

Insurgent Butterflies: Gender and Revolution in El Salvador, 1965-2015

by

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DEDICATION

Para mi madre, María Eugenia y las mujeres que lucharon y luchan por nuestra liberación.
And for my beloved comrade and brother-in-law, Jeffrey. May you rest in power.

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Table of Contents

DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
LIST OF APPENDICES	vii
ABSTRACT	viii
CHAPTER	
Introduction	1
Chapter 1. Fighting to Participate: Women Wage the Class Struggle, 1965-1980	39
Chapter 2. Las Compas and the Everyday Politics of Armed Struggle	105
Chapter 3. ‘For Our Total Emancipation’: The Making of Revolutionary Feminism and the Asociación de Mujeres de El Salvador (AMES), 1977-1987	149
Chapter 4. Remembering the Organized Woman and State Violence, 1992-2015	205
Conclusion	247
Bibliography	256
Appendices	269

List of Figures

- Figure 1. Giovanni Pallazo, date unknown. Courtesy of the MUPI. 10
Visit the photographer's website: <http://www.giopalazzo.it/>
- Figure 2. Caption reads: "Teachers interested in the social protection law," *Diario de Hoy*, September 19, 1964, courtesy of the MUPI. 42
- Figure 3. AMES poster, date unknown. Courtesy of the MUPI. 160
- Figure 4. Exhibit display. Photo taken by author. 231
- Figure 5. Display of wartime bomb fragments. Photo taken by author. 231

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A. Organizational abbreviations	269
Appendix B. Women featured in each chapter	272
Appendix C. Guerrilla groups within FMLN	274
Appendix D. Interviewed women	275

ABSTRACT

Drawing from archival sources and fifty oral histories, this dissertation recovers the political interventions of rank-and-file Salvadoran women, recognizing both the sexist currents within leftist movements and the alternative revolutionary praxis that women developed. It identifies some of the women who built the base of revolutionary movements in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, and demonstrates how they intervened in key ways through their labor, organizing practices, and political theorization. Women synthesized liberation theology, Marxism, and feminism to meet their specific needs, and in doing so strongly influenced the political practice of the Salvadoran left.

I trace women's organizing over five decades of struggle, from 1965 to 2015, paying special attention to praxis, or the interplay between theory and practice. I highlight the role of everyday practices, internal negotiations, and transnational networks in shaping revolutionary processes. Praxis is a useful concept because it illuminates how oppressed people who are engaged in collective political struggle acquire an understanding of their collective conditions, and how they produce theories to analyze and act in the world. Praxis is not a linear or one-way process; political consciousness arises from experience, and in turn, actors develop theories and practices that are applied and refined to confront new challenges.

Through collective organizing, teachers and peasants sought to create a world without landlords, dictators, paramilitaries, and imperialists. Struggles for better wages and workplace dignity generated a process in which women and girls took leftist principles such as dignity, equality, and solidarity to new radical conclusions. In the mid-1960s and early 1970s, women fought hard to join labor organizations and legitimate the social movement participation of women. Their entry into the revolutionary movement was by no means a foregone conclusion. As women waged a class struggle against the landed oligarchy and military governments, women also confronted patriarchal authority at home. Those two earlier decades of struggle created fertile soil for the emergence of a new revolutionary feminist praxis in the 1980s. Within the guerrilla territories, women intervened to shape the daily practices of armed struggle. Abroad, exiled Salvadoran women collaborated with other leftist women who also denounced both class and gender oppression. Salvadoran women developed a broad vision of revolution that linked socialism to women's liberation. This dissertation offers a new account of the emergence, meaning, and practice of revolutionary feminism in El Salvador. In so doing, it also offers a new periodization of Salvadoran feminism. While standard narratives date the rise of feminism to the 1990s, when many women abandoned the FMLN party and formed self-identified feminist organizations, I demonstrate how women developed feminist practices in earlier decades within the context of peasant and working-class movements.

The study contributes to two important fields: studies of the Salvadoran revolution and feminist studies of revolutionary women. It challenges dominant characterizations of the revolutionary movements as monolithic, static, and dominated by urban-based male intellectuals, expanding on an emergent current in scholarship on the civil war. Second, it contributes to feminist studies by

demonstrating the role of women in reshaping revolutionary thought and practice by linking women's liberation to anti-capitalist politics.

Introduction

“People have a better understanding of what carrying out a revolution involves. The traditional view—that the man works and provides for his family, while the woman stays at home with the children, not participating in society or politics—is changing. Today in the battle zones, women may go about their duties while men take care of the children.” Letty, 1983

One night in 1977, Domitila Ayala Mejía, age twenty, tiptoed past her sleeping parents and snuck out into the darkness. She walked off the dirt path and hiked deeper into the mountains. Under the moonlight, Domitila performed physical exercises and military drills with other members of the popular militia who called one another *compañera* and *compañero* as a marker of equality and respect.¹ Domitila learned to use a gun, provide security at protests, and protect her peasant village from military raids or worse. Chants such as *¡Revolución o muerte!* (Revolution or death) strengthened her commitment despite the high price of her beliefs and involvement in a clandestine guerrilla organization, Fuerzas Populares de la Liberación “Farabundo Martí” (Popular Liberation Forces “Farabundo Martí”, FPL).

Exhausted from her militia training, Domitila walked home and slept through the sounds of crowing roosters. She awoke to screaming accusations about her nighttime outings with men. Her father had gone to great lengths to prevent any contact between Domitila and other men, even prohibiting her from attending school past the second grade because he feared that she would later use her education to write love letters to men. Unable to break her silence, Domitila’s parents doubled her domestic chores as punishment and threatened to kick her out of the house.

¹ Leftists used the term *compañera* and *compañero* to refer to a comrade and/or life-long partner. In both cases, the term is marker of equality between two people.

Half asleep and her body still sore, Domitila carried a basket of clothes to wash in the river. Meanwhile her father searched her room, flipped over her pillow and made a tormenting discovery: the revolver that Domitila had hid for months. That day onward, the accusations stopped. Her father began to afford her a form of respect that he only reserved for men.²

What drove Domitila to train in the mountains? Seven years earlier, when Domitila was a teenage girl, peasants began to gather secretly in the mountain to listen to readings of the bible. *We are all equal because we are the children of God.* Those words resonated with Domitila and other peasants who had little or no education and labored on coffee plantations for less than one dollar a day. At age seventeen in 1975, Domitila joined a militant peasant union—Unión de Trabajadores del Campo (Union of Farmworkers, UTC)—that denounced electoral fraud, demanded higher wages, led land occupations, and denounced the rape and murder of labor organizers at the hands of government soldiers and death squads. A white hand painted on one's door foreshadowed death. Within days, death squads who sought to exterminate communists in the name of god and country, came for peasant organizers, executing or dragging them from their homes in the middle of the night. Thousands disappeared, while severely mutilated corpses routinely appeared on dirt roads or stuffed into coffee sacks. For days, soldiers guarded the bodies with the hopes of capturing family members who came to provide a proper funeral. In the youthful eyes of Domitila, such bloodshed only confirmed the necessity of armed struggle to

² See the following two interviews with Domitila for an overview of her life, including her adolescence, politicization, guerilla recruitment, and life in the camps. Domitila Ayala, interviewed by Rebecka Biró and Victoria Montero, July 2013, unpublished transcript. Domitila Ayala, interviewed by author, Arcatao, September 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

dismantle a military regime that violently defended the interests of the landed-oligarchy and foreign capital. For these reasons, she joined the FPL and began training in its militias.

A few months after her parents discovered her revolver in 1977, Domitila left home once and for all and fled to the mountains to live in the FPL guerrilla camps. A few years after that in 1980, government soldiers murdered her father and teenage brothers, and dumped their bodies into a mass grave. They were punished for their own role in supporting peasant unions and their familial ties to the insurgency. Hours later after their murder, Domitila felt the presence of her father's spirit accompany her throughout the night. That same year, the FPL joined four other guerrilla groups to form the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front). The FPL was the largest group within the FMLN. From 1980-1992, the FMLN waged armed struggle against the Salvadoran military regime, which received 4.5 billion dollars in U.S. economic and military aid.³ Self-described as Marxist-Leninists, the FMLN fought to overthrow military and oligarchic rule and U.S. imperialism, and advocated a peasant worker alliance to build a socialist society that addressed the needs of the poor. The FMLN represented one of the last major armed national liberation movements in the late twentieth-century.⁴

³ Americas Watch Committee, *El Salvador's Decade of Terror: Human Rights Since the Assassination of Archbishop Romero* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 141.

⁴ National liberation movements sought to overthrow colonial or imperialist powers via the strategy of armed struggle, usually in the form of guerrilla warfare. The latter refers to a group of mobile and armed people who use military tactics, such as ambushes, raids, and hit-and-runs (usually) against a traditional military.

In Chalatenango, a department under FPL control, Domitila and other women shaped the daily practices of armed struggle. In the early 1980s, she helped build a radical council government in which peasant civilians democratically managed their own lives and addressed the immediate survival needs of approximately 24,000 people.⁵ The first president was in fact a peasant woman. One group, the Asociación de Mujeres de El Salvador (Association of Salvadoran Women, AMES) organized women to participate within the councils and worked to make the revolution address the needs and aspirations of women. In coordination with the councils, the Association collectivized food production, shaped the agenda of health clinics to address gynecological health, and created childcare centers that enabled the political participation of women and taught children anti-sexist values. The Association even intervened in domestic disputes, denouncing men who opposed the political participation of their wives and daughters. Its motto proclaimed, *winning the rights of women and children, we will build the new society*.⁶

During twelve years of war, death followed Domitila like a shadow. On various occasions, she narrowly escaped government bombings and capture. To cross military check points, Domitila exchanged her jeans and boots for a feminine dress. Her long black hair and thin figure deflected the suspicions of soldiers. One time, an old man saved her life. For hours she ran

⁵ A skillful young woman, Domitila rose through the ranks and performed various tasks that made her a prime military target. She built the ranks of urban-based FPL groups that gathered intelligence and materials in San Salvador, worked as a security guard for the FPL general secretary in Managua, Nicaragua, built the radical council government and coordinated security work in Chalatenango.

⁶ Boletín de AMES, No. 3, Año 2 (March 1983) in BCRW.

from government soldiers until an old man hid her inside a large pile of dirt outside his humble home. Completely still, Domitila heard the stomping of military boots that got louder and louder. As dozens of soldiers inspected the premises, a blanket of dark clouds appeared unexpectedly and thunder struck—a rare occurrence during the dry season, which Domitila attributed to an act of God. The soldiers left and the downpour never came. But the soldiers did not give up the hunt. Soon after, Domitila became pregnant and from month two to five of her pregnancy, the military hunted her, offering a monetary reward for her murder. Each day, Domitila doubted if she would live to see another day. Over the course of her pregnancy, Domitila ran from soldiers without falling, despite her protruding belly and the torrential downpour that made the mud slippery and her feet swollen. Upon giving birth, she wrote to the father of her newborn daughter, a fellow combatant, but for months her letters went unanswered. He had been killed in a government ambush.

Despite the insurgency's heavy losses, the military regime could not defeat it. The United States poured funds, training, and armament into El Salvador to tilt the balance in the government's favor and yet the insurgency retained significant control. By 1983, the FMLN controlled a quarter of the nation's territory, while later in the decade it controlled a third. After years of a military stalemate, the FMLN and military regime finally signed the Chapultepec peace accords in 1992, formally ending the war. The civil war had resulted in the deaths of 75,000 people, eighty-five percent killed by government forces and right-wing death squads that

systematically tortured, disappeared, killed, and raped dissidents.⁷ As a negotiated revolution, the accords dissolved repressive state bodies and allowed the FMLN to become an official electoral party, but it left structural inequality untouched. Despite the demands of some women's organizations, the FMLN did not demand gender equality to be included within the accords. In this sense the accords did not capture the revolutionary demands of the rank-and-file. The accords triggered a mixture of sadness and happiness for Domitila.⁸ Utterly doubtful about government promises, she wept as her comrades burned their weapons in anticipation of their disarmament. Since the accords, rightwing political parties such as Alianza Republicana Nacional (National Republican Alliance, ARENA) have won every presidential election, until an FMLN victory in 2009 and 2014.

This dissertation tells the story of Domitila and other peasant and working class women who participated in the labor and revolutionary movements of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. As they organized, women confronted obstacles to their political participation and developed critical reflections about their role in the struggle. From their own embodied experiences, women came to new radical conclusions about their self-worth and their individual and collective rights as poor women, and they developed new theories and practices to identify the relationship between class and gender oppression. Women organized to extricate those forms of oppression from their

⁷ United Nations Truth Commission, *From Madness to Hope: The 12-Year War in El Salvador* (New York: UN Security Council, 1993).

⁸ Other women expressed similar frustrations, see Margarita's testimony in Cristina Ibáñez and Norma Vázquez, *Y la montaña habló: testimonios de guerrilleras y colaboradores*, (San Salvador: Las Dignas, 1997), 41.

own movement and from the wider society. Tracing the interplay between theory and practice, or praxis, is at the heart of this dissertation. The concept is relevant because it illuminates how oppressed people engaged in a collective political struggle, acquire an understanding about their collective conditions, and produce theories to analyze and act in the world.⁹ Praxis is not a linear process; political consciousness arises from lived experience and in turn, actors develop theories and practices that are applied and refined to confront new challenges that emerge.

Each decade of struggle represented both new and ongoing challenges for women. Their entry into the revolutionary movement was by no means a foregone conclusion. In the mid-1960s and early 1970s, a generation of women that preceded Domitila's fought hard to join labor organizations that represented teachers, peasants, and workers, and legitimate the social movement participation of women. Then, as women waged a class struggle against the military governments and landed-oligarchy, they also confronted patriarchal authority at home. From multiple fronts, women fought to participate in meetings, build the base of their organizations, take to the streets in protest, and join clandestine guerrilla organizations. Those two earlier decades of struggle created fertile soil for the emergence of a new revolutionary feminist praxis in the 1980s. Within the guerrilla-held territories, women intervened to shape the daily practices of armed struggle, while abroad, in places like Mexico and the United States, exiled Salvadoran

⁹ Popular educator Paulo Freire defined praxis as "reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed," see Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Bloomsbury Academy, 2000), 126. Black feminist, bell hooks defined feminism "as a movement to end sexist struggle." In doing so, she defined feminism as a form of political praxis and not an intellectual tradition alone. See bell hooks, "Feminism: a movement to end sexist oppression" in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 18-33.

women collaborated with other leftist women who also questioned the separation of class struggle from women's liberation. Perhaps most remarkably, Salvadoran women developed a broad vision of revolution that linked socialism to the liberation of women. Some exiled women called this vision "revolutionary feminism," while others used different vocabularies. I trace the emergence, meaning, and practice of revolutionary feminism within and outside of the guerrilla camps. In this sense, Salvadoran women are linked to other revolutionary women who also challenged conceptions of Marxist-Leninism that ignored the critical role of unpaid domestic labor in the accumulation of capital, imagined the revolutionary subject as male, and divorced women's liberation from socialism.¹⁰

Many peasant women compare the revolutionary struggle to the flowering of plants. Our consciousness, like plants, deserves constant attention: "if we do not keep receiving water, if we do not care for ourselves, sexism will return," explained one peasant woman.¹¹ I call these

¹⁰ For a discussion of the theoretical limitations of Marxist Leninism vis-à-vis women and gender, and the experiences of women within the centrally planned economies of the Soviet Union, China, and Vietnam, see María Mies, *Patriarchy and accumulation on a world scale women in the international division of labour* (London: Zed, 2001.) For a collection of critical essays from socialist-feminists and materialist feminists in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, see Lydia Sargent ed., *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1981); Rosemary Hennessey and Chrys Ingraham ed., *Materialist Feminism: A Reader in Class Difference, and Women's Lives* (New York: Routledge, 1997). The Zapatistas in Mexico and the Kurdish Freedom Movement in Syria and Turkey, are two contemporary armed movements that have placed the liberation of women at the center of their political project, see Meredith Tax, *A Road Unforeseen: Women Fight the Islamic State* (New York: Bellevue Literary Press, 2017); Hillary Klein, *Compañeras: Zapatista Women's Stories* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2015).

¹¹ Rosa Rivera, interviewed by author, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

women *mariposas insurgentes* or insurgent butterflies because they pollinated the revolutionary movements that sustained life in the face of state violence. *Mariposa* was a common political pseudonym among women and the insect is also abundant in the mountains where the insurgency took root.¹² One particularly famous Mariposa worked as a radio broadcaster for Radio Venceremos, the official voice of the FMLN insurgency.¹³ Today, more than twenty years after the signing of the peace accords, older women share their memories with younger people (many of whom are forced to migrate north) with the hope that they will pollinate new struggles.

¹² The symbol and pseudonym has also been popular among other Latin American women participating in movements against dictatorial regimes. For instance, the Mirabal sisters in the Dominican Republic were called butterflies by their comrades. Also, the song “El Zenzontle Pregunta por Arlen” by Carlos Mejía Godoy, which paid tribute to eighteen-year-old Arlen Siu, referred to her as a “mariposa clandestina” (clandestine butterfly). He wrote the song after the Nicaraguan National Guard murdered her in 1975. For an overview of her life, see Fabrice Le Lous, “Vida y muerte de Arlen Siu, la mariposa clandestina,” *La Prensa*, September 18, 2016.

¹³ Marina Manzanares used the pseudonym Mariposa. She described her experiences joining the Radio Venceremos in José Ignacio López Vigil, *Las mil y una historias de Radio Venceremos* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1991), 100-104. In the early 2000s, the Venezuelan group Llovizando Cantos wrote the song “Mariposa de El Salvador” as a tribute to her.



Figure 1. Giovanni Pallazo, date unknown. Courtesy of the MUPI. Visit the photographer's website: <http://www.giopalazzo.it/>

Accounting for the Silences

There are several challenges to writing about the social movement participation of women in El Salvador during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. The Spanish language is highly gendered, and masculine pronouns such as *ellos* (they) refer either to a group of men or a group of men and women. This has implications for how we “see” women in the archive and therefore understand key moments of Salvadoran history. The case of the Asociación Nacional de Educadores de El Salvador (National Association of Salvadoran Educators, ANDES 21 de Junio), which I discuss at length in chapter one, is a case in point. Founded in 1965, the

Association facilitated the revitalization of the Salvadoran labor movement and became one of the fiercest opponents of the military regimes. Even though women constituted eighty percent of the membership, the fact that men constituted a small fraction made the noun “teacher” be written in the masculine form, *maestro* (male teacher), rather than *maestra* (woman teacher).¹⁴ This gendered language has shaped all documents written about ANDES, including the documents that the Association itself produced. Therefore, when the historian is searching for women in the archive, their participation tends to be omitted or subsumed under masculine pronouns that privilege the participation of men. The omissions, however, are not just a function of linguistics; they are also a product of sexism.

The actors who produced English language documents also made gendered assumptions. For example, the State Department and U.S. embassy in San Salvador tended to equate the term “leftist” with men and rarely identified the participation of women in mixed-gender groups. Frank Devine served as U.S. ambassador to El Salvador from 1977 to 1980 under the Carter administration (1977-1981). Devine and his staff noted the participation of women when they partook in exceptionally dangerous (and therefore unfeminine) actions, such as land occupations, kidnappings of business men, take overs of radio stations, and armed attacks against businesses or government forces. For example, embassy officials noted how on September 21, 1977, FPL

¹⁴ In a 1981 interview with Radio Habana Cuba, the former general secretary of ANDES, Melida Anaya Montes, cited the membership as eighty percent women. By this point in time, Anaya Montes was known as Commander Ana María. “Entrevista de Radio Habana Cuba,” March 8, 1981. CIDAI, folder: FPL, subfolder: Ana Maria, subfolder: 1981. Entrevista RH a Ana María. The membership is also cited at ninety percent, see Marilyn Thomson, *Women of El Salvador: The Price of Freedom* (London: Zed, 1986), 72.

guerrilla members, including “two to three armed young people of both sexes” entered a radio station, tied up the staff, and played a pre-recorded cassette that denounced government corruption and repression.¹⁵ In October 1978, an FPL woman held a security guard at gunpoint while her comrades broke into the office of the Somoza-owned Nicaraguan airline, and threw Molotov cocktails into the waiting room and scattered pamphlets in support of the Sandinista struggle against Somoza.¹⁶ Given that the action took place at dawn, the FPL probably intended to destroy corporate property and not kill personnel. In fact, the embassy did not report any injured individuals. Officials probably identified women in these actions to underscore the extreme and disorderly nature of the situation.

Sexist assumptions about gender roles also shaped the ways government officials wrote about leftist women. For example, U.S. embassy officials saw men as the intellectual architects of collective actions even when women constituted the clear majority of its participants. In July 1979, 190 young women workers occupied ARIS de El Salvador, a glove-making factory owned

¹⁵ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 04484, September 22, 1977, 1977SANSAs04484, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017). In another similar instance, the FPL took over another radio station “calling for support for BPR groups occupying four embassies and National Cathedral” and denouncing “repression of campesinos,” see, Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 01824, April 18, 1978, 1978SANSAs01824, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

¹⁶ The scattered pamphlets stated, “Death to Somoziism [sic] and solidarity with the Nicaraguan people,” a direct reference to the Sandinista armed struggle against the dictatorship of Somoza, see Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 06235, November 30, 1978, 1978SANSAs06235, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

by ARIS Glove, New York. According to U.S. ambassador Frank Devine who interviewed the firm's lawyer, the unarmed workers presented a list of 31 demands, "ranging from the frivolous (more soap in bathrooms) to the clearly unacceptable (100 percent wage increase and firing of workers who did not join the strike)."¹⁷ To gain leverage over the company, the women took five U.S. citizens hostage, including the company president and several executives. The lawyer expressed to Devine that four men, including a "non-worker" linked to the Bloque Popular Revolucionario (Popular Revolutionary Bloc, BPR), a revolutionary coalition of teachers, peasants, and workers, coordinated the action. The lawyer added, "that the BPR rather than [the] union, was behind [the] takeover."¹⁸ Devine noted that the Ministry of Labor and Salvadoran Ministry of Defense had been informed of the situation, and that the latter had even sent a "small special police detachment to the site."¹⁹

The lawyer and U.S. ambassador mocked the grievances of the women workers. The demand for soap reveals the level of authoritarianism within the factory and the utter disdain of managers for the wellbeing of women workers. We can only imagine the humiliation that women must have felt to have worked under such unsanitary conditions. Menstruating women may have

¹⁷ The lawyer is listed as Abelardo Torres. Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 03889, July 13, 1979, 1979SANSAS03889, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

¹⁸ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 03889, July 13, 1979, 1979SANSAS03889 Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

¹⁹ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 03889, July 13, 1979, 1979SANSAS03889, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

found the absence of soap to be especially humiliating. In demanding soap, women refused to have unhygienic conditions be a permanent or natural part of their condition as workers. Given the brutality of state violence in the late 1970s, women took great risks to organize such a militant action. Furthermore, the demand for soap also reveals that the organizers had intimate knowledge of conditions within that specific factory—knowledge that only the women workers could have known. Thus, we can safely assume that women participated in crafting the demands. And even if we accept the embassy claims that the Revolutionary Bloc coordinated the action itself, the demand for soap also reveals how the organizers cared about the day to day conditions of workers and that they had a broad understanding of worker grievances that included but was not limited to wages.

The lawyer and U.S. ambassador attributed the actions to outside agitators. In identifying the men as the true architects behind the takeover, the lawyer and embassy official suggested that women simply did not have the political intellect and organizing capabilities to take such militant action. Even if we accept that assumption, logistically speaking, no individual could have successfully led the factory takeover if the women workers had not mobilized as well. Given the scale of state repression, women had an incentive to *not* participate, and yet they did so nonetheless, revealing their political consciousness and commitment. Furthermore, the lawyer argued that “outside agitators” coordinated the action, attributing all grievances as the product of outside agitation of unions, and especially “leftist extremists,” the preferred term of the embassy. And so, we see a hierarchy of outside agitators: men agitate women, unions agitate workers,

“extremist leftists” agitate unions; and Soviets and Cubans agitate extremist leftists in El Salvador. In each case, the agency of each agitated group is undermined and the revolutionary organizer is assumed to be a man. My point is not to deny the possible role of the Revolutionary Bloc in supporting the action or uphold the erroneous distinction between the Revolutionary Bloc and workers, when in fact workers made up the Bloc. Nor do I want to create a false binary between a male Revolutionary Bloc and women workers, because as I will show, women also participated in the Bloc. Rather it is to demonstrate how authorities produced documents that obscured how rank-and-file women participated as militants *in their own right*.²⁰

It is also challenging to write about the participation of women because women participated in organizations in which men held the majority of official leadership positions. Despite their small numbers, men dominated the top leadership positions in ANDES, even though women constituted eighty percent of the membership. For example, in June 1967, ANDES had four women out of 30 people in its executive council. The council was made up of four secretaries and two representatives from each of the fourteen departments.²¹ Mélida Anaya Montes, who served as conflict secretary in 1967, became secretary general in 1968, thus occupying the highest leadership position in ANDES. Unfortunately, sources do not exist to

²⁰ For a discussion of the union activities of women, including factory occupations, see Thomson, *Women of El Salvador*, 59-63.

²¹ “De magisterio al pueblo salvadoreño,” *El Mundo*, June 8, 1967. MUPI, folder: doc c3, image 47. Also see, “A la consciencia de los maestros y al pueblo salvadoreño,” October 7, 1967. MUPI, folder: 2, images 25-30.

describe the internal leadership structure of peasant organizations such as UTC—the group in which Domitila participated.²² Nonetheless, these inequalities should not deter us from understanding the important contributions of rank-and-file women, changes in gender relations at the grassroots level, and how the organizing process itself generated new understandings about the role of women.²³

In addition to the limits of the archive, historians themselves have perhaps unintentionally perpetuated the omission of women. Although women constituted the majority of ANDES members, scholars often fail to remark on this fact.²⁴ Readers are then led to believe that the teachers were mainly men, and women acted as passive supporters. For example, at the University of Massachusetts, I participated in an academic study group about Central America in early 2016, reading a valuable dissertation and book that failed to mention the gender composition of ANDES. At one point, participants viewed a photograph of an ANDES march

²² This is also the case for the Federación Cristiana de Campesinos de El Salvador (Christian Federation of Salvadoran Farmworkers, FECCAS). Although Patricia Puertas, affectionately known as “Ticha” served as the Secretary of Relations for the Federación de Trabajadores del Campo (Farmworker Federation, FTC), the organization that officially merged FECCAS and the UTC in 1978, oral histories suggest that women were not proportionally represented in the highest leadership positions at the national level.

²³ For instance in 1983, FTC encouraged women’s participation and denounced the injustices they faced, including workplace discrimination, physical violence, and sexual objectification. Thomson, *Women of El Salvador*, 59. Original source, “La mujer Centroamericana,” *FTC Boletín Internacional*, no. 2 (1983), 5.

²⁴ Héctor Lindo-Fuentes and Erik Kristofer Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador: Education Reform and the Cold War, 1960-1980* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012). Paul Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). Although Chávez does not mention the gender composition of ANDES, he does analyze how newspaper writers used sexist stereotypes to ridicule ANDES general secretary, Anaya Montes. Chávez, “Pedagogy of Revolution,” 206.

and thought, “look, here are some of the women in ANDES.” They were quite surprised when I mentioned that they were not staring at *some* of the membership, but the *majority*. While ANDES is but one example, it reveals the larger challenges of writing about women within the revolutionary left.

Writing the history of revolutionary movements requires both a women’s history approach and gender approach. The first is needed to demonstrate the participation and contributions of women, and to name the specific women who built those movements. The second approach is vital for analyzing the role of gender in shaping the political landscape more broadly, including discourses, ideologies, institutions, social relationships, and processes of subject-formation.²⁵ To embark on this task, one must critically consult written and oral sources.

The Necessity of Oral History

From 2014 to 2015, I conducted fifty interviews with peasant women, labor organizers, and former combatants. Carrying a brown bag of baked goods and a small recorder, I conducted most of the interviews in workplaces or homes. The women I interviewed generously hosted me from one to three hours at a time, conversing over coffee or as they masterfully cooked *pupusas*. Many found it amusing that a young woman with a peculiar Colombian accent had decided to live in San Salvador to document their histories. We laughed and we often cried, their deep sighs releasing tension and emotion as they narrated their profound lives, loves, and losses.

²⁵ Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053-1075.

The Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen (MUPI) connected me to women who had participated in past social movements. The MUPI documents the historical memory of social movement participants and has gained the trust of many communities.²⁶ Carlos Henríquez Consalvi (known by his wartime pseudonym, Santiago)—the founder of Radio Venceremos, the “official voice of the FMLN”—founded the museum in the early 1990s, basing the initial archive on his collection of wartime cassette tapes and photographs. Since 2013, I have collaborated with the MUPI on various projects, working as a popular educator and curator. This relationship facilitated my connection with peasant communities and a network of urban-based leftists, and allowed me to share my findings with the MUPI. All the sources cited in this dissertation and the interviews I conducted have been digitized and deposited in the MUPI archive.

I chose to interview women from the largest two guerrilla groups in the FMLN: the Fuerzas Populares de la Liberación (Popular Liberation Forces, FPL) and Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (Revolutionary People’s Army, ERP).²⁷ My existing contacts and the availability of sources partly informed this decision. Santiago and Lucio “Chiyo” Vásquez, two former ERP militants, personally introduced me to their comrades. In addition, the FPL most frequently recruited rural women who were already politically active and founded AMES, the

²⁶ Diana Carolina Sierra Becerra, “Historical Memory at El Salvador’s Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen,” *Latin American Perspectives* 43, no. 6 (2017): 8-26.

²⁷ Other studies should examine the gender dynamics within the other three guerrilla groups that made up the FMLN.

country's largest women's organization.²⁸ Many of FPL and AMES members had participated in struggles prior to the formation of the FMLN, providing an opportunity to study women's organizing across several decades.

Oral histories present distinct opportunities and challenges. As many have commented, oral histories are not just about what happened in the past but about the meanings that ordinary people assign to their extraordinary experiences.²⁹ It is an indispensable source because it offers insights into the subjectivities of women who are usually omitted from written documents.³⁰ In the process of listening to women like Domitila, I learned about the revolutionary aspirations of teenage girls and young women. I learned about the daily facets of insurgent life—those moments that transpired in between the production of leftist communiques or government memorandums. I caught glimpses of what it must have *felt like* for women to have lived through the hope of revolution and the terror of counter-revolution.³¹ However, like any other source,

²⁸ Viterna, *Women and War*, 252.

²⁹ Alessandro Portelli, "What makes oral history different?" in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 1998), 32-42.

³⁰ There is overlap between oral history and testimonial literature. However, the latter refers to a specific Latin American genre in which leftist organizers and sympathizers recounted their experiences in the mid to late twentieth-century for the sake of raising political consciousness and obtaining the support of an international solidarity movement. For the feminist uses of testimonial literature, see Isabel Dulfano, "Testimonio: present predicaments and future forays" in *Woman as Witness: Essays on Testimonial Literature by Latin American Women*, eds. Linda S. Maier and Isabel Dulfano (New York: Peter Lang Publications, 2004), 81-96. Linda S. Maier, "The Case for and Case History of Women's Testimonial Literature in Latin America" in *Woman as Witness: Essays on Testimonial Literature by Latin American Women*, eds. Linda S. Maier and Isabel Dulfano (New York: Peter Lang Publications, 2004), 1-17.

oral histories are not transparent windows into the past.³² The present-day moment shapes how participants remember (and forget) their past actions, feelings, and motivations, and existing narratives and ideologies mediate the telling of their story.³³ The task of the historian is to interrogate *why* people are committed to certain narratives over others. To address possible discrepancies between past events and current memories, I compared archival sources to memories about the past.³⁴ For example, I compared wartime organizational literature to how women remembered their political goals. In some cases, the same person I interviewed had also given a wartime interview. This comparison and cross-checking of sources allowed me to approximate the political motivations and consciousness that existed in the past. We owe Salvadoran women that much—to read their stories in good faith and take seriously their own telling.

The process of conducting fifty oral histories transformed this project and the questions I asked. While my own curiosity drove me to find and interview women about their own political motivations, their stories, in addition to the written sources I consulted, made me question how the social movement history of twentieth-century El Salvador is written. The stories of women

³¹ For a discussion of how revolutionaries experience time and “moments of intense hope and dread,” see Greg Grandin, “Living In Revolutionary Time: Coming to Terms with the Violence of Latin America’s Long Cold War,” in *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counter-insurgent Violence During Latin America’s Long Cold War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 1-61.

³² Steven C. High, *Beyond Testimony and Trauma: Oral History in the Aftermath of Mass Violence* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015).

³³ Daniel James, “Reading Doña María’s Story for Gender” in *Doña María’s Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), XX.

³⁴ Gould and Lauria Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, XIV.

like Domitila pushed me to reconsider the standard narrative that historians tell about Salvadoran revolutionary movements and the origins of feminism.

Contesting Histories of Salvadoran Feminism

A liberal feminist framework has shaped how the history of feminism has been written in both the United States and El Salvador. It organizes feminist movements into discrete “waves” that are often chronologically divorced from the struggles of working-class women.³⁵ As a result, working-class women who confronted racism, capitalism, and imperialism are excluded from the history of feminism, as anti-racist feminists have argued.³⁶ In the case of the United States, variants of the “second wave” model date the emergence of women-of-color feminism to the 1980s, *after* the women’s and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s.³⁷ In the case of El Salvador, scholars have adopted the wave model to date the rise of Salvadoran feminism to the 1990s, or “after the revolution”—the moment when many women abandoned the FMLN political party and formed self-identified feminist organizations.³⁸

³⁵ According to the historically inaccurate model, there are three waves: the “first wave” refers to movements that existed roughly from 1830 to 1920 and demanded legal recognitions, such as suffrage; “second wave” refers to the women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s that fought for entry into the workplace and access to birth control and abortion; and the “third wave” refers to feminist movements in the 1990s and 2000s that developed ideas about “intersectionality.”

³⁶ Becky Thompson, “Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism,” *Feminist Studies* 28 (2002): 336-360.

³⁷ Springer for example presents black feminism as arising after the women’s movement and only as a reaction to racism. Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 3.

The periodization of Salvadoran feminism is the product of the contentious debates that took place among feminists as the FMLN transitioned from a revolutionary movement into an electoral political party.³⁹ In the early 1990s, Salvadoran women articulated two distinct approaches for responding to sexism within the FMLN party and building a feminist movement. The first approach advocated *doble militancia* (double militancy), meaning that FMLN women should internally reform the party to support feminist causes *and* participate within the feminist movement.⁴⁰ The second approach advocated *autonomía* (autonomy), meaning that women should abandon the FMLN to form self-identified feminist organizations that are financially independent and set their own political agendas.⁴¹ The feminist organizations that advocated autonomy *created a new identity and history* independent of the FMLN, claiming that feminism

³⁸ Patricia Hipsher, “Right-and Left-Wing Women in Post-Revolutionary El Salvador: Feminist Autonomy and Cross-Political Alliance Building for Gender Equality” in *Radical Women in Latin America: Left and Right*, ed. Victoria González and Karen Kampwirth (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 133-164. Karen Kampwirth, “Feminists Break Away in El Salvador” in *Feminism and the Legacy of Revolution: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004), 75-111. Jocelyn Viterna, *Women and War Women in War: The Micro-Processes of Mobilization in El Salvador* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). Julie Shayne, “Feminism in Postwar El Salvador, 1992-1999” in *The Revolution Question: Feminisms in El Salvador, Chile, and Cuba* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 46-66.

³⁹ The case of El Salvador reflects larger trends in Latin American feminism. During the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, feminists witnessed the transition from dictatorial regimes to liberal capitalist democracies, and debated the organizational autonomy of women’s organizations vis-à-vis political parties and leftist organizations. Sonia Álvarez, “The (Trans)formation of Feminism(s) and Gender Politics in Democratizing Brazil” in *The Women’s Movement in Latin America: Participation and Democracy*, ed. Jane Jaquette (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 32.

⁴⁰ The Movimiento de Mujeres Mélida Anaya Montes (Mélida Anaya Montes Women’s Movement, MAM) had links to the FPL and supported this approach. The group formed in July 1992 and declared its independence from the FPL but many members continued to work within the party structure.

⁴¹ Hipsher, “Right-and Left-Wing Women in Post-Revolutionary El Salvador,” 145.

was born once they split from the FMLN. And thus, the narrative that dates the origins of feminism to the 1990s is largely a postwar creation.

The case of one feminist organization reveals how the split from the FMLN shaped how feminists interpreted women's wartime organizing. In 1990, *Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida*, *Las Dignas* (Women for Dignity and Life) became the first women's organization to split from a guerrilla organization, the *Resistencia Nacional* (National Resistance), one of the smaller groups within the FMLN.⁴² Other women's organizations split from the FMLN mainly after 1992.⁴³

Women left because party leaders attempted to control and/or ridiculed their feminist agendas. In 1993, a member of *Las Dignas* explained how RN leaders responded to the split:

In response to our claim that we had the right to choose the path of the organization by ourselves, the party responded by accusing us of being out of line, divisive, and radical... They made fun of us and of the name we had chosen, they made up stories to undermine our reputations, they closed off our access to the former war zones and to material and support, they prohibited the women of [National Resistance] from meeting with those of *Las Dignas*.⁴⁴

This experience drove *Las Dignas* to become one of the strongest proponents of feminist autonomy and shaped how it viewed women's wartime organizing.⁴⁵ For instance, *Las Dignas* published important women's testimonials about wartime sexism and trauma, and advanced

⁴² The group was *Resistencia Nacional*, (National Resistance).

⁴³ Kampwirth, *Feminism and the Legacy of Revolution*, 83.

⁴⁴ Kampwirth, *Feminism and the Legacy of Revolution*, 99

⁴⁵ Shayne, *The Revolution Question*, 53. The position of *Las Dignas* on the question of autonomy has not remained static. For a detailed discussion of *Las Dignas* and other groups who split from the FMLN, see Kampwirth, "Feminists Break Away in El Salvador," in *The Legacy of Revolution*.

feminist critiques of Marxist-Leninism.⁴⁶ In 1994, a member claimed that women's organizations within the insurgency had been manipulated by men: "All of the women's groups came into being for convenience sake because the men wanted them to, because they could get resources; they were not formed by women because of their needs."⁴⁷ Academic researchers from the United States have then used these statements as proof of the non-feminist nature of women's organizations in the 1980s.⁴⁸ While the 1994 quote rightly critiqued the sexism of men, it focused on the intentions of top male leaders and obscured the motivations of peasant women within their own organizations.

Critics in both El Salvador and the United States have argued that the revolutionary movements of the 1970s and 1980s failed women and obstructed feminism in El Salvador.⁴⁹ Categories such as "feminine" versus "feminist" demands are commonly used to judge whether or not an organization is sufficiently feminist, and to contrast the supposedly non-feminist,

⁴⁶ Norma Vásquez, Christina Ibáñez, Clara Murguialday, *Mujeres-montaña: vivencias de guerrilleras y colaboradoras del FMLN* (Horas y horas: Madrid, 1996). and *Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida, Montañas con recuerdo de mujer: una mirada feminista a la participación de las mujeres en los conflictos armados en Centroamérica y Chiapas*, ed. Clara Murguialday (San Salvador: Las Dignas, 1999).

⁴⁷ Shayne, *The Revolution Question*, 47.

⁴⁸ Shayne, *The Revolution Question*, 47. Viterna, *Women and War*, 148.

⁴⁹ Margaret Randall, *Gathering Rage: The Failure of Twentieth Century Revolutions to Develop a Feminist Agenda* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1992). Hipsher, "Right-and Left-Wing Women in Post-Revolutionary El Salvador." Viterna, *Women and War*. In 1991, Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, published "Marxism, Feminism, and the Struggle for Democracy in Latin America," *Gender and Society* 5 (1991): 291-310, which pointed to the feminist interventions of rank-and-file women within debates about Marxism. However, six years later in 1997, she published "Nationalism, Feminism, and Revolution in Central America," in *Feminist Nationalism*, ed. Lois. A. West (New York: Routledge, 1997), 201-219, which characterized the FMLN insurgency as a sexist and militaristic organization.

women's organizations of the 1970s and 1980s, to the self-identified feminist organizations of the 1990s.⁵⁰ For instance, demands for wage increases and child care are often categorized as feminine demands because they alleviated the role of women as caretakers, while access to abortion is framed as a feminist demand because it explicitly challenged sexism. These distinctions seemed to have influenced the scholarship of María Candelaria Navas, a Salvadoran feminist and former labor organizer who participated in AMES, an Association that advocated revolutionary feminism in the 1980s. Navas included a brief discussion about AMES in her book, *Sufragismo y Feminismo: visibilizando el protagonismo de la mujeres salvadoreñas* (2012), which provides a historical overview of women's organizing in El Salvador.⁵¹

Unfortunately, the inclusion of AMES did not alter her larger narrative about the origins of Salvadoran feminism. Navas argued that the 1980s witnessed an "incipient" women's movement

⁵⁰ Maxine Molyneux first coined the terms "practical" versus "gender strategic interests." The former are "usually a response to an immediate perceived need" and do not require women's emancipation, while the latter directly challenges gender hierarchies. Kampwirth also distinguishes between "feminine" and "feminist" organizing; the former includes demands such as communal kitchens, clinics, and day care centers that benefit women as workers, wives, and mothers, while the latter category explicitly challenge sexism. Hipsher argues that women's organizations in the 1970s did not make "gender-specific" demands due to their subordination to leftist organizations, while Stoltz Chinchilla claims that the FMLN and wartime conditions made it difficult for women to politicize "personal" problems. Stolz Chinchilla, "Nationalism, Feminism, and Revolution in Central America," 214. Hipsher, "Right and Left-wing women in Post-Revolutionary El Salvador." Maxine Molyneux, "Mobilization without Emancipation? Women's Interests, the State, and Revolution in Nicaragua," *Feminist Studies* 11 (1985): 232. Karen Kampwirth, *Women and Guerrilla Movements: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas, Cuba* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

⁵¹ Only two dissertations from 1987 have studied AMES but in brief detail. Francesca Gargallo di Castel Lentini Celentani, "Las transformaciones de conducta femenina bajo el impacto del conflicto socio-militar en El Salvador," PhD diss., Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1987. María Candelaria Navas Turcios, "Las Organizaciones de Mujeres en El Salvador: 1975-1985," Masters diss., Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1987.

that was not truly feminist. In contrast, she argued that feminist organizations made “gender-specific demands” in the postwar period.⁵² These demands included abortion and other matters related to reproductive health.

The postwar narrative that dates Salvadoran feminism to the 1990s remains appealing for several reasons. First, it contains an important political critique about the sexism and authoritarianism within male-dominated leftist groups and the subordination of feminist politics to party politics.⁵³ Certainly, the FMLN insurgency did have authoritarian *currents*, product of its hierarchical military structure that privileged the representation of men in the highest-decision making bodies and a narrow conception of class struggle that excluded women’s oppression. Second, the narrative highlights how class-based organizing and armed struggle did not *inevitably* liberate women, which speaks to profound frustrations in postwar El Salvador, including the failure of the peace accords to address structural and gender inequality, and the dire consequences of neoliberalism.⁵⁴ For instance, FMLN officials have often taken positions against

⁵² María Candelaria Navas, *Sufragismo y feminismo: visibilizando el protagonismo de las mujeres salvadoreñas* (San Salvador: Universidad de San Salvador, 2012), 79, 159

⁵³ Morena Herrera, “From Insurgency to Feminist Struggle: The Search for Social Justice, Democracy, and Equality between Women and Men” in *Women's activism in Latin America and the Caribbean: Engendering social justice, democratizing citizenship*, ed. Elizabeth Maier, Nathalie Lebon (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 299.

⁵⁴ While the FMLN command should be held responsible for not demanding gender equality within the accords, the political will of the FMLN was not the only deciding factor in producing the limited outcomes of the accords. It is important to remember that the FMLN did not win the war, but rather negotiated on unequal terms with the far-right ARENA party.

abortion in order to appear less radical and win votes.⁵⁵ The party won the presidential elections in both 2009 and 2014, breaking over eighty years of rightwing rule, and expanded social services to women. However, it has not broken with the neoliberal model or overturned laws that are among the strictest in the world in criminalizing miscarriages and abortions.⁵⁶ As a result, women continue to face dismal conditions and high rates of gender-based violence.⁵⁷ El Salvador also is the second most violent country in Central America.⁵⁸ Third, the narrative also reflects

⁵⁵ While the right has led the attacks on reproductive justice, the FMLN has been complacent. In 1997, the FMLN supported expanding abortion access to women whose pregnancy threatened their health or life, however the party lacked sufficient votes and the National Republican Alliance (ARENA) party successfully passed a total abortion ban. In April 1998, the ban became law. In 1999, ARENA advanced a constitutional amendment to declare that life begins at conception. The process went through three rounds of votes. The FMLN voted against the amendment in round one, lacked the votes in round two, and in the last round, FMLN officials—concerned about the upcoming election—told their members to “vote with their conscience” even if it undermined the party line. In 2009, FMLN President Funes declared his pro-life position after being attacked by ARENA. Jocelyn Viterna, “The Left and ‘Life’ in El Salvador: The Politics of Abortion in El Salvador,” *Politics and Gender* 8 (2012): 253. The Sandinistas, a former insurgency turned electoral party in Nicaragua, has been proactively anti-abortion to win votes, see Karen Kampwirth, “Abortion, Anti-Feminism and the Return of Daniel Ortega: In Nicaragua, Leftist Politics?” *Latin American Perspectives* vol. 35 no. 6 (2008): 122-136.

⁵⁶ Lorena Peña, former FMLN commander and current-day Vice President of the Legislative Assembly, representing the FMLN party, introduced legislation to decriminalize abortion in cases in which it represents a threat to the life of the woman or if the pregnancy is the product of sexual violence. The legislation is still pending a vote but the rightwing ARENA party hopes to block the measure and introduce legislation that incarcerates women for fifty years if they have an abortion. *La Prensa Gráfica*, “Legisladora promueve la despenalización del aborto terapéutico,” February 20, 2017.

⁵⁷ United Nations Children’s Fund. *Hidden in Plain Sight: A Statistical Analysis of Violence against Children* (New York: UNICEF, 2014), 35, 46, 140. United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Discriminatory Laws and Practices and Acts of Violence against Individuals Based on Their Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity* (New York: UN General Assembly), 10.

⁵⁸ Although violence decreased from 2011-2013, in 2014, El Salvador had 61 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, making it the most violent country in the region. “Programa Estado de la Nación. “Quinto

changes in grassroots organizing. The 1990s witnessed a transition from a revolutionary movement to the widespread expansion of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the professionalization of social movements.⁵⁹ Many of these organizations focus on policy change at best and are not invested in building social movements to confront structural inequities, let alone capitalism.⁶⁰ Thus, some NGOs may distance themselves (at least in their public discourse) from the revolutionary history of the 1970s and 1980s to secure donor funds.⁶¹ Overall, there are multiple factors that come together to produce a narrative (and various strains) that discount women's organizing prior to the 1990s as non-feminist.

The dominant narrative contains several problematic assumptions. While it rightly critiques the sexism of the top leadership, it ignores the interventions of rank-and-file women within debates about socialism, thus divorcing their revolutionary organizing from the history of Salvadoran feminism. The narrative also contains implicit binaries such as feminism versus

Informe Estado de la Región en Desarrollo Humano Sostenible,” (San José: Programa Estado de la Nación, 2016), 250. Honduras, the most violent country in the region, had 66 homicides that year.

⁵⁹ For the broader trends of professionalization of social movements in Latin America, see, Sonia Álvarez, “‘Advocating Feminism’: The Latin American feminist NGO ‘boom’.” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 1 2(1999): 181–209; “Beyond NGO-ization: Reflections from Latin America.” *Development* 52 2 (2009): 175–184.

⁶⁰ Lisa Markowitz and Karen W. Tice. “Paradoxes of Professionalization: Parallel Dilemmas in Women’s Organizations in the Americas,” *Gender and Society* 16 6 (2002): 949. William I. Robinson, *Transnational Conflicts: Central America, Social Change, and Globalization* (New York: Verso, 2003), 227-228, 232. Not all NGOs are treated equally. After the accords, NGOs associated with the FMLN received \$300,000 out of \$50 million available to NGOs (231).

⁶¹ For a discussion as to how Las Dignas has negotiated its status as an NGO, see Markowitz, Tice, “Paradoxes of Professionalization,” 952-953.

armed struggle and feminism versus socialism, which are products of Cold War and neoliberal frameworks.⁶² Moralistic arguments about armed struggle ignore how leftist women at the time understood the relationship between armed struggle and women's liberation.⁶³ Furthermore, the narrative privileges self-identification as a feminist to evaluate the feminist politics of an organization or movement. This assumption ignores the anti-sexist practices and consciousness that may have existed within past social movements, and the different vocabularies used to describe gender inequality.⁶⁴ In other words, we cannot assume that feminism looks the same in all times and places.

Toward an Alternative History

To write an alternative history of Salvadoran feminism, I draw from the insights of women-of-color feminism in the United States, socialist feminism in Latin America, the United

⁶² Nancy Fraser, "How feminism became capitalism's handmaiden – and how to reclaim it," *The Nation*, October 14, 2013. Liberal feminists have a Cold War definition of democracy and freedom, for a discussion of these latter concepts see, Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin American in the Cold War* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), xii, xiii.

⁶³ Jocelyn Viterna, "Radical or Righteous? Using Gender to Shape Public Perceptions of Political Violence" in *Dynamics of Political Violence: A Process-Oriented Perspective on Radicalization and the Escalation of Political Conflict*, ed. Lorenzo Bosi, Charles Demetriou, and Stefan Malthaner (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 189-215.

⁶⁴ For example, in the 1970s and 1980s, Salvadoran women's organizations used terms and phrases such as *el derecho a la participación política* (the right to political participation), *los derechos de la mujer* (the rights of women), *feminism revolucionario* (revolutionary feminism), and *el papel de la mujer en la revolución* (the role of women in the revolution) to tackle questions about the rights of women. Blackwell makes a similar point as to how "not all feminisms are practiced within women's organizations or even by those who label themselves feminist," see Blackwell, *Chicana Power!*, 207.

States and Europe, and transnational feminism.⁶⁵ Movements rooted within those feminist traditions contributed to a broad understanding of revolution that did not separate or subordinate the liberation of women to the struggle against capitalism. Some of these movements used the language of double or triple oppression to describe how class, race, and sex (the common term at the time) shaped the oppression of women, while others developed an analysis about the relationship or intersections between oppressive systems: capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy, and white supremacy.⁶⁶ Lesbians and other people with subversive genders and sexualities also expanded upon these frameworks to tackle the relationship of those systems to sexual oppression.⁶⁷ Within and across these movements, different analyses existed regarding the

⁶⁵ To be clear, I do not use the term “women of color feminism” to describe women of color who practice feminism. Rather, I refer to it as a political ideology or stance. One does not have to be a woman of color to practice women-of-color feminism. As a term, it is limited in describing all its complexity. Nonetheless, I find the term useful because it honors the contributions of working-class women of color to feminist praxis.

⁶⁶ Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table, 1983). hooks, *Feminist Theory*. Jennifer Nelson, ““Abortions under Community Control’: Feminism, Nationalism, and the Politics of Reproduction among New York City’s Young Lords,” *Journal of Women’s History* 12 (2001): 157-180. Blackwell, *Chicana Power!* Selma James, *Sex, Race, and Class*. Bristol: Falling Wall Press and Race Today Publications, 1975). Audre Lorde “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg: Crossing Press, 1984), 115-123. Maylei Blackwell, “Triple Jeopardy: The Third World Women’s Alliance and the Transnational Roots of Women-of-Color Feminism” in *Provocations: A Transnational Reader in the History of Feminist Thought*, ed. Susan Bordo (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 281-291. Klaus Viehmann, “Three into One: The Triple Oppression of Racism, Sexism, and Class.” 1993.

⁶⁷ See John D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity” and Adrienne Reich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” in *Power of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 100-116, 177-205. C.B. Darling, J. Rogue, Deric Shannon, and Abbey Volcano, eds. *Queering Anarchism: Addressing and Undressing*

origins of women's oppression and the exact nature and relationship between capitalism and patriarchy, and different vocabularies and strategies were deployed. But nonetheless, participants challenged (to varying degrees) the orthodoxies of leftist movements and the racist, capitalist, and heterosexist politics of bourgeois and liberal feminism.⁶⁸

The feminist movements that have been omitted from hegemonic narratives have important lessons for the Salvadoran context. Feminism has different genealogies that reflect the multiple sites where it has emerged.⁶⁹ In the United States, it is commonly known that feminism arose among middle-class white women. It is less known that feminism also arose within radical movements, from immigrant-led anarchist labor movements at the turn-of-the-century to Chicana and Puerto Rican national liberationist struggles in the 1960s and 1970s.⁷⁰ These movements theorized and organized to confront intersecting systems of oppression *prior* to the 1980s, the so-called origins of women-of-color feminism.⁷¹ Classical texts such as *This Bridge Called My*

Desire and Power (Oakland: AK Press, 2012). Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" in *Sister Outsider*, 54-59. Emily Hobson, *Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).

⁶⁸ Bourgeois feminists have not tackled class-based oppression or questioned the role of capitalism in oppressing working class women. Similarly, liberal feminists have sought to expand the power of mainly wealthy, white women within ruling class institutions, have not bridged reforms to a wider transformation of society, and have failed to incorporate an analysis of white supremacy and capitalism within their conception of women's oppression.

⁶⁹ Blackwell, *Chicana Power!*, 11.

⁷⁰ Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution*. Blackwell, *Chicana Power!* Nelson, "Abortion Under Community Control."

Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color are not the origins of women-of-color feminism, but rather one of many culminations. Women-of-color feminism arose not only in response to the sexist, racist, and bourgeois politics within the women's movement, but also in *dialogue with* anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist movements in the United States and across the globe.⁷² These insights have informed my interest to trace the historical roots of Salvadoran feminism prior to the 1990s and the multiple sites in which it has emerged, and the links of women's organizations to movements beyond their own national borders.

Mid-twentieth century feminism in Latin American arose from anti-dictatorial and/or anti-capitalist struggles. Cornelia Butler Flora and Norma Stoltz-Chinchilla have traced the rise of socialist-feminism in the region and its interventions in leftist debates about women and class struggle.⁷³ Sonia Álvarez and Marcela Rios Tobar specifically documented the broad understanding of revolution among black and socialist-feminists in Brazil and Chile during the

⁷¹ Another problematic narrative dates the origins of "intersectional feminism" to the 1990s when Kimberly Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" in her famous article, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43 (1993): 1241-1299. Many liberal feminists have stripped the concept of its radical content by delinking identities from an analysis of oppressive systems, including capitalism. This distorted interpretation is conducive to neoliberalism and imperialist feminism. Daniel Denvir, "Hillary Clinton's cynical race appeals: The Revenge of Neoliberal Identity Politics," *Salon*, February 19, 2016.

⁷² Laura Briggs, Gladys McCormick, and J.T. Way. "Transnationalism: A Category of Analysis." *American Quarterly* 60 (2008): 631.

⁷³ Cornelia Butler Flora, "Socialist Feminism in Latin America," *Journal of Women, Politics, & Policy* 4 (1984): 69-93. Stoltz Chinchilla, "Marxism, Feminism, and the Struggle for Democracy in Latin America."

1960s and 1970s.⁷⁴ These movements developed an analysis that connected U.S. imperialism and state violence to the supposedly private and apolitical violence against Latin American women. I draw from these insights to situate El Salvador within these region-wide debates about revolution in an attempt to integrate Central America within the broader trends of Latin American feminism.

Transnational feminism as a framework allows us to understand the connection of social movements across borders. It challenges us to write feminist histories that are not fixated on national boundaries. Álvarez and Laura Briggs have identified the transnational networks that connected different feminist movements and facilitated the emergence of new forms of feminist praxis.⁷⁵ This is also true for El Salvador. Like the Central American revolutionary and solidarity movements, Salvadoran feminism in the 1980s was also a transnational phenomenon, as I will argue.

