

The Trauma of “Peace”: Re-membering Icon, Image and Narrative in El Salvador, 2009-2019.

By

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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This dissertation, “The Trauma of “Peace”: Re-membering Icon, Image and Narrative in El Salvador, 2009-2019” interrogates how memory and trauma show up in the cultural production in three different contextual frames; in state funded public works and iconography, in privately funded art, and finally, in two recent novels by Salvadoran authors. Specifically, I examine the role of memory in postwar El Salvador through the cultural production tied to the Democratic transition from 2009-2019. This thesis makes a number of significant contributions to existing scholarship on the cultural production of postwar El Salvador. The first is that El Salvador’s postwar cultural production responds to the trauma of “peace,” that is, the silence, impunity and amnesty that were a condition of the Peace Accords. This study draws attention to the fact that El Salvador’s “peace” was signed on the condition of amnesties without meaningful accountability for wartime atrocities. I contend that “peace” introduced a second traumatic loss following the original trauma of war. Another important contribution proposed here is that the cultural production is engaged in the process of “working through” trauma. In comparison with existing scholarship that characterizes the postwar cultural production as disenchanting, self-destructive, cynical and evasive, this thesis attributes these to being markers of a generalized

social trauma. A common thread running throughout this dissertation is the notion that artists and writers are taking on the work of piecing back the mosaic of collective memory, from the rubble and ashes of silence, impunity and trauma. Instead of re-presenting the past for the sake of reconstructing historical events or to express a cynical and self-destructive attitude, I argue that these artists and writers re-present the past to process the secondary trauma of silence and official forgetting. Through the cultural production, they interrupt silences surrounding the past and make traumatic experiences visible. This assertion rejects readings of the postwar cultural production as inherently cynical and self-destructive and suggests that while it may exhibit these characteristics, that these tendencies are not an endpoint in themselves. Instead, they serve as evidentiary benchmarks that the process of working through trauma is underway.

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Introduction: “Harmony of Our People”

“The absence of an empathetic listener, or more radically, the absence of an addressable other, an other who can hear the anguish of one's memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness, annihilates the story.”

— Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub

(In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*)

El Salvador has a bloody history. In the most recent war (1980-1992) 75,000 civilians were killed by the armed forces and death squads. While the role of the Church in El Salvador's history is exceedingly complicated, during the 1970's and 1980's the religious community became one of the most vocal and prominent advocates for the Salvadoran civilian population. As a result of their defense of the poor the Church suffered the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero in 1980, the murder and rape of four U.S. churchwomen, and a massacre of Jesuit priests. Archbishop Romero's Sunday sermons, where he listed human rights abuses and demanded an end to state sponsored violence, were broadcast live around the country to people in every home listening to his homily on tabletop radios. The military plastered the slogan “Be a patriot, kill a priest” on many walls as they roamed the country killing and torturing anyone suspected of being a dissident, indicating that religious workers who sided with the country's poor were a target.¹ This history is the reason that it was so controversial when ecclesiastical

¹ See Hajek 2018.

authorities destroyed one of the most visible Salvadoran memorials referencing the unity of the Church and the rural poor masses and had it removed from the facade of the Cathedral of San Salvador.

Fernando Llorc's "Harmony of Our People" was a massive mosaic installed on the façade of the Metropolitan Cathedral in 1997 and destroyed on January 1, 2012. The highly charged images of campesinos, horses, crops and birds of peace, bridge contemporary architecture with traditional indigenous and Christian iconography. "Harmony of our People" references the Church's polemical history of commitment to the marginalized peoples of El Salvador, to social justice and their stance against state repression. During the 1970's and 1980's the Metropolitan Cathedral was a frequent site of anti-government protests and today Archbishop Oscar Romero, is buried in its catacombs. The Cathedral is steeped in local mythology, symbolism and collective memory and is located in the historic and cultural downtown district.

In December of 2012 the Church announced that the Cathedral needed renovation and in the midst of this process came the surprise disappearance of Fernando Llorc's mural, then in the process of being designated a national historic landmark. The Archdiocese claimed that the mural needed to be removed to protect pedestrians from the potential of damaged falling tiles. However, the prevailing popular perception is that the Archdiocese was making an excuse to explain their actions of erasing the historic and political symbolism of the site.

In her groundbreaking analysis *Literature in the Ashes of History*, Cathy Caruth outlines how traumatic experiences such as those of El Salvador's most recent war are often followed by a secondary loss; that of disappearing from the historical record (x). Trauma can "disappear" from the historical record for numerous reasons. There may not be survivors to bear witness and give testimony, there may be something about the testimony that makes the trauma

incomprehensible to another person, documentation might have been destroyed or missing or there may not be an empathetic listener who is willing to hear and acknowledge the testimony. Today, for example, the Metropolitan Cathedral is a living document of the past that is hauntingly whitewashed and plain. Its unadorned exterior reflects a modern aesthetic that no longer references the history and memory that many still associate with the place. If anything, the clean façade seems to reflect the country's ongoing culture of silence and impunity. Just months after the Peace Accords were signed in 1992 a blanket amnesty whitewashed the human rights violations of the war preventing trials from taking place and shielding individuals from criminal accountability.

During fieldwork in El Salvador in June and July of 2013, I was struck by several representations of the Metropolitan Cathedral in the cultural production that seemed to resuscitate images of The Cathedral's original facade "Harmony of Our People." One public mural, Antonio Bonilla's *Alegoría de la guerra civil y los Acuerdos de Paz*, depicts key images from El Salvador's most recent war; Archbishop Romero at the center, the capital city's emblematic Salvador del Mundo monument, the signing of the Peace Accords, and the Metropolitan Cathedral with Fernando Llorca's "Harmony of our People" still intact. In Jorgelina Cerritos' play *Audiencia de los confines: Primer ensayo de la memoria* (2014), characters piece together the broken tiles of Llorca's mural as a symbol of the recuperation of collective memory. Llorca's mosaic mural returned again briefly to the facade of the Metropolitan Cathedral in 2018 when multiple artists and activist groups projected the mosaic onto the historic facade, image-mapping the past onto the plain blank and now featureless face of the Cathedral.² As Elizabeth Jelin writes, "la memoria es obstinada, no se resigna a quedar en el pasado, insiste en su presencia"

²See Tercer Intento 2018.

(2), suggesting that the artistic production pushes back against attempts at silencing traumatic memory. Indeed, re-presentations of Llorca's "Harmony of Our People" in art recreate local referents, reinstalling the culture and history of the Metropolitan Cathedral. At the same time, these art interventions challenge the destruction of the Cathedral facade and resist attempts to silence the charged history of the place. Each work returns to the past as if driven to repeat remembered scenes and play them out again, as Sigmund Freud contends that people often do when it comes to trauma. This type of reliving and replaying, Freud reasons in his 1920 essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," is an attempt to gain mastery and control over experiences that leave wounds often so emotionally and psychologically painful that they are difficult to cope with, process and that do not allow people to move on.

During the development phase of my research proposal I surveyed public perceptions of Antonio Bonilla's public mural *Alegoría de la guerra civil y los Acuerdos de Paz*. I wanted to find out what the images and symbols from El Salvador's history communicated to its viewers in the postwar era.³ To examine the impact of nearly thirty years of postwar silence and impunity, I conducted interviews focused around detail images of Bonilla's CIFCO mural. My aim during this exploratory phase was to engage memory and allow the sources to re-member the past. I purposefully interviewed people of varying ages, with different political associations and

³ Scholars working on Central America including Roque Baldovinos, Beatriz Cortez, Wener Mackenbach and Alexandra Wallner have called into question the validity of that term "postwar" when it comes to the most recent cultural production. Some critics propose that "postwar" is a category imposed on cultural production from a temporal mode that defines time in terms of politics. They posit that using the term suggests that political processes show up automatically and directly in cultural processes. For my purposes in this study I use "postwar" keeping in mind a few qualifiers about the term. Here I use it not to mark a point on a historical timeline, but rather to highlight a radical change in the social logic from that of a divided nation to a collective national program. The conceptual marker of "postwar" becomes relevant in considering how individual and collective memories are represented in the cultural production.

different connections to the war. Using the mural as a prompt, the Salvadorans I interviewed readily narrated, re-membered and re-presented the past in each mural detail image and explained how they made sense of the history depicted there. People identified key individuals and historical scenes and also talked about the causes and consequences of war. This exploratory research suggested the existence of multiple layers of memory; a thriving collective memory as well as more traumatic taboo memories that were silenced in public. It is interesting to note that people were able to code-switch between these memories and moved easily between a dominant Historical narrative and what they actually remembered or subscribed to in the collective memory of the war. The importance of the interview subject as mediator of the images cast new light on the representation of memory in the postwar; like the ancestral knowledge stored in codices and image based manuscripts read and interpreted by the ancient Aztec Tlamatini, the cultural production is an archive that depends on individuals who are willing and able to read the images and interpret them for a public who is ready to listen. At the same time, there was a clear disjuncture between images and scenes in the mural and what people said they remembered about the war. There were also moments that people grew silent and remembered privately, not sharing these parts of the past. This exploratory research development process, therefore, led me to interpret the cultural production as an ambiguous archive and storehouse for both the memories and the silences of the most recent war.

The main objective of my research is not to reconstruct an original image of past events, but rather to examine how memory is signified, re-presented and erased in El Salvador's postwar cultural production. To this end, this dissertation identifies the points of tension between official processes of forgetting and the cultural production's insistence on re-presenting the past. While legal amnesties, impunity and the nearly thirty years of postwar history have silenced much of

the collective memory surrounding the most recent war, artists and writers continually insist upon its existence through the cultural production. This dissertation outlines the way traumatic experience is both silenced and re-presented in the cultural field. This study challenges the notion that the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to elicit victim testimonies of war-time trauma led to social restoration and reconciliation. Instead, I argue that the fact that this work was immediately followed by amnesties that snuffed out the possibility of meaningful accountability for wartime atrocities introduced a second traumatic loss following the original trauma of war. This is important because many contemporary Salvadoran artists and writers did not experience the war directly, but they have come of age in a society conditioned by the second state sponsored trauma of impunity. For this reason, they employ the cultural production as a place and means for pushing back against efforts to silence and deny the past as well as to protest current social conditions and forms of violence.

Each of the artists and writers featured in this dissertation represents the impact of the war and, more specifically, of trauma, silence and impunity on postwar society. As such, my focus is in large part on the impact of the war on the present. I have chosen this contemporary focus on trauma and the silence surrounding it because of the way trauma has been overlooked or underdeveloped as a critical framework in current scholarship on El Salvador. Many studies have examined the postwar cultural production, but trauma itself has rarely been considered directly as having had a meaningful impact on postwar culture. Trauma is the proverbial elephant in the room that, to my knowledge, no one seems to be addressing explicitly. For example, Beatriz Cortez has proposed a sensibility of “disenchantment” common in much of the postwar cultural production and identifies this tone as “cynicism” in contrast with the utopian tone that had previously characterized revolutionary processes (24): “Al hablar de sensibilidad de

posguerra me refiero a una sensibilidad que ya no expresa esperanza ni fe en los proyectos revolucionarios utópicos e idealistas que circularon en toda centroamérica durante la mayor parte de la segunda mitad del siglo XX”(25). This aesthetic of cynicism, Cortez argues, gives way to the formation of a precarious subjectivity that is made possible by its own self-destruction, dismembering and suicide (25). In other words, Cortez is interested in the aesthetic of cynicism as a counterproductive reaction to a failed project, “una trampa que constituye la subjetividad por medio de la destrucción del ser a quien constituye como sujeto” (26). Cynicism as a critical frame and lens leaves trauma out of the conversation, even though trauma is often the originating experience that alters a person's views of the world and self-image that can lead to a cynical outlook.

Salvadoran writer Horacio Castellanos Moya offers a provocative example of this in his novel *El asco: Thomas Bernhard en San Salvador* (1997). I am focusing on this text because it has been described by critics as the most representative example of postwar disillusionment and cynicism (Arias 23). The book is an eighty-three page diatribe in which the paranoid and neurotic main character, Edgardo Vega, is forced to return to El Salvador and rails against all aspects of Salvadoran culture. Suspicious and terrified of his countrymen, he sees everywhere “guys who were no doubt torturers and participated in massacres during the civil war.” Every bus driver, football player, and bartender is, to Vega, complicit in the most horrible war crimes. He doesn't stop, though, with accusing citizens of El Salvador. It is their culture, too, their dietary habits, their prejudices, and their leisure activities that are responsible for the war's atrocities. In the end, Vega denies his own name and Salvadoran heritage and takes on a new identity as a Canadian citizen named Thomas Bernhard. I contend that the framework of self-destructive cynicism that Beatriz Cortez proposes does not alone account for the extreme nature of Vega's

neurotic and paranoid reactions to people, society, politics and the culture of his native country. Vega's attitude and behavior pushes beyond self-destructive cynicism crossing over into the kind of neurosis that Freud reasons in his 1920 essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," signals trauma and emotional shock.

This study advances the idea that what Cortez calls cynicism may perhaps be part of an expression of trauma. Edgardo Vega characterizes the kind of psychosocial trauma that Jesuit scholar and socio-psychologist Ignacio Martín Baró identifies in the Salvadoran population. In 1989, a few months before he himself became a victim of a military massacre on the UCA grounds in San Salvador, Martín Baró published an article in which he highlights the effects of the prolonged violent war and "psychosocial destruction" and "dehumanized relationships" of the Salvadoran population: "The human nature of the 'enemies' is denied; one rejects the possibility of any constructive interaction with them, seeing them as something one would like to destroy. The indefinite prolongation of the war in El Salvador presumes the normalization of these kinds of dehumanized relationships, whose impact on people ranges from somatic stress to the rending of mental structures and the weakening of the personality, which can find no way of authentically affirming its own identity" (Baró 16). Martín Baró's description of the cognitive and behavioral changes caused by trauma parallel the attitudes and behaviors of Edgardo Vega. Among these are clinging to prejudices, absolutism, idealization, ideological rigidity, evasive skepticism, paranoid defensiveness, hatred and the desire for revenge (Baró 14). To describe these as symptoms of as evidence of self-destructive cynicism, I argue, is only the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

At the same time, the trauma that Edgardo Vega embodies is characteristic of that of the larger Salvadoran society and culture. While the state mandated legal amnesties, it is the citizens

themselves, through their own denial and evasion, that must uphold a culture in which impunity is possible. In the particular case of El Salvador literary critic Misha Kokotovic argues that the postwar cultural production exposes the kinds of denial and evasiveness that are characteristic of trauma. In an analysis focused on the work of Claudia Hernández, Kokotovic describes how characters are isolated by their memories because of a culture of not talking about the past: “In many of the stories included in *Mediodía de frontera*, individuals are left to deal privately, on their own, with the legacy of wartime violence. The persistent effects of the disappearance and torture practiced by the Salvadoran state during the war are hidden within the domestic sphere and depoliticized by making them a private rather than public responsibility. In some stories, individuals’ attempts to internalize the costs of restoring peace without addressing the structural violence that led to war, lead to acts of self-mutilation and even suicide” (Kokotovic 56). What Kokotovic calls “evasion” can also be understood as a literary strategy that expresses trauma. Similarly, in an analysis of crimes and the stories told about it in postwar El Salvador, anthropologist Ellen Moodie observes that in the years after the 1992 peace accords the state switched the way violence was to be interpreted, such that it now appeared as merely the result of common crime. This attempt to depoliticize violence only worked because Salvadorans were willing to forget, or to use Moodie’s term, to “un-know,” El Salvador’s history of inequality, social injustice and structural violence that led to war and today still keep the majority of the population marginalized, impoverished, and criminalized (Moodie 173).

Expanding on this scholarship, my project proposes a new lens and framework for exploring the cultural production of postwar El Salvador that promises a deeper understanding of how psychosocial trauma is represented in the cultural production of El Salvador. This aim here is to interrogate how memory and trauma show up in the cultural production in three different

contextual frames; in state funded public works and iconography, in privately funded art, and finally, in two recent novels by Salvadoran authors. Specifically, this dissertation examines the role of memory in postwar El Salvador through the cultural production tied to the Democratic transition from 2009-2019. My study begins in 2009 because it is a year that shifted the politics of memory with the election of the FMLN presidential candidate Mauricio Funes and the transition of power after 20 years from the conservative right-wing ARENA party.

This thesis makes several significant contributions to existing scholarship on the cultural production of postwar El Salvador. The first main contribution is that El Salvador's postwar cultural production responds to the trauma of "peace," that is, the silence, impunity and amnesty that were a condition of the Peace Accords. This thesis draws attention to the fact that El Salvador's "peace" was signed on the condition of amnesties with no meaningful accountability for wartime atrocities. I contend that "peace" introduced a second traumatic loss following the original trauma of war. Another important contribution proposed here is that the cultural production of the postwar is engaged in the process of "working through" trauma. In comparison with existing scholarship that characterizes the postwar cultural production as disenchanting, self-destructive, cynical and evasive, this thesis attributes these to being markers of a generalized social trauma. A common thread running throughout this dissertation is the notion that the people involved in producing culture are taking on the work of piecing back the mosaic of collective memory, from the rubble and ashes of silence, impunity and trauma. Instead of representing the past for the sake of reconstructing historical events or to express a cynical and self-destructive attitude, I argue that these artists re-present the past to process the secondary trauma of silence and official forgetting. Through the cultural production, artists and writers interrupt silences surrounding the past and make traumatic experiences visible. This assertion

rejects readings of the postwar cultural production as inherently cynical, self destructive and evasive and suggests that while the cultural production may exhibit these characteristics, that these tendencies are not an endpoint in themselves. Instead, they serve as evidentiary benchmarks that the process of working through trauma is underway.

El Salvador's Background and History of Impunity: Todos nacimos medio muertos en 1932

To more deeply explore the history of trauma and impunity within the cultural production of postwar El Salvador today, it is first important to understand how violence and impunity have taken root in El Salvador. On January 22, 1932 a horrific and formative event known as *La Matanza* took place when the Salvadoran government killed thousands of its citizens (mostly indigenous peasants) to put down a popular uprising. Though the government completely squelched *La Matanza* in a few weeks, the key conditions and causes of 1932 had been brewing since the conquest: “La cuestión de la tierra venía como consecuencia de una cantidad de factores que se remontaba a la conquista española, pues esta conquista asentó dos estratos básicos de población, la de los vencedores y la de los vencidos.” (Galindo Pohl 273)

These two divisions of the population, the victors and the defeated, while admittedly an oversimplified concept, is useful in that it clarifies something about how national life has developed in El Salvador and why it has only been sustainable with extreme state repression, violence and impunity. There were a nuanced set of causes behind the uprising of 1932, such as the extinction of the ejido and commonly held land system, the impact of the Great Depression and heightened government repression (Galindo Pohl 277). The economic crisis of 1929 that began in the United States was another factor in 1932. Salvadoran exports, particularly coffee, tied the country to the global economy crashed and the Great Depression caused the Salvadoran

economy to spiral downward dramatically after 1930. The economists of the day viewed the depression as a corrective measure that was part of a normal economic cycle and the government adopted severe measures to prevent workers from agitating and hoped that the global economy would improve given time. On August 12, 1930 the government of Pío Romero Bosque passed the first decree prohibiting meetings of workers. On October 30th of that year, a more general decree was passed that prohibited all types of public meetings or protests (Galindo Pohl 282). On May 17 of 1931 one such public meeting of several hundred unarmed peasants took place in the Rafael Campos Park in Sonsonate, El Salvador. When the first speaker began, armed agents from the National Police approached the speaker and dispersed the meeting. The demonstrators cooperated and retreated but when they had walked about two blocks, the National Police open fired anyway. This tendency to use the law to further repress, subdue and contain the population later manifests as the amnesty laws that followed the signing of the peace accords.

When the full-blown uprising came to pass, retribution was swift. By the end of January, the army and militias had, in some villages, killed all males over the age of 12. Elsewhere, they summarily executed anyone suspected of having a link to the uprising. 10,000 people were massacred and some statistics have the number as high as 30,000. The brutal way in which the uprising was crushed left many too scared to ever participate in political life again. The trauma resonated through six decades of military rule, until the 1992 peace accords ended the 12-year civil war.

Salvadoran poet Roque Dalton summarized the impact of 1932 on the Salvadoran population when he wrote “todos nacimos medio muertos en 1932.” The phrase captures the idea that a new subjectivity had come about, one that occupied the margins marked out by violence. In order to survive, indigenous people, abandoned themselves; their languages and customs for ladino

(non-Indian) ways, largely ceasing to exist as an easily identifiable ethnic group. “The army was given orders to kill anyone suspected of participating in the uprising, specifically Indians (who at the time were easily distinguishable by their Nahuatl language and, in the case of women, by their mode of dress), and those who were identified as active subversives” (Garrard Burnett 576). Roque Dalton continues in his poem, “sobrevivimos pero medio vivos cada uno con una cuenta de treinta mil muertos enteros.” Among the reasons that could make one feel half dead are living without the ability to express oneself and, in particular, living without being able to speak about fear and trauma. In the end, history has proven that *La Matanza* silenced popular opposition for 40 years: “The terror wrought by La Matanza was so pervasive that it effectively silenced political dissent in the country for nearly half a century, until the issues that underlay the event exploded into the civil war that ravaged El Salvador from the late 1970s until 1992”(Garrard-Burnett 576).

Sixty years later Salvadoran citizens continue to avoid, normalize, silence, ignore or deny information about human rights violations carried out by their government. A part of this contemporary impunity has to do with the nature of El Salvador’s peace agreement. Kathryn Sikkink argues that human rights accountability is tied to the kind of transition that countries experience. Countries with “ruptured transitions” in which an old regime collapses in a way that prevents political leaders from being able to control the terms and conditions of the transition, tend to see early public accountability measures (Sikkink 81). There is an important link between the position of key stakeholders in the postwar transition and ongoing processes of impunity. El Salvador experienced what Sikkink calls a “pacted transition” or a negotiated deal between contending groups that included an agreement not to pursue criminal prosecutions. In “pacted transitions” amnesty laws tend to immediately follow on the heels of peace agreements. El Salvador’s negotiated transition has promoted silence and impunity in the sense that “peace”

has come at the cost of amnesty settlements that have blocked the possibility of public trials. The two groups that negotiated peace, the FMLN and the rightwing ARENA party, continue to be among the main political protagonists. ARENA has been unwilling to accept concrete responsibility for the campaign of terror waged in the seventies and eighties that led to the deaths and disappearances of tens of thousands of Salvadorans. The left has also failed to recognize the internal purges within the FMLN during the civil war that led to the executions of hundreds of FMLN combatants (Sprenkels 271). Neither the left nor the right has been willing to push beyond symbolic reparations as doing so would likely result in criminal prosecutions of key individuals within their own political parties and groups of supporters. The stalemate of memory has created a socio-political culture in which impunity has been able to thrive.

How is it fathomable that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for El Salvador elicited thousands of victim testimonies in 1992 only to have the state then pardon the freshly documented human rights violations? How does the unwillingness or inability to truly listen to testimony of trauma at particular historical moments manifest in the cultural field? In the case of El Salvador, it was as if victim testimonies were brought into the folds of history, into the archive, and documented as part of the “official” record only to become part of what Primo Levi calls the “unlistened to story.” Primo Levi narrates a recurring nightmare in Auschwitz in which he gives testimony and re-experiences the Holocaust, but the response of his listeners only brings a return to trauma:

They are all listening to me and it is this very story that I am telling: the whistle of three notes, the hard bed, my neighbor whom I would like to move, but whom I am afraid to wake as he is stronger than me. I also speak diffusely of our hunger and of the lice-control, and of the Kapo who hit me on the nose and then sent me

to wash myself as I was bleeding. It is an intense pleasure, physical, inexpressible, to be at home, among friendly people and to have so many things to recount: but I cannot help noticing that my listeners do not follow me. In fact, they are completely indifferent...My sister looks at me, gets up and goes away without a word. A desolating grief is born in me. I am now quite awake and I remember that I have recounted it to Alberto and that he confided to me, to my amazement, that it is also his dream and the dream of many others, perhaps of everyone. Why does it happen? Why is the pain of everyday translated so constantly into our dreams, in the ever-repeated scene of the un-listened to story? (Levi 52-53)

For Primo Levi, the “unlistened to story” represents a second traumatic loss following his original traumatic experience of Auschwitz. He recounts the recurring nightmare of not being able to communicate his own personal testimony; even though he is prepared to give testimony, he is unable to find a compassionate and willing listener to bear witness. Levi’s “unlistened to story” is also the story of how impunity takes root in El Salvador where the efforts of the Truth Commission to collect testimony were followed almost immediately by a legal amnesty for perpetrators. While witnesses and testimony were plentiful in El Salvador, the indifference that the state demonstrated by not pushing for criminal accountability or reparations created a second traumatic loss for Salvadoran society; that of the “unlistened to story.” As Cathy Caruth writes, it is this second loss that often follows trauma; the second trauma of an experience disappearing and being erased because it cannot be communicated to another person who is willing to bear witness (x).

The story of Salvadoran poet and political activist Roque Dalton embodies El Salvador's culture of impunity and is an example of how memory in El Salvador has been transformed by its passage through history. As Martin Heidegger sets forth, memory and forgetting are fundamentally intertwined: "forgetting has priority over remembering— without an original forgetting, there can be no remembering" In this sense, then, all memory comes with a certain degree of forgetfulness. In the first part of this project I explore state funded public memory works that while opening important and new platforms, distort individual memory in a way that also can alienate people from their own memories. Pierre Nora writes, memory becomes history and it becomes separate from those who lived it: "we should be aware of the difference between true memory, which has taken refuge in gestures and habits, in skills passed down by unspoken traditions, in the body's inherent self-knowledge, in unstudied reflexes and ingrained memories, and memory transformed by its passage through history, which is nearly the opposite: voluntary and deliberate, experienced as a duty, no longer spontaneous..." (4). In the case of Roque Dalton, the newly elected FMLN government wanted to use his image as a historical icon tied to the FMLN, but was blocked by the Dalton family from using his image and name. In the President's victory speech, for example, President Mauricio Funes demonstrates his affinity with the slain poet's ideals of social justice in his declaration, "llegó el turno del ofendido" appropriating the title of one of Roque Dalton's books of poetry, *El turno del ofendido* (1962).⁴ President Funes quotes from the book, "Ahora es la hora de mi turno/ el turno del ofendido por años silencioso/a pesar de los gritos." This public association with Dalton obscures the fact that members of the Funes administration had a direct role in Roque Dalton's assassination. Members of the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo [ERP], one of the left-wing organizations

⁴ See "Gobierno de Funes" 2012.

that morphed into the FMLN, have admitted responsibility for the assassination of Roque Dalton. Ironically Jorge Meléndez, one of the people accused of Dalton's assassination, held the position of Head of Civil Security in the FMLN government, a post he was eligible to hold only as a direct result of the general amnesty passed in 1992. In light of the accusations against Meléndez, the Dalton family criticized the government for what they argue is a hypocritical appropriation of Roque Dalton's name and image. President Funes' public response has been that Dalton's legacy belongs to the entire nation and cannot be claimed by a single family.⁵

In light of this history and culture of impunity, one might not be surprised that the postwar cultural production would exhibit a dark and “cynical” tone. Still, as Beatriz Cortez herself says, cynicism is a counterproductive reaction because it leads to a disintegration subjectivity and ultimately to the destruction of the subject. Participating in the cultural production would mean falling into a rabbit hole that ultimately leads to the disintegration of the self or to suicide. I contend that there is something beyond cynicism at work when artists represent images like Llorca's Cathedral for the public who sees these restored, re-membered and re-imagined. Instead of further fracturing the subject, I propose that the cultural production is being harnessed as a space for bringing visibility to, and for processing, traumatic experiences. In the following section I define the terms that have been of prime importance in this dissertation project and delve into the scholarship that has informed my work.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Memory work

One of the central inquiries of this project is examining how images and text tied to El Salvador's most recent war are represented in the cultural production as “memory work.”

⁵ See Abarca 2010.

“Memory work” is a concept explored by Elizabeth Jelin in *State Repression and Labors of Memory* (2002). For Jelin, “memory work” is not a passive process, but rather, is produced by active subjects negotiating meaning between competing memories (68). Memory requires the active “work” of participants in these struggles. Examining memory as a kind of labor highlights the mental and physical effort that goes into crafting memory in the public sphere for a given audience as opposed to the experiences of spontaneous remembering that happen privately. Hence, I use the term “memory work” to explore the ways in which the past is narrated and represented and how memory and forgetting take shape in public works, in works by independent artists and in literary texts. I put the concept of “memory work” in dialogue with the cultural production to suggest, first, that memory is a source of imagery that is repackaged and deployed discursively for today’s social and political context and, second, to illustrate how images point to secondary texts, discourse and ideology rooted in the past.

Imagetexts

The way that images are deployed discursively has prompted scholars who study visibility across media to critically examine images beyond their illustrative qualities and define their intertextual relationship with other texts. I build on the work of WJT Mitchell who proposes that we live in an increasingly visual culture where images project ideology and communicate discourse. According to Mitchell, images are not “just images” because they call to mind and reference secondary textual discourse: “The interaction of pictures and texts is constitutive of representation as such.” Text and image are part of a composite and synthetic mode of representation that combines multiple media and one cannot understand what a picture means without an extended “reflection on texts; particularly the ways in which texts act like pictures or ‘incorporate’ pictorial practices and vice versa.” This means that the visual is not a

‘pure’ field of representation apart from verbal modes of representation; instead “all media are mixed media, and all representations are heterogeneous” (5). Approaching memory in this way functions not only to bridge my interdisciplinary exploration of art and literary texts, but also to identify the kind of dialogic, or multivoicedness, that is embedded in the cultural production. Within the specific context of El Salvador’s postwar cultural production, Astrid Bahamond posits that postwar art is a language that is tied into a particular social model. The work of art expresses both past and present temporal modes. It responds to a particular worldview, is intended for a certain public or publics and expresses a certain ideology conditioned by a particular economy, society and political conditions (Bahamond 87). In dialogue with my own work, the imagetext is a theoretical bridge for critically examining images beyond what they show to outline how images dialogue with discourse, specifically with memory, history and politics.

The Ethics of Memory and Forgetting

Given the inherently discursivity of the image, cultural critic Tzvetan Todorov has suggested that sometimes it’s better, from an ethical standpoint, to forget the past and not to represent it at all. In a broad sense, Todorov probes into the ethical component of memory for its own sake and points out that remembering has not historically proven to be beneficial for society and, in fact, has been a tool for propaganda that has flamed new conflicts. He argues that memory is not always “productive” and that re-membering often comes with its own dangers as the World saw with the Nazi party’s use of the Treaty of Versailles after World War I to flame German resentment and anger that the Nazi’s harnessed in World War II (Todorov “The Evil That Men Do,” 33). However, as Todorov notes, there are ways “to distinguish a priori the “good” from

the “bad” uses of the past.⁶ Todorov cautions against much of the kind of memory work that turns the past into propaganda and argues that memory work is only productive if it leads out beyond itself. This debate about the value of “memory work” has informed my theoretical and analytical approach and has led me to question what images in El Salvador’s cultural production want of the spectator. How does the cultural production want spectators to respond and what action does it want them to take? Is the point of viewing images from the past to remember for the sake of re-remembering the past alone? Is it to inform a new political ideology or to reinforce existing socio-political views? Or, is it something else? At stake in Todorov’s suggestion is that “memory work” is often more trouble than it is worth. While I find Todorov’s argument compelling, this dissertation puts “memory work” in dialogue with trauma theory to suggest that El Salvador’s cultural production does, in fact, lead out beyond itself and that it wants to re-present the past, not for the sake of memory alone, but for the sake of working through traumatic experience in the past and present.

