letter—at least not formally.

Instead, in September 1995, an armed group arrived in a car to our neighborhood and without warning gunmen opened fire on me and my nephew Ernesto. At the sound of the bullets, my nephew put himself in front of me, receiving eighteen bullets and dying instantly.

My grandmother then summoned a family gathering, ordering me to seek safety. I objected, arguing that my duty was to be there for her and to die for her if I had to. She quickly reminded me that the decisions of the *Comishauwal* were not open to debate.

In July 1996 I arrived as a humanitarian refugee in Australia, leaving behind all that I knew, loved and lived for.

Living in exile as a refugee was a painful process despite all the help and support given by Australia. I lived with extraordinary pain and longing every day as I saw the sun set and felt no hopes of ever seeing my grandmother and extended relatives again.

In 1997, when I finally relocated the whereabouts of my grandmother, she directed me to never give up the cultural program. She reminded me of my duty to my people: “we are born noble, and nobles we die.” And so that year I established the Office for Lenca Affairs. Since then, my

role at the UN sessions increased.

Without the efforts of my grandmother, these achievements would never have been possible. I can truly say that I am her product, and that I am in debt to her for all that she gave me during her life. Her brave example and rigorous teaching shaped me as a person in the new generation with skills and values to face the challenges at hand.

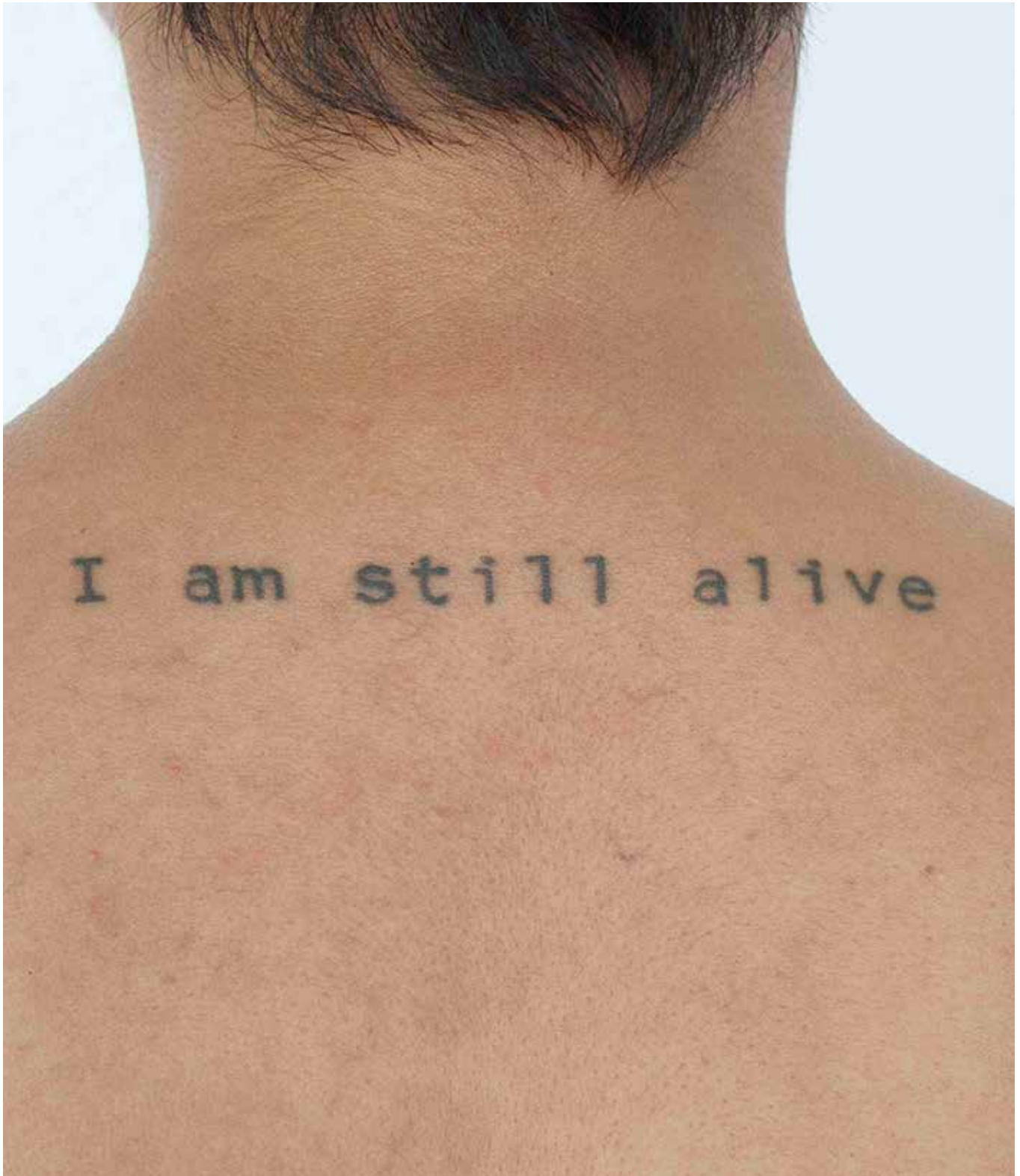
From exile, I have been able to influence the successful reform of the constitution of El Salvador, which in 2015 acknowledged the indigenous people. I know that these landmark events can only happen when great leaders are behind the scene, adding their wisdom and strength to the local processes on the village level to affirm our rights and to add our voice to a global process of great significance to us. Today, there are well organized indigenous entities such as CCNIS, ASIES, ACOLCHI and many more.

My grandmother lived to see these great events before her death in August 2015. Never fleeing into exile in the face of danger, but choosing to stay in the land of her people, the last *Comishauwal* now rests in the place that is once again acknowledged as the traditional land of the Maya Lenca people.

Our lineage is one of the last matriarchal clans of the Americas that has somehow survived to become the meeting point of the old ways and the modern world. Today, my sisters and I live scattered across several continents. Despite these vast distances of separation, we stay close and united by the values and traditions given to us by the last Queen in the Americas.

Leonel Antonio Chavez is the Ti Manauelike Lenca Taulepa (Hereditary Chief of the Jaguar House and the Lenca Indigenous People). He has served as strategic adviser to indigenous groups participating in the “Second International Decade of the World’s Indigenous Peoples” at the United Nations, and as a panel member in special sessions at the Permanent Forum on Indigenous People 2000-2014. He lives in Australia and can be contacted on info@lencas.net

ART AND ACTION



Claire Breukel and Mario Cader-Frech [Performing El Salvador](#) • James Iffland [Roque Dalton: The Magnificent Wound That Never Heals](#) • Federico J. Rivas [Technology and Collective Dreams in a Torn Nation](#)



Ronald Moran Installation view of Home Sweet Home, 2004 Prometheus Foundation, Lucca, Italy

Performing El Salvador

Contemporary Art: A Social and Political Gauge **BY CLAIRE BREUKEL AND MARIO CADER-FRECH**

ON MARCH 9, 2014, CRACK RODRÍGUEZ WALKED into a ballot station, penned his vote on a voting card, tore it in half, deposited one half into the ballot box and then proceeded to eat its remainder. A hand-held camera documented the artist chewing the ballot while carrying a copy of the exhibition catalogue, *Landings: New Art and Ideas from the Caribbean and Central America 2000–2010*. In only a few hours this video went viral.

At a time when El Salvador's leading political parties, the FMLN or "the left" and ARENA or "the right," were going head to head in a second round of closely tied elections, many Salvadorans felt disillusioned by the lack of an alternative voting choice. Reflecting these feelings of frustration and disempowerment, Crack Rodríguez's action suggested the alternative option of protest. What the artist did not expect, however, was the ardent reaction of the current FMLN government, or the degree to which his artwork would enter daily discussion. The artist was arrested and later released on house arrest, and his life was threatened, thus forcing him to go into hiding until the elections were over. Simultaneously his action made headline news and became a topic of "mainstream" dinner conversation. As a result, his action made positive strides for contemporary art within the consciousness of Salvadorans that had up to then little experience of it, and the performance has arguably come to embody the general dissatisfaction with the political situation in El Salvador.

However, in addition to key political concerns, the action also raised interesting questions about the artist. How did Crack Rodríguez come to build such a significant series of provocative performance works (used as evidence in his defense)—not having, at that time, ever traveled outside of the country?



Crack Rodríguez eats a voting card.

Rodríguez had met international visiting artists such as the TM Sisters, Susan Lee Chun, Bert Rodríguez, New York-based Salvadoran diaspora artist Irvin Morazán, and saw Kalup Linzy perform as part of the *Transcultura* project initiated by Rebecca Dávila and curated by

Performative works by Salvadoran artists include Alexia Miranda's recontextualization of domestic activities, Mauricio Esquivel's dedication to gym workouts to change the look and shape of his body, the durational experiences of Ernesto Bautista's poetry placed on transport trucks that traverse the landscape between the country's borders, as well as the Andy Warholesque transformative self-portraits by the artist known as Nadie (which means "nobody"). When asked about the experience curating *Transcultura* during an interview for the publication *Y.E.S. Collect Contemporary El Salvador*, Alanna Heiss comments: "When exhibitions include artists from dissimilar political and artistic backgrounds, there is sometimes a remarkable discovery between the artists themselves, and such an exhibition lives long past the show and in the works and minds of the artists themselves."

Renowned artist Ronald Moran uses cotton wool to wrap potentially violent domestic objects, entire kitchens, and bedrooms; Abigail Reyes embroiders words and texts found in newspapers; Danny Zavaleta writes an instruction manual of gang symbols used to communicate on the streets; Melissa Guevara's tattoo on the back of her neck and resulting photographic series proclaims "I Am Still Alive."

Alanna Heiss and Alanna Lockward. These performance-based artists visited San Salvador as part of the MARTE Contemporary program at the Museum of Art of El Salvador (MARTE). Their work has had an impact on the production of many Salvadoran contemporary artists who also came to see performance as a viable medium and outlet for expression.

Yet Crack Rodríguez also observed elements of the performative within the politics and social interaction of the everyday. El Salvador's culture is inherently ritualistic as well as social. That is, its predominantly Catholic society is also a society that has been involved in and witnessed public political protests throughout its twelve-year-long civil war



Simón Vega
Third World Sputnik, 2013
Installation at ILLA Pavilion
at the 2013 Venice Biennale

and up to today. In addition, informal traders and market places are “on the street,” providing a platform for social interaction and cultural expression. Having an acute awareness of his surroundings, Rodríguez uses public spaces as the

platform upon which he can play with interactions and push up against social norms and political tendencies.

His use of his environment is not an isolated example. Salvadoran artist Simón Vega used discarded materials to

recreate a life-size Russian Sputnik for the 2013 Venice Biennale, a work inspired by the makeshift and improvisational approach to building informal housing in El Salvador. In his ongoing “Far Away Brother Style” series, shown at the 2011

Venice Biennale, Walterio Iraheta documents homes built with remittances from relatives now living and working in the United States, photographing eclectic architecture that speaks to aspirations of wealth within a socially complex phenomenon of migration (see the article by Sarah Lynn Lopez with illustrations by Iraheta on p. 90).

Practicality is also a factor in the omnipresence of performance in arts programming in El Salvador. When an international artist is invited to El Salvador, mediums such as video performance don't require timely and expensive transportation of artwork. Most forms of performance require the artist to be present, which also encourages engagement with the local community resulting in a mutual sharing of knowledge. Performance is malleable and therefore responsive to public interaction, which is useful within a context that is often initially unknown by the visiting artist. For Salvadoran artists, performance is immersed in the contemporary realities of the everyday. The performative is omnipresent, and one could go as far as to say that the experience of contemporary art generally in and about El Salvador, is one that is intrinsic with life. Not only are artists inspired by improvisational architecture, many artists use found or everyday inexpensive materials. Renowned artist Ronald Moran uses cotton wool to wrap potentially violent domestic objects, entire kitchens, and bedrooms; Abigail Reyes embroiders words and texts found in newspapers; Danny Zavaleta writes an instruction manual of gang symbols used to communicate on the streets; Melissa Guevara's tattoo on the back of her neck and resulting photographic series proclaim "I Am Still Alive." These works are inarguably integrated with quotidian life, and these contemporary artists reflect a breadth of human experience that touches on religion, culture, politics, class, violence, urban planning, domesticity and more. It is not unusual then that Crack Rodríguez would come to use the voting process to perform an anti-institutional action.



Y.ES cover.

In El Salvador, contemporary art is also a tool that bridges not only artists and the public but also artists with established and prospective local patrons. It is inarguable that a hierarchical class system exists in El Salvador. However, art has effectively brought together different social circles in a neutral, open-minded and peaceful environment. Case in point is the MARTE Contemporary annual event *Hocus Pocus*, an art raffle where artists of all disciplines are invited to donate a work of art to raise funds for the museum program. Patrons buy tickets that guarantee they win an artwork. During the event, tickets are drawn one by one, and the first ticket gets first pick of an artwork, and so on. Patrons vie to claim the artwork they want. This fun and informal setting provides a unique platform where people from different social circles mix and mingle, engage in conversation, get to know each other's points of view and build long-lasting friendships. MARTE Contemporary, as well as programs at the Salarrue National Gallery, Cultural Center of Spain, the curated shows at collective work spaces POINT and SPACE, annual artist-initiated public projects such as ADAPTE, and the newly established exchange initiative Y.ES, provide opportunities to bring together diverse sectors of the Salvadoran community.

However, just as artists working in El Salvador are inspired by their surround-

ings, they also interrogate and are distanced from it. El Salvador, although culturally distinctive, is a space that has been, and still is, greatly denationalized. The Salvadoran civil war and mass migration have ensured a fraught relationship with the notions of unity and national identity. Contemporary art is the vehicle through which to export conversation about what El Salvador is today beyond the boundaries of geography. Today, El Salvador needs to be addressed as a metaphorical space that includes its vast diaspora. In fact, many artists living abroad have made a point to travel "home" to show their work—these include Irvin Morazán and Karlos Carcamo based in New York, RETNA and Beatriz Cortez in Los Angeles, Domingo Castillo in Miami, Victor Portillo in Vienna, Luis Paredes in Denmark, Rafael Díaz and Rodolfo Oviedo Vega in Spain, and many more. Currently the Y.ES program and the work of the Cultural Center of Spain in San Salvador are focused on reestablishing a connection with these artists. The challenge now is to cast a wide net around a vast community that has been historically undefined and largely disconnected. Contemporary art can, in this way, be an agent of reconnection, transformation and peace building. It is also not unpleasant that artists such as Crack Rodríguez have a penchant for humor, satire and play. This makes the process of working together always unexpected in an environment that is historically weighted, politically complex, yet culturally rich and socially engaged.

Mario Cader-Frech is a Salvadoran-born collector and philanthropist. Through the Robert S. Wennett and Mario Cader-Frech foundation, he and his husband have supported Salvadoran contemporary artists for the past two decades.

Claire Breukel, a Miami-based South African-born curator, is the Director and Curator of Y.ES, a Salvadoran exchange program, and co-editor of the book Y.ES Collect Contemporary El Salvador with artist Simón Vega and Mario Cader-Frech. See www.yescontemporary.org

Roque Dalton

The Magnificent Wound that Never Heals BY JAMES IFFLAND

THE WORK OF ROQUE DALTON (1935-1975) IS ONE of El Salvador's national treasures. Dalton garnered the admiration of many distinguished writers and intellectuals, ranging from Julio Cortázar to Régis Debray, from Mario Benedetti to Elena Poniatowska. In a region whose writers have had difficulty not only penetrating the circuitry of the so-called First World's cultural establishment but also that of much of Latin America, this is quite unusual. He achieved this status not only through his brilliant command of the Spanish language and sparklingly mischievous (and corrosive) sense of humor, but also through his unrelenting commitment to revolutionary change.

That commitment is one reason why the insertion of his work within today's cultural and political atmosphere becomes problematic on many levels: it can appear "archaic," "déphasé," in a moment of triumphant capitalism conjoined with post-modern skepticism. Dalton was always completely upfront about his ideological convictions (including his commitment to armed struggle), and while much of his poetry (the genre in which he flourished most) centers on the range of themes found throughout the ages such as love, solitude and death, one is always encountering unequivocal signs of his deep political engagement. This is why I have consistently insisted that Dalton was a "revolutionary who also wrote" rather than a "writer who was also engaged in revolution."

As many readers will know, Dalton's involvement in bringing revolution to his impoverished native land cost him his life. And yes, he died not at the hands of the military dictatorship ruling the country at the time, but at those of "comrades" of the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP), the revolutionary organization he joined after his clandestine return from Cuba to El Salvador at the end of 1973.

Dalton became caught up in internecine squabbling with ERP leaders on issues of strategy, and in May 1975 he and a fellow member of the organization were "arrested," put on "trial" and subsequently "executed." His enemies accused Dalton of being a CIA agent—an accusation that was subsequently retracted when the ERP leadership admitted that his "execution" was a mistake.

The exact circumstances surrounding Dalton's murder have never been definitively clarified, nor have his remains ever been recovered. Several of the individuals directly involved in the events are still

tuted an "error de juventud" (a "youthful error"). Villalobos has become a complete *bête noire* for his former comrades in the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) and is unlikely ever to reveal exactly what happened.

A very different path was followed by Jorge Meléndez. He remained in El Salvador after the war, became active in politics and still heads a small party allied with the FMLN. After the 2009 FMLN electoral victory, he was named head of Protección Civil, the governmental agency that responds to natural disasters. Needless to say, this was a source of outrage for

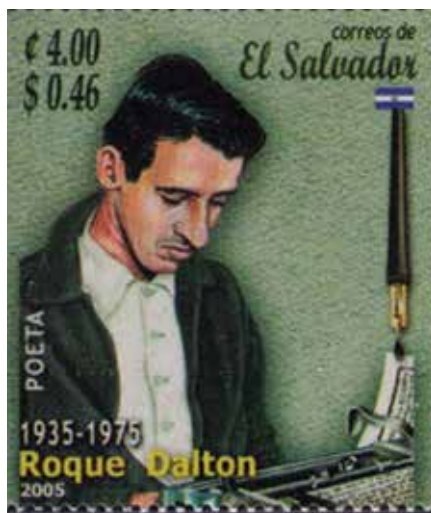
Dalton became caught up in internecine squabbling with ERP leaders on issues of strategy, and in May 1975 he and a fellow member of the organization were "arrested," put on "trial" and subsequently "executed."

alive, including Joaquín Villalobos (the supreme commander of the ERP forces during El Salvador's civil war that lasted from 1980 to 1992) and Jorge Meléndez (his second-in-command). The Dalton family—including his widow (Aída Cañas) and his two surviving sons (Juan José and Jorge)—have insisted over the years that those responsible for his death should be tried for murder. They also have demanded that his burial place be revealed.

After a failed attempt to enter electoral politics after the signing of the 1992 peace accord, Villalobos subsequently swerved sharply to the right, studied at Oxford (where he still lives), and became a consultant on "conflict resolution" for governments facing armed insurgencies such as Colombia, Mexico and Sri Lanka. He resolutely refuses to discuss the Dalton affair, though at one point admitted in an interview that the ERP leadership's acts consti-

the Dalton family, which nevertheless has remained steadfastly committed to the FMLN up to the present day. (Now a journalist and director of *Contrapunto*, Juan José was an FMLN combatant and was captured and tortured by the Salvadoran army.) During the government of Mauricio Funes the family initiated legal actions to prosecute both Villalobos and Meléndez, but these did not fare well given the general amnesty that was declared as part of the peace accords. The Dalton family persisted in its efforts, requesting that the FMLN government at least dismiss Meléndez from his prominent position. It never happened.

The family renewed its efforts after the electoral victory of the FMLN in 2014, and the assuming of the Presidency on the part of Salvador Sánchez Cerén, a key commander of the FMLN forces during the war. Its hopes were crushed when



Meléndez was named, once again, head of Protección Civil.

Meléndez has consistently refused to reveal what his precise role was in Dalton's "execution," largely making the argument that this sort of thing is to be expected, more or less, in the type of conflict that was emerging in the early seventies, and also invoking the exculpatory notion that our author was "tried" by a revolutionary military tribunal and found guilty on the basis of the "evidence" then available.

For someone who studies and teaches Dalton (in my own case, for more than thirty years now), this lingering state of affairs presents an array of vexing obstacles. Whenever I tell people that I am writing a book about Dalton, the first thing that comes out of their mouth is: "So who exactly killed him?" If the person is coming from the right, there is always a grimly self-congratulatory air that suffuses the way the question is posed ("You see! The left kills its own!"). If the person belongs to the left, the question is inspired by honest curiosity, tinged with immense sadness and almost a kind of guilt ("How could our comrades have done something like that?").

Mixed with the never-ending "Whodunit," we have the near legendary air that surrounds Dalton, one that often threatens to turn him into a "pop celebrity" of sorts. Dalton developed a (well-earned) reputation as a drinker of epic capacity as well as an incorrigible womanizer. This

has led many to fashion him as a scintillating bohemian writer and "dreamer" who stumbled, essentially by accident, into the revolutionary politics that got him killed. With this image as a point of departure, many scholars have striven to craft a "Roque-for-the-academy"—that is, a Roque Dalton whose poetic brilliance, fueled by his flamboyant life-style, justifies jettisoning, for the most part, any evidence of his hard-line Marxism-Leninism. This, in turn, facilitates circulation of his work in seminars, academic journals and other venues.

The "Dalton phenomenon" can only be fully understood if one looks at the entirety of his production: *all* of his poetry (including *Un libro rojo para Lenin* [A Red Book for Lenin]), not just the more lyrical variety, his historical works and theoretical writings about revolutionary struggle, and yes, his very "nuts-and-bolts" texts on guerrilla warfare. Quite frankly, I do not think that there is a comparable figure anywhere in Latin America, nor perhaps in the rest of the world. Studying *all* of his writings is really the only way to do justice to the rich complexity of his work and his life.

And when I say this, I do so not as a critic interested in presenting "new, improved" Roque-for-the-academy; rather, as someone who believes that the problems of Latin America, and much of the rest of the world, can only be solved from the left. And since the collapse of existing socialism in the early 90s, the left has been searching for a new language, for new ways to mobilize the people who need to be mobilized. I am convinced that Dalton has something to say to us at this moment in history, especially as the left makes inroads in much of Latin America (albeit with ups-and-downs). He believed that armed struggle was the only way out of the never-ending nightmare of Latin American history, particularly in the wake of the overthrow of democratically elected Socialist President Salvador Allende in Chile. However, he was by no means tied to armed struggle as universal "cure-all." The very vibrancy of his thought, *which is connected to that of his poetry*, would have

him thinking of new paths forward, particularly at a moment in Salvadoran history when a former FMLN guerrilla commander is the country's president.

It speaks well of those who planned the presidential inauguration on June 1, 2014, that they included Dalton in the exhibition of photos of Salvadoran heroes and martyrs—such as Farabundo Martí and Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero—held up by "living statues" along the walkway leading to the auditorium. And when Sánchez Cerén invoked Dalton in part of his speech, it sparked one of the loudest and most sustained applauses of the entire proceedings. It is clear that the FMLN wants to maintain Dalton as part of its pantheon of heroes, particularly given his continuing appeal to young Salvadorans. And it cannot be anything but galling to its leadership and militants to witness how the Dalton case continues to be used as a stick with which to hit them. The ongoing "mystery," and the fact that one of its protagonists continues to occupy an important government post, still provides fodder for the Salvadoran right in its unceasing battle to thwart the FMLN at every turn.

It is worth remembering that it was under ARENA governments of the mid-nineties that Dalton was officially brought to the center stage of Salvadoran culture. Among other things, a governmental publishing organ was responsible for the appearance of the first major anthology of Dalton's poetry in the country after the ban in effect during the war. Under ARENA, a postage stamp dedicated to Dalton was issued; he was bestowed a posthumous honor that essentially recognized him as the national poet of El Salvador. Had the right caught him when he was still alive, they would have killed him (as they were very close to doing on a number of occasions). But once the the left itself did them the favor of getting rid of Dalton, he provided them substantial ammunition for the electoral dynamics of the post-war period.

