

**Revolutionary Women in El Salvador:
The Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front,
women's organizations, and the transformation of the
position of women**

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Acronyms:

AMD: Asociación de Madres Demandantes (Association of Women Seeking Child Support)

AMES: Asociación de Mujeres de El Salvador (Association of Women in El Salvador)

AMPES: Asociación de Mujeres Progresistas de El Salvador (Association of Progressive Women of El Salvador)

ANDES: Asociación Nacional de Educadores Salvadoreños (National Association of Salvadoran Educators)

ARENA: Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (National Republican Alliance)

BPR: Bloque Popular Revolucionario (Popular Revolutionary Bloc)

CEMUJER: Centro de Estudios de la Mujer “Norma Virginia Guirola de Herrera” (Norma Virginia Guirola de Herrera Center for Women’s Studies)

CONAMUS: Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Salvadoreñas (National Coordinating Committee of Salvadoran Women)

CPD: Comisión Política-Diplomática (Political-Diplomatic Committee)

DRU: Dirección Revolucionaria Unificada (Unified Revolutionary Directorate)

ERP: Ejército Revolucionario Popular (People’s Revolutionary Army)

FAL: Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación (Armed Forces of Liberation)

FMLN: Frente Faribundo Martí de Liberación Nacional (Faribundo Martí National Liberation Front)

FPL: Fuerzas Populares de Liberación (Popular Forces of Liberation)

MAM: Movimiento de Mujeres “Mélida Anaya Montes” (Mélida Anaya Montes Women’s Movement)

PCS: Partido Comunista Salvadoreño (Salvadoran Communist Party)

PCN: Partido de Conciliación Nacional (National Conciliation Party)

PDC: Partido Demócrata Cristiano (Christian Democratic Party)

PRTC: Partido Revolucionario de Trabajadores Centroamericanos (Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers)

RN: Resistencia Nacional (National Resistance)

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1. Introduction

Peace accords were signed in 1992, bringing an end to the twelve-year civil war fought in El Salvador between the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) revolutionary forces and El Salvadoran government and its military. The ending of the war signaled a new beginning for the revolutionary left of El Salvador, which was finally given the chance to participate in a political process out of which it had been shut for decades. While the civil war brought international attention to the socio-economic inequalities in El Salvador and the peace accords acknowledged the need to confront these inequalities, one sector of the population in particular emerged from the conflict having been offered the opportunities to develop politically and ideologically: women.

It can be conjectured that women who have been empowered through the opportunities provided by the civil war would maintain a certain level of active participation in the newly re-formed government. It then becomes useful to look at the role women have played in legislation that directly concerns them, comparing two groups that grew out of the revolutionary movement, women working within the FMLN as a political party, and women who moved beyond the party structures to take part in women's organizations in civil society. In examining the strategies used by each group and the successes or failures of these strategies, conclusions will be drawn, in the specific case of women in Salvadoran politics, for women in post-conflict countries, and for women in emerging democracies all over the world.

Women in El Salvador have a history of participating in political events. Beginning in the 1920s, middle-class urban reformers and rural revolutionaries encouraged women to participate in support of an agenda which supported the creation of a more representative government. Participation generally took the form of demonstrations in favor of democratic governance (Hipsher, 135). There was also a suffrage movement organized and led by women. The right of women to vote was constitutionally recognized in 1938 and it took twelve years for a law to be passed that put women's suffrage into effect. (136) In addition, women's organizations formed, but were more aligned with democratic movements than with women's issues¹ in particular. In general, the establishment of a women's movement was constrained by the same repression and isolation that impacted any burgeoning social movement at the time. As a particular constraint for women, they were expected to play the traditional role of mother and wife, only directly taking part in the extraordinary times that galvanized popular, democratic movements.

El Salvador in the 1960s and 1970s was one such extraordinary time. Decades of exploitation and military rule had created an atmosphere in which resistance to the government was growing. Adding strong moral backing to the organizing opposition and the overall discontent was the introduction of liberation theology. The Catholic Church in Latin America, which throughout history had sided with the ruling classes and reinforced notions of social and gender inequality, began to identify with the poorest and least advantaged in their society and support efforts to educate them. (Kampwirth, 4) While traditionally Catholic in many ways, liberation theology examined social inequality in light of the Bible. It further gave women the opportunity to serve as lay people, educating the community in the teachings of the Church. This was one of the first instances in which such

¹ By "women's issues," it is meant policies dealing with reproductive rights, violence against women, legal rights, health care, and social services.

a traditional institution gave women the permission and encouragement to freely participate in such a vital task. Throughout Latin America, liberation theology spread along with other revolutionary doctrines. Following the success of the Cuban Revolution, the United States, traditionally involved in the politics and economies of Latin America and worried about the further spread of communism in their traditional sphere of influence, instituted a program called the "Alliance for Progress." Promising aid for democratic and economic reforms meant to prevent future revolutions, the US encouraged military governments to implement them. While the military government was willing to put superficial reforms into place, those who participated in the religious groups, teaching that poverty was neither unavoidable nor deserved, became targets for persecution. In many instances, this forced previously non-political women into an unfamiliar realm.

El Salvador was not the only Central American country repressed by dictatorial governments and influenced by revolutionary doctrines. Neighboring Guatemala and Nicaragua also suffered similar conditions of social, political, and economic inequalities; revolutionary movements, in which women participated, formed there as well. Liberation theory, as well as socialist ideals, inspired rebellions with mixed results. In Nicaragua, the revolutionary Sandinistas faced the personalist Somoza regime. They were successful in overthrowing that government in 1979 and maintained a government until democratic elections were held in 1990, despite ongoing civil war with military opposition funded by the United States. Guatemala faced a more impossible situation, as the military governments used extreme brutality against the indigenous population in an effort to eradicate the problem instead of finding a solution. In both cases, women became involved through the experience of persecution which did not discriminate on the basis of gender.

Women in El Salvador came to the revolutionary movements from other paths as well. Union movements, both teachers and health professionals, educated women in the ways of politics. Events of the 1970s also brought women, along with the general population, into the political arena as they had never been before. The presidential elections of 1972 were promoted as a chance for a free and fair outcome. However, they were fraught with voter fraud by the conservative military as it became evident that the center-left candidate, backed by reform-minded military, was going to win. In this new era of dashed hopes, left-wing organizing increased and more women became a part of the movement. The last major event before declared armed warfare began in 1979 was the 1977 massacre of students in San Salvador, who were protesting the amount of money spent on hosting the Miss Universe pageant while many Salvadorans were starving. When it became obvious that a more peaceful struggle led nowhere, the four main militant leftist groups joined forces along with the Communist Party, previously in favor of a peaceful solution, and launched a campaign of guerrilla warfare against the Salvadoran military forces.

The militant groups that made up the FMLN were all left-wing organizations that each came to the conclusion, albeit at different times, that guerilla warfare was the necessary next step. They formed in the universities of San Salvador and in the countryside, gaining support from students and peasants. These groups were: People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), Popular Forces of Liberation (FPL), National Resistance (RN), the Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers (PRTC), and Armed Forces of Liberation (FAL), the military branch of the Communist Party (PCS). The PCS was the original underground political party, outlawed in 1932. Its leadership would continue to be repressed and arrested. The Secretary-General of the PCS, Cayetano Carpio, left the party over his view that armed struggle was necessary, and founded the FPL, the first explicitly "political-military

organization.” Each organization had both a political and military strategy, but that of the FPL focused most on the military side. The ERP, founded in 1972, was the second political-military organization, and came out of the PCS as well. Their strategy was based around the foco system², not mass movements. Originally a faction of the ERP, the RN broke away and focused on work with peasants as its political goal. The final political-military organization formed was the PRTC, created in 1976 with a regional conception of revolutionary struggle. By the massacre of 1977, the PCS changed its policy of finding a peaceful solution and founded its military branch, the FAL, the fifth member of the FMLN. While political strategies were different in each group, they united in their desire to overthrow the military regime and create a new El Salvador. (Montgomery, 103-105)

The civil war itself, which began in full in 1979, opened opportunities for women. Within its left-wing ideology was included the idea of totally transforming Salvadoran society. The FMLN, like the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and other revolutionary armies in Africa, were willing to take all people willing to fight in combat. While they would never be superior in terms of arms, the revolutionary armies saw their strength as in numbers, both combatants and supporters. This included women, in both positions. In spite of the machismo that existed on society-wide and individual levels women gained leadership positions within the FMLN army. In a military situation in which the odds were stacked against them, the FMLN could not afford to discriminate. The FMLN also realized the importance of organizing the women who remained at home, involving them in other ways by creating women’s committees as part of pre-existing support organizations. These experiences offered women the chance to learn professional organizing and political skills,

² A Latin American theory that refers to a small group of committed revolutionaries who operate without mass support. (Montgomery, 104) The mass mobilization strategy used in the FMLN meant that the armies sought to recruit all possible revolutionaries, including women, in order to be successful. (Kampwirth, 33)

which they used to further the goals of the revolution despite constant threats of arrest and torture.

Not a unique phenomenon to the FMLN and El Salvador, other revolutionary movements felt the need to engage women in combat, and saw the benefit in creating women's organizations as support systems for the military campaigns. In the Southern Cone, where repressive governments came into power to stop revolutions before they could start, women also used their position as "non-political" wives and mothers to continue underground opposition movements and to organize groups to protest human rights violations being perpetrated against the victims of state-sanctioned repression.

Organizations of wives and mothers of the "disappeared" formed in Guatemala, El Salvador, Argentina, and Chile, increasing international attention toward the regimes and helping maintain civil society. These organizations of women and their importance to the opposition movements raised fundamental issues of including women in the transition to democracy and in democratic governance. This view, as the third-wave of democratization began, was particularly prevalent in El Salvador, as the women's organizations begun by the revolutionary armies began to break away from the FMLN and try to influence the new government in their own way.