Trauma Theory

One of the connecting threads among artists and writers studied in this dissertation project is the representation of trauma, of bearing witness to trauma and of processing and “working through” traumatic experiences. I define trauma as emotional or psychological pain resulting from extraordinarily stressful events that shatter the sense of security that many experience, and that can make a person feel helpless in a hostile world. To speak of trauma means, almost inherently, to speak of a wound that lingers and is difficult to heal within the frame of a lifetime. My analytical approach is informed by scholarship that asserts that trauma is passed on from one generation to another. Notably, Cathy Caruth has defined ‘trauma’ as, “a

⁶ See Todorov 1996.

response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or set of events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event,” noting that, “the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it” (4-5). My evaluation of how trauma manifests in the postwar cultural production enters into dialogue with Caruth’s argument that trauma can take time, even several generations, to process. Taken to its logical limit, this means that not only does trauma endure over time for the subject that originally experienced it, but that later generations can choose to recycle familial, national, or other historical trauma and connect with them again. Trauma, then, persists and evolves on a social level and has the potential to become a self-perpetuating feedback loop of trauma and violence. In the particular case of El Salvador, there is a consensus among scholars that the high levels of violence in the postwar are related, in large part, to a violent postwar culture that is rooted in the most recent war that left thousands dead and many displaced internally and externally.⁷ My theoretical framework also builds on Marianne Hirsch’s work looking in depth at how the second and later generations connect with the previous generations’ traumatic experiences and how those connections with the past becomes a type of “memory.” Putting trauma theory and post-memory studies into dialogue as in this example suggests that memory can be transferred to those who were not there even while transferred memories are of a different nature than those of witnesses and participants: “Hence, the insistence on ‘post’ and ‘after’ as qualifying adjectives”(Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory* 3). My analytical approach is informed by Hirsch’s work on affective force and psychic effects of post-memory. Hirsch has argued that emotional ties to the past are forged through images and text: “Memory signals an affective link to the past—a sense,

⁷ See “Trauma of a Generation” 2016.

precisely, of a material “living connection” –and it is powerfully mediated by technologies like literature, photography, and testimony (Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory* 33). As claims, it is through the cultural production in large part that the post-generation can come to know the past. While he is specifically looking at text, Dominick LaCapra purports that representing trauma “involves processes of acting out, working over, and to some extent working through in analyzing and giving voice to the past” (LaCapra 186). All the same, many of the representations that are the focus of this research are structured, furthermore, on different kinds of return to the original site of trauma mirroring the “literal” return of traumatic experience and the theoretical formulations of trauma such as critics like Cathy Caruth emphasize. Caruth looks at this phenomenon in Sigmund Freud’s confrontation with the “war neuroses” stemming from the First World War: “The traumatic reliving, like the nightmares of the accident victim, seemed like awaking memory, yet returned, repeatedly, only in the form of a dream” (Caruth, *Trauma Explorations in Memory* 152). This is important because it suggests that trauma is re-presented as part of a larger process of healing. This dissertation builds on these critical formulations, particularly on the kinds of re-living of the past that transfer trauma through the cultural production from one generation to the next.

Archive Theory

My consideration of the post-generation enters into dialogue with recent developments in archival practice. With regard to how documents such as photographs double as art and figure into literature, it is worth noting, as Hal Foster does, the “archival impulse” to construct discourse through artistic engagement with documentation and with the document as an object of art. He identifies archival relations as the “memory structure” characteristic of modern art practice, museum spaces and the study of an artistic tradition. Foster refers to examples of

artworks that collect and catalogue the past and that respond to consumer culture and to a shifting dialectics of seeing that are innate to our technological age. Within the specific context of postwar El Salvador, an “archival impulse” manifests in the cultural production and expands the possibilities of what can be articulated about the past offering new readings of the present that interrupt and counter the dominant emblematic discourses of the state as articulated in public art projects. In these new engagements with the historical document and with the archive, artists subvert the “official” through reconfiguration, degradation, parody, humor and the grotesque and provide an important narrative counterpoint to official discourses. I interrogate the way an image like the Llorca’s “Harmony of Our People” Cathedral painted into a mural can bear witness for the past and to its survivors. Applying this idea, I use Hal Foster’s characterization of the main features of archival art in my own critical approach: “In the first instance archival artists seek to make historical information often lost or displaced, physically present. To this end they elaborate on the found image, object and text” (4). The sources are at times familiar and drawn from mass culture but can also be harder to identify ‘retrieved in a gesture of alternative knowledge or counter-memory.’ The work is often a secondary manipulation that re-frames, re-constitutes and re-presents appropriated images, objects and texts in ways that significantly shift the original meaning and call for interpretation. The impulse to collect and categorize means that artists draw on archives, but also become producers of archives in a way that often is discursive (Foster 5). This conceptual framework of artists who become historians, anthropologists and archeologists that take on the task of remembering, unearthing, categorizing and storing information resonates strongly with my own observations of Salvadoran artists. The dissertation focuses on a body of works that highlight alternative experiences that are excluded from the “official” histories and highlight inconvenient, marginal and peripheral realities. Archival

artistic practice interrupts El Salvador's culture of silence and impunity. Here, I bring archival theory into dialogue with El Salvador's cultural production as a set of practices that interrupt ongoing silence and impunity.

Testimony, History and Memory

The testimonial has been the cornerstone of memory and history in El Salvador, and in Latin America more broadly. It has served as a bridge between personal experience and History and scholars and academics made a substantial effort to uphold the "truth-telling" status of the testimonial and to separate this from fiction. The term testimony carries with it a weight and a history, and my intention here is to offer only a brief definition before delving into how I apply the term to inform my analytical approach. For now, I define testimonio as first-person narratives written by an interviewer who inscribes the oral account granted by a subaltern. Works like *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1983), by Guatemalan Rigoberta Menchú, and Roque Dalton's *Miguel Mármol* (1972) are emblematic examples of this kind of writing in Central American Literature. In both of these texts, the testimonial mode was deployed to protest social injustice and to garner support for the revolutionary political causes of the 1970's and 1980's. The literary works that I evaluate in this dissertation are part of a trend that scholars have identified as a reconfiguration of the testimonial mode after the 1990's in Central America (Mackebach 425). Authors adopt the narrative and rhetorical conventions of the testimonial mode and carry out "memory work" but these narratives are no longer attempting to re-member and establish theirs as the singular and authoritative "truth." (Mackebach 425). More specifically, these modes of fiction, memory and history push up against each other creating points of tension and also new possibilities for representations. As literary critic Alexandra Ortiz Wallner describes, some kinds of traumatic experiences can be represented

more completely by moving between fictional, H/historical, memory and testimonial genres in a way that is “frictional.” Frictionality emerges in the liminal space between memory, H/history and fiction and allows the reader to imagine what could have happened outside of “official” narratives without a commitment from the author that what is being narrated is the absolute truth. According to Wallner, “frictionality” makes it possible to recuperate experiences, places and dates that have entered history in only a partial manner or have been ignored, forgotten or altogether erased from the official historical record and/or the collective memory (Wallner 2012). This dissertation applies “frictionality” to an interdisciplinary body of work from multiple genres to illustrate how these varied representational and aesthetic modes intersect as well as how they establish new possibilities for coming to understand the past.

Chapter Summaries

My approach to memory in each of my three chapters weaves in El Salvador’s traumatic history and memory of the most recent war with an analysis of contemporary deployments of images and text from the past. As a result, this research project is about the present as much as it is about the past and unpacks how memory is re-presented, in the sense of being made present, through the cultural production. I read this body of work through the lens of trauma as each piece shows how memory takes on new meanings in the postwar and in dialogue with the present. I outline how artists and writers bear witness, respond to the ongoing consequences of trauma, reconfigure and repackage traumatic memory into new forms and modes of discourse and reveal how trauma is passed on from one generation to the next through the society and culture.

The first chapter investigates iconography tied to El Salvador’s most recent war and outlines how images and text are represented in examples of “official” state commissioned

cultural production focused on “memory work.” I focus specifically on the Roque Dalton and Archbishop Romero as icons and on Antonio Bonilla’s murals in San Salvador. Instead of viewing state sponsored examples of memory work as a disinterested mechanism for coming to “know” the past, this chapter illustrates how the state deploys trauma as political propaganda. Through the symbolic language of art and culture, public works turn traumatic experiences into emblems that legitimize and culturally consecrate political groups. While this chapter takes a critical approach to viewing these representations, my intent has not been to question the value of “memory work,” but instead has focused on locating the convergence of official state sponsored examples of trauma in El Salvador and political “propaganda” as a nearly violent imposition of strategic political interest. While chapters two and three focus on the work of independent artists and writers, this chapter sketches out how the state deploys propaganda through the cultural production and what propaganda does and does not do for traumatic memory as well as for political parties. This chapter outlines examples of traumatic memory that have played into El Salvador’s recent cultural production as a source of images and discourse from the past that have been repackaged and deployed for today’s political context.

Chapter Two focuses on the work of privately funded artists like Danny Zavaleta, Mauricio Kabistán, Mayra Barraza and the The Fire Theory collective and highlights their work representing trauma by means of the archival document. Artists become historians, anthropologists and archeologists that take on the task of remembering, unearthing, categorizing and storing information. I show how their work pushes beyond the traditional bounds of aesthetic practice incorporating elements of anthropological fieldwork such as data collection from interviews, observation and documentation. The impulse to collect and categorize means that artists draw on traumatic experiences that are stored in archives, but also become the

producers of documents. For example, I analyze how The Fire Theory creates a an experimental performance staging a soccer game between ex-guerrillas and ex-members of the military in one of the most regions that had been the most divided during the war. The artist collective interviews players and edits these into a documentary with footage from the game as well as footage from the war. The result is *El juego*, a 2017 documentary about memory and the process of healing trauma in postwar El Salvador. In these new engagements with the historical document and with the archive, the work of artists is often a secondary manipulation that re-frames, re-constitutes and re-presents appropriated images, objects and texts in ways that significantly shift the original meaning and call for interpretation.

I also consider here how postwar Salvadoran art shifts the dynamic of artistic mediation and spectatorship through critical avant-garde projects. I suggest that international art organizations like Y.ES Contemporary and large-scale international exhibitions have contributed to formulations of trauma that go beyond exhibition making practice toward that of discourse production. A war scene embroidered on muslin cloth by a Salvadoran woman while in a refugee camp in Honduras might be overlooked by museums. At the same time, a curator in New York might opt to curate a show of similar traditional muslin embroidered with icons of violence borrowed from gang tattoo images such as those in a series by Danny Zavaleta because of how his work resonates with contemporary trends in art. In order for trauma to be processed and re-membered publicly for a global and international curating culture there are parts of it that fall away into oblivion because they seem outdated, outmoded or cliché.

The final part of this study brings in examples from literature to illustrate how memory work is re-presented in the text based cultural production. The novels that I examine assume a traumatized Salvadoran society not only in terms of what happened during the war, but also in

the reverberations of those experiences in the present. Each charts a path through the historical trauma experienced by Salvadoran society and asks for an accounting of that trauma today. Both novels represent a return to the original site of trauma mirroring the "literal" return of traumatic experience such as critics like Cathy Caruth emphasize: "the traumatic reliving, like the nightmares of the accident victim, seemed like awaking memory, yet returned, repeatedly, only in the form of a dream" (152). In fact, representations of trauma in art and literature are much like images in a recurring dream. They seem real as we experience them, again and again, but they are placeholders that take the place of lived reality and stand in for the past.

Chapter Three looks at the recent Salvadoran novels *Noviembre* by Jorge Galán (2015) and Claudia Hernandez' *Roza tumba quemada* (2018). I argue that each reconfigures the testimonial mode from its function as a mechanism for garnering support for revolutionary movements in the seventies and eighties into a tool for processing traumatic memory now. I also delve into what happens to testimony and "truth" when these are represented as fiction. As Cathy Caruth argues, fiction allows for bearing witness to events that cannot be completely known and allows the reader to imagine experiences that might have otherwise remained unspoken and unheard. Though Salvadoran society might not recover from, overcome or even fully understand its traumatic past, actively listening to it and to its effects as they are transmitted through witnesses and survivors, is of vital importance. Listening well offers dignity and value to the story and to the person. It is through fiction that Jorge Galán and Claudia Hernández propose an alternative to impunity and indifference; a different way to receive testimony in El Salvador against the backdrop of silence, rubble and ashes of History.

In closing, Cathy Caruth uses the metaphor of ashes, specifically the ashes of Pompeii to describe the enigma of representing a traumatic history that, in its very unfolding, seems to slip

away before our grasp: “Indeed, the figure of the destruction of Pompeii is not precisely, or not simply, a figure of burial, since the peculiarity of this “singular historical event” is that the destruction occurred not only through burial, but by burial through ashes, which is also a burning up, a destruction that does not simply preserve but may also totally incinerate the bodies it buries” (Caruth 86). El Salvador has had its own Pompeii in the most recent war and we need only to think of the image of the “Harmony of Our People” mosaic tiles in rubble and ash in downtown San Salvador to understand how impunity and indifference to the past has created a secondary experience of trauma. In this case, the second trauma came with “peace” and the destruction of memory. Hope lies in cultural change and in the work of artists and writers today to work through a traumatic past, continually engaging with it through the cultural production, actively listening to its echoes and its effects, bearing witness, again and again, to the stories transmitted through witnesses and survivors.

Chapter 1: Propaganda and Cooptation of Trauma in Public Art and Iconography

The idea for this chapter began with a single image, a snapshot taken in 2012 at the Sala Memorial de Mártires at the Universidad Centroamericana “José Simeón Cañas” (la UCA). My mother had agreed to take me to her alma mater where she had studied philosophy with the Jesuit priests in the 1970s. As we walked through the garden of roses where her former instructors had been dragged from their quarters and shot to death on November 16, 1989 by members of the Salvadoran military, she shared details about their lives, teaching and personal styles and what she remembered about that fateful night in November. A museum on the UCA grounds memorializes the Jesuits as well as other priests that were killed during the war. At the end of that day’s visit to the UCA I walked through the museum quietly looking at the objects in glass cases with little context other than captions on cue cards. Not knowing how else to channel my own ambivalence in that space, I began taking photographs.

Given that I was a child throughout the most recent war, my view of historical memory now is based on these museum spaces and on the objects, documents and life stories handed down to me. As I looked through the photographs that I had taken at the UCA museum, one image of a shirt in a glass display generated a strong affective response in me, a moment that Roland Barthes terms “punctum” (65).⁸ The image showed a mannequin torso wearing a *guayabera* that belonged at one time to Padre Rutilio Grande, a priest killed by paramilitary soldiers in the years leading up to the war in El Salvador. In the photograph I noticed that the bullet holes that pierced his body looked like innocuous blackish blue ink stains. I imagined the

⁸ In *Camera Lúcida: Reflections on Photography* Roland Barthes develops the twin concepts of *studium* and *punctum*: *studium* denoting the cultural, linguistic, and political interpretation of a photograph, *punctum* denoting the wounding, personally touching detail which establishes a direct relationship with the object or person within it.

gray shirt to have probably once been a dark navy color in a style like those I saw many men wearing outside the glass panels of the International Airport just days before this picture was taken. What struck me most about the snapshot was that it captured my mother looking at the representation of Padre Grande in the museum; her dazed expression, reflected in the display glass, floating eerily over one side of the shirt. As Roland Barthes has noted, the piercing impact of a photograph is an effect of the photograph's duality; the unexpected juxtaposition of two discontinuous elements that do not belong to the same world (58). In this case, a staged artifact from the past and the subject's experience of the past in the present. This photograph led me to think about how El Salvador's history is represented today in museum spaces, but also in the cultural production more broadly. I wondered how Salvadorans like my mother, who experienced the war of the 70s and 80s, reconcile their own lived memories with an external narrative constructed through symbolic representations of the past. I thought about how I had been able to imagine and experience deeply the memories that she shared as she guided me through what Pierre Nora conceptualizes as the *milieu de mémoire*, the actual spaces of memory where identity is formed. Then I reflected on my mother's silence in the museum space that Nora conceptualizes as the *lieux de memoire*, the artificial memory spaces that compensate for the loss of lived tradition. In the museum, the artifacts and the labels explaining the exhibit displays seemed to speak on behalf of my Mother.⁹ This distinction between history and memory is at the heart of the division that Nora insists on between authentic and represented memory spaces. This experience made me want to understand how Salvadorans viewing historical reconstructions in museums, murals and monuments in public spaces navigate this

⁹ See Nora 1989.

tension between historical images that propose a version of “truth,” and their own, more dispersed and contingent memories.

This chapter examines how traumatic memory is represented in examples of “official” state commissioned cultural production focusing on literary and artistic images in “memory work.”¹⁰ I begin with an examination of how the state uses political discourse and official spaces to deploy images of Monseñor Romero and Roque Dalton, two historical icons tied to El Salvador’s most recent war. Next, I examine a set of state funded memory murals located at San Salvador’s National Museum of Anthropology and International Convention Center to get at the narrative of history advanced by the state in artistic representations of memory. While chapters two and three focus on the work of independent artists and writers, this chapter argues for a consideration of how the state deploys propaganda through the cultural production and what propaganda does and does not do for traumatic memory as well as for political parties. This chapter focuses on trauma that is re-presented from the top down as a source of images and discourse from the past that have been repackaged and deployed for today’s socio-political context. Understanding re-presentations of these images is paramount in the following analyses, because it explains the revival of interest in Romero, Roque Dalton, and in memory in general, in El Salvador after 2009.¹¹

I am interested here in how traumatic memory plays into the cultural production as a source of images and discourse from the past that is directed by political parties and produced to

¹⁰ “Memory work” is a concept explored by Elizabeth Jelin in *State Repression and Labors of Memory* (2002). For Jelin, “memory work” is not a passive process, but rather it is produced by active subjects negotiating meaning between competing memories (68). Memory requires the active “work” of participants in these struggles.

¹¹ In this chapter I use the hyphenated spelling “re-present” to place the focus on the action of making something present again as in the sense of performing and practicing.

speak to a contemporary audience. In the case of El Salvador's state funded cultural production this means looking at how the state funds art that points to secondary texts, discourse and ideology often rooted in traumatic memory. W.J.T Mitchell uses the metaphor of early pinhole camera as a way to understand how images work within an increasingly visual culture to project ideology and communicate discourse, educate and entertain a public or publics. Mitchell's approach suggests that we critically examine images beyond their illustrative qualities and consider their intertextual relationship with texts. The central idea is that "imagetexts" are not just images, but they call to mind and reference secondary textual discourses: "The interaction of pictures and texts is constitutive of representation as such" (Mitchell, *Iconology* 5). Mitchell proposes that text and image are part of a composite and synthetic mode of representation that combines multiple media. He argues that one cannot understand what a picture is without an extended "reflection on texts; particularly the ways in which texts act like pictures or 'incorporate' pictorial practices and vice versa" (4). The visual is not a 'pure' field of representation outside of verbal modes of representation; instead "all media are mixed media, and all representations are heterogeneous" (5). There are obvious cases of "imagetexts" such as the graphic novel where image and text are combined explicitly but there are also less explicit examples where image calls text to mind and vice versa. My aim here is to reveal the discourse woven into the state funded cultural production as a way to think through the mechanisms for representing ideology and constructing propaganda in El Salvador after 2009.

El Salvador's "Culture of Memory"

When I returned to El Salvador in 2015 I was surprised as our plane touched down to hear pilots welcome passengers to Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero International Airport instead of what for me had always been El Salvador's Comalapa International Airport. Later I

found out that the name change was part of a long list of homages the state was paying to El Salvador's martyred Archbishop.¹² Inside the airport another re-presentation of the Archbishop, Rafael Varelas' mural (2014) dedicated to Romero, decorated the walls in a main part of the airport with scenes of the Archbishop working in Salvadoran communities.¹³ I wondered how these recent images of Romero compared with what the Archbishop had signified in the 1970's and 1980's and how these representations of the past spoke to the political systems of today.

Memory in El Salvador's postwar period is taking shape against the backdrop of what Andreas Huyssen calls today's "culture of memory," a global obsession with representing a past more and more distant and fleeting. Memory culture in El Salvador has resulted in an upsurge of homages, commemorations and in an increased production of memory spaces including artistic representations, museums and monuments that progressively have replaced authentic spaces of the past where organic connections to identity are formed.¹⁴ I am particularly interested in the visual aspects of memory culture given the "pictorial turn" that W.J.T Mitchell highlights. Mitchell operates under the central assumption that culture has reoriented itself around visual paradigms. At the same time his approach suggests that critics would do well to examine the interrelationship between image and text and how this generates new understandings about dialogue between visual culture and discourse (Mitchell 9). In the case of El Salvador, determining the relationships between images and text is key to understanding what public art is communicating to its viewers.

¹² See "El Aeropuerto de El Salvador" 2014; "Presidente Funes nomina" 2014.

¹³ See "Official El Salvador Apology" 2010.

¹⁴ Pierre Nora conceptualizes this as an opposition between history and memory "Between Memory and History" 1989, 3.

The case of El Salvador's International Airport is an example of how memory has recently captivated the attention of the Salvadoran state. Whereas previous state sponsored programs focused on a forward-looking modernity, progress and the future, after 2009 it is notable that the government of Mauricio Funes turned its gaze toward the past funding a rising number of public works related to memory.¹⁵¹⁶ In order to solidify public support for the new government, challenging and revising the long-standing "official" history advanced during the 20-year reign of the right-wing Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) took on critical importance. For this reason, I analyze how the state projects political propaganda in "memory work" between 2009 and 2019.

While publicly funded memory work in El Salvador has created opportunities for engagement with the past, I argue that this push to remember is also used to drive the political program of the state.¹⁷ Symbolic acts of memory are important, but they should not stand in for the kinds of concrete reforms in the judicial system that would determine individual responsibility for human rights violations. If representing the past becomes a substitute for justice, then ambivalence can saturate memory work: Is it enough to simply re-member and to re-present the past out of some sense of duty to know the past and transmit it to the future? How

¹⁵ In *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador* (2012), Hector Lindo-Fuentes and Erik Ching examine how El Salvador instituted a series of reforms that sought to modernize the country and undermine ideological radicalism, the most ambitious of which was an education initiative. It was multifaceted, but its most controversial component was the use of televisions in classrooms. Launched in 1968 and lasting until the eve of the most recent war in the late 1970s, the reform resulted in students receiving instruction through programs broadcast from the capital city of San Salvador.

¹⁶ See "Funes devela" 2012, especially the discussion about the Funes Government's commitment to a "full recuperation of the past."

¹⁷ See "El Aeropuerto de El Salvador Lleva" 2014 for example and the renaming of El Salvador's Comalapa International Airport after martyred Archbishop, Monseñor Óscar Arnulfo Romero International Airport in March of 2014.

can re-membering trauma be productive in the sense of learning from History's mistakes and missteps? And, in the end, what does society do with traumatic memory?

When the institutionalized FMLN government came to power in 2009 there was much hope that the populist government would vindicate the masses and the traumas suffered during and leading up to the most recent war.¹⁸ However, it quickly became evident that the way that the government was engaging with the past was critically entangled with the systematic advancement of its own political agenda.¹⁹ For example, after winning the presidential election of 2009, the administration of Mauricio Funes made a concerted effort to draw the memory of the Jesuit priests massacred in 1989 into the folds of state sponsored memory. In his first year as President, Funes recognized the Jesuits with the Order of José Matías Delgado's Illustrious Gold Cross Medal, the greatest honor that the state bestows on individuals. During the ceremony in the Presidential Palace, Father José María Tojeira, the then Dean of the UCA, remarked that this was the first time that the Salvadoran government had acknowledged the value and contributions of the slain priests and their commitment to Salvadoran society. However, despite its efforts to officially recognize the history of the UCA, the FMLN government has been criticized repeatedly by the American Commission on Human Rights and by various local human rights organizations for failing to pressure for legal prosecution of human rights violations. In light of this, Benjamin Cuellar, the Director of the Human Rights Institute of the UCA (IDHUCA), questions the true intent behind the State's symbolic measures:

La Orden Matías Delgado fue para los padres jesuitas y el decreto dice que fue por "sus contribuciones al país"....Eso no fue un acto de desagravio para las

¹⁸ See "Los cambios que no llegaron" 2016.

¹⁹ See Ricœur, 2004 for a discussion of how history overly remembers some events while leaving out others and how this shapes perception of national identity and historical narrative.

víctimas, eso fue, para este gobierno, como hacer una marca registrada del caso jesuitas, como se ha hecho con la figura de Romero o la de Katya Miranda. (Quezada).

Through the lens of art and culture these symbolic reparations can turn traumatic historical events into trademark emblems that legitimize and culturally consecrate political groups. From this point of view the public recognition of the Jesuits as heroes emerges, not as a shift in the paradigm of history against forgetting, but as a symbolic effort by the state to plot the UCA into a transcript of memory that authorizes the FMLN government and underscores the end of the 20-year reign of the right-wing Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA).

The issue of how the past is re-presented is of critical importance today given El Salvador's long standing politics of forgetting; a general amnesty was passed shortly after peace was signed in 1992 silencing over 22,000 complaints of acts of wartime violence.²⁰ In 2009, El Salvador experienced a cultural shift toward remembering with the election of the FMLN presidential candidate Mauricio Funes who brought a populist political agenda to the state and placed intellectuals and artists associated with the FMLN front and center in the cultural field.²¹ The state began working on a Law of Art and Culture to institutionalize the process of funding artistic projects that would lead to what Funes described as a "full recuperation of memory."²² While this process has been instrumental in opening critical discussions about the past, state

²⁰ See "From Madness to Hope" 1993. for a more detailed description of the work of the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador (Comisión de la Verdad Para El Salvador, CVES).

²¹ See "La Cultura: Cambio a La Medida de Funes" 2010.

²² See "Funes devela" 2012, especially the discussion about the Funes Government's commitment to a "full recuperation of the past."

funded “memory work” also constructs a one-sided view of history that doubles as political and ideological publicity for the government.

El Salvador’s Law of Art and Culture

As with the early pinhole camera referenced earlier, projecting the political ideology of the state in El Salvador involves creating a mechanism for creating and displaying both pictorial and photographic images. An important part of this system for projecting images is El Salvador’s recent Law of Art and Culture. Since 2009 the FMLN has been working to bring artistic and cultural projects related to memory under the institutional wings of the state. In 2012 the *Law of Art and Culture* was passed pledging government funding, resources and support to the development of artistic and cultural projects related to memory. “Article 131” of the *Law of Art and Culture* focuses directly on “reconstructing” collective memory by promoting the development of artistic projects:

La memoria histórica es colectiva y se expresa en forma individual o a través de medios como la literatura, la música, el teatro, entre otros, e incorpora narrativas, leyendas, elementos rituales, entre otros, articulándose con los imaginarios sociales...la política de estado de cultura y arte reconoce la centralidad de la memoria histórica nacional y local como constructora de pertenencia e identidad. El Estado impulsará el desarrollo de los estudios históricos e historiográficos culturales y artísticos y los esfuerzos que hacen las comunidades para recuperar y acrecentar sus conocimientos y saberes sobre las realidades pasadas y presentes del país, lo cual enriquece simbólicamente los proyectos democráticos y participativos que se construyen hacia el futuro.²³

²³ See Ley de Cultura y Arte 2012.

When art and culture when are institutionalized in this way, the cultural production becomes a public screen for political propaganda. Mexico's post-revolutionary artistic movement provides a useful comparison with El Salvador after 2009 because both of these historical contexts stemmed from the institutionalization of what were once populist "revolutionary" political parties. In his analysis of the Mexican Muralist movement Octavio Paz questions the possibility of "revolutionary art" that is, at the same time, "official" and sponsored by the state: "By definition, there is no such thing as public art made by isolated individuals or private groups. On the other hand, revolutionary art, which is simply a variation of free art, has been the work of independent, marginal and clandestine individuals or groups" (Paz, *Essays on Mexican Art* 149). Can art commissioned by the state be "great," or is art something essentially subversive that cannot be reconciled with the "official" as Pablo Picasso once said: "If art is ever given the keys to the city, it will be because it has been so watered down, rendered so impotent, that it is not worth fighting for."

With these questions in mind about how art can be reconciled with the "official" I visited the Wisconsin Veteran's Museum Exhibition *The Art of Persuasion: Mobilizing the Masses in WWI* and encountered multiple examples of how state sponsored posters, because of their visual appeal and ease of reproduction, were used to "sell" the war. In most of the posters "official" art blended aesthetics with messages deployed to shape public opinion.²⁴ For example in the posters by well-known Gatsby-era illustrator Henry Raleigh the aesthetic quality of the drawings was combined with overall messages of obligation, duty and patriotism. Other posters were clearly

²⁴ The Art of Persuasion: Mobilizing the Masses in World War I was a temporary exhibit featured at the Madison, Wisconsin Veteran's Museum in May of 2016.

influenced by the naturalistic and stylized forms of art nouveau, but the artistic quality seemed to be more of an afterthought in design rather than an end in itself.

Additionally, I noted that there was something about the medium of the poster and the fact that it was mass-produced for display in private homes, storefronts, in schools, in factories and offices that also conveyed meaning about who supported the war and implied that the war was a collective effort. This led me to reflect on how political messages are shaped by the context and manner in which an image is deployed: “Art can become propaganda through its function and site, its framing within public or private spaces and its relationship with a network of other kinds of objects and actions” (Clark 13). As I brought this experience back to my own research on El Salvador I found myself with more questions than answers about how art is used for political purposes.

Still it is clear that through state policies like El Salvador’s Law of Art and Culture, that the state has become a major patron of the arts and, in turn, the cultural production has become ensnared with the political agendas and demands of the FMLN. It is in this sense that state commissioned art in El Salvador can be examined as propaganda that promotes political ideology. Art commissioned by the state can be read as a for social-expression and as an “imagetext” designed to project a story about the past that brings legitimacy and provides cultural consecration for a particular political agenda. My primary concern here in confronting political propaganda is how populist visual technologies related to the Law of Art and Culture co-opt historical memory to construct a narrative of “collective” memory. When individuals or governments misappropriate iconography tied to traumatic memories, they do so not merely with the intention of exploiting the pain of its memory, but also in the hope that such images will mobilize people to their cause. In this chapter I use Mitchell’s concept of the imagetext to think

through how the state builds a narrative of collective memory and national identity through its visual and print culture.

In Jacques Ellul's classic definition, "propaganda" is "a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, ...unified through psychological manipulation and incorporated in an organization."²⁵ Historically, "propaganda" has been regarded with suspicion because it is designed for coercion, persuasion and indoctrination.²⁶ While propaganda often does these things, I use the term "propaganda" neutrally in broad reference to political publicity in state sponsored media and cultural products that spread political ideology or that legitimize and provide cultural consecration for the government. My specific intent in using the term is to destabilize how public art tends to be interpreted in El Salvador as an organic expression of popular reality, history and collective identity. I also use the term "propaganda" to shift the focus from the illustrative qualities of art onto how the state projects ideology through image and text in the cultural production. My specific intervention is to reveal how the state projects a national discourse of memory as political propaganda through the cultural production. By showcasing familiar icons and images in public works, traumatic and violent memories, such as the lives and deaths of Roque Dalton and Monseñor Óscar Romero, serve as shorthand for the FMLN itself and for their political ideology more generally. Ironically, these images, icons and symbols come into the folds of History and are made public in ways that trivialize and distort private memory and the historical record.

²⁵ See Ellul 1965, 61.

²⁶ See Fox 2014.

Given that images are fundamentally interdisciplinary objects of study, I include examples from a broad base of the cultural production, defined here as the systems, structures and spaces that produce and reproduce culture. I read and interpret the meanings of visual events on the two-levels that Roland Barthes terms *connotative* and *denotative*: “An image can denote certain apparent truths, providing documentary evidence of objective circumstances. The denotative meaning of the image refers to its literal, descriptive meaning. A single photograph can also connote more culturally specific meanings. Connotative meanings rely on the cultural and historical context of the image and its viewers lived, felt knowledge of those circumstances—all that the image means to them personally and socially” (Sturken 19). Through state funded examples of memory work after 2009, I show how the state uses the cultural production to deploy propaganda as part of the present-day political program. Specifically, I look at how state commissioned “memory work” functions as political propaganda.

In 2013 the state mass-produced an image of slain Archbishop Romero on publicity posters in and around the capital city of San Salvador. I examine this as an “imagetext” that reveals tensions between verbal and visual representations that are a part of political, cultural and memory struggles in El Salvador today. The image of Romero was captioned with an FMLN political slogan that tied their program to memories of the popular Archbishop. These posters of Archbishop Romero show how images related to historical memory are used for political purposes in El Salvador and disseminated through mass media.

