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**Grassroots Peacemaking: The Paradox of “Reconciliation” in
El Salvador**

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Grassroots Peacemaking: The Paradox of “Reconciliation” in El Salvador

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Report

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Para mi tan querida familia:

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Son oasis y primavera

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Grassroots Peacemaking: The Paradox of “Reconciliation” in El Salvador

By

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

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This paper examines how ex-combatants of El Salvador’s 1980-1992 civil war view post-war processes of reconciliation. I demonstrate that contrary to dominant understandings of ongoing political polarization in El Salvador, perpetuated by Salvadoran political parties, many former army and guerrilla combatants are coexisting in the same communities and working together in various ways. I show how the Salvadoran Peace Accords and the apparent political polarization has opened a space for the recreation of social networks and the creation of communities in post-war societies. I call this process “grassroots peacemaking,” emphasizing the everyday negotiations of remembering and creating new social relations in a nation torn apart by war and violence.

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1. Introduction

Reconciliation would be if these combatants were friends before the war, then during war became enemies, and in post-war times became friends once again.

Diego Lopez, San Salvador July 2010.¹

In 2004, I traveled to Brazil to visit a friend. A former guerrilla combatant of El Salvador's Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), he was attending a non-violent communication training. To my surprise, he was taking part in the conference alongside a former captain of the Salvadoran army's Atlacatl Battalion. My initial reaction to witnessing these former enemies attending the training together and living under the same roof at their home was one of unease. The Salvadoran state and FMLN forces fought a civil war from 1980-1992, leaving over 75,000 dead, 500,000 internally displaced, and thousands in exile (Thompson: 1997; United Nations: 1992). The army, and in particular the Atlacatl Battalion, was notorious for committing horrendous atrocities, including the December 1981 El Mozote massacre. This history made the seemingly impossible friendship between these two ex-combatants difficult to digest.

In trying to come to terms with what I was witnessing, I asked my friend, "How did you become friends with a member of the army?" He responded,

There are no saints in war. Most guerrillas fought because the army was bloodthirsty from the beginning to the end. How will a son forget that his mother was killed after being raped by a soldier? [But also,] how would the wife of a soldier forgive a guerrilla for killing her husband in front of her? Yet many people on both sides lacked understanding and political formation in the ideologies they supposedly defended (Author's notes, Brazil, July 2004).

The Salvadoran civil war divided the country, and countless families, into two camps.

Individuals either supported the state and its forces, or the guerrilla movement. However, to publicly acknowledge one's support for either side often meant risking one's life. Disappearances, assassinations, torture and forced displacement were part of a hideous

¹ I will use pseudonyms throughout this paper to protect informants' identities.

index of everyday violence in El Salvador. Of the more than 20,000 complaints filed with the U.N.-backed Salvadoran Truth Commission (STC) after the war, “over 60% were extrajudicial executions, more than 25% were forced disappearances, and more than 20% included the denunciation of torture. Of the total number of denunciations, approximately 60% were against the armed forces, 25% were against the security forces, 20% were assigned to the civil defense, 10% to members of death-squads, and 5% to the FMLN.” (STC: 1993).²

This violence provoked a silent socio-political polarization. And the combatants themselves, who were both defenders and symbols of the ideals they fought for, publicly represented this division. Many members of the army, despite coming from a working class background, self-identified as supporters of the state, the existing economic order, and capitalist ideals. In contrast guerrilla combatants and their sympathizers who identified with the poor, the working class, and socialist ideals.³ This socio-political polarization became common sense in Salvadoran society, and thus made my experience of witnessing former enemy combatants coming together in a meaningful friendship counterintuitive.⁴

Still perplexed by this experience, I returned to my home country as a graduate student in the summer of 2010 to conduct preliminary research on local practices of reconciliation among ex-combatants. As a native Salvadoran who grew up in El Salvador during the Civil War, an immigrant to the United States, an activist in the U.S.-based El

² I should note that El Salvador (21,040 km²) is comparable to the size of Massachusetts or Wales.

³ I should also point out that the geopolitical conflict between U.S. and Russia to control the Central American region and their ideological discourses permeated and obscured issues that generated the internal conflict.

⁴ I understand common sense as the experiences that has shaped the thinking of a group of people in society. This becomes a shared understanding that creates a set of norms which individuals internalize as social rules from which to draw for the way they act or make sense of the world.

Salvador solidarity movement, and most recently a graduate student at a “*gringo*” university, I was positioned as both an insider and an outsider. Within the landscape of the Salvadoran political left, my background as a social justice activist and native of Soyapango – a densely populated, working class neighborhood, just outside the capital city of San Salvador – positioned me as an insider and lent me trustworthiness and credibility. At the same time, living and studying in the U.S. positioned me as an outsider who did not have direct experience of the current socio-economic disparities, and who had only an outside observer’s understanding of the country’s current political dynamics. Yet it is my experience growing up during wartime and later witnessing former enemy combatants come together in the post-war era, despite ongoing political polarization, that has shaped my political leanings and research interests. As an activist researcher committed to social justice, I identify with grassroots efforts for the recreation of Salvadoran social networks and civil society in the post-war era.

I consider my work with former combatants who fought on opposite sides of El Salvador’s armed conflict to be “activist research,” as it overlaps with this approach. Activist research, according to Charles R. Hale (2007), is a methodology that combines rigorous scholarship with politically engaged work, in alignment with an organized collective group. This research,

“a) helps us better to understand the root causes of inequality, oppression, violence and related conditions of human suffering; b) is carried out, at each phase from conception through dissemination, in direct cooperation with an organized collective of people who themselves are subject to these conditions; c) is used, together with the people in question, to formulate strategies for transforming these conditions and to achieve the power necessary to make these strategies effective” (Hale: 2001:13).

While I concur with Hale’s broad definition of activist research and its methodology, in this particular research my work is not necessarily at the service of “an organized collective of people.” The ex-combatants whose practices I have studied are often at

odds with the institutions and organizations they are affiliated with. And frequently, victim-survivors of human rights violations and people at the extremes of El Salvador's highly polarized political establishment condemn ex-combatants' efforts to coexist and forge common ground. In light of the hostile reactions that they have engendered, these coexistence practices raise the following questions: How can we, as Salvadorans, address our recent history in a way that enables us to create a peaceful and democratic present? And, what would it take to re-humanize society?

