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## FROM A CIVIL TO SOCIAL WAR: A Case Study of the State of El Salvador

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Master Thesis



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## Abstract

On January 16<sup>th</sup>, 1992 El Salvador was considered an example for the world. The Central American nation had finally signed the Peace Accords in the Castle of Chapultepec, Mexico with the mediation of the international community. Such agreements indicated the end of El Salvador brutal 12-year civil war, the transition from an authoritarian military regime to democracy and the introduction of a series of democratic reforms which aimed to solidify the state apparatus.

This thesis examines the Salvadoran Peace Accords in their scheme, and the historical circumstances that led to such negotiation. Furthermore, it will shed light upon El Salvador after the negotiations, and how that historical event is deeply intertwined with the current social war El Salvador faces nowadays.

## Acknowledgement

This thesis marks the end of my master degree. Throughout this work, I wish to accomplish a deeper understanding of the area of Global Processes, focusing in El Salvador and its civil war; a conflict that encompassed political, economic, cultural and psychological aspects that divided all segments of the society. Even though El Salvador ended its civil war in 1992 with the Peace Accords in front of the eyes of international community who applauded the historical achievement, the country entered to a transitional period where democracy was introduced.

On a personal title, and as I have had the opportunity to study outside my country, El Salvador I decided to develop my final project on this subject. My master thesis addresses my individual roots and a significantly short-lived period of my life, the civil war, along with experiences that due to my young age I am unable to recall, yet a period of historical processes for my country. I firmly believe that by having the opportunity to study in Denmark and working with international organisations I have been somehow brought back to my roots since I get indirect exposure to several contemporary matters concerning El Salvador such as immigration, illiteracy poverty, violence, etc. Indeed, I also believe that El Salvador finds itself sunk in a whirlpool of endless violence, political and social problems, indicators that only affirm that democracy is far to be reached.

This thesis will serve others to understand that El Salvador could serve as an example demonstrating that the peace accords were simply political agreements that completely dismiss what concerns with peace and democracy. Therefore, I will aim to open up my thoughts and have a clearer understanding of conflict resolution

mechanisms and by breaking through those mechanisms, hopefully bring some insight, open up to discussion, and shed light upon El Salvador's armed conflict, its peace accords and its journey to the country it has become today, *a violent and unequal society*; likewise, I aim to unveil the current elements that feed on the increase of the cycle of violence.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank my parents, that have always provided me with their moral support throughout these two years living in Denmark, and at the same time, I want to thank my thesis supervisor whose insight and guidance were valuable for execution of this work.

## List of Acronyms and key terms

**ARENA:** The National Republican Alliance is the rightist political party in El Salvador. It was founded by high ranked military leaders and the Salvadoran wealthy elite.

**Atlacátl Battalion:** A former Salvadoran rapid-response unit, created in 1980 at the United States Army school of the Americas, and trained by United States advisors in El Salvador. This battalion was held responsible of the Mozote Massacre in 1981.

**Campesinos:** Poor peasant farmers of El Salvador civil war.

**Death Squads:** Paramilitary armed groups and associations that assassinated subversive individuals who were thought to have communist ties and revealed against the government. Death squads were supported by the Salvadoran government.

**Elite:** The richest and most powerful groups in a society.

**FMLN:** Frente Faraundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (leftist political party in El Salvador).

**Fourteen families:** Individuals who dominated major political, economic, religious, and social positions in the country, controlled much of nation.

**Guerrillas/Guerrilleros:** Members of an unofficial military group that is trying to change the government, throughout the Salvadoran civil war, they were fighting for the FMLN.

**Haciendas:** Private-owned property.

**Indigenous people:** People who naturally existed in the territory of El Salvador rather than arriving from another place.

**Mara Salvatrucha (MS13) and Barrio 18:** Transnational criminal organisations that emerged in 1990s. These groups engage in criminal behaviour and the control of territory.

**Monseñor Romero:** Óscar Arnulfo Romero, a religious leader and archbishop of San Salvador who publicly denounced the atrocities committed by the Salvadoran military

**PDC:** In Spanish “Partido Demócrata Cristiano” or Christian Democrat Party. The longest-lasting political party in El Salvador before the rise of ARENA and FMLN.

**Pipiles:** Indigenous people who live in El Salvador

## Personal Motivation

### Why am I interested on this subject?

I am highly interested on exploring and investigating how the issue of violence, one of the main problems that Central America suffers, has developed throughout the past decades. To be more specific, I wish to have my main focus in the case of El Salvador, a country that is currently going through a so-called “post war” period after a deadly civil war that lasted 12 years. Back in January of 1992, the Peace Accords were the door that El Salvador needed to stop all the atrocities, and the door that set the first glimpse of hope for the population.

However, more than two decades later, the problem of violence still persists, and it has intensified in present times, for example El Salvador closed the year of 2016 with more than five thousand murders, in other words 24 murders per day according to the newspaper El Diario de Hoy, signifying an alarming number for the local authorities. The political violence that harmed El Salvador throughout the 80s, which also existed before the civil war, and that equally harmed the rest of its Central American neighbours, has turned in other forms of aggression, which have brought terrible, interminable and possibly irremediable consequences for El Salvador’s population. Such forms of aggression are mainly adjudicated to criminal organisations, for example, the well-known “maras/pandillas” or the gangs.

Academia experts have tried to address and study violence in many social settings, and many of them have concluded that it is a real, as well as complex problem which needs to be tackled with a great degree of seriousness; nevertheless, I still believe that most

of the negative consequences and the dangerous aftermaths of a violent conflict might have a its initial precedents; for example, an action, an idea and/or certain forms of behaviour which often can escalate unleashing massive conflicts, nonetheless, I also believe that to analyse the issue of violence in a the specific setting will be crucial since I will, simultaneously, examine El Salvador's and its violent background by going back on time.

Specifically, one could assume that it will be highly difficult to define the exact origin of El Salvador's civil war, however, throughout this project I wish to shed light upon the concept of violence, and how the applicability of Norwegian scholar Johan Galtung's *conflict* and *violence* theory in the Salvadoran conflict, calls into question the basic and general premise of violence as "something that can be found within human nature" or "arms uprising against enemies", etc. However, it will be also important to examine whether the Salvadoran civil war had its psychological, political, ideological and cultural aspects. I strongly believe that even though El Salvador is trapped in a contemporary wave of violence, it is indeed not the same type of violence the country suffered in the past.

The continuity of the violence cycle in El Salvador is simple visible as a transition from political violence to criminal violence, nevertheless, one could claim that structural elements that were present before and throughout the civil war could remain existent in the post-war era. For example, the issue with accumulation of wealth, which only used to be entitled to a small minority, is still a present matter in contemporary El Salvador. I will intend to utilise Galtung's "Conflict Triangle" approach to present the antecedents that moved forward and fueled the continuous problems El

Salvador suffered throughout the post-colonial period, the military dictatorships which developed before the 80s, and how those issues might be still reflected in the post-war period, after the Peace Accords were signed in 1992.

Furthermore, with this thesis I am aiming to build a relationship between the past and the present, which is to say before and after the Peace Accords, to shed light upon how the persisting levels of unrest could be linked with a devastating past, and why the Salvadoran society's wound is far from heal in present times.

As a final and personal note, conflict resolution is a matter that deeply and personally concerns me, and therefore, I believe that this project could serve others to the motivation of the study of conflict resolution in other international settings which nowadays are experiencing a contemporary unrest.

## Introduction

On January 16<sup>th</sup> 2015, the former United Nations Secretary General visited El Salvador to commemorate the 23<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of the Peace Accords that ended the brutal civil war in the country. The civil war began to flourish throughout the end of the 70's decade until 1992. In his discourse, Mr. Ban Ki-moon emphasised that El Salvador is an "example to the world" entailing the consolidation of peace, and in his own words he claims: "By coming together today, you are showing a real determination to transform; building a future of peace, citizen security and prosperity for all is in your hands, and starts today" (Ban Ki-Moon, United Nations Secretary General). However, it is crucial to stress out that, meanwhile the Salvadoran authorities and the United Nations were celebrating the consolidation of peace, a year later the director of the Salvadoran Civilian Police (PNC) announced that the country had closed 2016 with a total of 5,278 assassinations (Policía Nacional Civil).

The so called "peace accords" in El Salvador marked the end of the 12-year civil war between the military-led government against the revolutionary armed forces known as the Faraundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), or also back in that period known as "left-wing guerrillas". El Salvador's armed conflict was marked by different types of political violence perpetrated against the different population groups who were considered supporters of both side's opposition, however, the conflict had foreign interests which will be further elaborated later on. According to the World Health Organisation, "violence is the intentional, actual or intellectual force or power, resulting in, or with the high likelihood of injury" (World Health Organisation). However, the typology of violence can be understood depending on the context, for

example “self-directed violence, interpersonal violence and collective violence (ibid).

The latter includes the political violence, which draws from the premise that there are political motives that attempt to trigger a change or resist change, to a country’s political system (Wilson and Drozdek 35); for example, some of the forms of political violence included torture, massacres and disappearances to all the different population groups, it does not matter if those included children, indigenous people and women.

The 1992 Peace Accords transitioned El Salvador from an authoritarian regime to a democratic state, which brought many changes that have transformed the country regarding the political, economic, ideological and social aspects. One of the most predominant accomplishments of El Salvador’s peace process was the “end of the hostilities and political violence, the disarmament and demilitarisation of the FMLN (former guerrillas) (Studemeister 5), the implementation of an electoral system, and the active participation of the former guerrilla to democratic elections; nonetheless, the peace accords did not put an end to killings, poverty, injustice and other hostilities, but instead, the country has been facing deeper hurdles throughout the last two decades after “peace” was reached. For example, the endless wave of violence perpetrated by different criminal groups, the increasing mass migration of Salvadorans in attempt to scape violence, and the high levels of corruption and abuse of power perpetrated by the governments throughout the last decades.