Images like this one are powerful when circulated through the cultural production and public forms of media. In his foundational essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin identifies the cultural production as a system and structure for

circulating propaganda and mobilizing images. Benjamin argues that the power of images changes when they are reproduced, they lose their “aura,” their unique presence in time and space, but they gain the ability to influence the masses. Toby Clark makes a similar argument that propaganda is intimately linked with the rise of mass media. The ability to broadcast and publicize symbols and messages effectively in a short period of time is a powerful tool for influencing national and international opinion (13). David Freedberg wrestles with this question of the power of images in his study of the histories and theories of response. He points out that the beliefs that people have had about the power of images has led them to worship, censor, reproduce and destroy certain images throughout human history. He shows that ethnographic evidence such as historical traditions, fears, conventions and taboos related to images demonstrates their power.

While the term “image” is difficult to pin down because it is used so liberally, let me suggest the following definition: images are symbolic representations or references that function as similes or metaphors that can circulate through the cultural production to become famous or fully iconic. Images are key to propaganda because of their inherent relationship with discourse. In *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (1986), W.J.T Mitchell explores the relationship between images, text and ideology “to show how the notion of imagery serves as a kind of relay connecting theories of art, language, and the mind with conceptions of social, cultural, and political value” (2). Analyzing the connection that Mitchell proposes between discourse and images is a key part of thinking through how the state builds a narrative about memory and propaganda through public art. The cultural production becomes a way to promote a certain ideology that brings moral legitimacy to the government. In effect, Mitchell deduces that “images are like an actor on the historical stage, a presence or character endowed with legendary

status, a history that parallels and participates in the stories we tell ourselves about own evolution from creatures “made in the image” of a creator, to creatures who makes themselves and their world in their own image” (9).

Images are useful in communicating discourse because of the way they convey information all-at-once and evoke an emotional response in the viewer without necessarily providing the space and time for analytical reflection. Roland Barthes calls the emotional impact of an image *punctum* the inadvertent piercing effect that moves the viewer in an emotional way and that establishes a sense of identification between the viewer and the image.²⁷ For example, a friend visiting Paris recently told me about an unforgettable moment she had while touring the Mémorial de la Shoah, the Holocaust memorial and museum. She overheard an old man say to his grandson, "Viens ici pour voir la photo de mon frère et ma sœur." / "Come here to see the photo of my brother and sister." The pair went along from room to room in the museum, until they all arrive at the room full of pictures of children deported to and murdered in Nazi camps. While his grandson looked on, the old man pointed up at the picture of two children, ages 7 and 9, surrounded by so many others. Then he looked at my friend and said in French, "There they are. My brother and sister." The man wanted to find and show it to his grandson because of the power of the image to convey something that his verbal descriptions and stories about his brother and sister could not. It is likely that the old man suspected that by seeing the image his grandson would be able to experience and identify with the past directly without needing his mediation. Visual imagery has this power to lessen the psychological and emotional distance between the past and the present. In this case the example focuses on a photographed image. Photography is

²⁷ See Roland Barthes' discussion in *Camera Lúcida* on the twin concepts of studium and punctum: studium denoting the cultural, linguistic, and political interpretation of a photograph, punctum denoting the wounding, personally touching detail which establishes a direct relationship with the object or person within it.

often perceived as an objective and unbiased medium for documenting and preserving history, however the choices made by the photographer about composition and framing inevitably impact how images are received and understood. Additionally, how the image is contextualized in an archive, museum or memorial also introduces other meanings and gives the image a sense of authority. For this reason, I consider both photographed and painted images similarly given that their authority comes from the way they are framed and projected, not only from the image itself.

El Turno del Ofendido: The Narrative of the State as Defender of the Masses

On election night March 15, 2009 the Salvadoran population elected the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) party under the leadership of President Mauricio Funes. The election marked a pivotal moment in Salvadoran national history ending one hundred and thirty years of conservative rule and twenty years of continuous rule by the rightist (National Republican Alliance) ARENA party. The FMLN became a legally recognized political party with the war's end in 1992, decades after forming clandestinely as an umbrella organization of various guerrilla groups and was a main actor in the Civil War of the 70's and 80's. The FMLN is named after Farabundí Martí, a Marxist-Leninist activist and community organizer who led the popular uprising in El Salvador in 1932. In 2009, Funes stood before thousands of his supporters and declared that his election meant that the "turn of the injured masses" had arrived: "Ahora es el turno del ofendido, ahora es la oportunidad de los excluidos, ahora es la oportunidad de los marginados, ahora es la oportunidad de los auténticos demócratas."²⁸ Funes' deployment of the "turn of the injured peoples" made direct reference to Salvadoran poet Roque Dalton's book by

²⁸ See "Funes: Llegó El Turno Del Ofendido" 2009.

the same title, *El turno del ofendido* (1962).²⁹ The book opens with a prologue that can be read as a rebuke of El Salvador's oligarchy that had long injured, marginalized and exploited the most vulnerable citizens:

Me habéis golpeado azotando
 la cruel mano en el rostro...
 me habéis encarcelado aún más
 con vuestros ojos iracundos
 muriéndose de frío mi corazón
 bajo el torrente del odio...

However the poem continues with an assertion of a moment of awakening social conscience that threatens to turn the tables on longstanding oppressive hegemonic systems:

Ahora es la hora de mi turno
 el turno del ofendido por años silencioso
 a pesar de los gritos
 Callad
 Callad
 Oíd.

The direct reference to Roque Dalton's "turno del ofendido" can be read as a signal to the public that the election of the new government is a turning point in national history.

At the same time, it is important to note the selective deployment of memory in this example. Funes' reference to Dalton is ironic in that it omits the thorny details of his execution

²⁹ The poems of *El turno del ofendido* are characteristic of Dalton's themes, biting style and commitment to the oppressed, to the victims of massacres, the poor, the forgotten, and the anonymous.

at the hands of some of the people that would now occupy key government positions.³⁰ In 1977 the leadership of the ERP accused Dalton of treason and executed him.³¹ Roque Dalton's son Juan José explains the weight of his father's memory on a national scale today: "Hay quienes sostienen que hay dos salvadoreños universales: Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero y Roque Dalton, que dejaron una herencia cultural de valores y de identidad sin paralelo a nivel nacional. Fue el intelectual más destacado y un paradigma moral: el intelectual al servicio de su pueblo" ("Dalton no tendrá homenaje").³² According to Dalton's family, instead of public remembrances, commemorations and homages, the memory of Roque Dalton would be better served by breaking the silence and impunity surrounding his death: "El tema se agudizó con las intenciones del gobierno de rendirle una serie de homenajes," explains Juan José Dalton. He adds that homages are empty symbolic reparations as long as Dalton's assassins are not prosecuted: "Es un acto inconsecuente, ética y moralmente, mientras proteja a uno de sus victimarios" ("Dalton no tendrá homenaje"). Roque Dalton's sons publicly denounced the numerous government homages to their Father after 2009 and prohibited state use of his name explaining that the tributes paid to Roque Dalton by the FMLN are the biggest injury done to the poet and his family in the thirty-five years since his assassination.³³

Funes' public response has been that Dalton's legacy belongs to the entire nation, not just to his family: "Dalton ya no es de los hijos ni de la viuda, es del pueblo, es la esencia de nuestra expresión cultural, no es patrimonio particular" (Abarca). Here, there is a conflict between how

³⁰ See Montgomery 1982, 122.

³¹ Dalton was an internationally celebrated writer, poet and member of the Communist Party who was accused of treason and executed in May of 1975 in El Salvador by a faction of hardline revolutionary leaders of the ERP (Revolutionary Army of the People), a group that later united with several other revolutionary organizations to form the FMLN.

³² See "Dalton no tendrá homenaje" 2010.

³³ See Mixco 2010.

Dalton's family remembers him and the image that the state projects publicly as "history." Dalton's image becomes political propaganda because it transcends the historical context of the 1970's becoming an emblematic icon of El Salvador's postwar era that is represented, remembered, practiced and performed to convey new meanings tied to present day politics. This resistance against memory on the part of Dalton's family can be read as a tactic that responds to political strategies that coopt memory in the advancement of a particular political program while glossing over the experience of traumatic memory. The nuances of memory surrounding Roque Dalton, such as role of the ERP in his death, threaten to interrupt the state's simplified version of his personal politics. We can draw a parallel between this case and the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, the mothers of the disappeared in Argentina who prohibit the state from commemorating their children with plaques and monuments that gloss over the traumatic nature of their deaths. According to Allen Feldman, for the families of the disappeared, official commemoration would be a new death at the same time that it would excuse the state for its role in the past:

These women defer formulaic memory lest it lend the state a moral stability embodied in the petrification of their children's names on a collective gravestone. In this way, the women reserve the right to recall and make public irreconcilable residual historical content that bears upon a present that cannot fully consume or dismiss its problematic past. (166)

As national leaders, the newly elected institutionalized revolutionary administrations of Mauricio Funes in 2009 and Salvador Sánchez Cerén in 2014 faced the task of revising a national history

that had been largely shaped by previous conservative governments.^{34 35} By identifying the popular masses as the historically “injured peoples,” President Funes constructs a sense of history’s debt to the masses while at the same time marking an historic break with previous emblematic memory narratives by positioning the institutionalized FMLN as the redeemer of the historically “injured peoples.”³⁶ As John Gillis points out, memory and identity are subjective constructions of reality that are revised to serve particular interests and ideological positions: “Just as memory and identity support one another, they also sustain certain subjective positions, social boundaries, and of course, power” (Gillis 4). The case, of Roque Dalton and the political use of his memory illustrate the point Gillis makes about memory’s relationship with identity and power.

Funes’ use of Roque Dalton’s image and literary work are examples of how isolated fragments of the past are taken up and projected as political propaganda that tells a story about the nation-state and authorizes the contemporary political project of the government. Paul Ricoeur describes this phenomenon wherein meaning is imposed on disperse historical events by weaving them together to tell a story about the nation. These narratives of national identity establish a teleology that links early with later historical events: “Exposing this continuity consists in the ordered stringing together of slight changes” (Ricoeur *Oneself as Another* 117).

This “stringing together” of single historical fragments constitutes a narrative that is internalized

³⁴ Salvador Sanchez Cerén was elected to the presidency on June 1, 2014 as the candidate of the left-wing Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front.

³⁵ See, for example, *Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador* (2007) where Lindo-Fuentes, Ching and Lara-Martínez argue that the dominant way of remembering the peasant uprising of 1932 is that it was a Communist rebellion. The right used the Communist causality argument to justify its hard-line stance against mass mobilization in the 1960s and 1970s, including the use of death squads to eliminate supposed “communist” insurgents (8).

³⁶ Emblematic memory is a term coined by historian Steve J. Stern that has been used to discuss competing memory narratives in that context. See Stern 2000.

by the individual and community and held to be “authentic” history (Ricoeur *Time and Narrative* 247). In cases like that of Roque Dalton, only part of the story is told about his person and his politics.³⁷ Critical memories about Roque Dalton’s life and death are excluded from public memory narratives, and for his family, these became traumatic silences. As discussed previously, Ricoeur’s thinking on this is that the narrative mode is key to communicating private experience and finding one’s position within public narratives. But, what happens when the personal cannot be narrated? Theorists in the field of memory studies suggest that trauma is rooted in this inability to reconcile personal and public memory (Jelin 23). The example of Dalton illustrates how the crafting of an official narrative can leave a wake of loose and residual traumatic memories.

These marginal memories remain on the peripheries of the official narratives and survive in what Mikhail Bakhtin calls a “second world,” a space for non-official discourse.³⁸ As the official memory narratives evolve in relation to contemporary events and discourses, pockets of residual memory persist in this Bakhtinian “second world.” Bakhtin proposes that the “official” uses power to create a sense of what is “true,” organizes discourse and determines what can be uttered publicly, documented and archived.³⁹ As in Mauricio Funes’ victory speech, Roque

³⁷ See Ricœur, 2004 for a lengthier discussion of how history “overly remembers” some events while leaving out others and how this shapes perception of national identity and historical narrative.

³⁸ Other critics touch on similar conceptions of memories that remain on the peripheries of the official narratives. Chilean critic Nelly Richard conceptualizes these remembrances as “cultural residues” that remain separate from dominant narrative frameworks and Historian Steve J. Stern calls these “loose memories” that persist outside of emblematic memory frameworks.

³⁹ Bakhtin sets out the opposition between official and popular discourse in *Rabelais and his World* with the comparison of the official feast and folk festivities like the carnival. Bakhtin writes that the official feast is a source of truth and power that is put forth as natural and indisputable: “This is why the tone of the official feast was monolithically serious and why the element of laughter was alien to it” (9). For Bakhtin the “official” is formal and critically tied to the established power of church, society and the state. The cooptation of the feast for “official”

Dalton has been incorporated into the official narrative of the FMLN without reconciling the fact that he was executed at the hands of members of that group that are protected from prosecution as a result of the amnesties passed since 1992.⁴⁰ From this analytical vantage point, it becomes clear that the official memory of Roque Dalton deployed by the state carries more discursive weight than any appeals made by his family about the irony inherent in such affiliations. Here, it is the power of the “official” that authorizes memory. As Foucault argues in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, “truth” has nothing to do with the details of what actually happened and everything to do with who has the power to authorize discourse.⁴¹ Foucault’s take on “truth” shifts the focus from historical events to the power of the “official” to authorize discourse. Still, in informal conversations and popular accounts the details of Roque Dalton’s death are well known and there is a general awareness of the contradictions inherent in homages paid to him by the government. There is a general acceptance of the authority of official narratives but, at the same time, people interpret official discourse in light of their own experiences, practices, subjectivities and group affiliations.

President Funes’ use of the “turn of the injured peoples” provides a storyline for conceptualizing the postwar reality rooted in imagined links between historical events and

purposes creates the need for what Bakhtin conceives of as a “second world” since the official feast does not provide an outlet for human expression, but rather serves the purpose of asserting and affirming power.

⁴⁰ See “Funes: Llegó El Turno Del Ofendido” 2009.

⁴¹ In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, published in 1969, Michel Foucault explicitly deals with the power of “official” documents to authorize discourse: “The Archive is the first law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements and unique events”(145). The Archive informs and defines what can be uttered; it is “the system of enunciability”. The Archive does not passively store discourse, but instead discerns between multiple existing discourses determining what will be spoken and what will be silenced (129). Foucault’s concept of the archive changes the focus from the truth value of a narrative to the power that authorizes discourse.

current social conditions.^{42 43} Funes deploys a local literary motif to imagine a debt owed by history to an “injured peoples.” The “turn of the injured” constitutes a new postwar identity and breaks with the narratives of previous governments where the right framed itself as the defender of the nation against Communism.⁴⁴ In his speech Funes explains that the “injured” are the socially and politically excluded and marginalized peoples, that is to say, the 30% of the population living in poverty and especially those living in the rural regions of El Salvador where poverty levels approach 40% (Rural Poverty Index El Salvador 2018). According to the incoming President, these are the “true democratic citizens” to whom he would now restore a voice in government. This reference to the “true democrats” can be read as a declaration of intent to return power to the popular masses and to break with previous governments that showed preference for a small sector of society that held political and social clout. Within the frame of this new national narrative, the oligarchs of the past become marginal citizens and the previous peripheral subjects occupy the vital position of “true” democratic citizens. The “turno del ofendido” is a crucial example of how the state projects a revised history to the public through the cultural production.

⁴² Benedict Anderson describes the nation as an “imagined political community” constructed discursively through print media.

⁴³ See Sommer 1991 for a discussion of how In the nineteenth century ‘national romances’ provided local narratives and provided spaces for Latin American authors to imagine themselves instead of adopting images of Latin America projected from Europe.

⁴⁴ See, for example, *Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador* (2007) where Lindo-Fuentes, Ching and Lara-Martínez argue that the dominant way of remembering the peasant uprising of 1932 is that it was a Communist rebellion. The right used the Communist causality argument to justify its hard-line stance against mass mobilization in the 1960s and 1970s, including the use of death squads to eliminate supposed “communist” insurgents (8).

“En el rumbo señalado por Monseñor Romero”

As with the image of Roque Dalton’s “turn of the injured,” President Funes deploys the memory of Monseñor Óscar Arnulfo Romero to suggest a correspondence between the popular ideals of the 70s and 80s and the political program of the institutionalized FMLN. Funes openly states that his government will follow in Romero’s footsteps: “Gobernaré como Monseñor Romero quería que los hombres de su tiempo gobernarán.”⁴⁵ In order to critically analyze iconography related to memory, one must distinguish between what images signified in their moment and the ways in which the same images are re-presented today. By invoking the figure of Romero, Funes calls up a repertoire of memories that tie the political program of the FMLN with the ideals of the martyred Archbishop.⁴⁶ Here we return to Mitchell’s concept of the complexity of the image. In *Picture Theory* he suggests a dialectical relationship between picture and discourse through the figure of the “imagetext” (9). Mitchell also argues that memory lends itself to imagetexts in that it inherently takes shape between the same codes of visual and verbal representation: “Memory, in short, is an imagetext, a double-coded system of mental storage and retrieval that may be used to remember any sequence of items, from stories, to set speeches to lists of quadrupeds” (192). The connection between President Funes and Archbishop Romero can be further understood by reflecting on how analogy functions as a way of suggesting relationships between things that are known and unknown. Through analogy the state establishes a likeness between Romero and today’s institutionalized FMLN and maps out an ontological relationship between what people remember about Romero and the unknown FMLN political program.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ See “Funes: Llegó El Turno Del Ofendido” 2009.

⁴⁶ Diana Taylor refers to the repertoire as an ephemeral archive. See Taylor 2003.

⁴⁷ See Lakoff 2013, 4.

While the Catholic Church did not officially recognize Romero as a Saint until 2015, many Salvadorans have remembered Romero as a martyr since his death and associate his image with hope, economic and social justice and with the Latin American Catholic bishops' call to the Church to a preferential option for the poor in 1968. Still Romero resisted these ideas and continued to suppress community-based pastoral projects that he felt were too radical and, instead, steadfastly protected the status quo. In 1977, a Jesuit priest, Rutilio Grande, was murdered along with a 72-year-old layman and a young boy. Romero questioned the fact that there was no official inquiry into their deaths after this becoming a staunch activist for human rights. Romero related scripture to the harsh everyday realities of El Salvador and brought attention to political violence by publicizing each documented case of persons who had been killed, assaulted, tortured or who had disappeared on the left and the right. His message of human rights and of social and economic justice was far-reaching; his ninety-minute Sunday morning homily was broadcast three times each week by YSAX, the radio station of the archdiocese, and it quickly became the most popular program in the nation. Romero is remembered for his steadfast defense of the destitute despite facing constant persecution by the state.⁴⁸ When the role of Saint is added to this, the discursive nature of representations of Romero become clearer; many point out the biographical similarities between Romero and Christ as well as other Apostles who experienced spiritual conversion, loved and cared for the poor and ultimately gave their lives for the cause of the people.

Images of Romero in El Salvador today are tied to popular memory narratives surrounding his life as a moderate cleric who converted into a staunch advocate for the

⁴⁸ The military repeatedly attempted to silence him by bombing the radio transmitter and *Orientación*, the archdiocesan newspaper. See Montgomery 1982, 114.

oppressed. Still, given that coffee-growing elites and political conservatives remember Romero as an instigator of popular discontent, memory related to Romero remains divided. John Diugans' *Romero* (United States, 1989), for example, a film that depicts the Archbishop's religiosity through the lens of liberation theology and the principle of a preferential option for the poor remained on the state banned list of films in El Salvador for at least five years after it was released elsewhere (Castro). The film about the popular Archbishop was prohibited because state officials argued that the film "did not contribute to the peace process."⁴⁹

The resurrection of Romero after 2009 in the cultural production has re-presented a version of the story of Christ that draws a parallel between the politics of the FMLN and Christ's mission, one that has been appropriated by President Funes and his supporters as a model for behavior, specifically tied to the politics of the FMLN. After 2009 longstanding silences surrounding Romero are overturned and there is a push by the state to publicize images of the Archbishop, his advocacy for the poor and his death at the hands of elites and right wing ARENA party. Romero has come to re-present, as Christ did, a struggle between two opposing factions. Instead of being between the forces of Good and Evil, however, it is between rich and poor. President Funes has indicated that the intent behind recent state funded memory work is to impulse projects that move the country toward a "full recuperation of historical memory." However it is clear that memory work has played a hand in perpetuating the story of Romero and keeping his image at the center of Salvadoran politics. While I do not debate the need for memory work, my intervention here is to question memory's hegemony and the privileges of this genre over other historical discourses that are scrutinized more critically.

⁴⁹ See Castro 2016.

In her essay *Tiempo pasado* (2005) Beatriz Sarlo problematizes the very idea that there exists a historical “truth” that can be recuperated (163). In her discussion of representations of the past, the controversial Argentine critic questions memory as a narrative that is privileged over other historical discourses and challenges the tendency to regard memory as an unquestionable source of truth about the past. A main argument in her book “Tiempo pasado: cultura de la memoria y giro subjetivo” is that what we think of as the past, “el tiempo pasado,” is always a construction. Sarlo points out that the reconstruction of historical events distorts the meaning of historical events because the past is viewed through the lens of the present and necessarily shifts the narrative (163). What are the privileges of memory as a discursive genre? One answer is that in referring to public works as part of a program of “full recuperation of historical memory”, the state is able to propose a historical narrative that is beyond critical examination.

I argue that instead of “recuperating” collective memory, the state is in fact co-opting lived trauma and projecting political propaganda through the cultural production under the guise of “memory work.” After 2009 both Romero and Dalton are made widely visible in the cultural production and in official public works as symbols of the present day socially progressive government. In examining these two cases it is clear that Romero and Dalton become part of an emblematic system of collective memories that are not restricted by their original histories. For example, their life narratives have been distilled so that controversial aspects of the lives of these legendary figures such as the early affiliation of Romero with the right and Dalton’s execution by members of his own revolutionary group have been distilled out. What is left over is a condensed romantic narrative of who Dalton and Romero were without the nuances that might interrupt the message that the state wants to communicate to the public. In El Salvador these re-

presentations of the past are taken as historical truth and have gone largely unquestioned. As Sarlo suggests, memory as a discursive genre has the privilege of being beyond critical examination (163).

Instead of reflecting the density of the past by depicting details of his person, iconography that represents Romero is simple identifying him by his cassock and clerical collar, glasses and quiet expression. During a recent visit to Panchimalco, a town in southern El Salvador, I noticed these simplified images of Romero on freshly painted state funded murals, on publicly funded sculptures, in shops and in the stands of nearly every street vendor on keychains, t-shirts and other memorabilia. While these depictions of Romero clearly paid tribute to the historical person, I began to wonder what else the image of Romero communicated about contemporary El Salvador. In addition to “re-membering” the past, I wondered how the image dialogues with the present-day socio-political context. The visual presence of Romero in the town of Panchimalco did not only reference the past but seemed to be an effort by the government to demonstrate the political affiliation of the town in the present. This reminded me of the propaganda posters from the exhibit “Mobilizing the Masses in World War I” and how their form and framing within public space was a key part of their function as propaganda. In this case the visual presence of Romero in Panchimalco creates the aura of the collective consent of the town with the political program of the FMLN even though the imagery is largely funded and projected by the government. It is through this effect of power that visibility imposes political discourse. The ability to make images visual to a public is an important effect of power that gives images historical authority:

Visibility is an effect of power “by which power visualizes History to itself. In so doing it claims authority, above and beyond its ability to impose its will.

Authority is that which leads people to follow leaders, even if they disagree with them, and even when the balance of social forces is such that the leaders might be overthrown in a trial of strength...visualization demonstrates authority, which produces consent” (Mirzoeff *The Visual Culture Reader* xxx).

Given the placement of Romero’s image in public space, the representation of the Archbishop is projected as a collective memory that is authorized by the populist government.

One of the government-funded murals in Panchimalco, El Salvador (Fig 1) located in the town center features the Archbishop in a colourful scene with a dove, a reference that suggests Romero’s peaceful methods and his life as a model of nonviolent resistance. In the mural, indigenous Salvadorans and *campesinos* look toward him as if looking for guidance and leadership. One of Romero’s quotes, “Aunque la bala asesina me mate, resucitaré en el pueblo-San Romero de las Américas,” is painted into the mural and captions the image representing his commitment to the cause of social justice and willingness to give his life on behalf of the people of El Salvador. At the same time, through its affiliation with Romero, these meanings extend to the FMLN government. Here the combination of image and text function not only to reflect Romero’s life and person, but also demonstrate the political connection of the town with the politics of today’s FMLN. My intervention here is to bring a critical eye to how historical murals like this one produce meaning about the present.



Figure. 1. Mural of Archbishop Romero. "Aunque la bala asesina me mate..."

Panchimalco. El Salvador November 28, 2015. PHOTO © Evelyn Galindo

In his work on image theory in the public sphere W.J.T Mitchell argues that public art often sets out to present a “utopian” landscape that promotes a positive view of the government and supports the status quo in fundamental ways (Mitchell *Art and the Public Sphere* 3). We see this in many of the simplified representations of Romero in idyllic rural scenes that tie the mission of today’s FMLN with the Archbishop’s work on behalf of the poor. After 2009 Romero becomes part of a romanticized political narrative pushed by the government that cuts across many public works. Mitchell’s critique of public art also highlights an important point of tension in state funded works given that public space has historically been a place for the public to question and critique power. This is not the case when public space is used to support existing power structures. In El Salvador today public visibility incorporates images into a collective narrative that explains the current structure of power and gives legitimacy to today’s power-

holders.⁵⁰ Visuality is closely tied to discourse because making, displaying and authorizing a visual history imposes one narrative of the past on the viewer and implies collective consent and buy-in to that particular narrative.

With the election of the FMLN, Monseñor Romero undergoes iconographic transformation and becomes a symbol adopted by the left to convey abstract concepts about policies, society and history. This means that after 2009 the image of Romero is not only well known, but has “transgressed the parameters of its initial making, function, context and meaning” (Kemp 3). Upon his death in 1980, the popular classes swiftly acclaimed him a saint, calling him St. Romero of the Americas. However he remained a “secular saint” because for more than three decades the Vatican stalled the canonization process for Romero.⁵¹ In a similar vein to previous studies about secular saints, Sarah M. Misemer’s extended study of four Latin American “secular saints” Carlos Gardel, Frida Kahlo, Selena and Eva Perón, Misemer calls attention to these “double performances,” that is to say, how subjects are represented in their given moment and how they are portrayed differently in later historical contexts (104). A “double performance” is intrinsic to iconography because the original person, image or event is necessarily rehearsed, recreated, prepared, performed and transmitted a second time often in ways that significantly depart from what the original signified in its day. Richard Schechner has postulated that a performance is any behavior that is ‘twice-behaved’ or ‘restored.’⁵² Certainly, this seems true enough for a political iconography in which Romero’s image has been re-

⁵⁰ Mitchell argues that “utopian” art builds consensus and collective memory while “critical” art “disrupts the image of a pacified, utopian public sphere.” Critical art exposes contradictions adopting an ironic and questioning relationship with its publics and spaces where it appears (3). See Mitchell 2009.

⁵¹ See Valley 2015.

⁵² See Schechner 1985, especially chapter two.

membered for more than thirty years after his death. Romero is constantly being learned, revised and then re-presented in El Salvador's cultural production through complex relationships and contexts that inform performances of this highly visible icon. Schechner writes:

To treat any object, work or product 'as' performance—a painting, a novel, a shoe, or anything at all—means to investigate what the object does, how it interacts with other objects or beings, and how it relates to other objects or beings. Performances exist only as actions, interactions and relationships. (Schechner *Performance Studies: An Introduction* 30)

Similarly, one cannot understand what Romero's image means without an extended reflection on how his image calls up and re-presents memory. Romero transcends the historical setting of the 1970's and 80's becoming an emblem of today's Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, that is learned, practiced and performed to convey new meanings tied to present day politics. It is largely through the production, transfer and circulation of his image that Romero functions as political propaganda. For this reason, it is critical to examine representations of Romero not only as visual objects in themselves, but also as "imagetexts" that reference particular hegemonic memory narratives in a new historical moment and in a radically changed political context. Looking at the case of memory of the 1970's and 80's in Chile, Steve J. Stern proposes that collective memory is organized around competing "emblematic memory" narratives that are largely hegemonic transcripts.⁵³ Here I contend that images like those of Roque Dalton and Archbishop Romero call up similar memory transcripts in El Salvador.

In 2014 the FMLN commissioned painter Rafael Varela to paint a portrait of Romero for the Hall of Honor in the Presidential House. Varela's *Monseñor Óscar Arnulfo Romero, Guía*

⁵³ See Stern 2000.

Espiritual de la Nación, denotes a familiar historical image of Romero; a pious religious man dressed in white on a path through El Salvador's countryside. However, upon looking at these images in context, secondary meanings emerge that are tied to present day politics. In this case the "utopian" scene of Romero in an idyllic rural setting serves as the literal background for the government and creates meaning about present day politics. This painting of Romero would form the backdrop for countless photographs of the President during press conferences and official events; the visual juxtaposition of the two men suggesting a likeness between the political program of the institutionalized FMLN and the ideals of Monseñor Romero. The figure of Romero overlooking state political policy and events suggests an appropriation of his image to signify that his principles provide the model for the political program of the state, whether that is actually true or not. The correlation between Mauricio Funes and Romero is arguably intentional given the official motto of the Funes administration: "En el rumbo señalado por Monseñor Romero."⁵⁴ This political slogan directly links the political program of the institutionalized left and the ideals of Romero. In 2013, the state used this slogan placed just under the image of Romero to serve as a caption on publicity signs in and around the capital city of San Salvador. This signage combines text and image to convey the message that the policies of the state are in line with socially progressive ideals that people remember in connection with the Monseñor Romero of the late 1970's. Here the relationship between image, memory and text proves to be complex. In a now classic example, René Magritte's *The Treachery of Images* (1928-29) explores the dynamic relationship between word and image: "He marks the very act of naming, drawing our attention to the word 'pipe' itself, and its function in representing the object. Both the word 'pipe' and the image of the pipe represent the material object pipe, and in pointing this

⁵⁴ See "Mauricio Funes: Beatificación de Romero" 2016.

out, Magritte asks us to consider how they produce meaning about it.” (Sturken 15). In fact the script underneath the image of Romero produces meaning about the image above it. The text tells the viewer what is being looked at. In this case the historical Romero and Romero as a symbol for today’s FMLN.



Fig 2. Funes giving a press conference with Rafael Varela’s *Monseñor Óscar Arnulfo Romero, Guía Espiritual de la Nación* in the background. PHOTO © elfaro.net



Fig 3. A publicity sign sponsored by the Funes administration that links the political program of the FMLN with the ideals of Monseñor Romero. PHOTO © elfaro.net

In his charge as President of the Republic, Mauricio Funes commissioned painter Antonio Bonilla to create a set of large-scale “memory” murals that I discuss in depth later in this chapter. Romero is the key figure of the murals located respectively at the National Museum of Anthropology (MUNA), the International Convention Center (CIFCO), and at El Salvador’s International Airport (renamed after Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero in 2014). The mural at the National Museum of Anthropology, titled “Mural Bicentenario,” was commissioned by the Salvadoran Department of Culture to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Independence and

depicts scenes from the last five hundred years of national history leading up to the institutionalization of the FMLN as a political party. A video documenting the mural's creation shows Antonio Bonilla carefully painting Archbishop Romero at the heart of the mural, before any other figure, as if Romero were the anchor and the central point from which the rest of Salvadoran history could be represented.⁵⁵ Antonio Bonilla's depiction of Romero in the *Mural Bicentenario* blends together two iconic images of Romero; one of a pious and patient Romero and one of the Archbishop as an activist on behalf of the poor. In the documentary video the artist references the first of these well-known images; the Archbishop in a black cassock posing patiently with his fingers interlaced. Bonilla blends this representation of Romero with a second well-known photograph of the Archbishop wearing a white cassock, making a speech and pointing upward with the index finger of his right hand. In the late seventies and early eighties this image of Romero pointing toward the heavens referenced God's law, Romero's own commitment to the poor and his moral authority as Archbishop. The same image today within a new political context calls upon a hegemonic memory that points to the moral authority and progressive social policies of the institutionalized left.

