Intellectual Forefathers Of A Guerilla Culture:
Constructing the foundations of Insurgency in El Salvador (1980-1984).

By
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"The young children of Copapayo, were my gravest concern,"[1] explains Charles Clements, a doctor from the United States (US) who joined a guerilla contingent positioned in the rural village of Guazapa, twenty minutes outside the capital city of San Salvador. As Clement's disquietude illustrates, the children of El Salvador often suffered the most during the civil war. Whether it was starvation, anemia, parasites, abandonment, or bullets, the reality of life in a guerilla encampment did not bode well for a child's longevity. Yet, for Clements the most shocking tragedy was when children and their mothers fled from an approaching enemy. As he explains, if a child whimpered during a hasty escape mothers would smother them until they grew silent. Although this survival technique protected the guerrilla community, all too often the child suffocated in the process thus becoming another casualty of war. This, Clements recalls, "was worse than the loss of a brother, husband, or father to the enemy, worse, even, than watching their children die of hunger and disease. It made them murderesses."[2]

In this climate of tragedy, the prospect of hope is a fleeting aspiration. Still, for all the suffering and inhumanity the guerrilla movement confronted, hope was an essential ingredient for maintaining the insurgency's strength throughout the course of the war. After all, as history recalls, a small group of passionate individuals consisting of primarily urban peasants, rural-farmers, radicalized students and intellectuals withstood 12 years of military oppression under a totalitarian government and an elite oligarchy, dubiously subsidized by the greatest superpower in the world, the United States. Yet, in the historiography of the Salvadoran civil war, few scholars examine the creation of an oppositional or guerrilla culture and its role in galvanizing and maintaining the support of a peasant class. In response to this myopia, the following analysis will explore the foundation of this guerrilla culture through an examination of the

[1] Charles Clements, *Witness to War: An American Doctor in El Salvador*, (New York: Bantam Books, July 1984), p. 5.
[2] Ibid..

intellectuals that emerged during the early years of the insurgency, 1980-1992. As we will see, their ability to resist the dominant narrative and forge a path that others could incorporate into their collective memory opened the doors to the creation of an oppositional culture. Yet, before examining this process, it is necessary to define a few terms and elucidate how this discussion fits within the historiography of the revolution's longevity.

DEFINITIONS

When discussing the Salvadoran civil war, scholars of this region utilize a plethora of terms to describe the conflict. Because the literature on this subject does not explicitly specify the difference between these terms, this analysis continues in this tradition. Specifically, the following examination does not delineate any difference between an insurgency and a guerrilla movement. In addition, revolution and civil war will both refer to the 1980-1992 Salvadoran conflict. On a side note, if a difference exists between these terms in the literature, it is in regard to the perspective one adheres to when discussing this subject. For instance, supporters of the military more readily refer to their enemies as an insurgency, while those on the Left see their struggle as a revolution. Regardless, the following thesis does not solely adhere to a particular bias, and instead uses these terms interchangeably.

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF GUERRILLA LONGEVITY

Analysis on the capability of the revolutionary vanguard to maintain support through twelve years of unimaginable violence emphasizes a few key factors. Most scholars of the revolution in El Salvador typically point out that the Farbundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), the primary organization of the insurgency,[3] received a continuous supply of foreign

[3] The FMLN was a conglomerate of five different Salvadoran organizations. Three of these groups, the Communist Party of El Salvador (PCS), the Popular Liberation Forces (FPL) and the Central American Refvolutionary Workers' Party (PRTC), originated from Marxist-Leninist roots, while the other two, the Armed Forces of National Resistance

aid that bolstered their durability. José Bracamonte suggests that "nearly every guerrilla faction in Latin America"[4] supported the FMLN. In addition, worldwide terrorist organizations such as the PLO, and the Basque ETA provided tactical strategies and advice for the FMLN to utilize. Most importantly, Vietnam supplied the insurgency with western weaponry confiscated from its war with the US. This was critical in maintaining a distance from the Soviet, Cuban and Nicaraguan contingent that the US repeatedly blamed for the insurgency's emergence and thus utilized as the primary impetus for sending aid, ultimately 6 billion dollars over the course of the war,[5] to the Salvadoran military.

This is not to say that Soviet, Cuban and Nicaraguan support, which provided key strategic support[6] and a vital arms route that transferred weaponry to the Salvadoran guerillas, was not critical for the insurgency's survival. Instead, this is to point out that, except for the high command, many of the guerrillas believed they were creating their own revolution predicated upon a local identity. In other words, their actions were not a product of communism as much as a response to US economic imperialism and an elite oligarchy that had controlled their country for more than a century. As one campesino explained after an FMLN general's speech:

> We should also remember that we are not Cubans or Nicaraguans. This is our revolution. Comandante, if Che himself were to appear here tomorrow, he wouldn't understand our reality any better than we do.[7]

Clearly, the peasants in this struggle claimed agency for their participation in the insurgency. In addition, many of the guerrillas and the high command believed that denying complicity with

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(FARN) and the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), emerged from the youth movement of the (Christian Democratic Party (PDC) and was heavily influenced by liberation theology.

[4] José Angel Moroni Bracamonte, *Strategy and tactics of the Salvadoran FMLN guerrillas: last battle of the Cold War, blueprint for future conflicts*, trans., David E. Spencer, (Westport: Praeger, 1995), p. 10.

[5] Although a total of 6 billion dollars was sent to the Salvadoran government during this time period, approximately 1 billion was in the form of military aid.

[6] Supposedly, US intelligence uncovered a document that confirmed the fact that Castro undeniably counseled the FMLN to unify. See Dunkerely, 181.

[7] Quote taken from tape 5 of 19 in Alex Deshler, El Salvador: "In the Name of the People" Audiovisual Collection. Benson Latin American Collection. (University of Texas at Austin.)

Nicaragua, Cuba and the Soviet Union was an important tactical strategy for preventing further US involvement in the war.

Another reason for the longevity of the revolution, authors have suggested, is the operational flexibility of the FMLN. Because this organization was a conglomerate of five different groups, each with its own strategy, the insurgency easily adapted to a perpetually changing war environment. This adjustment capability consisted of everything from a quick military action that would induce a peasant revolt, similar to the Sandinista experience, to a prolonged popular war based upon the strategy used in Vietnam. Bracamonte suggests that this operational flexibility allowed the FMLN to avoid the pitfalls of ideology. In other revolutions, Bracamonte points out, "tactical changes required a simultaneous overhaul of the ideology, a task…that doomed these groups to failure because it was only a matter of time before the local armed forces learned the tactical patterns and developed methods to defeat them."[8]

The final aspect that scholars point to when examining the longevity of this resistance relates to the FMLN's establishment of a revolutionary rear guard. In part, this strategy emerged as a response to the failure of other guerrilla movements' belief in the use of *foquismo*.[9] Originating from the writings of Ernesto "Che" Guevara about the Cuban Revolution, this tenet of revolutionary warfare suggests that guerrilla armies could form and maintain areas of activity "in the countryside, from which they could branch out, expand peasant support, and defeat the incumbent regime."[10] Unfortunately, implementation of this strategy often yielded little success for other revolutionary movements in Latin America. Understanding these failures, the FMLN conceived of a different tactic. Opposed to the foquismo strategy, the organization began