While the FMLN was not ultimately victorious in overthrowing the Salvadoran government, they could not be defeated and peace accords were negotiated in 1992. As part of the peace accords, the FMLN became a legal political party and its associated organizations were allowed to operate freely within a democratic system. Many women chose to run for office with the FMLN, both on the regional and the national level while others pursued their goals of influencing the democratic transition through civil society organizations. The party's ideological interest in advancing gender equality, combined with

the emergence and growing autonomy of women's organizations in Salvadoran civil society, provides an interesting lens through which to examine the concrete steps that have been taken since 1992 in the Salvadoran government that impact women.³ There are currently two main political parties in El Salvador, the FMLN, and the right-wing party ARENA, who roughly split a majority in the legislature. There are a few other important parties, including the ultra-conservative National Conciliation Party (PCN), the center-right Christian Democrats (PDC), and the center-left Democratic Convergence. With the right, made up of ARENA, PCN, and PDC, holding a majority of the seats as a bloc, the strategies used by the women in the FMLN and the women's organizations become even more evident, as victories are fewer and defeats can be seen more clearly.

This thesis shows that the opportunities offered to women during the war could not be taken away once peace accords were signed. Women maintained their positions within the FMLN as a political party and continued to strengthen civil society through women's organizations. Each served to influence the legislation pertaining to women through a series of strategies which demonstrate the tensions that exist between the FMLN as a formalized political party and the women's organizations as groups that would not have been created without the help of the FMLN, but that seek to define their own mission. A review of literature that shows the importance of including women in the development of democracy and an analysis of the development of women within the FMLN and the creation of its affiliated women's organizations will begin to illuminate the paths that each group has chosen to take. In depth examination of key pieces of legislation impacting women will then serve to flesh out the methods used to transform the position of women in Salvadoran

³ By "impact women" it is meant government policies that deal with issues of reproductive rights, violence against women (domestic, rape, sexual assault), legal rights, and more implicitly issues of health care and social services, typically designated to be women's problems.

society through the democratic process. In the end, we will see that while the key to the survival of the women's movement is autonomy, it is through compromise that they can accomplish practical, political goals.

2. Literature Review

Prior to examining issues of Salvadoran women and their role in influencing the legislation and policies of a democratic government, it is necessary to review the literature concerning the importance of this influence. In societies that are deemed democratic and developed, the issue is one of crafting philosophical and political arguments as to why women's participation is important in an area traditionally occupied by men. For those societies which are considered developing, or less-developed, and are currently experiencing a transition to democracy or its consolidation, the issues are more than just theoretical. In many cases, the countries are emerging from periods of civil unrest, and perhaps civil war. As they are currently constructing how they wish their democracies to operate successfully and often have systems that were previously more oppressive of women, at least in the view of many Western feminists, the concerns are immediate. There are also ideas specific to the Latin American experience, as the region works to consolidate democracies that have emerged from military dictatorships or civil war.

In order to address these issues from the bottom up, each theoretical area will be addressed, beginning with why, in the broadest theoretical sense, the participation of women in democracy is crucial to its functioning in a truly representative, inclusive, and accountable way. Prior to this, it is important to address two major issues in feminist discourse: the matter of public v. private and the controversy over feminists of the West applying their theories to the women in the rest of the world.

The creation of the public sphere as the realm of the masculine and the private as that of the feminine has been a common strain in Western thought since Aristotle. In this conception, women are kept out of public, or political, life due to their responsibilities inside the home of raising sons to be virtuous citizens and daughters to be future mothers. Throughout history, reasons have been formulated as to why politics is an inappropriate space for women to operate in. Aristotle accused women of lacking reason, saying that their subordination was part of the natural order of society. Rousseau, the Enlightenment thinker, developed more complex intellectual reasons for the exclusion of women from the public sphere. The Enlightenment spawned the belief that all rational creatures deserved a say in their political system. In order to maintain the status quo, however, women needed to not be a part of that. Thus, in keeping with traditional thought, women were declared irrational creatures and naturally opposed to the state. (Pateman, 21) The natural state of women, their “uncleanliness,” their uncontrolled sexuality, all these characteristics made women unable to rule themselves or others, and left the task to men. The separation of public and private spheres, and the sexual associations made with them, continue into modern political thought. (Pateman, 1989) Matters of state, economics, and war are men’s issues, whereas when women participate in politics, they are granted “women’s issues” with which to deal, e.g. education, health care, welfare. These issues, which in fact impact the whole of society, support the notion that if women must be allowed in the public sphere, they should continue to be in charge of “private” issues. Feminism disagrees on how to deal with this divide – whether to acknowledge it and work with it to create structures that are more equal for men and women, or to attempt a radical transformation of the very idea of spheres.

Another controversial aspect of feminist thought is the applicability of “Western” notions of feminism to developing countries. Feminist thought in the West has been developing for over 200 years, mostly by those women lucky enough to get an education and to have the leisure time to write and read. As the developing world has been opened to the West and as globalization has allowed ideas to spread, Western feminists have been accused of trying to spread their form of feminism to cultures in which it is not applicable and of analyzing cultures in terms that do not take into account context and history. Chandra Mohanty (1991), in her article “Under Western Eyes,” challenges these assumptions in important ways. First, she questions the universality of women’s experiences, pointing out many ways in which women around the world are not the same and demonstrating that the West’s tendency to use their terms of analysis places women in developing countries in an “oppressed” category that is not necessarily appropriate. Concepts such as women as victims in the contexts of male violence, marriage and the colonial process, the family, religion, and development are challenged. In each, Mohanty makes clear the need to look at the cultural realities of each specific case and to speak to the women in developing countries themselves, not for them. The development of hybrid feminisms is not discussed, but its emergence in developing countries indicated that there are ways in which Western conceptions of universal human rights and equality can combine with local customs and culture to empower women around the world. (Freedman, 2002) Regardless, it becomes important to analyze political events with a “gendered lens” - that point of view which looks at the role of women as participants in the political process by moving outside of the traditional view of that which is political.

In her book Gender, Identity, and Place, Linda McDowell (1999) discusses the link between gender and the nation-state throughout the development of ideas of nation and of

state. The nation, generally defined in terms of the link between a territory and the people who live there, includes a notion of “the other,” so as to differentiate it from other nations.

(170) While nation refers to the land and people, and not the government or ruling apparatus, the state is then the set of institutions that puts distributional and coercive policies into place. (171)

While this view of the nation-state appears gender-neutral, the construction of the nation and the policies of the state often are not. As members of the nation, men and women are connected differently to its image, with mythical and fictional female figures often overshadowing and outnumbering real political and cultural figures. (197-199) The state can also be looked at through a gendered lens. The feminist view involves looking at political projects and the economic and social context, along with the social forces that construct and oppose them. (173) In formal analyses of the state, as we will later see, social forces, many times with key women’s involvement, are ignored, and help contribute to the notion that women are not interested in politics. These ideas come from the Enlightenment when current notions individuality and equality for all were formally established. In order to justify the exclusion of women from public life, which was both a cultural and social standard of the time, the notion of public and private spheres became a standard form of analysis. (175)

McDowell argues that state, or public, policy has been formulated using women and their reproductive capabilities as a method of ensuring the definition of nationality, such as through population policies. (188) She also speaks to the economic inequities built into the state, which exclude women from participating fully in public life through their lack of economic resources. (180) While there are many new nation-states forming and formulating

their concept of “the nation” in a time when people are more aware of the impact of the state on gender relationship, she says:

“In too many cases, it seems that the splintering of former nation-states and their reformation into new nations have had an adverse impact for women, as the narratives of nationhood constructed by these new countries hark back to a former, perhaps mythical era when traditions reinforced male dominance.” (200-201)

In this setting, the ability of women to participate in the public sphere or to be acknowledged for such participation seems minimal. The pitfalls in the idea of the “imagined community”⁴ are many. As the next author, Anne Phillips, also sees it, there is a necessity for the transformation of the system itself so that women can be a part of the state and an active participant in its policies.

McDowell’s abstract analysis of the construction of the nation and its state is relevant to our discussion of the role of women in a post-conflict society. As a country that was re-formed with the end of the civil war in 1992, the traditional notions of rebuilding would indicate that women would be left out of the process. In order to prevent the state from instituting policies that dictate control over child-bearing and to lessen economic disparities, women must be active participants in the political realm. Revolutionary women in El Salvador, who worked alongside their male counterparts in creating their ideal of a new state, must then continue working for equality despite a negotiated end to the conflict.

Phillips (1991) moves within the issues of nation and state and examines the role of women in democratic systems. Like McDowell, she begins her analysis by using a gendered lens to look at seemingly neutral ideas of citizenship and participation in a democracy.

Phillips argues that there must be a new proportionality between the sexes in the political

⁴ A term coined by Benedict Anderson to describe the creation of a national identity through revisionist history and mythological national events.

arena through the development of representative mechanisms that explicitly acknowledge gender differences and gender inequality, and that we need to build on the insights of the many women who have created social and political movements in our efforts to reorder the relationship between public and private spheres. (7)

Phillips further argues that neither of these changes can have as great an impact if they happen independently of the other. For example, there are a high percentage of women in elected office in Scandinavia, yet women by and large hold lower-paying and less-skilled jobs than men, similar to other countries that have lower percentages of women in office. (19) In order for quota systems to make a difference in society as a whole, the identification of the private as solely the women's sphere and the public as one that is primarily male, but that women can enter on occasion, must be changed. As she states, a major dilemma of women and participatory democracy is that while women strongly want to be involved, they have the least time for it due to their traditional obligations of home and family. (21) The need to transform the notion of public vs. private is implicit in her statement that "no democracy can claim to be equal while it pretends away what are major and continuing divides; yet democracy is lessened if it treats us *only* in our identities as women or men." (8)

While Phillips does an excellent job laying out the problem of women's participation in a democracy, there are few solutions offered to this problem. As she implies in her section on quotas, cosmetic political solutions are useless without a transformation in the way women are treated economically and socially. Yet, she believes in beginning with these mechanisms with the possible outcome of changing the role of women in society. Both McDowell and Phillips, while speaking of emerging democracies, ignore one reason that democracies are forced to emerge – through revolution. Beginning with the construction of a democratic state or with mechanisms to create political equality is not enough. While all

women in some sense are excluded from the political process, this exclusion is not equal and the creation of legislative bodies with a 50/50 split of men and women, all from the urban, upper-class, would remain intrinsically unfair. Western democracies are not equal opportunity either, but the gap in developing countries, including El Salvador, is immense. There is, however, certain universality in the need for women to be involved in reconstruction and for the existence of representative mechanisms, both issues which have been grappled with in post-civil war El Salvador.

