

Extermination of the Other in El Salvador: A Heritage of the Colonial Violence?

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In this work we try to make an approach to the last five centuries of Salvadoran history from the viewpoint of political violence and human security. It is evident that there has existed the “extermination of the other” in El Salvador. Then it is questioned if this has to do with the Spanish colonization and its consequences.

Basically we review four cardinal moments through its history: 1) the conquest and colonization which institutionalized the culture of violence; 2) the military authoritarian regime represented by General Martínez with his prolonged and violent dictatorship, which left a severe and persistent trauma in the society overwhelming the value named “respect” with the anti-value named “terror” ; 3) the 12-year-long civil war, that is the very result of a long and fermented process of political repression as well as socio-economic injustice; 4) the postwar period when the anxieties for peace have undergone a bitter disappointment, because what followed was nothing more than the sequels of the armed conflict, now as a polarized society.

In each one of these historical moments, one may detect the confrontation between “Others” and “We”, with a certain metamorphosis in the meaning of both terms: the first, from “indigenous” into “stranger” and “the dominated”, and the second, on the contrary, from “foreign” into “national” and “the dominator”. At this moment, the postwar period culminates in the support of the Salvadoran government to the U.S. invasion to Iraq, once again reversing the meaning of the terms “Others” (the invaded) and “We” (the invaders and their allies).

We should recognize that this paper remains uncompleted, as history itself. Nevertheless, the Salvadoran reality analyzed here leads us to the idea that the conflicting relation between “Others” and “We” is a permanent vortex, the reason why in the end we raise a general question: is it possible to reach the pacific coexistence? To answer to this question does not correspond to the parts separately but to all of us concertedly, who are to seek and give examples of positive tolerance.

Keywords: authoritarianism, El Salvador, civil war in El Salvador, mestizaje (miscegenation), culture of violence

EXACT FATHERLAND

"This is my Fatherland:
a huge pile of men, millions
of men; a honey comb of men
who do not even know
from where comes their semen
of their immensely
bitter lives.

This is my Fatherland:
a river of pain that goes in shirt
and a fist of thieves
assaulting in plain daylight
the blood of the poor.

(Escobar 2004: 147-150)

INTRODUCTION: EL SALVADOR?... SOME ELEMENTS TO LOCATE THE COUNTRY

El Salvador is a tiny country which is precisely situated in the narrow central strip between the North and South American continents. After sporadic wars with its neighbors, in at least two previous centuries, El Salvador lost an important part of its territory, to such extent that nowadays its geographic extent remains at approximately 21,000 km². Its current population is 6.5 million, though it is estimated that another 2.5 million Salvadorans are living abroad, dispersed mainly through the USA, Canada, Mexico, other Central American countries and Europe, and even as far as Australia.

To better understand these numbers, here are some comparisons: Geographically, El Salvador could fit into Japan about 18 times. Its population is 19 times smaller than that of Japan. Consequently, the co-relation between territory and population in both countries seems almost the same. But El Salvador is an exceptional case in the American continents for its population density 10-20 times higher than the other countries. What does this mean? This small country seriously suffers from the huge demographic pressure.

The age structure of El Salvador is highly different from that of Japan. While only around 7% of El Salvador's population is 65 years old or above, in Japan the proportion is 17%. In other words, the Salvadoran population pyramid has a wide base, whereas in Japan it looks more like an overturned pyramid. Obviously the fecundity is higher in El Salvador than in Japan.

Moreover, to grasp the situation in which most Salvadorans survive, it is necessary to take into account deficiencies in public services such as health, education, housing, water and sanitation, energy and telecommunications (PNUD 2003: 37); scarce labor market opportunities (PNUD 2003: 136); dominance by an economic elite that concentrates wealth and does not ensure its equitable distribution in society (PNUD 2003: 63); as well as incipient and fragile democratic institutions created after a twelve-year-long civil war (1980-1992) and its sequels. All these contribute to put pressure on the population, who is obliged to find alleviation in massive emigration and subsequent remittances. At the same time this situation generates social violence from the inside, and to make matters worse, under a certain disorder called Globalization.