⁵⁵ See RadicalesTV 2011.



Fig. 4. Mural of Archbishop Romero. " Mural Bicentenario" Museo Nacional de Antropología Dr. David J. Guzmán San Salvador, El Salvador 2014. PHOTO © Rosemarie Galindo.

In a final more direct example of re-presenting Romero, it can be argued that President Funes stages and performs the Archbishop by embodying Romero's gestures and manner of dress. It is noteworthy that at the end of 2008 Joao Santana was hired to direct and carry out Mauricio Funes' presidential campaign. Santana is regarded as the "creator of leftist presidents" because of his ability to appreciate and stage a sense of the popular that has widespread political appeal to voters.⁵⁶ Some compare his work with that of Joseph Goebbels who fused art and culture in the infamous Nazi propaganda campaign. It is likely then that a larger than life symbol such as Romero would provide a readymade icon to capture the popular essence in the

⁵⁶ See "Arrest of Brazil's Maker of Presidents" 2016.

Salvadoran context, the hearts and minds of the masses and the popular vote. I argue that Funes stages Romero in a way that ties the iconic image of Romero of the seventies and eighties with the political program of the left.

In political speeches, for example, President Funes performs the iconic gesture of Romero pointing toward the heavens. This image of Funes with his hand and finger raised upward and wearing a white guayabera might remind the public of Romero's white cassock and calls up memories of the Archbishop's moral authority and of his commitment to social justice. In this light, President Funes' choice of dress and gestures could be read as a rehearsed and practiced performance that intentionally suggests a likeness between the Archbishop's known principles of social and economic justice and the unknown political program of the FMLN.



Fig.5 Óscar Arnulfo Romero.

PHOTO © lentmadness.org



Fig. 6 President Mauricio Funes addressing the

public. PHOTO © <http://polycarpi.blogspot.com>

In sum, these re-presentations of Archbishop Romero in the media, in the cultural production and in public space are rehearsed performances that construct an analogy between the popular ideals of the 1970's and 80's and the political program of the institutionalized FMLN. Images of Romero elicit collectively held memories about his selfless commitment to the most poor and destitute in El Salvador. In the case of El Salvador after 2009 "memory work" and political propaganda are tightly interwoven; the state projects a national discourse of memory through the cultural production. As an icon, Romero's image becomes a political tool used by the state to draw on the historical ties of the popular class to Romero. It is precisely the emphasis on constructing a political support base through his image that makes Romero a critical case for studying the political use of memory in El Salvador.

The first part of this chapter has examined the representation of historical icons in the cultural production as political propaganda of the state. In this section I shift the discussion to an analysis of a set of state funded "memory" murals commissioned to the Salvadoran painter Antonio Bonilla to examine how the state projects a collective national history by using murals to project both historical images and political discourse. The administration of President Mauricio Funes unveiled Antonio Bonilla's historically themed murals in 2011 and 2012 as part of what the President called a "full recuperation of historical memory." ("Funes devela mural"). Funes' claim to a "full recuperation of memory" is striking given that, in any representation of the past, certain memories are necessarily excluded; historical representations are always problematic and incomplete reconstructions of the past. This analysis of how the cultural production is used as a stage for political propaganda is driven by the conviction that a more complex reading of the past is necessary; one that pushes back against the prevailing official narratives.

I contend that Antonio Bonilla's *Mural Bicentenario* and his *Alegoría de la Guerra Civil y los Acuerdos de Paz* (2012) are part of a discursive visual strategy that establishes the story of El Salvador's "historically victimized people" and links this history with the birth of the present day institutionalized revolutionary government. In this narrative the state becomes the redeemer of 500 years of imperialism, exploitation and injustices suffered by the *indio* and mestizo population beginning with the Conquest. On the one hand, Bonilla's work serves as a necessary revision to a national history that has largely excluded its pre-Colombian heritage. His veneration of the indigenous past serves as a corrective to representations of indigenous identity as a "problem" to be overcome in the national process of modernization and progress.⁵⁷ On the other hand, however, Bonilla's murals project a history of offenses committed against the popular masses through years of abuse, neglect and corruption and provide a utopian visual narrative, the "turn of the injured," that legitimizes the change of government to the institutionalized left. Seven years into the government of the FMLN, it can be argued that in many ways the turn of the historically marginalized masses that Dalton called the "turno del ofendido" still has not arrived.

Antonio Bonilla: The Muralist of the Postwar

Antonio Bonilla's politically committed trajectory and critical vision of the oligarchy, the military and the Church are well known as are his irreverent use of satire, black humor, surrealism and symbolism. Antonio Bonilla (1954) is a self-taught painter that has participated in art expositions since 1975. Within the artistic field his ironic, socially critical and aggressive works mark a rupture with the history of Salvadoran painting (Cortez 64). Within the national art community, Bonilla's depiction of taboo themes and his acute examination of Salvadoran

⁵⁷ See Marroquín 1975.

society stand out as some of the boldest commentaries on Salvadoran identity and history. His paintings are provocative in that they do not shy away from polemical social and political themes such as state sponsored violence, racism, and social injustice, which he often represents in his characteristic dramatic and grotesque style. The decision to contract Bonilla as the painter of these murals reveals the state's partiality to a particular visual narrative of the past:

La ironía, el sarcasmo, lo grotesco, lo no-bello, lo original en el cuadro de Toño son las figuras recurrentes en cada cuadro: cerdos, calaveras, esqueletos, monstruos, entre otros. Estas figuras de cerdos en su obra son la manera de Bonilla de representar lo sucio, lo asqueroso, lo bajo que ha caído la sociedad. Cabe destacar que representa a cerdos bien alimentados, rechonchos que reflejan que se siguen nutriendo de la basura, de los desperdicios de los otros, las calaveras y esqueletos son, por excelencia, una alegoría a la muerte. (“Genio y figura” 6).

Bonilla's iconography offers a strong critique of the Salvadoran oligarchy and of their ties to U.S. imperialism and adoption of Anglo-American cultural influences. The upper class is depicted as a dishonest and parasitic social presence that opens the country to exploitation while the popular classes are represented as vulnerable and innocent youth and as the true essence of Salvadoran national identity. Bonilla's work is particularly biting because he includes recognizable political figures as well as emblematic “types”:

Los monstruos están representados en máscaras sobre los rostros, que en realidad si nos fijamos bien, no son máscaras sino sus verdaderas caras o identidades.

Estos personajes son emblemáticos, representantes del poder en la sociedad:

militares, políticos, sacerdotes, etc., todos están representados y sin embargo nadie se atreve a reconocerse (“Genio y figura” 6).

Negative portrayals of the upper class appear in Bonilla’s works such as *Réquiem para los mártires* (c. 1990) where two figures, a devious oligarch and another person resembling ARENA President Alfredo Cristiani organize the 1989 Jesuit massacre. In another painting, *Pompas funebres*, males and females of the upper class are represented as scavenging buzzards in suits and top hats. This vulture image can be read as a commentary about the upper class as a social entity that has become wealthy by preying on the labor of others. In contrast, Bonilla depicts the popular masses as the essence of Salvadoran national identity; they are engaged in pre-Hispanic folkloric dances and traditions surrounded by nature and later as part of a victimized rural poor population. It is noteworthy that Bonilla’s representations of indigenous ethnicity echo the literary motif of the “noble savage” where an indigenous “other” that has not been contaminated by “civilization” symbolizes humanity’s innate goodness and morality. In Bonilla’s iconography the idyllic renditions of pre-Colombian cultures and the negative portrayals of Salvadoran elites who have been contaminated by European and U.S. influences give a visual accounting of the conflicts that shaped national history.

Muralism: Art and Revolution

When analyzing El Salvador’s publically funded murals it is critical to consider that public art has long been used to shape official political narratives and dominant discourses. As part of international revolutionary processes, Nestor Canclini suggests that urban art including murals and monuments expresses the shift in visual culture from one political group to the next: “They are part of the struggle for a new visual culture in the midst of the stubborn persistence of signs of the old order, such as occurred with the first post-revolutionary Mexican muralism and

with Russian graphic art in the twenties and Cuban graphic art in the sixties” (426). Specifically, the intent of the Muralist movement of post-revolutionary modern Mexico was to change the national consciousness and promote political action (Goldman 111). To this end murals had a clear didactic function often conveying a romanticized view of pre-Colombian heritage and shaping a particular narrative of Mexican history from the Conquest to Independence. Through public art, masses of people become enlisted in the dominant visual narrative and come to see themselves as fitting into “history” in certain ways that make them more likely to behave in certain patterns (Hein et al. 49). In stylistic terms the vignette structure characteristic of the Mexican muralists and their realistic and accessible painting styles allowed the murals to serve as “painted books” for the largely illiterate masses of the 1920s (Goldman 111). Ironically, in cases like that of Mexico, when the revolutionary process becomes institutionalized and “official,” public art enters into conflict between representing the masses and representing the political program of the State: “when the new movement becomes the system, the projects for change follow the route of bureaucratic planning more than that of participative mobilization. When social organization is stabilized, ritualism becomes sclerotic” (Canclini 426). This is the case with Antonio Bonilla who was a “revolutionary” artist prior to the institutionalization of the FMLN as a legal political party. Once the FMLN becomes an established political party, “revolutionary” art ceases to create spaces for critical questioning and public art becomes complicit with the official policies of the government. Public art in El Salvador draws on an economy of images such as those examined earlier in this chapter. In the case of Romero, I argue that, in his day, he was a revolutionary figure who was critical of the state and of the dominant socio-economic system. Now, with the institutionalization of the revolutionary party, his image comes to represent the politics of the state.

In a similar vein, Mary Coffey argues that over time the work of mural artists in Mexico became complicit with the state project it sought to expose. Coffey builds on Octavio Paz's critical essays on Mexican art to explain how mural art became increasingly divorced from its revolutionary origins. Paz critiques the institutionalization of the Mexican muralist movement and traces the process through which revolutionary art becomes official art that serves to bolster the authority of the government and legitimize the state:

El joven estado revolucionario tenía la necesidad de legitimar y de consagrarse a través de la cultura, y qué mejor manera de consagrarse si no con el muralismo mexicano. De esa forma comenzó un error que empezó y concluyó con la perversión del muralismo mexicano: por una parte, era un arte de la revolución, o por lo menos se identificaba como arte “revolucionario”; por otra parte, era arte oficial. (Paz, *Revisiones* 254)

Paz's critique is highly controversial given that he questions one of the most important examples of art in the history of modern art. The Mexican muralists took up themes such as social justice and social consciousness and put art at the service of building a more equitable society. Paz's essays, however, are written from a cynical perspective after Mexico's Tlatelolco student massacre of 1968; a tragedy that throws the promises of national progress into question. From this vantage point, Mexican muralism is not “revolutionary” or populist but instead functions as a cultural mechanism for the formation of the national identity of post-revolutionary Mexico. For Paz, “official” art is propaganda; he sees a fundamental contradiction in state funded “revolutionary” art; it is at this juncture that “revolutionary” art ceases to be critical and instead becomes “official” rhetoric.

El Salvador's Public Art Murals

Antonio Bonilla's Bicentennial mural is located just inside El Salvador's National Museum of Anthropology (MUNA). The MUNA has a primarily educational mission and represents Salvadoran identity for a largely domestic audience by showcasing artefacts from El Salvador's pre-Columbian past, the economic and cultural changes during colonial and modern times and current political, social, artistic and cultural developments. Bonilla's mural here covers one entire wall and is the only artwork in the otherwise empty main entry hall to the museum. The scenes depicting the last 500 years of national history made me wonder why the mural was located in this particular space instead of in El Salvador's Art Museum. Its placement here is discursive giving Bonilla's mural the aura of an artefact, similar to the pre-Hispanic ceramic pots and ceremonial pieces that had also found spaces in the MUNA. Instead of a focus on the aesthetic quality of the mural, this space gives Bonilla's work a functional and didactic quality providing a visual narrative to contextualize the pieces that museumgoers see inside. Through careful analysis state funded murals like this one help to reveal a discourse that the government aims to project through the cultural production after 2009.

Antonio Bonilla's *Bicentennial Mural* (MUNA) and his *Allegory of Peace Mural* located at the International Fair and Convention Center (CIFCO) represent a central paradox at the heart of this chapter, how memory art tied to the popular insurgent movement of the seventies and eighties in El Salvador, becomes discursive in a way that serves to legitimize the state. As I note here, W.J.T Mitchell proposes the relationship between image and text as central to cultural politics and political culture (Mitchell, *Picture Theory* 3). I contend that state funded public art images in El Salvador after 2009 represent memory in a way that authorizes the political discourse of today's FMLN. It is not only the images themselves, but the total discursive weight

of the murals as public art that gives them power. The symbolism that Funes ascribes to Bonillas' murals turns them into "collective memory" and makes them a resource that guarantees consensus about what happened in the past and how today's FMLN is tied to that legacy. However, seven years of continued corruption and increasing violence has revealed the limits of the institutionalized revolution.⁵⁸⁵⁹ From this more cynical vantage point, art funded by the post-revolutionary state is arguably neither revolutionary nor populist but is, instead, a visual technology and a cultural mechanism that rationalizes the present-day political landscape.

I consider Antonio Bonilla's murals as key examples of what Elizabeth Jelin refers to as "memory work," an active practice of constructing a national narrative that is deployed as officially sanctioned collective memory. Jelin argues that "memory work" is tied to national processes of state formation, liberalization and transition because incoming political groups often impose alternative narratives and meanings of the past in order to legitimize their own political positions.⁶⁰ Using Antonio Bonilla's murals as a case study of "memory work" in El Salvador, I examine how a particular historical narrative is re-presented and circulated through art in post-war El Salvador and how revolutionary art becomes official culture. I consider Bonilla's artistic representations as "imagetexts" that use memory images to present a certain discourse about the past. Here it is important to think of history and art not as two separate camps, but instead in a dialectical relationship that takes place between the codes of visual and verbal representation. As W.J.T Mitchell argues in *Picture Theory*, memory is an imagetext because it relies on images to retrieve information, narratives and data from the past (192). In the case of El Salvador's public art, "memory work" calls up selective images that represent a revised narrative of history

⁵⁸ See "How El Salvador Became" 2016.

⁵⁹ See "El Salvador Investiga a Expresidente" 2016.

⁶⁰ See Jelin 2002.

and national identity after 2009. Additionally, the state, through their funding of these murals, choice of artist and with the placement of these murals in particular public spaces, grants authority to a narrative in which five hundred years of impunity, exploitation and injustice are vindicated by the election of the FMLN.



Fig. 7 Final Scene MUNA Bicentennial Mural, detail. PHOTO © Evelyn Galindo Fig 8.

Final Scene CIFCO Peace Accords, detail. PHOTO © Evelyn Galindo

Antonio Bonilla work visually represents pre-Hispanic cultures and today's dispossessed mestizo population as the essence of Salvadoran national identity and legitimizes the birth of the FMLN as an institutionalized revolutionary government. Each of his murals closes with the transformation of the FMLN into an official political party that promises to redeem a national history of popular struggle. Bonilla's *Bicentennial* mural culminates in a scene at the bottom right where a happy couple dances triumphantly. The woman's bright red dress reminds the viewer of the Marxist-Leninist social ideologies of the FMLN during the war of the 1980's and the man's white t-shirt and blue jeans represent the national colors of El Salvador and can be

read as a symbol of the state. Their blissful union symbolizes the merger of the revolutionary party and the state as well as the birth of the FMLN as an institutionalized party. In the final panel of Bonilla's *Alegoría de la Guerra civil*, the FMLN representatives wear suits, a symbol for officialdom, each with a red article of clothing that references an on-going commitment to universal social welfare. The union of the suit and the red article of clothing ultimately is a symbol of the transformation of the FMLN from a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary movement into an institutionalized political party. As discussed earlier in this chapter, in 2009 President Funes announced that the "turn of the injured masses" had arrived with the election of the FMLN to government making direct reference to Roque Dalton's book by the same title, *El turno del ofendido* (1962). Bonilla's constructions of indigenous identity, mestizaje and colonialism visually represent the "injured masses" and point to the Funes government as the vindicator of the historically traumatized popular class and indigenous peoples.

It is worth differentiating between Bonilla's mural scenes as references that call up memory and as images that construct ways of understanding the past. In *Practices of Looking* Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright explore the distinction between images that depict reality and representations that construct ways of understanding of the world. They argue: "painting produces meanings about these objects, rather than simply reflecting some meaning that is already within them" (14). Thus, even though Bonilla's murals reference historical events, one can distinguish symbolism in his choice of color, in his deployment of Christian and pre-Colombian iconography, in the religious allusions to Cain and Abel and in the other mythological orientations in his painting. His work does more to visually represent the narrative of the "turn of the injured masses" than to reflect historical reality as it was.

In this case the state uses public art to project “the turn of the injured masses” through visual imagery as a narrative of national identity and national history. As part of El Salvador’s memory turn after 2009 Bonilla depicts indigenous peoples as the historically “injured masses.” His representation of the indigenous character of El Salvador speaks to social category as well as to racial characteristics. Representations of the “injured masses” are based on a range of social practices that divide Salvadoran society into the haves and the have-nots including language, dress, religion, community, culture and personal identification. As Anthropologist Alejandro D. Marroquín explains:

...De ese choque sangriento surgieron dos sectores bien definidos que durante siglos van a ser los polos del proceso histórico Americano: por un lado los vencedores, los que conquistaron y sojuzgaron, que se denominan blancos o españoles; y por el otro lado están los vencidos, los despojados, los humillados hasta el ludibrio, los cuales se denominan indios. (751)

Bonilla’s murals explain the plight of the indigenous and mestizo majority through pre-Colombian, Colombian and contemporary history and culminating in the election of the FMLN in 2009. In Bonilla’s mural scenes national identity passes through as a series of stages; idyllic indigenous and pre-Hispanic images later transform into depictions of local everyday life, mannerisms, and customs associated with peasant life, and finally into scenes of the “injured masses,” a traumatized and poor mestizo population. This narrative of cultural decline sets the stage for the vindication of the masses by the populist government in 2009.

We see a clear example of representation of the “injured masses” in the CIFCO mural where Bonilla depicts a male and female couple before conquest, in colonial times and after the most recent war. In the first image the couple wear masks associated with a traditional

indigenous dance of the tiger and deer that speaks to pre-Colombian community structure, responsibilities and ways of life.⁶¹ In a colonial scene this couple appears again, but now they no longer wear the traditional masks. Instead they are angelic figures dressed in white with wings made of leaves representing the blending of Christian iconography with natural elements of the land, a symbol for the pre-Colombian population. The couple appears again in a third scene referencing the most recent war, but this time the woman looks lost and despondent. She is cast in blue and wears a simple dress. Her partner appears only as a photograph that she holds up of that reminds the viewer of photos of disappeared people that throughout Latin America made silent demands to know where disappeared family members were and what had happened to them.

Indigenous and marginalized mestizo peoples represent the “injured masses” and popular essence of Salvadoran national identity. In Bonilla’s *Bicentennial* mural, for example, Bonilla depicts scenes of Spanish culture and the Catholic religion being violently imposed on indigenous peoples. In the uppermost panels Spanish Conquistadors and Church authorities rape, kill, and subjugate pre-Hispanic peoples. A sinister looking priest holds out a cross of gold looks on as a man dressed as a jaguar is killed. Here the jaguar can be read as a reference to pre-Colombian cultures given the importance of the jaguar as a feline icon in Mesoamerican religions and societies (Benson 64). The imposition of the gold cross suggests that Christianity was enmeshed with the drive for gold, riches and other spoils of Conquest. Next to this scene, an indigenous woman holding a baby screams in anguish. These images make trauma visible, but it seems dislocated and no longer rooted in personal memory. In most of these panels indigenous and mestizo peoples are shown in submissive poses: kneeling, with hands tied behind them or

⁶¹ See Ramírez 2006.

folded passively in front of them. In the mural forefront, a woman covers her face with her hands shielding her eyes from the scene before her. These scenes provide a visual representation of the “injured masses,” but instead of seeking out justice or healing, the images construct a visual explanation of the conditions leading up to the birth of the institutionalized revolutionary government. Depictions like these show how trauma is deployed to build a sense of the moral legitimacy of the popular struggle and the right to power of the FMLN as the institutionalized revolutionary government.

The intense pre-Colombian and Christian religious iconography in Bonilla’s murals emphasize the distinction between painting a timeline of historical scenes and events and representations that produce a way of seeing the past.⁶² For example, Bonilla’s imagery presents El Salvador’s most recent war as a fight between a moral and an immoral brother. In the far left section of the CIFCO mural a white and grotesque Cain attacks Abel, his mestizo brother, with a glass Coca-Cola bottle. The use of the Coca-Cola bottle as a weapon can be read as a reference to U.S. economic investments in El Salvador and also to the Reagan administration’s financial backing of the Salvadoran military during the most recent war. In this scene Bonilla revisits the biblical story where Cain kills his brother Abel in a jealous rage. In the original version Abel is an innocent victim and a Good Shepard who is sacrificed because of his brother’s sinful nature. Bonilla establishes a metaphorical relationship between his image of the mestizo and white brothers and the biblical story of Abel who is an innocent brother murdered by Cain, a symbol of rivalry, anger and violence. In this allegorical scene the artist ties El Salvador’s social and historical conflicts to Cain’s immorality; this representation of Cain functions as a foil to a virtuous Abel. Here we have a clear example of imagery that represents the nature of the social

⁶² See Sturkin and Cartwright’s discussion of this distinction in “Practices of Looking,” 13.

conditions and racial characteristics that led to the most recent war. Bonilla's imagery is rooted in history, and yet it does not reflect historical events as much as it represents these in moral terms through the biblical story of Cain and Abel. The strong religious allusions produce meaning and tell a story about the past that goes far beyond an objective and transparent representation of historical events.

Bonilla's MUNA mural also makes visible foreign economic and military intervention in El Salvador during the most recent war. In the central panel Pope John Paul II, Uncle Sam and the Devil crowd around key historical figures in the war of the 1980's. The Pope puts an arm around Archbishop Romero, a key advocate for the popular masses in El Salvador. The devil has his tongue in the ear of Roberto D'Aubuisson a major in the Salvadoran Army tied to the formation of El Salvador's infamous paramilitary "death squads" and founder of the National Republican Alliance (ARENA) party. A suited man holding a piggy bank stands near René Ponce, a senior military officer in the Salvadoran Army associated with the massacre of the Jesuit Priests in 1989. Here the oversimplification of historical events and the telling of the past through icons such as Uncle Sam and mythological figures like the Devil add meaning to past historical events. Instead of being burdened with the timeline of history, with historical documentation and method, and showing a commitment historical reality, Bonilla's images tell a story with fictitious characters that convey history as a moral story with "good" and "bad" characters. These images and scenes do not reflect reality, but instead produce meaning about past events. These images feed into official propaganda by representing a view of national history focused on the victimization of the "injured masses" that, in turn, authorizes the transition in state control and legitimizes the birth of the institutionalized revolutionary FMLN government.



Fig. 9 Archbishop Romero stands above an indigenous warrior.

Central panel of Bonilla's CIFCO mural, detail. Photo: Evelyn Galindo.

Conclusion

This chapter proposes a different place from which to visualize public art in El Salvador by challenging the authority of the economy of images projected by the state after 2009 and revealing how the state deploys trauma as political propaganda. I contend that public art and visual examples of “memory work” in the cultural production call to mind the discourse of the “turn of the injured” in a way that legitimizes the political program of the government. This narrative was announced by President Funes on the night of his election when he stated “the turn of the injured masses has arrived.” Bonilla’s mural visually depicts the “injured” as the indigenous, mestizo and dispossessed masses and plots them into national history as central subjects and victims of the past. While I have taken a critical approach to viewing these

representations, my intent has not been to question the value of “memory work,” but instead has focused on locating the convergence of official “memory work” in El Salvador and political “propaganda,” the intersection of aesthetic disinterest and a nearly violent imposition of strategic political interest.

Bonilla’s murals represent the “turn of the injured” as the beginning of a utopian era that promises an end to a national history of wickedness, economic exploitation, and of the victimization of the popular masses. As W.J.T Mitchell proposes, a dialectic emerges in “public art between “utopian” and “critical” relations of art and its publics (Mitchell, *Art and the Public Sphere*, 3). Within the political context of El Salvador after 2009, Bonilla’s murals are not critical of the state, nor are they ironic or subversive in ways that disrupt the sense of consensus and “collective memory” underlying these images. Instead they build a political landscape, the “turn of the injured,” that promises that the time of vindication has come with the institutionalization of the FMLN. Again, visibility’s close ties to propaganda become evident.

Still, public art must not necessarily be either utopian or critical as these two functions are not mutually exclusive. Today many Salvadorans viewing representations of History in museums, on murals and monuments in public spaces navigate this point of tension between images and scenes that impose an “utopian” official version of the past rooted in the politics of today and their own more dispersed, contingent and sometimes conflicted and critical memories.

The preceding discussion about official art, icons and images in El Salvador after 1992, leads to the thorny issue of whether state funded art, public works and official monuments can represent traumatic memory with empathy. Can public art bear witness, perform memory, and, to some extent, provide a platform for working over and through the trauma perceived in the larger community and cultural setting? I have argued here that the “memory work” of the

FMLN government is largely propaganda, and yet there is something about how these public works bring visibility to traumatic memory that is potentially productive depending on one's subject position relative to trauma, for example, for survivors, witnesses, secondary witnesses, artists and writers. The questions I have raised, at most, explore possibilities with respect to the representation of traumatic memory in official and state funded images and text.

With this in mind I would like to return to the photograph of my mother's face reflected in museum glass as she looks at the reconstruction of Padre Rutilio Grande's torso after he was killed. The photograph captures two experiences of the past in a single image; an artifact that has been re-presented, re-constructed and staged in the present and, at the same time, my mother's own personal memories of who Padre Grande was in his day and how she remembers him. My mother's face could be read as registering the conflict at the heart of this chapter about the ways in which public art, traumatic experiences and "memory work" become propaganda; part of a utopian narrative of the past rooted in the politics of today. My Mother's expression looks contemplative and critically aware of how a private memory can be distorted to fit into a utopian narrative of the past. Bringing this critical awareness to "official" representations of the past means that we can engage with the "utopian" without closing out moments of convergence with more critical readings of historical events. In fact, a primary goal of "memory work" in El Salvador today should be to set official History, collective memory and private memories into public dialogue in ways that expand the archive and complicate dominant understandings of El Salvador's most recent war. One can read this appreciation of the expansiveness of memory in my Mother's face; a sense of contemplativeness at the fact that unresolved and traumatic private memories have taken on profound collective meaning and that the personal has become historical.

Chapter 2: Archival Practices in Contemporary Salvadoran Art

In July of 2016 I participated in a panel discussion “Conversatorio sobre el arte, la memoria y la violencia” in San Salvador that explored how violence and memory are represented in El Salvador’s artistic production. Examples of Salvadoran art were shown from the seventies and eighties including Carlos Cañas’ *El Sumpúl*, a painting from 1984 that represents a little known massacre of peasants that is an important example of military oppression and institutionalized violence during the most recent war; several of Camilo Minero’s socially committed *costumbrista* prints that record the daily realities of peasant life and examples of Antonio Bonilla’s characteristic biting representations of the oligarchs of the seventies and eighties in El Salvador, illustrating the abuses that led to the war. These works express a clear didacticism committed to creating art about social injustice, inequality and human rights violations based on the presumption of revealing to the viewer something that he or she does not already know about the social realities of the day. In its time this critical art positioned itself in relation to society and politics as if it were unveiling a hidden reality to the public and signaling the possibility of a radical alternative.

In the question and answer session someone from the audience commented that contemporary Salvadoran postwar art seemed to have lost the clear intent on denunciation and the hope of bringing about social change that motivated artists and writers before and during the war. Was it true? I wasn’t so sure, but the question made me curious about what it was that postwar art sets out to do or if it even does set out to do anything deliberately. This comment marked the beginning of what would become a line of inquiry in my own research for this chapter that sets out to answer the question: “What does postwar Salvadoran art hope to rouse in viewers?” This question is also indebted to the work of W.J.T Mitchell in which the critic

examines the power of images. He proposes that the image is in the precarious position of needing to “convince” instead of having the power to act in and of itself.⁶³ This is the case too in Salvadoran visual culture. Mitchell argues that instead of focusing on “the power of images” to do anything, that critics shift to an examination of the “desires” of images and to an emphasis on determining: “What do pictures want?” For this reason, instead of asking “What does postwar Salvadoran art do?” I am curious about what it desires of the spectator. What do these images want us to feel and remember? How do they hope that we will respond?

This chapter outlines how the second generation responds to familial and historical trauma and contemporary manifestations of violence through the cultural production. One panel from Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, for example, gets at the heart of how trauma is transmitted from one generation to the next. Artie comments, “I mean, I can’t even make any sense out of my relationship with my Father. How am I supposed to make any sense out of Auschwitz?... Of the Holocaust?” His comment gets at the central issue of how past and present trauma are often intertwined in complex ways. Trauma endures over time for the Father because he experienced it personally, but familial, community and historical trauma is recycled through Artie as he attempts to understand his Father and his Father’s life. In the case of El Salvador, how do images in contemporary art involve viewers in the act of bearing witness to trauma from the most recent war and, at the same time, in “working through” contemporary manifestations of violence? How does art function as a tool that allows the healing of trauma that has been passed on from one generation to the next?

Examples of public art from the seventies and eighties in El Salvador recreate the dynamic that Jacques Ranciere describes as a “stultifying pedagogy.” In this traditional pupil-

⁶³ See Bohrer and Mitchell 1997.

schoolmaster model the pupil assumes the position of knowing nothing of value about a given topic and needing to learn what the schoolmaster has to teach. The pupil is changed by this uniform one sided interaction, but not the teacher.⁶⁴ According to Rancière critical art may set out to liberate the public in some way even while it is rooted in this traditional model of spectatorship based on the privilege that the artist grants himself to take on a teaching role. In the same way, these works from the seventies and eighties in El Salvador reproduce a didactic model even while artists had the intention of striving to produce “a form of consciousness, an intensity of feeling, an energy for action” (Rancière 14). Despite the intentions of the artist the act of viewing requires that the public “play dumb” in relation to the process of production and the reality behind the images. The viewer must, to a certain extent, suspend prior knowledge, personal memories and experiences in order to be swept up by the spectacle. The act of viewing is only possible after a separation from knowing; one takes distance from personal memories and passively waits to receive words, images and knowledge from actors and projections: “To be a spectator is to be separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act” (Rancière 2).

In this chapter I contend that there has been a shift in critical art images in El Salvador today away from earlier models of didacticism. Today many Salvadoran artists blur the boundary between those who create art and those who look at it to draw spectators out of passivity and transform them into a community of “actors,” active participants in a shared world. The boundaries between artist and public and between historical artifacts and props, art materials and technique become blurred as art incorporates archival elements such as newspaper clippings, street graffiti, remains and other kinds of raw data. Additionally, artists take on the methods and practices of anthropologists, sociologists and historians involved in data collection, fieldwork,

⁶⁴ See Rancière 2009.

observation and sociological experimentation. I define this liminality in postwar Salvadoran art as the archival practices that recycle historical documents, artifacts and archival methods into art. In contrast with the artistic imagery of the seventies and eighties, postwar art shifts the position of the artist as mediator of images and challenges the opposition between art and artifact, between viewing and acting and between artist and spectatorship by an art public.