My attempt to explore these questions is based on my observations over the last 6 years and a series of 20 interviews I conducted in the summer of 2010. The open-ended question format I utilized was geared towards gathering information about the extent that reconciliation has been taking place in El Salvador, particularly among former enemy combatants. In addition, and as necessary, I followed an informal interview format (conversations) to respect individuals' requests not to be recorded on paper or audio taped. While I had assumed most people would feel comfortable addressing the topic, my preliminary research showed that many ex-combatants refused to label their coexistence practices as "reconciliation."

In one of my interviews, a former guerrilla combatant stated, "At first, guerrilla and army combatants did not talk to one another, assuming the interactions would result in a confrontation. Then, lack of healthcare for veterans pushed us beyond fears, and to work together to call on the state for help" (Authors' notes, July 2010). However, when I identified these practices as *reconciliación* (reconciliation) – a term that most transitional justice scholarship would use to understand these practices – ex-combatants refused the term as a description of their relationships with their former enemies. This insight caused

me to question my own understanding of the term and its meaning in the post-war Salvadoran context. It also led to a reexamination of the state-led reconciliation process, and, at the same time, encouraged me to analyze and document ex-combatants' localized, grassroots efforts for peaceful coexistence in Salvadoran society.

Based on my preliminary research findings, I argue that the attitudes of those I interviewed toward the word "reconciliation" is not directed at the concept of reconciliation, *per se*, but rather reflects a critique of the state's understanding of the term and its actions toward that end. Yet, rather than focusing on the state's understanding of reconciliation and its practices, I take as my subject of analysis ex-combatants' perspectives on the events that have led to what I refer to as "the paradox of reconciliation." First, I provide a summary of the process that created the state-led reconciliation process, its premises, and applications. In this section, I juxtapose the official, top-down approach to reconciliation – driven by international and national political actors – with the grassroots coexistence practices carried out by ex-combatants themselves. Through this analysis, I explain how the state-led reconciliation project has, paradoxically, given rise to a parallel, grassroots peacemaking process.

The second section begins with a brief overview of El Salvador's mainstream political parties, which serves as a means of examining how the popular discourse of socio-political polarization has contributed to the development of alternatives to the state-led reconciliation process. My analysis here emphasizes how the role of the two leading parties' ideologies in promoting polarization has increasingly diminished.

Finally, I explore the ways that ex-combatants and their relatives understand reconciliation, demonstrating their critiques of the state's understandings and practices.

Ex-combatants' rejection of state-led reconciliation and their resistance to political polarization brings to light their agency not only in resisting top-down projects, but also in creating an alternative approach for the reconstruction of the social networks in their communities. I suggest that grassroots peacemaking efforts dismiss the state's understanding of reconciliation, with its emphasis on "forgiving and forgetting," to instead highlight the concepts of justice, remembering, coexistence, and community.

My paper explores ex-combatants' approaches to postwar reconciliation, which in this essay I will call "grassroots peacemaking," and focuses on the following questions:⁵ First, what are the Salvadoran state's understandings and practices of reconciliation? Then, in what ways has the leading political parties' discourse of polarization hindered or supported grassroots peacemaking efforts? Finally, how is reconciliation understood outside of state apparatuses, and in what ways is this understanding leading to the construction of an alternative to the state-led reconciliation process? These questions take on particular importance in helping me address the overarching question of why ex-combatants engaged in reconciliatory practices refuse to label their efforts as reconciliation.

⁵ This is due to combatants' refusal to the term.

2. Historical Background

In 1992, the government of El Salvador and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) guerrilla organization signed Peace Accords that ended twelve years of armed conflict. The roots of this conflict reside in the country's socio-economic disparities, which go back to the late 1800s, and the political repression exercised by a string of military dictatorships that ruled the country from the 1930s. With the rise of industrialization in Western Europe and the United States in the 1800s, El Salvador became part of the global economy by producing cash crops such as coffee. The wealth generated from this market was harnessed by the approximately two percent of the population that owned coffee plantations. In time, they became the oligarchy of the country, owned about 60% of the productive land, and exercised direct or indirect control over most key productive sectors of the country's economy. This gave rise to a class-based social formation and military apparatus that generated tensions between the newly constituted oligarchy and the masses of indigenous people and peasants.

The oligarchy, with ties to the ruling political class and with the support of the military, enforced numerous laws directed at enhancing the production of coffee on their behalf. On one hand, the state sanctioned the elimination of *ejidos* (communal land holdings), and on the other imposed anti-vagrancy laws to ensure sufficient labor for the privately owned plantations. As a result, tensions between classes grew. The oligarchy, in alliance with the military, supported the 1931 military coup against the first democratically elected President of El Salvador, Arturo Araujo.⁶ This coup started the history of military dictatorship in the country.

⁶ I should point out that this characterization remains contested in El Salvador.

As a result of military repression and the disruption of indigenous means of subsistence living, Augusto Farabundo Martí, an indigenous leader, led a peasants' uprising against the military government in 1932. The state responded with a wave of repression that resulted in the massacre popularly known as *la Matanza* (the Massacre). Over 32,000 indigenous and peasants were assassinated, many by death squad groups that killed anyone who looked like an indigenous person, or who was suspected of supporting the uprising.

After this event, the military, in alliance with the country's economic elite, consolidated its control over the state. Indigenous and peasant resistance considerably decreased, even as the social inequalities that spurred the uprising continued to worsen. In addition to an elite that benefited from the class-based divisions, there was also military repression, lack of jobs in the cities, and lack of access to education and health care.

In response to this situation, the late 1960s witnessed a revival of the popular social movement. This time, teachers, students, factory workers, and peasants formed a broad-based movement mobilizing against the military dictatorship. As the confrontation grew on the national level, there was a parallel struggle within the army in late 1970s, and in 1979 a group of officers overthrew the military junta that was in power at the time in an attempt to stave off civil war. However, the new military leadership was unable or unwilling to enact reforms that addressed the root causes of the mounting conflict, and in 1980 war began in earnest.

The Salvadoran armed conflict was firmly rooted, both historically and ideologically, in the midst of the Cold War. The ideological discourse of capitalism

versus communism that dominated the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union also came to reductively frame El Salvador's internal conflict. Roberto D'Aubuisson, a Salvadoran military officer who gained notoriety as a leader of quasi-clandestine "death squads" that operated during the war, founded the ARENA party in 1981, promising to defeat the communists. From its formation, the party represented the country's military and economic elite, and aligned itself with conservative members in the U.S. government. During the war it sought state power through elections while at the same time supporting state repression against the social movement.

