

Rereading Salvadoran **testimonio** after the Cease-Fire

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En Centroamérica los guatemaltecos, nicaragüenses y salvadoreños, que han padecido guerras y altos índices de analfabetismo, suelen decir que los costarricenses son hipócritas y cobardes, porque son educados y pacíficos.

Yo aspiro, dejarles a mis hijos un país, donde no tengan ninguna oportunidad de ser héroes, no me importa, si dentro de cincuenta años dicen que somos un pueblo cobarde.

[In Central America Guatemalans, Nicaraguans and Salvadorans, who've suffered wars and high rates of illiteracy, often say that Costa Ricans are hypocrites and cowards because they are educated and peaceful.

I aspire to leave my children a country where they'll have no opportunity to be heroes, it doesn't matter to me if fifty years from now they were a nation of cowards.]

Joaquín Villalobos, March 1998<sup>1</sup>

Now that the war is over, Esmeralda has had her IUD removed.=What? I read the sentence again.@

Cynthia Enloe, The Morning After 1

La literatura tiene que seducir a otro lector.

[[Salvadoran] literature must seduce a different reader.]

Rafael Lara Martínez, LASA 1998

Now that the war is over...=

Joaquín Villalobos and Esmeralda were both FMLN combattants during the war in El Salvador. After the peace accords were negotiated, both were to hand over their guns and find another way to pursue the FMLN's agenda for social change through peaceful means. As the first sentence of Cynthia Enloe's book The Morning After, cited above, makes clear, the end of the war also means a change in how men and women will live their gendered identities, a change, in Enloe's words, in Ideas about manliness and womanliness@(5). These changes have perhaps been lived in a particularly intense fashion by women who were combattants, who deliberately

set aside at least some traditional notions of femininity in order to take on the role of guerrilla fighter. Certainly many people, both in El Salvador and elsewhere, allowed themselves to hope that the massive participation by Salvadoran women made necessary by the extreme conditions of the war --as fighters in the FMLN, as organizers in refugee camps and human rights campaigns, and at every level of the struggle for social change-- might produce a transformation for women in the demilitarization and reconstruction process after the war. Yet, while many Salvadoran women and men have been profoundly changed by the war and many continue to work to improve women's lives in their efforts to create a viable and more democratic civil society for all, the other quotation included above, with which Villalobos ended an article encapsulating his current view of the war and post-war political process, illustrates a profound ambivalence about the end of the war. All might aspire to peace and the better life that peace might make possible, but the hyper-masculine rhetoric of revolutionary heroics, however ironically deployed in this joke, provided a clear and secure place from which men could live their engagement with citizenship and revolution. What now? Can building peace only be imagined as the absence of heroism, as cowardice?<sup>2</sup>

Because military experience has often functioned as a way of gendering citizenship, I want to reread two texts, No me agarran viva: la mujer salvadoreña en la lucha , co-authored by Claribel Alegría and Darwin Flakoll (1983) and Nidia Diaz's Nunca estuve sola (1988), both written during the war with the express intention of mobilizing support for the political and military agendas of the FMLN, and in which women's experience as guerrilleras is central. The first book's publication coincided with the brutal state repression of the popular movement of 1980-81, following Archbishop Romero's assassination, a time in which the FMLN took center