To write an alternative history, I consider how rank-and-file leftist women *prior* to the 1990s contested understandings of gender, feminism, and socialism. This requires a recognition of the sexist currents within leftist movements *and* the alternative visions of revolution that

⁷⁴ Álvarez, “The (Trans)formation of Feminism(s) and Gender Politics in Democratizing Brazil.” Marcela Rios Tobar, “‘Feminism is Socialism, Liberty, and Much More:’ Second-Wave Chilean Feminism and its Contentious Relationship with Socialism,” *Journal of Women’s History* 15 (2003): 129-134.

⁷⁵ Sonia E. Alvarez, Elisabeth Jay Friedman, Ericka Beckman, Maylei Blackwell, Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, Nathalie Lebon, Marysa Navarro, and Marcela Rios Tobar, “Encountering Latin American and Caribbean Feminisms”. *Signs*. 28 2 (2003): 537-579. Briggs and McCormick, “Transnationalism: A Category of Analysis,” 631.

women developed.⁷⁶ In line with dialectical approaches to revolution, I distinguish between “revolution from above” (that is, the ideas and practices promoted by government leaders and political parties) and “revolution from below” (those advanced by rank-and-file organizers and grassroots organizations). In many situations, grassroots actors have pushed the limits of the revolutionary horizon, forcing concessions from leaders within and outside their movements.⁷⁷ I

⁷⁶ Feminist academics have usually emphasized the continuation or reconfiguration of sexism within leftist movements, arguing that class struggle does not *inevitably* empower women, see Molyneux, “Mobilization without Emancipation?” Sandra McGee Deutsch, “Gender and Sociopolitical Change in 20th Century Latin America,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 71 (1991): 259-306. Many researchers have critiqued narrow definitions of class that exclude an analysis of gender in studies of social movements and labor, see Florencia E. Mallon, “Patriarchy in the Transition to Capitalism: Central Peru, 1830-1950,” *Feminist Studies* 13 (1987): 379-407. John D. French and Daniel James, *The gendered worlds of Latin American Women Workers: From Household and Factory to the Union Hall and Ballot Box* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997). Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, *Dulcinea in the Factory: Myths, Morals, Men, and Women in Colombia’s Industrial Experiment, 1905-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

⁷⁷ Peter Winn, *Weavers of Revolution: The Yarur Workers and Chile’s Road to Socialism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1986). Jeffrey Gould, *To Lead as Equals: Rural Protest and Political Consciousness in Chinandega, Nicaragua, 1912-1979* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990). Heidi Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Labor in the Chilean Agrarian Reform, 1950-1973* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). George Ciccariello-Maher, *We Created Chávez: A People’s History of the Venezuelan Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013). Sujatha Fernandes, “Barrio Women and Popular Politics in Chávez’s Venezuela,” *Latin American Politics & Society* 49 (2007): 97–127. My approach to the participation of grassroots actors in national struggles has also been influenced by the historiography on Latin American independence movements and racial democracy. Since the 1990s, scholars have emphasized how slaves used wartime instability to demand abolition and independence, despite the more conservative goals of elites. Scholarship on race since the 2000s has documented the widespread appeal of racial democracy discourses among antiracists. These two broader frameworks are relevant to twentieth-century El Salvador because they recognize that subalterns can deploy dominant discourses to different ends and that grassroots actors can push movement leaders in more radical directions. Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1999). Nancy Appelbaum, “Post-Revisionist Scholarship on Race,” *Latin American Research Review* 40: 206-217. Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). Paulina L. Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion: Black Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011). For similar arguments about the Mexican revolution, see

center rank-and-file women who intervened in debates within the revolutionary left, thus filling an important gap in the literature, which has focused primarily on the political visions of the top male leadership. In doing so, I contribute to two important fields: studies of the Salvadoran revolution and civil war, and feminist studies of working class women. The first has critiqued dominant characterizations of El Salvador's revolutionary movements as monolithic, static, and dominated by urban-based male intellectuals.⁷⁸ The second has demonstrated the role of revolutionary women in critiquing and expanding upon leftist theories and practices to incorporate feminist politics, and the diverse genealogies and sites in which feminism has emerged.⁷⁹

Organization and Scope

Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent, *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994).

⁷⁸ Jeffrey L. Gould and Aldo Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness: Revolution, Repression, and Memory in El Salvador, 1920-1932* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). Joaquín Chávez, "The Pedagogy of Revolution: Popular Intellectuals and the Origins of the Salvadoran Insurgency, 1960-1980," (Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 2010). Jenny Pearce, *Promised Land: Peasant Rebellion in Chalatenango, El Salvador* (London: Latin America Bureau, 1986). Kevin Young, "Revolutionary Coalition Building in El Salvador" (paper presented at the Latin American Studies Association, New York, New York, May 27-30, 2016).

⁷⁹ Stoltz Chinchilla, "Marxism, Feminism, and the Struggle for Democracy in Latin America," 302. Jane S. Jaquette, *The Women's Movement in Latin America: Participation and Democracy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994). Rosario Montoya, *Gendered Scenarios of Revolution: Making New Men and New Women in Nicaragua, 1975-2000* (Tucson: Arizona University Press, 2012). Marcela Rios Tobar. "'Feminism is Socialism, Liberty, and Much More:': Second-Wave Chilean Feminism and its Contentious Relationship with Socialism," *Journal of Women's History*. 15 3 (2003): 129-134. Martha A. Ackelsberg, *Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women* (Oakland: AK Press, 2005). Fernandes, "Barrio Women and Popular Politics in Chávez's Venezuela." Michelle Chase, *Revolution within the Revolution: Women and Gender Politics in Cuba, 1952-1962* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

To tell this story, I consulted oral histories and documents from archives in El Salvador and the United States. For each chapter, I highlighted the stories of two to five women to recreate how they experienced key historical moments and to reveal dynamics that archival documents often cannot. Unfortunately, I had to place other people and stories in the background. While I tried not to overwhelm the reader with individual and organizational names, I found it ethically compelling to always list the names of people who had been murdered by state forces and death squads. We must say their names—say her name.⁸⁰

Chapter one traces the militant organizing that took place in the two decades prior to the formation of the peasant insurgency in October 1980. I follow the lives of four peasant and working class women who participated in the Asociación Nacional de Educadores de El Salvador (National Association of Salvadoran Educators (ANDES 21 de Junio) and Unión de Trabajadores del Campo (Union of Farmworkers, UTC). I draw from their memories to describe the rise of the labor movement and the left's radicalization prior to the outbreak of the civil war (1980-1992). As they confronted bosses, landowners, and military officials, women also confronted fathers and husbands who opposed their political participation. Far from being a common sense notion, the organizing process generated a consciousness about the right of women to participate in the class struggle. This chapter also sheds new light on the gendered meaning of dignity for teachers. During the 68' strike, ANDES publicly denounced the transfer

⁸⁰ I draw inspiration from the Black Lives Matter movement, particularly the interventions of black feminists and LGBT people in foregrounding how the state terrorizes black women and their insistence to say the names of those who have been murdered.

of teachers. Teachers recalled how supervisors demanded sexual favors in exchange for employment and transferred women to different schools as a form of retaliation. Dignity not only referred to adequate compensation in the form of just wages and benefits, but it also meant a workplace free of what we now call sexual harassment.

Chapters two and three follow the teachers and peasants who joined the insurgency and examine how women intervened to shape the daily practices of armed struggle and the meaning of liberation in the 1980s. Chapter two specifically analyzes how gender relations shaped daily life within the FPL and ERP guerrilla camps, the two largest groups within the FMLN. I compare FMLN discourses of gender equality to the daily gender conflicts within the FMLN ranks. Women recounted their efforts to collectivize food production, gain access to sanitary napkins, and prevent men from being unfaithful or abandoning their pregnant partners. These conflicts reflected competing conceptions of the role of women within the revolutionary struggle, while the efforts of women often challenged sexist definitions of who constituted a combatant.

Chapter three documents how women developed a new feminist praxis within a context of armed struggle. The Asociación de Mujeres de El Salvador (Association of Salvadoran Women, AMES), an organization composed of combatants, peasants, and FPL militants in exile, advocated “revolutionary feminism,” meaning the overthrow of both capitalism *and* patriarchy. I consult organizational documents, wartime interviews, and oral histories to illustrate how AMES reinterpreted Marxism to confront the realities of women and linked the exigencies of wartime survival to the long-term liberation of women. The transnational emergence of revolutionary

feminism took place within guerrilla territories in El Salvador, Salvadoran refugee camps in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, and solidarity networks in Mexico, Nicaragua, and the United States.

Chapter four examines how ex-combatants and former AMES organizers within the Comité de la Memoria Sobreviviente de Arcatao, Chalatenango (Living Memory Committee of Arcatao, Chalatenango) remember their insurgent past in a context of postwar inequality, disillusionment, and impunity for perpetrators who committed human rights abuses before and during the war. As a MUPI educator, I co-facilitated two workshops to trigger discussions in which committeewomen reflected on the gains and limitations of their movements and identified change over time. They insisted upon remembering how their revolutionary organizing created more equitable gender relations and resisted state violence against women. They critiqued male leftists who ignored the contributions of women. Nonetheless, they face unresolved tensions in discussions of wartime sexism and sexual abuse within the FMLN, particularly how to raise their critiques in a way that did not allow the far-right to absolve their role as perpetrators of state violence and delegitimize leftist movements.

The conclusion highlights the innovative strategies of Salvadoran social movements and identifies the factors that contributed to the explicit articulation of revolutionary feminism within the FMLN. In many ways, the revolutionary movements of the 1970s and 1980s were much more vibrant and dynamic than have been described.

Chapter 1. Fighting to Participate: Women Wage the Class Struggle, 1965-1980

This chapter narrates the important organizing that took place in the two decades before the formation of the peasant insurgency in 1980. I follow the lives of four working class and peasant women who participated in militant teacher and peasant organizations in the 1960s and 1970s. Cleotilde López (1929-) and María Candelaria Navas (1943-) participated in ANDES 21 de Junio in San Salvador, while Domitila Ayala Mejía (1957-) and Rosa Rivera (1957-) participated in UTC in Chalatenango department.¹ I draw from their memories to describe the rise of labor organizations, the influences of liberation theology and Marxism, the gendered experiences of peasant and working class women within class-based organizations, and the radicalization of the left. As girls or young women, these organizers witnessed how the state went from a tepid acceptance of their newly founded organizations in the mid-1960s to vicious state repression in the early 1970s. During this latter period, state violence and electoral fraud pushed the Left as a whole to seriously consider the strategy of armed struggle. In the early and mid-1970s, María Candelaria and Domitila joined the FPL, a clandestine guerrilla group that recruited organizers from the labor movement, and advocated for the building of socialism via mass organizing and armed struggle. In the late 1970s, María Candelaria joined other FPL exiles

¹ While this chapter prioritizes the stories of four women, I also incorporate the oral histories of eight other women. María Delia Cornejo, María Elma Landaverde Rivera, and Azucena Quinteros organized with the Federación de Campesinos Cristianos de El Salvador (Christian Federation of Salvadoran Farmworkers, FECCAS) in the municipality of Aguilares in the San Salvador department, while Rosa Rivera, María Helia Rivera, María Ofelia Navarrete, and Domitila Ayala, organized with the UTC in the Chalatenango department. Cleotilde López, Estela Cruz López, María Candelaria Navas, and Rosa Miriam Mena de Rodríguez, participated in ANDES.

in Mexico City while Domitila joined popular peasant militias to defend communities against state-led massacres; from these militias emerged the insurgency.² Eight months after the assassination of the progressive Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero in 1980, five peasant guerrilla groups formed a single coalition, the FMLN.

I consult government documents, organizational literature, and oral histories to highlight the gendered nature of working conditions and political participation, challenging histories of the Salvadoran labor movement that gender its protagonists as male. Most of my written sources are from the U.S. embassy in San Salvador, documents produced between 1967 and 1979.³ I read against the grain to identify the participation of women and critique how state officials and capitalist men such as U.S. embassy officials, corporate lawyers, and Salvadoran military officers wrote about the activities of revolutionary women.⁴ I also use oral histories to reveal what documents cannot. For instance, in their interviews, teachers recalled how supervisors demanded sexual favors in exchange for employment and transferred women to different schools if they did not cooperate. As I will demonstrate, the memories of teachers radically alter how we understand the 1968 strike that challenged the abuses of supervisors and the Association's slogan, *por la dignificación del maestro* (for the dignity of teachers).

The life stories of peasant women reveal how at almost every step of the process, women confronted specific obstacles to their political participation. As women challenged the abuses of their employers, they also grappled with their own ideas about the proper roles of women,

² See the interview with FPL commander Facundo Guardado in Marta Harnecker, *Con la mirada en alto: historia de las Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farabundo Martí a través de entrevistas con sus dirigentes* (Donostia: Tercera Prensa, 1991), 150.

³ State department documents from the 1980s are still classified.

⁴ For a discussion of this approach, see Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford, 1983), 16-17.

confronted the opposition of family members, particularly husbands and fathers, and drew support from their comrades. Male leftists were not impervious to sexism, but leftist organizing created a space for women to assume leadership positions and develop new forms of consciousness. The fifteen-year organizing process before the formation of the FMLN in 1980 generated a class consciousness among working class women about their right to participate in the class struggle. In their oral histories, women narrate how their ability to perform “men’s tasks”—such as public speaking, formulating strategy, leading campaigns, and rescuing comrades—profoundly changed how women saw themselves and set limits to men’s power over women. Many women (and even some men) came to fundamentally reject altogether the sexist idea that women as whole were ill-suited for certain tasks or were naturally inferior to men. In the words of Domitila Ayala, she came to reject the idea that men existed “to submit women to slavery. I liberated myself because I understood that I was the one that could determine how and when and what I wanted to do. And that no one could impose [their will] on me.”⁵ As I demonstrate in later chapters, this work before the formation of the FMLN created fertile soil for new ideas and practices to emerge in the 1980s about the liberation of women and its relationship to socialism.

⁵ Domitila Ayala, interviewed by Rebecka Biró and Victoria Montero, July 2013, unpublished transcript, pg. 50.



Figure 2. Caption reads: “Teachers interested in the social protection law,” *Diario de Hoy*, September 19, 1964, courtesy of the MUPI.

Life Under Military Rule, 1929 – 1965

Cleotilde López was born in 1929 into an extremely unequal society. For her entire life until 2009, she lived under military or conservative regimes that violently defended the interests of the landed-oligarchy and opposed labor organizing. When Cleotilde was just an infant, an indigenous and peasant insurrection challenged the fundamental pillars of the coffee export economy. The brutal crushing of the insurrection severely weakened the labor movement for several decades and allowed elites and the military to produce a hegemonic narrative about the threats of communism. This context set the stage for the subordinate relationship of teachers and peasants to military regimes. Cleotilde, who became a teacher in the late 1960s, helped to form a movement that began to challenge teachers’ subordinate status. Their activism opened

opportunities for other groups to engage in labor organizing in the early 1970s and instilled fears among military officials about communist instigators.

One year after Cleotilde was born, one woman defied patriarchal laws to defend women's political participation. Prudencia Ayala, a self-described indigenous woman and single mother, ran for the presidency during a time in which women could not vote or hold public office. Ayala was the first woman to run for the presidency in Latin America. She supported the rights of women, called for the legalization of unions, demanded an honorable public administration, restrictions on the distribution and consumption of liquor, freedom of religion, and legal recognition for illegitimate children.⁶ She used her newspaper *Rendición Femenina* to demand these rights. National media ridiculed Ayala and described her as a lunatic, revealing a conservative patriarchal aversion to the political participation of women.

Severe class inequalities also shaped Salvadoran society. In the early twentieth century, coffee began to dominate the Salvadoran economy, expanding social and class inequalities. In the mid-1920s, El Salvador doubled its coffee exports.⁷ The state actively supported the export economy, creating access to land and cheap labor and building the necessary infrastructure. For instance, beginning in the nineteenth-century, it privatized indigenous and communal lands and implemented vagrancy laws, and provided subsidies for the construction of roads, ports, and railways in the early twentieth-century.⁸ The coffee economy generated two new classes: peasant laborers who lacked sufficient land and worked on plantations as seasonal laborers; and *colonos*, resident laborers who received plots of lands from landowners in return for labor and a share of

⁶ "Prudencia Ayala," Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen, accessed December 10, 2016, <http://museo.com.sv/2010/11/biografia-prudencia-ayala-la-hija-de-la-centella/>

⁷ Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 6.

⁸ Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 34.

their crops.⁹ In western El Salvador, 100,000 workers labored on sugar and coffee plantations.¹⁰ These class inequalities only became worse when the economy plummeted in 1927 after a global market crash. In 1929, with the decline of coffee prices, landowners slashed wages to thirty cents a day, and in 1931, to fifteen to twenty five cents per day.¹¹ Resident laborers endured an increase in workload and rent prices. Landowners even began charging for access to water and increased the prices of goods in their plantation stores, and routinely paid workers in scrip, a fake currency only accepted in their stores.¹² In 1930, the elite that profited from these industries represented approximately 1,000 families in a country of 300,000 families.¹³

An intra-ethnic insurrection sought to redistribute land and dismantle the class and racial inequalities that the coffee economy had produced and exacerbated. On January 22, 1932, thousands of indigenous and nonindigenous peasants joined leaders such as Julia Mojica (“Red Julia”) to occupy villages and military barracks in western El Salvador. Mojica, a nonindigenous woman, led 1,500 to 2,000 insurgents to attack government troops, while indigenous leaders such as José Feliciano Ama and Francisco Sánchez articulated their own visions of Marxism.¹⁴ Rural organizers, many whom were Communist Party members, pushed the party to support the insurrection, despite the reservations of many urban communists. The insurrection was the largest in Latin America during the Great Depression. In response, President General

⁹ Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 3.

¹⁰ Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 18. Sugar and cotton production also dramatically increased during this period, and sugar exports became the second-most important commercial product; Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 8.

¹¹ Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 18.

¹² Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 21.

¹³ Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 8.

¹⁴ Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 161, 176, 178–180.

Maximiliano Hernández Martínez and the National Guard massacred 10,000–30,000 people in a country with a total population of 1.5 million; the exact figure is debated because of the scarcity of sources, the absence of a body count, and a long-standing leftist discourse that claims there were 30,000 victims.¹⁵ One of the victims was Farabundo Martí, an urban nonindigenous communist who later inspired the naming of the FMLN. Following the massacre, Martínez created rural paramilitaries to eliminate peasant organizers and granted his party full dictatorial control until his overthrow in 1944.¹⁶ The defeat of the insurrection severely undermined the strength of labor movements, further entrenched wealth and power in the hands of oligarchic elites, and produced a hegemonic narrative that erased indigenous agency and absolved the military of its role within the massacre. According to the military narrative, nonindigenous communists tricked innocent Indians and peasants to revolt, leading them to their deaths.¹⁷

In the absence of a strong labor movement in the 1950s, military regimes did not see teachers as a threat to their power, although teachers constituted the largest sector of civil servants in the country.¹⁸ In other words, the national government, specifically the Ministry of Education was the sole of employer of teachers, and ruling party leaders, particularly military commanders and politicians, acted as employers on the local level. The military government of Oscar Osorio (1950-1956), which gave government positions to prominent landowners, even

¹⁵ Thomas P. Anderson, *Matanza: El Salvador's Communist Revolt of 1932* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971). From an analysis of available documents, including leftist organizational and government correspondence, historians argue that the number is probably closer to 10,000, see Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness*, 233-234.

¹⁶ Martínez belonged to the Partido Pro-Patria (Party of the Fatherland). For a discussion of the relationship between landowners and Martínez, see Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds of El Salvador*, 43.

¹⁷ See Gould's chapter, "They Killed the Just for the Sinners" in *To Rise in Darkness*.

¹⁸ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 80.

described teachers as allies of the military.¹⁹ In 1954, teachers also participated in a ceremony to honor the military.²⁰ One ANDES member recalled the difficulty of organizing teachers during this period because teachers lacked the right to unionize and many feared losing their jobs.²¹ Teachers mainly represented the lower middle class or working class.²² In the 1960s, teachers earned 200 colones (\$80 USD) a month and received a raise of 10 colones (\$4 USD) every five years.²³ Teachers had to work for at least thirty years to finally earn 270 colones (\$108 USD) a month.²⁴

Although most teachers did not challenge the ruling regime, the future leaders of ANDES engaged in opposition activities from 1958 to 1960 in order to support independent labor organizations. Colonel José María Lemus (1956-1960) faced opposition in October 1958 from a group led by Mélida Anaya Montes, Carmen Hill de Minero, José Mario López, and Arnoldo Vaquerano who opposed government efforts to repress autonomous labor organizations and impose pro-government unions. All but Carmen would become an ANDES general secretary. The group did not articulate specific demands on behalf of teachers and claimed no ideological

¹⁹ In March 1944, military officers overthrow Martínez and promised free and fair elections. However, Martínez's Chief of Police, Osmín Aguirre y Salinas led a coup against the presidential candidate, Dr. Arturo Romero, a civilian reformer. Eventually, Martínez's former minister of government, General Salvador Castaneda Castro became president. In 1948, a military junta that supported the Revolutionary Party of Democratic Unification (PRUD) overthrew Castro and imposed their candidate, Osario. Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 48.

²⁰ Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 90.

²¹ Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 91.

²² Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 144.

²³ Salvador Sánchez Cerén, interview by Joaquín Chávez, April 2007. Cited in Chávez, "Popular Intellectuals," 191.

²⁴ Mélida Anaya Montes, *La segunda gran batalla de ANDES* (San Salvador: Editorial Universitaria, 1972), 9.

perspective but it was an important experience to “develop and independent consciousness and mobilize against their employers, the national government.”²⁵ In 1961, a military junta sent these leaders into exile because of their political opposition to the regime. In 1962, President Colonel Julio Rivera (1962-1967) allowed the exiled teachers to return. The teachers soon founded two organizations, one for women and the other for men.²⁶ In response, the government founded its own teachers group that planned vacations for teachers and invited teachers to join by invitation only, an indication of its apolitical and elitist nature.²⁷ In her early 30s, Cleotilde participated in the group and recalled how the organization “did not satisfy me” because it did not address the needs of teachers as workers.²⁸

The ruling military party of the 1960s, the Partido de Conciliación Nacional (Party of National Conciliation, PCN), continued to repress the teachers who had organized during the previous decade.²⁹ PCN leaders created a patron-client relationship with teachers, and supervisors often had direct ties to the PCN and used their position for self-gain. Cleotilde recalled that her mother, also a teacher, fought with supervisors at the same school where they worked: “My mother was one of the people who fought with him [the supervisor.] Let’s say they wanted to force her to do something, for example attend a government demonstration. She was

²⁵ The group was called the Frente de Maestros Revolucionarios (Teacher’s Revolutionary Front, FMR). Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 90.

²⁶ Montes founded the women’s organization, the Association of Secondary School Teachers (APNES), while Mario López founded the men’s organization, Salvadoran Teachers’ Union (UMS).

²⁷ The group was called Solidaridad de Maestras (Teachers’ Solidarity).

²⁸ Cleotilde López, interviewed by author, Soyapango, February 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

²⁹ Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 93.

always rebellious.”³⁰ The actions of her mother are notable given that teachers had historically attended pro-government rallies, as previously described. According to Cleotilde, supervisors not only enforced allegiances to the government, but also created a hostile workplace. Supervisors routinely transferred teachers they did not like and observed classes to intimidate teachers and “to break the spirit of the teacher, to show that they were superior.”³¹

Male supervisors, who were appointed by the ruling party, frequently intimidated teachers. A former male teacher remembered how local military commanders influenced decisions over teacher employment. On one occasion, a local commander in Cojutepeque falsely accused a woman teacher at an all-girls school of being a “prostitute” to justify her firing.³² It remains unclear if she was accused of being a sex worker or sexually promiscuous/immoral. In another case, another male teacher recalled the corruption and arrogance of education administrators who often hired women teachers based solely on their looks.³³ Cleotilde also recalled the sexual abuses of supervisors: “if some male teacher liked a female teacher, [and if] the supervisor liked her [too], then that’s when the illegal transfers came in—they were transferred...it didn’t matter who went to complain because if the boyfriend complained, he would also be punished.”³⁴ Cleotilde continued: “the supervisor was one of those people who

³⁰ Cleotilde López, interviewed by author, Soyapango, February 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “Mi mama era una de las que se peleaba con el [supervisor]. Porque eran, digamos, querían obligarla a hacer algo, por ejemplo a asistir una manifestación del gobierno. Entonces como, ella siempre fue rebelde.”

³¹ Cleotilde López, interviewed by author, Soyapango, February 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “Que directamente si él llegaba a observar la clase, que se acostumbraba en aquel época, que llegaban a ver la clase, que por lo general, no lo hacían en una forma sana, era ver como desglosaban el espíritu, del compañero o de la compañera, a demostrar que ellos eran superiores.”

³² Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 93.

³³ Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 93.

could take advantage of the compañeras...he took advantage—he didn't rape her but he did...they got married.”³⁵ Cleotilde did not state what exactly happened but her trailing off sentence indicated some form of sexual assault, and that this assaulted woman later married her abuser. The assailants may have married his victim to exonerate himself of social or legal wrongdoing.³⁶ Estela Cruz López, a colleague of Cleotilde had similar memories: “during that time the women teachers felt offended because the supervisors, in exchange for work, they would ask for something right...some asked for money for example and others well, to have relations with them.”³⁷ Two other ANDES teachers recalled similar abuses.³⁸ The arbitrary transfer of teachers, whether as a form of sexual harassment or retaliation against teacher organizers, would become a key issue in the 1968 strike. To this day, teachers recall the abuse as affront on their dignity.

The Meaning of Dignity for Teachers, 1965-1969

³⁴ Cleotilde López, interviewed by author, Soyapango, February 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “si algún maestro compañero, le gustaba a una maestra, el señor supervisor si le gustaba, trataba de separarlos, de ahí venían los traslados ilegales—los trasladaban. no importaba que les fueran a reclamar, porque si el novio le reclamaba, a él también lo castigaban”

³⁵ Cleotilde López, interviewed by author, Soyapango, February 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “En cambio el supervisor no hacia eso con las compañeras maestras y le gustaba—bueno yo conocí una compañerita que ahí en la delegación, en la subdelegación escolar, el aprovechó—no la violó, pero si...se casaron.”

³⁶ This was certainly the case in Brazil in which the law required men to marry the women they “deflowered” either through rape or consensual premarital sex. Sueann Caulfield, *In Defense of Honor: Sexual Morality, Modernity, and Nation in Early Twentieth-century Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

³⁷ Estela Cruz López, interviewed by author, Soyapango, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “en esa época las maestras se sentían ofendidas porque los supervisores, a cambio de una plaza, pedían algo verdad...como algunos dineros por ejemplo y otros pues relacionarse con ellos.”

³⁸ Daniel Ezequiel Rodríguez and Rosa Miriam Mena de Rodríguez, interviewed by author and Kevin Young, San Salvador, March 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

Teachers and peasants seized upon the political openings of the mid-1960s to found new mass organizations. During this period, the PCN military regime of Colonel Julio Rivera passed a set of reforms that recognized unions and associations and expanded public education and rural cooperatives. In 1963, after thirty-two years of one-party military rule, the electoral system transitioned to proportional representation, allowing opposition parties such as the Partido Democrático Cristiano (Christian Democratic Party, PDC) to participate.³⁹ The PDC and other opposition parties called hearings to discuss reforms to labor codes, university budgets, retirement packages, and land distribution.⁴⁰ In 1964, the Catholic Church and the PDC founded the peasant organization, FECCAS. Overall, the political opening of this era created opportunities for the creation of civic organizations and increased electoral participation.⁴¹

In 1965, Cleotilde joined Los Comités Coordinadores Pro-Derecho del Maestro (Coordinating Committees for the Rights of Teachers), which organized teachers in all the fourteen provincial capital cities. The committees denounced supervisors who sold teaching degrees and organized in opposition to a government reform, the Sistema Nacional de Retiros (National Retirement System).⁴² The reform granted pensions to those who worked for forty years and paid five percent of their annual salary into the system. Under this new law, employees were only awarded eighty percent of their salary upon retirement, rather than the former 100

³⁹ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 77.

⁴⁰ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 78. Although the PDC promoted reforms it was careful not to alienate landowners. For example, the U.S. embassy explained how the PDC opposed a successful motion for labor deputies to increase labor inspectors to enforce the minimum wage, calling the motion “hasty and as leading to unemployment.” “Joint Week No.29” July 17, 1965, in NA, Central Foreign Policy Files 1964-1966, Box 2146.

⁴¹ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 79.

⁴² “Denuncian grave delito por venta de títulos a profesores y bachilleres,” August 15, 1965. MUPI archive, folder: Doc c3, image 49.

percent. The plan applied to all public employees, except for military personnel. Opposition to the reform signaled an emerging class consciousness about the subordination of teachers as workers to the military.

The committee proposed an alternative pension plan for teachers, which had PDC support.⁴³ When the Rivera government rejected the proposal, the committee mobilized 11,000 teachers to march through the streets of San Salvador from Cuscatlán Park to the Presidential House. The march took place on June 21, 1965, one day before National Teacher's Day.

The committee transformed into an association. In December 1965, teachers formed the Asociación Nacional de Educadores de El Salvador, ANDES 21 de junio (National Educators of El Salvador, ANDES June 21). In 1967, ANDES achieved legal recognition. As a form of agitation to recruit new members, ANDES denounced how the government failed to make progress in two years regarding the teacher's demands. By 1967, ANDES claimed to have a strong base of teachers, including 4,000 active members and 10,000 supporters.⁴⁴

In the late 1960s, ANDES increasingly began to challenge its employer, the national government. In late 1967, ANDES escalated its organizing efforts to pressure the newly-elected president, Fidel Sánchez Hernández (1967-1972) to accept its new pension plan, which included plans to construct a new hospital for teachers.⁴⁵ The first strike lasted from October 3 to October 9, 1967. The Minister of Education, Walter Béneke, called the strike "illegal" and labeled the

⁴³ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 78. The proposed legislation was called the Ley de Protección Social para el Magisterio (Social Protection Law for National Teachers), which included wage increases, a modernized promotions and retirement system, and a hospital for teachers.

⁴⁴ ANDES claimed that 15,000 teachers worked in El Salvador in the late 1960s. Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 100.

⁴⁵ The plan was called the Instituto Magisterial de Prestaciones Sociales (Teachers' Institute for Social Welfare, IMPRESS).

teachers “terrorists.”⁴⁶ Thousands of teachers surrounded the National Palace where deputies debated the proposed ANDES pension plan and booed the deputies of the ruling military party who denounced it.⁴⁷ That month, the U.S. embassy acknowledged that “five thousand well dressed, orderly teachers and students [training to become teachers]” participated in the demonstration.⁴⁸ Cleotilde remembered how “during that time, all the women were accustomed to wearing high heels, [but] no one stayed behind; there, all of us came. And the men because there were fewer of them, they went on the sides, to protect us, they said.”⁴⁹ The women wore dresses while the men wore suits and ties, both enduring the intense sun and heat. In fact, ANDES published specific instructions for teachers in the national newspaper, *La Prensa Grafica*, stating: “each *escalafón* [group organized by seniority] shall promote order, decorum, and decency, so that this demonstration elevates the civic spirit of nation’s teachers.”⁵⁰ Although teachers presented themselves as the embodiment of order to rationalize their demands, their organizing represented a break from their historic pro-government stance.⁵¹

ANDES escalated its tactics and went on strike for fifty-eight days in early 1968. Several marches of over 20,000 people, with some reaching 100,000 protestors, and a month-long

⁴⁶ Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 147.

⁴⁷ Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 147.

⁴⁸ “Labor Strife and Related Developments,” October 9, 1967, in NA, Central Foreign Policy Files 1967-1969, Box 1233.

⁴⁹ Cleotilde López, interviewed by author, Soyapango, February 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “en esa época, todas las mujeres nos acostumbrábamos en andar en zapato alto, nadie se quedaba atrás, ahí veníamos todas. Y los hombres porque eran menos, ellos se iban a los lados, para protegernos decían.”

⁵⁰ “Desfile Magisterial Hoy en San Salvador,” *La Prensa Gráfica*, June 21, 1965, in MUPI, folder: Doc c3, image: 8.

⁵¹ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 83.

occupation in front of the National Library, the location of the Ministry of Education, accompanied the strike.⁵² The occupation was a lively space in which organizers gave fiery speeches that brought people to tears. ANDES demanded improvements in the pension plans, the resignation of the Minister of Education, and a reevaluation of the education reform that sought to modernize education via the introduction of television sets in the classroom.⁵³ Teachers strongly rejected the use of television sets in the classroom and feared that government officials intended to replace them altogether.

Supervisors resorted to past tactics of intimidation to defeat the strike. Prior to 1968, they had regularly transferred teachers to different schools as a form of punishment when they did not accept their sexual advances.⁵⁴ During the 1968 occupation, ANDES denounced common practices of supervisors linked to the ruling party such as firing or transferring teachers as a form of political retaliation against the strikers. For example, in January 1968, ANDES listed in a newspaper the names of 28 teachers (17 men and 11 women) who had been transferred as political retaliation and demanded the reinstatement of these and other affected teachers.⁵⁵ According to the U.S. embassy, 229 reported cases existed and the dispute “closed many Salvadoran schools and created a general atmosphere of crisis during February and March of this year.”⁵⁶ In March 1968, the U.S. embassy identified the demand to reintegrate transferred or

⁵² Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 97.

⁵³ Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 152.

⁵⁴ In her account of the 1971 strike, Anaya Montes lists the abuses that teachers had always confronted, including humiliation, the sale of degrees, the transfer of teachers, adulation, conformism, and partisan politics. Anaya Montes, *La gran batalla de ANDES*, 8.

⁵⁵ “Que el pueblo juzgue,” January 1968, in MUPI, folder: 2, images: 6-37.

⁵⁶ “Labor: Arbitration of ANDES Dispute Completed,” May 11, 1968, in NA, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Box 1233.

fired teachers as “one of the key issues in the dispute between the Ministry of Education” and ANDES.⁵⁷

The transfer of teachers was a critical point in the 1968 strike demands and negotiations. In response to the 1968 strike demands, the government called the strike illegal and denounced the strikers as immoral and unpatriotic. On February 18, 1968, ANDES negotiated with the president, who agreed to only six of ten demands. Five days later, ANDES mobilized one of its largest demonstrations. Conservative newspapers commented on the massive and orderly nature of the protests, including its broad support among workers and students.⁵⁸ Ultimately, however, the government threatened to revoke a month’s salary, forcing ANDES to accept the government pension plan and a commission that would evaluate the cases of fired and transferred teachers. The two arbitrators, a Christian Democrat and a liberal lawyer, argued that the Ministry of Education had properly handled 166 cases or seventy-four percent of cases in which teachers had been transferred; the teachers in the remaining 63 cases were granted permission to return to work at their original post or obtain a new post in their city of origin.⁵⁹ ANDES rejected the results and many teachers had “little faith in the government’s willingness to help them,” as embassy officials acknowledged in May 1968.⁶⁰ While U.S. embassy officials recognized the controversy over the transfer of teachers, they constantly rejected the legitimacy of the teachers’ demands, arguing that the claim of ““massive, unjust discharges and transfers’ were without

⁵⁷ “Labor: Arbitration of ANDES Dispute Completed,” May 11, 1968, in NA, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Box 1233.

⁵⁸ Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 154.

⁵⁹ “Labor: Arbitration of ANDES Dispute Completed,” May 11, 1968, in NA, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Box 1233.

⁶⁰ “Labor: Arbitration of ANDES Dispute Completed,” May 11, 1968, in NA, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Box 1233.

much foundation.”⁶¹

The transfer of teachers was an ongoing problem in future struggles. ANDES demanded that teachers be reinstated long after the 1968 strike. In a May 1969 newspaper advertisement, ANDES argued that since 1965, “a real repressive instrument has been applied” to primary and secondary education teachers that “allows the Ministry of Education to commit all types of arbitrary acts against teachers.”⁶² These abuses included “arbitrary transfers and firings, based on ill-intentioned reports [informativos viciados], in the majority of cases committed by supervisors and high officials.”⁶³ These school supervisors inflicted “undignified treatment and constant threats” on teachers and many have “become agents of repression against teachers.”⁶⁴ From the perspective of the teachers, their employer, the national government, monopolized the use of force against teachers. In the 1971 strike (which I elaborate upon below), supervisors forcibly transferred striking teachers after self-described *padres de familia* (fathers of families), violently prevented striking teachers from entering the schools.⁶⁵

⁶¹ “Labor: Arbitration of ANDES Dispute Completed,” May 11, 1968, in NA, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Box 1233.

⁶² “ANDES 21 de Junio, Al Pueblo Trabajador,” May 1, 1969, in MUPI, folder: 2, image: 40. “a los maestros de Educación Primaria se les viene aplicando un reglamento que es un verdadero instrumento represivo que le permite al Ministerio de Educación cometer en contra de los maestros toda clase de arbitrariedades; en igual forma se procede con los maestros de secundaria. Debido a la falta de una ley de la Carrera Docente que en forma verdadera garantice la estabilidad del maestro en su trabajo y los demás derechos que del el emanan.”

⁶³ “ANDES 21 de Junio, Al Pueblo Trabajador,” May 1, 1969, in MUPI, folder: 2, image: 40. “traslados y destituciones arbitrarios, basados en informativos viciados, en la mayoría de los cuales se ensañan supervisores y altos funcionarios.”

⁶⁴ “ANDES 21 de Junio, Al Pueblo Trabajador,” May 1, 1969, in MUPI, folder: 2, image: 40. “trato indigno y amenazas constantes por parte de supervisores escolares, mucho de los cuales se han convertido en agentes de represión en contra de los maestros.”

⁶⁵ Anaya Montes, *La gran batalla de ANDES*, 150, 157-160.

In demanding the reinstatement of teachers, ANDES seriously challenged the authority of supervisors who were government employers. The Association's public denunciations against the abuses of supervisors must be read alongside the individual memories of teachers who recalled the sexual abuses of supervisors prior to 1968. While ANDES did not *publish* denunciations against the sexual abuses of supervisors in the 1968 strike, it attacked the key mechanism (i.e. arbitrary transfers or firings) that supervisors used to sexually harass or politically retaliate against teachers. For these reasons, it is unsurprising that Cleotilde and two other teachers remembered the Association as having publicly denounced the sexual abuses of supervisors.⁶⁶ ANDES members may have also discussed the sexual abuses of supervisors in its private meetings and to mobilize its members.

To this day, ANDES women remember the struggle against the sexual abuses of supervisors as being central to the history of their Association. While ANDES first mobilized in 1965 against government-led changes to their pension plan, a colleague of Cleotilde offered a different explanation about teacher motives to create ANDES. She suggested that ANDES was founded to *directly* address the issue of sexual abuse and added: "when we got together, we used the [slogan], 'for the dignity of the teachers.'" As she spoke, Cleotilde nodded in agreement. Two former ANDES members also referenced the sexual abuse of supervisors when I asked what the struggle for dignity meant.⁶⁷ In the memories of these former teachers, their organizing against the sexual abuse of supervisors was at the core of their struggle for dignity. These oral histories move us to reconsider how we understand the ANDES slogan, *por la dignificación del*

⁶⁶ Cleotilde López, interviewed by author, Soyapango, February 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. Daniel Ezequiel Rodríguez and Rosa Miriam Mena de Rodríguez, interviewed by author and Kevin Young, San Salvador, March 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

⁶⁷ Daniel Ezequiel Rodríguez and Rosa Miriam Mena de Rodríguez, interviewed by author and Kevin Young, San Salvador, March 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

maestro (for the dignity of teachers). For these teachers, dignity not only referred to adequate compensation in the form of just wages and benefits, but it also meant a workplace free of what we now call sexual harassment.

The Threat of Coalitions

The 1968 ANDES protests were part of a growing wave of cross-sector alliances that continued to expand in the early 1970s. The majority of union and general strikes held in El Salvador between 1967 and the first quarter of 1972 involved solidarity strikes or work stoppages.⁶⁸ This protest wave witnessed doctors' work stoppages and strikes by nurses, textile workers, metal workers, construction workers, bus drivers, in addition to the continual mobilization of teachers.⁶⁹ In 1967 and 1968, the ANDES strikes and work stoppages specifically coincided with strikes of bakers and bus drivers, and ANDES received the support of a multi-sectorial coalition that included urban workers, students, and peasants.⁷⁰ For example, in support of the 1968 ANDES strike, the Federación Unitaria Sindical de El Salvador (Unitary Federation of Salvadoran Unions, FUSS) organized two dozen solidarity strikes that involved 3,000 workers.⁷¹ The Asociación General de Estudiantes Universitarios Salvadoreños (General Association of Salvadoran University Students, AGEUS) also went on strike in support of the teachers.⁷² By 1971, ANDES had organized one of the largest demonstrations against the

⁶⁸ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 97.

⁶⁹ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 90.

⁷⁰ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 91.

⁷¹ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 92.

⁷² Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 91.

government in the country's history and its membership was growing rapidly.⁷³ The 1971 strike, which demanded increased wages, a pension system corresponding to rank and seniority, and three months maternity leave, also prompted multi-sectoral alliances.⁷⁴ For example, two large federations coordinated a twenty-four hour strike in support of ANDES, in which workers from twenty-four workplaces and factories participated.⁷⁵ In addition, the teachers created the Frente de Unidad Popular (Popular Unity Front, FUP), a coalition of six different organizations and federations that included high school and university students and electrical, aqueduct, and factory workers.⁷⁶

The Salvadoran government feared the mass coalitions that ANDES built in the late 1960s. The 1967 actions generated concerns among military officials that the teachers sought to gain “pay and retirement system equal to that of military” and that “communists will exploit the situation.”⁷⁷ The Salvadoran government expressed similar concerns to the U.S. embassy in February 1968, distinguishing between the “legitimate teachers’ demands” and the communist

⁷³ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 83, 91. In 1974, ANDES officially had 4,000 national dues-paying members; 5,500 in 1975, and 10,000 in the late 1970s (which represented eighty-percent of the total teacher population). By the mid-1970s, ANDES mobilized 15,000 teachers.

⁷⁴ For a more in-depth discussion of the 1971 strike, see Chávez, “The Pedagogy of Revolution,” 196-205. For the reference to maternity leave, see Thomson, *Women of El Salvador*, 77.

⁷⁵ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 94. The federations included the Federación Sindical de Trabajadores de la Industria de Alimentos, Vestidos y Similares de El Salvador (Federation of Workers in Food, Clothing, Textiles and Related Industries, FESTIAVTCES) and the Federación Unitaria Sindical de El Salvador (Unitary Federation of Salvadoran Unions, FUSS)

⁷⁶ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 94. The organizations included FUSS, AGEUS, FESTIAVCTES, Asociación de Estudiantes de Secundaria (Association of Secondary Students, AES), Sindical de Empresa de Trabajadores de ANDA (Union of Water and Aqueduct Service Employees, SETA) and Sindicato de Trabajadores del Sector Eléctrico (Union of Electrical Sector Workers, STUS.)

⁷⁷ “Military coment [sic] on labor strife,” September 28, 1967, in NA, Central Foreign Policy Files 1967-1969, Box 1233.

infiltrators.⁷⁸ Officials told the embassy that the National Police would “not tolerate obstructionist tactics or violence” and that “police tear gas squads [are] standing by should demonstrators get out of hand.”⁷⁹ In February 1968, paramilitary groups murdered two FUSS members, Saúl Santiago Contreras and Oscar Hilberto Martínez, who had organized solidarity strikes with ANDES. Paramilitaries disappeared the men for four days and then left their mutilated corpses on the road. In rural areas, paramilitary groups such as Organización Democrática Nacionalista (Democratic Nationalist Organization, ORDEN) and other death squads intensified their repression against the Christian Democrats and striking teachers, writing death threats on the walls of homes, killing leftist leaders, and stuffing bodies into coffee sacks.⁸⁰ Meanwhile, an association of private business owners called on the government to defend private property, a widespread elite demand.⁸¹ The National Guard arrested hundreds of people and labeled them communists and terrorists. AGEUS, a group of university students, reported that at least 500 people had been detained in 1968, including two hundred people in Santa Ana and fifty students in the capital.⁸²

Despite government repression and fears of communist revolts, most organizations pursued legalistic strategies and did not publicly question or denounce the legitimacy of the state, capitalism, or U.S. imperialism. For instance, ANDES repeatedly targeted the legislative

⁷⁸ “Teachers’ Dispute and Election Campaign: Comments of Interior Minister,” February 24, 1968, in NA, Central Foreign Policy Files 1967-1969, Box 1233.

⁷⁹ “Teachers’ Dispute,” February 19, 1968, in NA, Central Foreign Policy Files 1967-1969, Box 1233.

⁸⁰ Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 156.

⁸¹ The organization was Asociación Nacional de Empresas Privadas (National Association of Private Businesses, ANEP), founded in 1966.

⁸² Lindo-Fuentes and Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador*, 156.

assembly and the Ministry of Education to make its demands.⁸³ Closely linked with the reformist Christian Democrats, FECCAS demanded land reform—not an overhaul of the oligarchy and the capitalist economy.⁸⁴ Between 1965 and 1971, one out of five protests targeted the legislative assembly. One can infer that activists viewed the institution as capable of passing favorable legislation.⁸⁵ Like most Latin American Communist parties, the Communist Party of El Salvador rejected armed struggle, embraced electoral strategies, and organized workers and university students to win basic reforms.⁸⁶ Overall, the protest wave between 1967 and 1972 was mainly nonviolent, and the government response was mainly limited to the arrests of organizers. While right-wing groups bombed offices and sometimes murdered leftists, this violence pales in comparison to what came in the 1970s.⁸⁷

Gender Ruptures within the Labor Movement

An entire generation attributed their politicization and radicalization to the ANDES strikes of 1968 and 1971.⁸⁸ Ana Dolores Díaz recalled how she became politically active at the age of thirteen in the city of San Gerardo in the San Miguel department, building a student movement to support the striking teachers.⁸⁹ She and other students “saw the injustices that were

⁸³ Almeida states: “Between 1965 and 1971 nearly one out of every five protest events targeted the legislative assembly, which challenger organizations viewed as legitimate and autonomous enough to listen to movement demands and at times pass favorable legislation.” Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 83.

⁸⁴ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 85.

⁸⁵ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 89.

⁸⁶ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 88.

⁸⁷ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 94.

⁸⁸ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 92.

taking place on the national level; we saw that the teachers worked too much...they spent the whole day there and their salary was too little to be spending the whole day there.”⁹⁰ Two former FECCAS members recalled how they supported the striking teachers as young peasant girls.⁹¹

One recounted:

I lived it, my own school was paralyzed...I joined the movement of high school students. The student movement started to form...we began to coordinate the whole effort with the unions that were formed by men and women who lived in the city, in the marginal zones, in the slums.⁹²

The ANDES strikes politicized many young women and galvanized an emergent solidarity between different sectors.

Striking ANDES teachers came to new understandings about politics and the role of women within the labor movement. María Candelaria joined ANDES at the age of twenty-five in

⁸⁹ Ana Dolores Díaz, interviewed by author and Carlos Henríquez Consalvi, Perquín, July 2014, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “A la edad de 13 a 14 años empecé a meterme en los problemas de la sociedad, a los problemas de los profesores, entonces me integre a los movimientos de ANDES 21 de junio...Apoyando a los profesores, haciendo campañas con los estudiantes de qué teníamos que apoyarlos (a los maestros), casi hicimos un movimiento estudiantil.”

⁹⁰ Ana Dolores Díaz, interviewed by author and Carlos Henríquez Consalvi, Perquín, July 2014, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “Las injusticias que habían a nivel nacional, nosotros veíamos que los profesores trabajaban mucho, porque antes la educación era tan bonita que los profesores pasaban todo el día prácticamente con nosotros, tenían dos turnos, por la mañana íbamos a clase, las cuatro áreas fundamentales, y en la tarde íbamos a educación física, a aprender arte, a aprender esas cosas que hoy ya no se enseñan, pues! Y entonces, pasaban todo el día allí y el salario de ellos era muy poco para pasar todo el día.”

⁹¹ María Elma Landaverde Rivera, interviewed by Kevin Young, Santa Tecla, March 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. María Delia de Cornejo, interviewed by Kevin Young, San Salvador, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

⁹² María Delia de Cornejo, interviewed by Kevin Young, San Salvador, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “yo la viví en carne propia porque mi escuela se paralizó, pero cuando me meto a todo el movimiento yo me metí en el movimiento de jóvenes de secundaria.”

1968. She explained how “the reform struggles introduced us to the realities of the country.”⁹³

She added:

We took to the streets for our rights as teachers, we were 75% women; we traded high-heeled shoes for sneakers, because [while] we were raised to believe we had to be clean, orderly, presentable, and socially committed, participation within the demonstrations broke with that framework, the traditional framework, and that rupture led us to understand the moment that we were living.⁹⁴

The reference to the exchange of “high-heeled shoes for sneakers” seems to represent a shift in consciousness. Teachers had used their embodiment of decorum to justify their political demands. The shift to sneakers, however, represented a turn to practicality, a new understanding among women about the state of their country and their role within social movements, and a distancing from middle-class respectability politics.

Despite their new forms of political consciousness, ANDES women struggled to juggle their multiple responsibilities as organizers, mothers, and wives. A teacher whose husband was also in ANDES recalled how friends and neighbors regularly told her to abandon the struggle. The support of her husband had facilitated her political participation. She stated, “I am a teacher and a mother, I cannot distance myself from the struggle. I was immersed deep in that situation but most of all because I was living the economic danger, a situation of social death.”⁹⁵ She and

⁹³ María Candelaria Navas, interviewed by author, San Salvador, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “las luchas reivindicativas nos permitieron introducirnos a las realidades del país”

⁹⁴ María Candelaria Navas, interviewed by author, San Salvador, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “podíamos salir a las calles para reivindicar por nuestros derechos gremiales, éramos 75% mujeres...dejamos los tacones altos por los zapatos tenis, porque nos formaron que teníamos que ser limpias, ordenadas, presentables y el compromiso social, la participación en las manifestaciones nos rompió un esquema, el esquema tradicional, y esa ruptura nos llevó a entender el momento que vivíamos.”

⁹⁵ Rosa Miriam Mena de Rodríguez, interviewed by author and Kevin Young, San Salvador, March 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “Me decían ándate para tu casa, con tus hijos y ya no volvas. Soy maestra y madre de familia, no me puedo aislar de la lucha, estaba uno impregnada en esa

her husband struggled to keep their family afloat, and she remembered how she frantically searched through the crowds to find her husband on several occasions. He survived government capture and torture three times.

The media took notice when ANDES teachers did not fulfill expectations about motherhood. During the 1971 strike, opponents used gendered stereotypes to attack ANDES president, Anaya Montes and ANDES more broadly. An anonymous advertisement created a fictional female character, “Niña Menchita,” who was modest (i.e. simply dressed and wore no makeup), submissive, honorable, and never missed class.⁹⁶ In contrast, Anaya Montes was presented as a childless woman who did not care about the children who missed class due to the strike.⁹⁷ This opponent depicted her as a woman who not only violated the obligations of her profession but also her sex. Opponents also painted Anaya Montes and ANDES leaders as an intellectual elite.⁹⁸ Montes had obtained her doctorate in education and worked as a university professor at the National University. Overall, opponents painted Anaya Montes as a woman who was more interested in her leadership and career than in school children.

From high-heels to boots: ANDES women join the guerrilla ranks

situación pero sobre todo porque lo estaba viviendo toda la situación económica de peligro, esa situación social de muerte, él nos les ha contado y lo ha dejado en un espacio cerradito que tuvo tres capturas terribles.”

⁹⁶ Cited in Chávez, “Pedagogy of Revolution,” 204-205. Original source, Anonymous, “Lo que Piensan los Niños de sus Maestros,” *La Prensa Gráfica*, July 10, 1971. Anaya Montes also mentions the attack in her critiques of media portrayals of the strike. She notes how the teacher in question in fact supported the 1971 strike, see *La gran batalla de ANDES*, 141-142.

⁹⁷ Cited in Chávez, “Pedagogy of Revolution,” 206. Original source, “Repudio de Padres de Familia a la Huelga de Maestros,” *La Prensa Gráfica*, July 9, 1971.

⁹⁸ Chávez, “Pedagogy of Revolution,” 204. See original source: Anonymous, “¿Querido Maestros, Porque Abandonas a tus Alumnos y a tus Propias Responsabilidades?” *La Prensa Gráfica*, July 8, 1971.

Electoral fraud and increasing state repression pushed many people to radical left politics. The reform period of the 1960s ended in the early 1970s when the state dramatically increased its repression to crush a growing militancy and cross-sector collaboration. As one peasant organizer recalled, “it was a tide...that the [political] right started to see. Something was happening and they needed to stop it.”⁹⁹ During the 1970s, state and death squad violence claimed 800 lives a month.¹⁰⁰ Understandably so, scholars identify state actions as key in radicalizing organizers. While state violence played a critical role, leftists also played an important role in recruiting people, adapting their theories to respond to the country’s realities, and articulating a strategy for how to confront such violence.¹⁰¹

As state violence increased, opportunities for electoral participation diminished. In 1972, the ruling military party committed fraud to impose its candidate Colonel Arturo Molina as president, negating the electoral victory of the Unión Nacional Opositora (National Opposition Union, UNO), a coalition of opposition parties that included the Christian Democrats. The military regime exiled UNO presidential candidate José Napoleón Duarte for seven years. The

⁹⁹ María Delia de Cornejo, interviewed by Kevin Young, San Salvador, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

¹⁰⁰ Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Owl Books, 2007), 94.

¹⁰¹ Young argues that, “Most often, scholars in the political-process school point to the pattern of savage and increasingly indiscriminate state repression of civilian protest in the 1970s, which then drove people to armed struggle. In other words, they focus on the way that *state actions* shaped popular protest – everything from the form of organization, to strategies chosen, to the configuration of coalitions within the resistance...State-centered and structural analysis must be accompanied by a closer examination of the revolutionaries and their supporters, whose decisions and strategies were not determined only by state actions.” Young, “Revolutionary Coalition Building in El Salvador.” For state-centric approaches, see *Waves of Protest*, 139-40. Charles D. Brockett, *Political Movements and Violence in Central America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Jeff Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). William Stanley, *The Protection Racket State: Elite Politics, Military Extortion, and Civil War in El Salvador* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010).

context of electoral fraud (both in 1972 and 1975) and increasing state violence facilitated people's recruitment into organizations that called for socialism.¹⁰² A former UNO supporter from a family of Christian Democrats recalled her radicalization as a young woman: "we felt that [Duarte] betrayed us by leaving for Venezuela, he didn't care that the people stayed fighting for that victory... Elections were not the alternative. I stayed, looking for alternatives."¹⁰³ This young woman eventually joined a clandestine guerrilla group.

Radical leftists debated the best way to respond to electoral fraud and state violence. The Fuerzas Populares de Liberación (Popular Liberation Forces, FPL), was in fact a direct product of those debates. Two seasoned labor organizers and spouses, Salvador Cayetano Carpio "Marcial" and Tula Alvarenga de Carpio, had been long-time members of the Communist Party (CP). However, Carpio and Alvarenga criticized the CP for limiting class struggle to the legal and electoral domains and shunning armed struggle. They attempted to reform the party internally to win it over to their position.¹⁰⁴ Unable to transform the party, the two labor organizers formed the FPL in 1970, which, from the outset, rejected electoral politics, embraced mass organizing and armed struggle, and identified itself as a Marxist-Leninist party. Ongoing electoral fraud throughout the 1970s only reaffirmed the FPL's stance.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² For example, in the mid-1970s, multiple unions left the pro-government trade union federation and joined federations with more radical leadership. In a 1975 poll, 49 out of 53 union organizers argued that "socialist revolution" would best resolve the country's problems. Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 108.

¹⁰³ Ana Dolores Díaz, interviewed by author and Carlos Henríquez Consalvi, Perquín, July 2014, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

¹⁰⁴ Pearce, *Promised Land*, 125.