According the Centre for Transitional Post-Conflict Governance, “the corrupt practices within state apparatuses are far from being eradicated in post-conflict El Salvador” (Fischer, Walecki and Carlson 58), and this can be reflected on the example involving the three latest Salvadoran presidents, who were brought to trials on alleged

corruption charges: Francisco Flores, Elias Antonio Saca and Mauricio Funes, the latter who currently was granted asylum in neighbouring Nicaragua.

Indeed, this research project will assess global processes in the context of peace and conflict resolution targeting El Salvador's processes of democratisation, and the *outcomes the Peace Accords* brought at the end of the civil war in 1992. At the same time, it will be important to understand the series of democratic practices the Peace Accords brought. Various scholars, the international community and diplomatic missions who resided and participated in El Salvador's peace negotiation allege that the Peace Accords were the gate that would lead to conflict resolution and peace transformation. Though claim can be highly contested, I wish to answer the following.

- *Did the political agreements of 1992 in El Salvador led to a ceasefire and a disarmament of the belligerents?*
- *Were the political agreements of 1992 followed by a process of peace transformation?*

This thesis attempt to find out why El Salvador is within a current social war and whether the Peace Accords have succeeded, or failed to ensure nowadays human and security rights.

# Understanding Conflict

## Johan Galtung's Theory of Conflict and Violence

What I wish to accomplish in this section is to highlight the uniqueness of El Salvador's civil war from an academic perspective.

To understand El Salvador's conflict, it is necessary the utilisation of different conflict analysis tools that will assist readers with the understanding of the type of conflict that El Salvador confronted on the decade of the 80s. To do this, I will first introduce Johan Galtung's framework of conflict, violence and peace since his understanding of conflict is not based in purely symmetrical or psychological views but also a relationship between structural and cultural roots.

First, it is crucial to highlight three essential components which, according to Galtung, better define conflict: contradiction, attitude and behaviour (Ramsbotham and Woodhouse 10). *Contradiction* defined simply as the incompatibility of goals between the stakeholders, it means that there is a "mismatch between social values and social structure" (ibid); in sum, the parties must clearly define the contradiction, which leans against their needs and/or interests.

The contradiction component can be seen in most of the conflicts, however, it is often perceived in a higher level around asymmetrical conflicts (Stalenoi 35). Asymmetrical conflict is defined as "a conflict involving two states with an unequal overall military and economic power resources" (Paul 20), however, an asymmetrical conflict is not only limited to a discrepancy of two states, but it also can involve two different groups and/or sides, and therefore, one of the parties has a "clear superior

standing than the other” (Stanelio 33), for example a majority versus a minority, a master versus his servants and/or a government and a rebel group (ibid). Many conflicts might share asymmetrical characteristics, especially in Latin America; the Guatemalan and Salvadoran conflicts could present examples of such asymmetries, for example a confrontation between two groups where a small elite used, and continues to rule the countries. Taking the individual case of El Salvador, the economic wealth belonged to the “fourteen families” (Wade 1) who retained their hold of power.

The second element to cited by Johan Galtung’s model of conflict is *attitude*, as he points out that it involves the perceptions and misperceptions of both parties, as well as themselves (Ramsbotham and Woodhouse 10); following up on this, Galtung claims that “attitudes can be negative and positive”, however, in the case of violent conflicts, parties start building stereotypes between each other, and attitudes might often be influenced by emotions such as hate, anger, bitterness, revenge, etc. (ibid) and when it comes to violence between two parties, the negative attitudes could be significantly attributed to several factors: ideology, culture, religion, etc. For example, the primary actors in El Salvador civil war were the “left-wing” movement FMLN and the army (the government of El Salvador), nonetheless, the negative attitudes they shared for one another did not develop from day to night, but it was a chain of happenings, which started to build upon emotions such as revenge, hate, anger, etc.

El Salvador is the smallest country in Central America, yet has a density of 301 habitants per square meter, which makes it the most densely populated country in Latin America (Organisation of American States); however, despite it is a small territory, El Salvador’s wave of violence has suffered a significant increase since the

civil war to current times. The significant increase of violence dates from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which can be attribute to a growth of socioeconomic inequalities (Chavez 2004). The latter statement is not just coincidence, as El Salvador has encountered, alongside its Central American neighbours a stormy colonial and national past, mainly characterised by the Spanish colonisation, which ended with the independence of 1821, afterwards El Salvador became part of the Central American Federation from 1823 to 1841, and finally an individual state, but heavily dominated by small elites (Haggerty 1990). It is crucial to highlight that there were many significant changes taking place in Latin America from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, as the neoliberal thinking “initiated when political elites implemented policies to modernise the state and stimulate its economic growth through agriculture and export” (Centeno and Ferraro 10), therefore, a burgeoning emerging export economy marked the importance of a “smallholding land ownership” (Centeno and Ferraro 208).

It is important to point out that one of the most highly valuable sources of economic growth throughout that period were different agricultural plantations such as banana, sugar cane and, the most profitable one throughout that period, coffee crops. For example, one of the first neoliberal land reform legislations was imposed by Costa Rican president Braulio Carillo Colina (1838-1842), and new codes were imposed towards labour regulations (ibid).

Similarly, the Guatemalan government led by Rufino Barrios (1873- 1885) and El Salvador president Rafael Zaldivar (1876-1884) followed up with liberal breakthroughs imposed at the national level. In the case of El Salvador, the notion of being a liberal state entailed economic, political and social reforms to reorganise the society and the

creation of a state hegemony, and since coffee was introduced as major cash crop in El Salvador, small elites issued land reforms to hold title of the most productive and profitable lands (Haggerty 1990).

One of the main features of president Zaldivar's reform included "the abolition of all ejidal and communal lands" (Centeno and Ferraro 208); this simply meant that lands that used to belong to indigenous people and/ or non-indigenous communities were privatised, and it is estimated that the claimed territory amounted "more than half of the area of the whole country" (ibid); moreover, only 2 percent of the population benefited from the revenue (Haggerty 1990). Other reforms propagated by president Zaldivar were the expropriation of indigenous lands, and the creation of a "repressive security apparatus composed of a permanent army, police and paramilitary forces" (Chavez) to deter any rebellious attack or protest from the affected groups.

The abrupt changes brought severe consequences, significantly negative feelings such as anger and discontent amongst the majority of impoverished population since it was obvious that the Salvadoran state system still lied under the patterns of "Spanish colonial structures", as small elites had controlled land production and revenues, therefore, as Galthung's model of conflict, and its second element suggests, attitudes could trigger negative feelings from one of the parts, which are susceptible to escalate if there is no an immediate solution. For example, because of the highly profound reforms issued by president Zaldivar, most the afflicted population - mainly peasants and indigenous people – who lost their homes and the sources of subsistence perceived themselves as less valuable, hopeless and somewhat vulnerable

to the small minority, which exercised power in most of the society sectors; additionally, with the expansion of the coffee economy between 1885 and 1932, a socioeconomic tension between the governing small elite and the civilians started to escalate.

Needless to say, it is clear that each of the reforms brought a lasting effect in El Salvador, which gradually fueled a culture of violence between the military and civilians (Chavez 2004), therefore, Galthung brings up the third element of his model of conflict: *behaviour*.

“According to him, behaviour involves cooperation or coercion, gestures signifying conciliation or hostility” (Ramsbotham and Woodhouse 11), as a violent conflict is characterized by threats, coercion and physical attacks (ibid). For instance, Erickson and Chan provide a specific example of Galthung’s third component of his conflict theory (behaviour); this example is Sudan, which became independent from Great Britain in 1956 and ruled by three Arab tribes, yet since its independence, the country went through catastrophic series of conflicts. Sudan’s two belligerent fronts were the National Islamic Force (NIF) against the majority of the population, who encompassed both Muslim and non-Muslim Arabs and Non-Arabs (146).

Due to the impose of the Sharia Law, the non-Muslim population revolted against the government and political tensions escalated, as the NIF revoked the constitution, banned opposition parties and proclaimed jihad against the Southern population, who were mostly non-Muslim (Enough). As reprisal, the NIF’s used an aggressive treatment towards the majority of the population, including those who were non-Muslims, excluding them socially and physically, and at the same time, NIB

labeled them as “non-desirable” by killing them, their families, friends or their religious group members, oppressing them, discriminating against them and imposing an idealized Arab-Islamic Identity (ibid), in response to this, the affected population by showed their resistance in several ways.