stage in the struggle for social change; Nidia Díaz's book belongs to the period in which the FMLN was preparing for its 1989 offensive. I want to think about how such texts are being read or re-read both by Salvadorans and by an international community of readers as we try to make sense of post-war transformations in Central America. Why reread narratives written during the war if the war is over? How do these narratives of heroic womanhood shed light on the murky process of constructing a civil society in El Salvador today? And what can this exercise reveal about the complex ways in which narratives call on different kinds of readers to become actors, participants in the process of social change in the Americas? There is a debate currently, one that was quite present in panels about Central American writing at the 1998 LASA conference, about how these two reading communities --Salvadorans and other Central Americans on the one hand, and an international community, based primarily in the U.S., of academics, students, and solidarity activists on the other-- do (and should) read literature written in El Salvador since the war's end: a number of Central American writers and intellectuals have recently reproached readers in the U.S. academic and solidarity communities for what they see as a preference, even a prescription, for writing that prolongs the testimonial mode made so visible during the course of the war. In this view, interesting and exciting post-war literary writing that does not fit the testimonial mold is discounted or rendered invisible, and Salvadoran writing is only read if it can be made to fit with a particular idea of the Central American as suffering, heroic, martyred, resistant, subaltern, etc. Salvadoran writers today do not want to write FOR this audience and its expectations, as they sometimes did during the war in order to mobilize its support. Now, as Salvadoran intellectual Rafael Lara Martínez said at one LASA panel, *La literatura tiene que seducir a otro lector.*<sup>3</sup>

I first encountered this issue when listening to another Salvadoran intellectual, Ricardo Roque Baldovinos, talk about No me agarran viva a number of years ago, in the context of a broader discussion about the testimonial mode. I was surprised by his vehement characterization of this particular book as dated, aesthetically awkward, no longer meaningful in the ways it might have been previously. His dismissive response to this widely read and powerful work of testimonio writing made me think about how different my reading experience of that book has been from his, both before and after the cease-fire in 1992. The book narrates events of the FMLN offensive in 1981 and of the decade leading up to this intensification of the armed struggle between the Salvadoran military and the Frente. When first published in Central America in 1983, it demanded of its readers, both in El Salvador and abroad, a moral or ethical response to the war and the political struggles surrounding it. The reputation of the book's authors, the well-known and respected husband and wife writing team Claribel Alegría and Darwin Flakoll, helped draw attention to the project while its focus on women's engagement in armed struggle made it especially important to feminists trying to understand women's participation in revolutionary struggles. While the war was going on, the book was not read primarily for its aesthetic value but rather in terms of its performance of Interestedness<sup>4</sup>. In other words, like many testimonios produced during the eighties, No me agarran viva sought, at the time of its first appearance in Spanish and later publication in English (in 1987 as They Won't Take Me Alive), to interpellate at least two audiences in an urgent fashion: the first, and perhaps most important to the authors, the audience of literate Salvadorans (or other Central Americans involved in wars in their own countries at the time) who might be called on to imitate the example of Eugenia, the FMLN combattant whose life and death are dramatized here both

through the authors' narrative and through their inclusion of the voices of her family, friends, and other militants: the second is the international audience, primarily in the United States, of those in the solidarity movement --many of them academics who read this book in classes with their students-- who might be recruited to take an active role in the internal opposition to U.S. intervention in El Salvador or elsewhere in Central America. The expectation was that this second reading public would play an important role in mobilizing support for the FMLN and opposition to the U.S. government's military involvement in the war.

As a U.S. intellectual involved in some measure with organizations working in solidarity with people in Central America in their struggle for change, my first reading of this book and others like it in the eighties might have led me at some point to a course of political action, whether inside the University or out, but at no time would I have been called on to take up arms, face physical danger, or make political declarations that might compromise my safety or that of my loved ones as a result of my relation to the war in El Salvador. A Salvadoran intellectual who obtained his Ph.D. in the U. S. but has returned to write and teach in El Salvador, Ricardo Roque obviously had a much different stake during the civil war in the questions raised by this text about militancy and sacrifice than did I. And clearly, now that the war is over, the anxieties that Ricardo and I might face about how to live the politics of the intellectual life are vastly different. But each of us is a teacher in a University who sees the educational system as an important location of political engagement, and so these questions about reading are also questions about how we form the habits of reading of our students.

