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Reckoning with Violence: Counterinsurgency, Prisons, and Gang Truces in Los Angeles and El Salvador 1979-2017

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**Reckoning with Violence: Counterinsurgency, Prisons, and Gang Truces
in Los Angeles and El Salvador 1979-2017**

by

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Bachelor of Arts in Political Science
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THESIS

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The ideas of Alex Sanchez of Homies Unidos, a gang peace organization, have been crucial in the formation of this thesis. Specifically, he talked about his vision of "organic solutions" every time that I spoke with him. The gang truce in Los Angeles was one such example of a grassroots, homegrown, American solution. Wondering about organic solutions to violence guided the inquiry behind this work. I am also grateful to Alex for the work of the organization that he serves for the work that it (and he) has done in an attempt to bring peace, safety, and healing to Los Angeles and El Salvador. Another organization that played a crucial role in this work is the Southern California Library across the street from Manual Arts High School in South Central Los Angeles. For over fifty years, it has been chronicling the history of struggle in Los Angeles. The collection there honors and preserves the papers of Angelino activists who played a role in resisting connected issues like U.S. funding

for the wars in Central America and the rise of the mass incarceration state in California. In fact, many of the same activists worked on both of these issues and acted in solidarity with each other. Michele Welsing and Yusef Omowale were insightful, infinitely helpful, and full of interesting ideas. They often pointed me in directions that I would not have thought of. The Library provides an invaluable service to subaltern Los Angeles.

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ABSTRACT

Mara Salvatrucha is a street gang that developed organizationally in California's prisons in the 1980s and was exported to El Salvador beginning in 1992. Convicted felons were deported to their native El Salvador just as the Peace Accords brought an end to the twelve-year civil war. Most of these convicted felons had come to California as children during the civil war, and many had been present for the seminal gang truce in Los Angeles in 1992 and 1993. Some of those same gang members were also present during the gang truce negotiated in El Salvador in 2012. The latter truce was less successful because of the different historical circumstances.

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Introduction: Reckoning with Violence: Counterinsurgency, Prisons, and Gang Truces in Los Angeles and El Salvador 1979-2017

Sometimes very small places take on outsized importance, like that of a ruptured appendix. If the Americas were a human body, El Salvador would lie somewhere in the gut, quite literally in the belly of the beast, digesting the material of the North's appetite.

In the wake of defeat in the Vietnam war, argues historian Greg Grandin in *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism*¹ the United States turned to Central America to rehabilitate its military power and relevance, and to retell the story of how it would liberate the world from communism and revolutions against the capitalist social order. American elites invested resources in the civil war in El Salvador (1979-1992) and across Central America because the results of the region's civil wars would be important to the balance of power throughout the world. Sitting on the scales were both the balance of power between Moscow's sphere of influence and Washington's, and also the balance of power between US-supported dictatorships and popular movements. The whole world was changing; the slow end of the Cold War helped to bring about the end of Central America's conflicts.

Analogously, El Salvador absorbed the energies of the pan American Left. Across the continent, socialists, leftists, and activists of all stripes built active, material solidarity with the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN), and with social movements fighting for national liberation, democracy, socialism, and the ideals of liberation theology. Progressives survived the 1980s with their hopes and their organizing skills intact, despite the

¹ Grandin, Greg. *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism*. [New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 2006].

rise of the neoliberal paradigm of that decade in large part by organizing solidarity for social movements in El Salvador. The Committee In Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) became an important training ground for activists who would dedicate their lives to social transformation across the Americas and across many issues. The victory of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in 1979, the worker cooperatives that expropriated land in El Salvador, and the general uninterrupted struggle for economic and social justice across Latin America held out hope that a more humane and equal world was possible. Through support for the FMLN and the Sandinistas, progressives attempted to ride out the reactionary climate that Reagan ushered in the Americas. As University of Michigan sociologist Jeffrey Paige said,

if all this hope and valor did not create the utopia that some, perhaps unrealistically, dreamed of, neither did it leave the world unchanged. Central America has been transformed in fundamental ways by the tumult of the 1980s, which opened up the possibility of a future long denied to the majority of its peoples. To realize this future will require even greater courage and hope than did the armed struggles themselves.²

The legacy of struggle in El Salvador, then, is significant to the continent's ideological opposition to elite power. It is important to the continent's elite, too, because the isthmus has been a "workshop" of military intervention and a contested ground for competing ideologies. What happens in El Salvador has relevance across the Americas. The extreme violence in the gut of the Americas is a sickness plaguing the whole continent. Neither its roots and causes, nor its implications, are isolated to one part of the overall American corpus. The seismic disruption of violence in El Salvador, previously unimaginable in a society not officially engaged in war, is a call for reckoning.

² Jeffery M. Paige, *Coffee and Power: Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America*. [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997]. P xii.

One in fifty-six Salvadorans was killed during that country's civil war from 1979-1991.³ Initial peace accords between the guerrillas and the Salvadoran government were signed in Mexico City in 1992, and the following year airplanes arrived in El Salvador from Los Angeles, bringing a new civil war. The planes were loaded with gang member deportees from California's jails, and they kicked off a conflict between rival gangs, citizens, and the state that will likely kill one in fifty Salvadorans. This strange parity in the death toll, whereby the modern gang-state conflict kills as many Salvadorans per year as did the civil war, makes a certain point; there are ways in which Central America's civil wars have not ended. In 2015, El Salvador's homicide rate of 104 per 100,000 was the highest in the world for any country not in open war, and much higher than even Iraq.⁴ If it is America's most violent country, then it is simply the wound that gapes most precariously open on a pathologically violent and battle-torn American corpus. The body of the Americas is a ruptured, disjointed, violent, volcanic, young, beautiful body. It bears the geographic scars of mineral extraction, the historical scars of slavery and genocide, and the corporal scars of facial tattoos and war amputations. But it is also full of vibrant young energy and hope.

The role of the United States in helping to create the violence in El Salvador is well documented, though poorly understood by the US public. The following transnational story is clear to Salvadorans, but not to voters in the US: the US helped to fund a civil war that triggered a mass migration crisis in which a million Salvadorans left the small country. The children of

³ Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador*. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003]. P 8.

⁴ Associated Press El Salvador, "A Day without a Murder: No One is Killed in El Salvador for the First Time in Two Years," *The Guardian* available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/12/el-salvador-homicide-rate-murder-two-years>. January 12, 2017

See also Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015, United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. "El Salvador Human Rights Report 2015" <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/253225.pdf>

the refugees fleeing the violence formed Mara Salvatrucha in Los Angeles in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a self-defense organization. Many of those gang members, caught up in the penal system of California, were deported to El Salvador as the civil war came to a close, carrying the gang problem with them to El Salvador. In fact, more than 81,000 convicted criminals have been deported from the US to El Salvador in the post-civil war period.⁵ The story of the birth of Mara Salvatrucha in Los Angeles and its transnational roots is one that I set out to tell in this thesis, but I discovered that it had already been documented by journalists, academics, and the Congressional Research Service.⁶ While poorly understood by most Americans, journalism about Mara Salvatrucha usually includes a brief, almost off-handed sentence that reminds readers that the gang's roots are in Los Angeles. Even the US' Department of Justice (DOJ) acknowledges the Californian roots of Mara Salvatrucha.⁷ The story that I set out to tell about the transnational movement of violence is already well accepted.

Less well understood is what happened next. In Los Angeles, an urban rebellion erupted just as El Salvador's civil war was ending. The riots created an atmosphere in which a truce between that city's most notorious gangs, the Bloods and Crips, went from the vision, blood, sweat and tears of a few gang members to a city-wide agreement. A similar truce between Latino gangs was finalized in 1993. These two truces permanently reduced the level of violence

⁵ Steven Dudley, "El Salvador Prisons and the Battle for MS-13's Soul." *Insight Crime*. Available at <https://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/el-salvador-prisons-battle-ms13-soul/>. February 16, 2017. He is citing the US Department of Homeland Security's chart, "'Ex-Convict Dpeortees from the United States.'"

⁶ As far back as 2010, the Congressional Research Service informed Congress that Mara Salvatrucha came from Los Angeles. See the summary of Celinda Franco, "The MS-13 and 18th Street Gangs: Emerging Transnational Gang Threats?" Congressional Research Service, available at <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc505520/>. January 22, 2010. For the best journalistic description of the roots of Mara Salvatrucha, see Carlos Martinez, and Jose Luis Sanz, "El Viaje de la Mara Salvatrucha: El Origen del Odio," *ElFaro.Net*, August 6, 2012. Two academic sources that stand out are Donna de Cesare, *Unsettled/Desasosiego: Children in the World of Gangs*. [Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013], and Elana Zilberg, *Space of Detention: The Making of a Transnational Gang Crisis between Los Angeles and El Salvador*. [Durham: Duke University Press, 2011].

⁷ U.S. Department of Justice "Department of Justice Fact Sheet on MS-13," available at <https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/file/958481/download>. April 18, 2017.

in Los Angeles. Some members of Mara Salvatrucha who were involved in the negotiations would later be deported to El Salvador. Two decades later, in 2012, the FMLN-led government, with some marginal help from the Catholic Church, brokered a truce inside El Salvador's prison system between its two deadliest gangs, Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18. Some of the gang members involved in the truce had been active in gangs in Los Angeles twenty years earlier when the truce was brokered. International solidarity activists and gang intervention workers also became involved in the truce by talking to politicians and gang members who were brokering the truce and also monitoring its progress. The 2012 truce in El Salvador, therefore, was informed by what happened in Los Angeles in 1992/93. An international group of gang intervention workers, academics, and politicians, most of whom had been involved with organizing help for Central American refugees and solidarity with the FMLN, went to El Salvador to monitor implementation of the gang truce.⁸ In that sense, the 2012 gang truce in El Salvador was an example of grassroots transnationalism.

By looking at what happened in Los Angeles in the 1980s and 1990s, and what has happened in El Salvador since the implementation of *Mano Dura* "Iron Fist" policies implemented by the Salvadoran government starting in 2003, it became clear to me that the organizational structure of gangs in El Salvador today has been shaped by the system of mass incarceration in both California and El Salvador. The roots of the crisis wracking El Salvador lie in mass incarceration, as well as counterinsurgency doctrine as understood, developed, and practiced cooperatively by the armies both in Central America and in the United States. One major attempt at the grassroots level to reduce the levels of violence, a 2012 gang truce, met with

⁸ "A Window of Hope: El Salvador's Opportunity to Address History of Violence Transnational Advisory Group in Support of the Peace Process in El Salvador," (TAGSPPEs) Report on the July 2012 delegation. Homies Unidos archives, Los Angeles. Available also at <https://www.wola.org/sites/default/files/downloadable/Citizen%20Security/TAGSPPEs%20Special%20Report.pdf>.

only fleeting and limited success. The truce in El Salvador was not as successful as the one in Los Angeles because of the different historical circumstances in which it was brokered. By 2012, gangs in El Salvador had become entities fundamentally different than the Bloods, Crips, and Latino gangs in Los Angeles in the early 1990s. The legacy of El Salvador's civil war, Mano Dura policies and the militarization of the police forces (including operational death squads targeting gang members).⁹ Prison conditions and the international drug trade, as well, have helped to shape Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18 into the mirror image of paramilitary organizations. Additionally, in California and in the United States in general, the state is a viable entity whose hegemonic control of force is not threatened by gangs. And opportunities for economic alternatives to gangs that exist in California are absent in El Salvador. I had wondered if gang truces could be a universal part of the solution to violence, but found that the historical circumstances make the difference between success and failure.

Chapter one outlines the theoretical basis for the thesis by reviewing the literature on mass incarceration, especially in California. Following Kelly Lytle Hernández's recent and important argument that mass incarceration is one component of settler colonialism¹⁰, the thesis connects mass incarceration at home to counterinsurgency policy abroad. This chapter gives a broad overview of the period between 1770-1970, of the establishment of settler colonialism and mass incarceration in California, and the building of the Salvadoran military by economic elites in El Salvador and military elites in the United States. Counterinsurgency, I argue, was further developed in collaboration between military elites in the United States and in Central and South

⁹ See for example James Bargent, "El Salvador Strikes Against Death Squads Led by Army, Police," *Insight Crime* available at <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/brief/el-salvador-strikes-against-police-and-army-led-death-squads/>. June 23, 2017.

¹⁰ Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles 1771-1965*. [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017]. See Page 3.

America. Further, military collaboration is the essence of elite transnationalism. But counterinsurgency doctrine is not well understood by nonmilitary historians. It is particularly important to understand the connection between military and economic strategy in counterinsurgency practice.

Chapter two reviews the years between 1979-1993 in El Salvador and then Los Angeles. Mara Salvatrucha was born in Los Angeles at that time, and became a large, hierarchical, authoritarian organization in response to its members contacts with the mass incarceration state. It was during these years that civil war tore at El Salvador, and the chapter reviews US involvement in that conflict. Chapter three talks about the urban rebellion in Los Angeles in April 1992, and the two gang truces that spread across the city in the aftermath of the uprising. The rebellion did not create the gang truce; it had been negotiated by individual Crips and Bloods before. But the rebellion brought cohesion and a sense of urgency to the process, and it made urban elites rethink strategy. Funding for some of the programs that gang members proposed in the truce as an alternative to gang involvement were much more forthcoming after the uprising showed city leaders that funding for social programs was one alternative, and riots were, perhaps, another. Many of the gang members who would end up in El Salvador in the following decades, and many gang interventionists, academics, and even a few politicians paid attention to the truce negotiations and the lessons that they had to teach.

Chapter four returns to elite transnationalism to look at the collaboration between the US government and El Salvador in the period after the civil war, particularly during the era of Mano Dura in El Salvador, starting in 2003. The chapter notes a striking similarity in crime policy during which the Republicans held the executive branch in the United States and ARENA held

the presidency in El Salvador from 2001-2009, and when the US had a Democratic president, and El Salvador an FMLN president from 2009-2016.

Chapter five reviews the truce that was negotiated at Chapultepec Castle between the two warring factions of the civil war in 1992. This truce had enormous impact on how warring members of Barrio 18 and Mara Salvatrucha, as well as members of the government and the Catholic Church thought about and conducted negotiations for a reduction in the violence in 2012. These negotiators, too, were influenced by the gang truce in Los Angeles. Many had been in Los Angeles during truce negotiations in 1992 and 1993, others talked regularly to veteranos such as Alex Sanchez of the organization Homies Unidos, who attempted to translate the lessons of Los Angeles' process, good and bad. The chapter explains that the truce in El Salvador, which did reduce violence from 2012-2014, did not endure over the long term because it lacked institutional support, and because civil society in El Salvador is too weak to effectively assimilate gang members back into the corpus of productive society.

This thesis draws on a long tradition of English-language historical analysis about El Salvador. Greg Grandin's thesis that Central America played the role of "empire's workshop" in the period after the Vietnam War is useful but also has limitations. The economic analysis of El Salvador's elite provided by Jeffrey Gould and Jeffery Paige are complementary but also competing in some ways. William Stanley's description of the Salvadoran state as a "protection racket state" was formative for my argument. For an analysis of social movements, I draw most extensively on Elizabeth Jean Wood and Paul Almeida. For military analysis, the scholars who have been most useful to my work are Robert Elam, who has written extensively about the history of the Salvadoran military, Thomas Davies and Brian Loveman who brilliantly dissect the dual nature of dictatorships across Latin America, and former US Army officer Andrew

Bacevich, whose work provides a necessary broad overview of US military strategy, and who also is crucial to understanding how the US military sees counterinsurgency. Theorists of the mass incarceration state, particularly important California social historians such as Angela Davis, Mike Davis, and Kelly Lytle Hernández, have helped me to understand the role of prisons and the criminal justice system in shaping gangs as we know them today. Lastly, proponents of the theory of settler colonialism used to characterize the United States, such as Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, have helped to clarify the connection between mass incarceration and domestic policies, on one hand, and counterinsurgency on the other.

For primary sources, I looked at different types of truces: first the Treaty of Chapultepec; then the “Bloods/Crips Proposal for an LA Facelift.” These two truces happened concurrently in 1992. I also use transcripts of reports, such as the report of the Truth Commission for El Salvador (headed by Bellisario Betancourt) titled “From Madness to Hope.” I conducted oral interviews with participants in the 1992 and 1993 gang peace process in Los Angeles, most prominently Alex Sanchez of the organization Homies Unidos. That organization also gave me access to its archives, where I found reports from delegations moving back and forth between the United States and El Salvador in the hopes of strengthening the peace between gangs there. Sanchez, a prominent protagonist of gang peace and gang intervention work, now serves as an expert witness in US immigration court as a “gang effort” to give testimony about the viability of asylum claims based on the fear of gang terrorism. I interviewed other former gang members as well as the president of a transnational justice group based in El Salvador.

For historical context as well as some primary source gems, two archives at the Southern California Library in South Central Los Angeles were crucial. The first was an eighty-four-box archive of reports, newspaper clippings, and organizing tools saved by Michael Zinzun, who

organized the Coalition Against Police Abuse (CAPA) in Los Angeles. In addition to providing data, his archive helped me to see how social justice activists placed the truce in Los Angeles into the broader context of mass incarceration. It also helped me to understand how deeply transnational grassroots activists in Los Angeles were. As it turns out, there was much collaboration between people who advocated for reforms of the criminal justice system and those who built solidarity with movements in Central America. I was also able to access the archives of Carol Waymire, who saved the papers of CISPES in Los Angeles. Looking at these two archives together gave me a picture of what Los Angeles was like in the 1980s and 1990s, particularly from the perspective of grassroots activists.

I relied on a plethora of reports that have been published in the last two years by academic and policy institutes about the state of gangs and the prison system in El Salvador. The best items are one published in 2017 by Florida International University, titles *The New Face of Street Gangs: The Gang Phenomenon in El Salvador*,¹¹ and a 2016 Brookings Institution report titled “Inside Out: The Challenge of Prison-Based Criminal Organizations.”¹² Human rights reports provided by the US State Department, and reports by the Congressional Research Service have been important to my understanding of the situation in El Salvador. In recent years, the conditions in prisons in El Salvador have been central to human rights concerns.

At the outset, I thought that the most important contribution that I would make would be to talk about the transnational connections between Los Angeles and El Salvador. Very quickly, however, this thesis turned into an inquiry about what peace activist Alex Sanchez calls “organic

¹¹ José Miguel Cruz, Jonathan Rosen, Luis Enrique Amaya, and Yulia Vorobyeva, *The New Face of Street Gangs: The Gang Phenomenon in El Salvador*. Florida International University and the Fundación Nacional para el Desarrollo. January 2017.

¹² Benjamin Lessing, “Inside Out: The Challenge of Prison-Based Criminal Organizations,” Brookings Institution. [Washington, D.C.] Available at https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/fp_20160927_prison_based_organizations.pdf. September 26, 2016.

solutions” to violence. We need “organic solutions, American solutions,” he said to me in almost every interview we conducted. It was very clear early in my research process that the prison system was a fundamental part of making gangs what they are today in California and El Salvador. Prisons are recruiting grounds for gangs among young people. They also harden gang members’ affiliations. And in the era of mass incarceration, the near certainty that a gang member will visit prison gives gang leaders in prison the ability to call the shots on the outside. No one wants to face jail-cell reprisals for defying the orders of prison gang leaders. Similarly, militarized policing in El Salvador, and the impunity with which death squads carry out “social cleansing” of suspected gang members creates a climate of civil war. The militarized police give the gangs a reason to exist as paramilitary-style bodies. They have an enemy. Repression has made gangs what they are, and so solutions rooted in repressive measures like more incarceration or more militarized policing are likely to make the gang problem worse.

When I was a child in the 1980s, Los Angeles was the national bogey-man for gang violence, drive-by shootings and drug dealing. But the Los Angeles that I lived and taught in from the late 1990s through 2014 did not fit that picture. While the students whom I taught in South Central Los Angeles were absolutely affected by gang activity, the city had a much lower homicide rate than it had in the 1980s and early 1990s. The impact of the gang truce in Los Angeles reached farther into the fabric of society and farther into the future than the public realizes. On the other hand, the 1992 and 1993 gang truce in Los Angeles had the profound impact that it did for historically specific reasons. Perhaps different organic solutions to violence will arise in El Salvador; gangs there have become different entities than they were in California. Organic solutions depend on the circumstances.

One: Historical Background, 1770-1970
Mass Incarceration and Counterinsurgency in Los Angeles and El Salvador

This chapter exposes the theoretical roots grounding the thesis. It focuses on the historical development of two institutions, the prison and the military, in Los Angeles and El Salvador. From 1770 onward, policy makers in Los Angeles played a unique and leading role in the creation of the mass incarceration state in the United States. This chapter reviews the literature on mass incarceration. Concurrently, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a transnational constellation of forces built the organizational structures of the Salvadoran military. Throughout those two centuries, the military, in both its reactionary and reformist/populist phases, held effective power for the Salvadoran elite.

Military and police cooperation between nations are the most isignificant component of elite transnationalism. Militaries of cooperating nations work together to advance elite interests, usually by suppressing social movements. Counterinsurgency doctrine is the distillation of the military elites' strategy and theory on how to achieve their paramount goal—the maintenance of elite power. This chapter describes counterinsurgency as understood and practiced by the US military.

Los Angeles, Settler Colonialism, and Mass Incarceration

Los Angeles' geographical position may explain its unique role in settler-colonialism in the United States and the rise of the mass incarceration state. It was first an outpost in the Spanish conquest of the Americas starting in 1770, and later was a key location in the consolidation of the US' empire. For California political scientist Kelly Lytle Hernández, incarceration was a key element of “elimination” needed to complete the settler-colonial project

in California in general, and the Los Angeles area specifically. In her 2017 book *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles*, she chronicles the history of incarceration policies in Southern California. First, the city was founded in the Tongva Basin in 1771 by a struggling Spanish empire. Prisons were established to incarcerate the Uto-Aztec—speaking Tongva peoples who numbered ten thousand at the time of the arrival of the Spanish in an attempt to control their behavior, and thereby their labor. Hernández roots this trend toward mass incarceration in Los Angeles in the theory of settler colonialism.¹³ *City of Inmates* is the most comprehensive and compelling look at the link between incarceration and settler colonialism.

The theory of mass incarceration has received much attention in the twenty-first century. The criminal justice system has become the subject of an emerging literature that transcends the boundaries of what was previously called “criminology.” The literary corpus of mass incarceration draws on all the social sciences and contemporary legal scholarship to look at the systemic causes and effects of the dramatic increase in incarceration in the United States. Michelle Alexander, law professor at Ohio State University and former director of the American Civil Liberty Union’s Racial Justice Project, and perhaps the most prominent scholar of the theory of mass incarceration, argues in her *The New Jim Crow* (2010) that it is imperative to understand that the criminal justice system is just one part of a larger constellation of systems and practices that explain institutional racism. For her, this “web of laws, rules, policies, and

¹³ Some of the scholars of settler colonialism whom she draws on are Lorenzo Veracini *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (2010), Audra Simpson “Settlement’s Secret” in *Cultural Anthropology* 26 no 2 (2011), Patrick Wolfe “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native” *Journal of Genocide Studies* 8 number 4 (December 2006), Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz *Indigenous People’s History of the United States* (2014), Alyosha Goldstein, ed., *Formation of United States Colonialism* (2014), and Walter H. Hixson *American Settler Colonialism: A History* (2013).

customs... control those labeled criminals both in and out of prison” and marginalize people of color as effectively as the system of Jim Crow.¹⁴

A theorist as well as a historian, Mike Davis coined the term “prison industrial complex” to draw a parallel with the earlier phenomenon that Pres. Dwight D. Eisenhower presciently dubbed the “military industrial complex” to denote the fact that the arms race was the defining social and economic feature of the few decades from the 1940s-1960s. As Angela Davis points out, the term “prison industrial complex” includes the economic and political structures and ideologies that have brought society to the point where mass incarceration is one of its defining features.¹⁵ For the purposes of this paper, it is not important to choose whether to use the term “mass incarceration” or “prison industrial complex”; they can be used interchangeably to support the claim that I make here. The mechanisms of mass incarceration, including policing practices, high incarceration rates, criminalization of whole communities, and collection of intelligence data as a means of social control, have organizationally shaped gangs in general and Mara Salvatrucha specifically.

Scholars who have come to use “mass incarceration” are generally referring to five distinct phenomena: 1) criminalization of people of color in the media and political rhetoric; 2) imprisonment of a skyrocketing percentage of the population, far outstripping incarceration rates in any other developed nation; 3) sweeps, crackdowns, gang lists, and police harassment in targeted neighborhoods; 4) gang injunction laws in targeted neighborhoods; and 5) increasingly tough sentencing laws including sentence enhancement and collective punishment for gang

¹⁴ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. [New York: New Press, 2010]. P 12-13.

¹⁵ Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* [New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003]. P 85.

crimes.¹⁶ The political and elite class in Los Angeles pioneered the development of these technologies of the mass incarceration state. While Los Angeles' role as pioneer was not exclusive—these trends were happening nationally—the City of Angels played a more prominent role than that of any other city in the development of these structures and tactics.

Los Angeles is the carceral capital of the country. As a city, it jails a higher percentage of its population per capita than any other, in a country that has the highest incarceration rate of any other.¹⁷ The City of Angels, out on the rocky edge of North America, spent the twentieth century on the leading edge of the continent. Most new trends— in transportation, culture production, and economics— were manufactured or pioneered (at least in part) there. In the post Second World War period, human migration that brought waves of people up from the Jim Crow South, and then up from the Global South, concentrated them in its sprawling neighborhoods. The city faces Asia, and its productive population is substantially Latin American. The site of largest port on the West coast of the Americas and 150 miles from the Mexican border, Los Angeles is the entry point for all manner of commodities, legal and illegal. Into this complicated mix of people in the midst of massive urban deindustrialization, the technologies of police surveillance and intelligence gathering (counterinsurgency come home), and the legislative technologies of mass incarceration state as means of population control, were shaped.¹⁸

At the end of the nineteenth century, incarceration was used to control both Chinese labor and attempts by workers to organize resistance. At the dawn of the twentieth century, the

¹⁶ These five factors of mass incarceration are my best attempt to conglomerate arguments made by Michelle Alexander in *The New Jim Crow*, Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates* and Naomi Murakawa, *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America*. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014]. I find these three books most germane to my scope and argument here, although each of the authors draws extensively on a much wider set of mass incarceration literature and legal scholarship.

¹⁷ James Austin, Wendy Naro-Ware, Roger Ocker, Robert Harris, and Robin Allen, *Evaluation of the Current and Future Los Angeles Jail Population* [Denver: JFA Institute, 2011] and “Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2015,” Prison Policy Initiative, December 2015 cited on Hernández 1.

¹⁸ This is the conclusion of the sum total of evidence in Hernández' book. It is supported with additional evidence throughout this thesis.

Mexican dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz collaborated with LAPD to incarcerate Mexican dissidents operating in Los Angeles in solidarity with the Mexican Revolution. By the 1930s, the per-capita levels of incarceration in Los Angeles were as high as they are today.¹⁹ By that time, incarceration was being used as a means to control the booming black population of migrant workers moving from the US South to Los Angeles' Central Avenue. The concept of an "illegal person" had been born in 1924 with the passage of the National Origins Act, leading to the beginnings of incarceration as a means of controlling migrant labor. During World War II the entire Japanese population on the north east side of downtown Los Angeles was stripped of its land and moved to detention centers in the sunbaked and godforsaken deserts of the Eastern Sierras. By the 1950s, Los Angeles had become the carceral capital of the country.²⁰

If the qualitative shift toward incarceration as the dominant form of punishment happened in the early nineteenth century, a different, quantitative shift happened in the 1960s and 1970s. Starting in 1973, the era of mass incarceration began. Over the next forty years, the number of individuals incarcerated in the US would increase *tenfold*. This sheer volume of increase is isolated to the United States and can only be explained by its particular set of historical circumstances. They can be seen in microcosm in Los Angeles. In the 1970s, the city was cut open and robbed of its vital industrial organs. Between 1971 and 1975, blue collar Angelinos lost seventy-five thousand jobs, particularly in various manufacturing industries, including aerospace. Those jobs moved to the suburbs of Orange County and to Asia.²¹ The Black community, whose previously strong cohesion was built in part on the shared hope and circumstances of plentiful working-class jobs, began to stratify. Some Black Angelinos moved into the upper middle classes, and some joined the ranks of the political class, perhaps most

¹⁹ Hernández, 1-2.

²⁰ Ibid., 2.

²¹ Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles*. [New York: Verso, 1990]. P 304.

powerfully and symbolically Tom Bradley, mayor from 1973 to 1993, and Maxine Waters, a US Congressional Representative from 1991 to the present, and previously a California assemblywoman. Others sank into poverty and unemployment at rates unknown during the postwar boom era.

Many scholars mark the beginning of the “Age of Mass Incarceration” around the time of (and partially in response to) the Watts Riots in 1965.²² The first element of the mass incarceration state—the criminalization of people of color in general, and most particularly Black people—began around this time as a response to the Civil Rights Movement. In her insightful book *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America*, Naomi Murakawa argues that, beginning with the 1964 presidential election, the criminalization of Black people became a major feature of American politics. Republicans and Southern Democratic conservatives appealed to racism by using the coded language of “black lawlessness.” At the same time, liberals accepted an exaggerated sense of black lawlessness to make the case for social programs that they believed would help to ameliorate conditions of poverty. To white liberals, poverty was the problem that the Civil Rights movement tried to bring to America’s attention, and social programs were the answer. This is a condescending view if an alternative one is considered: that a healthy desire for total liberation (not just a desire to join the ranks of the middle class) explained the social unrest of the 1950s-1970s. Nevertheless, Murakawa lays out how liberal politicians took the lead in trying to professionalize prison systems and standardize sentencing laws, and arguing for federal intervention to monitor and oversee backward state prison systems.²³ In so doing, they wittingly or unwillingly played leading roles in many cases in the development of the mass incarceration state. Liberals did not challenge the

²² Hernández 195.