Dalton's stature will most likely continue to grow in future years as more and more critical studies of his work con-

tinue to appear. The year 2013 saw the release of a wonderful new documentary film, *Roque Dalton: fusilemos la noche* [Roque Dalton: Let's Shoot the Night], by Austrian film-maker Tina Leisch. Dalton's "novelesque" life continues to provide raw material for fiction writers, as in David Hernández's *Roqueana* (2014) as well as in Manlio Argueta's *Los poetas del mal* (2013)

And despite all of this, the open wound that remains regarding the circumstances of Dalton's death and the issue of accountability will continue to be an obstacle for those who wish, first, to bring to light the true literary greatness of his work, and second, for those who feel that he has much to teach us about how the left can move forward within the current historical juncture (for example, by learning to use the liberating power of humor).

I evoke this situation in the paradoxical title I have chosen for this essay. Here we have an extraordinary legacy still waiting to be explored fully, yet a terrible wound mars it, one that has not yet healed after forty years. No one, including the Dalton family, believes that those responsible for Roque's death will ever be put on trial and punished the way they deserve. But some form of transitional justice, perhaps a Truth Commission with good-faith participation on the part of those who have been accused, would go an enormous distance towards finally closing that wound. And what would probably heal it completely would be a sincere public apology from the guilty parties once they reveal the complete truth of what happened—no more weasel words regarding "youthful errors" or "military tribunals." Then, and only then, will the full magnificence of Dalton's legacy be able to shine forth unimpeded. A scar would still remain, but some scars can be beautiful...

James Iffland is a professor of Spanish and Latin American Studies at Boston University. He is currently at work on a book on Roque Dalton. He was the 2005-2006 Central American Visiting Scholar at DRCLAS.

Reimagining the Future

Technology and Collective Dreams in a Torn Nation

BY FEDERICO J. RIVAS

MY PARENTS TELL ME HOW LUCKY I WAS TO BE born in a hospital. It was late November of 1989 amidst the "final offensive"—one of the last but more gruesome clashes between armed guerrillas and military forces in the Salvadoran Civil War—and the odds were surely against making a safe trip. The guerrillas had stormed into the capital and established a strict 6 p.m. curfew enforced by checkpoints out on the streets. With the aid of a borrowed armored car, my mom was rushed safely into the hospital and I was born.

Two years later, peace was signed. And yet, while I don't remember anything about the war, I also can't say I have actual memories of a country at peace.

Today, El Salvador has one of the highest homicide rates in the world and, according to a recent poll, 79 percent of the population wishes they could leave the country. This can be interpreted as a majority of Salvadorans saying they have lost the ability to dream and build a future here. For me, as a member of the post-conflict generation, it's hard to reconcile how a nation gifted with extravagant natural beauty and passionate, hard-working people, has become one of the most violent nations of the world.

As a twelve-year-old I decided to accept the challenge of becoming a businessman. I started my first company when I was a sixth-grader by selling campaign buttons to my classmates running for student council. Many years later in 2013, inspired by Giuseppe Tornatore's film *Cinema Paradiso*, my brother Edwin and I decided to start building spaces of peace, and promoting access to culture by screening free open-air movies at public squares across El Salvador. Cinetour, our company, goes into some of the most disenfranchised communities across the country. We install in public squares a

huge inflatable screen—larger than most movie theatre screens in the region—and show short educational videos on topics such as violence prevention, nutrition and moral values, followed by a family-rated movie.

We've now expanded to several countries across Central America thanks to the support of mass-consumption brands such as Unilever, which use the film screening to offer samplings and market their products. For three years, Cinetour has enabled hundreds of thousands of people to converge during weekends in spaces free of violence, in places where trust is restored: these events reignite creative processes in areas stigmatized by conflict, allowing people to dream, even for a moment, that there is more out there than just the plight of violence. In the same way that Hollywood dazzles and enables audiences to dream, we are challenging through our screens the barrage of negative news that permeates our day-to-day media. Cinetour has also increasingly become an important platform for publicizing NGOs such as Global Dignity and raising awareness about serious health issues affecting our country such as the Zika virus, dengue, and chikungunya.

Cinetour is successful, but we wanted to have a bigger impact. In the year 2013, as a student in a class taught at Harvard by Professor Fernando Reimers, I read *Abundance*, a book coauthored by Peter Diamandis of the X-PRIZE Foundation. Both this book and this class profoundly shifted the way I think about the world, giving me the gift of understanding that for the first time in history, small, committed teams are able to tackle large-scale problems.

Abundance argues that the world is better than ever before, and that expo-



An outdoor theatre provides free films to the public through Cinetour.



Above: Kids show off their tickets to the free movie. Opposite page: Salvadoran government forces disembark from a troop carrier in the Salvadoran capital during fierce fighting with insurgents during a bloody guerrilla offensive in 1989.

nential technologies can enable a future in which the basic needs of every man, woman and child are met. This struck a chord, because somehow I didn't feel like this has happened for El Salvador. Perhaps my view has been affected by my disappointment with how governments have dealt so poorly with reducing violence, educating our population and advancing our competitiveness as a nation.

So I and a group of like-minded millennials started *Estadio Ventures*: the first innovation lab in the country to try to address our most pressing problems, including gang violence through violence prevention initiatives. We want to engage some of El Salvador's brightest young minds in an isolated environment that rewards creativity and risk-taking by combining an innovation lab, accelerator and a co-working space.

Within our lab we experiment with a variety of commercially available exponential technologies including robotics, virtual reality, sensors, 3D printing and artificial intelligence. The promise of these technologies is that they eventually become democratized, widely distributed at a low cost. We are placing a bet that

Its small territorial extension, the smallest country in the continental Americas, combined with a high population density, makes it the ideal real-world laboratory for creative out-of-the box thinking and testing breakthrough ideas from which we can expand to neighboring countries and regions

these trends will continue, while we build innovative solutions around these technologies to tackle some of our region's most pressing problems. I was fortunate enough to be selected for this year's World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos, where the central topic was

“the Fourth Industrial Revolution,” which suggests that these ideas and technologies may finally be getting the mainstream attention they deserve.

Solving our global society's most pressing problems requires our perception of adversity to shift from a predominantly pessimistic outlook to one of optimism. Indeed, El Salvador is traversing one of the worst crises in its history. It is our calling to youth to propagate hope, to restore in older—and younger—generations the capacity to dream, and to foster collaboration—so we may rebuild—a social tissue which has inherited inequality, hatred, and political polarization. As entrepreneurs we must wield the tools of exponential technologies to imagine and build a future where all basic needs are met.

If within each crisis lies opportunity, El Salvador is a veritable gold mine. Its small territorial extension, the smallest country in the continental Americas, combined with a high population density, makes it the ideal real-world laboratory for creative out-of-the-box thinking and testing breakthrough ideas from which we can expand to neighboring countries and regions.

We millennials may be an idealistic bunch. Perhaps we are entitled, perhaps delusional, perhaps we haven't had a taste of “reality” yet. But perhaps we also just happen to instinctively know the potential of technology and have the passion to shape the future. Time will tell. Whatever the case, I believe it is time to act. Indeed, we are lucky to be alive during this most exciting time. The computer science pioneer Alan Kay said it best: the best way to predict the future is to invent it. We are committed to improving the state of El Salvador, Latin America and (maybe, hopefully) the world.

Federico J. Rivas is Chief Executive Officer of International Media Group and co-founder of Estadio Ventures. He is curator of the Global Shapers San Salvador Hub, an initiative of the World Economic Forum. He holds a BA from Georgetown University and an MA from Harvard. He can be reached at federico.rivas@gmail.com

THE PAST IN THE PRESENT



Salvadoran government forces disembark from a troop carrier in the Salvadoran capital during fierce fighting with insurgents during a bloody guerrilla offensive in 1989.”

Mary Jo McConahay [Transitional Justice in El Salvador](#) • Jack Spence [The Convulsions of War](#) • Steve Cagan [Salvadoran Refugees in the Camp at Colomoncagua, Honduras 1980-1991](#) • M. Brinton Lykes and Nelson Portillo [A Search for Justice in El Salvador](#) • Michael S. Serrill [A Nation at War with Itself](#) • Bill Gentile [Photojournalists in a Cauldron of Violence](#)

Transitional Justice in El Salvador

The Promise and the Pain **BY MARY JO MCCONAHAY**

ON A WARM MORNING IN JANUARY 2016, IN A small town far from the capital in El Salvador's northern Morazan province, just off the shady central square, an extraordinary hearing is unfolding in a cramped courtroom. Over the low, constant whir of a fan, Justice of the Peace Mario Soto speaks clearly to survivors and relatives of victims of a 1982 army massacre by U.S.-trained forces at a village called El Mozote and nearby settlements. A thousand unarmed civilians, including infants and children, died. Government attorneys, lawyers for the peasants whose families were killed and forensic scientists, listen closely. They are not accustomed to hearing such words from the bench.

"I want to know everything," says Soto. "What we do here has national transcendence, international transcendence. My decisions will be based on the constitution, and above all on international human rights law."

Some 75,000 persons, overwhelmingly civilians, died in the civil war between 1980 and 1992, most at the hands of government forces. Adjudicating past crimes, especially war crimes, is arguably one of the most effective ways to strengthen a post-conflict society, lending credence to the judicial system and fortifying the process of transitional justice to underpin a true democracy. But in El Salvador no one is convicted for ordering, or carrying out, massacres like El Mozote, or for assassinations such as those of Archbishop Óscar Romero in 1980 and six Jesuit priests in 1989. There remains no accounting for thousands of disappeared civilians.

That is why the scene in the Meanguera courtroom feels unusual: a judge is pushing for justice in the case of a war crime with every apparent intention of seeking a resolution within El Salvador's own judicial system, no matter where the evidence

leads. Frustrated with roadblocks in the past, lawyers for families of the slain and for survivors of the killings in the hamlets around El Mozote took the case to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR), which found the government responsible. In a 2012 ruling, the court ordered reparations and made other demands that remain unfulfilled. When locals objected to the way a government forensic exhumation was being conducted in the hamlet of La Joya, risking the loss of evidence, they repaired to Judge Soto to stop the exhumation, which he did. Now Soto finds himself in the middle of one of the war's best-known cases, one which symbolizes the army's scorched-earth policy that killed thousands of unarmed civilians, a massacre which Washington dismissed at the time as communist propaganda. In the Meanguera courtroom, survivors and family members, some quaking and tearful, claimed harassment and intimidation from government attorneys charged with fulfilling the IACtHR demands. Moreover, distrusting government, they demanded that exhumations be performed by the renowned Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team.

"We are being made victims again," one woman told the packed room. "I do not understand the justice system, but I know we have a judgment from an international court and we want no more hypocrisy."

Judge Soto too has encountered roadblocks. In an interview, Soto, 43, said his request for scientific advisers was turned down by superiors, who also denied him all-terrain transport, forcing him to educate himself in libraries on complex technical aspects of the case, and to take the bus to some of its remote sites. One morning he found slipped under his door a piece of paper containing only the license number of his family car, he

said, which he took as a personal threat to "judicial independence."

In court Soto referred to the harassment and "obscene" and "alarming" incidents that have erupted to put "obstacles" before the process so far, which has been limited to elements concerning fulfillment of the IACtHR decision. He said he wants to see "a penal investigation of everything that has happened." In Meanguera, he ruled that the Argentine team could work with the government's forensic scientists



on future exhumations, a solution that seemed to please all. He welcomed the presence of new government attorneys, giving one he knew well "a vote of confidence," which survivors said was a relief. The process in Meanguera is not a penal case, but lawyers for victims are encouraged when they see a jurist willing to move forward on an aspect of such a controversial event from the past.

"Many are dying without seeing justice," said Wilfredo Medrano of the Tutela Legal "María Julia Hernández," whose lawyers took the El Mozote case to the Inter-American Court. At Meanguera, Medrano referred to the January arrival in El Salvador of former Defense Minister José Guillermo García, extradited from the United States. Last year former Vice-Minister of Defense Nicolás Carranza, who had been on the CIA payroll

while in office according to U.S. court testimony, was extradited. Both men were found culpable in U.S. courts for crimes against humanity, torture and murder of civilians. Victims and advocates want to see them tried in El Salvador. “Exhumations are important but we want justice,” said Medrano.

At the end of the emotional session, Judge Soto declared the El Mozote case was going in “a new direction” and survivors agreed; *primero Dios*, they inevitably added, “God willing.” Soto took to social media in February to invite “the entire nation” to a ceremony at El Mozote, where remains “scientifically” examined by forensic experts were handed over to families.

THE SHADOW OF THE “AMNESTY LAW”

Soto’s declared intent to follow international human rights law is telling, and in El Salvador, unusual. In 1993, just five days after a U.N. Truth Commission laid responsibility for 85 percent of war deaths on the government (and five percent on the rebel forces of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front [FMLN]), the rightist-controlled National Assembly declared a blanket amnesty for violence during the armed conflict. The “Amnesty Law” has hung over progress in justice like a dark cloud. Judges invoke it when failing to proceed in the most egregious, well-documented cases, even when they have room to act.

Crimes against humanity, such as torture, genocide, summary executions and mass killings of unarmed civilians are considered so fundamental to international rights law that nations have agreed their prosecution cannot be suspended. In a 2000 ruling, El Salvador’s own Supreme Court said that while the amnesty law was not unconstitutional, it should be applied only when “said amnesty does not impede...the fundamental rights of the human person,” such as the right to life. The wording “is big enough to drive a truck through,” as one lawyer said, giving jurists a green light to pursue rights cases, but they do not. Fear remains strong of upsetting powerful economic groups linked to the military. Concern



Opposite page: Photos of the murdered churchwomen in Cinquera. Above, A boy rides his bicycle past a memorial in Cinquera.



Above: A mother of fallen FMLN combatants chats with an international student on the Peace Route in Perquin, a former guerrilla stronghold; Opposite page: A woman holds a portrait of Archbishop Romero.

reigns about a destabilizing effect when implicated players are linked to the government. Rights advocates call the “stability” argument specious.

“Guatemala considered a case of *lesa humanidad* and the state is still standing,” Medrano wryly told the Meanguera court. He was referring to the 2013 marathon genocide trial of the 1980s dictator, General Ephraín Ríos Montt, in the neighboring country, which caused ripples of notice and demands for like treatment of former leaders in El Salvador.

Meanwhile, the amnesty law is under formal review. On its 21st anniversary in 2013, lawyers from the Institute of Human Rights (IDHUCA), of the University of Central America José Simeon Canas (UCA)—where the Jesuits, their housekeeper and her daughter were slain in November 1989—presented a challenge to the law’s constitutionality before

the Supreme Court.

No matter what the high court decides on the challenge, however, or what happens in Soto’s small Meanguera courtroom, as long as the Salvadoran judicial system in general invokes a blanket amnesty or an attitude of letting the past be the past, the small country remains outside the margins of international law. Not only are human rights affected, but persons harmed are also denied the right to sue in civil and administrative cases. The government fails in its obligation to citizens. Little by little, “biological impunity” takes over for the killers, as survivors and witnesses die. While the overwhelming number of war crimes was perpetrated by state actors and rightist death squads, the FMLN, which now holds the reins of government, stands accused in others. When the government partially complied with a Spanish court arrest

order in the Jesuit case in February, Pres. Salvador Sánchez Cerén also immediately called for creating a “space” where the population might “pardon crimes committed in the past.” Neither left nor right, it seems, wants to push decisively inside the country for clarification of the past.

“El Salvador is an example of how a pact between two major political forces can stall accountability or reparations in a way that is unhealthy for the body politic,” said Distinguished Law Professor Naomi Roht-Arriaza of the University of California Hastings Law College, an international human rights law expert.

CLAIMING THE HISTORICAL MEMORY, THE RIGHT TO THE TRUTH

For all the importance of legal cases to adjust accounts with the past, transitional justice is not only about criminal pros-

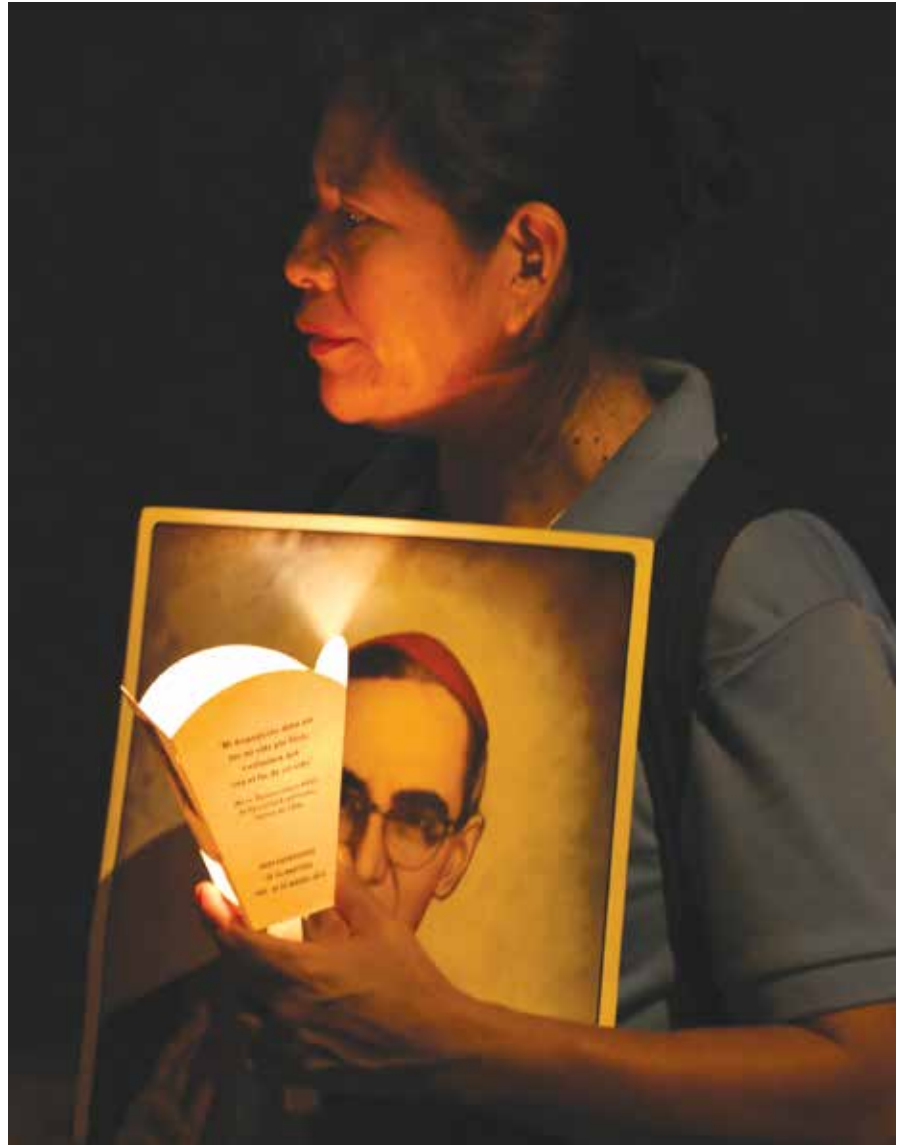
education. In El Salvador, it also includes efforts at ensuring transparency and eliminating corruption, at producing an accounting of the names of the dead and disappeared (the FMLN government has initiated work on a Registry of Victims), and expressing respect for those harmed, including reparation.

In the big picture of transitional justice, suggests Roht-Arriaza, “very little takes place in the courtroom.”

Mirian Ábrego, a member of the Victims Committee of Tecoluca, a pre-Hispanic town by the volcano of San Vicente in the heart of the country, knows how much the work of transforming the present by elucidating the past takes place outside the courtroom. In the absence of government action, small volunteer local groups, working in villages, in one-room schoolhouses, going door to door in the countryside, become the forces that move transitional justice forward, led by individuals like Ábrego, a massacre survivor.

On the morning of July 25, 1981, Ábrego, then 19, was preparing lunch in her house, at the limits of a settlement in San Francisco Angulo in a rural area near Tecoluca, in central El Salvador. Men in black military garb, faces hidden behind ski-masks, burst in and shot her in the throat, leaving her for dead. Ábrego did not know at the time that her sister, with an 11-month old at the breast, had already been murdered by the death squad, along with some 44 other peasants in their houses and in the streets. Later investigation would show the assassins belonged to the military and a paramilitary operating on behalf of the army, part of a systematic scorched-earth government policy of the time to eliminate civilian support for the rebels. In an unprecedented 2014 decision, the Supreme Court said a stonewalled investigation of the mass homicide violated victims’ rights, that a new process must publicize its findings and charge perpetrators. In Tecoluca, with scarce funds, volunteers like Ábrego have so far compiled “a data base” of names of victims in four out of forty local massacres she said took place in the area.

When she recovered from “the edge of



death” thirty-five years ago, Ábrego said, “I told God, ‘thank you for my life, and now I am going to work for the victims.’”

Like thousands of activist victims and survivors in the country, Ábrego toils not only to bring cases to courtrooms but to keep the memory of the violence alive. Every June, with the local Historical Memory Unit—its office is in the city hall—she plans testimony collection, organizes a ceremony of remembrance, and oversees a youth group that hears from survivors and creates theatrical performances about the history of the war. Elsewhere, in a country-wide plethora of versions of reparations for the past, in

events that span the year, family members of the slain and survivors are determined that recent history will be part of the country’s future. They paint buses with the face of Monseñor Óscar Romero, or carve names of the local disappeared onto memorial walls or erect modest monuments.

Some local activists find more support on a local level than they do in the national palace. Mayors help organize memorials. The municipality of San Sebastián, in San Vicente, operates under an official 2013 policy based on the “Right to the Truth” enunciated in Inter-American Court decisions, and the Salvadoran peace accords.

The policy mandates agreements with schools and churches “to keep alive the memory of massacred loved ones in the years of the armed civil war,” to create a municipal victims registry, to study the historical roots of the violence, to identify people who were unable to finish primary school because of the violence and their inclusion in adult education programs, and to support a free network for legal consultations. Four other municipalities are considering similar policies.

In the past decade, surveys by the UCA’s respected Institute of Public Opinion (IUDOP) have found an “overwhelming consensus” that Salvadorans want the government to investigate grave violations of human rights that occurred during the war. The state’s unfulfilled debt with the past fuels impunity for those responsible for El Salvador’s high crime rate, said IUDOP director Jeannette Aguilar. Without clarification of the past, the transition to democracy remains unrealized. “‘Democracy’ is emptied of content,” she said.

In the absence of strong government commitment, however, the task of clarifying history often feels left in the hands of a very few jurists, survivors and advocates. They attempt to make the justice system do what they feel they deserve, case by case. They may organize to demand exhumations, or insist on access to public information held by the military. Groups like the Center for the Promotion of Human Rights CPDH “Madeleine Lagadec,” for instance, named for a French nurse tortured and killed by the army along with an Argentine doctor and three patients at an FMLN field hospital in 1980, work for these goals, and also provide psychological attention to survivors. Professionals and trained *promotores*—CPDH “Madeleine Lagadec” counts more than a thousand country-wide—manage education events about the war or prepare family members who will watch the remains their dead be raised from the dirt by scientists. They build memory walls and collect testimony. They work, as Mirian Ábrego says, “so we might never live again that reality.”

TWO EMBLEMATIC CASES: THE MURDERS OF THE JESUITS AND OF ARCHBISHOP ROMERO

The case of the murders of six Jesuits, their housekeeper and her daughter has taken a positive turn in the eyes of those who want the crime tried. Effectively blocked by the amnesty law inside El Salvador, an international team led by the San Francisco-based Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA), an international non-profit firm, took the case to the National Court of Spain, which accepted it on the principle of universal jurisdiction—the legal understanding that some crimes are such an affront to humanity they may be tried anywhere. In January, Spanish Judge Eloy Velasco re-issued a capture order—El Salvador virtually ignored the first order in 2011—for seventeen former military officials. Four were arrested, although principal high-ranking culprits remain free. Even if El Salvador does not detain all the men, the order means the once-powerful officers are virtual prisoners in their own country. Also hanging over their heads is the pending extradition from the United States of an alleged fellow conspirator, former Vice-Minister of Defense for Public Safety Col. Inocente Orlando Montano. The CJA, which led the process that convicted Carranza and García and saw them deported, found Montano living quietly in Boston, and saw to it that he was jailed for perjury and fraud. Steps are underway to send Montano to Madrid on the Spanish Court’s request. With Montano in Spain, the case against all the accused can proceed, whether or not the others are present. At the IDHUCA office just yards away from where soldiers killed the Jesuits and the two women, lawyer Pedro Martínez characterizes the process to charge their murderers as more than a legal case. “It is above all a moral question,” he said.