But now that the war is over--or at least the **A**hot war@of active military engagement if not the quieter war of economic and social violence-- how do our readings of this book and others

like it have to change? In other words, since, to my mind, testimonio is best understood as a kind of textual production that foregrounds the doing of the text--its forms of moral or ethical intentionality and how those constitute readers as doers in their respective social and political contexts--then what happens to the urgent call to action when the armed struggle has been suspended, some of the exiles have returned home, and political engagement in El Salvador and in the U.S. must find other channels to effect change? Is such a text's force rendered ahistorical because of the new context?<sup>5</sup> What is to be done, now? Or, to put the question differently, how does this subtitle La mujer salvadoreña en la lucha resonate with readers in El Salvador and abroad, in the context of the transición or demilitarization?

We can observe a similar kind of questioning in the work of one U.S. critic thinking about Central American writing, John Beverley<sup>6</sup>. In Literature and Politics in the Central American Revolutions (1990), Beverley and his co-author Marc Zimmerman asserted the importance of literature, and poetry and testimonio writing in particular, in the ideological struggles of the last few decades in Central America. Looking back on this project a few years later, Beverley himself sums up the book's conclusions thus: Literature has been a means of national-popular mobilization in the Central American revolutionary process, but that process also elaborates or points to forms of cultural democratization that will necessarily question or displace the role of literature as a hegemonic cultural institution (207: quoted in the preface to Against Literature, x). However, in his book Against Literature, put together after the cease-fire and published in 1993, Beverley expresses more skepticism and pessimism about the potential of the literary institution for escaping its own hegemonic functions. Beverley's more jaundiced eye in this book implies no lessening of his commitment to a politics of social justice, but rather a

disillusionment regarding the privileging of literature as a field for counter-hegemonic projects. And the desire of at least some Salvadoran writers today to shake off the constraints of writing in the service of a particular political agenda, in this instance that of the FMLN, would seem to confirm this view. Ricardo Roque's situation, to return to my first reader, leads him to pose these questions somewhat differently: he is not on the outside of the particular national-popular literary mobilization analyzed by Beverley, and his role in the politics of cultural production and reconstruction after the cease-fire must also be different from Beverley's or mine. Roque's impatience with a particular rhetoric of militancy quite possibly has as much to do with the politics of the FMLN since the cease-fire as it does with aesthetic issues or theories of cultural politics<sup>7</sup>.

In the national context, since the negotiation of an end to the armed struggle the FMLN has had to grapple with demilitarization. In *An Exile's Return*, published shortly after the cease-fire in NACLA's May 1993 issue, prominent writer Manlio Argueta summed up the challenge facing El Salvador in its reconstruction of civil society: *Now it's in the hands of the Left and the Right: a battlefield without arms or hierarchy for the FMLN and with humane methods for the Right* (6). But the situation is confusing; much of the armed violence now going on in El Salvador is seen as *criminal* or gang violence rather than actions of state repression or war. At the same time, the second group of readers, the international solidarity community, has also had to come to terms with the shift in context that alters the meanings circulating about relations between the U.S. and El Salvador. Certainly in 1992, when the peace accords were signed, social justice activists in the U.S. asked themselves how their work would be different now that the press and the public seemed to perceive that the wars in El Salvador and



Nicaragua were over. In our gatherings to discuss what to do next, most agreed that there would be a loss of energy or momentum as the attention of the public turned elsewhere, but that while these political changes were significant, the exploitative economic structures and social inequities remained relatively unchanged, and must be understood within new frameworks of globalization. Work for social justice did not cease with the end of the war, but the arenas and forms of international collaboration have changed. To some extent, writing from and about El Salvador during the war constituted a vehicle through which a vision of an alternative society could be projected to a (reading) public in the U.S. and Europe, and that vision and call to action could create a bond that would enhance action toward common goals; this, too, has changed.

What formerly had seemed clear is now murky: the opposition **A**the people@the Revolution vs. the oligarchy/military/U.S. intervention was easy to grasp (**A**l-2-3-4, U.S. out of El Salvador@); explaining the economic and political realities of Central America in the nineties is not. Now the work of education and citizen-led foreign policy in the U.S. means understanding the processes of globalization, Free Trade Initiatives, immigration, the role of women and children on the global assembly line; although the impact of these forces on people's lives may be profound, action for social justice cannot so easily be organized by the rhetoric of militance, heroics, and clarity.