²³ See Murakawa, 7-12.

conservative idea that imprisonment was an acceptable solution to social problems, nor did they challenge the way that black lawlessness and the Civil Rights movement were being linked in the public mind. That liberals played a role in the creation of the mass incarceration state makes sense in light of Angela Davis' insight, described above, that prisons were initially seen as a sort of a reform which bureaucrats sought to professionalize and codify punishment, and to make it less arbitrary. That is precisely what liberals from Truman onwards sought to do, according to Murakawa; they strove to create a system of sentencing laws and regulations that would standardize methods of punishment across the country. Liberal Los Angeles politician James Hahn, described in chapter two, is a perfect example of what might be called a "mass incarceration liberal."

In 1973, five to ten years after the tide turned toward a focus on black lawlessness, incarceration began a precipitous climb upward that has still not relented. In 1973, about 110 people per 100,000 of the population of the United States were in prison. In 2010, there were about 500 people incarcerated per 100,000. This is seven times higher than other Western democracies.²⁴ Up until 1973, Black people were three times more likely to do prison time than their white counterparts. Since 1973, that rate has doubled; they are now six times more likely than white people to serve time despite the fact that studies consistently show that drug use and drug dealing happens at similar rates among all ethnic groups.²⁵ The federal, state, and local prison population of the United States stood at around two hundred thousand in 1972. Today it stands at over two million, and that figure does not even include people on probation and parole. The next chapter describes the acceleration of mass incarceration in Los Angeles in the 1980s and 90s.

²⁴ 2010 Bureau of Justice Statistics Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics cited in Murakawa, 5.

²⁵ Murakawa, 6.

Salvadoran Elite Power: Economic and Military

As the Central American republics won independence from Spain in 1821, the region's elite turned their gaze from the Spanish colonial system to the global marketplace. Working with other Latin American elites, and under the influence of more powerful states in Europe and North America, they set out to create modern states. The Central American republics split up, and El Salvador became an independent nation in 1841. In 1859, the Colombian general Jose Maria Melo professionalized the army, which had twenty thousand troops two decades later. Before 1864, the president of El Salvador was not the commander-in-chief of the Salvadoran military, and so the generals had enormous power.²⁶ Robert Elam has provided the best English-language descriptions of the building of the Salvadoran military in his "The Army and Politics in El Salvador 1840-1927," and "The Military and Politics in El Salvador 1927-45," published in Brian Loveman and Thomas Davies' seminal *The Politics of Anti-Politics: The Military in Latin America* (1978).

Jeffery Paige's *Coffee and Power: Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America* (1997) is a look at the economic base of the Salvadoran ruling class. By interviewing members of the families of the coffee oligopoly, using the archives of their Salvadoran Coffee Council, and drawing on the work of Guatemalan historian Edelberto Torres-Rivas, Paige attempts to understand the economic base of elite power in three Central American countries. Paige uses the direct testimony of the coffee elite to explain how that class held power from the late nineteenth century until the 1980s. He calls their class a "dynastic elite." The elite class was made up of the descendants of colonial aristocracies whose power was based on having wrested

²⁶ Robert V. Elam, "The Army and Politics in El Salvador, 1840-1927" in Thomas M. Davies and Brian Loveman, ed. *The Politics of Antipolitics: The Military in Latin America*. [Scholarly Reprint Books: Lanham, Maryland, 1997. Reprint, 1978.] P 53.

control of indigenous labor and tribute systems from native civilizations on the isthmus.²⁷ The new mestizo dynastic elite, consolidated under the flag of El Salvador, built its power from 1850-1890 by gearing agricultural production in El Salvador mainly toward the production and processing of coffee for the global market in the nineteenth century's newly fashioned imperialist system. They represented the transition from colonialism to participation in international capitalism. Many of the dynastic elites were European immigrants, especially Italians, such as the Cristianis, Borganovs, Prietos, and Meardis, who came at the height of the late nineteenth century boom. By the time of the Great Depression, seventeen of the twenty-four biggest coffee producing families were immigrants. Other families, such as the de Solas, Regalados, Alvarez, Mathies, and Dueñas, were descendants of mestizo elites. By 1895, almost all legislators came from coffee-growing families, and until the Great Depression the office of the presidency was monopolized by coffee families. These families founded the national bank, Banco de Comercio, and controlled electrical utilities, sugar refineries, automobiles, and investments.²⁸

Politically, the coffee dynastic elite relied on authoritarian rule. Oligarchic families built the modern military by blending rural private armed forces, and also controlling the organizational shape of the armed bodies of the state, because they controlled the official political system. The National Guard was created in between 1905-1912 as a rural force to control the Salvadoran population. Five Chilean officers, themselves trained by the German military, advised and helped El Salvador build the National Guard for the purposes of internal security and also to engage in external wars. In 1912, Spanish officers arrived and retooled the

²⁷ In El Salvador and elsewhere in Latin America, elites took control of the systems and institutions of rule from developed indigenous civilizations, as opposed to displacing them. Indigenous people were required to provide tribute or labor.

²⁸ Paige, 14-15 and 18.

National Guard as a “peacekeeping” force.²⁹ Officers of the National Guard helped large landowners to hire private militias, gather intelligence on labor organizers, and enforce labor codes.³⁰ The Treasury Police, a separate body, helped with these duties as well as border patrol and customs enforcement. The National Police worked under the direction of government bodies in urban areas. The National Guard, in particular, the future backbone of the civil war–era Salvadoran military, worked hand-in-glove with rural landowners. By 1924 the National Guard had one thousand troops and one hundred officers. The National Police were created in 1880 and reorganized in 1919. They were charged with keeping order in the urban areas.

As described in Jeffery Gould’s “On the Road to ‘El Porvenir’: Revolution and Counter-revolutionary Violence in El Salvador and Nicaragua,” the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a massive transfer of land from poor rural landholders to the coffee-producing elite families. In 1881-1982, laws were passed outlawing communal ownership of land, which particularly affected indigenous farmers. The coffee boom of the 1920s further accelerated the concentration of land in the hands of a smaller group of people, displacing whole communities. For the first time, most rural people were wage workers on the coffee plantations. The crash of 1929 hit the monocrop coffee economy particularly hard, and formerly poor conditions and the threat of hunger got worse. Rural workers and indigenous groups organized unions, protests, and armed pickets in a collective attempt to demand a solution to their hunger. The National Guard repressed rural workers and the indigenous movement, even under the tenure of the liberal

²⁹ Elam, 55.

³⁰ *From Madness to Hope: The 12 Year War in El Salvador*. Report of the Truth Commission for El Salvador, 46.

reformist president Arturo Araujo. Under Araujo's tenure in 1931, for example, the National Guard killed multiple people gathered at unarmed union meetings on at least two occasions.³¹

In December 1931, General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez led a coup against the Liberal government of Araujo and installed himself at the head of a military dictatorship that would effectively last through the Second World War. The Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS), which played a big role in the rural union organizing and had also become a contender elections in many of El Salvador's departments, was effectively outlawed. Militant activists in the departments of Ahuachapán and Sonsonate pressed for a radical response to the military coup, and an initial round of strikes in early 1932 were violently suppressed. According to Gould, Hernández intentionally provoked the left-wing movement in order to begin a process of social cleansing, even within his military. Maybe as many as fifty percent of the soldiers in the army and thirty percent of the National Guard were Communist sympathizers.³² Then in mid-January, the leadership of the PCS, under its interim secretary Farabundo Martí, reluctantly called for a general insurrection against the military dictatorship. In the popular memory, Martí wears the mantle of leadership of the insurrection. The army and the National Guard killed between ten to thirty thousand people in an event that has come to be known as the "Matanza."³³ They were joined by the Civic Guard, an irregular militia organized by rural elites to assist the army and National Guard in carrying out the killings. In western El Salvador at the epicenters of the uprising, especially in the indigenous strongholds of Juayúa, Izalco, Nahuizalco, and Tacuba, some two-thirds of the population may have been killed.³⁴ According to official U.S. policy at the time, they could not support any government that had taken power as the result of a coup.

³¹ Jeffery L. Gould, "On the Road to 'El Porvenir': revolutionary and counterrevolutionary violence in El Salvador and Nicaragua." In *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence During Latin America's Long Cold War*. Greg Grandin and Gilbert M. Joseph, ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). P 92.

³² Gould, 97.

³³ Gould, 88, Paige, 103.

³⁴ Paige, 103.

But the State Department began to covertly support Martinez as the best available alternative to the threat of Communism in El Salvador. It also supported his economic reforms, such as the establishment of a Central Bank and a mortgage bank.

Prior to the Second World War, Italy, Germany, Spain, and France were the main purchasers of coffee from El Salvador, and therefore they had an interest in the Salvadoran military and provided much of its training. The Salvadoran military was directed by a Wehrmacht officer in 1938.³⁵ The United States began an attempt to pull Central America fully into its orbit in 1907 and 1923 with the Treaties of Washington, in which the U.S. negotiated an agreement creating the Central American Criminal Court of Justice and establishing the principle of nonrecognition of governments that came to power through revolutionary means.

Consolidation of the role of the United States as the major power dominating in the affairs of El Salvador was not complete, however, until after the Second World War. In 1939 the United States sponsored a meeting of the foreign ministers of American Republics in Panama and were involved with the pre-war regime of General Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez.

To build an essentially pan-American military, the US government set up a number of bodies and training centers. The Inter-American Defense Board, through which the U.S. military began to send officers all over Latin America to train their counterparts, built permanent military bases, and used the lend-lease program to get military equipment to nations in its sphere of influence, became permanent in 1945.³⁶ From 1961-1967, the Conference of American Armies was held every year, and in 1963 the Central Defense Council of the Ministers of Central America was set up.³⁷

³⁵ Michael McClintock, *The American Connection: State Terror and Popular Resistance in El Salvador*. [London: Zed Books, 1985]. P 4.

³⁶ McClintock, 5.

³⁷ McClintock, 10.

The Army Special Warfare Center training facility opened at Fort Bragg in 1956 and subsequently trained many of the officer corps of the Central American militaries. Central American officers, and in some cases, entire battalions received training at Fort Bragg or on the ground in their home countries through deployment of Mobile Training Teams (MTTs), units of 12-36 Special Forces soldiers whose official duty was to advise armies in crisis zones. In the mid-1960s, the United States military collaborated with the Salvadorans to set up the Agencia Nacional de Seguridad Salvadoreña (ANESAL), the official intelligence body of the military that consolidated the various arms of the military that provided intelligence prior to that (state-run forces like the National Guard mixed with and the semiprivate rural Treasury Police and other police forces).³⁸ Conservative leader Roberto D'Aubuisson controlled the intelligence gathered by ANESAL while he gave orders to the unofficial paramilitary body ORDEN. Both organizations were set up under the leadership of General José Alberto Medrano and collaborated deeply with each other.³⁹ D'Aubuisson always had access to ANESAL's information and kept its archives even when he officially left the government and fled to Guatemala.⁴⁰

In addition to the U.S. Army, both the Israelis and the Argentines played a role in training the Salvadoran army.⁴¹ Some were also trained in Taiwan at an international training center set up by the World Anti-Communist League. In 1986 journalists Scott Anderson and Jon Lee Anderson published the results of their research on this international body in *Inside the League: The Shocking Expose of How Terrorists, Nazis, and Latin American Death Squads Have Infiltrated the World Anti-Communist League*. Based on interviews with World Anti-Communist

³⁸ Grandin 2006, 95-96, Sonja Wolf, *Mano Dura: The Politics of Gang Control in El Salvador*. [Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017]. P 27.

³⁹ *From Madness to Hope*, 124; Wolf, 27.

⁴⁰ *From Madness to Hope*, 126.

⁴¹ McClintock, 316.

League members and former members, as well as membership lists and the limited State Department files about the organizations and its funders (obtained by using Freedom of Information Act requests), the authors argue that “the Salvadoran rightist killing peasants today learned his methods from Nazis and their collaborators in Europe, and he did not receive this knowledge through the reading of books but through careful tutoring. This international transfer of the fine art of unconventional warfare was made through the one organization to which all the necessary groups belonged—the World Anti-Communist League.”⁴² While the authors may be overstating the centrality of this one organization to create a dramatic story of a conspiracy, the information about the deep levels of transnational collaboration among military elites is nonetheless worthwhile.

William Stanley, a political scientist at University of New Mexico published *The Protection Racket State: Elite Politics, Military Extortion, and Civil War in El Salvador* in 1996. He digests the work of Salvadoran historians such as Mauricio de la Selva, Rubén Zamora, and Guido Véjar, and also draws on his own fieldwork in El Salvador from 1987-1995. His work is particularly helpful to an understanding of the nature of the Salvadoran elite. Stanley argues that the Salvadoran army has become the main institution that can act in the national interest as a whole, and is the only institution capable of consistently carrying out the functions of the state in El Salvador. He writes that “[t]he Salvadoran military put itself forward as the institution capable of distinguishing the national interest from the particular interests defended by the liberalism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries”⁴³ Military elite do this by vacillating between reforms and suppression, depending on the most pressing needs of the day. The

⁴² Jon Lee and Scott Anderson, *Inside the League: The Shocking Expose of How Terrorists, Nazis, and Latin American Death Squads Have Infiltrated the World Anti-Communist League*. [New York: Dood, Mead & Co., 1986]. P xviii.

⁴³ William Stanley, *The Protection Racket State: Elite Politics, Military Extortion, and Civil War in El Salvador*. [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996]. P 69.

military performs a balancing act between three forces: the rural conservative elite; the United States government; and Salvadoran population (its minimum needs) to prevent uprising. The Salvadoran military has always resorted to brutal violence and called on its affiliated death squads to keep order as a measure of last resort. In 1980 US diplomat and Reagan advisor Jeanne Kirkpatrick said that in El Salvador, “traditionalist death squads... are the only institution that can transform brute violence into legitimate authority.”⁴⁴

Brian Loveman and Thomas Davies, Jr. put forward a comprehensive theory of the power of Latin American militaries in their 1978 *The Politics of AntiPolitics*. In Latin America under influence of US power, they argue, the national militaries always hold effective power. The governments of Latin America have a clientalist relationship with the U.S., and military collaboration is one of the main ways in which the U.S. presses its influence. In addition, argue Loveman and Davies, Hispanic capitalism developed in a particular way; it was an authoritarian and paternalistic capitalism based on nepotism, family ties, and tradition. In many cases in Hispanic capitalist economies the ruling elite acted like a benevolent patriarchy, and in other cases, they were an iron fist.⁴⁵ For these reasons, Latin American social structures were particularly hierarchical and authoritarian. They were also subject to intense imperial power by the United States. Under these hierarchical and rigid conditions, only the militaries in Latin America could provide modernization, economic development, and political stability. “Antipolitics,” to Loveman and Davies, is a form of power based on centralization of authority, hierarchical rule through administrative (as opposed to parliamentary) means, a “flexible” constitution, and common acceptance of a state of siege as a means of governance. Under an “antipolitical” regime, there are a set of political practices for systematic oppression and

⁴⁴ Quoted in Grandin, 2006 106.

⁴⁵ Brian Loveman, *Chile: The History of Hispanic Capitalism*, (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1979).

persecution of the opponents of a regime, and a nonrecognition of the legitimacy of protest and opposition. In El Salvador as in the rest of Latin America, the military holds effective power for the elite in El Salvador.⁴⁶

The brilliant insight of their analysis, however, is that the rule of “antipolitics” the disinterested, professional, technocratic power wielded by the military is always the real power undergirding the elite interests in El Salvador and applies even when the regime appears liberal and nonmilitaristic. Loveman and Davies compare different military regimes across Latin America; in nations with more developed capitalist economies with strong social movements demanding reforms, such as Brazil, Chile, and Argentina, the antipolitics of military regimes appeared more repressive and reactionary. In such places and at such times, military regimes can attempt to modernize through capital accumulation, which requires increasing exploitation of labor, and therefore suppression of social movements. In other places, however, where semifeudal land relations persist and the economies have not been fully integrated into global capitalist relations, and where liberal tendencies are stronger in the middle classes, military regimes can be populist, reformist, and even appear “leftist.” This was true in Peru and at times in El Salvador. The authors encourage a look at the continuities as opposed to the differences between military regimes that appear more reactionary and those that appear more liberal. There are different forms of military authoritarianism—sometimes reactionary, sometimes liberal— but these two forms of military authoritarianism share the goal of advancing the interests of the national elite in a global capitalist system.

There are times in Salvadoran history when military dictatorship has been naked and vicious in its repression, as in the Hernandez years between the Great Depression and The

⁴⁶ Elam, 102, and Walter Knut and Phillip Williams, “Antipolitics in El Salvador 1948-1994,” in Thomas M. Davies and Brian Loveman, ed. *The Politics of Antipolitics: The Military in Latin America*. [Scholarly Reprint Books: Lanham, Maryland, 1997. Reprint, 1978.] p. 327.

second World War . But there were other times when military regimes have appeared to be reformist and populist. El Salvador had a history of coups by “progressive” young officers who overthrew more draconian regimes and attempted to implement reforms. This happened in 1960, 1972, and arguably in 1944.⁴⁷ The tradition of liberal and populist military regimes in El Salvador (1960s) contributed to a great deal of disorientation on the eve of the Civil War in 1979; the officers who took the reins of power initially were economic reformers promising land distribution. The United States in fact, refused to acknowledge the Salvadoran regime as a military dictatorship and contributed to the false notion that the 1979 coup put a progressive military junta in place.

The post-coup regime initially included politicians of the left, and they pushed the Salvadorans to implement progressive land reform with measures directly borrowed from the “land-to-the-tiller” program in Vietnam. In Decree 207 issued in April 1980 tenant farmers were to gain title to the land that they worked.⁴⁸ This was not new, as the United States had pushed for the progressive land reform policies under President Arturo Molina from 1973-1976, even though the conservative landed elites had succeeded in stopping those policies then.⁴⁹ But the United States obfuscated the dictatorial nature of the regime. An “antipolitical” military regime is still a military regime, argue Davies and Loveman. As long as it maintains the authoritarian characteristics elemental to such a form of power, it vacillates between economic reforms and horrific oppression to maintain elite power.

Sociologist Paul D. Almeida’s book *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador 1995-2005* (2008) focuses not on the military *per se*, but on the effectiveness of Salvadoran

⁴⁷ Paul D. Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005*. [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008] P 136; and Walter and Williams, 327-349.

⁴⁸ McClintock, 25, and 261-267.

⁴⁹ Almeida, 136.

social movements. Because social movements in El Salvador have always had to organize against the military, his insights on military power are useful. Almeida provides copious evidence to support Paige's argument that the conservative element in Salvadoran society has always maintained de facto control of the military and that each regime, liberal or conservative, has been willing to resort to brute military force when necessary to maintain power.

Almeida roots his explanation of the dynamics of social change in El Salvador partly on economic changes that Paige fails to account for in *Coffee and Power*. A Central American Common Market was established in 1960, and although it disintegrated in 1969, a shift had begun to occur wherein Salvadoran elites were more connected to globalized trade, and more economically diversified than the earlier powerful class of the coffee elite, which was dependent on a single cash crop. After the first Free Trade Zone Law was established in 1974, export industrial zones were established all over El Salvador. Between 1960 and 1966, Salvador's industrial production grew from \$53 million to \$154 million. From the same year to 1979, university population increased tenfold.⁵⁰ The Salvadoran elite were becoming more industrial, more globalized, and more cosmopolitan. Colonel Arturo Molina, president for most of the decade prior to the civil war, formed an alliance with the industrial bourgeoisie. Almeida's argument about the shifting nature of the Salvadoran economic elite is more convincing than Paige's contention that the power of coffee elite made a comeback after the Civil War in 1992 with the presidency of Alfredo Cristiani, who was from a prominent coffee family. Today Salvadoran economic elites have tooled their economy for the global, service-oriented marketplace, capitalizing on the large numbers of the population able to use the cultural and

⁵⁰ Almeida, 113, 98, 109.

language skills gleaned in the United States.⁵¹ But regardless of whether one emphasizes the power of the landed coffee elite or the newly developing global industrial class, both authors agree that the military deftly positioned itself to represent the interests of these elite sectors.

Almeida's explanation for the revolutionary upsurge of the 1970s rests on the cyclical patterns of suppression and opening coming from the Salvadoran state. In the early 1960s, labor law was liberalized, agricultural cooperatives were formed, and proportional representation in the parliamentary bodies was introduced by a succession of liberal governments from the progressive military junta to Eusebio Rodolfo Cerdón Cea. It was the interplay of this liberalization and the return to repression of the conservative governments of the 1970s that fueled the upsurge of popular movements.⁵²

Counterinsurgency Theory and Preparing Central America for Civil War

Counterinsurgency, the ideology and practice of "total war at the grassroots level" became mainstream doctrine of the US military in the early 1960s under President John F. Kennedy. Counterinsurgency represented a shift in US military policy away from the "containment" strategy of the early Cold War to one of "rollback," in which the US military attempted to go on the offensive in the developing world to "take the revolution out of the hands of the revolutionaries" in the words of Special Forces veteran and political scientist Sam Sarkesian.⁵³ The literature on counterinsurgency is confusing, though, unless the term is taken to mean three distinct things: 1) a specific military philosophy and set of practices; 2) historically specific movement of US military officers and other policy makers with specific ideas for how to

⁵¹ See, for example, Jonathan Blitzer, "The Deportees Taking our Calls: how American immigration policy has fuelled an unlikely industry in El Salvador." *The New Yorker*, January 23, 2017. The article describes the fifty thousand Salvadorans, mostly deportees from Los Angeles, working in telecommunications call centers in San Salvador.

⁵² Almeida, 148-173.

⁵³ Grandin 2006, 89.

fight insurgency in the developing world (these officers, nicknamed “the COINdistas” are a faction of the officer corps of the US military and do not reflect the whole); and 3) a term colloquially used, usually by non-military historians, to mean irregular warfare against revolutionary movements.

First, counterinsurgency theory and practice as understood by the military is best distilled in *Counterinsurgency*, a jointly published field manual of US Army and Marine Corps while David Petraeus was commander of the US Army Combined Arms Center.⁵⁴ Shortly after its publication Petraeus became commanding general of US forces in Iraq. The manual draws on earlier literature such as David Galula’s 1964 *Counterinsurgency Warfare* (which had been the first source to discuss the advantages of “plausible deniability” in the case of paramilitary death squads) and Sir Robert Thompson’s 1966 *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam*.⁵⁵ *Counterinsurgency* is a summary of fifty years of counterinsurgency theory as understood by a section of the US military.⁵⁶

The manual’s target audience is US Army and Marine Corps officers who lead combat units, large and small. It begins by reviewing the history of insurgencies and their motives. The US Army is therefore asking its officer corps to grapple with the theory, methods, and reasons for revolutions in order for the officers to more effectively be able to cripple such social and political movements. Interestingly, the manual’s authors argue that counterinsurgency theory

⁵⁴ *Counterinsurgency*, Army Field Manual FM 3-24 and Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No. 3-33.5 [Washington DC: US Army Headquarters, December 15, 2006]. David Petraeus, Lieutenant General, US Army and James F. Amos Lieutenant General, US Marine Corps.

⁵⁵ *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24, Introduction.

⁵⁶ I originally came to understand the centrality of this document from an author interview conducted via email with military historian and former US Army officer Andrew Bacevich June 13-14, 2017. Douglass Porch’s book, *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of a new Way of War*. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013], considered the best military history of counterinsurgency, was written as a specific response to Field Manual 3-24 because that Field Manual has been so influential in the US military. See Porch xi. Therefore for the purposes of this thesis I am allowing that Field Manual to represent “official” US military theory of counterinsurgency.

became especially important at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁵⁷ They ignore counterinsurgent theory and practice as used against indigenous nations during the nineteenth century and before by European and American colonial governments. After the introductory chapter on the history of insurgency and counterinsurgency, the next chapter is devoted to “integrating civilian and military activities,” which describes use of economic development programs. The next chapter after that is devoted to “intelligence in counterinsurgency,” and these two aspects of counterinsurgent theory receive more attention than any other. This point is important because the integration of military and economic aid programs, and the use of intelligence as the most important tactical pillar of counterinsurgency receive very little attention from nonmilitary historians.

Establishing the legitimacy of the host nation is the ultimate goal of counterinsurgency strategy. The army field manual asks officers at all levels, down to sergeants in the field, to study the socioeconomic and political factors leading to the insurgency. Attention must be paid to “redressing the social, political, and economic grievances that fuel the insurgency.”⁵⁸ Providing for security of citizens and the rule of law in the host nation is one of the ultimate goals. In addition, counterinsurgency doctrine calls for “unity of effort” among government agencies and nongovernmental actors in an intervention.⁵⁹ What this means in practice is the integration of economic aid as well as NGOs with military strategy. Historically, this has meant that, starting with Kennedy and the Alliance for Progress, and continuing through to the US Agency for International Development (USAID), aid agencies have been part and parcel of U.S. intervention

⁵⁷ *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24, P 1 1-3.

⁵⁸ *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24, P 23.

⁵⁹ *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24, P 1-22.

strategies and tactics in other nations. Andrew Bacevich points out that US law mandates the separation of military and development aid.⁶⁰

But in reality, State Department cables from the 1960s until the present time present copious evidence of profound collaboration on goals between aid agencies, such as the Alliance for Progress and later USAID, non-governmental organizations, and State Department officials.⁶¹ Military historians list economic development aid along with military aid, tacitly acknowledging the fact that the two types of assistance go hand in hand. So, for example, Bacevich's history of the civil war in El Salvador lists \$2.6 billion dollars of total assistance from the United States to El Salvador in the period between 1979 and 1987; only about 27 percent was "security assistance," while the rest was "direct economic assistance."⁶² The integration of economic and military components of intervention are one of the technical mechanisms of counterinsurgency as described in the army field manual.

Integration of economic, military, and political goals and tools is one of the most important aspects of COIN as described in the army field manual. A second technical component of this type of warfare is that intelligence operations are paramount to tactical suppression in the field. The field manual explains very clearly that "Counterinsurgency is an intelligence-driven endeavor."⁶³ In modern counterinsurgency, the United States military provides technological assistance to militaries in the host country to be able to gather as much data as possible on rebelling forces. Data-collection technology, however, is only one small component of COIN intelligence. In twenty-eight detailed pages in the army's

⁶⁰ Andrew J. Bacevich, James Hallums, Richard White, and Thomas Young. *American Military Policy in Small Wars: The Case of El Salvador. Special report.* Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis. [Washington: Pergamon-Brassey's 1988]. P 13.

⁶¹ See, for example, Alexander Main, Jake Johnson, and Dan Beeton, "Latin America and the Caribbean." in *The Wikileaks Files: The World According to U.S. Empire*, [New York: Verso, 2015].

⁶² Bacevich, Hallums, White, and Young, 5.

⁶³ *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24, p 3-1.

Counterinsurgency bulletin, military leaders detail the importance of intelligence networks built of people, from informants to soldiers. “Intelligence in COIN is about people,” the field manual argues.⁶⁴ The goal of these networks is to understand the local situation, and also to create lists of insurgents and their organizational structures. Chapter three of the manual stresses the “joint, interagency, and multinational” nature of intelligence gathering. On intelligence information, perhaps above all else, the military elites cooperate transnationally.

Working as a historian, Grandin puts intelligence operations in their historical perspective; Latin American dictatorships, after all, were propped up by intelligence technology provided to them by militaries with superior resources. The United States has historically played a central role in communications infrastructure, data-gathering systems, and intelligence analysis in El Salvador by providing the technical infrastructure necessary for maintaining a dictatorship:

First, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, telegraphs, telephones, railroads, cars, wireless radios, repeating rifles, and automatic weapons allowed the state to respond more thoroughly and rapidly to threats. Then, during the Cold War, tape recorders, fingerprint and surveillance equipment, cattle prods, filing cabinets, typewriters, carbon paper, radio and other communication technologies, binoculars, cameras, cars, and helicopters contributed to the creation of an omnipresent counterinsurgent infrastructure.⁶⁵

The army’s field manual focuses on winning hearts and minds through economic as well as military means, and on the precise and effective use of intelligence information to identify insurgent targets and minimize civilian casualties. But some historians might object, there is a difference between theory and practice. As the counterinsurgent small wars in Central America

⁶⁴ *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24, 3-1 through 3-5.

⁶⁵ Greg Grandin, “Living in Revolutionary Time: Coming to Terms with the Violence of Latin America’s Long Cold War,” in Greg Grandin and Gilbert M. Joseph, ed. *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence in Latin America’s Long Cold War*. [Chapel Hill, Duke University Press, 2010]. P 2.

show, irregular tactics and death squads are a part of every intervention carried out in the name of “counterinsurgency.” To explain the disconnect between theory and practice, military historian Douglas Porch differentiates between “high option” counterinsurgencies (winning the hearts and minds of local populations through economic means) and “low option” counterinsurgencies (when armies are turned into “killing machines unleashed upon their own civilian populations”).⁶⁶ Colloquially, especially in nonmilitary histories, counterinsurgency is usually understood only in its “low option” form. Nonmilitary histories focus on the military use of unconventional tactics, and on irregular armed militias organized outside the purview of the state. El Salvador provides far more examples of “low option” counterinsurgency than “high option.”⁶⁷

On the other hand, it is important to pay attention to “high option” counterinsurgency because sharper analysis is needed of the integration of military and economic mechanisms of intervention. Also, the role of intelligence gathering in population control, both domestically and abroad, warrants attention in the modern world if a social scientist wants to be able to truly understand her government’s actions. And these two “high option” components of counterinsurgency have received too little attention. However, the disconnect between “high option” and “low option” methodologies gapes so wide open that it is sometimes impossible to tell whether a battle is an example of applied counterinsurgency theory or not. As Porch argues, the reality is that counterinsurgency “does not constitute a specialized category of warfare.”⁶⁸ For that reason it is sometimes most helpful to understand “counterinsurgency” as a specific and historically situated movement orchestrated by a section of the US military elite.

⁶⁶ Porch, 225.

⁶⁷ Porch, 224-245.

⁶⁸ Porch, xi.