In the first chapter of this project I argued that the state uses publicly funded art as political propaganda. In publicly funded art, the state represents history as having a redemptive quality that culminates in the institutionalization of the FMLN as the governing party. In Chapter 2, I focus on analyzing examples from postwar Salvadoran art that are not publically funded but that are instead promoted by private international arts organizations and consider how historical and contemporary violence are represented in images that are unrestricted by state regulations and funding, but that are responsive to global markets, cultures and publics. Here I am referring to the way that the rise of large-scale international exhibitions and increasingly globalized curatorial discourse have effectively realigned the art world, presenting a view of the world that is more transcultural (O'Neill 85). The local and global are not taken as separate poles, but rather as points of intersection in a network (O'Neill 53). I contend that postwar Salvadoran art shifts the dynamic of artistic mediation and spectatorship through critical avant-garde projects that push beyond the traditional bounds of aesthetic practice incorporating elements of anthropological fieldwork such as data collection from interviews, observation and documentation. Given the artistic affiliation with the international art world and the global projection of Salvadoran art through private organizations, I examine how local arts constitute and are constituted by global formations of art markets and practices.

A key tendency of Salvadoran postwar artists is that they work at the threshold between art and artifact and play on the ambiguity and disorientation that occurs in this in-between space. Contemporary Salvadoran artists who form part of the post-war generation are carrying out anthropological, sociological and historical work using interdisciplinary methods, practices, places and mediums. Consider for example a traditional circular muslin tablecloth embroidered with icons of violence borrowed from conventional gang tattoo images in El Salvador; a blog-project that records 100 days of violent deaths in El Salvador taken from reports in the country's two major newspapers; a sound piece generated from the random arrangement of dots separating the names of victims of the Salvadoran Civil War; and a soccer game between ex-guerrillas and ex-members of the military organized as an experimental documentary by an art collective and staged in one of the most volatile wartime regions of El Salvador. However disparate in medium, concept and composition, these works by Danny Zavaleta, Mayra Barraza, Mauricio Kabistán and The Fire Theory Collective share a notion of artistic practice as a way of engaging with history and memory that challenges the standard understandings of spectatorship and acting. While some artists working in the post-war era have turned away from socially committed work altogether, this group of artists remains politically engaged by shifting the norms of artistic mediation challenging the separation between the viewer and the image and the artist's role as a pedagogue that leads the viewer through artistic images, scenes and experiences. Each of these artists is affiliated with Y.ES Contemporary, a non-profit international initiative funded by the Miami based Wennett and Cader-Frech foundation that creates opportunities for conceptual and avante-garde Salvadoran contemporary artists to advance their artistic practice and engage with artists, curators, collectors, gallerists and the media within and outside El Salvador. This group of artists could be extended (a list of other Y.ES Contemporary affiliated artists might include

Ronald Morán, Simón Vega, Melissa Guevara and Victor Crack Rodríguez) but for my purposes here an analysis of multiple works by these four suffices to suggest that much of the postwar Salvadoran cultural production emerges at the threshold between art and artifact and between the local and the global. This also provides a thought-provoking contrast with the official uses of memory explored in the previous chapter that set about to teach about the past by building a national narrative of “collective memory.”

This chapter would be incomplete without highlighting the role of Y.ES Contemporary as a mediator of Salvadoran art; that is to say its role as an international instrument and channel through which local discourses on art come to be generated, and the generative force behind a particular kind of transcultural artistic production in an expanded cultural field. Y.ES Contemporary provides support for local artists and a means for them to reach an international audience in biennials as well as exposure to international galleries and art collectors. In his essay ‘The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse’, Paul O’Neill discusses the site of the biennial as a critical part of curatorial practices and the large-scale, international display as the primary “means through which contemporary art is now mediated, experienced and historicized” (4). In this chapter the term “biennial” is used to describe recurring blockbuster exhibitions that have ample budgets and internationalism at their core. Participation in global art biennials cannot be underestimated as they are sites that provide a platform existing on an “inter-national, trans-national and multinational scale, where the ‘local’ and the ‘global’ are in constant dialogue”(4).

The international projection of Y.ES has significantly influenced artistic practice and the kind of knowledge emerging in the discourse of contemporary Salvadoran art. In fact, I would argue that Y.ES curatorial practices of the last decade are one of the most significant developments in discourse surrounding contemporary Salvadoran art. By bringing peripheral

artists to international art centers, Y.ES has succeeded in validating local arts on a global scale. Y.ES Contemporary affiliated artists Ronald Moran and Simón Vega describe this relationship between the periphery and the center as a fusion of international and local elements in their work. Their work needs to be able to translate globally—without losing sight of its meaning within Salvadoran culture. Ronald Moran opts to address this concern by focusing on the human condition more broadly and using widely understood symbols; other artists like Simón Vega mix themes from the first and third world contrasting these two different worlds consciously in his work. He also focuses on exhibiting locally in Salvadoran galleries and art spaces drawing ideas from El Salvador and taking these to an international stage (Moran). These Salvadoran artists have responded to the international art publics of biennials and to new curatorial practices by actively reflecting on the ways that global and local themes play out in their work. At the same time, for many in this postwar generation impacted by diaspora and globalization, the experience of moving between and through local and global sites and points of reference is a fundamental experience from which to narrate personal experiences of transculturalism.

An important underlying argument here is that postwar Salvadoran artists break with the politically committed work of the seventies and eighties that followed a more didactic model that was intent on revealing to the viewer something that it was supposed he or she didn't know or understand about the social reality. It is important to note that while works from the seventies and eighties do represent historical events and conditions, the images themselves remain firmly grounded in the realm of artistic representation and are not taken as historical documents. They do not challenge the traditional distinction made between art and artifact nor the boundary between artist and art public. Instead of following this didactic model, many Salvadoran artists such as Víctor Crack Rodríguez, Danny Zavaleta, Walter Iraheta and Mauricio Esquivel work at

the juncture between art and real life engaging in experimental artistic practices that defy traditional understandings of what art is by exploring the liminal space between aesthetics and activism. Ileana Diéguez Caballero describes this liminality as the symbolic gestures that may or may not have aesthetic goals but that captivate cultural critics and invite analysis from the artistic field (11). She builds on Victor Turner's theoretical work and applies it in an analysis of political performances and actions of the Southern Cone that often are not perceived as "art" because of their heavy political commitment. Instead of being rehearsed and crafted for a public with a didactic intent, these artistic practices are often provisional and take shape only in the moment of representation; these works respond to and are integrated directly into daily life (Diéguez-Caballero 10). For her, artists working in this zone of liminality are responding to the situation of social crisis that is produced in the artistic field after the political conflicts and failed revolutionary projects of the 70s and 80s (31). She coins as "artivism" these experimental works that fuse art and activism. Building on Diéguez' work Diana Taylor posits that artists (art-activists) use artistic methods for political and economic interventions and that performance is the continuation of politics by other means (Taylor, *Performance* 147). In El Salvador today I argue that many artists work in this liminal zone between art and activism where artistic tools and methods borrow and draw from other fields and can be adapted from everyday interactions, real artifacts, social experiments and historical documents.

Using interdisciplinary artifacts and methods in art is not new to the art world or unique to El Salvador. Ever since Marcel Duchamp's reproduction and miniaturization of his works, organized and arranged in an archival suitcase titled *La boîte-en-valise* (1935–41), there has existed an artistic fascination with the documentary practices of art and museums (Enwezor 14). The artworks that I analyze in this chapter represent examples of Salvadoran contemporary art's

engagement with “archival practice,” the liminal appropriation of historical documents, artifacts and methods for aesthetic ends in art. I contend that there has been a shift in critical art images in El Salvador today away from a model of didacticism; artists blur the boundary between those who create art and those who look at it to draw spectators out of passivity and transform them into a community of “actors,” active participants in a shared world. The boundaries between artist and public and between historical artifacts and props, art materials and technique become blurred as art incorporates archival elements such as newspaper clippings, street graffiti, remains and other kinds of raw data. Additionally, artists take on the methods and practices of anthropologists, sociologists and historians involved in data collection, fieldwork, observation and sociological experimentation. I define this liminality in postwar Salvadoran art as “archival practice,” the reappropriation of historical documents, artifacts and methods in art. In contrast with the artistic imagery of the seventies and eighties, postwar art shifts the position of the artist as mediator of images and challenges the opposition between art and artifact, between viewing and acting and between artist and an art public. Here I examine the “archival practices” of contemporary Salvadoran art and consider “archival art” as a postwar tendency in its own right.

The conventional definition of an archive references only the place; a space apart that houses public records and historical documents. However, this is only part of the meaning behind the word. Michel Foucault’s work on the archive is almost entirely dissociated from conceptualizing the archive as a physical space and focuses on how it is a discursive function of power and knowledge. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, published in 1969, Foucault explicitly deals with the archive as an abstract concept: “The Archive is the first law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements and unique events.” Foucault does not conceptualize the archive as a storehouse of historical documents, but rather as the intangible

origin of discourse. For Foucault, the archive informs and defines what can be uttered; it is “the system of enunciability”. The archive does not passively store discourse, but instead discerns between multiple existing discourses determining what will be spoken and what will be silenced (Foucault 129). Foucault’s concept of the archive changes the focus from the story of the past to the source of power that authorizes discourse.

The archive responds to what Pierre Nora calls the “imperative of our epoch” – that is, “not only to keep everything, to preserve every indicator of memory – even when we are not sure which memory is being indicated – but also to produce archives”(Nora 14). According to Nora our age is defined by the desire to archive. Andreas Huyssen expands on this archival drive by proposing the existence of “a culture of memory” obsessed with the symbolic representation of the past in the present. Huyssen considers that the “culture of memory” responds to the danger of forgetting with the creation of memory sites that establish ties of identity with the past: “Nora’s lieux de mémoire compensate for the loss of milieu de mémoire just as musealization compensates for the loss of lived tradition” (Huyssen 24). Marianne further suggests the importance of the archive for the “post-generation,” the descendants of survivors, perpetrators and bystanders of mass traumatic events. The second generation connects deeply with the previous generations’ remembrances and that connection with the past becomes a type of prosthetic memory. In these cases, historical documents such as photographs in archives and other kinds of artifacts allow people to experience the past in a way that is potentially less mediated.

I analyze elements, methods and practices taken from archival work and used in art such as artifacts and documents because these can function as an unmediated third presence in Salvadoran post war art. In Rancière’s logic of emancipation, for example, there can often be a

“third thing” between the teacher and novice “that is owned by no one, whose meaning is owned by no one, but which subsists between them, excluding any uniform transmission, any identity of cause and effect” (Rancière, *Emancipated Spectator* 15). The “third thing” allows for an alternative to didacticism; the “re-appropriation of a relationship to self, lost in a process of separation.” I see this third presence in the work of Salvadoran artists where artifacts, even while subject to artists manipulation, remain essentially open to interpretation. Historical artifacts and documents stand apart and ask that the public connect to them personally instead of through the artist. In an artistic representation the use of archival elements can level the footing between artist and public so that the privilege of the artist to teach about the past begins to fall apart. The public no longer is asked to “play dumb” in the process of spectatorship; the viewer does not have to suspend prior knowledge and personal memories and experiences in order to take part in the spectacle.

My analysis of the independent cultural production in El Salvador today draws on this body of theoretical work as well as on that of Hal Foster in which he posits the archival process as key to understanding modern artistic practice. Hal Foster conceptualizes the “archival impulse” as a drive to construct discourse through artistic engagement with the documentation process and with the document as an object of art. Foster identifies the archival relations as the “memory structure” characteristic of modern art practice, museum spaces and the study of an artistic tradition. Foster refers to examples of artworks that collect and catalogue the past, repackaging and re-presenting it from the vantage point of the present. In the context of postwar El Salvador an “archival impulse” manifests in the cultural production and expands the possibilities of what can be articulated about the past offering new readings of the present that interrupt and counter the dominant emblematic discourses of the state as articulated in public art

projects. In these new engagements with the historical document and with the archive, artists subvert the “official” through degradation, parody, humor and the grotesque and provide an important narrative counterpoint to official discourses. Hal Foster draws attention to the following features of archival art: “In the first instance archival artists seek to make historical information often lost or displaced, physically present. To this end they elaborate on the found image, object and text” (Foster 4). The sources are at times familiar and drawn from mass culture, but can also be harder to identify ‘retrieved in a gesture of alternative knowledge or counter-memory.’ The work is often a secondary manipulation that re-frames, re-constitutes and re-presents appropriated images, objects and texts in ways that significantly shift the original meaning and call for interpretation. The impulse to collect and categorize means that artists draw on archives, but also become producers of archives in a way that often “underscores the nature of all archival materials as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private” (5). At the center of archival artistic practice is a basic questioning of the ability of the “real” document or archived artifact to represent a complete story about the past and present. Artists become historians, anthropologists and archeologists that take on the task of remembering, unearthing, categorizing and storing information. The work of artists like Danny Zavaleta, Mauricio Kabistán, Mayra Barraza and The Fire Theory collective highlights alternative experiences that are excluded from the “official” histories and highlight inconvenient, marginal and peripheral realities. Archival artistic practice builds informal archives that supplement, complement and complicate the official versions of the past and present.

In the following sections of this chapter I examine liminality in the work of Danny Zavaleta, Mayra Barraza, Mauricio Kabistán and The Fire Theory art collective to illustrate how Salvadoran postwar art draws spectators out of passivity and transforms them into actors and

active participants in a shared world. As mentioned earlier I refer to this liminality in postwar Salvadoran art as “archival practice,” defined as the re-appropriation of historical documents, artifacts and methods in art. These artists engage viewers in bearing witness, make historical and contemporary trauma and violence visible, and highlight the culture of silence and impunity and its relations with the “archive.” Contemporary art in El Salvador is no longer committed to teaching about or revealing some “unknown truth” about local society and politics as it was in the seventies and eighties. Instead, art uses real artifacts to create lab like spaces for experimentation and viewing by local and global publics; meaning is created through art and through dynamic interactions between actors and spectators. Art in postwar El Salvador rouses spectators out of passive attitudes by allowing them to play out their own lives on stage and in relation to artistic representations.

Danny Zavaleta: The Archive and Marginal Subcultures

I first met Danny Zavaleta (1981, San Salvador) in 2015 on a visit to his studio at La FabriK. Many of the works that I saw that during that visit were large picture window size reproductions of symbols associated with El Salvador’s leading MS-13 and Barrio 18 gangs including black roses, spider-webs, crucifixes, cars and grenades and reproductions of the street art that is often visible on buildings and walls in the gang-controlled areas of San Salvador. Zavaleta has based his artistic practice on documenting the iconographies of urban life creating a visual compendium of images, gestures, jargons and even capturing the nuanced wall textures and way that street art is layered covering-over older tags in the turf wars of the gang concentrated areas of the city.

Zavaleta grew up and still lives in Soyapango one of the suburbs of the capital city that is now a stronghold of the MS-13 *mara*. His work focuses on the symbols and imagery that over

time have come to mark the walls and fences in his neighborhood from the vantage point of a member of the community. It is worth emphasizing that Zavaleta is not an outside observer; this is especially important when one considers that his artistic practice involves anthropological and archaeological observation and documentation that would be difficult for anyone but an insider to carry out. Zavaleta has been able to infiltrate gang culture because he is a member of the community; he reads and interprets gang symbols as someone who lives subject to the logic of the city and the power of the rival gangs.

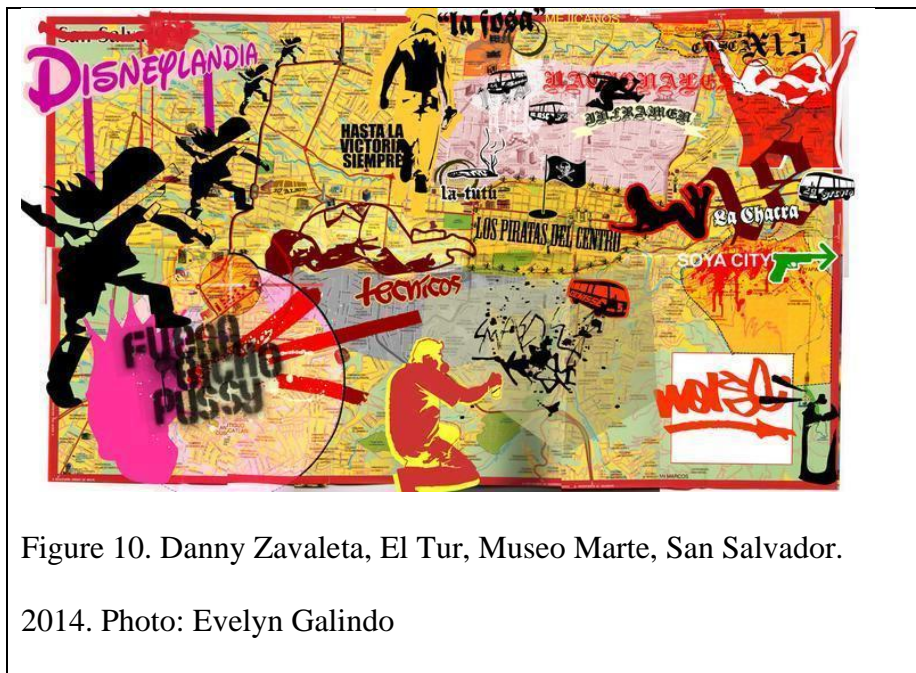


Figure 10. Danny Zavaleta, *El Tur*, Museo Marte, San Salvador.

2014. Photo: Evelyn Galindo

Zavaleta’s work is rooted in the kinds of liminal archival practices that I have defined as “the re-appropriation of historical documents, artifacts and methods in art and artistic practice.” His artwork provides a visual map through the subcultures of gangs in San Salvador. For example, *El Tur* (2006) one of Zavaleta’s paintings now hanging in El Salvador’s MARTE national art museum, is an actual diagram of the capital city overlaid with the territories as they

are known by the gangs. Here Zavaleta reveals an alternative version of the city of San Salvador that is unofficial while at the same time very real (see fig. 10). In this piece Zavaleta appropriates and revises the “official” city map and shows a degraded and grotesque second view of a postwar society in which things have gone terribly wrong. *El Tur* is a visual representation of the expansion of poverty, violence, territorialism and conflict in the capital city. On the map the name San Salvador is crossed out and covered over with the name “Disneylandia,” an ironic utopian reference to the “magical kingdom” that speaks to the harsh realities of the capital city. Red spray paint marks the walls and doubles as dripping blood, a reference to the violence of Zavaleta’s neighborhood where killings are commonplace. One of San Salvador’s key gang controlled drug distribution areas, known as La Tutunichapa, is marked with an image of a rolled marijuana cigarette; the downtown marketplace known for black market products is labeled “Los piratas del centro”; the outline of a woman in a provocative pose and high heels marks a gang controlled area of illegal prostitution; and the name La Chacra, a community where gang members recently executed three young men for violating the gang-imposed curfew, is marked in Old English style script.⁶⁵ Additionally, Zavaleta’s map is dotted with the beat-up minibuses that transport the masses around the capital and that are vulnerable to gang extortions and ambushes.

In these portrayals of San Salvador’s urban culture, the city appears chaotic; a brutal and dysfunctional space engulfed in social crisis, seduced by capitalist consumption and organized by turf wars. In this way Zavaleta’s representation of San Salvador subverts the “official” by depicting an urban underworld of crime, prostitution, drug trafficking and gang iconography that is invisible to outsiders. Like much of his work *El Tur* is a dystopian piece that places the viewer directly in a terrifying world that is, for many, part of the daily logic of San Salvador. *El tur*

⁶⁵ See Valencia 2007.

underscores the incompleteness of the standard city map of the capital where streets are represented falsely as a grid organized into neat geometrical lines that promise to take the viewer from one part of the city to another with no regard for the turf wars and informal divisions that shape movement through city. Zavaleta does not only lay out the city itself, but also documents a language of symbols typically associated with San Salvador's rival gangs. In the capital city, these symbols function as a type of signage used to direct the movement and behavior of community members while remaining cryptic and illegible to members outside of the community. Images such as the spider web and religious figures can be misinterpreted if read from outside of the gang culture. For example, Zavaleta represents the spider web typically tattooed on elbows, shoulders or knees of gang members. While the spider web is often read as a sinister symbol, in the context of street art, it is often used as a show of power that signifies the relentless expansion of the gang into new territories. Religious iconography such as two praying hands with fingers facing skyward or images of Jesus Christ can also be misinterpreted as a direct representation of religiosity, when instead these symbols often refer to an attitude of resignation by the gang member to a lifestyle outside of what society holds as "morally correct" and "decent."

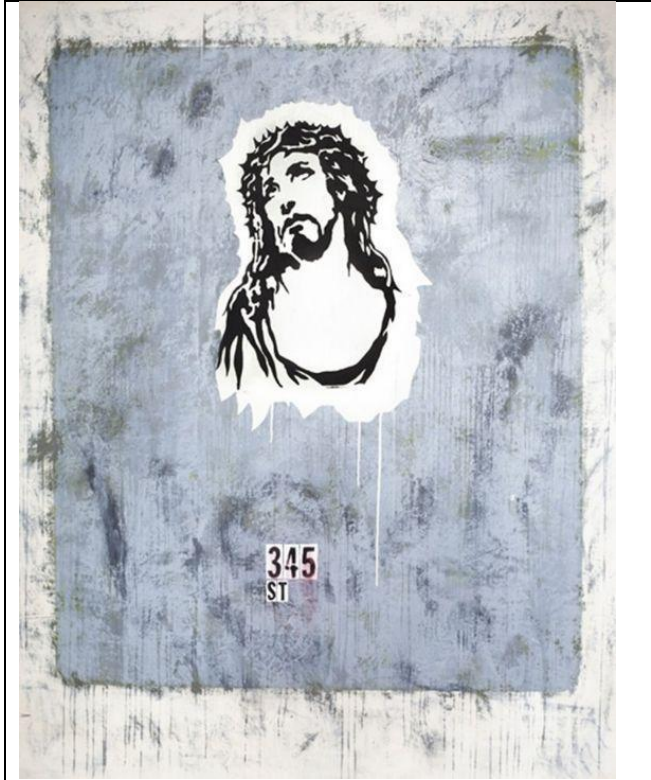


FIGURE 11. CRISTO 345 DANNY

ZAVALETA (2015)

In his series *Abecedario* Danny Zavaleta documents an alphabet of gang signs on schoolhouse chalkboard. The series borrows from the format of a children’s alphabet primer presenting the letters of the alphabet with corresponding phrases and images. Instead of the typical alphabet, the artist depicts the hand gestures of gang signs that many Salvadoran children learn early on and that serve as the building blocks of their early instruction in gang culture. For example the letter M is shown as a hand sign with the phrase meant for practicing pronunciation: “Mi mamá no me mima, me mima mi mara.” The lesson is clear; the gang takes of the parenting role in the lives of many children.



FIGURE 12. DANNY ZAVALTA, “MADE IN,
PHOTO © Danny Zavaleta

Similarly, another of Zavalta’s series called *Made In* (see fig.12) features homespun embroidery in a format associated with traditional Salvadoran domesticity. The artist appropriates traditional pastoral embroideries representing birds, trees, and the rising sun and revises these established icons with codes found in gang templates and standard in tattoos and street art. Here Zavaleta uses stitched forms common in many indigenous and rural communities and reinterprets this style considering the urbanscape of San Salvador, unifying black threaded iconography associated with gang violence and the traditional white muslin cloth embroidery. He brings visibility to marginal iconic formats and confers onto them a level of legitimacy as public artifacts. Through his engagement with the city and gang iconographies including projects like his alphabetization chart – which shows, from A to Z, linguistic and iconographic conventions of

gang life, and *Made In* which documents and interrupts notions of the “traditional,” Zavaleta allows spectators to reflect on the logics that shape their own lives.

In these examples Zavaleta works in a liminal zone between documenting urban iconography and creating original artistic pieces. In fact, the innovativeness of his practice comes from working in the in-between space of being an artist and an archivist that re-appropriates urban iconography as art. The secondary manipulations and framings of these images and the process of displaying them in institutions, galleries and museums allows for an alternative narrative about the city spaces of San Salvador to emerge from the peripheries. In this way Zavaleta’s work does not focus on revealing an “unknown truth” about society and politics, but rather represents urban artifacts as art and gives spectators the opportunity to recognize, identify with, and reflect on these images as art objects. In this way Zavaleta’s work allows local spectators to “work out” the dynamics of their own lives, especially conditions surrounding daily violence and trauma, on stage and in relation to public works.

At the same time it is important to note that much of Zavaleta’s work on gang iconography and violent imagery is consumed by an international rather than a local art public and many of his art viewers likely do not have direct experience with gangs. As a Y.ES artist Zavaleta has exhibited in Works at the Art Center BRAC Bronx River, Museum of contemporary art and design of Costa Rica MADC, Museum of Long Beach-California Molaa, Museum of Art in Pontevedra, Galicia, Spain, Miami Biscayne Art House, Medellin Modern Art Museum and has participated in various international biennial exhibitions.⁶⁶ Given the international audience of his work it is important to consider what happens when the act of viewing violence becomes a primarily aesthetic experience. Ethical considerations emerge such as the possibility that

⁶⁶ See José Ruíz 2009.

viewing art tied to the experience of violence implicates the international art world in more than the act of seeing, listening or consuming, reading, interpreting or decoding art. Danny Zavaleta's work involves the international art world in the act of witnessing contemporary manifestations of El Salvador's violence and trauma. This act of witnessing draws attention to the responsibilities and obligations that accrue from the capacity to view art from a distant position and opens the international art world out to a broader domain of ethical questions about spectatorship and witnessing.

Mauricio Kabistán: The Archive and Memory, Ethnography and Identity

Like Danny Zavaleta, Mauricio Kabistán is a Salvadoran artist working at the juncture between art and archival practice. Kabistán's experimental artistic practice defies traditional understandings of what art is and what it does by exploring the liminal space between aesthetics and documentation. Much of Mauricio Kabistán's work relates directly to memory, migration and social injustice and falls squarely at this juncture point between art and artifact. Consider for example Kabistán's work titled "Essay about Silence," a project in which the artist uses sound to interpret the "Monument to Memory and Truth," a memorial place from victims of El Salvador's civil; his "Yellow Book," an artistic piece based on a recently declassified 1980's Salvadoran Military Forces document; "Memory Circle" in which Kabistán collects testimonies about those disappeared during the civil war; "What My Neighbors Left Behind," a project in which Kabistán creates a photographic record of objects recovered from abandoned and looted houses in San Salvador; and "Wan Keman Tanesi" a field based project in which the artist documents the Nahuatl language. These examples of political and anthropological work show a departure from purely aesthetic considerations and an engagement with archival practice in terms of what documentation is and what it does.

Kabistán's engagement with the historical document shows a basic questioning of the ability of the "official" or archived artifact to represent a complete story about the past and present. The motif of silence in "Essay on Silence," for example, questions how El Salvador's "Monument to Memory and Truth" both brings attention to and silences the traumatic past. This sound project is a reflection on the accumulation of names printed on the 40 greenish black granite stone plates that represent more than 60,000 known deaths over 12 years of conflict. While the monument is meant to bring visibility to the victims of the most recent war, the arrangement of names on a wall has the opposite effect in that it allows spectators to process historical trauma in a single experience and as a whole without needing to reflect on the gravity of the past. Kabistán represents this problem as a musical score generated from the arrangement of dots separating the names of the victims on the memory monument. The resulting sound document becomes a composition about the acoustics of the silence, the space between the names, and the stories forgotten and lost in the chaotic wholeness of collective memory. Kabistán's play with memory, sound and silence in this work is an artistic piece that can be read as a historical document. The eerie musical composition alludes to trauma and pain in a way that the monument silences allowing spectators to reflect on the pain of the past through a visceral auditory experience.



FIGURE 13. MAURICIO KABISTAN “THE YELLOW BOOK” PHOTO © Mauricio Kabistán

A second piece titled the “Yellow Book” (see fig. 13) based on an original document used by the Salvadoran military in the 1980’s as a registrar of political opponents and enemies of the state that included two thousand photographs. Almost half of the individuals mentioned in this document were disappeared, tortured and killed during the civil war.⁶⁷ Kabistán recreates the “Yellow Book” as an artistic piece that represents the elusive nature of the historical document. In Kabistán’s “Yellow Book” historical information is printed on transparent sheets and the pages are superimposed, one over another. The information is present but the transparent format clouds the text and images making the document garbled and hard to read. By obstructing information and interrupting the construction of meaning in this work Kabistán represents the limits of the historical document and the archive as ways of knowing the past. Even though the original “Yellow Book” contains the descriptions of a missing persons, for example, the

⁶⁷ See Ball 2014.

document cannot convey the experience of the disappeared person or of failing to find meaningful information about that person.

Kabistan's work draws attention to historical information that is lost or displaced and to how this information is made or not made physically present. Part of Kabistan's process involves retrieving these alternative knowledges and counter-memories through interdisciplinary curatorial, archival anthropological and historical fieldwork. The aesthetic nature of his projects blend with the critical and anthropological aspects of these works. In "Wan Keman Tanesi," for example the artist travels to Santo Domingo de Guzman (known as Witzapan in the Nahuatl language), a small town in the western part of El Salvador to record indigenous song. By documenting Nahuatl, an endangered language with only about 300 native speakers remaining in El Salvador, Kabistan's work highlights the fact that little is being done by the state to preserve and document this dying language and culture. In this piece he records a simple song composed by a Nahuatl speaker that describes how men leave their houses at sunrise to work in the fields harvesting corn. Kabistan's work is more easily read as anthropological fieldwork instead of through an aesthetic lens. At the same time since his work is displayed in art museums it is read artistically and leads the spectator through a reflection on memory and on the kinds of memories and ways of knowing that are excluded from documentation and from the archival record.



FIGURE 14. MAURICIO KABISTÁN, “MEMORY CIRCLE” PHOTO © Mauricio Kabistán

The international projection of Kabistán’s work puts local memories in dialogue with a global culture of memory and memorialization and makes historical and contemporary trauma visible for an international audience. For example in “Memory Circle” (see fig. 14) Kabistán organizes a circle of remembrance in which women share their testimonies about the war and the disappearances of family members. He works collaboratively with COMADRES (an association of mothers of people disappeared and killed during the Salvadoran Civil War) to collect the stories of mothers and grandmothers engaged in the process of finding out what happened to their disappeared children, brothers and husbands. The artist collects local testimonies and collaborates with community organizations involved with political work and yet global audiences will likely read this against the backdrop of more well known cases of disappeared family members such as Argentina’s Madres de Plaza de Mayo.⁶⁸ What happens when local

⁶⁸ Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo is a movement of Argentine mothers who campaigned to find out the whereabouts of their “disappeared” children between 1977 and 2006. The women

memories are set into dialogue with international cases of trauma and memory work? Can the suffering of different groups of people be compared? Do these types of comparisons lead to establishing a hierarchy between traumas? In *Multidirectional Memory* Michael Rothberg poses a non-competitive way of looking at memory; he suggests that traumatic memories are not hierarchical in terms of one trauma being worse than another, but are instead in dialogue with each other borrowing and supplementing in ongoing negotiation and cross-referencing. He argues for finding ways to see relationships between traumatic memories that are productive and not privative (Rothberg 3). In this view the case of Madres de Plaza de Mayo provides a base for understanding the testimonies of El Salvador's COMADRES instead of a privileged history that uproots local constructions of cultural memory and group identity.

At the same time, the biennial as a global stage for memory work and trauma can shift local discourses about the past given the emphasis on the here and now. In his discussion of biennial culture Paul O'Neill argues that the biennial model focuses on the new and novel in the here and now and promotes the concept of the contemporary; O'Neill explains: "Every biennial curator is under the pressure to be dynamic, charismatic and capable of identifying new artists , artworks and art worlds for their exhibition content (O'Neill 54). Still, even though curators are identifying and promoting new artists and contemporary artworks, this doesn't necessarily mean that this work is not concerned with the past. In fact, Kabistan's own work is evidence that new artists continue to explore the past albeit with more generational distance making anthropological and archival research a key component of this work.

brought national and international attention to state sponsored violence, oppression and human rights violations of the Argentine "Dirty War."



FIGURE 15. MAURICIO KABISTAN “WHAT MY NEIGHBORS LEFT BEHIND”
2012.

Image courtesy of The Fire Theory.