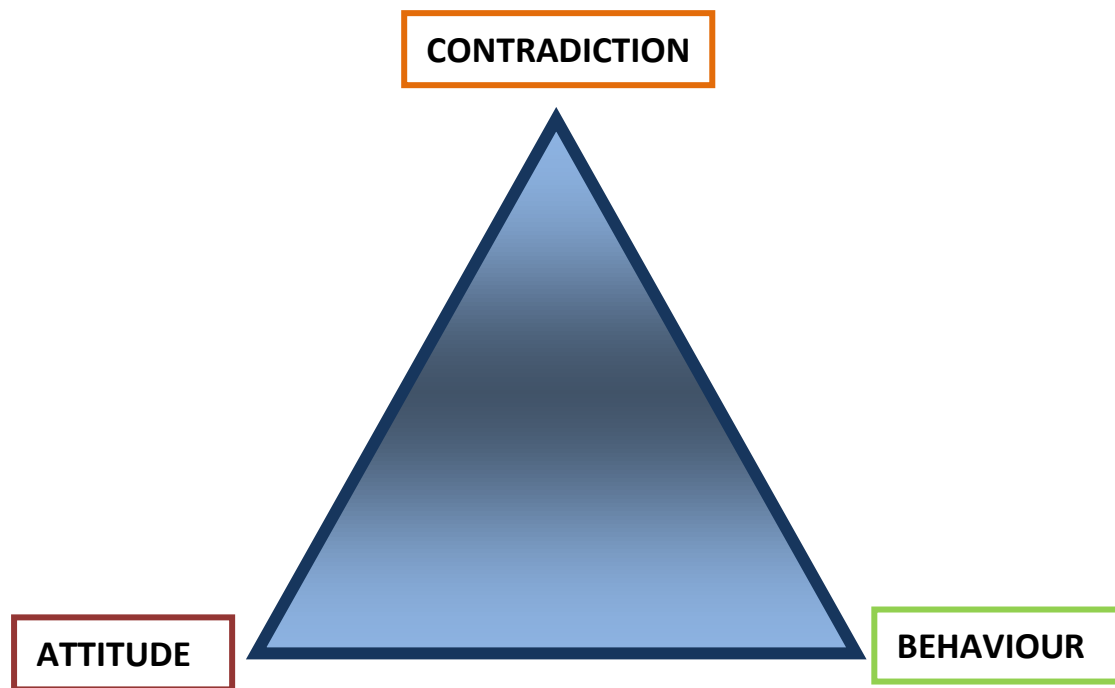
It is important to highlight that behaviour can also have an “instrumental view of the sources of conflict” (Ramsbotham and Woodhouse 11) for instance, a conflict exists ‘whenever incompatible actions occur, an action that is incompatible with another action prevents, obstructs, interferes, injures or in some way makes the latter less likely to be effective’ (Deutsch 10) (ibid).

Applying this component to the Salvadoran conflict, it is significantly understandable that there were economic, cultural and political incompatibilities between the society groups, and with the expansion of the coffee economy between the 1885 to 1932, and “the governing elites ruling the country had to confront the growing social and ethnic conflicts with unmeasured repression” (Chavez). Some examples of repressive actions performed by the ruling oligarchy were: the exercise of its dominance through coercion, state terror and terrorism, however, its dominance came through psychological means: “a national ideology based on three central components, social exclusion, racism and anti-communism” (ibid); the creation and the deployment of a coercive security force included a permanent army, police and paramilitary groups was also part of president Zaldivar reforms.

Galtung points out the importance of the three abovementioned components to be present together in a conflict since conflict is a dynamic process in which

contradictions, attitudes and behaviour are constantly changing are constantly changing and influencing one another (Ramsbotham and Woodhouse 11).

The following figure shows Johan Galtung's model of conflict:



As Galtung suggests, all three components must be present in a conflict since conflict is a dynamic process, the three components are continually changing. As the conflict dynamics develop, the parties' interests clash and then, relationships become oppressive between them. To pursue their interests, parties develop hostile attitudes and conflictual behaviours, therefore, the conflict formation starts to escalate (Ramsbotham and Woodhouse 11).

Galtung indeed dismisses the premise that indicates that violence is inherently in human nature: "he denies that human nature condemns us to violence; instead he gives another explanation of its reasoning based on three interacting forces: *structural*,

*cultural, and direct*” (Hathaway), the latter three elements are Galtung’s model of Violence.

Before building upon Galtung’s model of violence, it is crucial to build up further upon El Salvador main developments from 1930 since it might illuminate to distinguish structural, cultural and direct violence, however, it is necessary to figure it out whether the three of them were present in the Salvadoran conflict.

### El Salvador from 1930 - 1980

As the social exclusion, racism and misery stroke the vast majority of population, it was more noticeable that they were, gradually, deprived from the basic human needs, since “the propertised elites were the only ones who benefited from the privileges” (Haggerty 14). However, things worsened between 1931-1932 as the coffee export fell into a crisis, dropping its price by 54 percent (ibid); the crisis resulted in a significant wage-cuts to agricultural workers, food supplies fell sharply and many “campesinos” (peasants including low class agricultural workers) were left out of work. Racial discrimination and human rights violations towards the indigenous and mestizo cultures were heavily present.

The afflicted indigenous people and campesinos, began to listen more attentively to the urging message of leaders such as Faraundo Martí (Haggerty 14), a former student from the University of El Salvador whose political thinking was influenced by Karl Max and communistic ideas (Haggery 14-15), and at the same time Martí was one of the founders of the Central American Socialist Party, along with Sandino from Nicaragua. Faraundo Martí was jailed many times by the Salvadoran authorities who strongly disagreed with his political thinking, however, he carried on

his efforts in organising a popular rebellion aiming to establish a communist system on place (ibid).

Led by Faraundo Martí, supporters of the socialist party formed an uprising to fight for the recognition of their rights; the general discontent provoked by the coffee crisis, social inequalities and racism triggered an increasing number of Salvadorans signing up to the banner of Marx, “forming the Partido Comunista de El Salvador (PCES) (El Salvador Communist Party), the Red Aid International and the Anti-Imperial League” (Haggerty 15). President Arturo Araujo took office between March to December of 1931, and his initial response towards popular unrest was to calm down the disturbances by using force, however, at the same time he appointed municipal elections in which he promised that the PCES could also participate.

President Araujo’s deal regarding municipal elections aroused the land owned elite and Salvadoran military leaders; the latter perpetrated a coup, in 1931, against president Araujo, and it received the support from a large number military officers who claimed Araujo’s incompetence to justify their decision (ibid). The military coup, which overturned Araujo set an important precedent in Salvadoran history since it was the first time the military took direct action as an institution and its rule would last for fifty years (ibid); the first administration was led by General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, who was previously vice-president and Minister of War under Araujo’s period, and took office in 1931.

### La Matanza of 1932

Though president Martínez surprisingly allowed the municipal elections, the communist candidates who won certain municipalities were never allowed to take office, this action was repudiated from most of the population who hoped for

democratic elections. Outraged, groups of rebels encompassed mainly by campesinos and indigenous people decided to plan, and later launch a rural insurrection, however the military forces found out about the operation due to poor communication between rebels, and thus, were already aware about their intentions; as first reprisal, the military responded by arresting Faraundo Martí and other communist leaders on January 18, 1932 (Haggerty 15).

Even though the rebels continued their operations plan, and succeeded on seizing a small number of government buildings, the military forces regained the areas taken by rebels, and “less than seventy-two hours after the initial uprising, the government was again firmly in control” (Haggerty 15), and that was the initial moment that the retaliation and chaos began.

This military action known as *La Matanza* (The Massacre) of 1932, left an estimated, most likely higher, death toll of 30,000 campesinos in a period of 6 days. The government violently carried an ethnocide against the Pipiles, who were the biggest indigenous group, and other civilian peasants; similarly, within that period Faraundo Martí who had been captured was assassinated by the military. Fuentes, Ching and Martínez suggest that “La Matanza was an attempt at ethnocide, the elimination of an entire group (the Indigenous peoples) from the population” (62); the unstoppable six-day execution of Indigenous people and campesinos was an intention to demonstrate that El Salvador was ruled by a military system that lasted many decades, but at the same time, it set precedent for an anti-communism sentiment, which was mainly shared by the indigenous groups and the rural citizens. La Matanza of 1932 was a chapter that marked the beginning of a heavily militarised state which created a vicious circle of “normalised political violence” (Haggerty 15), the Salvadoran

military had acquired the role of a new governing class that lasted until the peace accords were signed. Further will be elaborated in the following sections of this thesis.

## Johan Galthung's Model of Violence

Besides the abovementioned model of conflict, Galthung also makes emphasis model of violence, divided in three categories: *direct violence*, *structural violence* and *cultural violence*. It will be crucial to understand how these operate with one another, but at the same time, how those elements can be related to the Salvadoran context.

### Direct Violence

According to Galthung, direct violence can be simply seen as a “physical manifestation of the violence, which ranks from verbal abuse to killing” (Great Britain: Parliament: House of Commons: International Development Committee 183). Direct violence is the most recognised type since it involves physical force and humiliations and/or puts down in its psychological form. Integrating the Salvadoran context on this type of violence, the 1932 genocide against campesinos and indigenous peoples might be the first example of direct violence as big segments of the population were subjected to the worst types of human rights for example torture, hangings, rape, sexual assault of indigenous women and children, beatings, etc.

However, these groups were also targets of psychological violence, in the forms of humiliation and dehumanization of victims. For example, “the psychological effects of the political repression on the victim include those produced by the different levels of physical damage suffered from a violent act” (Chávez), resulting on the victims' levels of frustration, anger and aggression towards his/her aggressor raises (ibid). For

instance, the population groups who suffered from the agrarian reforms and land privatisations imposed by president Zaldivar provoked the resistance and rebellion sentiments, which conducted them to gather up and fight for their rights.

However, as a response to the victim's action, the aggressors escalate the levels of repression and use of force since those were necessary to contain the growing levels of frustration amongst the victims. La Matanza of 1932 might be clearly be an example of such type of direct violence. Even though actions as killing, torturing, humiliation and verbal violence are widely recognised as violence, Galthung describes direct violence as the "avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs" (Bobichand), and therefore, it is nearly impossible for people to meet their goals, fulfill their needs and achieve their full potential.

Direct violence can be considered as the tip of the triangle within Galthung's model of violence; in other words, if one compares an iceberg, direct violence is "merely the visible tip of a much larger iceberg of violence, much of which is hidden on view but which sustains and gives rise to direct violence" (International Development Committee 183).

### Structural Violence

Considered as the first component of the invisible part of the iceberg is the structural violence. Galthung suggests that structural violence exists when different types of groups within the society are assumed to have more privileges than others. Structural violence refers to "social, economic and political structures, which are built in an unequal power" (Great Britain: Parliament: House of Commons: International Development Committee 183). In principle, Galthung used to frame the term structural violence to refer to any "constraint in human potential due to economic and political

structures” (Beyer 58), which might be interpreted when the violence is not a direct act from an individual but a result of an unequal distribution of resources (Bobichand); however, he also argues that there are, as well, underlying factors that impulse structural violence, for example the repression and exploitation of groups.