¹⁰⁵ One year after the PCN committed electoral fraud, the August 1973 issue of *Campo Rebelde*, the FPL rejected electoral strategies and called for the organization and radicalization of popular struggles via mass political education and the escalation of tactics (e.g., strikes, occupations, blockades, and seizing and distributing the goods of wealthy individuals), see *Campo Rebelde* no. 10, August 1973, 5. In March

The FPL advocated anti-capitalist revolution. It articulated three goals: ending political, economic, social, and military dependence on the United States; ending oligarchic power and capitalist exploitation; and building grassroots bases to construct socialism and eventually communism.¹⁰⁶ In its newspaper *Estrella Roja* (Red Star), the FPL identified “Yankee imperialism as *the main enemy*” and the “bourgeois-landowning oligarchy and the pro-imperialist and pro-oligarchic governments” as “the immediate enemies.”¹⁰⁷ The working class—meaning “the industrial proletariat and agricultural proletariat”—was “the class historically interested in propelling the most radical revolution” given their structural position within capitalism.¹⁰⁸ The FPL defined revolution in the following class-based terms:

What is revolution? Revolution is: the destruction of the state oppressor, beginning with the reactionary military of the rich that sustains that state via the force of arms; in addition, the destruction of all the bourgeois state such as the ministries, the bourgeois legislative assembly and all the institutions that help maintain the economic, political, and social injustice of the capitalist regime. Once the enemy state of the people is destroyed, a new state is created over the ashes of the old state oppressor, and the revolutionary state is built up, with its own popular armed forces of liberation and supported by the exploited classes and sectors. That is how the revolutionary government is installed with proletarian hegemony and based on the worker-peasant alliance. The taking of power by the proletariat and the people, led by the political-military revolutionary vanguard (FPL), will serve to promote new relations of production where there is no exploitation. With the taking of political power, it is possible to create a more just society without exploiters or oppressors.¹⁰⁹

1978, it once again expressed its rejection of electoral strategies amidst state repression and corruption, see *Campo Rebelde* no. 2., March 1978, 7, 16.

¹⁰⁶ *El Rebelde, Edición Internacional* no. 2., March 1978, 16, in CIDAI.

¹⁰⁷ *Estrella Roja, Órgano ideológico de las FPL* no.1, December 1973, 5, in CIDAI.

¹⁰⁸ *Estrella Roja*, December 1973, 4.

¹⁰⁹ *Campo Rebelde: periódico revolucionario dedicado a los trabajadores del campo* no. 8, May 1978, 7, in CIDAI.

The FPL strove to be a vanguard party which used the “revolutionary science of the proletariat” to analyze national conditions and defend “the fundamental interests of the working class.” Such interests would ideally be reflected in the organization’s composition, methods, direction, and work.¹¹⁰

Like other Latin American revolutionaries, the FPL adapted Marxist-Leninism in specific ways, which complicates characterizations of the organization as static and entirely orthodox.¹¹¹ First, in contrast to orthodox Marxism, the FPL viewed peasants as a revolutionary force and did not adhere to a linear conception of revolution in which a country first undergoes capitalist development prior to having socialist revolution.¹¹² It advocated revolution in a country that was mainly agricultural in its development and also drew inspiration from peasant insurgencies in Vietnam and China.¹¹³ Second, the FPL advocated vanguardism in which an enlightened group of cadre lead the revolution to counter the conservative tendencies of the working class. While the FPL believed in building cadre with a unified analysis, vision and strategy, it placed great emphasis on the self-organization of different working class sectors, which would create the groundwork for revolutionary struggle. Third, the FPL also challenged older conceptions of armed struggle, critiquing *foquismo*, the strategy advocated by Che Guevara in which a small

¹¹⁰ *Estrella Roja*, December 1973, 6.

¹¹¹ Mayan peasants in Guatemala likewise articulated their own local visions of Marxism, see Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre*.

¹¹² Marx originally viewed peasants as a reactionary force that would not renounce private property, see Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, trans. Daniel De Leon (New York: Labor News, 1951), 414.

¹¹³ In a 1986 lecture in Chalatenango, Commander Fermán Cienfuegos discussed the FPL’s Vietnamese influence, particularly its self-defense militias; see section, “periodo de acumulación de las Fuerzas” in, Fermán Cienfuegos, *Veredas de audacia* (San Salvador: Arocoris, 1996), 23. To read an online version of the lecture, see <https://www.marxists.org/espanol/tematica/elsalvador/sancho/1986/dic24.htm>

band of guerrillas spark and lead the revolution.¹¹⁴ Instead, it advocated a *guerra popular prolongada* (pro-longed people's war), a Maoist political and military strategy in which an armed movement builds broad popular support among peasants and simultaneously defends the gains of revolutionary peasants.

The FPL bridged reform-based movements and revolutionary struggle. Like most revolutionaries, the FPL recognized the limits of reformism: policy reforms “will not resolve the fundamental problems; they do not end exploitation and oppression which are the root of the grave problems and suffering of the masses,” it explained in December 1973. Nonetheless, reform-based struggles could “elevate the consciousness of the working class to a level of comprehension and disposition to fight for their revolutionary objectives.”¹¹⁵ Such struggles advanced working-class “organization” and “discipline” and created “class confrontations with their exploiters.” Therefore the FPL concluded that “immediate interests are not opposed to the struggle for revolutionary objectives, rather [reforms] become the *necessary link*, essential and inseparable from it.”¹¹⁶ For these reasons, the FPL did not see itself as a substitute for social movements but rather strongly advocated the self-organization of workers and peasants and recruited leaders from the ranks of those movements.

As state repression increased, many ANDES women joined the FPL.¹¹⁷ Mélida Anaya Montes, the president of ANDES 21 de Junio joined the FPL in the early 1970s and began to

¹¹⁴ Pearce, *Promised Land*, 131.

¹¹⁵ *Estrella Roja* no.1., December 1973, 9.

¹¹⁶ *Estrella Roja*, December 1973, 11.

¹¹⁷ I have not come across sources that indicate the gender composition of the FPL during the 1970s. See chapter four for a discussion of the postwar mobilization numbers of the FPL.

publicly advocate the use of armed resistance as ANDES president.¹¹⁸ Anaya Montes became the second in command in the FPL. Rank-and-file members were also recruited to the FPL. At age twenty-seven, María Candelaria Navas, an ANDES member, joined the FPL in 1970. She recalled how women's participation within the FPL generated many "matrimonial ruptures" and "contributed to a rupture with tradition."¹¹⁹ In other words, many men opposed their wives joining guerrilla groups. She explained the impact of Anaya Montes' incorporation into the FPL on other women. Her leadership "was an example, and afterwards, she exchanged her heels—because she always distinguished herself with her well-painted nails—for boots and it was a tremendous example...I think it was an environment that lent itself to ruptures with tradition."¹²⁰ She again used the symbolism of shoes, specifically the exchange of high-heeled shoes for boots, to refer to the incorporation of women within the FPL. The women in the FPL were inspired by Anaya Montes, a respected movement leader with a traditional feminine appearance. For women like María Candelaria, it underscored the excitement of the period and the possibilities for women's leadership and the shift in gender roles. In addition, students who had supported ANDES also joined the FPL.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Anaya Montes, *La Segunda Gran Batalla de ANDES*, 119, 182, 183.

¹¹⁹ María Candelaria Navas, interviewed by author, San Salvador, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. "hubo muchas rupturas matrimoniales porque muchas mujeres se metieron...recuerde que en el 71...había mujeres colaborando con las guerrillas, nuestra colaboración empieza en el 70 con las FPL, todo eso contribuyo a una ruptura tradicionales."

¹²⁰ María Candelaria Navas, interviewed by author, San Salvador, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. "Eso era un ejemplo, y después que ella cambio sus tacones—porque ella siempre se distinguió con sus unas bien pintaditas—y cambió por botas y era un ejemplo tremendo...creo que era un ambiente propicio para las rupturas tradicionales."

¹²¹ Audelia, a young student, who had supported her sisters on strike, later joined the FPL. After the strike, she "started to participate in matters that required more commitment." Audelia Guadalupe López, interviewed by author, San Salvador, May 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

The FPL, created in 1970, was not the only guerrilla group that existed during this period, though it was the largest. Other guerrilla organizations with different political platforms and agendas formed throughout the 1970s; the (Revolutionary People's Army, ERP) in 1972; Resistencia Nacional (National Resistance, RN) in 1975; the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centro Americanos (Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers, PRTC) in 1976; and the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación (Armed Liberation Forces, FAL) in 1979. After the FPL, the ERP was the second largest guerrilla group. In contrast to the FPL, the ERP believed in the foco model of revolution. Like the FPL, these guerrilla groups participated in mass front organizations, but although these guerrilla groups each claimed to be the vanguard of the revolution, their limited organizing capacities set constraints on these goals.¹²² In other words, it would be a mistake to ignore the internal negotiations within the mass organizations and paint them simply as appendages of the guerrilla groups.

From Catechists to Peasant Organizers

The FPL would continue to evolve as an organization. In the early 1970s, peasants developed a consciousness about class inequality within Bible study groups. From these religious networks emerged peasant unions that confronted terrible working conditions, and from those unions the FPL recruited peasants into its ranks. But the influence was not unidirectional. Peasants pushed the FPL to change its political position on religion and encourage the

“vínculo que me llevó a después que nos reclutaran...ya me fui incorporando a cuestiones más comprometidas, ya con la organización de las FPL.”

¹²² The FPL was linked the BPR; the ERP to the Ligas Populares 28 de Febrero (Popular Leagues, February 28, LP-28); the RN to the Frente de Acción Popular Unificada (United Popular Action Front, FAPU); FAL to the Unión Democrática Nacionalista (Nationalist Democratic Union, UDN); and PRTC to Movimiento de Liberación Popular (Movement for Popular Liberation, MLP).

participation of peasant women, and transformed it into a rural insurgency. The oral histories of Domitila Ayala and Rosa Rivera shed light on these processes and how women experienced it.

Domitila and Rosa both recalled the economic and social restrictions they faced as poor peasant girls growing up in Chalatenango department.¹²³ Both women were born in 1957. As young girls in the 1960s, they each cooked and cleaned for their eight siblings, and had limited opportunities to go to school. Domitila's father prohibited her from continuing her education after the second grade, fearing that she would later use her education to write love letters to men. Struggling to buy food, Rosa's parents could not afford to purchase her school supplies and she dropped out of school after a few years. Her cousin, María Helia Rivera, faced similar problems and only completed the second grade.

Domitila remembered how prior to her political involvement, she greatly feared men. Her parents, particularly her father, surveilled her whereabouts and insisted that she stay at home to perform domestic tasks. She recalled her childhood views about men: "I feared all men because that's what [my parents] had taught me. I feared that [men] would hurt me. I didn't want to be negatively affected; that was my thinking when I was younger."¹²⁴ She added: "I could not be mixed up with men because men would misinterpret [the situation]" and therefore possibly justify their sexual abuse.¹²⁵

¹²³ Domitila was born in Los Ramírez, in a small *caserío* (hamlet) in the *cantón* of Las Minas, while Rosa was born in Los Rivera cantón.

¹²⁴ Domitila Ayala, interview by Rebecka Biró and Victoria Montero, July 2013, transcript, pg. 49. "yo le tenía miedo a todos los hombres porque así me lo habían inculcado. Tenía miedo que me hicieran daño, no quería ser perjudicada, ese era mi pensamiento de cuando estaba pequeña."

¹²⁵ Domitila Ayala, interviewed by Rebecka Biró and Victoria Montero, July 2013, transcript, pg. 49. "no me podida estar revolviendo con los hombres porque los hombres iban a malinterpretar si yo andaba ahí revuelta con ellos o que se yo..."

Rosa and her family faced terrible conditions as seasonal laborers on coffee plantations. Rosa woke up at two in the morning to grind corn to make tortillas and then began picking coffee at five or six in the morning and stopped between noon and two in the afternoon. Landowners only provided one tortilla and a small portion of beans and salt to men who shared their single portion with the entire laboring family, including children.¹²⁶ One peasant organizer recalled how “dead rats would appear” in the beans and lamented how children “were condemned to eat beans, tortillas, and salt for the rest of their lives. The salary was not enough for a piece of meat, chicken, or for milk, eggs, fish, the necessary [food] for children to not be malnourished.”¹²⁷ Rosa also remembered the rotting food and how landowners forced her and others to sleep under coffee branches and drink from uncovered jugs of water.¹²⁸ Furthermore, landowners deducted the cost of damaged coffee branches and food from peasant wages.¹²⁹ Workers received such little food that in December 1974, the Legislative Assembly passed a measure that required landowners to provide “1-1/2 pounds of corn and four ounces of beans or an allowance of .75

¹²⁶ María Elma Landaverde Rivera, interviewed by Kevin Young, Santa Tecla, March 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “Si tú te imaginas que le pagan al campesino 2.50 de colon por rozar una tarea de caña es el trabajo más duro que puede haber porque la caña tiene una mota que los campesinos tenían que ponerse manga larga y amarrarse con telas, entraban a las 7, 6 de la mañana y estaban saliendo a las 12, 2 de la tarde para ganarse 2.50 de colón. El alimento era una tortilla que les llamaban *chengas*, porque eran grandes, un poco de frijoles y sal, no había prestaciones sociales, no había un bono para la educación, no había nada. Peor ese campesino tenía 4, 8 cipotes que darles de comer y su mujer.”

¹²⁷ María Elma Landaverde Rivera, interviewed by Kevin Young, Santa Tecla, March 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “Esos niños estaban condenados a comer toda la vida frijoles, tortilla y sal. El sueldo no les daba para un pedazo de carne, pollo para la leche, los huevos, pescados, lo necesario para crear niños que no estén desnutridos pero que además tengan desarrollo cerebral para que sean buenos estudiantes.”

¹²⁸ Rosa Rivera, interview by author, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “si quebrabas una rama te la descontaban, dormías debajo de los cafetales, se mojaba la gente, y si en algunas fincas, daban comida, pero salían animales muertos, el agua la recogían de lo que caía de la lluvia, ahí destapado los tanques...de esa agua tomaba la gente.”

¹²⁹ María Delia de Cornejo, interviewed by Kevin Young, San Salvador, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “Food Allowances for Agricultural Workers Legislated,” December 12, 1973.

colones (30 cents in U.S. currency)” to “each full-time worker.”¹³⁰ Deputies from the ruling military party blocked the original proposal that had included a slightly higher food allowance because it would “ruin the small farmer,” a euphemism for land owners.¹³¹

The conditions that Rosa faced reflected nation-wide structural land inequalities. In 1961, 19.8 percent of peasant families had no access land.¹³² As a result, 60 percent of the total Salvadoran population (including children over the age of ten) labored as rural workers.¹³³ Even peasants who had land often worked on large estates because their small plots of land did not meet the basic needs of their families. Unequal access to land only increased in the 1970s. In 1975, 41.1 percent of peasant families lacked access to land, while an elite of 1.5 percent, owners of large estates, controlled half of the cultivable land.¹³⁴

Class exploitation and sexism shaped the pay structure on plantations. Plantation foremen regularly cheated peasants, not paying them for the full quantities they had picked or cut.¹³⁵ In

¹³⁰ “Food Allowances for Agricultural Workers Legislated,” December 12, 1973, in NA, Central Foreign Policy Files 1967-1969, Box 2064.

¹³¹ “Food Allowances for Agricultural Workers Legislated,” December 12, 1973, in NA, Central Foreign Policy Files 1967-1969, Box 2064.

¹³² Carlos Rafael Cabarrús P., *Génesis de una revolución: Análisis del surgimiento y desarrollo de la organización campesina en El Salvador* (Ciudad de México: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social Ediciones de la Casa Chata), 59.

¹³³ Forty-five percent of rural workers worked part-time and owned small parcels of land; twenty-six percent of rural workers relied completely on wages; and twenty-four percent owned their own land and five-percent labored as sharecroppers. “Campesinos as a Political Force – El Salvador,” July 8, 1964, in NA, Central Foreign Policy Files 1964-1966, Box 2146.

¹³⁴ Cabarrús P., *Génesis de una revolución*, 58-59.

¹³⁵ María Delia de Cornejo, interviewed by Kevin Young, San Salvador, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “En las haciendas te daban la comida y te la descontaban del salario que la gente ganaba, pero era una cosa tan antihigiénica que generaba que la gente ni comía. Cortabas un saco de café y lo que hacían los caporales, y te decían tanto, y tal vez te estaban robando una arroba o dos arrobas y le pagaban menos a la gente, había también una serie de acoso contra las mujeres, la corta del café estaba en

the “[plantation] hills the coffee sack *was so heavy* but on the scale, it didn’t weigh anything. I then started to reflect [about] what my dad had said, that [landowners] robbed us of our labor,” Rosa explained.¹³⁶ Whether Rosa made a literal or symbolic point, her argument still stands that peasants were cheated of dignified pay. A peasant organizer described how it was common practice for plantation owners to give the wages of women and children to their husbands or fathers, which was also common practice in other Latin American countries.¹³⁷ Another peasant woman recalled how “there was frequent harassment against the women.”¹³⁸

Women also received less pay than men. In a 1967 study, the Salvadoran government reported that sixty-two percent of women workers, in comparison to fifteen percent of men, reported earning less than minimum wage, two *colones* a day or \$1 USD.¹³⁹ The embassy commented, “enforcement is probably the major factor limiting the effectiveness of the minimum wage program in El Salvador.”¹⁴⁰ Therefore, it is safe to assume that most agricultural

manos de mujeres, en su mayoría. Esas luchas reivindicativas son las que se empiezan a impulsar en aquel momento.”

¹³⁶ Rosa Rivera, interviewed by author, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “en el lomo aquel saco de café *pesaba tanto* pero en la báscula no pesaba. Entonces yo hacia la reflexión. Esto es que lo decía mi papa, que nos robaban nuestra fuerza de trabajo. Yo sentía como que me daban un *gran empujón de continuar* haciendo todo lo que estaba a mi alcance para luchar.”

¹³⁷ Azucena Quinteros, interviewed by Diana C. Sierra Becerra, San Salvador, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “Cuando iba a cortar algodones y a cortar café, lo que pasaba es que en el listado aparecía el hombre, pero todo el trabajo lo hacían las mujeres y los hijos e hijas...El hombre era el que siempre recibía el pago.” For a discussion of sexism in Peruvian peasant households and plantations, see Mallon “Patriarchy in the Transition to Capitalism.”

¹³⁸ María Delia de Cornejo, interviewed by Kevin Young, San Salvador, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

¹³⁹ “GOES Announces Rationale and Impact of Minimum Wage,” November 5, 1967, pg. 1, in NA, Central Foreign Policy Files 1967-1969, Box 1233. “Labor Developments,” June 28, 1967, pg. 5, in NA, Central Foreign Policy Files 1967-1969, Box 1232.

workers received less than \$1 USD per day. Landowners routinely hired paramilitary groups to enforce obedience on plantations.

In the 1960s, paramilitary groups like ORDEN formed long before there was any hint of guerrilla or peasant rebellion. The Alliance for Progress allotted El Salvador the largest amount of funds in Central America.¹⁴¹ The Kennedy administration created the program to provide military assistance to Latin American governments to address “internal security” concerns (i.e. domestic social movements) and contain the influence of the Cuban Revolution, which came to power in 1959.¹⁴² Agents from the State Department, Green Berets, CIA and US AID established and funded the Agencia Nacional de Servicios Especiales (National Agency of Special Services, ANSESAL) and ORDEN.¹⁴³ These two paramilitary groups became the backbone of El Salvador’s death squads. ORDEN and other paramilitary groups targeted comunidades eclesiales de base (Christian Base Communities, CBC), peasant groups that interpreted the Bible to confront the poverty that marked their own lives.¹⁴⁴ One CBC participant in Chalatenango remembered, “...it was illegal to read the Bible, to sing [religious] songs.”¹⁴⁵ Government

¹⁴⁰ “Labor: Recent GOES Activities in the Labor Field,” September 2, 1967, pg. 1. Central Foreign Policy Files 1967-169, Box 1232.

¹⁴¹ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 71.

¹⁴² Jeffrey F. Taffet, *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy: the Alliance for Progress in Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2007). Stephen G. Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America: the Foreign Policy of Anticommunism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 147-48. Stephen G. Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 125-47. Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop*, 47-49.

¹⁴³ Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop*, 95.

¹⁴⁴ Approximately 50-60,000 people participated in Christian Base Communities by the mid-70s. Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 111, citing Vega (1994).

¹⁴⁵ Esperanza Ortega, interview by author, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

security forces and death squads murdered practitioners of liberation theology, including catechists, nuns and priests such as Rutilio Grande. “Be a Patriot, Kill a Priest,” was a common death squad slogan.

In the early 1970s, Domitila and Rosa joined thousands of other peasants who became politically active in the CBC. Liberation theology emerged within the Catholic Church in the 1960s in tandem with the Church’s professed “preferential option for the poor.” Practitioners of liberation theology interpreted Catholic doctrine through a radical social justice lens. Rather than accept the status quo as a God given order or wait for salvation in the afterlife, liberation theology advocated collective mobilization to eliminate the sins of poverty, inequality, and state repression to create heaven on earth.¹⁴⁶ This shift in consciousness challenged prevalent stereotypes about the alleged passivity and stupidity of peasants. For instance, in 1965, the U.S. embassy claimed that the “chief problems and grievances of rural workers are those of simple poverty. They show little interests in elaborate theories about their problems” and “only occasionally complain that they are exploited.”¹⁴⁷

The message of liberation theology resonated strongly among peasants who endured severe exploitation. Rosa and her cousin, María Helia both joined bible groups. María Helia explained, “...through biblical readings we started to discover that we were living in slavery, [learned about] inequality in the country and that it was necessary to organize ourselves in order

¹⁴⁶ Penny Lernoux, *Cry of the People: The Struggle for Human Rights in Latin America—The Catholic Church in Conflict with U.S. Policy* (London: Penguin, 1980). Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology: Radical Religion and Social Movement Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

¹⁴⁷ “Campesinos as a Political Force – El Salvador,” July 8, 1964, in NA, Central Foreign Policy Files 1964-1966, Box 2146.

to struggle and get out of that inequality.”¹⁴⁸ A former peasant organizer recalled how Father Rutilio Grande, who was later assassinated by death squads, eloquently explained the oligarchy’s greed: “at a mass, he said that in El Salvador there were people, the majority powerful people who did not think about the poor, they went to bed crossing themselves in the name of coffee, sugar, and cotton, thinking about all their capital.”¹⁴⁹

The politicization and radicalization of peasants within CBC networks led them to create peasant unions. They founded the Unión de Trabajadores del Campo (Farmworkers Union, UTC) in November 1974 in Chalatenango and San Vicente departments.¹⁵⁰ Rosa recounted, “I entered the organization through the word of God.”¹⁵¹ Rosa, her cousin, and Domitila each joined the UTC at age sixteen in 1974. To this day, Rosa remembers the date, June 4, 1974, when her village selected her as a UTC organizer. Domitila organized to recruit more members and worked within the highest decision-making bodies in the UTC. Almost thirty years later, Rosa’s

¹⁴⁸ María Helia Rivera, interviewed by author, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “todo eso fuimos descubriendo por las lecturas bíblicas que estábamos viviendo en esclavitud, de desigualdad en el país, y que era necesario organizarnos para luchar y salir de esa desigualdad.”

¹⁴⁹ María Elma Landaverde Rivera, interviewed by Kevin Young, Santa Tecla, March 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. For the bibliography of Rutilio Grande, see Rodolfo Cardenal, *Historia de una esperanza: vida de Rutilio Grande*. San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1985). “Porque él dijo en una misa que en El Salvador había gente, la mayoría de la gente poderosa, que no pensaban en el pobre, se acostaban persignando en el nombre del café, de la caña y del algodón, pensando en todo su capital.”

¹⁵⁰ Chávez, “Pedagogy of Revolution.” Many of the peasants who joined the UTC had participated in rural cooperatives that had 2,500 members in Chalatenango (135). A diocesan priest, José Romero Maeda, helped form these cooperatives in the 1960s that later offered courses to support new peasant organizations (159). According to Chávez, this network of rural cooperatives, radio schools (e.g. Catholic program that offered primary education to adult peasants), and pious associations in Chalatenango, served as the initial bases for the later emergence of the UTC (160).

¹⁵¹ Rosa Rivera, interviewed by author, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “De repente me dijeron que estaban en UTC, yo entré en la organización a través de la palabra de Dios.”

cousin remembered and sang a song about the peasant struggle: “Those of FECCAS and UTC we must get food for the [coffee and sugar cane] cutters and give them a place to sleep...the season is soon arriving, now we’re going to cut, to eat like animals, and to sleep [under coffee plants].”¹⁵²

State violence and electoral fraud set the stage for the creation of the UTC, which demanded clean food, improved workplace conditions, access to schools, land, seeds, and low-interest loans, and lower land rents.¹⁵³ High-interest loans kept peasants in debt or prevented them from purchasing the supplies necessary for land cultivation. In 1972, Justo Mejía, Chinda Zamora and other peasant leaders from Las Vueltas, Chalatenango met secretly to discuss the creation of a new peasant political organization.¹⁵⁴ These leaders had supported the Christian Democrats in the March 1972 election. However, the fraudulent elections confirmed the need to create a peasant organization independent of political parties. Apolinario Serrano, the FECCAS secretary general and FPL militant, assisted in the formation of the UTC.¹⁵⁵ In 1974, the National Guard massacred six peasants in La Cayetana, a hamlet in San Vicente department, which accelerated the formation of the UTC that year.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² María Helia Rivera, interviewed by author, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “Los de FECCAS y UTC les tenemos que conseguir comida a los cortadores, y darles donde dormir...ya viene la temporada ya nos vamos a cortar a comer como animales y a dormir al cafetal”

¹⁵³ María Delia de Cornejo, interviewed by Kevin Young, San Salvador, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “Se empezaron a dar una serie de luchas reivindicativas, por ejemplo, recuerdo las consignas, cuando no había nacido el BPR todavía, decíamos “queremos frijoles, arroz y tortillas sin carne de ratón” porque los frijoles a veces salían ratones muertos.”

¹⁵⁴ Chávez, “Pedagogy of Revolution,” 156.

¹⁵⁵ Pearce, *Promised Land*, 153.

¹⁵⁶ Chávez, “Pedagogy of Revolution,” 157. On November 26, 1974, the police went to the village of La

Electoral fraud helped UTC organizers to recruit new members. Rosa's neighbor, María Ofelia Navarrete, remembered how the 1972 election fraud "generated in me a sentiment of frustration. I thought that elections were useless, that they deceived the people, that it was more [of a] risk [than benefit]."¹⁵⁷ She added that people had taken great risks and received beatings and death threats for supporting the reformist Christian Democrats, and thus electoral fraud made them seriously consider the risks of a losing strategy.¹⁵⁸ Two years later in 1974, Facundo Guardado recruited Navarrete, age twenty-two, into the UTC.¹⁵⁹ Both would become prominent FPL commanders. She became an FPL commander known as María Chichilco.¹⁶⁰

Upon being recruited, women confronted their husbands to participate in the UTC. Domitila recounted how "at the beginning of the organization, the men were kind of jealous. But many women didn't pay any attention to that, they felt very emotional about the work...they learned to defend themselves with words against their husbands. Afterwards, the men ended up with them because they had liked [the organization]."¹⁶¹ Sometimes "women counted on the

Cayetana to arrest peasant organizers, however the village successfully mobilized to release the prisoners. Three days later, the National Guard returned to "punish the campesinos for their audacity," the U.S. embassy noted; Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 05085, December 27, 1974, 1974SANS05085, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

¹⁵⁷ María Ofelia Navarrete, interviewed by author, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. "eso generó en mí un sentimiento de frustración, pensé que las elecciones no servían para nada, que eran un engaño para el pueblo, que era más el riesgo." For a 1984 interview with her, see Pearce, *Promised Land*, 84.

¹⁵⁸ Sotomayor and Portillo, "En la Guerra, nunca celebré una victoria con euforia," *El Faro*, March 3, 2015.

¹⁵⁹ FPL commander Valentín (Gerson Martínez), mentions the participation of some FPL women—Clara Elizabeth Ramírez ("Eva"), Ruth, Cora, Eugenia, and Virginia Peña—in building relationships with peasants; see, Harnecker, ed., *Con la mirada en alto*, 151.

¹⁶⁰ Navarrete is also known by her other political pseudonym, María Serrano.

support of their husbands for pastoral work but they didn't see them doing political work, and so the women secretly went to the marches and the political formation meetings..." explained a former peasant organizer.¹⁶² In other words, husbands often saw pastoral work within the bible study groups as more appropriate for women than political agitation. One peasant woman argued that Patricia Puertas, (affectionately known as Ticha), an icon of the peasant movement, had the support of her husband, which allowed her to assume a formal leadership position.¹⁶³

Reflecting about the UTC in 2015, María Ofelia Navarrete recognized that the union did not have an explicit political analysis about gender equality, but argued that the organizing process shifted the attitudes of men toward women: "it was something really nice that with liberation theology and political organizing, men were also educated to see their women as equals; look I know of cases of peasant men who have confessed to me about how they use to be with their women, and they alone say '[what] ingratitude, why was I like that?'"¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Domitila Ayala, interviewed by author, Arcatao, September 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. "mire la mayor parte, al inicio de la organización los hombres eran como celosos. Pero muchas mujeres no le hacían caso a eso, se sentían muy emocionadas con el trabajo...aprendieron a defenderse aun con el marido con palabras. Después terminaron los hombres también con ellas [en la organización] porque les había gustado."

¹⁶² María Elma Landaverde Rivera, interviewed by Kevin Young, Santa Tecla, March 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

¹⁶³ María Elma Landaverde Rivera, interviewed by Kevin Young, Santa Tecla, March 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. "Patricias Cuerdas, es entre los iconos femeninos en haber asumido una tarea de dirección, lo que le favoreció a ella es que su marido se metió, juntos, aunque tenían sus hijos, pero ellos no dejaron sus trabajos, y eso fue lo que a muchas mujeres limitó porque tal vez tenía permiso, contaban con el apoyo del marido para el trabajo pastoral pero no las veían haciendo trabajo político, entonces las mujeres escondidas se iban para las marchas y la reunión de formación política, porque ya había gente que daba formación política y esa gente no vivía como la Patricia como Apolinario, Félix, Santos y otras gente que nos esperan en el otro mundo."

¹⁶⁴ María Ofelia Navarrete, interview by author and Kevin Young, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. "Pero hubo una cosa bien linda que con la teología de la liberación y la organización política también se educaba al hombre a ver como su igual a su mujer, mire yo conozco

Peasant organizing transformed how peasant women saw themselves. Prior to becoming politically active, Domitila did not interact with men and she feared their abuse. She also feared speaking in public and was immensely shy. She attributed her new confidence to the support of her comrades. She recalled one occasion when her comrades asked her to speak at a rally. She started shaking with nerves but she nonetheless read the speech. On later occasions, she preferred to memorize her speeches rather than read directly from the paper. She remembers fondly how her comrades “gave her great encouragement; I believed that I could do things and that I should not be afraid, they didn’t reject me.”¹⁶⁵ Even though Domitila was “a young woman without a husband,” she “too organized people. Very early on I acquired a leadership position and I never felt discriminated [and had it happened] I would have been the first to not allow it.”¹⁶⁶ The absence of a husband probably made it easier for Domitila to participate, although she confronted her father’s opposition. She felt respected even without the presence of men to protect her honor and noted how her self-perception changed. She had the right to demand respect and to assume leadership. Given the sexist upbringing that had limited her opportunities, organizing produced a real shift in how she understood her self-worth.

From Peasant Organizers to Guerrilla Cadre

casos de campesinos que me han confesado como ellos eran con su mujer y ellos solos, dicen que ingratitud, porque era yo así.”

¹⁶⁵ Domitila Ayala, interviewed by author, Arcatao, September 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “me dieron gran animo yo creía que si podía hacer las cosas y que no tenía que tener miedo...ellos no me rechazaron.”

¹⁶⁶ Domitila Ayala, interviewed by author, Arcatao, September 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “...yo era una joven que no tenía marido, era una *cipotana* [muchacha] pero yo también organizaba a la gente. Muy temprano adquiere una jefatura ni en ningún momento me sentí discriminada [y hubiera pasado] fuera la primera a renegar no me hubiera dejado.”

As peasants built their unions, FPL cadre traveled to Chalatenango department to support the self-organization of peasants and recruit leaders. Peasant organizing pushed the FPL in new directions. The group changed its previously antagonistic stance on religion, embracing radical Christianity as compatible with Marxism, and openly encouraged the participation of peasant women such as Domitila who joined its ranks. This history refutes scholarship that has exaggerated the role of urban intellectuals in building the insurgency.¹⁶⁷

By the time priests and the FPL arrived to work in 1972, peasants were already politicized and wanted to build an organization independent of political parties, a commitment that was reinforced by the fraudulent 1972 elections. FPL militants such as Felipe Peña Mendoza and sociologist Andrés Torres Sánchez arrived in 1972; their humility and willingness to work in the fields gained them the trust of many peasants.¹⁶⁸ Peasant leaders such as José “Santos”

¹⁶⁷ For an urban-centric approach, see Yvon Grenier, *The Emergence of Insurgency in El Salvador: Ideology and Political Will* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999). Brockett has a more sophisticated account but argues that FECCAS and the UTC were “subordinated to the objectives and strategies of revolutionary urban activists,” see Brockett, *Political Movements and Violence*, 164. For critiques of urban-centric approaches, and an approach that centers peasants as revolutionary actors, see Young, “Revolutionary Coalition Building in El Salvador”, Chávez, “Pedagogy of Revolution”, Pearce, *Promised Land*, 129-30, 139.

¹⁶⁸ María Ofelia Navarrete, interviewed by author and Kevin Young, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. Peasants distrusted urbanites whom did not put their status and lives on the line as they did, see Cabarrús, *Génesis de una revolución*, 252-53. The murder of Torres Sánchez was one of hundreds during the 1970s, when government forces and death squads routinely harassed and murdered leftists, whether they were affiliated or not, with the FPL. In October 1977, the State Department reported on the police harassment of Father Rutilio Sánchez in San Martín. The local mayor who was a former police officer, accused him of being a FPL collaborator; see: AM Embassy to Secretary of State, Telegram 237404, October 3, 1977, 1977STATE237404, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017). Eight months later in May 1978, Archbishop Romero defended priest Fabian Amaya in Las Vueltas, Chalatenango from National Guard accusations of distributing arms to peasants, see AM Embassy to Secretary of State, Telegram 03302, June 28, 1978, 1978SANSAS03302, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

Martínez guided priests and FPL militants from the cities.¹⁶⁹ These “popular intellectuals” articulated the grievances and demands of peasants.¹⁷⁰ Peasants possessed the knowledge about geography and local politics, playing an important role in the expansion of the FPL from a small clandestine organization to a rural insurgency.¹⁷¹

In Chalatenango, priests and university students linked with the FPL supported the self-organization of peasants. Between 1973 and 1975, priests taught workshops to 800 peasants in Chalatenango.¹⁷² Priests promoted the creation of autonomous peasant organizations such as the UTC that were independent of political parties.¹⁷³ These exchanges have been characterized as “a horizontal dialogue among urban and peasant intellectuals, a dialogue informed by the Catholic theological reform in the 1970s, the FPL’s Marxist-Leninist ideology, and the distinct political and religious culture of the peasant intellectuals in Chalatenango.”¹⁷⁴

Peasants transformed the politics of the FPL. The organization had originally rejected Catholicism given the historic role of the Church in perpetuating oppression and presenting inequality as a God-given order. However, liberation theology had radicalized peasants and they constituted the base of militant unions. In an effort to recruit peasants the FPL adapted its stance.

¹⁶⁹ FPL militants such as Felipe Peña Mendoza and sociologist Andrés Torres Sánchez arrived in 1972; their humility and willingness to work in the fields gained them the trust of many peasants.¹⁶⁹ Peasants later learned that Torres Sánchez’s had been an FPL member after his murder in 1976.¹⁶⁹ His murder was one of hundreds during the 1970s, when government forces and death squads routinely harassed and murdered leftists, whether they were affiliated or not, with the FPL.

¹⁷⁰ Chávez, “Pedagogy of Revolution,” 6-7.

¹⁷¹ Chávez, “Pedagogy of Revolution,” 183.

¹⁷² Chávez, “Pedagogy of Revolution,” 167.

¹⁷³ Chávez, “Pedagogy of Revolution,” 169.

¹⁷⁴ Chávez, “Pedagogy of Revolution,” 163-164.

However, I do not mean to suggest that the organization did so for purely utilitarian reasons. The change can also be understood as a testament to the organization's praxis. In 1975, the FPL stated in its revolutionary newspaper, *Estrella Roja*:

We start from the premise that to be Christian is not opposed to the duty of fighting for justice, for the liberation of the people from exploitation and misery...we consider the incorporation of the peasants and workers, who are fundamentally Christian, absolutely necessary to the revolution—a strategic condition...The work of the organization in growing sectors is strategic work, aimed at winning a fundamental sector actively for the revolution. Without this it cannot succeed.

Militant peasant organizing forced the FPL to contend with the question of radical Christianity. Peasant leaders such as Apolinario Serrano, FECCAS secretary general and FPL member, pushed the FPL to consider the revolutionary potential of liberation theology.¹⁷⁵ In turn, his participation in the FPL helped him push FECCAS in a more militant direction that rejected the reformist politics of the Christian Democrats.¹⁷⁶

The participation of peasant women within peasant organizations influenced how the FPL understood the role of peasant women within the revolutionary struggle. In a notable 1978 article titled “Las luchas populares y la mujer campesina,” (Popular Struggles and the Peasant Woman), the FPL argued that the leadership of peasant women deserved “revolutionary respect” because prominent peasant organizers such as Eva, Ursula, Rubenia, and Filomena Puerta (usually known only by their first names), had sacrificed their lives to the struggle.¹⁷⁷ Despite state repression,

¹⁷⁵ Harnecker, ed., *Con la mirada en alto*, 128.

¹⁷⁶ Electoral fraud also pushed FECCAS to debate its relationship to the PDC and electoral politics. By 1975, it distanced itself from the PDC and developed more militant politics. Apolinario Serrano played an important role in the radicalization and growth of the organization. By 1976, FECCAS had about 2,000 members and 500 sympathizers in 66 bases in the departments of San Salvador, Cabañas, Cuscatlán and La Libertad. Pearce, *Promised Land*, 157, 163.

¹⁷⁷ *Compañera*, May 1979, 6.

the “revolutionary compañera” attended protests and distributed propaganda. She demonstrated her political commitment because despite “long work hours” in the fields, “domestic tasks” and “being burdened by the poor health of her children,” she was “always present in the collective meetings, preparing for Revolution.” The “suffering and merciless exploitation” of the peasant woman allowed her to “assimilate quickly the new methodology of popular armed struggle.” She pulled the “weeds” that blocked “her and above all, her people’s development towards progress.”¹⁷⁸ The FPL created a presumably fictional monologue in which a peasant woman stated:

...the times have changed and I should not be left with my arms crossed, listening and living as other struggle for our wellbeing, for the wellbeing of the people in general, when I am an important part of this process in the history of my people.¹⁷⁹

The FPL characterized peasant women as more politically radical than men and women’s participation as an indicator that “the submissive and humiliated peasant woman” had been “left behind.”¹⁸⁰ While it celebrated the political agency of women, the FPL also flirted with essentialist discourses about motherhood. The organization paid its respects toward mothers who had lost their family members to state repression and denounced the exploitation of working-class mothers.¹⁸¹ But they reduced the political agency of mothers to their “clean heart, pure feelings, and noble ideals.”¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ “Las luchas populares y la mujer campesina,” *Campo Rebelde: periódico revolucionario dedicado a los trabajadores del campo* no.1, January 1978, 10-11.

¹⁷⁹ *Campo Rebelde*, January 1978, 11.

¹⁸⁰ *Campo Rebelde*, January 1978, 11.

¹⁸¹ *Compañera*, May 1979, 7.

¹⁸² *Compañera*, May 1979, 8.

The FPL highlighted women's participation within international revolutionary movements as a means to encourage the participation of Salvadoran women within working class organizations. In the May 1979 issue of *Compañera*, the FPL argued that working-class women had "just desires" to "defend their interests, rights, and necessities." Women's demands were part "of the general struggle of the people to conquer their liberation" and construct socialism.¹⁸³ Members encouraged women to join their political-military organization and claimed that "women are indispensable to revolution," citing their revolutionary participation in Russia, China, Korea, Cuba, Nicaragua, Vietnam, Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, South Africa, and Palestine.¹⁸⁴ The FPL encouraged women to join any subcommittee, from propaganda development to militia training.

The organization's insistence on the revolutionary potential and discipline of peasant women may have also been an indirect response to working-class men who believed that women had no place in the struggle. Rather than publicly denounce sexism within the working class and its own ranks, the FPL argued that women deserved respect due to their revolutionary commitment. In contrast, the FPL explicitly denounced the sexism of elites. In their July 1978 and August 1979 issue of *Campo Rebelde*, the FPL explained how elites treated their wives "as a thing of adornment and pleasure." Elites feared socialism because they saw their wives as property and imagined that wealth distribution "would also mean the expropriation of their wives." Such logic "was one of the dumbest lies of the exploiters."¹⁸⁵ The organization also

¹⁸³ *Compañera, Revista de las FPL dedicada a la Mujer*, May 1979, 1, in CIDAI.

¹⁸⁴ *Compañera*, May 1979, 4, 6.

¹⁸⁵ *Campo Rebelde* No. 10., Julio 1978, 4.

denounced the sexism of government soldiers who used rape as a “repressive method” against women organizers at the hands of government or paramilitary soldiers.¹⁸⁶

The Making of a Peasant-Worker Alliance

In the mid-1970s, peasants and workers unified in a revolutionary coalition. From that period onward, state and paramilitary violence only worsened, and continued to get worse as the state frantically attempted to crush land occupations and other militant tactics. In 1977, the ruling military regime committed electoral fraud again, nullifying a second UNO presidential victory. Between 1976 and 1981, the military prohibited electoral opposition in the legislature and local governments, and passed laws to criminalize protest and dismantle due process.¹⁸⁷ In October 1977, the government passed the Law of Public Order, which allowed government forces to arrest and detain people for seventy-two hours without charges and to raid their homes without search warrants. The law had dire consequences, greatly increasing the number of disappeared people and received an indirect green light from the United States.¹⁸⁸ Frank Devine, U.S. diplomat to El Salvador under Carter, argued that “any government has the full right and obligation to use all legal means at its disposal to combat terrorism.”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ *Campo Rebelde* No. 14., September 1979, 5

¹⁸⁷ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 138.

¹⁸⁸ The State Department summarized the findings of the Archdiocese of San Salvador, which “reported that 715 persons were arrested between December 15, 1977 and July 9, 1978” under the Law of Public Order. In September 1978, the Archdiocese published the names of 100 disappeared people and the date of their capture. Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 012718, January 17, 1979, 1979STATE012718, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

¹⁸⁹ Kathryn Sikkink, *Mixed Signals: U.S. Human Rights Policy and Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 141.

In 1975, mass organizations unified or joined larger militant coalitions. That same year, organizers formed the Bloque Popular Revolucionario (Revolutionary Popular Bloc, BPR), a coalition of teachers, students, urban workers, and peasants to dismantle a dictatorial regime and build socialism.¹⁹⁰ ANDES 21 de Junio, FECCAS, and UTC were key organizational members, each with a substantial membership. Altogether, the BPR had about 60-80,000 members.¹⁹¹ Mélida Anaya Montes, ANDES president and FPL commander, served as the first secretary general of the BPR. The BPR coordinated mass actions such as land occupations and strikes, unified the largest mass organizations, developed a coalition platform, and linked reform-based struggles to a revolutionary project based on the peasant-worker alliance.¹⁹² In the specific case of peasant workers, the BPR led land occupations to demand wage increases from two colones (\$1 USD) to fourteen colones (\$7 USD).¹⁹³ The FPL had a strong influence on the BPR but it was not merely a front group. In the words of Facundo Guardado, a peasant organizer and ex-general secretary of the BPR, it “[took] on its own life [and] its own dynamics.”¹⁹⁴ In 1978, three

¹⁹⁰ The BPR members included: AGEUS, ANDES 21 de Junio, FECCAS, UTC, and the Unión de Pobladores de Tugurios, (Slum Dweller’s Union, UTP). For an account of the factors that facilitated the creation of the coalition, see Young, “Revolutionary Coalition Building in El Salvador.” The factors included progressive religion, a grassroots political culture based on solidarity, the FPL emphasis on mass organizing, the role of activists that bridged the urban-rural divide, and a personal and organizational style that emphasized humility and facilitated peasant trust of urbanites.

¹⁹¹ Viterna, *Women in War*, 248.

¹⁹² Pearce, *Promised Land*, 161.

¹⁹³ In December 1979, the embassy reported that the BPR issued a communique announcing occupations of eleven properties in Chalatenango and Aguilares and demanded a daily wage of 14.25 colones. Embassy to Secretary of State, Telegram 07204, December 14, 1979, 1979SANSAS07204, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

¹⁹⁴ Facundo Guardado, interviewed by Kevin Young, San Salvador, May 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. Young, “Revolutionary Coalition Building in El Salvador.” Organizations like ANDES 21 de Junio had to *vote* to join the BPR—top leaders did not unilaterally make the decision; see

years after the Bloc formed, FECCAS and the UTC officially merged to form the Federación de Trabajadores del Campo (Federation of Rural Workers, FTC), although their joint collaboration began in 1976. A UTC organizer explained their motivations to unify with FECCAS: “we realized that FECCAS was suffering the same forms of repression as us.”¹⁹⁵

State repression gave an urgency to form the revolutionary bloc. Revolutionaries responded to state violence by strengthening coalitions and solidarity between different sectors. Organizers responded to the events of July 30, 1975 in which the National Guard killed at least thirty-seven university and high school students at a demonstration, including the nephew of ANDES organizer Cleotilde. A UTC organizer explained how the massacre impacted the organization: “as the UTC we also participated in the mobilizations of July 30th. That day there was a massacre of the students. When later the dead were being taken to the cathedral, the population cried like fathers and mothers, as though their sons had died; and they went to the cathedral to denounce what had happened.”¹⁹⁶ Participants occupied the cathedral for six days.¹⁹⁷ María Ofelia Navarrete, recounted, “the spirit of liberation theology” and “the repression they exercised over us” contributed to the solidarity among different social sectors such as teachers, students, workers, slum dwellers and peasants: “I don’t remember the author who said this, but ‘the enemy is our collaborator.’ The enemy leaves you with no alternative... the consciousness of

Lorena Peña’s testimony in Claudia Sánchez and Iosu Perales, *Ana María, combatiente de la vida: Mélida Anaya Montes: salvadoreña, maestra, guerrillera* (México: Morazán, 2013), 107-08.

¹⁹⁵ Quoted in Pearce, *Promised Land*, 161.

¹⁹⁶ Quoted in Pearce, *Promised Land*, 152.

¹⁹⁷ Pearce, *Promised Land*, 160.

a progressive spirituality pushes you and it gives you a giant moral boost.”¹⁹⁸ According to one historian, peasants transformed these “acts of state terror into symbols of popular rebellion that nurtured several generations of activists and insurgents.”¹⁹⁹

Despite state violence, the revolutionary bloc led land occupations to protest murders and demand wage increases. For example, eight days after the murder of Father Rutilio Grande on May 12, 1977 in the town of Aguilares, FECCAS and UTC organizers occupied a farm for three days. The occupation appears to have been a coordinated response to the murder. In response to the occupation, the government conducted a raid in Aguilares, searching for “subversive ties to the campesinos’ takeover of a nearby hacienda.”²⁰⁰ The attack resulted in the death of six civilians and the arrest of several people, including three women and three foreign priests whose nationalities were not listed.²⁰¹ The Guard arrested, beat, and verbally abused a foreign priest. The U.S. embassy noted how even the conservative Papal Nuncio who gave the Salvadoran government “every opportunity to rationalize its behavior against the church,” described the incident as “beyond sadism.”²⁰² A month later, the National Guard conducted a military

¹⁹⁸ María Ofelia Navarrete, interviewed by author, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “Del espíritu de la teología de la liberación y de la represión que ejercían hacia nosotros, porque no me acuerdo que escritor es que dice; “que el enemigo es nuestro colaborador”. El enemigo no le deja alternativa y tiene que recurrir y a la conciencia de espiritualidad progresista te empuja y te da una moral gigante.”

¹⁹⁹ Chávez, “Pedagogy of Revolution,” 28.

²⁰⁰ The hacienda is listed as San Francisco, “some 35KM north of the capital city.” Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 02404, May 20, 1977, 1977SANSAS02404, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

²⁰¹ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 02404, May 20, 1977, 1977SANSAS02404, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

operation in the same town, which resulted in the murder of “six possible insurgents and two policemen.”²⁰³ The U.S. embassy could not “deny this may have occurred since indeed Aguilares was sealed off for several days during the operation.”²⁰⁴ In another incident, in December 1977, the National Guard evicted approximately 250 peasants occupying a cotton farm. The peasants were preventing the harvest of cotton and thus hoped to pressure the landowners to pay their wages, however the exact nature of the wage dispute is unclear in the documents. The Guard arrested twenty peasants, including five women, and charged them with “possessing various types of weapons and [BPR and FPL] propaganda material” and labeling the occupation “a criminal act against public peace.”²⁰⁵ The State Department acknowledged, “there is as yet no proof that 20 prisoners have been accorded full due process of law.”²⁰⁶ The following year, the National Guard committed more murders. In March 1978, the embassy reported a “confrontation” between the BPR and ORDEN/National Guard, estimating deaths to be between

²⁰² The documents only refer to the priest by his last name, Guevara Siguenza. Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 025161977, May 27, 1977, SANSA02516, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

²⁰³ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 03375, July 19, 1977, 1977SANSA03375, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

²⁰⁴ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 03375, July 19, 1977, 1977SANSA03375, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

²⁰⁵ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram A05639, December 8, 1977, 1977SANSA05639, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

²⁰⁶ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram A05639, December 8, 1977, 1977SANSA05639, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

30 and 300 people.²⁰⁷ The embassy noted, “[the] National Guard probably overreacted to real or potential threat posed by demonstrators.”²⁰⁸

Peasant organizers were aware of the high costs of their tactics and the difficulty of securing a land occupation long-term. Nonetheless, they used those tactics to mobilize more people into the struggle and attack the profits of the landed-oligarchy. In 2015, an FPL woman who participated in the land occupations explained the political goals of such tactics: “first [it was] a way of pressuring the government, it was a means to denounce, because pamphlets were made, it was a way to raise consciousness among the people who came from nearby, because we were sure that [the landowners] wouldn’t give us those lands, but it was a form of struggle.”²⁰⁹ Women assumed logistical responsibilities, cooking food, buying necessary materials to sustain the occupation, and lighting small rockets to alarm others about the arrival of security forces. A peasant woman remembered the actions they took to demand wage increases: peasants “sabotaged the sugar cane [cañales], they burned it all. There was this type of struggle and it started to affect the great oligarchy.”²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 01825, April 17, 1978, 1978SANSAS01825, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

²⁰⁸ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 01825, April 17, 1978, 1978SANSAS01825, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

²⁰⁹ Azucena Quinteros slept over at a land occupation at the Cerro China in El Paisnal. Security forces displaced her and other occupiers and took over the town of Aguilares, possibly the same takeover that the U.S. embassy reported in May 1977. Azucena Quinteros, interviewed by author and Kevin Young, San Salvador, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “Para hacer una toma en primer lugar es una forma de presión para el gobierno, era una forma de denuncia, porque se hacían panfletos, era una forma de concientización a las demás personas que vivían en los alrededores, porque seguros estábamos que esas tierras no las iban a dar, pero era una forma de lucha.”

²¹⁰ María Delia de Cornejo, interviewed by Kevin Young, San Salvador, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “Luego cuando en una hacienda o en un beneficio de café, o en un ingenio, no

Two patterns emerge within U.S. embassy accounts of confrontations between Salvadoran security forces and peasant organizers and guerrilla members. First, in these embassy reports, peasants always fire upon government soldiers first. Second, security agents find evidence of subversive activity, such as leftist literature, guerrilla flags, and weapons. The following example is typical. According to the embassy, on May 1978, a year later after the raids in Aguilares, the National Guard arrested FECCAS and UTC members who met in front of the municipality building in Zacatecoluca, La Paz department.²¹¹ Peasants allegedly met without getting permission and thus violated the law of public order. The National Guard and Armed Forces proceeded to secure the area when “subversive elements” attacked them four kilometers from the original meeting location. The government killed two FPL members, while other FPL members left their flag and submachine guns, which security agents held as evidence, reported the embassy.²¹² While the U.S. embassy did not question the occurrence of these events, it questioned the guerrilla affiliation of the two people killed: “evidence for this conclusion, however, seems somewhat flimsy as security forces were not even certain concerning the identification of the deceased.”²¹³ One month after the raids on June 29, 1978, a joint FECCAS-

pagaban lo que querían y la gente se iba a huelga y era gente que estaba y no estaba organizada, simplemente era una demanda justa. A veces sabotajes a los cañales, lo quemaban todo. Había ese tipo de lucha y empezó a afectar a la gran oligarquía.”

²¹¹ Organizers gathered to commemorate events that had transpired in Aguilares in 1976.

²¹² Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 02487, May 19, 1978, 1978SANSAS02487, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

²¹³ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 02487, May 19, 1978, 1978SANSAS02487, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

UTC bulletin denounced ORDEN killings, torture, and threats against peasants in Aguilares and other towns such as San Pedro Perulapan, Cinquera, and El Paisnal.²¹⁴

Paramilitaries also targeted catechists and other practitioners of liberation theology who organized peasants.²¹⁵ For example, in June 1977, a foreign delegation traveled to El Salvador to denounce the death squad, Unión Guerrera Blanca (White Warriors Union), which threatened to kill all priests and their allies if they did not leave the country within thirty days.²¹⁶ Another group called The Knights of Christ the King attacked its victims in the “style of Ku Klux Klan nightriders.”²¹⁷ In May 1978, the National Guard captured and tortured six catechists for distributing subversive literature. Students and lawyers mobilized in their defense, and managed to release four people.²¹⁸ In January 1979, the State Department also acknowledged human

²¹⁴ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 03934, July 28, 1978, 1978SANSANSA03934, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

²¹⁵ Archbishop Romero denounced the arrest of Father Jorge Sarsanedas, a Panamanian priest captured by the National Guard after giving mass in Tutulepeque. The priest reported to the Panamanian ambassador that he had been “extensively interrogated and only given two meals in six days.” Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 02129, May 6, 1977, 1977SANSANSA02129, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

²¹⁶ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 03057, June 29, 1977, 1977SANSANSA03057, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

²¹⁷ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 02884, June 20, 1977, 1977SANSANSA02884, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

²¹⁸ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 01825, April 17, 1978, 1978SANSANSA01825, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

rights abuse accusations against the National Guard and ORDEN, including “denial of food and water, electric shock and sexual violation [of prisoners].”²¹⁹

Government soldiers and paramilitaries did not spare women organizers. A peasant woman from Morazán department who picked coffee as a child remembered how the National Guard “beat women, tortured them” and took “suspicious” women (i.e. suspected labor organizers) “to farms to rape them and kill them.”²²⁰ In July 1978, the embassy summarized media reports of FECCAS and UTC organizers who fled from paramilitaries in El Paisnal, San Salvador department. María Elena Hernández Salinas, a sixteen year-old BPR organizer, was one of the people to flee. A year later in April, local press reported that an unknown assailant (probably a death squad member) murdered her.²²¹ Later in September, Archbishop Romero listed six disappeared persons, including María Josefina García from El Paisnal.²²² That same month, security forces conducted a military operation in La Pita del Canton el Puente, killing Pilar González and Adelina Carranza and her son Pastor Martínez Carranza.²²³ The embassy also noted the murder of labor leader Mercedes Recinos. Death squads also punished women for the

²¹⁹ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 012718, January 17, 1979, 1979STATE012718, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

²²⁰ Irma Esperanza Díaz Vásquez, interviewed by author, Quebracho, July 2014, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

²²¹ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 03217, June 13, 1979, 1979SANSAS03217, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

²²² Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 05431, September 21, 1979, 1979SANSAS05431, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

²²³ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 05431, September 21, 1979, 1979SANSAS05431, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

labor activities of their partners, as in the case of Adriana Reyes. Men in civilian clothing armed with G-3 rifles killed Reyes when they did not find her husband, their original target. One month later, in July 1979, a group of armed men kidnapped and later killed Ana Silva Olivares Olan, a leader within an electrical workers' union.²²⁴ The embassy interpreted these murders as “another indication that women can perhaps no longer count on previous taboo that females should not be considered as potential assassination victims of Salvadoran terrorist groups.”²²⁵ While the United States had provided the funds to establish ORDEN in the 1960s, by the late 1970s, American officials under Carter viewed the group as destabilizing because it undermined opportunities for limited reform and thus legitimated the left's claims for radical societal change. At the same time, the Carter administration (and later Reagan) continued to fund the Salvadoran governments that worked closely with ORDEN, the group that terrorized both liberal and leftist opposition.