[8] Bracamonte, 7.
[9] For an in depth discussion of *foquismo* See James Dunkerley, *The Long War: Dictatorship and Revolution in El Salvador*, London: Verso, 1982, p 48-57.
[10] Hugh Byrne, *El Salvador's Civil war: A Study of Revolution*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996, p. 9.

building a political rear guard in the late 1970s. In theory, this provided a base of support and protection from the Salvadoran military. In a document cited in Hugh Bryne's analysis, a FMLN commander describes the importance of this strategy. He states:

> We consider an internal rearguard a political-military zone of control where the local power of the enemy has been expelled; where our troops, installations, workshops, hospitals, schools of instruction, command, were located…. These rearguards were built on a base of highly organized and radicalized zones where practically the whole population had risen up and broken with the regime…. In the period 81-82 we began to build the social base of support of the guerrillas; a base which provided food, gave information, and shared our lives.[11]

It is here that the creation of a guerrilla culture began to proliferate. Yet again, it remains an overlooked construction. As Lungo Uclés suggests, "someday, when a historian describes the control zones of the Salvadoran revolution" they will focus on the "development of an alternative popular culture."[12]

To summarize, a discussion of the Salvadoran guerrilla culture, particularly in the formative years (1980-82) of the insurgency, remains elusive in the historiography. If discussed at all, this cultural identity emerges within the context of the revolutionary rearguard and is never seen as a crucial element of the insurgency's durability. This is not to suggest that the aforementioned elements of the revolutionary vanguard were not responsible for its longevity. On the contrary, they were critical for the insurgency's survival. Yet, the construction of a guerrilla culture provided another tool for attracting many of the peasants in the countryside to join the movement. In this sense, the following analysis is both a bottom-up and top-down approach that examines the dynamic between the leaders of the Salvadoran insurgency and the reaction of the peasants who joined the movement.

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[11] Taken from Marta Harnecker, *Con la Mirada en alto: Historia de las Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farbuno Martí a través de entrevistas con sus dirigentes.* San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1993, in Bryne, *El Salvador's Civil war*, p. 83.
[12] Lungo Ucles, *El Salvador in the Eighties: Counterinsurgency and Revolution*, Philadephia: Temple University Press, 1996, p. 53.

Although further research will incorporate a multi-disciplinary examination of this guerrilla culture and how the ideas of intellectuals were disseminated through popular education, poetry, folk music, public radio, and liberation theology, this analysis primarily focuses on how leaders within the movement utilized collective memory as a foundation for both individual and group radicalization. In addition, it will explore how the interaction of leaders with the peasant classes allowed them to claim an "negotiatedagency," a construct this analysis will define, and resist the dominant narrative.

CONSTRUCTING THE INTELLECTUALS

Often the best place to begin to understand the creation of an oppositional culture is with the leaders/intellectuals that influence the different trajectories emerging within a movement. After all, in any ideological battle, leaders of a struggle appear from both within and outside of a movement; therefore, their words and actions are an open door into the ethos of a broader contingent. Moreover, as we will see, the impetus for their emergence resides in an evaluation of their own locality. This local perspective is critical in order to examine a struggle from its specific origins and avoid an ideologically biased analysis. The scholar Jeffrey Gould explains this process concisely. According to Gould, those who view revolutionary movements from a top-down approach, which posits class and political conflict over any specific historical milieu, deny the uniqueness of an individual's experience. As Gould states:

> Scholars have considered the revolutionary elite's capacity to politicize the subordinate classes as the key to the success or failure of the revolution… [We] need to broaden the scope of such studies to include the construction of revolutionary alliances from the bottom up.[13]

In his study of the Nicaraguan hamlet of Chinandega, we see how Gould exemplifies this process by placing the origins of peasant resistance in 1912, decades before the Sandinistas rose

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[13] Jeffrey Gould, *To Lead as Equals: Rural Protest and Political Consciousness in Chinandega, Nicaragua, 1912-1979,* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), p. 16.

to power. Instead of an instant radicalization predicated on any particular ideology, Gould illustrates how their historical experiences with the sugar barons of this region gave them the tools to resist. As leaders emerged within this local milieu, they utilized their collective experience as a means of radicalizing the group. Clearly, this gives agency to the masses that participate within a resistance.

In this sense, scholars such as Gould and Greg Grandin depart from the "conspiracy theory of hegemony"[14] purported by political theorists such as James C. Scott,[15] where only elites manipulate aspects of culture in order to gain the consent of the governed. Instead, these authors, and the following analysis, embrace William Roseberry's examination of Gramscian hegemony.[16] From Roseberry's perspective, hegemony is a "common material and meaningful framework for living through, talking about, and acting upon social orders characterized by domination."[17] Within this conceptualization, marginalized groups utilize the language of the elites to make demands on their behalf. If this tactic ceases to work, they will then look towards other means of obtaining their demands. This is where the possibility of a violent peasant uprising becomes viable.

Indeed, in many cases, the marginalized are complicit in their own subjugation, but they are also capable of resisting a hegemonic system through their own intellectual journey. This suggestion leads to what I will refer to as "negotiated agency." From this idea, I argue, all subjugated groups have agency, but they must claim that agency from their own cultural hegemonic system in order to break free from an eternal cycle of domination. Often, as this

[14] Greg Grandin, *The Blood of Guatemala: A History of Race and Nation*, (Duke University Press, 2000), p. 13.
[15] James Scott, *Domination and the Art of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.).
[16] William Roseberry, "Hegemony and the Language of Contention," in *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico,* eds., G. Joseph and D. Nugent, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994): 355-366.
[17] Roseberry, 361.

analysis will show, those who are most capable of obtaining negotiated agency are the intellectuals within a resistance.

It is important to note that the term intellectual in this analysis is not defined in the normal university or book-smart identification of the term. Instead, the following examination defines intellectuals according to the categories purported by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. For Gramsci, intellectuals are either organic or traditional intellectuals.[18] George Lipsitz provides an interpretative definition of these categories that is worth quoting at length. He suggests:

> Unlike traditional intellectuals, whose support from patrons, universities, and cultural institutions allows detachment from practical life, organic intellectuals learn about the world by trying to change it, and they change the world by learning about it from the perspective of the needs and aspirations of their social group…Organic intellectuals resemble traditional intellectuals in that both manipulate signs and symbols to make the interests of their social group appear synonymous with the interests of all of society.[19]

This description illuminates three central ideas concerning the role of organic and traditional intellectuals in a resistance movement.

First, traditional intellectuals typically emerge from the institutions of the dominant culture. This is not to say, however, that institutional training results in a rote regurgitation of the dominant ideology and perpetuation of the ruling hegemony. As we will see, a number of factors can alter the consciousness of these individuals to such a degree that they ultimately challenge the hegemonic structure that helped create them. Often, this ability to part from their institutionalization is a product of events they experience within a grounded reality. In this sense, the traditional intellectual's contact with 'practical life' radicalizes the individual. Within this contact zone with the outside world a space for resisting the dominant culture is created.

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[18] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks,* ed. and trans. by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, (New York: International Publishers, 1971)
[19] George Lipsitz, *A Life in the Struggle: Ivory Perry and the Culture of Opposition,* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press) 1988, p. 9-10.