Scholar Anna Beyer suggests that there are few pre-conditions for direct violence that emanate from structural violence: Ideology and a leader (9). The ideology to be described as an idea that will potentially be strong enough to change and influence others. The latter points out that usually there needs to be a charismatic leader capable of gaining a certain degree of respect and/or fear. Let’s put the United States as an example of a leader: the “United States has pursued its role as a world leader specifically towards the Middle East” (Beyer 4), however, the US’ historical behaviour towards this region is marked by political or military violence, and various of informal and formal interventions (ibid).

In a more contemporary sense, and focusing in Latin America after 1945, it could be argued that such type of leadership might be interpreted as the pursuit for the control of resources by shaping, controlling and penetrating the political, economic and social structures of already independent countries (Beyer 68).

In relation to the Salvadoran conflict, structural violence can be noticed since the colonial period, where the Spanish conquistadores utilised repression to deprive the Indigenous population from their land. One could claim that, even after colonialism, agriculture continued to dominate El Salvador’s social, economic and political structures; however, the uneven distributions of land is can be “clearly traced directly to the Spanish colonial system” (Haggerty) since the land title used to belong

to the Spanish crown (ibid). Nevertheless, the tendency continued throughout the land reforms, the military period, and consequently the civil war (a section that will be elaborated separately in this thesis).

Structural violence represents the opposite of diversity, pluralism and freedom since only certain structures, which can be seen in the forms of individuals, groups, political system, etc. are granted the absolute control and advantage towards less privileged groups. Examples of structural violence are colonialism, imperialism, slavery, totalitarianism, autocracy and the negative aspects of neo-liberal systems (Great Britain: Parliament: House of Commons: International Development Committee 183), further contemporary examples might include unequal access to resources, political power, education, freedom of expression, free press, religion, legal standings, healthcare, amongst others (Beyer 58). Indeed, the inclination for left-wing standings of the indigenous people developed the elite's anti-communism sentiment, and therefore, "anti-comunism became the dominant pretext to impede democratic participation and to persecute dissidence" (Chávez 2004) after 1932.

Structural violence is can be considered highly dangerous, sometimes, imposed by direct violence, or at last, the threat of it (Great Britain: Parliament: House of Commons: International Development Committee 183); it is also defined as "the cause of the difference between the *potential and the actual* (Galthung 1980b, 107)(Bayer 58), meaning that this difference might lead to tensions, and tension leads to aggression, and subsequently, aggression will, in most of the cases, unleash a conflict (ibid), and conflicts often last a long period of time. The unequal advantage amongst the Salvadoran society sectors has been built within the social, political and economic

systems that govern societies, states and the world (Bobichand), and therefore, it is evident that there is a tendency to award the more economically powerful groups. For example, a non-uniform land legislation that takes away and bans one group to own their property whilst “exclusive and affluent” groups are free to own whatever landed property they want; the latter example could be clearly labelled as structural violence.

### Cultural Violence

According to Galtung, cultural violence are the prevailing attitudes and beliefs that one has been taught, perhaps since early years, and that justifies or legitimises power and the use of violence (Bobichand). Cultural violence might include things as images, symbols, representations, art, science (empirical, scientific, logic, etc.) and they are used to justify and/or legitimise direct or structural violence (Galtung 291). For example, contemporary El Salvador has traced its violence from the colonial period, in which cultural violence was already implemented.

It can be significantly difficult for scholars to point out that certain culture might be more likely to be naturally violent; however, I strongly believe that instead of labelling entire cultures as violent, it might be more accurate to label aspects of that culture that are violence. To better understand cultural violence, it is important to depart from Galtung's statement: “Aspect A of the culture C is an example of cultural violence” instead of cultural stereotypes as “culture C is violent” (Galtung 291). Entailing the Salvadoran case, and in other Latin American countries, there was an institutionalisation of culture since it was imposed, for example language, and religion.

Spanish rule did little or nothing to change to change their values once in the new world since “religious influence on daily life was strong in pre-conquest and colonial societies” (Haggerty 2004); as the simple “animalistic” nature of the Indigenous people and their beliefs allowed the Spaniards to obligate them to assimilate the Roman Catholic dogma (ibid).

It is imperative to shed light upon cultural violence by tracing back to period of the conquest, when the Spaniards thought that ethnicity marked the economic and social statuses, especially in an emerging global market. One of the most prominent examples was the sixteenth century, when the Spanish colonisers settled in Central America suffered a significant decline of cacao crop due to competition from Venezuela and Ecuador (Fuentes, Ching and Lara-Martínez 72), clearly, they needed to concentrate in another product and a different strategy to make their profit.

Thus, as the Europeans arrived to the Americas to find fortune, Central America challenged them since, unlike other countries, there was a significant absence of precious metals, however, instead of the likes of gold, silver, etc. the profitable resource was land. Indigo crop, a blue coloured dye made from the leaves of a plant the Indigenous people used for putting on their faces throughout religious ceremonies, served to dye clothes. Indeed, the Spaniards realised indigo plant provided the main link to the world economy until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century since “European textile manufacturers used it similarly as a dye in the fabric production” (Fuentes, Ching and Lara-Martínez 72).

The dye making process was executed by the Indigenous people, and it was not easy nor healthy since its extraction involves the fermentation of indigo leaves

producing highly toxic fumes for the human body (ibid). Indigo producers ignored the consequences the workers suffered by working on the industry even though the Spanish Crown prohibited employment within this dangerous and unhealthy industry, nonetheless, the Spaniards who ran indigo businesses completely disregarded the physical damage workers were suffering so the Indigenous people continued being forced to process and collect indigo leaves (ibid).

Indeed, ethnicity played a significant role in relation to cultural violence in El Salvador since it defined people's destiny. In other words, being a Spanish, born either in Europe or El Salvador granted a person the highest and most privileged status in society, unlike having a person with *ladino/mestizo* blood; however, a ladino would be higher positioned than Africans or Indigenous people (Fuentes, Ching and Lara Martinez 73). For instance, taxes were paid per ethnicity, everything from public service, military duties, labour and marriage was defined by ethnicity (Fuentes, Ching and Lara Martínez 72-73). The hierarchical structure of the Catholic church completed the rigid stratification of the colonial society (Haggerty 2004), meaning that religion was one of remarkable instruments of power throughout colonisation. It goes without saying that cultural violence in El Salvador started from the impositions the Indigenous people were subjected to throughout the colonial era. Though when independence was reached, it served to aggravate the levels of cultural violence, which widened the already inherent inequalities.

Cultural violence can be seriously dangerous as it encourages directly the perpetration of the other two types of violence. Galthung suggests that "cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, or even feel right, or at least not

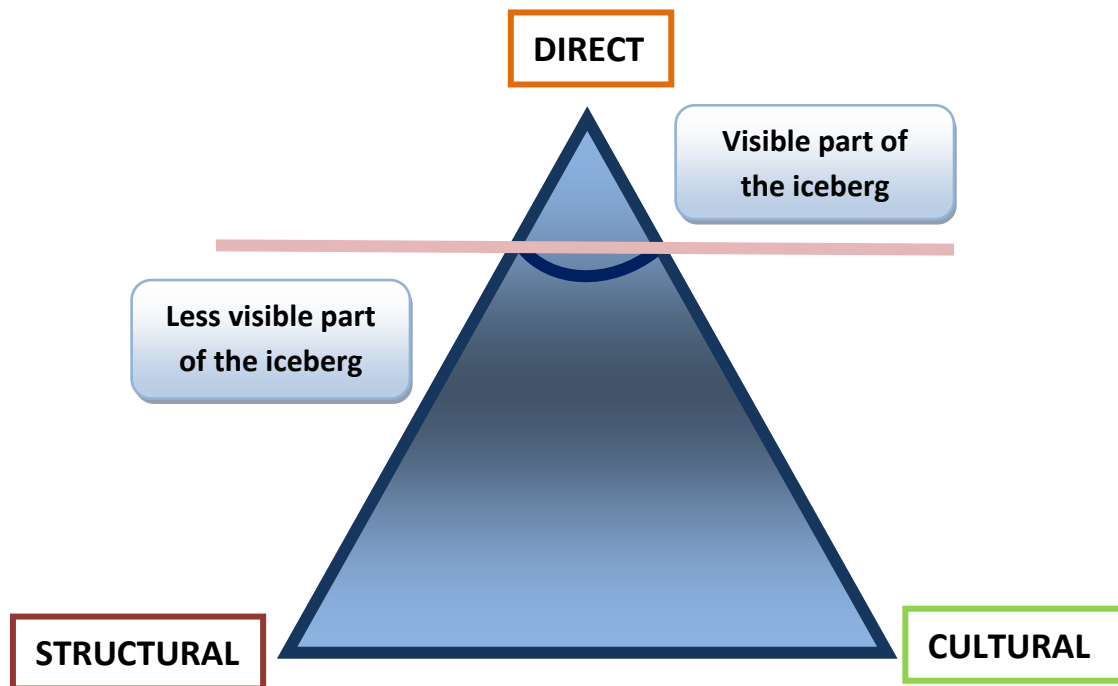
wrong” (Galthung and Fischer 42). For instance, throughout La Matanza period, peasants in the capital, or surrounding towns were gunned down by Salvadoran government troops, vigilantes, military and private militias; also, people who joined anti-government demonstrations received death threats by the above-mentioned armed groups, especially if their physical appearance was of an indigenous person, or if they happened to carry land-working tools such as machetes and sombreros.

Galthung and Fischer point out that one way to legitimise cultural violence is to compare human acts with colours, to green/right, yellow/acceptable and red/wrong for example, to commit a murder in behalf of oneself/wrong or commit a murder in behalf of a nation or a political ideology/right (Galthung and Fischer 42).