Though the FMLN's recognition as an official political party did not take place until the signing of the 1992 Peace Accords, it was founded in 1980 as a military-political umbrella organization for five armed groups: Popular Liberation Forces (FPL), People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), National Resistance (RN), Communist Party Armed Forces of Liberation (FAL), and the Central American Workers' Revolutionary Party (PRTC). These organizations had each formed to counter the state repression apparatus (police, armed forces, and death squads) employed by El Salvador's military junta government in the late 1970s.⁷ United as the FMLN, they demanded that the military junta be replaced with a civilian government. They also called for land reform, the redistribution of capital, more jobs, and access to education and healthcare.

The war persisted throughout the 1980s, perpetuated in part by U.S. military aid of \$1.5 million per day to the Salvadoran government. By 1989, the FMLN had become a sophisticated guerrilla army that had fought the Salvadoran military to a stalemate. ARENA, on the other hand, had won state power through that year's presidential

⁷ "Fuerzas Populares de Liberación (FPL), Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP), Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRTC), Resistencia Nacional (RN), Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación (FAL)"

election. Recognizing that neither party was likely to defeat the other militarily, the two sides entered into peace negotiations that lasted for three years. On January 16th, 1992, the signing of the Peace Accords between the government of El Salvador and FMLN put an end to twelve years of civil war.

To help with the transition from conflict to peace, the peace accords included measures such as land reform and a restructuring of the judicial and electoral systems. The FMLN was demilitarized in a U.N.-certified process, and the military and police were dramatically reorganized, and, the FMLN became an official political party. At the same time, the negotiators of the accords recognized that two key steps towards peace were the reunification of Salvadoran families and the generation of trust in the newly created or reformed state institutions (United Nations: 1992). Toward these ends, a U.N.-backed Truth Commission was created for the investigation of human rights violations committed during the war, which was viewed by the state and victim-survivors of violence as a step toward achieving national reconciliation and procedural justice. However, as time passed it became evident that the work of the commission, combined with two laws granting amnesty to those accused of war crimes, was the extent of the state's reconciliation effort.

The legacy of the Peace Accords, and particularly its reconciliation elements, has evolved into something of a mixed blessing. On one hand, the government and FMLN were able to put an end to twelve years of armed struggle and created structural transformation within the state apparatus. On the other hand, the peace agreements limited the means for dealing with human rights violations and effecting reconciliation to the Truth Commission's quasi-legal mandate. Even this limited potential for procedural

justice and “reconciliation” was short lived, as the amnesty laws made it impossible to achieve any form of procedural justice.⁸

While I can only speculate as to what could have been an alternative approach to the reconciliation process, I know that the state’s process has been a source of disillusionment for many Salvadorans, including perpetrators and victims-survivors of war violence, who associate the official reconciliation process with state power and a political elite (Silberina: 2011: 02). This disillusionment and lack of socio-economic reforms for reducing the gap between rich and poor, in turn, are the dynamic forces behind the grassroots peacemaking processes in El Salvador.

⁸ I should notice that the removal of Amnesty Laws to open the space for procedural justice is a contentious debate in El Salvador across social strata.

3. Theoretical implications

My work is situated within literatures of social memory and transitional justice, but moves beyond the dominant paradigms of the latter by studying ex-combatants' understandings of their own grassroots peacemaking processes. Transitional justice scholarship highlights the connections among reconciliation, peace, and democracy as keys to ensuring socio-political stability and security in post-conflict societies. Many social theorists argue in favor of war crimes tribunals as functional instruments to promote universal standards of justice and respect for human rights, and in turn to deter future violations and persuade individuals to comply with these norms. Conversely, other social theorists argue that truth and reconciliation commissions are a better approach for transitional justice. They argue that the political goal of ensuring a transition out of conflict should not be compromised by a legal process that further divides society. While both arguments provide insights for transitioning a society out of conflict, they both assume individuals will share with the state a common understanding of reconciliation and agree with the state-led process to attain it.

This assumption has been critically examined by another group of social scientists. They argue that, while reconciliation and other transitional justice efforts intend to support the reunification of society and address human rights violations, in practice these efforts have shown to be based on inherently unequal power dynamics between the state, civil society institutions, and individuals engaged in the process. According to Richard Wilson and Shannon Speed, state-led reconciliation processes and their human rights discourse are best understood as top-down efforts to incorporate individuals into a state project (Wilson 2001; Speed 2008). These projects take place

within the framework and rules of newly formed state bureaucracies, and at the behest of individuals and sectors behind state power (Wilson 2001:19). Individuals' participation in these processes occurs through strictly regulated moments in which victim-survivors submit complaints and provide testimonies to Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. At the same time, perpetrators confess participation in atrocities in exchange for pardon and amnesty. Reconciliation is often considered achieved when amnesty laws are passed and commission reports are published (Sieder et al: 1998:181). The state's involvement often ends with these final efforts for dealing with past human rights violations and attaining procedural justice, even when individuals remain critical of the state's process. (Shaw, Waldorf, Hazan et al: 2010; Popkin: Theidon: 2004:190,193; 2000:x; Sieder et al: 1998:251)

In light of this critique, other social scientists have argued that reconciliation is something lived and practiced at the community level, and thus the concept of reconciliation needs to be studied and understood at the local level (Theidon 2004; Shaw, Waldorf, Hazan et al: 2010; Silberina: 2011:186). Theidon writes,

“If we are interested in recuperating people and communities, it is necessary to understand how these concepts [reconciliation] are defined and how the relationship between them and a particular culture is conceptualized...[Because] what is at stake in postwar contexts is the reconstruction of the social networks, of the cultural forms and economic networks, and the re-invention of life rituals that allows a community to make sense of the suffering experienced and produced” (Translation mine; Theidon, 2004: 44,89).⁹

Such analysis brings to light the ways in which people practice reconciliation and process their physical and psychological wounds in their everyday lives. These practices often

⁹ “Si nos interesa recuperar personas y comunidades, es necesario entender como estos conceptos (reconciliación) son definidos y como la relación entre ellos se conceptualiza en una cultura dada...Lo que esta en juego en los contextos de posguerra es la reconstrucción de las relaciones sociales, de las formas culturales y de las redes económicas, y la reinención de la vida ritual que le permite a una comunidad dar sentido al sufrimiento experimentado y causado.”

depart from states' understanding of "reconciliation" and its implementation projects. The state tends not only to overlook the power dynamics involved with its participation – a top-down reconciliation process – but also obscures the power dynamics and social stratification that caused the conflict in the first place.