El Salvador’s most famous war crime may be the assassination of Archbishop Óscar Romero while he was saying mass, the day after he directly called upon the army and National Guard in

a sermon: “I implore you, I beg you, in God’s name I order you: Stop the repression!” Romero’s is “a case in limbo,” said Ovidio Mauricio González, director of the aid office Tutela Legal “María Julia Hernández.” Not only the legal system, but the murdered prelate’s conservative brother bishops have dragged their feet or blocked progress toward legal redress. In 2007, the archdiocese fired David Morales, then the church’s legal aid office counsel (now the government Human Rights Ombudsman), when Morales supported bringing up Romero’s case before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in Washington. In 2013, Archbishop José Luis Escobar unexpectedly locked out Mauricio and the rest of the staff of the Archdiocesan Tutela Legal, founded by Romero, from the office where they had been working for years, forcing them to find a new space to pursue El Mozote and other crimes. The precipitous shut out occurred shortly after the Supreme Court took the challenge to the amnesty law under consideration. Escobar has told local press the law is necessary “to prevent the fall anew into a spiral of demands that cannot be fulfilled.”

President Mauricio Funes, of the FMLN party, apologized in 2010 for Archbishop Romero’s murder. For those who already regard the slain prelate as San Romero de America, however, and for much of El Salvador, the pursuit of his killers in the courtroom might strengthen faith in the rule of law on earth.

Mary Jo McConahay is a journalist whose reporting on Central America since 1975 has appeared in publications including Time, Newsweek, Los Angeles Times, National Catholic Reporter and others. She is the author of Maya Roads, One Woman’s Journey among the People of the Rainforest, and Ricochet, Two Women War Reporters and a Friendship under Fire. Her book on World War II in Latin America appears in 2018 (St. Martin’s Press).



A military parade in San Salvador.

The Convulsions of War

El Salvador (1980-2015) and the U.S. Civil War **BY JACK SPENCE**

THE IMPACT OF THE 1980-1992 WAR IN EL SALVADOR is as profound as the Civil War's impact on the United States.

Despite the current immigration debate and the dominant role of the United States during, and for several years after, the war, the convulsive and long-lasting impact of the Salvadoran conflict is largely overlooked in the United States.

The war in El Salvador used to be

front-page news in the United States, seen in a post-Vietnam Cold War media frame with a Washington foreign policy focus. Since 1992, with a few news "blips" during presidential elections, El Salvador has been invisible, and to U.S. millennials, its devastating war is not even an historical speck.

By contrast, the U.S. Civil War, a century and a half later, remains a vivid

presence in the United States. Witness the Confederate flag controversy that followed the hate crime murders of nine African Americans in their Charleston, South Carolina church. PBS has launched a dramatic series on the Civil War. It would be beneficial for the U.S. public, amidst the Trumped-up immigration debate, to know the impact of the U.S.-financed war on El Salvador.



Mourners for the murdered U.S. churchwomen December 1980.

Thousands of political assassinations in the early years, particularly in San Salvador, were followed by the decimation of many rural areas, mostly not by bombardment.

THE DEAD

In *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, Drew Faust traces the efforts for decades after the war to count the dead. The count is imprecise because of battle commanders' inevitably poor records and the nature of destruction of the war itself. There was so much killing that the social fabric, North and South, was badly torn. Her estimate of estimates concludes that roughly two percent of the nation's inhabitants died as a direct result of the war.

Wartime killing in El Salvador was almost as great—about 1.5 percent of the population. The United Nations estimated 75,000 killed, almost fifty percent higher than U.S. deaths in Vietnam. In rural areas and among the poor, everyone knew somebody who had been killed. However, the killing in El Salvador had a very different quality. Rather than

soldiers killed in large-scale Civil War battles, in El Salvador, 88 percent of the Salvadoran losses were civilians, according to the U.N. Peace Commission. Thousands of political assassinations in the early years, particularly in San Salvador, were followed by the decimation of many rural areas, mostly not by bombardment.

POST-WAR TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE AND POLARIZATION

In late 1865, the Confederate commander of the notorious Andersonville prison, Captain William Wirz, after an extensive trial with 140 witnesses (including many from the Confederate side) was found guilty of war crimes and hanged. Some 13,000 prisoners died in Andersonville, more than in any one Civil War battle. The trial and Wirz remained controversial for many decades; in 1909 a statue of him was erected in Andersonville.

Neither Confederate General Nathan Bedford, nor the more famous General George Pickett ("Pickett's Charge" at Gettysburg) was tried. Following a battle victory Bedford's troupes slaughtered some three hundred black Union troops and a dozen of their white officers. Apparently, that was not considered a war crime. Bedford became an early leader in the Klu Klux Klan. Several statues of him exist, including one in Selma, Alabama. Pickett, a graduate of West Point and former U.S. Army officer, fled to Canada after Appomattox because he feared he would be prosecuted and possibly executed as a traitor. But in 1866 President Andrew Johnson halted military tribunals, and Pickett returned. In 1874 his West Point classmate, President Ulysses S. Grant, granted him complete amnesty. (Pickett was first decorated during the Mexican-American War in the Battle of Chapultepec. In 1992 the Salvadoran peace accords were signed in Chapultepec Castle, the site of the battle.)

In the South, a brief political opening for African Americans was swiftly eclipsed by the Jim Crow laws that, among other ills, disenfranchised blacks for over a century until the Civil Rights Act of 1965. In the North, for decades during elections, Republicans from the "Party of Lincoln" regularly "waved the bloody shirt" to blame the South and Democrats for the War.

In El Salvador, a broad amnesty law, passed before the end of the war, has largely shielded from prosecution or civil trial the perpetrators and intellectual authors of even the most notorious cases of human rights abuses—the killing of the Jesuits, the assassination of Archbishop Romero, the massacre at Mozote. However, continuing legal and political actions using international law attempt to hold perpetrators accountable. Legal actions in the United States resulted in two Salvadoran generals being forced to move from their Florida residences back to El Salvador. Efforts to reunite Salvadoran orphans adopted during the war by U.S. families with their Salvadoran relatives revealed a war-time

military-run “baby traffic” operation. Even two decades after the war, some of these efforts are met with threats—a note under a lawyer’s door, a burglary in which only computers are stolen.

For several election cycles the rightist ARENA party “waved the bloody shirt” against leftist FMLN candidates, but with FMLN successes this tactic faded. In contrast to the South and Jim Crow, in post-war El Salvador, after several election cycles, the franchise has effectively been expanded in rural areas by decentralizing polling places. However, hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans in the United States face formidable barriers to vote in Salvadoran elections. And those who have U.S. citizenship face new measures in some twenty states aimed at restricting the vote of African Americans and Latin@s, a rolling back of the franchise expanding effects of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

THE MIGRATIONS

Forty years after the start of the U.S. Civil War, the rural African-American labor force began The Great Migration from the South. Families escaped lynch mob repression and sharecropper poverty, often sneaking out of town almost as in the days of the Underground Railroad, as chronicled in Isabel Wilkerson’s *The Warmth of Other Suns*. By the beginning of the Depression 1.5 million had fled, followed by 1.4 million from 1940 to 1950. In 1910 blacks were 40 to 57 percent of the populations of six “Black Belt” states; by 1970, only Mississippi had more than thirty percent black population.

Proportionally, El Salvador’s migration has been greater and faster. During the war, more than one million persons, in a country of just over five million, were driven from their homes in an effort to “drain the sea” from the FMLN guerrillas. The government press-ganged men into the military. Escape to the United States was less dangerous and might provide income for their war-impooverished families. Seeking to portray El Salvador in a positive light, the Reagan administration tried to block Salvadoran immigrants—



League Central America produces the Collegiate Wear for Harvard.

only three percent of applicants were approved (compared to 60 percent of Iranians). But Salvadorans continued to make their way through Guatemala and Mexico. In 1980 only 354,000 Central American immigrants were in the United States. By 2013 there were 3.2 million, including 1.3 million Salvadorans.

After the 1992 Peace Accords, wartime violence was quickly replaced by criminal violence that was at least initially related to the war. The profusion of available assault rifles, rapid demobilization, job shortages, and rampant if undiagnosed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) all contributed to violence that still feeds the flow of immigrants. Gangs, armed with guns smuggled from the United States have fought for advantage in the drug trade that feeds a demanding U.S. market.

TRANSFORMATION OF THE ECONOMY

The social and economic impact of the U.S. Civil War, for the victors and the vanquished, was profound. The North, bolstered by wartime production, completion of the transcontinental railroad and the Homestead and Land Grant Acts

after 1865, plunged into the most rapid period of economic industrial expansion ever seen (until post-1985 China), with robber barons exploiting a labor force prohibited from unionizing.

By 1866 the South’s agro-export economy lay in ruins and slave holders lost their “capital.” But the South remained an agro-export economy, with less-than-free sharecroppers as its labor force. By 1880, cotton exports exceeded those of 1860. Even as late as the 1930s, only one in five sharecroppers showed any profit (\$30 to \$150 for a year’s work).

Unlike the U.S. South, the traditional Salvadoran agro-export economy—also dominated by a few families and with a less-than-free labor force—was eclipsed within ten years of the Peace Accords. For more than a century, the coffee elite had dominated the economy. Sugar, cotton and cattle became significant export crops after World War II. Beginning in the 19th century, small peasants on fertile land had been dispossessed through a series of land laws. Vagrancy laws and debt peonage then provided a low-paid work force to the then new coffee elite.

Three generations later, increasing land-

lessness and insufficient growth in urban jobs were partially relieved in the 1960s by migration to Honduras, a process that was abruptly reversed by the 1969 “soccer war” with Honduras. More landlessness and an increasingly repressive military dictatorship were the chief causes of the war that broke out in 1980.

The 1992 peace accords only minimally addressed the issues of poverty and inequality, and by 1995 the public’s estimation of the success of the accords had dropped dramatically. So, amidst postwar violence, migration to the United States continued.

But the war and its aftermath radically eroded the agro-export economy and replaced it with “nontraditional” exports and the growth of financial capital, as detailed in Alexander Segovia’s *Transformación estructural y reforma económica en El Salvador*.

The United States in 1980 sponsored an agrarian reform (mainly for counter-insurgency purposes) that expropriated with compensation about 14 percent of arable land and 19 percent of lands devoted to export crops. (Following the U.S. Civil War, proposals for land distribution in the South—“40 acres and a mule”—were defeated.) In areas of the country where the FMLN was strong, the guerrillas charged landowners war taxes, and other owners abandoned their land, which was then farmed by landless peasants. Additionally, the United States pushed for non-traditional exports and textiles from assembly plants (*maquilas*). Massive U.S. wartime aid prevented the economy from going over the cliff and also gave its policy preferences outsized influence.

After the war coffee prices hit low points, particularly after Vietnam suddenly became a major producer. Traditional agro-export major players, many of them paid off through the agrarian reform, shifted their assets into non-traditional areas.

In the five years prior to the war traditional agro-exports were 65% of exports with coffee at 50%. From 1990 to 1994 traditional exports fell to 32%, and coffee to 26 percent. By 1999 these numbers fell to 13 and 10 percent. Meanwhile *maquila*

exports grew from 5.2% of exports before the war, to 25 percent in 1990-1994, to 53 percent in 1999. The agricultural share of the labor force fell from one third to one fifth from 1990 to 1999. In 2015 apparel made up 40 percent of exports; agricultural products accounted for 15 percent.

But owners of *maquilas* did not emerge as the most powerful economic forces as the coffee elite had been. Rather, it was the owners of banks that were privatized when the rightist ARENA political party and President Cristiani came to power in 1989. That economic power shift included families traditionally associated with coffee (including Cristiani).

THE REMITTANCE ECONOMY

This movement to financial capital has been made possible, ironically, by the Salvadorans who fled to the United States. It is the money they have sent home, called remittances (*remesas*), that has most transformed the Salvadoran economy and constitutes, by far, its most potent force. As families in El Salvador spend that money it passes through the commercial sector and through the banks. (African Americans who migrated North sent money to relatives in the South, as illustrated by several anecdotes in *Warmth of a Rising Sun*. But I’ve not found aggregate data.)

In 1980 remittances to El Salvador were \$21 million. In 1995 they amounted to 1.1 billion—50 times greater. Cumulative remittances over the 15 years amounted to \$5.5 billion, almost twice the amount of U.S. aid (\$2.8 billion). By 1999 U.S. aid had dropped to \$5 million; remittances that year were \$1.4 billion.

In 2014, following a dip during the U.S. great recession, that figure rose to \$3.9 billion, or \$655 per person in El Salvador. That far exceeds the per capita total of almost every other country—two to three times the typical monthly wage in El Salvador.

Per capita, Salvadorans received about 45 percent more than Hondurans and Guatemalans, and five times the relative amounts for Nicaraguans and Mexicans.

The national poverty rate in El Salvador is very serious, but is far less (30 percent) than that of the aforementioned countries (42 to 64 percent), partially because of remittances.

Like the African Americans who left the South after the Civil War, Salvadorans have often found themselves confronting prejudice and difficult work circumstances despite opportunities.

THE SOCIAL FABRIC

It is tempting to see success in these numbers. Hard working Salvadorans, fleeing a war, rebuild the homeland’s economy from afar. Avoid this temptation.

A very high proportion of Salvadorans left home—24 percent compared to about 7 percent from Guatemala and Honduras. El Salvador has a huge number of families, villages and neighborhoods broken by war and migration. Migrants are separated from loved ones for years and decades. And like the African Americans who left the South after the Civil War, Salvadorans have often found themselves confronting prejudice and difficult work circumstances despite opportunities.

During and following a devastating twelve-year war, the transformation of the Salvadoran economy has come at an enormous social cost.

Jack Spence monitored the war in El Salvador from 1982, had a Fulbright there in 1993-94, and from 1992-2004, as President of Hemisphere Initiatives, co-authored a dozen analyses of the Salvadoran peace process. He has retired from the Political Science Department at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

A Search for Justice in El Salvador

One Legacy of Ignacio Martín-Baró **BY M. BRINTON LYKES AND NELSON PORTILLO**

IN THE SMALL RURAL TOWN OF ARCATAO, Chalatenango, Rosa Rivera clung to the hope that one day she would find the remains of her disappeared mother and father and lay them to rest in peace. Others sought to exhume mass graves hoping to recover bodies of nearly 1,000 relatives massacred in the Río Sumpul. Centro Bartolomé de las Casas (CBC) accompanied Rivera and other survivors on journeys of truth-telling and justice-seeking that include exhumations of clandestine cemeteries, healing rituals and reburials. They constitute just one example of work supported by the Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund for Mental Health and Human Rights, furthering the development of small group's psychosocial training, organizational capacity and financial resources. This is not an abstract cause for us, as we both actively work with the fund.

We met each other for the first time in New York City at a conference commemorating the 25th anniversary of the assassination of the Salvadoran social psychologist and Jesuit priest, Ignacio Martín-Baró, whose ideas have opened new horizons for the field of psychology in El Salvador and across the globe.

I (Lykes) had met Martín-Baró in Cuba in 1987 during the XXI Congress of the Interamerican Society of Psychology (SIP). I was struck by his presentation on "lazy Latinos." He challenged us as psychologists to deconstruct this commonplace, demeaning description of Salvadoran peasants that, despite its kernel of "truth," obscured economic and power inequities that underlay assumptions about Salvadoran labor and this labeling process.

At these meetings I savored his humor, his guitar playing, and the urgency with which he engaged in gatherings some of us had organized to discuss forming a transnational network of activist psy-



Above: Women aid in identifying exhumation spots. Below: Ignacio Martín-Baró.

chologists committed to accompanying local Latin American communities build knowledge “from the ground up.” I could not have imagined then or in subsequent gatherings with him in Boston and Berkeley that these schemes and dreams would be cut short by the actions of the U.S.-trained Atlacatl Battalion two short years later.

Just a week after I (Portillo) turned 15, San Salvador was occupied in the largest offensive launched by the guerrilla forces in November of 1989. I never met Martín-Baró, but I remember TV coverage that included his dead body and those of his Jesuit brothers on the grass at the University of Central America (UCA). Four years later, I began my studies in psychology at the UCA. I studied Martín-Baró’s writings and learned about his life through surviving colleagues and commemoration acts on campus. I was drawn to his ideas and particularly to his proposal for a psychology of liberation, which voiced the need to construct a psychology that responds to the needs of the oppressed.

We, the two authors, reconnected in Boston where we are collaborating in the Martín-Baró Fund (www.martinbaro-fund.org). The fund was established in 1990 by a small group of psychologists, activists and advocates who sought to extend Martín-Baró’s liberatory psychology by supporting programs in the global south developed by and in communities affected by institutional violence, repression and social injustice. The fund seeks to encourage innovative grassroots projects that promote psychological well-being, social consciousness and active resistance by means of grants, networking, and technical support. Coordinated by an entirely volunteer group and housed at Boston College’s Center for Human Rights and International Justice, the fund has supported a total of 183 projects directed by 97 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in 32 countries. A total of \$1,090,878 has been distributed among these organizations.

Although small and limited in resources, the fund is one of the few

sources of support for organizations in the global south whose understanding of and engagement with the effects of state-sponsored violence and gross violations of human rights is systemic and structural. These organizations recognize how important it is to accompany individuals and groups in addressing their suffering and its underlying conditions. The fund prioritizes projects in countries affected by U.S. political and military policies and practices, thus striving to critically educate the U.S. public about the use of its taxes and resources abroad.

Given the United States’ deep complicity in the armed conflict in El Salvador, the fund has provided support to 14 separate NGOs there; many have received small grants for several years. Community organizations and grassroots movements such as those supported by the fund have played a pivotal role in the recent history of El Salvador and the well-being of its people. Unfortunately their reach is usually limited, their life span is commonly short, and their experiences are rarely systematized. As a result, historical discontinuity is the norm and lessons learned are all too frequently lost.

In the new millennium, however, a fresh wave of community organizations has emerged seeking to continue the unfinished task of healing the deep wounds and ongoing social suffering in the Salvadoran society in the wake of the war there. One of those organizations is the Centro Bartolomé de las Casas (CBC, <http://www.centrolascasas.org>), founded in 2000 by a group of religious and community activists committed to the post-war reconciliation process. Just as Bartolomé de las Casas had advocated for the rights of indigenous people during the early years of the Conquest, the center began its work advocating for the survivors of the war who suffered its ongoing effects or what Martín-Baró had called *psychosocial trauma*.

Unlike the common understanding of psychological trauma—considered individual and nonpolitical—Martín-Baró sought to name and then respond to the collective experience of war that produced not only psychological wounds in individuals, but also—and above all—damages to the social fabric of entire communities. He suggested that trauma resides in relationships between the indi-



A mural depicts the Sumpul River massacre.

Goals of the Martín-Baró Fund

1. To develop a holistic perspective for understanding the connections between state and institutional violence and repression, and the mental health of communities and individuals;
 2. To support innovative projects that explore the power of community to foster healing within individuals and communities trying to recover from experiences of institutional violence, repression, and social injustice;
 3. To build collaborative relationships among the Fund, its grantees, and its contributors for mutual education and empowerment; and
 4. To develop social consciousness within the United States regarding the psychological consequences of structural violence, repression, and social injustice.
-

vidual and society and emerges within an historical context; psychosocial trauma, he wrote, is “the concrete crystallization in individuals of aberrant and dehumanizing social relations.” He contended that mental health cannot be seen as separate from the social order, challenging psychologists to address not only the individual and social effects of war and other human rights violations, but also, in his words, to “construct a new person in a new society.”

Since 2004, the fund has supported CBC in its psychosocial work with women survivors of massacres and families of victims in the rural communities of Arcatao, Nueva Trinidad and Perquín in the northwest part of the country for two three-year funding cycles. During this time CBC staff trained local community workers who accompanied survivors in their communities as they mourned those massacred and disappeared during the armed conflict and sought to rethread community. Group-based activities facilitated by CBC staff included creative play, traditional medicines and acupressure.

CBC also provided psychosocial accompaniment for the exhumation of remains. The exhumation work was done in collaboration with an experienced Guatemalan forensic anthropological team. In 2007, CBC inaugurated

the Museo de la Memoria (Memory Museum) and published a community resource, *Cuarenta Días con la Memoria: Memoria Sobreviviente de Arcatao (Forty Days of Memory: Survival Memory of Arcatao)*, as well as other testimonial materials.

Toward the end of the grant cycle provided by the fund, CBC was charting new directions, creating actions at the local, municipal, and national levels, demonstrating its work with survivors to justice authorities, landowners, and other committees. CBC workers had been invited to Chile and Brazil to share their experiences at international meetings on historical memory and mental health. In 2008, CBC staff visited Boston to participate in the fund’s Bowl-a-thon, its signature fundraising event, and had the opportunity to share firsthand reports on their project activities with members of the fund and with Boston College students.

More recently, CBC has added new programs in the areas of masculinities and peace-building among others. The educational and political campaigns of their Masculinities Program mobilize Salvadoran men to say no to violence against women, and yes to gender equity. It incorporates Martín-Baró’s concept of de-ideologization to expose cultural assumptions held by many Salvadorans

about gender-based violence with the aim of constructing alternative forms of masculinity. CBC members have systematized and disseminated this experience in journal articles and other publications.

CBC is, in Martín-Baró’s words, constructing new people in a new El Salvador.

At the same time, CBC embodies the spirit of the work and political commitment of Ignacio Martín-Baró and remains one of the most successful partnerships that the fund has established in El Salvador. Defying the historical discontinuity that characterizes many community organizations, CBC has worked with Salvadoran men and women for more than 15 years to provide educational and psychosocial resources.

Working under extreme constraints and with meager budgets, community organizations in El Salvador and beyond are supported by funders and advocates who not only understand the goals of the grantees, but also work to accompany them on their journey to a more just society. The Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund exemplifies how small individual donations informed by pragmatic solidarity and the liberation psychology of its namesake can have a larger impact around the world.

M. Brinton Lykes is Professor of Community Cultural Psychology, Associate Director of the Center for Human Rights & International Justice at Boston College, and co-founder of the Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund. She also accompanies Mayan women and children and transnational and mixed-status migrant families in participatory and action research processes.

Nelson Portillo is a Salvadoran social psychologist and Assistant Professor of the Practice in the Counseling, Educational, and Developmental Psychology Department in the Lynch School of Education at Boston College. He joined the Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund in 2014 and currently serves as the chair of its Fundraising Committee.

Salvadoran Refugees in the Camp at Colomoncagua, Honduras, 1980-1991

A PHOTOESSAY BY STEVE CAGAN

IN 1980 AND 1981, MORE THAN 35,000 REFUGEES fled from Salvadoran military actions into Honduras. In the mountainous northern part of Morazán department, the military's scorched-earth campaign resulted in about 9,000 people fleeing El Salvador to the Honduran border town of Colomoncagua. The Morazán attacks are best known for the infamous massacre at El Mozote, which left only one known survivor, but there were a number of less well-known massacres, causing the Honduran camp to swell. By 1981, refugees concentrated in a camp near the town, administered by the United Nations and surrounded by Honduran military, were permitted to leave only with special permission—usually for medical emergencies.

The refugees came from one of the most remote areas of El Salvador. They had lived in widely scattered family units. Children grew up knowing only siblings and cousins, and had little if any schooling. The soil was inadequate to support the traditional basis of Salvadoran rural life, the *milpa* (corn field), and frustrated farming efforts left people increasingly poor over the generations. Men supplemented family incomes by migrating to work in coffee plantations. Mistreatment and repression by the representatives of El Salvador's notorious oligarchy and by public institutions were widely felt and resented.

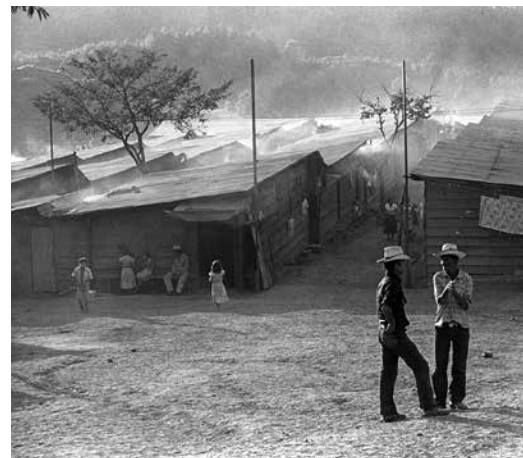
In these conditions, liberation theology found a ready audience, as did the revolutionary politics of the groups that would become the FMLN. The two liberatory messages reinforced each other. The response of the Salvadoran government to the increasing radicalization of the countryside was to launch a widespread

military repression. While peasant communities suffered, the military was not ultimately successful, and in areas like northern Morazán, the counter-thrust by guerrilla forces pushed the army back and established a substantial area that remained under guerrilla control for the duration of the internal conflict.