An examination of theories of the nation-state and democracy needs to be further contextualized. In Gender In Third World Politics, Georgina Waylen (1996) brings in issues of women in countries that are still developing economically and politically. She begins by introducing three main premises upon which her work is based: 1. politics has a different impact on men than it does on women, 2. political processes alter gender relations, and 3. women often participate as political subjects in political activity in different ways than men, begging the question, what is “women’s political activity.” (1) In beginning her analysis, she emphasizes that notions of public vs. private were written in a 1st world voice, but that its influence on the construction of politics in the developing world makes it important to consider.

This critique of the influence of 1st world feminism on earlier conceptions of gender and politics continues as Waylen questions the practice of treating all 3rd world women as a uniformly oppressed group, regardless of their position within their own societies. (8) She also goes on to remove the placement of all blame on the state, criticizing previous feminist literature for its portrayal of the state as either all good or all bad. (16). State policies typically fall under one of three categories: those aimed particularly at women, those that deal with relations between men and women, and those “gender neutral” policies that have

differing impacts on men and women. (13) In determining the level of involvement of women in the making of these policy decisions, Waylen identifies the importance of looking at the role played by different groups of women in conventional politics, examining women's political activity, and using a gendered analysis of state and policy making. (20)

While Waylen looks at the role of women in colonialism, revolutions, and authoritarian regimes, her chapter on democratization is crucial to the understanding of women in politics in most of the developing world today. To begin her analysis, Waylen brings up three of the frameworks used to explain transitions from authoritarian regimes to democratic ones in order to focus our attention on the lack of gender awareness in this literature. The first explanation, which is agency-led, ignores the importance of social movements and the wider distribution of power in society, excluding women by only including those in positions of power during the transition. The structure-led approach uses institutional changes to explain the transition and also uses a class-based framework or analysis that helps to explain the role of women once democracy was attained, though not leading up to the transition. (118) The third approach, which goes from the bottom up, focuses on popular movements and civil society, areas in which women are more likely to participate. However, it marginalizes the role women play in these movements. (119) Thus, none of these approaches are sufficient to explain the impact of women on democratization.

In order to include women in this process, Waylen begins by looking at the role women played under the authoritarian regimes. As repression impacted formal opposition structures, informal organizations grew, often led by women. (121) Also, as opposition grew to these regimes, the locus of political action moved from institutions which were controlled by the regime to the community, where women played an active part, as the community was viewed as a more private space. In addition, since most of the victims of repression were

men (though there were many women, as well), the women members were left to keep the political parties alive. The emphasis of the authoritarian governments on conservative values and the role of the family also led to the re-emergence of feminist movements.

Despite these advances, when the authoritarian regime fell and transitions to democracy began, women were left behind. During the transition, newly founded women's organizations were often marginalized, or used as a tool to keep women out of political parties. Additionally, as democracy became consolidated, there was a lack of women in important positions. (123) This shift causes us to ask if women's social movements have trouble remaining "politically relevant" once competitive party politics resume, and if the emergence of competitive electoral politics is fluid enough that women's movements can pressure governments into implementing policy. (116) Waylen looks for answers in an examination of how newly democratic policies affect women, the impact of state policy regarding women, and women's movements themselves. (117)

As regards the first two areas, there is evidence that the influence of women on state policy depends on the ability of the new government to break from the authoritarian past, based on the nature of its transition to democracy. In formal politics, however, gender has become politicized in an effort to woo women voters, while women's councils are a part of many governments. (127) Specific policies, especially those that deal with economic liberalization and fall into the third, "gender neutral" category of state policy, hurt women as they constitute a higher percentage of those already living in poverty. (127). In the last area, women's movements, it appears that feminist organizations of upper and middle-class women have a greater influence over transition politics than do popular women's movements, an example of the non-monolithic nature of the 3rd world woman and the influence of social class in politics. (133)

Even with this evidence, Waylen concludes that it is too early to answer whether or not women's social movements become political, as the results have been varied depending on the social movement. While women's movements campaigning around practical gender interests and popular movements have become marginal and demobilized, the feminist organizations with strategic demands have had some success, such as measures for child support. (134) She also sees the problem of women's formal political involvement as the barriers that have been resurrected to block women's entry into party politics. With the continued marginalization of women in developing democracies, Waylen emphasizes that women's movements in many contexts are more successful in influencing the state if they come from an autonomous background and that this, along with coordination between disparate women's organizations, may be a solution for women to gender democracy and the state in the most effective manner. (137)

As combatants in the revolutionary struggle and as members of civil society institutions, women certainly played an important part in starting the transition to democratic rule in El Salvador. Waylen asks us to look at the specific nature of the transition to democracy. In this case, it took place due to a pact, or compromise, between the FMLN and the Salvadoran government. As the FMLN could not then name their own terms, they could not ensure a role for women in the new government, which, as we will see, may not have happened even with an FMLN victory. The only thing the FMLN could control were its internal party affairs, and through their own efforts, women remained active participants. In this situation, the onus was placed on the newly formed women's organizations to continue grassroots efforts and to keep the ideas of gender equity alive. Waylen's analysis of women's roles in transitional situations is more applicable to this particular case and successfully criticizes the theories that do not include women, but does

not capture the fundamental need for women to be involved as do McDowell or Phillips. It is easier to analyze exclusion than to describe why it is a problem. Missing in all three authors is the explicit recognition that social movements, which are how women's movements are often classified, are in fact political, and need to be seen as much so as to be legitimated.

In an article that focuses more directly on the role of the state in the relationship between women and politics, Maxine Molyneux (2000) criticizes a move away from using the state as a central tool for analysis of gender and politics in Latin America. (35) In her view, the role of the state is key to understanding the position of women in Latin America. To counter the view that the state is a monolithic, neutral locus of power, Molyneux describes the limits on power in the state as an arena of struggle in which policy outcomes are more contingent and unpredictable than had been supposed. She also mentions that the transformative power of the state is limited - that states do not stand above society, but exist in a state of synergy or reciprocity with society. (38)

Molyneux also challenges the view of women as passive objects of Latin American law and policy. While recognizing that colonial and post-colonial Latin American states enshrined family relations in legal codes (39), she also states that,

“women's agency played its part in shaping the direction of policy as it did in changing gender relations. Women persisted in making demands of the state, and their active pursuit of reform made them participants in that process as well as objects of law and policy.” (47)

Molyneux goes on to amend this statement, reminding us that the role of the state and the limits on its power, as stated above, mean that the outcomes of their demands were strongly dependent on “favorable contexts and political alliances as well as how diverse in character and politics it was.” (67) In her historical view of women and the state in Latin America, the progress that women have made and their increasing importance to the state demonstrates

the realization of the women's movement that "the central feminist insight was that the private or reproductive sphere, the social terrain upon which gender division and inequalities are constituted, lies at the interface between state and civil society." (34)

This view of the state is the most useful of those that have been presented so far, and allows us to insert so-called social movements into the picture without breaking it. However, the interaction between state and society is also highly contingent on economic and social distinctions. While women have become actors, and in El Salvador are actively making demands on the state, much depends on the position of power within the society. As women organize to extend the progress to women of all classes, the state is forced to begin to acknowledge their presence. Just as the state is not monolithic, neither is society; involving all sectors of society in the state is key to its transformation. The notion of a non-monolithic state can also be transferred to organizations that wish to fulfill the same role as a state, in this case the FMLN. As such, it is also necessary to apply the same level of analysis regarding the interaction between the leadership of the FMLN and society at large as its functions in terms of women are elaborated.

The relationship between women and the state in Latin America is thus more complex and ever-evolving than is visible from a surface glance. The question of how it will evolve is picked up by Navarro and Bourque (1998) in their article, "Fault Lines of Democratic Governance: A Gender Perspective." In it, their central question addresses the mobilization of women in challenging state policies and whether this is short-term or will be long-lived. To reach their conclusions, they look at changes in the political "left," the Catholic church, international contemporary feminism, and expanded educational and employment opportunities. (176)

Looking at the history of women's movements in Latin America, they trace its evolution from organizations dealing with family welfare issues and "mother's clubs" to the formation of human rights organizations to the rebirth of the feminist movement. (182,185) The role of the Catholic church in this movement is also examined in terms of liberation theology, in which men and women rallied to work for social and economic justice with clergy dedicated to democracy. However, there was little change in attitudes about traditional roles for women, hindering the development of a connection between the Church and the women's movement. (187) In the view of Navarro and Bourque, much of the success of the women's movement in Latin America has been due to the importance of United Nations conferences and the increased access to education and employment. (193) This, combined with an abandonment of their reluctance to work with the state, is seen as the key to making the women's movement in Latin America a long-term force in Latin American politics.

As we begin to look in-depth at women in the FMLN and the development of women's organizations, it will be important to keep these ideas in mind. In the last piece, along with looking at the reconstruction of the nation, representative mechanisms, the transition to democracy, and the nature of the state, we are reminded to look at the larger picture of the Catholic Church and the international community. The need to treat these issues both holistically and individually is evident in order to determine the type of relationship women in politics have with the state. Before we examine the case of El Salvador specifically, I want to first make the leap that many of the authors did not. These women are political actors. Their actions, whether through combat or organizations, are political actions that have impacted the transition to democracy and its aftermath. Women are important to the political processes of democracy because they have been formally excluded for so long, yet have found ways to participate outside of the traditional notion of

the political sphere. As we move on, the theories presented will be important to understanding and placing Salvadoran women in the “big picture.” Having expanded our definition of what is political, we can acknowledge the qualification of these women to take part in re-creating their government.