On the other hand, the very name of El Salvador says much of the country's history and how the Salvadorans identify themselves with the religion they profess, even nowadays when secularization

proliferates all over the world. The name of El Salvador comes from “Divine Salvador of the World,” patron of the republic, which means Jesus, “the Christ” for Christian believers. For that reason Christianity in its diverse tendencies may have a significant influence over the Salvadorans who in turn question it along with historical flux, or ideologize it for conformity.

Given these references, from this concrete place, El Salvador, and from its concrete historical actualities, now we try to approach to the question raised for this occasion: “Extermination of the Other: A Heritage of the Colonial Violence?”

1 . THE ASSAULT BY EUROPEAN MODERNITY AND THE ROOTS OF THE CULTURE OF VIOLENCE

For El Salvador, as well as for the rest of the American countries, European Modernity arrived by accident and in a violent way. The expression “1492: The Encounter of Two Worlds” is euphemistic and conceals the crush of “Others” by “We.” Yet it is important to clarify that here the terms are upset: “We” corresponds to the invaders and “Others” has to do with the invaded. This upset in meaning might reflect the relations of power which have been taking shape, deepening and extending through more than 500 years; from the beginning of the Conquest of the Americas to the present.

Christopher Columbus, inspired by his predecessor Marco Polo, looked for Cathay (China), Cipango (Japan) or India but at first arrived at the Caribbean islands. Later, other explorers like Hernán Cortés, Pedro de Alvarado and Francisco Pizarro arrived more and more at the continent, and were astonished by unknown findings and exuberance of the “New World” they came across. This is why they called the native population there “Indians” : a contemptuous qualification which distinguishes the “Others” (Indians), as different from “We” (the Spanish conquerors).

The native peoples of El Salvador, formerly Cuscatlán, came from diverse groups: Pokomames, Pipiles, Lencas, Chortis, or Ulúas to mention a few of them. They had migrated from the south of Mexico. Therefore the denomination of “Indians” as one category does not describe them as they were, more than as the “Others,” those “Others” in languages, beliefs, color of skin, and different customs, perhaps “inferiors”, perhaps “semi-wilds” or perhaps even “without soul” for “We” the conquerors. These modern doubts the conquerors held, combine with the search of wealth—not only for the battered Spanish economy but also for personal interests—as well as the medieval eagerness to expand their faith, mixed the sword and the arquebus with the Gospel, submitting and exploiting the indigenous peoples toward their total destruction (Lardé 2000).

The Indian Law (Bascuñán 1954: 197) , promulgated in Spain to protect native Americans, arrived on the continent too late, only after long discussions between pious monks and monarchic authorities. In addition, the law’s effectiveness was so weak that lasting the end it failed to function as was pretended. The result was that the conquerors turned into *adelantados* (a kind of military governor), *encomenderos* (master of Indians and the feud) and later into landowners. These were the “*de fact*” power in these latitudes, and they acted arbitrarily toward their “protected,” their “Indians,” the “Others.”

As the conquerors stayed longer and more permanently in the land of the “Others,” the direct consequence came to be *mestizaje*, the miscegenation; in spite of the differences between the “Others” (Indians) and “We” (Spaniards), and of the reluctance of both groups, at least on the face of it, to mix blood. This happened not only between the conquered and the conquerors but also with the African population that was introduced into the continent through slavery, to substitute the native workforce that existed, after unknown diseases transmitted by the invaders had caused substantial diminution in the native population.

The miscegenation produced *mestizos* (or *ladinos*), *mulatos* and *zambos*, and along with these new beings expanded the meaning of the “Others.” Among them, the first, called *mestizo* or *ladino*, which particularly means children basically between a Spanish father and an “Indian” mother, repudiated themselves and were rejected by others. *Mestizos* were considered, and considered themselves despicable people whom nobody could trust. Nevertheless, the political, economic and social surroundings throughout history would turn *mestizos* into the majority in the society.