The documents cited above demonstrate not only the increasing brutality of the Salvadoran government but also the goal of the United States to contain the influence of the radical left, including both armed and unarmed movements. The Carter administration (1977-1981) rhetorically denounced human rights abuses. At the same time, however, it privately sought to avoid destabilizing the armed forces, the body responsible for violently repressing progressives and radical leftists.²²⁶ The latter goal ultimately triumphed over human rights concerns, leading Carter to support the ruling military party of President Carlos Humberto

²²⁴ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 05431, September 21, 1979, 1979SANSAs05431, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

²²⁵ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 03452, June 22, 1979, 1979SANSAs03452, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

²²⁶ For a discussion of Carter and how his domestic and foreign policies “facilitated the rearming of the Cold War that his successor would implement in full,” see Grandin, *Empire's Workshop*, 66.

Romero (1977-1979), a government that dramatically increased violence against the left. In 1977, Carter required respect for human rights as a condition of receiving military aid and in response, the Salvadoran government refused aid between 1978-1979. After a junta of reformist military officers came to power in October 1979, the Carter administration unveiled plans in January 1980 to provide El Salvador with \$54.3 million in economic and military aid. By this point, the more progressive members of the junta had resigned and Christian Democrat leader, Duarte, remained, in addition to the rightwing officers. In late 1980 the goal of maintaining regime stability became even more pressing for Carter in order to avoid an FMLN takeover, which perhaps explains the increase in military aid to the junta even after its more progressive members resigned. After the National Guard murdered and raped four U.S. Church women in El Salvador in December 1980, Carter temporarily suspended military aid but re-continued \$10 million in lethal and non-lethal aid on January 14, six days prior to Reagan's inauguration. In his first week of office, Reagan increased aid to \$64 million. Reagan did not threaten to suspend aid based on concerns of human rights but rather dramatically increased such aid that it ran into the billions throughout the course of the 1980s.²²⁷ As one scholar notes, after 1979 the "United States began to appear not merely powerless to stop [military] abuses but complicit in their commission."²²⁸ While the Carter administration was critical of certain military and government actions in its correspondence prior to 1979, it ultimately viewed those groups as necessary allies to prevent a radical left and/or FMLN takeover, a goal that both Democratic and Republican presidents shared. Thus, while it is important to recognize the rhetorical differences between

²²⁷ William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since WWII* (London: Zed Press, 2003), 357.

²²⁸ John H. Coatsworth, *Central America and the United States: The Clients and the Colossus* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), 148.

Carter and Reagan and the tactical differences in their policies, it is equally important to remember that both administrations sought to maintain U.S. hegemony, prevent an FMLN takeover at all costs, and were firmly rooted in imperialist and Cold War ideologies. As one scholar argued, Carter is best understood as a “modified cold war warrior” and “the differences between classic cold war containment [e.g. Reagan] and Carter’s were only differences of degree...”²²⁹ Furthermore, the Salvadoran “center” championed by the United States joined the far right in unleashing terror against the left. Modest policy differences between Carter and Reagan, and between the Salvadoran moderates and extreme right, should not obscure the areas of consensus.

The Making of a Peasant Insurgency

While the FPL had advocated armed struggle prior to the devastating increase in state violence in the late 1970s, the dramatic onslaught made the creation of peasant militias a top priority. In building peasant militias, the FPL hoped to lay the groundwork for the insurgency. To embark on this task, FPL women had to train at night and prioritize their political work over their domestic responsibilities. In doing so, FPL women confronted patriarchal authority at home, and in some cases, successfully obtained more power within the home.

In the mid-1970s, peasant men started sleeping in the hills to avoid government capture. However, by the late 1970s, women no longer assumed that they would be spared because they were women. By 1976, Domitila and Rosa started to sleep in the hills to avoid the nighttime attacks of the National Guard and death squads. Rosa organized her community to defend itself and remembered how villagers lit fireworks and used phrases such as “coyotes are coming,

²²⁹ Martha L. Cottam, *Images and Intervention: U.S. Policies in Latin America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994), 179.

wolves are coming, [and] lions are coming” to announce the arrival of soldiers.²³⁰ Rosa’s neighbor, María Ofelia Navarrete, lived near a military base and remembered how she and her family heard the cries of tortured victims. She and her family fled their home after a National Guard soldier warned her that she and sixty-six other individuals were on a death list. She was number 11.²³¹

By 1977 in a context of heightened state repression and a closed political system, the FPL publicly called for the “development of popular militias.”²³² At the age of twenty in 1977, Domitila began her clandestine participation in the FPL and military training in the popular militias. While Domitila’s parents had originally encouraged her catechist work and tolerated her labor organizing in the UTC, her clandestine activities with the FPL threatened patriarchal authority in several ways. As narrated in the introduction to this dissertation, after Domitila’s father discovered her revolver, her parents began to respect her:

From that moment, they no longer bothered me at home, because I lived a hard life. I endured difficulties to participate in the organization; even to the point of being kicked out of the house because they said that I was coming and going and didn’t help them. And why was a woman doing that. They later realized that I had the ability to [organize and handle weapons.]...But the first few months, they were not easy, it was hard for me, because I had to work hard in the organization and I had to work hard at home. Apart from that, I had to listen to all the things my parents said about me not being with them.²³³

²³⁰ Rosa Rivera, interviewed by Jenny Pearce, Arcatao, 2014.

²³¹ Sotomayor and Portillo, “En la Guerra, nunca celebré una victoria con euforia,” *El Faro*, March 3, 2015.

²³² *Campo Rebelde* no. 62, December 1977, 4.

²³³ Domitila Ayala, interviewed by Rebecka Biró and Victoria Montero, July 2013, transcript, pg. 5. “Desde ese momento no me molestaron en mi casa, porque yo vivía duramente. Yo pase dificultades por estar en la organización. Ya a punto de echarme de la casa porque decían que ya solo pasaba arriba y para abajo y no les ayudaba. Y que hacia una mujer haciendo eso. Después se dieron cuenta que si tenía capacidad de hacerlo. Ya después, aunque me iba delante de ellos, ya no me decían nada. Pero los

The discovery of the revolver reassured her parents and raised fears. First, the discovered revolver confirmed to her father that Domitila had the training to protect herself from men, including her father. His worst fear, that she was sexually active, seems to have rescinded when he found the revolver. Her parents no longer questioned her nighttime outings and even granted her privileges normally afforded to men, such as special food items.

FPL women participated in activities that the U.S. embassy perceived as a threat to economic productivity, government legitimacy, and elite families and businesses.²³⁴ For example, in April 1978, the embassy accused the FPL of planting bombs at the Santa Ana office of a textile company and in the car of its chief executive. The bombs caused “minor property damage.”²³⁵ In three other instances in November 1978, the embassy summarized media reports of alleged FPL bombings, including Bayer’s main laboratory, which produced insecticides, and a McDonald’s five blocks from the embassy, and a shootout between four FPL members and 150 police officers.²³⁶ In a communique attributed to the FPL, the organization described Bayer as an

primeros meses, no fue fácil, fue duro para mí, porque trabajaba duramente en la organización y tenía que trabajar duramente en la casa. Aparte de eso tenía que oír todo lo que mis papas me decían por no estar ahí con ellos.”

²³⁴ The embassy accused the FPL of bombing Salvadoran government headquarters in December 1974; “Bombing Incidents in Government Offices.” It also lamented the FPL assassination of foreign minister Mauricio Borgonovo in May 1977, see: Embassy San Salvador to US INFO, Telegram 02224, May 12, 1977, 1977SANSAS02224, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

²³⁵ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 02599, May 24, 1978, 1978SANSAS02599, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

²³⁶ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 06171, November 27, 1978, 1978SANSAS06171, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017). Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 06229, November 29, 1978, 1978SANSAS06229, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017). Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 06007, November 17, 1978, 1978SANSAS06007, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic

“instrument of Yankee and German imperialism” that “obtains all these profits from the exploitation of rural workers who live by harvesting crops.”²³⁷ The police had a drastic advantage in terms of force and military equipment and the shootout resulted in the death of four FPL members.

According to the U.S. embassy, the FPL selectively assassinated elites responsible for exploiting and repressing peasants. For example, on January 15, 1979, the FPL assassinated an ORDEN and PCN member in Las Minas, near the city of Chalatenango. The FPL accused him “of having raped several women and having caused [the] arrest of many farm workers.”²³⁸ In December of that same year, fifty FPL women and men occupied the town of Nejapa, 24 km north of the San Salvador capital city. They “rounded up seven individuals, including administrators of large estate[s], [the] chief of [the] municipal police, and a son of latter; tied their hands behind backs and took them to the town park, where [a] reported 400 citizens of town had been summoned by loud speakers.”²³⁹ According to the U.S. Embassy, at the urging of “youths” in the crowd, FPL guerillas shot the administrator and flogged the police chief. That

Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017). Drawing from the autopsy reports, Archbishop Romero denounced how the sole survivor of the shootout had been shot in the head by security forces after his arrest and suggested the possibility that three people may have also been killed and tortured before the shootout, see Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 06350, December 6, 1978, 1978SANSAs06350, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

²³⁷ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 06194, November 28, 1978, 1978SANSAs06194, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

²³⁸ The executed man is listed as Venancio Alas. Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 01231, March 7, 1979, 1979SANSAs01231, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

²³⁹ Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 07204, December 14, 1979, 1979SANSAs07204, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

same month, the embassy reported that the FPL assassinated “an administrator for the Dueñas Family enterprise and brother of military officer prominent in military regime.”²⁴⁰

While in hindsight it appears that El Salvador was on the inevitable path toward civil war, in October 1979, some leftists believed in the possibility of a new path. From October 15, 1979 to January 3, 1980, junior military officers governed the country through the Junta Revolucionaria de Gobierno (Revolutionary Junta of Government). The officers had taken power through a bloodless military coup, promising political and economic structural reforms, including agrarian reform, an end to human rights abuses, the abolition of paramilitary groups, and freedom for political prisoners.²⁴¹ Jesuit intellectual Ignacio Ellacaría urged the revolutionary left, including peasant and guerrilla leaders, to critically support the junta given its promises to implement progressive reform. However, the revolutionary left rejected the junta, viewing it as incapable of reigning in rightwing violence and thus underserving of support. In fact, 1980, was the most violent year of the decade, with a total of 4,288 deaths.²⁴² A series of irreconcilable political disagreements within the junta resulted in the resignation of more progressive members in January 1980. Afterwards, the leader of the Christian Democrats, José Napoleon Duarte, joined the junta; the latter finally dissolved four months later.

For many, the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero on March 24, 1980 confirmed the necessity of armed struggle to resist state violence. If the top clergyman in El

²⁴⁰ The administrator was Jose Francisco Vides Ceballos. Embassy San Salvador to Secretary of State, Telegram 07204, December 14, 1979, 1979SANSAS07204, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-79/Electronic Telegrams, RG 59: General Records of the Department of State, National Archives (accessed January 8, 2017).

²⁴¹ Jeffrey Gould, “Ignacio Ellacuría and the Salvadoran Revolution,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 47 (2015): 300.

²⁴² Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 142.

Salvador had been murdered, what chances did peasants have to live? Romero denounced military repression against peasants and the urban poor in the late 1970, and he also assisted families in their search for their disappeared family members.²⁴³ A death squad bullet pierced his heart as he said mass; the previous day he had publicly demanded that the army stop killing civilians and one month prior he had written to President Jimmy Carter demanding a halt to U.S. military aid.²⁴⁴ Carter ignored his pleas and approved \$5.7 million in aid.²⁴⁵ At Romero's funeral, government sniper fire rained down on 100,000 attendees, including Rosa and Domitila, and killed between thirty to fifty people and wounded 600.²⁴⁶ Two months after the assassination of Romero, government soldiers murdered Rosa's parents, María Rivera Serrano and Nasario Rivera Ayala. Months later, Rosa and Domitila joined the newly-formed FMLN. Rosa became an organizer in a women's association and Domitila became a respected guerrilla leader. In the city, Cleotilde continued to organize with ANDES, while María Candelaria took refuge in Mexico City, coordinating solidarity work to support the women's association that Rosa had joined.

Conclusion

In the 1960s and 1970s, thousands of women joined teacher and peasant organizations. Two decades prior to the formation of the FMLN, workers engaged in militant struggles that

²⁴³ For example, in 1977 he supported the establishment of the Comité de Madres y Familiares de Presos, Desaparecidos, Asesinados Políticos de El Salvador (Committee of Mothers and Relatives of Prisoners, the Disappeared, and Politically Assassinated of El Salvador, CO-MADRES).

²⁴⁴ "Document Four," February 19, 1980. Unclassified, Cable, "Text of Archbishops Letter to President Carter." United States Embassy. El Salvador. NSA. <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB339/>

²⁴⁵ Coatsworth, *Central America and the United States*, 154.

²⁴⁶ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 159. Coatsworth cites the higher number of murdered individuals, *Central America and the United States*, 154.

radicalized their membership and exposed the undemocratic and repressive nature of the state. Women specifically confronted the power that family members and employers exercised over them, thus reconsidering their own ideas about proper gender roles and their role in the class struggle. Significantly, leftist women legitimated their right to political participation. The following two chapters will examine how women in the guerrilla-controlled territories negotiated the *terms* of their political participation while they simultaneously organized more women into the struggle.

Chapter 2. Las Compas and the Everyday Politics of Armed Struggle

“When terror and crime closed every possibility of openly expressing their yearnings, the rifle substituted the banner; the sound of the megaphone gave way to that of explosives. The union local moved to the guerrilla camp. The war inexorably became the only possible way. A traditionally peaceful people had to learn to fight. It was in this landscape that peasant women, the women workers in the free [trade] zones, the market women, the women students, were integrated to realize the tasks of the war. From now on, they would only be called, *las compas*.” *Las Compas* (1983)¹

Las Compas refers to the thousands of women who joined the FMLN insurgency, taking on roles as commanders, combatants, and political cadre; the latter included political organizers, *radistas* (radio operators), *sanitarias* (medics), and *misioneras* (women who transported materials across the Honduran and Nicaraguan border). Many of these women articulated a vision of gender equality and fought to have it applied in practice.² In the 1980s, the FMLN used its propaganda apparatus to disseminate its anti-sexist critique of capitalism. Within that propaganda, FMLN women emphasized their important role within the struggle and invited more women to join their ranks, and some even claimed that the revolution would create a new society where women would be respected for their worth, not their relationships to men or physical appearances. Within the guerrilla camps, women took to heart revolutionary values such as equality and solidarity and applied these principles in their everyday life, as the FMLN asked

¹ *Las Compas*, Sistema Radio Venceremos, 1983. “Cuando el terror y el crimen cerraron toda posibilidad de manifestar abiertamente sus anhelos, el fusil tomó el relevo de la pancarta; el megáfono cayó para dejar oír los explosivos. El local sindical se trasladó al campamento guerrillero. La guerra inexorablemente se fue convirtiendo en la única vía posible. Un pueblo por tradición pacífico, tuvo que aprender a pelear. Fue en ese terreno, en que las campesinas, las obreras de las zonas francas, las mujeres de los mercados, las estudiantes, se integraron a las labores prácticas de la guerra. En adelante, serían llamadas únicamente, *las compas*.”

² For the purposes of this study, I will analyze the experiences of both combatants and political cadre because they shared the same living space within the guerrilla camps and received orders from the military command.

them to do. However, they applied these values in unexpected ways that shaped norms in the camps and contested patriarchy, including the sexism of many FMLN men who wished to confine women to particular roles and exert their authority over women.³ In addition, women resisted male-centric definitions of the revolutionary subject, which marginalized the labor, bodies, and needs of women. For instance, women fought to collectivize food production among both men and women and to gain access to sanitary napkins. Women also navigated sexual relationships and reproductive choices, and pushed the FMLN to punish infidelity, sexual harassment, and rape. While some of these interventions challenged sexism, others reinforced it. To explore how *las compas* intervened in daily life, I draw from the oral histories of eleven women from the two largest guerrilla groups that comprised the FMLN.⁴ I specifically highlight the experiences of FPL members Elda Gladis Tobar de Ortiz (1962-) and Domitila Ayala (1957-), and ERP members Dina Vaquerano (1959-) and Irma Esperanza Díaz Vásquez (1956-).

In highlighting how FMLN women pushed their organization to practice gender equality, I offer a new interpretation about the motivations of FMLN women. Sociologist Jocelyn Viterna interviewed two-hundred women who forcefully insisted that “women and men performed all jobs equally in the guerrilla camps,” which according to them reflected the FMLN’s

³ The contestation of patriarchy is not a complete or linear process. Tinsman makes a similar argument, demonstrating how the Chilean Agrarian Reform “eroded some forms of male dominance (landowners’ sense of entitlement to rural women’s bodies)” and “strengthened others (campesino men’s roles as breadwinners); Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict*, 13.

⁴ None of the participants disclosed their involvement in same-sex relationships and they provided scarce information about gay or lesbian couples in their units. I suspect that taboos and a lack of trust may have shaped their responses. The organization Acción por la Memoria y Apoyo al Trabajo para la Equidad en El Salvador (AMATE) is doing ground-breaking work, compiling the oral histories of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex people during the 1980s and onwards. For a discussion of dissident masculine sexualities in El Salvador from 1932-1992, see Amaral Palevi Gómez Arévalo, "Del "cuiloni" al homosexual: sexualidades masculinas disidentes en El Salvador entre 1932-1992," *Cultura, Lenguaje Y Representación – CLR 15* (2016): 119-137.

commitment to women's equality.⁵ In contrast, Viterna points to the inequalities that existed in the FMLN and claims that FMLN women have internalized the narratives of commanders who wished to obscure the reality of gender *inequality*. Although commanders encouraged the participation of women within high-prestige positions, they also explained the predominance of women within low-prestige positions as a reflection of their individual abilities. This argument implicitly suggested that men were more capable than women, which explains men's disproportionate representation in the top decision-making bodies of the FMLN.⁶ While Viterna rightfully critiques how commanders naturalized the gender division of labor, we must also consider why women themselves, including the women that Viterna and I interviewed respectively, are invested in a narrative about equality, even as we recognize that sexism certainly existed.

Rather than attribute a false feminist consciousness to rank-and-file women and overstate the power of commanders to determine the views of rank-and-file women, I suggest that women's investment in a narrative of gender equality captures the *promise* of the FMLN. When the FMLN made a call for women to join the struggle, many men wished to confine women to particular roles and did not wish to change the hierarchies between men and women. Men may have argued that equality between men and women already existed, and therefore no further debate or action against sexism was necessary. But on the ground, many women contested sexism and redefined what it meant to be a combatant. Women may have used a discourse of gender equality to point to the promises of the revolution, what had been won and what else

⁵ Viterna, *Women and War*, 139.

⁶ Viterna, *Women and War*, 149.

needed to be done for women to be free.¹ Therefore, when some women in the postwar period (including the women that Viterna and I interviewed) continue to insist that equality existed in the FMLN, they perhaps point to the relative success of their own anti-sexist interventions. Their insistence on equality also reflects what living in the camps meant to these women. While sexism was by no means eradicated, life in the camps radically departed from the gender roles promoted by the society at large. Many women felt that their work and input mattered within the FMLN, and that it was an organization that, with some pushing, could ensure respect for women and punish men, at least lower-ranking men, who did not respect *las compas*.

A Brief History of the War

In October 1980, months after the assassination of the progressive Archbishop Arnulfo Romero, five distinct guerrilla groups formed a coalition: the FMLN.² Inspired by guerrilla movements in Cuba, Vietnam, and other colonized countries, the FMLN identified armed struggle as a viable strategy to dismantle U.S.-backed dictatorial and oligarchic rule, defend organizers and civilians against state violence, and construct socialism via the taking of state power.³ The FMLN mainly operated within the countryside although it also had urban guerrillas.

¹ My framework is very much informed by the scholarship on racial democracy. While discourses of racial democracy have been used by elites and government leaders to shut down further debate about racism, many people of color used such discourses to point to unfulfilled promises. Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion*.

² “Comunicado de la Dirección Revolucionaria Unificada (DRU-PM) anunciando la formación del Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN),” October 10, 1980, <https://www.marxists.org/espanol/tematica/elsalvador/organizaciones/fmln/1980/oct/10.htm>

³ “Manifiesto del Partido Comunista de El Salvador, de las Fuerzas Populares de Liberación “Farabundo Martí” y de la Resistencia Nacional, al Pueblo Salvadoreño, a los Pueblos Centroamericanos y del Mundo,” January 10, 1980, <https://www.marxists.org/espanol/tematica/elsalvador/organizaciones/fmln/1980/ene/10.htm>

It led two major city offensives in 1981 and 1989, which included the capital city of San Salvador.

As part of its military strategy against the FMLN, the Regan administration and Salvadoran governments enacted “low-intensity warfare,” which included military and economic aid to state forces, political isolation of opponents, and repression directed at movement leaders or sympathizers in order to discourage political participation. The shift to low-intensity warfare reflected debates within the top leadership of U.S. intelligence agencies. For instance, National Security Council adviser William Clark, advocated the approach in the early 1980s because it did not require the deployment of U.S. soldiers in El Salvador and could avoid the mistakes of Vietnam. Counter-insurgency strategists such as Clark worked to raise the costs for social movement participants and identified all peasants as potential subversives and their resources, including food and water supply, as potential guerrilla resources.⁴ In order to take the “fish out of water,” the Salvadoran state led a murderous scorched earth campaign against civilians and FMLN supporters. One of the most infamous massacres occurred in December 1981 in the village of El Mozote in Morazán department. Days after the massacre, Radio Venceremos, the “official voice” of the FMLN, interviewed survivor Rufina Amaya who testified that the government Atlacatl Battalion under the command of Colonel Domingo Monterrosa had murdered close to 800 peasants. Soldiers raped, impaled, burned, strangled, shot, and decapitated their victims. Throughout the 1980s, the Regan administration and the right-wing National Republican Alliance (ARENA) party, whose founder organized death squads, continuously

⁴ For a detailed discussion, see Smith’s “Low-intensity warfare” in *Resisting Reagan: The U.S. Central America Peace Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

denied the massacre.⁵ Exhumations later removed all doubt: one mass grave alone held the remains of 131 children under the age of twelve and at least one fetus.

The scorched-earth campaigns internally displaced thousands of Salvadoran peasants, while others fled to refugee camps in Honduras and Nicaragua. In 1982, Honduras hosted 21,250 refugees in five refugee camps.⁶ Refugees faced psychological trauma and torture, deportations, murder, and sexual violence at the hands of Honduran military soldiers who regularly raided the camps.⁷ Peasant refugees strategically collaborated with international aid workers to increase their chances of survival because Honduran soldiers avoided killing refugees in the presence of foreigners. Foreigners also added credibility to the testimonies of peasant refugees regarding human rights abuses.⁸ In addition, many refugees had participated in peasant organizing in previous decades and approached the camps as an organizing site which was part of the larger revolutionary struggle. They organized literacy, metalworking, and sewing workshops, and communal kitchens to raise political consciousness and create the groundwork for building a new society once they returned home.⁹

⁵ Keith Preston, *El Salvador: A War by Proxy* (London: Black House Publishing, 2013), 65. Mark Danner, *The Massacre at El Mozote: A Parable of the Cold War* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 9-10, 91-93, also see Danner's chapter "Washington's Version." Grandin, *Empire's Workshop*, 135.

⁶ By 1983, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees relocated the majority of Salvadoran refugees to five camps in Honduras: La Virtud (sheltered between 3,000 and 10,000 refugees at any one time); Colomoncagua (sheltered around 8,400); Buenos Aires (200 to 300); San Antonio (approximately 1,500); and Mesa Grande, which consolidated with La Virtud, made it the most populous of the camps (around 11,500). MollyMc, *Beyond Displacement: Campesinos, Refugees, and Collective Action in the Salvadoran Civil War* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 27.

⁷ Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, 113, 130-131.

⁸ Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, 114.

⁹ Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, 160-163.

In the 1980s, U.S. foreign policy towards Central America was marked by a conjuncture of militarization, free markets, right-wing nationalism, and Christian fundamentalism.¹⁰ While both the Carter and Reagan administration sought to maintain U.S. dominance in the region, their tactics, rhetoric, and perspective often diverged. In contrast to Carter, Reagan did not prioritize a discourse of human rights but rather justified U.S. intervention in the region to stop the spread of communism. The United States provided equipment and funding to the Salvadoran state and trained military officials, including Col. Monterrosa at the School of the Americas (SOA) in Fort Benning, Georgia.¹¹ For instance, of the 245 cartridge cases found at El Mozote, 184 had been manufactured for the U.S. government at Lake City, Missouri.¹² SOA trained Latin American military officials in counter-insurgency techniques, including torture. U.S. military aid to El Salvador approximated \$3.6 billion during the 1980s; including economic aid, the number rises to \$4.5 billion.¹³ Military funding enabled the expansion of the Salvadoran army, which increased from 16,000 soldiers in 1979 to 62,000 in 1991. By the end of the war, the armed forces outnumbered FMLN combatants by at least six to one.¹⁴ In addition, the United States sent funds, military equipment and advisers to Honduras in order to launch counter-insurgency programs against armed revolutionary movements in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador.¹⁵

¹⁰ Grandin, *Empire's Workshop*, 145-158.

¹¹ School of the Americas Watch, "Notorious Graduates from El Salvador," to view full list, see http://soaw.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=238. For a discussion of the training techniques of soldiers, see Grandin, "Going Primitive" in *Empire's Workshop*.

¹² Danner, *The Massacre at El Mozote*, 159.

¹³ Cynthia McClintock, *Revolutionary Movements in Latin America: El Salvador's FMLN and Peru's Shining Path* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1998), 221-223. Americas Watch Committee, *El Salvador's Decade of Terror*, 141.

¹⁴ This figure does not include data on other state bodies such as the National Guard, Hacienda Police, Communal Patrols, and death squads. Viterna, *Women in War*, 27.

The Sandinista government, which had overthrown the Somoza dictatorship in 1979, fought the U.S.-funded contras or paramilitary groups that sought to overthrow the revolution. In Guatemala, Generals Fernando Romeo Lucas García and José Efraín Ríos Montt led a genocidal campaign against the indigenous population whom they suspected of collaborating with guerrillas. U.S. intervention in Central America contributed to the deaths of at least 300,000 people in the region.¹⁶

The U.S. peace and solidarity movement demanded a halt to U.S. intervention in Central America.¹⁷ Movements such as Sanctuary, Witness for Peace, and Pledge of Resistance mobilized thousands during the 1980s. For example, in its first three years, the Sanctuary movement mobilized more than seventy thousand people to break federal immigration laws that denied Salvadorans refugee status. Witness for Peace sent delegates to El Salvador to accompany organizers since state forces thought twice about committing violence in the presence of foreigners, meanwhile Pledge of Resistance obtained commitments from tens of thousands of U.S. Americans who agreed to engage in civil disobedience in the case of a military intervention in Central America.¹⁸ In 1980, sisters Lisa, Heidi, and Rebecca Tarver established the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), a national organization that coordinated a

¹⁵ Robert Armstrong and Janet Shenk. *El Salvador: The Face of Revolution* (Boston: South End Press, 1982), 215.

¹⁶ In Guatemala, the thirty-six year conflict resulted in 200,000 deaths. In El Salvador the death toll was 75,000, while in Nicaragua it was 30,000 (excluding the lives lost in the fight against Somoza).

¹⁷ The peace and solidarity movement opposed U.S. intervention in Central America, but the solidarity movement additionally worked to support the political goals of leftist organizations in the region.

¹⁸ Smith, *Resisting Reagan*, 374. The case of the four U.S. American church women illustrates the risks that people in the solidarity movement took when visiting El Salvador. Death squads raped and murdered Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel, Jean Donovan, and Sisters Maura Clarke and Ita Ford on December 2, 1980.

spectrum of actions, from lobbying and fundraising to civil disobedience.¹⁹ For instance, in October 17, 1988, CISPES shut down the Pentagon in protest of U.S. military aid to El Salvador and over the course of the decade fundraised over one million dollars in humanitarian aid.²⁰ The organizing success of CISPES made it a threat to government authorities. The Federal Bureau Investigation (FBI) surveilled CISPES and its organizational allies, which included more than 100,000 activists in over fifty-nine cities. This was the largest surveillance operation since COINTELPRO in the 1960s.²¹ U.S. government officials broke into the offices and homes of CISPES activists, and death squad agents linked to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) kidnapped and raped Yanira Corea, a Salvadoran refugee and CISPES organizer living in Los Angeles.²² For at least ten years, the FBI also surveilled activists from the School of the Americas Watch, an organization founded in 1990 that protested the training of Latin American military officers at the School of the Americas.²³

Self-described lesbian, gay, and feminist organizers played an important role within the Central America solidarity movement. Organizers attempted to bridge feminist and queer liberation and anti-imperialism, and connect domestic struggles to U.S. foreign policy.²⁴ In the

¹⁹ The sisters came from a family of radicals, which in part influenced their actions, including the decision of Rebecca Tarver to fight in the FMLN. For a discussion of the internal debates within CISPES, see Gosse, “The North American Front,” in *Reshaping the US Left*.

²⁰ Bradford Martin, *The Other Eighties: A Secret History of America in the Age of Reagan* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011), 36. To see footage of the action, visit: <http://cispes30years.org/1988/10/footage-of-the-pentagon-shutdown/>

²¹ Smith, *Resisting Reagan*, 283-287; CISPES, “History of CISPES.”

²² Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop*, 139.

²³ Verheyden-Hilliard, “Exposed: FBI Surveillance of School of the Americas Watch,” *Alternet*, November 11, 2015.

²⁴ Hobson, *Lavender and Red*, 115

process, they hoped to advance “radical sexual politics and to build a multiracial lesbian and gay community.”²⁵ For instance, Somos Hermanas, a multiracial feminist group of lesbian and straight women based in San Francisco, pointed to the devastating effects of militarization; abroad it led to the murder of thousands of people and attacks against revolutionary movements, while at home it justified cutbacks against social services and criminalized reproductive freedoms and people of color. Organizers based in the United States admired women’s participation within the Central American revolutionary movements and their efforts to link women’s rights to the broader struggle. For these reasons, groups like Somos Hermanas hosted Salvadoran women’s organizations, including AMES, at a five hundred-person conference in the Mission District in March 1985.²⁶

Although the Salvadoran military received U.S. military aid it could not defeat the FMLN. After years of a military stalemate, on January 16, 1992, the FMLN and ARENA signed the Chapultepec Peace Accords in Mexico City that formally ended the twelve-year war. The accords notably dissolved repressive state bodies, specifically the National Guard, National Police and Treasury Police, recognized the FMLN as a political party, and demobilized combatants and government soldiers.²⁷ The war had inflicted devastating consequences. From 1979 to 1983 alone, the state murdered nearly one percent of the population. By its end, the war had resulted in the death of at least 75,000 people.²⁸ In 1993, the United Nations Truth

²⁵ Hobson, *Lavender and Red*, 98

²⁶ Hobson, *Lavender and Red*, 130

²⁷ By 1995, the National Guard, National Police, and Treasury Police were dissolved, while the size of existing military branches were reduced and placed under stricter civilian control. The National Civilian Police Force (PNC) incorporated former state and guerrilla combatants. Through demobilization programs, combatants could apply for a loan or educational scholarships, and receive agricultural training, equipment or supplies to build a house or purchase a plot of land.

Commission reported that government forces and death squads committed 85 percent of acts of violence, whereas the FMLN was accused in 5 percent of cases.²⁹

Women in the FMLN Ranks

The FMLN had a hierarchical military structure. The general command, the highest FMLN decision-making body, included a total of five general secretaries (all men) who each represented one of the five guerrilla groups. Each guerrilla group also had its own command structure, made up of a general secretary and a group of commanders, and advocated its own interpretation of Marxism and controlled its funding and access to arms. The ERP had the highest number of women, four in total, in its general command structure.³⁰ In all five guerrilla groups, mid-ranking commanders oversaw different territories while leaders known as *jefes* or *responsables* oversaw specific camps or units. Prior to 1985, a camp could have 4,000 combatants and a large civilian presence. After 1985, the FMLN divided its units into platoons (thirty people) or squadrons (five to six people).³¹ On average, the camps had two to three men for every one woman; with the exception of the all-women Silvia platoon.

Postwar reports, even with their limitations, reveal the number of rank-and-file women in the FMLN. The United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL), the organization responsible for the demobilization of FMLN insurgents after the 1992 peace accords, reported

²⁸ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 179.

²⁹ Based on 22,000 complaints of “serious acts of violence” committed between January 1980 and July 1991. United Nations, “From Madness to Hope.”

³⁰ Ana Sonia Media (Commander Mariana), Mercedes del Carmen Letona (Commander Luisa), Ana Guadalupe Martínez (Commander María), and Lilian Milagro Ramírez (Commander Clelia, also known as Haydée).

³¹ Viterna, *Women in War*, 38.

that women constituted twenty-seven to thirty-four percent of the membership in the FMLN.³² There were 4,492 women out of the 15,009 FMLN registered members.³³ The registered FMLN members were largely between the ages of fourteen and forty-years of age.³⁴ Although ten to fifteen percent of the FMLN membership was not counted, largely due to many members' legitimate mistrust of the state, the data show clearly that women constituted a significant base of the FMLN.³⁵

FMLN participants were divided into three major categories: combatants, political cadre, and wounded noncombatants. Of the total 8,552 combatants, 2,485, or 29 percent, were women. The two largest guerrilla groups, the FPL and ERP, had the largest number of women combatants: 696 (twenty-eight percent) and 754 (33.3 percent) respectively.³⁶ Women were concentrated among the political cadre. Of the total 3,983 political cadre in the FMLN, women made up 1,458 or 36.6 percent. The FPL and ERP had the largest percentage of women political cadre: 33.9 percent (488 women) and forty percent (185 women).³⁷ In the FMLN, less than thirty percent of women worked in the kitchen, fifteen percent performed tasks related to healthcare, and eleven percent occupied support roles. Men over the age of sixty partook in support roles at

³² Ilja A. Luciak, *After the Revolution: Gender and Democracy in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 5.

³³ Luciak, *After the Revolution*, 5.

³⁴ Ninety percent of women and eighty-two percent of men, were between the age of fourteen and forty years old. Luciak, *After the Revolution*, 9.

³⁵ Luciak, *After the Revolution*, 4.

³⁶ The RN had the highest percentage of women: 35.2%. The Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación (the armed wing of the Communist Party), had 30.1% or 334 women fighters. The PT, had the lowest percentage of women, 24%. Luciak, *After the Revolution*, 5.

³⁷ In the FPL had the highest number of political cadre: 951 men and 488 women. The FAL had the second highest: 615 men and 381 women.

higher numbers than women.³⁸ Lastly, of the total 2,474 wounded noncombatants in the FMLN, there were 549 women or 22.2 percent.³⁹

The definition of a combatant is controversial. Most reports distinguish between support roles (e.g. medics) and combatants, meaning people whose primary function was combat. However useful, these distinctions obscure important realities.⁴⁰ First, women themselves have contested this distinction since it has meant their exclusion from material benefits or recognition. For instance, the cooks who prepared meals for hundreds of combatants also fought to be considered as combatants.⁴¹ The cooks risked their lives because the government routinely bombed cooking sites, an important lifeline of the insurgency. Second, FMLN participants often changed roles throughout the course of the war, from support roles to actual combat, and regardless of their role, most people had basic military training and many were armed.

Sociologist Jocelyn Viterna examined recruitment patterns within the guerrilla ranks over the course of the war. She identified three major types of recruits: *politicized*, *reluctant*, and *recruited* combatants. Politicized and reluctant recruits mainly joined prior to 1984, while recruited combatants joined after 1985. The former had previously participated within militant mass organizations prior to the outbreak of the war in 1980.⁴² In contrast to politicized recruits, reluctant combatants did not have previous political experience and joined the FMLN because it increased their chances for survival. Lastly, recruited combatants resided within locations that

³⁸ Luciak, *After the Revolution*, 10.

³⁹ The ERP had 217 women and 597 men. The FPL had 213 women and 847 men. Luciak, *After the Revolution*, 6.

⁴⁰ Luciak, *After the Revolution*, 10.

⁴¹ Luciak, *After the Revolution*, 9.

⁴² Viterna, *Women and War*, 93.

facilitated contact with FMLN combatants and sympathizers, such as refugee camps or repopulated territories under FMLN control. Recruited combatants tended to be childless young women who learned to read and write within the refugee camps. These skills enabled their participation as radio operators and medics, a point to which I will return.

Once women joined the FMLN, other factors such as motherhood impacted their ability to rise within the ranks. In a sample of twenty-eight political cadre and combatants, twenty-one women who arrived to the camps without children achieved high-prestige positions. In contrast, all ten women who arrived to the camps with young children remained in low-prestige positions. Childless women averaged 5.4 years in the camps, while mothers averaged 1.5 years.⁴³ In addition, childless politicized and reluctant recruits who joined in the second half were “significantly more likely to move directly into a high-prestige position and to stay there over the years” in comparison to the same category of recruits who joined in the earlier stages of the war.⁴⁴

Education levels also impacted the ranking of women. Peasant women with low-levels of education were overrepresented in low-prestige work such as cooking, while men were overrepresented in high-prestige work such as combat because able-bodied adolescents and adult men were expected to fight as combatants. For these reasons, a stark gender division of labor was most evident in the realm of cooking and combat. However, peasant women who managed to obtain some education managed to rise through the ranks. As stated previously, women were most heavily represented as political cadre and they occupied high-prestige positions as medics, radio operators, political organizers and mid-level commanders and officers. Women often

⁴³ Viterna, *Women and War*, 133.

⁴⁴ Viterna, *Women and War*, 135.

worked as medics and radio operators during the second half of the war due to their higher levels of education.⁴⁵ They had learned to read and write in refugee camps, a space mainly composed of women, children, and the elderly. It was uncommon for able-bodied adult men to be within the refugee camps, thus diminishing their opportunities to read and write. However, many male combatants did learn to read and write within the camps, especially if they entered as children.

To this day, many women point to their broad participation within the ranks as proof of the FMLN's commitment to gender equality.⁴⁶ Women's participation as combatants, medics, and radio operators broke with stereotypes about the proper capabilities of women. However, the challenging of patriarchy was not a complete or linear process. The diverse roles of women also co-existed with a gender division of labor that was most evident within the realm of cooking and combat. Remarkably, despite a gender division of labor and a hierarchical military structure, women still managed to articulate their visions about the role of women within a revolutionary struggle and push their comrades to practice those ideals.

Ideals of Gender Equality

From the beginning, the FMLN developed sophisticated vehicles to disseminate information about itself nationally and internationally. Founded in 1981 and broadcasting from the Morazán mountains, Radio Venceremos (Radio We Shall Win) denounced human rights violations, broadcasted educational programs, reported FMLN military operations, and

⁴⁵ Viterna, *Women and War*, 93. Prior to 1984, men had higher levels of education, averaging 2.3 years of education in comparison to 1.6 years among women. By 1984, women averaged 3.4 years, while men averaged 1.8 years of education. This data suggests that popular education may have greatly benefited women, although Viterna does not make this point. For discussions of popular education within the FMLN, see Hammond, *Fighting to Learn*.

⁴⁶ Viterna, *Women and War*, 117, 139.

summarized local and international news.⁴⁷ For instance, Radio Venceremos interviewed Rufina Amaya, one of the few survivors of El Mozote massacre, days after it occurred in 1981. The radio was indispensable for sustaining links between the different guerrilla groups within El Salvador, and linking the insurgency to the international solidarity movement. Furthermore, the radio was linked to Sistema Radio Venceremos and Señal de Libertad (Signal of Freedom), collectives that produced documentaries and published international bulletins and magazines.⁴⁸

Sistema Radio Venceremos produced audiovisuals to disseminate the FMLN's analysis and practice of gender equality, and to invite more women to join the struggle. In 1983 and May 1987, the collective produced two documentaries about the insurgent participation of women: *Las Compas* and *La mujer en la revolución*.⁴⁹ The latter documentary was produced in collaboration with La Unión de Mujeres Salvadoreñas para la Liberación, Mélida Anaya Montes (The Union of Salvadoran Women, UMS), a coalition of five women's organizations linked to the FMLN.⁵⁰ AMES, an association that defined revolution as the overthrow of both capitalism

⁴⁷ Henríquez Consalvi, *La Terequedad del Izote*. López Vigil, *Las mil y una historias de la Radio Venceremos*.

⁴⁸ For documentaries on Radio Venceremos, see: *10 años tomando la lucha por as alto*, available to view online: <http://archivomesoamericano.org/camvasb/displaysegment.html?id=10023-E6805>

⁴⁹ All the audiovisual materials are available on the Mesoamerican Archive. Elizabeth's interview is included within "Entrevista a Mujeres Combatientes," El Salvador Media Project, 1982, <http://archivomesoamericano.org/camvasb/displaysegment.html?id=10054-E0734>. *Las Compas*: <http://archivomesoamericano.org/camvasb/displaysegment.html?id=10041-C3654&videoPlayer=SWF>. *La mujer en la revolución*: <http://archivomesoamericano.org/camvasb/displaysegment.html?id=10011-C2634&videoPlayer=SWF>

⁵⁰ The other organizational members of UMS included the Asociación de Mujeres Progresistas de El Salvador (Progressive Women's Association of El Salvador, AMPES), Comité Unitario de Mujeres Salvadoreñas (Unitary Committee of Salvadoran Women, CUMS), Asociación de Mujeres Salvadoreñas (Association of Salvadoran Women, ASMUSA), and the Asociación Mujer Salvadoreña (Salvadoran Woman Association, AMS). "We Are Going to Play a Significant Role," May 1988, 107, in *A Dream Compels Us*.

and patriarchy, was one of the coalitional members. UMS named itself after Mélida Anaya Montes (pseudonym Ana María), the second in FPL command.

It is worth discussing the politics of UMS since it influenced the message of *La mujer en la revolución*. UMS organized women to expand their participation within the revolutionary process. Organizers facilitated discussions about “our situation as women” and mobilized women to “participate fully in the decisions about our country’s future,” explained an UMS representative in 1988.⁵¹ UMS supported the political platform of the FMLN and coordinated clinics that trained rural women to be “health promoters” who taught women how “their bodies work” and “about basic hygiene and health practices.”⁵² UMS politicized women as they addressed everyday survival: “You see, we can’t just come into a community and call all the women together to sit down and talk things over...Discussions will take place while we’re treating someone who is sick or wounded, or while we’re watching over the children,” the representative commented. UMS encouraged “men to take on some of the housework, so that their compañeras can also have a chance to develop themselves...”⁵³

FMLN women identified sexism as a product of capitalism. In a 1982 interview, an FMLN combatant named Elizabeth described how capitalism “bombs us ideologically” and “tries to impose onto us certain norms that are obstacles for the development of women, [for her development] in the revolutionary struggle.” As a result of their marginalization, women do “not have an *active participation* within the activities of society (emphasis hers).”

⁵¹ The representative is listed as Linda Fuentes. Quoted in “We Are Going to Play a Significant Role,” 108.

⁵² “We Are Going to Play a Significant Role,” 108.

⁵³ “We Are Going to Play a Significant Role,” 109.

According to FMLN women, capitalism exploited the sexuality of women and prohibited men and women from developing relationships rooted in equality. A combatant featured in *La mujer en la revolución*, critiqued how capitalists sexually exploit women: “women in this country or in this system, have been used [as an object] of advertisement. The worth of women has not been respected.”⁵⁴ In 2015, two peasant women cited this example in their oral histories, noting how the bodies of women are used to sell products, from cars to beer.⁵⁵ In 1982, Elizabeth also added that capitalism produced sexist anxieties among parents who policed the sexual behavior of their daughters. Many parents initially opposed the participation of their daughters “because we were women, as if men can only participate [in the] revolutionary struggle, the liberation of a people.” She added, under “capitalism it’s a matter of sexism, you can’t be with a comrade—they always see it in a morbid, sexual [way].” Parents believed that company between men and women only resulted in promiscuity or sexual abuse. To participate, women had to confront these sexual taboos.

Elizabeth argued that women’s participation within the revolutionary struggle challenged sexism. According to Elizabeth, the revolutionary struggle challenged male entitlement over the bodies of women, specifically the idea that a woman who associates with men is obligated to

⁵⁴ La Unión de Mujeres Salvadoreñas para la Liberación “Mélida Anaya Montes”, *La mujer en la revolución*, Sistema Radio Venceremos, May 1987. “La mujer en este país, o en este sistema, ha sido utilizada como una propaganda. A la mujer no se le ha respetado ningún valor. Una mujer tiene el mismo derecho que un hombre, tiene el mismo valor, es capaz de realizar las mismas tareas que el hombre realiza. Pero ahora vamos a ver también lo que significa el valor de la mujer en la revolución. La mujer en los países liberados, en los en los países revolucionaros, la mujer no vale por su físico, por que sea la más bonita, la mujer vale por su capacidad, por lo que esa muchacha sea capaz de hacer, por su sentimiento, por su dignidad de ser humana. Una de las banderas de lucha del FMLN es revindicar el valor de la mujer.”

⁵⁵ Rosa Rivera, interviewed by author, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. María Helia Rivera, interviewed by author, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

have sex with them. Elizabeth contrasted sexism in the larger capitalist society to the equality that women experienced in the FMLN:

Here in the revolutionary struggle we treat each other like siblings, we see each other as equals, [and] we have the same rights. We the women feel that things have completely changed, it's different, as you can see [in comparison] to the cities. The situation has advanced and through the popular struggle, women have been able to abandon their marginalization, that ideological domination that the capitalist system has imposed onto us. We women in the revolutionary struggle have made great advances in that sense...*to be able to participate, to be able to contribute* and be active people in the liberation of our people.⁵⁶ (her emphasis)

Elizabeth identified the participation of women as a victory in of itself, a great feat given the multiple obstacles that women faced to just even attend a single meeting, let alone have an ongoing active participation. FMLN women commanders also identified the broad participation of women within the FMLN as a victory. In a 1982 radio interview, FPL commander Ana María, noted “the role of women in our revolutionary process is of great historical transcendence... a great percentage of Salvadoran women have liberated themselves from the ties of the current system.”⁵⁷ A year later, ERP commander Ana Guadalupe Martínez recognized the remarkable leap that women made in the 1980s in comparison to their participation in the 1960s and 1970s.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ “Entrevista a Mujeres Combatientes,” El Salvador Media Project, 1982. “Aquí en la lucha revolucionaria nos tratamos como hermanos, nos vemos como iguales, tenemos los mismos derechos. Ahorita nosotras sentimos que ha cambiado totalmente, es diferente, desde como ustedes pueden ver de cómo se da en la ciudades. La situación aunque ha avanzado a través de la lucha popular, la mujer ha logrado de salir de esa marginalización, de esa dominación ideológica incluso que el sistema capitalista nos ha impuesto, nosotras en la lucha revolucionara hemos dado grandes avances, en ese sentido... *poder participar, poder aportar* y ser gente activa en la participación de la liberación de nuestro pueblo.”

⁵⁷ “La mujer salvadoreña en el proceso de la liberación,” 12. *Revista Farabundo Martí*, no 8., May 1982. Fundabril Archive, folder 0006 FMLN, subfolder: 0611 publicaciones, subdfolder: 120 Revista Farabundo Martí, No. 8 (1982). “Le repito: el papel de la mujer en nuestro proceso revolucionario es de gran trascendencia histórica.”

⁵⁸ *Las Compas*, Sistema Radio Venceremos, 1983.

FMLN recruitment pitches ranged from a general call to join its ranks to a more explicit call to fight for the rights of women. *Las Compas* occupied the former category and highlighted the critical participation of women. In the opening scene, a young combatant woman stated, “I am fighting because here we need the help of all the people, and not just men. We also need the help of women. I saw the need to struggle alongside the people and that is why I joined.”⁵⁹ In another scene in which dozens of protestors ran from government soldiers, a woman narrated:

Because they always shared the same injustice, the same misery, they had to occupy together, woman and man, the streets of San Salvador. The woman alongside the man, paid the price that the people pay when they decide to be free. The Salvadoran woman never stayed home when she reclaimed history in the street.⁶⁰

The scene powerfully expressed the right of women to participate in the revolutionary struggle and emphasized the class exploitation of both men and women. *La mujer en la revolución* also pointed to class inequalities but highlighted the divisions among women. In doing so, it indirectly critiqued feminists who argued that all women share the same class interests. Through menacing music and abrupt scene changes, the documentary contrasted the lives between wealthy, light-skinned women and poor dark-skinned indigenous and *ladina* women (mixed race women). Adorned in expensive clothing and sporting fashionable 80s hairdos, elite women strolled through posh shopping malls and neighborhoods, while poor women carried heavy baskets, often barefoot, through crowded markets filled with garbage. The voice of a woman narrator commented, “opulence coexists door to door with extreme poverty, precisely from that

⁵⁹ *Las Compas*, Sistema Radio Venceremos, 1983. “estoy combatiendo porque aquí se necesita la ayuda de todo un pueblo, y no solamente e hombres, se necesita también la ayuda de mujeres, he visto la necesidad de luchar al junto al pueblo, y por eso estoy incorporada.”

⁶⁰ *Las Compas*, Sistema Radio Venceremos, 1983. “Como siempre compartieron la misma injustica, la misma miseria, tuvieron que ocupar juntos, mujer y hombre, las calles de san salvador. La mujer pagó junto al hombre, el precio que los pueblos pagan cuando deciden ser libres. La mujer salvadoreña nunca se quedó en casa, cuando la historia la reclamó en la calle.”

is born the decision of many Salvadoran women to oppose the most [unintelligible] inequalities that become more evident each day.”⁶¹ While the documentary visually represented indigenous women, it framed their oppression in terms of class not ethnic exploitation, reflecting a dominant current within the FMLN that identified class as the major division in society.⁶²

Las Compas underscored the critical participation of women within the revolutionary movement. In other scenes, women combatants and commanders gave speeches to groups of men and participated in political discussions, radio operators gave orders and wrote down code, combatants participated in military training, and cooks made hundreds of tortillas. An anonymous combatant stated, “Yes, we women play an important role, without the participation of women, you cannot make war.”⁶³ In addition, the narrator explained the significance of women’s participation in the highest FMLN leadership body, which marked a “radical change in a country in which women, the same as the peasant and workers sectors, were always excluded from power.”⁶⁴ Within this conception, women were understood to be one of many oppressed sectors.

⁶¹ La Unión de Mujeres Salvadoreñas para la Liberación “Mélida Anaya Montes”, *La mujer en la revolución*, Sistema Radio Venceremos, May 1987. “la opulencia convive puerta a puerta con la más onda miseria, precisamente de ahí nace la decisión de muchas mujeres salvadoreñas de oponerse a los más [unintelligible] contrastes que se vuelven cada día más evidente.”

⁶² In the documentary, the indigenous women wear a *refajo*, a garment that covers the lower-half of the body. This dress is typical of women from Izalco, an indigenous municipality located in Sonsonate department, which witnessed the 1932 insurrection and massacre of 10,000 indigenous and ladino peasants. The FMLN is named in honor of Farabundo Martí, the urban-based, Communist Party militant who was executed in 1932. In the 1970s and 1980s, the revolutionary left primarily identified the CP and Martí as the primary architects of the insurrection, and downplayed the role of ethnicity within the insurrection. Gould, “Revolutionary nationalism and local memories in El Salvador.”

⁶³ *Las Compas*, Sistema Radio Venceremos, 1983. “si nosotras jugamos un papel muy importante, sin la participación de las mujeres, no se puede hacer la Guerra.”

⁶⁴ *Las Compas*, Sistema Radio Venceremos, 1983. “Al nivel de la comandancia, la mujer comparte las responsabilidades de la conducción del proceso revolucionario, este hecho comparte un cambio radical, en

While *Las Compas* underscored the broad and important participation of women, *La mujer en la revolución* made a much more explicit call for women to defend their rights as women.⁶⁵ The influence of the UMS, the coalition of women's organizations that collaborated with the film collective to produce the documentary, is clearly marked. To a packed crowd of combatants and civilians, a woman combatant stated,

A woman has the same rights as a man, has the same worth, [and] is capable of carrying out the same tasks that the man does. But we're also going to discuss the value of women within the revolution. A woman in liberated countries, in revolutionary countries, is not valued for her physical [appearance], because she is the prettiest, a woman is valued for her capacity, because of what that young woman is capable of doing, for her dignity as a human being. One of the FMLN banners of struggle is to defend the value of women.

In encouraging the participation of women within the FMLN, the women featured in these documentaries and interviews hoped to also challenge the political exclusion of women and their sexual objectification, and inspire women to fight for a revolutionary society that would treat them with respect.

Who will make the tortillas?

While FMLN women articulated their ideals about gender equality within the organization's propaganda, oral histories with former combatants point to the tensions and contradictions of translating those ideals into practice. Every day, the rank-and-file debated the role of women within the revolutionary struggle as they confronted practical questions about

un país en que la mujer, al igual que los sectores campesinos y obreros, siempre fueron excluidos el poder.”

⁶⁵ Women workers and the mothers of disappeared children march through the streets of San Salvador, leading chants with a megaphone and denouncing the high cost of living and state repression against workers. Scenes from the countryside are also highlighted: women combatants participate in military training and make explosives, and civilian peasant women, hold their children, as they stare nervously at the sky in search of government planes. La Unión de Mujeres Salvadoreñas para la Liberación “Mélida Anaya Montes”, *La mujer en la revolución*, Sistema Radio Venceremos, May 1987.

food preparation, water collection, and combatant hygiene. Women confronted their comrades about sexism, shaping the norms of camp life and pushing the FMLN to fulfill its promise of equality for women.

The question of who would make tortillas generated serious conflicts about gender roles. Many men resisted orders to grind corn and collect water, perceiving “women’s work” as emasculating. They worried that other men would dismiss them as gay.⁶⁶ To confront their sexism, which endangered the survival of the unit itself, a former FPL combatant from a peasant family used her authority as a camp leader to discipline men who refused to follow her orders to make food. She recognized that the behavior of some men changed due to her imposed discipline or a real change in consciousness about gender roles. Dina Vaquerano, a former ERP militant and member of Radio Venceremos, also recalled one particularly heated struggle over food production. Within her camp, women began preparing tortillas at 3am and served them at 6am. Some men demanded that women with sexual partners awake at 1am “to wash well because they will be cooking our food. And why? Because she slept with a man and she is dirty.” She continued:

...the situation was so tense that year. So Pichinte [the camp leader] said that the men would also cook. The women demanded it, the few of us there said that the men should get up at 1am to cook because they had slept with a woman. The only happy ones to cook were Santiago and the *gringo* Lucas. But the rest fermented with anger. And the measure was suspended because the men no longer wanted to eat tortillas made by men.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Elda Gladis Tobar de Ortiz, interviewed by author, San Salvador, May 2015, audio recording, MUPI. “Hay memoria histórica en que los compañeros hombres que cuando les decían bueno tú vas a jalar agua y vas a moler el maíz eso era traumático, un hombre guerrillero con su fusil pusiera la masa para hacer las tortillas o que ese día le tocara la cocina, eso era difícil y que había que trabajarlo.”