Yet, in this process, traditional intellectuals resemble an ethos similar to the organic intellectual in that they are learning about the world by "trying to change it." This suggests that these categories are not bipolar but are a fluid construction that is in constant interaction.

Despite this dynamic, there are two key differences between these categories for intellectuals. First, traditional intellectuals articulate their resistance through their writings, speeches and activism, which ultimately aids in the creation of an oppositional culture. Second, there is a distinct difference between the origins of resistance between these two categories. For instance, in this analysis, traditional intellectuals will emerge from the Catholic Church (Archbishop Oscar Romero), the US Army (Dr. Charles Clements) and the University system in El Salvador (Li'l Milagro Ramírez), while organic intellectuals will originate from the peasant classes in society.

To examine organic intellectuals it is also important to understand why these individual's emergence are critical for creating an oppositional culture. As Gramsci suggests, "all men are intellectuals but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals."[20] In other words, everyone in society possesses an intellect and uses it, but not everyone is an intellectual by social function. In El Salvador, as individuals participated in the revolutionary movement their ability to conceptualize peasant life in an oppressed society awoke their intellectual capability to lead. Reiterating Lipsitz's description, they learned "about the world by trying to change it" and subsequently brought this enlightened perspective to the people of this social group. As a result, they began to aid in the creation of an oppositional culture through their actions, which most of the time consisted of violent resistance. Those who represent this category of intellectual within this analysis will be Magdaleno, the oldest member of the Guazapa guerrilla contingent, and the child soldier Nico.

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[20] Gramsci, 9.

The final idea in need of elaboration is how both traditional and organic intellectuals utilize "signs and symbols to make the interests of their social group appear synonymous with the interests of all of society." In classic Gramscian fashion, Lipsitz purports that the dominant culture exercises power through its ability to manipulate and control communication and culture. Conversely, the opposite is also true. As a counter-hegemonic movement emerges, organic and traditional intellectuals who are able to gain control of the dissemination of information are some of the most critical members of the resistance. Sometimes this information control is on a scale that attracts thousands of followers, while others propagate their ideas through everyday conversations. Granted, the larger the arena the more effective an intellectual can be in gaining support. Yet, there is often a synergy created between these two products. As we will see, a traditional intellectual with massive support, such as Archbishop Romero, brings people together for a cause while the organic intellectual reiterates this dogma. Combining these efforts, these intellectuals create a more viable and passionate member of the resistance. In both cases, however, a tool used by these intellectuals is the construction of a collective memory.

UNDERSTANDING COLLECTIVE MEMORY

To understand how intellectuals utilize collective memory in creating a counter-hegemonic movement, it is necessary to examine the literature on this subject. Based on the seminal work of Durkheimian sociologist Maurice Halbwachs,[21] collective memory is a tool that social groups use to conceptualize the origins of their present needs and desires. As Halbwachs asks, "How can currents of collective thought whose impetus lies in the past be recreated, when we can grasp only the present?"[22] Ultimately, Halbwach's framework reifies memory within a

[21] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, with an introduction by Mary Douglas (New York: Harper-Colophon Books, 1950).
[22] Halbwachs, 80.

social group's present situation. Here, the historian Peter Novick provides an excellent way to conceptualize Halbwachs' ideas. He explains:

> Typically, a collective memory, at least a significant collective memory, is understood to express some eternal or essential truth about the group—usually tragic.[23]

An example he gives of this process is the Jewish memory of Masada, where a group of Jewish exiles committed suicide in order to avoid becoming slaves of the Roman Empire. In this case, Novick explains, the Masada suicide did not exist within the Jewish memory "for almost two thousand years, though the text describing the event was readily available." He attributes this lack of consciousness to the fact that traditional Judaism focused on "survival and holy study rather than on military resistance."[24] Yet, when Zionists in the twentieth century discovered the tragedy at Masada it instantly became a relevant way for understanding their own self-actualization. Indeed, events in the past, especially tragic ones, are an effective rallying cry for the present.

George Lipsitz adds to this discussion when he explains the creation of "counter-memory." In this construction, individuals reevaluate the collective memory purported by the dominant class. Counter-memory thus "focuses on localized experiences with oppression, using them to reframe and refocus dominant narratives purporting to represent a universal experience."[25] To some extent, this dynamic is present in the reemergence of Masada for the Jewish people. Yet, a gray area exists at this conjuncture. After all, who is the dominant culture in this example? Is it the Romans, who were not a threat when Israel became a recognized state? Perhaps, the Jewish people embody the dominant culture and their reclamation of Masada

[23] Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1999), p. 4.
[24] Ibid., 5.
[25] Lipsitz, 213.

justifies their subjugation of the Palestinians. This quagmire raises another critical aspect in grappling with the notion of collective memory.

In examining any social group's use of collective memory, it is essential to emphasize who is introducing this social construction. This is where Halbwachs deters from traditional thoughts on memory. As Novick states, "Freud treats memory as imposed, while Halbwachs treats it as chosen."[26] In the case of the guerrilla insurgency in El Salvador, those who helped create a collective or counter memory were the intellectuals. As Novick suggests, although groups and individuals make choices everyday, "most of us are pretty conformist and take our cues from others." This is an important understanding in the discussion of collective memory as it places the necessity of intellectuals at the center of a movement. After all, if quotidian choices are predicated on an acquiescence to a given groups' tendencies, which typically originate from the dominant ideology, the Gramscian suggestion of hegemonic power maintains control; therefore, to create a counter-hegemonic movement intellectuals must reformulate the dominant paradigms to fit within an oppositional reality.

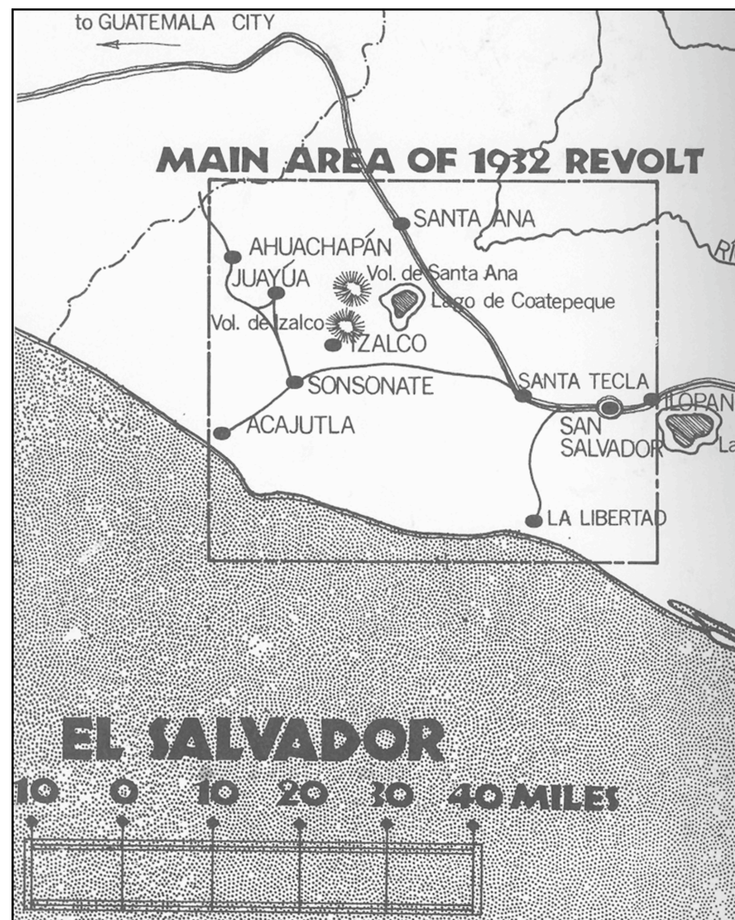
From this suggestion, we ascertain a more precise picture of the role of intellectuals in an insurgency movement. Once an intellectual claims agency via personal and social contestation of the dominant paradigm, this individual creates and spreads a counter-memory to a given group, which then identifies with it and assimilates it into their own collective memory. As Halbwachs states, "while the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember." It is here that Lipsitz is again insightful. According to him, organic intellectuals, in particular, "rely on collective memory—shared experiences and perceptions about the past that legitimate action in the present—and on social learning—experiences with contestation in the present that transform