In 1956, two years after the overthrow of progressive Guatemalan president Jacobo Árbenz, US military leaders set up the Army Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg in North Carolina. Under the leadership of William Yarborough, who organized Green Berets in Vietnam at a time when they carried out extrajudicial executions,⁶⁹ the Center trained military officers from across Latin America in “special warfare” techniques. In 1962 Yarborough travelled to Colombia where he met with military leaders there to learn from their best practices in stopping the emerging guerilla movement. He wrote a secret supplement to the Colombian Survey Report, in which he stated:

A concerted country team effort should be made now to select civilian and military personnel for clandestine training in resistance operations in case they are needed later. This should be done with a view toward development of a civil and military structure for exploitation in the event the Colombian internal security system deteriorates further. This structure should be used to pressure toward reforms known to be needed, perform counter-agent and counter-propaganda functions and as necessary execute **paramilitary**, **sabotage** and/or **terrorist** activities against known communist proponents. It should be backed by the United States.⁷⁰

From 1961-67, the United States organized the Conference of American Armies every year. During this time, counterinsurgency doctrine and practices were standardized across the region. In 1963, the United States established the Central American Defense Council of the Ministers of Central America for the purposes of information sharing, joint field operations, and of facilitating meetings of military leaders. A 1965 secret army report provided a roadmap for setting up irregular paramilitary units that would come to be known as “death squads” throughout the region.⁷¹

El Salvador’s longest standing and most notorious death squad was the Organización Democrática Nacionalista (ORDEN). The Salvadoran military built ORDEN in 1961 under the leadership of General José Alberto Medrano with the advice of the U.S. military through the US

⁶⁹ Grandin 2006, 96. Yarborough would go on to lead the COINTELPRO intelligence program in the United States.

⁷⁰ "Secret Supplement, Colombian Survey Report." quoted in McClintock, 23. Copy in Kennedy Library, Box 319, National Security Files, Special Group; Fort Bragg Team; Visit to Colombia; 3/62.

⁷¹ McClintock, 24.

Public Safety System.⁷² ORDEN began as a network of informants, feeding information about suspected Communist organizers to the *Servicio de Seguridad*, the national intelligence service that reported directly to the president. The state encouraged membership in ORDEN, even tying state jobs to membership, and its membership was recruited by active military officers from the military reserves. At its height, it organized at least 50,000-100,000 Salvadorans,⁷³ and relied on coordination from the officer corps of the Salvadoran military. Jose Medrano, architect of ORDEN, said “ORDEN puts at the disposal of the Salvadoran state and the most responsible actors of this country a civilian army that can be armed in twenty-four hours, that will defend the democratic system ...”

In 1968, during the strike organized by the teachers’ union, ANDES, the paramilitary squad ORDEN began its practice of physical disruption of protest, torture, and kidnappings. It would continue with these practices until the 1980s, when it was disbanded and became an official part of the state, known as a “Civil Defense” force. U.S. military authorities insisted that paramilitary organizations across Central America be officially disbanded, and reconstituted under the aegis of “Civil Defense.”⁷⁴ Proof of U.S. involvement in the training of death squads can be found in the testimonies of ex-death squad participants before U.S. Congressional hearings.⁷⁵ In 1983 Vice President George Bush visited El Salvador and publically stated that disappearances from death squad activities threatened the legitimacy of the Salvadoran state, and he insisted that they cease and desist in their activities. He gave the Salvadoran government a list of civilian and military authorities whom the US suspected of belonging to paramilitary

⁷² Wolf, 26, McClintock, 34-36, 204-209.

⁷³ McClintock, 34, and 205-207.

⁷⁴ McClintock, 342.

⁷⁵ Grandin 2006, 107 and McClintock, 325-345.

organizations. For a time, the number deaths attributed to death squad activity dropped.⁷⁶ In 1970, the US military sent a group of sixteen advisors to El Salvador as a Mobile Training Team (MTT).⁷⁷

As a mainstream military policy, however, counterinsurgent ideology officially fell out of favor in the U.S. military and political establishment during latter 1970s after it failed in Vietnam. In the 1970s, the Weinberger Doctrine, followed by the Powell Doctrine, attempted to erect a firewall between politics and warfare. The internal rifts in the US military establishment are explained by Andrew Bacevich, James Hallums, Richard White, and Thomas Young in their 1987 *American Military Policy in Small Wars: The Case of El Salvador*, written in 1987 for the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis.⁷⁸ Bacevich, a prominent military historian and a former US Army officer, helps to shed light on the military's understanding of counterinsurgency doctrine by interviewing its practitioners. In a more nuanced way than nonmilitary historians do, he explains that there are two schools of thought about counterinsurgency practice within the US military. And proponents of this particular set of strategies and tactics fell out of favor after Vietnam. But counterinsurgent ideologues and proponents of unconventional warfare, such as Waghelstein, General John Singlaub, Oliver North, Richard Armitage (who would become Reagan's assistant secretary of international security affairs),⁷⁹ all of whom had been in Vietnam and internalized what they believed to be its lessons of counterinsurgency, continued to push for the adoption of unconventional tactics of guerilla warfare tactics.

Latin American historian Greg Grandin wrote *Empire's Workshop* in 2006. His argument is that Latin America, particularly Central America, played a powerful role in

⁷⁶ *From Madness to Hope*, 26.

⁷⁷ McClintock, 327.

⁷⁸ Bacevich, Hallums, White, and Young, "Executive Summary." P vi-ix.

⁷⁹ Grandin 2006, 92.

rehabilitating counterinsurgency strategy for the United States after it fell out of favor with the US defeat in Vietnam. For example, James Steele, who led Special Forces missions in El Salvador and worked with Oliver North to run supplies to the Contras, ended up decades later training Baathist paramilitaries in Iraq. As the U.S. military shifted its gaze to the Middle East, “the Salvador option” became common parlance in the military for discussing the use of paramilitary death squads.⁸⁰

Counterinsurgency doctrine became mainstream again after Reagan’s 1980 election. John Waghelstein, the army colonel who did two tours of duty in Vietnam and then led the U.S. military team in El Salvador in the early 1980s said that “real counterinsurgency techniques are a step toward the primitive.”⁸¹ In 1975 he authored the work “Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Low-Intensity Warfare in the Post-Vietnam Era,” in which he argued that soldiers needed to be trained in “psychological operations, civic action, and grassroots, human intelligence work.”⁸² In 1981 Theodore Shackley published *The Third Option*, which proposed that counterinsurgent guerilla-style military tactics were most effective in the modern world. He counterposed these tactics to direct, traditional military engagement and the strategy of “sit back and do nothing.” Andrew Krepinevich wrote *The Army in Vietnam* in 1986, and argued that the failures of the US Army in Vietnam resulted from their reluctance to apply counterinsurgency theory. In 1986 David Petraeus wrote an article for the military journal *Parameters* in which he argued that the army needed to retool itself to be better able to fight in low-intensity conflicts. James Mattis, a general who in the 1980s was known as a leading intellectual light, who commanded a section of the Marines during the second invasion of Iraq, and now serves as Secretary of Defense, is known as a leading COINdista. So is HR McMaster, an officer during the 1980s whose 1997

⁸⁰ Grandin 2006, 87.

⁸¹ Quoted in Grandin 2006, 87, 89, 112.

⁸² Quoted in Grandin 2006, 91.

book *Dereliction of Duty* is seen as a COIN treatise, and who served until 2018 as national security advisor.⁸³ Counterinsurgency doctrine was not hegemonic in the US government, even during the 1980s. There were policy makers and US military officers who disagreed with the theory. Harry Summers's *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (1982) is cited as the most prominent example of the case against both the effectiveness and the morality of counterinsurgency.⁸⁴ The prominent general William Westmoreland, who commanded the US Army during the Vietnam War, opposed the nascent theory.⁸⁵ To officers in this camp, counterinsurgency distracted the army and Marines from the real ground war and wasted resources and personnel.

Counterinsurgency as the set of ideas developed by a section of military officers and high-level US politicians was prominent in the US government in the early 1960s under the Kennedy administration. It made its most prominent comeback in the 1980s during the Reagan administration, and then became the guiding doctrine for the Bush administration during the Iraq war. The Army Field Manual FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, was published as an effort to use counterinsurgency theory as the guiding practice of the US Army in Iraq.⁸⁶ Though it was published after Greg Grandin's 2006 book *Empire's Workshop*, the manual's publication supports his thesis that counterinsurgency theory was revitalized and retooled in the civil wars in Central America only to be carried to the Middle East two decades later.

At the level of organizational structure, strategy, tactics, technology, and information sharing, military elites of different nations collaborate profoundly. Though in the popular

⁸³ For an excellent explanation of the split between COINdistas and those opposed to them in the US military, see the following piece by US Army Major Daniel Sjursen, "The War that Never Ends for the US High Command: and It's Not the War on Terror," *Tom Dispatch* available at <http://www.tomdispatch.com/blog/176378/>. January 28, 2018.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Porch, ix-xiii.

consciousness armies are the most patriotic and nationalist of institutions, they are also (perhaps ironically) the most important site of elite transnational cooperation. Global elites share a goal, the repression of movements for popular power. Therefore, their armies also share and collaborate on intelligence and resources. In a global imperialist system, some militaries (such as Germany, Italy, France, Spain, and especially since the Second World War, the United States) have superior power and resources. Often technical experts from these military bodies have dictated the organizational structures of armies in less powerful countries (former colonies) through technical “advice.” However, the collaboration is a two-way street. Tactics and ideas developed in collaboration with military elites in Latin America have also transformed the United States military. Military strategists, especially generals, have distilled practices and theories that have developed out of collaboration with armed forces in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. Understanding counterinsurgency theory is therefore crucial to understanding global elite transnationalism.

Chapter Two: 1979-1992

The Salvadoran Civil War, Street Gangs, and the birth of Mara Salvatrucha in Los Angeles

The Salvadoran civil war (1979-1992) shaped US counterinsurgency policy into the twenty first century, and sent a wave of refugees fleeing north to escape political violence. The children of these refugees settled in Los Angeles and created the Mara Salvatrucha street gang. At the same time, Reagan kicked off the War on Drugs during his early days in office in 1981. His administration funded transnational antinarcotics policing efforts and supported military efforts of those governments, like Colombia, that pledged to fight “narco-guerrillas” (the FARC). Domestically, the War on Drugs justified a mercurial increase in incarceration rates across the United States. Mass incarceration policies, outlined in the last chapter, began in the 1970s most prominently in California, but in the 1980s the increase in incarceration rates accelerated and became national policy. At the same time, research suggests that some Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agents worked with Nicaraguan Contras to bring cocaine to the United States, much of which was sold on the streets of Los Angeles.⁸⁷

Mara Salvatrucha is one product of dual policies: counterinsurgency doctrine abroad; and mass incarceration policies in the United States. The criminal justice system in the United States did not create Mara Salvatrucha. Young Salvadorans formed the gang because of the social conditions created by poverty, mass migration, racist targeting of immigrant children by other gangs, and the lack of social institutions to help care for young people’s material and emotional

⁸⁷ Comments on the 1996 investigation of *San Jose Mercury News* reporter Gary Webb into the CIA’s role in running drugs and introducing those drugs into Black neighborhoods of Los Angeles is outside the scope of this thesis. Webb’s research was hotly contested at the time of its publication, but is increasingly accepted as other researchers cross-check his references as described in the following article: Ryan Grim, Matt Sledge, and Matt Ferner, “Key Figures In CIA-Crack Cocaine Scandal Begin To Come Forward” *Huffington Post*, available at https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/10/10/gary-webb-dark-alliance_n_5961748.html, October 10, 2014. See also Mike Levine, *The Big White Lie: The Deep Cover Operation that Exposed the CIA Sabotage of the Drug War*. [New York: Thunders Mouth Press, 1994]. This book was written by a former DEA agent.

needs. The professionalized and international structure of MS-13 in its current iteration, however, can be attributed to organizational structures forced onto it by the prison system, both in the United States and in El Salvador. The “managerial revolution in gang organization,” as it was dubbed by California social historian Mike Davis, took place in California in the 1980s and 90s, as described in this chapter.⁸⁸ While the prison system in El Salvador began to swell the ranks of gangs in the 1990s, the greatest impact of mass incarceration in El Salvador on gang structures happened after the Mano Dura policies of the early twenty-first century. Those later organizational transformations of Mara Salvatrucha in the penal system of El Salvador will be described in chapter four. What becomes clear by looking at the trajectory of Mara Salvatrucha, as well as the Bloods and Crips that made a truce in 1992, is that gangs have changed tremendously over time in response to historical circumstances. A “gang” in one country in one era is an entirely different form of organization from other groups called “gangs.” While painting these different forms of organization with the same brush may be useful to historians or journalists looking for a quick story, simplified ways of understanding gangs are historically inaccurate.

Salvadoran Civil War, Counterinsurgency Policies, and the Battle in the United States

Officers in the Salvadoran Army carried out a coup against General Carlos Humberto Romero on October 15 1979. For several reasons, it was not immediately clear to international observers or social movement activists in El Salvador that civil war had been declared.⁸⁹ First, El Salvador had history of coups by “progressive” divisions of the military that attempted to carry out land reform described in the last chapter. Additionally, the regime that took power in

⁸⁸ M. Davis, 300.

⁸⁹ See Stanley, 133.

1979 initially incorporated progressive young officers, and relatively liberal politicians such as Napoleon Duarte from the Christian Democratic Party, and because it promised land reform. However, shortly after the coup, executions began against anti-regime protesters. In early 1980, two hundred members of the militant and progressive teachers union, ANDES (National Association of Salvadoran Educators), were executed. By January, progressive young officers grouped around an organization called COPEFA (Permanent Council of the Armed Forces) were being pushed out of the junta. All civilian members of the government were encouraged to resign. By March 1980, when Archbishop Oscar Romero was assassinated, it was clear to the US Embassy that El Salvador was embroiled in civil war.

Starting with the Carter administration, the US government supported the military regime with monetary and technical assistance. In 1980, under President Carter, El Salvador's military dictatorship received \$70 million in economic and security assistance. In 1981, Reagan's first year in office, that aid jumped to \$200 million. By 1987, the amount of military and security assistance coming from the United States had jumped to \$2.7 billion. The Salvadoran military, which had 10,000 soldiers under its command in 1979, had grown to 56,000 by 1987.⁹⁰ It is appropriate to add the security aid together with "economic assistance" coming from the United States government to give an overall figure, because even economic assistance, often administered through USAID, was used to purchase military equipment. A "White Paper" produced by the U.S. State Department and released in February 1981 after Reagan's inauguration claimed that the tendencies toward torture and extrajudicial killings in the Salvadoran military were being brought under control. The United States funded and trained the Salvadoran military throughout the entire civil war without interruption except for two weeks in

⁹⁰ Bacevich, Hallums, White, and Young, 5.

December 1980.⁹¹ William McClintock's *The American Connection: Volume 4: State Terror and Popular Resistance in El Salvador* is an excellent aggregation of data about US policy and intervention in El Salvador. He reports on almost three hundred extensive Congressional testimonies on "The Situation in El Salvador" from Carter-era ambassador Robert White, to former Salvadoran army officers seeking asylum in the United States, to former Marines, and critically dissects the potential motives of the participants. He also draws on declassified State Department cables, Defense Department budgets, and research produced by America's Watch and the ACLU—based on evidence produced through Freedom of Information Act requests—about transnational military training centers where the U.S. military trained their Salvadoran counterparts (which moved from Fort Bragg North Carolina to Fort Benning Georgia). He also evidence that was being collected on the ground in the heat of battle by the Jesuit-run Universidad Centroamericana on the number of war deaths, to a "Dissent Paper" written by U.S. military officials and leaked to the press in November 1980.

Reporters on the ground in Central America tried to make sense of events and document patterns in the killing. In particular, Ray Bonner of the *New York Times* and Alma Guillermoprieto of the *Washington Post* documented what may have been "the largest massacre in modern-Latin American history"⁹² in December 1981 in El Mozote, Morazón Province in the southeastern part of the country. Somewhere between 700-900 people were massacred by the Atlacatl Battalion. The U.S. military trained the entire Atlacatl battalion, and the U.S. military high command had been grooming the commander of the battalion, Lt. Colonel Domingo Monterrosa, who had attended training schools in Panama as well as the Political Warfare Cadre

⁹¹ McClintock, 277.

⁹² Mark Danner, *The Massacre at El Mozote: A Parable of the Cold War*. [New York: Vintage, 1994]. P 10.

Academy in Taiwan.⁹³ The Atlacatl Battalion was one of several Immediate Reaction Infantry Battalions (BIRI) created in 1981 with the advice and technical support of US military advisors (others included Atonal Battalion and Bellosa Battalion.)⁹⁴ Mark Danner, an investigative journalist with *The New Yorker* during the massacre, later wrote *Massacre at El Mozote*, a superb review of all the evidence of what happened in that incident and in the years following. Because of his position with *The New Yorker*, Danner was able to interview State Department officials as well as former guerillas to assemble a complete picture of the conflict. Danner uses declassified State Department cables, reports to Congress, reports of Tutela Legal (the legal aid and research center sponsored by the Jesuit Order), and perhaps most interestingly, a report by the Argentinian Team of Forensic Anthropologists who were granted access to the massacre site in 1992 as part of the United Nations's fact-finding mission to uncover the truth.⁹⁵ What he describes in the book is a campaign of organized terror in which four thousand Salvadoran soldiers commanded by Domingo Monterrosa descended on small villages in Morazon Province and unleashed a campaign of total annihilation on villages accused of materially aiding the rebels. They particularly targeted El Mozote. After locking down everyone in their houses for almost a day without access to food and water, almost all the men of the village were dragged out and executed. The women and children were herded into a church, where they were dragged out a few at a time, raped, killed with machetes and bayonets, or shot. The massacre at the village was so complete that only one known eyewitness, Rufina Amaya, lived to tell the tale. Danner draws extensively on her testimony.

⁹³ Danner, 143.

⁹⁴ *From Madness to Hope*, 22.

⁹⁵ The role of Argentina is very interesting in this conflict, given its own struggle with military dictatorship. It was the second largest trainer of Salvadoran officers after the United States. (McClintock, 331).

The truth of what happened at the hands of the Atlacatl Battalion was particularly germane to the course of events. By that point, the United States had spent over \$200 million in economic and security aid to the new regime and ongoing aid depended on certification provided by the State Department that the Salvadoran military was improving its human rights record.⁹⁶ This certification relied on cables from State Department officials, such as Todd Greentree and John McCay, charged with being the “eyes and ears” of the U.S. government on the ground. But despite the fact that the officials never visited the site of the massacre, they cabled the U.S. government that “although it is not possible to prove or disprove excesses of violence against the civilian population of El Mozote by government troops, it is certain that the guerilla forces who established positions in El Mozote did nothing to remove them from the path of battle which they were aware was coming and had prepared for, nor is there any evidence that those who remained attempted to leave.”⁹⁷ Based on this report, the Reagan administration certified improvements in the Salvadorans’ human rights records, and the aid continued to flow. Ray Bonner, reporter for the *New York Times* (who, unlike the State Department officials, actually visited El Mozote) published a list of 767 people murdered in the province in early December 1981. He was removed from his assignment to Central America by the editorial staff at *The Times*.

Historians and researchers (prominent examples being Greg Grandin and William McClintock) describe the massacre at El Mozote as an example of US counterinsurgency policy, but this is a problematic description. In Grandin’s view, because the massacre happened under the watch of COINdista John Waghelstein, and because it was “step toward the primitive,” the massacre becomes emblematic of counterinsurgency practice.⁹⁸ The conflation of the irregular tactics of the Atlacatl Battalion and counterinsurgency is understandable, since Waghlestein

⁹⁶ Bacevich, Hallums, White and Young, 5.

⁹⁷ Danner, 110-111.

⁹⁸ See Grandin 2006, 89-91.

would later praise some of the Salvadoran military leaders who conducted it.⁹⁹ However, not everything irregular is counterinsurgency as understood by the military. The attempt to “annihilate all living creatures (human and animal) within the confines of the 30 mile area,” as described by eyewitness Phillipe Bourgeois¹⁰⁰ actually contradicts counterinsurgency theory as understood by the US military and as described in chapter one because it does not rely on intelligence (in fact, the Battalion was flat out wrong that the village of El Mozote was collaborating closely with the FMLN) but rather on brute force, which undermines the COIN focus on winning the hearts and minds of the local populations. This is important to understand because dictatorships in Latin America were offered a smorgasbord of tactics through which to govern. Pinochet, for example, explicitly rejected COIN because he thought that its hearts and minds approach was soft on terrorists.¹⁰¹ He saw torture and extermination as a better alternative, and therefore was more influenced by French *guerre révolutionnaire* theory. It is also important to note that within the US military establishment the massacre at El Mozote would be understood as undermining COIN strategy. Careful and quiet elimination of opponents based on intelligence is counterinsurgency; large-scale massacres are not seen as such inside the US military. Characterizing what happened at El Mozote accurately would lend credibility to a more important argument: that excesses of violence are nearly impossible to prevent once the US military helps to form irregular units and then sets them loose on local populations without supervision.

Further evidence of collaboration between the state and paramilitary bodies is provided in the 1992 report *From Madness to Hope*. The result of the 1992 Chapultepec Peace Accords, the United Nations commissioned a study of the patterns of violence during the civil war. From July

⁹⁹ McClintock, 307-308.

¹⁰⁰ McClintock, 308.

¹⁰¹ Porch, 233.

1992 until January 1993, Commissioners Belisario Betancur, Reinaldo Figueredo Planchart and Thomas Buergenthal carried out an investigation of violence committed in El Salvador between 1979-1991. They were commissioned by the UN secretary general as a result of the peace negotiated by the government of El Salvador and the FMLN in Mexico. Belisario Betancur, tasked by the United Nations with being Chairman of the Commission, was President of Colombia from 1982-86 and a member of its Conservative Party. He and Reinaldo Figueredo Planchart and Thomas Buergenthal, heading up the Commission, set out in the pursuit of the “overall truth and the specific truth, the radiant but quiet truth,”¹⁰² but had only about six months to complete this lofty task. The Commission directly received testimony from about 7,000 victims of serious violence, compiled secondary evidence from non-governmental organizations relating to twenty thousand victims of serious violence, compiled testimony of members of the Salvadoran judiciary, and compiled documentary evidence, such as that collected by the Argentine Forensic Team as well as abundant video and photographic evidence. Other sources from which the investigators drew most extensively were the US Embassy’s record of violence, Christian Legal Aid (El Salvador), Legal Protection (El Salvador), Americas Watch, Amnesty International, Fundacion Salvadoreña Para el Desarrollo (FUSADES), which kept extensive records of displaced persons, the Salvadoran Human Rights Commission (NGO), and the Interamericas Commission on Human Rights. The report was ultimately published for public release under the title *From Madness to Hope: the 12-year war in El Salvador*. 85 percent of acts of violence were attributed to those committed by the state and the paramilitary death squads.¹⁰³ The report documents, in as great of detail possible, extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, massacres of peasants by the armed forces, death squad assassinations, violence

¹⁰² *From Madness to Hope*, 4.

¹⁰³ *From Madness to Hope*, 36.

committed by the FMLN, and murders of judges. This evidence is now housed at the Foundation for the Truth at the International Rule of Law Center at George Washington University.

The report is an extremely useful overview of patterns of violence. In 817 cases, deaths were traced to paramilitary organizations and the commission discerned a pattern in which these deaths “ceased to be an isolated or marginal phenomenon and became an instrument of terror used systematically for the physical elimination of political opponents. Many of the civilian and military authorities in power during the 1980s participated in, encouraged, and tolerated the activities of these groups.”¹⁰⁴ Death squads involved groups of men dressed in civilian clothing, heavily armed and equipped with lists provided by intelligence services. These groups engaged in abductions, torture, and extrajudicial executions. The report found that these death squads were funded by right-wing Salvadoran families, and that a coterie of wealthy individuals would helped to draw up the notorious hit lists used by the paramilitaries. The Truth Commission felt that it should “inform the international community about what it was that, by commission or omission, caused the death squads to insinuate themselves so perniciously into the state structure.”¹⁰⁵ They were not an excess or an aberration, but rather central to military strategy as practiced in El Salvador in the period leading up to and including the civil war. Collaboration between official state security forces and extra-military organizations has been part and parcel of counterinsurgency.

The first three years of El Salvador’s civil war were the bloodiest, and those were the years of the highest migration of refugees. Migration peaked in 1982, with 129,000 individuals leaving the country. The Migration Policy Institute estimates that during the civil war, 25 percent of El Salvador’s population of six million (one and a half million) people fled the

¹⁰⁴ *From Madness to Hope*, 123.

¹⁰⁵ *From Madness to Hope*, 123.

country.¹⁰⁶ Before the mass wave of undocumented children arrived in the United States 2014-2016, the Institute estimated that there were one and a half million Salvadorans living in the United States.

As the Salvadorans arrived, and as reporters, US officials, and human rights workers battled over the evidence of what was happening in the US press and in Congressional hearings, social justice activists and Salvadorans began to build grassroots efforts to oppose the dictatorship and US funding for it. For example, in October 1980, the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) was founded in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. CISPES sent over two thousand people to El Salvador on peace delegations, and hosted and toured FMLN members that came to the United States to educate the US public and lobby against Congressional authorization of funding for El Salvador's regime.¹⁰⁷ FMLN members and activists in the United States organized a deep and ongoing collaboration. The FMLN sent representatives to the United States to provide analysis of the situation in El Salvador and visions of socialism to solidarity activists, speaking often on these topics and writing position papers for CISPES conferences. Together, the refugees and the solidarity movement organized to protest and expose US funding for the dictatorship, and to send material aid to humanitarian and political projects in areas controlled by the FMLN. The solidarity between El Salvador and Los Angeles was so deep that activists in Los Angeles received copies of death-threat letters from the death squads in El Salvador addressed to their compañeros.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Sarah Gammage, "El Salvador: Despite an End to Civil War, Emigration Continues." Migration Policy Institute, Available at <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/el-salvador-despite-end-civil-war-emigration-continues>. July 26, 2007.

¹⁰⁷ "History of CISPES" CISPES: Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador. <http://cispes.org/section/history-cispes/>.

¹⁰⁸ "CISPES Papers of Carol Waymire 1982-1992" archive housed at the Southern California Library, 6020 S. Vermont, Los Angeles. Accessed February 13-17, 2018. and "CISPES Papers of Rhoda Shapiro of the Echol Park chapter" archive housed at the Southern California Library, 6020 S. Vermont, Los Angeles. Accessed February 13-17, 2018.

This grassroots transnationalism laid the groundwork for some of the cooperation “from below” around the gang truce in 2012. The Transnational Advisory Group in Support of the Peace Process in El Salvador (TAGSPPEs) included twenty-four people who visited to El Salvador in July 2012 to monitor the results of the Peace Process. All twenty-four members, who had since become academics, gang intervention organizers, and policy makers, were involved in solidarity work with Central America in the 1980s.¹⁰⁹ Further, a few members of the fledgling Mara Salvatrucha gangs attended CISPES meetings in Los Angeles. Alex Sanchez, for example, attended some CISPES meetings and saw other gang members there, especially the ones who had gotten older and more mature, although they attended as individuals and not as gang members and left their gang affiliations at the door. “You could be in a gang and support some of that stuff as an individual,” Alex told me. “As people got deported, some of them joined the FMLN.”¹¹⁰ Sanchez was also clear, however, that the FMLN had no influence on gang ideology overall, and that some gang members sympathized with the FMLN, while others sympathized with ARENA.

As the Cold War drew to a close, the international community began to lose patience with the civil war in El Salvador. The key support for the Salvadoran government came from the US government. From 1983 onward, the US funded the government of El Salvador at levels that enabled them to continue to defeat the rebels, but not to beat them decisively. The exposure of the human rights abuses by the Salvadoran military in the United States media made it politically unpopular for the United States to continue to fund the war. The money kept flowing, however.

¹⁰⁹ See “A Window of Hope: El Salvador’s Opportunity to Address History of Violence,” (TAGSPPEs) available at <http://homiesunidos.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/09/TAGISTTES-description.pdf>

¹¹⁰ Julio Cañas is an example that he cites. Cañas, who is now incarcerated in El Salvador, had been involved in gangs in New York, where he was incarcerated. He was deported back to El Salvador because he signed a voluntary deportation order when he could no longer stand the deplorable prison conditions in New York, even though he eventually won his petition for political asylum. Back in El Salvador, he joined the FMLN and was also using gang structure to set up workshops for kids to learn how to fish and swim. But then he was reincarcerated in El Salvador. Interview with Alex Sanchez, Author, in Los Angeles February 22, 2017.

Henry Kissinger was appointed head of the Bipartisan Commission on Central America in 1981, and issued a report on the conflicts there in 1984.¹¹¹ He wrote, “[t]here might be an argument for doing nothing to help the government of El Salvador. There might be an argument for doing a great deal more. There is, however, no logical argument for giving some aid but not enough. The worst possible policy for El Salvador is to provide just enough aid to keep the war going, but too little to wage it successfully.”¹¹² Of course for Kissinger, who encouraged US support for dictatorships across Latin America, he would have wanted the US to provide more in military and economic support.

By 1985, the U.S. had spent \$1.65 billion in military and economic aid to the military regime in El Salvador.¹¹³ Former US Army colonel and military historian Andrew Bacevich, who has consistently written scathing critiques of US military policy, concurs with Kissinger that “the U.S. government as a whole mustered enough commitment only to prevent El Salvador’s demise.”¹¹⁴ He also argues, however, that the United States did not successfully apply counterinsurgency doctrine in El Salvador in the 1980s. For one thing, COIN requires a grasp of the “appropriate level of force,”¹¹⁵ and clearly this balance was not struck within the Salvadoran military. There has long been recognition that paramilitary units require close supervision by overseers within the regular military to be kept on a tight leash, and this was not accomplished in El Salvador. But the rapid erosion of support for the Central American wars that began in 1985 with the Iran-Contra Affair accelerated tremendously with the murder of six Jesuit priests and two Salvadorans in November 1989. Evidence had been mounting, but it was

¹¹¹ Greg Grandin, *Kissinger’s Shadow: the long reach of America’s most controversial statesman*. [New York: Picador, 2015]. P 191.