⁶⁷ Dina Vaquerano, interviewed by author, Morazán, August 3, 2014. “Fue tan tensa la situación ese año. Entonces Pichinte [the commander] dijo que los hombres iban a cocinar. Entonces las mujeres exigimos, las pocas mujeres que habíamos ahí dijimos que [los hombres] tenían que levantarse a la 1 de la mañana a bañarse porque se habían acostado con una mujer. Los únicos contentos de cocinar fueron Santiago, y

Although women successfully pressured the camp leader to meet their demands, other men sabotaged these efforts. Interestingly enough, only one male combatant from the United States accepted making tortillas.⁶⁸ This possibly reveals the extent to which tortilla preparation felt especially emasculating to Salvadoran men.

Another woman who worked within the Radio Venceremos contemplated the reasons as to why their camp leaders did not force men to make tortillas. She argued that wartime conditions made it easier for camp leaders to rely on peasant women to make tortillas and deprioritize teaching men to make tortillas. The added resistance of men to learning these skills and the lack of patience among leaders to teach them, contributed to the division of labor, she argued. These immediate obstacles, in addition to the gender division of labor that had existed within peasant communities prior to the war, created a situation in which peasant women were disproportionately represented as cooks. Only in rare cases did men occupy these positions permanently.⁶⁹ For instance, the camp where Dina worked had one male cook because his mother had taught him to grind corn from a young age.

Dina's story about cooking conflicts also reveals the frustrations of *urbanas* (urban woman) to navigate gender expectations rooted in rural life.⁷⁰ Dina was raised in San Salvador

Lucas el gringo. Pero los demás se murieron de la cólera. Y la medida se suspendió porque los hombres ya no querían comer tortillas hechas por hombres.”

⁶⁸ Santiago was the pseudonym of Carlos Henríquez Consalvi who is Venezuelan but has lived in El Salvador since 1981. Lucas was the pseudonym of Joseph David Sanderson, a Vietnam veteran born in the United States who joined the FMLN and was killed in an ambush. His personal diary is housed at the MUPI and Henríquez Consalvi also discusses his interactions with him in his wartime memoir, Carlos Henríquez Consalvi, *La terquedad del izote: El Salvador, crónica de una victoria: la historia de Radio Venceremos* (México: Editorial Diana, 1992), 62.

⁶⁹ Some urban women claimed that they were required to serve kitchen duty before being incorporated into other work, while men were not required. Vásquez, Ibáñez, Murguialday, *Mujeres-montaña*, 118.

and joined the FMLN as a medical student in the early 1980s. In the capital city, she altered the medical files of combatants who sought treatment in public hospitals in order to prevent their capture and murder at the hands of authorities. Soon after, she left to Morazán department to work with Radio Venceremos. For urban women like Dina, being forced to make tortillas presented particular challenges. Although her university education enabled her participation within Radio Venceremos, Dina struggled to meet the gendered expectations of her comrades. She recalled how some men questioned her womanhood given her inability to make tortillas, even though it was not her main or sole responsibility within the camp. The historic rural and urban divide may have informed the resentment of some peasant men toward highly educated city women. In other words, peasant men may have used sexism to fight the historic contempt of urban people toward peasants.

Peasant women who lived in refugee camps also had similar memories about their efforts to collectivize food production. One peasant woman fled to Colomancagua camp after receiving death threats. As a catechist in Morazán department who organized other peasants to defend their rights, she was a prime military target. In the refugee camp, she participated in a mother's committee that addressed the basic needs of refugees, including food.⁷¹ The committee successfully mobilized men to prepare food for everyone in the camp to honor women on mother's day. Although it remains unclear if men could have successfully made food for 8,000 refugees, the important point is how she remembered

⁷⁰ Vásquez, Ibáñez, Murguialday, *Mujeres-montaña*, 112. A combatant named Rosaura also discussed the difficulties of adapting to rural life as an urban-raised woman, see Cristina Ibáñez and Norma Vázquez, *Y la montaña habló: testimonios de guerrilleras y colaboradores* (San Salvador: Las Dignas, 1997), 49-50.

⁷¹ Celina Velásquez claimed that the group drew its inspiration from the existing mother's committee in San Salvador, a group of women who searched for their disappeared children. Celina Velásquez, interviewed by author, San Luis, Morazán, August 2014.

her interventions to collectivize food production. In other words, this woman recalled how she and other women had enough authority within the camp to demand such labor from men. Another woman who also lived in the refugee camp but later joined the FMLN, remembered how another women's group took a similar measure, making the men prepare food for 150 people.⁷² The women claimed that if women and men were truly equal, then the men should also prepare the food. Given that they were in the majority, women felt empowered to establish new norms for collective life in the camps.

Overall, women with different relations to the FMLN took the revolution to task to fulfill its promises of equality. In the realm of everyday life, women pushed their comrades to participate in the domestic chores that sustained life in the insurgent or refugee camps, and had varying levels of success. To this day, women remember these stories to highlight their own interventions in applying ideals about equality into practice.

Bleeding Combatants

Women not only pushed men to partake in food production but also pushed the FMLN to respond to their needs as menstruating combatants. The experience of menstruating in a war zone was a facet of daily life that women remember vividly. When asked about wartime difficulties, eight combatants from Morazán and Chalatenango identified menstruation as “the most difficult or ugly aspect of being a woman during the war.”⁷³ Domitila, an FPL high-ranking officer,

⁷² María Silvia Hernández, interviewed by author, San Luis, Morazán, August 2014.

⁷³ I asked them, “¿qué fue lo más feo o difícil de ser mujer durante la guerra?” Some women recognized that everyone faced difficult war-time conditions, such as combat and *guindas*, long walks to flee government bombardments. But women identified menstruation as a difficult experience specific to women. ERP women: Ana Dolores Díaz (1957-), Irma Esperanza Vásquez, Dina Vaquerano, María Lucrecia Argueta López, Vergelina Vásquez de Orellana (1961-); FPL women: Domitila Ayala (1957-), Alicia Rodríguez, Blanca Ramírez (1968-).

remembered the pain she felt during her period: “my uterus would hurt, my entire body and I had to walk with a heavy load...when I didn’t have my period I felt happy about life and I did not feel that I was inferior in comparison to another person.”⁷⁴ Three other ERP women expressed the discomfort and pain of menstruating during miles-long hikes in the rain and without a change of clothes.⁷⁵

Combatants vary in their memories about the treatment of menstruating combatants at the hands of men. Two ERP combatants remember the intense mistreatment of menstruating women. One described the experience of wartime menstruation as “horrible.” Rank-and-file men “discriminated” against menstruating women and saw their bodies as “disgusting.”⁷⁶ She understood the absence of sanitary napkins, as proof that commanders, “the majority of the men” did not “really care for us [women.] We were marginalized, well they forgot about us, I don’t know if out of ignorance; they never cared about the women.”⁷⁷ For this combatant, the difficulties of living in a war zone did not sufficiently explain the absence of sanitary napkins. When commanders deemed it a priority, various goods, including cigarettes, were transported to the camps, although with great difficulty. According to this combatant, sexism among commanders shaped their decision to not purchase or transport sanitary napkins into the guerrilla

⁷⁴ Domitila Ayala, interviewed by author, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “para mí lo más feo cuando me venía la regla porque muchas molestias, me dolía el vientre, todo el cuerpo y tener que caminar con la gran carga...cuando no había regla, menstruación, yo me sentía feliz de la vida y no me sentía que era menos que el otro.”

⁷⁵ Irma Esperanza Vásquez. María Lucrecia Argueta López, Vergelina Vásquez de Orellana.

⁷⁶ Ana Dolores Díaz, interviewed by author and Carlos Henríquez Consalvi, Perquín, Morazán. August 2014, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

⁷⁷ Ana Dolores Díaz, interviewed by author and Carlos Henríquez Consalvi, Perquín, Morazán. August 2014. “Eso era horrible, la situación como mujer, no teníamos las toallas sanitarias, que difícil fue esa época, no tener toallas sanitarias pues, para nuestros periodos, pues porque no había quien se preocupará por nosotras realmente. Pues porque los mandos, la mayoría eran hombres...estábamos marginadas, si se olvidaban de nosotros pues, no sé si por ignorancia, ellos no se preocuparon nunca por las mujeres.”

camps. Dina also recalled the rejection that menstruating women faced within her unit, which protected the Radio Venceremos. She recalled how some men did not want women to swim near them when they had their periods or to wash their bloody rags in front of them.

Some women recalled the solidarity of men toward menstruating women. Dina also had positive memories: “We did an exchange with the men we trusted; they would give us their old shirts, really worn, and we would give them our extra bras.” The men tied the straps around their ankles to prevent animals from climbing up their legs.⁷⁸ Other men pretended not to notice the blood-stained uniforms and gave women enough space to bathe privately.⁷⁹ A former ERP combatant recalled how men tore their shirts or socks so that from various scraps of fabric women could piece together a menstruation rag. In exchange, women gave the men their underwear if the men lacked a pair. The ERP combatant did not explain why men lacked underwear but more importantly she claimed that “many [male] compas died in combat wearing women’s underwear,” which for her, indicated the level of comradery and equality in the camps because men were not ashamed to wear women’s underwear.⁸⁰ She also claimed that “no one made fun” of menstruating women because “we were all brothers and sisters and had to help each other.”⁸¹ Domitila remembered the compassion her FPL comrades practiced toward her and

⁷⁸ Dina Vaquerano, interviewed by author and Carlos Henríquez Consalvi, Perquín, Morazán. August 2014. “Fue una situación bien tensa, incluso cuando estábamos menstruando era terrible, no querían que estuviéramos nadando nada. No teníamos cotex niña, no teníamos toallas sanitarias. Hacíamos un cambio con los que teníamos más confianza, ellos nos daban sus camisas viejas, bien gastaditas y nosotros les dábamos el extra de los braséales y ellos se lo ponían abajo en el pantalón para que no se subieran las ranas.”

⁷⁹ Vergelina Vásquez de Orellana, interviewed by author and Carlos Henríquez Consalvi, Perquín, Morazán. August 2014.

⁸⁰ Irma Esperanza Vásquez, interviewed by author, Quebracho, Morazán. August 2014. “Nadie se burlaba. Y cuando los compañeros no andaban calzoncillos para ponerse, se ponían la ropa interior de las compas también. Varios compas caían en combate con ropa interior de mujer.”

other menstruating women. To ease her own insecurities, they told her “it’s not a disease, that is normal” and helped carry her heavy baggage to avoid a heavier menstruation flow. Salvadorans and many Latin Americans believe that heavy lifting can increase menstrual flow, cramps, and pain, and thus the gesture of her comrades aimed to ease her discomfort.

FPL militants from Chalatenango successfully pressured commanders into purchasing sanitary napkins. At the age of sixteen in 1984, a teenager who worked as a medic and later as a radio operator for Radio Farabundo Martí, the radio of the FPL, participated in a successful effort within her camp to obtain sanitary napkins. She described having your period as “the most horrible thing” because there was little or no money to purchase *cotex* (menstruation pads). Women gathered to discuss the problem and proposed a new budget that pointed to the low cost of pads (4.50 colones or approximately \$2 USD for a pack of twelve pads), which was much cheaper than a box of cigarettes, she recalled. Women pressured the man in charge of logistics (who was also stingy in purchasing food) to purchase menstruation pads. The FPL woman recalled a glaring contradiction: “men buy cigarette boxes and what about us [the women]?” She framed their intervention as a victory, “those were things that we [women] won, those were struggles.” Another FPL combatant also remembered their success in obtaining pads after they pressured their unit leader who was ignorant about the needs of women.⁸²

Remarkably, women combatants coordinated with women abroad to obtain tampons and sanitary napkins as part of an international solidarity campaign with El Salvador. In London, a woman who represented the Frente Democrático Revolucionario (Revolutionary Democratic Front, FDR), a coalition of mass civilian organizations that represented the diplomatic wing of

⁸¹ Irma Esperanza Vásquez, interviewed by author, Quebracho, Morazán. August 2014.

⁸² Audelia Guadalupe López, interviewed by author, San Salvador, May 2015, audio recording, MUPI.

the FMLN, called upon women in the United Kingdom to denounce U.S. military intervention in El Salvador and to “donate the price of a packet of tampons or sanitary towels to the Solidarity Campaign here which can be used to buy protection for the women in the guerrilla armies for often they have to fight using nothing. Both these things would help us tremendously.”⁸³ Women in the United States also learned about the campaign due to the work of the Women’s International Resource Exchange (WIRE), a socialist-feminist organization based in Brooklyn, which republished the original article in which the campaign was announced. WIRE published the campaign article within a whole booklet dedicated to revolutionary women in El Salvador and also translated the theoretical texts of Salvadoran women’s organizations, including AMES.⁸⁴

The existence of this campaign demonstrates how seriously women took the issue of menstruation and how they successfully pressured the highest bodies within the FMLN to meet their bodily needs. The women probably confronted arguments about wartime urgency that elevated some goods as more necessary than others, which makes the existence of the campaign that much more impressive. The campaign also reveals how FMLN women participated within the transnational networks that connected socialist and revolutionary feminists in different parts of the globe. FMLN women may have made the case to their comrades that the campaign would succeed due to the support of global feminists. While some FMLN men may have accepted the campaign for instrumentalist reasons, it held a radically different meaning for women and represented their struggle to have their basic needs met within the camps.

⁸³ Jenny Vaughan and Jane MacIntosh, “Women’s Lives in El Salvador, an interview with Miriam Galdámez, an El Salvadoran refugee” in *Women and War, El Salvador*, (New York: Women’s International Resource Exchange, n.d.), 3, in BCRW.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Some FPL combatants based in Chalatenango did not remember conflicts over menstruation because pads were regularly provided. Domitila explained that the practices of each unit varied but in her unit, women comrades understood the distinct necessities of women. One combatant who had worked as a medic, had similar memories: “from the beginning [having pads] was something we had won. It was always [due to] the struggle of women.”⁸⁵ In addition, another FPL combatant remembered how women combatants met to “discuss topics only about us, intimate things...we even talked about the need of having a little hand mirror...the things that as women or young people would interest us.”⁸⁶ Within a context in which menstruation had been newly understood as a collective issue, women also gathered to discuss other “personal” issues that may have appeared to some men as trivial.

The demands for sanitary napkins reveal how women challenged assumptions about who constituted a combatant. While the absence of sanitary pads can be partially attributed to the scarcity of goods under wartime conditions, the FMLN did provide food, water, clothing, arms, and healthcare (including birth control and abortion), albeit in limited means, to their combatants. Although women literally bled through their uniforms, some ERP and FPL commanders in Morazán and Chalatenango considered menstruation a personal and private responsibility.⁸⁷ However, FPL combatants in Chalatenango successfully pressured their

⁸⁵ Alicia Dubón, interviewed by author and Carlos Henríquez Consalvi, Perquín, Arcatao, September 2014. “¡Aquí desde el comienzo fue como una conquista! Siempre lucha de las mujeres pues.”

⁸⁶ Audelia Guadalupe López, interviewed by author, San Salvador, May 2015, audio recording, MUPI. “a veces hacíamos reuniones solo como combatientes y hablábamos de temas solamente de nosotras, cosas íntimas del grupo de mujeres, íbamos desde la necesidad de tener hasta un espejito...las cosas como mujer o como jóvenes uno podía interesar.”

⁸⁷ Luciak points to the unwillingness of commanders to address the menstrual needs of women, but ignores how women intervened in these matters. Luciak, *After the Revolution*, 15.

commanders and even won an international solidarity campaign that responded to their bodily needs as menstruating combatants.

Sex in times of war

War and the hierarchical military structure of the FMLN set constraints on the choices women made about sex, including their relationships with men, usage of contraception and abortion, and experiences of pregnancy and motherhood. While women brought their specific moral codes about sex and abortion into the camps, wartime conditions mediated how women felt and acted upon their choices and often produced conflicting feelings and responsibilities. In the face of limited options, women attempted to create the most ideal situation, such as securing stable partnerships. In doing so, they shaped partnership norms within the camps.

The FMLN attempted to prevent pregnancies to guarantee the participation of as many combatants and militants as possible.⁸⁸ ERP women described a pregnant combatant as a “loss” to the struggle.⁸⁹ The FMLN inconsistently provided birth control pills and trained medics, many of whom were women, to perform abortions. When women decided to carry their pregnancy to term, FMLN officials sent them to refugee camps. If the child was left in the care of a family member or trusted party member, the woman returned to her duties.

While the FMLN provided abortions within its territories, the Salvadoran government criminalized abortion, with few exceptions. The 1973 Penal Code, which remained in effect until 1997, authorized abortion in three cases: to save the life of the mother; in cases of rape or

⁸⁸ I have yet to hear of civilian women receiving birth control pills and/or abortions from FMLN medics. Combatants Angela and Rosaura discuss how the FMLN provided sexual education and limited access to contraception within its camps, Murguillday, Olivera, and Vásquez, *Y la montaña habló*, 45, 54.

⁸⁹ Irma Esperanza Vásquez and Ana Dolores Díaz.

statutory rape; and in cases of fetal deformities.⁹⁰ According to the 1975 Contraceptive Prevalence Survey, almost twenty percent of women who had ever been married had had at least one abortion or miscarriage in their lifetime. The rate was even higher in rural areas.⁹¹ Urban women used contraception (including intrauterine devices, pills, and injections) at double the rate of rural women, according to a 1975 study.⁹² This was also the case for sterilization.⁹³ Overall, rural women had abortions at higher rates but used contraception at lower rates than urban women.

Within the camps, access to birth control facilitated the further delinking of sex and pregnancy. The women I interviewed did not narrate this as a monumental change. Rather the change was manifested in their ability to begin and end monogamous relationships without stigma. However, they did not attribute this change to the contraception itself, but rather to the values within the FMLN.

Unequal power relations in age and rank impacted the use of contraception. Dina remembered how she and two other women commanders opposed the decision to give a thirteen-

⁹⁰ “The Code also recognized the concept of *honoris causa* abortions and imposed reduced penalties if a woman of good conduct caused her own abortion or consented to one being performed in order to protect her reputation.” The 1973 Penal Code had replaced the 1956 Penal Code which had criminalized abortion in all cases. United Nations, *Abortion Policies: A Global Review. Volume 1, Afghanistan to France* (New York: United Nations, 1992).

⁹¹ The National Fertility Survey obtained similar results in 1978. United Nations, *Abortions Policy: A Global Review*.

⁹² In metropolitan areas, twenty-nine percent of women between the ages of 15 to 49 used contraception, in comparison to nine percent in rural areas. If only women who have been married or are in consensual relationships are considered, that number is 40 percent for urban women and twenty-two percent for rural women. Leo Morris, Ricardo Castaneda Rugamas, Angela M. de Mendoza, and Sam Taylor. “Contraceptive Use and Demographic Trends in El Salvador,” *Studies in Family Planning* 10, no. 2 (1979): 46.

⁹³ Urban women who had once been married used sterilization at a rate of fifteen percent, in comparison to six percent for rural women. *Ibid*, 46.

year old girl an intrauterine device upon her first menstruation. During the war, she denounced an ERP commander who had sexual relationships with two thirteen-year old girls who worked as his radio operators. From the perspective of Dina, an urban woman, peasant women saw this treatment as normal because they had been raised in violent homes. Another woman who worked as an ERP medic recalled that at certain points of the war, FMLN leaders pressured women into having abortions.⁹⁴

Wartime conditions eased stigmas about contraception and abortion but the practice of abortion presented ethical dilemmas to peasant women who were predominantly Catholic. Maritza, a former ERP medic recalled how she distributed birth control pills and performed abortions. However, when supplies were limited she told women to resort to other methods, such as abstinence or the rhythm method. Overall, she believed in the necessity of birth control to prevent unwanted pregnancies (especially in a context of war and poverty) and did not reject its use on either moral or religious grounds. Abortion however was a complicated matter. Maritza described the procedure “as a sin” and as a “painful” decision for women. She referenced the experiences of women who died or nearly died from hemorrhaging after having multiple abortions. Simultaneously, she recognized the limited choices for women, sympathizing with women who did not want to have children in a war zone and the importance of securing their participation. In this sense, she complicated her own characterization of abortion as a sin. At the same time, she mainly placed responsibility on the women for their inability to refrain from sex, and thus excluded men from the same responsibilities to avoid pregnancy. But she also understood that having children was not the solution either. She expressed hesitation about sending pregnant women to refugee camps because their participation was needed. And after the

⁹⁴ Ana Dolores Díaz, interviewed by author and Carlos Henríquez Consalvi, Perquín, July 2014, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

child was born, the women returned to her duties, feeling conflicted between her responsibilities as a mother and combatant.

Many women left their children in the care of family members, a decision that strained their relationship with their children.⁹⁵ Maritza left her first son in the care of her mother but to this day he feels hurt that his mother left him to join the guerrillas. She reflected on the complexity of her feelings and decision:

It was the hardest [decision] for me and I think I was right; today my son suffers the consequences of that decision but at the same time I will tell you that I do not regret it. My son is my son but I fought for many [people], not just him.⁹⁶

Maritza's words express the unresolved difficulty of being a combatant mother and feelings of loss and guilt. And yet, Maritza defended her right to participate in the struggle because she had a collective obligation that extended beyond her individual responsibilities as a mother. In this sense, motherhood was denaturalized as an inevitable role for women that surpassed all other commitments.

Wartime conditions, including constant travel, the threat of death, and the delinking of sex and pregnancy via the limited availability of contraception and abortion, placed severe strains on long-term, monogamous relationships.⁹⁷ Even the act of sex had been impacted. One ERP combatant recalled how camp leaders encouraged couples to have sex with their clothes on to anticipate a surprise attack by government soldiers.⁹⁸ Given the unpredictability of war, many

⁹⁵ María Lorenza Claros (Rosita), interviewed by author, Perquín, May 2014.

⁹⁶ Vergelina Vásquez de Orellana (Maritza), interviewed by author and Carlos Henríquez Consalvi, Perquín, "Fue lo más difícil para mí y creo que tenía razón, porque hoy con la relación de mi hijo quien sufre las consecuencias de esa decisión pero a la vez decirte que no me arrepiento, mi hijo es mi hijo pero luché por muchos, no solo por él."

⁹⁷ Vásquez, Ibáñez, Murguialday, *Mujeres-montaña*, 160-171.

FMLN combatants (especially men) had multiple partners at once or practiced serial monogamy, meaning they had one partner after the next.⁹⁹ Many peasant women had children with different fathers who had abandoned them or the state had murdered, or because they had simply ended the relationship. The practice of serial monogamy among peasant women reconciled their sexual moral codes with the reality of wartime conditions. According to a former militant in the Communist Party, urban women emphasized love and sexual desire as important elements of a sexual relationship, while peasant women emphasized life-long partnerships and mutual aid.¹⁰⁰ Although peasant women had multiple partners over a given period of time, they did not label this behavior as promiscuity because in entering those relationships, they intended to be with the person long-term, but due to conditions mainly outside of their control, they were forced to end the relationship. However, many peasant women were more likely to label as promiscuous a relationship that they perceived was about pleasure not companionship.

In response to wartime conditions, the FMLN created norms for heterosexual relationships. Although relationship norms seemed to have varied within each guerrilla group and their corresponding units, many combatants reported their relationship to a camp leader.¹⁰¹ In return, the couple gained permission to have a sexual relationship and sleep together in the same tent, and other combatants were notified to avoid courting the new couple. The need to create norms reflected a desire to avoid conflicts such as infidelity, the abandonment of women,

⁹⁸ *¿Valió la pena?* “(Carolina) Emirita Díaz Vásquez,” 102.

⁹⁹ In a sample of twenty-five combatants who had partners during the war, nineteen lost one or more of their partners either due to death or separation. Viterna, *Women and War*, 158.

¹⁰⁰ Norma Vásquez, “Motherhood and Sexuality in Times of War: The Case of Women Militants of the FMLN in El Salvador,” *Reproductive Health Matters* vol. 5, no. 9 (May 1997): 6.

¹⁰¹ The popular expression is *estar acompañado/a* (which literally translates to being accompanied) but refers to life-long partnerships irrespective of legal marriage.

and sexual harassment. It also reflected practical security concerns since combatants needed to obtain permission to travel to campsites other than their own.

Soon after the war, many women still felt invested in the camps' norms to enforce monogamy. Two combatants remembered how men, especially commanders, had multiple partners at once, and although it was discouraged, it was also tolerated.¹⁰² Women may have been invested in enforced monogamy because once they declared themselves as *acompañada*, their partner could be punished for infidelity, and any man who courted or harassed them, could be punished as well.¹⁰³ One woman recalled how unfaithful men were forced to cook wearing an apron.¹⁰⁴ The punishment reveals the devaluing of cooking (assumed to be a woman's job) and the feminization of men. It also demonstrates how women turned traditional gender roles on its head. While traditionally unfaithful men have boasted about their infidelities and sexual conquests, within the camps, they faced punishment.

However, it would be misleading to assume that the top leadership imposed its sexual codes onto the rank-and-file. Oral histories reveal how the sexual norms within camps largely reflected the sexual morality of peasants, both combatants and civilians who tried to resist the wartime strains on monogamous relationships. In 2015, Irma Esperanza Vásquez pointed to the lack of sexual promiscuity within the camps as an indicator of revolutionary discipline and respect among combatants, particularly toward women. In the camps, "there was respect, the war was not handled in a crazy manner [*a lo loco*], crazy women were not with one man and then another, nor were men with one woman and then another." Promiscuity "was a problem because

¹⁰² Dina Vaquerano, interviewed by author, Morazán, August 3, 2014. María del Socorro Álvarez Henríquez, interviewed by author, San Salvador, July 2014.

¹⁰³ Vásquez, "Motherhood and Sexuality in times of War," 6.

¹⁰⁴ Murguilday, Olivera, and Vásquez, *Y la Montaña Habló*, 15.

we had to provide an example to the population that we were organizing. We had to be exemplary to the population because if they saw that we were a disaster, then they were not going to believe what we were doing,” she explained.¹⁰⁵ Sexual disciplinary norms were part of a larger strategy to win civilian support and delegitimize right-wing propaganda (and civilian perceptions) that mixed-gender camps functioned as brothels. Furthermore, Irma perceived the promiscuity of other combatants, especially women, as a threat to her moral standing as a committed revolutionary. This threat could undermine the respect that men showed her. Overall, these memories demonstrate how women acted as “repositories of revolutionary honor.”¹⁰⁶

Women who policed promiscuity claimed to be ensuring order and respect toward women in the camps. An FPL leader recalled the difficulty of “working with [women] comrades who did not believe in themselves or respect themselves, they did not respect their bodies.” She remembered having spoken to a comrade “who was very promiscuous” because she did not know if she would live to see the next day.¹⁰⁷ She then proceeded to discuss her efforts to educate women to denounce the sexual abuses of men and then returned to the topic of promiscuity. Promiscuity generated problems within the camps: “sometimes they would say, the whole battalion passed through there, the entire unit...all the noises were heard, we all shared the same tent...that noise generated a lot of discomfort in terms of values...”¹⁰⁸ For this camp leader,

¹⁰⁵ Irma Esperanza Vásquez, interviewed by author, Quebracho, Morazán. August 2014.

¹⁰⁶ Vásquez, “Motherhood and Sexuality in times of War,” 6.

¹⁰⁷ Elda Gladis Tobar de Ortiz, interviewed by author, San Salvador, May 2015, audio recording, MUPI. “era difícil trabajar con compañeras que primero no creyeran en sí mismas o que no se respetaran a sí mismas, que no respetaran sus cuerpos... a mí me tocó una tarea de trabajar una compañera por el respeto de ella misma... bueno ya la compañera ya no está viva, pero *ella era muy promiscua*, pues ella decía hoy estoy viviendo hoy, no sé si estaré viva mañana, pero yo le decía pero bueno las relaciones personales no debe de ser de esa manera.”

promiscuity contradicted revolutionary values and the success of the unit. Other twentieth-century guerrilla groups have shared similar concerns, and have equated monogamy with revolutionary discipline.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, she may have associated promiscuity with sexual abuse because both behaviors generated conflicts within the camps. She understood sexual promiscuity as a sign of low self-esteem in women that could cause men to treat all women with disrespect and possibly camp leaders who had authority over all combatants. The life of the military unit depended on the successful collaboration among combatants. And thus, camp leaders perceived promiscuity as a source of conflict that provoked anger, jealousy, and discomfort within the camp. To avoid such conflicts that could result in desertion or death, camp leaders policed the sexuality of women.

Peasant women shaped relationship norms within the camps. In a context filled with uncertainty and instability, peasant women demanded accountability from their partners. In essence, they called for sexual responsibility and rejected behavior that they characterized as promiscuous. Promiscuity was too much of a risk for some women. It threatened to undermine men's responsibilities to their partners and children, and threatened the moral reputation of the guerrillas as serious revolutionaries. Further research could illuminate the impacts of such policing on those women accused of promiscuity.

Sexual Harassment

¹⁰⁸ Elda Gladis Tobar de Ortiz, interviewed by author, San Salvador, May 2015, audio recording, MUPI. "a veces decían pasó todo el batallón ahí, pasó toda la escuadra y eso—el ambiente dentro de un campamento... un campamento en realidad es un radio de acción pequeño... todos los ruidos se oyen, todos compartimos una sola carpa, entonces el hecho que todos pasen, todos oyen, y se va pasando la consigna de otra voz, eso generaba—ese ruido generaba mucho malestar en parte de los valores..."

¹⁰⁹ Isabel Cosse, "Infidelities: Morality, Revolution, and Sexuality in Left-Wing Guerrilla Organizations in 1960s and 1970s Argentina," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* vol. 23 no. 3 (2014): 447. Argentine guerrilla groups developed sexual norms that aligned with their revolutionary values and military strategy.

Sexual violence, whether directed at civilian women or combatants, occurred infrequently within the guerrilla camps. The infrequency points to the success of FMLN women in demanding respect and creating consequences for abusers. Their oral histories overwhelmingly pointed to the comradery that existed between combatants. Some combatants remembered how rape was punishable by death.¹¹⁰ But gaining respect for women was an ongoing struggle. Some combatant women remember the sexual harassment they faced from their comrades, and specifically identified commanders as the main perpetrators of harassment within the ranks.

The FMLN did not systematically engage in sexual violence against civilians. In the 450 cases of sexual violence reported in the United Nations Truth Commission, all were attributed to state forces. FMLN cadre did not participate in a single case against civilians, nor did FMLN women make complaints against their comrades.¹¹¹ The organization viewed the rape of civilian women as particularly heinous.¹¹² As evident in the broadcasts of Radio Venceremos, the murder and rape of women and children demonstrated the utter brutality of the state's armed forces.¹¹³ The insurgency won the support of the civilian population precisely in its defense of civilians and the condemnation of sexual violence.¹¹⁴ In a context in which the state used sexual violence as a strategy of war, the infrequency of sexual violence stands as a remarkable gain of the FMLN

¹¹⁰ Vásquez, Ibáñez, Murguialday, *Mujeres-montaña*, 151.

¹¹¹ Elizabeth Jean Wood, "Armed Groups and Sexual Violence: When is Wartime Rape Rare?" *Politics and Society* 37 (2009): 152. Wood defines sexual violence as sexual torture, genital mutilation, forced sex work, sterilization, and pregnancy.

¹¹² Vásquez, Ibáñez, Murguialday, *Mujeres-montaña*, 183.

¹¹³ In its broadcasts, Radio Venceremos routinely denounced government and paramilitary violations of human rights. The MUPI transcribed and housed recordings from 1981 to 1985. For specific mentions about rape, see March 19, 1981, code: mupi_rv_19810307_A_or; November 10, 1981, code: mupi_rv_19811110_A_or; October 18, 1983, code: Mupi_rv_19831013_B_or.

¹¹⁴ The FMLN recruited women with promises of protection from rape. Viterna, *Women and War*, 78, 91, 112.

and its practice of gender equality. However, women face challenges in discussing wartime abuses within their own ranks.

Combatant women overwhelmingly recalled the respect they experienced within the camps.¹¹⁵ Women recounted how they slept safely next to dozens of men, often complete strangers, which for them demonstrated how the FMLN respected women and enforced revolutionary values.¹¹⁶ Domitila, an FPL leader, who had been raised as a young girl to fear and avoid all contact with men, explained the dramatic transformation that she underwent in the struggle, working alongside men:

Well, I felt that it was a huge change, a complete change. From thinking that [men] could harm me and thinking that men worked to, I don't know...to submit women to slavery. And so afterwards I liberated myself of that. I liberated myself because I understood that I could determine when and how and what I wanted. And no one could impose it on me. I felt that, that no one could impose it on me.¹¹⁷

Domitila learned that she alone had the right to make decisions on her behalf and that men and women could have relationships grounded in inequality, not oppression. She attributed this won respect to the participation of women:

Because we had the same function, a woman like a man could grab a weapon and fire bullets. Radio operators were men, a woman could be a radio operator. If a woman did not live, a male combatant also [died]. And who would make the food? The women. The men understood that women were indispensable for making war, that's how they saw it.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Viterna, *Women and War*, 154-158.

¹¹⁶ Murguilday, Olivera, and Vásquez, *Y la Montaña Habló*, 8.

¹¹⁷ Domitila Ayala, interviewed by Rebeka Biró and Victoria Montero, Arcatao, 2013, transcript, pg. 50. "Pues, yo siento que fue un cambio bastante grande, un cambio total. De pensar que me podían hacer daño y de pensar en que el hombre era para no se...para someter a las mujeres a una esclavitud. Eso pensaba antes, que estar con un hombre era para tenernos de esclavas. Entonces ya después yo sentí que me liberé de eso. Me liberé porque entendí que yo era la que podía determinar cuándo y cómo y qué era lo que yo quería. Y que nadie me lo podía imponer. Yo sentía eso, que nadie me lo podía imponer."

In other words, men came to respect women because they partook in the same activities, thus challenging gender ideologies that devalued the labor and capabilities of women. Other combatants have explained how the arming of women and the threat of punishment and execution of offenders, ensured respect toward women.¹¹⁹ In other words, for some combatants, discipline rather than consciousness played more of a role in changing men's behavior toward women.

Although the majority of oral histories point to the absence of sexual harassment within the camps, some women remember how practices of respect also co-existed with sexual harassment. One combatant recounted: "there was a lot of respect, there were various stages, due to discipline there was equality more or less" and she simultaneously acknowledged the sexist jokes and persistence of men who sexually pursued her.¹²⁰ FMLN cadre rarely committed rape and other forms of sexual violence, which is not to say that it never occurred.¹²¹ FMLN women cadre have testified about sexual violence within their own ranks and many suggest that commanders perpetrated these acts more frequently than rank-and-file men.¹²²

ERP women identified how the FMLN military structure facilitated the abuse of power. Commanders had no "one to order them around" and so "they wanted to take advantage of the

¹¹⁸ Domitila Ayala, interviewed by Rebeka Biró and Victoria Montero, Arcatao, 2013, transcript, pg. 50. "Porque igual función hacíamos, tanto podía agarrar un fusil para tirar balas un hombre y una mujer también. Radista era un hombre, radista podía ser una mujer. Si una mujer no vivía un guerrillero también. ¿Y quién les hacía la comida? Las mujeres. Ellos entendieron de que las mujeres eran indispensables en la guerra, así los veían."

¹¹⁹ Viterna, *Women and War*, 154-156.

¹²⁰ María del Socorro Álvarez Henríquez (Mariana), interviewed by author, San Salvador, July 2014.

¹²¹ Wood, "Armed Groups and Sexual Violence," 33.

¹²² Herrera, "From Insurgency to Feminist Struggle," 293-294.

pretty compas [women comrades],” Irma recalled and added that commanders transferred male combatants to other camps if they perceived them as a threat. Dina had similar memories and described the abuses of commanders as “contradictory” given their revolutionary commitment. The critique of these rank-and-file women reflect larger narrative trends. Rank-and-file combatants tend to remember and emphasize the privileges afforded to FMLN commanders and the abuses that they committed.¹²³ While Irma claimed that she never witnessed rank-and-file men sexually harass her or other women, Dina recalled how her comrades sexually harassed her. As I discuss in chapter four, Dina’s memory or willingness to talk about these memories is unusual among the twenty-five combatant women I interviewed. Many of these women face unresolved tensions and anxieties that narrow their opportunities to discuss wartime sexual abuse within the FMLN. In a context in which rightwing parties are legally absolved from wartime abuses, women prefer to publicly emphasize their wartime accomplishments and denounce the role of the state in perpetuating sexual violence, rather than to highlight wartime abuses among leftist men.

Conclusion

Focusing on the everyday negotiations within the camps has allowed us to appreciate the interventions of FMLN women and understand the contestation of sexism as a process. FMLN women articulated a vision of gender equality that pointed to the potential of revolutionary movements to liberate women from sexist oppression under capitalism. Their analysis arose from their lived experiences within the camps in which they applied revolutionary values to the realm of everyday life. Women contested their role within the struggle over daily conflicts about food,

¹²³ Erik Ching, *Stories of Civil War in El Salvador: A Battle over Memory* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 226-230.

sex, and hygiene and pushed their comrades to be responsive to their needs as women. At the same time that FMLN women contested everyday sexism, FPL militants and peasant civilians within refugee and guerrilla camps organized within a woman's association that explicitly defined revolution as the overthrow of both capitalism and patriarchy. In the following chapter, I examine the feminist consciousness and practices that emerged from that organizing.

Chapter 3. ‘For Our Total Emancipation’: The Making of Revolutionary Feminism and the Asociación de Mujeres de El Salvador (AMES), 1977-1987

During the 1980s, the Asociación de Mujeres de El Salvador (Women’s Association of El Salvador, AMES) developed a revolutionary feminist praxis. Composed of combatants, peasants, and militants in exile, AMES mobilized peasant women within the guerrilla territories in El Salvador and refugee camps in Nicaragua and Costa Rica, and coordinated solidarity work from Mexico, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and the United States.¹ AMES organized simultaneously within those multiple sites to expand the scope of revolution and the role of working-class and peasant women in the armed struggle for El Salvador’s national liberation. It redefined socialist revolution to mean both the overthrow of capitalism and patriarchy, and mobilized women to shape the everyday and long-term trajectory of the revolutionary process. I trace how a revolutionary feminist praxis, an interplay between theory and practice, emerged from the multiple sites in which AMES organized. To tell this rich story, I draw from the oral histories of María Candelaria Navas (1943-), María Margarita Velado (1953-), Rosa Rivera (1957-), Elda Gladis Tobar de Ortiz (1962-), Audelia Guadalupe López (19XX-), and ten other former AMES members. In addition, I consult dozens of AMES bulletins, conference papers, wartime interviews, organizational documents, and FPL newspapers.

¹ In English solidarity documents, AMES is often written as: “Women’s Association of El Salvador” or “Association of Salvadorean Women.” While some of the biggest refugee camps were located in Honduras, the documents I collected did not make reference to Honduran camps, and none of the fourteen participants that I interviewed made reference to the existence of an AMES presence in Honduras.

Given the simultaneous organizing that took place in different locations, I organize this chapter thematically rather than strictly chronologically. This organization also allows me to challenge a unidirectional analysis of AMES in which one organizing location or group of women is privileged over another. I specifically challenge the notion that only university educated women developed AMES's theoretical interventions. From their specific locations, AMES organizers, including semiliterate peasant women and university educated women, contributed to the Association's praxis. While exiled women used the term "revolutionary feminism" within theoretical texts, peasant women largely developed revolutionary feminism as a political practice. Within the guerrilla territories and refugee camps, AMES politicized reproductive labor, deepened the participation of women within the revolutionary process, and built alternative institutions that advanced women's equality. From these organizing practices emerged new ideas about the relationship between gender and class oppression, and the role of women within the revolutionary struggle. In turn, these ideas drove women to hold the revolution to task and ensure that it would also liberate women. This organizing took place as Salvadoran women in exile coordinated solidarity work and produced the Association's literature, including its theoretical texts. As they mobilized support for women within the guerrilla territories and refugee camps, exiled AMES organizers collaborated with leftist women from Latin America and the United States who also critiqued the separation of women's liberation from class struggle. Those exchanges, in addition to its organizing, impacted how AMES theorized about the oppression of women under capitalism. Within its theoretical texts, AMES explicitly highlighted the patriarchal foundations of capitalism and argued that the revolution had to overthrow both capitalism and patriarchy. This conception departed from the revolutionary politics of the FPL, the guerrilla organization which had initially founded AMES in 1977.

The FPL Establishes AMES

When the FPL decided to form AMES, many members did not have an understanding of women's oppression. In these early years, organizers situated their struggle within the broader history of labor and guerrilla organizing, and much of their literature pointed to urban-based organizing. However, a remarkable shift in political consciousness would take place in the early 1980s as AMES gained a stronger presence in the countryside.

Rank-and-file AMES members had initially become politically active in labor and student movements and then joined the FPL. At the age of twenty-seven, María Candelaria Navas, a seasoned organizer within ANDES 21 de Junio joined the FPL in 1970. In 1978, she fled to Mexico City after surviving an attempted assassination attempt. There she coordinated the AMES chapter and produced the organization's literature at the request of FPL leader, Tula Alvarenga de Carpio. Elda Tobar de Ortiz joined the FPL at the age of sixteen in 1978 via her work in the Movimiento Estudiantil Revolucionario (Revolutionary Student Movement, MERS), an organization of high school students that originated in Chalatenango.² Once the war broke out, she worked in the guerrilla camps until the FPL assigned her to represent AMES internationally. Under the pseudonym Mereya Lucero, she coordinated AMES chapters in the United States and Canada that fundraised and denounced U.S. intervention in El Salvador. María Margarita Velado joined the FPL as a university student, organizing transportation workers. In 1980, at the age of twenty-seven she traveled to Nicaragua to coordinate AMES chapters that provided childcare and other forms of support to Salvadoran women in the guerrilla territories and refugee camps. Audelia Guadalupe López joined the FPL at the age of seventeen in the early 1970s. In the late 1970s, her FPL *responsable* (supervisor) assigned her to work with a woman's

² MERS was a member of the Bloque Popular Revolucionario (Revolutionary Popular Bloc).

collective in charge of developing AMES in Chalatenango department, a stronghold of the FPL. She was in her mid-twenties at the time. In 1985, she served on AMES's national executive body, using the pseudonym Rebeka Guevara.³ While all of the aforementioned women were FPL members, some women who joined AMES never became FPL militants. For example, cousins Rosa and María Helia Rivera grew up in an impoverished peasant family and became active in peasant organizing in the 1970s. Once the war broke out, they joined AMES in their mid-twenties, recruiting other civilian women within Chalatenango department.

In 1977, the FPL encouraged or directly assigned its members to build AMES as part of its larger strategy to organize working class women. A small collective of women founded AMES in 1977 but it went public on September 3, 1979 in an assembly named after Isaura Gómez, a teacher and organizer who was murdered alongside her twelve-year old daughter by state forces. AMES members represented two major groups: FPL militants living in El Salvador or in exile, and peasant civilians residing in FPL-controlled territories or in Nicaraguan and Costa Rican refugee camps. By 1985, AMES claimed 10,000 members in El Salvador.² In addition, it had chapters in Managua, San José, Mexico City, Brooklyn, Chicago, Montreal, and Paris, and an international solidarity organization called Friends of AMES.³ Salvadoran women in exile usually ran the international chapters.

³ AMES, "Entrevista a Rebeka Guevara, miembro de la dirección nacional ejecutiva a de AMES," *Boletín Internacional* (January-March 1985): 3, in BCRW.

² "Women's Rights," *Women's Association of El Salvador* 3, no.1 (Winter 1985), in NACLA-NS. This document does not offer further details and I have not found additional documents that provide clues as to the rural versus urban numeric composition of the Association.

³ The U.S. chapter of Friends of AMES educated "American women about the situation in El Salvador" in order "to mobilize support for the struggle" via fundraisers and organized opposition to U.S. foreign policy in Central America. "Women in El Salvador Fight for Nothing Less Than Everything," *Reproductive Rights Newsletter: Newsletter of the Reproductive Rights National Network* 4 (November 1982): 8, in BCRW.

AMES was the second women's organization to have been founded by a guerrilla group, although it retained its status as the country's largest women's organization. During the 1980s, all five guerrilla groups within the FMLN founded their own women's organizations to incorporate more women into the struggle.⁴ However, further research is needed to illuminate the goals of women within these organizations.

As discussed in chapter one, the FPL encouraged the participation of peasant women within the labor movement and within its ranks. When the FPL decided to form AMES in 1977, the FPL did not have a clear stance about the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism, although some members individually undertook the task of understanding that relationship through readings of the Russian socialist, Alexandra Kollontai. While the FPL did not explicitly articulate an analysis of women's oppression, it promoted the political participation of peasant women and denounced sexism and the exploitation of poor women at the hands of elite men and government soldiers. Rather than publicly denounce sexism among working-class men, the organization resorted to encouraging the revolutionary participation of women. Unlike many

⁴ In 1975, the Partido Comunista de El Salvador (Communist Party of El Salvador, PC) formed the Asociación de Mujeres Progresistas de El Salvador (Progressive Women's Association of El Salvador, AMPES) and in 1986, under the leadership of Norma Virginia Guirola de Herrera, established the urban-based Instituto de Investigación, Capacitación y Desarrollo de la Mujer (Institute for the Investigation, Empowerment, and Development of Women, IMU). IMU conducted participatory research and provided legal and educational aid to women's organizations. In 1981, exiled FMLN women in Costa Rica formed the Comité Unitario de Mujeres Salvadoreñas (Unitary Committee of Salvadoran Women, CUMS). In 1983, the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos (Central American Worker's Party, PRTC) formed the Asociación de Mujeres Salvadoreñas (Association of Salvadoran Women, ASMUSA). The organization conducted participatory research projects with women. In 1987, the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (Revolutionary People's Army, ERP) established the Asociación Mujer Salvadoreña (Salvadoran Woman Association, AMS), which operated in the departments of Morazán, San Miguel, San Vicente, and Usulután. In 1988, the Movimiento Salvadoreño de Mujeres (Salvadoran Movement of Women, MSM) was established and several members were from the FPL; its slogan was "construyendo la equidad entre los géneros" (building equality between the genders). Brenda Carter, Kevan Insko, David Loeb, Marlene Tobias, ed., "With One Single Voice: Women's Organizations of El Salvador," in *A Dream Compels Us: Voices of Salvadoran Women* (San Francisco: New American Press, 1989), 76-77. Lynn Stephen, *Women and Social Movements in Latin America: Power from Below* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 68-70. Hipsher, "Right- and Left-Wing Women in Post-Revolutionary El Salvador," 138.

other revolutionary organizations of the twentieth century, the FPL did not see a separate women's organization as divisive to the class struggle.⁵ The organization insisted that each sector within the working class should organize itself to fight for reforms that would develop its militancy to wage revolution.

The FPL women who were assigned to build AMES did not originally have an explicit awareness about their specific oppression as women. Audelia remembered that she originally “did not understand what we were going to do...we began by listening to other people about the role of women.”⁶ In 1986, another FPL member who worked as an AMES organizer in a Nicaraguan refugee camp, explained that she originally “did not understand what the struggle of women was [about].”⁷ This account complimented her 2015 interview in which she said, “It wasn't until Nicaragua that I realized that we women were oppressed. Before I was involved in so many things that it wasn't the most important.”⁸ As I will later demonstrate, the organizing process generated new understandings about the relationship between class and gender oppression.

The rank-and-file FPL women who built AMES also counted on the support of top FPL leaders. Tula Alvarenga de Carpio, an FPL founder, oversaw the international AMES chapters and is often credited as being the founder of AMES. Tula and her husband, Cayetano Carpio

⁵ For example, anarchists in Spain fiercely debated the strategy of establishing an autonomous women's organization, which opponents characterized as divisive to the anarchist movement. Women formed *Mujeres Libres* due to the inadequate attention afforded to women's revolutionary leadership and their emancipation within the anarchist movement. Ackelsberg, *Free Women of Spain*.

⁶ Audelia Guadalupe López, interviewed by author, San Salvador, May 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

⁷ Celentani, “Las transformaciones de conducta femenina bajo el impacto del conflicto socio-militar en El Salvador,” 180.

⁸ Azucena Quinteros joined the FPL in the late 1970s and began working in AMES in 1982.

“Marcial”, FPL general secretary, recruited well-known leftist women into AMES.⁹ Other FPL leaders also assisted AMES organizers. Mélida Anaya Montes, also known as Commander Ana María, the FPL’s second-in-command and former general secretary of ANDES 21 de Junio, helped prepare AMES women before their speaking engagements, although it remains unclear if she was a formal AMES member.¹⁰ But according to a union activist in 1985, ANDES 21 de Junio “assisted in the formation” of AMES because their “role is to organize other women.”¹¹

Given the organizing background of its membership, AMES situated its work within a larger history of labor organizing. In a 1977 pamphlet, AMES summarized the participation of women in most of the country’s key struggles, implicitly pointing to the important role of women within leftist movements. The earlier struggles included the indigenous and peasant uprising of 1932, women’s labor protests in 1948, and the overthrow of Colonel José María Lemus López (1956-1960). The *Fraternidad de Mujeres* (Fraternity of Women), which participated in Lemus’s ouster in 1960, was an especially important precedent. Tula Alvarenga de Carpio and other Communist Party women founded the Fraternity in 1957, organizing factory women, street vendors, students, domestic workers, and housewives. Foreshadowing AMES, its slogan was “In Defense of the Woman and Child.”¹² In contrast to the Fraternity, AMES explicitly linked

⁹ Marcial personally invited Aida Cañas, the widow of writer and activist Roque Dalton, to participate in AMES. She represented the organization on international speaking tours. She had originally been an ERP member but left the organization after a sect of ERP members assassinated her husband. Aida Cañas, interview by Carlos Henríquez Consalvi, April 2015, Havana, Cuba. A discussion of fatal factionalism is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but Joaquín Chávez argues that New Left anti-intellectualism that sought to purge the left of its petit-bourgeois ethos led to the murder of Dalton, see Joaquín Chávez, *Poets and Prophets of the Resistance: Intellectuals and the Origins of El Salvador’s Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 167.

¹⁰ Aida Cañas, interviewed by Carlos Henríquez Consalvi, April 2015, Havana, Cuba.

¹¹ Marta Alicia Rivera, quoted in “Teachers Fighting to Learn,” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 51. The original interview was published in *New American Press*, Los Angeles, 1985.

women's rights to a revolutionary project, as evidenced by its slogan: *conquistando los derechos de la mujer, construyéremos la nueva sociedad* (winning the rights of women, we will build the new society). AMES also cited women's participation within more recent struggles: the 1968 and 1971 teacher strikes, peasant organizing, guerrilla groups, and market women's organizations.¹³ Prior to founding AMES, its members organized market vendors via the Comité Coordinadora de las Señoras de los Mercados Luiz Dilían Arévalo (Coordinating Committee of Market Women, Luiz Dilían Arévalo).¹⁴ Given the membership's prior experience in the labor movement, AMES members denounced the economic and sexual exploitation of women street vendors, coffee pickers, and factory and domestic workers.¹⁵ From the outset, AMES sought to organize peasant and working class women.

AMES supported human rights and national self-determination, as evident in its 1980 bylaws. The Association was distinct in that it linked women's rights to popular movements, as I will outline in following sections, and emphasized the crucial role of women in liberating themselves, their families, and country. Members supported "dignity and human rights," particularly those of families, women, and children; "liberty," which included individual and

¹² Navas Turcios, "Las Organizaciones de Mujeres en El Salvador: 1975-1985," 127.

¹³ AMES, *Participación de la mujer salvadoreña en el proceso revolucionario* (1977), 9-10, in NACLA-NS, reel 26. All AMES documents from NACLA-NS are located in reel 26. Olga Baires is listed as the author writing on behalf of AMES. Baires joined the FPL after leaving the Communist Party youth group. In 1963, she traveled to Moscow to study agronomical engineering at the Patrice Lumumba University. During the 1970s, she was obtaining her doctorate in the sociology of economic development from a Parisian university but frequently traveled to El Salvador where she worked with mass organizations. She participated in the Bloque Popular Revolucionario (Revolutionary Popular Bloc, BPR), a coalition of mass organizations, and worked with the Federación Cristiana de Campesinos Salvadoreños (Christian Federation of Salvadoran Peasants, FECCAS). In her mid-thirties in 1978 she joined AMES.

¹⁴ AMES, *Participación de la mujer salvadoreña en el proceso revolucionario*, 10.

¹⁵ Jenny Vaughan and Jane MacIntosh, "Women's Lives in El Salvador, an interview with Miriam Galdámez, an El Salvadoran refugee" in *Women and War, El Salvador* (New York: Women's International Resource Exchange, n.d.), n.p., in BCRW.

collective “self-determination;” equality without distinction of age, race, religion, class, and education; and “solidarity” with all people and struggles for human rights. Their “fundamental objectives” included women’s equality, familial unity, rights for minors, peace, and solidarity.¹⁶ AMES demanded “the rights of family and children, women, and the entire people,” according to Audelia in 1985.¹⁷

In its first three years, AMES mainly organized urban-based women. It described this sector as a group of “women (housewives, professionals, teachers, secretaries, shantytown dwellers, students, etc.) who, because of their special circumstances, had not yet joined the people’s struggle.”¹⁸ Given their organizing base, AMES made demands that would improve the lives of urban women. For instance, in March 8, 1980, the AMES chapter in San Salvador organized a rally demanding equal salaries for women, employment, the lowering of food prices, and an end to forced sterilizations. In 1982, an AMES organizer stated that “hundreds of women have been sterilized after childbirth without their consent or knowledge.”¹⁹ While the organizer did not discuss who was being sterilized and for what reasons, we do know that the government heavily promoted sterilization and received U.S. support. The state family planning agencies, Salvadoran Demographic Association, an affiliate of the International Planned Parenthood

¹⁶ AMES, *Estatutos de la Asociación de Mujeres de El Salvador* (n.p., 1980), in BOP, General Files Subseries, International Women’s Liberation Subseries, El Salvador—AMES Materials, Box 16, Folder 1.

¹⁷ Audelia Guadalupe López used the pseudonym Rebekla Guevara. AMES, “Entrevista a Rebeke Guevara, miembro de la dirección nacional ejecutiva a de AMES,” *Boletín Internacional* (January-March 1985): 3, in BCRW.

¹⁸ AMES, *Participation of Latin American Women in Social and Political Organizations: Reflections of Salvadoran Women*, (New York: Women’s International Resource Exchange, n.d.), n.p., in BCRW. All BCRW documents obtained via email communication. This text was written in 1981 and presented at the Primer Seminario Latinoamericano de Investigación sobre la Mujer in San José, Costa Rica. The Spanish title is “Participación de la mujer latinoamericana en las organizaciones sociales y políticas. Reflexiones de las mujeres salvadoreñas.” The Spanish language text is available in CIDAI.

¹⁹ “Our Work, Our History (August 1982)” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 90.

Federation, and the Ministry of Health and Social Security Institute of El Salvador, effectively promoted sterilization. Between 1978 and 1988, sterilization constituted ninety-one percent of the increase in contraception use among married women between fifteen and forty years of age.²⁰ A 1984 study reported that state facilities had performed 22,000 female sterilizations that year. It surveyed 648 women who had undergone sterilization and found that the majority were younger than age thirty, had begun childbearing as teenagers, had an average of 3.4 living children, and had a primary education. The report argued that Salvadoran women were not coerced because 98 percent knew of at least one other contraception method, 69 percent had known about sterilization for three years prior to their operation, and 69 percent cited themselves as having recommended sterilization. In addition, 87 percent of women had learned about sterilization via radio, while 67 percent learned about it from pamphlets and posters. However, the report also found that 55 percent of sterilized women had not received information from medical professionals about alternative forms of birth control prior to their operation and 1.5 percent of sterilized women had been under age twenty. The report did not mention the specific ages of these adolescents, which certainly raises ethical issues about the consent age of young women.²¹ Overall, it seems that Salvadoran women underwent sterilization due to the difficulties of raising children in poverty and the disproportionate promotion of sterilization by state agencies. Those factors certainly limited women's options but the report suggests that state officials were not forcibly sterilizing women. While we cannot confirm if AMES had access to this research, the important point is that AMES worked to ensure that women actively consented and determined their reproductive futures.