Much of this critique is salutary, as it examines the local rituals allowing for coexistence practices, and the ways in which reconciliation is lived and practiced at the local level. Yet in their efforts to focus our attention on the local, Theidon (2004) and Shaw, Waldorf, Hazan, et al (2010) ultimately rely on the assumption that the concept of reconciliation is widely and unquestioningly accepted. While it is certainly true that local practices of coexistence need to be understood from a localized standpoint, it is also the case that questioning the acceptance of the reconciliation term opens a fruitful window of analysis. This provides an understanding of the recreation of social networks that goes beyond a state-led understanding of reconciliation.

I suggest that expanding the analytical lens beyond the official conceptualization of reconciliation and its notions of "forgiving and forgetting" will provide a nuanced, critical understanding of social formation in post-conflict communities. Without this understanding, social scientists risk missing why individuals who were perpetrators or victim-survivors of war violence might not view efforts to forgive and forget as positive for themselves and their communities. Without understanding how individuals and communities negotiate a delicate balance between remembering and constructing a new community outside official understandings of reconciliation and its programs, social scientists might end up re-inscribing similar power disparities between local communities and the state.

Many Salvadorans engaged in coexistence practices, including ex-combatants, are not aware they are participating in what is known as “reconciliation.” Instead, they have formed friendships and worked together due to material needs. Thus, when asked about the reconciliation topic, a common answer given by many Salvadorans is, “neither reconciliation, nor forgetting, now I simply can [live with my pain]” (Author’s notes).¹⁰ In sum, the process I call “grassroots peacemaking” takes place without an agenda, a method, or a political goal. And yet in refusing to label their actions as “reconciliation,” and by contesting the state-led reconciliation process, the limits of the reconciliation concept are questioned.

My hope is that this research will contribute to an anthropology of politics and violence and interdisciplinary scholarship on transitional justice in relation to democracy, peace, justice, and collective memory. By understanding ex-combatants’ grassroots peacemaking in a specific context, my work draws out the nuances of lived experiences in a postwar situation, and ultimately questions the viability and usefulness of external concepts such as “reconciliation” for successful and productive post-conflict relationships. More importantly, my work examines how social relations in a postwar society are formed, and suggests that questioning what has become the common sense of “reconciliation” will sharpen social scientists analytical gaze.

¹⁰ “Ni reconciliación, ni olvido, hoy simplemente puedo soportarlo”

4. Peace Accords and the State's Reconciliation Process

As the 1992 Salvadoran Peace Accords were rapidly implemented at the close of the war, and the Truth Commission investigated a number of symbolic human rights violations, the international community and institutions such as the United Nations regarded the Salvadoran peace process as one of the most successful in the world. Addressing the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador in March 1999, then-U.S. President Bill Clinton said, “[N]o nation has traveled a greater distance to overcome deeper wounds in [as] short [a] time [as] El Salvador” (Clinton: 2000: 336). In June 2010, U.S. Congressman James P. McGovern reiterated this position, stating “El Salvador is a reconciled nation” (Author’s notes).¹¹

At the national level, the state and key leaders from right and left parties have also appraised the peace agreements as a “success” (Prensa Grafica: 2007). However, for rank-and-file former combatants, the agreements fell short creating structural changes that facilitated the reunification of Salvadoran society.

When asked to talk about the agreements, Jose Torres, a former FMLN leader and combatant in his late 40’s, addressed the past with a certain nostalgia, and yet with poignant critiques of the process. As Torres described the transition from conflict to peace from a combatant’s point of view, he stated, “When the peace accords were signed, all combatants... had to conduct a new grand operation: reinsertion [into civilian life].”¹²

Torres continued:

¹¹ As part of my research for the project, I conducted an internship with Rep. McGovern. As I was particularly interested in understanding U.S. foreign policy towards El Salvador from someone with close ties to the country as Rep. McGovern, who had a leading role in the U.S. congressional investigation that created the Joe Moakley Commission report. The report tied then Jesuit military subjects to the assassination of seven Jesuit priests and recommended to cut military aid to the Salvadoran army, which in turn contributed to the beginning of the peace process in El Salvador.

¹² “Todos los combatientes...nos topamos con una nueva gran operación que realizar: reinsertarnos.”

Many *compas* [comrades] created cooperatives... some of us received the order to enrol at the PNC [National Police Academy], a scholarship to study, a course in a specific profession, and others were simply pushed aside. And then *cada quien vea como le hace* (everyone for him- or herself) became a slogan... It would be interesting to do a study to locate the...*compas* and find out what has become of them today. I am almost sure that it will result in something like neoliberalism applied on a small scale. A few are doing well. Others, the majority, are as they were before the war, and even worse because we now carry the phantoms of the war with us uphill (Translation mine; online transaction: 2008).¹³

This statement raises the following question: For ex-combatants, what were the material gains from the signing of the peace agreements? In answering, Torres wrote on his blog:

The only tangible gain from the [peace] accords for the combatants and the [masses] is that the guns were silenced... the army stayed in the quarters and we could say with pride that we were from the *frente* [FMLN]. That was it. The gain for us is that we were not killed and that we now can write without problems. From this perspective the peace agreements were a success (Translation mine; online transaction: 2008).¹⁴

Jose Torres went on to comment that another gain has been in the area of governability and democracy. However, for him this is “a theory, a question for the state, something that the majority of us *compas* understand very little, and the little we understand we see as [reversion]” (Online transaction: 2008).¹⁵ His words seem to reflect a deeply ingrained critique among rank-and-file former combatants, many of whom are highly disillusioned by the lack of support shown to them by the leadership of the FMLN party and the state.

When talking about the peace agreement with Roberto Diaz, a former army captain, he stated, “The combatants need health care, a way to make a living. Especially

¹³ “Muchos compas se organizaron en cooperativas...otros recibimos la orden de ir a la PNC, otros recibimos alguna beca para estudiar, otros recibimos cursillos de alguna profesión y otros...fueron simplemente apartados. Y el cada quien vea como le hace, se convirtió en consigna...Seria curioso hacer un estudio para ubicar donde están los compas (los de verdad) y que es de ellos ahora. Casi estoy seguro que resultaría algo así como el neoliberalismo aplicado en chiquito. A unos cuantos les ha ido bien, otros , los muchos están como antes de la guerra, y si cabe mas jodidos porque cargamos con los fantasmas de la guerra a costas.”