There was another American-born population called “*criollo*,” the descendant of Spaniards from the Iberian Peninsula. They did not have Indian (the “Others”) blood but “lamentably” had been born in the colony. This was sufficient to be considered a second category Spanish, that is to say, a *criollo* was different from a peninsular Spanish in terms of social condition. It is interesting that these new American-born/Spanish natives were transformed into the new “We” : proud of their European roots, although Europeans did not accept them easily. On the other hand, they yearned to become independent from the Spanish crown, in order to deal freely with other European powers or the rising power called the Thirteen Colonies (Martinez 1994).

Suffering from many conflicts, the Spanish Empire crumbled little by little. Besides, under the strong influence of the U.S. independence (1776) and the French Revolution (1789), those *criollos* educated in Europe or the U.S. and now allied with *mestizos*, with indigenous peoples, or even with some peninsular Spaniards, managed to dismember themselves from the Spanish crown, with major or minor violence.

In this process, El Salvador obtained its independence in 1821. Then Mexico attempted to annex most of Central America, but this plan was not achieved (Lopez 2000). Now the independence in Central American countries did not change the conditions of the “Others” (indigenous and *mestizos*), who was subdued by “We.” On the contrary, in the second half of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, the situation got worse because of the despoliation of communal lands (the territory of the “Others”), an act that would allow “We” to concentrate large extension of land and then to cultivate articles of export such as indigo and later coffee (Browning 1982). Yet to accomplish an export-oriented economy, it was necessary to afford enough labor. That is why hereafter “idlers” (the “Others” turned into peasants) were forced to work as serfs for the landowners under newly established law (Misión Española 1925) .

One of the best known uprisings occurred in 1833, in the Eastern region of the country, commanded by an indigenous leader, Anastasio Aquino, who fell into the hands of the National Army after demonstrating his cleverness and sagacity amidst cruel fighting, and was beheaded to teach a lesson to the

“Others.” His head was taken around several places so that nobody could ignore what might happen if the “Others” rebelled against the *criollo* power. At that time, after their failure to integrate Central America as a Federation, the *criollos* were trying to consolidate a new project: to establish a nation-state.

During the 19th century, excessive exploitation caused interethnic conflicts. However, the way to dissolve these conflicts did not depend on appealing to the institutions of the budding republic. The landowners looked for the third person who dared to violate or exterminate the “Others.” Here a *mestizo* or *ladino* could transform himself into an instrument of the master, who would not hesitate to take the life of anyone against the master. But this third person had to be careful of not making a scandal, far less denouncing his master, the landowner. This kind of abuse caused the institutionalization of authoritarianism and the culture of violence in the country, because all knew where the orders came from but nobody tried to denounce them, while the authorities pretended not to know about such affairs. These practices of the culture of violence would prevail from the 19th century, throughout the 20th century, until today (Alvarenga 1996: 97).

During the first half of the 20th century, new immigrants arrived at El Salvador, from various parts of the world and for different reasons (Spanish Civil War, World Wars I and II). They were of many origins such as Catalan, Palestinian, Jewish, German, North American, British, French, Italian, Greek, Chinese and so on. Some of them, in this case mainly the Europeans, came to join in the concept of “We.” Others of them were also to assume important positions in the economic, social and political space of El Salvador, even if only gradually, by the second or third generation (Serrano 2002).

2. AUTHORITARIANISM: A PROFOUND MARK LEFT BY GENERAL MARTÍNEZ

In 1929, Arturo Araujo, candidate for the Labor Party, and Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, general of the National Army, were elected as president and vice-president respectively. It was this government that suffered in 1930 the Great Depression, which provoked a collapse in the international coffee market and subsequently brought much more impoverishment to El Salvador.