Meanwhile, the refugees in the camp at Colomoncagua faced a situation totally new to them. With the clandestine leadership of guerrillas of the ERP (one of the five guerrilla groups in the FMLN), who slipped in and out of the camp through the Honduran lines, the refugees had to create new social structures that would support life in their now crowded conditions. They had to learn how to live without land, unable to practice the agriculture that had been at the center of their family economy and culture. And they had to face life as people newly dependent on the support and solidarity of international agencies and organizations that worked with the camp.

Within these strange and difficult conditions, a perhaps surprising set of changes turned out to support very positive developments. Indeed, looking back on their decade-long stay in the camp after the war ended, some of the former refugees saw their time in the camp as a “golden age.”

With the support of the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and a few European and North American NGOs, the refugees created several sub-camps, which they called *colonias*, the Salvadoran term for neighborhood, constructing dwellings, buildings for workshops, classrooms, nutrition centers and health stations, nurseries, a chapel, latrines and small gardens





From top clockwise: Camp residents wash their laundry in one of the very small streams in the camp, unlike the bigger ones at home where the women would bathe as well; men and women learn new skills such as using a sewing machine; a woman waits in the doorway of her camp home; men converse in the refugee camp; living in larger communities required cultural adjustments.



From left, clockwise: a woman practices in the tortilla workshop; newly literate adults thirst for reading material; overcoming gender roles in the workshops.

and barns.

They developed a set of productive workshops, where men, women and children (when they were not in school) worked together. These produced furniture, clothing, shoes, hats, hammocks, metal utensils (bowls, pitchers, buckets) and other items. The refugees were learning genuine skills, both occupational and social.

One emblem of change was the torti-

lla workshop. Here women made tortillas as an occupation, a job. In addition to creating a new social respect for this skill, the workshop freed the great majority of women in the camp from this task, allowing them to participate in non-traditional work and new social and leadership roles.

Some refugees functioned as teachers, sanitary workers, social workers and child-care workers. These latter would

organize the children in the morning to make sure faces and hands were clean and teeth brushed, and they would look for kids who were not in the classes where they belonged

No one was paid for their work—work provided meaning in people's lives, and the products were distributed according to need. When donations arrived—corn, vegetables, pigs, household goods—they were carefully measured and divided



From top, clockwise: boys and girls took part in the workshops, along with the adults; they also socialized there; a woman heats tortillas for the evening meal in one family's living quarters.

among the families.

Like other newly literate people, the refugees were thirsty for reading materials—newspaper, magazines and books brought to the camp by visitors were eagerly received and passed from hand to hand.

In addition to new occupational and social skills, the refugees learned about self-governance, and the camp was run internally by an elaborate structure of

committees and boards. Through their experiments in self-governance the refugees became an organized group, and developed confidence and strength that served them in their negotiations with the Honduran and Salvadoran authorities, representatives of UN agencies and NGOs, and others.

One of the important demands the community made was that the international agencies not provide teachers and

leaders for the workshops, but rather that they train refugees to perform these roles. So in the classrooms the teachers were refugees—often, young children teaching their elders to read—and in the workshops production was organized and led by refugees.

There was of course an underlying problem waiting to emerge. The materials and expertise that supported the achievements of the community were



provided for them by the various agencies—and they were put to very good use. But later, when the community would have to move from this dependency to independent development, some new behaviors would have to be learned, and some others unlearned.

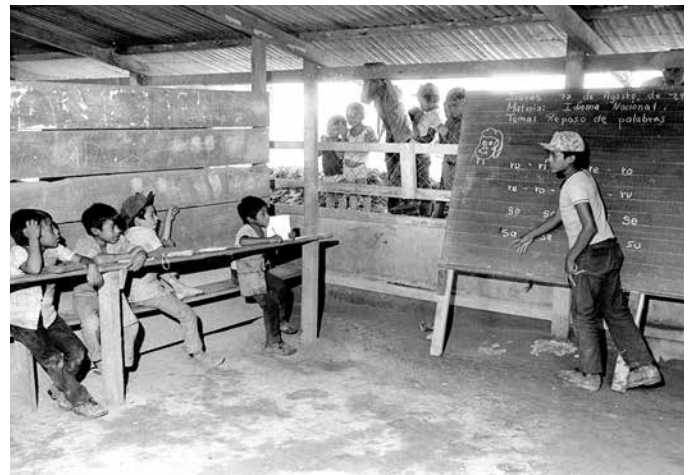
In the last couple of years in the camp, there was pressure from the Honduran authorities and UNHCR to repatriate the refugees to El Salvador, but as indi-

vidual families. They, however, insisted on waiting until they were ready to repatriate as a community. Their strength was a source of conflict with some NGOs, which were more accustomed to treating people as victims and dependents, and not as partners.

In 1989, the community decided to return to the war zone in Morazán and create a new community, named for F. Segundo Montes, one of the priests mur-

dered by the army at the UCA, who had a long relationship with the community. In a major operation by the two governments, the UN and NGOs, the refugees and everything they owned—including the boards and nails of their dwellings—were transported to their new home.

Once in Morazán, the community faced a new set of challenges: trying to recreate the social environment of the camp within a totally different context;



Clockwise, from left: Community meetings were an important feature of life in the camp. Here, people in one of the sub-camps gather to engage with UN officials about the pressure to repatriate; refugees were happy to have visitors and also found the foreigners (including this photographer) amusing; youngsters become literacy teachers; smaller work meetings and study groups engaged both men and women.

operating the workshops as enterprises within a cash economy; responding to the military activities around them; and more. One young grass-roots leader told us, “We lived for ten years in exile...We learned so much...If we had lived longer in [El Salvador], it would have been more difficult to become organized, to think about serving the community.... We [youth] have come back into a capitalist system, the same one our parents

lived in, but we’ve had the experience of being in an autonomous community, of deciding for ourselves what our values are.” They were conscious of the enormity of moving from dependency to development, and they knew that a new chapter in their story was opening. A grass-roots member of the new community said to us, “Why are you writing a book about us now? We are just beginning—you ought to wait a few years.”

Steve Cagan is an activist photographer who has been doing projects in Latin America for more than 30 years. His 1991 book, This Promised Land, El Salvador, written with his wife, Beth Cagan, was Book of the Year of the Association for Humanist Sociology, and was published in San Salvador as El Salvador, la tierra prometida. He can be reached at steve@stevecagan.com or www.stevecagan.com.

A Nation at War with Itself

The Role of U.S. Advisers **BY MICHAEL S. SERRILL** With photographs by Robert Nickelsberg



U.S. advisers display a replica of the Salvador parachute corps' insignia fashioned from shell casings.

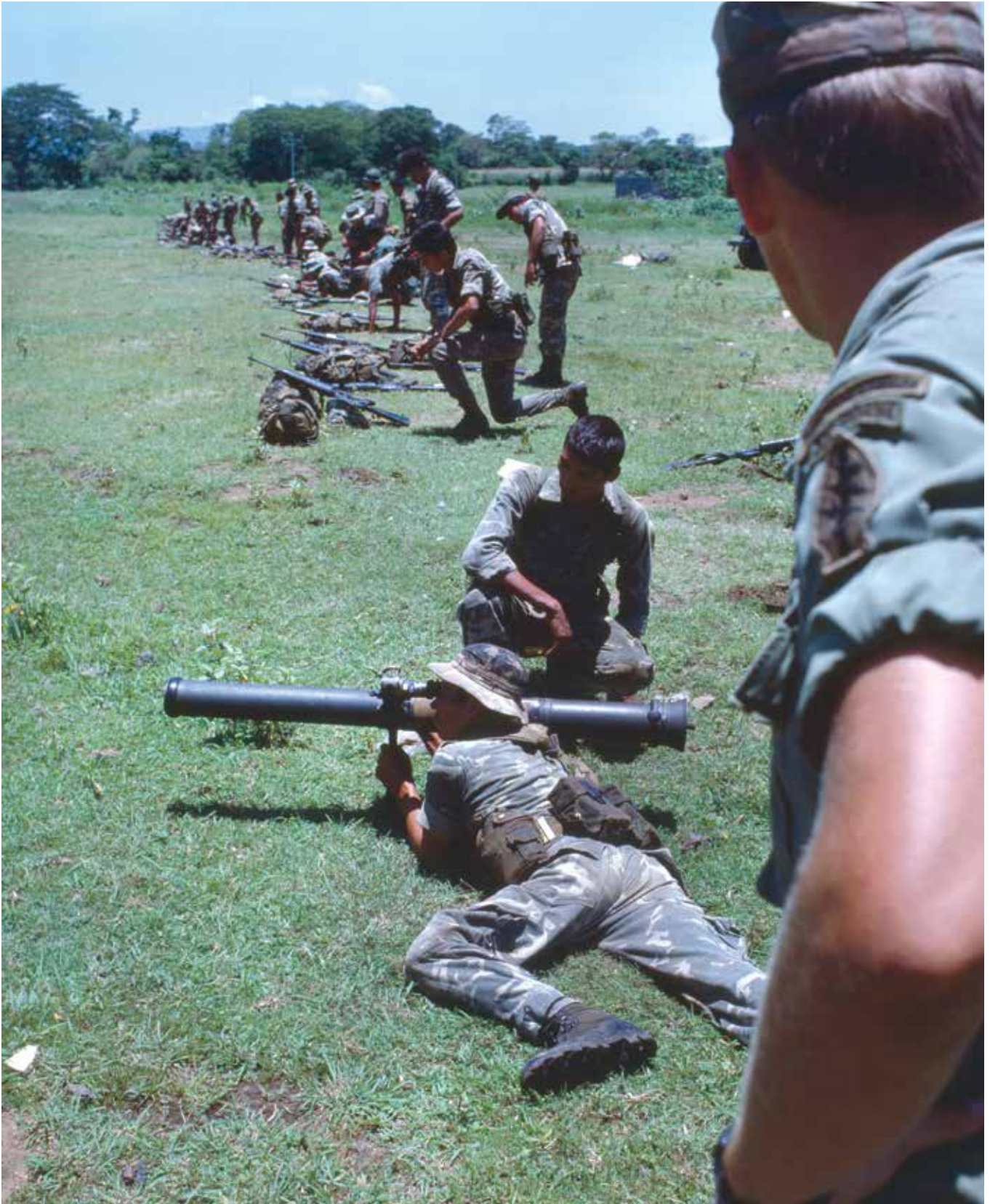
IN JANUARY 1981 THE U.S. EMBASSY IN EL SALVADOR headed by Robert White sent an urgent cable to the Department of State in Washington. The memo, labeled SECRET, alleged that the death squads responsible for hundreds of political murders in the war-torn Central American nation were being funded and directed by a cabal of six Salvadoran businessmen who lived in Miami. The cable, based on information from a “highly respected Salvadoran lawyer” who was about to flee for his life, blamed the six for the assassination earlier that month of a Salvadoran land reform

advocate and two U.S. labor officials who were meeting at San Salvador’s Sheraton hotel. “The *time* has come,” the memo said, “to investigate these charges and, if proven, to arrest the perpetrators and prosecute them to the full extent of U.S. law.”

It is not clear whether any investigation of the six was undertaken. What did happen is that Ambassador White, who railed against the right-wing violence, was fired around that time by the incoming administration of President Ronald Reagan, and in the next few years military and economic aid to the Salvadoran regime dramati-

cally increased. With Nicaragua and Cuba supplying arms to the Salvadoran rebels, and a separate leftist insurgency on the boil in Guatemala, the Reaganites had an apocalyptic vision of all of Central America gone red. “The attitude of the Reagan Administration in its first two years was that we had no enemies on the right,” says Donald Hamilton, chief public information officer at the U.S. Embassy in El Salvador from 1982 to 1986.

Critics of U.S. policy in Central America—from Peter, Paul & Mary to Joan Didion—asserted that the United States, in its



Recoilless rifle training at San Miguel, El Salvador, 1984. The advisers' goal was to professionalize a sometimes brutal Salvadoran military.



Counterinsurgency training. A priority was converting pro-rebel peasants through a “hearts and minds” campaign.

anti-communist fervor, aided and abetted Salvador’s right-wing killers, or at best did too little to stop the slaughter, in which at least 30,000 civilians were killed. U.S. officials who were on the ground in El Salvador in the 1980s remember it differently, saying they did their best—short of cutting off aid—to curb the wanton violence on the government side and professionalize the Salvadoran military. The 10-year conflict ended with a negotiated settlement in 1992.

One eyewitness to the violence was Robert Nickelsberg, whose photos of U.S. Special Forces advisers illustrate this story. He covered Central America’s wars from 1981 to 1984 for *Time* magazine from his base in San Salvador.

One of Nickelsberg’s tasks was to venture out on many mornings to take photos of the latest batch of dead bodies dumped by the side of the road in the capital. This put him in what he calls a “macabre competition” with local funeral directors, who would scour city streets for new business. The victims “were killed with a bullet to the back of the head, or by having their throats slit,” Nickelsberg says. “They would

be bruised, with their hands tied behind their back.” In the countryside, he says, “the white hand of death” would mark the next victim. “A palm print in white paint would appear on someone’s door. And they would die.”

However sickening the killings were, “you had to document this,” Nickelsberg says. “I was personally very affected by it.”

El Salvador had been a nation at war with itself for a hundred years when the United States intervened in 1979. Its economy, and most of its wealth, had long been controlled by a small coterie of ranchers and businessmen—the so-called 14 families—with close affiliations to the national police and military. Through much of the 20th century this elite lived a paranoid existence in one of the poorest and most overcrowded countries in the hemisphere. Anyone who proposed social action to reduce poverty—particularly land reform—was labeled a communist. And starting in the 1970s, those activists began to die in large numbers.

The United States took little interest in El Salvador until the Sandinista victory over Nicaragua’s Anastasio Somoza in July

1979—an event that inspired Salvador’s own guerrilla coalition, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), and provided it with a source of arms from their neighbor to the north. The FMLN would eventually field 12,000 fighters and control a wide swath of northern and eastern El Salvador. In late 1979, President Jimmy Carter, as eager as his successor, Reagan, to prevent another leftist victory in Central America, stepped up military aid substantially. The United States would spend \$6 billion on aid to El Salvador between 1980 and 1992, according to a 1996 study of U.S. military involvement by then-Army Major Paul P. Cale. Looking back, Hamilton finds the United States’ huge investment in the Salvadoran conflict extraordinary. Until 1979, “we had shown ourselves very capable of ignoring El Salvador’s existence,” says Hamilton, 68, who now declassifies documents for the State Department. “We’re talking about five million people in a country the size of Massachusetts.”

The outbreak of full-scale civil war is usually dated to the March 1980 assassination of Archbishop Óscar Romero, a



Salvadoran soldiers lectured on human rights in August 1984. The slaying of six Jesuit priests in 1989 suggested the training “didn’t amount to anything,” says reporter Preston.

It would take the kidnapping and killing of three American nuns and a lay church worker in December 1980 to force a suspension of U.S. military aid.

fearless critic of government repression, who in one of his last sermons called for an end to U.S. military aid. It was the time of “liberation theology,” and 11 priests active on behalf of the poor were killed in three years, according to a history of the conflict by William Blum. (It may be apocryphal, but it is said that the slogan of one death squad was, “Be a Patriot, Kill a Priest.”)

It would take the kidnapping and killing of three American nuns and a lay church worker in December 1980 to force a suspension of U.S. military aid. (Four members of the National Guard were later imprisoned for the crime—but not before what the 1993 United Nations Truth Commission report labeled a cover-up by authorities.) Soon after the churchwomen’s murder, the FMLN launched an offensive so fierce Washington feared a rebel victory, and the Carter administra-

tion resumed aid.

The worst of the political violence took place between 1980 and 1983, according to journalists and diplomats who worked in El Salvador at the time. “The deaths and the bodies never stopped,” says Nickelsberg, recalling that his housekeeper, who walked to work, often alerted him that the killers had been at work the night before. The United States was both ally and enemy, says Clifford Krauss, who covered the El Salvador conflict for *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*. “I was in the U.S. Embassy when it was attacked by the death squads in 1980,” he says. “It was a complex relationship that wasn’t always friendly.”

Far from ignoring the carnage, Hamilton says that Deane Hinton, U.S. Ambassador from 1981 to 1983, lobbied hard, privately and publicly, for the government

to get the military and the three branches of the national police—the National Guard, the National Police and the Treasury Police—under control. In April 1982, a tough Hinton speech to the American Chamber of Commerce made front page news in the United States. “The gorillas of the right are as dangerous as the guerrillas of the left,” he told the businessmen.

“The official American community [in El Salvador] was largely outraged by what was happening,” Hamilton comments. “One of the hardest things for us was explaining away the stupid things they were saying in Washington.” There, officials including Reagan aide Gen. Alexander Haig, U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick and North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms vigorously defended U.S. involvement in the war and labeled allegations of atrocities as FMLN propaganda. Helms befriended former military officer Roberto D’Aubuisson, founder of the right-wing ARENA party, who is now acknowledged as the author of much of the death squad violence, including the murder of Archbishop Romero. In that 1981 cable to the State Department, he was identified as the

agent in El Salvador of the Miami Six. He died in 1992.

While Hinton strove to convince officials in San Salvador and Washington that murdering the opposition was not a viable strategy, Col. John Waghelstein was trying to persuade the Salvadoran military of the same thing. A counterinsurgency expert who now teaches at the U.S. Naval War College, from 1981 to 1983 he was in charge of the small squad of military advisers who taught Salvadoran soldiers how to use American weapons, instructed army officers in tactics and strategy, created a signal corps and, most important in Waghelstein's view, gave lessons in "low-intensity conflict"—that is, pacifying a rebellious populace with kindness rather than bullets. The most famous convert to this "hearts and minds" strategy, Waghelstein says, was Lt. Col. Domingo Monterrosa, head of the U.S.-trained Atlacatl Battalion. That was the army unit that several investigations confirmed was responsible for the December 1981 massacre at El Mozote, in which troops systematically killed as many as 1,000 people, many of them women and children, in that village and surrounding communities. By the time Monterrosa was promoted to head all military operations in eastern El Salvador in 1983, he had undergone a transformation. After his troops took a village from the rebels they would set up camp and build roads and schools, distribute food and provide medical care. The charismatic commander would make speeches telling the farmers they could trust the army to provide for their needs better than the rebels. As Mark Danner tells it in his book, *The Massacre at El Mozote*, the campaign was so effective that the rebels set out to kill Monterrosa—which they did in 1984 by planting a bomb aboard his helicopter.

The United States supplied the Salvadoran military with hundreds of millions of dollars worth of weapons and ammunition—including dozens of transport helicopters and fighter planes. The challenge was to train the troops in the weapons' use within the strict limits agreed to by the Reagan administration under the watchful eye of congressional critics. The num-



Thomas Pickering, ambassador to El Salvador from 1983-85. The tide of U.S. policy turned after his appointment.

ber of military advisers could not exceed 55, and they were forbidden from engaging in any combat, or even accompanying Salvadoran troops into the field—though according to reporters who covered the conflict the last restriction was sometimes ignored. "The limits came because of concern in Congress about mission creep like Vietnam—that with large numbers of U.S. military in place it would result in some kind of debacle," says Thomas Pickering, U.S. ambassador to El Salvador from 1983 to 1985. The embassy kept a running count of the advisers "almost on an hour by hour basis," Pickering says. "Often if we needed some particular help we had to move people out of the country before moving people in." As Waghelstein says: "The beauty of the 55-man limit was it that it was hard to argue that this is like Vietnam." It also made clear to the Salvadoran military that it was their war to win or lose.

Scott Wallace, a freelance reporter who worked for CBS News and was based in El Salvador from 1983 to 1985, spent much of his time in the province of San Vicente, where many U.S. military advisers were introducing counterinsurgency methods to the Salvadorans. One of the advisers' main jobs was training members of a new civil defense force, "to teach the locals how to defend their towns from attack, train them in handling weapons and to respect

Pickering, now 84, says he only agreed to take the job after Secretary of State George Shultz assured him that the United States would no longer stand by while hundreds of civilians, including officials of the moderate Christian Democratic Party, were gunned down.

the rights of their fellow citizens," Wallace says. "These forces ended up being cannon fodder in guerrilla attacks throughout the territory. Guerrillas would overrun these thinly defended towns, execute the civil defense people and the army would get there too late."

The advisers included Army Special Forces, Navy SEALs and Air Force flight trainers. Especially in the early years, the U.S. government skirted the 55-man unit by training hundreds of Salvadoran soldiers and officers in Honduras and at U.S. bases in Panama and the United States—often



A U.S. Army officer inspects a Salvadoran's M16. The number of advisers was never permitted to rise above 55.

at great cost. One crucial need the advisers met was the training of a field medical service and the provision of MEDEVAC helicopters. Before those units were in place, “it was like the [U.S.] Civil War,” says Pickering. “If you were wounded your chances of dying were pretty high.”

By all accounts, the tide of U.S. policy turned in late 1983 with the appointment of Pickering as ambassador. Pickering, now 84, says he only agreed to take the job after Secretary of State George Shultz assured him that the United States would no longer stand by while hundreds of civilians, including officials of the moderate Christian Democratic Party, were gunned down. Pickering's arrival in September 1983 coincided with a three-month guerrilla offensive that, he says, prompted a “significant upturn” in political murders. In December Pickering asked Vice President George H.W. Bush to stop in El Salvador on his way back from a trip to Argentina. Bush delivered a blistering public speech in which he denounced the “cowardly death squad terrorists.” Then, according to Pickering, he told a private meeting of colonels and generals that if the killing continued there was nothing the Reagan administration could do to stop Congress from cutting off military aid. “Up until then I think they thought Reagan would be sympathetic with any-

thing they did,” Pickering says. The killings did diminish, in part because the Salvadoran government agreed to ship a half dozen officers suspected of death-squad activity to foreign postings.

The next step was the establishment of a legitimate government—accomplished in 1984 with the election of Christian Democrat José Napoleón Duarte as president. (His main opponent was D'Aubuisson.) To great fanfare, Duarte launched negotiations with the guerrillas. But there would be a great deal of ruthless killing on both sides before the war finally sputtered to an end. One gruesome catalyst was the 1989 murder of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her 15-year-old daughter—a last spurt of violence, it has been shown, from the Atlacatl Battalion. “After all that reform and training, lectures and diplomatic threats, it really didn't amount to anything,” says Julia Preston, a *New York Times* reporter who covered the war for *The Boston Globe* and *The Washington Post*. “They ended up committing this crime that shocked the world's conscience.”

Says Pickering: “The mindlessness of the killing of the priests had to be an example of how frantically concerned the hard right was” at the prospect of a negotiated settlement. As U.S. ambassador to the U.N. from 1989 to 1992, he played a

“subterranean” role in those peace talks, which were led by Colombia, Mexico, Spain and Venezuela. “I spent a lot of time with the Salvador government legation,” he says. “Others in my mission at the U.N. were reached out to by guerrilla organizations. So we had the opportunity to do our bit to support the negotiating effort.”

What really ended the war, according to *The New York Times*' Krauss, was an event thousands of miles away—the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union. “When I look back from 3,000 feet I see it all as a battle in the Cold War,” he says. “When the Berlin Wall went down it ended all these proxy wars.” He is convinced that without U.S. help the country would have fallen to the FMLN, an outcome no one wanted. The U.S. accomplishment was to help the Salvadorans “draw out the war until the end of the Cold War.”

In the end, of course, the FMLN did win—taking control through the ballot box in 2009. “But that's the way it should be,” says Waghelstein. A former FMLN *comandante*, Salvador Sánchez Cerén, is now president.

Former embassy staffer Don Hamilton, for his part, looks back on the U.S. role in the conflict with regret and a subversive thought: “It's not that hard to make the case that we were on the wrong side in that war. I don't believe we were, but I don't think we covered ourselves in glory either.”

Michael S. Serrill is a freelance writer based in New York and a former foreign editor for Bloomberg News and Business Week. He edited stories on the Central American conflicts for Time magazine in the 1980s and 1990s.

Robert Nickelsberg, a Time magazine contract photographer for 25 years, was based in El Salvador from 1981 to 1984. He covered the civil wars, unrelenting violence and the effects of U.S. foreign policy in Central America with particular focus on El Salvador and Guatemala before relocating to Asia. This is the first time his images of the U.S. military advisers have been published.