A final piece by Kabistan that I would like to draw attention to is “What my neighbors left behind.” In this piece Kabistan takes on the role of both archeologist and curator. This series is a project that creates a photographic record of objects recovered from abandoned and looted houses in a suburb of San Salvador. The series focuses on the forced displacement of families resulting from violence and the expansion of organized crime in El Salvador. The objects left behind are things that would typically be taken for garbage, but through the process of being photographed the objects become artifacts that tell us about the lives of people who used them. These are familiar objects such as empty bottles, dirty brushes used for cleaning, jars and articles of clothing that are often excluded from the traditional archive because they belonged to common people in the present day. The implication being that the archive now is incomplete because it excludes the evidence of these lives lived on the social peripheries. Kabistán collects samples of the remnants that are left behind by people living in precarious situations and that are forced to move because of violence in their communities. The piece suggests that power is at the

very heart of the archival process and of the determination of an object as a document, as a historical artifact or as garbage. Here Kabistán's piece can be read as questioning the role of curators and archeologists as producers of knowledge and memory by interrupting the way that objects are typically categorized as art, artifact, litter and waste.

Both Danny Zavaleta and Mauricio Kabistan's work are examples of the liminality that I argue is representative of trends in Salvador's postwar cultural production. Both artists work at the juncture between art and archival practice crossing over established fields of knowledge and borrowing from anthropological, archaeological, political as well as artistic methods. Their work demonstrates how archival art allows opportunities for spectators to reflect on their own lives and to create new understandings about themselves and their communities through the process of viewing "art." At the same time, the international projection of their work means that, in many cases, artists are producing archives that are consumed by global audiences. Local memories are set in dialogue with a global culture of memory that necessarily makes the past take on new significance against the backdrop of more well known cases of memory and trauma. At the same time, it is important to consider what it means when spectators view traumatic memory through an aesthetic lens. What are the ethical implications of this kind of aesthetic witnessing?

Mayra Barraza's 'República de la Muerte': The archive and mass media

Mayra Barraza is a third Salvadoran artist whose work illustrates a more widespread trend toward constructing discourse through artistic engagement with the documentation process and with the document as an object of art. Barraza also primarily has presented her work in international exhibitions including the Museum of Latin American Art in California, the II Lima Biennale in Perú, the Maison de l'Amérique Latine in Lyon, France, the Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno in Canary Islands, Spain, the Museo del Barrio in New York, among others. She is

currently represented by Liliana Bloch Gallery in the USA. In her work she collects and compiles data similar to the Mauricio Kabistán's process of collecting testimonies, but instead of conducting fieldwork, Barraza uses the daily news as a secondary source in her work. Like Danny Zavaleta's paintings that bring visibility to gang symbols and culture, her work represents daily violence and makes this phenomenon visible to a primarily international public. Barraza plays with the liminality of art and real life by initiating the viewer into a bakhtinian second world where violence is so prevalent that one revels in it with irony, cynicism and dark humor.

In her series "República de la muerte," exhibited in San Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Los Angeles and in the Ibero American Biennial in Cáceres, Spain, the artist reframes and showcases everyday violence through artistic methods and techniques. For example, Barraza represents dead and dismembered bodies as ironic watercolor paintings (see fig. 13). The watercolor medium is key to building a strong parodical tone given that watercolors are generally associated with idyllic natural settings including birds, animals and beautiful landscapes; Barraza uses watercolor instead to represent dead and dismembered bodies. The red lettering calls up images of blood and the print setting font references the "Noticia roja" genre of journalism that reports violence and violent death. Through her work with watercolors Barraza represents the archive making news reports that are easily overlooked information physically present. The flowing images seem to suggest that in El Salvador violence is savored and that there is something society finds pleasing about the image of violence inflicted on the body. We see this ironic play throughout "República de la muerte" in references to social and artistic genres, conventions and methods. Barraza's *República de la Muerte* takes an ironic stance on representation and genre as a means of political protest and resistance that brings visibility to

trauma and violence. By creating a cynical tone in her painted images, Barraza showcases how violence is not only experienced, but cultivated by Salvadoran society. At the same time, Barraza is not revealing an unknown truth about Salvadoran society. Instead she uses commonplace information about deaths drawn from the country's major newspapers to create different ways of seeing this information so that spectators are roused out of apathy and forced to look at violence again and grapple with what it means as a social phenomenon.



"República de la Muerte" is a multi modal series that includes sculpture, installation, watercolors and photography. The sarcasm of the name itself, "Republic of Death," suggests the basic failure of the nation to ensure the safety and security of its citizens. The artist uses the daily news as reported in the country's two leading newspapers *La Prensa Gráfica* and *El Diario de Hoy* as primary sources and cites news reports at length. These daily news reports of violence

are amplified through Mayra's work and she brings a cultural pattern of violence to the forefront that is not evident in the primary source. One of the most fascinating pieces of the series "100 días en la República de la Muerte" is a yearlong blog project started in September of 2006 "100 días en la República de la Muerte" in which Mayra Barraza catalogues news reports of non-accidental violent deaths each day over the course of a year. Each entry highlights the violent deaths from that day. Her work on the blog involves her in the sociological work of data collection from the two main written news sources in El Salvador. In this way the artist takes on the multidisciplinary task of remembering, unearthing, categorizing and storing information. Barraza explains her project as a kind of activism that responds to mounting violence and is an attempt to make society examine its attitudes toward violence. The artist explains in the blog prologue:

Comienzo este ejercicio con la sensación de estar haciendo algo contra el sentido común. Las personas normales no buscan la muerte. La rehuyen. Quizas buscan la vida. Yo también. Pero no puedo seguir así. Leo el periódico todos los días. De atrás para adelante. "Porqué" me pregunta mi hijito de 9 años. Prefiero comenzar por las noticias más bonitas - le digo - las de cultura. Al acercarme a las noticias nacionales, día tras día, me choca lo que veo: los crímenes cometidos, la sordidez de los hechos, y la ligereza con que pasan a sumarse una y otra vez al olvido. Conversando con un amigo sobre lo que quería hacer con este blog, me hacía una interesante observación: "los muertos no los vemos, no están en la calle, están en las noticias (Barraza)

Mayra Barraza creates an alternative archive through the blog genre that chronicles the phenomenon of daily violence by using innovative methods, techniques and genres such as the

blog. These representations make spectators look again and notice specific aspects of violence in El Salvador such as the age, class and lifestyle of the typical victims and the psychological state of the perpetrators. Consider, for example, the post from day 35:

Manuel de Jesús Vásquez de 34 años fue asesinado a balazos en su casa... el hombre salió de la casa cerca de la 1:00 de la madrugada de ayer para dirigirse al sanitario. Al parecer era esperado por sus agresores en el patio de la casa, quienes le dispararon en numerosas ocasiones y luego huyeron sin ser identificados. El cadáver tenía no menos de 19 impactos de bala calibre 9mm.

Barraza reprints in bold the quote citing the number of times that the victim was shot to emphasize the psychology of the perpetrators. Then she repeats the number and emphasizes the shots with the repetition of “disparo”:

"El cadáver tenía no menos de 19 impactos de bala calibre", dice la nota en el periódico.

19.

Disparo

Disparo

Disparo

Disparo

Disparo

Disparo

Disparo

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Disparo

Each entry includes the name, gender, occupation and age of the victim when these details are available. The artist also includes information about the cause of death and about the violence inflicted on the body and how the body was found; whether it was discarded on a roadside, in a well, in a river or in some other place. With these details her entries seem to represent not only the victim, but also spaces and the mindset of the aggressors. Her daily posts are a blog archive that paints an uncomfortable, albeit well-known, picture of the phenomenon of violence in El Salvador. It is worth emphasizing that beyond the violent acts themselves the artist documents the pattern and culture of violence in El Salvador. At stake in Barraza's work is this sense that violence is not the root of the problem, but that complex cultural and historical causes and attitudes underlie this phenomenon.



FIGURE 17. MAYRA BARRAZA, “CABEZA RODANTE” Photo courtesy of Mayra Barraza.



FIGURE 18. MAYRA BARRAZA, “BRAZOS” Photo courtesy of Mayra Barraza.

The artist challenges the “official” monument through her own set of monuments in this series.

Official monuments are intimately tied to power and are used discursively by governments to

win legitimacy and cultural consecration (Canclini 281). For example, her sculpture in bronze titled “brazos” (see fig. 18) Barraza represents a dismembered anonymous body on a base of grass and rocks. Here, instead of the standard patriotic statues of healthy and heroic human bodies installed in a public plaza, Barraza shows that the national discourse is one of violent death and so these are the kinds of bodies that the artist represents as national “monuments”. The types of bodies that are representative of the nation are violently dismembered ones that want to be taken as monuments. Barraza’s work including her blog, the watercolor series and the monumental sculptures make up “República de la muerte” and serve as a corrective for the emblematic national narratives in public works that were the focus of Chapter One.

In “República de la Muerte,” Mayra Barraza uses irony and parody to question the possibility of a national community that does not provide basic security for its citizens. The name itself is a parody that discards the name El Salvador for a name that more accurately represents the country. Instead of the country as the salvation of the people, which its original name suggests, it is a country that promises little more than death to its citizens. Her work represents violence and violent death to rouse spectators out of passive attitudes and to coax them away from normalization of these phenomena in the daily news. Again, as in the discussion of the work of Danny Zavaleta ad Mauricio Kabistán, Mayra Barraza’s work is consumed primarily by an international art going public. What does this kind of aesthetic witnessing of trauma mean for biennial culture? How are spectators ethically implicated by viewing violence formulated as art?

The Fire Theory: The archive and collective trauma

This section examines an artistic collective called The Fire Theory (TBT) as a final example of the trend toward archival processes in postwar Salvadoran art. The Fire Theory

stands out in San Salvador's art scene as a group of artists who blend art, activism and protest. For example, on March 9, 2014 one of The Fire Theory's founding members Víctor Crack Rodríguez walked into a school voting station just outside of San Salvador and followed the necessary procedures to get a ballot card to vote. However, instead of depositing his ballot, he tore it in half and then proceeded to eat the voting card. The artist is seen in a video, filmed by other members of the collective, chewing the ballot while carrying a copy of the exhibition catalogue, *Landings: New Art and Ideas from the Caribbean and Central America 2000–2010* (Donald et al.). In only a few hours the video documenting the action went viral. The Salvadoran legal system reacted, accusing the artist of electoral fraud, a criminal offense punishable by up to six years in prison. This action is typical of work by The Fire Theory in how it questions dominant notions of social and political realities. In this case the only candidates that people had to choose from represented El Salvador's established political parties that have dominated government since the 1980's. Crack Rodríguez' "action" reflects a widespread sense of frustration and disempowerment that people felt regarding the limited electoral choices and suggests the alternative option of protest (Breukel and Cader-Frech).

The collective structure of The Fire Theory is worthy of note because of how it provides support to the creative objectives of the group. Many artists in El Salvador work with collectives because these open resources and backing that free artists from dependence on specific funding agencies and from the commercialization of their work through select galleries. In one visit to La FábriK art collective in El Salvador one of the artist members, Ronald Morán, explained that he and other artists in the collective were doing "experimental" work. The collective, he explained, provided support for emerging artists and allowed them a way to project themselves that was not directly tied to traditional galleries and museums. Working as art of an art

collective seemed to be a way to mediate the pressures of the cultural industry that caters to the demands of an established economy of collectors, curators, galleries, museums and other sources of funding. According to Morán the art collective in El Salvador provides a space for more experimentation that is free from the direct demands of the market and established cultural institutions. The collective provides an independent space that fulfills specific needs. While artists working in collectives are not entirely free from market pressures, the collective structure is a way to share resources, connections, recognition and cultural value through collaboration with other artists.

The Fire Theory is known for these types of experimental “art-actions” that involve little scripting and formality. In comparison with performances that can be repeated and rehearsed, these art actions are one-time interventions comparable to Allan Kaprow’s “happenings” of the 1950s and 1960s that minimized many formal elements related to design, choreography and structure. Instead of staging a performance with clear structure and purpose, the goal of the “happening” was to intervene in reality and the outcome depended on many unknown and uncontrollable factors including public reception. In an interview, TBT member Crack Rodriguez explained that these artistic actions intervene in the social reality instead of functioning as public spectacles meant to entertain: “Estoy haciendo verbo, eso es arte acción...No vengo a adornar la ciudad, vengo a ser parte del lugar, espacio, y tiempo.” While performance often has a choreographed structure and a fixed intent, art-actions open to possibility: “Creo que hay que estar abierto a lo que pueda pasar o a lo que de la situación. Yo puedo decir que las cosas van a suceder de cierta forma pero al final se desarrollan de otra. Que la gente del lugar llegue y te de algo de tomar o te peine, eso no lo puedo controlar, no lo voy a controlar” (Rodríguez).



FIGURE 19. “EL JUEGO” GAME DOCUMENTARY FILM IMAGE. Photo courtesy of The Fire Theory.

“El juego: The Game” is a documentary piece by The Fire Theory that exemplifies archival practice because it shows the blending of art, activism and the archive that Hal Foster conceptualizes as the “impulse to archive” in contemporary art (see fig. 19.) The documentary was showcased in the Costa Rica X Bienal Centroamericana in San José in September of 2016 and is based on an experimental soccer game organized by The Fire Theory that took place on May 7, 2016 in the community of Segundo Montes in Morazán, one of the areas of El Salvador most affected by the war of the 1980’s. Many of the residents of Segundo Montes are survivors of massacres and were forcibly relocated to the area after the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992. The soccer game brought together ex guerrillas and ex military members, deserters, dissidents and the sons and daughters of combatants, many of whom had seen each other as “enemies” during the war:

El partido fue un experimento. No sabíamos si iba a resultar. Si iban a reaparecer las confrontaciones entre los dos bandos. Solo intervenimos para generar un punto de partida y las condiciones para que ocurriera. Los equipos, uno blanco y

otro azul, se armaron espontaneamente en el momento, a partir de la consigna de mezclar ambos bandos. (Galindo)

In the film footage, a woman from the community watching the game comments that during the war if these same men had met in this place that they would have tried to kill each other. Her reflection is valuable because it expresses how spectators identify the game as a symbolic reenactment of the past and how it re-presents tensions still underlying the social fabric that stem from collective memory. At the same time, her comment also expresses an awareness of how society has changed since that time. Now, twenty-four years into the postwar period, the same individuals can play a friendly soccer game without incident. As a memory exercise the game functions as a symbol of the war and places historical players back in a region that had been one of the most conflicted areas during the war to restage a bilateral encounter. Re-staging the armed conflict as a game between two teams re-presents the war and offers the potential to “work through” conflict again playing out other ways to resolve conflict, to show character, humanity and sportsmanship. The fact that the game went smoothly without confrontations between the ex-military and ex-guerilla players might lead spectators to consider practical alternatives to a culture of war and violence. The game showcases instead engagement based on respect, equality, democratic participation and tolerance. In the film the game ends with the players looking content, having played well overshadows the importance of determining winning and losing teams and each player is awarded a medal for having participated. The important outcome seems to be that the game took place, was played in good spirit and ended in a way that was satisfying to all. The spectators watch the game as an experiment and the dynamic interactions between the players allow them to explore how historical tensions might play out today. In this regard, the game serves as a model for building a culture of peace in El Salvador.

El juego is at the border between art and activism that Suely Rolnik delineates as the line between micro and macro politics. In an analysis of the relationship between art and politics, Brazilian scholar Suely Rolnik (2008) suggests that there is a play of variations in the fields of micro and macro politics. For Rolnik, art and political activism set out to do different things; while activism seems to work in a dimension she calls “macropolitics”, art would work in a “micro” level. According to Rolnik (4), while the macro-political action seeks to "work on the tensions that fall under the visible forms of domination," at the micro level actions work "the tensions operating in the sensitive field of forces pierce the subjective field." *The Fire Theory's* "artworks" do not correspond exclusively to the canon of art and their "critical actions" are beyond the model of "political art" and “activism”. Instead, these artistic practices and methods become documents in themselves.

As part of the research and preparation for this project, members of The Fire Theory worked with San Salvador’s Museo de la Palabra y Imagen (MUPI) in order to access historical archives, footage and sound recordings from the war. This is worth highlighting because it shows that the artists’ work to make historical footage from the war and images present again in order to engage with these historical documents, to reframe and to elaborate on them. The documentary film shows images of people during the war from the region of Morazán engaged in typical leisure activities in a rural community including footage of people playing soccer during the war. In this way “El juego” reframes leisure activities from the archives of war and highlights leisure and play as a symbol of a culture of peace. A game that served as a diversion during the war is reframed to symbolize the war and possibilities for peace in El Salvador. In this way “the game” represents a secondary manipulation that re-constitutes historical images,

objects and texts from El Salvador's most recent war in ways that change the original meaning and that ask us to reinterpret the present-day social context.

The documentary not only shows the artistic impulse to collect and categorize raw material from the historical archives, but also shows how artists become the producers of archives. The end result of the project is a historical documentary film that sets out to document "peace" in postwar El Salvador through the dynamic interactions of people who were engaged in conflict during the war and that meet again face to face two decades later. This takes the theoretical concepts of democratic transition, reconciliation and peace and brings them to a very quotidian and grounded level that allows the viewer to examine the real possibilities of these concepts and also to what degree society already can be said to have moved beyond the traumas of the past as visible in these spontaneous interactions. It is also important to note that part of the filming process involved interviewing all of the players and in this way *The Fire Theory* was also conducting fieldwork and collecting raw data by carrying out, recording and transcribing the interviews. Fragments of these interviews are interwoven throughout the documentary film. At the center of this archival artistic practice is a basic questioning of how the "official" document or archived artifact contributes to a discursive telling of the past and present. The fact that artists become historians, anthropologists and archeologists that take on the task of remembering, unearthing, categorizing stories is significant because they would otherwise remain outside of history. Through this liminal work, *The Fire Theory Collective* creates a historical document through artistic engagement with the community. Their work uses historical documents and also creates the documentary as a historical document. Here it is evident how art uses real people in the community and artifacts to create lab like situations and spaces for experimentation; meaning is created through art and through dynamic interactions between the players and through

observation and reflection by the spectators. In this way art in postwar El Salvador rouses spectators out of passive attitudes by creating stages such as this soccer game where they can play out their own lives in relation to history, memory and artistic representations.

At the same time, it is important to consider that, like the other artists and works examined here, the public for this documentary is primarily the international art world. In the San José biennale, for example, this piece was exhibited alongside other works that focused on immigration, urban and cultural change and indigenous memory. It is read as part of a larger story of Central America today in relation to the United States. In this light memory work tied to a very specific place and moment in El Salvador's history is uprooted to become part of a different story about Central America today in relation to the United States.

This chapter began with the question "What does postwar Salvadoran art hope to rouse in the spectator?" I have aimed to illustrate the shift in critical art images in El Salvador today away from earlier models of didacticism to a more experimental engagement with archival practices that recycle historical documents, artifacts and archival methods into art. In contrast with the artistic imagery of the seventies and eighties, contemporary Salvadoran art has moved away from positioning the artist as mediator of images and blurs the boundary between art and artifact and between aesthetic viewing by an art public and witnessing. Contemporary Salvadoran art responds to global markets and anticipates international publics. For better or worse, what began as locally based artistic critiques of both contemporary and historical violence have been re-constituted for the context of international exhibitions. As international showcases for local arts, biennials have introduced new spaces for critical reflection, exposure to transcultural audiences and to a complex network of global memory culture. At the same time these mega exhibitions are memory making institutions in themselves that function as large scale

archives for artistic representations of trauma, global memory and representations of contemporary violence.

International exhibitions are productive in that they can expand meaning and what can be known about the past by putting the local in dialogue with the global. At the same time the artworld is pushing up against the limitations of the biennial construct. What these examples of contemporary Salvadoran art suggest is that large scale international exhibitions have contributed to formulations of memory culture that go beyond exhibition making practice toward that of discourse production. What is at stake here is that international exhibitions and globalized curatorial practices may sacrifice local examples of memory work and expressions of contemporary violence at the altar of the new, the novel and the Avant Garde.

Chapter 3: Fiction, Testimony and the Archive in Jorge Galán's *Noviembre* and Claudia Hernández' *Roza tumba quema*

The influence of the archival document on Salvadoran authors can be attributed in part to the documentary phase of the Peace Accords of 1992 that included a mandate to investigate human rights violations committed during the most recent war. Immediately after the war ended, the Truth Commission was assigned the immense task of investigating acts of violence by collecting victim testimonies, documenting the nature and effects of the violence and recommending methods for promoting national reconciliation.⁶⁹ According to *From Madness to Hope*, the final report of the Truth Commission, from the time that the FMLN unified as a guerrilla revolutionary group in 1980 and the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992 that ended the war between the Salvadoran state and the FMLN guerrilla movement, some 75,000 people were killed. In order to begin reckoning with the nature of the violence experienced by the Salvadoran population the Truth Commission heard over 2000 witness testimonies and compiled information from an additional 20,000 witness statements. One of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's main objectives was to investigate serious acts of violence that occurred from 1980-1992 that had a serious impact on society (12).⁷⁰ The narration of traumatic experiences is a process that continues to be represented in multiple ways in Salvadoran literature and other artistic and symbolic forms and genres.

This chapter looks at the kinds of writing that appear in El Salvador at the intersections of narrative and history and focuses on the testimonial mode and how it is reconfigured in fiction to

⁶⁹ El Salvador's Truth Commission was a restorative justice commission working under the auspices of the United Nations to investigate the atrocities that occurred throughout the country's twelve year civil war.

⁷⁰ See Betancur, Belisario, et al. "From Madness to Hope" 1993.

work through trauma. Shoshana Felman defines narrative as “someone telling someone else that something happened” and the event that happened as history (Felman and Laub 93). Felman goes on to explain that the two orders come together in testimony, through which language is transmitting the direct experience of an eyewitness: “Once endowed with language through the medium of the witness, history speaks for itself” (101). But if narrative and history come together in this unproblematic way in the testimonial genre, why do contemporary Salvadoran authors like Horacio Castellanos Moya, Roger Lindo, Miguel Huezo Mixco, Jorge Galán and Claudia Hernández take to fiction to represent history? One answer to this question might be that despite the Truth Commission’s efforts to collect testimonies, many victims were faced with the secondary injustice that their experiences were excluded, denied or negated from the public record. So, fiction opens a way to imagine and narrate these stories. Another part of the answer is that there is an “impossibility of telling” traumatic experiences and that, even those accounts that were recorded, only partially represent the experience of trauma. Dori Laub argues, for example, that the Holocaust, while there are many survivors, is a historical event without a witness:

The imperative to tell the story of the Holocaust is inhabited by the impossibility of telling and, therefore, silence about the truth commonly prevails...Some have hardly spoken of it, but even those who have talked incessantly feel that they managed to say very little that was heard. None find peace in silence, even when it is their choice to remain silent. Moreover, survivors who do not tell their story become victims of a distorted memory, that is, of a forcibly imposed “external evil,” which causes an endless struggle with and over a delusion...The longer the

story remains untold the more distorted it becomes in the survivor's conception of it, so much so that the survivor doubts the reality of the actual events (79).

These kinds of traumatic experiences, where the survivor is unable to bear witness to his or her own story, and where time and distance have distorted memory, can be represented most completely by moving between fictional, H/historical, memory and testimonial genres in a way that literary critic Alexandra Ortiz Wallner conceptualizes as “frictional.”⁷¹ Frictionality emerges in the liminal space between memory, H/history and fiction and allows the reader to imagine what could have happened outside of “official” narratives without a commitment from the author that what is being narrated is the absolute truth. These multiple genres push up against each other in a way that creates new representational and aesthetic modes as well as new possibilities for coming to understand the past. According to Wallner, “frictionality” makes it possible to recuperate experiences, places and dates that have entered history in only a partial manner or have been ignored, forgotten or altogether erased from the official historical record and/or the collective memory. In this way writing allows the author to appeal directly to the imaginations of other human beings who are able to play out situations that cannot be known, but that could have occurred and that create valuable connections with the past as well as a sense of empathy and a culture of human rights in the present (Galchinsky 5). In this chapter I analyze this relationship between narrative and history in two Salvadoran novels, *Noviembre* (2015) and *Roza tumba quema* (2017), both crucially situated one generation into El Salvador's post-war era. I argue that these novels set out to assimilate the trauma of post-war Salvadoran society through writing that attests to the experience of war while attending to its ongoing reverberations in the present.

⁷¹ See Ortiz Wallner 2012.

Noviembre by Jorge Galán defines itself as fictional narrative right away in the book subtitle: “*Noviembre: La novela sobre la masacre de los jesuitas que conmocionó al mundo.*” Critics like Gustavo Forero Quintero argue that as “crime fiction” *Noviembre* responds to the limits of justice in El Salvador and that national and international impunity serves as the backdrop for this novel (137).⁷² For Quintero, the context of impunity makes fiction a way to explore a past that has remained outside of the “official” records. But it is unclear whether this can really be taken as a fictional account given that Galán’s narrative builds on the rhetorical devices and narrative conventions of first-person witness accounts elicited through personal interviews. To tell the story of the massacre of the Jesuit Priests of 1989, Galán takes on the methods of an ethnographer interviewing key witnesses, collecting their testimonies and documenting elements of the story that had been largely excluded from the official archive. The novel itself becomes a depository for testimonies about the lives of the UCA Jesuits, the socio-political context surrounding their killings, the night of the massacre as well as the killings of religious figures Rutilio Grande and Archbishop Romero. Is *Noviembre* truly a fictional narrative as the title suggests or is it an archive that expands on known historical documents and existing research? Claudia Hernández’ *Roza tumba quema* also engages with human rights discourse; particularly with the testimonial mode. I argue here that in Claudia Hernández’ *Roza tumba quema*, fiction becomes a means of exploring stigmatized and taboo memories of El Salvador’s most recent war. In an interview with the author, for example, Hernández explains that while she consulted some official documents in the process of writing this novel, that most of the information about experiences in the guerrilla camps comes from a series of personal

⁷² See Quintero 2018, 137.

interviews and notes that she compiled over more than twenty years.⁷³ This is because women's experiences, especially cases of sexual humiliation and rape, have been largely excluded from the official record. Like *Noviembre*, I argue that this novel also functions as an archive, a storehouse for testimonies about the lives of women guerrilla militants and how the promises of the revolution played out for them in the past and into the postwar era. In both cases the question that emerges is to what extent these novels are fictional narratives and if they can be taken as archival documents that expand what can be known and understood about the past. What is the relationship between narrative and history in each novel? Who is reading about these traumatic experiences? It is important to note that Hernández' novel about women's experiences in the war and post-war fell flat in El Salvador not garnering substantial praise or critical attention apart from plotline reviews in newspapers and online summaries in non-peer reviewed texts. This may in part be due to the stylistic features of the book that make it at times hard to follow such as the constant shifts from one woman's perspective to the next, the flashbacks in time to the past and back to the present and overall lack of chronological order, the lack of place names aside from Paris and the fact that all of the characters remain nameless. Critic Gabriella Argueta Cevallos argues that these stylistic features make the experience of trauma visible; the timeless cycling, fragmentation, dissociation with identity and the lack of being able to determine exactly when the trauma began and the degree to which it extends into other generations (33). *Noviembre* and the story of the UCA Jesuits had more success, winning literary acclaim especially in Spain, their home country. In El Salvador, however, the novel sparked a national debate about Galán's motives for writing the story of the Jesuits and to what extent he had the right to tell it, especially given that soon after publishing the novel he sought political asylum in Spain. It would be an

⁷³ Hernández, Claudia. Personal interview. 4 Nov 2018.

oversimplification to say that the reception of these novels and the fact that both failed to resonate widely with a local audience signals that Salvadorans are unwilling to engage with the past or that they are apathetic about the memories of the previous generation. In fact, the publication of these novels suggests that the next generation is starting to do some of the memory work that pushes back against and works through some of the longstanding silences ushered in by El Salvador's Peace Accords and subsequent amnesties.

Memory work shows up in this postwar literary production in that they assume a traumatized Salvadoran society not only in terms of what happened during the war, but also in the reverberations of these experiences in the present. Both novels analyzed in this chapter, for example, chart a path through historical trauma that was experienced by Salvadoran society and ask for an accounting of that trauma today. Yet, instead of writing about historical trauma, the kind of writing that Dominick LaCapra explains as "an aspect of historiography related to the project of reconstructing the past as objectively as possible," these novels "write trauma." For LaCapra, writing trauma "involves processes of acting out, working over, and to some extent working through in analyzing and giving voice to the past" (186). The plots are structured, furthermore, on different kinds of return to the original site of trauma mirroring the "literal" return of traumatic experience and the theoretical formulations of trauma such as critics like Cathy Caruth emphasize. Caruth looks at this phenomenon in Sigmund Freud's confrontation with the "war neuroses" stemming from the First World War: "The traumatic reliving, like the nightmares of the accident victim, seemed like awaking memory, yet returned, repeatedly, only in the form of a dream" (152).⁷⁴

⁷⁴ See Caruth 1995.

Horacio Castellanos Moya's *El asco* (1992) is another important case of a postwar novel that focuses on how historical trauma is lived today. *El asco* is a fictional novel narrated by Edgardo Vega, a Salvadoran living in Canada who, due to his Mother's death, finds he must return to his home country. This return sets the stage for acting out and working through traumatic memory of war and issues of identity tied to the experience of migration and diaspora. His oral monologue calls to mind the testimonial model of the revolutionary years. Only that now, instead of giving testimony as a way to elicit revolutionary change, Edgardo Vega relives what it is like to be Salvadoran as if it were a traumatic nightmare: "I left," he says, "because I never accepted the macabre joke of being destined to be born in this place" (5). In an unbroken monologue, Edgardo Vega fixates on and attacks every aspect of Salvadoran culture he can think of—from pupusas and soccer to the archetypal Salvadoran person. Paradoxically, Edgardo Vega's neurosis is accompanied by amnesia for the past made all the more possible by his Canadian passport. His waking life in Montreal does not seem to be preoccupied with the past, but rather by trying to not think of it: Vega says, "I came because my mother died, Moya, the death of my mother is the only reason I felt obliged to return to this filthy pit" (6). The trauma of El Salvador's postwar is further evidenced by Vega's frustrated diatribe and his paranoia. He is suspicious and terrified of his countrymen, he sees everywhere "guys who were no doubt torturers and participated in massacres during the civil war" (6). Vega's verbal onslaught hints at the possibility of his own repressed memory, that despite his Canadian passport, despite his hatred of violence, he too is guilty of the same kinds of crimes. It is possible that in order to work through his own guilt, everyone else had to be made culpable.

Noviembre and *Roza tumba quema* build similarly on the testimonial genre as a structural means of working through memory and present-day trauma. Dori Laub recognizes three separate

distinct levels of witnessing in relation to traumatic experience: the level of being a direct witness to oneself within the experience; the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others; and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself. Given that these authors are writing a generation into the post-war and were children during the war and not direct protagonists, they have fewer distinct memories of their own. Both authors engage in the second and third levels of witnessing through participating, not in the events, but in the account given of them, by interviewing survivors and receiving their testimonies and by representing the past as a way to work through, re-member and relive it (Laub 76). Together, these works chronicle the emergence of trauma in Salvadoran linguistic representation, and indeed into Salvadoran history. Both novels are structured, at least in part, around oral monologue, interview and testimony. By combining orality and fiction, each recalls the testimonial project of the revolutionary years, where personal stories were told to garner support for solidarity movements in Central America. Now, the generation after the war uses same genre to work through the past while at the same capturing a sense of ambiguity and ambivalence with regards to the effects of the past on the present.