In The Morning After, Cynthia Enloe examines the post-war situation in El Salvador (and in the rest of Central America) in the broader, global context of the **A**post Cold-War era@. **A**The Cold War depended on a deeply militarized understanding of identity and security. Militarization relies on distinct notions about masculinity, notions that have staying power only if they are legitimized by women as well as men@ (1993: 3). Her analysis of the Salvadoran

peace accords reads their proposals for demilitarization of the social conflict through a feminist lens, one that makes visible women's relations to the state, the police, the army, and the FMLN, the Right and the Left. Will masculinity be demilitarized? Will relations between men and women change? Will violence against women in the forms of rape or domestic violence be understood as political tools, as violations of human rights, or will that violence continue to be understood as normal? As Enloe says,

If the years of violent conflict have depended upon varieties of militarized masculinity, then successful demilitarization will require the reconstitution of each of these varieties into a form that fosters social reconciliation. This gendered transformation has not been recognized in recent Central American accords. So it is being left to women to accomplish the task. More than likely it will be women, in their roles as mothers, lovers, and wives, who will be expected to socialize men, one by one, into new masculine identities that rest more on cooperation and respect for women, and less on violence and sexism. If they fail, it is more than likely that they, the women in these still-militarized men's lives, will bear the brunt of persistent contempt and violence. Will the United Nations peacekeepers monitor misogyny? (133)

>...I read the sentence again.=

In their prologue to No me agarran viva, Claribel Alegría and Bud Flakoll characterize their subject/protagonist, the FMLN combattant known as Eugenia, as

...modelo ejemplar de abnegación, sacrificio, y heroísmo revolucionario, es un caso típico y no excepcional de tantas mujeres salvadoreñas que han dedicado sus

esfuerzos, e incluso sus vidas, a la lucha por la liberación de su pueblo.

[...exemplary model of self-denial, sacrifice, and revolutionary heroism, she is a common, not exceptional, example of so many Salvadoran women who dedicated their efforts, and even their lives, to the struggle for the liberation of their country]

(1983:9)

In a strategy common to many other testimonios, the singular example is presented as more than the story of one person's life; it is meant to stand for the experience of many in a particular set of circumstances. The authors create a story of martyrdom out of Eugenia's life through narratives, some written by them, others summarized or transcribed from interviews attributed to family members, friends, and other FMLN combatants. In addition, they include stories of the lives of other women actively engaged in struggle. While Alegría and Flakoll do not take center stage as narrators, presenting much of their story in the form of directly quoted material from interviews, neither do they attempt to conceal their presence as writers. Instead, they adopt a tone of respectful service to their task of inspiring the reader to empathize with Eugenia and her struggle, and perhaps to find some way to aid or emulate it.

The book begins with a **dramatization** of the events leading up to Eugenia's death in a clandestine military action. Alegría and Flakoll choose to narrate in the third person omniscient form of a traditional novel, with physical descriptions, action, dialogue, a dramatic structure of suspense; they present Eugenia's memories and state of mind as if they had direct access to these. They make no attempt to present her objectively, but rather dramatically, and end the first chapter with a cliff-hanger: danger is imminent but the results still untold, if not unknown. Subsequent sections of the book reconstruct the life leading up to Eugenia's death: her childhood,

her family and intellectual background, the political context, her coming to political consciousness and engagement, her entry into clandestine work, her pregnancy. In the second half of the book, stories of other women activists or fighters make clear that Eugenia was one of many courageous women who made enormous sacrifices or displayed great determination in their engagement with the struggle for change. In the main body of the book, the narrative voice adopted by Alegría and Flakoll in the beginning takes a back seat to the first-person narratives reconstructed from interviews. Here, the speaker's words are set off typographically, as quotations, and the presence of Alegría and Flakoll as interviewers, while minimized, is marked in the framing text through references to their questions and the use of the pronoun *nos*. The story told through this accumulation of first person narratives is that of a young woman who came to the armed struggle, as did many, from more traditional engagements with religious activism and University studies, and who transformed herself through her actions. The language used by some of the other militants to describe Eugenia and her transformation is, at times, formulaic or clichéd, as when comandante Marcial claims that Eugenia overcame her class origins and was able to *vincularse directamente a los problemas de la clase trabajadora en nuestro país* [connect herself directly to the problems of the working class in our country] (1983: ). Alegría and Flakoll, skilled poets and editors, do not make any overt attempt to distance themselves from this rhetoric, although they do not adopt it directly themselves and do include voices that present forms of political engagement in other terms.