[26] Novick, 5.

values and goals for the future."[27] Yet, as Lipsitz also suggests, "it is the oppressions of history—of gender, or race, and of class—that make aggrieved populations suspicious of dominant narratives."[28]

1932 LA MATANZA

The most obvious parallel to this discussion of collective memory in El Salvador relates to the 1932 massacre known as La Matanza. As several authors have illustrated, the 1932 massacre of 10,000 peasants, which included mostly indigenous people and at least a third of the Ahuachapan[29] region's adult male population, remains a contested memory for both the left and the right. Yet, to understand the use of this event in collective memory, it is necessary to explain its origins.



The transpiring of events that led to this massacre began with the introduction of the coffee industry in El Salvador. In the 1860s, coffee

[27] Lipsitz, 228.
[28] Ibid., 212.
[29] See Map.

production slowly acquired large tracts of land in the country.[30] The enormous profits resulting from this market transformation allowed an elite oligarchy to rise to power. The "fourteen families,"[31] as Salvadorans refer to them, became an entrenched symbol of power within the government. Unfortunately, for the peasants and indigenous people, coffee was a disastrous enemy. As the historian Thomas Anderson explains:

> Coffee caused an economic upheaval. Coffee was a cash crop. You cannot eat coffee. It has to be processed by the *beneficio,* or coffee-drying plant, to be used at all. You can only exchange it for money and then buy what is needed. Thus, the multicrop economy was replaced by what gradually became a one-crop, cash economy."[32]

Obviously, this metamorphosis from a subsistence lifestyle to dependency on cash crops changed the way peasants, particularly the Pipil natives, functioned in everyday life. Inevitably, like the populist uprisings in the US during the 1920s[33], this dramatic altercation, where a farmer's livelihood depended on wages and not fieldwork, met massive resistance. Then with the Great Depression in 1929, the coffee economy collapsed in El Salvador. By the start of 1930, coffee produces "preferred to let the harvest of 1930 rot in the fields."[34] In addition, plantation owners cut wages as a response to the depression thus inflicting starvation on many of the peasants who no longer held land.

Conveniently, new communist and worker groups were emerging in San Salvador. The Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS) and the Regional Workers Federation (RWF) attempted to

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[30] Although El Salvador had experienced the introduction of several cash crops to the area, first indigo, then cotton and cattle, the coffee industry not only created an elite super class but was also inextricably complicit with the government, which created the foundation for any action by the military. In addition, the harvesting of coffee requires extensive labor thus explaining its employment of several thousand peasants.

[31] Although originally fourteen families created this oligarchy, in reality, it is more. As James Dunkerly suggests, in 1974, "67 family firms exported coffee on a commercial scale while an inner group of 37 enterprises dominated the production of coffee, sugar and cotton." See *The Long War,* p. 7.

[32] Thomas Anderson, *Matanza: El Salvador's Communist Revolt of 1932*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), p. 6.

[33] Similar to the Farmer's Alliance and the emergence of the Socialist Party, farmers challenged by industrialization demanded protection from the elite control of bankers and powerful companies.

[34] Anderson, 8.

garner the support of higher wage labor in central and western El Salvador, but upon their inception into these communities, their ideological exhortations often failed to galvanize massive support. The historian Douglas Kincaid suggests that this was a result of the strict Catholic following many peasants embraced at the time.[35] To circumnavigate this reluctance, the PCS began to examine local issues such as "road repairs, transportation to medical facilities and community insurance schemes."[36] Over time, many peasants and Pipil began to see this new ideology as a means of obtaining the necessary goods to sustain life. As a result, they embraced these organization's propositions.

Then, in 1932, under the revolutionary leadership of Farbundo Martí, who had organized the communist organization Socorro Rojo Internacional (SRI) and fought in Sandino's army, a peasant uprising became imminent. Within days, the entire region of Ahuachapan revolted, attacking military garrisons, plantation owner's homes, and prominent businessmen they blamed for their suffering. After overthrowing this region for three days, the military eventually squashed the rebellion and formed a contingent of death squads that killed thousands of peasants and Pipils residing in the area. Ultimately, this event left a permanent blotch on the collective memory of the Salvadoran people.

Martí (far right) next to Sandino in Nicaragua

The historian Jeffrey Gould explains how La Matanza became a tool used by both the Left and the Right to meet their current needs in his article, "Revolutionary Nationalism and

[35] Douglas Kincaid, "Peasants into Rebels: Community and Class in Rural El Salvador," p 466, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 29: 3 (Cambridge University Press, July 1987).
[36] Kincaid, 477.

Local Memories in El Salvador."[37] According to him, "Both the Left and the Right have long regarded the events of 1932 as pivotal in modern Salvadoran history."[38] On the Left, the most obvious incorporation of La Matanza in their identity is the use of Martí's notoriety in the FMLN namesake (Farbundo Martí Liberation Front). In a more general sense, however, the Left typically points to the extreme repression and indiscriminate massacre of peasants and indigenous people as indicative of the government's affinity for repression. Interestingly, Gould also suggests that the Left has recently altered this interpretation and now view La Matanza as evidence of a government sponsored ethnocide.[39]

Conversely, the Right points to the communist element of this uprising and their subsequent victory as evidence of their commitment to everything that is anticommunist. As Gould states, "the governing elites have successfully placed anticommunism at the center of their nationalist discourse." Indeed, this has been an effective tool for the Right, for as Anderson recalls, "memories of the uprising account for the almost paranoiac fear of communism that has gripped the nation ever since." Despite this machination, the following intellectual portraits will illustrate how some individuals within the insurgency utilized La Matanza in their dialogue.

TRADITIONAL INTELLECTUALS

Archbishop Monsignor Oscar Romero

Perhaps no other figure in El Salvador receives recognition for the revolution like Archbishop Oscar Romero. On the surface, Romero is a traditional intellectual in the strictest sense of the term. After all, he emerged from the Catholic Church and utilized symbols of the dominant hegemony (the official Catholic Church was a professed supporter of the Salvadoran

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[37] Jeffrey Gould, "Revolutionary Nationalism and Local Memories in El Salvador," in *Reclaiming the Political in Latin American History,* ed., G. Joseph, (Duke University Press, 2001), p. 138-171.
[38] Gould, 138.
[39] Ibid., 141.

government). This is why in 1977, the Vatican, with support from the government of El Salvador, ordained Oscar Romero as the Archbishop of San Salvador. To the dismay of progressive clergy at the time, Romero exemplified the traditional ethos of the Catholic Church.