The conservative economic civil elite and National Army officers made use of the situation to justify overthrowing this government. Once this civic-military alliance was formed, the military would emerge as the protector of landowners and their economic interests, in exchange for the preservation of its own privileges. This was also an historical moment for the Republic to consolidate its agro-industry model of economy (Cáceres 1986).

Although the U.S. government was not disposed at the moment to recognize Gral. Martínez, now restored by the younger officers as the new president of El Salvador, curiously he remained in the presidency until 1944 (Castro 1989: 104).

The presidency of the Gral. Martínez was one of the bloodiest periods of Salvadoran history. Soon after he took up office in 1932, a peasant revolt broke out like a volcanic eruption. In this movement the indigenous *izalqueños* (inhabitants of a small town named Izalco) and racially mixed population (that is to say, the “Others”) were dominant. Among their leaders were Feliciano Ama and Farabundo Martí. At this point, there exists a discussion about how to interpret this revolt: Was it an outbreak of the peasant

masses caused by overexploitation? Or was it an interethnic conflict, or an international communist conspiracy?

The current evidence allow us to conclude that it was an outrage of the peasant masses but not a revolt led by the Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS), which was founded one year before and had hardly had time to organize such an act (Anderson 2001). The thesis of the interethnic conflict lacks credibility, since it is known that while the “Others” (indigenous and *mestizos*) certainly took part in the revolt, they did not vindicate any ethnic group in particular. They just claimed to rectify the injustices that they had been suffering for many years in coffee plantations. However, “We” continued to be protected by the National Army and the National Guard, whose members paradoxically came from the peasantry; *mestizos*, or even indigenous people (the “Others” again). It is worth pointing out that the National Guard was founded in 1912, and at first officers of the Spanish Civil Guard served as instructors. Within a few years, the National Guard became one of the most frightful and infamous security corps among the population.

The 1932 peasant revolt took place in the Western region of the country, principally in Izalco and Nahuizalco. It's extremely difficult to know the exact number of victims, though some researchers estimate about 30,000 people were killed during the repression. Wherever the estimation, the memory of brutal repression lasts to the present time, shielded under a series of oral tradition that comprises realities, myths and legends (Menjívar et al. 1988: 76).

Although the “Others” were consisted of a complex combination mentioned above, the indigenous were especially associated with the communism, and this caused them to suffer persecution. To be indigenous, that is to behave such as they were—to practice their customs, to use their clothes, and to speak their Náhuatl language—indicated that they could be communists. In consequence, their presence was undesirable. This contributed on the one hand to the near disappearance of the “Others,” and on the other hand, to the extension of the category “Others,” as political and ideological factors were added to race.

Gral. Martínez became a mythical dictator, like some of his colleagues in Central America: Jorge Ubico in Guatemala, Tiburcio Carías in Honduras, and Anastasio Somoza García in Nicaragua. Supposedly, he maintained order and tranquility—based on obedience, silence, and conformity—, that some Salvadorans still long for as memories of the “good old days.” However it was really a military dictatorship dyed with the blood of innocents. Also during his dictatorship, he counted on various specialists who helped him to strengthen economic structure and to centralize national institutions. Thereby he created the Central Reserve Bank (BCR), unified the currency within the national territory, and settled the national debt, among other things.

In the diplomatic sphere, Gral. Martínez povoked the international rejection of the Salvadoran state, because his government disobeyed the recommendation of the incipient League of Nations not to recognize the state of Manchukuo on account of its doubtful origin related to Japan. Nevertheless, El Salvador recognized it and gained an enigmatic friendship with the Japanese government (Iijima 2003).

Gral. Martínez used to say that he had two gloves: “one of silk for those who are obedient and another of iron for those who are not.” The iron glove meant kidnappings and murders of his political rivals, including prominent figures of the economic elite. The situation became so unbearable that in 1944,

military and civilians conspired again to organize a “general sit down strike.” They succeeded in removing the General from his presidency.