¹⁴ “La única ganancia tangible para los combatientes y las “masitas” es que con los acuerdos ya los fusiles se silenciaron...el ejercito ya se quedó en los cuarteles y nosotros podíamos decir con orgullo que éramos del frente. Hasta ahí. La ganancia para nosotros es que no nos mataron y que podemos escribir sin problema alguno. Desde esa perspectiva los acuerdos de paz fueron un éxito.”

¹⁵ “una cuestión de teoría de estado, algo que la mayoría de compas poco entendemos y los que poco entendemos vemos como involución.”

those with disabilities, who deal not only with the ghosts of war, but with their physical impediments.” After a pause, he added, “El Salvador *es un hospital en desorden*” (El Salvador is a messy hospital). Diaz’s metaphor provides a strong image of the chaos and suffering still experienced not only by former combatants, but also by Salvadoran society in general. For him, healing and an organized grassroots peacemaking is a process yet to come.

The topic of “reconciliation” seemed to peripherally emerge in my conversations, but was not directly addressed. I asked Torres to share what reconciliation meant for him. The following is an excerpt from his answer, posted on a blog:

Regarding reconciliation: there was *gato por liebre* [trickery]. The truth commission only showed us a showcase truth... it was impossible to do anything, amnesty laws were in the middle... [During the war] there was indiscriminate violence, the social wounds have not healed yet, they are there. [They] might be at a rest, but latent. There is no such thing as *borrón y cuenta nueva* [to erase the past and create a new future on a blank slate]. Nobody believes in that. There has not been reconciliation, because we have been extremely occupied with reintegration (into society). Or, better said, we have been extremely occupied in surviving, like everyone else. This has not allowed us to participate in a reconciliation [process] under academicians’ standards (Online transaction: 2008).¹⁶

These statements raise the questions, does an academic understanding of the reconciliation concept share similar assumptions to that of the state? If the answer is yes, how can social scientists move beyond the state’s understandings, and avoid reinscribing similar power dynamics that exist between the state and communities?

In 1992-1993, the Salvadoran Truth Commission played a key role in easing the transition into peace. Similar to South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Salvadoran Commission was created as the main vehicle for dealing with atrocities

¹⁶ “Sobre la Reconciliación: Es que ahí hubo gato por liebre. La comisión de la verdad, solo nos mostró una verdad en vitrina:...No se podía hacer nada, leyes de amnistía de por medio...hubo represión indiscriminada todo eso está ahí. Quizás quieto, pero latente. No hay tales de borrón y cuenta nueva. Nadie cree en eso. Reconciliación no ha habido, porque hemos estado demasiado ocupados en la reinserción. O más bien hemos estado ocupados en sobrevivir, como todos los demás. Eso no nos ha permitido entrarle a la reconciliación bajo los estándares de los académicos.”

committed during the war and for bringing about reconciliation in the country. As stated in the peace agreements, the Government of El Salvador and FMLN created the commission “reaffirming [their] intention to contribute to the reconciliation of Salvadoran society” (United Nations: 1992). This process was to be accomplished through “the task of investigating serious acts of violence that have occurred since 1980 and whose impact on society urgently demands that the public should know the truth” (United Nations: 1992). A main goal of the commission was then to act as a catalyst for closure to the individual and social wounds created by state repression and war violence. Paradoxically, the granting of amnesty to those accused of human rights violations was viewed by the Salvadoran government at the time as a primary form of national reconciliation.¹⁷

In contrast to the South African experience, in which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission investigated and engaged in symbolic procedural justice for many years, the Salvadoran Truth Commission (SCT) was limited by a mandate to investigate for only six months, after which it was to publicly reveal the names of perpetrators of human rights violations and suggest a mechanism for punishing those who were found guilty of atrocities (SCT: 1993). Despite the limited scope of the SCT’s powers, the process generated hope for justice among the victims of human rights violations and their families. However, this transitional justice effort was thwarted both before and after its inception.

Before the creation of the SCT, on January 23rd, 1992, the National Assembly of El Salvador – composed of deputies from the pre-peace agreement political parties – approved a National Reconciliation Law that granted amnesty to various government

forces and FMLN members. Yet because this law did not protect everyone, on March 22, 1993, just a few days after the SCT published its findings, the newly elected assembly passed an even further-reaching amnesty law. This law made it illegal to prosecute anyone who had committed an atrocity during the course of the war (Amnesty Law: 1993). This law remains the state's primary expression and practice of the concept of reconciliation.

Despite the lack of further concrete actions, the state promoted a reconciliation discourse in which El Salvador was portrayed as a nation that had left behind its violent past to construct a new peaceful future. Yet this discourse did not represent most individuals' understandings of the principle of "reconciliation," including former combatants. This imbalance resulted in the articulation of localized, grassroots peacemaking processes based on ex-combatants coexistence experiences. These processes include the organic negotiation of spaces for working together, living in the same communities, and even forming meaningful relationships with people who may have caused harm to them or their families. In a country in which job opportunities are few and levels of poverty are high, for many, including ex-combatants, the only resource left is the support of community networks.

In an interview with a husband and wife who are both *ex-guerrilleros*, the husband told me:

When we moved to this town, we never mentioned we were *frente* people. This town, Cinquera, was known for being an army stronghold during the war. But after the war, we came to live here. With a couple zinc rooftops and other materials, we built a place for our children and us to sleep. That winter we got wet. The roof did not protect us from the heavy rains. One day the neighbor came with a couple pieces of zinc roof for us. Then, another day, he came with wood. Little by little we started to talk. Not surprisingly, he was a former army combatant. Yet the surprise has come many years later, despite having fought against one another during the war, and us being *frente* people, we continue to be friends, helping each other in what we can (Translation mine: Author's interview, June 2010).

I was surprised to find numerous stories similar to this one, in which material needs outweigh past ideological divisions among former combatants. And yet this should not come as such a revelation, as a former guerrilla combatant Valeria points out,

“Both soldiers and guerrillas once were[/are] poor peasants, workers, students. Coming from the same social background, same village, barrio, sometimes (and quite, quite often, same family). As the war ended there are evident...commonalities amongst us all” (Electronic Communication with Author: April 2011).