3. Women and the revolution

The massive mobilization of the FMLN in 1979 included thousands of women. Over the course of the previous decade, women had become involved in the social turmoil of El Salvador and in each of the revolutionary organizations that joined forces in the first offensive. In data recorded from demobilization in 1994, there were a total of 15,009 combatants, 4,492 of them women. (Luciak, 1999, 46) This constituted approximately 27-34% of the FMLN; within the leadership, about 20% were women. In each of the five armies, the numbers varied, with the ERP having the largest percentage. (Montgomery, 123)

Anecdotally, these numbers are comparable to the women participating in the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua. Because there was no official demobilization, exact numbers are not known. According to Luciak (2001b) however, it seems that almost all studies refer to the 30% figure in terms of the final struggle of the 1970s when the Sandinistas were forced to become more inclusive and accept all potential combatants. (16) In Luciak’s study of the gender composition of the Guatemalan revolutionary movement, there is a smaller percentage of women than in the Salvadoran or Nicaraguan cases, but they represented approximately 15% of the combatants. (26) The similarities in the number of women involved in combat throughout the region further demonstrates the commitment women had to re-creating their governments and their ability to participate in them.

Women became actively involved in the FMLN for a variety of reasons, often a combination of personal and political. In general, factors leading to involvement included migration from a rural to an urban setting, family stories of past political violence, participation in a strike, and membership in a pre-existing network. (Kampwirth, 59) These experiences are ones which dislocate an individual from society at large. When one moves away from the only home they've known to a strange city, or is introduced to the idea that they cannot depend on the government for security, becoming involved in a revolutionary struggle becomes less risky, as there is less for the individual to lose. In a study of 35 female combatants, 60% mentioned that the most important influence was family. (Kampwirth, 60) Being raised in a family with a tradition of resistance and hearing stories of relatives involved in strikes and protests inspired many daughters to continue the fight for personal reasons. 40% mentioned participation in student organizations. (Kampwirth, 65) In fact, the inner circle of the FMLN emerged from student activists at the National University in San Salvador in the 1970s. (MacClintock, 267) The activities of the Catholic Church were another impetus for women's involvement in the revolutionary movement, cited by 28.5% of the participants in the study. (Kampwirth, 68) Finally, 20% mentioned labor unions. (Kampwirth, 69) What each of these factors indicates is that the women of the FMLN found their way to the movement through pre-existing networks. These networks introduced them to the movement in an initially private, thus acceptable for women setting, and made the transition into the public and political. In this way, the women entered with connections to other participants, including men, setting in place structures and ways of interaction that gave them at least a certain level of equality entering into the struggle.

In "la Montaña," as the remote areas where the FMLN trained and hid from the Salvadoran Army were called, female combatants learned skills, gained independence, and

were treated with new respect by their male comrades. (Kampwirth, 76) This engendered a shift in attitudes and an effort to eradicate machismo. (Montgomery, 123-4) Each of the five armies had women as senior commanders, and women made up three of the 15 members of the Unified Revolutionary Directorate (DRU). (Montgomery, 123) In 1981, an all female battalion was created in Gauzapa (Montgomery, 123) Despite the mythologized equality and lack of discrimination of la Montaña, other stories describe the situation of being a woman in combat as less idyllic in terms of gender relations. One woman, who headed the FMLN Women's Secretariat after the war, remembered that women were punished by being sent to do "women's work," such as kitchen work, while men were not. (Kampwirth, 76) Many of the combatants did not recognize the discrimination at the time, including the women whose story is told above, indicating that discourse on gender inequity was not part of FMLN ideological training. In addition to the implication that women's traditional work qualifies as punishment, the leaders did not appreciate spending money on products necessary for feminine hygiene. Sexual relations also posed a problem, as many relationships were formed between male and female combatants. When being considered for promotions or up for review, the "professional" nature of these relationships was taken into consideration only for women. Allegations of sexual harassment were made, and ignored by senior leadership. (Luciak, 2001b, 15) In this environment, some women chose to conform to the standards of the male leadership and rose in the ranks. Others questioned the inequality, particularly once given the chance to interact with other female FMLN combatants and discuss issues impacting only women.

Looking more closely at three of the senior commanders gives a clearer picture of the way women became involved in the organization and rose to its upper echelons. Mélida Anaya Montes, alias Ana María Gomez, served as the second-in-command in the FPL. She

was a founding leader of the National Association of Salvadoran Educators (ANDES), the main teacher's union. In getting more involved in the struggle against the military government, she became a member of the FPL in the 1970s. During this time, Montes helped establish a link between the FPL and another movement, the Popular Revolutionary Bloc (BPR). For these efforts, she was assassinated by fellow members of the FPL, who were afraid that with unification might come the lessening of their control over the organization. (MacClintock, 256-7) The unfortunate assassination serves to indicate the power Montes wielded in the FPL and the threat she posed in her attempt to bring the two organizations together.

The second-in-command of the PRTC was María Concepción Valladares, also known as Nidia Díaz. Like many, she became involved in a left-wing group at the National University through coordinating strikes and occupations of buildings. In 1972, she began to join the more extreme factions, learning about weapons and becoming a "guerilla militant." (McClintock, 256) During the conflict, she was captured and tortured for eight months in 1985, before being released in exchange for the FMLN's release of the president's daughter. (Luciak, 2001b, 30) Díaz also served on the Political-Diplomatic Commission (CPD), which functioned as a sort of foreign ministry. (Montgomery, 123) The last main female figure in the FMLN was Ana Guadalupe Martínez, the second-in-command in the ERP. Similar to Díaz, Martínez first participated in the movement through a strike at the National University in 1969. After the 1972 presidential elections, she became fully involved in the left-wing, joining the ERP in 1973. Arrested in 1976, Martínez spent seven months in jail and was raped, beaten, and tortured. (MacClintock, 255) Along with Díaz, Martínez was on the CPD. (Montgomery, 123) Women served in other important positions, such as Mercedes del Carmen Letona, who managed Radio Venceremos, the FMLN's radio station, in the mid

1980s, before going on to serve in other leadership positions in the FMLN. (Montgomery, 123)

Despite the cases of individuals who reached top positions, the FMLN did not have a goal of empowering women. However, these specific cases illustrate the ways in which women became involved, like through the universities. They also show two other important factors when one is considering the role of women in the FMLN. First, it is evident that when a woman is in a position of power in the FMLN, she is treated with the same level of violence as a man would be – assassinated, arrested, and tortured. The second point, which cannot be conclusively made by these three examples, is that many of those in the senior leadership were university-educated, while many of those under them were from the peasant class. This difference became more important as women chose whether or not to continue with the FMLN as a political party.

Regarding women in general, as a revolutionary movement, the FMLN needed a broad base of support, which meant including women in the ranks, as well as using them as cooks and for other more traditional purposes. Many women who joined the FMLN did not do so in the search for individual, or women's rights, they did so for the cause of society-wide liberation. As an extension of the work begun in the university or through family or church connections, women combatants saw their military activities as a necessary step since they believed, along with the FMLN, that there was no longer a possibility for a peaceful solution. In terms of traditional views of the sexes, the FMLN reflected the general views of society in terms of a basic level of sexism. However, their need for women allowed the women involved to gain skills and become empowered. Their more egalitarian worldview meant qualified women were able to rise through the ranks to become commanders. With

this, there was a shift in attitudes toward women and their capabilities, which would prove to instigate positive steps in the post-civil war era.

The formation of women's organizations

The role of women in the FMLN and the formation of organizations specifically focusing on the rights of women are intimately connected. In the years before the FMLN coalesced, several women's organizations were formed with connections to the various movements, including the Association of Women in El Salvador (AMES) and the Association of Progressive Women of El Salvador (AMPES), which was founded by women in the Communist Party. (Montgomery, 124-125) Realizing the utility of creating organizations of women in support of the FMLN, plans were made in 1984-85 to form such organizations, but although there were women in high-level positions in the military, the plans were made by the male leadership, excluding the women. (Kampwirth, 78) The FMLN saw women's organizations as political assets - a chance to get international aid from organizations wishing to further the women's movement, an issue that would re-emerge in a struggle for autonomy at the conclusion of the civil war. (Luciak, 1999, 49)

On the level of the ground-level female combatant, none of the women interviewed in the study of 35 combatants had belonged to women's organizations prior to joining the revolutionary coalition. (Kampwirth, 73) This reflected the fact that most women had not yet been exposed to the concepts of feminism and a gender identity, and thus organized around professions and not on the basis of sex. The first groups of organizations primarily made up of women were groups such as ANDES, a teacher's union, or AMES, which served to further the overall struggle of Salvadorans, not women specifically. The creation of women's groups by the FMLN was meant to follow this model. In the early stages of the formation of women's groups associated with the FMLN, large groups of women were sent

to meet together. In these meetings, women were able to discuss collectively, for the first time, issues surrounding womanhood in the FMLN and to formulate criticism and suggestions. Quickly, the format shifted to smaller groups of women, perhaps to diminish the impact the women could have as a cohesive whole. (Kampwirth, 79) A number of female FMLN combatants became involved in these organizations because they were sent by their superiors to work in these groups. (Kampwirth, 77) In general, the FMLN felt it had little to fear from these organizations, especially compared to the financial resources and international support they stood to gain. This belief was not unfounded. The women's organizations were not feminist organizations from their inception since their recognized goals were not gender-specific demands – the need to defeat the status quo was greater. (Hipsher, 139)

Over time, women's organizations founded by FMLN members began to advocate for women's rights. (Luciak, 1999, 48) The female combatants realized that the issues they faced, such as sexual harassment, were different from those of their male counterparts. When arrested, women faced rape and the possibility of pregnancy, a threat used as demoralizing tools to torture them, among more common forms of torture. (Kampwirth, 79) This realization and the space the organizations created allowed female combatants to classify their complaints about the place of women in the FMLN and Salvadoran society in general. Ideas of feminism also began to filter into conversations, as women who had been involved in revolutionary movements abroad joined the organization and exposed other members to examining issues from a gender perspective.