However, on March 23, 1980, the Archbishop denounced his conservative teachings and pleaded for a resolution to the government-sanctioned violence that had come to plague his country. At the end of this world-renowned sermon, he called out to the military and security forces of the right-wing White Warrior Union and officials in the Salvadoran government to stop killing the peasants. As he states:

> I would like to make a special appeal to the men in the army and in particular, to the ranks of the National Guard and the police brothers, we are one people you are killing your own peasant brothers and sisters under the law of god the command thou shall not kill prevails over any human command. In god's name, therefore and in the name of this suffering people who cry loudly to Heaven I implore you, I beg you. I order you in the name of God. Stop the repression.[40]

The next day a group of hired assassins[41] murdered Romero, shooting him while he performed Mass at a church near Santa Miguel.

As a former priest in a poor neighborhood of Panama, Phillip Berryman witnessed this speech first hand. In his book *Liberation Theology*, Berryman recalls the gravity of the situation in El Salvador, and how accusations like the one Romero made in his sermon had the potential for inciting violence. Berryman specifically notes that Romero and his advisors discussed the possible ramifications of accusing the government of murder, and yet, decided that the level of killing in the country had reached an intolerable level making "it necessary despite the risk."[42]

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[40] Quote taken from the film by Peter Chappell, *Remembering Romero,* (New York: First Run Icarus Films, 1992)
[41] Who ordered the assassination of Romero is a controversial topic. Phillip Berryman suggests that they were hired by the government of El Salvador and would latter become members of the *contra* movement in Nicaragua. The sociologist Christian Smith, however, suggests that they were members of the White Warrior Union.
[42] "Although guerilla war was not to break out for many months, the church later documented 588 killings during this month, almost all the work of government and right-wing forces." From Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), p. 2.

On the surface, the fact that a historically conservative bishop radically departed from his beliefs seems puzzling. The sociologist Christian Smith[43] also questions this transformation when he asks, "What could have transpired in those few years to turn the acceptable choice of El Salvador's rich and powerful into one of their greatest enemies?" Ultimately, Smith argues,

> In the months before his assassination, the archbishop had received constant death threats, threats that were authenticated by the murders of many of his priests,[44] close friends, and co-workers.[45]

Smith goes on to point out,

> Romero was influenced by the ideas of a new, peculiarly Latin American way of understanding the meaning of the Christian faith, commonly known as "liberation theology." Although not a leading liberation theologian himself, Romero's *lived experience* in a violent, oppressive, and unjust situation made many of the *ideas* of liberation theology very real to him, transforming his perception and evaluation of the world.[46]

Clearly, liberation theology and the persecution of his clergy forced Romero to confront the practical reality of his followers. The resulting consequence of this confrontation radicalized Romero to such a degree that he began to challenge the dominant hegemony and instill a hope for a more egalitarian future. In this sense, he claimed a negotiated agency in that he denounced the Salvadoran and Catholic hegemony, which long guided his convictions. In fact, he went as far to question the motivation of priests within the Catholic Church who refused to convert to the ideas expressed in Puebla, the second meeting of liberation theologians. He states:

> The documents of Puebla deal explicitly with this issue. They say that in Latin America not all of us are converted to the option for the poor. That's important, because without such a conversation people are continually looking for other explanations. But the message of Puebla to the people of Latin America was not only addressed to the poor it

[43] Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1991), 2.
[44] Many of the authors examined in this reading suggest that the night Romero drove out of the capitol to *Paisnal* to view his first priest's body, Rutilio Grande, signified the point when Romero first took up the plight of the poor. According to these authors, Grande was a target because he defended the peasant's rights to organize farm cooperatives.
[45] Ignacio Martin-Baro, "psicología de la liberación para América Latina," (1990), quoted in Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 1.
[46] Ibid., 3.

> calls on al social classes to adopt he cause of the poor as their own as the cause of Jesus Christ who told us that what we do to others, we do to him. I think it's very simple. We should consider the suffering of the poor as though it was happening to us.[47]

There is little doubt that Romero, trained in the hegemonic language of the dominant class, adhered to the call of liberation theology and believed that it was the only way to end oppression. As he would state, "The gods of power and money are opposed to the Transfiguration [liberation theology]. It's you, Lord, who'll be the first to raise your arm against oppression." Romero believed in the power of faith overcoming oppression, and he shared this belief with the marginalized classes. For this reason, his assassination made him a martyr for the Left and a symbol of hope for the peasant classes.

Many historians agree with this deduction, as they see the assassination of Romero as the straw that broke the camel's back. After all, this event brought many peasants, who were already grappling with Romero's teachings in the ubiquitous Christian base Communities emerging throughout the countryside, to see the plight of the FMLN as a justified action. Moreover, his understanding about the legacy of poverty in Latin America, gave peasants a reason to join the resistance in his name. In this sense, he clearly helped create a counter-memory that emphasized societal injustices as the impetus behind peasants' subjugation. Moreover, as we will see, Romero's teachings infiltrated the guerrilla culture and influenced many of the organic intellectual's own radicalization.

Reactions to Romero:

To further understand the impact of Archbishop Romero on the peasant classes, a documentary titled *Remembering Romero* by Peter Chappell, examines the reactions of a group of young people who had their picture taken with Romero eleven months prior to his assassination. In the comments of two of those present during this photograph, Ligia Barrios

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[47] Chappell, *Remembering Romero*

Pelia and Carlos Miguel Cubias, it is clear that Romero continues to instill hope for a future generation.

In the documentary Pelia reflects on the general peacefulness he experienced in Romero's presence and this continues to give him hope today. Moreover, he gives a detailed assessment of how he felt after learning about Romero's assassination. Although his statement is an individual reaction, it is feasible that his emotion reflects the sentiment felt around the country at the time. He states:

> We used to talk about all the death threats made against him. We knew he was prepared, and not at all worried about it. He said so on many occasions. So we had some idea of what he meant but we never thought it would happen because there is often a gulf between words and deeds. When we heard of it. It was terrible for all of us our reactions were hopelessly inadequate. It was very painful. I don't remember what followed that Monday I cannot, because I lapsed into a kind of crisis.[48]

Picture of Romero from documentary

As Pelia's comments reflect, Romero understood the consequences of his actions but remained resolute in his convictions. In the process, he embodied the hope for creating an alternative society free of oppression and steeped in equanimity.

The other participant interviewed in this documentary, Carolos Miguel Cubias, elaborates on Romero's legacy and how he continues to inspire his actions. He states:

> At times when I'm feeling depressed reading about him, or just remembering him maybe just looking at the photo inspires joy in me a determination to see things from another point of view and understand that I will not be weighed down by my problems. This faith

[48] Chappell, *Remembering Romero*

> remains, it will always remain. It is the very last thing I could ever lose. But it would never happen.[49]

In Cubias' comments, we also see a theological interpretation of Romero and how many of his followers believed that he was the Salvadoran equivalent to Christ.