Photojournalists in a Cauldron of Violence

“THIS IS HISTORY. THIS IS MY VOCATION.” **BY BILL GENTILE**

HIS VOICE CRACKED AND HE FIDGETED AS HE recounted the incident. He had raced out of his newspaper office to make photographs of yet another cadaver in the street. That’s part of his job—to photograph victims of his country’s slow-motion suicide.

He cut through heavy traffic on his motorcycle to beat colleagues from competing newspapers to the scene. But a pack of young men stopped him along the way. They were armed. They surrounded him. Asked if he was a cop. Demanded to know what was his business in their ‘hood. One of them reached for his motorcycle, killed the engine and pulled out the key. That’s when Juan (not his real name) feared that his colleagues soon might be making pictures of *him* lying lifeless in the street.

The young men, all gang members, questioned and searched him. They didn’t believe he was a photojournalist. One of them called somebody on a cell phone. The gang member handed Juan the phone so that he might explain himself to “El Jefe.”

The “boss” told Juan not to “talk shit” about his neighborhood or about his “homies,” and assured him there would be consequences if Juan did. The gang members now knew where Juan lived, they threatened.

Juan recounted this incident during my visit to El Salvador in December 2014. It had been a long time since my last trip to El Salvador in the early 1990s. Back then I was *Newsweek* magazine’s contract photographer for Latin America and the Caribbean. Although my area extended from the Rio Grande along Mexico’s northern border all the way down to the tip of South America and then east to include Cuba and Haiti, I spent most my time covering the contra war in Nicaragua (where I lived for seven years) and the civil war in El Salvador. At the time, Cen-

tral America was the eye of the storm. The last battleground of the Cold War.

I never liked working in El Salvador. The country had too often extracted too much blood from too many of my friends and colleagues. John Hoagland, my predecessor at *Newsweek*, was killed in a firefight there in 1984, one year before I signed my first contract with the magazine. In the late ‘80s I helped carry to hospital two other colleagues shot only yards from me in separate incidents while covering the conflict. They both died of their wounds. Every time I flew into the country my gut would tighten, and it would stay that way until I was beyond Salvadoran air space on a flight out—to any place other than El Salvador.

After I listened to Juan recount his run-in with the gang members and conducted phone interviews with some of his photojournalism contemporaries to report this story, I understood that the violence in El Salvador is so much more

insidious now than it was when I covered the region. And I’ve come to respect and to admire even more the men and women who practice our craft under conditions unfathomable to the population at large.

Violence in Latin America during the late 1970s and 1980s was largely characterized by left-wing insurgencies fighting to overthrow right-wing governments supported by U.S.-backed militaries. But violence in the region now is about multinational drug cartels in collusion with urban gangs. Much of the killing is gang-against-gang; “homies-against-homies,” if you will. But non-combatant civilians often are killed for resisting gang extortion or for simply showing up in the wrong *barrio* at the wrong time.

A TOTALLY DIFFERENT WAR

In a follow-up telephone interview from my home in Washington, D.C., I listened to Juan describing today’s conflict.

“This is a totally different war,” he said.



A boy carries arms during the civil war in 1989.



Above: Chocoyito the clown carries his son's coffin after the youth was killed by gang members after being kidnapped for several days; below, man is captured with two illegal guns.

"It's different because we're immersed in this cauldron of violence. It makes it hard to work."

In comparing his situation with that of the photojournalists who covered the civil war of the 1980s, he said, "You all, at least, knew where the army was when you went out to work and accompanied the army and you knew the army wouldn't attack you. And you were able ... to see the guerrillas and their camps in the mountains and the jungle. But now, these urban militias live in our communities. They live where we live. And it's dangerous to live in these communities."

In another follow-up phone interview, Carlos (not his real name), a photojournalist veteran of the 1980s civil war, told me, "They (journalists) pretend not to be journalists because it's dangerous if they (the gangs) know that they are journalists."

THE MOST VIOLENT COUNTRY IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

In its 2015 Latin America Homicide Roundup, InSight Crime reported:

"El Salvador is now the most violent country in the Western Hemisphere, registering approximately 6,650 homicides in 2015 for a staggering homicide rate of

103 per 100,000 residents. Competition among the country's two principal street gangs, the MS13 and Mara 18, in addition to heavy-handed police tactics, contributed to the explosion of violence."

It is in this "cauldron of violence," as Juan put it, that photojournalists in El Salvador work. And it is the photojournalists that I focus on for this article, because they, much more than many of their "non-visual" colleagues, are exposed to that violence. Photojournalists can't do their work over the phone or through interviews after an event or by pulling information from the Internet. Photojournalists, including still-and video journalists, have to be there, on time, as an event unfolds, to generate the images that are our craft.

"THEY ALWAYS RESPECTED YOU"

Another veteran photojournalist of the 1980s civil war (we'll call him Pedro) told me, "There was always a chance that you would find yourself in the crossfire" between government forces and the guerrilla, "but that was part of the job. In one way or another, they always respected you. In other words, they respected your work and they gave you the opportunity



to do it without robbing your equipment or hurting you intentionally.

"I think journalists gained the guerrilla's respect because they (the guerrillas) wanted the media to tell the world what was happening in El Salvador. And the army wanted the media to publicize its operations during the armed conflict. So this generated a certain trust among the warring parties and the journalists," he said.



Gang members are captured in a police raid.

“But it’s very different now,” Pedro observed when I called him from Washington. In many sectors of the capital San Salvador, and even in parts of the countryside, “journalists can’t go in to do a story... because the gangs will capture him or kill him. They can disappear him. So nobody does that kind of work now. Nobody goes out to certain neighborhoods looking to do interviews with people,” he said.

Pedro should know. Gang members recently robbed one of his cameras. Gang members beat up two of his colleagues.

This violence, and the potential for violence, have reduced journalists’ ability to cover important events in their own country.

“The only thing we do is, whenever there are cadavers out there, we go out and shoot photographs at the scene of the crime—but only when the police are there,” Pedro continued. “While security forces are there. While investigators are there. Once they finish their investigation and the authorities leave, we journalists leave as well because it’s impossible to stay there without being concerned that something can happen to you. There’s an almost 90 percent possibility that something will happen to you.”

Pedro said the space in which journalists could work freely began to shrink in the late 1990s and by 2005 had vanished. And it is perhaps the survival tactics of self-censorship and limited exposure that have allowed journalists to stay alive while covering the bloodfest that is El Salvador today.

But there are exceptions. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reports that three journalists have been killed in El Salvador since 1992. It lists the killings as “Motive Confirmed,” which means that the watchdog organization is “reasonably certain that a journalist was murdered in direct reprisal for his or her work.”

Perhaps the most infamous of the killings was that of Christian Poveda, a Franco-Spanish photojournalist who made “La Vida Loca” (The Crazy Life), an internationally acclaimed documentary about the gangs. A colleague of mine with whom I worked in El Salvador and Nicaragua during the 1980s, Poveda gained the trust of, and access to, a notorious gang known as Mara 18 in a tough slum in San Salvador, the nation’s capital. In September 2009 Poveda was ambushed and shot four times in the head. Two years later a court convicted 10 gang members and a former policeman for the murder.

(Two other journalists have been killed since 1992, but the CPJ lists their deaths as “Motive Unconfirmed,” which means “the motive is unclear, but it is possible that a journalist was killed because of his or her work.”)

“WE’RE ALWAYS AFRAID”

The killings have had a profound effect on Salvadoran society as a whole, but especially on the photojournalists who cover their society.

“We journalists always try to be strong and a lot of us deny this has an impact on us but the truth is that, deep inside

of ourselves, we’re always afraid, always fearful,” Pedro said. “There’s always something that keeps us up at night, or on edge, thinking about what can happen to us. There’s always anxiety surrounding our work.

“The truth is that, with our families, we always try to cover it up, so the family doesn’t see that we are being affected, so the family doesn’t worry.”

None of the photojournalists with whom I spoke believes that the violence tearing El Salvador apart will end soon. Pedro, for example, sees a “dark future” for his country’s next generation.

“Today’s young boys grow up with the goal of becoming a gang member,” he told me. “And today’s young girls grow up with the idea of becoming the partner of a gang leader.... It’s as if they have a goal to belong to a gang and to rise up in a gang, in status. And the common people just watch. They can’t do anything but just try to stay alive but they realize they are increasingly surrounded by the gangs.”

“THIS IS HISTORY. THIS IS MY VOCATION”

Juan, the photojournalist stopped by gang members, explained his motivation to continue working—despite the danger.

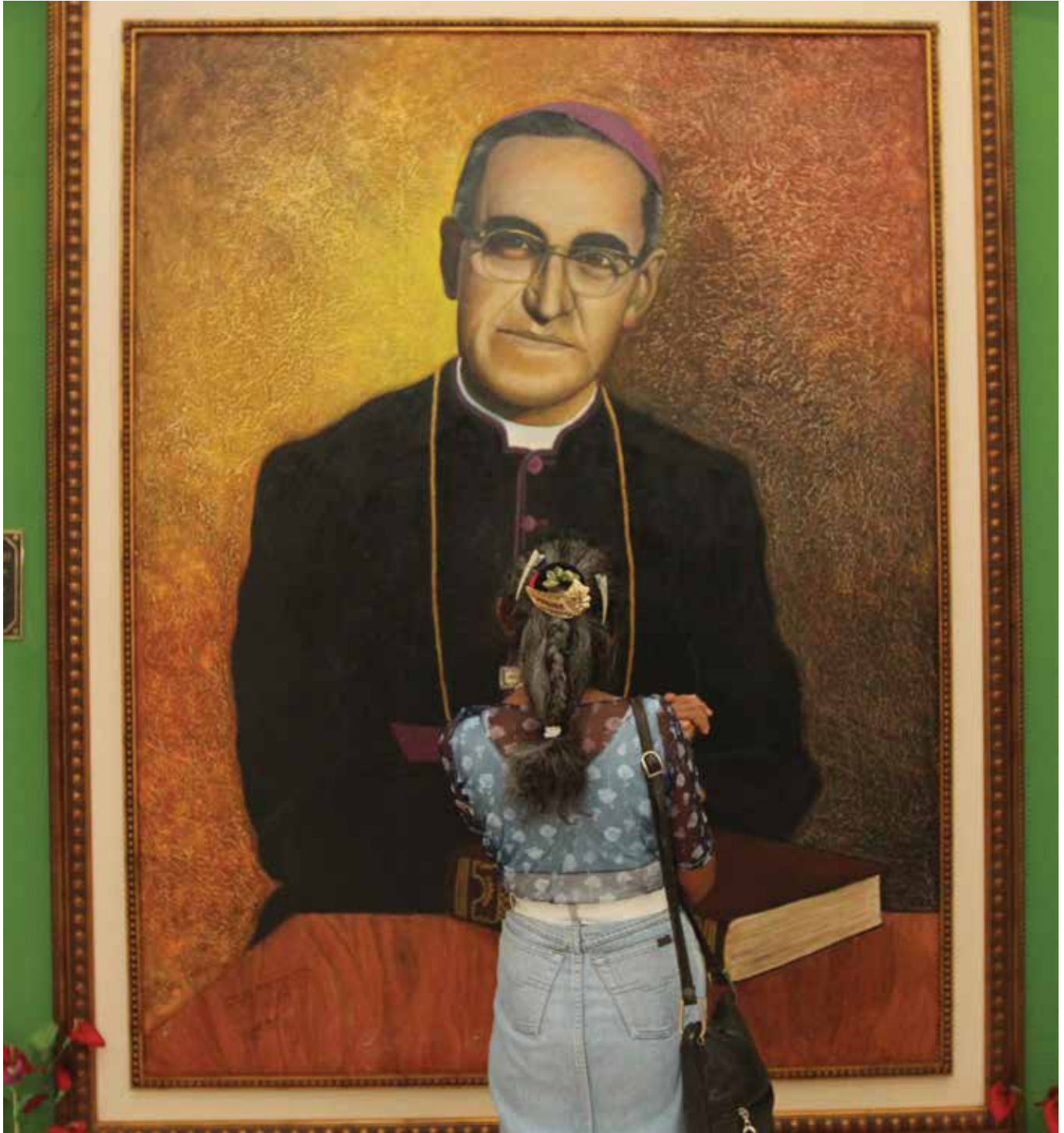
“The salary for journalists is not good,” but he wants to “document what’s happening in this country... like (your generation) had the opportunity to do” during the 1980s civil war.

“This conflict is a bit more clandestine and underground. You work in the street and it makes you fearful but it’s your passion, making photos, informing, documenting. This is history. This is my vocation,” he said. “I hope they don’t take away from us the right to inform ... I would like that our right to inform remains intact.”

I do too.

Bill Gentile is Journalist In Residence at American University in Washington, DC, and runs The Backpack Journalist, LLC. He has worked as a photojournalist in El Salvador and Nicaragua since the 1970s.

REMEMBERING ROMERO



Lorne Matalon *San Romero de América* • Gene Palumbo “God Passed through El Salvador” • June Carolyn Erlick
The Boy in the Photo

San Romero de América

Beyond Polarization

A PHOTOESSAY BY LORNE MATALON

SAN SALVADOR, EL SALVADOR—MARÍA ISABEL DELARIO IS crying. Her body is bent, her face buried in her arms, her hands rest on the metal cast depicting the face of a murdered archbishop, a man nominated for sainthood by Pope Francis.

Delario is at the tomb of Archbishop Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez in the basement of the Catedral Metropolitana de San Salvador. Some people around her wear shirts emblazoned with the words, “San Romero de América.” “For me he’s still alive” she says. Another worshiper, Carlos Martínez, adds, “Romero’s message was that the Church must work to end inequality. And that was a message that people in power did not want hear.”

Reverence for Romero is evident when you land in San Salvador. A massive sign facing the tarmac announces that you’re arriving at an airport named for Romero. As you enter the country, his image is stamped into your passport. This story is about how Romero’s image continues to be manipulated 36 years after his murder.

How it happened that a man murdered by a government-linked death squad and derided for years by the rich and powerful in El Salvador is now so honored is a key to understanding the country today. In 2015, Romero was beatified by Pope Francis, an Argentine and the first Latin American pontiff, a man who understands Romero’s legacy to millions of people across the Americas.

But his nomination for sainthood has not been met with universal acclaim here.

Retired General Mauricio Ernesto Vargas commanded the Third Infantry Brigade and Military Detachment 4. Both units were accused of human rights abuses during the civil war 1980-1992. Vargas denies the allegations. He was listed in a U.S. Congressional document titled, “Barriers to Reform: A Profile of El Salvador’s Military Leaders.” The son of a founder of the country’s Christian Democratic Party, Vargas went on to become one of the signers of the Peace Accords in 1992. He represented the Salvadoran army in negotiations with Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front/FMLN), the coalition of





From top, clockwise: María Isabel Delario, bent and crying, prays at Romero's tomb in the San Salvador cathedral.

Salvadoran soldiers murdered six Jesuit priests, their maid and her daughter at the University of Central America on November 16, 1989. Like Romero, the slain priests were working to change structural inequality in El Salvador.

Otilia Chicas Díaz, who says she says she lost 24 members of her extended family in the El Mozote massacre, stands in front of photos marking the event. One shows words left by the Atlacatl Battalion as it left El Mozote, "Atlacatl, For Country And With God" under an image of a skull pierced by a machine gun and bayonet.

Romero was wearing this vestment when he was shot to death while celebrating Mass March 24, 1980.





The village church at El Mozote, Morazán Department. Romero is mentioned in prayers and his image is beside the altar.

guerrilla forces that became part of the country's political establishment after the peace deal and whose current leader is now El Salvador's president. Today Vargas is a member of the Legislative Assembly as a member of the Nationalist Republican Alliance, or ARENA, which governed El Salvador from 1999-2009.

Speaking of Romero, Vargas said, "His homilies and his words were absolutely manipulated by both the left and Liberation Theology priests," he told me referring to the movement within the church that calls on priests to actively oppose social inequality and that such work is not decoupled from religion and faith. Romero did not publicly portray himself as a liberation theologian although the issues he addressed dovetailed with some of the movement's ideals.

"The left infused his words with Marxist-Leninist ideals," Vargas told me,

"and that's what the guerrillas did in the mountains. They used his words for indoctrination. His image should not be used for political ends." Vargas said that he wanted to make clear his personal reverence for Romero. "There are people who don't like him today but that is because they don't understand what he represented. "I have read his words. He was a pastor and nothing more."

Others in ARENA, including party president Jorge Velado, have accused the FMLN government of former Salvadoran President Mauricio Funes (2009-2014) of blatant "politicization" of Romero. Funes publicly referred to Romero as his "guide" in government; he renamed the San Salvador airport; he gave a piece of Romero's bloodstained vestment to Pope Francis and he formally apologized on behalf of the state for the killing, saying the death squad that killed the Archbish-

op "unfortunately acted with the protection, collaboration or participation of state agents." All are gestures that critics claim demonstrate the FMLN's co-opting of Romero for political ends.

Of the current government, Velado said, "Some people from the FMLN are all the time saying that Monseñor Romero was a person very close to us, [that] he used to think like we think. That's not true." But Velado added the current FMLN government of Salvador Sánchez Cerén is not "over the top" the way he charges Funes was. Velado pointed out that he, along with Roberto d'Aubuisson Arrieta, son of ARENA founder Roberto d'Aubuisson, were in the delegation of dignitaries attending Romero's beatification ceremony. FMLN supporters heckled the ARENA members and branded them as political opportunists for attending. The younger d'Aubuisson,



Sergio Domínguez Calles prays at Romero's tomb in San Salvador. He is one of many citizens who regularly seek solace here.

now the mayor of a San Salvador suburb, wrote the same day on Twitter, "Let's not politicize the beatification."

The perception of Romero being linked to the left undoubtedly delayed his canonization.

Stanford political science professor Terry Karl, an advisor to United Nations negotiators who brokered the peace agreement, also served as an expert witness for the U.S. government in trials involving high-ranking Salvadoran military officials. She helped build the case against Álvaro Saravia, a former head of security at the Legislative Assembly. Saravia was living in California in 2003 before he went into hiding after being served in a civil suit for the Romero murder. In 2004, a U.S. federal judge issued a default judgment finding Saravia liable for extrajudicial killing and crimes against humanity. He is the only person

convicted of the killing.

"Romero is still divisive in El Salvador today," said Karl. "He was the voice of human rights in El Salvador and he believed in accountability. All parties want to claim him. The fight over Monseñor Romero is the fight for both justice and memory."

Romero led the Catholic Church in El Salvador from 1977, when he was appointed Archbishop, until he was murdered March 24, 1980—shot by a sniper with a single bullet through the chest—while saying Mass in the chapel of the Divine Providence Hospital. He had lived an austere life in a *casita* at the cancer hospital. A 1993 United Nations Truth Commission report concluded that the intellectual author of the crime was Roberto d'Aubuisson. He was 47 when he died of throat cancer in 1992 and some Salvadorans claim that was God's

revenge for the Romero murder.

The day before he was killed, Romero delivered a memorable homily. As the nation listened on the Archdiocese's radio station, he spoke about a divided Salvadoran society and about repression. He addressed the Salvadoran military, national guard and police directly, exhorting them not to kill their own brothers and sisters, the *campesinos*. He declared that the law of God prohibits killing and that divine law supersedes human law.

"No soldier is obliged to obey an order to kill if it runs contrary to his conscience," Romero said. "I implore you, I beg you, I order you in the name of God. Stop the repression!" His words were met by applause from the pews but ultimately cost him his life. Romero's murder helped propel El Salvador into a civil war between leftist guerrillas and a



Romero's image beams down on worshipers at Catedral Metropolitana de San Salvador.

right-wing military government actively supported by the United States.

The United States funded the Salvadoran military as a purported buffer against the spread of Communism in the Americas. In 1979 the Sandinistas had toppled the U.S.-backed Somoza dictatorship in neighboring Nicaragua, and newly elected U.S. President Ronald Reagan was loathe to let a similar scenario unfold in El Salvador. Central America was a focus of U.S. foreign policy the way Iraq, Syria and Iran are today. It was against that backdrop that the manipulation of Romero's image began.

He had been selected as Archbishop because he was deemed to be a conservative, pliable prelate, a man who would not disturb the political status quo in which a few families and the military controlled the vast majority of the country's resources. Later his image would be co-opted by the leftists, including guerrillas and their supporters who sought to imply Romero was a supporter.

But Romero condemned atrocities on

both the left and right. The majority of his criticism was directed at the military and state security forces because, as the U.N. report later concluded, they committed the vast majority of human rights abuses at the time.

Three weeks into his tenure as Archbishop came a turning point that started Romero on a path that ultimately led to his beatification in 2015. Romero's colleague, Jesuit priest Rutilio Grande, was killed along with an old man and a young boy as the three made their way to a church in the village of El Paisnal.

Romero suspended classes in Catholic schools for three days. He ordered the cancellation of Mass throughout El Salvador. Instead, he gathered all his priests for a single service in the capital attended by 100,000 people. He ignored warnings from the Papal Nuncio not to hold the Mass for fear of offending the government. The Archbishop then refused to attend any state occasions, including the swearing-in of a new president, General Carlos Romero, until the Grande murder

was investigated. No such investigation took place.

Now Romero was gaining in popularity, his image transformed into that of an ardent defender of the poor. That same image meant Romero was reviled by the right. The right accused Romero of being a fellow traveler with left-leaning movements that included the FMLN.

OPPOSITION FROM THE OLIGARCHY

José Jorge Simán, affectionately known as "Don Pepé," is a scion of a prominent and wealthy family in El Salvador. He shuns labels such as "member of the aristocracy" but admits he fits the bill. Simán, a former leader of the Catholic laity group, Comisión Nacional de Justicia y Paz, is the author of *Un Testimonio*, a memoir of his friendship with Archbishop Romero. That friendship made him a rare breed among El Salvador's upper class.

"People with money never understood Romero," said Simán in a recent

interview in his modest office festooned with photographs and images of the slain cleric. “They told me I was crazy, I was a Communist, that I didn’t know what was going on, that I was being deceived.”

“At that time, most of the information you got was completely distorted. So logically, people never knew him,” Simán continued. “And this is our challenge now, that people know him, not through the point-of-view of left or right, but from the point-of-view of Romero.”

When asked what Romero’s perspective was, Simán said it was to oppose oppression, be it military or social. “He followed Jesus and that is the point of reference,” Simán concluded.

OPPOSITION WITHIN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Across town, at the Iglesia San Francisco de Asís, the Auxiliary Bishop of San Salvador, Monseñor José Gregorio Rosa Chávez, said the hierarchy of the Catholic Church never liked Romero following his conversion from passive priest to passionate defender of the poor.

“Romero spoke out against violence, structural violence in the country and inequality,” Rosa Chávez said. “The story about the 14 families (controlling the vast majority of the country’s wealth) was true.”

“There was never true freedom here and that was the situation that Romero stepped into when he became Archbishop. But a key point to remember is that this all took place during the Cold War.”

“He confronted violence in the country and he also was involved in geopolitics,” he said, referring to Romero’s letter to U.S. President Jimmy Carter asking him to send food to El Salvador, not military aid.

Rosa Chávez said Romero knew he was a target, that he’d reconciled himself with the notion that he might be killed. “He was aware of what he was getting into. And he spoke out during a brutal fight between east and west that played out here. He was a victim of that confrontation.”

Rosa Chávez met with Pope Fran-

cis October 30, 2015 at the Vatican. He watched the Pope make official what had long been common knowledge in El Salvador, that Catholic priests and bishops had defamed Romero before and after his murder.

“I was a young priest then and I was a witness to this,” the Pontiff told a group of Salvadoran bishops and pilgrims. “He was defamed, slandered and had dirt thrown on his name, his martyrdom continued even by his brothers in the priesthood.”

Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia supervised the beatification process at the Vatican. He told reporters in 2015 that he saw proof of that opposition. “Kilos of letters against him arrived in Rome,” he explained. “The accusations were simple. He’s political, he’s a follower of Liberation Theology.” He added that unnamed Salvadoran ambassadors to the Holy See had asked the Church to stop the process.

Romero’s brother Gaspar, in discussing the assassination of the Archbishop, said, “He saw the injustice and poverty that people were living with. The oligarchy hated him. They wanted to silence his voice but they didn’t succeed and they won’t ever succeed.”