The third section of the book, told by Eugenia's *responsable*, Isabel--another extraordinary woman-- reminds me of Nicaraguan writer Gioconda Belli's novel *La mujer habitada* (published in English by Curbstone as *The Inhabited Woman*), a fictional account of a

women's involvement with the Sandinistas before the 1979 Revolution in Nicaragua. It is important to point out that the action of Belli's novel takes place during the armed struggle leading up to the victory of the Sandinistas, but the novel itself was written during the Contra war, and is, in part, an exploration of the issues of feminism, revolution, and women's participation in armed struggle aimed at reminding her fellow Sandinistas both of the importance of women's contribution to the revolution and of the ways that gender issues and a feminist perspective should be central to the construction of the new society. Margaret Randall analyzes the need for such a discussion in the cases of Cuba and Nicaragua in her book Gathering Rage: The Failure of 20th Century Revolutions to Develop a Feminist Agenda.

In Belli's novel as well, as in the story of Eugenia, a man and a woman involved in a clandestine armed struggle fall in love and must decide how to live their emotional life along with their militance. Eugenia and Javier love each other and marry, but must live with constant fear and the necessity of separations. While the novelist Belli foregrounds the doubts and uncertainties of her fictional protagonist Lavinia, Alegría and Flakoll present Eugenia's doubt and uncertainty as an initial moment in her quiet heroism, mediated through the voice of the more experienced combattant, Isabel, who explains that fear, while present, is transcended in the struggle, and emphasizes Eugenia's serenity (1983:56). Eugenia's exemplary behavior and the strength of her convictions are clearly intended as inspirational.

As is also the case in Belli's novel, the particular circumstances of being a woman who chooses the path of armed struggle are the heart of Eugenia's story, even as some of the voices included in the testimonio explicitly minimize the importance of gender. In fact, Alegría and Flakoll make a point of demonstrating that they asked a number of women about women's

role in combat and whether sexism was an obstacle to their participation in the war effort. The answers they summarize acknowledge the general problem, but assert that it was a minor one. Is this an accurate description, or an attempt to smooth over internal contradictions?

The second half of the book's title is *the story of women in the Salvadoran struggle*, and not *the story of a woman*. Including the words and examples of other women places Eugenia as just one of the many Salvadoran women who took up arms. The story of comandante Ana María, presented as representative of *la gesta heroica del pueblo salvadoreño* [the heroic saga of the Salvadoran people] (102), emphasizes the importance of women's participation in the social base of the revolutionary movement through the teacher's union and their strike. Another story, that of Marina, shows how a *maquila* [sweatshop factory] worker arrived at her political engagement through the Christian base communities and her response to vital necessities rather than through a more traditional intellectual formation. The last section of the book returns us to the events of 1981 and the FMLN's general offensive in which Eugenia is killed. By this time, we have been led to an understanding of Eugenia's enormous responsibility as coordinator of a sector, but also of her responsibility for the education of her child, along with that of her sisters and of their children. Included in this part of the book is a facsimile of a hand-written letter to her husband which demonstrates how her participation is grounded in *la mística* (145) even as she reminds him of their child's bottles. The model of femininity presented here equates being a woman with being a guerrillera and a mother. The first is explained by the second: the war is a evil necessary in order to make a better future for their children: *Eugenia siempre fue futuro* [Eugenia was always the future] (59). In the sixth chapter of the book, Eugenia's pregnancy is paralleled with the Sandinista victory in 1979 in a way that casts the militant as

mother. The stories of other women that are included in the following section make children and their future the primary motivation for these women's political engagement. It is this recentering of a rhetoric of militancy around maternal action that I continue to find so fascinating about this book. In contrast to the assumption underlying Esmeralda's removal of her IUD, Comandante Ana María specifically states about women becoming guerrilla fighters "No es contradictorio ser madre" [Motherhood is not a contradiction] (1093:80).