If translated into Salvadoran context, land tenure might be considered as cultural violence since it followed “hierarchical norms and ethnic patterns of colonial society” (Fuentes, Ching and Lara Martínez 73). For example, Spanish landlords could own and rule the *haciendas* (private land properties) whilst indigenous people couldn’t (ibid), therefore it was not wrong that landlords killed indigenous people who wanted to own haciendas.

Cultural violence is obviously linked with the other two forms of violence. However, violence could start from each of the three tips of Galthung’s triangle, and it easily can spread out to the other corners. The case of El Salvador presents the three types of violence, but they are expressed in a different way before and after the civil war.

Johan Galtung's types of violence as it follows:



## Civil War in El Salvador, 1980-1992

### Background

Throughout the end of the seventies, the cycle of repression orchestrated by military governments increased the cycle of violence that impregnated within all sectors of Salvadoran society. Inequalities amongst the wealthy elites and the impoverished majority deepened creating a hostile environment throughout the country, it was very clear that country leaders had a complete disregard for the value and respect of human life. For example, peaceful demonstrations made by the population usually ended up with arbitrary types of violence and killings perpetrated by the military, people who were thought to spread anti-government ideas were persecuted or sent to jail.

However, various guerrilla groups, who shared similar bitter feelings as the population started to organise on an attempt to deter the military attacks. It is important to highlight that the guerrilla groups were an alliance of communist, non-communists and anti-communist people who were fed up with the country's situation and had no more remedy but to start to mobilise. In other words, such organising groups never shared an ideological commitment, yet they had a political agreement to stop the injustices committed by the military.

As the guerrilla started to gradually strengthen in many ways, it stepped up its operations by leading kidnappings, assassinations and bombings of military bases "as a form of self-defence against the government" (Haggerty 2004); the government perceived these guerrilla actions as serious threat, and indeed, the fears of consequences of a possible successful communist revolution raised. The government

feared the guerrilla and its operations mainly because they were aware about similar happenings in Nicaragua, in which the neighbouring country's guerrillas had the capability to overthrow the military government of Anastasio Somoza Debayle (ibid).

The levels of violence were undoubtedly unsustainable by the end of 1979, yet it reached its highest peak on March of 1980, when Monsignor (in Spanish "Monseñor") Oscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez was assassinated. Romero was archbishop of San Salvador, highly popular amongst the biggest segment of the population and the critical voice who denounced the atrocities committed by the military that ruled El Salvador by that time. He had been selected as archbishop due to his moderate, or somewhat neutral, political views (Haggerty 2004) and came to be well known and appreciated by most Salvadorans, regardless of their religious view, and for his courageous public denouncements of the human right abuses perpetrated by the military.

He came to be known as "the voice of the voiceless", as he participated in an uncensored small radio station where his homilies were broadcasted. On this radio space, "he related statistics on political assassination committed by the military and its death squads" (Haggerty 2004), also, he pronounced the names of people who went missing, and he would urge soldiers to stop their actions. He would sympathise with families whose relatives went missing, and help them find them (Woods). Most remarkably, he used his influence to question the government, demanding answers regarding the disappearances and the violations of human rights, he also argued against the United States military aid to El Salvador (Haggerty 37).

Monseñor Romero and his high profile raised him as a political leader in revolutionary times, and somehow his influence disturbed the government (ibid) who saw him a serious threat. The biggest outrage came when Monseñor Romero was brutally assassinated, shot to death by a sniper, on March 24<sup>th</sup> 1980 whilst he was participating in his homily at Hospital Divina Providencia Chapel in San Salvador, and even though there is no documented trial nor full certainty of who was the perpetrator, one of the UN Truth Commission reports of 1993 states that his killing was carried out by the Salvadoran right wing: "There is full evidence that former Major Roberto D'Aubuisson – a military and political leader, and founder of ARENA (Nationalist Republican Alliance), El Salvador's right-wing party – gave the order to assassinate the Archbishop and gave precise instructions to members of his security service, acting as a death squad, to organize and supervise the assassination" (Hayner).

Romero's assassination ignited a period of mourning and increased the hate and divisions amongst Salvadorans. The mobilisations and motivations to fight for justice and the "cessation of repression", as Monseñor Romero claimed in his last mass, increased.

The guerrilla offensives started in 1981, and at the very beginning it seemed they were not prepared to support an operation on a countrywide level since they lacked military resources such as modern armament and sufficient training. This put the Salvadoran armed forces in a more advantageous position as they were capable to easily beat back the guerrilla attacks. It is crucial to highlight that, throughout this period, the guerrillas were not conformed as a single organised Marxist-opposition group who fought against the armed forces, instead they were an alliance of

communist, anti-communists, non-communists and active university student groups who opposed the government actions.

Later, such groups allied together and founded the FMLN (Faraundo Martí National Liberation Front), a political and revolutionary force, taking the name of Faraundo Martí, the revolutionary leader who partly fought in the 1932 massacre. Even though the FMLN did not have, at the very beginning, a united and consolidated ideological commitment, they had the political commitment of deter the atrocities and endless violence perpetrated by the armed forces and its death squads.

Although one could claim that the military was better equipped in terms of the possession of better weapons, training, etc. than the FMLN guerrillas, the latter succeeded on retaining several military fortresses (Haggerty 41) and at the same time, they liberated various towns that were taken by the military. It was hard to believe the FMLN guerrilla's intellectual capabilities despite the military's vast economic resources and superior armament. For example, whilst some government battalions were busy trying to occupy several towns, the guerrilla succeeded on making territorial gains in the eastern part of the country, they were even capable of blowing up strategic bridges controlled by the military to interrupt telecommunications and direct supply routes (Chávez). All the above-mentioned attacks were deemed as small victories for the guerrilla who was gradually securing more territory.

As time passed the struggles carried on the guerrilla kept liberating military territories; from that point onwards, the guerrilla's achievements no longer became unnoticed by the international community. The fact that the guerrilla progressed from using machetes to possess a capability of setting intelligence operations and using

imported weapons drew an international attention towards the ongoing conflict in El Salvador, the guerrilla started to stand out as a “formidable force both politically and military” (Haggerty 41). Foreign governments such as France and Mexico started to perceive the guerrillas as a representative political force, and called for a negotiated settlement between the guerrillas and the government (ibid), whilst at the same time, the guerrillas carried out foreign operations where they resupplied and prepared military and intellectually to reorganise their operational efforts in the field. For instance, military training concentrations for the Salvadoran guerrilla sharply increased after the 1981 offensive, it is reported that Cuba and the Nicaraguan Sandinistas concentrated on helping FMLN guerrillas and trained them in military camps (Shultz and Collins 184).

The continuous offensives perpetrated by the guerrillas started to draw the attention from American observers and policy makers, which led to an initial approval of economic and military aid to the Salvadoran government, the first notably forms of supports were endorsed under the administration of president Jimmy Carter (Stanley 102).

Indeed, the United States influence started to become highly visible from 1981 onwards. Washington’s attention was driven by a motivation of shifting the Salvadoran political spectrum, and the main aim was to prevent a communist rule in Central America. It was certain for the international community that El Salvador’s outcome of the civil war could possibly end up in two following scenarios: either with the rule of a Marxist-led revolution or with a conservative military regime. Therefore, pressures

built up even more for the United States after the success of the Sandinista Revolution which became the dominant political force in Nicaragua.

The most visible intromission of the United States in El Salvador's civil war came within the Reagan administration. His government clearly stressed the need to "shore up El Salvador as a barrier against communist expansion in Central America" (Haggerty 43). A special report issued by the United States Department of State in 1981 titled "Communist Interference in El Salvador", put in evidence that "the insurgency in El Salvador has been progressively transformed into a textbook case of an indirect armed aggression by communist power through Cuba" (The New York Times), the report also emphasised Nicaraguan, Cuban, and Soviet support for the FMLN. The report was highly criticised by the American media and the United States Congress, though the critics did not stop the Reagan's administration success to increase the levels of military and economic aid to El Salvador (Haggerty 43).

### The United States intervention and its limited success

It is crucial to highlight that American economic and military support did not only intend blocking the left from taking power, it also sought to influence a transition away from a military rule, to a legitimate form of governance (Stanley 101) and with less state violence against innocent civilians. However, such intention was somehow unsuccessful as "the leadership of the Salvadoran military in 1980 was not interested in democracy" (Stanley 101) neither was it interested to consider any negotiation to drop the weapons and end human rights abuses committed by their death squads. For example, the military along with its right wing civilian allies, together, murdered several US citizens and an attorney general (Stanley 102).

Moreover, Salvadoran institutions were unfunctional as legal punishment could not be applicable to military leaders since they successfully resisted investigations and prosecutions, the sacrificed ones were only regular enlisted men who had no power over high-level military decisions. It is crucial to point out that before Reagan took power, the Carter administration urged the military to stop human rights abuses, however, his statement was clearly ignored by high ranked military officials, who were initially unimpressed by American aid (Stanley 102) and continued their operations.

It is somewhat difficult assuring why United States aid was not successful at the beginning, however, there is a possibility that this initial failure could be linked with institutional features from the Salvadoran armed forces. The structure of the military possessed such a strict policy of promoting officers by seniority, and sometimes without any regard of intellectual competence, but at the same time, the institution operated under extensive corruption which gave officers perverse incentives to keep units understrength (ibid). Nonetheless, the flaws within the military institution and the frustration of the United States over negative outcomes of their intervention resulted a benefit for the guerrillas, who took advantage of the situation and kept launching various offensives that occupied many parts of the country, including the capital San Salvador (Staley 103).

### The birth of a conservative party: ARENA

One of the latest contributions of the United States and its foreign influence in El Salvador's conflict is their involvement in the formation of a conservative political force that, hopefully, could change the course of the conflict; a coalition of conservative and civilian elites along with high-ranked military leaders such as Roberto

D'Aubuisson joined forces and founded a new right wing party called National Republican Alliance (ARENA).