Many of the women's organizations founded during this time did not survive the post-war period. Two key ones, however, did. Women for Dignity and Life, also known as *las Dignas*, was originally affiliated with RN. As they became more aware of women-specific

issues and began to agitate for changes in the organization, the relationship with their parent organization became difficult. Their work was sabotaged and the organization was pushed aside and marginalized by RN. In 1992, when the civil war was over and the FMLN had become one political party, las Dignas declared their independence. (Ready, Stephen, & Cosgrove, 189) According to Ilja Luciak (2001) in his article, “Women’s Networking and Alliance Building in Post-War Central America,” due to their experience with RN and the FMLN, las Dignas viewed party militancy in the FMLN as incompatible with maintaining the necessary level of autonomy in order to be active and successful in the women’s movement. (68)

Morena Herrera, one of the leaders of las Dignas, provides a contrast to the profiles of the female military commanders of the FMLN. She too came to take part in the civil war through her involvement in the student movement. Her work with the FMLN was primarily to work with the civilian population; she moved into the countryside to do so. Herrera helped to form a women’s association that worked with peasant women to prepare food, bring supplies to field hospitals, and to construct a small hospital for civilians. Despite all this work, Herrera felt that the FMLN did not give the group the recognition it deserved. As she says, “I did reach a position of power within the FMLN, but the thing I recognized was that it wasn’t power for women in general. It was space for certain women who were able to work within male parameters.” (Morgan, Jackson, & Cosgrove, 29) This realization led her and other members of las Dignas to decide that they no longer wanted to work to support the broader struggle if that struggle ignored women in the process.

Movimiento de Mujeres “Mélida Anaya Montes,” referred to as MAM and named after the assassinated commander of the FPL, was formed by that branch of the FMLN. Their experience was distinct from that of las Dignas. They left the official branch of the

FPL, but allowed their members to be both militants in the FMLN and active participants in MAM at the same time. This action, referred to as being a “doble militante” (double militant) became an issue that would separate the women’s movement in the future.

Other women’s organizations that continue to play a role in El Salvador’s post-civil war political environment are CONAMUS and CEMUJER. CONAMUS, the National Coordinating Committee of Salvadoran Women, was formed as a federation of women’s organizations and women’s committees as were many at the time, though most did not survive. (Ready et al., 187) CEMUJER, the Center for Women’s Studies, another important organization, was autonomous from its inception and never faced the issue of “doble militancia,” moving more easily between the two spheres of civil society and political parties. (Hipsher, 139) No matter the relationship between each women’s organization and the FMLN, there was recognition by women, even if they moved away from the FMLN as a political party, “of the link between the guerilla movement and the independent feminist movement it had inadvertently engendered.” (Kampwirth, 81)

The decisions made by women’s organizations in pre- and post-civil war El Salvador bring up a central issue of civil society movements: the balancing of compromise and autonomy. Because most women’s organizations were formed by men, not in an effort to advance women’s rights but in an effort to obtain development aid, the past relationship between these organizations and the FMLN is not ideal. During the war, there was a sense of tolerance, as there were broader ideals for which the struggle was launched, and it was important to maintain a sense of unity within. However, on top of the fact that the groups were created for the primary purpose of raising money, they also allowed issues of discrimination within the FMLN to emerge and be vocalized. A fear was a repeat of the Nicaraguan experience, in which the women’s movement formed out of their revolutionary

movement remained subordinated. (Luciak, 2001a, 68-69) Las Dignas is the extreme example of breaking away from the FMLN. Most others have maintained a relationship and have members who are active both in the party and in the organization. The conflict between the two entities has served a purpose, however:

“Unlike other women’s movements in Latin America, the Salvadoran women’s movement has grown during the post-conflict period (a period tied to democratic transition)...When women take political roles in opposition movements, the existence of an autonomous women’s movement can be critical to ensuring that the women continue to occupy those roles after the conflict.” (Ready, 2001, 198)

As will be seen, the strength of the women’s movement has its limitations, and autonomy can be a double-edged sword. The survival of the movement, ten years after the signing of the peace accords, is an example, however, of its flexibility and willingness to both compromise and be autonomous in order to accomplish its goals.

As this section deals with the dysfunction of the Salvadoran state shown by a broad-based revolutionary movement, it is useful to first look at the FMLN in the place of a state in the analysis of the literature written on women and democratization. The FMLN was attempting to build a new form of governance for El Salvador. In looking at its construction through a gendered lens, as McDowell would have us do, it reveals that 30% of the combatants and three of the senior commanders were women. However, in its policies, gender inequities continued in attitude and action. This forces us to use Molyneux’s frame of reference and look differently at the distinct levels of the FMLN. However, while on the upper level there were women in senior positions, they were by and large not concerned with issues of gender, which were left to those sent to work with women’s organizations to encounter and wrestle with. In this way, while inclusive of women, the FMLN can be seen as empowering women by teaching them important skills for future political activism, but not as creating an environment or an overall structure in which women were equal. But by

inadvertently creating powerful women's organizations, the FMLN began to politicize its female members in the more traditional sense and to create women who saw themselves as agents, allowing them to move into the democratic transition with the desire and ability to maintain their position of power.

Impact of the peace accords

By the early 1990s, both sides were exhausted and the international community began to pressure the FMLN and the Salvadoran government to end the civil war. Each side presented a plan, neither of which confronted the issues of discrimination against women directly. (Morgan et al., 28) The signing of the peace accords meant the end of the civil war, but despite the participation of women at all levels in the FMLN, only three women were included in the negotiations. Those three were Nidia Diaz, Lorena Peña, and Ana Guadalupe Martinez, all high ranking commanders in the FMLN. Despite their participation, women's issues received little attention – not completely surprising as each side was overwhelmingly represented by men. The goals of the peace accords were both to reintegrate former FMLN combatants into Salvadoran society and to reform aspects of the society that had promoted the conflict in the first place. If society was to be truly reformed, the issues of women, who represented the highest percentage of the poor in El Salvador, the primary caregiver, and oftentimes the breadwinner, needed to be addressed. The scant attention paid to women in the peace accords reflected the continuation of the masculine view of the state, even one that had undergone what had promised to be a massive societal change.

Three key issues prevented women who were former FMLN combatants from equal treatment. As part of the reintegration of FMLN combatants and social reform, land was to be re-distributed to those who had fought and had no land. In many cases, when a female

combatant was married, either by common-law or by the state, the land deeds were given in the name of the man, on the grounds of giving one plot per family. (Luciak, 2001b, 39)

Also, many women who could have received land or other financial benefits in the agreements could not, since fewer women than men possessed Salvadoran identity cards, necessary to claim them. Third, the peace accords stipulated giving cash awards to former FMLN combatants based on a system of ranking. The rankings were formulated within the FMLN and many of the women who did not serve in direct combat were given lower priority numbers than the men who fought. (Luciak, 2001b, 46-48) Through the process of re-integration, women continued to lack the resources to be financially independent and were again made to feel as though their work was of less value.

The women who participated in the peace accords were also not advocates of women's rights as separate from the rights of all individuals. As high-level members of the FMLN, their loyalty lay primarily in the party and its work, not the work of women's organizations that were forming and breaking away. These women were not the ones who were sent to participate in women's groups or to have discussions about the gender inequities in the FMLN; they were those who ordered others to do so. For Lorena Peña, women's emancipation had not been an issue throughout the war and, in her own words, she had no conception of "gender theory." Martinez, while supporting women in the FMLN, thought of women's organizations as radical. (Luciak, 1999, 47-48)

By including only those women who had succeeded in the structure of the FMLN in the peace talks, the accords were inevitably not focused toward the issues of the women who had struggled for independence and autonomy within the system. This problem is representative of the issues women members, high-level or low, would face in the FMLN as it began its transition to political party status. In this moment of transition, we can see that

the “representative mechanisms” advocated by Phillips are not employed in either the make-up of the peace accords or the distribution of resources. As occurs in many societies that are reconstructing, such as the recent example of Afghanistan, those who were not part of the power structure prior to the conflict are not included in its aftermath – a fact which almost systematically excludes women. This serves as an attempt to remove women from the political role they felt they were playing throughout the conflict and to place women back into the public sphere. As we will see, the women who participated in the FMLN’s struggle did not want to go back, and fought not to do so. This struggle, and the methods women within the FMLN used to keep women’s issues on the agenda, is the focus of the next section.

FMLN and women

The transformation of the FMLN into a political party meant turning a military organization with authoritarian and hierarchical characteristics into an internally democratic organization. (Luciak, 2001b, xv) In this shift, the rights of women within the party were not forgotten, at least on paper.

“The construction of a true democracy entails the full realization of women [’s rights] and their creative participation in all spheres of national life. This is a fundamental principle in the societal project for which the FMLN is fighting. We have a commitment: to win equal rights for women, [and] overcome their marginalization and oppression in Salvadoran society...”