²⁰ Richard S. Monteith, Charles W. Warren, José Mario Caceres, and Howard I. Goldberg, "Changes in contraceptive use and fertility: El Salvador, 1978-88," *Journal of Biosocial Science* 23 1(1991): 85.

²¹ Jane T. Bertrand, José David Araya Zelaya, and Evelyn G. Landry, "Is Female Sterilization Voluntary in El Salvador?" *International Family Planning Perspectives* 12 2 (1986): 41-43.

AMES also led educational and skill-building workshops for urban women. In San Salvador, AMES also formed Comités Femeninos de Barrios y Colonias (Female Neighborhood Committees). The committee activities consisted of political education and trainings in baking, typewriting, and sewing; presumably, such trainings would equip women with skills that could enable the economic support of their families. Those trained in typewriting assisted in the spreading of revolutionary literature. Members also supported political prisoners and refugees, providing food, medicine, clothing, literacy and hygiene classes and reported human rights abuses to international press and major human rights agencies, specifically Socorro Jurídico de Arzobispado (Archbishop Legal Aid), the Comisión de Derechos Humanos (Commission on Human Rights).



Figure 3. AMES poster, date unknown. Courtesy of the MUPI.

Women Plant the ‘Seeds of the New Society’

In its early years, AMES mainly organized in cities but after 1982 it built a stronger presence within rural areas under guerrilla control, particularly in Chalatenango department.²² Within the guerrilla territories, AMES took the revolution to task to ensure that women participated in meaningful ways within the revolutionary process. Toward this goal, AMES mobilized women to participate in leadership roles within the *poderes populares locales* or popular councils that functioned as the democratic decision-making bodies of the revolution. Organizers linked women’s immediate survival needs to the long-term eradication of *machismo* (sexism). In the refugee camps in Nicaragua and Costa Rica, AMES organizers approached the camps as an organizing site that was part of the larger revolutionary struggle, developing the leadership of women so they could participate in building a new society once they returned home.²³ Overall, AMES’s development of a feminist praxis within a context of armed struggle challenges prior academic accounts that have situated feminism in opposition to armed struggle.²⁴

²² In April 1983, AMES worked in the following FMLN fronts: Feliciano Ama, Clara Elizabeth Ramírez, Apolinario Serrano, Roberto Sibrián, Felipe Pena, and Para-Central, and began working in the eastern front and Ahuachapán. In July 1984, AMES worked in the following areas: Chalatenango, Usulután (San Agustín, Tres Calles, Ozatlán, San Francisco, Javier de Costa de Usulután, Zona de San Marcos Lempa); San Vicente (west of Tecoluca and to the Lempa river, Chinchontepec volcano, the coast and San Pedro hills); northern and western Santa Ana; northern La Libertad; Guazapa Volcano (south of Lake Suchitlán); western Cabañas; northern San Miguel, and the metropolitan area of San Salvador. “Aportes de la Asociación de Mujeres de El Salvador en el momento actual,” (n.p., July 1984), n.p., in BOP, Folder 1; *Desarrollo de la participación política de la Mujer Salvadoreña y su influencia en el Proceso de la Liberación Nacional* (1983): 9, in BOP, Folder 2.

²³ While Todd does not center an analysis of gender, she made similar arguments about the forms of radical democracy that took root within the Honduran refugee camps. Todd, *Beyond Displacement*, 160-163.

²⁴ Viterna, “Radical or Righteous? Using Gender to Shape Public Perceptions of Political Violence.” Stoltz Chinchilla, “Nationalism, Feminism, and Revolution in Central America.”

In the early 1980s, the FMLN gained control over a significant amount of territory. By 1983, the guerrillas controlled a quarter of the nation's territory, while later in the decade it controlled a third. The FMLN controlled about twenty-three percent of all the municipalities in the country.²⁵ In 1983, the FPL alone controlled twenty-eight out of thirty-three municipalities in Chalatenango department.²⁶ Although the so-called liberated territories faced constant government threats via troop invasions and aerial attacks, the FMLN held its ground, facilitating the growth of AMES within these areas since women could organize with relative freedom.

In their oral histories, former FPL women insisted on situating AMES within a context of armed struggle. They understood the revolutionary process as the mechanism that would liberate women. Margarita recalled that AMES saw “no contradiction between the struggle for the rights of women and revolutionary change—one thing was going to depend on the other.”²⁷ She cautioned me to avoid an “idealized vision” of AMES that divorced the organization from armed struggle. But she also rejected reducing the revolutionary process to “only a military struggle; it was a *political*-military struggle, we were political warriors.” Elda used similar language, claiming that a “well-nourished military [umbilical] cord” connected the FPL to mass organizations, including AMES.²⁸ Although AMES and FPL worked closely together, the Association did not simply recruit women to join the FPL ranks. In January 1982, an AMES

²⁵ Vásquez, Ibáñez, Murguialday, *Mujeres-montaña*, 120

²⁶ Pearce, *Promised Land*, 223.

²⁷ María Margarita Velado, interview by Diana C. Sierra Becerra, San Salvador, April 28, 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

²⁸ Elda Gladis Tobar de Ortiz, interviewed by Diana C. Sierra Becerra, San Salvador, May 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

representative explained that their goal was to “educate and politicize women, not to arm them,” each woman would “decide for herself what role she will play in the struggle.”²⁹

After the FPL gained control over large portions of Chalatenango department, peasants seized upon those military victories to organize popular councils. As early as 1981, peasants began organizing councils to manage their immediate survival needs, such as security, food, and health. Older women, mothers with young children, and elderly persons comprised a significant portion of civilians within the liberated territories. In 1987, an AMES organizer estimated that 2,525 civilians were living in Arcatao municipality; forty percent were women and fifty percent were children, the remaining ten percent may have been elderly persons.³⁰ Many civilian women had lost their male relatives to state violence, while many able-bodied men had joined the guerrilla ranks or deserted the area, and thus women alone assumed the responsibility of keeping their families alive.³¹ In response to state violence, food shortages, and the absence of schools and clinics, council organizers established peasant militias and popular clinics and schools, and collectively cultivated their own food. The clinics treated both serious injuries from government bombings and curable diseases such as diarrhea. Sitting under trees and using sticks to write letters in the dirt, popular educators taught an entire generation to read and write, and approached education as a tool to understand and resolve collective problems.³² The FMLN actively

²⁹ “Women in El Salvador,” January 1982, in BCRW.

³⁰ “We Are No Longer a Community on the Run” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 197.

³¹ Both peasant civilians and the FMLN accepted the notion that only very young boys and elderly persons be allowed to enter refugee camps. And thus men made choices to increase their chances of survival, either joining the guerrillas, being forcibly conscripted into the armed forces, or fleeing the country. For a discussion of how men understood their limited choices, see Viterna, *Women and War*, 109.

promoted literacy within its own camps, for both practical and ideological purposes.³³ While many of the peasants who participated within the councils were seasoned labor organizers, many were not and thus the councils provided an opportunity to organize more people, deepen their political consciousness, expand their political participation, and consolidate political power over a vast territory. The self-organization of civilians was also a necessity because the FPL did not have the resources to fight against the Salvadoran military *and* provide for the basic necessities of civilians residing within the liberated territories.

The councils continued to grow as the FPL secured more territory. Each council oversaw one municipality that was connected to a larger regional junta made up of approximately seven municipalities. One regional junta alone oversaw the needs of 7,000 people.³⁴ Four regional juntas oversaw the entire Chalatenango department.³⁵ After 1988, the councils evolved into *directivas comunales* (communal directives) that performed similar work as the councils.³⁶ These

³² During the mid-to-late twentieth century, popular education became an important tool for building social justice in Latin America. Paulo Freire, the best-known theorist and practitioner of popular pedagogy, developed methodologies for eradicating illiteracy and equipping the poor with the skills to challenge the hierarchies that sustain their oppression. He criticized the “banking method” of education for treating students as empty vessels in which to deposit information and encouraging student passivity. Instead, he argued, popular educators should treat the experiences of students as a source of knowledge and pose questions that can be resolved through collective reflection and action. Paulo Freire, “Education as the practice of freedom,” in *Education for Critical Consciousness*, ed. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1973), 36, 47. Peter McLaren and Henry A. Giroux, “Writing from the margins: geographies of identity, pedagogy, and power,” in *Revolutionary Multiculturalism: Pedagogies of Dissent for the New Millennium*, ed. Peter McLaren (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 16-41. Howard Zinn and Donaldo Macedo, *Howard Zinn on Democratic Education* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 64-65.

³³ For a discussion of popular education within the guerrilla camps, see John L. Hammond, “Learning on the Front Lines,” in *Fighting to Learn: Popular Education and Guerrilla War in El Salvador* (New Brunswick: New Jersey), 52-73.

³⁴ Asociación de Comunidades para el Desarrollo de Chalatenango, *CCR: Organización y lucha popular en Chalatenango* (San Salvador: Algiers Impresores, 2012), 35.

³⁵ *CCR: Organización y lucha popular en Chalatenango*, 36-37.

communal directives later evolved into a peasant organization that coordinated the return of refugees and rebuilding of villages in 1988.³⁷

The councils kept people alive but also represented a specific organizing strategy. A 1982 AMES bulletin described the councils as “an instance of local self-governance composed of representatives elected by the community.”³⁸ A year later, an AMES organizer described the councils as “the seed of the new society.”³⁹ In a 2015 interview, Elda used similar language, describing the councils as “the ideal of our new society.” Peasant organizing created a dual power situation in which revolutionaries built institutions and relationships that challenged the existing state apparatus that upheld capitalist interests and monopolized the use of force.⁴⁰ In directly representing their interests via the councils, peasants practiced a form of pre-figurative politics, defined as the practice of building alternative institutions as a movement wages a struggle against capitalism.⁴¹ Despite the devastation that the war inflicted, peasants did not wait

³⁶ *CCR: Organización y lucha popular en Chalatenango*, 67. “The Seeds of a New Society: Popular Power in the Countryside,” 174, in *A Dream Compels Us*.

³⁷ Ongoing international pressure on the Salvadoran government limited its physical abuses against the civilian population, facilitating the efforts of peasants to repopulate villages without massive government violence. (this should be in the text) See Todd, “Retorno!” in *Beyond Displacement*. Via the Comundidades y Repoblaciones de Chalatenango (Communities and Repopulations of Chalatenango, CCR), peasants coordinated the return of refugees and the rebuilding of villages. As a federated organization, the CCR represented multiple municipalities and was also an experiment in radical democracy. The CCR continues to exist in postwar El Salvador as the Asociación de Comunidades para el Desarrollo de Chalatenango, see *CCR: Organización y lucha popular en Chalatenango*, 132-203. For a wartime interview with an organizer coordinating the return of refugees, see “We Are No Longer a Community on the Run (November 1987)” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 200.

³⁸ *Como Nacemos y que hacemos*, 10.

³⁹ “Helping Women to Participate as Equals (1983)” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 103.

⁴⁰ Lenin first articulated the concept of dual power. For an overview of the concept and its application in Venezuela, see George Ciccariello-Maher, “Dual Power in the Venezuelan Revolution,” *Monthly Review* 59 4 (2007): 42-56.

until a definitive military victory to begin building their ideal society. Rather, they used the councils to bridge the present-day movement to a revolutionary horizon.

Building the councils was no easy task. The pressing nature of the war legitimated arguments about the importance of prioritizing military activities over mass organizing. The argument had its merits—military defeat would have meant the extermination of leftists and a major blow to sustained organizing efforts. A European doctor who worked in a popular clinic in Chalatenango summarized this tension in 1984:

There were people who said, we are at war and we cannot deal with too many other problems, let's win the war first and then deal with other things like health care in the villages, literacy, the situation of women. Being there, I could understand that position much better than outsiders, where it is easy to say those people are wrong. But living the daily situation, you see the difficulties of maintaining the liberation movement and keeping the initiative... People are very busy [with the war efforts] and therefore it is not strange if people say they can't do anything else. But finally the prevailing argument is, what is this war about? It is to improve the lives of the people, and we can't wait for that until we win the war. We have to do that simultaneously which is very difficult, but we have to try.⁴²

The councils reflected an effort to improve people's lives in the here and now. In line with that approach, AMES linked activities related to wartime survival to efforts to eradicate sexism.

AMES intervened to ensure that women participated in the councils. Due to its efforts, a former secretary general of AMES served as the first president of the regional junta government in Chalatenango. From 1982 to mid-1983, María Ofelia Navarrete had worked as AMES

⁴¹ Carl Bogg first coined the term pre-figurative politics but as a political project it has longer historical roots, from the Paris Commune to Spanish anarchist revolution. Bogg defined pre-figurative politics as practice “within the ongoing political practice of a movement... those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experiences that are the ultimate goal.” Carl Boggs, “Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers’ Control,” *Radical America* 4 (3): 359-393.

⁴² The doctor is not named but is quoted in Pearce, *Promised Land*, 271.

secretary general, coordinating its work in twenty-seven municipalities.⁴³ After 1983, she served as the president of the regional junta government and shortly after became the famous FPL Commander María Chichilco.⁴⁴ In 1984, she explained the goals of AMES and explained the importance of women's political participation:

AMES is an organization that has two aims: the liberation of women as such and the liberation of the people, within which women ought to participate as a living element of the people. We struggle so that our women do not get stuck with the role of housewife who looks after the children, but also that they integrate themselves into political life. A woman has to have the opportunity to be mayor or president...we realize that our demands as an organization are not a struggle against the other sex. On the contrary, it's our liberation and that of our compañeros, liberation from the machismo that the system has created. I feel that we are gaining a lot.

AMES not only encouraged women's participation within the councils, but worked to have those bodies address women's concerns. For instance, AMES encouraged the popular clinics to address women's health concerns, as one visitor to the territories noted in February 1984:

The local community governments in the area were trying to design a new health care system for thousands of people, and AMES was working with them to define the needs of women. Traditionally, things like bladder infections and gynecological problems just weren't talked about, and so they often weren't treated. Now women's needs will be incorporated into the health system.⁴⁵

⁴³ María Serrano was the political pseudonym of María Ofelia Navarrete. She was also known as Commander María Chichilco. "Aportes de la Asociación de Mujeres de El Salvador en el momento actual," n.d., 1. BOP, Folder 1. Also see her interview in Pearce, *Promised Land*, 274.

⁴⁴ According to council rules, council representatives could not serve as elected officials of a mass organization, nor could organizations have a vote in the councils, which perhaps explains why María Chichilco was not AMES general secretary at the time of her council presidency. "Helping Women to Participate as Equals" in *A Dream Compels Us*, 104.

⁴⁵ "Popular Power in Chalatenango Province (February 1984)" in *A Dream Compels Us*, 185.

Each month, the clinic treated 200-500 patients and had 50 deliveries.⁴⁶ Older women, guardians of traditional medicine, assisted in the classification of native plants that could be used for natural remedies.⁴⁷ The same European doctor quoted earlier, saw the clinics as a “system where people can participate and make decisions, feel responsible for their own health.”⁴⁸ AMES members also collected food for civilians and injured hospital patients, and taught women how to bake bread and make candles and soap. These projects ensured the survival needs of women. Access to food was key for survival, perhaps explaining why four AMES members in 2015 remembered food collections as a major AMES task.⁴⁹ Farmers growing food always faced the threat of aerial bombardments. One peasant woman described how the war disturbed the most basic aspects of daily life: one did not “eat in peace...the bombs would come and one had to leave the plates of food.”⁵⁰ To save their lives, peasants and their families dug and hid in *tatús* (underground bomb shelters). Tragically, many women accidentally suffocated their children, hoping to muffle their cries to avoid detection from government soldiers.⁵¹

Collective projects addressed immediate survival needs but also provided AMES organizers with an opportunity to develop women’s political consciousness. AMES organized projects related to daily survival in order to “develop the political consciousness of women and

⁴⁶ Pearce, *Promised Land*, 269.

⁴⁷ “Popular Power in Chalatenango Province (February 1984)” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 188.

⁴⁸ Pearce, *Promised Land*, 271.

⁴⁹ María Helia Rivera, interviewed by author, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. Ermelinda López, interviewed by Diana C. Sierra Becerra, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. Filomena Beltrán, interview by Diana C. Sierra Becerra, Arcatao, September 2014, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

⁵⁰ Filomena Beltrán, interview by Diana C. Sierra Becerra, Arcatao, September 2014, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

⁵¹ Pearce, *Promised Land*, 273.

help them to understand their ‘double oppression’...“show [women] that they *are* capable of more, that they are capable of fighting for what they need. The problem is that men, by virtue of being men, have authority over “their women” and this keeps women down,” explained an eighteen-year old AMES organizer in 1983.⁵² She had joined the Association at age fourteen. In 1987, another organizer described how organizing enabled women to “understand why we were fighting and how they could participate in the process. It was a time of going from home to home, from woman to woman, and talking about these things.”⁵³ According to this young organizer, older women wanted to limit their participation to prayers and tortillas alone but she encouraged them to participate further, attending workshops and bible study groups that would develop their political education.⁵⁴ Despite these obstacles, both younger and older women participated in AMES. In February 1984, the director of a U.S.-based humanitarian aid organization traveled to Chalatenango and commented that the “great majority of both older and younger women” participated in AMES. The older women “tended to be quieter; the younger women were bolder and more outgoing” and the latter’s relationships with younger men “seemed to be on a more equal footing.”⁵⁵ The younger women were mothers caring for small children, while women without children (between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five) tended to be in the FMLN.⁵⁶

⁵² “Beautiful pages of History Are Being Written (August 1983)” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 99.

⁵³ “We Are No Longer a Community on the Run,” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 193.

⁵⁴ “We Are No Longer a Community on the Run,” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 194.

⁵⁵ Tracey Schear is listed as the director of NEST foundation. “Popular Power in Chalatenango Province (February 1984),” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 185.

⁵⁶ “Popular Power in Chalatenango Province,” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 186.

In their oral histories, peasant women recalled how the Association impacted their self-esteem and commitments. Esperanza Ortega remembered how her younger sister Ana Elsy, an AMES organizer and FPL member, motivated her “to do little projects to resolve some basic needs,” believing “that as women we had to take initiative, that we should not hold onto the hope that the men would [financially] support us.”⁵⁷ Esperanza then participated and led a council. Political participation gave her “a wider vision” and taught her “to think of others” beyond her immediate circle.⁵⁸ Another peasant woman who identified as a collaborator rather than AMES member, recalled her participation with pride: “it’s the only thing I have ever done [outside the home]—participate in the women’s meetings.” She remembers how AMES organizers told her “to not merely stay at home, to not merely make the food—if you only do that you won’t develop [as a person].”⁵⁹ In AMES “women discovered that they had the same capabilities [as men],” recalled Rosa Rivera, while another peasant woman added “that we women are equal” and observed how women’s political participation resulted in “them being taken into account as if they were men.”⁶⁰

AMES developed a political education program to deepen the participation of women. Organizers prioritized the “political and ideological formation” of women in order promote their leadership and solve “collective problems.” Towards these goals, AMES held collective discussions about individual, family, and community problems, and hosted study groups about

⁵⁷ According to Ortega, Ayala, and the Rivera cousins, Anaelsi was among the first to organize AMES bases in Chalatenango.

⁵⁸ Esperanza Ortega, interviewed by Diana C. Sierra Becerra, Arcatao, September 2014, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

⁵⁹ Ermelinda López, interviewed by Diana C. Sierra Becerra, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

⁶⁰ Filomena Beltrán, interviewed by Diana C. Sierra Becerra, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

the political, economic, social, and cultural situation of the country. It outlined this work in an undated document that summarized the “contributions of the organization to the current moment.”⁶¹ This educational work also took place within the refugee camps. Azucena Quinteros, an AMES organizer, remembered how she organized study groups on Marx and Engels with refugee women in Nicaragua. These texts “discussed the origins of patriarchy...which had to do with women because they became the private property of men,” she explained. Since “we couldn’t use those documents” with illiterate women, the organizer selected extracts and created “little drawings” that “women could understand” and discussed “why women in these times are oppressed a bunch of times over.”⁶² In other words, AMES adapted Marxism and made it accessible to point to the class and gender oppression that women faced.

The educational work of the Association also impacted its organizers. Prior to her involvement in AMES, Azucena collaborated with peasant organizations but faced resistance from her husband who accused her of being “a loose woman who was out with men.” Her husband, a member of ANDES 21 de Junio, demanded that she ask permission prior to leaving the house.⁶³ However, “the dialectical study” about women’s realities made her “wake up” and “revaluate consciously” her “principles” and “family situation,” she explained in 1987.⁶⁴ In 2015, she still remembered how she had created an equitable distribution of domestic labor and how she had explained to her children that organizing women “made her feel good; that it was a

⁶¹ “Aportes de la Asociación de Mujeres de El Salvador en el momento actual,” 1.

⁶² Azucena Quinteros, interviewed by Diana C. Sierra Becerra, San Salvador, Abril 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

⁶³ “Celentani, “Las transformaciones de conducta femenina bajo el impacto del conflicto socio-militar en El Salvador,” 170.

⁶⁴ Celentani, “Las transformaciones de conducta femenina bajo el impacto del conflicto socio-militar en El Salvador,” 180-181.

fundamental part of my life, as fundamental as they were.”⁶⁵ In other words, she rejected her husband’s framing that motherhood was incompatible with political participation.

AMES also organized more formal gatherings to educate women about their rights. In 1984, AMES organized its first congress, hosting it in Chalatenango. Audelia also attended and recalled that women from San Vicente, Guazapa, Usulután, San Salvador, Cinquera, and Chalatenango participated, including FPL Commander Rebeca Palacios (Lorena Peña). Aside from the participation of FPL commanders, FPL combatants also provided security because during the congress “three [government] military invasions took place,” recalled Margarita. FPL guerrillas guided and transported AMES members to safety, and patrolled the area as women engaged in their work. For Margarita, this demonstrated the commitment of the FPL to women’s organizing.

María Helia, the cousin of Rosa Rivera and a former UTC organizer, identified the conference as a key moment where she learned about “organizing women, defending ourselves as women, learning to read and write...motivating [women] about their rights and responsibilities; that they too could participate in the guerrilla ranks.” While AMES did not recruit women to join the guerrilla ranks and while María Helia never became a combatant, she saw the opportunity to join as an indication of women’s equal status. Without educational materials and “much preparation,” she hosted women’s assemblies in Los Amates, Santa Ana, and Tequeque (currently known as Nombre de Jesús) in order to explain to others “the little that I learned at the congress.” The term “revolutionary feminism,” used frequently in AMES’s theoretical texts, meant little to María Helia, but two decades later, she still remembered the slogan: “AMES combate, también aquí en Chalate! (AMES also fights in Chalate!)”

⁶⁵ Celentani, “Las transformaciones de conducta femenina bajo el impacto del conflicto socio-militar en El Salvador,” 181-182.

As AMES women demanded the right to participate politically, they faced opposition from men. A 1983 documentary about the FPL territories filmed an AMES meeting in Chalatenango in which a peasant woman called for the anti-sexist education of men. In an impassioned speech, she stated, “make [the men] feel that we are a people and we have the right as compañeras to also fight” and not only perform domestic tasks. To a large crowd of women and children, the same woman implicitly responded to accusations that only morally dissolute women left their homes: “well if [the men] are capable, if they are so confident, well they can wash their own clothes, they can make our tortillas. If we go to a meeting it is to understand the revolutionary process.”⁶⁶ She mocked men who considered themselves superior to women and domestic work, and even threatened to withhold her domestic labor if men opposed her political participation. In response, the women cheered and yelled slogans, “¡Con la mujer activa! ¡Con la mujer decidida y valiente! ¡Con la mujer incorporada!” (With the active woman! With the dedicated and brave women! With the incorporated woman [into the struggle]!)

Women’s organizing set limits to sexism. In 1982, a FPL woman combatant explained “how people have a better understanding of what carrying out a revolution involves... Today in the battle zones, women may go about their duties while men take care of the children.”⁶⁷ In 1983, another AMES organizer in Nicaragua, defined *compañerismo*, (comradery) as the “full integration of men into childrearing and into all family tasks.” She argued that the movement needed *compañerismo* because the “Salvadoran movement cannot coexist with *machismo*.”⁶⁸ Elda made similar comments in 1987: it is “women’s participation itself that is eradicating

⁶⁶ *El camino de la libertad*, Instituto Cinematográfico de El Salvador Revolucionario, 1983, in MUPI.

⁶⁷ “Developing as Women within the Revolution (June 1982),” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 147.

⁶⁸ “Breaking Down Barriers in Ideas and Practice (May 1983)” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 93.

machismo. It's also a question of ideology. At least in the war zones, the *compañeros'* political education discourages *machismo*.”⁶⁹

AMES developed measures to address men's opposition to women's political participation. In 1983, an organizer explained how AMES confronted “serious problems” because some men threatened “to leave if their wives become politically active.” In response, AMES members worked as “marriage counselors.”⁷⁰ One peasant woman also remembered how the councils created a secretariat dedicated to the resolution of community conflicts. In cases of conjugal conflicts, said person would “make [the man] see the problem that was happening in the family,” she recalled.⁷¹ The interventions of AMES seemed to improve conjugal relationships. For example, in 1983, an AMES organizer reported that a man who initially opposed his wife's political participation now made tortillas, a supposedly feminine task.⁷² In another case, a woman walked for a week to attend the first AMES Congress in 1984. Due to a government army invasion that prevented her return, her husband, who participated in the local militias, took care of their children for three months. According to the AMES organizer, he learned to better appreciate the contributions of his wife. The fact that the woman attended the Congress speaks volumes about their relationship, either its equitable form or a wife who no longer tolerated that her husband dictate her whereabouts.⁷³

Politicizing ‘Personal’ Problems

⁶⁹ “We Are No Longer a Community on the Run,” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 196.

⁷⁰ “Beautiful pages of History Are Being Written,” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 99.

⁷¹ Esperanza Ortega, interviewed by Diana C. Sierra Becerra, Arcatao, September 2014, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

⁷² “Beautiful pages of History Are Being Written,” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 99.

⁷³ “We Are No Longer a Community on the Run,” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 196.

Scholars have criticized the FMLN for discouraging the discussion of “personal” problems, which silenced women’s grievances.⁷⁴ But the women of AMES did in fact politicize so-called private and personal problems, such as marital rape and childcare. Organizers challenged sexist notions that justified the sexual abuse of wives and educated women about their right to deny sex. They also created childcare centers as part of a larger anti-sexist struggle to encourage women’s participation, collectivize the raising of families, raise children with non-sexist values, and resist state violence. The existence of the childcare center complicates the claim that there was little discussion within the revolutionary movements regarding alternative visions of parenting and motherhood.

In the refugee camps, AMES educators attempted to shift how women viewed their own bodies. In 1982, Azucena Quinteros began working with Salvadoran refugees in Nicaragua. AMES organized approximately 800 women in the Nicaraguan cities of León, Chinandega, Managua, and Rivas, in addition to refugees in Costa Rica, described a 1984 pamphlet.⁷⁵ This work hoped to promote women’s participation in solidarity efforts and “prepare her for the return to her country and full incorporation into the reconstruction and formation of a new society,” according to a 1983 pamphlet.⁷⁶ We “organized and trained [women] who didn’t know their rights...not even their body they knew,” recalled Azucena in 2015.⁷⁷ She taught sexual education

⁷⁴ Stoltz Chinchilla, “Nationalism, Feminism, and Revolution in Central America,” 212.

⁷⁵ In Costa Rica, AMES and the Association of Costa Rica Women in Solidarity with Salvadorean Women (AMCOPAMS) founded the Vocational Training Center for Refugee Women in Heredia. The center offered literacy and technical trainings, in addition to political education on “women’s role in society.” By teaching women work skills “previously considered to be appropriate for men only” they hoped to challenge sexism and demystify the mechanics of technology. “Building a new society,” *Women’s Association of El Salvador* Volume 1, No. 1., March 1984, BOP, Folder 2.

⁷⁶ *Desarrollo de la participación política de la Mujer Salvadoreña y su influencia en el Proceso de la Liberación Nacional*, Abril 4, 1983, 11, in BOP, Folder 2.

and rejected “the propaganda” of population control that “serve[d] the framework of the system” and is not “useful” for women.⁷⁸ Azucena referred to Malthusian proponents of population control. As others have demonstrated, such proponents often promoted non-consensual drug experimentation, and the sterilization of women in the Global South as a means to reduce global poverty.⁷⁹ While the Salvadoran government did not forcibly sterilize women it did actively promote sterilization over other means of contraception. Azucena also recalled how she facilitated discussions about rape within Nicaraguan refugee camps:

I remember that when I asked them if they had ever been raped they would say “no”, you see, but when I asked them if their husbands forced them to have relations, then they said “yes”, and so I told them, “that’s rape” – [they replied] “oh I thought that was normal, because it’s my husband, one has to service the husband.”⁸⁰

As a result of these discussions, women “began to make changes in their lives” but it was “very complicated” to discuss marital rape “when there are people in our country dying,” explained Azucena.⁸¹ Margarita who worked both in Nicaragua and El Salvador, remembered having similar concerns about AMES’s relationship to peasant women: “we did not look for conflicts that could break that relationship...I have to modify that sexist behavior [but] to emphasize that situation too much could cause desertion among women.”⁸² In other words, characterizing the

⁷⁷ Azucena Quinteros, interviewed by Diana C. Sierra Becerra, San Salvador, Abril 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

⁷⁸ di Castel Lentini Celentani, “Las transformaciones de conducta femenina bajo el impacto del conflicto socio-militar en El Salvador,” 200.

⁷⁹ Ana María Portugal, “Targets of Population control: Latin America,” *Connexions* 41 (1993): 12.

⁸⁰ Azucena Quinteros, interviewed by Diana C. Sierra Becerra, San Salvador, Abril 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

⁸¹ Azucena Quinteros, interviewed by Diana C. Sierra Becerra, San Salvador, Abril 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

sexist behavior of poor men as the *primary* target could have alienated many peasant women who had lost their partners, sons, and male relatives to state violence. Furthermore, if some women excluded spousal sexual abuse from the category of rape, they may have framed their rape at the hands of state and paramilitary forces as their primary opposition. Even if AMES had publicly denounced marital rape, a public campaign to denounce sexual violence would not be possible without survivors coming forward with their testimonies. Rather, AMES resorted to internal education about marital rape and publicly denounced state violence when survivors and relatives came forward. For example, in 1977 AMES decried the capture of pregnant women who gave birth inside jail and the capture of children as a means to force women to “give information to repressive bodies.”⁸³ It also denounced the drugging, electrocution, burning, and gagging of victims, in addition to “sexual torture, which consists of rape by one or several people.”⁸⁴ In one example, a mother testified to the murder of her daughter whose stomach was split open and stuffed with a man’s decapitated head. Brutal incidents such as these are almost impossible to avoid when reading AMES literature, reflecting the scale of state repression and the gendered ways in which military officials targeted their victims. In addition, AMES denounced state violence in general, including rural bombings in which women, children, and elderly people were “the most impacted,” the forced recruitment of children and husbands, and women’s burdens of providing for the daily subsistence of their families under capitalism and during times of war.

⁸² María Margarita Velado, interviewed by Diana C. Sierra Becerra, San Salvador, April 28, 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

⁸³ AMES, *Participación de la mujer salvadoreña en el proceso revolucionario* (1977), 7.

⁸⁴ “Situación de la mujer en material de los derechos humanos,” n.d., n.p., in BOP, Folder 2.

The concerns of peasant women to keep their families alive and united shaped AMES projects. In the guerrilla territories, AMES developed “common houses” or collectively run childcare.⁸⁵ Establishing collective childcare “was a very difficult struggle, especially when you consider the taboo against women leaving their homes...So just getting the women to go out and leave their kids at home at another house was a significant breakthrough,” explained Elda in 1987.⁸⁶ In Managua, AMES also established the “Luz Dilían Arevalo” childcare center for Salvadoran refugees. The center provided for the “medical, nutritional, and psycho-emotional needs” of children and promoted social skills that departed “from sexist traditions” and advanced the goals of “equality, mutual respect, and collective decision making,” detailed a 1984 pamphlet.⁸⁷ AMES teachers took a similar approach at popular education schools within FMLN territories. They taught literacy as a means to also “eradicate existing traditional values established as masculine or feminine.”⁸⁸

As it cared for children, AMES also strongly condemned state violence against children. In 1982, AMES denounced the military targeting of children who were “shot at point blank” and killed in attacks against the population, in addition to being “imprisoned, raped, disappeared, [and] tortured alongside their mothers in the sickest of ways...”⁸⁹ AMES frequently accompanied its denunciations with specific cases collected by the Comisión de derechos Humanos de El Salvador (Human Rights Commission of El Salvador CDHES), which included

⁸⁵ Malena Giron, “Breaking Down Barriers in Ideas in Practice,” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 95.

⁸⁶ “We Are No Longer a Community on the Run,” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 193.

⁸⁷ “For the Children of El Salvador (September 1984)” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 4.

⁸⁸ “For the Children of El Salvador (September 1984)” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 4.

⁸⁹ *La Asociación de Mujeres de El Salvador – AMES – ante las violaciones de los derechos humanos en El Salvador con relación a la niñez*, May 1982, 7. In November 1982, the AMES Mexico City chapter republished the text in *La mujer y la niñez salvadoreña víctimas de la represión militar*. BOP, Folder 1.

the state-led murder of children via machete, strangulation, and throat slitting. In 1983, AMES members also participated in a 150 person protest to denounce the use of napalm and phosphorus bombs that had left their children blind.⁹⁰

While AMES mobilized women via their traditional identities as mothers, the organizing process sought to change how women understood and practiced motherhood. In collectivizing childcare and food preparation, a responsibility which women mainly shouldered, AMES encouraged women to “actively participate in the construction of a new society” it argued in 1984.⁹¹ Keeping children not only alive but happy “was a revolutionary contribution by women and AMES,” explained a 1984 bulletin. Motherhood would no longer be a mark of isolation but rather a collective struggle against the state. Decades later, former AMES members expressed similar views. Although childcare can “stereotype” women, “during war time it is very important” commented Margarita who was among the first directors of the childcare center in Nicaragua. The center mirrored the “daily reflections” of women, including their “commitments and worries.”⁹² “We go the way we are...some of us did not have children but others did and they looked to protect them.” Margarita made an important point about how women navigated their historical constraints. AMES did not choose the conditions that faced their membership, including the violent conditions and unequal partnerships in which women conceived and raised their children. Nonetheless, the organization collectivized childrearing to be inclusive of mothers who wished to participate politically and kept children alive in a context in which the

⁹⁰ “Beautiful Pages of History Are Being Written,” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 100.

⁹¹ “For the Children of El Salvador (September 1984),” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 4.

⁹² María Margarita Velado, interviewed by Diana C. Sierra Becerra, San Salvador, April 28, 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

government considered them to be military targets. For Margarita, that was and continues to be revolutionary.

Transnational Debates and Exchanges in Exile

As AMES organized within the guerrilla camps, it also sent organizers abroad to coordinate solidarity work. While living in exile, AMES organizers, many whom were university educated women, wrote the organization's bulletins to mobilize support for peasant women, and in the process collaborated with other leftist women who also attempted to bridge women's liberation and socialism. These exchanges impacted how AMES organizers theorized about revolution and women's oppression under capitalism. AMES women redefined key concepts of the FPL in order to address the needs of rural women and theorize and practice an anti-capitalist feminism. These theoretical interventions need to be contextualized within a larger debate taking place within the left in the Americas. In the 1970s and 1980s, Latin American and U.S. women fought to integrate a feminist praxis within national liberationist and working class movements and re-conceptualized the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy.⁹³ In this sense, the revolutionary feminist interventions of AMES reflect the larger trends of Latin American feminism.

During the fight against dictatorial regimes in the 1970s, Latin American women questioned the separation of gender and class oppression.⁹⁴ Leftist women faced similar

⁹³ Stoltz Chinchilla, "Marxism, Feminism, and the Struggle for Democracy in Latin America," 296.

⁹⁴ In 1981, 200 women representing eleven Latin American countries (Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Curaçao, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, and Venezuela,) met in Bogotá, Colombia to attend a feminist conference in Latin America. Three major approaches to the question of feminism's relationship to leftist political parties emerged: autonomous feminist movements; intentional alliance building between feminist groups and organized parties; working within political parties. Leni Silverstein, "First Feminist Conference in Latin America," *International Supplement to the Women's Studies Quarterly* 1 (1982): 35. For the feminist interventions of Chilean women, see Rios Tobar, "Feminism is Socialism, Liberty, and Much More:" 130.

conditions, such as capitalist inequality and political repression, with specific forms and intensities varying by country.⁹⁵ In the process of organizing against state violence in its many manifestations, leftist women developed new understandings about women's oppression under capitalism. Chilean women for example made the connections between 'private' and military violence, and their experiences of exile in Europe facilitated the exchange of feminist ideas and solidarity organizing that explicitly addressed the gendered nature of state repression.⁹⁶

"Democracy in the nation and in the home" became a popular slogan of Chilean leftist women, a slogan that politicized violence within the home and connected it to a larger struggle to democratize the country.⁹⁷ In addition, the Women's International Year (1975) and the United Nations Decade of Women (1975-1985), which included three international conferences in Mexico City, Copenhagen, and Nairobi, created an opening for academic research about discrimination against women.⁹⁸ In the 1980s, as authoritarian states transitioned to liberal democracies, women in Southern Cone countries also questioned their subordination to political parties that marginalized anti-sexist struggle. In Brazil women established autonomous women's organizations independent of leftist political parties, while others pushed to internally reform their parties in order to address women's oppression.⁹⁹ Overall, these experiences led to a growing current of socialist-feminism in Latin America that identified women's liberation as central to anti-capitalist revolution.

⁹⁵ Cornelia Butler Flora, "Socialist Feminism in Latin America."

⁹⁶ Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney, "Forging Feminism under Dictatorship: Women's International Ties and National Feminist Empowerment in Chile, 1973-1990," *Women's History Review* 19 (2010): 620-621.

⁹⁷ Pieper Mooney, "Forging Feminism under Dictatorship," 619.

⁹⁸ Fanny Tabak, "UN Decade and Women's Studies in Latin America," *Women's Studies International Forum*. 8 2 (1985): 103-106.

⁹⁹ Álvarez, "The (Trans)formation of Feminism(s) and Gender Politics in Democratizing Brazil," 32;

Conversations and contacts with leftist women in the Americas shaped the Association's perspective on the relationship between patriarchy, capitalism, and imperialism. For example, during her exile in Mexico City—a former hub of Latin American exiles—María Candelaria Navas formed relationships with Chilean women exiles from the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario (Revolutionary Leftist Movement, MIR) who also questioned the separation of women's liberation from class struggle.¹⁰⁰ The Pinochet dictatorship most heavily targeted the MIR of the major leftist parties.¹⁰¹ While exiled in Mexico City, Chilean exiles Adriana Santa Cruz and Viviana Erazo wrote *Compropolitan*, a satirical take on the U.S. magazine *Cosmopolitan* that critiqued the corporate manipulation of women in advertisement. In the 1980s, the book became a “transformative tool of feminist consciousness-raising.”¹⁰²

AMES worked with socialist-feminist organizations in the United States such as the Women's International Resource Exchange (WIRE), which also rejected sexism within the revolutionary left.¹⁰³ Founded by Bobbye Ortiz in 1979, WIRE recognized the “gender-specific ways” that “imperial powers” oppress “Third World” women.¹⁰⁴ WIRE had published and translated several MIR documents in which Chilean exiles critiqued the sexism of leftist political

¹⁰⁰ José Miguel Castillo Mora, “‘También luchábamos, también caíamos’ aproximación a la represión sufrida por las militantes femeninas del MIR en la dictadura del Pinochet,” *Contrastes* 13 (2004): 139-155.

¹⁰¹ Castillo Mora, “‘También luchábamos, también caíamos,’” 150. The parties included the socialist and communist parties, the Manuel Rodríguez Patriotic Front, Popular Unitary Action Movement, and MIR.

¹⁰² Mooney, “Forging Feminism under Dictatorship,” 622.

¹⁰³ Similarly, MIR exiles in the United States worked closely with the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, which published the classic feminist texts, *Women and their Bodies* and *Our Bodies Ourselves*. The latter text has been translated into several dozen languages. Pieper Mooney, “Forging Feminism under Dictatorship,” 622.

¹⁰⁴ Lindsey Churchill, “Transnational Alliances”. *Latin American Perspectives*. 36 6 (2009): 2.

parties, and its founder carefully archived leftist literature written by Latin American women.¹⁰⁵

María personally met the WIRE founder and confirmed that WIRE translated several AMES documents into English, as some WIRE documents specify. In 1985, Bobbye identified AMES's theory as a "departure" from the linear conception of revolutionary priorities in which women's emancipation is subordinated to anti-capitalist revolution. Bobbye felt assured that "when a revolutionary transformation of society is achieved in El Salvador," AMES will provide "an available body of organized, experienced, and conscious women who can play an important role in building a society free not only of class oppression but also of gender oppression."¹⁰⁶ The politics of WIRE reflected the political climate of the feminist movement in the United States. The 1980s witnessed a rich period of feminist theorizing and organizing by U.S. women of color and socialist-feminists (often overlapping groups), who aimed to create a theory and praxis capable of confronting multiple and intersecting forms of racial, gender, sexual, and class oppression.¹⁰⁷ Within this context, groups like WIRE supported groups like AMES that advanced a broad vision of revolution, while denouncing U.S. intervention in Central America.

AMES received support from reproductive rights organizers in the United States. The Reproductive Rights National Network advocated a broad vision of reproductive justice, defending access to abortion and contraception, while simultaneously denouncing forced

¹⁰⁵ Gladys Diaz, *Roles and contradictions of Chilean women in the resistance and in exile: collective reflections of a group of militant prisoners* (New York: Women's International Resource Exchange Service, 1979).

¹⁰⁶ Bobbye Ortiz, "Changing Consciousness of Central American Women," *Economic and Political Weekly* 20 (1985): 7.

¹⁰⁷ These groups presented a new praxis of leftist organizing; they rejected the racist, heterosexist, and capitalist politics of liberal feminists, many nationalists, and orthodox Marxists. They theorized intersecting oppressions to challenge the allegedly universal categories of "worker" and "woman." For these feminists, addressing the multiple sources of oppression was central, not divisive, to liberation movements. Moraga and Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back*; hooks, *Feminist Theory*; Nelson, "Abortions under Community Control"; Thompson, "Multiracial Feminism;" Blackwell, *Chicana Power!*

sterilizations and cutbacks of social services that pushed pregnant mothers into poverty. In a 1982 bulletin, the network publicized an advertisement for Friends of AMES, which invited American women to mobilize in support of the Salvadoran struggle. In another bulletin, the network reported on the forced sterilizations campaigns of the U.S. government against both American and Salvadoran women.¹⁰⁸ Such reporting hoped to bridge the struggles of women against state violence across national borders.

Feminist and self-described gay and lesbian organizations in the United States hosted AMES on speaking tours. Organizers attempted to bridge queer liberation and anti-imperialism, and connect domestic struggles to U.S. foreign policy.¹⁰⁹ In the process, they hoped to advance “radical sexual politics and to build a multiracial lesbian and gay community.”¹¹⁰ For instance, Somos Hermanas, a multiracial feminist group of lesbian and straight women based in San Francisco, pointed to the devastating effects of militarization in the United States, pointing out that abroad, it led to the murder of thousands of people and attacks against revolutionary movements, while at home it justified cutbacks against social services and criminalized reproductive freedoms and people of color. The group was also inspired by the potential of revolutionary movements in Nicaragua and El Salvador to liberate women. Somos Hermanas

¹⁰⁸ *Reproductive Rights Newsletter: Newsletter of the Reproductive Rights National Network*, Fall 1981, pg. 8 in BCRW. The network reported a presentation in Seattle that linked the abuses of the U.S. government against American and Salvadoran women: “A presentation by the Sterilization Abuse/Birth Control Committee of the Reproductive Rights Alliance examined efforts of the U.S. government and U.S. agribusiness to control (via sterilization) the poor, both here and abroad...The Women's Task Force of CISPES and the Committee for Health Rights in El Salvador spoke about the current situation in El Salvador, stressing health issues” (5).

¹⁰⁹ Hobson, *Lavender and Red*, 115

¹¹⁰ Hobson, *Lavender and Red*, 98

hosted Elda who represented AMES at a five-hundred person conference in the Mission District in 1984.¹¹¹

AMES members confronted questions about lesbianism while working in exile, and the exchanges resulted in individual reflections about sexuality. Through national speaking tours and at congregational hearings, Elda pressured U.S. politicians to stop funding the Salvadoran military, detailing its disastrous impact on the lives of women. “If this front failed, no one would know the reality of women,” Elda explained decades later.¹¹² She also spoke to U.S.-based progressives and leftists who were participating in the Central American solidarity movement. Her work led her to attend a 3,000 person lesbian conference in Chicago in either 1984 or 1985. Elda recalled how she did “not perfectly understand what it meant to be a lesbian or lesbianism” and so a lesbian comrade who worked in the AMES chapter explained to her the goals of lesbian organizations. These exchanges led Elda to believe that “the FMLN should also respect [this work],” she recounted. To this day, Elda remembers fondly “the respect [the women] had toward our work” and how AMES members “recognize[d] their way of being and their work.” However, solidarity work did not always produce an understanding about sexual oppression. One FPL member embarrassingly recalled how lesbian and gay attendees at an AMES presentation asked her what “the revolution thinks about them.” She remembers having responded, “I think that’s inadmissible at the moment, [the lesbian and gay movement] is a deviation.” The attendees said nothing. Since the end of the war, she has changed her views and sees sexual liberation as an important component of working-class and feminist movements. Her postwar participation

¹¹¹ Hobson, *Lavender and Red*, 130

¹¹² Elda Gladis Tobar de Ortiz, interviewed by Diana C. Sierra Becerra, San Salvador, May 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

within Las Melídas, a feminist organization and the postwar rise of LGBT movements have influenced her politics.

European feminists also traveled to Central America to learn about women's revolutionary participation. A Basque woman in her thirties arrived in Managua, Nicaragua in 1980 as a member of a Marxist-Leninist Basque political party.¹¹³ She recalled how her party claimed that socialism would automatically liberate women and so she traveled to Managua to verify this claim for herself. In Managua she met regularly with FPL activists, including FPL secretary general Cayetano Carpio, and was invited to write international bulletins for AMES as part of a collective of international women under the leadership of Margarita Velado, an AMES coordinator and FPL member. Women living inside El Salvador passed information to the leaders of international AMES chapters such as Velado. In turn, Margarita asked foreign women to produce AMES bulletins for international dissemination.¹¹⁴ Thirty years later, the Basque woman reread the AMES bulletins that I shared with her and she expressed how her own political ideas (i.e. a feminist understanding of socialist revolution) were reflected in those documents.

AMES members also studied how past socialist movements dealt with the question of women. Margarita and another FPL member recalled their interest in socialist women. Margarita remembered how she particularly “admired” Aleksandra Kollontai and Clara Zetksy because they combined “the revolutionary struggle and their condition as a woman.” Those socialists

¹¹³ Clara Murguialday, interview by Diana C. Sierra Becerra, skype interview, April 1, 2014.

¹¹⁴ It was only after the war that Clara Murguialday entered El Salvador. She actively participated in the founding of a new feminist organization, Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida (Women for Dignity and Life, Las Dignas). After living in Nicaragua and other Central American countries for over two decades, she is now a university professor and feminist researcher.

taught her “that women had other interests and that the class struggle should not hide them.”¹¹⁵

Other AMES members had been exposed to women socialists during their studies abroad. One woman who authored an AMES text in 1977 and who studied in Moscow agreed that Kollontai “was always the inspiration” and that Kollontai’s work informed the Association’s stance on the role of domestic labor as a mechanism of capitalist exploitation.¹¹⁶

Rethinking Revolutionary Theory

Organizing abroad and within the guerrilla territories and refugee camps informed the theoretical interventions of AMES, which departed and expanded on FPL politics. In contrast to the FPL, AMES explicitly bridged socialism and women’s liberation. It intervened in Marxist debates, pointing to the role of sexism in upholding capitalist oppression and critiquing arguments that sought to postpone the liberation of women until a revolutionary victory; the latter assumed that a transformation in the economy alone would automatically liberate poor women. Simultaneously, the Association also critiqued Western liberal feminists who did not reject capitalism and ignored the class divisions among women.

AMES pointed to the gendered workings of capitalist exploitation. Both AMES and the FPL agreed upon the necessity of armed struggle and socialism for achieving national liberation and the importance of incorporating women into a class struggle that improved daily conditions and worked to overthrow capitalism. In contrast to the FPL, however, AMES explicitly argued that patriarchy fundamentally shaped how working-class women experienced their oppression under capitalism. In 1981 at the Primer Seminario Latinoamericano de Investigación sobre la Mujer (First Latin American Research Seminar on Women) in San José, Costa Rica, AMES

¹¹⁵ María Margarita Velado, interview by Diana C. Sierra Becerra, San Salvador, April 28, 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

¹¹⁶ Olga Baires.

explained how capitalism reproduces itself through the exploitation of women's unpaid domestic labor, which upheld "the male monopoly of political power" and forced women into unskilled jobs.¹¹⁷ AMES insisted that housewives were members of the working class and also denounced gender hierarchies within the working class, a departure from orthodox Marxism and the FPL. While the FPL recognized that different sectors, including women made up the working class, it tended to emphasize their common class oppression and downplay the unique ways in which that oppression was experienced.

AMES's analysis of capitalism also set it apart from Western liberal feminists. The latter sought to incorporate (elite) women into capitalist institutions without questioning how capitalism is built on the exploitation of working-class women and the imperial domination of the Global South. For these reasons, AMES argued that all women do not share a common interest because "unquestionably our class interests transcend those of gender."¹¹⁸ AMES rejected women's "insertion into [capitalist] development" because obtaining a "bigger piece of pie does not constitute liberation" if one does not transform the "kind of development."¹¹⁹ Only "national liberation" could facilitate "our liberation from a machista society," it argued.¹²⁰ Women's emancipation depended on a "collective consciousness" that would arise "with the restructuring of society without private property and exploitation."¹²¹ In addition, AMES also critiqued essentialist views of women as innately revolutionary, pointing to women's roles "as

¹¹⁷ AMES, *Participation of Latin American Women in Social and Political Organization*, 2.

¹¹⁸ AMES, *Participation of Latin American Women in Social and Political Organizations*, 1.

¹¹⁹ AMES, *Participation of Latin American Women in Social and Political Organizations*, 3.

¹²⁰ "Women's Lives in El Salvador," 3

¹²¹ *Como Nacemos y que hacemos*, 5.

reproducers” of the “dominant ideology,” a departure from FPL discourse that tended to characterize women in essentialist terms.¹²²

AMES re-conceptualized women’s relationship to class struggle and socialism. According to AMES, nineteenth-century Marxists had argued that the “abolition of capitalism would immediately free women from economic dependence on men, and consequently from subordination.”¹²³ For AMES, the overthrow of capitalism was a “necessary but not sufficient condition” to achieve “our total emancipation.”¹²⁴ AMES redefined revolution to include both the overthrow of capitalism *and* patriarchy. In 1983, it wrote:

We seek the liberation of our countries from imperialism, dictatorship, and the local bourgeoisie—although we work simultaneously around the question of the specific condition of women and our oppression within the capitalist and patriarchal system.¹²⁵

Situating the liberation of women within a “context of [the] total transformation of society,” was the “hallmark of revolutionary feminism.”¹²⁶

AMES measured revolutionary progress through the lens of women’s emancipation, stating: no “genuine social transformation” can take place “without women’s emancipation.”¹²⁷ A “true revolution” is “accompanied by the conquest of [women’s rights] in all social spheres.”¹²⁸ This analysis overlapped with, yet departed from that of the FPL. Both organizations

¹²² For a discussion of FPL essentialism, see chapter one. AMES, *Participation of Latin American Women in Social and Political Organization*, 5.

¹²³ AMES, *Participation of Latin American Women in Social and Political Organization*, 2.

¹²⁴ AMES, *Participation of Latin American Women in Social and Political Organization*, 2.

¹²⁵ AMES, *Participation of Latin American Women in Social and Political Organization*, 1.

¹²⁶ AMES, *Participation of Latin American Women in Social and Political Organization*, 7.

¹²⁷ AMES, *Participation of Latin American Women in Social and Political Organization*, 3.

actively recruited women into anti-capitalist movements. But whereas FPL literature suggested that women would no longer be exploited in a post-capitalist society, AMES added that women's liberation would not be automatic—rather, it would be contested even after the taking of state power.¹²⁹

Drawing from the FPL synthesis that bridged reform struggles to revolution, the Association argued that women “cannot wait for socialism or a change of structures” to solve their immediate, everyday problems.¹³⁰ Decades later, María Margarita continued to reject the notion that women's emancipation would be “automatic” in an economically egalitarian society because “sexism is a patriarchal system” and proposed that only “reflection makes us change our position and vision.”¹³¹

AMES evaluated the maturity of political organizations based on the extent to which those groups seriously advanced women's participation. AMES critiqued the Latin American “parties and movements of the democratic left” for not consistently addressing “the problems of women” and recognizing that women's “integration in the struggle” is “a key factor in the liberation of our societies.” Those unnamed groups assumed that “feminism and socialism are opposed to each other.”¹³² Nonetheless, AMES saw progress in the *frentista* or mass front model because it facilitated women's mass participation to expose “prevailing contradictions” and

¹²⁸ Olga Baires writing on behalf of AMES, *Participación de la mujer salvadoreña en el proceso revolucionario*, July 1977, in NACLA-NS.

¹²⁹ “Taking state power” refers to a Leninist conception of the state in which it can be yielded to either the benefit of workers or the bourgeoisie. In contrast, anarchists argue for the dismantling of the state and view it as a bourgeois apparatus that monopolizes the use of violence. Noam Chomsky, *Chomsky on Anarchism*, ed. Barry Pateman (Oakland: AK Press, 2005).

¹³⁰ AMES, *Participation of Latin American Women in Social and Political Organization*, 7.

¹³¹ María Margarita Velado, interview by Diana C. Sierra Becerra, San Salvador, April 28, 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

¹³² AMES, *Participation of Latin American Women in Social and Political Organization*, 5.

expose “the true nature of military regimes.”¹³³ In the case of El Salvador, AMES recognized that women participated on an unprecedented mass scale.¹³⁴ However, women’s participation alone was not sufficient. It argued that the problem of women’s leadership could not be resolved through “stipulated quotas” but rather by scrutinizing “male-female relationships” and re-conceptualizing both the goals and daily practice of revolution.¹³⁵

The Dissolution of International AMES Chapters

A traumatic murder in 1985 resulted in the expelling of AMES members from international chapters and the dissolution of those chapters. The expulsion of members was not a debate about feminism or the direction of AMES per se but rather about personal and organizational allegiances to competing FPL leaders. According to some AMES members, AMES continued its work within the liberated territories, while expelled members advanced their feminist ideas in other spaces in El Salvador and abroad. In other words, despite the dissolution of international chapters, expelled women continued to practice the politics of AMES.

In April 1983, Commander Mélida Anaya Montes “Ana María”, the second in FPL command, was stabbed multiple times with an ice pick inside her home in Managua. Soon after, the FMLN issued a statement holding the C.I.A. responsible. Several months later, a Sandinista and Cuban investigation implicated FPL secretary general, Cayetano Carpio “Marcial” as the architect of her murder and three other FPL militants as the assassins or conspirers.¹³⁶ Soon after

¹³³ AMES, *Participation of Latin American Women in Social and Political Organization*, 4.

¹³⁴ AMES, *Participation of Latin American Women in Social and Political Organization*, 6.