This strike did not mean a change from authoritarianism to democracy. The military continued in the presidency, with a particular kind of reform. During the following decades, some young officers who had studied in Mexico, the USA and Europe, reached the presidency of El Salvador and tried to apply some recipes recommended by new schemes of economic development.

The successive military governments did not break with the violent tradition of exterminating the “Others.” Since 1932, the Salvadoran Communist Party was proscribed and could not re-appear as a political party, but only clandestinely and allied with other political parties and organizations. Though the original “Others” (indigenous) were reduced and disappeared almost totally, they have paradoxically been evoked by the economic elite, when it has been necessary and convenient to promote tourism and folkloric images of the country. This situation brings a socio-cultural identity crisis to many Salvadorans.

3. “THE ONE WHO SEEDS WINDS, HARVESTS STORMS”

The authoritarianism and its culture of violence in El Salvador have prevailed and had strong influence over the daily life of people from the 19th to the 21st century. However, militarism, as an authoritarian expression of this society, experienced a major crisis in 1979, which immediately led to the twelve-year civil war (1980-1992). During this war, approximately 75,000 Salvadorans were victims of many human rights violations (Amnesty International 2003).

Prior to the civil war, the government of Cnel. Arturo Armando Molina (1972-1977) was established as product of an electoral fraud against National Opposition Union (UNO), which agglutinated the diverse tendencies of the political opposition. Cnel. Molina tried to control the political situation, repressing opposition parties, workers union, peasants and teachers associations, mass media, and universities. Simultaneously, he promoted a vain attempt at agrarian reform, which several private sector entities, such as National Association of the Private Enterprise (ANEP), Farmers Front of Eastern Region (FARO), Chamber of Commerce and Industry of El Salvador (CCIES) and others forced to abort.

Although it was nothing new under the successive military governments, the presidential elections in 1977 were blatantly fraudulent, and this time the “winner” was Gral. Carlos Humberto Romero. The repression and the extermination of the “Others” (which the author now uses to refer to those who thought in a different way from the authorities’) became more and more a daily phenomenon, while there was also a *crescendo* of answers to those violent acts, because popular organizations had been prepared since the 70’s to confront the military regime.

On October 15th, 1979, a group of officers commanded by Cnel. Adolfo Majano and Gral. Abdul Gutiérrez, overthrew Gral. Romero, with the approval of then U.S. President, Jimmy Carter (El Salvador 1996). The military were in charge of the execution of the coup d’état, but they needed the support of other social sectors, so they invited Román Mayorga Quirós, rector of José Simeón Cañas Central American University (UCA), Mario Andino, an independent businessman, and Guillermo Manuel Ungo, leader of Revolutionary National Movement (MNR), to constitute the Revolutionary Junta of Government.

After the first Junta, there followed the second and the third, because neither of the first two was really able to generate important changes between “We” (until this time the term had incorporated the Armed Forces) and the “Others” (the have-nots or those who had been preparing to respond to military repression).

The year of 1980 was one of the bloodiest in Salvadoran history. On March 24th, a sniper assassinated the Archbishop of San Salvador, Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero, when he was saying mass, precisely at the moment of eucharistic consecration. Several priests, nuns, and catechists had already been captured, tortured and assassinated in brutal forms, but Romero’s assassination demonstrated the magnitude of hatred kept by “We” towards the “Others.” For instance, during the civil war, the recalcitrant right wing did spread the slogan: “Be a patriot, kill a priest.”

The second and third Juntas of Government impelled the agrarian reform, the nationalization of banks and the reform in foreign trade, in order to de-legitimize the arguments of the insurgent forces, but this series of reforms, supported by the U.S. government, could not stop the avalanche of the armed conflict. On January 10th, 1981, the Farabundo Marti Front for the National Liberation (FMLN), the united organization of five guerrilla forces, rushed into the first general offensive.