-FMLN Carta de principios y objetivos, 1993

The inclusion of women the FMLN’s founding charter as a political party began to rectify the fact that issues of women’s emancipation were “conspicuously absent” from official documents of the FMLN during the civil war. (Luciak, 2001b, 149)

Women in the FMLN soon found that the most effective method to keep the attention of the rest of the party was to organize among themselves. They held their first

national meeting in August of 1993, in which for the first time they openly criticized the party for their lack of support. Accepting the need to look at the events of the past with a gendered lens, one of the women's main objectives of the meeting was to free themselves from the "old shackles" imposed by Salvadoran society and the FMLN hierarchy. The other was to declare their willingness to fight to make sure that the new political party of the FMLN would reflect these issues. (Luciak, 2001b, 149)

Soon after the national meeting, the Women's Secretariat of the FMLN was formed, the leadership's effort to appease female activists within the party. While an important and symbolic gesture, it was an essentially empty one. The Secretariat was given little funding and no clear mandate or support from the party leadership in terms of advancing women's rights. Originally, it was composed of representatives from each of the five groups that constituted the FMLN. Because of this lack of unity there was frequent disagreement and high turnover, leading even more to a lack of influence within the party structure. (Luciak, 2001b, 152) The Secretariat leadership was aware of its lack of autonomy. Its subordination to the FMLN Political Commission meant it was obligated to work for the goals of the party, not for women within it or within El Salvador in general. (Luciak, 2001b, 153)

Percentage-wise, women were not ignored in the FMLN. In the 1994 elections, the first in which the FMLN took part, 25% of the FMLN candidates were women. When 21 seats were won in the National Assembly, 24% of them went to women, the same success rate as their male FMLN counterparts. (Luciak, 1999, 57) This demonstrates the general commitment the FMLN had to more equal representation, if not to the advancement of women's rights specifically. In many cases, a relatively high percentage of candidates presented can be women, but their placement on the party list can be such that very few win

seats even if the party is successful.⁵ In comparison with other political parties in the Assembly, five out of the nine female legislators belonged to the FMLN. (Luciak, 1999, 57) Also, following the 1994 party convention, women made up 20% of the two most important political structures in the FMLN, the Political Commission, with a total of 15 members, and the National Council, which has 66 members. (Luciak, 2001b, 159) Aware of the success of women in the early years of the party, some women leaders wanted it to be institutionalized through a quota system of 30%, first suggested in 1994. A quota system meant that women would be required to constitute 30% of the membership of the FMLN, 30% of the internal leadership, and 30% of the candidates put forward for office. Despite the advances women had appeared to have made, the criticisms, from both men and women, were very familiar. It was stated that for women in the countryside, this was not feasible, since women had a primary responsibility to their families and not to running for office. The concerns of husbands were also heard, worried that a political career would take their wives out of the home. (Luciak, 1999, 56)

In April 1995, the FMLN Assembly met to elect new Secretariat leadership. There was a suggestion that there should continue to be representative from each of the five groups, but this idea was defeated. At the time, the FMLN was attempting to become more unified as a political party. Instead of members seeing themselves as belonging to the ERP or the FPL they wanted to create an FMLN identity. When the voting was complete, each group did not end up with a seat, as there was neither a representative from the RN nor from the Communist Party. (Luciak, 2001b, 154)

⁵ In the proportional, party-list system, parties nominate lists of candidates in multi-member districts and voters vote for one party or another. The seats are given out to the list in proportion to the percentage of votes received, starting with the first candidate on the party list. Thus, position on the list is very important. (Lijphart, 147)

After the election of the new leadership, three clear objectives were outlined by the Secretariat. First, that the political rights of women in the party and in society be recognized and be made to count. Second, that the party analyze the situation of women from a gender perspective that permits recognition of the existing inequalities between men and women. These should be corrected as a fundamental step toward achieving democracy in the party as well as in society. Third, that the party adopt a gender perspective in establishing its identity, strategies, and operational plan, party principles, statutes, internal rules, and organic structure. (Luciak, 2001b, 155) These clearly defined goals gave the Women's Secretariat a platform on which to argue for fundamental change, and made gender equality the "most discussed topic" post-war in the FMLN with its fight for positive discrimination. (Luciak, 2001b, 156)

Like the symbolic, yet empty nature of the original creation of the Secretariat, the party leadership preferred to have these goals in principle and not in practice. In 1997, not long after the Secretariat had succeeded in including a women's rights agenda in the party's socio-economic proposal, the leadership of the Secretariat was replaced by female members with a history of following the party line, rather than an affiliation with the feminists within the party. (Luciak, 2001b, 155)

On the ground level, however, the divide continued. Between 30-35% of all FMLN members are women, and it was proposed once again that there be a quota, this time of 35%. They succeeded in a party-wide vote, despite the fact that this quota was also opposed by certain women in leadership positions. (Luciak, 2001b, 157) However, it was decided by the leadership that this change could not be truly institutionalized through placement in the party statutes, since it could be ruled unconstitutional under the clause of the Salvadoran constitution prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender. (Luciak, 2001b, 157)

Both the creation of a Women's Secretariat and the debate over quotas are familiar in democratizing countries. Many governments have formed Women's Secretariats at the bureaucratic level and a few have instituted quotas that establish a minimum number of women who must be elected to their representative body. Women's Secretariats have been relatively uncontroversial institutions, as many serve only to promote women's rights in a non-political way, through education and information. Quotas, on the other hand, have been fiercely debated by both men and women, as was the case within the FMLN.⁶

The FMLN and women's organizations

Throughout the course of the decade, the relationship between the FMLN and women's organizations has varied. In the 1999 presidential election, the first major divide between the two factions occurred. In the FMLN's internal campaign for a presidential candidate, two women were in the field out of three total candidates. In the FMLN system, the party would vote for two candidates, and the second-place one would be the nominee for vice-president. The first woman, Nidia Diaz, the former commander in the army and high-ranking party official, was the candidate supported by the party. The other female candidate had the vocal support of the women's organizations. When Diaz placed second and the other woman third, she still received little to no support from the women's movement, wounded over the rejection of their candidate. For the first time in Salvadoran modern history, the "social left" maintained its independence from the "political left." (Luciak, 2001b, 164) The FMLN ticket and Diaz were ultimately defeated by the right-wing ARENA candidate, partially a result of this fracture within the left, which traditionally united behind the FMLN.

⁶ A more in-depth discussion of quotas will take place on pp. 50-52

In a 1997 interview with Violeta Menjivar, a member of the Political Commission and the Women's Secretariat, many of the issues mentioned in this section are elucidated in a personal account. Menjivar came from a family with a history of political participation and first became involved in left-wing politics at the National University, and became a militant in the FPL. She describes her role in the FMLN as being "dedicated to the national liberation struggle and the class wars" and not concerned with gender issues. In the interview, she stated that she did not gain a gender identity until after the peace accords were signed. Currently, she is part of the Women's Secretariat, which she calls "a group of women who has brought the gender debate to the party," referring to the success of the quota measure. In her view, the quota is not a gratuitous gesture and there has been much debate within the party in an attempt to make it evident to the FMLN that a quota is an appropriate measure to help eradicate the gender inequity in the party. As a woman who served in the army leadership and in the senior leadership as part of the Political Commission and the Women's Secretariat, she has a unique vantage point for viewing the sexism that remains in the party and the steps that still need to be taken. Menjivar identifies herself as a "doble militante," and sees no problem supporting both the political party and her women's organization. In fact, it seems to add to her ability to understand the issues at the grassroots and the more complex political level. (Menjivar interview)

As the FMLN transitioned from a military organization to a political party, women struggled to maintain leadership positions and to strengthen the overall position of women in the party membership. Conflict within the FMLN between female leaders who didn't see the problems lower-level women faced and the women who wanted to fix them also weakened the role of the Women's Secretariat – caught between the senior leadership and the female party members it was meant to represent. The key in the analysis of women in

the FMLN is to look beyond the 35% quota and the quantity of women in the party and examine the quality of their participation. Over time, the prominence of women's issues in the internal debate of the party and issues that arose in the National Assembly have been able to push women to the fore of the party. This helps to dissuade Waylen's fear of women being left behind in party politics. The FMLN, as a newly formed political party, was less institutionalized, and thus women were able to form for themselves an enduring part of the party structure. In general, their position in the FMLN became stronger, sometimes in concert with a women's movement that was "conflicted in its opinion" regarding the FMLN and its commitment to women's rights. (Luciak, 2001b, 148)

4. Strategies

Both the women's movement and the FMLN had a stated mission to promote and support women's rights in post-civil war El Salvador. The primary location of efforts to do so was the Salvadoran National Assembly through the passage of legislation. For the women's movement, the challenge was more focused, as they could have one issue at a time on their agendas and could concentrate their efforts solely on these bills. For this reason, the main area of examination will be how these organizations act in conjunction with established political parties, be they right-wing or left-wing, and their efforts in educating the public to create pressure for legislation through public interest. Within this, the limitations of women in the FMLN party system will become evident, as a larger number of factors determine their flexibility and ability to support or bring up legislation concerning women's issues.

In looking at the Salvadoran National Assembly, we begin to see the actions of the Salvadoran state itself, not just within one revolutionary political party. This brings us back

to Molyneux's conception of the state as an arena of struggle between different forces and that policy outcomes are thus unpredictable. In this environment of contingency, we encounter a new sector of Salvadoran political society – the political right. The interaction of the political parties on either side, namely the FMLN and ARENA, is key to the success of any piece of legislation, whether or not it deals with women's issues. Based on this knowledge, a strategy used by the women's movement is to create "strategic alliances" with right-wing women in the legislature. (Hipsher, 133) These connections, though temporary, deal primarily with political rights and women's roles as wives and mothers. Alliances have yet to be formed between the groups regarding economic and sexual rights. (Hipsher, 151) The reason the first group of women's rights can be confronting together, while the second commonly cannot comes from the phenomena of "politicizing motherhood." This functions to

"...advocate defense of the integrity of the family and the autonomy of persons within its ambit of responsibility, and stress the centrality of values associated with motherhood for shaping the wider order of the political community. They work for women's causes while advocating a transcendent world view." (Werbner, 231)

Two of the issues, domestic violence and child support, impact women as mothers and wives and do not threaten the social or economic order that conservative politicians work to protect. The common ground found on these issues, and others that deal with political participation, may also exist because of the ability of the women's organizations to shape their identities outside of their connection to the FMLN. By working outside the traditional framework of left-wing organizations with left-wing political parties, the women's movement has been able to open up its issues to a more general public and gain widespread support.