> That's why we say that just as Christ suffered, here we are suffering each and every Salvadorean and just as Christ died, we are dying—over 70,000 of us. I think his death was like that of Monsignor Romero. He wouldn't let himself be weighed down; we should follow his example.

For Cubias, and many Salvadorans, Romero was a martyr, whose words allowed them to break free from their oppression. Clearly, Romero's use of historical oppression is prevalent in the words of Cubias, as is his legacy as a traditional intellectual for the poor.

Charles Clements, MD

Although not the radicalizing magnet of Romero, the US doctor Charles Clements represents another cadre of the traditional intellectual who emerges from a hegemonic institution. In his actions and words, we see how his experiences with 'practical life' allowed him to claim a negotiated agency and subsequently provide an assurance of morality for the guerrillas he joined.

During the spring of 1968, an aspiring scholar-soldier reported for flight training school at Reese Air Force Base in Lubbock, Texas. Over the next year, Captain Charles Clements trained in the art of flying the "corvettes" of fighter planes. Beginning with the T-41 and ending with the T-38, he became a proficient member of the United States Air Force and ultimately flew C-130s in Vietnam from 1969 to 1970.

In Vietnam, Clements began to confront the reality of his actions. This is evident in his recollection of a conversation with a fellow C-130 pilot, Terry Savery. At the time of their confrontation, Savery was applying for conscientious objector (CO) status, which provoked Clements to question the motive behind such an action. After a bout of cogent assaults from

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[49] Ibid.

both sides, Savery "caught [Clements] off guard when he brought up Dwight Eisenhower," a hero to both Clements and his parents. Terry's argument purported:

> Ike had said we couldn't allow free elections in Vietnam, because Ho Chi Minh would sweep them…and since that amazing concession…we had slogged on in the path of the French, killing hundreds of thousands of nationalist who rather than being a strategic threat to us were merely trying to rid their country of hated foreign influence.[50]

According to Clements, "This was the first time I'd been forced to articulate something I'd always taken for granted."[51]

Over the course of the next three years, Clements confronted a reality that challenged his convictions further. He understood that Nixon lied to the public about the US presence in Laos, he knew of the secretive nature of Cambodian bombings, and he became aware of the increasing anti-war protests that radicalized thousands of students in the US. Eventually, Clements filed for CO status, which the US Army reacted to by admitting him to an insane asylum for psychological evaluation.

After a year in the mental institution, Clements converted to the non-violent belief system endorsed by the Quaker religion and applied to medical school. Then on leave from medical school, the former Vietnam pilot came face to face with the violence of poverty in a sojourn to India. There, Clements recalls, he learned patience and sensitivity for the poor, understandings that served him extensively when he became a medical doctor in the guerrilla encampment of Guazapa. He explains this understanding succinctly as he discusses the problematic nature of foreign aid. He states:

> High-yield strains of wheat and other grains are fine, if you can afford the fertilizers to make them grow and the pesticides to save them from insects. Gasoline motors to power irrigation systems are an improvement over ox power only if you can afford the fuel. Birth control

[50] Clements, 73.
[51] Ibid.

pills make sense as an appropriate, low-tech method, but until a woman's fear of abandonment in old age is conquered, she will continue to have children.[52]

It is here, that we see Clement's thoroughly questioning the dominant narrative and claiming a negotiated agency. No longer does he view the world through the hegemonic institution of the US Army, instead he sees reality through the institution of poverty, which in turn acts as a radicalizing force in his life.

Thirteen years after leaving the military, Clements dedicated a year of his life helping the peasants and guerrillas of El Salvador fight against a repressive government funded by his own country. In a very literal way, Clements utilized the signs and symbols associated with western medicine as a way to bring moral righteousness to the guerrillas of El Salvador. Looking at a few statements from his patients reveals his impact on the guerrilla culture.

First, there is the comandante of Guazapa, Raul Hercules. Explaining the significance of the revolution to Clements, he informs him that, "this is an authentic revolution as yours was."[53] Identifying with the American Revolution illustrates how this guerrilla understood that their motives were similar to those who fought in the United States; therefore, instead of opposing their action the US should support them. Although Clements did not suggest this, his presence clearly reiterated the validity of this individual's beliefs.

Then there was Jasmine, Clements Salvadoran counterpart in Guazapa. After receiving $10,000 worth of medical supplies from the medical community in the US she told Clements, "Your North American friends have sent us a great present."[54] Clements explains that this gesture "made a deep impression upon Jasmine as well as the health workers" for it was a message of life and hope delivered by the American people. "Compared to the daily messages of

[52] Clements, 98.
[53] Clements, 123.
[54] Clements, 138.

death" they were receiving from the US government, Clements states, this was a welcome sign. For in this package sat a symbol of humanity's solidarity with their cause. Moreover, it allowed these Salvadorans' to separate the US government from its citizens.

Indeed, Dr. Charles Clements provided an invaluable service to those he helped in El Salvador not only in a practical sense but also in a metaphorical way. His courage to resist the dominant narrative emerged from his own experience of oppression, which translated into a radicalizing historical memory. In his biography, he often reflects on this memory as a means of justifying his actions in El Salvador. In this sense, he is a manifestation of Halbwachs' discussion of collective memory in that his memory of oppression justified his need for social justice. More importantly, Clements gave validity to the guerrilla insurgency and helped fortify an egalitarian culture open to inclusion. In other words, he encouraged the belief that there is a separation between the government of the US and its people.

Lil Milagro Ramírez

Adding a new dynamic to the traditional intellectual, Lil Milagro Ramírez introduces gender into the equation of radicalization. Her testimony of strength, courage, and defiance in the face of imminent tragedy is an allegory for the middle-class youth that joined the movement. Not only did she challenge the gender roles of machismo, domesticity, and the general acquiescence of women, but she chastised anyone who did not follow their convictions. In the process, she claimed a negotiated agency, which emerged, in part, from her training in the hegemonic institution of Academia but also from her parent's teachings. Moreover, her understanding of historical Latin American oppression and her ability to articulate this to a broader audience served as a guiding light for many who joined the revolution.

Although Ramírez was a voracious writer during the revolution, this analysis focuses on her journey to a radical consciousness, which is evident in a letter she wrote to her father in the summer of 1971[55], nine years before the civil war began. In this letter, we see the internal struggle Ramírez encountered as she debated between leaving her family and joining the revolution or repeating the "errors of the past" by becoming a lawyer of the dominant class. For this chosen path she explains, "Father, I am no longer able to be a hypocrite." Interestingly, although she recalls a lack of communication between her and her parents, which she attributes to a "political ripening," she is adamant about explaining to them why she chose such a difficult path. In part, this is due to the fact, as she suggests, that the legacy of resistance her parents taught her molded her into the person she has become. As she explains:

Portrait of Lil Milagro Ramírez

> For me, life has given so much, a home, an intelligence, and parents that morally shaped me and placed me on the cultural road of instruction, who taught me to love the truth and value justice. They showed me that money nor material comforts are what makes a person.[56]

Yet, although her parent's influence shaped her current understanding of the world, she claims a negotiated agency through her awareness of the past. She asks the question, "How many times have I in the University, at rallies, on radio programs and in personal conversations identified that there was a fight to join, one that is in the