Furthermore, as ARENA's economic and political consolidation within the Salvadoran political spectrum was highly notable, its capacity of planting the seed of hate against the FMLN guerrillas was ARENA's main theme throughout their public campaigns (Stanley 107); its ties to impulse violence towards the left were highly symbolic. For example, in its public appearances, "former Major and ARENA's founder Roberto D'Aubuisson would cut an open watermelon with a single blow of a machete" (ibid), whilst pointing out that guerrilla sympathisers who were not members of the FMLN, but who were members of the Christian Democratic Party (PDC), a centrist-ideology political party which had been founded long time before ARENA and FMLN, were "green on the outside but red from the inside" (ibid); D'Aubuisson's claim was related to PDC's party flag, that has green colour.

Even though the United States, in theory, supported the principles of respect for human rights and kept urging El Salvador to cease its violence, it also expressed its sympathy for ARENA's attempt to increase its political power - it is essential to highlight that the leaders of ARENA also included wealthy land owners high-ranked military elites. A remarkable example of the United States sympathy towards ARENA was a Department of State official note stating that D'Aubuisson and company had saved El Salvador from a communist takeover: "I have no problem with the idea of identifying your enemy and going out and killing him" (Stanley 107).

## The elections of 1984

The presidential elections of 1984 marked interesting aspects in respect of the United States and its actions in relation to the involvement in the civil war in El Salvador. Firstly, it was evident that, from a political point of view, the Reagan administration considered that helping ARENA could be interpreted as an action against the American ideals of standing for peace, the respect of human rights and the rule of law; American leaders understood that it would be contradictory to aid a repressive right wing political force that was leading the death squads, a terrorist group who were responsible of conducting mass killings, rapes, disappearances and the persecution of activists who were believed to have leftist ties. The United States had to finally accept that ARENA, which thanks to its violent image and close ties with the death squads, “was a disaster for the USA’s policy of promoting a legitimate, democratically elected civilian government” (Stanley 107).

Therefore, from 1979 to 1980, instead of supporting ARENA, the United States backed the Christian Democratic Party (PDC) since it was considered the most decent political alternative; for American leaders, it was worth aiding PDC rather than the two following alternatives:

- 1) ARENA, the political right wing political party, which was closely associated with the Salvadoran elite and death squads and the responsible for “training the organisational talents of death squad leaders and the networks they controlled” (Stanley 107)

- 2) FMLN, a revolutionary group, leftist guerrilla movement who was gradually strengthening, and at the same time already occupied more territory. The FMLN was

highly dangerous and could potentially become a political force that would repeat the same history of Cuba and Nicaragua.

Therefore, as neither ARENA nor FMLN could be suitable options, with the help of the United States, José Napoleón Duarte from the “centrist alternative” (PDC) won the elections of 1984.

The elections of 1984 and the United States’ decision regarding its support to PDC made ARENA leaders re-think about their approach on how to respond. Few of ARENA’s founders thought that it was a good idea to stick to its radical operations and keep the leading of the death squads, however, more moderate ARENA leaders, such as Alfredo Cristiani, favoured a less harsh ideas and a more business-oriented style which put less emphasis on violence, and therefore more appealing to a broader constituency. For example, ARENA founder Roberto D’Aubuisson, along with other business leaders supported Cristiani’s business-oriented approach claiming that it was time to pay attention to the economic opportunities instead of the use of direct violence to obtain the victory, this approach was crucial since it helped ARENA to regain a political acceptance from the United States (Stanley 108).

By the last stages of the war, ARENA had accepted that it was crucial to develop a business-oriented approach to make a good impression towards the eyes of the United States. As agriculture and other economic sectors expanded throughout El Salvador, one determinant part of ARENA’s transformation was the development of the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUSADES), which was a think-tank initiative that aimed to promote a “new national economic model” (Schdeiner 119). FUSADES’ professionals, prepared mainly in the economic field, produced extensive analysis of regulatory bottlenecks in the Salvadoran economy. At

the same time they offered seminars, workshops and technical assistance to promote non-traditional exports (Stanley 108).

FUSADES had a network of allied foundation with premises in New York and Miami, and grew massively throughout 1984 to 1992; it was funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) with around \$67 million between 1985 and 1987. FUSADES started to build its political influence in the beginning of 1989 since its executive members launched themselves forward and won presidency candidatures.

ARENA leaders thought that if they implemented a more neoliberal approach, instead of depending on the military, they could be a vehicle for the spreading out of the American neoliberal ideals. The creation of FUSADES was the perfect ticket to secure a strong political influence since FUSADES offered development plans to each incoming government of 1989, but at the same time, FUSDES Executive Committee members put themselves forward and won, through ARENA, candidacies of El Salvador's presidency. Simultaneously FUSADES won staff members as cabinet ministries and public seats (Schneider 119). The outcome of the 1989 elections designated former director of FUSADES Alfredo Cristiani, as the new president of El Salvador, under ARENA (ibid).

### Final FMLN's 1989 military offensive

ARENA's victory on the presidential elections of 1989 motivated the FMLN to seek an open door to explore its political options. The FMLN had been working on renewing its political networks in San Salvador and other cities throughout the country from 1984 to 1989. After Duarte's successfully winning of the presidency on 1984, high commanders of FMLN began to discuss the possibilities to participate in elections. On

one of their petitions the FMLN presented a set of conditions for their participation on elections, including proposals for an electoral reform (Manning 119), however, the FMLN petitions were rejected and its attempt to compete for elections was unsuccessful.

As FMLN was completely blocked and banned from participating on the 1989 elections, they had no choice but to start a new wave of violence as a response of such exclusion, which marked the outbreak of the final 1989 offensive. On November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1989, the FMLN prepared its largest offensive by striking, along with coordinated attacks, El Salvador's capital and the country's largest 7 other cities (Meaning 119). Several fixed targets were attacked, including the residence of the president Alfredo Cristiani, in one of the most exclusive neighbourhoods of San Salvador.

Not only several First Brigade barracks within San Salvador were hit and occupied by the guerrillas, but they were also capable of taking "control of the city's northern perimeter-a half moon-connecting the country's main highways" (Miles and Ostertag). The guerrilla's offensive went much better than they expected since they had successfully installed its operations in most of the middle-class barrios within the capital, and at the same time, they fenced the country's main access to highways and mountains.

It is crucial to highlight that the guerrillas also succeeded on gaining civilian collaboration throughout the offensive. For example, "residents built barricades and air raid shelters, provided food and intelligence, and took up arms" (Miles and Ostertag), all the above-mentioned series of events took place in only three days. The government responded the guerrilla's attacks by ordering a massive aerial bombing of the guerrilla-controlled barrios where innocent people resided, high-ranked army

members led a wave of repression against anyone who was known to support the FMLN and its views for example religious leaders, members of social movements who opposed the government, human rights organisations, unions and normal citizens were brutally attacked (Miles and Ostertag). One of the most remarkable victims of the offensive of 1989 was the assassination of the six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper Julia Ramos and her daughter Celia in the Central American University (UCA), which perpetrated by a "US trained unit of the Salvadoran military (Manning 118). As the situation worsened, the international community, led by the United States, realised that El Salvador had reached a crucial moment, and the only option was to start a negotiation.

El Salvador found itself unsustainable as the government could not control FMLN and their operations. It was highly impressive that the FMLN had the capabilities of occupying the Sheraton Presidente Hotel, one of the most exclusive hotels of the capital where USAID officials and other business people were hosted whilst the army and guerrillas were battling. In addition, FMLN's tactical occupation of San Salvador's wealthiest vicinities conceived themselves as a propaganda of victory (Stanley 109).

As the FMLN increased their occupations, the government officials and wealthy individuals feared that the army could no longer protect their dwellings. As they found themselves in a dead-ended situation, they realised that it was time to either have the willingness to sit and start a negotiation process or carry on with the offensive which could have an uncertain outcome.

### Peace Accords

After two years of entering into a series of negotiations that began throughout the FMLN military offensive of 1989, on January 16<sup>th</sup> of 1992, the protagonists of the

brutal civil war of El Salvador gathered in Chapultepec Castle, Mexico and signed the Peace Accords in front of the eyes of United Nations mediators and international observers. Some of the mediators who participated in this negotiation were the Catholic church, members of international organisations such as special representative of the United Nations Secretary General Álvaro de Soto, the Organisation of American States (OEA) and diplomatic representatives from partner countries such as the United States, Mexico, Spain and the Central America.

The agenda for peace entailed the following agreements, below are presented some of the most relevant ones:

1. *Military reforms*: the peace accords demilitarised internal security, confining armed forces to defend the country against international threats only. This reform would reduce by fifty percent military manpower by 1993; furthermore, the national guard, treasury police and elite counter-insurgency battalions were to be dissolved as well as paramilitary groups would be banned.
2. *FMLN political participation*: ARENA and FMLN reached out and agreement, backed up by the necessary legislative instances, that opened the political system to grant the FMLN the status of political party with the right to full political participation.
3. *National Civilian Police (PNC)*: A new civilian police force was born to be established for urban and rural areas. It was stipulated that the PNC was born to be an entirely separate entity from the armed forces, it would operate under democratic principles and be independent from any political party (Sriram 91).

4. *Judicial Reform*: An independent national judicial council was created to foster a transparent and fair judiciary with the leadership of the Human Rights Ombudsman (Procuraduría para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos).
5. *Electoral Reform*: The Supreme Electoral Tribunal was created, this was a special commission established to study and draft reforms entailing the electoral code.
6. *The Truth Commissions*: The United Nations sponsored truth commission in charge to the generation of a definite report on acts of violence and human rights abuses committed by both belligerent groups throughout the conflict.

One could claim that the Peace Accords could be deemed as a victory for the Salvadoran population as it was thought that repression in El Salvador would be successfully replaced by peace. However, I strongly believe that the conditions of the civil war by 1989 were already worn out for both belligerent sides.