¹³⁵ AMES, *Participation of Latin American Women in Social and Political Organization*, 7.

his arrival from a trip abroad, he committed suicide amidst the accusations against him.¹³⁷ His wife, Tula Alvarenga de Carpio, the founder of AMES who coordinated international chapters, soon left the FPL after her husband's suicide.

To this day, former FPL members debate the character and possible motivations of Marcial. Activists less than sympathetic to him connect his actions to his larger than life ego, jealousy, and diminishing authority, while others attribute his actions to political disagreements between him and Ana María. It is rumored that Marcial would have led an FPL breakoff from the FMLN if Ana María and the FMLN continued to support peace negotiations with the state, which he opposed. Some claim that Marcial had evidence that Ana María was stealing funds. María Candelaria, an FPL militant, commented in 2015 that at the time she “didn’t know that there was a division” growing “within the party.” Her comments perhaps suggest that rank-and-file members were not directly informed about the political and personal divisions between their two major leaders.

The assassination impacted the international chapters of AMES. Eight months after the murder, AMES issued a communique in January 1984, denouncing the murder as a “betrayal and deception” committed against the FPL and “revolutionary people.”¹³⁸ Another AMES communique presumably from that same year characterized Marcial supporters as “fanatics” and “splinter” groups. Months later, AMES began to expel members who had (or were perceived as

¹³⁶ The conspirators were Rogelio Bazzaglia, Walter Elías, Andrés Vásquez, and Julio Soza. For more details about her murder, see Renny Golden, *The Hour of the Poor, the Hour of Women: Salvadoran Women Speak* (New York: Cross Road, 1991), 167

¹³⁷ Thomas P. Anderson, *Politics in Central America: Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua* (Wesport: Prager Publisher, 1988), 109.

¹³⁸ Association of Salvadoran Women, “Communique concerning the events of April 1983,” January 17, 1984, n.p., in BOP, Folder 2.

having) either personal or political sympathies for Marcial. The FPL also expelled members whom it identified as “Marcialistas.”¹³⁹ The exact definition of a “Marcialista” remains unclear; did they support Marcial’s opposition to state negotiations or did they believe Marcial to be innocent? These questions remain to be answered.¹⁴⁰

In its public documents, AMES justified the expelling of its members due to corruption not personal allegations to Marcial. In a memo signed by Rebeka Guevara, the political pseudonym of Audelia Guadalupe López, AMES asked international human rights organizations to not work with “unscrupulous” women who falsely represented the organization for “lucrative and personal interests.”¹⁴¹ In late 1984, the organization provided another list of expelled members, including Olga Baires, who authored an AMES text in 1977, and Candelaria Melgar, the confirmed pseudonym of María Candelaria Navas who had been personally invited by Tula to coordinate solidarity work in Mexico City.¹⁴² According to María Candelaria Navas and the foreign Basque woman who worked with AMES in Nicaragua, they were expelled from AMES and the FPL due to their perceived sympathies with Marcial, although they too mourned the murder of Ana María. Therefore, the expelling of these women seems to have been more about their perceived political allegiances rather than their moral character or alleged corruption, as the AMES communique had claimed.

¹³⁹ Aida Cañas, interview by Carlos Henríquez Consalvi, April 2015, Havana, Cuba.

¹⁴⁰ The assassination of Commander Ana María, a beloved revolutionary leader may have also caused debates within the party about the treatment of women but as of yet, no oral histories or documents have explicitly raised this point.

¹⁴¹ The memo specifically listed Candelaria Melgar and María Luisa Rojas. Asociación de Mujeres de El Salvador, “Comunicado de AMES a las organizaciones homologas y a la solidaridad internacional,” Undated. The document was signed by Rebeka Guevara, the pseudonym of Audelia Guadalupe López.

¹⁴² The other names include Vilma Santos, Alma Cruz, Vilma Padilla, Ofelia Chavez, Meyvel Dedad, Aracely Padilla, and Sara de Chacon. AMES, *Boletín Internacional* (Agosto-Noviembre 1984), in NACLA-NS.

It seems that the FPL ultimately decided which AMES women and chapters it would expel or dissolve. Azucena was not expelled from the FPL but nonetheless the party dissolved her AMES chapter in Nicaragua. “In the end, [the party] dissolved AMES...it was really painful for us,” commented Azucena, who dated the end of the entire organization, not just her chapter to 1985. The dissolution of international AMES chapters meant the absence of resources to produce and disseminate literature.¹⁴³

Despite the turmoil, AMES continued to work with women within the liberated territories even after 1985, according to Margarita. In contrast to the women interviewed who resided abroad, the women who joined AMES within the liberated territories did *not* mention the expulsion of AMES members, suggesting that AMES survived even after Ana María’s death. One woman who coordinated international chapters even claimed that AMES existed until the signing of the peace accords in 1992.¹⁴⁴ Within the liberated territories, the work of AMES was perhaps too necessary to dismantle and the membership, which included civilian campesinas, was not directly under FPL leadership. Nonetheless, the important point is that both the women who stayed in AMES and those who were expelled remained committed to the political goals of AMES. The expulsion of members was not about feminism or women’s rights, but rather about perceived personal allegiances to Marcial and strategic debates vis-a-vis the state.

Expelled AMES Women and Region Wide Debates

Expelled women like María Candelaria continued to share the politics of AMES with other leftist women. In 1987, she helped organize an international conference in which Central American women debated the role of women within armed movements. As evident in the meeting minutes, the praxis of AMES to struggle against both gender and class oppression was

¹⁴³ I have only found one document from 1987.

¹⁴⁴ Aida Cañas, interview by Carlos Henríquez Consalvi, April 2015, Havana, Cuba.

not a dominant position among the Salvadoran presenters that participated. But the politics of AMES were not insignificant either. The conference organizers and Sandinista women agreed that armed movements had to place the liberation of women at the center. The workshop reflects how Central American women debated the strategies of their movements within a region wide context.

Around the same time that María Candelaria was expelled, AMES joined a coalition: Union de Mujeres Salvadoreñas para la Liberación, Mélida Anaya Montes (Union of Salvadoran Women for Liberation, Mélida Anaya Montes, UMS).¹⁴⁵ The Union was made up of five women's organizations linked to the various guerrilla groups in the FMLN. As discussed in the previous chapter, it produced a documentary about the participation of women within the FMLN and linked the FMLN to an anti-sexist struggle.¹⁴⁶ The Union organized women to “discuss our situation as women, and participate fully in the decisions about our country's future,” explained the U.S. representative of UMS in 1988. UMS supported the political platform of the FMLN and coordinated clinics that trained rural women to be “health promoters” who taught women how “their bodies work” and “about basic hygiene and health practices.”¹⁴⁷ Similarly to AMES, UMS politicized women as they addressed everyday survival: “You see, we can't just come into a community and call all the women together to sit down and talk things over...Discussions will

¹⁴⁵ The other organizational members of UMS included the Asociación de Mujeres Progresistas de El Salvador (Progressive Women's Association of El Salvador, AMPES), Comité Unitario de Mujeres Salvadoreñas (Unitary Committee of Salvadoran Women, CUMS), Asociación de Mujeres Salvadoreñas (Association of Salvadoran Women, ASMUSA), and the Asociación Mujer Salvadoreña (Salvadoran Woman Association, AMS). “We Are Going to Play a Significant Role (May 1988)” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 107.

¹⁴⁶ *La mujer en la revolución*, Sistema Radio Venceremos, May 1987. To view, visit Mesoamerican Archive, <http://archivomesoamericano.org/camvasb/displaysegment.html?id=10011-C2634&videoPlayer=SWF>

¹⁴⁷ “We Are Going to Play a Significant Role,” in *A Dream Compels Us*, 108.

take place while we're treating someone who is sick or wounded, or while we're watching over the children," commented the UMS representative. She also added that UMS encouraged "men to take on some of the housework, so that their compañeras can also have a chance to develop themselves..."¹⁴⁸ In this sense, the coalition shared AMES's perspective about the need for an equitable division of domestic labor.

In 1987, UMS participated in a conference workshop organized by María Candelaria, a former AMES member. María Candelaria and other women who described themselves as "Central American feminists" organized a three-part workshop titled "Mujer Centroamericana: Violencia y Guerra" (Central American Woman, Violence and War). The workshop was held at the IV Encuentro Feminista Latinoamericano y del Caribe (IV Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Gathering) in Guerrero, Mexico.

The workshop aimed to discuss movement experiences "from the perspective of gender" and "war and violence." Organizers also identified the "unpostponable need to integrate feminist practice (the gender, ethnic, and class demands of women) to the counter-hegemonic projects in the region; an unavoidable condition for the triumph of an integral human liberation."¹⁴⁹

Delegates from El Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua were present, and 150 women participated as audience members. While other countries had one to two women's organizations at the event, El Salvador had six, which possibly reflected the contacts of the conference organizers. The organizations included, Instituto de Mujer (Institute of Women), Coordinadora Nacional de la Mujer (National Coordinator of Women), Centro de Promoción Social (Center for Social Promotion), Centro de Apoyo a Desplazadas de Guerra (Support Center

¹⁴⁸ "We Are Going to Play a Significant Role," 109.

¹⁴⁹ Lilia Monroy Limón, ed., *Memorias del Taller: Mujer Centroamericana, Violencia y Guerra. IV Encuentro Feminista Latinoamericano y del Caribe* (Taxco: Mexico, 1987), 9.

for Women Displaced by War), Departamento de Sociología de la Universidad Centroamericana (Sociology Department from the Central American University), and UMS.¹⁵⁰ While AMES was presumably represented by UMS, its analysis, which bridged wartime concerns and the long-term struggle against sexism, was not the shared position among the Salvadoran presenters.

Workshop organizers, mainly activists and academics, pointed to the theoretical underdevelopment of Central American feminism but celebrated the region's advanced feminist practice.¹⁵¹ (It remains unclear what criteria the organizers used to assess the development of theory (e.g. self-identification with feminism, feminist publications, etc.) but as this chapter shows, feminist theory also emerged alongside practice.) In the conference publication, they critiqued feminists who were not linked to a social base or movement because in "these concrete struggles" lies the "potential of a feminist consciousness."¹⁵² Leftist women activists were "essentially feminist" because from "their experience they construct anti-sexist values." Experiential feminism created "small ruptures that little by little gestate in the life of a woman and are expressed in multiple ways in daily life (family and work)."¹⁵³ Nonetheless, feminist consciousness was not the "mechanical" product of participating in reform-based struggles, rather it demanded "additional effort" because working-class women must recognize their "self-worth" and "capacities" and "recover and construct her identity as a woman."¹⁵⁴ At the same

¹⁵⁰ Limón, *Memorias del Taller*, 135.

¹⁵¹ Workshop collaborators include Navas, Carmen Lucia Pellecer, Rina Villars, Alma Guadalupe Sánchez, Galia Martínez, Eva Arranz, Concepción Albiter, Yolanda Pina, Teresa Hernández, Solange Ouellet, Pilar Jaime, Sara Elva Nuño, Adriana Arroyo, Adriana Meza, Lila Monroy, Ena Gilda Melgar, Margarita de León, Norma Chinchilla, Elizabeth Álvarez, Noemí Reyes, Margarita Díaz, Eugenia López, Yolanda Aguilar. Limón, *Memorias del Taller*, 135.

¹⁵² Limón, *Memorias del taller*, 26.

¹⁵³ Limón, *Memorias del taller*, 26.

¹⁵⁴ Limón, *Memorias del taller*, 131.

time, women had to push the left to recognize “that the struggle for a change in mentality in the man-woman relationship is a fundamentally political struggle.”¹⁵⁵ Organizers concluded:

Women’s demands should be made within the revolution; however, support for the revolutionary movement does not guarantee a transformation of the man-woman relationship—the development of feminist consciousness goes through a process, it is forged in practice.¹⁵⁶

But despite agreement on the participation of women within anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist movements, participants disagreed regarding what constituted sufficiently feminist demands and framing. Some participants suggested that women must make demands *explicitly* as women.¹⁵⁷ Drawing from her experiences within the Sandinista revolution, a Nicaraguan woman pushed the Salvadoran presenters to consider the limits of taking state power and the potential exclusion of women from the revolutionary project. She argued, “women participated in the revolutionary movements and helped take power for men. From that moment we have to begin formulating: power for whom, what does that power look like, where is the woman located in that power.” In response, one of the Salvadoran presenters emphasized how the war prevented them “from working intensely on questions specific to women” and how the FMLN’s taking of power would benefit “an entire people” and for those reasons “we cannot say that the taking of power is for men.”¹⁵⁸ The workshop minutes do not specify which Salvadoran organization made the previous comments but in contrast to AMES, it did not push for women’s demands within the context of armed struggle.

¹⁵⁵ Limón, *Memorias del taller*, 26, 131-132.

¹⁵⁶ Limón, *Memorias del taller*, 131.

¹⁵⁷ Limón, *Memorias del taller*, 50.

¹⁵⁸ Limón, *Memorias del taller*, 49.

Sensing the tension in the room, an unnamed participant intervened, stating that the comments of the Nicaraguan woman were “not an aggression” but rather an invitation for reflection. The taking of power would not automatically change the situation of women: “we can change the structures and still be left outside the game; we can be left inside the house,” argued the commentator.¹⁵⁹ In the best situation, women participate but without a collective consciousness, she argued. This exchange reflected how leftist women still debated the strategy most conducive to women’s liberation and held varying understandings about feminism, as reflected in the comments of a Salvadoran presenter who prior to the conference had a “very different” conception of feminism. Unfortunately, the documents do not specify what her original conception was but she described the political clarity gained at the conference “as a great experience.”¹⁶⁰

Ultimately, however, in the concluding workshop minutes the organizers, including María Candelaria insisted: “The fact that there is a war in our countries should not postpone for us women the struggle for our gender interests, but rather the opposite: it should link them.”¹⁶¹ In other words, the context of armed struggle provided an opportunity to “integrate [a feminist] perspective within their specific areas of work.” Feminism would work to “integrate the different forms of struggle in which we are immersed” and build “an equality that will strength class unity.”¹⁶² The debates continued; two years after the conference Maria Candelaria recalled how she was nearly kicked out of another international conference after she started her presentation

¹⁵⁹ Limón, *Memorias del taller*, 49-50.

¹⁶⁰ Limón, *Memorias del Taller*, 45.

¹⁶¹ Limón, *Memorias del Taller*, 132.

¹⁶² Limón, *Memorias del Taller*, 129, 131.

by stating that “class analysis was insufficient” for women’s liberation. She laughed as she recalled that the two Salvadoran women who wanted to expel her are now “radical feminists.”

While the politics of AMES was not the hegemonic position within the workshop, it was a position that carried significant weight among the conference organizers and Sandinista women. Although she had been expelled from AMES, María Candelaria continued to advocate a vision of armed struggle that bridged feminism and anti-capitalism. Despite the disagreements among the workshop participants, it nonetheless demonstrates the region wide context in which leftist women debated their ideas.

Lessons for Studies of Revolution

The case of AMES has theoretical and historical implications for studies about gender, revolution, and armed struggle. Like other women in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s, the women of AMES—refugees, peasants, and FPL militants and exiles—strategically waged their feminist struggle within a revolutionary movement. Their vision of “revolutionary feminism” (a term used by FPL militants in exile) linked the liberation of women to an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist project.¹⁶³ Rank-and-file women critiqued and expanded upon Marxism and revolutionary strategy, developing a revolutionary feminist praxis that emerged from multiple sites of struggle: liberated territories, refugee camps, and chapters in exile. Audelia recalled how AMES members “constructed a theory but from a practice and not only from our

¹⁶³ For some, working in AMES led to an explicit identification with feminism, specifically socialist feminism or “revolutionary feminism.” Other women did not adopt such labels, and some even argued that they did not hear about “feminism” until after the war. In the postwar period, some continue to identify as feminists while others prefer to say that they do “trabajo de género” (gender work). Regardless of their personal political identifications, AMES members engaged in an anti-sexist struggle.

own practice but from that of other women—that gave life to AMES.”¹⁶⁴ Women exiled in places such as Mexico, Nicaragua, and the United States wrote the literature of the organization and developed their theories within a larger transnational network of socialist-feminists in the Americas. But they alone did not dominate the production of AMES theory. A critical response to the devastating conditions facing peasant women shaped the demands and organizing model of the Association. In short, women intervened to make the revolution relevant to their own lives and dreams. For these reasons, we cannot speak of a singular monolithic understanding of Marxism within the revolutionary left in El Salvador.¹⁶⁵ In other words, the top FMLN leadership did not monopolize the goals of the revolution.

The work of AMES challenges the notion that vanguardism and militarism inevitably triumphed during the war. Writing about the revolutionary movements in Central America, Stoltz Chinchilla argues that the “the very concept of the vanguard was unconsciously gendered” and that the “military predominated over the political.”¹⁶⁶ Her characterization is partly true. As I argued in chapter one, the FPL flirted with notions of vanguardism and essentialist views of women, and during the war some members prioritized militarism over mass organizing. But wartime conditions also imposed constraints on the FPL. The self-organization of civilians became practically important within the liberated territories because the FPL did not have the resources to fight against the Salvadoran military *and* provide for the basic necessities of repopulated communities. The *poderes populares locales* played an important role as an

¹⁶⁴ Audelia Guadalupe López, interviewed by Diana C. Sierra Becerra, San Salvador, May 11, 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen, San Salvador.

¹⁶⁵ This also applies for the top leadership. Each organization had its own interpretation of Marxism and political tendencies also existed in each group.

¹⁶⁶ Stoltz Chinchilla, “Nationalism, Feminism, and Revolution in Central America,” 214.

alternative form of government that democratically coordinated the needs of civilians, the majority women, children, and elderly persons. Aside from meeting basic survival needs, the establishment of health clinics, popular schools, food collectives, and artisanal workshops raised morale and promoted a collective consciousness. AMES participated in the councils and their members often held leadership positions, which was part of the Association's larger strategy for integrating women into decision-making bodies.

Organizers, civilians, and guerrilleras continuously negotiated the meaning of wartime priorities. The debate centered around one main question: given the urgency of the war, would military goals be prioritized over mass organizing? AMES members agreed that military success was important for the long-term survival of mass organizing and that the overthrow of capitalism and imperialism was necessary for women's liberation. But they also insisted that revolutionary success depended on the strength of popular power—the self-organization of civilians via democratic institutions that would improve people's lives in the *here and now*. For AMES, improving the daily lives of women meant linking wartime concerns to a long-term struggle against sexism. The war fundamentally shaped the concerns of peasant and refugee women and AMES made serious efforts to politicize those concerns. While the FPL promoted women's political participation within the class struggle prior to AMES, the organizing process led AMES members to expand their vision of revolution to also include the dismantling of private and public gender hierarchies. AMES organizers (FPL militants and peasant civilians) intentionally identified how the intersection between capitalism and patriarchy shaped the day-to-day problems of women, while the base (peasant civilians and refugee women) in turn shaped the day-to-day agenda of the organization. This practice politicized women's "personal" problems related to childcare, motherhood, domestic labor, and intimate partnerships, challenging

previously scholarly accounts of wartime organizing as purely class-based and absent of feminism.¹⁶⁷

The Association's organizing model allows us to reconsider the categories of "practical" versus "gender strategic interests," or "feminine" versus "feminist" demands.¹⁶⁸ While the distinction between feminine and feminist organizing can be useful, a binary opposition between the two can obscure their intimate relationship. As previously argued, AMES linked their immediate demands (i.e. feminine interests) to the structural transformation of capitalist patriarchy (i.e. feminist demands). In other words, they politicized "practical" interests and situated these reforms within a revolutionary project. The complexity of this organizing process is overlooked if we only focus on the immediate demand. And often times, narrow visions of feminism dismiss the demands of poor Third World Women as not sufficiently feminist. As an alternative, we can focus on how organizers frame an issue and how the organizing process shapes understandings about oppression, gives rise to new demands and leadership, strengthens

¹⁶⁷ Hipsher argues that women's organizations in the 1970s did not make "gender-specific" demands due to their subordination to leftist organizations, while Stoltz Chinchilla claims that wartime conditions made it difficult for women to politicize "personal" problems. Navas claims that women's organizations pre-1980 are characterized by the "absence of a gender analysis within their objectives and platforms," while the 1980s witnessed an "incipient" women's (but not truly feminist) movement. In contrast, feminist organizations made "gender-specific demands" in the post-war. In the following chapter, I will explain how the post-war narrative regarding the origins of Salvadoran feminism, often obscures the contributions of earlier feminist movements. Stoltz Chinchilla, "Nationalism, Feminism, and Revolution in Central America," 214. Hipsher, "Right and Left-wing women in Post-Revolutionary El Salvador"; Navas, *Sufragismo y Feminismo*, 79, 159.

¹⁶⁸ Maxine Molyneux first coined the terms "practical" versus "gender strategic interests." The former are "usually a response to an immediate perceived need" and do not require women's emancipation, while the latter directly challenges gender hierarchies. Kampwirth also distinguishes between "feminine" and "feminist" organizing; the former includes demands such as communal kitchens, clinics, and day care centers that benefit women as workers, wives, and mothers, while the latter explicitly challenges sexism. Molyneux, "Mobilization without Emancipation?" 232; Kampwirth, *Women and Guerrilla Movements*.

the long-term viability of the movement, and disrupts existing gender hierarchies (and their intersecting oppressions).

Scholars are correct to argue that participation in class-based movements does not *inevitably* lead to feminist consciousness or a change in gender hierarchies.¹⁶⁹ While the FPL insistence on mass organizing benefited women, AMES organizers made deliberate choices to reframe FPL theories and practices in order to confront the specific forms of oppression that impacted the lives of rural women. While it is hard to measure the extent to which AMES changed the revolutionary left as a whole, its members contributed to the meaning and practice of revolution—a vision which they applied in other organizations even after AMES and a vision that they hold to this day. As Velado expressed, “the FPL connected me to the gender struggle; it was not the other way around.” The revolutionary process needed “women to be able to express their interests,” and so the “class struggle led me to understand that there were other types of oppression that women faced due to their gender oppression.”

¹⁶⁹ Stoltz, Chinchilla, “Nationalism, Feminism, and Revolution in Central America,” 216. Molyneux, “Mobilization without Emancipation?” Deutsch, “Gender and Sociopolitical Change in 20th Century Latin America.” Randall, *Gathering Rage*.

Chapter 4 Remembering the Organized Woman and State Violence

“El pueblo que recupera su memoria está vivo y camina hacia la justicia.”
– Comité de la Memoria Sobreviviente de Arcatao, Chalatenango¹

Over a quarter century has passed since the Chapultepec Peace Accords ended the civil war in 1992 and yet peasant women continue to discuss the meaning and relevance of their insurgent past. On a hot day in October 2015, I facilitated a workshop with nine peasant women from the Comité de la Memoria Sobreviviente de Arcatao, Chalatenango (Living Memory Committee of Arcatao, Chalatenango). The group is based in Chalatenango department, a former hotbed of insurgent peasant organizing during the 1970s and 1980s.² Sitting in a circle, the women discussed how the *campesina sumisa* (submissive peasant woman) became the *mujer organizada* (politically organized woman) during the insurgency. The committee founders, María Helia and Rosa Rivera, insisted upon remembering how their revolutionary peasant organizing created more equitable gender relations and resisted state violence.

In 2004, twelve years after the war, María Helia and Rosa, along with a group of peasant women, founded the committee.³ All the founders had participated in peasant unions before the war and as civilian organizers or combatants during the war. They all lost family members to

¹ English translation: “The people who recover their memory are alive and walk toward justice.”

² Participants included María Helia Rivera, Rosa Rivera, Ana Arminda Dubovi, María del Carmen Cruz, María Ana Miranda, Hermelinda Flores, Tomasa López Rivera, Margarita Serrano, and Evangelina Salazar.

³ After the committee’s initial founding, three other people joined the group presumably in the late 2000s: Nicolas Rivera, a former UTC organizer and ex-combatant; Jaime Rivera, an activist in his early twenties; and María del Carmen, a wartime popular educator. Originally from Spain, she is now an academic at the Universidad Centroamericana (Central American University). María del Carmen and Jaime are the only two to have received a formal university education.

state violence. For instance, government soldiers murdered Rosa's parents María Rivera Serrano and Nasario Rivera Ayala in 1980. Another committee member lost seven family members—including four child nephews and a sister and brother-in-law—as they fled aerial bombardments and troop invasions.⁴ Thirteen women and two men form the current core members of the committee, many whom are related to one another.⁵ With the exception of one young man in his early twenties, committee members range in age from forty to early seventies.⁶ The committee has worked on four major projects: the exhumation of victims killed in military-led massacres, the construction of a sanctuary to house the victims' remains, commemorative events, and a community museum.

The analysis in this chapter is drawn from two workshops that I facilitated in October 2015.⁷ As part of a collaborative project between the committee and the Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen (Museum of the Word and Image, MUPI)—an institution dedicated to creating and preserving the historical memory of social movement participants—I co-facilitated two workshops with MUPI popular educator, Anna Theissen.⁸ Since 2013, I have collaborated with

⁴ Rosarlin Hernández, “Las guindas de las madres salvadoreñas,” *El Faro*, May 8, 2016. *Y la Montana habló*, 59. Unsurprisingly, the group has shared their testimonies about surviving guindas and has worked collaboratively with artists to share their message via dance and theatre. The committee collaborated with dancers and psychologists to create the theatrical performance, “Guindas.” To see photos and video clips, visit the twitter page: <https://mobile.twitter.com/guindasproyect/media>

⁵ Aside from her cousin María Helia, Rosa has several family members involved in the committee: her niece and nephew, Tomasa and Nicolas Rivera, and her great nephew, Jaime Rivera who is the son of Nicolas.

⁶ Rosa's great nephew, Jaime is in his early twenties. The second youngest person is José Anibal, who was orphaned and injured during the war. He survived the military bombing of his village in the early 80s and was raised in the collective child-care centers in the FPL-controlled territories.

⁷ I conducted the research for this chapter over the course of several visits to the municipality of Arcatao located in the northern Chalatenango department. I traveled twice to Arcatao between September 2014 and May 2015 to participate in committee events and interview its members.

the MUPI as a popular educator, researcher, and curator. The first workshop, which I call the museum workshop, assisted the committee in the long-term planning of their community museum. The second workshop, which I call the memory workshop, prompted committee women to assess the gains and limits of their revolutionary organizing via a set of exercises that included collective drawings and skits. I drafted workshop proposals and, through personal and email communication, received the feedback of committee members regarding the activities that would be the most useful to them.⁹ The committee invited other community residents to participate in these workshops based on their interest to either work on committee projects or join the committee at a later date.

This chapter analyzes how peasants remember their insurgent past, particularly the decades of the 1970s and 1980s. The committee produces historical memory, which refers to the practice of creating a collective understanding about the past. Historical memory operates on two levels: what happened and how people from that specific historical moment understood and acted upon their situation; and how people, experientially connected to the event or not, remember it.¹⁰ Committee members bridge these two levels; the people producing a history of the war are the very same people who lived through it. They embody the bridge between past and present.

The historical memory of the committee defies dominant narratives about the war. Hegemonic rightwing narratives absolve the state of responsibility in perpetrating human rights abuses and obscure the structural conditions that led to the rise of leftist movements. The

⁸ Sierra Becerra, "Historical Memory at El Salvador's Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen."

⁹ The Museum Studies Program at the University of Michigan awarded me the Fellowship for Dissertation Research on Museums that covered the logistical costs of the workshop.

¹⁰ This last element, commonly termed "collective memory," has implications for identity, power, and justice in the present, see French, "What is social memory?"

rightwing party, Alianza Nacional Republicana (National Republican Alliance, ARENA) has memorialized its founder Roberto D'Aubuisson, the founder of a death squad who ordered the 1981 assassination of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero, a progressive clergyman who denounced military violence.¹¹ The committee is also distinct from the tourist initiatives undertaken by former combatants. For instance, former ERP combatants work with the Ministry of Tourism and rely on international funding to promote tourism to massacre sites such as El Mozote. As two scholars have noted, tourism projects such as *Ruta de Paz* (Peace Route) present an idealized pre-war past of El Mozote that “tacitly discredits those who rebelled” and upholds the “innocent, the passive, the politically neutral” as the ultimate victims of the war.¹² Overall, those initiatives frame the armed struggle as a *locura* (madness) rather than the “outcome of decades of socioeconomic injustice, militarization, and oligarchic repression.” Within this logic, the insurgency is put on “a par with the army and the repressive security forces.”¹³ For example, some Salvadorans have incorrectly attributed the military-led massacre of 800 peasants at El Mozote to the FMLN.¹⁴ Developers of tourism programs are not unique in their views about the war. Postwar school curricula also equate the destruction of economic infrastructure by the FMLN to violence against people, and reproduce Cold War paradigms.¹⁵

In contrast to dominant narratives about the war, the Living Memory Committee of Arcatao has a powerful critique of state violence and the reasons that motivated people to join

¹¹ United Nations Truth Commission, “From Madness to Hope,” 119.

¹² Rafael Alarcón Medina and Leigh Binford, “Revisiting the El Mozote massacre: memory and politics in postwar El Salvador,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 16 (2014): 529.

¹³ Alarcón Medina and Binford, “Revisiting the El Mozote massacre,” 525-526.

¹⁴ Alarcón Medina and Binford, “Revisiting the El Mozote Massacre,” 525.

¹⁵ For a discussion of school curricula and how it teaches the history of the civil war, See Sierra Becerra, “Historical Memory at El Salvador’s Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen,” 9, 17.

peasant and guerrilla organizations. As evident in an analysis of its museum and my workshop findings, the committee foregrounds the history of peasant organizing and the role of state violence in pushing peasants to take up arms, and highlights the unequal nature of the war, fought between a peasant insurgency and a heavily armed and financed military regime that received U.S. military aid. As it resurrects the past, the committee identifies the lessons that younger generations can learn from past struggles to confront present-day violence and inequalities. For instance, the committee works to revive revolutionary values such as *compañerismo* (comradery) to build solidarity and community in the face of neoliberal atomization and gang violence.¹⁶ Furthermore, the committee rejects dominant chronologies about the war. Most narratives across the political spectrum date the beginning of the war to 1980, the year in which the FMLN was formed. In contrast, the committee locates the start of the war to the early and mid-1970s, the period in which the state severely escalated its terror against peasants who had already been organizing in Christian base communities and unions. Its intervention refutes rightwing narratives that obscure the origins of the war and academic accounts that privilege urban intellectuals over peasants in building the insurgency.¹⁷

The committee articulates a broad vision of armed struggle that includes the mass organizing of peasant civilians within the guerrilla territories. Committee members point to the

¹⁶ For a discussion of neoliberal disillusionment among former combatants, see Irina Carlota Silber, "Mothers/ Violence and Disillusionment in Post-War El Salvador," *Violence, Vulnerability and Embodiment: Gender and History* (2005): 567.

¹⁷ For a discussion of rightwing narratives, see Sierra Becerra, "Historical Memory at El Salvador's Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen," 10-12. For an urban-centric approach that privileges the role of urban actors in building the insurgency, see Grenier, *The Emergence of Insurgency*. Brockett has a more sophisticated account but argues that FECCAS and the UTC were "subordinated to the objectives and strategies of revolutionary urban activists," see Brockett, *Political Movements and Violence*, 164. For critiques of urban-centric approaches, and an approach that centers peasants as revolutionary actors, see Young, "Revolutionary Coalition Building in El Salvador", Chávez, "Pedagogy of Revolution", Pearce, *Promised Land*, 129-30, 139.

alternative institutions that peasants created, such as popular schools, clinics, and *poderes populares locales* or councils in which peasants democratically managed their own lives and addressed their immediate survival needs. Their memories challenge academic accounts of the war that reduce armed struggle to combat or present armed struggle as divorced from mass organizing.¹⁸ In short, peasants offer a much richer and grassroots perspective on armed struggle.

While the committee refutes rightwing and urban-centric narratives about the war and insurgency, committeewomen also tackle sexist historical narratives within the peasant community that belittle the contributions of insurgent women. In response to postwar sexism, within peasant communities and the country at large, and low levels of mobilization among women, committeewomen highlight the strategic and multiple roles they played within past revolutionary movements. They insisted that women's organizing expanded the collective decision-making power of women and created more equitable gender relations between women and men. Their stories hope to inspire a younger generation of women to organize. However, narrating how women confronted sexism presents its challenges. In particular, committeewomen struggle to discuss sexual abuse within the FMLN, an infrequent occurrence but a problem nonetheless. Unresolved tensions and anxieties inform how women talk about their male comrades and have narrowed opportunities to discuss wartime sexual violence. My conversations with committee women suggest that they fear that rightwing parties will exploit their critiques to delegitimize the left as a whole and thus they prefer to emphasize the advances that can be won when women organize.

Postwar El Salvador

¹⁸ Stolz Chinchilla, "Nationalism, Feminism, and Revolution in Central America."

The war had inflicted devastating effects. From 1979 to 1983 alone, the state murdered nearly one percent of the population. By its end, the war had resulted in the death of at least 75,000 people.¹⁹ In 1993, the United Nations Truth Commission reported that government forces and death squads had committed 85 percent of acts of violence; the guerillas had committed 5 percent; and unknown perpetrators had committed 10 percent.²⁰ One week after the United Nations published its 1993 report on human rights violations committed during the war, the ARENA-controlled Legislative Assembly passed amnesty laws to prohibit the investigation and prosecution of the crimes documented in the report.²¹

The transition from military dictatorship to democracy took place during the expansion of neoliberalism.²² In the 1990s, ARENA, the ruling rightwing party whose founder established death squads, distanced itself from its repressive “past” while advocating neoliberal reform. The ARENA government signed its first structural adjustment loan with the World Bank in February 1991 and agreed to privatize government enterprises, cut subsidies, reduce tariffs, and reduce budget deficits.²³ By decade’s end, ARENA governments privatized the banking system, government-run sugar refineries, the telecommunications system, electricity distribution, and the national pension system.²⁴ Whereas the struggle against military dictatorships had become the

¹⁹ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 179.

²⁰ Based on 22,000 complaints of “serious acts of violence” committed between January 1980 and July 1991. United Nations, “From Madness to Hope.”

²¹ In 2013 the Instituto de Derechos Humanos de la Universidad Centroamericana (Human Rights Institute of the Central American University) challenged the constitutionality of the amnesty laws, but disputes are ongoing. Geoff Thale, “Amnesty under Fire,” *Washington Office on Latin America*, October 21, 2013.

²² Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 182.

²³ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 194.

unifying force for the leftist opposition, the struggle against neoliberalism became the “central cleavage for social conflict in the late 1990s and early 2000s.”²⁵

The larger transition to neoliberalism set the stage for the peace accords and its limited reforms. While the insurgency undermined the power and profits of the agricultural elite, elites connected to industry and finance rose to power; this latter group had an economic incentive to end the war given the military stalemate between the opposing groups.²⁶ In short, war had become bad for the business interests of that specific elite sector. On January 16, 1992, the FMLN and ARENA signed the Chapultepec Peace Accords in Mexico City that formally ended the twelve-year war. The accords notably dissolved repressive state bodies, specifically the National Guard, National Police and Treasury Police, recognized the FMLN as a political party, and demobilized combatants and government soldiers.²⁷ The accords also implemented limited agrarian reform, which reflected the concessions of the FMLN leadership to neoliberal interests. The accords established demobilization programs that offered resources to combatants to help them reintegrate into civil society. As part of the programs, combatants could apply for a loan or educational scholarships, receive agricultural training, and obtain equipment or supplies to build a house. They could also purchase a small parcel of land at market value via the Programa de

²⁴ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 194.

²⁵ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 186.

²⁶ Elizabeth Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 52-53, 62, 74. The civil war transformed elite interests in three major ways: 1) an alliance between the United States, Christian Democrats, and the military enabled reforms that undercut the power of agrarian elites; 2) the sustained military capabilities of the FMLN created economic uncertainty, and therefore elites deferred investment in coffee and developed new enterprises; and 3) inflows of foreign exchange in the form of remittances and US economic and military aid presented new opportunities not tied to coffee.²⁶ Elites redirected their investments to commerce, financial services, construction and real estate.

²⁷ By 1995, the National Guard, National Police, and Treasury Police were dissolved, while the size of existing military branches were reduced and placed under stricter civilian control. The National Civilian Police Force (PNC) incorporated former state and guerrilla combatants.

Transferencia de Tierras (Land Transfer Program, PTT).²⁸ Overall, demobilization programs privileged higher-ranking FMLN officials and thus disadvantaged women, the majority of whom had belonged to the rank-and-file.²⁹ One study based on 230 interviews concluded that women combatants were least likely to occupy a “beneficial network position” in the postwar period, impeding their access to key resources such as land, employment and loans. In contrast, women who had personal connections to high-ranking FMLN commanders fared better in the postwar period.³⁰

The peace accords did not address women’s rights, which kept sexist structures in place, hindering women’s access to resources offered by demobilization programs and postwar political participation.³¹ For instance, women reported that the Land Transfer Program discriminated against them. In its earlier stages, the program violated the official guidelines and discriminated against women in partnerships with men, granting land access to male “heads of households.”

²⁸ The PTT transferred state properties, properties exceeding 245 hectares, and private properties for sale in delimited conflict zones. The FMLN obtained smaller land plots than it had originally demanded. Over the course of six years, the PTT transferred ten percent of the nation’s agricultural land (over 103,300 hectares) to 47,500 beneficiaries, including 7,500 FMLN ex-combatants, 15,000 soldiers from the armed forces, and 25,000 *tenedores* or civilian FMLN supporters. Ariane De Bremod, “The Politics of Peace through El Salvador’s Resettlement and Land Transfer Programme: Caught between the State and Market,” *Third World Quarterly* 28 (2007): 1538, 1545.

²⁹ Only three women (out of fifteen people) were represented in the Unified Revolutionary Directorate, the highest FMLN decision-making body. Within the accords, higher leadership bodies had more access to financing than lower-ranking militants and combatants. In addition, FMLN bodies often reviewed the leadership placements of its members and some women reported being discriminated against and placed in lower leadership categories. Ilja A. Luciak, “Gender Equality in the Salvadoran Transition,” *Latin American Perspectives* 26 (1999): 54.

³⁰ Viterna, *Women and War*.

³¹ Three FMLN women commanders participated in the negotiations: Commanders Nidia Díaz" (María Marta Valladares), Lorena Peña ("Rebeca Palacios"), and Ana Guadalupe Martínez. Díaz had recognized in 1997 that she lacked an understanding of gender theory at the time of demobilization. Luciak, “Gender Equality in the Salvadoran Transition,” 47.

After women voiced criticism, administrators remedied the situation.³² The limitations of the accords to address issues of domestic labor also impacted women's postwar political participation. A 1993 study of 1,100 FMLN women found that fifty-seven percent had worked in the home prior to the war and ninety-five percent continued their domestic activities a year after the peace accords.³³ In another study conducted from 1995-1996, 200 FMLN women militants in three municipalities claimed that their domestic responsibilities prevented them from running for FMLN positions.³⁴ While the accords failed to address domestic labor, feminist organizations in the late 1980s articulated a broad vision of peace that included access to healthcare, including contraception and abortion, childcare, and education, and the right of women to sexual pleasure.³⁵

Women pushed the FMLN to be responsive to their needs and expand the party participation of women. In the early 1990s, FMLN women questioned the party's relationship to existing women's organizations and the party's relationship to feminism more broadly.³⁶ FMLN

³² Some local leaders also demanded identification cards, which discriminated against women who were more likely than men to lack such documents. However, according one study, the program (in addition to transfer and agricultural credit program) did not discriminate women in the later stages; women were overrepresented in the service and industry programs Luciak, "Gender Equality in the Salvadoran Transition," 52.

³³ Luciak, "Gender Equality in the Salvadoran Transition," 54.

³⁴ Luciak, "Gender Equality in the Salvadoran Transition," 57. The municipalities were San Esteban Catarina, Meanguera, and San José Las Flores.

³⁵ Founded in 1987 by former FPL members, Coordinadora Nacional de la Mujer Salvadoreña (National Coordinating Committee of Salvadoran Women, CONAMUS), argued that peace is not "the absence of war" but requires a solution to "the situation of misery and injustice that the people are subjected to," and demanded services that addressed the basic needs of women and their families, see the following documents held at the MUPI: CONAMUS, *Voz y Acción de la Mujer* (March-April 1989); CONAMUS, *El Mundo*, San Salvador, July 23, 1988, pg. 31; *El Mundo*, San Salvador, September 2, 1988, pg. 34. For a discussion of CONAMUS' stance on sexuality and reproductive rights, see CONAMUS, *Voz y Acción de la Mujer* (March-April 1989), in MUPI; "A People's School: A Woman's Body," in *A Dream Compels Us*, 115.

women grew disillusioned with how the party discouraged or dictated the agenda of these groups and controlled their funds.³⁷ Many women left the FMLN and formed self-described feminist organizations.³⁸ Women within the party pushed for reforms to expand their party participation. They intervened to make the 1993 party platform identify gender equality a key goal of the FMLN.³⁹ In anticipation of the 1994 presidential elections, a coalition of women's organizations, including FMLN women, proposed a national feminist program to push the FMLN and ARENA to address women's rights.⁴⁰ One of their most successful initiatives was a coordinated campaign to expand the representation of women within both leftist and rightist political parties.⁴¹ In 1994, FMLN women won eleven percent of parliamentary seats. As a point of comparison, women only represented ten percent of elected officials in the United States and twenty-four percent in Cuba.⁴² In 1995, FMLN women also obtained quotas to ensure their political representation in one-third of the national decision-making bodies.⁴³ In March 1996, the FMLN's political

³⁶ For a full chart of the women's organizations and their guerrilla links, see Kampwirth, *The Legacy of Revolution*, 77-80.

³⁷ Hipsher, "Right-and Left-Wing Women in Post-Revolutionary El Salvador," 145.

³⁸ For a discussion of the process that led feminists to break from the FMLN, see Kampwirth's chapter, "Feminists Break Away in El Salvador."

³⁹ The 1993 party platform stated: "The construction of a true democracy entails the full realization of women's rights and their creative participation in all spheres of national life. This is a fundamental principle in the societal project in which the FMLN fights. We have a commitment: to win equal rights for women [and] to overcome their marginalization and oppression in Salvadoran society."

⁴⁰ The feminist coalition Mujeres 94 proposed a national program in anticipation for the March 1994 presidential elections.

⁴¹ Hipsher, "Right and Left-Wing Women in Post-Revolutionary El Salvador."

⁴² Luciak, "Gender Equality and Electoral Politics on the Left," 57.

⁴³ Luciak, "Gender Equality and Electoral Politics on the Left," 42

commission implemented a program in which the Women's Secretariat educated members about gender inequality.⁴⁴ In the 1997 elections, women increased their national representation from thirty-five to forty-five percent.⁴⁵ However, they continued to fight for increased representation on the department and municipal level, and even faced sexist defamation attacks from party members who felt threatened by their participation.⁴⁶

While FMLN women were able to expand their participation within their party, they have had little success in the struggle for reproductive rights. Party officials have often taken a position against abortion to appeal less radical, deter attacks from ARENA, and win votes.⁴⁷ In 1997, the FMLN supported expanding abortion access to women whose pregnancy threatened their health or life, but the party lacked sufficient votes and the ARENA-controlled Legislative Assembly successfully passed a total abortion ban. In April 1998, the ban became law. As a result, El Salvador has one of the strictest abortion laws in the world. In 1999, ARENA advanced a constitutional amendment to declare that life begins at conception. The process went through three rounds of votes. The FMLN voted against the amendment in round one, lacked the votes in round two, and in the last round FMLN officials, concerned about the upcoming election, told their members to "vote with their conscience" even if it undermined the party line.⁴⁸ In 2009, after ARENA attacked the FMLN presidential candidate, Mauricio Funes, he

⁴⁴ Luciak, "Gender Equality and Electoral Politics on the Left," 49. 60.

⁴⁵ Luciak, "Gender Equality and Electoral Politics on the Left," 59.

⁴⁶ Luciak, "Gender Equality and Electoral Politics on the Left," 49. 51.

⁴⁷ Viterna, "The Left and 'Life' in El Salvador," 253.

⁴⁸ Viterna, "*The Left and 'Life' in El Salvador*," 251.

declared his pro-life position. Thus, while the right has led the attacks on reproductive justice, the FMLN has been complicit.

Anti-abortion legislation has been devastating for poor women who are disproportionately charged with murder and sentenced to jail for thirty to forty years after a miscarriage or other complications.⁴⁹ Doctors report their patients to police and remove the uteruses of women who have been accused of having an abortion; the uterus is then used as evidence against the woman in court.⁵⁰ In 2008, Carmen Guadalupe Vásquez Aldana, age eighteen was sentenced for thirty years in jail for having an illegal abortion, although she and her advocates argue that she had a miscarriage. She is one of seventeen women who were sentenced for forty years in jail, convictions that took place between 1999 and 2011.⁵¹ Agrupación Ciudadana por la Despenalización del Aborto (Citizens' Coalition for the Decriminalization of Abortion), has documented the cases of 129 women who were convicted for abortion-related crimes in the country between 2000 and 2011.⁵²

El Salvador under FMLN Presidential Rule

Since 1994, the FMLN has consistently increased its electoral influence and has produced important yet limited reforms.⁵³ The party ended twenty years of rightwing ARENA rule when it

⁴⁹ Erika Guevara-Rosa, "El Salvador and Las 17," *The New York Times*, March 2, 2015,

⁵⁰ Jack Hitt, "Pro Life Nation," *New York Times*, April 9, 2006.

⁵¹ Guevara-Rosa, "El Salvador and Las 17."

⁵² Guevara-Rosa, "El Salvador and Las 17."

⁵³ Almeida, *Waves of Protest*, 189. Between 1994 and 2006, the FMLN competed in five successive sets of municipal and parliamentary elections (1994, 1999, 2000, 2003, and 2006) and three presidential elections (1994, 1999, and 2004). In 1994, the FMLN won fifteen out of 262 municipal governments, and twenty-one legislature seats out of eighty-four. In 1997, the FMLN controlled fifty-one local governments, including six of fourteen provincial capitals and the mayorship of San Salvador.

won the 2009 presidential elections. Mauricio Funes, a journalist who joined the party before the 2009 elections, won the presidency that year, while Sánchez Cerén, a former guerrilla commander, school teacher, and Vice President under Funes, won in 2014. The Funes administration has been described as a “mixed bag of progressive social policies, occasional confrontation with the FMLN, significant compromises with local elites, and appeasement of the United States.”⁵⁴ For instance, contrary to party wishes, Funes kept Salvadoran troops in Afghanistan in exchange for U.S. support for International Monetary Fund loans and vetoed FMLN proposals to increase taxes on corporations and the rich.⁵⁵

Under Funes, the FMLN did expand social services to the poor. It passed laws to provide free lunches, school supplies, and uniforms, abolished fees for all public school students, provided a basic pension for elderly people living the most impoverished areas and low-income housing, opened public hospitals in four mid-size cities, and granted property titles to thousands of agricultural workers.⁵⁶ The party also expanded women’s access to social services. For example, the party founded Ciudad Mujer (The City of Women), a woman-led neighborhood that houses dozens of organizations that provide key social services to women.⁵⁷ These policies may

⁵⁴ Héctor Perla Jr. and Héctor Cruz-Feliciano, “Twentieth-first-Century Left in El Salvador and Nicaragua. Understanding Apparent Contradictions and Criticisms.” *Latin American Perspectives* 190 (2013): 84.

⁵⁵ Funes had a tense relationship with the FMLN during his term. For instance, party pressure forced Funes to accept audits of properties exceeding \$300,000 to combat tax evasion and increase taxes on alcohol. Perla Jr. and Cruz-Feliciano, “The Twentieth-First Century Left in Nicaragua and El Salvador,” 85.

⁵⁶ Perla Jr. and Cruz-Feliciano, “The Twentieth-First Century Left in Nicaragua and El Salvador,” 87.

⁵⁷ “¿Que es Ciudad Mujer?” The former first lady, Vanda Pignata, directs Ciudad Mujer, a gender equality initiative started under Funes that continues to the present day. Ciudad Mujer aims to secure the “fundamental rights of women” via specialized services such as “sexual and reproductive health, integral attention to gendered violence, economic empowerment and the promotion of [women’s] rights.” Ciudad Mujer is currently located in the departments of La Libertad, Santa Ana, San Salvador, and Usulután; new

have contributed to poverty reduction. From 2000-2013, El Salvador was the only country in Central America to reduce income inequality, as measured by the Gini coefficient.⁵⁸

Despite the expansion of social services, the FMLN has not broken with the neoliberal model. The Obama administration coerced the FMLN to ensure corporate-friendly policies via the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), which promotes privatization, deregulation, and trade provisions that benefit U.S. corporations. Ultimately, this partnership “exemplifies a more general U.S. strategy in Latin America” that institutionalizes “neoliberal policies that can constrain future governments regardless of political affiliation.”⁵⁹ In exchange for educational and infrastructure funds, the FMLN accepted a Public-Private Partnership (P3) that allows private investment in state-controlled economic sectors, and reduces legislative control over investments. The U.S. also demanded that the FMLN comply with Central American Free Trade (CAFTA) regulations, and thus stop buying and distributing corn and bean seeds to peasants, and instead allow Monsanto to control the market. However, national and international outcry ultimately forced the U.S. to back down.⁶⁰

centers are being built in Morazán and San Miguel. The following organizations are concentrated within Ciudad Mujer: la Secretaría de Inclusión Social (SIS); el Instituto Salvadoreño para el Desarrollo de la Mujer (ISDEMU); Ministerio de Salud (MINSAL); Policía Nacional Civil (PNC); Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social (MTPS); Instituto Salvadoreño de Formación Profesional (INSAFORP); Consejo Nacional de la Micro y Pequeña Empresa (CONAMYPE); Banco de Fomento Agropecuario (BFA); Registro Nacional de las Personas Naturales (RNPN); Procuraduría General de la República (PGR); Fiscalía General de la República (FGR); el Fondo Solidario para la Familia Microempresaria (FOSOFAMILIA), el Instituto de Medicina Legal de la Corte Suprema de Justicia y el Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería (MAG).

⁵⁸ Programa Estado de la Nación. “Quinto Informe Estado de la Región en Desarrollo Humano Sostenible,” 122.

⁵⁹ Kevin Young, “War By Other Means in El Salvador,” *North American Congress on Latin America*, March 16, 2015.

Decades of neoliberal policies have contributed to the migration of Salvadoran peasants from the countryside to the cities and United States. In the words of one journalist, “free trade has plunged a generation of youth into free fall” due to declining wages, precarious workplace conditions, displacement of farmers, and increased militarization under CAFTA.⁶¹ Free trade policies have particularly devastated farmers who are unable to compete with foreign corporations. In the last two decades, all Central American countries have increased their export dependence. El Salvador has imported eighty percent of its rice and one hundred percent of grains.⁶² In 2013, the Salvadoran agricultural minimum wage was insufficient in covering the cost of food.⁶³ These policies force people to migrate and as a result, the United States has implemented programs to control undocumented migration. For instance, in 2015, the U.S. allocated \$750 million to fund the Alliance for Prosperity, a program designed to control undocumented migration and promote free trade, extractive industries, and private foreign investment. The program externalizes U.S. immigration policies, requiring El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to police their own borders and detain undocumented migrants.⁶⁴

High rates of violence are characteristic of neoliberal El Salvador and other Central American countries. One historian attributed the rise of gangs in Guatemala to the brutal defeat of the left, including its values and networks, and Cold War state violence.⁶⁵ This may be the

⁶⁰ Young and other authors cited the U.S. press communique in which the embassy demanded that the FMLN government comply with CAFTA but since then it has been removed from the U.S. embassy San Salvador website. Young, “War By Other Means in El Salvador.”

⁶¹ Michelle Chen, “How US ‘Free Trade’ Policies Created the Central American Migration Crises,” *The Nation*, February 6, 2015.

⁶² “Quinto Informe Estado de la Región en Desarrollo Humano Sostenible,” 122.

⁶³ “Quinto Informe Estado de la Región en Desarrollo Humano Sostenible,” 122.

⁶⁴ CISPES, “Special Report: Congress Doubles U.S. Aid to Central America.”

case for El Salvador as well. Although violence decreased from 2011-2013, in 2014, El Salvador had 61 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, making it the second most violent country in Central America.⁶⁶ Youth gangs known as *maras* sell drugs and arms, extort and kill civilians and competing gang members, and even work for sweat shop owners to make death threats against workers.⁶⁷ An estimate of 500,000 Salvadorans or eight percent of the population depend on the income of family gang members. *Maras* impact many facets of daily life, including where people live, work, and go to school, and how they dress.⁶⁸ This larger context of neoliberal inequality and gang violence has made young women and LGBT youth especially vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence.⁶⁹

In comparison to other departments, gang crime and homicides in Chalatenango are rare, as journalistic reports indicate. The department was the stronghold of the FPL, the largest guerrilla group in the FMLN, and many among its current-day residents are former organizers and combatants and their descendants. During the war, civilians collectively patrolled military

⁶⁵ Deborah Levenson, *Adiós Niño: The Gangs of Guatemala City and the Politics of Death* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013). The brutal defeat of the organized left, alongside the deterioration of living conditions under neoliberalism, set the stage for *maras* to emerge. Debora Levenson documents how state violence shaped the Guatemalan *maras*, which evolved from youth gangs linked to labor struggles to groups that murder and extort the poor. During the Cold War, the military trained its soldiers in counter-insurgency techniques to rape and murder leftists (and their perceived supporters); in many cases, children who later joined gangs had witnessed such acts or inherited traumatic memories from survivors. Nacroliving or murder as a natural death has shaped the lives of *mareros*, including how they earn a living, gain respect, maintain order, and construct their own masculine identities.

⁶⁶ “Quinto Informe Estado de la Región en Desarrollo Humano Sostenible,” 250. Honduras, the most violent country in the region, had 66 homicides that year.

⁶⁷ “Quinto Informe Estado de la Región en Desarrollo Humano Sostenible,” 268. Ayala, “Salvadoran Maquila Plants Use Gang Members to Break Unions.”

⁶⁸ Roberto Lovato, “El Salvador’s Gang Violence: The Continuation of Civil War By Other Means,” *The Nation*, June 8, 2015.

⁶⁹ United Nations Children’s Fund, “Hidden in Plain Sight,” 35, 46, 140; United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Discriminatory Laws and Practices and Acts of Violence Against Individuals based on their Gender and Sexual Orientation,” 10

movement and coordinated their most basic survival needs. Organizing ensured solidarity and survival.⁷⁰ After the war, residents continued to organize via community organizations such as the Comité de Desarrollo Comunitario (Committee of Community Development) that coordinates projects such as violence prevention and infrastructure development in their municipalities. Residents have continued to organize in part to deter gang presence. Organizing promotes communal values and encourages youth participation, which undermines gang recruitment.⁷¹ One resident explained: “All these municipalities out here, (San José Las Flores, Nueva Trinidad, Las Vueltas, Arcatao) that were involved in the war, those of us that lived it, it’s as if the people are less violent, there are less problems because we already know what a war is and we don’t want to get to that point again.”⁷² Some residents have taken even more active measures, patrolling the community to detain gang members looking for new recruits, imposing curfew, and banning the selling and consumption of liquor. However, the aforementioned municipalities are not immune. In 2011, Arcatao reported its first homicide in the last six years. In 2012 and 2013, two homicides occurred each year and none in 2014. For many residents, the presence of violence is connected to the decline of community organizing.⁷³ They view community organizing as a means to inoculate communal values among youth and prevent domestic violence and alcoholism. For the committeewomen of Arcatao, the presence of gang

⁷⁰ Jimmy Alvarado, “Las claves de cinco municipios que se vacunaron contra la violencia,” *El Faro*, May 4, 2015. See the interview with Amadeo López.

⁷¹ Further research can explain why other former guerrilla territories experience the emergence of gangs. Ruxandra Guidi, “These isolated towns in dangerous El Salvador are murder-free zones,” *PRI*, June 30, 2015.