This kind of grassroots, organic peacemaking is especially powerful given the political polarization that continues to permeate Salvadoran society, and the efforts of political parties to further this division by drawing on war rhetoric while obscuring this reality, especially during electoral campaigns.

5. Political Parties and the Socio-political Polarization

After the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992, the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) and Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) became El Salvador's two main political parties, and positioned themselves at opposite ends of the political spectrum. Despite the two organizations' emergence as advocates of opposing interests at the start of the postwar era, their leaders' diplomatic experience in negotiating the end of the armed conflict was seen as a promising foundation for El Salvador's nascent democracy. The Peace Accords demonstrated that individuals representing opposing, entrenched ideological beliefs and interests could come together to reach agreements for the benefit of the country and its people. For many Salvadorans, the end of the war brought about the promise that the terrain for the negotiation and resolution of social, ideological, economic, and cultural conflicts would now be political, rather than military. In turn, it was assumed that belligerent wartime discourses would lose their acrimony, allowing Salvadoran society to heal the wounds left by twelve years of armed conflict.

However, this was a short-lived hope. As time passed, the ARENA and FMLN parties increasingly fell back on their tried-and-true discourses, capitalizing on the country's collective memory of war for their own political gain. Meanwhile, both parties blatantly embraced the state-led reconciliation process as a standard campaign trope. This approach for practicing politics has promoted a Salvadoran political culture that views the rival party and its members as enemies. In addition to alienating many Salvadorans from party politics, this polarization has paradoxically also created a space for the grassroots peacemaking process now under way in El Salvador.

During the war, ARENA's ideological discourse and economic policies provided the party with fruitful support from the military and upper class sectors of society. However, after twenty years of controlling both the executive and legislative branches of the Salvadoran government, ARENA's failure to reduce social disparities caused Salvadorans from various social strata to question the party's political-economic program for the country. In the post-war era, ARENA has advocated and implemented neoliberal economic policies such as the adoption of the U.S. dollar as El Salvador's currency and the implementation of a multi-lateral free trade agreement with the U.S., the Dominican Republic, and four other Central American countries (DR-CAFTA).

Meanwhile, the FMLN's ideological discourse, history of struggle against state repression, and proposals for the construction of a socialist society bestowed the party with wide support from poor, middle, and some upper-middle sectors of society. However, in the postwar era, many Salvadorans have questioned the party's lack of a concrete economic and political plan to achieve the promise of a new society. Since becoming a political party, the FMLN has readily opposed ARENA's neoliberal economic policies. Yet since the FMLN, in a coalition with current President Mauricio Funes, gained state power for the first time in 2009, the administration has continued with neoliberal policies. At the same time, they are implementing educational and healthcare programs directed at increasing access to these government services.¹⁸

As a considerable number of Salvadorans grew disenchanted with the performance of the two main political parties, both ARENA and the FMLN feared it would translate into electoral support for its rival. As a result, these parties found it more

¹⁸ It should be noticed that there is a lot of contention about who is ruling the country. The FMLN doesn't view this government as theirs.

profitable to polarize the electorate by drawing on old ideological discourses than to debate their economic, social, and political platforms for the nation – platforms that had in some ways started to resemble one another with the passage of time. The parties' ideological discourses and polarizing actions were viewed as devices to gain political support and access to state power, while at the same time obscuring the similitude of their political programs for the nation (Artiga et al: 2007).

The best example of this took place in the lead up to the March 2004 presidential elections. In 2004, *The Washington Times* reported that “during the campaign, leftist [FMLN candidate] Schafik Handal...has sung a revolutionary song from the 1970's, while followers of his right-wing rival, Elias Antonio Saca, have thrust fists into the air shouting, ‘Communism, No!’”(The Washington Times: March 17, 2004) That same year, *The Washington Times* reported on how ARENA had utilized its connections to U.S. officials to generate fear of the FMLN. “Mr. Saca [ARENA's candidate for the presidency] says an FMLN administration can't guarantee good relations with the United States and would jeopardize the work visas of the Salvadorans who live there.” In support of ARENA's campaign, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Roger Noriega travelled to El Salvador just days before the election and was quoted as saying that Salvadorans considering voting for the FMLN should think about “what kind of relationship a new government could have with us” (TWT: March 17, 2004).

The FMLN responded with actions that aimed to further polarize the political system and society. According to Dada, in the period of the mid-2000s, the FMLN reacted by “publically aligning themselves and creating closer ties with the Venezuelan government and proudly announced its fidelity with Cuba” (Artiga et al: 28-29). At the

same time, the use of words such as “revolution” and “socialism” became heavily used to describe and differentiate the FMLN’s governmental program from ARENA’s platform.

In examining the two main parties’ electoral politics and actions against one another, Rubén Zamora, a long-time Salvadoran politician and academic argues, “As the parties’ political programs become more similar, emphasis on the rhetoric is what they have left to gain electoral support.” (Artiga et al: 2007: 97) To exemplify this, Zamora juxtaposes text from the parties’ platforms leading up to the 2004 presidential election:

“The FMLN proposal, without renouncing socialism as an end goal, has adjusted its programmatic proposal to fit the framework of a capitalist and democratic society... (It) explicitly establishes as its vision that of a ‘rich country, a productive and prosperous society, duly informed, culturally advanced, socially just and in solidarity, free of the dehumanizing inequalities and territorial disequilibrium (urban-rural) that affect (the country) today; a democratic society, with freedom of religion, free of delinquency and safe, highly organized, integrationist, promoting a sustainable environment, directed for the well being of the people and the realization of the human being. A society founded in the self-determination of its people.’”

ARENA’s program seems to address similar issues. Zamora quotes:

“Within the renovated vision of the historical project of ARENA, the administration of 2004-2009 will have as its referential framework the following aspirations: To convert El Salvador into a modern society, rooted in knowledge, with high human capital, integrated socially and territorially, with general access to information, significantly oriented to reduce poverty and attainment of the common good; In the economic realm: to construct an inclusive and humane system, sustained by solidarity, businesses’ social responsibility and state subsidiaries that generate necessary revenue in the individual and social scope. In the political realm: to transform our country in a tolerant and cohesive, participatory, free society, that aspires to high levels of democracy and governability based on a complete application of the Constitutional Law, in permanent search for social peace.”