It’s convenient to remember that the Salvadoran internal conflict drew the U.S. government’s attention, first of all because it was considered as a key piece in the context of the “Cold War” maintained among the Soviet Union, the U.S. and their respective allied countries. This argument served as base so that later, during the 80’s, Ronald Reagan’s administration could send significant military aid to the Salvadoran government under the so called “Low Intensity War” strategy. This U.S. policy ensured that the dead would be Salvadorans and the “consultants” would be North Americans. The latter could avoid the risk of repeating the Vietnam experience. Moreover, when the civil war broke out in El Salvador, the U.S. government had been seriously entangled in many problems related to the Iranian and Nicaraguan revolutions which were closely bound together.

After three unsuccessful Juntas, the presidential elections were celebrated in 1984, despite the civil war. The winner was José Napoleón Duarte, who presided over the third Junta. In those days, to mention dialogue as a way of seeking a solution to the armed conflict implied that one was a “traitor to the fatherland.” Nevertheless, after many efforts, President Duarte invited FMLN, to dialogue on three occasions: in La Palma (October 1984), Ayagualo (November 1984) and the Apostolic Nunciature (October 1987). These meetings did not bring forth concrete results for various reasons, including lack of will in both parts, lack of international support, the expectancy of military victory and so on.

Maybe it is important to emphasize here that on August 28th, 1981, the governments of France and Mexico recognized, in their joint declaration, the belligerency of FMLN. However, the government of El Salvador rejected this, since to recognize FMLN at all would legitimize its enemy, and compel it to seek dialogue.

It was not until after the 1989 presidential election that the winner of this time, Alfredo Cristiani, of the right wing Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) party, began to swing towards negotiation. The guerrilla forces, in turn, carried out their “Final Offensive” in November of the same year, to put pressure upon the government. Many cities, San Salvador among them, were besieged by FMLN. In some areas of

the capital, street fights became intense under fusillade or cannonade, and the National Army responded by bombarding the city. Through this offensive, a great number of civilians perished, including six Jesuit priests and their two employees of the Central American University (UCA). They were killed directly by special command of the National Army inside the campus.

Later, the executioners of this planned crime were judged and condemned temporarily, but there are many voices in society that call for a reopening of the case in order to judge who is really responsible. This case as well as the magnicide of Monsignor Romero, still remains in impunity, because soon after the publication of the Truth Commission's document on human rights violations in 1993, Legislative Assembly approved the Amnesty Law in which pretends to "pardon and forget" for all cases committed during the civil war.

The outcome of the "Final Offensive" did not favor the National Army, nor the guerrilla forces. It became clear for both parts that it was useless to continue the armed confrontation.

In addition, other international factors, including the fall of the Berlin Wall, the agreement between George Bush (U.S.) and Mikhail Gorbachev (USSR), as well as regional pressure in Central America, South America and Europe, led without many difficulties to the signing of the Peace Accords in Chapultepec, Mexico, on January 16th, 1992.

4. WE LONGED FOR PEACE AND WHAT ARRIVED WAS JUST A "POSTWAR"

To put it in another way, in El Salvador "We" (those who want to preserve the *status quo*) and the "Others" (who tried to change the social structure) signed the Peace Accords to avoid total extermination. Both parts hoped for peace but it did not come. The Peace Accords just silenced guns and led into a postwar period.

As the economic infrastructure of the country was broken, its democratic institutions were still to be constructed. Its most valuable asset—its population—was also left prostrated for several generations, suffering from a complex of traumas accumulated throughout history.

Everyone had to defend their own life and that of their beloved ones as best they could. During the war, most people decided to go far away, as previously mentioned, mainly to the North or to the U.S. After the Peace Accords were signed, lots of Salvadorans continued to leave the country day by day. Certainly some of them have managed to settle abroad after great efforts and despite racial and social discrimination in Mexico, the USA, Canada and other European countries, but it is also true that many have been trafficked as semi-slaves and prostitutes. Others have been maimed trying to cling to trains that would allow them to cross from Mexico to the land of the "American Dream," whereas others simply died, suffocated in wagons or trucks, thirsty and hungry in the midst of a North American desert or killed by traffickers.