EL MOZOTE AND ROMERO

Today, paramilitary death squads and guerrillas have been replaced by organized crime and drug traffickers. The inequality Romero railed against remains. And so does his image. It is omnipresent.

In Arambala, in Morazán Department, a mountainous zone that was the cradle of the guerrilla movement, a mural depicts four images under a banner that reads, “Junto al Pueblo Seguimos Luchando.” (We’re still fighting alongside the people.)

The four images are of Che Guevara, Óscar Romero, Schafik Handal, a deceased FMLN leader, and Farabundo Martí, executed in 1932 after a peasant uprising he helped organized was put down.

Romero’s photo also adorns the wall

of the church in the mountain hamlet of El Mozote, site of a massacre December 11, 1982, of hundreds of peasants by the same Atlacatl battalion implicated in the murders of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter in 1989. Romero’s death, the Jesuit murders and El Mozote are all touchstone events in the story of modern El Salvador. All represent wounds that have not healed.

Every day in the village church, steps away from the village square where men and women were separated before being executed, Romero is mentioned in prayers. “He was a true leader,” said María Delfina Argueta. She guides visitors around one of the massacre sites. “He died for speaking the truth. I tell you right now that Romero still lives with us,” she said. Before he died, Romero wrote that violence would continue to plague the country until structural inequality was addressed.

Former Defense Minister General José Guillermo García was deported from the United States January 8, 2016. The expulsion followed a 2014 ruling in U.S. courts that Guillermo García assisted or otherwise participated in the assassination of Romero, the murders of four American churchwomen, two U.S. labor advisors and the massacre at El Mozote, not to mention thousands of Salvadoran citizens. But it’s unclear if he’ll ever have to answer for the crimes.

In 1993, days after the U.N. declared that Roberto D’Aubuisson planned the Romero killing, the ARENA government passed an amnesty law. The military, the death squads and FMLN would never be held to account. It is within that vacuum of historical responsibility that Romero’s image continues to be manipulated.

Lorne Matalon is a reporter at the Fronteras Desk, a collaboration of National Public Radio stations focused on Mexico and Latin America. He began reporting on Latin America in 2007 from Mexico City for The World, a co-production of the BBC World Service, Public Radio International and WGBH, Boston.

Remembering Romero

“God Passed Through El Salvador” BY GENE PALUMBO

SAN SALVADOR—FR. PAUL SCHINDLER REMEMBERS the day when Óscar Romero sat beside him, trembling. Romero knew he wasn't among friends. The scene was a clergy meeting in early 1977, and many of the priests were furious: a man they'd clashed with—Romero—had just been named as the new archbishop.

As the meeting was ending, Romero—who hadn't yet been installed—was asked if he'd like to say a few words. For all Schindler knew, they would be the last words he'd ever hear from Romero. Discouraged at the prospect of working under someone he was unsure of, Schindler had told his bishop back in Cleveland that he'd decided to return home after eight years of parish work in El Salvador.

“He walked to the front of the room and began to speak,” said Schindler, “and after a half hour, I said to myself, ‘I'm not going anywhere.’”

It was Schindler's first glimpse of something that, until then, had been unknown to him and many others: Romero had begun to change. Earlier, in his years as an auxiliary bishop in San Salvador, many had regarded him as too docile, too accepting of a social order which, they felt, cried out for change. Then, in 1974, he was named bishop of Santiago de María, a rural diocese where government repression was widespread, and where, while Romero was bishop, the first massacres of peasants took place. His three years there affected him deeply.

Those were the years when Eva Menjívar came to know him. She was one of many nuns who, in the 1960s, left their convents in San Salvador and went to work in rural parishes that had no priests.

She was assigned to Ciudad Barrios, the small town in eastern El Salvador

where Romero was born and grew up. The town was located in the Santiago de María diocese, and by the time Romero was named bishop there, Menjívar and her fellow sisters had catechetical and literacy programs underway, and were offering job training in sewing and auto mechanics.

Menjívar says that when people invited Romero to visit their far-flung hamlets, he almost always accepted. She recalls an occasion when residents of one of those hamlets staged a play for him, a play they had written about several Gospel parables. Afterward, they spoke about what the parables meant to them.

At the end they turned to Romero and—as one might ask an expert—said, tell us what these parables really mean. His reply, Menjívar recalls, was, “I have nothing to add. I've learned more about the Bible today than I did when I studied it in the seminary in Rome.”

“We had never seen a bishop draw near to the people the way he did,” says Menjívar. “He'd greet them all, try to speak with them all, and when they had questions for him, he was happy to try to answer them.”

Schindler's experience was similar. “Whenever I'd invite him—and not just to the main church, but to the rural villages—he would come. He was always there with the people. That was his whole thing: to walk with them, to feel with them, to inspire them.”

Menjívar recalls the sisters' monthly retreats with Romero, and the time in late 1976 when, informed that the National Guard had arrested two teenage catechists in Ciudad Barrios, he went there immediately to demand their release. To ensure that they wouldn't be re-arrested, he took them back to Santiago de María where he listened to their

accounts of being tortured.

Menjívar was later transferred to a parish near the town of Aguilares. There she worked with Jesuit Fr. Rutilio Grande, whose sainthood process is now underway. On the evening of March 12, 1977, she was at Mass when she was handed a note saying that Grande had disappeared. She went straight to Aguilares and, upon arriving, learned that he had been murdered along with an elderly *campesino* and a teenager.

Grande and Romero had become close friends in the late 1960s, when both were living at the seminary in San Salvador. When Romero was named bishop in 1970, he asked Grande to preside at his installation ceremony.

In the following four years—up until the time he left for Santiago de María—Romero had bitter disputes with priests in the archdiocese, and when, to their dismay, he was named archbishop in 1977, it was Grande who stood up for him.

“Rutilio said to us, ‘Yes, he's conservative. But he's honest, and he's someone you can work with,’” said Fr. Pedro Declercq, a Belgian missionary whose work with grass-roots Christian communities led to the bombing of his parish.

Declercq didn't have to wait long to see how much Romero had changed. They'd had an ugly falling out in 1972, when his parishioners invited Romero to visit them to say Mass and explain why he had justified, on behalf of the bishops conference, a military invasion of the National University.

The army had wounded some people, arrested others, and evicted people whose homes were on the university's campus. The discussion between Romero and the parishioners began at the homily, but quickly turned into a shouting match, with Declercq finally tearing off his vestments and saying the Mass was over.

When Romero returned to San Salvador as archbishop, he visited the parish again. As recounted by Sister Noemí Ortiz in María López Vigil's *Monseñor Romero: Memories in Mosaic*,

[Romero] brought up [the earlier incident] as soon as he got there. "We couldn't even celebrate the Eucharist that afternoon . . . We were insulting each other . . . Do you remember? I remember it well and today, as your pastor, I want to say that I now understand what happened that day, and here before you I recognize my error.

"I was wrong and you were right. That day you taught me about faith and about the Church. Please forgive me for everything that happened then."

Well, all of us, young and old, started crying . . . We broke into applause, and our applause melted into the music of the party . . . All was forgiven.

On the night of Grande's death, Menjívar was sitting beside his corpse, using a towel to absorb the blood that was trickling out, when Romero arrived at the parish. She said Romero approached the corpse and, after standing in silence for several moments, said, "If we don't change now, we never will."

Jesuit Fr. Jon Sobrino, a prominent liberation theologian, was at the parish that night, and answered the door when Romero knocked. Earlier Romero had criticized Sobrino's writings on Christology; later, as archbishop, he would consult Sobrino when preparing his pastoral letters.

Sobrino says that after Romero himself was murdered, "people began speaking of him as an exceptional person and Christian. In the funeral Mass we held for him at the UCA (Central American University), Ignacio Ellacuría said, 'In Archbishop Romero, God passed through El Salvador.' The people spontaneously proclaimed him a saint." (In 1989, Fr. Ellacuría, along with five other Jesuits and



Above: Father Paul Schindler at his parish dining room table in November 2015.



Below, Author Gene Palumbo and *ReVista* Editor June Erlick with Archbishop Romero, in Ateos, 1979.

two women, was murdered at the UCA.)

When Pope Francis ratified Romero's status as a martyr, Schindler said, "The people in the parish have been waiting and waiting for this. They hold him as a saint, and they've always held him as a saint, and now that the pronouncement has been made, they're going to be overwhelmed."

Menjívar said that when she heard the news, "I felt great joy — and at the same time, I thought to myself, I hope this will be the occasion for those who killed him to be converted."

Gene Palumbo made his first reporting trip to El Salvador in early 1980. He moved there to cover the civil war (1980-1992) and has stayed on. He reports frequently for The New York Times, and has also reported for Commonweal, National Public Radio and the Canadian Broadcasting Company. He teaches at the Casa de la Solidaridad, a semester-long study-abroad program for U.S. university students. A version of this article appeared in the National Catholic Reporter.



Archbishop Romero in La Chacra, 1979.

The Boy in the Photo

Return to La Chacra **BY JUNE CAROLYN ERLICK**

THE MANGY DOGS STROLLED EVERYWHERE along the railroad track. I remembered dogs just like them from the long-ago day in La Chacra in 1979 with Archbishop Óscar Romero, just months before he was killed.

Dogs were everywhere. So were children. I wondered how the archbishop kept his robe so pristine white amidst the mud and ramshackle shacks. We talked for a long time with Alicia Campos, a community member active in both religious affairs and housing rights. She told the archbishop about the local problems. A catechist was accused of being a

guerrilla. Small Bible study groups were afraid of being suspected of revolutionary activity and now met in secret. It was getting harder to organize people to demand housing rights because of fear, she said.

“I often stop to think,” Romero told me at the time, “how the first cause of deaths in El Salvador is diarrhea from parasites and poor nutrition. And the second cause is homicide...violence.”

La Chacra was then an abysmally poor community snuggled between the river and the railroad tracks. Many of the houses were thrown together from cardboard, tin and cast-off building mate-

rial. I spent the afternoon walking with Romero, listening to community members and taking photos.

That night, Romero would write in his diary about how he and journalists witnessed “different aspects of the miserable but happy and Christian life of the community of La Chacra. I went in houses where the rain that is falling is making the walls and floors damp. Often, the wall is the cliff itself, to which a metal roof has been attached. When they left, the journalists were impressed by this situation of misery and human proliferation—there were children all over the place.”

(Archbishop Óscar Romero, *A Shepherd's Diary*, St. Anthony's Press, 1983).

I remembered the dogs. He remembered the children. After Romero was assassinated in 1980, one of the photos I had taken that day in La Chacra for the *National Catholic Reporter* suddenly became iconic. It showed Romero in his pristine white robe talking to a woman holding a naked child, a boy just a bit too old to be naked. It was somewhat of a Madonna pose, and the image found itself on T-shirts, posters, liturgical calendars.

I had tried once before to go back to La Chacra to find the mother and child, but had been told it was too dangerous. This time, in November 2015, I was determined to visit the community. I wrote to everyone I could think of for help. The Salvadoran Foundation for the Development of Basic Housing, known by its Spanish acronym as FUNDASAL, came to the rescue. It had been working with poor neighborhoods, including La Chacra, since 1968.

I told Claudia Handal, the urban development specialist for FUNDASAL, what I remembered about the neighborhood and we pinpointed the area of La Línea near what used to be the Fe y Alegría school (some people don't even like to call the area La Chacra, but Romero did, so I will too).

We went door to door with the photo of the woman and the little boy. Alicia Campos, many people said. She went to the States a long time ago and died there. The boy might be there too. The house is now a cinderblock evangelical church. Indeed, most of the houses in the neighborhood are now cinderblock, some with satellite dishes, many lacking in basic services like water and garbage collection. Police cars linger on the fringes of the community.

La Chacra is divided up among three rival gangs, Handal and other sources tell me. FUNDASAL is trusted, and doors open readily as we canvas the neighborhood. Some run up to Handal to thank the community organization for a housing loan, for their "casita." Fear is not



Author shows photo of boy to townspeople.

apparent, but I am soon to learn it is there.

Handal has organized a community gathering for me. The youth, she tells me, cannot cross over into the area we have visited because of gang rivalries. Melvin Rivera, 16, tells me in a plaintive voice, "We are discriminated against because we are young. We can't study or do internships because of the gangs. We're afraid. We're afraid we'll get killed because of our age."

Rina del Carmen Campos' son almost did get killed. He was studying medicine at the National University and returned home one evening around 5 p.m. last May. Two young men hit him over the head with a pistol and then beat him up, hitting his legs over and over again. Campos thinks the motive was robbery, but she's not sure. Her son is still recuperating; he may not go back to school.

Over and over, mothers tell me about keeping their children out of school—even grade school—because of fear of recruitment, robbery and in the case of young girls, rape and abduction. There's also fear of police brutality. Many of the youth I spoke with are working in the government's Proyecto Patti, a temporary work program that helps youngsters earn money by cleaning up streets and doing other community-based jobs. More than once, various youth said, police came and beat them up even while they were wearing government-issued uniforms (the National Police did not return calls asking to comment on the situation). The Workers' Union (Intergremial de Trabajadores) of the Salvadoran Education Ministry says that 15 teachers and 50 stu-

dents were assassinated in El Salvador in 2015, compared with 14 teachers and 38 students in 2014.

Later that day in the FUNDASAL offices, Edin Martínez, the former executive director of the organization, commented, "It was dangerous then to go out to greet Archbishop Romero. It was dangerous to have a Bible. It is still dangerous to be young in El Salvador."

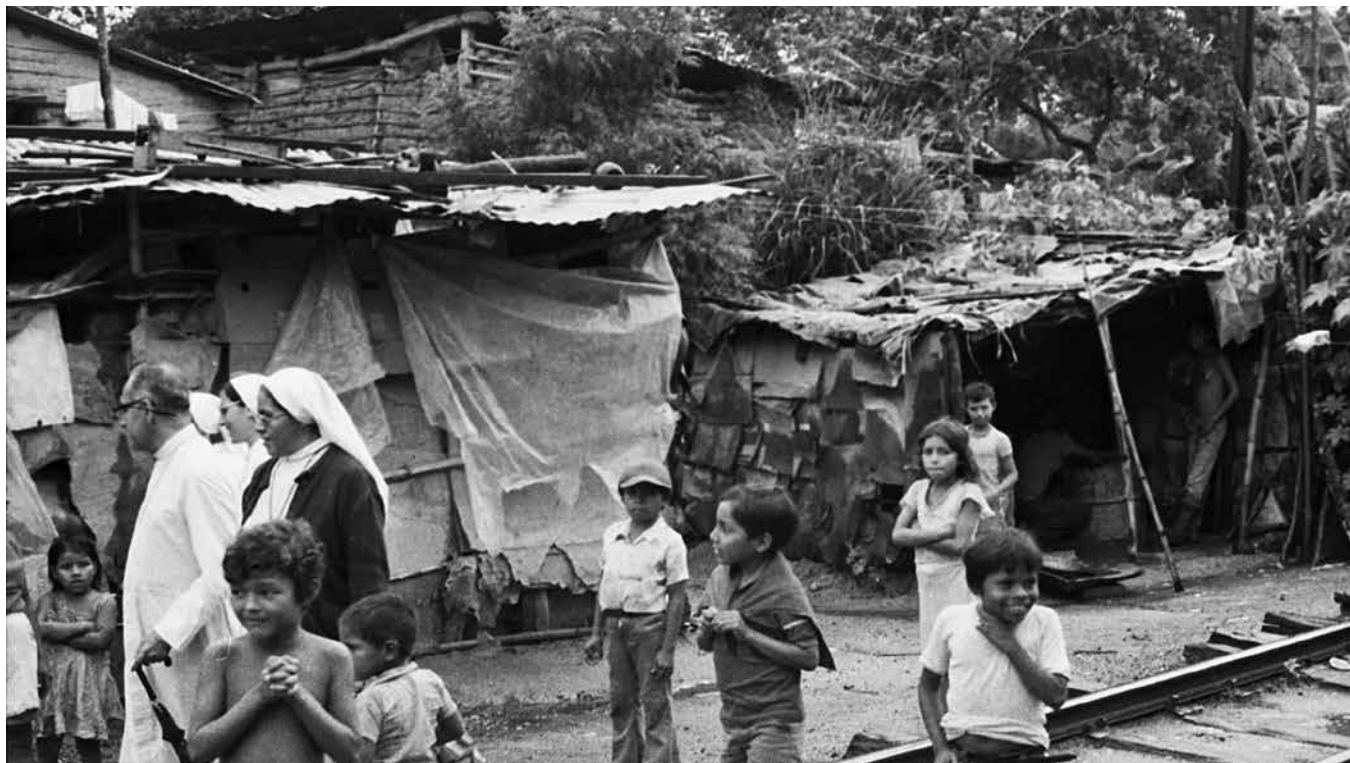
He does not recognize the mother and child in the photo, but he is not surprised that they might have gone "North," as Salvadorans term the migration to the United States. Before we left La Chacra, Handal and I had talked to a woman in the parish office who thought she might know a friend of the boy in the photo. She'd try to contact him by Facebook, she said.

I saw her again on my second trip to La Chacra at a Sunday mass at Santa María de los Pobres. A second contact had emerged: Mauricio Morales, a chemical engineer who had grown up in the neighborhood, and had just happened to study for his Master's at the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA) with my friend, former Boston College professor Father Douglas Marcouiller, who had once lived in La Chacra.

I was a little afraid to go back to La Chacra. Would gang members think I was a spy? Morales reassured me. The mass, led by Father Luis Sánchez, was packed. He showed the photo of the mother and child to the congregation during his homily. A lively musical group played many of the songs I remembered from the 70s and 80s, songs inspired by liberation theology, by recognition of the plight of the poor. I felt transported back in time.

Morales is also a legacy of the neighborhood. He had spent his time after school reading in the Fe and Alegría library, then earning scholarship after scholarship. He is now thinking of pursuing a doctorate in the United States. He still maintains his ties to the old neighborhood, especially to the church.

After the second visit, I returned to the States, to my job as editor-in-chief of



Óscar Campos (in center of photo with improvised Superman cape) follows Archbishop Romero with other children and nuns, La Chacra, 1979. He is also shown in liturgical calendar below on the right in red shirt.

ReVista to prepare the issue about El Salvador. Then, one day, sitting in my office, answering my endless e-mail, I found a message with the subject line “Small boy in the photo.” The message read, “Recently, I was made aware that the journalist who took the attached photo was interested in communicating with the individuals in the photo. I happen to be the small boy wearing a red shirt and shorts (right hand side).”

The message was from Óscar Campos, Alicia Campos’ son. And there he was, with Romero, a group of nuns and many children, walking along the railroad tracks. The photo, however, was not mine. I sent him a copy of my photo. Óscar seemed older than the naked boy in my photo, and he emphasized that his grandmother, Alicia Campos, who raised him, never allowed him to run naked “like many of the other boys.”

“It is quite interesting how a single photo can transport the human mind to a moment in time long lived,” he wrote me in an e-mail. “And in a fraction of

a second, we find ourselves reliving our childhood once again.”

Óscar confirmed that his grandmother had died a few years back and that she had been the housing activist Romero and I had talked to. Not long after Romero’s visit, he and his grandmother had taken a tourist bus to Mexico, crossing the U.S.-Mexico border on foot to reunite with Óscar’s mother in Los Angeles. They received immigration amnesty under the Reagan administration, and he now works as a chief operating officer for an export company in Los Angeles.

A few days after I talked to Óscar Campos on the phone from Cambridge, I searched through other photos I had taken for the *National Catholic Reporter* on La Chacra visit. There he was in my photo wearing an improvised “Superman cape” and trailing Archbishop Romero.

And the boy in the first photo? Campos may work in finance and administration, but he told me he sometimes dreams of being a journalist or chef. Using those journalistic instincts, with just a few



inquiries, he identified the woman and the child as Niña Chave (the nickname for Miss Isabel) and her son Nelsy. So today the boy with Romero in a photo, now a Los Angeles businessman, is helping me search for the boy in the other photo. As Archbishop Romero observed in his diary, there were many children that day.

June Carolyn Erlick is the editor-in-chief of ReVista, the Harvard Review of Latin America. She reported from El Salvador for the National Catholic Reporter and other publications from 1977-1988.

THE DIASPORA



Sofía Jarrín-Thomas [The Legacy of War](#) • Caroline Lacey [A Personal View from the Diaspora](#) • Marta Castillo Ramos [Beating Stereotypes](#) • Sarah Lynn Lopez [The Migrant Architecture of El Salvador](#) • Muriel Hasbun [Santos y Sombras, Saints and Shadows](#) • Kimberly M. Benavides [Entre el Amor y la Distancia](#)

The Legacy of War

From El Salvador to Boston **BY SOFÍA JARRÍN-THOMAS**

MIGUEL WAS SIX YEARS OLD WHEN HE WAS forced to witness the execution of his first-grade teacher for participating in a teachers' strike. "What I remember is that the guard turned around and pointed a G-3 to our heads and told us that if we went down that road, he would kill us too." The image of the teacher falling on the school grounds haunts him to this day. The story of Miguel (not his real name) is one of several personal testimonies I heard during an investigation I carried out about survivors of El Salvador's war in the 1980s then living in the Boston area. Their stories are a poignant attestation of human resilience.

I interviewed ex-guerrilla members, army veterans, torture survivors, civilians, and two Americans who regularly visited El Salvador during the war. As their stories slowly unfolded, I came to realize that many immigrants today still live in utter silence about the horrors experienced during the Cold War era. They manage to lead normal lives, some have been even professionally successful in the health care or non-profit sectors; most are U.S. citizens and have extended families, but their internalized traumas go largely unnoticed.

Take Cecilia, for example, who was eleven when she first saw a massacre during a student demonstration in 1975. After that, "I started witnessing difficult situations that I could not comprehend... When people began to disperse, you could see a suitcase here, a purse there, books, shoes... There was blood everywhere... On top of that... this feeling of insecurity or lack of trust, and not being able to talk about it." Now in her 40s, Cecilia explained that that feeling never really went away. During stressful situations it creeps back in, leaving her exhausted, she told me.

The United Nations Truth Commis-



A dentist in Boston advertises Spanish-speaking capabilities.

The United Nations Truth Commission in El Salvador determined that 85% of human rights violations were committed by state agents just in the period between 1980 and 1992.

sion in El Salvador determined that 85% of human rights violations were committed by state agents just in the period between 1980 and 1992. Yet social unrest in the 1960s and 1970s was also violently repressed in El Salvador, marked by mutilated bodies thrown by the side of the road and extrajudicial killings to instill terror in the population. Many of the stories I heard go back to that earlier period and are marked by a deep feeling of helplessness and distrust of law enforcement.

"The army and the [national] guard are supposed to protect you, but what do you do when those who are supposed to protect you are killing you?" said Miguel as an explanation of how he joined the guerrilla. It became a matter of survival, you joined one side or the other.

One of the military members I interviewed, Carlos (not his real name), explained that as the eldest member of his family, he was approached by both the army and the guerrillas to join their ranks, but ended up in the army because otherwise his family could have been labeled as leftist sympathizers—a deadly target. He painfully described to me his participation as a member of a death squad, something he was not proud of. It left him emotionally detached from his present wife and children and suffering from PTSD. When I met him he was undergoing therapy, finally, after 20 years of silence.

Ana Milagros left El Salvador in 1978 and managed a smile when she told me she came to the United States undocu-

mented and worked for every penny to bring her entire family here. “My mom, my sister, my brothers... I didn’t want them to be there. I wanted to erase all of that. To bury it all.” She lived some of the worst violence in San Salvador and prayed every day on her way to work that a stray bullet or a bomb wouldn’t end her life. “In the morning you go to work, and you don’t know if you’re coming back. You had to put your trust in God.”

“I never wanted to come here,” said César (not his real name), a union organizer who now works as a mechanic. He was tortured in a military barrack for almost two months and had to undergo seven years of physical therapy to fix four damaged vertebrae. “I knew very well how hard life is here for the immigrant; it’s not easy... But I stayed in the system because of my children, to give them a better future because in El Salvador, there is no future.”

The silence these people have lived in is what struck me the hardest. For most of those interviewed, I was the *first* person they had talked to about their experiences. The result was very cathartic and painful: a tearful release of the horrors lived, a mix of pride and shame. Pride for finally speaking out; shame for surviv-

ing, for the silence, for leaving loved ones behind.