Even while the parties’ focused on hiding the similarities in their programs under ideological discourses, their actions have resulted in political polarization. The paradox is that this political polarization has not been between former guerrilla and army combatants, or among different sectors of the Salvadoran society. The polarization has been between the political parties themselves, and between the parties and the majority of Salvadoran citizens (Artiga: 2007: Dada: 2005).

The polarization between individuals came to light in my interviews. After being introduced as a U.S.-based student to a potential subject, a former army general, I started the conversation by introducing my research topic and mentioning my interest in the role collective memory plays in the reconciliation process. As soon as the general heard my last words, he looked towards his friend, the captain who had facilitated the meeting, and with suspicious eyes said, “Did you hear? Collective memory? Are you sure about this interview?” With his question and emphasis on the word *collective*, the general positioned me on the left of the socio-political spectrum, and thus hesitated to do the interview. Yet his friend emphatically replied to the general, “Yes my general, it is okay. She already interviewed Raul Gomez and me.” After this reply, the general quickly consented to the interview. Yet most of his answers to my research questions included long monologues about the classics (i.e. Plato) and stories about the origins of the war from army’s point of view, rather than his opinion on the topic at hand.

Similarly, individuals from the left received me with a mix of welcome and distrust. In a conversation with an acquaintance, a former rank-and-file guerrilla combatant, I mentioned my visit was to conduct research on the topic of reconciliation. As soon as he heard this, his demeanor changed from warm to reprimanding as he interrogated me, “Why is a *compañera* (leftist sympathizer) with political education conducting research on reconciliation?” For him, the reconciliation topic belonged to U.S. and right wing Salvadoran governments; in other words, “our enemies.” International organizations and the U.S. supported the Salvadoran reconciliation process’ focus on “forgiving and forgetting,” rather than dealing with the social and economic disparities that led to the armed conflict in the first place.

In a conversation with Roberto Diaz, an army captain, and Ruben Villareal, a former rank-and-file army combatant, I commented how the conversation with the general had gone. Villareal replied, “That is not rare. The people at the top usually think people would do them harm. They have their own (political) interests. During the civil war, many of us believed guerrillas, our fellow Salvadorans, were the enemy. Then, after the war, we learned the armed conflict was for the most part fueled by and for the benefit of the Cold War parties in conjunction with a small group of Salvadorans.” Entering the conversation, Roberto Diaz stated, “What happens is that political parties continue to practice a political culture that views tactics such as social polarization, defamation, and political violence as a way to do electoral politics. Many friends, who are army and ex-guerrilla combatants and civilians, don’t believe in (political parties or their supporters) anymore. Their discourses have not resolved our basic needs. Our well-being and that of our families, we have learned, depends on us and many times on the help of those same people who were our former enemies” (Author’s notes, July 2010). The topic of reconciliation, from a military conservative point of view, was for the most part welcomed. This was true as long as the person conducting the interview was not viewed as being part of the political left.

These interviews allowed me to understand that the polarization between the FMLN and ARENA has primarily served to increase the rancor between the parties’ most fervent supporters, their *militantes*. For most of them, communication with those from the opposing party is viewed as unacceptable. These “militants” are encouraged by their parties’ rhetoric to viewing the “Other” as someone who will cause them harm. These electoral strategies have normalized war attitudes such as distrust, prejudice, and the view

of the “Other” as the enemy. However, many Salvadorans feel alienated by these discourses and attitudes. This frustration has, in turn, given rise to a grassroots peacemaking process based on people’s own understanding and practices of what it means to coexist among “intimate enemies” in a highly stratified country (Theidon: 2004).

6. Reconciliation vs. Grassroots Peacemaking

As my understanding of the term “reconciliation” seemed to describe the organic grassroots peacemaking happening in El Salvador, I had assumed that the term was widely accepted. However, after weeks of conversations with ex-combatants engaged in coexistence practices, I realized that our conversations had a circling dynamic that avoided mentioning the word reconciliation.

For instance, in one of my initial interviews with Diego Lopez and Rafael Dominguez, two ex-guerrilla combatants who are friends with ex-army combatants, I asked them to what extent reconciliation was taking place among former combatants. They paused for a second, made a gesture as if they were about to address the topic, and then instead of doing so diverted the conversation to another topic. They narrated war stories, debated national politics, and gossiped about leaders of the mainstream political parties. But conversations about reconciliation were kept to a minimum. After several such conversations, I decided to ask some of my closest informants why people avoided mentioning the word “reconciliation.”

In a conversation with Roberto Diaz, a former captain of the Atlacatl Battalion (and friend of Diego Lopez, an ex-captain urban guerrilla), I asked him to comment on what reconciliation means for him. Energetically, as if he had been thinking about the topic for a long time, Diaz replied, “For me, reconciliation is, first of all, to recognize and accept within oneself the atrocities committed... I am a different person after the war.” Then, he continued, family reunification needs to happen. At the same time, there should be a “resolution with your former enemy, accepting that you were both the perpetrator and the victim of the violence committed.” In addition, ex-combatants must find “ways to

coexist with victims of war violence.” “But” Diaz concluded, “this is not happening in El Salvador.”

As at first Roberto Diaz’s comment seemed contradictory, I asked, “What about your friendship with Diego Lopez? Is that reconciliation?” Diaz began to answer with a similar beaming enthusiasm. “My friendship with *el chero* (a nickname for Diego Lopez) is an individual expression of reconciliation.” And, in the process of answering, his face lost some cheerfulness as he stated, “Reconciliation does not exist as long as socio-economic polarization continues to take place in the country.” For these ex-combatants, the term reconciliation obscures the power dynamics between the state and sectors of civil society, between various local communities, and between individuals in those communities. The state-led reconciliation assumes that “reconciliation” needs to take place between victim-survivors and perpetrators, and between ex-combatants who fought on opposite sides. Yet the social disparities that led to civil war continue to be in place.

As I further explored this concept at a local *comedor* (cafeteria-style restaurant) over dinner with Diego Lopez, Lourdes Maria (a former urban guerrilla combatant), and Rodrigo (a civilian who lost his mother to state repression), I told them about Roberto Diaz’s previous answer to my question about reconciliation. Lopez sturdily replied, “Reconciliation doesn’t exist. Having former army and guerrilla combatants sitting together is not reconciliation. Reconciliation would be if these combatants were friends before the war, then during war became enemies, and in post-war times became friends once again. There needs to be a rupture and repair [in order for a relationship to be understood as reconciliation]. Thus, what I have with Roberto is another thing; a newly formed, caring friendship.” Entering the conversation, Lourdes Maria states, “Some of us

work with former enemy combatants, and we have learned to have cordial relationships, but I would not call it reconciliation, either.”