¹¹² Grandin 2015, 193.

¹¹³ Bacevich, Hallums, White and Young, 5.

¹¹⁴ Bacevich Hallums White and Young, 13.

¹¹⁵ *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24, p 1-25.

as though the debate about the human rights abuses was settled by this one event. Public opinion, however, does not determine when a war ends, unless that public organizes itself into a powerful force. The antiwar movement in the United States played a role in pushing the war to a close.

More importantly, though, factors internal to El Salvador forced both sides to the bargaining table. By the end of 1983, the positions of the FMLN and the armed forces were fairly well entrenched in the countryside, and a situation of “dual sovereignty,” according to political scientist Elisabeth Jean Wood, existed between the government and guerillas. She argues that the key factor in the effective control of the FMLN in some areas of the countryside was campesino support. Campesinos supplied the guerillas with food and accurate intelligence about troop movements. Their refusal to provide the military with equivalent intelligence was another form of support. In addition, guerillas received training and weapons from both Cuba and Nicaragua, and high-level military commanders even received training in Vietnam. The support from communist-allied nations began to dry up by the end of the 1980s, but by that time FMLN militias had gained valuable military expertise. According to historian Facundo Guardado, by the end of the war the FMLN fighting forces were 95 percent campesino.¹¹⁶ Under these conditions, it would have been difficult for the military to take the countryside by force.

The ARENA party began to restructure the Salvadoran economy in the late 1980s to bring it into line with the neoliberal economic policies that dominated the global scene in that decade. In June 1990, US president George H. W. Bush announced a plan to create a hemisphere-wide free trade zone, and the ARENA party was seen as a full partner in that elite collaboration. In 1991, El Salvador received a World Bank loan that was tied to structural-

¹¹⁶ Wood, 121-127.

adjustment stipulations.¹¹⁷ The World Bank stipulated that public subsidies for food and other items had to be cut, salaries for public workers would decrease, and spending on social programs had to be cut until the budget was balanced. They also mandated repayment of government debt.

Partially in response to scrutiny and criticism at home, the US State Department continuously supported the more liberal sectors of the military regime, for example providing overt electoral support to the liberal Alvaro Magana over ultra-right-wing Roberto D'Aubuisson in the 1982 elections, as well as the presidency of the most liberal Christian Democrat, Napoleon Duarte, in 1984.¹¹⁸ US officials also pushed for land reform, and reforms to the banking system, and asked the Salvadoran government to moderate human rights abuses as a condition of aid.¹¹⁹ The analysis provided by Thomas Davies and Brian Loveman in *The Politics of Antipolitics*, explained in the last chapter, is critical to understanding the US intervention during the civil war. Military regimes, the authors argue, are still authoritarian no matter whether they are pushing for progressive or conservative reforms. Therefore, the US efforts to support the more liberal wings of the military regime, or to coach the military regime to respect human rights or moderation of their more excessively violent tendencies do not change the fact that the US continuously supported a military dictatorship.

In 1989, three factors dovetailed to force the government of El Salvador into peace negotiations with the FMLN. The first was the increasing strategic effectiveness of the FMLN in its strikes against the military. Second, the Cold War was drawing to a close and the whole world was changing. The United States would no longer be able to justify its support in the same ideological terms. Lastly, the brutal murder of six Jesuit priests at the Universidad Centroamericana in 1989 was the last straw for an international audience appalled by the rising

¹¹⁷ Almeida, 194.

¹¹⁸ Danner, 140; McClintock, 351.

¹¹⁹ McClintock, 315.

level of violence. The Chapultepec Peace Accords, signed in January 1992, were built on the philosophy that truth was a necessary precondition for reconciliation. In Article Five of the Accords, “acts of this [violent] nature, regardless of the sector to which their perpetrators belong, must be the object of exemplary action by the law courts so that the punishment prescribed by law is meted out to those found responsible.”¹²⁰

Salvadoran Migration and Mara Salvatrucha

Neither the civil war nor the current crisis of violence, however, initiated the movement of Salvadorans to the United States. Poverty and political repression under the military dictatorships described in chapter one pushed Central American migrants to the United States throughout the post-World War Two era (although never at the same levels as the early 1980s during the height of the civil war, or the 2014-2016 height of the gang and government violence after the collapse of the truce between MS-13 and Barrio 18 in 2014). Still, between 1970-1975, for example, forty-five thousand Salvadorans entered the US,¹²¹ just as Los Angeles was gutted of its industrial base.

In 1979 at age seven Alex Sanchez travelled from San Martin as an unaccompanied minor with his younger brother to unite with their parents, who had left them behind with family members to seek work in the United States. They settled in the Pico Union area of Los Angeles, where most Salvadorans settled, and Alex went to Berendo Middle School, and Manual Arts, Grants, and Los Angeles high schools, frequently being kicked out for delinquent behavior. He was a member of Mara Salvatrucha in the early 1980s. He was involved in the gang truce in Los

¹²⁰ Quoted in *From Madness to Hope*, 5.

¹²¹ Gammage, Sarah. “El Salvador: Despite an End to Civil War, Emigration Continues.” Migration Policy Institute, available at <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/el-salvador-despite-end-civil-war-emigration-continues>. July 26, 2007. P 3.

Angeles in 1992 and 1993, and would eventually go on to found and direct Homies Unidos Los Angeles, an organization of former gang members who try to ameliorate the effects of gangs on young people's lives through various intervention efforts. I interviewed Sanchez several times throughout 2017 and 2018, and he gave me access to the records of Homies Unidos.¹²²

I also interviewed Jaime Martinez. He came from Usulután to Los Angeles in 1979 at age thirteen and joined the Playboys, a gang clique that preceded Mara Salvatrucha and was the sworn enemy of Barrio 18. He was incarcerated in California for thirty years on a felony conviction from 1983-2013, and his insights were invaluable in helping me to understand the impact of incarceration on gang organization.¹²³ Another Salvadoran who was present in Los Angeles as Mara Salvatrucha was being born is La Chele, who was born in El Salvador, raised in Los Angeles, joined Mara Salvatrucha at age thirteen, and is now living back in El Salvador. She was one of the main informants for the most comprehensive single piece of investigative journalism about the origins of Mara Salvatrucha in Los Angeles: "El Viaje de la Mara Salvatrucha: El Origen del Odio," written by Carlos Martinez and Jose Luis Sanz, and published in ElFaro.Net.¹²⁴

In the late 1970s, when Jaime, Alex, and La Chela arrived, the "maras" were cliques of young street gangs who identified as "stoners," "rockers" or *metaleros*, "metal-heads". They dressed in the post-punk style of Black Sabbath, and tried desperately to survive and assimilate in immigrant and Chicano communities dominated by much more established Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants. The maras were composed almost entirely of youth under the age of eighteen. They organized for protection, but also to form and guard an identity

¹²² Interviews took place at his office August 23, 2016; February 22, 2017; June 29, 2017, October 8, 2017 and February 13, 2018.

¹²³ Martinez, Jaime, author interview in Los Angeles June 29, 2017.

¹²⁴ Martinez and Sanz, "El Origen del Odio."

unique to themselves; they were Salvadoran youth who were cool, tough, American, and Salvadoran all at the same time. They began calling their cliques “maras” after the Spanish translation of the 1950s Charlton Heston movie *The Naked Jungle* (“*Cuando Ruge La Marabunta*”). The upside-down horns that MS members throw up as their gang sign (in the shape of an “M”) were copied from Black Sabbath’s tradition of showing Italian *cuernos* or horns in their stage performances.¹²⁵ They gathered at the 7-11 at the corner of Westmoreland and Berendo. Salvadoran gangs expressed deference to organized gangs like Barrio 18 as well as the Mexican Mafia. Mexican gangs had been organizing in Los Angeles since the 1920s, when Zoot Suiters formed the Clanton Street gang. In the aftermath of the Second World War, as a defensive response to racist attacks on their neighborhoods by white mobs, particularly sailors, many Latino gangs became more organized. Barrio 18 came to dominate the Latin gang scene in the postwar period, perhaps because the Mexican gang also accepted other Latino immigrants.¹²⁶

The Mexican Mafia, Los Señores, on the other hand, came to dominate the prison scene after their formation in a detention center in 1957.¹²⁷ By the 1980s the Mexican Mafia (“la Eme”) were so dominant in the prisons that Mara Salvatrucha, whose members were incarcerated in rapidly accelerating numbers in the 1980s, had to show respect and deference and pay the equivalent of prison tribute. As a symbol of this, they added the number 13 on to the end of Mara Salvatrucha, transforming themselves into MS-13. The Mexican Mafia uses the number thirteen as another name for itself because *la eme* is the thirteenth letter in the alphabet.¹²⁸

In his classic work *The American Street Gang*, sociologist Malcolm Klein makes a compelling case that street gang cliques are a phenomenon different than organized and

¹²⁵ Martinez and Sanz, “El Origen del Odio;” and Ioan Grillo, *Drug Dollars, Killing Fields, and the New Politics of Latin America*. [New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2016]. P 196-204.

¹²⁶ Sanchez, Author interview, June 29, 2017.

¹²⁷ Grillo, 199.

¹²⁸ Martinez and Sanz.

hierarchical criminal enterprises. In the most common form that they took in most American cities throughout most of the twentieth century, street gangs were informal and loosely organized. Their *raison d'être* was to give a sense of identity and basic low-level protection to their young members. They were loosely structured and nonhierarchical. They were not oriented, in the main, to the drug trade, and criminal activity was wide-ranging and random. Street fights over territory, while violent, mostly did not end in death. Klein interviewed eight hundred gang members over thirty years for his research. He also drew on the files and databases of the Drug Enforcement Agency and the FBI, to which he had access as a researcher working for the National Institute for Justice. His conclusion was that “the primary thrusts [for gang membership] have more to do with identity, status, companionship, and perceived protection against perceived threats.”¹²⁹ While the causes for joining gangs were not the primary subject of his book, he did make a hard argument that a desire to commit crime is not what drove young people into gangs. Nor was the *raison d'être* for street gangs made up of young people the drug sales that they are associated with. Rather the needs for identity and status were intertwined with the need for physical protection, housing and food support, and love. All of these social conditions worked together to push young people to create organizations or institutions of their own; no one cause could be isolated from the other, or could be seen as more important. In an implicit acknowledgment of this, most of the gang intervention programs that Klein describes asked intervention workers to provide sympathy, acceptance, affection, and understanding to gang members.¹³⁰

The Salvadoran *maras* that existed in both Los Angeles and El Salvador concurrently from the 1970s to the mid-1980s perfectly fit the picture of the classic street gang. In El

¹²⁹ Malcom M. Klein, *The American Street Gang: Its Nature, Prevalence, and Control*. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995] P 179.

¹³⁰ Klein, 137, and 142-143.

Salvador, for example, the indigenous street gang cliques in the 1970s had names like Mara Gauchos Locos 13, Los Valerios, Los Meli 13, Los Chancletas, and Los Uvas. Gang members for the most part were not armed with guns, and their activities mainly consisted of fighting at parties. It was precisely these cliques that would later be organized into the larger criminal enterprises of Mara Salvatrucha by deportees from Los Angeles.¹³¹ In Los Angeles they provided identity and protection to massive waves of middle and high school-aged Salvadorans escaping the violence of one country only to find themselves threatened by already-organized gangs, vigilante and state violence in California. Mike Davis called gangs “family for the forgotten, a total solidarity (like national or religious fervor) closing out other empathies and transmuting self-hatred into tribal rage.”¹³²

Klein’s arguments about the driving forces behind youth street gangs during the time period from WWII to the 1990s, as well as their loose, diverse, and disorganized nature, are supported by all the interviews with gang members that I have conducted, and also those described in the journalistic literature. In addition to the investigative piece in *El Faro*, “*El Origen del Odio*,” already described, the best journalism narrating the early days of Mara Salvatrucha are photojournalist Donna DeCesare’s *Unsettled/Desasosiego: Children in the World of Gangs* (2013) and journalist Ioan Grillo’s *Gangster Warlords: Drug Dollars, Killing Fields, and the New Politics of Latin America* on the origins of Mara Salvatrucha in Los Angeles (2016).

¹³¹ These particular examples are from Atiquizaya in Ahuacapan province. The cliques there retained street-gang, disorganized clique behavior until the early 2000s, when Chepe Furia, deported from the United States, organized them into a section of Mara Salvatrucha. This is according to Oscar Martinez, *A History of Violence: Living and Dying in El Salvador*. [New York: Verso, 2016]. P 7. Fodder for deportees from the United States to organize into criminal enterprises included orphans (either orphaned by the civil war or by economic migration) and also demobilized guerillas as well as young soldiers from the Salvadoran military forces. Grillo, 204.

¹³² M. Davis, 315.

Grillo reports on Luis “Crazy Belly” Romero, for example, who moved to Los Angeles from San Salvador in 1980 to escape recruitment into the Salvadoran military at age fifteen. When Luis got to Los Angeles in late 1980, he was exposed to drugs in his aunt’s household. He became addicted, was not able to provide for his aunt’s family in the way that she wanted him to by doing undocumented jobs, and he was kicked out of her house. As an adolescent, he ended up homeless and drug addicted in the Shatto Park neighborhood, where he met a Barrio 18 gangster named Shaggy. Romero recalls: “He give me a big shirt with tirantes [braces], a nice pair of shoes, and he let me use his sombrero. He said you look nice right now. They dress me up like Tintan [a Mexican comic]. I was looking so good, man. They was nice with me. The girl, she see me all dressed, and she even make me sex. I took them like my family. They give me money, they call me Pancita Loca.”¹³³

¹³³ Grillo, 197-198.

Chapter Three: Policing Counterinsurgency, Gang Transformation, and the Gang Truce in Los Angeles 1985-1996

Mass Incarceration in Los Angeles and the Professionalization of MS-13

By the mid 1980s, however, gangs began to change in terms of their purpose, organizational structure, and modus operandi. A process of diversification started, whereby gangs took on entirely different characteristics depending on their geographical location and historical circumstances. Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18 in El Salvador began a dramatic divergence from those organizations in Los Angeles. Later, MS-13 on the East Coast of the United States would look different from gangs in El Salvador or in California. A gang is a product of its environment and historical situation. The dramatic changes in Mara Salvatrucha in El Salvador can largely be attributed to the conditions that gang members encountered in a postwar society that lacked economic reconstruction and failed to follow through on plans for truth and reconciliation. In California, the “managerial revolution” in gangs that began in the 1980s was largely a response to the policies of mass incarceration, and later a response to the gang truce in Los Angeles in 1992 and 1993.

In the popular memory, the 1984 Olympics, hosted in Los Angeles, was the impetus for the “cleansing” of the streets. At the end of the Cold War, it was important to the leaders of capitalist America to project an image of a thriving, clean, and vibrant city. Gang member La Chela described to ElFaro journalists Carlos Martinez and Saenz the impression of young Latinos that they were being swept from the streets to transform the image of the city. In the immediate aftermath of the bloodiest three years of El Salvador’s civil war, the streets of Los Angeles were filled with thousands of new arrivals from Central America struggling to survive. Many of these Central American young people found themselves caught up in the street-level

detentions that would characterize the rest of the 1980s, and thrown in jail cells with gang members from an estimated seventy-five other gangs in Los Angeles at the time. New arrivals like La Chela were shocked at the level of police crackdown that they witnessed. Malcolm Klein explains that these raids were “extensions, often military style, of already available tactics. Harassment, control, winning the ‘war against gangs’ are both means and goals, with tactics seldom related to any meaningful understanding of target groups.”¹³⁴ One out of every twelve children between the ages of eleven and seventeen in Los Angeles were arrested between 1984 and 1994, half for serious felonies.¹³⁵

But the “social cleansing” in Los Angeles, shocking some of the young people who saw a rapid shift, was part of a national movement, the War on Drugs. This set of policies began in political rhetoric and in legislation in the early days of the Reagan administration. The US House set aside \$2 billion for an antidrug campaign that involved the participation of the military in antinarcotics efforts. The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 introduced the infamous mandatory minimum sentences that punished crack dealers and users far more severely than those who dealt or used cocaine.¹³⁶ The racial implications were clear; the percentage of black prisoners increased at the same time as the overall rate of incarceration. Los Angeles became a national symbol in the media and in political rhetoric of the “crack blizzard” hitting the United States. The fact that the CIA was involved in the ring of people, which included the Contras in Nicaragua, supplying crack to South Central Los Angeles would not be exposed until Gary Webb wrote his 1996 expose in the *San Jose Mercury News*.¹³⁷ Immediately, community organizers in Los Angeles, in cooperation with US Representative Maxine Waters, began to

¹³⁴ Klein, 161.

¹³⁵ M. Davis, 287.

¹³⁶ Alexander, 53.

¹³⁷ Grim, Sledge, and Ferner.

organize community forums and protests demanding accountability for the US government's role in the devastating scourge of crack addiction in Los Angeles.¹³⁸

The year 1988 was a turning point in Los Angeles. The development of these phenomena are described in intimate journalistic detail in Mike Davis' 1991 *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles*, based on a broad overview of news sources in Los Angeles as well as interviews with victims of the drug wars and activists who resisted the policies. Authorities began to apply the word "terrorism" to gang members and drug dealers. That year, a California bill that became legislation known as the Street Terrorism and Enforcement Act (STEP) stated that "the legislature hereby recognizes that street gangs are involved in terrorism."¹³⁹ Granted permission to equate gang activity and terrorism, the media were off to the races, and soon began to paint a picture of urban youth of color in general that the public equated with terrorism. Thus the War on Drugs, the War on Gangs, and beginnings of the War on Terror became equated in the public imagination. The LAPD and the Los Angeles Sheriffs placed their boots and tactics firmly within the geopolitical movement of counterinsurgent efforts to defeat terrorists and drug dealers by any means necessary. By 1993, STEP legislation had spread to fourteen states.¹⁴⁰

Foucault's description of "technologies of behavior" is a useful concept.¹⁴¹ Technologies should be seen as particular laws, surveillance techniques, and the techniques of repression as a means of population control. Five prominent Los Angeles men, while none of them invented the various technologies described below themselves, can be seen as symbols for different technologies of behavior in Los Angeles. And techniques that were invented in Los Angeles set the tone for the rest of the country.

¹³⁸ Coalition Against Police Abuse papers of Michael Zinzun 1976-1996 archive housed at the Southern California Library, 6020 S. Vermont, Los Angeles. Accessed February 13-17, 2018. Box 85.

¹³⁹ Klein, 178.

¹⁴⁰ Klein, 177.

¹⁴¹ Foucault, 293.

Chief William Parker (LAPD Chief, 1950-1966) and his protégé Daryl Gates (LAPD Chief, 1978-1992) are the first two. Police Chief William Parker, after having served a lengthy military term in Europe during the Second World War, returned to Los Angeles and joined the police force, where he implemented techniques adopted from his experience from wartime intelligence gathering. As early as the 1950s, he created a Public Order Intelligence Division that maintained intelligence on suspicious groups until 1982. Parker's former driver, Daryl Gates, is credited with the invention of Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams. The Los Angeles Police Department's budget hit \$400 million for the first time in 1988.¹⁴² On April 9, 1988, Operation HAMMER ushered in a new era of street level oppression in Los Angeles.¹⁴³ A ten square mile section of Southcentral Los Angeles was blocked off and a team of one thousand extra-duty police officers as well as special tactical squads and an anti-gang task force conducted a sweep reminiscent of a Vietnam search-and-destroy mission.¹⁴⁴ Nearly fifteen hundred people, mainly young people of color, were rounded up and processed in mobile booking units. While the ostensible goal was to search for drugs and other evidence of gang activity, only 32 felony convictions resulted from the sweep, while 1,350 of the arrestees were released without charges.¹⁴⁵ Sweeps and raids modelled on this operation continued and escalated. For example, a raid on a Dalton Street housing unit took place in August of 1988. 88 police from the Southwest Division, calling themselves the "Dalton Raiders," subjected residents to "an orgy of violence as they were punched and kicked by officers conducting the raid."¹⁴⁶ Officers smashed furniture, poured bleach on people's belongings, and forced thirty two arrestees to run a gauntlet and whistle the theme song of the Andy Griffith Show while they were beaten. Only two minor

¹⁴² M. Davis, 307

¹⁴³ M. Davis, 268.

¹⁴⁴ In fact, many LAPD officers were Vietnam vets. M. Davis 267.

¹⁴⁵ Klein, 162.

¹⁴⁶ M. Davis, 276.

drug arrests resulted. In fact, between 1988 and 1990, fifty thousand suspects had been picked up in street raids. And about 90 percent were released without charges.¹⁴⁷

Wesley McBride, who worked within the LA Sheriff's Department pioneered gang intelligence work in the 1970s after tours of duty with the Marines in Vietnam. He is considered an international expert on gangs and their eradication; he co-authored studies for the California Department of Justice on the impact of criminal street gangs, spoke at gang conferences all over the world, and helped to form the California Gang Investigators Association.¹⁴⁸ McBride's philosophy about policing neighborhoods affected by gangs mirrors counterinsurgency theory exactly. He believes that outright repression is not the strongest tool in the toolbox of law enforcement officials, and that operations should be based on intelligence gathering.¹⁴⁹ LA Sheriffs in his department looked for and used informants, cultivated relationships with local business and civic leaders and looked for tip-offs, used arrest data on particular neighborhoods, and profiled people based on clothing and tattoos. Based on interviews with local residents, business people, and other gang members, suspected gang members are put on lists. They were then served written notification that they are members of the named gang and subjected to the provisions of the STEP Act. The LAPD also used information collected by their Parole Division's "gang workers" to establish their gang lists.¹⁵⁰

Both the LAPD and the Sheriff's Department began to keep lists of suspected gang members. These were eventually shared at the federal level with the Drug Enforcement Agency

¹⁴⁷ M. Davis, 277.

¹⁴⁸ Elena Gaona, "Gang Expert Hangs up his Spurs," *Los Angeles Times*, available at <http://articles.latimes.com/2002/feb/09/local/me-mcbride9>. February 9, 2002.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ The Los Angeles Police Department opened the Group Guidance Unit to operate out of its Parole Department as a response to the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943. From the 1940's to the 1960s, "gang workers," usually parole officers or trained social workers, would meet with gang cliques and try to secure employment for members, mediate disputes with other cliques, be present at school or court hearings, and organize sports events. These "liberal" approaches to gang intervention were also attempted in New York in the 1950s and 1960s. In some places, they were funded in part with Ford Foundation money. Klein, 53.

(DEA) and other enforcement agencies. By the 1990s, more than one hundred thousand Angelinos were on these lists. The Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums (CRASH) Unit of the LAPD was also pioneered in 1988. By working with the Probation Department and the intelligence lists of suspected gang members, the CRASH unit conducted sweeps in areas with concentrations of young parolees.¹⁵¹ McBride began a policy in Torrance called GREAT (General Reporting, Evaluation, and Tracking) in 1985 that grew to list between 145,000-250,000 individuals as “identified” (really suspected) gang members.¹⁵² The individuals were not necessarily aware that they appeared on these lists, but if they were picked up by law enforcement, they were eligible for gang enhancement sentences. Decisions about where to place them in the California penal system was based on their alleged gang affiliation. In this way, the state plays a role in keeping an effective register of gang members, and in some cases likely pushing people toward gangs by identifying them as gang members before they identify themselves.

Fourth, liberal Los Angeles politician and Democrat James Hahn served as city attorney from 1985-2001, at which point he served a four-year term as mayor.¹⁵³ As city attorney, he made a name for himself (in addition to the one he inherited from his powerful father) by inventing techniques to criminalize gang activity in certain neighborhoods. Collectively known as “gang injunctions,” these policies attempted to make it illegal to hang around in groups of two or more people, especially in certain parks, or to entertain in one’s home for less than ten minutes in certain neighborhoods. California courts ruled that such abatement efforts were only constitutional if applied against specific individuals. Nevertheless, James Hahn continued to try

¹⁵¹ Klein 6, 153.

¹⁵² See Jane Hemler, “Clinton’s National Gang Trafficking Network,” *Los Angeles Weekly*, June 14-20, 1996 available in the Coalition Against Police Abuse Archive at the Southern California Library box 3 folder 14.

¹⁵³ Hahn’s career is one of the best confirmations of the argument made by Murakawa, described in chapter one, in her book *The First Civil Right*. In it, she details the way in which liberals were equal partners with conservatives in the construction of the mass incarceration state.

everything from punishing landlords who did not paint over graffiti quickly enough or kick out suspected drug dealers, to punishing mothers for the crimes of their gang-affiliated minors. According to Mike Davis, “liberal conscience aside, [Hahn] has probably travelled further than any metropolitan law enforcement official in the country towards establishing the legal infrastructure of the American police state.”¹⁵⁴

City Attorney Hahn asked a judge to consider the Playboy Gangster Crips an “unincorporated association,” making all members (as defined by the city) eligible for organized conspiracy. LAPD and sheriff’s investigators were charged with figuring out a gang’s leadership structure, thus reifying it in the eyes of the law.¹⁵⁵ Hahn initiated Operation Hardcore, a buffet of sentencing options that made it easier to prosecute gang members. In suspected gang cases, especially high bail was set and plea bargaining was eliminated. The police were trained in the unique circumstances surrounding gang warrants, and were trained at how to be better expert witnesses in gang cases. Gangs were defined as corporations, so conspiracy charges applied. Sentences were enhanced in gang-related crimes. Prosecutors followed cases from investigation through conviction to provide maximum continuity (nongang cases can typically be handed from one prosecutor to another).¹⁵⁶ This intense level of cooperation between law enforcement and prosecutors, and the invention of new methods of prosecution agreed to by legislators and the judiciary are nothing short of what Foucault called “technologies” of behavior control. Mechanisms, methods, technologies, and strategies were being invented in Los Angeles were later copied across the country.

Finally, William Bratton (LAPD Chief 2002-2009), by no means a local Angelino, completes the picture. Although temporally, his tenure as Chief of Police belongs in the next

¹⁵⁴ M. Davis, 280, 278.

¹⁵⁵ Klein, 182-183. Also see 171.

¹⁵⁶ Klein, 181, 173.

chapter, he is worth mentioning here because during his tenure, the LAPD as an organization engaged in deep levels of collaboration with police forces across Latin America and in Israel. In her brilliant article, “William Bratton in the Other LA,” California State University-Los Angeles scholar Michol Seigel describes Bratton’s activities in Latin America prior to and during his tenure as chief of police in Los Angeles. The Manhattan Institute funded his work with local law enforcement in Brazil from 1997-2003, and he arrived in Caracas in 2000 one month after the inauguration of Hugo Chavez. His Bratton Group consulting firm was involved in Venezuela from 2000-2002, and worked with many people who were later instrumental in the coup against Chavez, like Caracas mayor Alfredo Peña.¹⁵⁷ Police forces, it seems, collaborate deeply on an international level just as militaries do. And counterinsurgency theories, particularly on the issue of intelligence gathering, permeates these institutions as well.

From these five men, a picture of the “technologies of behavior” being developed in Los Angeles emerges. First were sweeps of whole neighborhoods and the policies of mass incarceration. Intelligence gathering and data collection on individuals who are suspected drug dealers, suspected gang members (these two are often conflated), and belonging to certain neighborhoods have been part and parcel the population control and gang eradication techniques employed by the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department and the Los Angeles Police Department since at least the 1950s. These techniques have been exported to other cities, often through programs run by the DEA, the FBI, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF), which often set up federal programs for local agencies to cooperate on the War on Drugs and antigang efforts.

¹⁵⁷ Micol Seigel, “William Bratton in the Other LA,” in *Without Fear: Claiming Safe Communities without Sacrificing Ourselves*, journal of the Southern California Library, Los Angeles, April 2007. P 59.

Keeping lists on suspected gang members is a central part of my argument that the state has played a large role in reifying and shaping gang organization. President Bill Clinton (President 1992-2000) copied Wes McBride's system when he implemented the Computerized National Gang Trafficking Network, which he announced in 1996.¹⁵⁸ A set of ten criteria was identified, including admitting to being in a gang (with a form to sign), being photographed with a gang member, using gang signs, wearing gang clothing, and having gang tattoos. If a young person met several of these criteria, he or she would be entered into a gang database.

Gang Transformation

In 1984 and 1985, the maras transformed themselves from groups of loosely organized cliques to a more organized force unified as the Mara Salvatrucha. The waves of repression that began in 1984 locked up much of the existing leadership of the neighborhood-based cliques. There was a shakeup, and the need for new leadership meant increased violence, and new alliances. There were also new opportunities in the mid-1980s because of the sheer number of Salvadoran youth newly arrived seeking refuge from the massive violence in their home country. And as Mara Salvatrucha members cycled through prison, members came out educated in the gang codes of the area. Formerly incarcerated members started calling the shots and laying down rules for street level conduct developed since the 1940s by LA gang culture.¹⁵⁹

In a study written for the Brookings Institution in 2017, "Inside Out, the Challenge of Prison-Based Criminal Organizations," Benjamin Lessing explains the ways in which gangs in California, El Salvador, and Brazil are transformed by incarceration. Antigang crackdowns that led to more incarceration lead to the consolidation of power in the hands of gang leaders in

¹⁵⁸ President William Clinton, "Remarks Announcing Proposed Anti-Gang and Youth Crime Control Legislation," available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=52802>. May 13, 1996.

¹⁵⁹ Martinez interview, author, June 29, 2017, and Sanchez interview, author, June 29, 2017.

prison. Because gang members are relatively certain that they will serve time in prison, they adhere to the authority of prison gang bosses. Imprisoned gang leaders have the authority to impose codes of conduct on members on the street, define turf between gangs, levy taxes, and order specific acts of violence.¹⁶⁰ And, while Lessing does not mention it, gang leaders in prison have the authority to negotiate truces between gangs and impose their terms on members on the outside.¹⁶¹ While incarcerated, inmates have to battle for access to resources, such as smuggled contraband, and prison privileges like job assignments and access to the yard. This pressures inmates to affiliate with groups that control access, usually prison gangs. And especially because inmates are often segregated by race (in the United States), and by gang affiliation (most pronouncedly in El Salvador), this gives gangs what Lessing calls “coercive jurisdiction” over inmates in their proximity. The ranks of the gangs swell, and so does the authority of those gangs that are more powerful than the others, and able to win battles for resources and privileges. These gangs, then, have more power to influence what happens on the streets.