⁷² Alvarado, “Las claves de cinco municipios que se vacunaron contra la violencia.” See the interview with Angel Serrano. Original text: “Todos estos municipios de por acá (San José Las Flores, Nueva Trinidad, Las Vueltas, Arcatao) que estuvimos involucrados en la guerra, que la vivimos, es como que la gente es menos violenta, hay menos problemas, porque ya sabemos qué es una guerra y no queremos llegar a ese punto otra vez.”

⁷³ Alvarado, “Las claves de cinco municipios que se vacunaron contra la violencia.”

violence reflects a lack of solidarity and class consciousness since gang members kill and extort the poor. For these reasons, it is all the more urgent to revive a memory about their community's insurgent past.

Honoring the Dead

Committeewomen such as Rosa and María Helia have wrestled with severe trauma. In 2004, members from the Centro Bartolomé de las Casas (Bartolomé de las Casas Center)—an organization founded in 2000 to address psychosocial trauma among war survivors—hosted mental-health workshops in Arcatao. In line with the approach of Ignacio Martín Baro, an assassinated Jesuit, the Center, which is led by religious and community activists, approaches trauma as a product of social hierarchies.⁷⁴ María Helia Rivera initially felt hesitant to participate in the mental-health workshops because she believed that she did not need such services. However, the local parish priest and nun framed the workshop as a preventative measure, perhaps to lessen the stigma associated with mental health treatment. After the first workshop, María Helia invited her cousin Rosa to participate. Without this psychological support, “I don't know if I could have been able to talk about the [murder and torture] cases...there are difficult things to express,” María Helia reflected.⁷⁵ This assistance enabled the Rivera cousins to process their traumas and embark on a collective project to historicize their embodied experiences of state violence.

⁷⁴ Lykes M. Brinton and Nelson Portillo, “A Search for Justice in El Salvador. One Legacy of Ignacio Martín-Baro,” *ReVista* (Spring 2016): 52-53.

⁷⁵ María Helia Rivera, interviewed by author, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

A sense of urgency and responsibility to younger generations drove the formation of the committee in 2004.⁷⁶ The group rejected a proposal to call themselves the “committee of victims” because such a name suggested “a group of people who can’t do anything,” explained Rosa. The person who made the proposal remains unclear, but the important is that the committee rejected viewing itself through the lens of victimhood. The committee self-identifies as survivors because “we have survived that difficulty but we want to keep on struggling for new generations” and leave youth a “legacy” that inspires them to “keep struggling,” described Rosa. The cousins “found it necessary to not only talk” as they did in their mental health workshops, rather they felt obligated “to leave something in history” for younger generations.⁷⁷ Rosa underscored the urgency of their intervention: “every day there are fewer of us who lived through it and the history will be buried in the earth if we don’t tell it, if we don’t leave something.” In El Salvador, peasants continue to dig up objects from the war, including entire archives from the ground.⁷⁸ Another committeewoman explained her own personal motivations to join the group:

some say ‘why should you go on remembering those things,’ but it’s good to get involved, that way things can be avoided, so they are not repeated; if all young people [understand this,] this will not happen again.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ In their interviews, the Rivera cousins dated the committee founding to 2003, after the completion of the CBC mental health workshops. However, Lykes and Portillo date the work of CBC within Arcatao to 2004.

⁷⁷ María Helia Rivera, interviewed by author, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

⁷⁸ In 2016, a peasant in Chalatenango found the archive of FPL Commander Susana, whose legal name was Virginia Peña.

⁷⁹ Ermelinda López, interviewed by Diana C. Sierra Becerra, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

María Helia echoed similar sentiments: “it is a right that we have, to struggle for the victims that died; to not forget them... what we are building is [to make sure that] this is never again repeated.”⁸⁰ As a survivor of state repression, she felt a responsibility to act: “[there are] so many things we have gone through. I admire myself. Diosito [God] has kept me alive so I can tell [my story] and always struggle for us women and the population [as a whole].”⁸¹

The Rivera cousins argued that the strong spiritual commitments of women and losses during the war explained their majority participation within the committee. “Perhaps we feel more committed to spiritual work because sometimes due to sexism, men are not interested,” explained María Helia. She defined spiritual work as “healing” yourself and others, and suggested that men possibly struggle to process and discuss their emotions and thus are ill-equipped to lead this work. According to Rosa, the war “was more difficult for us [women],” and thus women have a stronger commitment to engage youth.

Rosa used biblical metaphors to explain the motivations of women in remembering their past. She compared women war survivors to Mary, the mother of Christ and explained how “it’s more painful for a mother” to lose a child in comparison to a father. Some but not all committee women lost their children to state violence, therefore Rosa may also be referring to the loss of children among *el pueblo salvadoreño* (Salvadoran people).⁸² She also made parallels between

⁸⁰ María Helia Rivera, interviewed by author, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. “es un derecho que tenemos, que luchar por las victimas que murieron, no olvidarlos... esto que estamos construyendo es para que esto nunca más se repita”

⁸¹ María Helia Rivera, interviewed by author, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

⁸² Rosa’s comments are in line with discourses of revolutionary motherhood, Bayard de Volo, *Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs*.

the work of early Christian women to document the bible soon after the murder of Christ and the efforts of Salvadoran women to preserve the memory of survivors of state violence:

They say that women were the first to go find [Jesus after his crucifixion]...when Jesus died, no one wanted to talk about it because of fear. I imagine that years later they started to write the bible. That's what happened to us, more than fifteen years have passed since the war [and just recently] we [women] have begun to *awaken* and work to rescue the living memory of survivors.⁸³

Committee members draw from an older tradition of revolutionary martyrdom that links contemporary struggles to the life and death of Jesus Christ. In the 1970s and 1980s, mourning rituals rooted in liberation theology politicized and connected individual deaths to a collective struggle that sought to create heaven on earth. Activists viewed the sacrifices of the dead as contributing “to a rebirth, not in individual bodily terms but in a collective, moral sense.”⁸⁴

Activists honored the dead by continuing the struggle and encouraging others to join. The linking of sacred and secular history reinforced “the power and significance of each.”⁸⁵

The committee's commitment to mourn the dead drove their decision to exhume victims of state and death squad violence. The inability to bury family members is a “nightmare” described Rosa whose mother and father were murdered by government soldiers in 1980. In most cases, animals ate human remains or rivers swept bodies away, a common occurrence during *guindas* or treacherous hikes in which civilians and combatants fled military invasions over the course of days or weeks. For example, Rosa's brother died during a *guinda* in May 1982; the river swept his body away. Yet in thousands of cases, bodies remain buried in unmarked graves.

María Helia explained:

⁸³ Rosa Rivera, interviewed by author, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

⁸⁴ Anna L. Peterson and Brandt G. Peterson, “Martyrdom, Sacrifice, and Political Memory in El Salvador,” *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 75 (2008): 524.

⁸⁵ Peterson and Peterson, “Martyrdom, Sacrifice, and Political Memory,” 526.

Our dream was to bring our family members or take them from where they were [buried]. We thought, out there they are lost, afterwards no one will recognize them, they will become *milpa* [corn fields] in those places and [other people will] take them out or afterwards no one will remember them. And they died so that we would [live] in peace someday.⁸⁶

The Rivera cousins feel a moral obligation to provide a proper burial to honor the political sacrifices of their family members.

Over the course of several years, the committee sold *tamales* and *pupusas* to raise the construction funds to build a sanctuary to house exhumed bodies. In 2015, the “martyr’s sanctuary,” which resembles a small humble church, was finally completed. Similar to other spaces dedicated to martyrs, the sanctuary localizes and facilitates an ongoing mourning process.⁸⁷ Although the sanctuary can only accommodate the remains of fifty-two individuals due to limited space, all people are encouraged to use the space to mourn their loved ones and reflect upon the history of state violence and mass organizing.⁸⁸ The exhumation and mourning process facilitates personal and collective healing.⁸⁹ In other words, family members are encouraged to make sense of state violence.⁹⁰ For Nicolas Rivera, a committee member, their work is a means of healing and maintaining a link to martyrs. In his words,

⁸⁶ María Helia Rivera, interviewed by author, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

⁸⁷ For a discussion of the use of museum architectural strategies that facilitate mourning, see Christiane Gruber, “The Martyrs’ Museum in Tehran: Visualizing Memory in Post-Revolutionary Iran,” *Visual Anthropology* 25 (2012): 70.

⁸⁸ During my visit the sanctuary was in its final stages of construction and thus I did not witness firsthand mourning rituals. For these reasons, I do not analyze these rituals, nor do I know how the committee selects which person’s remains to house there.

⁸⁹ In a parallel case, Canadian aboriginal inmates have used history within group therapy sessions in order to “understand their circumstances, how they came to be damaged” and how “the legacy of historical processes of oppression remain as threats to personal and collective well-being.” James B. Waldram, “Healing History? Aboriginal Healing, Historical Trauma, and Personal Responsibility,” *Transcultural Psychiatry* 51 (2014): 377.

We have lived the war, a very difficult war, whether you want it or not, *there is trauma* and we can't deny that...if you work for the victims that also helps us to liberate energy because you know that did you not stay asleep. We can't stay asleep, we should keep working because that work means we have not forgotten the martyrs.⁹¹

Nonetheless, the process is difficult, as he explained: “the community sometimes puts up resistance, myself included. You do not always have the same capacity [to keep up the struggle]” each day. Pointing to his throat he said, “sometimes I tranquilly talk about the museum as if it's nothing, but sometimes I feel that something happens here that doesn't allow you [to talk].”

In coordination with human rights agencies in Guatemala, the committee exhumed the bodies of several people in Arcatao in 2015, including Rosa's parents and María Helia's brother. The committee organized a vigil the day of the exhumations. Reflecting on that day, María Helia said, “for me it was happiness and sadness, all of the people waiting at the cemetery.” She identified the “reunion with our family members” as the committee's first achievement.⁹² The exhumations allowed the committee to link the life history of that individual to a larger history of political struggle. Those who “gave their lives to a just struggle, well they don't deserve to be

⁹⁰ In contrast, unresolved trauma and grief among Salvadoran war survivors has hurt familial relationships and in part contributed to a negative group culture. Julia Dickson-Gómez, “The Sound of Barking Dogs: Violence and Terror among Salvadoran Families in the Postwar,” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 16 (2002): 416. Timothy P. Brown, “Trauma, Museums and the Future of Pedagogy,” *Third Text*. 18 (4): 249. According to Dickson-Gómez, traumatized war survivors often transmit symptoms of trauma onto their children. The transmission entails not only physical symptoms such as anxiety, isolation, and paranoia, but also a “traumatized worldview of fear, pessimism and violence” (429). Traumatized parents who have unresolved grief often belittle the needs of their children or implicitly demand that their children absolve their pain. The author argues that the intergenerational transmission of trauma, including mistrust in political institutions, is responsible for the high rates of postwar violence (420). However, Dickson-Gómez does not disentangle postwar trauma from other forms of violence, such as poverty and domestic violence (426). In addition, she does not pay enough attention to the structural forces, including state violence that contributed to the perpetuation of violence during the war and postwar period, and even equates the scale of state and guerrilla violence.

⁹¹ “El Pasado No Es Historia: Memorias de Guerra y Revolución en Chalatenango, El Salvador,” 2014.

⁹² María Helia Rivera, Abril 2015.

forgotten, they deserve to be remembered; not only bringing their remains—[but acknowledging the] man, their memory, who they were,” stated Nicolas in a 2014 documentary.⁹³

Producing Insurgent Histories

The creation of the “Museo de Memoria Histórica de Arcatao, Chalatenango” (Museum of Historical Memory of Arcatao, Chalatenango) stemmed from the desire to educate younger generations about the history of peasant organizing. Nicolas described his frustration when he interviewed survivors and wrote their answers by hand. Transcribers struggled to write fast enough or to write all together: “we have to tell this history but what [happens] if we cannot write?” he lamented. While the committee hopes to write a book, Nicolas questioned the accessibility and visual impact of a book: we need “something that reflects what we have lived through and what we tell in a book...*we need something that can be seen*. Ah, well [we need] a museum.” From his perspective, material objects, rather than textual narrative, are more effective in communicating their history.

The creation of their museum is truly a grassroots endeavor. The museum is temporarily located at a community center, the Centro de Formación “Mártires del Sumpul” (Sumpul Martyrs Training Center).⁹⁴ The center is named after a massacre in which the Salvadoran and Honduran military murdered at least 600 peasants attempting to cross the Sumpul River on May 14, 1980. The museum’s humble space, which is a large rectangular room, is exposed to bats and frequent water leakages; problems that the committee addresses to the best of their ability. Committee members provide free tours to Salvadoran and international visitors, usually on weekends. The

⁹³ “El Pasado No Es Historia: Memorias de Guerra y Revolución en Chalatenango, El Salvador,” 2014.

⁹⁴ The Catholic Church owns the center and rents its facilities, including small bedrooms and a large pavilion to groups at a low-cost; cultural, religious, and political events are hosted at the center. The center however provided the room to house the museum free of charge.

committee prides itself on staffing the museum with survivors, defined as people who participated in wartime organizing or resided within the liberated territories. The committee assessed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing their museum during a “SWOT [spell out] analysis” that I facilitated. The committee identified their “theoretical capacity” as a collective strength because they are “experts in the history of the community.” In contrast, they identified their lack of technical training (e.g. exhibit design and computer skills) and funds to establish a permanent museum location, as a major weakness.

The museum has built its wartime archive through a community call for donations. Community members searched their homes or unearthed objects that had been buried during the war to avoid government detection. The museum showcases photographs on larger wooden panels that are organized thematically: “children of the war,” martyrs, women’s organizing, community organizing, popular education, and “the war against the people.” The latter set of photographs display mangled bodies, skeletal remains, and Christian burials; this wartime documentation refuted denials of state violence among Salvadoran elites and U.S. government officials. In addition, the museum possesses copies and originals of leftist literature, combatant clothing, corn grinders, several albums of original photographs, and fragments of bombs, bullet cartridges, mines, and other military equipment. One fragment alone belonged to a 1,000 pound bomb that did not detonate. These objects are a powerful testament to the brutality of the war and the audacity of collective survival

Figure 4. Exhibit display. Photo taken by author.



Figure 5. Display of wartime bomb fragments. Photo taken by author.



The committee has created simple wooden panels in their museum that teach visitors about the history of grassroots organizing in Arcatao. In contrast to academic narratives that privilege the role of urban and university educated people within the insurgency, the committee points to the role of peasants themselves in leading their own movements. There is an intentional effort to remember the scale of community organizing that took place within the guerrilla territories, thus challenging accounts of armed struggle that are divorced from grassroots efforts. There is a basic structure to most of the panels: descriptions of daily organizing before and after the war, the names of local leaders and martyrs, and the relevance of past struggles to the present-day. For example, a laminated sheet of white paper dedicated to “popular education” demonstrates how the committee incorporates community organizing within its narrative about armed struggle. The panel outlines the difficulties of teaching children, youth, and adults to read and write under wartime conditions. Many peasants first learned to read and write within the guerrilla territories, and popular education was a key tool for mass mobilizations prior to and during the war.⁹⁵ The names of educators who spearheaded popular education in Arcatao are listed, in addition to the names of teachers and school children that were murdered by the military. Lastly, the sheet concluded: “Education was and is a way to promote community development in search for equity and equality in opportunities; a right that all people have.” This quote is essentially the definition of popular education in which a community draws from its own knowledge and experience to identify solutions to collective problems.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Hammond, *Fighting to Learn*.

⁹⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

While the committee had its own museum, it hopes to obtain a new space and thus develop new exhibition spaces. To assist the committee in the long-term planning of their museum, I created a series of activities that allowed participants to assess the state of their museum and develop short-term and long-term goals. In one activity, participants drew the exhibit showrooms of their future museum, which revealed important insights as to how peasants and their descendants understand their insurgent past. Without my prompting, two groups formed based on age. Participants produced an alternative chronology of the war that challenges 1980 as the origin point of the insurgency and war. They organized their showrooms chronologically and thematically (i.e. peasant organizing, state violence, armed struggle, refugees, and postwar life). The group of older peasants began their narrative “before the war” to explain how the state violently responded to civilian social movements between 1975 and 1980, forcing peasants to *guindiar* or flee military operations. For older peasants, the war did not begin with the formation of the FMLN, but rather when the state violently targeted the unarmed peasant movement. In contrast, the group of younger participants began their narrative with “armed struggle” in the 1980s. The difference between the two groups perhaps signals how older generations struggle to transmit some of the nuances of their historical narrative. While a difference in chronology existed, it is noticeable that both groups emphasized the fatal impact of state violence, highlighting “repression, destruction, massacres, military officers and violence.”⁹⁷ Participants emphasized the consequences of state violence on civilians who fled via *guindas* or to refugee camps, and their mass “return” to El Salvador after 1986. The latter is an important detail that marks the date when many refugees began to rebuild the villages where they currently reside. Lastly, the postwar exhibits that both groups designed described the “current-day moment”

⁹⁷ Group two, specifically identified the years 1980 to 1986 as a peak of civilian organizing within the liberated territories, and post 1986 as a key turning point for the return of civilian refugees.

which is characterized by “community organizing and violence.” Organizing included “social consciousness” while violence was linked to “gangs, migration, drugs, alcohol” and the “disintegration” of “family and discipline.”

Participants articulated a broad understanding of armed struggle that centered the organizing of civilian peasants. They represented the various forms of organizing and labor that characterized life during the war within the guerrilla territories. Both groups highlighted wartime civilian organizing and highlighted the working relationship between civilians and combatants. In other words, they did not reduce armed struggle to combat. For example, the category of “armed struggle” encompassed “armed life with the compas (comrades)” “hospitals,” “radio,” and “*compañerismo* (comradery).” “Hospitals” kept combatants alive, while “the radio” referred to the Radio Farabundo Martí, the radio of the Fuerzas Populares de Liberación (Popular Liberation Forces, FPL), the largest guerrilla group within the FMLN.⁹⁸ In contrast to the accounts of scholars who dismiss wartime organizing as monolithically hierarchal and militaristic, former participants have a grassroots perspective that centers ordinary peasants and peasant organizing, and the political and practical ties that connected civilian peasants to the FMLN. For example, both groups emphasized the civilian organizing that sustained the life of the insurgency, as evident in the categories: “health”, “popular education”, “popular power”, “community organizing,” “women’s organizing, folklore, religiosity, and solidarity.”

In teaching their history to a younger generation, older participants hoped to resurrect revolutionary values. They specifically emphasized *compañerismo* (comradery), which refers to the collective spirit of revolutionary organizing. *Compañerismo* was a revolutionary value but

⁹⁸ The radio served as a political life line, maintaining communication among the five different guerrilla groups who fought in distinct parts of the country and connected the FMLN to international supporters.

also a practice that kept people alive and emotionally invested in the wellbeing of their group.

According to older peasants, comradeship manifested itself in daily life. For example, a group of hungry combatants shared a single *tortilla* when faced with limited food supplies.

Unsurprisingly, many older activists identify *compañerismo* as an important practice that contributed to the longevity of the insurgency and argue that such revolutionary values have been slowly lost since the war. In a neoliberal context of hyper individualism and atomization, *compañerismo* is especially relevant in the minds of older activists.

Within those revolutionary values, Rosa and María Helia also hoped to verbally transmit feminist politics and values to younger generations. Both women described their commitment to women's rights as feminism. Rosa wants young women to understand the role of "capitalist systems" in exploiting women as a sexual object, "a business instrument" to sell commodities. In sharing their own stories about women's organizing, the Rivera cousins hope to impact how young women see themselves. Rosa has told young women "you are a *capable* woman; you will not give up; you will never say 'I can't'." María Helia wants women to understand that they are capable of overcoming desperation and trauma. Although their sources of trauma may differ, she tells women:

Look during the war we lost everything, *everything*...but our soul remained in us—life. As long as you have life, you have a lot, because during the war we were only left with our soul in the body and we have gotten ahead thanks to God. No, we have not died...with that life we went on building.

Her words are meant to inspire women about their strength and abilities to confront present-day forms of violence.

The Rivera cousins feel an urgency to discuss women's past insurgent organizing in a present-day context of domestic violence. María Helia insisted, "we have to keep struggling" because "during the war we liberated ourselves a little bit...but [other women], even though they

were involved in the war, now during [times of] peace they have been abused by their husbands.”⁹⁹ Some injured ex-combatants beat their wives and so “it is still a struggle, a very big challenge to continue raising awareness among women (concientizando a la mujer) so that she does not [become subjected to] gender-based violence (violencia de genero).”¹⁰⁰ For these reasons, she sees the recovery of historical memory as central for reclaiming the rights of women. She argued: “We are struggling for the rights of women, for those rights that have been stolen...the history of women has been stolen by other people; so many women have suffered, so many violent cases.”¹⁰¹ In other words, peasant women are struggling against the erasure of their history, which has consequences for how the past is understood and impacts the ability of young women to draw from past histories of struggles against sexism.

Contesting Sexism within Peasant Narratives

Peasant women actively engage with memory to assess the gains and limits of their past organizing for improving the lives of poor women. The workshop activities revealed how committeewomen identify a clear change in their lives before and after they became politically active. At the same time, women also navigate tensions when critiquing the sexism and abuses of leftist men.

I prompted participants to reenact past events in which women confronted sexism within their movements. Participants included committee members and community residents, specifically older peasant women, and men and women under thirty. I created three scenarios about gender-based conflicts that I drew from the testimonies of older women from Arcatao and

⁹⁹ María Helia Rivera, interviewed by author, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

¹⁰⁰ María Helia Rivera, interviewed by author, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

¹⁰¹ María Helia Rivera, interviewed by author, Arcatao, April 2015, audio recording, Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen.

elsewhere whom I had previously interviewed. I divided participants into two groups that had to choose one of the following historical scenarios that took place within the guerrilla territories during the 1980s: 1) a group of AMES women gather to discuss their goals and needs; 2) women combatants meet to discuss the absence of sanitary napkins and sexual harassment within the camps; and 3) members of the *poderes populares locales* or community councils talk to a family in which the husband is opposed to the political participation of his wife and daughters. The activity aimed to encourage intergenerational learning because older activists explained the goals of past historical actors to younger participants, and collectively they recreated the choices those actors may have pursued. No participants chose the scenario about menstruation and sexual harassment. I assume that they may have struggled to see the relevance of the skit, partly informed by the fact that the majority of participants were not ex-combatants. However, as I will later discuss, discussing sexual harassment within the FMLN is fraught with tensions, which possibly explains why participants avoided the topic.

Peasant women acutely remembered the role of AMES in encouraging the participation of women within the guerrilla territories. The skit triggered many questions among youth participants who had never heard of AMES before. María Helia, who had participated in AMES as a young woman, explained its goals. In response, a young man asked, “It sounds really beautiful, the organization they had and what they were fighting for. My question is, were they able to achieve all of it?” Another young woman added: “Where did the initiative arise? How did women get involved?” Collectively the group developed a skit in which AMES organizers spoke to a group of unorganized women within the liberated territories. Huddled underneath an imaginary tree that prevented detection from state helicopters, María Helia explained to the audience: “it’s not only about domestic work or taking care of children. We also must have

opportunities to develop ourselves, to contribute.” As she had narrated during her interview, María Helia told the group that she had attended an AMES Congress in 1984 and wanted to share what she had learned. The repetition of this detail perhaps signals how proud María Helia feels about her participation and the significance of the congress in developing her political education. A young woman playing the role of a potential AMES recruit, responded: “we should become a part of this struggle! They offer us things we need. In organizing ourselves as women, it’s going to allow us to work together, to become a part of the struggle.” She identified a key part of AMES strategy: linking the immediate needs of women to their larger participation in the revolutionary process.

The older women who chose the skit about the community councils directly challenged my framing of their history. Older women, including Rosa, argued that by the time the community councils emerged in the early 1980s, most residents belonged to *familias organizadas* (politically organized families), and thus male relatives accepted women’s participation. For these reasons, my original scenario about the wartime sexism of peasant men seemed odd to them and instead they presented an alternative skit. Although documents from the 1980s point to the ongoing *process* of organizing against sexism, the postwar memories of peasant women tend to frame the process as a before and after event, a moment frozen in time. In other words, their memories confined sexism as existing prior to their political involvement, although documents illustrate how it was an ongoing problem.

Rather than begin their story in the 1980s as the original scenario intended, participants started their skit in the 1970s, describing the role of women within peasant organizations *prior* to the creation of the FMLN in 1980. Participants created an extremely detailed skit about the role of women in organizing against state violence and mobilizing their communities for their basic

rights. Rosa played an organizer who went from village to village explaining the importance of political organizing. A former combatant played the role of a nursing mother who frantically lamented the poor health of her child, while other women voiced their fears of becoming politically active. As the women spoke, a group of military officers (played by younger participants) insulted and arrested people from the village.¹⁰² Rosa's character successfully recruited women into the movement and together they marched to the prison to demand the release of their arrested family members.

The reframing of the skit is significant for several reasons. Peasant women identified state violence, rather than family hierarchies, as the *definitive* experience that distributed their lives. In a skit that hoped to teach younger participants and myself, a foreigner, about peasant history, these older women felt that it was important to foreground the intense power inequalities between a repressive state and peasant organizers. Readers should not interpret their maneuver as a refusal to discuss the gendered obstacles to their political participation. As I demonstrate below, peasant women are fully aware of sexist inequalities.

In another activity, I prompted older peasant women to map changes in gender relations over time, which revealed a critical feminist engagement with their past. In their interviews, women from Arcatao and elsewhere made a strong distinction between life before and after the war. I used these markers to frame a discussion in which women evaluated the accomplishments and limits of peasant organizing. Participants received two prompts: How did society before the war view men and women? How did popular organizations view men and women? Participants received two genderless silhouettes where they drew their responses to the questions. When participants felt shy about their drawing abilities, I as the facilitator drew what they asked me to place on the silhouette.

¹⁰² Jaime Rivera and Elizabeth played the role of the military officials.

During the activity, the women identified key aspects of their history. They discussed at length the gendered impacts of organizing, which transformed how women saw themselves and how they navigated their relationships with male relatives and partners. Participants insisted on the strategic role that women played during the war. In contrast to men, women had to assume multiple responsibilities at once. Participants critiqued male comrades who during and after the war did not recognize the political contributions of women, and lively debated, which specific experiences should be regarded as representative of their overall experiences. It is important to note that the women subtly reframed my activity once again. Rather than focus solely on the life of women before and after the war (as I had originally suggested), the women reframed the discussion to be about life before and after becoming politically active. This is important because these participants dated their political participation prior to the formation of the FMLN and identified organizing, not the war per se, as the process that transformed women and gender relations.

Oppression characterized the life of the campesina before she became politically organized. Participants drew long hair, rosy cheeks, a smile, an apron, and a dress, and intentionally left the silhouette without shoes. One woman explained how midwives received less pay when a baby girl was born, while the “less valuable” baby girl received no or fewer presents in comparison to the baby boy.¹⁰³ The postpartum mother of the girl was ostracized because she was “not a full woman until she [birthed] a male.” Meanwhile, the baby grew into a girl who had “no time to play” and spent her time doing domestic chores. She did not go to school because people feared that an educated woman would only write letters to her boyfriend. The girl became a woman and a mother and had “many tasks” including caring for “the children”

¹⁰³ Tomasa López Rivera shared this important point.

and doing “household chores.” Participants visually expressed her responsibilities by drawing a house in the background and a group of small children. If the campesina worked for wages, she received “less pay” than men. The campesina felt “tired,” “sick,” “discriminated,” “not taken into account” and did “not lift her head up.” I walked across the room with my head down to express the feelings that they described. In response, the women yelled, “hunch your back further; tilt your head lower!”

Older participants characterized the politically inactive *campesino* (peasant man) as individualistic and arrogant. They drew trousers, a hat, a beard, and sandals made of tire rubber—the latter a marker of poverty. As a child, the campesino had more opportunities to attend school and play than the campesina. They described this campesino as “powerful” because he walked “proud” and believed he was the “boss.” If the campesino made business deals, he did so without consulting his wife. The women laughed as I then stuck my chest out and walked across the room imitating their description. Overall, the drawing of the campesino received less attention than the lively discussion of the campesina.

The silhouette of the politically organized woman contrasted the life of the politically inactive woman. Participants added a cap, trousers, boots, a watch, a bag, bible, and gun to the silhouette. These objects represented the mobility of the organized woman who traveled from village to village, preaching liberation theology. The boots and gun pointed to her status as a combatant. These objects collapsed organizing experiences from two decades into a single drawing: the organization of Christian Base Communities and peasant organizations in the 1970s and the insurgency in the 1980s. For the participants, the organized woman represented a radical departure from the submissive, politically inactive campesina, as evident in a comparison

between the two drawings. They identified leftist organizing as the process that generated a new consciousness about the rights of women and that enabled women to take on new roles.

Participants eagerly shouted the wartime responsibilities of the organized woman: propaganda maker, mail carrier, cook, combatant, radio operator, medic, dentist, seamstress, baker, and teacher. Despite the enormous risks, the organized woman seduced security guards to help political prisoners escape and sneaked objects through military checkpoints (which they hid inside their bras or baskets). She also “rescued the wounded and dead” and made hundreds of tortillas for combatants without producing smoke and being detected by government helicopters. Cooks traveled with combatants and their cooking sites were often the first to be bombed by enemy airplanes. Women’s wartime responsibilities, including cooking, proved that women were “capable” of doing tasks outside the home, according to participants. The women critiqued the lack of wartime and postwar recognition afforded to insurgent women, particularly cooks. They explained how during the war, combatants often dismissed cooks as “just cooks” and FMLN leaders used cooking duty as a common punishment or demotion in rank.¹⁰⁴ According to participants, the ongoing devaluing of domestic labor in the postwar period has excluded cooks (predominantly women) from receiving recognition for their wartime sacrifices. Given the array of tasks that women performed, Rosa Rivera argued that women “played a more important role in the war” because of her multiple and strategic roles. The rest of the group, including an older peasant man, unanimously agreed. Overall, participants challenged the notion that male combatants played the most important role in the war.

The organizing process also impacted men themselves. Participants characterized the male comrade or *compañero* as a man that practiced revolutionary values. They recognized the *compa* as being more supportive and respectful of his partner than non-organized men, assisting

¹⁰⁴ Murguilday, Olivera, and Vásquez, *Y la montaña habló*, 36.

her with domestic chores and childcare. He assumed difficult tasks and worked for the wellbeing of his community. In the discussion however, I sensed an uneasiness among the women as to how they should criticize the limits of the “compañero,” who like the organized woman, consolidated thousands of experiences over time that were impossible to represent within one single drawing. Participants recognized the real commitment of most men toward revolutionary principles and wished to honor those men, including their male relatives who were murdered by state forces. Simultaneously, they recognized that *not all* men had developed a revolutionary consciousness toward women. They struggled with how to discuss this sector of men without discrediting the goals and practices of their movement *as a whole*.

During the discussion, María Helia raised a very contentious point: sexual assault within the FMLN ranks. During my initial interview with María Helia, I had asked her how the FMLN dealt with sexual assault. She explained to the group how my question prompted her to ask a former woman combatant the same question. María Helia recounted what happened to her friend. As she slept, a fellow combatant tried to assault her. She fought back and reported the abuser to an FMLN commander who then punished the assailant. As María Helia narrated the story, several women shook their heads in disagreement while others immediately intervened. Two women asserted that throughout the war they slept peacefully in the presence of dozens of men, often complete strangers.¹⁰⁵ Overwhelmed by the reaction of the group, María Helia conceded that perhaps there was one perpetrator out of 100 male comrades.

With her anecdote about assault, María Helia implicitly pointed to the limits of the movement in eradicating sexism among leftist men or rape within the liberated territories. As a person who has organized against domestic violence in the postwar period, a third-party

¹⁰⁵ Ana Arminda and María del Carmen.

experience about wartime sexual assault may have been particularly devastating to María Helia. She may have raised the issue to make the point that leftist men can also participate in violence against women and to underscore the necessity of women's organizing in the postwar period.

The women who challenged María Helia may have been concerned about the political implications of her claim and did not necessarily oppose holding men accountable.¹⁰⁶ I suspect that they disagreed about foregrounding an experience of assault and making it representative of their *overall experiences*. Many women in the room had survived sexual torture at the hands of state officials, not leftist comrades. Peasant women wanted their political gains to be the *central* legacy of their revolutionary organizing, the legacy that they would share with younger generations (and myself, a foreigner). The tension in the room perhaps pointed to larger anxieties: how to critique perpetrators without casting all leftist men, particularly martyred comrades in the same light? Would the political right use such accounts to equate the scale of violence between the state and the guerrillas? These concerns are not unwarranted. As discussed earlier, rightwing narratives have created a moral equivalency between state/paramilitary and insurgent violence, although the former committed ninety-percent of wartime human rights abuses. Within this context, peasant women make choices about which experiences to prioritize.

The debate that ensued after the anecdote also revealed a larger dilemma. How can wartime survivors, particularly women, discuss their experiences of empowerment within leftist movements, while at the same time *not* contribute to a silence about the abuses among leftist men? I cringe at the thought: what if a woman who had been assaulted by a leftist man had been or was in the room? How would she have felt to hear the response of other women? Survivors of sexual violence face additional burdens. Leftist women may struggle to denounce sexual abuse

¹⁰⁶ In the early postwar period, many committee participants, including Rosa gathered to physically beat a local man who had murdered his wife, a well-respected popular educator. The local priest stopped the group of women before they could drag the murderer from his jail cell.

because they fear that the movement and its goals will be discredited as a whole. They may also fear the response of their comrades. And while it matters that the FMLN *did not* commit sexual violence on the scale of the state, this fact does not translate to justice for those who survived sexual violence at the hands of men in the FMLN.

Conclusion

Within the workshops, women contrasted the brutality of state violence against organizers and civilians at large, to the collective empowerment that they experienced within peasant and guerrilla organizations. The women explained how organizing expanded the collective decision-making power of women, transformed how women saw themselves, and led peasant women to understand their specific grievances. While they emphasized the role of the state as a major oppressive force, participants also recognized how sexism shaped their intimate relationships. For example, participants explained the opposition of male relatives and spouses to their initial political involvement. They argued that women's organizing set limits on the power of men over women and often motivated comrades to respect women and complete domestic chores. Unfortunately, the revolutionary process had been cut short, enabling many comrades to view and treat women poorly after the war and belittle the political contributions of women.

Some committeewomen have a political incentive to prioritize denouncing (at least in public) the violence of the state over those of individual comrades. Everyday sexism shaped the lives of women but state-sanctioned violence radically disrupted their lives. State actors who committed systemic abuses currently enjoy legal impunity and the political right still has significant power in shaping postwar narratives about the war. This postwar context, along with their historical framework that centers the role of state violence, has shaped how committeewomen discuss sexual abuse within the FMLN. However, women like María Helia,

pursue a different strategy. While she shares the same critique of past state violence, she also finds it important to discuss past and present abuses against women, whether committed by leftist or rightwing men.

Conclusion

Through collective organizing, teachers and peasants remade themselves into new actors who sought to create a world without landowners, dictators, paramilitaries, and imperialists. Struggles to demand increased wages and workplace dignity, from the classroom to plantation, generated a process in which women and girls took leftist principles such as dignity, equality, and solidarity to new radical conclusions. Confronted with sexism, class inequality, state violence, and imperialism, women and girls made intentional choices about the direction of their lives, relationships, and movements. Given that Salvadoran women have been largely erased from their own histories, this dissertation names and identifies some of the women who constituted and built the base of these revolutionary movements. But beyond pointing to the presence of women, this dissertation also demonstrates how they intervened in key ways through their labor, organizing practices, and political theorization. They synthesized liberation theology, Marxism, and feminism to meet their specific needs, and in doing so, contributed to the rich political practice of the Salvadoran and Latin American left. As other scholars have commented, leftist and armed movements of the 1970s and 1980s were more vibrant than have been described, and for these reasons, it is worth summarizing the innovative strategies of Salvadoran revolutionaries.¹

In the 1970s, after teachers had revitalized the labor movement, state violence sought to crush struggles for the most basic demands and contain the influence of the radical left. Such

¹ Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre*, 192. Chávez, *Poets and Prophets of the Resistance*.

efforts largely failed. Instead, Salvadoran organizers deepened their political militancy and bridged the divide between reforms and revolution. The broad opposition to the military regime included both reformists and revolutionaries. Reformists' political analysis and demands reflected a naïve faith in the reigning institutions and power-holders in Salvadoran society. For instance, the top leadership of the Christian Democrats (PDC) failed to recognize that landowners materially benefited from the exploitation of peasants and would not implement the most minimal of reforms.¹ In the best of cases, PDC reformists pressed for minimal and gradual reforms but left untouched the oligarchic export economy that created radically opposed interests between landowners and landless peasants. While revolutionaries sought to transform the economic structure as a whole, they also fundamentally believed that people needed to see concrete improvements in their lives as a matter of daily survival. As a result, revolutionaries bridged reforms and revolution, pursuing what others have called non-reformist reforms: organizing that wins immediate reforms and puts a movement in a better position to dismantle the root causes of exploitation.² For instance, the UTC fought to win higher wage for peasants who labored on plantations for less than \$1 a day, and simultaneously denounced the role of capitalism in upholding a gross unequal distribution of land, wealth, and power. In the process of struggling for basic reforms, peasants developed their political consciousness and leadership,

¹ Historically, liberals have hurt radical movements via their political commitments to the status quo. Martin Luther King Jr. described the destructiveness and toxicity of white liberals who hindered the progress of radical social movements through their concessions to politicians and capitalists, investment in white supremacy, capitalism, and militarism, and dismissal of civil disobedience as a tool of economic disruption against racists; see "Letter from Birmingham Jail," April 16, 1963.

² French writer André Gorz coined the term non-reformist reforms to discuss the relationship between labor demands and anti-capitalist struggle, see Andre Gorz, *Strategy for Labor, Strategy for Labor: A Radical Proposal* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967). Peter Frase, "Curious Utopias," *Jacobin*, May 14, 2013. Robin Hahnel, *Economic Justice and Democracy: From Competition to Cooperation* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

built the base of their organizations, and demonstrated that winning was possible. Women specifically confronted the opposition of their husbands and fathers, and generated a consciousness about their right to participate in the class struggle.

The creation of revolutionary coalitions enabled coordinated nation-wide attacks against elite power and profits. In 1975, Salvadorans created the BPR, a revolutionary bloc of peasants, workers, slum dwellers and students that advocated immediate reforms, such as wage increases, as well as more far-reaching ones: the overthrow of the military regimes and the building of socialism. To achieve their demands, organizers used militant tactics such as general strikes, burning crops, kidnapping company executives, land and factory occupations, and road blockades. Teachers mobilized to support the peasant-led land occupations, while peasants bused to the cities to support worker strikes, marches, and factory occupations. In withholding their labor and disrupting business as usual, organizers attacked the profits of the landed oligarchy to force concessions. In other words, organizers made it costly for military officials and capitalists to pursue particular policies.

Women drew from past organizing experiences as seasoned organizers to confront new and ongoing challenges in the 1980s. Within a context of armed struggle against U.S. imperialism, Salvadoran women developed strategies to confront sexism within their movements. Within the guerrilla camps, combatant women pushed the FMLN to apply revolutionary values to the realm of everyday life. Women contested their role within the struggle over daily conflicts about food, sex, and hygiene and pushed their comrades to be responsive to their needs as women. In doing so, women redefined camp norms and international solidarity campaigns. Simultaneously, the Association of Salvadoran Women developed a revolutionary feminist praxis to dismantle capitalism, patriarchy, and imperialism. In the process

of organizing peasant women within guerrilla territories and refugee camps, AMES reformulated Marxism to analyze how patriarchy interlocks with and reinforces capitalism. For instance, AMES explained how capitalists profit from sexism, including women's unpaid domestic labor and the unequal wages between men and women workers. In addition, it denounced how sexism alienated women from decision-making power over their labor and bodies, and taught men to see women as objects for sex and reproduction. To confront these inequalities, AMES advocated a revolution for "our total emancipation" that would liberate women from both capitalism and patriarchy. In bridging socialism and women's liberation, AMES critiqued both orthodox Marxists and Western liberal feminists. It critiqued the former group for wanting to postpone a struggle against sexism until a moment of revolutionary triumph. Rather than assume that a change in economic relations alone would automatically liberate poor women, AMES argued that women had to organize in the present to build a society free of both class and gender oppression. Conversely, it also critiqued Western liberal feminists who ignored the class divisions among women and sought inclusion within capitalist institutions. The expansion of privileges for capitalist and imperialist women further entrenched the oppression of working-class women in the Global South. In short, AMES approached Marxism and feminism as living, breathing theories that it developed and strengthened through organizing. In this sense, AMES women are connected to other leftist women who linked women's liberation to socialism.

Salvadoran peasants did not succumb to the devastation of war but rather built alternative institutions that expanded revolutionary horizons. Amidst a war, peasants in Chalatenango department built alternative institutions in which they democratically managed their own lives. The FMLN secured large or liberated territories that kept government forces at bay, allowing peasants to experiment with radical and participatory democracy. Through the *poderes populares*

locales (popular local power) or councils, peasants managed their immediate survival needs, such as security, food, education, and healthcare. While many of the peasants who participated within the councils were seasoned labor organizers, many were not and thus the councils provided an opportunity to organize more people, deepen their political consciousness, expand their political participation, and consolidate political power over a vast territory. The councils kept people alive but also represented the seeds of the new society. Peasant organizing created a dual power situation in which revolutionaries built institutions and relationships that challenged the existing state apparatus that upheld capitalist interests and monopolized the use of force. Peasants, the historically exploited labor force of the Salvadoran export economy, directly represented their interests via the councils. In doing so, peasants practiced a form of pre-figurative politics, simultaneously building alternative institutions and waging a struggle against capitalism. Despite the devastation that the war inflicted, peasants did not wait until a definitive military victory to begin building their ideal society. Nor did women wait to confront sexism. Women intervened in the councils to ensure that the revolution would dismantle both capitalism and patriarchy. For instance, women collectivized food production and childcare, thus politicizing reproductive labor, and had the councils confront husbands and fathers who opposed the political participation of their wives and daughters. Internally, AMES organizers also raised consciousness about marital rape. In short, they took the revolution to task to ensure the liberation of women and girls.

The revolutionary opening that culminated in the 1980s came to a close with the signing of the 1992 peace accords. Confronted with postwar neoliberalism and low-levels of mobilization, peasant women in the Comité de Memoria Sobreviviente de Arcatao, Chalatenango, transmit their memories of collective action to younger generations. In contrast to

rightwing narratives that absolve state violence, and academic narratives that are urban-centric and reduce armed struggle to combat, peasant women offer a grassroots perspective about their insurgent past. They are highly critical of state violence and center the community organizing that sustained civilians and combatants within the guerrilla territories. For instance, they are keen to remember the councils that placed decision-making power within the hands of peasant civilians. Peasant women wage their struggles over memory on two fronts. While they resist rightwing narratives about the war, they also challenge sexist narratives within their own communities that privilege the role of men and belittle women's domestic labor and its role in sustaining the insurgency. In pointing to the grassroots efforts of peasants, and the strategic and multiple roles of peasant women, the committee hopes to inspire younger generations to continue the struggle.

Remarkably, Salvadoran peasant women pollinated a vision of revolution that sustained life in the face of state violence and utter despair. The development of women's political consciousness about sexism was several decades in the making. In the 1960s and 1970s, women simultaneously revitalized the labor movement, made class demands against powerful men that intimately impacted their lives as women, fought to participate in class-based organizations against the wishes of their male relatives, and deepened the political militancy and capacity of their movements. This organizing produced a new political consciousness among women about their right participate in revolutionary movements. But women did not leave the fate or terms of their participation to chance or to the decision of men. In the 1980s, the explicit articulation of revolutionary feminism, a praxis against multiple systems of oppression, was made possible due to the daily interventions of Salvadoran women against sexism and the hemispheric context of

the 1980s, a decade in which feminism blossomed in the Americas. These factors came together, allowing insurgent women within the FMLN to articulate a vision of their own liberation.

The revolutionary feminism of Salvadoran women offers an important alternative to current-day imperial feminism.³ Dominant narratives have erased the feminist histories of working class women, women of color, and women in the Global South. This has severe consequences for how we think about the goals and demands of past and present feminist movements, as the organizing and scholarship of women of color has demonstrated.⁴

Unsurprisingly, in the United States, corporate feminism, which has disproportionate visibility, defines feminism as the right of (mainly white and heterosexual) capitalist women to profit from the spoils of capitalism and U.S. imperial power.⁵ Global capitalism and imperialism continue to destroy lives and threaten the planet with ecological collapse, while fascist and right-wing movements advance agendas that attack the basic rights of women, people of color, LGBT people, immigrants, workers, and other oppressed groups. To guide our struggles forward, we need to challenge narrow conceptions of feminism that uphold the interests of elite women at the

³ As Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton supported military coups and dictatorial governments in Latin America and the Middle East that have increased the murder rate or made conditions worse for women and LGBT people; see Young and Sierra Becerra, “Hillary Clinton’s Empowerment”; Riley, Mohanty, Pratt, *Feminism and War*, 1-14. Imperial feminism has a long history. Its contemporary liberal manifestation within the United States, celebrates women, people of color, and LGBT people who lead capitalist and imperialist institutions. Imperial feminists understand patriarchy as a problem rooted in the uncivilized cultures or underdevelopment of the so-called Third World. Most importantly, imperialist feminists, such as Madeline Albright and Hillary Clinton view capitalism and U.S. Empire, as a mechanism for bringing democracy and women’s equality to different parts of the globe. In short, they justify U.S. intervention in the name of “saving” women.

⁴ For a critique of these narratives, see Jennifer Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution: Italian Women's Resistance and Radicalism in New York City, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 4; Maylei Blackwell, *Chicana power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 16-18.

⁵ Kevin Young and Diana Carolina Sierra Becerra, “Hillary Clinton’s Empowerment,” *Jacobin Magazine*, February 2015. Robin Lee Riley, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Minnie Bruce Pratt, *Feminism and War: Confronting US Imperialism* (New York: Zed Books, 2008). Hegemonic currents of feminism also include liberal feminism, neoliberal feminism, corporate feminism, white feminism, or imperial feminism.

expense of the majority of women and people, create an alternative history of feminism, and draw lessons from past struggles that confronted multiple and intersecting forms of oppression.

While overthrowing the grip of U.S. hegemony seems like an insurmountable task, the lives of peasant women demonstrate that history is made through the course of struggle. Each year, one hundred million Central American butterflies fly two thousand miles over several militarized borders. The collective flapping of their resilient wings produces the sound of thunder. I hope we are inspired to follow the butterflies.

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- Bobbye S. Ortiz Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University (BOP)

New York City

- North American Congress on Latin America, New School for Social Research (NACLA-NS)
- Barnard Center for Research on Women (BCRW)

San Salvador

- Centro de Información, Documentación y Apoyo a la Investigación (CIDAI), Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas (UCA)
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Appendix A. Organizational abbreviations

Abbreviation	Name
AGEUS	Asociación General de Estudiantes Universitarios Salvadoreños (General Association of Salvadoran University Students, AGEUS)
AMES	Asociación de Mujeres de El Salvador (Association of Salvadoran Women)
ANDES 21 de Junio	Asociación Nacional de Educadores de El Salvador 21 de Junio (National Association of Salvadoran Educators, June 21)
ANSESAL	Agencia Nacional de Servicios Especiales (National Agency of Special Services)
ARENA	Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (National Republican Alliance)
BPR	Bloque Popular Revolucionario (Revolutionary Popular Bloc)
CBC	Comunidades eclesiales de base (Christian base communities)
CISPES	Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador
CONAMUS	Coordinadora Nacional de la Mujer Salvadoreña (National Coordinating Committee of Salvadoran Women)
ERP	Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (Revolutionary People's Army)
FAL	Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación (Armed Liberation Forces)

FECCAS	Federación Cristiana de Campesinos de El Salvador (Christian Federation of Salvadoran Farmworkers, FECCAS)
FDR	Frente Democrático Revolucionario (Revolutionary Democratic Front)
FPL	Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Fuerzas Populares de la Liberación “Farabundo Martí” (Popular Liberation Forces “Farabundo Martí”)
FTC	Federación de Trabajadores del Campo (Farmworker Federation, FTC)
FMLN	Frente Farabundo Martí para la liberación nacional (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front)
FUP	Frente de Unidad Popular (Popular Unity Front)
FUSS	Federación Unitaria Sindical de El Salvador (Unitary Federation of Salvadoran Unions)
MERS	Movimiento Estudiantil Revolucionario (Revolutionary Student Movement)
ORDEN	Organización Democrática Nacionalista (Democratic Nationalist Organization)
PCN	Partido de Conciliación Nacional (Party of National Conciliation, PCN)
PCS	Partido Comunista de El Salvador (Communist Party of El Salvador)
PDC	Partido Democrático Cristiano (Christian Democratic Party, PDC)
PPL	Poderes Populares Locales (Popular Local Power)

PRTC	Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centro Americanos (Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers)
RN	Resistencia Nacional (National Resistance)
SOA	School of the Americas
UGB	Unión Guerrera Blanca (White Warriors Union)
UMS	Union de Mujeres Salvadoreñas para la Liberación, Mélida Anaya Montes (Union of Salvadoran Women for Liberation, Mélida Anaya Montes)
UTC	Unión de Trabajadores del Campo (Union of Farmworkers)
WIRE	Women's International Resource Exchange

Appendix B. Women featured in each chapter

Chapter One

ANDES 21 de Junio (1965)

- Cleotilde López
- María Candelaria Navas

FPL (1970)

- Domitila Ayala
- María Candelaria Navas

UTC (1975)

- Domitila Ayala
- Rosa Rivera

Chapter Two

FPL

- Elda Gladis Tobar de Ortiz (1962-)
- Domitila Ayala (1957-)

ERP

- Dina Vaquerano (1959-)
- Irma Esperanza Díaz Vásquez (1956-)

Chapter Three

FPL

- María Candelaria Navas (1943-)
- María Margarita Velado (1953-)
- Elda Gladis Tobar de Ortiz (1962-)
- Audelia Guadalupe López (19XX-)

AMES

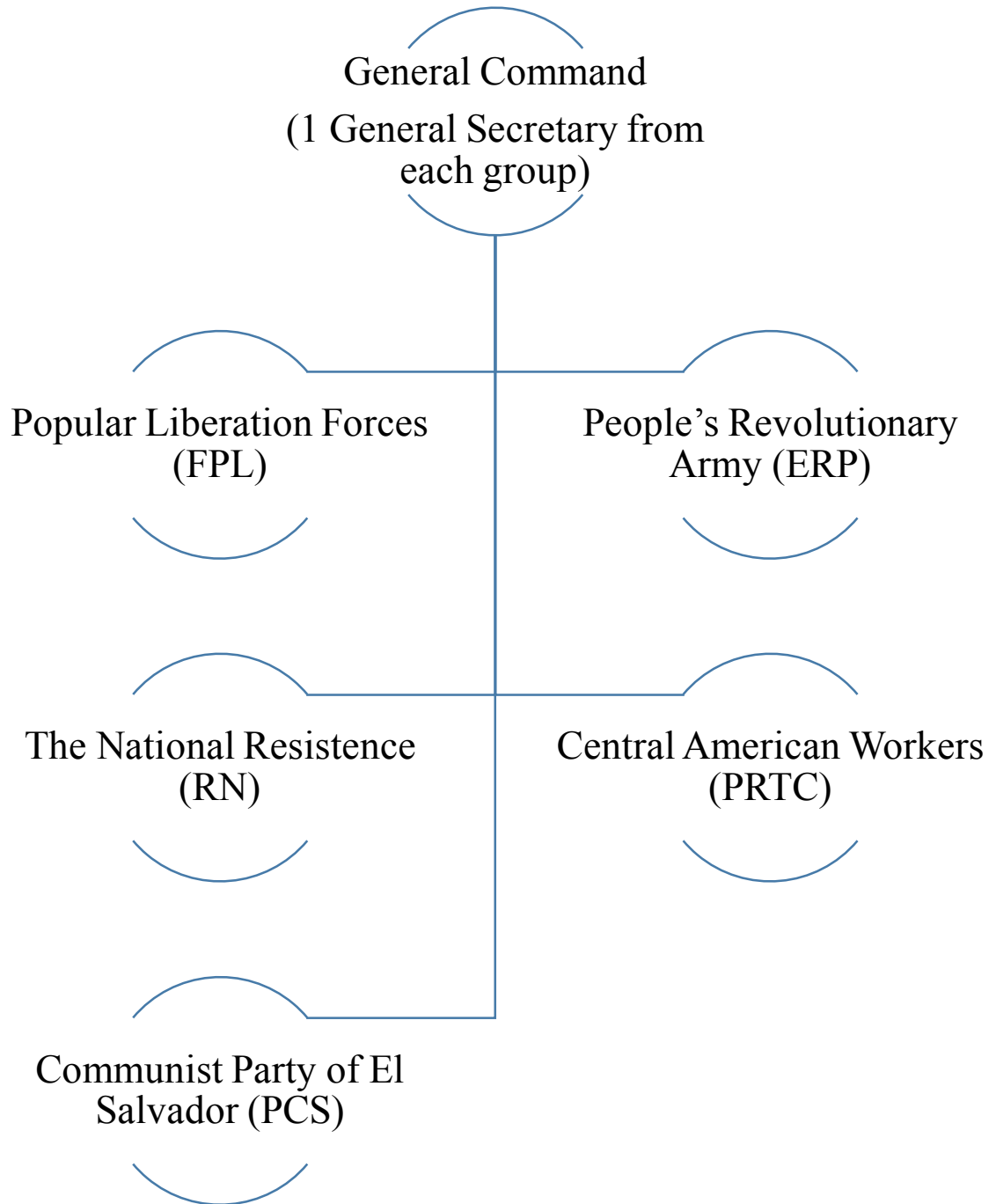
- María Candelaria Navas (1943-)
- María Margarita Velado (1953-)
- Rosa Rivera (1957-)
- Elda Gladis Tobar de Ortiz (1962-)
- Audelia Guadalupe López (19XX-)

Chapter Four

Committee

- Rosa Rivera
- María Helia Rivera

Appendix C. Guerrilla groups within FMLN



Appendix D. Interviewed women
Political pseudonyms are in parenthesis

Aida Dalton, ERP, FPL, AMES
Alicia Dubón (Roxana), FPL
Ana Dolores Díaz (Laura), ERP
Austina López (Naomi), ERP
Audelia Guadalupe López (Rebeka Guevara), FPL, AMES
Azucena Quinteros, FPL, AMES
Blanca Ramírez, (Mirna), FPL
Clara Marguiladay, AMES
Cleotilde López, ANDES 21 de Junio
Celina Vásquez, CBC
Daniel Ezequiel Rodríguez, ANDES 21 de Junio
Dina Vaquerano, ERP
Domitila Ayala, UTC, FPL
Elda Gladis Tobar de Ortiz (Mereya Lucero), MERS, FPL, AMES
Ermelinda López, CBC, AMES, Comité
Esperanza Ortega, PPL
Estela Cruz López, ANDES 21 de Junio
Filomena Beltrán, CBC, AMES
Lucinda Pérez Viuda de Ortiz, ERP
Irma Esperanza Vásquez, ERP
María Candelaria Navas (Candelaria Melgar), ANDES 21 de Junio, FPL
María Delia de Cornejo, FECCAS, FPL
María Elena Márquez, refugee in Colomancagua
María Elma Landaverde Rivera, FECCAS, FPL
María Helia Rivera, CBC, UTC, AMES
María Gutiérrez (Mila), ERP
María Lorenza Claros (Rosita), ERP
María Lucrecia Argueta López, ERP
María Margarita Velado, FPL, AMES
María Ofelia Navarrete (María Chichilco), UTC, FPL, AMES
María Silvia Hernández, ERP
María del Socorro Álvarez (Mariana), ERP
Olga Baires, PCS, FECCAS, FPL, AMES
Rosa Miriam Mena de Rodríguez, ANDES 21 de Junio
Rosa Rivera, CBC, UTC, AM
Silvia Sánchez (Anabel), ERP
Tula Alveranga de Carpio, PCS, FPL, AMES
Vergelina Vásquez de Orellana (Maritza), ERP