Similarly, the discomfort with the term reconciliation and the relationship between former combatants and the broader civil society was revealed at the home of Catalina, a mother whose daughter was “disappeared” by the Salvadoran army. My informant, Diego Lopez, had invited me to visit Catalina’s home. After the customary greetings, followed by a serving of coffee and bread, Lopez announced, “She is studying reconciliation in the country. Do you think it exists?” Immediately, Catalina responded, “Of course not. How can I have reconciliation with those assassins (the soldiers)? They killed my daughter.” Her other daughter, also in the room, replied, “But the guerrillas also killed many people, and probably the relatives of those people feel the same way you do, but toward the guerrillas. I am not ashamed to say it: I am friends with ARENA people now.” The conversation about reconciliation evoked candid, vibrant, angry feelings. People who have lost loved ones due to assassinations or disappearances, reconciliation, as understood by the Salvadoran state, means to forgive and forget. This is a step many citizens such as Catalina are not willing to take without legal punishment for the perpetrators of crimes committed during the war.

As I discovered, the term “reconciliation” did not come from Salvadorans on the ground, and ex-combatants and members of their communities do not use it to describe their efforts to reconstruct the social networks and civil society of the country. I found out that ex-combatants most often use the term *convivencia* (coexistence). In an unplanned conversation with a friend at the University of El Salvador, I asked Diana Orellana, a former *guerrilla*, “What does reconciliation mean to you?” Uncomfortable silence

followed my question. Orellana looked at me, lowered her reading glasses, and gave me an intense look, a look that could have meant, “Did the *gringos* send you to do this research?” Instead, she burst into laughter, and with a big smile told me a story. “The other day, I was at a presentation in the law school building when a group of students and faculty started to talk about the war. I got drawn into the conversation and started narrating my experiences as a former FMLN member. A friend pinched my arm, and took me aside to tell me ‘Do not talk so explicitly about your involvement. You never know who can be listening.’ We don’t have reconciliation. What we have is *convivencia* (coexistence).” For Orellana, *convivencia* with people from a different political view is experienced not as reconciliation but as negotiation of spaces in light of concrete needs such as being able to work and generate an income.

These ethnographic moments paint the state’s official “reconciliation” as a top-down process that negates individual and community desires for justice and an inclusive social memory of the armed conflict. On the contrary, a reconstruction of the country’s social networks and civil society from the bottom-up, as understood by those who were themselves the perpetrators and victims of war violence, holds a potential to enlighten the creation of a peaceful and democratic society. These organic grassroots peacemaking efforts demonstrate that there is a lack of popular identification with the reconciliation concept. Moreover, for many ex-combatants and people who lost loved ones, the notions embodied in the term reconciliation do not form part of their sentiments and approach to everyday life. As a result, an alternative understanding of reconciliation, which I call grassroots peacemaking in the post-war era, has emerged. This is based on the need to

recreate ex-combatants' social networks in society and live among ex-enemies in a densely populated country that continues to be polarized by socio-political conflict.

7. Conclusion

In El Salvador, reconciliation is a contentious term. Yet the puzzling revelation is that no one seemed to agree with the state's understanding and practices of reconciliation. The state-led reconciliation consists of the implementation of two amnesty laws and the creation of a Salvadoran Truth Commission (STC), with its limited scope of power. While at the beginning the STC was viewed as an effort to usher in truth and justice, in the end it only facilitated the legitimization of the peace agreements and the newly formed state bureaucracy. The amnesty law, approved just a few days after the publication of the STC's findings, closed what little space there had been for attaining symbolic justice. Thus, the contentiousness is not a critique of the term itself, *per se*, but rather a refutation of the state's understanding of the term.

Ex-combatants' engagements in coexistence are in fact organic community and individual efforts to come to terms with the actuality that before political ideologies they share the same social background. While for the most part, scholarship on transitional justice would refer to ex-combatants' coexistence practices as "reconciliation," they themselves refuse the term as it is representative of the state's and the people behind state power type of reconciliation, "forgive" and "forget." Paradoxically, this refusal creates a space for what I call "grassroots peacemaking" in everyday life that include negotiations about what ex-combatants have done in the past, who they are now, and why and how they create communities. I suggest that "remembering" and "creating" communities have become part of a contestation against the common sense of: 1) the state's reconciliation and its practices; and 2) the socio-political polarization based on ideological discourses serving the interests of political parties. For many Salvadorans, including ex-combatants

there cannot be “reconciliation” with those individuals behind economic-political power that maintain and further social disparities.

As there are various examples of “grassroots peacemaking” taking place in El Salvador, many times led by former combatants, the political parties and their members could support these efforts by focusing their attention on the abysmal social disparities affecting Salvadoran society. Furthermore, many Salvadorans, including ex-combatants would have to create, develop and implement programs that facilitate the construction of a social memory with justice at its forefront. As a measure of redress for their involvement in the war, the international community, and in particular the government of the United States, has the responsibility to economically support these programs without directing them. I contend that such initiatives, if carried out simultaneously, will have a positive impact on strengthening the social networks of society and nascent democracy in the country.

To this end, ex-combatants who participate in grassroots peacemaking, and who have received psychological support, are a potential resource for the maintenance of peace. As survivors of the conflict, with the experience of war violence, their testimonies would contribute to the construction of a collective memory of the recent past. At the same time, as individuals who fought and perpetrated violence during the war, in post-war years many of them are among the most fervent advocates against state and social violence. The grassroots peacemaking processes that they are part of have a potential to plant the seeds for a much-needed social healing that will ensure peace in El Salvador.

At the theoretical level, I believe that expanding what is the common sense of “reconciliation” will provide a nuanced interpretation of social formations. This includes

making sense of why and how seemingly contradictory practices such as “not forgiving” and “remembering” become key elements for recreating social networks and in creating a new community in post-war societies. Moving beyond the general notions of “reconciliation” will help prevent social scientists from replicating power dynamics similar to those between the state and the community. These localized efforts to coexist and move forward as a community, although seemingly contradictory, reveal the potential of expanding the analytical lens for understanding social formation in post-war societies.

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9. VITA

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