Studies such as Lessing’s show the impact that imprisonment has on the structure of gangs. While most politicians and law enforcement authorities hold up prison as one solution to the gang problem, the research indicates that incarceration only makes gangs more organized, hierarchical, and larger. In other words, imprisonment professionalizes the operation of a gang. This is one way in which the War on Drugs and the mass incarceration state have helped to shape the current organizational structures of gangs like Mara Salvatrucha.

Interviews I conducted with Alex Sanchez and Jaime Martinez, both of whom had done time in the California penal system, confirmed the conclusions of Lessing’s study. “Getting

¹⁶⁰ Lessing, 6-8.

¹⁶¹ Sanchez interview, Author, February 22, 2017.

locked up is simply a rite of passage,” Alex told me. “You get judged and ranked depending on where you do your time. The ultimate badge for MS members is to do time in the maximum-security prison in Florence, Colorado, the ADX.”¹⁶²

Jaime had joined the Playboy Gangster Crips when he arrived in Pico Union. This clique was sworn enemies of Barrio 18. Incarcerated in 1982 and sentenced in 1984, he would serve thirty years in a Level Four prison. He describes the ways in which the laws and mechanisms of gangs are codified behind bars. “You have to live by a set of rules set by the inmate population,” he explained to me. “You have to respect the law, and the law is not set by the prison authority, it’s set by the gang.” Respecting the “law” of the gangs, along with faith, reading, and the creation of a personal routine are the things that enabled him to survive thirty years locked up with his sanity intact. When Jaime was released in 2013 he began to participate in rehabilitation programs, eventually going to work for Homies Unidos, a gang intervention and prevention organization.¹⁶³

For Jaime, the most important first rule in the inmate code of conduct is that the races do not mix. There are black gangs (divided into Bloods and Crips), and white gangs, and Latinos are divided into sureños and norteños (based on which part of California they come from). Each racial clique has its own code. The Sureños, for example, have to exercise, be clean cut, and be ready to kill in a prison fight, especially a race riot. “I saw at least three hundred fights based on race during the time I was locked up,” he told me. And he wanted to give me another example of how prisons create organizing structures. He and Alex explained “protective custody” units. LGBT prisoners, those convicted of crimes against children, those that were physically ill, and those that were vulnerable to violence at the hands of other inmates petitioned for special

¹⁶² Sanchez interview, Author, February 13, 2018.

¹⁶³ Martinez interview, Author, June 29, 2017.

protections behind bars. When Jaime’s sentence began in 1984, there was no such thing as “protective custody” for groups that were vulnerable to harassment inside mainlined prison populations. But by the time Jaime was released in 2013, a majority of prisoners qualified for some kind of protective status and were held in “S and Y yards” in protective custody. The interesting thing is that each category of protected status has formed its own clique on par with the prison gangs. They have established their own culture, traditions, and norms, and begun to copy gang behavior. Protective custody inmates have become known as “pc-etats,” Alex told me, a play on the word for “pesetas.” These protective custody cliques have begun to operate on the streets of LA and beyond, with membership made up of released inmates as well as other people belonging to those social groups.¹⁶⁴ It is one more way in which codes of conduct on the streets of LA mimic those set up in California’s prison system.

Ernesto Deras, “El Satan,” arrived in a different world in 1990 with years of Salvadoran military training under his belt. In fact, he had fought for one of the US trained BIRI units described in the last chapter in counterinsurgency techniques. His military tactics, penchant for strategic alliances, and the ability to seize opportunities were immediately useful in his new home in Pacoima, in the San Fernando Valley.¹⁶⁵ He arrived in a much different world than the one that Jaime and Alex had entered a decade before. There had been at least six years of increased state repression against the gangs, which had hardened and reified their status and purpose. Tens of thousands of gang members had cycled through the mass incarceration state, and inside the prisons, the rules, alliances, enemies, and methods of operation had hardened. Likewise, crack had been a reality on the streets of Los Angeles for at least six years, and so the stakes in the turf war were higher. Intergang violence reached new heights. In 1989 there had

¹⁶⁴ Sanchez interview, Author, February 13, 2018.

¹⁶⁵ As described in Martinez and Sanz, “El Origen del Odio.”

been 500 murders in Los Angeles recorded as “gang related.”¹⁶⁶ By 1992, that number had risen to 802.¹⁶⁷ The city had hit a boiling point.

Racism between Blacks and Latinos was high, but so, too was the animosity between different sets of Latino gangs. In 1989 all-out war had broken out between Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18. Since the Salvadorans were the new kids on the block, Mara Salvatrucha had something to prove. Its membership was known to use machetes as the weapon of choice, and decapitations were a favorite method of assassination for them. In this atmosphere, then, it made sense that El Satan’s superior military capabilities, learned in a US-trained battalion in El Salvador, would bring him into a leadership position in the Fulton Street set of Mara Salvatrucha. The clique had a reputation for being particularly deranged; they used decapitations and were more likely to rape and torture victims than other street gangs in Los Angeles.¹⁶⁸

1992 and 1993: Two Gang Truces in Los Angeles

In 1992, as the civil war in El Salvador came to a close, gangs in Los Angeles were busy negotiating a peace treaty as well. This treaty, negotiated originally between the Bloods and the Crips, would have tremendous impact on an effort to organize a gang truce in El Salvador in 2012. Some of the protagonists were involved in both truces, having been deported from Los Angeles to El Salvador. More importantly, according to Alex Sanchez, who was involved in the truce in Los Angeles in 1992 and 1993, “it gave the homies in El Salvador a sense of what was possible” in terms of a reduction in violence.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Steven Braun and Paul Feldman, “Killings Related to Street Gangs Hit Record in ‘87,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 8, 1988.

¹⁶⁷ Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, “Department Crime Statistics 1960-2012,” accessed December 29, 2017. Available at www.lasd.org.

¹⁶⁸ Martinez and Sanz, “El Origen del Odio.”

¹⁶⁹ Sanchez interview, Author, February 22, 2017.

In the popular memory, the gang truce in LA followed the wreckage of the April/May 1992 uprising, but that notion is a popular misconception. Weeks before the urban rebellion, the Grape Street Crips of Jordan Downs and the PJs of the Imperial Court housing projects were negotiating a ceasefire. “The truce would have happened with or without the riots,” Alex told me. “It had already been set into motion.” Daude Sherrills from Jordan Downs and Anthony Perry, both of whom participated in football star Jim Brown’s program Amer-I-Can self-esteem project for gang members, were actively looking for ideas about how to broker a peace. Anthony Perry, who was not college educated himself, used the University of Southern California’s von Kleinschmeid Center for International Public affairs to do research. He found the text of the 1949 Egyptian-Israeli General Armistice, a UN-brokered treaty that ended the 1949 conflict between Israel and Egypt and attempted to curb the violence in Palestine. He translated the terms of the peace into gang language. For example, cessation of hostilities in UN language was translated into a ban on drive-bys in Southcentral. Sherrills, Perry, and other gang members generated two documents, a “Multi-Peace Treaty” and “A Blueprint for Peace Here,” and carried them into neighborhoods, trying to get at least ten signatures from each clique.¹⁷⁰

The general climate in many neighborhoods in Los Angeles was one of outrage against racism. The prior year, in 1991, two incidents became emblematic of racial and class injustice in Los Angeles. In early March 1991, Rodney King, a black man, was severely beaten by LAPD officers Stacey Koon, Lawrence Powell, Theodore Briseno, and Timothy Wind after a car chase. Less than two weeks later a fifteen-year-old Black teenager, Latasha Harlins, was shot by Korean immigrant and merchant Soon Ja Du in the back of the head. The two women had had an

¹⁷⁰ See Andrea Ford and Jesse Katz, “Ex-Gang Members Look to Mideast for a Peace Plan : Truce: Group uses 1949 cease-fire agreement between Egypt and Israel as the basis for an agreement among L.A.’s Bloods and Crips.” *Los Angeles Times*, available at http://articles.latimes.com/1992-06-17/local/me-438_1_former-gang-member. June 17, 1992.

altercation in Du's convenience store. Du accused Harlins of trying to steal orange juice (although enough money for the juice was found crumpled up in the girl's hand after she was dead). After a brief physical fight between the two, and as Harlins was walking out of the store, Du shot her Harlins in the back of the head. In November 1991, Du was convicted of voluntary manslaughter. At the discretion of Judge Joyce Karlin, however, she was sentenced to time served in prison, three hundred hours of community service, five years of probation, and the cost of Latasha Harlin's funeral expenses. Given the extremely light sentence, Harlin's family immediately began to organize for justice, and through the Latasha Harlins Justice Committee, collected two hundred thousand signatures demanding the recall of the judge. In most of the media coverage of the Los Angeles rebellion, it was a response to the failure of the justice system to convict the four officers who beat Rodney King. But as UCLA history professor Brenda Stevenson points out in her comprehensive look at the roots of the rebellion, *The Contested Murder of Latasha Harlins: Justice, Gender, and the Origins of the LA Riots* (2013)¹⁷¹, Latasha Harlin's murder was an equal factor in the minds of most of the protesters and rioters. As the more complicated case of what happened between two women, Du and Harlins, fades in the popular memory, it becomes more difficult to understand the relationship between the protests and riots and immigrants, both Koreans and Latinos.

On April 28, 1992 (one day before the Rodney King verdict), two hundred members of the Bloods and the Crips, led by the Amer-I-Can organization and its organizer and co-founder Aqueela Sherrills, attended the Los Angeles City Council meeting to announce their truce with each other and to ask for institutional support from the Council. Out of the negotiations, gang leaders came up with a list of demands for Los Angeles' political class, which they called

¹⁷¹ Brenda Stevenson, *The Contested Murder of Latasha Harlins: Justice, Gender, and the Origins of the LA Riots*. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013].

“Bloods/Crips Proposal for LA’s Facelift.” This ten-page proposal outlined a very specific set of demands with recommended budget appropriations amounting to \$3.7 billion. The proposal started with a city beautification program to gut every burned and abandoned structure, repavement of sidewalks and city streets, and a lighting, landscaping, and sanitation program. Incredibly specific, this plan included demands such as, “all trees will be properly trimmed and maintained. We want all weeded/shrubbed areas to be cleaned up and properly nurtured. New trees will be planted to increase the beauty of our neighborhood.”¹⁷² Next, the plan turns to a vision of a better educational system in Los Angeles. The leaders demanded a reconstruction of Los Angeles Unified School District schools, curriculum as demanding as that found in “non economically-deprived areas,” afterschool tutorial programs, and an opportunity for high-achieving students to study abroad at the expense of the school district. Gang members demanded highly-qualified teachers in all schools (foreshadowing the purported goals of federal No Child Left Behind legislation passed almost a decade later). The Bloods/Crips plan promised that “bussing shall become non-existent in our communities if all of the above demands are met.”

To further fund redevelopment in the ravaged core of the city, gang members proposed loans to minority business owners from the Small Business Administration at no more than four percent interest and without down payments. Gang members demanded three new hospitals and forty additional health centers in South Central. Interestingly, they also demanded that “welfare be completely removed from our community and these welfare programs be replaced by state work and product manufacturing plants that supply the city with certain supplies. . . the State of California shall provide child welfare building to serve as daycare centers for single parents. We would like to encourage all manufacturing companies to vigorously hire these low-income

¹⁷² The entire text of the “Bloods/Crips Proposal for an LA Facelift” is available at: Blood-Crips Proposal for L.A.’s Face-Lift, May 1992, L.A. Subject Files, Southern California Library, Los Angeles. I’m not aware of any publication or online source where it is available to the public outside of Los Angeles.

recipients and the state and federal governments shall commit to expand their institutions to provide work for these former welfare recipients.” These demands, too, were prescient in that Bill Clinton’s 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act attempted to implement this “welfare to work” concept, albeit probably not in the way envisioned by the gang members who wrote up the Proposal for LA’s Facelift.

Lastly, the plan demanded a major reform of the police system. “The Los Angeles Communities are demanding that they are policed and patrolled by individuals whom live in the community and the commanding officers be ten-year residents of the community in which they serve. Former gang members shall be given a chance to be patrol buddies in assisting in the protection of the neighborhoods [without arms].” The proposal included a plan for all police officers to wear body cameras, a demand which would be raised again to much greater success by the Black Lives Matter movement about twenty-five years later. The City Council ignored their requests.¹⁷³

On April 29, 1992, the four officers who beat Rodney King were acquitted, and the first major urban uprising since 1965 spread from South Central Los Angeles north to Koreatown. Before it was over, there were 54 deaths and 2,300 injuries. Forty-one people were shot, three were burned to death, six killed in car accidents directly related, and four were beaten to death. Forty-five hundred business were looted, well over half of them Korean-owned businesses, with at least one billion dollars of property damage.¹⁷⁴ A decade after sweeps and raids became a regular part of life for people of color in Los Angeles, part of the explanation for the urban eruption is that it was a response to the policies of mass incarceration and mass criminalization of youth in Los Angeles. Another part of the explanation is that people were reacting to

¹⁷³ D. Amari Jackson, “The Lasting Legacy of the 1992 Watts Gang Truce,” *The Atlanta Black Star*, available at <http://atlantablackstar.com/2017/04/29/lasting-legacy-1992-watts-gang-truce/>. April 29, 2017.

¹⁷⁴ Stevenson, 280.

increasing economic stratification. Both of these factors help to explain the widespread involvement of Latinos in the lootings and burning. Latinos were 37 percent of the people arrested in the week of the riot for participation, blacks were 30 percent of those arrested, and whites were 22 percent.¹⁷⁵

As Stevenson argues, the Latasha Harlins case occupied equal space in the minds of the participants of the uprising as did the case of Rodney King. The Harlins case captured the economic resentment between black and Latino residents of South Central and Korean immigrants, who were at least perceived as better off in terms of socioeconomic status, and who often owned small businesses. This resentment explains Latino participation the rioting. Ironically, though, it also explains the targeting of Latinos, as immigrants, by black and white looters and protesters. As Albert Bergensen and Max Herman explain in "Immigration, Race, and Riot: The 1992 Los Angeles Uprising" in the *American Sociological Review*, many black and white Angelinos linked urban poverty to immigrants, both the Latino immigrants "taking their jobs," and the high prices at the Korean-owned convenience stores. On the famous corner of Florence and Normandie, where the beating of white truck driver Reginald Denny was filmed, for example, there were thirty other victims of violence. Only two of the victims were white; most of the rest were Latino.¹⁷⁶ The uprising further deepened the animosity between racial groups that pushed Salvadorans to form their own organization, Mara Salvatrucha, a decade before, for self-protection.

The National Guard was called out to help quiet the violence, but did not join LAPD in efforts to intervene to stop the looting until twenty-four hours after it began. Most of the army

¹⁷⁵ Stevenson, 288.

¹⁷⁶ Stevenson, 288.

troops and Marines who were called up did not actually mobilize.¹⁷⁷ The response to the 1992 urban uprising was not a good example of the state applying the lessons of counterinsurgency theory to policing, as the Christopher Commission would point out in its report in the aftermath of the riots. Perhaps because they had already been in discussions about how to broker and keep the peace, many gang members intervened in the riots to try to stop indiscriminate violence and destruction of property. According to the Reverend Clarence Eziokwu Washington, founder of the “We Can” Foundation, gang members were joining the substantial ranks of people who were trying to prevent the riots.¹⁷⁸ The City Council members, who had earlier ignored the requests for help coming from Amer-I-Can and the Bloods and Crips attending the City Council meeting, called on those same members to intervene in the uprising to help stop the violence. Those gang members involved in truce negotiations did get involved to try to calm violence and looting, until it became too dangerous.¹⁷⁹ While the gang truce was negotiated before the urban uprising, and while it may have happened with or without the Rodney King verdict and the subsequent violence, the six days of urban unrest probably cemented the process by giving common cause to gang members to come together against violence, and later to rebuild their communities. As city leaders saw disorganized and spontaneous looting and violence as an alternative to organized efforts for peace, they paid more attention to the demands raised by the “Bloods/Crips Proposal for an LA Facelift.”

The riots both built solidarity between blacks and Latinos and sharpened racial tensions at the same time. Blacks and Latinos rioted and looted together, brought together by the common causes of lack of economic opportunities, exploitation, and racist treatment by the

¹⁷⁷ Stevenson, 301.

¹⁷⁸ Paige Brettington, “L.A. Riots: 20 Years Later, Still Trying to Heal.” Annenberg Media Center, <http://www.neontommy.com/news/2012/04/la-riots-20-years-later-still-trying-heal>. April 24, 2012.

¹⁷⁹ Jackson.

police and sheriffs in Los Angeles. The First American Baptist Church, a bastion of black political organizing, a church that hosted a peace vigil the night that the rebellion erupted, also opened up its basement to victims of violence and looting, including Latino residents of Los Angeles, documented and undocumented.¹⁸⁰ On the other hand, Latino residents were targeted by some black looters. And Proposition 187, an attempt to establish a state-wide system to stop undocumented residents from receiving social services or attending public schools in California, passed a year and a half after the uprising. In their study, “Immigration, Race, and Riot: The 1992 Los Angeles Uprising, Bergensen and Herman attribute the polarization and anger toward immigrants in part to the questions raised in popular consciousness by the uprising. So the riots built solidarity between some blacks and Latinos, while it eroded the relationships between others.

The contradiction that the rebellion in Los Angeles both exacerbated racial tensions, and helped to build solidarity between racial groups at the same time is illustrated perfectly by the extension of the gang truce to Latino gangs. On October 31, 1993, about a year and a half after the Bloods and Crips announced their truce, Latino gang leaders held a mass meeting in Pacoima in the San Fernando Valley to announce a parallel and connected truce. Three factors converged to push Latino cliques into the citywide gang truce process. The first was the truce between majority-black gangs. “So there was a lot of insecurity with regards to the Latinos,” Alex told me. “The riots left a sour relationship between blacks and Latinos, who were victimized by the situation. Shortly after that we learned about the truce between the African Americans, and we wondered, ‘are they going to organize to attack the Latino gangs?’”¹⁸¹ The truce between the black gangs both set an example of what was possible in terms of negotiated peace, and also

¹⁸⁰ Zilberg, 24.

¹⁸¹ Sanchez interview, Author, February 22, 2017.

pushed Latino gangs to think about collective self-protection. Latino gangs, in other words, were frightened into solidarity with each other in the case that the black gangs were uniting against them.

The second factor in the Latino truce was an order from the leadership of the Mexican Mafia (“la Eme”) inside California’s penal system in the summer of 1993 to stop drive-by shootings.¹⁸² *Los Angeles Times* reporters in the aftermath insisted that the reason for the order to halt drive-by violence was so that the Mafia could more easily and smoothly control the drug trade.¹⁸³ According to Alex Sanchez, “the orders were coming from inside the prisons. It was about falling in line. No drive-by shootings. You agree to talk things out. There were certain procedures for what to do if someone crosses someone else out. You meet and you fight. But people were not getting killed. There were specific instructions given from inside prison about what to do if a war broke out with the African American gangs.”¹⁸⁴ The “edict” from la Eme forced many of the small cliques and sets, who were not affiliated with any of the bigger gang conglomerates— from the Bloods and Crips, to Barrio 18, to the much-more recently organized Mara Salvatrucha— to fall in line and subscribe to mandates from inside prison. Autonomy was given to the cliques and sets to meet and hammer out territorial delineations and local procedures for mediating disputes.¹⁸⁵ For this reason, the heart of the Latino gang truce was in the San Fernando Valley. Barrio 18 was invited to the discussions late in the process, and Mara Salvatrucha, the newest gang, but becoming a large organized force slightly different from the smaller Latino street gang sets, was the last to be invited to the negotiations. Alex Sanchez participated, along with MS-13 member Nelson Fernandez, “El Muerto.” Boromeo Henriquez,

¹⁸² Lessing, 7-8.

¹⁸³ See, for example, Henry Chu and Julie Tamaki, “As Gang Truce Wanes, Valley Slayings Rise,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 9, 1995.

¹⁸⁴ Sanchez interview, Author, January 10, 2018.

¹⁸⁵ Sanchez interview February 22, 2017

“El Diablo,” an MS-13 leader who would later be involved in the truce in El Salvador described in Chapter Four, was present in Los Angeles at the time, and around the people negotiating the truce, although he himself was not a negotiator. In Los Angeles, mass meetings of gang members to negotiate the terms of the truce were covered by the media. For example, in the lead-up to the meeting in Pacoima, one thousand gang members met in Elysian Park near Dodger Stadium in September 1993.¹⁸⁶

Lastly, leaders in the Latino community in the San Fernando Valley organized regular meetings of gang leaders to negotiate a peace. Among those leaders most cited by the media was William ‘Blinky’ Rodriguez, a businessman whose son was shot by gang members, founder of both the Christian organization Victory Outreach and, later, Communities in Schools. Donald Garcia, an ex-gang member and evangelical preacher, was another.¹⁸⁷ After the Halloween 1993 mass meeting of gang members organized by these leaders, meetings continued between leaders of the sets every week at the Pacoima Recreation Center.¹⁸⁸ Eventually, a permanent seven-member peace council was organized in the Valley, its members acting as unpaid gang intervention workers. They organized a one-year “Peace Summit” in 1994 to celebrate the successes of the coalition and featured many prominent celebrity speakers.¹⁸⁹

The major success was a drop in the number of homicides. Gang members and Valley residents agreed with the Los Angeles Police Department on this fact. The Foothills Division of the LAPD gave itself the authority to declare deaths to be gang-related or not gang-related. In an oft-cited statistic in the *Los Angeles Times*, in 1993 there were forty four gang-related murders in

¹⁸⁶ Richard Lee Colvin, “Valley Gangs’ Peace is Strained but Holding: Truce: Rivals from Latino groups meet to air concerns as members and police say the violence has subsided,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 26, 1993.

¹⁸⁷ See Colvin, above, and Efraín Hernández, Jr, “Latino Gang Truce in Valley is Praised Despite Rise in Homicides,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 30, 1997.

¹⁸⁸ Colvin.

¹⁸⁹ Jocelyn Stewart, “Dialogue Winning Against Gang Bullets: Peace: A truce among Latino gangs in the Valley may have drastically reduced the number of young men gunned down,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 28, 1994.

the Valley, and by 1994, that number had dropped to twenty nine, a thirty three percent drop.¹⁹⁰ LAPD detectives also credit the truce between the Crips and the Bloods in part with an overall drop in homicides across Los Angeles; their statistics show that between September 1992 and September 1993, there were 276 gang-related murders in Los Angeles. Nevertheless, from the end of September 1993 to the end of September 1994, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, gang related murders had dropped to 182.¹⁹¹

Murder rates in Los Angeles are difficult to track with accuracy because of conflicting and overlapping data sets. The Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, for example, issued the report "Homicides in LASD Jurisdiction 1960-2012,"¹⁹² which is very useful, except that it covers only areas patrolled by the Sheriff's Department, the map of which is Byzantine and not useful unless each neighborhood is considered separately. The LAPD has no such aggregate data, and part of their archives were damaged and disappeared and data from certain years is unavailable.¹⁹³ The Disaster Center collects overall violent crime data for each city, but only publishes aggregate data for every five years prior to the year 2000 in its uniform crime reports.¹⁹⁴ The *LA Times*, therefore, has become the defacto archive of homicide rates. Under intense pressure from community leaders to cover deaths in black and Latino neighborhoods just like they do in white areas, the *LA Times* started its online Homicide Report database in 2000. This database covers the total number of homicides in Los Angeles County, including officer-involved shootings.¹⁹⁵ Its aggregate data, however, does not begin until 2000. None of these sources are specific

¹⁹⁰ See for example, Hernandez.

¹⁹¹ Stewart, Jocelyn, "Dialogue Winning Against Gang Bullets: Peace: A truce among Latino gangs in the Valley may have drastically reduced the number of young men gunned down," *Los Angeles Times*, October 28, 1994.

¹⁹² Available at http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/lasd/189085_2012_Crime_Stats_PC_Charts.pdf

¹⁹³ Hernandez,

¹⁹⁴ <http://www.disastercenter.com/californ/crime/976.htm>

¹⁹⁵ <http://homicide.latimes.com>

enough to cross-check the claims being made by the *LA Times* in 1992 and 1993 that homicide rates had dropped by 33 percent in the immediate aftermath of the gang truce.

A general pattern does emerge from all three of these sources, however. Violent crime peaked everywhere across Los Angeles County in the late 1980s and 1990. Crime dropped slightly in 1993, and then again in the late 1990s. The clearest agreement between the three sources, however, is that the most marked and steady drop in crime happened in the twenty-first century. Total violent crime in Los Angeles was 31,767 cases of manslaughter, rape, robbery, aggravated assault in 2005, compared to its height of 83,813 in 1990, according to the Disaster Center's uniform crime report.¹⁹⁶ The average yearly homicide rate in the areas patrolled by the Sheriff's in the 2000s was around 250, compared to its height of 424 in 1992.¹⁹⁷ And throughout the first 18 years of the twenty-first century, the number of homicides have continued to fall in Los Angeles County, according to the Homicide Report, to an average of about 650.¹⁹⁸

These statistics, while not specific enough to look at a particular month or a particular neighborhood, nevertheless support the point that the truce between gangs in Los Angeles has held. Los Angeles is a more peaceful place than it was in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the truce between gangs has played a large role in the reduction of violent crime. Twenty-five years after the Bloods and Crips began their negotiations, homicide rates have continued to fall. The truce in Los Angeles has met with measured success for several reasons. Perhaps most importantly, it is enforced by orders from inside prison from both the Mexican Mafia and the Bloods and Crips. "The older brothers were sick of the drive-bys, the rapes, and the lack of respect for the older guys," Sanchez explained to me. "So in California, if you get sent up for one of those things, you are going to be green-lighted [prison gangs will put you on a list to be

¹⁹⁶ <http://www.disastercenter.com/californ/crime/976.htm>

¹⁹⁷ http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/lasd/189085_2012_Crime_Stats_PC_Charts.pdf

¹⁹⁸ <http://homicide.latimes.com>

killed or beaten]. The truce stuck in Los Angeles, it stuck,” he emphasized.¹⁹⁹ I have not seen a differing opinion in any media source or heard any of my interviewees express a different point of view.

Both the truce between the Bloods and the Crips and that between the Latino gangs took the basic need for gang organization for granted. Neither asked their members to cease and desist their gang affiliation nor stop battling over territory. Both assumed that their members would continue to represent their colors and their sets, and would continue on with certain criminal enterprises (in some cases drug dealing, in other cases petty theft and acts of violence), but that they could do so without the levels of indiscriminate killing that had become characteristic of the gangs in the 1980s. There was a recognition that the social conditions that had produced gangs had not changed, and no organizational alternatives had arisen, and so gangs would continue to exist. “But we could stop the excesses,” Alex explained. “No one wanted that anymore.” The two Los Angeles truces had support from some sections of the Los Angeles establishment because they happened in the aftermath of the Los Angeles riots, when politicians and business leaders were looking for ways to prevent any such future uprising. They were willing to put money in to gang intervention programs, and make some effort to provide jobs and educational opportunities to children in South Central and East Los Angeles.

Lastly, the truce has met with lasting success because it had community support from the outset. The Coalition Against Police Abuse, for example, which had been organizing for police accountability in Los Angeles since 1976, quickly organized a network called “Community Support for the Los Angeles Gang Truce.”²⁰⁰ At least until 1996, there were “Gang Truce Anniversary Mobilization Committees” that organized demonstrations in Will Rogers Park in

¹⁹⁹ Sanchez interview, Author, February 13, 2018.

²⁰⁰ See “Coalition Against Police Abuse papers of Michael Zinzun 1976-1996” archive.

support of the gang truce. Faith leaders across Los Angeles expressed support for the “peace efforts” of former gang members and gang truce advocates. Gang intervention workers became a permanent part of Los Angeles city government.

In the aftermath of the fourth annual “Gang Truce Peace Rally” in Los Angeles, and with homicide rates dropping across the city, President Clinton decided to announce a Computerized National Gang Tracking Database. From his May 1996 speech, one would never guess that gang members and community organizers in Los Angeles had found an organic way to reduce violence and a partial solution to the problems plaguing urban America. President Clinton said:

The message today to the Bloods, the Crips, to every criminal gang preying on the innocent is clear: We mean to put you out of business, to break the backs of your organization, to stop you from terrorizing our neighborhoods and our children, to put you away for a very long time. We have just begun the job, and we do not intend to stop until we have finished.²⁰¹

Gang truces and proposals for economic reconstruction aside, the War on Drugs, rooted in military counterinsurgency theory, continued at the national level.

²⁰¹ President William Clinton “Remarks Announcing Proposed Anti-Gang and Youth Crime Control Legislation,” <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=52802>. May 13, 1996.

Chapter Four: Elite Transnationalism and Violence: State-to-State Collaboration, 2003-2016

Since July 2003, government and business elites in the United States and El Salvador have collaborated to create repressive policing mechanisms to deal with gang members in the small Central American nation, modeling them on techniques pioneered in Los Angeles and other American cities in the preceding decades. From 2003-2009, these policies, known as *Mano Dura* and *Super-Mano Dura* in El Salvador systematized cooperation at the institutional level with government agencies in the North. The Mérida Initiative authored by the George W. Bush administration in 2007, was adopted by Obama and branded the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) in 2010, continuing the basic policy platforms.