[55] Lil Milagro Ramírez, "Carta de Lil Milagro Ramírez, en la que explica las rezones que la obligaron a clandestinizarse," reprinted in El Diario de Hoy, Monday, July 14, 2003.
[56] Ramírez, 1a

mold of El Che and Camilo[57]?" This identification with these Latin American revolutionaries indicates how her incorporation of historical oppression reinforced her belief in violent resistance. In addition, she sites how her mother taught her to "admire and love" the great American liberator Simón Bolívar, another indication of how she values her parent's wisdom.[58]

Still, her words indicate that she is content with her choice to participate in the revolution and challenges others to act upon their convictions. She states:

> But words are not enough when one is sincere and truly believes in what she says and admires the work of those who have lived their thoughts. Although the sacrifices are large and painful, I will not deny how hard it is to be separated from you and everything I loved, especially during birthdays, anniversaries, family reunions which united us, I am sincere and I confess to stay. Otherwise, I would be cowardly ignoring the voice of my conscience and shielded in my comforts.[59]

She goes on to suggest that too many students in the University "passing their youth shouting and protesting" eventually "embrace the establishment and yield to the errors of the past."[60] It is here that we see Ramírez conceptualization of the hegemonic structures, which hinder social justice and perpetuate the dominant narrative. Again, she is claiming a negotiated agency, and using the symbol of the University as a way to create a new understanding for the people.

Clearly, Ramírez left a radicalizing mark on society. The simple fact that this letter appeared in a widely distributed newspaper in El Salvador suggests that she challenged the dominant narrative utilizing her understanding of historical oppression, to such a degree, that she became a permanent fixture in the broader culture. Although later research will examine the influence of her words by looking at the literature she wrote while imprisoned by the Salvadoran

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[57] Camilo Torres was a Colombian priest who took up arms after he lost faith in the Catholic Church's ability to create social justice.
[58] Ramírez, 1a.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.

National Guard, the following poem written by a guerrilla in the insurgency is a testament to her profound impact.

SHADOWED BY A BLOSSOMING GIRL
A poet says that Lil opens the daytime doors
so we all may enter,
her poetry is like the people: creative,
when she dreams an angel lowers his eyes
and when children cry Lil shares her smile
the light and the whole world.
She writes freedom from the dark cell
she sees everything and touches it silently like a child
we poor drink from her bounty, her exile from this life
usurped by blood and fire
we learn to love her in each skirmish
she is the perennial daybreak in our heats.
--Alfonso Hernández[61]

ORGANIC INTELLECTUALS

As mentioned earlier, the primary difference between organic intellectuals and traditional intellectuals are their origins of resistance and the medium they use to communicate. Because of this difference, the following portraits of organic intellectuals reflect their emergence from a peasant class and the transmission of their beliefs through conversational anecdotes.

Magdaleno

In nineteen tapes of documentary footage provided by a film crew from the US who infiltrated the guerrilla encampment of Guazapa in 1981, one of the more fascinating characters who emerge is the 62-year-old Magdaleno. Known as El Anciano (the ancient one) by his comrades, Magdaleno tells of a past littered with violence, repression, and torture. As a witness to his father's execution during La Matanza, Magdaleno formed a reluctant stance towards joining an uprising, clearly substantiating how the Right created a collective memory of La Matanza based on anticommunism. Yet, despite this reluctance, the harshness of reality as a

[61] Alfonso Hernández, "Shadowed By A Blossoming Girl," in Claribel Alegría and Darwin J. Flakoll, ed. and trans., *On the Front Line: Guerrilla Poems of El Salvador*, (Willimantic: Curbstone Press, 1989), p. 8.

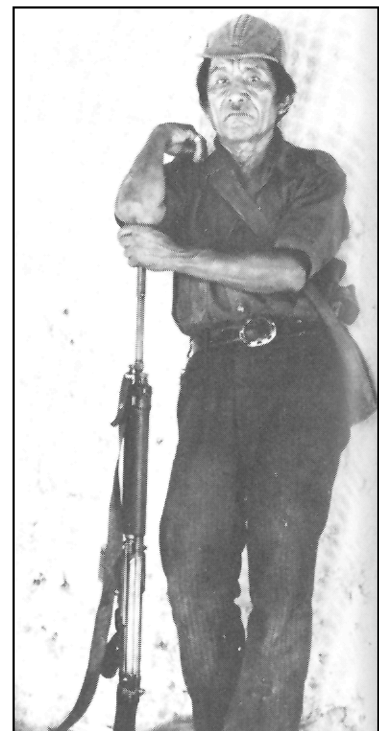
peasant directed him to an educational meeting conducted by the Federation of Christian Peasants (FCP). Although not directly associated with the FMLN, members of the FCP occasionally organized strikes against unfair wage practices and campesino rights in El Salvador's past. For this reason, the Salvadoran government outlawed the organization in 1965.

Tragically, the National Guard learned of Magdelno's presence at this meeting and although he had not joined, soldiers imprisoned him for three nights where he was subsequently castrated during questioning.[62] Despite this atrocity, Magdaleno remained reluctant to join the revolution. Conflicted with this dilemma Magdaleno sought out the council of Archbishop Oscar Romero in 1979. In Romero's presence, Magdaleno explained,

> I am very troubled. I can no longer feed or clothe or educate my children. I may soon be arrested and 'disappeared.' I feel it is just that I join the people's struggle, but I am also a Catholic.[63]

According to Magdaleno, Romero responded to this predicament by saying it was also a crime to let his children starve. Although he did not blatantly endorse violence, Romero admitted that it was not a sin to defend his family from starvation. After receiving this council, Magdaleno received the tools to claim a negotiated agency and resist the anticommunist narrative he previously understood. In the process, Magdaleno began to create a counter-memory of La Matanza based on his need to justify participating in the insurgency. As he explains:

> I told my companera this is like a legacy because my grandfather was one of those who fought when I was young and we have now taken his place. I joined the people's struggle because of the injustices that I saw. We didn't have money for our families nor food for our children or for clothing or their education.[64]



Magdaleno stands guard.

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[62] Clements, 171.
[63] Clements, 170-171.

In these comments, we see, again, a manifestation of Halbwachs ideas in that Magdaleno utilized the tragedy of the past to meet his present needs. Yet, it is bluntly clear that starvation and love for his family was the primary impetus for his incorporation.

Still, in the documentary footage of Magdaleno, it is obvious that his knowledge about La Matanza becomes part of the collective memory of the group. Frequently citing his experience and his father's involvement in the 1932 uprising, younger members begin to acquire this into their own memory, which then creates a collective memory based on Magdaleno's perceived wisdom.

The Child Intellectual

As this essay began, children were a central concern to the insurgency. In the documentary footage examined for this analysis, leaders, women, farmers, priests, and doctors repeatedly point to children as the casualties of an unjust society and the impetus for their struggle.