According to the Migration Policy Institute in 2013 there were around 38,200 Salvadorans living in Boston, out of more than 1.1 million who migrated to the United States. Their population increased 12-fold since 1980, 70-fold since 1970. Many of them have found economic success in towns like East Boston, Allston and Jamaica Plain, although the war and its consequences still haunt their communities. To listen to their sto-

ries, in their own words, visit: www.memoryandpeace.com.

Sofía Jarrín-Thomas is a radio freelance journalist with a focus on human rights, social movements, the environment, and immigration. Her print and audio work has been published in several independent outlets in the United States and Latin America, including *Truthout.org*, *Ecoportal.net*, *Z Magazine*, *Bolpres.net*, *Pacifica Radio*, *Free Speech Radio News*, *ALER* and *AMARC*.



A Salvadoran-themed mural in East Boston.



A view from Chelsea, where many Salvadorans live.

A Personal View from the Diaspora

A PHOTOESSAY BY CAROLINE LACEY

IN 1992 THE CHAPULTEPEC PEACE ACCORDS ENDED EL SALVADOR'S brutal 12-year civil war. The government granted amnesty to all parties, protecting war criminals from even so much as a public confession of their crimes. There was no truth, there was no reconciliation. Attempts at peace and healing manifested as institutionalized amnesia.

During the wartime a quarter of El Salvador's population had fled the violence. The majority sought safe harbor in the United States but were denied refugee status because of U.S. policies that supported and fueled the conflict. As unacknowledged casualties of the turmoil, many were forced to live undocumented, the truth of their trauma repressed once again.

The Salvadoran diaspora is a population perched between two countries. They live in the shadows in the United States but are unable to return to their home country now overrun by gang violence. Left in limbo, they look for El Salvador through the creative acts of ordinary life. Painted volcanoes mimic the landscape they left; food is a means of communicating culture and images are a way of holding close what is far away. Sentimentality is both the lifeboat and its leak.

"I miss this color," Lorena said, holding up a painted wooden mango with the words El Salvador written on its base. She brought it close to her face and contemplated the speckled orange surface—as if it wasn't right in front of her, as if it wasn't really the color she missed at all. But through it she could grieve for all things lost, maybe even for the person who used to see those colors.

Caroline Lacey is a lens-based story teller living in Washington, DC. She has a Master's in New Media Photojournalism from Corcoran College of Art+Design at George Washington University. Lacey recently won the PDNedu competition for photojournalism, the NPPA Bob East Scholarship and her video took first place in team multimedia at the Northern Short Course. Her work has been published in The Washington Post, Smithsonian Magazine Online, NPR, Washington Magazine and PDN.





It wasn't until I was in middle school that I had the opportunity to visit El Salvador. My father, Salvadoran-born, only told me stories of his childhood in La Unión, El Salvador. The only image of El Salvador was of my father's parents. My grandparents who I never met. A tragic reality inside the Salvadoran civil war that our father doesn't speak about. Their image to me represent the innocence that was violated by people who had no respect for humanity. El Salvador was a place presented in my mind as a far dangerous place compared to Maryland. No one is safe. My journey in El Salvador during my first trip changed my mentality of these citizens. Every one deserves respect because I saw things also wanted a big change to live a better, safer lifestyle without violence. —EDGAR M.



From the series, "How to Be After..."

From top left, clockwise: YouTube video of the civil war streams on a big screen television. Other times it will be fruits or pixelated landscapes.

A photograph of a combat unit featuring Carlos Molina is prominently displayed on the wall in his home.

Edgar M. from La Unión, El Salvador, recalls in a letter how he had finally returned to El Salvador in middle school and wishes a better lifestyle without violence for his fellow Salvadorans.

Sonia Estrada contributed this drawing of her home in El Salvador.

Richard Aparicio's living room in the Washington D.C. area. Aparicio fled for the United States after fighting for the military. His mother, having her house bombed and her eyes infected from the smoke of burning bodies, was there waiting for him. He has been deported twice. His son, Anthony Aparicio, said, "In my dreams I would see my dad and run to him. Then I would blink and he was gone. I would just lie on the ground and cry."

The Festival of Women and Corn in Hyattsville, Maryland.



Beating Stereotypes

The Political Management of Multiculturalism

BY MARTA CASTILLO RAMOS WITH PHOTOS BY ANÍBAL MARTEL PEÑA

ABOUT ONE OUT OF EVERY TEN HISPANICS IN THE Boston metropolitan area is Salvadoran, according to the 2010 American Community Survey. Yet little is known on the outside about this community, just occasional references to an extraordinary restaurant that sells the Salvadoran pancakes known as pupusas or the sadder headlines about local gang activity with its origins in El Salvador.

Historically, Salvadorans arrived in the United States fleeing the civil war (1980-1992). Many others were forced to leave after the ravages of the strong earthquake in 2014. Nowadays, many of them leave their homes to avoid the violence or poverty. We decided to go beyond the statistics to interview Salvadorans about their lives.

Rolando Oliva, 59, came nine years ago to New Bedford, a port city south of Boston, from the small city of Santa Ana. He spent nearly a year without a job; for the time being, he works in a bakery while looking for a more stable job—one of those immigrants who has had to adapt to the postindustrial labor market in New England. “Unfortunately, during the recession year, there were no jobs anymore. Those offices (of employment), full of people and after a whole day waiting there... nothing.”

Once he got a job, Oliva said he also faced discrimination at his work site, and learned that companies dispose of immigrants in irregular situations, using their vulnerability to exploit workers even more, if possible. In Rolando’s words, yelling and humiliating people is a norm in many jobs. However, Oliva chose to fight back by participating in workers’ networks, giving support and advice to anyone who needs it.

Another Salvadoran, Ana Marina Vaquerano, 56, who met us in a Colombian eatery in East Boston, talks passionately of her struggle for social justice. Like so many others, she crossed the border with



a *coyote* (a migrant trafficker), escaping the war. Arriving alone and undocumented, she later managed through solidarity networks to obtain legal and social support, originally settling in San Francisco. She has been in Boston now for thirteen years, mostly working in the social work field, but she does not feel completely integrated into the city. Like Oliva, Vaquerano considers that discrimination is a reality in Massachusetts, especially for those people who are not fluent in English. She believes this happens because “they don’t give any importance to someone that doesn’t belong to this country. To someone that they know that can’t even defend themselves at a minimum.” Vaquerano notes, “Salvadorans are a hard-working community. They are a determined people, and despite any situation they face, they continue to move forward.”

Our third interviewee, Erika Yanira Arevalo, the Salvadoran vice-consul, received us with her family in their apartment in East Boston. She says she loves living in East Boston, her little piece of El Salvador in the state capital. Arevalo, 34, was a bit busy during the morning, since that day 37 members of a gang had been arrested throughout Greater Boston, including in East Boston. Arevalo thinks Salvadoran people are unfairly stigmatized as violent, but they are not the only ones: she believes that this stigma affects several Latino American communities. To her, it is not enough to identify the stigma; Salvadoran people have to confront this prejudice:

(...) “Unfortunately, there are complicated processes going on in the framework of the electoral year. In general, I think we are living a hard process as Latin Americans and we are stigmatized in different ways. It is also our duty to demonstrate that it is not like this and that many people in this country have different roles, not only in the kitchen, not only cleaning but also, in companies, universities, schools... We are in other spaces and we are doing big things for this country as well.”

Arevalo is positive regarding the situation in El Salvador. In her opinion, the campaigns of her government are helping people to invest remittances in education and other areas of development.

It is no coincidence that our interviews were in New Bedford and East Boston. If we analyze the urban space of Boston, New England’s most important city, we find a city with a high urban spatial segregation, which means that separate groups of population live inside a bigger one. In this case, this separation is established by the ethnic and cultural origin of the population. Thus, every group is socialized in a different environment, promoting the reproduction of certain patterns, which generates an identity that perpetuates social stratum. Identifying prejudice barriers is not enough; it is necessary to take an active part to seek integration between the various cultures coexisting in New England. The task of many organizations such as Centro Presente or Chelsea Collaborative is fundamental to build multicultural communities that live together harmoniously. Only by following this path will future generations avoid dealing with stereotypes.



Marta Castillo Ramos is a Catalan sociologist, with an M.A. in European Labor and Social Policies. She is involved in social movements and has worked in the fields of poverty, social and gender exclusion. She currently works in Boston with the Latin American community.

Aníbal Martel Peña has developed his professional career as an independent photographer in various capacities: print media, digital media and press agencies. He is currently working as a correspondent and editorial photographer. www.anibalmartel.com



Opposite page: A view of East Boston. From top, clockwise: Salvadoran consul Erika Yanira Arevalo with her family in their East Boston home; Ana Marina Vaquerano in East Boston; Roland Oliva in New Bedford.

The Migrant Architecture of El Salvador

BY SARAH LYNN LOPEZ WITH
PHOTOGRAPHY BY WALTERIO IRAHETA

IN THE SUMMER OF 2015 I TRAVELED TO THE CITY of San Salvador to meet photographer Walterio Iraheta. After publishing my book on the remittance-funded landscape and architecture of Mexico, I wanted to learn about the changing rural landscape caused by El Salvador's remittance boom, a subject Iraheta began photographing in his native country in 2006. Propelled north since the 1980s and 90s because of the civil war, today approximately two million Salvadorans—more than 25% of the country's total population—live abroad. The exodus continues, now fueled by violence and lack of economic opportunity.

This migration to the United States is mirrored by a continuous flow of dollars south. By 2013, the 4.2 billion dollars streaming into El Salvador's economy accounted for an astounding 16 percent of its GDP. Some migrants have built impressive new homes—what I call “remittance homes”—with dollars earned in the United States, resulting in dramatic changes across rural landscapes.

Iraheta's photographs allow me to compare the architecture of Mexico's remittance homes to those found in El Salvador. The American flags etched in plaster on the façades of El Salvadoran homes and the miniature replicas of the Statue of Liberty found in Mexican ones both function as public announcements of distant horizons, and are intended to represent migrants' gratitude toward the United States. Iraheta describes the homes as “autorretratos” or self-portraits; each home is a crystallization of the special desires and circumstances of a migrant family in the context of migration. While the photographs allow me to compare the homes visually, it was out in the field with Iraheta—when we went to document



architectural changes to homes he had previously photographed—that the stakes of migration and remitting as a way to a better life for Salvadoran families were revealed.

On our first day out, Iraheta and I visited Ilobasco, a town about an hour east of San Salvador with 60,000 inhabitants. Iraheta had arranged for a municipal employee to be our formal guide through Ilobasco's *barrios*. Upon arrival, we were told that unfortunately there was no official car available for our trip. But, after

we suggested the use of our car or the local *tuk tuk* taxis, he explained that it was not safe to go and take pictures of migrant houses—no matter that they were abandoned. The gangs of Ilobasco have territorial sovereignty over the areas beyond the main plaza. These are the same places from which many migrants have fled, and where they subsequently built new homes financed by dollars. Around the plaza, where our conversation took place, the local government maintains order and commerce thrives, but beyond the



From left, clockwise: House in Ilovasco, Cabañas; castle in El Pinar village, San Ignacio, Chalatenango; an American flag tops a house built with remittances.

central district, he explained, we would risk being beaten or shot simply because we would not be recognized—“they don’t wait to ask questions.” At that moment, frustrated by the promise of being so close to Ilobasco’s remittance homes, I imagined what this meant for families who had risked everything to build them. The transformation of the *barrio* due to the increasing prominence and power of local gangs robbed migrants of their dream home, whether built for residence, vacation or for retirement; as the neighborhoods became inaccessible,

the houses remain empty—symbols of cultural and economic changes in the region.

Remittances homes are also symbols of migrant success and their continuing (and often increasing) importance in their country of origin. Achieving what would have been unattainable without migration, many of these aspirational homes are in what Iraheta calls “*estilo hermano lejano*” or far-away brother style. *Hermano lejano*, like Mexico’s colloquial terms *norteño* (northerner) and *hijo ausente* (absent

son or daughter), encapsulates the sadness people experience on a daily basis in emigration villages and towns. Built for a brighter future, prominent homes dotting countryside’s become memorials—testimonies—to the men, women and children who remain far away.

Sarah Lynn Lopez, an assistant professor at the University of Texas at Austin, is an architectural and urban historian.

Walterio Iraheta is a Salvadoran photographer and curator.

Santos y Sombras Saints and Shadows

BY MURIEL HASBUN

I COME FROM PEOPLES IN EXILE.

I became an adult with an extreme sensitivity to the irreconcilable...

Since 1990, I have committed my creative energy to developing a body of work that explores my family history and sense of identity. *Santos y sombras* is a refuge against silence and forgetting. The work becomes a personal diary where I mold the emotional aura surrounding my Palestinian/Salvadoran Christian and Polish/French Jewish family as I was growing up in El Salvador.

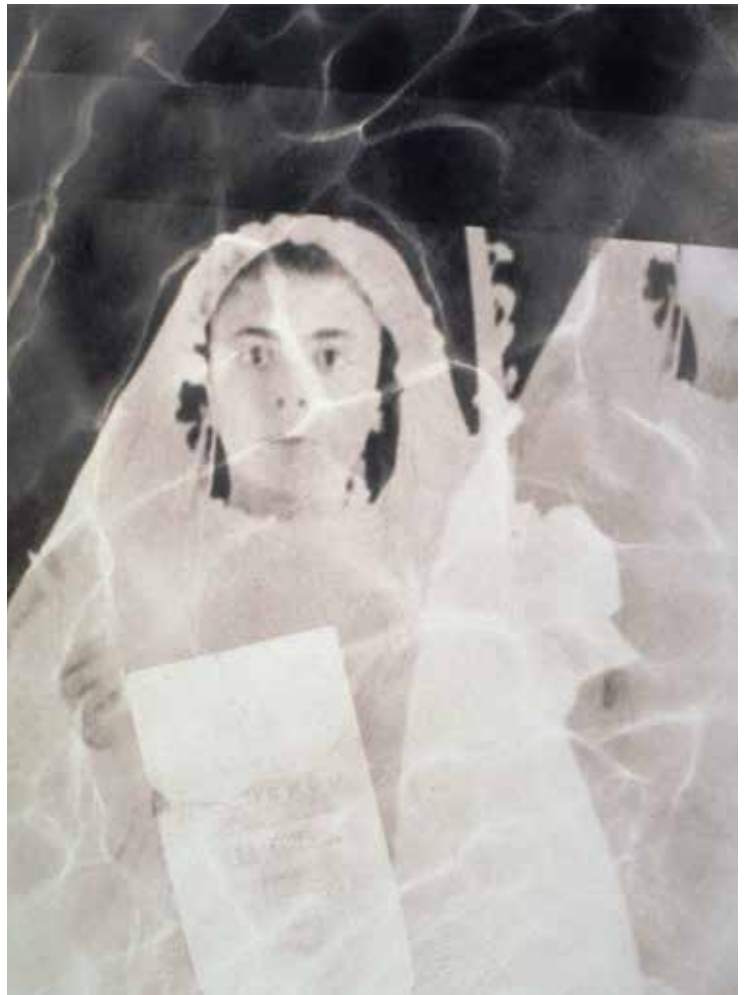
With the *Todos los santos* (All the Saints) images, I explore my memories of childhood as well as delve into the expression of identity of my paternal, Palestinian Christian family. Through the finding of family photos and documents, the collection of oral histories, and the re-evaluation of my own perceptions, I am slowly reconstructing a world that, with the process of assimilation and the passage of time, had become obscured.

The *¿Sólo una sombra?* (Only a Shadow?) images take me into a world where silence is refuge; persecuted in France and in Poland during World War II, my maternal Jewish family had no alternative but to become invisible. Through my work, I begin to unearth the lingering echoes of those silenced voices, hoping to regenerate them, from burnt ash into glimmering light.

My photographic work, then, is a process of re-encounter, of synthesis and of re-creation. Through it, past and present become interlaced in a renewed configuration; the Palestinian desert and Eastern European ash sift, shift and blend in the volcanic sands of El Salvador, to form the texture of the path on which I define and express my experience.

Muriel Hasbun is Professor and Program Head of Photography at the Corcoran School of Arts & Design at George Washington University.





From left, clockwise: 1. El altar de mi bisabuelo/ My Great Grandfather's Altar. 2. Todos los santos (Para subir al cielo) / All the Saints (To Go Up to Heaven) 3. ¿Sólo una sombra? (Familia Lódz)/ Only a Shadow? (Lódz Family) 4. Todos los santos IV/ All the Saints IV, woman with veil. 5. ¿Sólo una sombra?/ Only a Shadow?, Remembering Pola (small bottom photo) 6. Todos los santos VII/ All the Saints VII, little girl

Entre el Amor y la Distancia

A PHOTOESSAY ON IMMIGRATION
BY KIMBERLY M. BENAVIDES

I'M A FIRST GENERATION CHILD OF IMMIGRANTS, dealing with the complexities of familial love and the effects the Latin American diaspora has had on this love.

The photographs used are the few family photos that exist of my family's lives, both here and before they migrated to this country. The text is from personal interviews that I conducted with my parents, correspondences with my maternal grandmother, notes scrawled on the backs of photographs, and words that exist in my memory. I asked my parents about their lives before me, before they met each other, and before they left their wartorn and military-governed countries of El Salvador and Argentina, respectively. Together, the prints represent a history that I have reappropriated that serve me as reminders of our pasts and our future.

At the time that I created the work, I had not gone to see my family in El Salvador or Argentina in over 15 years. The title, presented in Spanish, like much of my work, came from a conversation with my parents. We were talking about the feeling of being split in two and having one foot in the past (El Salvador or Argentina) and the other in the future (the United States), and I felt the same way, regardless of having the privilege of being born here. There was a whole other separate life, land, and people who loved me, and I them, but we had no concrete memories of time spent together. Thus leaving me to wonder how love could exist across socially constructed borders, and what lay in the space between love and the physical distance that separated us.

Kimberly M. Benavides, a graduate of Corcoran College of Art and Design, uses photography to reflect on her Hispanic identity.



Se que somos fuertes.



*pa' ti con
CARÍO.*

7

6



Me siento diferente,

2



I've forgotten what it would actually be like to see them again.

3

4



Todo tiempo pasado fue mejor.



SIEMPRE QUERIA IR CON ELLA



CON DESTINO A LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS

5

From upper left, clockwise:

1. "Sé que somos fuertes" / "I know that we are strong"
2. "Me siento diferente" / "I feel different"
3. "I've forgotten what it would actually be like to see them again"
4. "Todo tiempo pasado fue mejor" / "The time that has passed was the best"
5. "Con destino a los Estados Unidos" / "Destined for the United States"
6. "Siempre quería ir con ella" / "I always wanted to go with her"
7. "Para ti con cariño" / "For you with love"

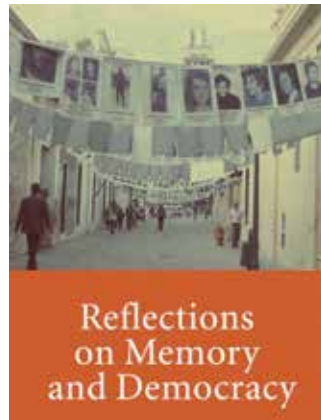
The Politics of Memory and The Memory of Politics

A REVIEW BY ANDREAS HUYSEN

Reflections on Memory and Democracy, edited by Merilee S. Grindle and Erin E. Goodman (David Rockefeller Center Series on Latin American Studies, Harvard University Press, 2016, 260 pages)

Memory is tricky business. So is democracy. Both are invariably challenged and contested from within and from without. The struggle against the manipulation of memory for purposes of forgetting and erasure, hegemony and domination, has to be waged time and again, just as the abuses of democracy need to be confronted to guarantee its future. A strong civil society and citizens' participation not just in elections, but in associations and public life, will strengthen both memory and democracy. The case of Latin America provides a panoply of examples of how this linkage of memory and democracy has played out in the past few decades, in some cases with more success than in others.

Indeed, there seems to be a consensus that historical memory of traumatic violence perpetrated by state terror and military dictatorships is a *sine qua non* for the often difficult transitions to democracy. A host of questions and problems is embedded in this consensus: transitional justice as amnesty or prosecution of perpetrators; the creation of democratic institutions and a functioning public sphere; reforms of



the security apparatus, of the judiciary, of education; the role of Truth and Reconciliation commissions; creating public spaces for testimony humanizing the past; restitution in its symbolic and its real material dimensions; reconciliation and forgiveness as desirable or as a placebo covering up festering wounds; the role of public memorials and museums as well as the contributions of the arts in a society's coming to terms with violent past. And then there is the question of memory politics in relation to Human Rights as universal or as a tool of political hegemony. I do believe that for historical memory to take hold it must be robustly linked to a developing and increasingly transnational Human Rights regime. But the exclusive focus on Human Rights will be as ineffectual as the dwelling on the horrors of the past unless it is firmly linked to social histories of oppression and inequities of wealth and privilege that far transcend the time frame of

recent dictatorships and state terror, both deeper into the past and right into the present. All these issues have generated public debates across the world and filled libraries with studies upon studies of specific histories in local contexts, their transnational connectedness and affinities, their universal meaning within a globalizing culture in which violence, memory and rights have emerged as touchstones for an insecure and menacing present.

The volume here under discussion emerged out of a conference held at Harvard's David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies in November 2013, shortly after the 40th anniversary of that other 9/11—the military coup in Chile of 1973. For me as an outsider of Latin American Studies, but interested observer of memory politics in Latin America, this collection of essays by journalists, writers and poets; literary critics, political scientists and historians; philosophers, economists and linguists transcends disciplinary boundaries in a felicitous way. It also offers a challenge to comparative studies, in that apart from its binding focus on Chile it includes essays on Guatemala, Peru, Brazil, Haiti, Mexico and Colombia. What emerges is a multidirectional view of memory politics across the continent that allows the reader to draw inferences

between the different national cases discussed and to recognize fundamental differences between, say, Chile and Brazil, Argentina and Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico.

As the poetic prologue on the Chilean *arpilleras* (some of which figure prominently in Santiago's Museo de memoria y derechos humanos) suggests, this volume of reflections is a patchwork stitched together from many histories and many memories, but united in the continuing call for justice and accountability and in the commitment to the democratizing potential of historical memory. Introduced by a framing essay by Merilee Grindle and ending with an essay by Erin Goodman summarizing conference presentations unfortunately not included (this goes especially for a presentation by John Dinges on new archives documenting disappearances in Santiago), the volume is subdivided into three parts entitled "Remembering and Democracy: Memory and Its Place in Democratic Institutions," "The Challenges of 'Capturing Memory'" and "Citizenship and Democratic Futures." The first part contains two pieces dealing with disappeared and slain journalists, pointing to the repression of a free press in Guatemala (June Erlick) and in Haiti (Michele Montas) and two pieces by political actors: Sergio Bitar, a member of Allende's government turned social

democrat, who describes the slow pace of democratic change in Chile and argues that reconciliation still has a long way to go; and Salomón Lerner, chair of Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, who reminds us forcefully of the ingrained racism at the root of much of Peru's violence perpetrated on the civilian population, a problem Peru shares with other Latin American countries.

Part II focuses on three literary pieces. Marguerite Feitlowitz on three Argentine novels featuring children of the disappeared as detectives of their parents' fate, which can never be fully revealed by memory; Susana Draper on a Mexican woman's prison memoir from 1968 which focuses on class and gender stereotypes on the Mexican left; Ava Berinstein's essay on the struggles of community radio stations in Guatemala and Belize in preserving Mayan oral culture, an essay that links up compellingly with Lerner's political reflections on indigenous populations in Peru.

The third section begins with two essays on the deficiencies of memory politics in Brazil and in Chile. Frances Hagopian analyzes why and how Brazil is a latecomer to the Latin American memory debates. In contrast to Argentina, Brazil had accepted the idea that in order to secure democracy after the military dictatorship, war crimes could go unpunished. Amnesia was the result. Only under the Lula government was there even an uptick of memory concerns, probably more as a result of international pres-

sure than as a reflection of a deep-seated social need to come to terms with the history of Brazil's military dictatorship, the longest lasting in Latin America. Turning to Chile, Peter Winn describes how Allende and his era continue to shadow memory politics there. He contends that the avoidance of that period is the great repressed gap of the post-Pinochet politics of the *concertación*. The deficiencies of memory politics in Chile—and here his piece resonates strongly with Bitar's though they may represent different political positions—can only be overcome if civic memories from Allende's experiment in socialism can feed into contemporary struggles for memory, justice and equity. The concluding country-focused piece in Part III is Paolo Vignolo's essay about the Central Cemetery of Bogotá as a site joining cultural heritage and historical memory and thus functioning as an open air museum nurtured by active citizenship for memory building. Perhaps this is a fitting conclusion in the sense that Colombia's half-a-century-long *violencia* which is still going on has been the worst on the continent.