As a final remark, it goes without saying that the international community, particularly the United States demonstrated a strong necessity of establishing a “peace agreement” to negotiate a ceasefire, however, the Peace Accords did not deter a development of an emerging and new social war (not the civil war) that immediately broke out after the peace agreements, which some scholars also call post-war period. Further insight on this will be elaborated on the following section of this project.

## Analysis

### El Salvador after 1992

In this section, I will present my qualitative study and build my analysis in relation to Galthung's triangle and an additional theoretical reasoning, hereof I will use the peace agreements as point of departure. The main reason for it is to understand subsequent events that followed the peace agreements. However, I strongly believe it is crucial to complement this analysis with an alternative theory of *State* to shed light upon the continuity of the conflict in El Salvador after the signing of the peace agreements and the introduction of democracy. In addition, I will shed light upon the gang phenomenon within the Salvadoran society since I believe it is part of the continuity of the current ongoing conflict.

In sum, my analysis will help the readers to understand why the peace accords did not instill peace after 1992 but instead, served as an open door for the current social war El Salvador faces nowadays.

### Definition of State in the Salvadoran case

There are various scholars that present different definitions of what state is. For example, Shils suggested that state is "the embodiment of the nation, of the people and of its rules" (Migdal 13), however, there are slightly different approaches on this term as expressed by contemporary scholar Max Weber, "the modern state is a compulsory association which organises domination" (Migdal 13). In other words, Weber claimed that state is a relation of men dominating men, and this relation could be supported by means of violence (ibid).

However, I strongly believe that it is significantly difficult to provide an exact definition of state if one starts to evaluate the different states in the world, as each of them have individual complexities. In the case of El Salvador, Weber's definition could be, at some extent, applicable as the *domination* element was present since the colonial period. For example, the conditions imposed by the Spanish crown in El Salvador were evident since their invasion in 1524 in terms of language and religion, and I firmly believe that these two concessions were never negotiated between Spanish and Indigenous people. Another example of such domination can be found in El Salvador Constitution of 1983, a key governing instance as presented in its 212 article, that established the end of Armed Forces as the dominant class.

Follow up with Weber's definition of state, it is important to highlight that "state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory" (Migdal 13). One characteristic that defines a state is its monopoly of on the use of physical violence within the territory (Barash and Weber 151). Considering the Salvadoran perspective after 1992, I strongly believe that the right-wing elite (ARENA) already had the control of the state, however, Weber's claim on the importance of physical force can be considered biased as the use of physical violence cannot be the only way to achieve power.

The Salvadoran case presents structural aspects that shed light upon different forms of violence that are used to acquire the monopoly of power. The civil war involved all types of violence, however, when the peace agreements were signed, the agreed reforms were only institutional, and never social or economic. Even though

Salvadorans were told they were in peace, the peace agreements deemed no importance to the well-being of the victims of war or former combatants.

Even though Weber brings the first discussion of state as an agency within a society that possesses the monopoly of legitimate violence, other scholars present different contributions in regards to the definition of state. Scholar Ernest Gellner's gives special importance to nationalism, in which he explains the role of education as the most critical institution of the modern nation: "the economies of industrialised states depend upon a homogenising of culture, mass literacy and fairly monolithic education system" (Giddens 214).

As Gellner deeply emphasizes in the exigencies of industrialism, I strongly believe that nationalism is much a more complex matter, on his discourse Gellner points out that "nationalism is a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones" (Guibernau). The Salvadoran case does not apply to Gellner's utopic approach since there is a well-marked division between the elitist power-owners and the rest of the population, before and after the Peace Accords.

One could allege that Gellner's theory misses the intrinsic part of personal attachment to a homeland, the practice of certain values or sense of belonging to a certain place. Anthony Giddens also provides his own contribution alleging that the nation-state arouses with the expansion of capitalism, and this capitalism could gain hegemonic power "in the context of a new state system which created a framework of law and the fiscal guarantees of a pacified social environment" (Tucker 119). In the context of 1992, the Salvadoran political agreements created the conditions for the

establishment of a pacified social and political environment since the population was consciously deceived; up to date, there is a great part of Salvadorans that still think El Salvador is in peace.

Throughout the 1989 offensive, ARENA and the United States, particularly, needed to negotiate political agreements in order to assure the control of the state apparatus in a legitimate way; in other words, the nature of the peace accords was the monopoly of the state, through the creation of legitimate institutions. This was a tricky strategy the negotiators played against the Salvadorans who thought that the political agreements would ensure their well-being.

### The Deep-State and the introduction of democracy

The peace agreements brought new change that aimed to create a promising horizon for the Salvadoran people, they would also would strengthen the political structure of El Salvador by establishing institutions, for example, the creation of transparent elections through the emergence of the Electoral Supreme Tribunal, the foundation of the National Civil Police as the instance that would guarantee the security amongst citizens and the reforms of the judicial sector.

However, it is highly important to address that after the signing of the peace accords in 1992, the negotiators from the both belligerent sides were fully aware that the world had changed. New forces had emerged as the Cold War ended and the economy was highly controlled by the American market, the Soviet Union had fallen and United States had already implemented its neoliberal supremacy in Latin America. Political scientist Harold Hasswell suggests that “a society’s leadership class consists of

people whose private motives are displaced on public objects and rationalised in terms of public interests” (Lofgren 39).

Hasswell reasoning is fully applicable in relation to El Salvador after 1992; the elite understood that it was imperative to preserve the things that were most important to them such as “the market economy and the sanctity of private property” (Ching 86). The leaders of ARENA, who participated in the peace accords and were simultaneously owners of the big corporations, decided to establish series of massively indiscriminate privatisations of public resources throughout El Salvador. One of the well-known examples is the privatization of the Comisión Hidroeléctrica del Río Lempa (CEL), a state-owned energy facilities (Ching 86). Here, 90 percent of CEL employees were fired due to its union’s objections that demanded dignified salaries and better working conditions which resulted in transferring of the state-owned energy assets to the private sector (ibid). However, CEL was not the only case as the same was repeating in other sectors of national economy such as telecommunications, lands, airlines, petroleum derivatives as well as the privatisation of El Salvador’s largest bank, Banco Cuscatlán under the administration of Alfredo Cristiani (Wade). In sum, it is crucial to point out that the Salvadoran elite, through the Peace Accords, had succeeded fulfilling their most sought-after goal which was the control of the state apparatus.

### Violence in contemporary El Salvador

Considering the Salvadoran panorama after the Peace Accords in 1992, it is clear that such negotiations never addressed aspects in relation to the economic order; in other words, democracy was the only instrument to retain the political and

economic power for a small group, some of them had secured their accumulation of wealth since 1930s. However, when describing post-war El Salvador, several aspects still remain unattended, particularly when it comes to security matters. Historian Kunt Walter presents provocative allegations by stating that “the nation of El Salvador no longer exists”, meaning that the Salvadoran government is powerless before the forces of globalization (Ching 50), and at the mercy of other international forces that generated the conditions for the development of the phenomenon known as “Mara” or “Pandillas”, which means gang associations.

El Salvador’s crime rate remains still high, with a homicide rate often ranked as one of the highest in the world (ibid). A sentiment of fear and uncertainty amongst Salvadorans is outstandingly noted since most of the communities are submitted to the gang phenomenon. Some of their operations entail extortion of local businesses, kidnappings, drug trade and the commanding of crimes to the outside from the inside of the prison. The public opinion and the media suggests that “the youth gangs often embody the devil responsible for all committed crimes” (Does); however, the gangs should not be deemed as an isolated phenomenon that appeared out of the blue, but instead, this phenomenon has its structural antecedents, which have evolved significantly after the peace negotiations.

It is important to address that the deep-state definition also involves a model of dual domination, according to Gingeras “it presents an elective or evolving political theater of competition and cooperation, which involves legal and illegal elements” (Gingeras 264). Domination is not enforced by single entity but a set of different deep-

state coalitions that evolve in conjunction with the political economy and political culture of regions, countries and transnational spaces (Gingeras 265).

Lofgren defines the deep-state as “a wasteful and incompetent method of governance” (40). In the case of contemporary El Salvador, it is crucial to note that political authorities did not show any willingness to tackle this issue in a correct manner. In spite of its migratory background, the gang phenomenon did not only develop due to deportees from the United States but it is also a result of a careless attitude and a lack of seriousness of the authorities from the very beginning when gang-related killings started to make the headlines in the early 1990s. Related to this, Plan International Director Rodrigo Bustos claims that “the state...has been slow to react. In the past, gang violence was not seen as a problem the state had to deal with” (Moloney).

One must note that the gang problem is also deeply rooted to domestic conditions that allowed this phenomenon to expand, for example dysfunctional families, socio-economic inequalities, unemployment, lack of opportunities and no chance of reinsertion of deportees upon their return to El Salvador. In other words, the gangs were initially conformed by groups of young men and women who started to heavily arm, however, as they grew in size, they also gradually expanded their power throughout the communities.

The gang phenomenon is far from being resolved, instead, it has slowly modernized. Nowadays, such criminal groups also represent political and military power in El Salvador, with capacity of negotiation. For example, the gang truce in March, 2012 was given international attention, as the Salvadoran government

negotiated a truce with the two prominent gangs, Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18 (18<sup>th</sup> street gang), in exchange of a drop in the murder rate. Even though the government initially denied talks were taking place, soon it became evident that government representatives were involved in the negotiations (Geneva Declaration Secretariat). As the deep-state definition suggests, and when it comes to organised crime, “changes in how states are governed and how economies are regulated have strong influence over the political and social complexion of criminal syndicates” (Gingeras 265). In other words, it is evident that the gangs matured in perceiving themselves as political actors, with capabilities of having a political voice.