Yet, children were also critical for the insurgency's survival. For example, many of the children acted as messengers between regions. In this capacity, children received strategic messages from one region's commander and then deliver it to a nearby village. Moreover, the culture of the guerrilla encampments reinforced a child's role in the revolution. For instance, in the documentary footage, we see a leader giving a speech to the children before an everyday soccer game. He explains in this speech the children's role in the insurgency today and their importance for the future. He states:

Sometimes we have to go into the line of fire, where our companeros are. We must do this, the war demands this of us. Right now, we are messengers tomorrow we will be in the militia and the day after we may be combatants, which is what we all want to be. If some day we have to give up our lives, we will be following the example of companero Picho. He gave his life with

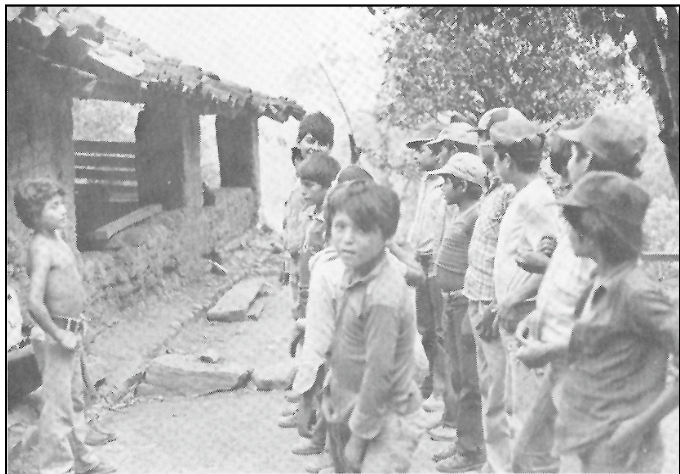
[64] Deshler, tape 9.

great courage. For companero Picho, one moment of silence. [Students raise their left hand in silence][65]

In many regards, this speech is nothing more than propaganda directed towards children. Still, it emphasizes how this guerilla encampment actively created its own culture.

Although many children did not actively participate in the insurgency, there were exceptions. The child known as Nico, for instance, not only provided messenger support for the insurgency but also symbolized a new generation of combatants for the future. Only twelve years old, this child's experience of violence drew him to the revolution. As he recalls:

> My mother was grinding corn one day when the death squad came. They grabbed her by the hair and took her to the patio. Put her face down I was hiding behind a chair they had her there about five minutes then they put two bullet in her head from there they left downhill they left over the river, the one we call Lempa. They said they were going to kill me if they found me there again. But…they never came back. They left for another post. I want to be a combatant so that I can fight against them. I want to see one of them from the death squads again. I want to avenge the blood of my mama.[66]



Nico addresses fellow messengers.

As his statements illustrate, it is difficult to separate vengeance from agency. For this reason, it is not logical to say that Nico experienced a moment where he claimed a negotiated agency. However, his experiences clearly radicalized this child soldier. In this sense, his historical memory, although short, guided him towards another path.

More importantly, Nico had a profound impact on many of the people within this community. In this sense, Nico embodies the role of an organic intellectual learning about the

[65] Deshler, tape 2.
[66] Deshler, tape 2.

world through the lens of the guerrilla culture and helping others conceptualize the needs and aspirations of their social group. Consider, for example, a statement made by an insurgency leader in regards to Nico. He states:

> Nico could symbolize all Salvadoran children who at times in the revolutionary war must pick up a weapon. They do it not because they are products of television or the adventures of super heroes that the ideology of US imperialism instills in us, but because they have to survive a repression so brutal that it doesn't respect any age.[67]

Without a doubt, Nico's actions embody the ethos of an organic intellectual in that he is a reflection of the community that supports him. In this sense, Nico laid a layer of foundation for the creation of an oppositional culture.

FORESHADOWING THE COUNTER-HEGEMONIC CULTURE

Up to this point, this examination has argued that intellectuals and their ability to claim a negotiated agency from a culturally hegemonic system and then articulate this to the masses laid a foundation for the creation of an oppositional culture. At times, these intellectuals utilized their personal historical memory as a means of justification and radicalization. In other examples, it was the ability of these intellectuals to identify with historical oppression that preceded their radicalization. Nevertheless, in each case, these intellectuals contributed to the overall collective memory of the insurgency, which in turn radicalized others, particularly the peasant class. This is not to suggest that these intellectual's words were the only foundation for a counter-hegemonic culture to emerge. As Nico and Magdaleno of the organic intellectuals clearly illustrate, personal violence, among other things, gave individuals the tools to resist the dominant culture.

On a side note, it is important to acknowledge that the significance of this cultural emergence existed primarily within the formative years of the insurgency. Unfortunately, as the

[67] Deshler, tape 3

FMLN and the insurgency confronted a more sophisticated and organized military complex, the tactics used within the rear guard evolved. In particular, the guerrillas began forcefully recruiting individuals for the insurgency and neglected to indoctrinate them into their way of thinking. This analysis is not suggesting that the FMLN is the manifestation of a benevolent despot. Instead, it was an insurgency, first and foremost, that desired to gain power through violence. In the mold of the Cuban revolution of 1959 and Sandinista revolution of 1979, the FMLN believed that the only way to power was through violence. In fact, as José Bracamonte points out, the Salvadoran government offered the FMLN participation in the political process in 1982,[68] and yet they chose not to accept this compromise.

Nevertheless, the construction of a guerrilla identity, predicated on the articulation of intellectuals, opened an incipient space for creating an alternative culture. Although not explicitly stated, leaders within this movement understood the importance of creating this oppositional culture in order to galvanize support. As a captured FMLN document states:

> The guerrilla units base their action on a political military concept in which the ties with the masses are the vital element for survival, for fighting and for expansion. In the organization and integration of the masses is founded the support base, the intelligence, the subsistence, and above all, the growth of new guerrilla units.[69]

Yet, despite this concerted effort, the FMLN never obtained massive popular support. In fact, during the presidential elections in 1994, 69 percent of the population rejected the FMLN candidate for president.

Of course, election results are not always indicative of a movement's popular support, but this is beyond the scope of this analysis. This is just to suggest that when looking at the creation of a guerrilla culture, one must be aware that the insurgency did not create an alternative culture

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[68] Bracamonte, 11.
[69] Max Manwaring and Court Prisk, *El Salvador at war: an oral history,* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1988), p. 127.

persuasive enough to galvanize massive support among the people of El Salvador. In fact, scholars such as Bracamonte suggest that lack of public support was one of the reasons the insurgency "failed." Yet, the challenge that this alternative culture produced for the hegemonic ruling class was profound enough to alter the direction of the future trajectory this tiny country would experience. As one FMLN commander in Hugh Bryne's examination of the revolution suggests, "more than 95 percent of the guerrilla combatants were from the peasantry by the end of the war, as were four out of every five intermediate military commanders."[70] This elucidates the fact that although the insurgency did not gain broad public support it was indeed an attractive alternative for the marginalized classes.

Today, the FMLN is a political participant in a democratic society that is no longer in direct complicity with an elite oligarchy. In this sense, the intellectuals introduced a different road towards progress that is simultaneously opposed to and part of the dominant culture. Yet, as the picture on the right portrays, intellectuals like Romero and Martí remain within the collective memory of the people of El Salvador. Whether it was the actions of a priest dedicated to the poor, or the ability to reclaim the memory of a leftist revolutionary, it is difficult to deny that these intellectuals became forefathers of an oppositional culture.

Mural outside of San Salvador with Romero portrayed on the far left and Martí on the far right.

[70] Bryne, 35.

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