The women's movement and the FMLN continue to deal with the tensions that have existed since their formation. There is still a distinct weakness in the ability of female party

militants and the women's movement to collaborate. (Luciak, 2001a, 69) This weakness and the level of frustration evident in the women's movement toward the FMLN are detrimental to the advancement of women within the party. Many in the movement have abandoned female party members and leave them to deal with their male colleagues with little support. Women in the FMLN have not given up the struggle, as some legislation they have introduced into the Assembly has caused Salvadoran society to re-examine their views of gender relations. (Luciak, 1999a, 64) There is also less need for the women of the women's movement to court female legislators in the FMLN as those who are already "doble militantes" are committed to the cause. However, the lack of support is significant, which is perhaps why female legislators in the FMLN are hardly more supportive of a feminist agenda than are male legislators of the FMLN. (Luciak, 2001b, 165)

Another strategy used by the women's movement is a program of public education. Beginning with the 1994 elections, women's organizations have publicly challenged Salvadoran political parties to incorporate their demands into their political platforms. (Luciak, 1999, 44) By stating their position in the news media, the public becomes aware of the issues women face and their daily struggles in confronting them. Involvement in international and regional conferences also serves to legitimate the position and status of the women's movement in the eyes of the elites and the government. In preparing the "Platform of Salvadoran Women, 1997-2000," the involvement of women's organizations played a crucial role. (Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women [CEDAW], 2003) Further efforts include participating in the lives of the local community – the existence of shelters and a safe space for women which has been their hallmark since the establishment of the women's organizations. (Stephen, 80)

Perhaps the largest impact of the women's movement is the fact that it has served to enlarge the arena of public debate on a wide variety of women's issues. Prior to the civil war, access to media and the public discourse was strictly controlled by the military governments and social issues were rarely discussed. In constantly pushing issues of concern to women, whether in the legislature, private, or public settings, the messages of the women's movement have infiltrated a majority of discussions on the future of El Salvador. (Ready et al., 196) Las Dignas has been working since 1994 to get women to create local political platforms at the municipal level and to train women as potential political candidates. (Stephen, 81) Starting at the local level, las Dignas hope to change the face of Salvadoran politics one town at a time. This strategy, in which las Dignas recognize the importance of grassroots organizing, reflects their desire to reach out to not only the urban population but the rural as well. The desire of these women's organizations, as evidenced in the past two strategies, to improve the economic, social, and political lives of women throughout the country is, according to Navarro and Bourque, a key to the success of the movement overall. Whether it influences votes on legislation at present, its long-term effects are those which will keep women's issues on the agenda.

Neither women in the FMLN who are concerned about women's issues nor women's organizations have an easy time fighting legislative battles. In the case of autonomous and semi-autonomous women's organizations, there is an opportunity to choose who to work with on what issue. This is a relative luxury compared to the battles of women in the FMLN who still face an immense ideological and psychological divide between themselves and the women of the right-wing political parties. For this reason, women in the FMLN must work within their own party to gain support, which, as we have seen, can be a challenge due to both male and female colleagues. In the current political

environment, the strategies employed by the women's movement to create alliances with the right-wing female politicians and to educate the public and increase legitimacy advances the cause of women's rights on a more practical and pragmatic level.

Within these strategies, however, is the central issue of compromise versus autonomy. When alliances are formed with right-wing female legislators, and even left-wing ones, some sense of the autonomy held by the women's organizations is lost. This is more a problem for certain organizations than for others. Las Dignas, which made a concerted effort to break away from the FMLN, is an organization that prides itself on its autonomy from that party. Other groups, such as MAM, allow their members to work with them and with the party, and see this as a strength. (Luciak, 2001a, 70)

The definition of autonomy is important here – the idea that the organizations can dictate their own agendas and actions without the interference of other actors. Neither autonomy nor compromise are negative actions, they simply have differing consequences depending on the situation. The strategies involving forming alliances with either the left-wing or right-wing women imply compromise of some sort, though on different level. Alliances with right-wing women force women's organizations to focus on the one issue at hand, ignoring the other topics that involve social and economic women's rights that divide the two groups. The strategy of aligning with the FMLN is less politically compromising, but can feel more personally compromising to las Dignas, who fought to separate themselves. For the other organizations, this connection can feel natural and keep the groups within their comfort zones. Efforts to educate and provide the community with resources are the most independent actions of the organizations, and may create important bonds with society at the grassroots level. With the examination of pieces of legislation and the strategies used, the advantages of each strategy will become clearer.

Mujeres '94

When the first post-war elections were held in 1994, the women's movement decided that this was the moment in which to make its presence known. It did so by organizing Mujeres '94, a "pluralistic and independent initiative" that brought together women and women's organizations in an effort to develop a platform to present to the political parties. ("From Confusion to Hope," 9) One driving force beyond the coalition was the belief that women had been marginalized in the peace accords, so that in order to get their voices heard in the new El Salvador, women would have to lobby for themselves. (Luciak, 2001b, 195) Mujeres '94 had two main objectives in making this a successful goal: to strengthen the movement and involve more women, and to learn how to engage the electoral process and political parties. ("From...", 9)

In 1993, Mujeres '94 began by holding a series of open debates as the starting place for creating a platform. Over a period of eight months, over 32 organizations and 800 women participated. (Ready, 190) Women from the FMLN also played a large role in the preparations, mostly "doble militantes" who wanted to share their experience with a political party with the coalition. (Luciak, 2001b, 195) As part of their work, Mujeres '94 analyzed the platforms of each party for their consideration of women's issues. The platform that emerged from these forums involved a wide range of demands, including calling for an end to rape, incest, and sexual harassment, coordinated medical attention for women in more and better hospitals, responsible fatherhood, and occupation by women of 50% of the positions of power in the government. (Stephen, 70-71) In addition, it proposed an overhaul of the judicial system. ("From...", 9)

The coalition sent the platform to all the political parties for discussion. The FMLN, with more of a commitment to women's rights than the other parties, partially recognized

some of its points at its national convention in 1993. Their experience with the other political parties, however, was not as positive. Despite their attempts, the newness of the women's movement and its relative lack of experience in dealing with the entrenched, conservative parties meant the coalition "did not have the institutional power to truly negotiate with El Salvador's major political parties." (Stephen, 71)

There were also lessons to be learned from the experience itself. While a symbolic moment of unity for the Salvadoran women's movement, there was large debate over double militancy, difficulties with the diversity in feminism, and revolutionary sectarianism.

(Hipsher, 147) For *las Dignas*, *Mujeres '94* was a time to negotiate through the range of political perspectives and to create the opportunity for future alliances. The most positive aspect of *Mujeres '94* was the visibility it gave to the women's movement as it moved into mainstream politics. (Stephen, 80) Thus, while the coalition did not succeed in convincing political parties to adopt its platform, it did introduce them, and the Salvadoran public, to a new political force.

Legislation and specific strategies

The National Assembly of El Salvador has passed a number of pieces of legislation dealing with women's rights since the end of the civil war. These changes are evidence of the ability of women, or a change in attitudes toward women, to influence the state. In many ways, the legislation is a function of the number of women in the National Assembly. Prior to 1994, there were few women who served. However, five of the nine FMLN legislators elected were women, and there were a total of nine women overall, representing 10.7%. In the 1997 elections, this number increased further, to nine female FMLN legislators, and 14 overall, or 16.7%. (Luciak, 2001b, 214)

The revision of the Family Code in 1994 was one of the first steps taken, stating that spouses have equal rights and duties, a clear shift from the former divisions of labor and responsibilities of men and women under the former Family Code. The code had not been revised since 1860, and once democracy was re-established, its reformation became a priority. Other than time, Salvadoran legislators recognized a need to update the code to match provisions in the 1983 constitution and the United Nations treaties it had ratified. Among the most compelling reasons to revise the code, however, was to loosen its strict definition of marriage, so that the social realities and the impact of the war did not designate hundred of thousands of children as “illegitimate” in the eyes of the law. (“Who wrote..., 1) There are other pieces of legislation protecting women in vulnerable situations, i.e. prostitution and trafficking in women and girls, a reformation of the Labor Code, barring discrimination in employment, and a change in the Penal Code criminalizing sexual harassment in the workplace. (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women [CEDAW] report, 2003) In addition to these important laws which signal a shift in Salvadoran society, there are four pieces of legislation that can be used to examine the strategies used by the women’s movement and the political parties. These four laws deal with domestic violence, child support, quotas, and abortion. In each, the women’s organizations have played a major part, both independently and in conjunction with left-wing and right-wing political parties.

Domestic Violence

A major law passed in 1996 was the Law Against Domestic Violence, which allows members of the community to inform police of suspected cases of domestic violence, lets police enter homes and make arrests based on the testimony of a plaintiff or neighbor,

allows domestic violence victims to file restraining orders, establishes special units within the National Civilian Police trained in domestic violence issues, and encourages the establishment of temporary shelters. (Hipsher, 155)

Domestic violence has long been a major problem in all sectors of Salvadoran society. Public notice of the issue, however, did not come about until the peace talks. Around the same time, a regional conference was held in Brazil in which a convention was created condemning domestic violence as a public security issue. This convention, referred to as the Belem do Para convention, came to the National Assembly at the same time as the Law Against Domestic Violence.

Prior to the introduction of legislation in the National Assembly, women's organizations brought the issue to the attention of the Salvadoran people and worked at the community level to combat the problem. CONAMUS and CEMUJER took out television ads to inform Salvadorans of the widespread nature of domestic violence and to inform them of the resources available if a viewer is a victim of domestic violence. (Ready et al., 193) MAM had a history of organizing Casas de las Mujeres in San Salvador which served as safe houses for victims and as training centers for people to learn how to counsel victims. (Ready et al., 193)

The support of right-wing women in the legislature was crucial to the passage of the legislation. Gloria Salguero Gross, an ARENA member and a leading conservative figure, and Rosa Mélida Villatoro, a Christian Democrat congresswoman and the President of the National Commission on the Family, Women, and Children, both spoke in favor of this measure. (Hipsher, 155) In ratifying the Belem do Para convention and the Law Against Domestic Violence during the same time period, women from all sides of the political

spectrum signaled that domestic violence was an issue that would be confronted in El Salvador.

The FMLN appears to play a more tacit role in the legislation. In the Menjivar interview, she indicates that the members of the FMLN in the legislature played a part in its passage. Menjivar refers to the law as a “big step forward” as it turns intrafamilial violence into a public crime when it was formerly considered a private crime to be taken care of within each family. (Menjivar interview)

As a widespread issue, domestic violence proved to be a useful topic to rally women of all ideological positions. The education campaigns and resources provided by women’s organizations served to inform the public and to offer proof of the gravity of the problem of domestic violence. The decision of the women’s organizations to form a public alliance with ARENA and other right-wing women was a strategy that paid off for both groups. Women’s organizations gained even broader visibility, as those who would have previously ignored them for their left-wing ties were introduced to the groups more “moderate” nature. At the same time, the women of ARENA learned the utility of reaching out to women’s organizations and the popularity of supporting certain women’s issues, increasing their interest in asking their party to support these issues as well.