Both in their prologue and specifically in comandante Ana María's story, Alegría and Flakoll present their task as the elaboration of an epic, the *Agenda heroica* in which the hero is a heroine, who represents her people in their struggle precisely because of her transformation of the traditional virtues of motherhood (self-sacrifice, pragmatism, and the coordination of the lives of others, the capacity to assume enormous responsibility) into political and military assets. The book includes the traditional rhetoric of Marxist militance and heroism in tandem with another important discourse that came to the fore during the Salvadoran struggle, that of social motherhood in which women were political protagonists in ways that emerged from their primary identification as mothers<sup>8</sup>.

Underlying the traditional elements of the *Agenda heroica* is the novelty of making a woman's story the center of a narrative of heroic death during military action. There are actually a fair number of Latin American novels in which women become associated with an armed struggle because they fall in love with a man who already is involved, and stories, both fiction and non-fiction, of women's heroism of various kinds, but the sub-genre of diaries and testimonios of guerrilleros in Latin America had been primarily men's stories until this point. Although many voices tell Eugenia's story, each from its partial viewpoint, there is no ambiguity

here, no Rashomon-like uncertainty about the truth of her feelings or actions, or about the value of a woman's part in an armed struggle (compare this to Meg Ryan's character in *Courage Under Fire*, a film replete with anxiety about women at war). No me agarran viva places women's participation in the civil war squarely in the center. The discourse of Eugenia and her group is that of moral certitude in the face of enormous pressure, in which the *Enemigo* is clearly known and the *Compañeros* and the *Pueblo* incarnate the virtues of the struggle for a better future.

I'd like to look very briefly at another woman's testimonio for an example of a related, but somewhat different mode of presenting women's involvement in the war. Nunca estuve sola (published in El Salvador in 1988; published in English as I Was Never Alone: A Prison Diary from El Salvador in 1992) by Nidia Díaz. Nidia Díaz (the nom de guerre of María Marta Valladares) is another FMLN combatant who tells a battle story, but she writes that story herself. She tells how she was wounded in battle, captured with the help of a CIA agent, left with untreated wounds, interrogated around the clock for days on end, forced to listen to others being tortured, but also how she defied her captors, resisted their pressures, and was eventually released as one of the prisoners exchanged for Salvadoran president Napoleon Duarte's kidnapped daughter. While this is primarily a narrative of her imprisonment and moral triumph over her enemies, Díaz also occasionally invokes her earlier life and the motivations for her involvement in the armed struggle as part of her story. Her book is also intended to serve as example, in this case of how one woman resisted interrogation by building a carapace of moral certitude. When captured, she was already a military and political leader in the FMLN who had participated in negotiations with the government; as part of her training she had probably already prepared herself mentally for capture. She describes how, in her cell, she sang, talked back,



argued with her captors, lectured them about politics, made speeches to her visitors when she was eventually allowed them despite the risks. One of the devices she uses to address her readers indirectly is that repeating arguments with her jailors; she explains and justifies the FMLN's agenda, pointing out that the FMLN wants to negotiate a peace. Thus the reader is presented with the Frente's political arguments of the moment, while Díaz's (and the FMLN's) engagement in armed struggle is differentiated from the oppressive use of violence of the state. She tells a gripping story, and I was left with the impression of a woman of great strength, energy, and conviction, who might invoke her feelings of love, motherhood, and patriotism to explain her successful resistance to tremendous pressure, but who, as a Party leader, would never admit to a moment's doubt either to her captors or to her readers. In fact, she contrasts herself to another prisoner who was broken by torture and collaborated with his captors, asserting that it was the strength of her ideas that helped her hold out. Are we to believe that this experience was really as straightforward as Díaz's narrative asserts? Mary Jane Treacy's article *ADouble Binds: Latin American Women's Prison Memories*,<sup>9</sup> discusses how many of these accounts repress or silence what is most traumatic, sexual violence or self-doubt about transgression against gender norms, in favor of more optimistic assertions for collective solidarity.<sup>9</sup>