Cooperation and training in repressive policing techniques are the first U.S. “methods of intervention” in post-civil war Central America discussed here.²⁰² The second is business and trade deals (symbolized by the 2006 Central America Free Trade Agreement, CAFTA), and the third, development aid funding for social welfare programs aimed at gang prevention, brokered by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The increasing importance of the latter two types of U.S. involvement represent small shifts in policy emphasis between the Bush era (2001-2009) and the Obama (2009-2017) era. Despite some small differences, however, there has been fundamental continuity in cooperation between the states while the Republican Party held the executive branch in the United States while ARENA did in El Salvador prior to 2009, and while the Democratic Party and the FMLN controlled the executive branches of the two countries, respectively, from 2009-2016. As it has for decades,

²⁰² The phrase “method of intervention” in this context can be attributed to policy analysts Main, Johnson, and Beeton, in Alexander Main, Jake Johnson, and Dan Beeton. “Latin America and the Caribbean.” in *The Wikileaks Files: The World According to U.S. Empire*. [New York: Verso, 2015]. P 484.

the United States acknowledges and documents human rights abuses and vigilante tendencies within the Salvadoran military, but continues to fund and train that country's security forces.

U.S. involvement in Salvadoran policing has a long history discussed in chapter one, but a new era of intervention began at the end of the civil war. One of the conditions of the Chapultepec Peace Accords was a requirement that the former National Police and military be disbanded and reconstituted.²⁰³ In 1992 under Bill Clinton, the U.S. Department of Justice committed \$20 million to training the new National Police Force (PNC) in US-developed policing tactics.²⁰⁴ The US helped to shape both a Special Investigative Unit and an anti-narcotics unit within the PNC that collaborated closely with U.S. law enforcement agencies.²⁰⁵ In the new millennium, this deep involvement by the U.S. state has continued and even professionalized to a certain extent, with a focus on creating “vetted units” of police who could conduct U.S-style operations against suspected gang members. In vetted units, there must be one U.S. personnel for every fifteen Salvadoran police.²⁰⁶

In October 2003, under the presidencies of Francisco Flores (1999-2004) and George W. Bush, El Salvador passed its first Ley Anti-Mara, modeled on U.S. anti-gang laws and their philosophical underpinnings. This law permitted the arrest and prosecution of gang members based solely on their physical appearances (tattoos, style of dress, etc.). President Antonio Saca (2004-2009) continued and ultimately accelerated *Mano Dura* policies. Shortly after the passage

²⁰³ 60 percent of the newly formed PNC was supposed to be made up of civilians, and the other 40 percent was supposed to be an even combination of former members of the FMLN guerrilla army and the national police and military. Elites and former military members succeeded in maintaining effective control of the military. It's director general position, for example, was always occupied by ARENA hardliners like Mauricio Sandoval and Rodrigo Ávila, and the veteran military commander Ricardo Menesses . Wolf, 35-42.

²⁰⁴ Cristina Eguizábal, “The Central America Security Initiative: A Key Piece of U.S. Security Assistance to El Salvador, But Not the Only One.” In Eric L. Olsen, ed. *Crime and Violence in Central America's Northern Triangle: How U.S. Policy Responses are Helping, Hurting, and Can Be Improved*. [Washington D.C., Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2015]. P 69.

²⁰⁵ Wolf, 34.

²⁰⁶ Eguizábal, 85.

of the new Ley Anti-Mara, as they patrolled the streets of San Salvador and conducted mass arrests, the Grupos Tarea Anti-Mara (GTA), joint police/military operations, looked much like Los Angeles SWAT teams described in chapter two. The GTA units made 19,275 arrests between July 2003 and August 2004.²⁰⁷ There was an element of shock-and-awe to this sudden attack on suspected gang members, but 95 percent of the cases of those arrested were thrown out in court.²⁰⁸ For the ARENA government facing elections in 2004, however, the aim was to make a case to the public that it was taking action against a criminal element that needed to be cleansed from the streets.²⁰⁹ The media covered the arrests robustly, but failed to publicize the fact that the vast majority of cases were dismissed in court. But, just as in Los Angeles, a criminal “class” was created, with the goal of justifying collective punishment to the public. In another parallel to Los Angeles, the homicide rate continued to rise in the years during which repressive policing increased. After two years of *Mano Dura*, the homicide rate had risen from 22.8 per 100,000 to 51.1 per 100,000. With crime on the rise, the policy became *Super-Mano Dura* from 2004 to 2009. At the end of the *Super-Mano Dura* policy in 2009, El Salvador had its most violent year to date with a homicide rate of 70.4 per 100,000.²¹⁰

In 2005, the cooperation between police agencies in the two states was institutionalized at a new level. The U.S. coordinated an international, one-day sting operation in twelve states as well as Central America and Mexico, organized by the FBI’s MS-13 National Gang Task Force. Over six hundred suspected gang members were arrested internationally.²¹¹ This was the impetus for the formation of an International Anti-Gang Task Force in which various U.S.

²⁰⁷ Wolf, 51.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Chapter two of Sonja Wolf’s book discusses the motives of the Salvadoran state.

²¹⁰ For an explanation of rates of measure of homicide statistics see Eguizabal, 56.

²¹¹ United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean Office of Regional Sustainable Development, “Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment,” April 2006. P 24.

government agencies (the FBI, DEA, Bureau of AFTE, Bureau of Prisons, US Marshals Service, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection) participated.²¹² Since the FBI and the Department of Justice funded and participated in the program, their underlying assumptions and philosophies guide the work— namely, that street gangs are equivalent and mock the behavior of organized crime and should be eradicated in the same ways, and also that the international drug trade is the driving force behind gang violence in El Salvador.²¹³ Starting in 2007, the DEA, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) created *Grupo Especial Antinarcóticos* (GEAN) units within El Salvador’s anti-narcotics division.²¹⁴ The Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF), based in Key West, is a multinational anti-narcotics operation that coordinates operations across the Americas. It has been very active in El Salvador.

Also in 2007, the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) opened in San Salvador, funded by international narcotics and law enforcement dollars from the United States. This institution has taken on the task of training “vetted units” within the National Police, as well as for training the judiciary. It offers human rights training for the Salvadoran judiciary.²¹⁵ The activities of the ILEA show how deeply the U.S. government is involved in the intimate details of the Salvadoran state. In addition to providing technical policing advice, the US government also provides training and advice to the judiciary. In 2015, however, 106 judges were being investigated for judicial misconduct. Of those 106 judges, only 16 received disciplinary action.²¹⁶ This deep involvement in the affairs of state can be seen explicitly in the goals of CARSI, laid out five years later. One of the State Department’s five goals for the Central

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Wolf, 70.

²¹⁴ Eguizábal, 84.

²¹⁵ Wolf, 70.

²¹⁶ US Department of State, “Country Report on Human Rights Practices,” 9.

American Regional Security Initiative is to “support the development of strong, capable, and accountable Central American governments.”²¹⁷ Whether this refers to accountability to its own citizens or to the U.S. State Department and law enforcement agencies is not made clear.

The collaboration between the U.S. government and its law enforcement agencies and the Salvadoran security forces is profound. There are three distinct but interrelated problems with the Salvadoran forces: human rights abuses carried out by the armed forces; ties between the armed forces and narcotraffickers; and ties between other factions of the armed forces and death squads committed to social cleansing policies. Ironically, the U.S. government, through the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices put out annually by the State Department, plays an important role in documenting human rights abuses. At the very same time, the funding and training from the U.S. government is a fundamental part of maintaining these police forces.

The Special Investigative Unit within the PNC, for example, funded by the United States was shown to have regularly covered up police abuses.²¹⁸ Especially in the early 1990s, the PNC was rife with corruption. The head of the anti-narcotics division, the UEA, who also served a brief tenure after the civil war as the deputy director of operations in the PNC was identified by the Truth Commission as a drug trafficker.²¹⁹ The U.S. Military’s SOUTHCOM established an interagency task force, the Cuscatlán joint group (GCC). Its commander, Godfredo Miranda Martínez, was investigated for links to narcotraffickers while he was director of El Salvador’s anti-narcotics division.²²⁰

Insight Crime is an independent news clearinghouse that operates out of the American University’s Center for Latin American and Latino Studies and is funded by the Open Society

²¹⁷ <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/261079.pdf>. Accessed on April 5, 2017.

²¹⁸ Wolf, 34.

²¹⁹ Wolf, 35.

²²⁰ Eguizábal, 75.

Foundation headquartered in Medellin, Colombia. It continues to provide reports of questionable human rights practices on the part of both the Salvadoran and United States, although these are not always verified by independent NGO or state-run investigations. Reporters, for example, documented the connections between Salvadoran police officials and drug trafficker Jose Natividad Lena Periera, “Chepe Luna.” Two Salvadoran police officials, Luis Ernesto Nuñez Carcarro, who was named a police attaché to the Salvadoran Embassy in Washington, D.C., and the Ricardo Menesses, who served as a deputy chief in the Salvadoran Embassy in charge of reviewing and sending lists of deportees with criminal records to the Salvadoran Embassy can be connected to the notorious drug trafficker.²²¹

Two reliable sources that collect data on reports on human rights abuses are the Office of the Ombudsperson for Human Rights (PDDH)²²² which issues an annual report, and the independent *Fundación de Estudios para la Aplicación del Derecho* (FESPAD), an NGO that defends the legal rights of suspected gang members.²²³ In the fiscal year that ended in May 2015, the PDDH processed 2,202 complaints of human rights violations, 92 percent allegedly carried out by the military and armed forces. The Ombudsperson cited complaints of “arbitrary deaths, situations that verge on torture, and possible executions at the scenes of armed confrontations between police and supposed criminals.”²²⁴ Members of the Police Reaction Group were allegedly responsible for deaths at two activist farming collectives, the San Blas coffee farm in San Jose Villanueva and La Paz Farm in Cojutepeque.²²⁵

²²¹ Hector Silva, “Washington: a Refuge for Friends of El Salvador Drug Trafficker,” *Insight Crime*, available at <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/washington-a-refuge-for-friends-of-el-salvador-top-drug-trafficker>. May 27, 2013.

²²² United States Department of State, “Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2015.” El Salvador draws heavily on the Ombudsperson’s report.

²²³ FESPAD is the subject of the entire chapter four of Sonja Wolf’s book *Mano Dura*

²²⁴ US Department of State 2015, 2.

²²⁵ *Ibid*, 2.

“Social cleansing” is a common term used by Salvadorans for the effort to create a criminal class out of potential young gang members and to then take extreme and violent measures to remove them from the streets. Anthropologist Sonja Wolf did extensive field research in El Salvador and embedded herself with NGOs there attempting to reduce gang violence, mitigate its effects, and speak out for the human rights of suspected gang members. In her 2017 book, *Mano Dura: The Politics of Gang Control in El Salvador*, she cites sources who informed her about a death squad, Grupo Omega, run by ex-military personnel, that receives logistical support from PNC officials, Commissioners Douglas Omar Garcia Funes and Jose Luis Tobar Prieto. There are, according to her source, at least three other “extermination” groups that work closely with the PNC.²²⁶ These paramilitary groups carry out extrajudicial killings of suspected gang members, and operate with impunity as they patrol the streets and rural areas of El Salvador to “clean up” the problem of crime. Since the publication of Wolf’s book, members of El Salvador’s army and the PNC have been officially prosecuted for collaborating with civilians— building death squads to carry out “social cleansing.”²²⁷ Investigative reporters have uncovered WhatsApp text streams with up to fifty members of the military and police forces that share information about the whereabouts of suspected gang members and their extrajudicial killings.²²⁸

These death squads are the proverbial chickens coming home to roost; their presence in El Salvador, as discussed in chapter one, dates back at least to the 1960s, and probably, it could be argued, to the private rural police forces that predated the state taking direction of the armed

²²⁶ Wolf, 44.

²²⁷ James Bargent, “El Salvador Strikes Against Death Squads Led by Army, Police,” *Insight Crime* available at <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/brief/el-salvador-strikes-against-police-and-army-led-death-squads/>. June 23, 2017.

²²⁸ Brian Avelar and Juan Martínez D’Aubuisson, “El Salvador Police Using WhatsApp, Facebook to Run Death Squads,” *Insight Crime* available at <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/el-salvador-police-using-whatsapp-facebook-run-death-squads-report/>. August 24, 2017.

forces in the 1930s. In its 2006 study, USAID talked to many deportees or potential deportees from the United States who were willing to risk living underground and staying in the U.S. illegally because they were fairly certain that they would be executed by the Sombra Negra death squad operating at that time.²²⁹ During the *Super-Mano Dura* period, this group had a practice of distributing fliers in areas where it operates. A group calling itself Mano Blanca made a radio broadcast in the rural town of San Miguel announcing that it would take care of the criminal element and made appeals to people's desires for "social cleansing."²³⁰

In a climate of human rights abuses committed by security forces, and where those security forces are tied to narco-traffickers and vigilante death squad, the Salvadoran state cannot fulfill its most basic duty, which is to provide for the security of its citizens. USAID makes the point that in "areas lacking in social services and security, gangs become bolder, and may take on roles normally reserved for the state."²³¹ Although it has substantial logistical and financial support from the United States, El Salvador is dangerously close to being a failed state. This support from the United States is substantial. Since 2008, the United States has spent appropriated at least \$1.2 billion for CARSI, about a fifth of which goes to El Salvador.²³² In fiscal year 2016, Obama requested \$750 million for the region.²³³ This is despite the fact that the U.S. Department of State and the Congressional Research service continue to publish reports that document and roundly criticize human rights abuses in the Salvadoran military.

Concurrently to the implementation of *Mano Dura* and *Super-Mano Dura* policies, and just as collaboration between state agencies was being institutionalized at a new level, the U.S.

²²⁹ USAID 2006, 20.

²³⁰ Wolf, 73.

²³¹ Quoted in the court affidavit of expert witness and Latin America expert Kimberly Gauderman, 16.

²³² Mike LaSusa, "Are the U.S. Anti-Crime Programs in Central America working?" *Insight Crime*, www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/are-us-anti-crime-programs-in-central-america-working. March 6, 2017.

²³³ Peter J. Meyer and Claire Ribando Silke, "Central America Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service. Available at <https://fans.org/sip/cars/row/R41731.pdf>. December 17, 2015. P iii.

ramped up deportations of gang members from its own jails back to Mexico and Central America. In 2004, there were 140,000 deportations from the U.S. to places south of the border.²³⁴ Between 2000-2004, 20,000 Salvadorans were sent back.²³⁵ In 2007, 20,000 Salvadorans were deported.²³⁶ In 2008, Bush established “Secure Communities” in the United States, which included funding and mechanisms for more profound collaboration between Immigration and Customs Enforcement in the U.S.

Deporting Criminals, Exporting Neoliberalism, and the Role of Economic “Aid”

As the civil war drew to a close in El Salvador, the United States deported three things at the same time. There were plane loads of thousands of criminal deportees from Los Angeles, the mara members described in the last chapter. There were “technologies of control” to borrow a phrase from Foucault— mechanisms of “best practices” in repressive policing policies. Preceding any of these things, however, were neoliberal economic policies that were put in place before the war ended. International financial institutions placed new austerity demands on the government of Alfredo Cristiani, and these demands only accelerated at war’s end.²³⁷ Bowing to the demands of these international institutions, the Cristiani government slashed the size of the public sector. As gangs gained more power, they confronted an anemic state unable and unwilling to provide jobs, healthcare, and social opportunities to combat the lifestyle that the gangs had to offer. Without these austerity cuts, the gangs would not have been as powerful vis-a-vis the state.

²³⁴ USAID, 19.

²³⁵ Eguizabal, 77.

²³⁶ Blitzer, 30.

²³⁷ Cristiani was a graduate of Georgetown’s business school and a business leader himself. So to say that austerity and structural adjustment were imposed on the Salvadoran state is not to imply that he was not an eager partner. Neoliberalism was the guiding philosophy of the Georgetown business school.

As a condition of a 1991 structural adjustment loan with the World Bank, El Salvador privatized its banking system, sugar refineries, telecommunications industry, electricity distribution, and national pension system.²³⁸ The urban working class, involved in the civil war and concerned with the conditions of the Peace Accords, was in a weak position to fight back against these privatization measures. In El Salvador, the neoliberal think tank Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social (FUSADES) coordinated the austerity plan. It took unions in El Salvador eight years, until 2000, to win any measure of victory against layoffs and cuts to public sector services. In that year they successfully defeated the privatization of the public healthcare system.²³⁹ But the damage had been done.

The U.S. government and partner corporations and foundations used both business deals and aid mechanisms to advance their objectives in El Salvador. Trade policies and loans are the second “mechanism of intervention” in the new, post-civil war paradigm to be examined here. The dollar became the legal tender of El Salvador in 2001, and that country firmly adhered to the “Washington Consensus” of a regime of trade liberalization. After Chile, El Salvador was considered the “freest” economy in Latin America.²⁴⁰ The Central American oligarchy, a small number of families who control large sections of the economy, became increasingly globalized, and the Salvadoran state stayed open for business by maintaining a tax structure in which most state revenues are generated by regressive consumer taxes and the corporate tax structure is low.²⁴¹ The Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) was established in 2006.

Rather than being a passive victim of US decisions, the Salvadoran elites benefited from neoliberal reforms. In the post–civil war era, Salvadoran elites have globalized their interests

²³⁸ Almeida, 194.

²³⁹ Almeida, 199.

²⁴⁰ Eguizábal, 58.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

very successfully. While their economy was traditionally focused on monocrop export, mainly coffee, since the civil war they have shifted to the service sector and other nontraditional exports. And since 2009, a new group of wealthy economic elites, enriched by Alba Petroleos, has arisen out of former FMLN leaders. Both the old elites and the new ones are influential in the policy decisions of Sánchez Cerén. In the new globalized economy, the Salvadoran business class, although it may be small, is an equal partner in shaping trade policies that work to the advantage of economic elites in both the North and on the isthmus.

An example of the economic shift is that thousands of former gang members deported from the United States with their Angelino English skills from the streets and the public schools in the North have created a low-wage workforce in El Salvador. In a prominent January 2017 *New Yorker* article “Called Away: A Deportation Crisis has Fueled an Unlikely Industry,” Jonathan Blitzer tells the story of American-based call centers like Sykes, aka “Homieland,” whose workforce is more than half deportees. Workers do customer service for hotel chains, provide technical support for camera products, and make around \$150 per week.²⁴² Twenty thousand Salvadorans work for ten major call center companies.²⁴³

The International Development Bank provided a \$45 million violence-reduction loan to El Salvador in 2006.²⁴⁴ The European Union provided \$10 million in assistance to the Government of El Salvador’s National Council on Public Security for prevention activities. The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) is an aid agency, independent of USAID, established by the U.S. Congress. Over the past five years, MCC has provided about a million dollars a year in aid and loans to El Salvador.²⁴⁵ The loan money was contingent on the Salvadoran state’s

²⁴² Blitzer, 31.

²⁴³ Ibid, 30.

²⁴⁴ USAID 2006, 28.

²⁴⁵ Main, Johnson, and Beeton, 487.

adoption of two laws, one attempting to curb mechanisms for money laundering, and the other to encourage public-private economic partnerships.²⁴⁶ The loans and aid money are profoundly attached to the U.S.' agenda. Main, Johnson, and Beeton state that “[s]igning a compact with the MCC would also help legitimize ARENA’s economic program by showing that it carries concrete benefits.”²⁴⁷

In April 2005, USAID as well as the Department of Justice were called before a House of Representatives Committee on International Relations subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere to testify on the gang problem and potential solutions. USAID consequently undertook a gang assessment study that resulted in the influential report “Central America and Mexico Gang Assessment,” in 2006, which would set the tone for USAID involvement in funding gang prevention programs in El Salvador.²⁴⁸ These programs began under the Bush administration and were accelerated under Obama.

In 2007, George Bush Jr. provided the initial framework for the next decade of U.S. involvement in El Salvador that became known as the Mérida Initiative. Congress authorized \$400 million for Mexico and \$65 million for Central America that year for funding designed to combat drug trafficking and organized crime, as well as anticorruption measures in Central America. This was part of an overall \$3.7 billion package to fight drug trafficking and secure the borders. The Mérida Initiative framework was adopted by the Obama administration and became known as CARSI in 2010.²⁴⁹

Just as Obama and the Democratic Party were taking the reins in the North, the FMLN won the presidency in El Salvador for the first time in the person of Mauricio Funes, a journalist

²⁴⁶ Eguizábal, 82-83.

²⁴⁷ Main, Johnson, and Beeton, 488.

²⁴⁸ USAID, 2006.

²⁴⁹ Olson, 3.

who had joined the FMLN in 2008 and therefore had not been a long-term FMLN theoretician or military commander. US diplomatic cables show that the embassy and U.S. officials pursued a strategy of exploiting potential splits between Funes and longer-term FMLN leadership to exert influence on his policies.²⁵⁰ Ambassador Charles Glazer said in a telegram to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, “A concerted effort by the USG, perhaps allied with the Brazilian government, could conceivably hold Funes to a responsible center-left approach to governing, giving him the strength necessary to push back against the radical elements of the FMLN. If high-level USG attention is required, we will not hesitate to request it. . .”²⁵¹ Hillary Clinton attended Funes’s inauguration in 2009, and Obama paid El Salvador a visit in 2011. The Partnership for Growth (PFG) was established in October 2011 after a visit by Obama to El Salvador earlier in 2011. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has laid out guidelines for collaboration between states; the Obama and Funes administrations attempted to put the guidelines for interagency cooperation into practice through a plan called the Joint Country Action Plan (JCAP). Under these plans, there has been an increasing focus on “transfer of expertise” in the realm of military affairs.²⁵² As CARSI policies were being codified in the United States, El Salvador passed a new anti-gang law in 2010 under Funes’s leadership.

Under CARSI, aid to El Salvador is more explicitly split between two arms: a military one, run by SOUTHCOM, and aid arm, run by USAID. From 2008-2014, funding for CARSI was \$803 million, \$128 million of that going to El Salvador. About 64 percent is administered under International Narcotics Control and Enforcement, managed by the Department of State, and 32 percent is administered by USAID.²⁵³

²⁵⁰ Main, Johnson, and Beeton, 490.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Eguizábal, 70-75.

²⁵³ Ibid, 82.

USAID funding represents the third method of U.S. involvement in Central America examined here. In El Salvador this aid funding has focused on underwriting gang-prevention programs and studies. NGO projects in El Salvador includes programs like Aid to Artists, which funds gang members involvement in local art initiatives, job training for local gang members, workshops on self-esteem.²⁵⁴ Other examples of programs funded by USAID are the “School Harmony Program” (*Convivia Escolar*), through which school employees are trained in alternative conflict resolution and schools are encouraged to dramatically reduce at-home suspensions and expulsions.²⁵⁵ USAID also pays for school-based psychologists. USAID usually channels its funding through for-profit contracting companies, and it has done some of this in El Salvador. However, SolucionES is a coalition of five El Salvador-based nonprofits that makes recommendations for how money should be spent.²⁵⁶

The existing literature is split as to whether the two arms of CARSI, military and enforcement cooperation coordinated through SOUTHCOM (64 percent of overall funding), and gang-prevention funding through USAID (32 percent of overall funding), work at cross-purposes, or whether the two branches of North American involvement reinforce each other. Many current studies, however, mistake a lack of efficiency in coordination between the two branches of CARSI (military and social spending) for a fundamental difference in purpose and philosophy between them. In fact, the people in charge of the two arms of CARSI are mostly united in philosophy and attempt to work together.

In the United States, strong-arm policing tactics are seen as ideological competitors with social welfare funding programs. In other words, SWAT-team sweeps, gang injunctions, tough-

²⁵⁴ USAID 2006, 28.

²⁵⁵ USAID 2006, 45.

²⁵⁶ Olson and Moffat, in Eric L. Olson, ed., *Crime and Violence in Central America's Northern Triangle: How U.S. Policy Responses are Helping, Hurting, and Can Be Improved*. [Washington D.C., Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2015]. P 9.

on-crime, and mass incarceration policies are advocated by one group of policy-makers. Other policy-makers advocate after-school programs, job programs, tattoo removal, and vocational training. The advocates of these two different types of policies are at odds with each other. Written from the United States with this theoretical framework as a backdrop, then, Eric Olson and Kathryn Moffat argue in the executive summary of a study commissioned by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C., in 2014 that “CARSI does not represent a security strategy but rather a number of programmatic initiatives with laudable goals that operate largely independently of each other. At times, United States supported programs contradict or undermine these goals.”²⁵⁷ To explain the shortcomings and ineffectiveness of CARSI, the authors argue that a key problem is that there is an ideological and practical split between the tough-on-crime policing strategies, on the one hand, and on the USAID assistance and social welfare programs, on the other.

However, a look at U.S. diplomatic cables from and to the U.S. Embassy in San Salvador between the years of 2004-2009 leaked by WikiLeaks offers a different perspective. These cables show the US diplomats such as Michael Butler, the U.S. Charge d’affaires in San Salvador, U.S. Ambassador Charles Glazer, and Otto Reich, Assistant Secretary of State for the Western Hemisphere, providing direct guidance to USAID country offices on how NGO funding could be leveraged to achieve U.S. diplomatic aims.²⁵⁸ The direct communications between State Department officials and USAID officers suggest that there is no Great Wall between the two arms of CARSI. For example, Michael Butler suggested in 2005 that

the close US-El Salvador bilateral relationship tends to further strengthen ARENA’s hand in next spring’s [legislative] elections. Newspapers have frequently publicized USAID-funded projects in housing construction for 2001 earthquake victims, potable water supplies for poor rural communities, new clinics and schools, agricultural and rural-sector development finance through

²⁵⁷ Olson and Moffat, 4.

²⁵⁸ Main, Johnson, Beeton, 484.

USDA, and other much needed social investment, and US assistance is widely perceived to be a benefit of postwar ARENA governments' close relationships with the US.²⁵⁹

In addition, Salvadoran Security Councils, Consejo *Nacional de Seguridad Ciudadania y Convivencia*, funded through the PNC, are responsible for spending social prevention program dollars.²⁶⁰

In 2016, influential journalist Sonia Nazario published an article in the *New York Times* editorial page titled “How the Most Dangerous Place on Earth Got Safer.”²⁶¹ Analyzing neighboring Honduras, Nazario argued that USAID programs were responsible for a huge reduction in homicide rates. “What we really need to do is to double down on the programs that are working and replicate them elsewhere,” Nazario argued, rendering the debate about the purpose and efficacy of the USAID programs in Honduras relevant to El Salvador. Nazario’s piece in the *New York Times* explicitly argued against efforts by members of Congress and activists in the United States to cut funding to Honduras after the assassination of indigenous activist Berta Cáceres, allegedly at the hands of Honduran security forces. Under the CARSI paradigm, funding for military support and social programs administered through USAID are bundled together, so the question of whether or not they can be separated or should be seen as distinct is crucial.

The first seminal study conducted by USAID reinforces the idea that, while tough-on-crime policing and social welfare funding may be at odds in the United States, in the context for foreign intervention, they work hand-in-glove. In April 2006, USAID’s “Central America and New Mexico Gang Assessment” was released as a direct result of the agency being called before Congress the previous year to make recommendations about gang intervention south of the

²⁵⁹ Main, Johnson, Beeton, 487-488.

²⁶⁰ US Department of State, “Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2015, El Salvador,” 10.

²⁶¹ Sonia Nazario, “How the Most Dangerous Place on Earth Got Safer,” *New York Times*. August 11, 2016.

border. It argues that an “integrated and coordinated response that incorporates prevention, intervention, and law enforcement approaches is needed to achieve sustainable results.”²⁶² They call this the “prevention-intervention-law enforcement approach.” The study argues that “the root causes of gang activity in the five countries are similar. Those causes are marginalized urban areas with minimal access to basic services, high levels of youth unemployment compounded by insufficient access to educational opportunities, overwhelmed and ineffective justice systems, easy access to arms and an illicit economy, dysfunctional families, and high levels of interfamilial violence.”²⁶³

Eight years after its initial report, USAID commissioned a second study, an “impact assessment.” The study, whose impartiality may be questioned because it is funded by USAID, is based on 848 semi-structured interviews and focus groups in Central America with community leaders and members of Municipal Crime Prevention Committees, school directors and teachers, religious leaders, police officers, and USAID officials. The Vanderbilt University’s Latin American Public Opinion Project, contracted to conduct the study, used a research technique called a “cluster randomized experiment,” whereby they measured drops in levels of violence and other factors in communities where USAID community prevention programs were in place, and compared them to control group areas where they were not. Researchers concluded that in El Salvador people’s perceptions of insecurity were down 17 percent as a result of USAID programs, and the number of youth gang participation was down 14 percent compared to what they would have been without the programs.²⁶⁴ This second report, unlike the first, explicitly counterposes “community-based crime prevention” to the traditional and repressive *mano dura*

²⁶² USAID 2006, 6.

²⁶³ USAID 2006, 17.

²⁶⁴ Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) “Impact Evaluation of USAID’s Community-Based Crime and Violence Prevention Approach in Central America: Regional Report for El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Panama.” [Nashville: Vanderbilt University, October 2014]. P 27 and 28.

approach.”²⁶⁵ However, by their own admission, some of the internationally-funded neighborhood councils (USAID funds Municipal Crime Prevention Committees), for example, were collaborating closely with police efforts, even as the police were engaged in widespread sweeps of young people in gang neighborhoods and incarceration rates were skyrocketing.²⁶⁶ The Municipal Crime Prevention Committees, funded by USAID, appear from LAPOP’s report to be taking the lead in gathering together different community stakeholders, from the schools to the police to coordinators of church-led social programs, and then selecting and recommending programs that the neighborhoods need.²⁶⁷ And while LAPOP takes great care to draw a distinction between neighborhood-based solutions and repressive enforcement solutions, one of their key recommendations is to “train the police.”²⁶⁸ It should be remembered that the US government is the key audience for this report. The close integration of community-based programs and repressive enforcement mechanisms in the report shows that these two approaches are closely linked in the decisions of US policy makers. The report does not mention intelligence gathering or the keeping of gang databases. While more research on this is necessary, I suspect that the Salvadoran police have taken a lead from their counterparts in the Los Angeles Police Department and LA County Sheriffs, and that they use their community-based programs to gather intelligence on gang members and leadership structures.

In March 2012, a gang truce between MS-13 and its rival gang, Barrio 18, was brokered under the auspices of the Mauricio Funes government. The homicide rate dropped by half in 2012 and 2013.²⁶⁹ Seven months later, the U.S. Department of the Treasury classified MS-13 as

²⁶⁵ LAPOP, 1.