This chapter explores the essential question posed earlier about the relationship between narrative and history in the testimonial genre and why authors like Jorge Galán and Claudia Hernández take to fiction to represent history. History, as Pierre Nora regards it, is a perpetually incomplete and problematic representation of the past (8). This sense of not being able to know the past in its totality that Nora talks about is rooted in the archive, which as Foucault explains is not a storehouse of objective historical documents, but rather the intangible origin of discourse. The archive determines historical discourse and what can be said about the past. For this reason,

documents that are archived become part of an official historical discourse about the past, but cannot be taken as the absolute limits of discourse. As Michel Foucault writes:

Silence itself—the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name...—is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within overall strategies. There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses (27).⁷⁵

It is in filling this gap that literature, especially fiction, can facilitate re-membering what has been forgotten and provide a way to imagine that which eludes the archive, including the silent experiences of the “absolute witnesses” of history. By “absolute witness” I am referring to Giorgio Agamben’s paradox of witnessing in which he points out the incompleteness of the testimonies of survivors given that these testimonies are speaking for the victims that did not survive and who are not able to give testimony. According to Agamben, testimony always contains a lacuna, or an unfilled gap because those who are able to bear witness did not touch bottom, as did those who perished. “No one has told the destiny of the common prisoner, since it was not materially possible for him to survive...those who have not lived through the experience will never know; those who will never tell; not really, not completely...the past belongs to the

⁷⁵ See Foucault 2008.

dead...” (Wiesel cited in Agamben 33). At the same time, representing the past as fiction constitutes a potential trap for memory given that introducing imagination into the realm of memory would seem to discredit the claims of personal testimony as faithful representations of the past. Critics of Holocaust fiction have grappled extensively with the idea that literature can be of service to the work of memory (Lavenne, Renard & Tollet 5). The question of historical truth then is one of the key philosophical problems that memory narratives pose as fiction seems to muddy the already hazy water of memory allowing for the creation of false memories or anachronistic memories that threaten to alter history after-the-fact. Cathy Caruth uses the metaphor of ashes, specifically the ashes of Pompeii to describe the enigma of representing a traumatic history that, in its very unfolding, seems to slip away before our grasp: “Indeed, the figure of the destruction of Pompeii is not precisely, or not simply, a figure of burial, since the peculiarity of this “singular historical event” is that the destruction occurred not only through burial, but by burial through ashes, which is also a burning up, a destruction that does not simply preserve but may also totally incinerate the bodies it buries” (Caruth, *Literature in the Ashes* 86). A critical part of the analysis of writing about the past, then, involves looking at how a particular narrative is communicated through different mediums such as testimony, historical document and the novel, and how each medium influences the transmission of the story. For this reason, I focus my analysis of these two novels around how each utilizes the testimonial mode to produce meaning. By deconstructing the binary division between fiction as imagination and testimony as historical truth, this chapter examines new representational and aesthetic modes as well as new possibilities of coming to understand the past.

I have chosen to analyze these two novels because of how the authors Jorge Galán and Claudia Hernández leverage the memories of the previous generation and primary source

documents as a means to work through collective trauma of the past. Post-memory describes the relationship of the generation that came after the war to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute their own memories (, *The Generation of Postmemory* 5). The postmemory generation connects deeply with the previous generation's remembrances and that connection with the past becomes a type of prosthetic memory. In these cases, historical documents such as photographs in personal archives serve as points of transfer that transmit memory to those who were not there in a given historical moment and images convey a visual way to imagine a past that one did not experience directly. The following section examines how fiction writing can open a space to work through trauma, especially in cases of impunity, as a means for unpacking the silences and voids surrounding personal and historic events. Jorge Galán's novel about the 1989 massacre of six Jesuits and the two women that worked for them illustrates how fiction permeates the unfilled gaps of historical discourse from which readers extract just as much, if not more, meaning as can be mined from documented images and words.

Noviembre: Traumatic Re-memberings from the Generation After

Just months before his own murder, one of the UCA Jesuits, Ignacio Martin Baró, published an article in the *International Journal of Mental Health* on trauma and violence in Salvadoran society. He was concerned about the impact of the war on the mental health of Salvadorans and argued that the length of the war, the social polarization it caused and perpetuated, the military presence and ongoing violence especially in high conflict zones were psychologically traumatizing to Salvadoran society and referred to this widespread impact as "psycho - social trauma." Baró argued that the process of war was leaving the entire population collectively affected and the trauma was nourished and maintained in the very relationship

between the individual and society, through various interactions with institutions, groups, and other people (13). The way that this trauma would be passed on to the next generation is something that Baró only suggested in his writing given that his primary concern was the immediate effects of the war on the mental health of the population.

Months after El Salvador's war ended with a signed peace accord, a general amnesty agreement was passed allowing for a clean slate, but little in terms of public reckoning for atrocities of the war. In light of this history of impunity, *Noviembre* tells the story of how traumatic memory is transmitted from one generation to the next within a socio-political context that encourages forgetting the past and "moving on," while at the same time putting into question how memory can and should be represented as well as how fiction can be used to create deep emotional connections with the past. In an interview with Europa Press Jorge Galán describes the present day trauma of Salvadoran society and how this is rooted in the past: "The terror is something everyday for us." Galán pointed out that El Salvador is "a country where you can not walk, where life can end around any corner or on a bus ride that turns into your last...I have seen good people die, innocent people who went to work and who supported their families with dignity," he said. In the same interview Galán notes that *Noviembre* is a novel about the impunity which has turned his country "into hell" and whose "greatest symbol" is the murder of Monsignor Romero and the Jesuits of the UCA. Though the perpetrators were convicted and acquitted, the intellectual authors of these murders have still not been tried and continue to enjoy impunity. He went on to explain that the Salvadoran government refused to comply with requests for extradition by the National Court of Spain for fourteen soldiers involved in the crime. Given this context, I argue that the kind of reckoning with the past that Galán does

through fiction can be a way to work through impunity and trauma in El Salvador by engaging with symbols and icons like Romero and the Jesuits, among others.

Given the social context that Galán describes, it may not come as such a surprise that in the same month that *Noviembre* was released the author was attacked on his way to his home in San Salvador. Around noon, two armed men stopped and insulted him before taking out a pistol. This incident came after a continuous series of verbal attacks and threats that the writer received after the publication of his novel, in which he reconstructs the assassination of the Jesuits in San Salvador in 1989 including suggestive information about the perpetrators and intellectual authors behind the crime. Jorge Galán requested and was granted political asylum in Spain, the native country of five of the murdered Jesuits.

The reception of this novel was mixed; divided between those who supported Galán and empathized with his work and request for asylum and those who were suspicious of the reported verbal attacks and threats and who felt that Galán was a “con-artist” leveraging the memory of the Jesuits to establish himself in another country.⁷⁶ Still, Galán received strong support from writers and other intellectuals in Spain and elsewhere, who circulated a “manifesto of support” on his behalf. The list of over 400 supporters included poets Ernesto Cardenal and Sergio Ramírez of Nicaragua, Pulitzer Prize-winner Charles Simic, and Donald Hall, 2006 Poet Laureate of the United States, as well as numerous Spanish artists including singers Joan Manuel Serrat and Joaquín Sabina. The manifesto stated that “memory and culture have a fundamental commitment to oppose impunity and denounce injustices. Therefore we sympathize with the writer Jorge Galán and urge the authorities of El Salvador and the international community to

⁷⁶ See Menjivar 2015.

ensure his integrity, to become aware of the seriousness of the events he narrates in his novel and which promote both the knowledge of truth, justice and reparation that the victims deserve.”

The conflictive reception of this fictional novel speaks to the fact that *Noviembre* crosses over into the liminal space where it doubles as a historical document. Instead of trying to tease apart what parts are historical and what is fictional narrative, my analysis of *Noviembre* examines the intersections between fiction writing and the historical document as a means of remembering the past and working through the trauma of impunity for the generation that comes after the war. Here, the focus is on the liminal space between the aesthetic and the documentary with the aim of examining the primary elements of Jorge Galán’s representational choices. This section is concerned with what happens when historical documents such as the testimony and the photograph are mediated by the next generation, in this case, by the author’s representational and aesthetic choice of the fictional novel.

This section builds on Marianne’s critical work on memory in the generation after trauma, as well as on the work of other critics in the field of trauma literature including Elizabeth Jelin, Dori Laub and Roland Barthes. Marianne’s work looks at how the second and later generations connect with the previous generations’ remembrances and how those connections with the past becomes a type of “memory.” In these cases, memory can be transferred to those who were not there even while transferred memories are of a different nature than those of witnesses and participants. “Hence, the insistence on ‘post’ and ‘after’ as qualifying adjectives” (, *The Generation of Postmemory* 3). Post-memory is similar to memory in that it has an affective force and psychic effects, as opposed to history. “Memory signals an affective link to the past-a sense, precisely, of a material “living connection” –and it is powerfully mediated by technologies like literature, photography, and testimony (33). The term originally referred to the relationship

between the children of Holocaust survivors and the memories of their parents, but has since been expanded beyond the familial cord to describe "the relationship that later generations or distant contemporary witnesses bear to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of others—to experiences they 'remember' or know only by means of stories, images, and behaviors" (*Connective Histories* 339). Particularly useful for my own analysis is 's example of how cartoonist Art Spiegelman constructs a relationship with his father's memories through fiction and art in the graphic novel *Maus*. *Maus* provides a useful contrast here as it is a seminal work of literature about the retrieval of traumatic memory and the intergenerational transfer of memory. Like *Noviembre* it compiles historical research, documents and testimony in an experimental medium in a project that re-members the past. *Maus* provides a useful comparison for examining how Jorge Galán uses fiction to get beyond the limits of history and memory, building the emotional bridge with the past that is characteristic of post-memory.⁷⁷

My analysis of Galán's work explores the notion of being haunted by the memories of trauma that one has only experienced indirectly and how personal memories are often displaced by the urgency to re-member the traumatic stories of the generation that came before. Marianne describes post-memory as how the second generation of writers and artists internalize the memories of their parents and grandparents, and how children relate to traumatic memories that are not their own:

I felt the need for a term that would describe the quality of my own relationship to my parents' daily stories of danger and survival during the Second World War.

⁷⁷ *Maus* is a graphic novel about the Holocaust by American cartoonist Art Spiegelman in which the Jewish community is depicted as mice, the Poles as pigs and the Nazi party members, as cats. *Maus* is a graphic novel, serialized from 1980 to 1991. It depicts Spiegelman interviewing his father about his experiences as a Polish Jew and Holocaust survivor.

Why could I recall particular moments from my parents' wartime lives in great detail and have only very few specific memories of my own childhood, I began to wonder? Why could I describe the streets, residences, and schools of pre-World War I Czernowitz and interwar Cernauti, where they grew up, the corner where they evaded deportation, the knock on the door in the middle of the night, the house in the ghetto where they waited for deportation waivers—all moments and sites that preceded my birth—when I had lost the textures, smells, and tastes of the urban and domestic spaces in Bucharest where I spent my own early life? It took a long time for me to recognize and to name these symptoms—the magnitude of my parents' recollections and the ways in which I felt crowded out by them. These moments from their past were the stuff of dreams and nighttime fears for, as a child, it was at night, particularly, that I imagined myself into the lives they were passing down to me, no doubt without realizing it (, *The Generation of Postmemory* 4).

For the next generation, post-memory exacts a heavy investment in the past; something of the present is lost in the process of recovering the past. Hirsch describes the process of imagining herself into the stories that were being passed down and how her parents' memories burdened and crowded out her own experiences. She proposes that narration and imagination account for how “recall” works for the post-generation given that one cannot remember things that they did not experience in the first place. It is through the process of “imagining themselves into the lives they were passing down” that the post-generation builds emotional connections to the past; through the imaginative investment involved in listening to stories, looking at family photographs and other artifacts and being in the places that can facilitate imagining the past.

Why transmit memory through testimony to work through trauma? How does giving testimony help the survivor work through trauma? What's in it for the survivor? According to Argentine sociologist Elizabeth Jelin, one of the characteristics of traumatic events is the massive character of their impact, creating a gap in the capacity "to be spoken" or told about: "This provokes a hole in the ability to represent the event symbolically. There are no words, and therefore there cannot be memories" (23). There is no space for these memories in the collective and thus the memories remain disarticulated, fragmented, and overall, traumatic. For this reason, the act of a survivor giving testimony can be cathartic or therapeutic. Jelin discusses the importance of the dialectic between the speaker and the listener in the testimony. She uses the example of Rigoberta Menchú and discusses how she actively transmits her personal story to Elizabeth Burgos who is an active listener that is engaged and asking questions. Dori Laub also discusses the therapeutic potential of giving testimony as a way of re-enacting and escaping the isolation of the past: "a process of constructing a narrative, of reconstructing a history and essentially, of re-externalizing the event --has to be set in motion. This re-externalization of the event can occur and take effect only when one can articulate and transmit the story, literally transmit it to another outside oneself" (69). Laub emphasizes the critical role of the listener in this process of helping the survivor undo the entrapment of the past. She cautions that if one talks about the trauma without actually being heard or truly listened to that it could be re-traumatizing. One of the recurring nightmares that Primo Levi has in Auschwitz, for example, is that he is telling friends and family of the experience of hunger, lice-control, and cruelty at the hands of the guards, but in his dream his listeners are indifferent. Levi's dream of the "unlistened to story" causes in him a desolating grief (Laub 68). Putting human experience into

words is part of the cathartic process, but it is not enough. Transmitting the story to another who is willing to receive and carry the experience is crucial for healing to begin.

Turning back to Jorge Galán's novel, *Noviembre* focuses on the Jesuit massacre of 1989, a story that he does not know or recall personally. Even though the massacre took place at one of the main Universities in El Salvador, there are few references to the UCA Jesuits outside of the walls of the UCA and even fewer representations of them in murals or public monuments. Memory of the UCA Jesuits is different than that of an iconic figure like Archbishop Monseñor Oscar Romero because the Jesuits have not come to symbolize anything other than their own work and who they were in their day. In Chapter One of this thesis I discuss how the image of Romero was taken up by the FMLN government as a symbol of their own political agenda and commitment to the popular and poor masses. The memory of the Jesuits, in contrast, has remained curiously "off limits" for representation. This makes the few published accounts, like *Noviembre*, all the more important because they represent memory of the Jesuit massacre in a public way.

In any case, Jorge Galán came to know of the Jesuits two years after the infamous massacre when he became a student at the University where they invested their lives, worked and were ultimately killed:

En el año 1991, entré como estudiante a la UCA, y conocí a mucha gente que había convivido con los jesuitas asesinados y me hablaron de ellos. La figura del sacerdote Ignacio Ellacuría continuaba presente más que la del resto. Aquella seguía siendo su universidad, y su historia, conmovedora, seguía estando en aquellos pasillos. Años más tarde, profundicé en mi investigación y entrevisté a muchísima gente. Algunas me contaron historias que utilicé en el libro, otras,

algún detalle, o incluso cosas que solo utilicé como contexto, sobre todo de la vida en la clandestinidad. (Álvarez)

It was not until he became a student that Jorge Galán met people who had known the Jesuits personally and shared their personal memories about the Jesuits with him. Through their stories Galán describes perceiving the continued living presence of Ignacio Ellacuría in the halls of the UCA University, “Aquella seguía siendo su universidad, y su historia, conmovedora, seguía estando en esos pasillos.” While this might seem like little more than a wistful comment, it is in fact how the opportunity of memory presents itself for the “post-generation.” A “post-generation” are the descendants of survivors, perpetrators and bystanders of mass traumatic events. The second generation that connects deeply with the previous generations’ remembrances and those connections with the past become a type of “memory.” In these cases, memory can be transferred to those who were not there even while transferred memories are not the same as the direct experiences of witnesses and participants. “Hence, the insistence on ‘post’ and ‘after’ as qualifying adjectives” (*The Generation of Postmemory* 3). Post-memory is similar to memory in that it has an emotional force and certain psychic effects, as opposed to history: “Memory signals an affective link to the past—a sense, precisely, of a material “living connection” —and it is powerfully mediated by technologies like literature, photography, and testimony (*The Generation of Postmemory* 33). Galán explains that the space of the UCA and the people that narrated stories about Father Ignacio Ellacuría, kept the martyred Jesuit present. It is through transmitted memory that the past can be re-membered affectively by the next generation in a way that forges an emotional connection with the past. At the same time, in the process of externalizing and transferring the experience of trauma, direct witnesses can also work through their own memories.

Jorge Galán builds the novel around Father Tojeira's testimony about the killing of the six Jesuits of the UCA - Ignacio Ellacuría, Amando López, Juan Ramón Moreno, Ignacio Martín-Baró, Segundo Montes and Joaquín López, and two women, Elba and her daughter Celina, by members of the Salvadoran military's elite Atlacatl battalion during the 1989 Offensive. On one level, *Noviembre* tells the story of Father Tojeira, who worked closely with the Jesuits and carried on with their work after the massacre. On another level, *Noviembre* tells the story of the intergenerational transmission of memory; it is the story of how Tojeira transmits his testimony to Jorge Galán who represents that testimony through the novel genre.

Noviembre is structured into seven parts and each part is divided into various chapters dedicated to flashbacks that build up to or stem from the Jesuit massacre and the socio-political context of 1989. The author portrays real people and historical events using the dramatic and stylistic techniques of fiction writing including diverse narrative viewpoints and an episodic plot. Some of the episodes are narrated in the first person from the point of view of an interviewer asking questions and probing into the past while daily episodes and flashbacks are written in the voice of a third person omniscient narrator that already knows all the thoughts and feelings of the characters in the story. At times these voices reveal specific details about the Jesuits and at other times they reveal information about the broader historical context and other victims of the war such as Archbishop Romero and Father Rutilio Grande. In this way, Galán blends Father Tojeira's testimony with fiction, creating a prose writing with multiple levels and facets that is devoid of a single underlying plot. The novel comes together through a multitude of voices each providing a fragmented memory piece that contributes to re-membering the Jesuits, the historical frame and socio-political context of El Salvador in November of 1989.

Noviembre is a hybrid genre of literary writing that blends history and fiction and past and present time. In the acknowledgements at the end of the novel, for example, Jorge Galán thanks those who he says made the book possible including researchers Martha Doggett and Teresa Whitfield for their groundbreaking analysis of the case in 1993 and 1995 and also the people he interviewed including Father José María Tojeira, Father Jon Sobrino and Alfredo Cristiani, former president of El Salvador.⁷⁸ The novel is the result of research and investigation, a search carried out by the narrator whose identity is never revealed but who the reader can surmise is a fictional character based on the author. At the same time, and beginning with the book's subtitle, "*Noviembre: La novela sobre la masacre de los jesuitas que conmocionó al mundo*," Galán promises nothing to the reader other than fiction; he establishes fiction as the primary framework for telling the story of the Jesuit massacre. Still, *Noviembre* is unlike fictional historical novels that take place in a setting located in the past because the novel takes place in the present; the main protagonist is someone driven to unravel memory and to remember the past in the present. Galán becomes the listener to a narrative of extreme human pain and of trauma. While details of the historical event have already been known and recorded, the trauma of the witnesses like Tojeira is something that had remained widely undocumented:

In spite of the presence of ample documents, of searing artifacts and of fragmentary memoirs of anguish, he comes to look for something that is in fact nonexistent; a record that has not yet been made. Massive trauma precludes its registration...While historical evidence to the event which constitutes the trauma may be abundant and documents in vast supply, the trauma --as a known event and not simply as an overwhelming shock--has not been truly witnessed yet, not

⁷⁸ See Doggett 1993; and Whitfield 1995.

been taken cognizance of...The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer, who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time. (Laub 57)

Father Tojeira's testimony begins with his being alerted of the massacre by Obdulio, husband of Elba and father of Celina, who first discovered the bodies of the eight murdered:

La escena seguía intacta, a la espera de que las autoridades policiales hicieran su trabajo. Un cuadro en verde y rojo bajo el sol, rodeado de periodistas, de amigos y de curiosos. En algún momento, Tojeira descubrió que había moscas sobre los cuerpos.

--Me enfurecí --confiesa.

--¿Se enfureció?

--Sí, me dio muchísima rabia cuando vi las moscas encima de los cuerpos. Era indignante. Y me dije: "Los han tratado como mierda y ahora esto".

Cuando lo dice, sonrío. Han pasado tantos años que ahora puede sonreír al final de una frase como esa. (Galan 27)

As a medium for probing into history, the intimate personal interview allows for narration and imagination of private memories that penetrate more deeply into the past teasing out the emotional weight of what happened. Marianne Hirsch argues that it is in private settings that children of survivors and their contemporaries inherit catastrophic histories, not through direct recollection but through haunting post-memories, mediated images, objects, stories, behaviors, and affects passed down within the family (Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory* 3). Like Art Spiegelman who frames his father's memories of the Holocaust as a bedtime story in the first version of *Maus* (1972) where "Poppa" sits on the edge of his son's bed, the boy bundled under

the covers with his head on his father's lap, *Noviembre's* narrator sits with the Jesuit Fathers in their cloistered offices on the UCA campus and they talk while the student alumni asks questions, follows up on details and demands more minute descriptions. The reader is presented with Father Tojeira's experience of traumatic memory, the woundedness that remains in the present and the degree to which Salvadoran society can speak of closure and reconciliation with the past. Tojeira's emotional reaction is an example of the kinds of memories that would remain outside of the archive as gaps of history. Here, Galán's narrator is the listener to trauma and comes to be a co-owner of the traumatic event as he asks clarifying questions, is attentive to Tojeira's words as well as his silences (Laub 57). While the massacre had already been written about in other texts and historical documents, Galán's novel allows the reader to see and acknowledge Tojeira's trauma. It is in filling this gap that fiction facilitates re-membering what has been forgotten and that which has never been previously made known and provides a way to imagine the trauma that eludes the archive.

Noviembre is dominated by the absence of the voices of Ignacio Ellacuría's and the other Jesuits, the literal destruction of their minds by point blank execution, of their writings and archives. Through his academic work Ellacuría and the other Jesuits made important contributions to Liberation Philosophy that focused on liberating the oppressed in order "to reach the fullness of humanity". Ellacuría was also a strong supporter and contributor to Liberation Theology. In his post as rector of the UCA Ignacio Ellacuría published extensively and Jorge Galán could have chosen to include his actual voice in the text, but he did not. One possible reason for this is that the subject of the book is not really Ignacio Ellacuría and the UCA Jesuits, but on how the massacre is remembered by others. As a memory the Jesuits are mystified, objectified, shaped to the needs and desires of those who re-member, whether it be Father

Tojeira or Jorge Galán. Father Tojeira's testimony, for example, underscores the absence and destruction of the Jesuits, deriving from their silence and absence its momentum and much of its energy:

El centro pastoral tenía el suelo cubierto de ceniza y las paredes manchadas de sombra estaban repletas de orificios de bala, igual que los archivadores y los escritorios. Habían acabado con el lugar como si se tratase de la oficina de inteligencia de un cuartel enemigo, salvo que aquello era una universidad católica. El olor a pólvora era insoportable. (Galán 2)

The Jesuits are recollected and imagined by others like Father Tojeira. This is the paradox of witnessing, that testimony always contains a lacuna, or an unfilled gap because those who can bear witness did not touch bottom, as did those who perished. “No one has told the destiny of the common prisoner, since it was not materially possible for him to survive...those who have not lived through the experience will never know; those who will never tell; not really, not completely...the past belongs to the dead...” (Agamben 33). For this reason in *Noviembre* Ignacio Ellacuría's thoughts and desires are imagined by Jorge Galán and voiced through a third person omniscient point of view where the narrator knows the thoughts, actions, and feelings of all characters:

En esos días le gustaba pensar que al volver sin duda sería otra persona. Lo que nunca pudo imaginar entonces es que no iba a volver, o que lo haría solo de una forma parcial e incompleta, porque volver para marcharse es como no volver y porque uno sólo regresa al lugar al que pertenece, y este hombre, este muchacho de diecisiete años, pronto iba a darse cuenta de que ya no pertenecía al sitio del que había partido. (7)

Here fiction functions as a tool for re-membering a past that can no longer be accessed. Even though Ellacuría's mental process when he decides to take on the charge to work in El Salvador cannot be known, fiction presents the reader with a plausible and probable scenario. The parts of the lives of the Jesuits that can be pieced back together through history and memory cannot be taken as the absolute limits of discourse because these pieces function alongside that which can no longer be said or known. It is in filling this gap that literature, especially fiction, can facilitate re-membering what has been forgotten and provide a way to imagine that which eludes the archive.

At different moments in *Noviembre*, real photographs appear in narrated form within the text. These representations are critical for building emotional connections with the past. More than oral or written narratives, photographs of the past undo the finality of past by reanimating it with the act of viewing. In his exploration of photography in *Camera Lucida*, French philosopher and literary critic Roland Barthes defines two essential elements of photography that determine the observer's relationship to a photograph: the *studium* and the *punctum*. The *studium* is: "...an average effect...a kind of general enthusiastic commitment, but without special acuity...It is by *studium* that I am interested in so many photographs, whether I receive them as political testimony or enjoy them as good historical scenes: for it is culturally that I participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions" (26). The *studium* is informative by nature without necessarily evoking an emotional response. "Many photographs provoke only a general and, so to speak, polite interest....To recognize the *studium* is inevitably to encounter the photographer's intentions, to enter into harmony with them, to approve or disapprove of them, but always to understand them, to argue them within myself, for culture (from which *studium* derives) is a contract arrived at between creators and consumers. The *studium* is a kind of

education, which allows me to discover the Operator, to experience the intentions which establish and animate his practices” (27). In stark contrast, the *punctum* creates an emotional connection with the viewer: “...it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me...A photographer's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (28). The *punctum* pushes the viewer to re-member, reflect, and think deeply. This experience of viewing images transforms the viewing public, the spectator, by making an emotional connection via *punctum* to both the object of the selected image and to the intentions of the photographer.

It is through this experience of the *punctum* of the image, that *Noviembre*'s first person narrator builds emotional connections to the past which in turn allows for memory to be transmitted from one generation to the next. For example, there is one image of Ignacio Ellacuría at Monseñor Romero's funeral that became a recurring thought and point of reflection:

--Hay una foto --dice Sobrino--, en la que se ve a Ellacuría cargando el féretro de Monseñor ese día en la catedral.

--No lo sabía. No sabía que había asistido.

--Pues sí, allí estábamos todos.

--He visto muchas veces las imágenes de ese día. La gente corriendo o arrastrándose y los megáfonos pidiendo que tuvieran calma y el sonido de los disparos y los muertos, una locura. Y una cosa que me impresionó: docenas de zapatos tirados en la calle después de que todo pasara. Nunca se me olvida esa imagen.

--Pues así eran esos años.

--Y si eran así, por qué se quedaron? ¿No pensaban que podrían matarlos? (202)

The *studium* of images from that day provide information about a historical scene. The figure of Ellacuría against the backdrop of the assassination of Monseñor Romero, their similar life trajectories and, at that moment, Ellacuría's survival. However the *punctum* of the photograph emerges later, because the narrator knows Ellacuría's fate. His carrying the coffin communicates, at once, "I am alive" at that particular historical moment and the distance between Ellacuría and Romero; the limit between life and death. The photograph captures an event or object at a particular point in time, and thus connects the Spectator to that event, in this case, to Ellacuría's presence there at that moment in time. Other images from that day of shoes scattered after the military intrudes on the funeral also carry their own power making emotional connections between viewers and historical events. The narrator says that those images are impossible for him to forget. As Barthes explains, these images have pierced him through the viewer's experience of *punctum*.

Also worth noting here is that the narrator pushes back against the context of the photograph, asking the person he is interviewing why the Jesuits stayed in a society where that kind of violence against religious figures was commonplace. It is the testimonial mode via fiction that allows for further understanding of a historical moment. The author's decision to include a textual version of an image in *Noviembre* allows the witness to give more information about the event using cues from the historical image. In this way this photograph connects the two levels of the text, the history of El Salvador in the 1980's as evidenced through historical documents such as photographs and testimony and the next generation's experience of remembering and working through the past.

Remembering with Ambivalence: Claudia Hernández' *Roza tumba quema*

Roza tumba quema's engagement the testimonial mode is an example of how history and narrative intersect in El Salvador's postwar period and have become part of the process of collectively re-membering the past. I argue here that in Claudia Hernández' *Roza tumba quema*, fiction becomes a means of exploring the ongoing trauma rooted in El Salvador's most recent war that is largely experienced only in private and kept out of public view. The novel tells the story of multiple generations of women in the postwar period; one searching for her daughter, another battling with depression, and a third desperate to escape a society that seems to offer no real opportunity. In an interview with the author, Hernández explained that while she consulted some official documents in the process of writing this novel, that most of the information about women's experiences in the guerrilla camps and after war comes from a series of personal interviews that she compiled over more than twenty years.⁷⁹ Women's experiences, especially cases of sexual humiliation and rape, have been largely excluded from official records in global armed conflicts, according to a UN report. Social stigma, safety concerns and trauma are among the many reasons women hesitate to come forward about their experiences.⁸⁰ For example, in November of 2018 *The Guardian* reported on a woman named Marta who was at her boyfriend's house, moulding dough into circles to make tortillas, when five soldiers barged in. They forced the 19-year-old into the bedroom and raped her at gunpoint. Not long after that October afternoon in 1981, Marta fled her hometown of El Mozote in eastern El Salvador. That December, nearly all of Marta's family were murdered in El Mozote. Survivors of the massacre recount seeing bodies of dead women with their skirts pulled up, and hearing the screams of

⁷⁹ Personal interview with Claudia Hernández 4 Nov 2018.

⁸⁰ See "Report of the Secretary General on Conflict Related Sexual Violence" 2017.

those who were separated from men and taken to the mountains. While there were many allegations of sexual violence in El Mozote, the crimes could not be prosecuted because of the amnesty agreement that was passed as the war ended, until recently. However, the amnesty was overturned in 2016 by a supreme court ruling that deemed the law unconstitutional making it possible to begin to recognize how widespread sexual violence was during the war.⁸¹ The fact that this novel fell flat in El Salvador and did not win much critical attention or acclaim, reflects a society and culture that has allowed for little recognition of the nature of wartime experiences of women and how women experienced the war and postwar.

The first novel by the Salvadoran author Claudia Hernández, *Roza tumba quema*, published in 2018, represents sexual violence during the war:

Apenas tres días atrás, le advirtió que se fuera de ahí y se escondiera en los montes o en las quebradas porque tres guerrilleros con fusiles andaban en los alrededores violando a las mujeres que encontrarán. Ya me violaron a mi y me preguntaron dónde vivías vos, le dijo. Me preguntaron y tuve que decir. (29)

In this quote a neighbor warns one of the main characters that a roving group of armed guerrillas are targeting women in the surrounding communities. While many collective and official memory narratives are built around human rights violations committed by the military and paramilitary groups during the most recent war, little has been documented in historical, testimonial or fictional form about war crimes carried out against the population by the groups

⁸¹ Cases of sexual humiliation and rape from El Mozote in 1980 are a key example. These cases are being reopened after a 2016 repeal of amnesties found the general amnesty laws to be unconstitutional. Trying the perpetrators in the El Mozote case would be a strike against impunity for gender violence in El Salvador. See “Finally they will pay” 2018.

that joined together to form the FMLN, and even less so about how women were targeted in particular.

In the aftermath of El Salvador's most recent war, the struggle for national liberation has given way to a Democratic transition in which the FMLN was elected and re-elected to run the country during three presidential elections. While recently elected third party candidate Nayib Bukele President promised to turn the page on the belic past that has defined El Salvador and end the "postwar period," El Salvador's transition has been marked by divided memory about the role of the FMLN and that of the military and two separate memory camps about what happened persist.⁸² Is the FMLN a party born out of popular revolution that advanced the cause of the poor and dispossessed masses in El Salvador?, or did the FMLN leadership use the cause of the popular masses to oust the old ruling class and gain power and position for themselves? Were the gains made for the masses worth the cost in civilian lives and relationships? On the one hand, there is an impulse to embrace those who have been historically excluded and stigmatized in the collective memory and embark on a mission of social repair. At the same time, there is also an impulse to forget; not uncovering too much, not provoking too much. A key part of my argument here is that this ambivalence about the role of the FMLN in El Salvador's most recent war and in the Democratic transition is captured in Claudia Hernández' *Roza tumba quema*. History, testimony and memory when re-presented through fiction writing can open up a space to articulate ambivalent memory.

In an earlier novel, *La diáspora* (1989), by Horacio Castellanos Moya, there are already representations of crimes committed within El Salvador's revolutionary movement. Moya writes about the impact of the murders of Melida Anaya Montes (Commander Ana Maria), Salvador

⁸² See "Bukele Pasa La 'Página De La Posguerra" 2019.

Cayetano Carpio (Comandante Marcial), and Roque Dalton, three killings that resulted from internal conflicts and rifts within the groups that had come together to form the FMLN.