While No me agarran viva and Nunca estuve sola may now appear dated in their resolutely heroic presentation of guerrilla martyrdom, for me, at least, they remain compelling and important today for their portrayal of how some women turned their traditional female socialization into the grounds for taking up arms. While they do not challenge traditional gender norms directly, their feminization of heroism does challenge limited ideas about women's participation in war, and by extension, in citizenship after the war's end. After the war is over,

and without the overarching urgency of specific discourses of militancy, there is pressure for women to go back to normal life, including a gender ideology that limits women's access to participation and full citizenship. Another narrative by an FMLN woman combattant gives us another framework from which to reread what was smoothed over or left out by these texts: Morena Herrera was also a high-ranking comandante with the FMLN, like Eugenia responsible for the coordination of military efforts over a wide area, and who gave birth to three children during the time of her participation in strategy and combat. Her story, told after the war's end, is included in Lynn Stephen's 1997 book Women and Social Movements in Latin America: Power from Below. In contrast to all the other examples we have seen so far, Herrera speaks frankly about the obstacles and prejudice she encountered as a woman to her participation in the war effort on equal terms with men. She co-founded an alternative, feminist organizational structure toward the end of the war (DIGNAS), and has called for a gender focus to be the point of departure for imagining the new Salvadoran society. Nidia Díaz has also focused some of her continued political participation in the FMLN as a political party around the issues of human rights as they include violence against women.

There are now several other collections of Salvadoran women's testimony and studies of their massive participation in the armed struggle and the political processes of the last decades. Lynn Stephen and María Teresa Tula, an activist with the group COMADRES, collaborated on the book Hear My Testimony after the peace accords were signed. COMADRES is a human rights organization, at first associated with the Catholic Church, that grew from a victims' association into an important political player in its role of mobilizing the Salvadoran population. It is part of a larger phenomenon of women's political activism since the 1970s in Latin America,

similar to groups in Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina. The book is a first-person life story about the coming to political consciousness and activism of María Teresa Tula, with an introduction and end chapters on the situation in El Salvador and the genre of testimonio writing by Lynn Stephen, a U.S. anthropologist who has also done important work on Zapotec activism in Oaxaca, Mexico. The motive for the book's existence, clearly stated by both women, is political education in the U.S. AFTER the peace accords: A dialogue of solidarity that has long existed between the peoples of the U.S. and those engaged in grassroots struggles throughout Latin America (232). In other words, despite the end of military engagement, the internal struggle and the need for international support and collaboration continue, and the production of this kind of testimonial text is still urgent. Tula tells the difficult circumstances of her childhood and family background, her everyday struggles to survive, her marriage and growing involvement with political activity through her husband's participation in a strike and imprisonment. Her husband was eventually murdered and she herself was detained and tortured on two occasions as a result of her political work; she was separated from her children, had to live in exile, and saw her co-workers disappear and tortured as well. She also describes the founding of COMADRES and the work the group has done. Her heroism does not take the form of military action, but she too confronts danger on a daily basis and is subjected to the physical tortures Díaz described witnessing. In this book, rather than a discourse of party militance and the traditional Marxist rhetoric of Latin American leftist political parties, the reader is addressed through the language of the sanctuary movement, of witness, of the Christian base communities. It is no less wavering in its moral certitude, but it offers a form of political engagement that remains viable after arms have been set aside, and suggests possibilities for analysis and action untainted by the

murkier actions of at least some FMLN leaders or factions, who are known, for example to have murdered poet Roque Dalton and comandante Ana María due to sectarian differences. In the words of Renny Golden, another woman whose work with Salvadoran women produced another important work of testimonial writing, The Hour of the Poor, the Hour of Women:

Masculine@and Afeminine@are social constructs that mediate the definitions that men and women give to patriotism. Patriotism, historically defined as defense of the nation until death, has been a male undertaking. Women render another definition of patriotism, a definition less abstract, less symbolically associated with sentimentality and war. For women the patriotic action is the act of preserving life, of guaranteeing the people's survival when state terror is unleashed. Dying for the nation is not an objective, survival is. The needs of patriotic honor, of heroism, so tied to being a man, are subsumed to the daily heroism of keeping the community alive.

(1991: 192)

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## Endnotes

1. This translation and all subsequent ones are mine unless otherwise noted. This rather extraordinary statement comes at the end of a paper by former FMLN comandante Villalobos in which he lays out his understanding of the causes of the war, the transformations of the 80s and 90s, new social threats, and the challenges facing political parties after the cease-fire (A la transición). El Salvador: Democracia y Gobernabilidad, @ Joaquin Villalobos. 8/5/98 3:51 PM. <<http://www.ufg.edu/theoretikos/Marzo98/joaquin.html>>.

2. In her recent book Women, Guerrillas, and Love: Understanding War in Central America, Ileana Rodríguez looks at the gendered relations between narrating subjects and the imagined collectivities of nation, people, masses, etc, in a variety of narratives by liberal and revolutionary writers. Her analysis underscores the fact that narratives in which women are the heroic subjects rather than men are relatively rare, and that they insert themselves into a discourse in which that subject is masculinized in particular ways while the Apueblo is feminized.

3. One of the factors that conditions the reception in the U.S. of writing from Central America is access to books. The solidarity networks provided incentive for translation and publication of Salvadoran texts during the war, and a readership (in English) that extended beyond the university classroom. Now that the war is over, that particular market has shrunk.

4. In Atestimonio, Performance, and Survivor Narration: A Revolution in Form? @ Kitty Millet talks about the performance of memory in testimonial writing: : A..memory's intervention in the aesthetic representation significantly changes the experience: instead of a disinterested subject experiencing an art object, constructing a judgement of taste, and then, imagining a homogenous community through the process of identification, the subject interestedly experiences not the imagination's power but the memory's. @

5. In the introduction to her book Women, Guerrillas, and Love: Understanding War in Central America, Ileana Rodríguez makes this point about John Beverly and Mark Zimmerman's study, Literature and Politics in the Central American Revolutions: AHad it been in print during the decade of the eighties, the book would have been the definitive statement on Central American literature in the United States. Unfortunately, the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas and the demise of socialism worldwide rendered their discussion historical, the debate no longer framed by their parameters @ (xix).

6. Beverly's early essay in the journal Ideologies and Literature Can Hispanism be a Radical Practice? @ had an impact on me as a graduate student--more or less giving me a way of thinking about my intellectual work as connected to my political work in a meaningful way; in effect, he exhorted those of us on the left who did any kind of work as Latin Americanists not to cede the field of knowledge production, education, or public discourse about Latin America, in the classroom or out, to Latin Americanists like Jean Kirkpatrick.

7. See Mario Uclés= Building an Alternative @ for an overview of the relationship between the popular movement and the FMLN during and after the war.

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8. See Francesca Miller's Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice for a history of social motherhood in Latin America since the nineteenth century.

9. In another national context, the truly harrowing memoir, El infierno, by Luz Arce -- the Chilean woman who was captured, tortured and repeatedly raped, and who finally collaborated with the Chilean secret police, the DINA, when her family and young son were threatened with torture-- provides a counter-example. Both Diamela Eltit and Hernán Vidal have written in compelling ways about the significance of this text's publication to the way that Chilean readers engage with their collective past, and have come to very different personal responses to Arce's performance of an act of contrition.