²⁶⁶ LAPOP 7.

²⁶⁷ LAPOP 48.

²⁶⁸ LAPOP 53.

²⁶⁹ Eguizabal, 55.

a transnational criminal organization pursuant to an Obama-era Executive Order (13581).²⁷⁰ The classification of MS-13 as a transnational criminal organization is one factor that helped to undermine the long-term viability of the truce.

²⁷⁰ United States Department of the Treasury, “Treasury Sanctions Latin American Criminal Organizations,” October 11, 2012, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1733.aspx>.

Chapter Five: Two truces in El Salvador; the impact of prisons on gang structure and organization 1992-2016

The gang truce between Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18 in March 2012, brokered by the government of El Salvador, was informed by two major historical precedents. The first was the peace accord signed between the government and the FMLN, presided over by the United Nations, and signed at the Chapultepec Castle in Mexico City January 16, 1992. The second was the gang truce hammered out between the Bloods and the Crips in Los Angeles in 1992, and extended to Latino gangs in 1993. The lessons of the Los Angeles truce were carried to El Salvador both by individual gang members who were present in Los Angeles during truce negotiations, and then in El Salvador two decades later, and also by a transnational advisory committee of human rights activists and observers, with working knowledge of Los Angeles' truce, that travelled to El Salvador in 2012. In this way the Salvadoran gang truce of 2012 is an example of transnationalism "from below," or grassroots transnationalism.

These three truce processes (El Salvador 1992, Los Angeles 1992/93, and El Salvador 2012) were fundamentally different in many ways. But some of the protagonists of the 2012 truce had also been involved in one of the previous processes. More importantly, ideologically and practically, the two 1992 agreements inspired the 2012 Salvadoran gang truce and set the parameters for what negotiators viewed as possible. The truce negotiators had similar goals, outlooks, and methods. "The truce in Los Angeles is what got people into the state of mind to be able to meet with the enemy," as Alex Sanchez, former member of Mara Salvatrucha explained.²⁷¹ "I tried talking to the homies in El Salvador and saying that hey, these levels of violence are unnecessary. This truce is not going to last, I told them. But take advantage of the moment to end the rapes and the forced recruitment." The FMLN activists, the representatives

²⁷¹ Sanchez interview, Author, February 22, 2017.

of the Catholic Church, and the international solidarity activists and gang truce workers who were involved in the process failed to recognize the differences in the historical, political, and economic context, however, between the truce brokered in Los Angeles in 1992 and El Salvador in 2012. Because of the different context and historical moment, Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18 had become fundamentally different organizations and played a different role in society than the gangs in Los Angeles in 1992. The Bloods, Crips, Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18 in Los Angeles, on the one hand, and Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18 in El Salvador are all called “gangs,” and therefore grouped together in the popular imagination. But this conflation glosses over the fundamental differences. In fact, the success of the gang truce in Los Angeles since 1992 and the failure of the truce in El Salvador a year after its negotiation in 2012 can be attributed to the historical differences between the organizations that are called gangs and the historical circumstances that they were operating in.

1992 Chapultepec Accords

While negotiations to end the civil war in El Salvador, often mediated by the Catholic Church, had been attempted since the mid-1980s, they had broken off by the late 1980s and began afresh in 1989 when the United Nations became involved. In the first UN-brokered agreement in Geneva in April 1990, both the government and the FMLN agreed that the purpose of peace negotiations was “to end the armed conflict by political means as speedily as possible, promote the democratization of the country, guarantee unrestricted respect for human rights and to reunify Salvadoran society.”²⁷² The war, however, would last for almost another two years. In July and May 1990, negotiations continued in Mexico and Venezuela, and by April 1991,

²⁷² United Nations Full text of the Chaultapec Peace Agreement p 2 available at http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/SV_920116_ChapultepecAgreement.pdf

several agreements had been reached at a New York negotiating session. The level of violence between the warring parties, however, escalated in 1991 as each side made a last push and concerted effort to improve their relative positions at the bargaining table through a show of force.²⁷³

In the final accords signed in Chapultepec, Mexico City, on January 16, 1992, the signatories on behalf of the FMLN were Commander Shafik Handal, who would later become mayor of San Salvador, Commander Salvador Sanchez Ceren, the future President (2014-present; he would attack the truce between MS-13, Barrio 18, and the government), Commander Eduardo Sancho, Ana Guadalupe Martinez, and Maria Marta Valladares. On behalf of the government, Oscar Alfredo Santamaria, David Escobar Galindo, General Mauricio Ernesto Vargas, and Rafael Hernan Contreras.²⁷⁴ Two of the key protagonists of the 2012 gang truce, while they were not signatories, were involved in the process. Raul Mijango, one of the two key architects of that later truce, represented the Ejército Revolucionario Popular (ERP), one of the five sections of the FMLN, in its demobilization efforts and its transformation from a guerilla group to a political party. David Munguía Payes, as an officer in the military, helped to oversee the transformation of the armed forces as stipulated in the peace accords. The Accords so deeply affected every part of society that they left a stamp on the consciousness of Salvadorans, those directly involved and those who were not, and had a formative impact on the truce that was negotiated by gangs two decades later.

In chapter one of the 1992 peace accords, the armed forces were reorganized and regulated. The responsibility of the armed forces was defined as defense of the nation, narrowly

²⁷³ Wood, 121-127.

²⁷⁴ Annex II of the Chaultapec Peace Agreement. Page 4

interpreted as to “safeguard sovereignty and territorial integrity.”²⁷⁵ The armed forces were reduced from 63,000 at the height of the confrontation to 32,000 in the year afterward. By 1999, the FAES (Fuerzas Armadas de El Salvador) had been reduced to 15,000. An educational system was established to train recruits to the armed forces and also to provide human rights training. An Ad Hoc Commission was established to review the conduct of officers of the armed forces and to purge those whose human rights record indicated an unwillingness to operate within the “legal order” and with respect to human rights.²⁷⁶

Three armed bodies were abolished under the agreement: the National Guard, the Treasury Police, and the National Intelligence Department.²⁷⁷ The National Guard and the Treasury Police had operated as the de facto shock troops of rural landlords in their efforts to police and control rural populations since their establishment in 1911, as explained in Chapter One. The National Intelligence Department had been a clandestine unit reporting only to the president of El Salvador. It was in charge of gathering intelligence against opponents of the regime. In its place, a State Intelligence Agency was established and subordinated to civilian oversight. Soldiers from the Treasury Police and the National Guard were incorporated into the newly organized armed forces. In addition, the Rapid Deployment Infantry Battalions (BIRI) described in previous chapters were disbanded. “Civilian defense units,” described in chapter one, that provided the link between official military personnel and intelligence and the paramilitary death squads, were also disbanded.²⁷⁸

Chapter two provided for the establishment of an entirely new police force, whose job would be to “protect and safeguard the free exercise of the rights and freedoms of individuals, to

²⁷⁵ P 3.

²⁷⁶ P 5.

²⁷⁷ P 8.

²⁷⁸ P 10.

prevent and combat all types of crimes, and to maintain internal peace, tranquility, order, and public security in both urban and rural areas.”²⁷⁹ An autonomous National Public Security Academy (ANSP) was set up to train, hire, and evaluate police personnel. This was an entirely new police force that had risen to 18,000 officers by 1999. Twenty percent of the police force was to be recruited from the ranks of former FMLN guerrillas, twenty percent demobilized soldiers from the armed forces, and the rest were to be civilian recruits. In practice, however, both sides from the conflict came to be overrepresented as compared to the initial quotas, especially former military officers.²⁸⁰

In addition to the regulation of official state military bodies, the negotiating parties were concerned about operations of both paramilitary death squads and private military forces. Both types of organizations had operated outside the scope of the law. Therefore, “the Parties recognize the need to regulate the activities of all those entities, groups or persons who provide security or protection to private individuals, corporations or State Institutions, in order to guarantee the transparency of their activities and also their strict subordination to the law and to respect for human rights.”²⁸¹ A system was set in place to regulate such private security forces, including a system for registering their personnel and weapons.

Since the time of the agreement, though, both death squads and the proliferation of private security forces have violated its terms. Death squads, such as Sombra Negra, have been targeting suspected gang members. On June 21, 2017, four police officers, ten members of the military, and thirty-four civilians were arrested by the Ceren government for their alleged connections to death squads that operate inside the security forces and target gang members, in a

²⁷⁹ P 13

²⁸⁰ Patrick J. McNamara, “Political Refugees from El Salvador: Gang Politics, the State, and Asylum Cases.” *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 2017, P 4.

²⁸¹ Chapultepec Peace Accords, 10-11

haunting echo of civil war–era death squads. The Attorney General’s Office charged that the death squads “take justice into their own hands because of the incompetence of authorities in solving the gang problem that affects the population.”²⁸² Investigative journalists at Factum uncovered, through a source, a WhatsApp and Facebook group being used by an officer in the PNC’s antigang unit and other lower-ranking police to share information about gang members, their whereabouts, their relatives, gang structures, and executions. Fifty police officers participated in the network monitored by Factum.²⁸³ The transcripts of the information sharing on these social media apps give an eerie picture of the way that death squads have morphed in the twenty-first century. Throughout the civil war, military personnel and sympathetic civilians informally shared information that led to extra-judicial executions. The ease with which these networks can be set up and the speed with which information can flow has increased exponentially.

In addition, today more than five hundred companies employ between 35,000 and 40,000 private security personnel,²⁸⁴ bringing them to roughly the same numbers as the combined total of the police (PNC) and army (FAES) of El Salvador. These private security companies do not, in practice, comply with the stipulations set out in the Peace Accords to register staff and weapons. Most of the private security personnel are poorly trained, which undermines the significance of the professional training academies set up for the military and police.

Other chapters of the agreement provided for reforms of the judicial and electoral systems. Today the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman (PDDH) is in charge of investigating human rights violations. Where the Ombudsman’s office believes that there is a credible claim, it refers the claim to the Attorney General’s Office, and the Attorney General has

²⁸² Bargent, *Insight Crime*.

²⁸³ Avelar, and D’Aubuisson, *Insight Crime*.

²⁸⁴ McNamara, 18.

the power to prosecute such violations. The Supreme Court has jurisdiction over constitutional violations.²⁸⁵ In addition, the Peace Accords provided the means for the FMLN to become a legal party competing in open elections. The official status of the FMLN as a legal party began at the end of 1992, and the party started competing in elections in 1994. An FMLN candidate, Mauricio Funes, would win the presidency for the first time in 2009.

Two things stand out most about the Chapultepec Peace Accords. The first is that the entirety of chapter five discuss “Economic and Social Problems.” As the Accords argue, “one of the prerequisites for the democratic reunification of the Salvadoran society is the sustained economic and social development of the country.”²⁸⁶ The economic and social conditions identified at Chapultepec are the “agrarian problem” (in other words, a plan for transferring lands in excess of the constitutional limit of 245 hectares), “measures required to alleviate the social cost of structural adjustment programs, appropriate procedures for direct external cooperation designed to encourage community development and assistance projects, and establishment of a forum for economic and social consultation and the National Reconciliation Plan.”²⁸⁷ A system was set in place for the transfer of lands in excess of the constitutionally allowed limit for the use of individual campesinos, with preference given to former combatants from both the FMLN and the government. Particularly interesting is that, already by January 1992, there was a recognition among the negotiating parties for the need to mitigate the effects of structural adjustment. Beginning in 1984 ARENA pursued neoliberal structural adjustment policies. These included the establishment of free trade zones where labor laws and environmental regulations were suspended, and an increased push toward non-traditional exports in the agriculture industry. As

²⁸⁵ Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015, United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. “El Salvador Human Rights Report 2016”

<https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265798.pdf>

²⁸⁶ Chapultepec Peace Accords P 31.

²⁸⁷ P 31.

prescribed by World Bank recommendations for Central America, tourism was developed, pushed, and subsidized as an industry. In order to fund the war against the FMLN, the government implemented fiscal austerity and cut subsidies for public goods.²⁸⁸ The Accords, in an attempt to deal with some of the effects of structural adjustment, recommended consumer protection and social welfare programs. In addition, in a small section on privatization, the parties state that “the policy of privatization shall increase society’s share of ownership by affording workers access to ownership of privatized companies.”²⁸⁹ One of the basic tenets of structural adjustment and neoliberalism, privatization, is cast into a potentially positive light for workers. In reality, however, privatized industries were controlled by multinational corporations and not by workers.

The recommendations that the Peace Accords made for alleviating the effects of rural landlessness and urban poverty are one example of the fact that, while the Accords did an excellent job of identifying the roots of the problem and recommending solutions, and while its agreements were supposed to be binding on the new government, those recommendations were rarely followed. Another example is the way in which the reconstituted army was supposed to be made up of 20 percent former soldiers, 20 percent former civilians, and 60 percent civilians. In reality the reconstituted army was made up overwhelmingly of former military leaders, especially in the officer corps. The separation between the national defense role of the armed forces of El Salvador and the role of the police in keeping social order has also completely broken down. So the most striking thing about the Peace Accords document is how accurately it described the problems in El Salvador at the end of the civil war, and how thoroughly its recommendations were ignored.

²⁸⁸ Almeida, 180-182.

²⁸⁹ Chapultepec Peace Accords, P 36.

The Chapultepec Accords call for an end to impunity. “The Parties recognize the need to clarify and put an end to any indication of impunity on the part of officers of the armed forces, particularly in cases where respect for human rights is jeopardized. ...acts of this nature, regardless of the sector to which their perpetrators belong, must be the object of exemplary action by the law courts so that the punishment prescribed by law is meted out to those found responsible.” To that end, the Accords established a Commission for Truth, described in chapters one and two. The Commission decided that in the truth and reconciliation process, individuals who committed war crimes should be named and held accountable. Institutions like the Armed Forces of El Salvador would not be held collectively and institutionally responsible. This decision was controversial because war crimes happened in the context of cultures created inside the institution of the Army. But in the interest of being able to document each individual crime with evidence as opposed to making a general political case, the Commission elected a model of accountability based on individuals. The purpose of the Commission for Truth was to end the culture of impunity that had permeated Salvadoran society for decades. The Commission hoped that, by naming names, individual officers and other offenders would be brought to justice. But in April 1993, the Salvadoran legislative assembly passed a blanket amnesty law absolving all parties for crimes they had committed during the conflict. That law was declared unconstitutional by the Salvadoran Supreme Court in 2016.²⁹⁰ By that time, however, any violations of human rights that had taken place during the civil war had gone unpunished for twenty-five years.

The Chapultepec Accords are notable for their recognition of the roots of the violence in economic inequality, and also for creative solutions to problems like human rights violations. Disbanding the army and setting up a quota system for the re-recruitment of soldiers could have

²⁹⁰ State Department, “El Salvador 2016 Human Rights Report”

changed the culture of abuse and indiscriminate violence in the armed forces, for example. But the newly elected government after the civil war, led by the ARENA party, did not hold itself to the agreements. Likewise, the Truth Commission's efforts to identify individuals responsible for the killing and torture of civilians may well have laid the basis for truth, reconciliation, and healing in the country. However, shortly after the Truth Commission released its report in 1993, Salvadoran legislators passed a blanket amnesty law. There would be no truth and reconciliation. Lastly, the Accords recognized that economic inequality would have to be addressed for El Salvador to enjoy lasting peace. But economic inequality in El Salvador is as extreme as it was in 1992. Like the truce between the Bloods and Crips in Los Angeles that were negotiated in the same year, the Salvadoran Accords pointed out that economic development would be a prerequisite for lasting peace. Truces are useful because they capture the vision of peacemakers of what type of a society that they are fighting for; the economic reforms introduced in both Los Angeles and El Salvador, however, were limited in scope.

The Gang Revolution in El Salvador 1992-2012

As the ink was drying on the Chapultepec Accords, and as the Salvadoran military was being dismantled, four thousand gang members were deported to Central America from prisons in the United States, mainly from California.²⁹¹ They entered a society where the armed forces and police forces had been completely dismantled and were being rebuilt. The country that they entered was devastated by the effects of 75,000 deaths over previous decades, often executions carried out in the most gruesome fashion. The United States decided to deport gang members into a society torn apart by violence, without any time for truth, reconciliation, or healing, and without a viable security apparatus. Over the next few years, deportees would arrive in El

²⁹¹ Martinez, *History of Violence* xx.

Salvador, stamped with gang tattoos garnered on the streets of Los Angeles, and affiliations with cliques and gangs determined by the block in Los Angeles where their parents landed.

Deportations have continued at a steady pace for two decades. Eighty-one thousand convicted criminals were deported to El Salvador between 1998 and 2014.²⁹²

Alex Sanchez was one of these deportees in 1994. “The most impactful thing to me,” he explained, “was the extreme poverty.” As a member of a fledgling Mara Salvatrucha gang in Los Angeles, he had never held a grenade in his hand. But he did in El Salvador. “The kids over there gave us power as legit gangsters. But the truth is that the level of violence over there scared the fuck out of me.” Alex believes that the civil war had a major impact on the depravity of the gang members in El Salvador, and the particular forms of violence, such as beheadings, that they carry out.²⁹³ “I used to see these *huele pegas* how they were being treated, and the reality was that these kids were being killed and treated like dogs every day. It gave the gangs unimaginable power. The acknowledgement that ‘you exist, brother.’”

The prison system in El Salvador forces young people to join gangs to protect themselves. Prisoners, many as young as fourteen or fifteen years old, have to decide which gang to join in order to survive, or have it thrust upon them depending on which wing of the prison they are assigned to. Photojournalist Donna De Cesare met a young gang member named Guillermo in a gang house in Soyapango, on the outskirts of San Salvador when Guillermo was sixteen years old. His mother had left for Washington, D.C. when he was six years old in search of a better job, and his grandmother had raised him. And according to Guillermo, he had not heard from his mother since. He began hanging around at gang hangouts in the mid-1990s, and

²⁹² Steven Dudley, “El Salvador Prisons and the Battle for MS-13’s Soul,” *Insight Crime*, available at <https://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/el-salvador-prisons-battle-ms13-soul/>. February 16, 2017. He is citing the US Department of Homeland Security’s chart, “Ex-Convict Dpeortees from the United States.”

²⁹³ Sanchez interview, Author, August 23, 2016.

experienced harassment by the police. He was taken to Mariona prison when he was fifteen years old. He saw a neighborhood friend whom he knew like an older brother cut to pieces with a knife on his first day of imprisonment. He slept on cardboard boxes on a freezing concrete floor and was scared to death. “Every place is controlled by guys who are doing life- the most murderous ones. Real criminals, not homeboys.” Guillermo quickly learned the code for survival. He and a number of young juveniles were released from detention, however, after a prison fight. But he knew he might end up back in Mariona prison after another police sweep. “I had no choice,” he told de Cesare.

I joined the Mara that day. At least I knew if I got sent back to Mariona the guards would put me in the gang cell. It would be tough but less violent than being in the pen with the killers doing life. You see that graffiti? It’s our message to the Sombra Negra that killed our homie on that corner. Inside prison or on the street, we have to stick together.²⁹⁴

In fact, most gang members (62 percent) told Florida International University researchers that they first did time in prison as juveniles.²⁹⁵

This process has intensified since the implementation of Mano Dura policies described in chapter three. In the year 2000, before Mano Dura, El Salvador had 7,754 inmates in its prison system. Mano Dura policies began in 2004. Between 2004-2008, the number of gang members in El Salvador’s prisons doubled from 4,000 to 8,000.²⁹⁶ By 2016, the country had 34,938 prisoners.²⁹⁷ The prison population grew 450 percent from 2000 to 2016. Because prison capacity is officially for 10,035 inmates, the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUSADES) reports that El Salvador’s jail system is operating at 345 percent

²⁹⁴ De Cesare, 91-93.

²⁹⁵ Cruz, Florida International University, 32.

²⁹⁶ Steven Dudley, “How Mano Dura is Strengthening the Gangs” *Insight Crime*, available at <http://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/how-mano-dura-is-strengthening-gangs>. November 22, 2010.

²⁹⁷ Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2016, United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. “El Salvador Human Rights Report 2016” <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/265798.pdf>

capacity.²⁹⁸ In such conditions, infections are rampant. There are often neither blankets nor space for inmates to sleep, because thirty to forty human bodies are packed into spaces measuring 10.2 square meters, an average of three square feet per person.²⁹⁹ Article 11 of El Salvador's constitution guarantees citizens the right to a dignified detention. On May 27th, the Supreme Court of El Salvador ruled that the systematic overcrowding of El Salvador's prisons is unconstitutional, but conditions have not been ameliorated. The rates of incarceration in El Salvador skyrocketed between 2004-2010. It is worth noting, however, that the *rate* of incarceration in El Salvador only began to approach the rate of incarceration in California after 2010. In that year, California had 450 prisoners per 100,000 residents, much higher than the rate in El Salvador.³⁰⁰

Journalists, academics, and activists alike have spent time in El Salvador's prison system. Photojournalist Donna de Cesare documented the transnational movement of gangs in El Salvador and Los Angeles from 1992-2012 and later published the book *Unsettled/Desasosiego* (2013). The book is equal parts documentary photography and narrative about her qualitative and quantitative research, including visits to the Mariona prison in San Salvador to talk to family members of gang members that she knew on the streets of Los Angeles. Brothers Oscar and Carlos Martinez of the online investigative journalism site *ElFaro*, and their brother Juan, an anthropologist, have reported extensively from inside Salvadoran prisons. They collaborate with the journalists working with *Insight Crime*, funded by Open Society Foundations and sponsored by American University's Center for Latin American and Latino Studies. Steven Dudley and Juan Jose Martinez published, for example, "El Salvador Prisons and the Battle for MS13's

²⁹⁸Ibid., p 3.

²⁹⁹ Sean Tjaden, "Court Rules El Salvador Prison Crowding Unconstitutional," *Insight Crime* available at <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/court-rules-el-salvador-prison-crowding-unconstitutional>. June 8, 2016.

³⁰⁰ See useful chart on Lessing, 7.

Soul” in February 2017 for Insight Crime. These two sites publish the most thorough analysis of El Salvador’s gangs and prisons. Journalist and author Ioan Grillo visited prisons in both El Salvador and Honduras for his book, *Gangster Warlords*. Elana Zilberg, California anthropologist, first visited prisons in El Salvador in 1996 as a part of an international delegation of politicians such as Tom Hayden, writers like Luis Rodriguez, activists and academics to look at the implementation of the Salvadoran peace accords. She continued to visit to do research for her book *Space of Detention*. The Florida International University’s report, “The New Face of Street Gangs: The Gang Phenomenon in El Salvador,” and Benjamin Lessing’s Brookings Institute report, “Inside Out: The Challenge of Prison-Based Criminal Organizations,” discussed in chapters one and three, provide further evidence of the way that the prison system reifies gang structures.

This body of work shows that the prison system in El Salvador has shaped Mara Salvatrucha, Barrio 18, and other gangs in important ways. First, prison officials give themselves the authority to decide who belongs in which gang, and to segregate inmates according to gang affiliation. Salvadoran prisons are divided into three or four wings. One is for members of Mara Salvatrucha, one is for members of Barrio 18, and another is the “civilian” wing for people not affiliated with either of these two national gangs. The civilians, however, have formed their own gangs with names like “La Raza”³⁰¹ that operate with every bit as much brutality as the other gangs to protect themselves and enforce order in the prisons. These gangs that are formed inside the prisons often carry over into the streets as prisoners are released.³⁰²

³⁰¹ Martinez, *A History of Violence*, 21.

³⁰² In jails in neighboring Honduras, there is a fourth wing of prisons dedicated for corrupt police. Grillo, 205.

During the intake process, prisoners have to divulge their affiliation, clique, and rank. The state keeps records of these affiliations, thus reifying gang structures.³⁰³

Benjamin Lessing's argument, outlined in chapter two as it applies to gangs in Los Angeles, is equally true of gangs in El Salvador, where his research is also based. The segregation of inmates by gang affiliation gives those gangs "coercive jurisdiction" over sections of the prison. And in El Salvador as well, it is the certainty that gang members will go to jail that gives prison leaders ("*palabrer*os" in this case) authority to control the situation on the streets. Gang members can be almost certain that they will do jail time. Therefore they obey the orders of prison gang leaders to ensure their survival once they are locked up.³⁰⁴ Two thirds of the gang members interviewed in the Florida International University study had done prison time.³⁰⁵ Prisons have become the home, and the organizing center for gangs in El Salvador like they were in Los Angeles. Gangs were not created in or because of prison, but they took their hierarchical organized shape, and spread in their scope, inside prisons. Mara Salvatrucha is the most hierarchically organized of the gangs operating in El Salvador. Their leadership structure, the "*ranfla*," is divided between members who operate inside the prisons and those who operate on the street. Underneath the *ranfla*, *clicas* (local groups) and *sectores* (regional groups) regulate the daily life of gang members very highly.³⁰⁶

Gang members control the space inside the prison, setting up the "laws" and rules much like the way they do in California jails. Much more so than in California, however, prisoners are heavily armed with firearms and other weapons, sometimes patrolling the roof of the prisons themselves and controlling entries. Wives and girlfriends are ubiquitous in the prisons, and

³⁰³ Martinez, *A History of Violence*, 21.

³⁰⁴ Lessing, 7-8.

³⁰⁵ Cruz, Florida International University, 5.

³⁰⁶ For an excellent description of organizational structures see Cruz, Florida International University p 5.

prisoners have cell phones and intermittent internet service. Bloody battles between rival gangs leave dozens or even hundreds of dead. In his 2017 article “El Salvador Prisons and the Battle for MS-13’s Soul” journalist Steven Dudley outlines how gang leaders in prison order assassinations by passing orders through their networks of inmates, many of whom interact with gang members from other prisons in the court system. He tells the story of how a gang leader from the Fulton Locos Salvatrucha clica, el Chory, decided to challenge the leadership of the *ranfla historica* inside the Mariona prison. Chory accused the gang’s leadership of taking as much as \$25 million in bribes from the two political parties to deliver votes, and betraying the gang’s devotion to the neighborhood and its members. Gang leaders inside the Mariona prison ordered his assassination, and were able to have those orders carried out in the Izalco prison. Prison protects gang members, to a certain extent, from their enemies, and facilitates easy communication. According to the Salvadoran Attorney General’s office, 84 percent of all extortion operations are run from inside the prison system.³⁰⁷ Gang members on the streets are required to collect “impuestos de guerra,” in other words extortion money, from residents and businesses and to pay tribute to gang leaders in jail.

The conditions in the prisons are not the only way that the criminal justice system in El Salvador acts to reify and strengthen gang structures. Another important component of gang identity, and their *raison d’etre*, is their oppositional position to the police and military. 45 percent of the gang members interviewed in the Florida International University study reported that they had been attacked by the police.³⁰⁸ According to *Insight Crime* reporter Tristan Clavel, “clashes between security forces and gangs in El Salvador have begun to resemble a low-

³⁰⁷ Dudley, “How Mano Dura is Strengthening the Gangs.”

³⁰⁸ Cruz, Florida International University, 31.

intensity conflict.”³⁰⁹ By their very nature, gangs need enemies in order to justify their continued existence, and the mass incarceration system in El Salvador and state repression continue to act as the enemy against which the gangs operate.

There are important similarities between the prison system in California and El Salvador, and while both prison systems have worked to reify gang structures in some ways. However the different circumstances in which Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18 operate in California and in El Salvador may be more important than their differences. El Salvador was deeply torn apart by a civil war that killed 12 percent of its population and exiled another 25 percent when prison gangs were imposed on it by the United States (although El Salvador already had typical mid-twentieth century street gangs of the type described by Malcolm Klein). The armed forces and the police force were not operational, their predecessor organizations having operated with a culture of corruption, human rights violations, and collaboration with death squads. The economy of El Salvador, unlike the economy of California, was less able to provide economic alternatives to gang activity to young people. If gangs are shaped by historical circumstances, then Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18 had become fundamentally different organizations in El Salvador than they are in California. Politicians and the media in the United States do not recognize these differences. The differences may also have been lost, though, on the negotiators of the gang truce in El Salvador that tried to map the lessons of LA’s gang truce onto a situation that was different in crucial ways.

Gang Truces in El Salvador

³⁰⁹ Tristan Clavel, “El Salvador Police Running ‘Clandestine Jails’ Report,” *Insight Crime*, available at <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/el-salvador-police-running-clandestine-jails-report>. September 20, 2017.

Localized attempts at gang truces in El Salvador were attempted before the highly publicized 2012 truce. In a little-known case in San Martín, eleven miles from San Salvador, a parish priest attempted to bring together gang members in 1996 to sign a local truce to stop the violence. One hundred and thirty members of both Barrio 18 and Mara Salvatrucha signed the truce, and the local city government poured money into sports programs for young people. The same year, a local cease-fire was brokered in the San Salvador suburb of Soyapanga. An article published in the *Los Angeles Times* that year specifically links these localized efforts to the gang truce in Los Angeles. The truce efforts were inspired by the efforts in Los Angeles, and the impetus for the efforts were the thousands of deportees arriving from California's jails. Like the gang truce in Los Angeles, these efforts specifically addressed the root causes of joblessness and family disintegration.³¹⁰ I serendipitously discovered the article about the early efforts at gang truces in El Salvador in the files of the Coalition Against Police Abuse in Los Angeles. The community justice activists affiliated with CAPA were deeply involved in the truce process in Los Angeles and interested in the transnational impact.³¹¹ In 2003, gang leaders tried brokering a truce again at the local level in San Martín³¹² This time, all the leaders of the local truce were executed by the national leadership of MS-13 and Barrio 18 for failing to respect the leadership hierarchies. By that point, MS-13 and Barrio 18 in El Salvador had become organizations with fundamental differences from the street and prison gangs in California.

Mauricio Funes, a former journalist and FMLN deputy, was the first FMLN candidate to win the presidency of El Salvador. He took office in June 2009. He did not oppose Mano Dura

³¹⁰ Juanita Darling, "Gang Truce Gets a Boost from Salvadoran City," *Los Angeles Times*, April 12, 1996.