Many Salvadorans who had moved to the U.S. in their childhood grew up there short of affection in aggressive surroundings, and looked for refuge in *pandillas* or gangs. Some of these groups have criminal antecedents. What followed here was something phenomenal never seen before: the emergence of so called *Maras* or *Clicas*. Two of the biggest, most powerful and best organized ones are

Mara 18 (M 18) and *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS). With many members deported or in living as illegal migrants, these two groups expanded to Mexico and all over Central America, where they returned after the Peace Accords in 1992. Now they constitute another aggravation for the society which gave birth to them. There are countless bloody confrontations between the two bands, involving hundreds of young boys and girls. According to official statistics compiled by the National Civil Police, which is itself a fruit of the Peace Accords, there are 2,300 annual murders (more than 35 deaths per one hundred thousand inhabitants), registered in the first years of the 21st century (Cruz 2003: 1152). In the case of Japan, the same rate approaches to 0.475 (600 annual murders). In El Salvador you are 80 times more likely to be killed than in Japan.

Not a few natural disasters (for example, two major earthquakes in 2001), a depressed economy, galloping unemployment, poverty without any solution and the proliferation of common delinquency, organized crimes and maras all together paint a panorama of darkness and hopelessness in the postwar period (Cruz 2003: 1154). At the same time this situation enlarges the range of the “Others” since “We” are still powerful economic elites who conduct El Salvador to the future with great emphasis on inserting the country in the Globalization process on the basis of competitiveness.

Frankly speaking, twelve years of the postwar period have left only a bitter taste to Salvadorans. The Peace Accords remain unaccomplished, although the Salvadoran government stated officially that even the “postwar” period had finished—and the United Nations glorifies this case as a successful example of U.N. mediation (CIS 2002). The Salvadoran people expected too much from the Peace Accords. Indeed they thought that structural causes of the conflict should be resolved but the change simply did not happen. Today those structural causes become much more complex and the situation of the human security is as hard as it was during the civil war. People are vulnerable and exposed to the struggle for everyday survival. They do not know every morning if they can come back home at night alive. Great risks are part of Salvadoran daily life.

The Peace Accords intended to introduce important changes to the country: the cessation of armed confrontation, legalization of FMLN as political party, professionalization of the Armed Forces, creation of the National Civil Police, substantial reform in the judicial and electoral systems, and dialogue on socio-economic subjects. In other words, the Peace Accords tried to re-found the institutions of the country. In some of these aspects, there have been remarkable advances, but in others there were few advances or practically nothing.

The society turned into arena of a new political struggle: that of partisan politics. But this struggle is not a game where two adversaries compete for the power according to rules, but a battle field where the contenders make use of cajoleries and manipulation to win the combat. The society is polarized without reconciliation, and there is suffering from the lack of justice. The few advances that have been made are far from being consolidated; one example is the difficult situation of FMLN ex-combatants. Of course, for all, to integrate into the productive life of the country is difficult, but especially so for those who suffer disabilities as result of the war (Baumgartner 1998 : 18-19).

Nowadays, the Salvadoran government is committed to accompanying to the U.S. government in its “fight against terrorism” to such extent that troops of the Salvadoran National Army were sent to

Iraq. Recently, in spite of the danger that Iraqi people face, a lot of men and women of El Salvador have been contracted to serve as private security. It seems that the terms are upset once more: the “Others” (invaded) by “We” (invaders and their allies).

History continues, but...

EPILOGUE FOR AN UNFINISHED APPROACH

After this short account of more than 500 years, it seems that both “We” and the “Others,” have always existed, and continue to exist. The basic question is: How can “We” and the “Others” live together, in this same world, without crushing one another? Is there disposition not only to tolerate negatively (to bear) to the “Others,” but to tolerate positively (to accept) to the “Others”? Not only a disposition to “accept them” beyond racial differences, but also beyond cultural, religious, ideological, political, economic and social differences.

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