A massive factor to be addressed in post-war El Salvador is the revolution of violence and the decline of the state. As gangs could be conceived as a transnational phenomenon, its nature has developed in the past decades. For example, “from public nuisance actors involved in street crime and violent internal rivalries into political/military entities that control large amounts of territory (Sullivan and Bunker). Similarly, the drug-trafficking is a phenomenon that has a heavy incursion in Central America; for instance, in El Salvador, drug lords help the gangs to expand their power. Aguilar claims that “Mexican cartels saw ideal conditions in El Salvador and other parts of Central America, weak governance and impunity in which to operate in. They tapped into the gangs and they use them as local operators” (Moloney).

Indeed, the lives and personal integrity of Salvadorans depend on these transnational forces who force them to remain pacified due to fear of reprisals. It is nearly impossible to denounce a crime and punish the perpetrator due to the inefficient and corrupted judicial system. Political analyst Dagoberto Gutierrez claims

that the gang phenomenon operates from “below” in terms of social strata, meaning that it is important to examine which society group suffers from insecurity issues. For example, “the PNC has modified its behaviour due to the presence of gang members” (Caldera 37), this means that police members would not dare to enter gang territories due to fear of reprisals towards them or their families. The same applies to other groups such as small business owners, bus drivers and normal citizens who live their everyday lives under uncertainty; however, unlike the regular citizen, the dominant class and owners of big corporations are easily capable of ensuring their safety.

El Salvador’s public security has reached new highs after the Peace Accords in 1992. However, it is necessary to separate the existing difference regarding levels of insecurity amongst the *above* and *below* Salvadoran sectors of society. Cosgrove points out that “the ongoing levels of violence have created a security industry which many of the owners and investors in these activities hold leadership positions within the government” (171).

It is remarkably evident that the Peace Accords did not address the ongoing social war in El Salvador, the ongoing levels of violence perpetrated by criminal forces, linked with the high levels of corruption have broken the social equilibrium since 1992. It is ironic that a democratic and contemporary El Salvador is experiencing similar patterns of previous violent periods its history such as the imposition of norms of convivence, which accepted and legitimated by the population. 25 years after the 1992 peace agreements, it is still highly questionable for whom is the democracy, however, it is clear that the Peace Accords never tackled the conflict and the only victory of such agreements was the negotiation.

## Methodology

This research project studies global processes with the utilisation of El Salvador as the specific case study; my thesis entails a qualitative methodological approach as I strongly believe that my contribution can be understood as a multi-layered perspective work, enriched with cultural, political, social, economic and, at some extent, psychological perspectives of the events taking place throughout El Salvador's civil war. I have framed this project with theoretical and historical accounts supported by primary and secondary sources.

It is crucial to highlight that even though my project contains mainly a qualitative reasoning, I also take into consideration minor qualitative aspects through the incorporation of statistics of El Salvador in terms of statistics on violence and population density, which were drawn from primary sources such as the Organisation of American States, the United Nations, Salvadoran state institutions such as the National Civilian Police and the Salvadoran Constitution of 1983.

### Research Strategy

The purpose of the methodology section is to provide an overview of the research approach conducted in this project. Various aspects of my methodology are based on Alan Bryman's Social Research Methods since I had valuable insights from the lessons I was taught throughout my master program in terms of research methodology; the methodological aspect I present throughout my thesis is qualitative since "it addresses mostly words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data" (Bryman 380).

My research strategy has a deductive reasoning as I have begun shedding light upon the theoretical framework. My theoretical framework has been guided by scholarship on peace and conflict studies, using Johan Galtung's triangle of conflict and violence as a point of departure. It is of my understanding that this study field is relatively new, and that it has been developed in the past few decades, however, I firmly believe that instead of viewing the concepts of violence and conflict in an isolated matter, I attempt to merge Galtung's contribution within the Salvadoran conflict since he offers a critical evaluation of the different layers within the concepts of conflict and violence.

### Research design

As Bryman's Social Research Methods points out, the research design allows the researcher to answer the research questions (715). This is carried out by the collection of data analysis, which communicates key aspects of a single or multiple cases (Bryman 709). In this opportunity, I have chosen to conduct a case study of El Salvador and the events that unleashed the civil war, and subsequently the peace accords that put an end to the conflict, however, I have bounded this historical event to examine different aspects of contemporary El Salvador.

As it can be observed, the case study of El Salvador also includes a combination of various key historical events which will provide an extensive analysis of the term *conflict*. For example, I present several previous violent events that led to the civil war in 1980s for example: El Salvador before 1930s, the 1932 Massacre "La Matanza", the assassination of Monseñor Romero, along with violent events that ended the civil war and led to Peace Accords of 1992 for example: the final offensive of 1989. Subsequently, I have conducted my analysis by connecting the peace negotiations with

El Salvador's contemporary context aiming to place the conflict into a contemporary perspective, and elaborating upon the continuity of the issues after the signing of the peace agreements.

## Conclusion

25 years after the Peace Accords, El Salvador finds itself in the worst war in its history, a social war that exploded immediately after the peace accords. It can be noted that what Johan Galtung's triangle of violence presented is seriously reflected in today's El Salvador, however, I strongly believe that his conflict pillars (contradictions, attitudes and behaviour) should not be separated from one another because they are deeply intertwined. It is important to highlight that with this thesis, I transmitted two main things: First, the political agreements in El Salvador resolved *only* the civil war yet those never addressed the conflict; in other words, the civil war in El Salvador ended after the 1989 Final Offensive, whilst external factors such as a defeated Soviet Union also swift the conditions to start the negotiation.

It is important to highlight that there are profound differences between war and conflict: the conflict could possess a social, historical, political, economic, psychological, ideological or cultural nature; however, a war unleashes when a conflict is not addressed. In the case of El Salvador, the civil war was the consequence of an ongoing historical crisis that was left constantly unattended; this crisis was marked many structural features, which were reflected by the struggle between an oppressed class against a small elite, who always possessed the accumulation of wealth, for example the atrocities committed throughout La Matanza of 1932, that wiped out the majority of the Salvadoran Indigenous peoples; the government of El Salvador, throughout its military years, attempted to preserve the absolute control and authority over the government by the use of force, repressive actions, and discriminatory legislation that excluded peasants and the political opposition.

Secondly, the main engine of the Salvadoran civil war was the political exclusion of the FMLN guerrilla. It is important to understand that the Salvadoran guerrilla, who brilliantly executed the war, was not a communistic group but an alliance of communists, anti-communists and non-communist groups who desired an establishment of democracy and their inclusion to political participation, as they had been marginalised by the authoritarian regimes.

It is equally important to remark the immense influence of the United States in the Salvadoran civil war, mainly in terms of its economic and military support towards the Salvadoran armed forces. Regarding the American intervention in the civil war in El Salvador I highlighted two main things: First, such intervention aimed to prevent communism to take power in light of what happened in the Nicaraguan case; secondly, the intervention wanted to see a transition to democracy away from the military rule. However, such foreign intervention was not successful, instead, the United States faced several hurdles as the Salvadoran Armed Forces and its leadership, in the beginning, were never interested in democracy, neither were they interested in curbing human right abuses.

As noted in this thesis, the Salvadoran guerrilla could not be defeated even though the armed forces counted with American support. For the guerrillas, not losing the war meant success, however, for the armed forces, not winning the war meant failure since they were provided with significant foreign aid. Notwithstanding, with the 1989 Final Offensive, the United States understood that foreign aid was not sufficient to assure the victory of the Salvadoran armed forces, unless they organised a direct military intervention with American troops. Indeed, such scenery would have been

catastrophic and unnecessary, and the only feasible alternative was to start a negotiation.

The political agreements of 1992 presented various features that aimed to democratise El Salvador, through the creation of institutions and the inclusion of the FMLN to the political participation. However, such agreements failed to address the need of economic reforms. Pelulessy points out that there is a necessity to consider how both economic and political variables affect social structures and institutions (1); in other words, after the transition to a new democratic order and the introduction of neoliberal policies ARENA allowed various series of privatisations, resulted in an increased price for public resources.

However, it is crucial to point out that the post-war period was not the first time privatisations had been made, instead they have historical antecedents; for example, a process of privatization and a concentration of Indigenous lands in the 30s, in which legal restrictions were imposed to Indigenous peoples and campesinos, such inequalities created sentiments of anger between the marginalised majority and the elites, resulting in La Matanza of 1932. After 1992 several state-owned entities were privatised such as telecommunications, banks, water, etc. provoking negative consequences for many manufacturing and farm workers who endured labour right violations, and left them with no other means of employment. Children had no other choice but to become workers, and leave school to help their parents to provide for their family. As Salvadorans were experiencing such hardships throughout “peaceful” period, new international forces such as the rise of organised crime, migration and

gang groups deepened the preexisting inequalities between the marginalised community and the privileged elites.

As the allure of international forces increased, so did their power, the disparity and social division amongst the different sectors of the population continues. The criminal gang groups have acquired political, military and negotiation capabilities. The gangs discovered the power of “territory ownership”, through various collective activities such as extortion from local businesses or neighbourhoods, and distribution of drugs; in other words, Salvadorans must pay an extortion to gangs to be able to enter their neighbourhoods or run their business. Nowadays, the physical and psychological integrity of Salvadorans remains deeply threatened, as they are unable to pledge for justice due to the high levels of corruption within the state institutions.

The so-called “peace accords” put the end of a 12-year civil war yet they were a failure and a betrayal for the Salvadoran population. The only victory from the political accords was the negotiation. From the momentum democracy was introduced, without the integration of policies that regulated the economic order, set the indicator that democracy was the instrument to maintain state power in the hands of a small elite who control the economic wealth. El Salvador is in the midst of its deadliest war, a social war, the transition to democracy in 1992 is deeply hindered by the continuity of economic inequalities, poverty, uncertainty, normalised culture of violence, lack of accountability and distrust towards state institutions.

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