Castellanos Moya uses “fiction” to reveal this darker side of the armed revolutionary movement. The book begins with the default caption, “Este libro es un libro de ficción” in bold letters. From the year 2000 on, novels are published that reenact and repeat the revolutionary process. This is the case also in Roger lindo’s *El perro en la niebla* (2006) and Miguel Huezo Mixco’s *Camino de Hormigas* and Mixco’s *Casa de Moravia*. *Roza tumba quema* is part of this proliferation of novels about ex-militants looking back at their experiences with, at best, ambivalence. As a group, these novels can be taken as a means of collapsing the distance between now and then, reenacting and reliving a traumatic collective past compulsively as in a recurring dream. In his groundbreaking work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Sigmund Freud writes of an encounter with veterans of World War I who have recurring dreams about the horrors of the battlefield: “Now dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back to the situation from which he wakes up in another fright. This astonishes people far too little.” (Freud 13). Why do these authors take up the scene of war again re-living the trauma of the past? The repetition of battlefield horrors in fiction gives language meaningful control over memory affording literature a crucial role in working through the past:

When the past becomes accessible to recall in memory, and when language functions to provide some measure of conscious control, critical distance, and perspective, one has begun the arduous process of working over and through the trauma in a fashion that may never bring full transcendence of acting out (or being haunted by revenants and reliving the past in its shattering intensity) but which may enable processes of judgement and at least limited liability and ethically

responsible agency. These processes are crucial for laying ghosts to rest, distancing oneself from haunting revenants, renewing an interest in life, and being able to engage memory in more critically tested senses. (LaCapra 90)

This changes the frame of analysis from looking at novels like *Roza tumba quemada* as a novel that represents the past, to an examination of how this novel and others like it function as a means of working through trauma, now.

Roza tumba quemada is part of a general literary turn away from a relatively homogenous period from the 1960-1990's in Central American literature in which the literary production became an ideological practice of the struggle for national liberation. Critics argue that during this time, writers largely limited themselves to writing about topics that advanced the political causes of the revolution. Testimonial writing, for example, became a popular politically committed genre that gave a voice to people marginalized by well ingrained power structures. Many times the testimonial genre functioned as a vehicle for protest, representing the lives of the subaltern that stood in opposition to dominant "official" narratives. Fiction, in contrast, was largely viewed as politically uncommitted and frivolous; a waste of time and a way to evade reality through art (Aparicio 12). While testimonial writing took on the important task of conveying the truth so that traumatic experiences could be known, fiction, seemed to avoid reality in favor of the unknown, or worse, in favor of un-knowing in the sense of denial or forgetting. Bearing witness and giving testimony can often be a way to work through trauma and yet, as I have argued in this chapter, sometimes an experience is not transmittable or able to be transferred to another person because of the nature of the trauma for the victim and/or the receptiveness of the listener.

Claudia Hernández' *Roza tumba quema* has a hybrid quality, interweaving the testimonial mode, with memory and fiction writing to work through trauma instead of to advance the causes of the revolution. Ortiz Waller proposes that after the failure of the utopian revolutionary projects in Central America, fiction writing and particularly the novel develops a parodic and ironic tone in response to the testimonial genre and to the politically committed narratives of the previous decades (Ortiz-Wallner, *El arte de ficcionar* 18). Ortiz Wallner argues that the perversion of the testimonial model has popularized a style of writing that moves constantly between testimonial, H/history, memory and fictional modes. These genres push up against each other in a frictional way, in ways that seem at once contradictory and complementary, creating new representational and aesthetic modes as well as new possibilities of coming to understand the past. I aim to show that this frictional and hybrid quality is at work in Claudia Hernández' *Roza tumba quema* and that the author uses this to represent ambivalent memory about the war; in this case, the ways that the popular revolution betrayed Salvadoran women during wartime and into the postwar era.

The main character of *Roza tumba quema* was a guerrilla militant during the war who was forced to give her daughter up during the war. This kind of forced separation was a reality for many Salvadoran militants with young children during the war. Many made arrangements for their children for temporary separations, but after the war ended, families couldn't find their loved ones. For example, in 1994, Father Jon de Cortina, a Spanish priest working in El Salvador, founded an organization called Pro-Búsqueda with three human rights researchers to search for these missing children — many of whom had been adopted by families living abroad. Since then, and according to their website, the organization has solved more than 443 cases, with

more than 275 resulting in reunions between family members.⁸³ The frictional quality of *Roza tumba quema* becomes evident in reading the testimonies given to Pro-Búsqueda by people looking for family members.⁸⁴ In one case, for example, Salvador García, a militant during the war had to give up his newborn son in 1981 when the baby's Mother was killed by the military:

Mientras él vivía “enmontañado”, su mujer dio a luz al pequeño Manuel. A finales del mes de octubre de 1981, el Ejército salvadoreño lanzó un cruel operativo sobre la zona de San Agustín, en el departamento de Usulután, conocido como la masacre de La Quesera. De esa forma, la Fuerza Armada respondía a la voladura del Puente de Oro a manos de los guerrilleros realizada pocos días antes en esa zona. El resultado fueron cerca de 500 personas muertas de las comunidades de San Agustín y Jiquilisco y cientos de violaciones a mujeres, actos de tortura y ejecuciones arbitrarias masivas contra la población masiva. Cuando Salvador pudo regresar a su casa, encontró el cadáver de su mujer, que aún sostenía al bebé en sus brazos. Milagrosamente, el niño sobrevivió a la matanza. Con sólo 40 días de vida, el niño había sido testigo del asesinato de su madre. Dada su condición de guerrillero, Salvador no se podía hacer cargo del cuidado de su hijo. “Busqué gente para que lo cuidaran, pero no fue posible”, explica. Finalmente, recurrió a unos amigos suyos que vivían en San Agustín. “Les pedí el favor de que llevaran al bebé al Hogar del Niño, en San Salvador”, recuerda. Pero el matrimonio le propuso cuidar al niño, a pesar del temor de Salvador de que pudieran sufrir algún tipo de represalia política.

⁸³ See www.probusqueda.com.sv

⁸⁴ See <http://www.probusqueda.org.sv/salvador-garcia/>

The main character of *Roza tumba quema* is a woman, whose actual name the reader never learns, but who also has a story similar to Salvador Garcia's testimony. The subtle effacement of the personal identity in the namelessness of the main character suggests on the one hand that her story, or parts of it, is that of many Salvadorans. The main character is reunited with her daughter in Paris after the signing of the Peace Accords and many years after their separation. There is a heavy symbolic weight to Paris as the site of their meeting. According to Alexandra Ortiz Wallner's analysis in "Guerra y escritura en *Roza tumba quema* (2017) de Claudia Hernández" the context of this novel the city evokes the Central American intellectual side of militancy of the Central American left:

Para esta, París fue el lugar que acogió o refugió a varios de los líderes (hombres) de los movimientos contrainsurgentes pero también es el lugar en el que el testimonio más emblemático fue posible: el que surgió del encuentro a inicios de 1982 entre Rigoberta Menchú Tum y Elizabeth Burgos. La antropóloga venezolana condujo en su apartamento parisino más de 1000 minutos (más o menos unas 18 horas, grabadas en 12 casetes) de entrevistas con la entonces muy joven líder indígena maya quiché, miembro de la insurgencia guatemalteca, exiliada en aquel momento. (Ortiz-Wallner, *Guerra y escritura* 124)

This meeting takes place with the help of an NGO like Pro-Búsqueda and with the guidance of an interpreter who helps the older woman communicate with her daughter who has been adopted by a French speaking family. As one would expect, the daughter asks for an accounting of the story of her birth and of what happened that made her Mother decide to give her up. The Mother responds with a personal account of this part of her life.

The confessional scene in Paris involving international actors and interpreters immediately calls to mind the testimonial mode. This genre is credited as the first to give voice to poor, rural subjects, often indigenous and female, whose stories had long been excluded from lettered discourse in Latin America. The most well known of these is, of course, Rigoberta Menchú's *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchu y asi me nacio la conciencia*, first published in 1992, which tells the story of the Guatemalan army genocide against indigenous people from the perspective of one of its survivors, a Maya K'iche woman. Elizabeth Burgos is a French journalist who brings Menchú to Paris and records her interviews with Menchú to write the book. Burgos' voice mediates Menchú's testimonial much like the interpreter in *Roza tumba quema* acts as a filter between the Mother and Daughter.

The narration in *Roza tumba quema* is in the third person and one suspects that they are hearing about the mother's life as mediated by the interpreter. Here, the orality of her testimony is foregrounded in the interpreter mediated conversation between Mother and Daughter in a scene that echoes Rigoberta Menchu's telling of her story, in broken Spanish in a series of interviews, to Elisabeth Burgos-Debray in Paris in the now canonical *I Rigoberta Menchu an Indian Woman living in Guatemala*. One key difference is that the testimony that the Mother gives does not project an idealized and utopian vision of the revolution and postwar, but instead reveals a certain ambivalence about the past. Her testimony calls into question the particular kinds of abuse, human rights violations and war crimes suffered by women as combatants at the hands of both the military and of the national liberation movement. For example, the Mother tells her daughter that she was left vulnerable to abuse by her superiors who were much older, more experienced, and who had hierarchical power over her within the compartmentalized

organization. In this way Hernández begins to craft a story about how the revolution betrayed female guerrilla militants:

El hombre con el que la concibió dirigía algunas operaciones. Tendría al menos diez años más que ella. No sabía de dónde había llegado o cómo se llamaba porque, en ese tiempo y en esa situación, era una medida de seguridad no conocer el nombre verdadero de nadie ni su procedencia. Él sí conocía los suyos. Había estado presente cuando se tomó la decisión de que ella se quedara en el campamento. Cree que fue él quien le puso su seudónimo, que, por cierto, era francés...Un nombre era solo un nombre. En la guerra, era lo mismo que un número, un tatuaje o una placa al cuello: una manera de identificar las bajas. La niña era eso para él.” (57)

The novel alludes to situations in which male superiors forced female combatants in guerrilla movements into using contraception or having abortions. Several testimonies collected by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reveal that guerrillas in fact practiced forced abortion (Shekawat 140). Often, military superiors decided whether or not women would be permitted to bring pregnancies to term or if they would be forced to terminate the pregnancy. However, in a country like El Salvador that continues to restrict abortion in all cases such stories are terribly taboo and hard to narrate. These testimonies remain anonymous and filed in the TRC archives. (Shekawat 140). At the same time, this experience of women in war in *Roza tumba quema*, reveals that women that participated in guerrilla movements throughout Latin America faced similar experiences and were punished for trying to leave the encampments to avoid forced abortions. Guerrilla leaders often treated pregnancy suspiciously, as something that was a

woman's responsibility to manage, as evidence of women's lack of commitment to the cause and even possibly as ill-disguised desertion attempts:

Estaban en guerra. El era un jefe. Debían dar el ejemplo. Estaba prohibido tener hijos en el frente de batalla. ¿Acaso no se lo habían dicho? ¿Cómo se le había ocurrido embarazarse?...Estaba muy molesto. Le preguntó por qué no había avisado antes. De acuerdo con el médico que atendía el campamento en el estado en que se encontraba ya no era posible hacer algo para detenerlo. ¿Por qué no avisó antes como las demás para que le hicieran un raspado? (Hernández, *Roza tumba quema* 57)

The protagonist explains to her daughter that she left the encampment for two months to give birth and care for her child and that her military superiors ordered that she return to the encampment despite her pleas to stay with the baby. Her superiors cut off contact between the Mother and Daughter promising that it was the best way to protect the child and also ensuring her that they would locate the child for her after the war. However, after the war the FMLN leadership did not keep their promise and the Mother and Daughter were not reunited:

Le dijeron que no debía preocuparse por el bebé: estaría a salvo. Quedaría en un hogar con aliados suyos que la cuidaría bien hasta que llegara el final de la guerra...podía darle una mejor vida a su hija luchando desde las montañas. La mejor forma de protegerla era no bajar a visitarla porque los soldados podían seguirla ubicar a la niña y matarla para debilitarla....por eso decidieron mover a su hija del sitio donde había nacido y negarle información al respecto. Le juraron que la guiarían a ella el día que la guerra terminara. Pero no cumplieron. (Hernández, *Roza tumba quema* 60)

The novel recalls the testimonial project of the revolutionary years where people often partnered up with international organizations to help garner support for solidarity movements that worked to end the violence in Central America. *I, Rigoberta Menchú* opens with a disclaimer, “This is my testimony. I didn’t learn it from a book and I didn’t learn it alone. I’d like to stress that it’s not only my life, it’s also the testimony of my people”(1). Right away the reader is faced with the ambiguity of the term “testimony.” In John Beverley’s definition “testimonio is a narrative...told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts.” (Beverley, *Against Literature* 70). While Menchú Tum claims that her book is written in the genre of the testimonio, she does not agree to play by its rules of being a direct witness to the events that she recounts.

The most vocal critic of Menchú’s account is David Stoll. In an interview by Dina Fernández García, “Stoll: I Don’t Seek to Destroy Menchú,” David Stoll points out key inconsistencies in Menchú’s telling of the events of her life, but at the same time writes that Rigoberta Menchú’s testimony is “obviously the truth, in a national sense if not a personal one” (Stoll and Arias, *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy* 69). Among the inaccuracies that Stoll highlights is the fact that Menchú did not lack an education; she was in fact educated at private Catholic boarding schools. Also, she did not witness the death of her brother Petrocinio as she claimed and others in her village contend that he was not burned alive, but was killed by the military in other circumstances. The territorial dispute with landowners that Menchú claims to have sparked her father’s political awakening was, in fact, a dispute for land with members of her own family. Stoll found more than 600 pages of government records to support this version of events on file at the National Agrarian Transformation Institute of Guatemala City.

Stoll absolves Elizabeth Burgos-Debray of blame for the inconsistencies in Menchú's narrative because he heard a few of the taped testimonies and says that she essentially only made superficial changes to Menchú's version. Next Stoll argues about the "truth" of Rigoberta Menchú's testimony. He discusses collective memory and argues that her testimony can be said to be "true" because many Guatemalans identify with it. Particularly compelling is his argument that what is imagined has a true dimension. This is the case in theories of post-memory where even though an event may not be witnessed directly, the memories of family members are "inherited" and, in a way, "remembered." Stoll proposes that standard concepts of "remembering" are too limited and ends the chapter by proposing that Menchú's account is an "explosion of memory and imagination"(200).⁸⁵ Later in his book Stoll suggests that even if her testimony is not true that it is in the process of becoming true as what society chooses to remember is the only thing that counts.

David Stoll posits that, as a whole, Rigoberta Menchú is a convenient symbol of indigenous resistance for North American academics who want to see themselves as "intellectual rebels." With regards to what Latin American Historians want to "know" about Guatemala, Stoll says that "the truth would ruin everything." He notes that, "books like *I, Rigoberta Menchú* will be exalted because they tell academics what they want to hear...What makes *I, Rigoberta Menchú* so attractive in universities is what makes it misleading about the struggle for survival in Guatemala. We think we are getting closer to understanding Guatemalan peasants when actually we are being borne away by the mystifications wrapped up in an iconic figure" (227).⁸⁶

⁸⁵ See Stoll 2008.

⁸⁶ See Stoll 2008.

Claudia Hernández's novel reconfigures the testimonial mode to represent a woman's experience as a guerrilla militant within the revolutionary left, however, does the opposite of what Burgos Debray set out to do in the story of Rigoberta Menchú. Hernández reconfigures the testimonial genre to capture ambivalent memories about the war and postwar years and to present a more critical view of the FMLN and the guerrilla movement. Hernández tells the story about how women fared in the guerrilla movement and she tells it in a way that is complex and nuanced without clear cut heroes and villains. This inverts the original function of the testimonial that plays out in the case of Rigoberta Menchú as a tool for garnering support for the revolutionary processes of Central America.

Going back to the text of *Roza tumba quemá* itself, and to the meeting between the estranged Mother and Daughter, as they sit together, the older woman gives an oral account through an interpreter to her daughter of the reasons that she left her during the war and that led the child to being adopted by a French couple: "Le decían que lo que debía saber debía escucharlo de la boca de su madre"(7). This focus on orality and the constant challenge of translation and communication builds a pattern of linguistic, social and cultural barriers that mirrors the interaction between a subaltern subject giving testimony to a privileged international interviewer - editor. The distinguishing characteristic of the interaction between a testimonialist and the interviewer editor is that the person who gives testimony is a member of a marginalized group who speaks to the oppression of a collectivity and also highlights an urgent need to communicate.⁸⁷ In the "postwar," communication between the two women is thwarted and the Mother's testimonial falls on deaf ears as the daughter only responds with a cool, forced and formal demeanor: "La llamaba hija. A la niña no le agradaba. Habría preferido que la llamara por

⁸⁷ See Beverley and Yudice 1996.

su nombre, aunque lo pronunciara mal. Ella prefería llamarla señora. Era más distante y siempre educado. No podían acusarla de ser descortés. Nadie lo hacía, aunque todos los pensaban.” (6) The reader quickly understands that their relationship has been severed by the war and that communication and understanding between the women is no longer possible.

Whereas Rigoberta Menchú’s testimony in the 1980’s was well received by an international audience, the Mother’s testimonial to her daughter close to thirty years later is not. The conversation between Mother and daughter exposes the brokenness of their relationship and suggests a similar brokenness in the relationship between one generation and the next. More than anything, what stands out in their meeting is the Daughter’s inability to process the Mother’s story:

Ella pensaba que hacía todo lo que podía. Incluso, más de lo que la señora merecía porque, sin importar lo que dijera o las historias que le contaban, era un hecho que la había abandonado. Nadie podía sacarle eso de la mente. Se preguntaba que había tenido o hecho ella para que lo hiciera. Los investigadores le decían que había sido culpa de la guerra. Los hermanos le decían que debía concentrarse en el hecho de que, con todo y todo, la mujer llegaba del otro lado del tiempo para arreglar la situación y que sería bueno que la escuchara antes de sacar conclusiones.” (Hernández, *Roza tumba quema* 7).

A view of the military emerges in her testimony that is also nuanced. Soldiers are portrayed as human beings that became victims of the war in their own way and subject to the orders of their superiors: “Un soldado le pegó la cara. Le dijo que las órdenes no las daba él y lo tiró al suelo. Le dijo que lo iban a matar cuando ellos quisieran. Era mentira. Ellos tampoco daban las órdenes. Y no morían de ganas de matar niños. De hecho algunos sintieron algo de alivio

cuando llegó la orden de dejarlos e ir detrás de los guerrilleros que habían ubicado en una hacienda cercana. Otros no sentían nada. Era una forma de sobrevivir” (Hernández, *Roza tumba quema* 27). In *Roza tumba quema* soldiers negotiate between their superiors and the civilian population sometimes disconnecting from their own emotions to carry out orders against the population and other times putting themselves at risk to help the population escape harm: “Uno de los últimos en irse se les acercó y les dijo ‘Ahora es cuando ustedes pueden irse. Les insistió, Corran. Váyanse, porque ellas no se movían, no porque estuvieran paralizadas del miedo, sino porque no creían que uno de ellos estuviera en disposición de ayudarlas” (Hernández, *Roza tumba quema* 25).

Rather than serve the political cause of the revolution, these kinds of ambivalent memories about the war call into question the sacrifices made and the costs of war in terms of human lives and relationships. On a very basic level, this inversion of the testimonial genre shows how women’s lives and their stories, such as that of Rigoberta Menchú, have been instrumentalized as a political tool deployed in the service of revolutionary processes. Gone from *Roza tumba quema* is the tone that idealized the FMLN and its leadership. The novel, instead takes an ambivalent stance with regards to the internal workings of the FMLN in El Salvador’s most recent war and reveals a similar ambivalence now in terms of how these memories play out in the present day Democratic transition. The reader is presented with a novel that is conflicted about both the past and present.

In sum, *Roza tumba quema* pays respect to the guerrilla movement and to the revolution, but instead of nostalgic memory, the kind of re-membering that evokes a longing for the past, there is instead a tone of ambivalence about the past and present. A sense of vagueness about what the gains of war actually were and if these were made on an individual level by women

who were adults during the war or if they were made on behalf of all women and for subsequent generations. There is very little improvement in the life conditions of the women in the novel that could be attributed to the wartime experience for women. The novel uses a frictional mode where the testimonial truth telling mode is deployed through fiction to give women the chance to tell their own stories. In this case, the protagonist tells her own story and that of many other Salvadoran women who, despite taking up arms in the revolution, were targeted and abused by men on both sides of the conflict. In this way the testimonial mode turns in on itself; instead of advancing the causes of the revolution, it is critical of the revolutionary project by revealing the ongoing trauma in Salvadoran society and the ways that the guerrilla movement failed women militants and the next generations of Salvadoran daughters. Given that the legitimacy of today's FMLN is rooted in memory, these kinds of re-memberings are polemical and threaten to reveal too much about the past and, ultimately, to undermine the legitimacy of today's institutionalized FMLN.

This chapter began with the essential question about why Salvadoran authors have taken to fiction as a way to represent history. Given my analysis of these two novels, I have argued that the answer lies in the fact that the postwar period has been characterized by legal amnesties and national and international impunity making it impossible to bear witness in any meaningful sense. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission collected extensive witness testimonies and yet, after these were collected and presented to the state, the government proceeded by pardoning the crimes committed during the war and, to date, has done little to seek justice for victims of human rights violations. This means that despite the fact that testimony was given that the weight of human experience was not transmitted; victims were not truly listened to or heard.

Re-living the past without being able to transmit these experiences to a listener can create a return to trauma. For example, Primo Levi narrates a recurring nightmare in Auschwitz in which he gives testimony and re-experiences the Holocaust, but the response of his listeners only brings a return to trauma:

They are all listening to me and it is this very story that I am telling: the whistle of three notes, the hard bed, my neighbor whom I would like to move, but whom I am afraid to wake as he is stronger than me. I also speak diffusely of our hunger and of the lice-control, and of the Kapo who hit me on the nose and then sent me to wash myself as I was bleeding. It is an intense pleasure, physical, inexpressible, to be at home, among friendly people and to have so many things to recount: but I cannot help noticing that my listeners do not follow me. In fact, they are completely indifferent...My sister looks at me, gets up and goes away without a word. A desolating grief is born in me. I am now quite awake and I remember that I have recounted it to Alberto and that he confided to me, to my amazement, that it is also his dream and the dream of many others, perhaps of everyone. Why does it happen? Why is the pain of everyday translated so constantly into our dreams, in the ever-repeated scene of the un-listened to story?

(Levi 52-53)

Similarly, in El Salvador, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission elicited victim testimonies only to have the state then pardon the freshly documented human rights violations. It was as if their testimonies were brought into the folds of history, the archive, and documented as part of the “official” record only to eliminate the very possibility of remembrance and justice. Cathy Caruth’s metaphor of Pompeii seems to capture this brilliantly; she poses that literature as a

symbolic language emerges in the ashes of history to “recount the traumatic struggles of characters attempting to reappear in the legal and political realms from which they have been banished” (Caruth, *Literature in the Ashes* x). In *Noviembre*, for example, Ignacio Ellacuria and the Jesuits are re-membered through the probing of a student who never knew them personally. Jorge Galan draws the unsettling picture of a student trying to bring them back to life --to make them reappear both socially and politically in a world that has buried them and burned up their histories time and again in the ashes of amnesty and impunity. Similarly, Claudia Hernández sketches out the stories of three generations of Salvadoran women and how they struggle to appear in a world to which they have never truly belonged; one woman who was forced to become a guerrilla and later searches for her lost daughter, another woman struggles with depression and a third cannot find a way to escape a world in which she finds little opportunity. In both of these novels, fiction is a rigorous attempt to articulate human experience in the advent of a history that is constituted by the very way that it erases memory. As in the testimonies collected after the war by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in El Salvador, witness testimonies emerged and in their very unfolding seemed to slip out of grasp.

The two novels that I have examined here then are about memory and re-membering the past, but even more significantly about representing the experience of working through trauma in the present and making this trauma visible to readers in light of a history that emerges “as the performance of its own disappearance” (Caruth, *Literature in the Ashes* xi). At the heart of both novels is the enigma of how testimony has unfolded in El Salvador’s postwar period, and in that very unfolding or telling has translated into what Primo Levi has described as “the unlistened to story.”

Conclusion

This thesis has examined how memory of the most recent war is signified, re-presented and erased in public works, privately funded arts and in the literary production of El Salvador's postwar period, especially in the ten years spanning 2009-2019. This project identifies the points of tension between how the state deploys memory and forgetting and how independent artists and writers have responded to propaganda, legal amnesties, impunity, and the passage of time. This dissertation project grew out a single photograph taken haphazardly at a historical museum that memorializes the UCA Jesuits. The photograph shows my Mother's face reflected in museum glass as she looks at the reconstruction of Padre Rutilio Grande's torso after he was killed. The image simultaneously captures two experiences; an artifact that has been re-presented, re-constructed and staged in the present and, at the same time, my mother's own personal memories of who Padre Grande was in his day and how she remembered him personally. My research began with the desire to know what was behind the expansiveness of my Mother's expression; I wondered what it meant to have traumatic private memories take on profound collective meaning and for personal trauma to become historical. In sum, I wanted to examine the junctures and disjunctures of memory and History. This meant looking at the impact of silence and impunity on postwar society and how memory has been re-presented over the last decade in light of El Salvador's social contract to move on and leave the past in the past. As such, my approach to each of these chapters has been to weave in El Salvador's traumatic history and memory of the most recent war with an analysis of how images and text are deployed today, why, where, and for what audience(s). In short, my research outlines how the cultural production bears witness to the past, how it responds to the ongoing consequences of trauma,

how it reconfigures and repackages traumatic memory into new forms and modes of discourse and how trauma is passed on from one generation to the next.

Main Contributions to the Field

During my field work in El Salvador I spent many afternoons exploring San Salvador's MARTE national art museum and, in many ways, it was like walking through an archive of violence and trauma. In one area dedicated to El Salvador's Armed Conflict, for example, Carlos Cañas' *El Sumpúl* (1984) depicts the 1980 massacre of refugees crossing the Sumpúl river. In this painting, decomposing corpses of young and old men and women pile together as if they were debris deposited on the riverbank. An eerie morning light falls on the entwined bodies illuminating their pained expressions. This painting documents the ways that violence and trauma imprint themselves on a community of bodies. Twenty plus years later, Danny Zavaleta's *El tur* (2006) is a map that documents modern-day violence and how it organizes movement in the capital city. The map depicts gang controlled streets marked with graffiti and blood and identifies zones with their popular names referencing the ways the city is used in unauthorized ways. They are quite different works, but at the same time, this thesis concludes by arguing that the same thread of violence and trauma unite them.

One of the main contributions I have made to scholarship on the cultural production in El Salvador is to suggest trauma as a framework and lens for analysis. I have argued that trauma is the proverbial elephant in the room in El Salvador. Central American scholars dialogue with critical theories that characterize the postwar cultural production as cynical, evasive and caustic, but, to my knowledge, no one has proposed this tone as evidence of trauma or of the process of working through trauma. Maybe no one is talking about trauma, because as Irina Carlota Silber suggests, "trauma creates victims and that troubles the metanarrative of heroic collective action."

In other words, trauma interrupts the memory of grassroots mobilization and popular revolutionary processes as self-actualized political action. This means that a piece like Carlos Cañas' work is read as being "politically committed" instead of as a representation of trauma and of working through traumatic memory (Najera 54). Instead, I have suggested here that trauma is a valid way of reading this work. Another possibility, as Ellen Moodie suggests in *El Salvador in the Aftermath of Peace*, is that the violence that we are seeing today in El Salvador is really a manifestation of the same violence that took shape in the Conquest, that erupted again in 1932, yet again in the most recent war and that is chronic now in Salvadoran society. Moodie offers a theorization of the "critical code-switching" of violence.⁸⁸ This refers to a transition in the superficial taxonomies that state officials use to categorize homicides. Moodie argues that most recently, homicide has been labeled as "common crime" so as to separate it from a more generalized political and social crisis affecting the nation as a whole. Violence in El Salvador then is read as a map of "high crime areas" instead of a structural problem that calls on the state to respond. In this light, Danny Zavaleta's *El tur* seems like a cynical reproach of what San Salvador is becoming instead of a piece that both documents and works through the violence and trauma of his community.

Instead of imposing an analysis on the cultural production that responds to a political timeline of war and postwar and assuming that art robotically responds to political processes, this thesis proposes that these works can be read through the lens of trauma. Trauma provides a cohesive analytical approach that focuses on violence as a response to ongoing problems of injustice, inequality and racism rooted in the conquest and colonialism. This is important because focusing on trauma cuts across superficial political and legal taxonomies that have

⁸⁸ See Moodie 2010.

shaped the way scholars have approached the cultural production most recently, allowing viewers to trace a unifying thread in art and literature at least from the 1970's and 80's into the postwar period.

The end of the postwar era

Trauma provides a good starting point for discussion, but further research needs to be done to understand how it plays out in the Salvadoran context as there are many gaps in the existing knowledge and scholarship on this topic. It remains to be seen, for example, how the next generation will deal with the trauma of the past. In his victory speech after his election as President in February of 2019, Nayib Bukele promised an end to the pain from the past and that El Salvador had “turned the page of the postwar era, and can now start to look towards the future.” The day after the election, Salvadoran newspapers called the 37 year old “The Young Man who Brought Down the Dinosaurs.”⁸⁹ President Nayib Bukele was just eleven years old when the Peace Accords were signed ending the war. The “Dinosaurs” in this case are El Salvador’s long standing political parties; the FMLN and ARENA, but also the colonial paradigm of *los vencedores y los vencidos*, the habitual impunity and the traditional social order. In terms of “memory work,” Bukele's first order of business was to order the army, via Twitter, to remove the name of Colonel Domingo Monterrosa from its barracks in San Miguel. The name was removed with little backlash even though Monterrosa has previously been regarded as an “untouchable” by both ARENA and the FMLN. Monterrosa served as the commander of the Atlacatl Battalion that was responsible for the infamous El Mozote massacre in 1980 that nearly wiped out the entire village. Two days later, Bukele ordered that Jorge Antonio Meléndez, the Head of the Security Department, be terminated from his government position because of

⁸⁹ See Toro 2019.

accusations of his role in the assassination of the revolutionary poet Roque Dalton.⁹⁰ In August, the major newspapers of El Salvador reported that a plaque remembering Mauricio Funes next to the mural he commissioned at the International Airport of Archbishop Romero, had been removed.⁹¹ Indeed, removing Monterrosa's name, ending Jorge Meléndez' state post, and withdrawing Mauricio Funes' plaque are actions that indicate the beginning of their fall into oblivion. These are symbolic acts that signify a constant writing and re-writing of a narrative of collective memory with a shifting set of events and cast of actors. Monterrosa, Meléndez and Mauricio Funes are only the most current examples of the shifting landscape of memory and they will continue to be heralded privately by some as heroes, but the politics and society that made that kind of state terror, violence and impunity possible have already begun to evolve into something new. How will the cultural production respond to the end of the postwar era? How will Salvadoran artists and writers dialogue with these changes in the politics of memory?

There is much at stake in how Salvadorans remember the war and postwar that is outside the scope of this dissertation. History has shown that the memory of violence, repression and trauma and the way that Salvadorans piece back together the social and cultural fabric will determine the country's future. The memory of *La Matanza* in 1932, for example, is a river of lava boiling just under the visible surface of society that erupted violently in the most recent war. The feedback loop of memory is particularly evident, for example, in the fact that one of the most iconic activists and revolutionary leaders in 1932, Farabundo Martí, was reborn in the 1980's as the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Army. Now, the FMLN has been born yet again as an institutionalized legal political party and one of the major political power holders in

⁹⁰ See Vida 2019.

⁹¹ See "Desaparece placa de expresidente" 2019.

El Salvador. Given the constantly changing landscape of memory, the artists and writers analyzed here have the important work of interpreting the nation's traumatic past, re-presenting historical and contemporary trauma and violence so that they don't become commonplace, and providing a stage to work through and process trauma so that these experiences do not continue to plague the country. Their work is not only thought provoking but also provides hope that, through cultural change, El Salvador will one day truly be at peace.

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