Chile, of course, remains in the center of this book. A recent visit to Santiago and its many public sites of torture and remembrance convinced me that the Museo de memoria y derechos humanos will eventually have to include more about the Allende years than the president's last radio address to his people. As national memory is at stake, the museum may even need to address the deep history

of colonization and its effects on the indigenous minority population all the way to the present. If human rights are universal, they cannot be limited to the post 9/11 regime. What to include and what to exclude is always a political struggle, but both should be subject to reconsideration and change—even and especially in a museum that lays claim to historical knowledge. Chile, of course, is the paradigmatic case for the havoc caused by the neoliberal economics of the Chicago Boys in Latin America during the Cold War. Many have argued that the main effect of the dictatorships has been to prepare the ground for neoliberal economics in Latin America. Chile's 9/11 will always remind us of the invisible elephant in the room, not just in Chile, but in Latin and Central America as a whole: the United States and its Cold War politics followed by the Washington Consensus of neoliberal economics. But the United States is strangely absent from this volume as it is from the memorial sites in Santiago, Valparaiso and Paine I visited a few months ago.

While the volume recognizes that memories are always contested, often unreliable, and threatened by erasure, it offers a view on Latin American memory politics that could only be had in retrospective and with the passage of time. Democratic political culture (this seems to be a common assumption underlying the essays) was nurtured by a growing sense of revulsion about the military dictatorships of the past. The commitment to democracy

and civil society resulted from changes in the mentality of political actors both on the right and on the left. As Frances Hagopian argues, today the everyday terror of the past is no longer “a crushing weight on the brains of the living” (Marx) as it was in the years right after the dictatorships in, say, Argentina in the 1980s or Chile in the 1990s. Muted by the passing of time, the growing up of new generations, and refracted by the multiple struggles for justice and accountability, memory of that terror has become a major factor in shaping democratic societies across Latin America. Some will find this view too optimistic, given the continuing lack of accountability and persistent impunity in several Latin American countries. As I know from my own history having grown up in West Germany after World War II, the struggle for memory never ends; it changes its shape; it keeps having to confront revenants, new evidence, new archives; and it remains a task for future generations. Ultimately, it is and remains a political struggle for democracy. The politics of memory will go nowhere unless it is accompanied by a robust sense of a memory of politics.

Andreas Huyssen is Villard Professor of German and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. He is the author of many books, including Miniature Metropolis: Literature in an Age of Photography and Film and Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory (Cultural Memory in the Present).

Recycled Wars

A REVIEW BY ALBERTO SALCEDO RAMOS

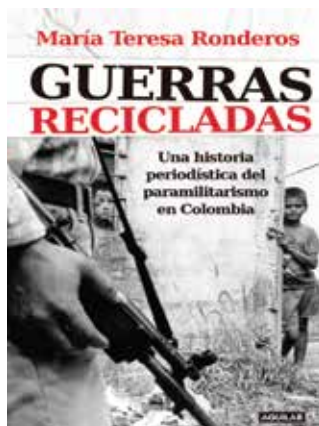
Guerras recicladas: Una historia periodística del paramilitarismo en Colombia by María Teresa Ronderos (Bogotá: Aguilar, 2014. 402 pages.)

Guerras Recicladas is not just “a journalistic history of paramilitarism in Colombia,” as the subtitle describes it. It is also a very insightful book, and a key to understanding our own country.

Many of our main issues appear across its pages: armed conflict, the mentality of our leaders, the relationships between central power and regional leaders in the periphery, the way in which politics has been historically practiced, the agrarian problem, exclusion, corruption in management and in the military, drug trafficking from its origins to the present day, arms smuggling and a void in legitimacy that contributes to the multiplication of parastates within the national entity.

In addition, the author draws detailed and complete portraits of the promoters of paramilitarism in Colombia and provides extensive research on their criminal activities, information regarding their corrupt allies in the public sphere and the military forces, and analysis of the devastation they caused.

María Teresa Ronderos is a superb reporter who has aimed her great research skills at clarifying a few pernicious misunderstandings we



misunderstandings we have all fallen for, such as the allegation that the Castaño brothers—Fidel, Carlos and Vicente—become criminals as a consequence of their father’s murder, committed by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

Ronderos, who was the 2011-12 Santo Domingo Visiting Scholar at Harvard’s David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, provides evidence that Fidel Castaño had begun his career in drug trafficking before the death of his father and had already amassed many pieces of land in some regions of Colombia—such as Córdoba and Urabá—through blackmail or intimidation.

Another example of the author setting the facts straight: David Tomkins, one of the mercenaries who came to Colombia in the late eighties, quoted an article on the FARC he claimed to have read in *Cromos* magazine. Ronderos went through

all the issues of the year in question and found no such article. By calling this crook’s lie, she unmasked him, she undermined the deceitful legitimization of his cause.

One of the merits of *Guerras Recicladas* is allowing us precisely to see that no lie is too small. She achieves this in a way both simple and insightful that is often forgotten in day-to-day journalism: by confronting all the information available or, as Ronderos calls it, by “piecing the versions together.”

Ronderos follows leads to their final conclusion; she reads heaps of books—many of them published in different countries; she compares documents and talks to dozens of people. Thus, she is prepared when she makes claims such as that the first Israelis to train assassins in the Magdalena Medio region had support from the United States.

Still operating under the Cold War principles, the paramilitaries who brought those mercenaries managed to sell to the United States the idea that they were promoting a political crusade against communism. It was their way of legitimizing the killing and drug trafficking machine that by then they had already created.

“Those courses,” says the author, “were aimed at students who were going to perpetrate massacres but

also at those who were going to put bombs in buildings. Killing Bernardo Jaramillo, the UP presidential candidate, because he defended a different ideology, and killing Luis Carlos Galán, the liberal candidate, because he supported the extradition of drug traffickers to the United States was, for these multidisciplinary students, one and the same.”

Guerras Recicladas doesn’t settle for the easy stigmatization of murderers along the biased, simplistic division between good and evil: it is a book that tries to understand and to explain. It mentions, for example, how paramilitary chief Daniel Rendón learned to read and write in prison, and in that way it shows us that often criminals started out as victims.

To retrace the steps of misinformation in search for a truth willingly distorted by many is a just and courageous act. That is why this book is so essential.

Alberto Salcedo Ramos is a Colombian writer and journalist. He is a columnist for *El Mundo* in Spain and teaches workshops at the *Foundation for a New Iberoamerican Journalism (FNPI)* in Cartagena. He is the author of several non-fiction books, including *La eterna parranda*, *Botellas de naufrago* and *El oro y la oscuridad*.

To Build or Not to Build?

A REVIEW BY ALBERTO VERGARA

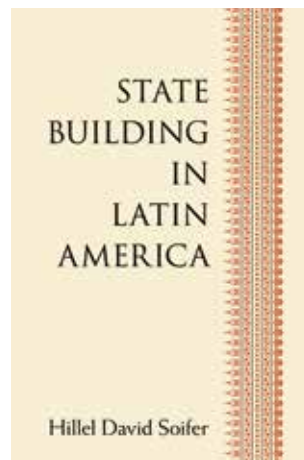
State Building in Latin America

by Hillel David Soifer (Cambridge University Press, 2015, 307 pps).

Hillel Soifer's powerful new book proposes a solid and original theory of state-building in Latin America. In recent years the study of how states formed and develop has become a burgeoning subfield, and Soifer aims to tell the Weberian—if not Hobbesian—story of Latin American states; one that is told from *within* the state.

Soifer tells us, "... state-building was a *state* project rather than a sectoral or class project" (emphasis in the original, p. 9). In this account, Latin American state leaders in the nineteenth century enjoyed a considerable amount of "autonomy"; that is, a strong or weak state did not result primarily from its encounters with the society it aimed to govern, but rather: "I argue that the institutional *choices* made by leaders in populating the bureaucracy shape the fate of state-building efforts" (my emphasis, p. 233).

Soifer's book is masterfully anchored to substantive theoretical issues that he illuminates with analytical clarity and impressive empirical work. The book's departure point is that neither pre-independence institutions nor the aftermath of independence in Latin America can explain the



divergent capacity of states in contemporary days. Instead, "the liberal era," that is, more or less, the period between 1850 and 1900, established the resilient foundations of either successful or failed state projects. Three decisions and trajectories were taken in that "critical juncture": 1) elites decided not to build a state, hence an effective state never emerged; 2) elites decided to build a state but failed; 3) elites choose to build a capable state and they succeeded.

According to Soifer, Colombian elites never did actually attempt to build an effective state, so that state has been ineffective throughout history. Peruvian elites, instead, had a state project but failed to implement it. Although these arguments, I am sure, will trigger reactions among historians of both countries, they make a main analytical contribution:

causes of state inefficiency diverge and institution builders must be aware of them.

Why would some national elites decide not to build a national state? Soifer's answer is that a country with several important urban centers, like Colombia, will not undertake the state-building effort, whereas a country with the undeniable primacy of one urban center would attempt to do it. The reason is that this kind of *geography/demography* produces different sets of *ideas* in elites leading them to either attempt to build a state or not. Backed by quantities of data in three crucial dimensions of state activity (education, coercive capacity and tax extraction) Soifer argues that Colombian elites—*embedded* in a *laissez-faire* liberalism derived from the abundance of urban centers—chose not to engage in the costly effort of building a state. In Chile, Mexico and Peru, conversely, liberalism "was more statist"—an ideology derived from the undeniable prominence of Santiago, Mexico City and Lima—and that is what led central elites to seek a national state.

However, why did countries choosing to build a central state, like Peru, fail, while others, such as Chile and Mexico, succeeded? Soifer dismisses explanations built on war effects on the state, and those that

give too much importance to society: "...I attribute more autonomy to Latin American state leaders than do either of my interlocutors..."(p. 8). According to the author, the crucial step to set a path of state capacity was an administrative decision: either deciding to rule the country with deployed bureaucrats, or in alliance with local/regional elites. In Soifer's account, this mid-19th-century decision is the key and critical choice for state-building in Latin America. Where central leaders decided to rely on local/regional elites to rule the periphery, the state undertook a path of weakness; where they decided to circumvent local powers and deploy a troop of bureaucrats, they put the state on the right track. This is because deployed bureaucrats' salary depends on central institutions and because the absence of local allegiances helps them to rule in a more independent and effective way, thus constructing more solid institutions: Peruvian leaders relied on regional powers, which prevented the emergence of a strong state; Chilean leaders, instead, aggressively deployed bureaucrats and kept local people out of administrative state positions, which placed their state in the successful path of state building (Mexico followed a path closer to the Chilean one, though relying a

bit on regional powers). This is key to the whole argument: “The result of this difference in administration is nothing less than the success and failure of the state-building efforts...” (p. 86).

Soifer argues that the chosen strategy depended on the elites’ *perception* of their periphery. If they perceived subaltern classes as rebellious, they preferred to ally with local powers; if they perceived them as non-threatening, they ruled directly. Secondly, if central elites perceived local powers as backward, they would try to defeat them with deployed bureaucrats. Therefore, since Chilean elites perceived a non-threatening periphery, they deployed bureaucrats; because Peruvian elites perceived a tumultuous periphery, they relied on local notables to manage it. Hence, this *perception* constitutes Soifer’s Archimedean supporting point for the whole proposed theory (and for the institutional future of Latin American countries).

To conclude, this is a clean analytical and persuasive book; it will inform the debate on the Latin American state for long time. Yet, I will raise three sources of skepticism in this account of Latin American state-building.

IDEAS AND MENTALITÉS

Soifer argues that both an urban and ideological variable play a key role in why some elites do not engage in state-building. Yet I don’t see why the author emphasizes the decisive contribution of ideas when his argument makes it clear that in a

country with several strong regions, regional elites have interest in building regional institutions rather than alien central institutions. And, actually, Soifer’s cases almost perfectly correlate: Chile, Peru and Mexico had a single urban center and developed state-building efforts; Colombia had several urban centers and the effort did not emerge. The role of ideas would be much clearer if we had an outcome that “defeats” the urban variable, that is, a case where despite the existence of multiple urban centers, ideas led leaders to undertake a state-building effort; or one country that had a sole main urban center, but the elites’ ideas pushed them not to develop a central state. But the argument lacks such *dealignment*, which dilutes the weight of the ideological variable. Although Soifer spends two pages (pp. 56-58) warning us to not make this critique, the reader feels that this caveat confirms that the author is aware that ideas have a shaky role in the explanation. Indeed, this feeling seems justified when in the book’s conclusions the whole argument is summarized in a table (p. 260) that combines the geographical variable with state efforts and almost perfectly places/explains every country, with no need of the allegedly crucial ideological dimensions.

In the same realm of “ideas” the reader misses a more detailed reconstruction of the crucial ideological debates and the intellectual context in which they must have happened. The author succinctly establishes the

emergence of a *laissez-faire* liberalism in Colombia and a more statist liberalism in Chile, Mexico and Peru. But how did such homogenous ideological elites’ consensus occur? We miss a more careful intellectual history of such ideas and debates.

Likewise the reader misses a more in-depth analysis of the “central elites perceptions” of their peripheries. It is precisely because I do not doubt those perceptions were crucial—and because their consequence, according to the book, was the most important one in state-building—that I miss a careful reconstruction of those cognitive structures that, in other century, people used to call *les mentalités*.

THE ART OF GOVERNING

Soifer’s most ambitious point is to rule out interpretations where the state is the result of its relation with the society it aims to control. Instead, the state (the 19th-century Latin American state) is quite autonomous from society. I agree with Soifer that state leaders’ decisions may have a lasting effect on the state itself, and that they may enjoy some levels of autonomy or isolation from societal forces. However, is this tantamount to proclaiming that Latin American states can be explained on their own, putting society aside? I doubt it, for two reasons. The state leaders that Soifer conceptualizes/sees as insulated state functionaries actually belonged to parties, classes, indigenous groups, clientele, loggias, clubs, etc... The Latin American state was not kidnapped by a specific

class as a basic Marxist view would tell us, but neither was it an autonomous artifact. The state had porous borders with society. Alan Knight, a historian free of subaltern perspectives, has shown that well into the 20th century the successful Mexican state was constantly involved in a give and take with different sectors of society. My own research on Bolivia and Peru during the 20th century gives me a similar impression.

My second point of skepticism about this “administrative” explanation of state capacity in Latin America is that Soifer’s book is actually full of examples of how the state ends up being shaped not only by administrative procedures and political choices, but by the society it aims to govern. At several times Soifer’s main actors, state leaders and bureaucrats alike, face rebellion, resistance, anti-fiscal revolts, etc... that shaped their policies and decisions. Where Soifer proclaims state-building as a political choice, I see a much more *embedded* choice.

This last observation brings me to make a final, epistemological comment: to what extent can we explore such a vast, long and complex process as the development of states from a framework that seeks to discover the single independent cause that would allow us to build a general model of state-building? I think Soifer does a superb job in showing that deploying bureaucrats instead of relying in regional strongmen had a true positive effect on state-building in Latin America, but I doubt this can be the

ultimate theory that rules out the other ones. Instead, I tend to lean more towards another author who also masterfully inquired about state-building in Latin America: “I hope to offer a challenge to the implicit ‘claims for essential, invariant universals’ that Charles

Tilly asserts have become too predominant in the field. [...] I hope to demonstrate that contingency, contextuality and relationality play too an important role in historical developments to allow for all-encompassing general laws [...]” (Miguel Ángel Centeno,

Blood and Debt. War and the Nation-State in Latin America, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002, p.18).

Alberto Vergara is a Banting post-doctoral fellow at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs and

lecturer on Latin American politics at Harvard’s Government Department. He recently published *La Danza Hostil: Poderes Subnacionales y Estado Central en Bolivia y Perú (1952-2012)* (Lima, Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2015)



EL SALVADOR SNAPSHOT Margarita Segura, 47, with her granddaughter Ruby, in her marketplace store “Eclipse Ruby Hermano Pedro.” When she got her spot in the market, some of the adjoining stalls were dedicated to native medicine with local remedies, candles and other spiritualist items. She was attracted by the merchandise, and decided to mount her own venture. “I don’t care if they call me a witch, I’m just that, a witch for the new century. We sell illusions. Each person’s beliefs makes it all work.”

FE ERRATA We apologize for the mistakes in the Winter 2016 Music issue (Volume XV, No. 2)

It should be *Richie Valens*, not *Ricky Valens* in the editor’s letter. It should be “*expatriate*,” not “*ex-patriot*” in Panayotis (Paddy) League’s article on Polkas in Paraiba. Photographer *Jonathan Moller*’s name was misspelled in the issue as *Jonathan Moeller*.

Thanks to our eagle-eyed readers for catching these mistakes! See something, say something! Write to jerlick@fas.harvard.edu

BUILDING BRIDGES

Mapping Childhood Malnutrition in Chiapas, Mexico BY MAGGIE COCHRAN

I love global health. I love to travel, I love learning new languages, and I am passionate about providing health care to underserved populations. Thus, the opportunity to do hands-on pediatric research in rural Mexico this summer sounded perfect. However, what I thought would be a summer of inspiration and enlightenment became an internal struggle to find purpose in my work. I found myself questioning the value of global health, and my role in its mission. Instead of clarity, I often encountered overwhelming ambiguity.

THIS SUMMER, I WORKED AS A researcher with *Compañeros En Salud* (CES), a sister organization to Partners in Health. It provides high-quality, primary health care to the Chiapas region—one of Mexico's poorest and most isolated states. I sought to assess the prevalence of chronic and acute malnutrition in children under five and to make comprehensive maps of this information for future health care interventions. Each week I traveled to a new mountain community with a GPS and measuring tape in hand; I hiked home-to-home weighing and measuring children, interviewing parents about food security, and plotting this data on virtual maps of the region.

Most days were inspirational. The community-mem-



Maggie Cochran with a child; Chiapas landscape



bers were incredibly warm and open, offering bottomless cups of coffee as they told me their deepest fears about money, food and family. As a second-year medical student, I am still getting used to the privilege that comes with the white coat; I am humbled by the fact that strangers are willing to reveal so much to me about their personal lives and inner reflections—and I hope this humbling feeling never goes away.

I also felt as though I could truly be helpful. Almost half of the children I encountered suffered from chronic malnutrition. Chronic malnutrition may be caused by poor diet, frequent infections and/or poor maternal nutrition while the child is in the womb. If left untreated, children who suffer from chronic malnutrition may not grow to their full potential, mentally or physically. My goal was to intervene during this critical period, to

inform parents of their child's illness and motivate them to act. Many parents seemed to really listen to my nutritional *charlas*, asking thoughtful questions about their child's diet. A majority of parents immediately visited the local doctor to engage in more personalized conversations about their child's health.

But many days I felt hopeless. Many days I didn't want to go to work, because I knew I'd have to tell twenty more starving mothers that their children were starving, too. And what were the mothers supposed to do with this information? They have no resources; they have no options. I began to question the value of my work. Without reform at the highest level—national and international governments enacting real social change—how can individuals like me hope to improve the health outcomes of these suffering families? I felt myself

starting to crumble under an overwhelming feeling of helplessness.

When I spoke to my mentor about these alternating feelings of empowerment and despair, he responded that these were staples of the global health experience. On the one hand, the work is meaningful and often life-changing for patient and physician; on the other hand, global health delivery can feel hopeless when larger social structures work against it. While organizations like CES take both a bottom-up and a top-down approach in an attempt to address health care at the individual and societal level, my mentor still emphasized that as an individual global health practitioner, one needs to hold on to the good days during times of self-doubt. So I am choosing to hold on to the good days—the days full of inspiration and love and hope—and I am excited to use the data collected from this summer to design interventions that will make Chiapas a happier, healthier place. And today, that is good enough motivation for me.

Maggie Cochran is a student at Harvard Medical School. She graduated from Harvard College in 2011 with a major in Psychology. She used her DRCLAS Summer Independent Internship Travel Grant to study childhood malnutrition in Chiapas, Mexico.

DAVID ROCKEFELLER CENTER FOR LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

VISITING SCHOLARS AND FELLOWS PROGRAM



THE CENTER

Founded in 1994, the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard University works to increase knowledge of the cultures, economics, histories, environment, and contemporary affairs of past and present Latin America.

THE PROGRAM

Each year the Center selects a number of distinguished academics (Visiting Scholars) and professionals (Fellows) who wish to spend one or two semesters at Harvard working on their own research and writing projects. The Center offers nine fellowships that provide support for one semester. Applications from those with their own resources are also welcome.

Visiting Scholars and Fellows are provided shared office space, computers, library privileges, access to University facilities and events, and opportunities to audit classes and attend seminars. The residential fellowships cover round-trip travel expenses, health insurance, and a taxable \$25,000 living stipend while at Harvard. Appointments are typically for one or two semesters. Recipients are expected to be in residence at the University a minimum of twelve weeks during the semester.

APPLICATIONS DUE FEBRUARY 1ST

THE APPLICATION

Applications should be submitted electronically to drc_vsf@fas.harvard.edu or via the online application form. For the form and further details please visit <http://www.drclas.harvard.edu/scholars>.

**DAVID ROCKEFELLER
CENTER FOR LATIN
AMERICAN STUDIES**

1730 Cambridge Street
CGIS, South Building
Cambridge, MA 02138

Phone: 617-496-1588
drc_vsf@fas.harvard.edu

David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies

HARVARD UNIVERSITY



DAVID ROCKEFELLER CENTER
FOR LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

1730 CAMBRIDGE ST., CAMBRIDGE, MA 02138

EL SALVADOR

NON-PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BOSTON, MA
PERMIT NO. 1636

CONTRIBUTORS

8 Carolina Avalos, a Salvadoran economist, was a 2015 DRCLAS Central American Visiting Scholar. **33 Claire Breukel** is the Curator of Y.ES, a Salvadoran exchange program. **33 Mario Cader-Frech** is a Salvadoran-born collector and philanthropist. **86 Marta Castillo Ramos** is a Catalan sociologist based in Boston. **Maggie Cochran** is a student at Harvard Medical School. **28 Leonel Antonio Chevez** is the Ti Manauelike Lenca Taulepa (Hereditary Chief of the Jaguar House and the Lenca Indigenous People). **20 Carlos Dada** is the founder and editor of El Faro, an online news site based in San Salvador. **2 Héctor Dada Hirezi** is a Salvadoran economist. **94 Andreas Huyssen** is Villard Professor of German and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. **36 James Iffland** is a professor of Spanish and Latin American Studies at Boston University. **82 Sofía Jarrín-Thomas** is a radio freelance journalist. **11 Carmen Aída Lazo** is the Dean of Business and Economics at Salvador's business school, ESEN. **88 Sarah Lynn Lopez** is an assistant professor at the University of Texas at Austin. **51 M. Brinton Lykes** is the Associate Director of the Center for Human Rights & International Justice at Boston College. **42 Mary Jo McConahay** is a journalist who has reported on Central America since 1975. **16 Manuel Andrés Meléndez** is a Research Fellow at the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUSADES). **76 Gene Palumbo** is a journalist based in El

Salvador. **51 Nelson Portillo** is Assistant Professor of the Practice at the Lynch School of Education at Boston College. **38 Federico J. Rivas** is Chief Executive Officer of International Media Group and co-founder of Estadio Ventures. **14 Luis Mario Rodríguez R.** is the director of Political Studies of the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUSADES). **96 Alberto Salcedo Ramos** is a Colombian journalist. **60 Michael S. Serrill** is a freelance writer based in New York and a former foreign editor for Bloomberg News and *Business Week*. **47 Jack Spence**, former president of Hemisphere Initiatives, co-authored a dozen analyses of the Salvadoran peace process. **97 Alberto Vergara** is a Banting post-doctoral fellow at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs and lecturer on Latin American politics at Harvard University's Department of Government. **24 Jocelyn Viterna** is Associate Professor of Sociology at Harvard University, where she teaches and researches about gender and social movements in Latin America.

Featured Photographers and Photoessayists: Mauro Arias, Kimberly M. Benavides, Steve Cagan, Maggie Cochran, Luis Galdámez, Bill Gentile, Muriel Hasbun, Walterio Iraheta, Andreas Jahn, Caroline Lacey, Lorne Matalon, Robert Nickelsberg, Aníbal Martel Peña, Roland Moran, Edgar Romero