³¹¹ In fact, they were more than just interested in looking at the impact of LA's gang truce in other cities; they actively tried to build solidarity. Their files contain video archives of gang members on the East Coast recording messages to be delivered to LA gang members. In these messages gang members talk about being inspired by Los Angeles to broker their own truces.

³¹² Sanchez interview, Auhtor, June 29, 2017.

policies, and in fact, expanded the military 57 percent during his first two years in office.³¹³ He was, however, one of the main protagonists of the gang truce negotiated in 2012. As a part of a mass shakeup in the Funes government in that month, FMLN President Mauricio Funes appointed David Munguía Payes, the Minister of Defense, to hold the additional post Minister of Public Security, essentially elevating him to a sort of a “Super Minister.” Munguía Payes had been a general in the Salvadoran forces at the time of the civil war, and was an advocate for a stronger crackdown on gangs, including military intervention in gang-ridden communities and a suspension of civil rights in those communities. Raul Mijango, an ex-guerilla and FMLN ex-deputy, began to meet with Munguía Payés and make a plan for brokering a peace. According to interviews conducted by *ElFaro*, President Funes was briefed at every step of the truce process and it had his full approval.³¹⁴ In this sense, the truce in El Salvador differed from the truce in Los Angeles because it was conceived of by the government first, and brought to gang leaders later, although gang leaders had been open to the idea for more than five years. Gang leaders in El Salvador, however, almost all of them locked up, could not meet without the intervention of the government because they were physically separated. In Los Angeles, it was a more grassroots process that took place in the housing projects rather than in prison.³¹⁵ Court documents from 2017 revealed that the impetus for the talks came from the office of Munguía Payés with the full knowledge and complicity of Funes.³¹⁶

³¹³ Hannah Stone, “The Iron Fist Returns to El Salvador” *Insight Crime*, available at <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/the-iron-fist-returns-to-el-salvador>. Feb 2, 2012

³¹⁴ By far the best piece on the gang truce process is Carlos Martinez and Jose Luis Sanz’ “La nueva verdad sobre la Tregua entre pandillas,” published in *ElFaro* on September 11, 2012.

³¹⁵ Sanchez interview, Author, February 22, 2017.

³¹⁶ Angelik Albaladejo, “El Salvador Gang Truce was ‘State Policy’: Trial Testimony” *Insight Crime*, available at <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/el-salvador-gang-truce-state-policy-trial-testimony>. August 9, 2017.

In January 2012, Mijango began contacting the *palabrer*os (leaders) of gang cliques to float the idea of a truce.³¹⁷ He knew many of them because of negotiations that he had conducted as a government deputy to negotiate over the distribution of cooking gas,³¹⁸ and also relied on his credibility as an ex-guerilla. By talking to his gang contacts, he realized that the *palabrer*os of the key cliques, New Israel (Mara Salvatrucha) and Cabañas de Ronca and Las Palmas (Barrio 18) were locked up in the Zacatecoluca prison, “Zacatraz” as it is called in El Salvador.

Before heading into the prisons to negotiate with the gangs, Mijango realized that he needed a co-negotiator. He and Munguía Payés agreed that a representative of the Church could help to give the process legitimacy. This was partially a legacy of the 1991 and 1992 peace negotiations, and an effort to copy the impact that church involvement had on those negotiations. Mijango and Munguía Payés thought that a church leader would help to convince the extraordinarily powerful business class that the process was legitimate, and also help to ease tensions among gang members, many of whom were Catholic. However, when the two men went out looking for participants, they were turned down three times by an archbishop, an auxiliary bishop, and the parish priest who had championed the canonization of Archbishop Oscar Romero. They were left with Fabio Colindres, a low-level chaplain with deep ties to the military and the police. While not what they hoped for, Munguía Payés and Mijango chose Colindres as a co-negotiator to move ahead with the process. Thus, at the highest levels of civil society, the key protagonists of the truce were the FMLN President (Funes), an ex-guerilla and ex-FMLN deputy (Mijango), an ex-general from civil war days who espoused repression (Munguía Payés), and a chaplain with deep ties to the police and the military. “Mijango was

³¹⁷ Literally, “He who holds the word.” This is how clique leaders are described.

³¹⁸ As a part of the government, Mijango had taken it upon himself to try to solve the problem of extortion. As the government was distributing cooking gas, the gangs were levying a “war tax” on this commodity as they do on many others. Mijango had realized that any realistic solution would involve negotiations with the *palabrer*os. Because of this previous work, he was familiar with many of them.

using his experience from the negotiations with the Peace Accord,” according to Alex Sanchez. “He knew what he would and would not be able to get. The gang members, for their part, were thrilled to see Mijango there, because he had the legitimacy of the FMLN on his side.”³¹⁹

Mijango and Colindres entered Zacatecoluca prison on February 9, 2012, and began talks with Mara Salvatrucha. During the following three days, they negotiated with three separate factions of Barrio 18. One of the difficulties of the truce process was that a deep inter-gang feud in Barrio 18 had broken out. The gang was split into three factions: the sureños, the revolucionarios, and a third faction of disgruntled leaders. After three days of talks, the factions decided to speak as one group under the direction of Carlos Ernesto Mojica Lechuga, “El Viejo Lin,” who became the Barrio 18 spokesperson. Borromeo Hernandez, “El Diablito” was the leader of MS-13. Both Hernandez and Lechuga told *ElFaro* that they had been open to these types of negotiations for at least five years, but that they had not found any receptive government officials to participate in negotiations. February 20, 2012 was the first day that both factions met together, with nine members of Mara Salvatrucha and ten members of Barrio 18 (see their names on page 8 of Martinez and Sanz) Lagrima, mentioned in chapter two, was one of the negotiators for Barrio 18. The objective of the truce negotiations was very simple: to reduce the levels of homicides.

During the talks that took place inside Zacatecoluca, the negotiations took on a life of their own among gang members, and while the process had started “from above,” initiated by government officials, what came out of it was more organic. The nineteen members of the negotiating team hand-wrote a “Document Seeking Peace,” with six points on it, that they submitted to the OEA. They proposed a “*Ley de Proscripción de Pandillas*,” proposing a

³¹⁹ Sanchez interview, Author, February 22, 2017.

dramatic reduction of the military, a halt to military operations in gang territory, and a series of social programs for the betterment of the community.

Mijango and Munguía Payés wanted to keep the negotiations secret until after the March 11, 2012 elections. The deal was that after that date, there would be a slow transfer of the nineteen gang leaders out of the Zacatecoluca prison into lower-security facilities in some of the more far-flung areas. But behind bars, the prisoners had a different idea. Both gangs cooperated to organize, from behind bars, a potential transportation strike the day before, the day of, and the day after the election. They called Mijango on March 4th, a week before the election, and told him that the planned strike would go forward unless all nineteen participants in the negotiations, plus eleven others were transferred immediately out of Zacatecoluca. Taking the threat seriously, the government officials arranged to move all thirty gang members out of Zacatecoluca on March 8 and 9, two days before the national election. On March 11, the election happened. Still, both the government and the maras wanted to keep the negotiations secret. The maras declared a cease-fire, but did not want it to be known that they were collaborating with the state. For the part of the Funes government, it was important that they not be seen as being soft on crime. After a decade or more of the maras being painted as “terrorists” in the media and by politicians, negotiating with them would be politically costly. On March 14, however, the journalists at *ElFaro* caught wind of the deal and published an article about the transfers and a reported cease-fire between the gangs.

In the aftermath of the *ElFaro* expose, the government and the negotiators panicked and called a press conference to try to explain the transfer of thirty of the country’s most dangerous gang members out of the maximum security Zacatecoluca. At that press conference and for six months after, the government continued to deny involvement in negotiations with the gangs.

Their claim about why the transfers took place, however, was not credible to the Salvadoran public. David Munguía Payés and Raul Mijango brought journalist Paolo Lüers of the newspaper *El Diario de Hoy* into the process to try to explain what had happened. Rather than simply acting as a journalist, however, Lüers became involved in the process. Along with the Salvadoran Association of Industries (ASI), prominent business leaders and economists, he helped to organize the Humanitarian Commission, a group of business leaders committed to supporting the truce by economic means.³²⁰

The gangs, for their part, promised a reduction in homicides, that they would stop operating in the schools, end forced recruitment, and stop or reduce violence against women.³²¹ They also turned in three thousand arms to the Organization of American States (OEA/OAS). They claimed in the media that they were calling a cease-fire unilaterally and without any conditions being placed on the state. “I told the homies that the truce is not going to last,” Alex Sanchez said. He was talking to participants via phone from Los Angeles, and reflecting on his experience there. “But you can use the momentum to set in stone certain things. Stop the rapes. Stop killing family members. Stop forcible recruitment of minors. We’re not going to stop gangs, but can we be more humane?”³²² Both sides, the maras and the state, had an interest in making it seem as though this were a process independent of state involvement. In the six months after the treaty, homicides dropped in half. They went from 13.6 per day at the beginning of March 2012 to 5.5 per day in September. In 2010, there had been 2,818 recorded homicides in El Salvador. In 2012, there were 1,867.³²³

³²⁰ Martinex and Sanz “La Nueva verdad” 19.

³²¹ Martinez and Sanz “La Nueva verdad” 17.

³²² Sanchez interview, Author, February 22, 2017

³²³ Martinez and Sanz “La Nueva verdad” 17

The truce was not popular with Salvadorans of either party affiliation, however. The fact that the negotiations had been conducted in secret, and had later been exposed by the media caused immediate suspicion and skepticism. The media, in general, with the exception of journalists like Paolo Lüers who specifically organized support for the truce and its conditions, brutally attacked the government for being soft on crime while ordinary Salvadorans were suffering. On nightly news and in the papers, there was a “constant barrage of gang members being interviewed from behind bars,” according to Alex Sanchez, who says that the media did it for cynical reasons. “The community felt slapped in the face. The population did not accept it and so the pressure came on. ... if these guys are serious about redemption, most people thought, then they would stop *la renta* [extortion], but that part never stopped.”³²⁴ The desperate conditions in El Salvador create a level of support for the policies of social cleansing.

Partially because of the weakness of the Salvadoran state, the signatories of the truce appealed to the Organization of American States (OAS), and that body became involved in June 2012. They organized the collection of three thousand small arms from gangs, and organized reports on the social and economic conditions that gave rise to the gang problem. They brought in NGOs and the private sector in a technical commission intended to create plans to alleviate prison overcrowding, enact violence prevention programs, and create social reintegration programs for former gang members.³²⁵

In addition to the United Nations, enforcement of the truce had a grassroots element. A Transnational Advisory Group in Support of the Peace Process in El Salvador (TAGSPESS), according to their own literature, “a coalition of individuals and groups with years of experience

³²⁴ Sanchez interview, Author, February 22, 2017.

³²⁵ Organization of American States, “OAS Secretary General Highlights Results from the First Year of Gang Truce in El Salvador,” available at http://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-084/13. March 11, 2013.

working in Salvadoran diaspora communities in the United States,” visited El Salvador for a week in July 2012 to assess the progress of the truce. “Members of TAGSPPEs are recognized experts in gang/violence intervention and prevention, mental health, prison reform, business and job development, human rights, and healing through the cultural arts in Central American, Chicano/Mexicano, Puerto Rican, African American, and Afro-Caribbean communities.”³²⁶ The delegation was made up of some people, such as Luis Rodriguez, author of *Always Running*, who had been involved in the gang truce in Los Angeles in 1992 and 1993, and Luis Cardona, former gang member and a gang intervention worker in Washington, D.C. Alex Sanchez of Homies Unidos Los Angeles, while he was not allowed to travel to El Salvador, was a key participant in TAGSPPEs, and was able to advise its members about what gang members in Los Angeles learned from the lasting gang truce in that city.³²⁷ This is one reason why the gang truce can be seen in part as an example of transnationalism from below: some gang members carried the lessons of Los Angeles with them to El Salvador. And other anti-violence activists tried to use organizations such as TAGSPPEs and Homies Unidos to put forward arguments to gang members in El Salvador, as well as to the governments of El Salvador and the US about how to approach the gang truce.

After meeting with gang members in six prisons, the truce facilitators, and officials in the Salvadoran government including David Munguía Payes, the transnational advisory group issued a set of findings and recommendations. For the first year of the truce, homicides were halved, from about 72 per 100,000 residents per year to 36.³²⁸ But the advisory committee found that the truce was “not yet a true reconciliation engaging with victims,” and found that the

³²⁶ “A Window of Hope,” TAGSPPEs report.

³²⁷ “TAGSPPEs Statement on the One-year Anniversary of the Truce in El Salvador”

³²⁸ Steven Dudley, “El Salvador’s Gang Truce: Positives and Negatives” *Insight Crime*, available at <http://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/el-salvadors-gang-truce-positives-and-negatives>. June 11, 2013.

secrecy with which it was conducted was perhaps the biggest reason why it had failed to win support among civil society. The advisory board noted the “strong common ground between all stakeholders, whether they were engaged with the truce or not. Perhaps most crucially, all agreed that Mano Dura and its legacy of suppression and social fragmentation without increased public safety, was a failure.” Chief among their recommendations was the ending of Mano Dura policies.³²⁹ They also recommended that the government of El Salvador institute social welfare programs to reintegrate gang members (following the recommendations of gang members themselves negotiated in the truce), and to address the root causes of the violence. In 2012, during a period of more than a year when homicides dropped, the Salvadoran government had to choose a path between economic development and reform as a way to address gang violence, or increased repression and an acceleration of Mano Dura policies.

Actions of the United States government undermined the truce. In October 2012, six months after the truce, the Department of the Treasury declared Mara Salvatrucha to be a transnational criminal organization (TCO) pursuant to President Obama’s Executive Order 13581. The designation gave the Department of the Treasury the power to freeze perceived assets of the gang. The Executive Order also prohibits US citizens from “conducting transactions” with MS-13. Anti-gang activists in the US, many of whom had made up the Transnational Advisory Committee, were therefore barred from assisting MS members in their efforts to negotiate a truce, or at least perceived that that was the case. Alex Sanchez, in particular, because he is an asylee and former gang member, interpreted the order from the Department of the Treasury as barring him from having any contact with MS members in El Salvador.³³⁰

³²⁹ “A Window of Hope” TAGSPPE report P 3.

³³⁰ Sanchez interview, Author, August 23, 2016.

Expatriate Salvadorans could vote for the first time in the presidential elections in the spring of 2014. Salvador Sanchez Cerén, one of the FMLN's chief negotiators in the 1992 Peace Accords was the FMLN's candidate. Calculating the unpopularity of the gang truce and continued support in the Salvadoran population for Mano Dura policies, Cerén campaigned against the gang truce and its underlying philosophy. He was inaugurated president in 2014, and he began to re-intensify Mano Dura policies. By spring of 2014, the truce was no longer in effect, and homicide rates had reached their pre-truce levels.³³¹ In 2015, violence spiked 70%.³³² The Salvadoran legislature, perhaps looking to the 1988 STEP legislation in California, characterized gangs as "terrorist organizations." Also in that year, three quick reaction military battalions were created to support the PNC in their efforts to combat gangs. On April 20, 2016, the Fast Reaction Force (FERES), a joint police-military operation involving 250 Special Forces Soldiers hit the streets of San Salvador with military tanks.³³³ In 2016 Cerén introduced "extraordinary measures" to try to cut contact between gang members in prison and the outside world. These included stripping inmates of cell phones, increasing the time that inmates could be detained without being charged, and perhaps most disturbingly, the increased use of solitary confinement. In 2016 the Attorney General had nineteen officials associated with the negotiation of the truce, most prominently Raul Mijango, arrested and tried for corruption. Cerén's government also threatened to have Munguía Payes impeached from his position as Defense Minister.³³⁴ In August 2017, however, they were exonerated.

³³¹ Two interviews confirm the fact that the general consensus is that the gang truce only lasted until the spring of 2014- an interview I conducted with journalist Oscar Martinez November 2, 2017, and also with Alex Sanchez August 23, 2016.

³³² U.S. Department of State, "Travel Warnings," <https://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/US-Renews-Travel-Alert-for-El-Salvador-Over-Violence-and-Crime-20160115-0033.html>.

³³³ U.S. State Department "El Salvador 2016 Human Rights Report" P 7.

³³⁴ U.S. State Department, "El Salvador Human Rights Report 2016"

The government led by longtime FMLN cadre Sanchez Cerén had made it clear that it had taken the road toward increased repression and intensified Mano Dura policies. These policies of mass incarceration and police repression exacerbated the gang problem in California in the 1980s and 90s, and they exacerbate the problem in El Salvador now. The Transnational Advisory Committee that visited El Salvador in 2012 recommended that the government take the opposite path, and attempt economic reforms as a strategy for addressing the root causes of violence. In September 2017, the homicide rate had jumped to 15 per day, one of the highest levels ever.³³⁵

³³⁵ Héctor Silva Ávalos, “El Salvador Violence Rising Despite 'Extraordinary' Anti-Gang Measures,” *Insight Crime* available at <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/violence-el-salvador-rise-despite-extraordinary-anti-gang-measures>. October 3, 2017.

Conclusion: Reckoning with Violence

Because a “gang” is a social organization, it is a product of the historical context in which it operates. In the United States, the media and politicians fail to historicize gangs and to understand the specific characteristics of each of the different organizations that are called gangs, or even share a gang name, like Mara Salvatrucha in Los Angeles and Mara Salvatrucha in El Salvador. The Treasury Department of the United States government has characterized Mara Salvatrucha as a transnational criminal enterprise.³³⁶ The reality, though, is that these two organizations, both called Mara Salvatrucha, are fundamentally different in California and El Salvador.

In California, Barrio 18 (in the late 1950s) and Mara Salvatrucha (in the late 1970s) began as traditional street gangs whose main purposes were the self-defense of young people from racist attacks on immigrants and Chicanos, and a sense of identity, belonging, and material support³³⁷ in a society where the nuclear family is supposed to provide those things but unable to. The main modus operandi of these gangs was property crime, fighting, and some drug sales (although it has been documented that drug dealing was not the central focus of street gang activity in the 1980s- that claim has been exaggerated).³³⁸ In the mid-1980s when street sweeps and mass incarceration accelerated in California, these gangs (as well as the Bloods and Crips) morphed into prison gangs whose membership and organizing structures were shaped in important ways by both the penal system. The identity of the gangs partially depended on their oppositional status to the various police forces sweeping young people off the street. The Mexican Mafia, which had always been a prison gang, played an enormous role in codifying

³³⁶ US Department of the Treasury, “Treasury Sanctions Latin American Criminal Organization,” Press release available at Treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1733.aspx. October 11, 2012.

³³⁷ Martinez and Sanz, “El Viaje de la Mara Salvatrucha: El Origen del Odio,” and Grillo, 196-204. These are also the conclusions of my chapter two.

³³⁸ Klein, 52-60.

gang behavior and centralizing various cliques.³³⁹ Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18 became more unified and centralized.

In El Salvador, street gangs existed before the deportation of gang members from the United States that began in 1992 and has continued since. The new gang entities that formed as these deportees from the California penal system began to arrive in El Salvador were shaped by US government immigration and criminal policy, but also and perhaps more importantly by the legacy of the civil war that had just ended. From the particular weapons that they used (machetes, grenades, and weapons obtained in the civil war), to their willingness to participate in decapitations and massive and indiscriminate rape,³⁴⁰ their particular forms of violence reflect the warfare techniques of irregular, civil war. Throughout the 1990s the Salvadoran state struggled to re-establish its security apparatus. At the same time, it failed to hold anyone accountable for crimes during the civil war, and a “culture of impunity” permeates the society.

Starting in 2003 with the implementation of the repressive policies of Mano Dura, the prison system in El Salvador was an equally important a factor in shaping the hierarchies Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18. The identity of those two gangs were shaped in opposition to the repressive violence of the state and the death squads. Today it as though the state and the gangs are warring factions in a civil war; the death tolls are as high as they were during the civil war and the types of violence as deranged. Inside the prison systems, Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18 have become more centralized and influential in Salvadoran society. Mara Salvatrucha in El Salvador has become a completely different entity from its predecessor organization in Los Angeles.

³³⁹ Sanchez interview, Author, February 13, 2018.

³⁴⁰ Sanchez interview, Author, February 22, 2017.

These differences explain why the gang truce in California in 1992 was an “organic solution” (albeit a partial one) that has decreased violence for decades, but the gang truce in El Salvador accomplished something else entirely. Murder rates in Los Angeles have continued to drop in the twenty-five years since the LA Rebellion.³⁴¹ The role of the gang truce brokered by the Bloods and Crips at the grassroots, reinforced by a prohibition on drive-bys by the Mexican Mafia prison gang, and buffeted by the Latino gang truce has not been written about enough in the media or in academia. In El Salvador, the murder rate dropped by half for a year after the 2012 truce.³⁴² It appeared to outside observers as though some of the lessons of the Los Angeles truce would hold true in El Salvador as well. But the extortions never stopped. Unlike Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18 in Los Angeles, extortion is the *raison d’être* for those gangs in El Salvador. “People said if you’re serious, stop *la renta* [extortion],” Alex explained. “But the *renta* never stopped. It got worse.”³⁴³ While the truce did dramatically reduce violence for over a year, just as it did in Los Angeles, it did not stop extortions. Extortions had become the most essential function of the gangs in El Salvador and their main source of revenue, given the relative dearth of other economic opportunities.³⁴⁴ In fact, there was speculation, though never substantiated, that the gangs brokered the truce as a ruse, promising a reduction in homicides to give themselves some space from law enforcement to be able to strengthen their extortion networks.³⁴⁵ And as of 2014, murder rates began to rise again to their previous level.³⁴⁶

³⁴¹ Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, “Department Crime Statistics 1960-2012,” accessed December 29, 2017. Available at www.lasd.org, as well as “The Homicide Report” *Los Angeles Times* <http://homicide.latimes.com>, and http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/lasd/189085_2012_Crime_Stats_PC_Charts.pdf

³⁴² http://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-084/13

³⁴³ Sanchez interview, Author, August 23, 2017.

³⁴⁴ Steven Dudley, “El Salvador’s Gang Truce: Positives and Negatives.”

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ See Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015, United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. “El Salvador Human Rights Report 2015” and Héctor Silva Ávalos, “El Salvador Violence Rising Despite 'Extraordinary' Anti-Gang Measures” *Insight Crime* October 3, 2017 <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/violence-el-salvador-rise-despite-extraordinary-anti-gang-measures>.

Solidarity activists, gang experts, and journalists explain the “failure” of the gang truce in El Salvador as a product of the secrecy with which the negotiations were conducted. Unlike the widespread community support in Los Angeles for the truce between the Bloods and the Crips, and the Latino gang truce, in El Salvador no such public support existed. Negotiations were initiated by the government, “from above” by Raul Mijango and David Munguia Payes, and not from the grassroots like they were in California. In California truce negotiators testified in front of the city council and garnered support from several social justice movements, as well as civic and faith leaders. By the time the truce was extended to Latino gangs, news cameras and media outlets were present at some of the major meetings to cement the agreements. On the contrary, negotiations were kept secret from the public in El Salvador. People found out that they were happening through an expose written by ElFaro, and therefore were instantly suspicious of the motives of the government and the gangs. “The problem with the negotiations,” Salvadoran activist Elizza Jurado told me, “is that there was no support from civil society.”

An additional factor is the international drug trade and the War on Drugs. Networks of “transportistas,” begun during the civil war to traffic weapons and people throughout Central America, have become involved in the drug trade.³⁴⁷ In the years after the 2012 truce, Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18 became increasingly involved in the global cocaine trade. Their dealings with cartels such as Mexico’s Sinaloa cartel³⁴⁸ has begun perhaps yet another shift in organizational practices. As historical circumstances change, so too do the organizational forms of gangs and the methods that they resort to.

³⁴⁷ “El Salvador” *Insight Crime* available at <http://www.insightcrime.org/el-salvador-organized-crime-news/el-salvador/>. September 15, 2017.

³⁴⁸ Douglas Farah, “Central America’s Gangs Are More Dangerous than Ever,” *Insight Crime* available at <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/central-america-gangs-are-more-dangerous-than-ever/>. January 27, 2016.

Alex Sanchez remarked on the organizational shifts in gangs in El Salvador since the truce. “before the truce, yes gang members had weapons. Grenades were easy to come by but many of them had homemade shotguns. They used a lot of machetes. Not all of them had access to military gear. But right after the truce, during the elections all of the sudden they had M-16s, AK-47s, they were all coming out in pictures armed with assault rifles. Who gave them that? It was only after they made contact with the government that that came about.”³⁴⁹

There are important ways in which the conclusions of this study should be investigated and either supported or changed. Its engagement with counterinsurgency doctrine, for example, is lacking because I have not looked at primary source material being produced in the 1960s and 1970s. Military historians today assure me that the 2006 Petraeus manual is a crystallization of five decades of the development of the philosophy inside the military, and that the Douglass Porch book *Counterinsurgency* is the best overview of how it was practiced historically. Still, to completely substantiate the claims made here would require a closer study of military history. In particular, I would like to trace the role of intelligence gathering, and its exact mechanisms in transforming domestic policing practices in the United States.

I would like to further develop the picture of the role played by USAID and NGOs in accomplishing military objectives. I have argued here that part and parcel of counterinsurgency practice is that the US government funds economic development efforts that are tied to the overall military agenda. I suspect that the State Department is the key link between the military, NGOs, corporations, and aid agencies, and that these groups cooperate to accomplish the overall agenda of the US government. I also suspect that evidence for this would be provided by a careful inspection of State Departments made available through WikiLeaks, but I have not had time to scour those files meticulously to help me to understand the link between the economic

³⁴⁹ Sanchez interview, Author, August 23, 2017.

and military agendas of the US government, aid agencies, corporations, and NGOs. Still, such research is clearly needed, because most Americans see military and economic aid as two diametrically opposed entities. This is best symbolized by Sonia Nazario's problematic piece "How the Most Dangerous Place in the World Got Safer" in *The New York Times* (analyzed in Chapter Four), in which she argues that USAID is a humane alternative to US military/police intervention in Honduras.³⁵⁰

There is no easily accessible map of the prisons of El Salvador. A useful map could be pieced together that shows the locations of prisons and maybe even traces each prison's role in the historical developments of Mara Salvatrucha. I hear the calling of an interdisciplinary geography, investigative journalism, and history project that maps El Salvador's prisons. Furthermore there is no comprehensive study of alternatives to violence, either in Los Angeles or El Salvador. Such a study could encompass the "gang intervention" industry that has arisen in Los Angeles and become entangled with local law enforcement and city government, school-based gang prevention programs, jobs programs, a long-term look at the impact of Homeboys Industries, a non-profit business that employs the formerly incarcerated and former gang members, faith-based initiatives, and the long term work of gang truce negotiators. I began this study because I wondered if gang truces are the type of organic, grassroots solution that Alex Sanchez talked about. I concluded that the 1992 and 1993 gang truce in Los Angeles had a huge impact on the reduction of violence in California for decades to come. But at the same time, the effectiveness of that gang truce is historically specific; it happened at the moment of a massive urban uprising that gave solidarity between gang members a boost. The uprising scared the city's elites into supporting the truce as an alternative to urban unrest, and also into pouring resources into Southcentral Los Angeles. The communities in which gangs thrive in Los

³⁵⁰ Nazario, "How the Most Dangerous Place on Earth Got Safter."

Angeles supported the truce, as did progressive clergy and other social justice movements. More importantly, the economy in California was robust enough to be able to provide other economic alternatives to drug dealing, theft, and extortion. Lastly, while there were tens of thousands of gang members in California in the 1990s (or hundreds of thousands if one believes the gang LAPD and LASD gang tracking lists, which I do not), those gangs were never large enough to be a serious threat to government sovereignty, even at the local level.

El Salvador is a different story. There, tens of thousands of members of Barrio 18 and Mara Salvatrucha³⁵¹ rival state military power. (There are roughly 16,000 active duty military personnel and 16,000 police in the PNC).³⁵² In fact, they reflect state power and the way that is organized; they operate much more like paramilitary death squads, their mirror image, than do gangs in the US. In addition to threatening the state's monopoly on violence, they also provide a serious economic alternative to the flagging official economy. "Gang tends to become more invisible," Alex explained. "They are being pushed to become more organized, to adapt and survive. The core issues are not being addressed. In the truce they said, you give us a job, we'll work. But nobody has a job, so you can't just give gang members a job, because then everyone will join a gang to get a job. Because there's like 50 percent unemployment. The postes are the lookouts. Those are the kids that give in. You can give in or you can flee." Therefore the gang truce was never able to accomplish in El Salvador what it did in Los Angeles.

Gang truces therefore are no panacea; they are not a universal solution to violence between the state and the varied organizations that are colloquially known as "gangs." While this study came up short in identifying more universal potential solutions to gang and

³⁵¹ The US Department of Justice estimates that Mara Salvatrucha alone has a total membership of thirty thousand, about twenty thousand of which are in Central America. "Department of Justice Fact Sheet on MS-13," April 18, 2017. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/file/958481/download>

³⁵² "El Salvador" *Insight Crime* available at <http://www.insightcrime.org/el-salvador-organized-crime-news/el-salvador>. September 15, 2017.

government violence, I suspect that much could be learned from a feminist analysis of gang violence. Such an analysis would go beyond describing the horrific sexual violence carried out by gang members against women and against each other. It would ask: why is society (in the United States or El Salvador) failing to meet the needs of its young people, from their material and emotional needs to the legitimate desire to belong and be a part of a collective identity? The nuclear family is the main institution in our society charged with such a task, a phenomenon called “privatized reproduction.” But perhaps we are past the moment in history when the nuclear family could provide for such needs (if it ever could). If the family is a social institution created by human beings to meet their needs, and if it is failing to meet those needs, perhaps a new form of organization could be invented. Gangs are one possible social organization. Perhaps we could create other forms of social organization that could accomplish the goals of providing for young people’s material and emotional needs and their need for identity without reflecting the massive brutal violence of militarization, coming from the highest echelons of society, in which our young people grow up today.

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InSight Crime <http://www.insightcrime.org>

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