Child Support

With a history of poverty, centered on female-headed households, legislation on child support would have been a necessary step at any time for the Salvadoran government. Throughout the war, many of these women felt constrained from demanding child support because it would cause an interaction with the police or it would put the former partner in jeopardy of being identified and detained by the police, both dangerous possibilities that it

was better to avoid. (Ready, 168) With the signing of the peace accords and a re-evaluation of FMLN women of their domestic situations, there were new family codes enacted that enlarged men's child support responsibilities. (Ready, 168-9) Once the code was enacted, there was a marked increase in the number of child support claims – an increase of 75% in the years 1993-1997. (Ready, 169)

The important position of motherhood in Salvadoran society meant that the women's movement could use this to their advantage. Las Dignas formed the Asociación de Madres Demandantes (AMD) in order to be a direct part in this process. "If motherhood is socially constructed, then it can be reconstructed through a feminist praxis of analysis, consciousness-raising, and political action." (Ready, 175) The reconstruction of motherhood meant joining forces with right-wing politicians for whom motherhood was always considered a sacred duty. In 1996, las Dignas worked with the Attorney General's Office, which was in charge of child support claims, the Ministry of Education, and the Salvadoran Institute for the Protection of Minors in the creation of programs to increase the payment of child support by deadbeat dads. (Ready, et al., 193) The broad coalition involving the women's movement and both ends of the political spectrum took measures a step further the following year. The "Non-Arrears Bill," which required that all candidates for elected office get legal clearance certifying that they were not in arrears for child support payments, was lobbied for by MAM and AMD, introduced into the legislature by the FMLN, and supported by ARENA and the PDC. (Ready, 165)

The "Non-Arrears Bill" was a remarkable combination of the desires of the women's movement for more accountability from former partners and the stance of the right-wing that the state should stay uninvolved in these affairs. The bill did not give the state the responsibility of supporting children - it gave that responsibility to the fathers. (Ready, 185)

This forethought on the part of the left-wing kept the broad coalition intact. The women's movement, in the form of las Dignas and the AMD, also showed its ability to adapt to the situation at hand. The AMD was successful in creating a new political identity as an organization working for the rights of mothers within the context of the women's movement.

Quotas

Despite the advances women have made in Salvadoran politics, men continue to hold approximately 90% of Salvadoran public offices. (Hipsler, 151) To help remedy this inequality, organizations within the women's movement and female legislators on the left and right have proposed reforms to the Electoral Code. These reforms would require that women constitute at least one-third of all political parties, one-third of internal leadership positions within political parties, and one-third of all candidates nominated for political office. (Hipsler, 151) Supporters of these reforms include Las Dignas, MAM, and AMD on the left and former first lady Elizabeth Calderon Sol as well as several congresswomen, including former ARENA congresswoman Gloria Salguero Gross, the former president of the Salvadoran Legislative Assembly. (Hipsler 152-153)

The issue of quotas is one that crosses ideological lines. We are aware of the sexism within the FMLN, and Gross has described the sexism within the ARENA as an eight or nine on a scale of zero to ten, with ten as the worst. (Hipsler, 153-4) There are two main obstacles to the success of these reforms, however. One is the resistance on the part of conservative male legislators and attorneys, who argue that this reform would violate the Constitution's prohibition on sex discrimination, which has been discussed in terms of the FMLN quota. The second, a more society-wide obstacle, is the public's unwillingness to

decrease the relative power of men, with its traditional preference of seeing women as victims as opposed to protagonists in their own liberation. (Hipsler, 154) This is also expressed as a desire to have the “best” person for the job be elected, instead of having to elect a less qualified woman. The counter-argument to this is to ask on what basis people are considered the “best” or most qualified. (McDowell, 176) As we have seen, women bring a range of experiences that are not traditionally termed political, and with our expanded definition of what is political we see that women are ready and able to hold elected office. Quotas have become more commonplace in countries as they reform their Electoral Codes after an experience with authoritarian rule or civil war, and as the validity of this counter-argument becomes clearer. In Latin America, both Argentina and Brazil have quotas that reserve a certain number of seats in parliament for women. Uganda also has a quota system, in which a designated percentage of elected bodies at each level must be women. (Simmons & Wright, 6)

Legislation was in fact introduced for a constitutional amendment with a 30% quota for female candidates for political office, but due to the obvious barriers, the legislators settled for introducing a law to that effect. Despite support which was promised from legislators which indicated that it would pass, the bill received only 41 of the required 43 votes. It was later discovered that some female legislators were pressured into switching their votes by male colleagues in power positions in the party. Another error the sponsors acknowledged was not fully involving the women’s movement, which could have added vital support and information on the problem of women’s under-representation in government. (Luciak, 2001a, 70)

Paradoxically, a problem in the passage of a law establishing quotas may be the existence of quotas in the FMLN. Some of the women who are recruited for office lack

understanding of the importance of the women's movement and feminist ideology. For this reason, they are more likely to go along with the wishes of the party leaders than to work to support women's rights (Luciak, 2001b, 167)

Quotas continue to be an issue in the Salvadoran legislature. The involvement of both left-wing and right-wing legislators played an important part in bringing the bill to the floor, and in the 41 votes received by the bill. But unlike the Law Against Domestic Violence and the Non-Arrears Bill, the political left and right did not seek the support of the women's movement in rallying the public and in educating society and other legislators on the importance of quotas. It is possible, as quotas are a more divisive issue than domestic violence and child support, that this strategy would not have succeeded either. The failure of the bill by two votes indicates otherwise. Had the unified front approach taken place, the fight for quotas may have turned from a losing battle to a victory.

Abortion

One of the most divisive issues that societies currently face, the issue of abortion arose during the reform of the Salvadoran Penal Code. Article 169 of the original Penal Code made abortion not punishable under three circumstances: when it was necessary to save the life of the mother, when there was rape or incest, or when it was presumed that the fetus would be born with a grave deformity. (Hipsher, 157) Originally, Article 137 of the new Code included almost the same provisions: when necessary to avoid grave danger to the life and physical or mental health of the mother, when there was a crime against the women's sexual will, and when there was grave physical or mental deficiency of the fetus. (Hipsher, 157)

Immediately, female ARENA and PDC leaders took open stances against Article 137. (Hipsher, 157) A draft bill, criminalizing abortion in all cases, was written by ARENA members and introduced in 1997. A campaign, spearheaded by the Catholic Church and right-wing Catholic groups, developed as the church hierarchy spoke out against Article 137 and Catholic groups organized demonstrations, mobilizing thousands of students to march against abortion. (Center for Reproductive Law and Policy [CRLP], 2000, 32) Both the government and the media came out against abortion, with the Catholic Church dominating the discussion. Even medical professionals, citing the ability in almost all cases to save the life of a fetus, spoke in favor of criminalizing abortion. (CRLP, 2000, 29)

The principal supporters of Article 137 were women's organizations such as las Dignas, MAM, and CEMUJER, and FMLN legislators. (Hipsher, 158) Women's organizations tried to make their position known, but "their perspective did not have the forum, support or strength to make a significant impact on general public opinion." (CRLP, 2000, 33) The influence of the Catholic Church also had a huge impact on the members of the FMLN who supported Article 137. Only a handful chose to speak publicly in favor of it, while most were aware that going against the Church could hurt their prospects for re-election. (CRLP, 2000, 34)

When it came time to vote on Article 137, it became obvious that those supporting the article were fewer and less powerful than those against. As was rarely seen in the Salvadoran legislature, two speakers were invited to voice their opinions before the vote took place. One was Morena Herrera, of las Dignas, speaking in favor, while the other speaker was a medical professional in opposition. Despite Herrera's appeal to the rights of the mother, the legislature voted 58 to 26 to eliminate Article 137 from the Penal Code. (Hipsher, 158)

As such a controversial issue, the debate over abortion and why its total criminalization succeeded continues. One failure of the women's movement and those who supported Article 137 was their inability to couch the argument for it in their own terms.

“the proposals of women's groups were ignored during the debate over which provisions on abortion to include in the new Penal Code. The proponents of criminalization spoke only about protecting life from the moment of conception and the need to save the fetus's life and safeguard its rights. They never took into account the rights of women, which are recognized in the international human rights treaties signed by El Salvador. Women's right to make autonomous decisions about issues linked to their reproduction was never considered.” (CRLP, 2000, 35)

The lack of discussion of public health issues helped the Catholic Church and right-wing legislators invoke religious and moral rhetoric without confronting the truths surrounding the need for access to abortion in certain circumstances. The women's movement recognizes this failure, and certain groups, such as las Dignas and CEMUJER stated that they are preparing to deal with the issue more thoroughly. (CRLP, 2000, 41) All organizations recognized, however, the danger in speaking out on these topics and the need for more support in order to protect them from right-wing Catholic groups. (CRLP, 2000, 40) Partially out of this fear and the difficulty of getting support, the women's movement had a hard time organizing until a few days before the vote, when they circulated a document advocating a clause for exceptions, sent a series of memos to assembly members, organized meetings, and presented two new proposals. (CRLP, 2000, 33) This last-minute effort did not succeed, and there was widespread disappointment that the FMLN did not support them.

In terms of the FMLN, the politicization of the issue made many legislators unable to vote in the manner they wanted to. The real fear of the Catholic Church and its influence played a major role. Questions have been raised as to what the outcome would have been had there been a secret vote. However, the image portrayed by the media of a society

strongly against abortion and the visible demonstrations and protests against it meant that many of the FMLN legislators may have honestly believed that they were acting in their role as representatives. Both the inaction of the women's movement to mobilize widespread support and the fact that the FMLN did not take a stand can be blamed for the criminalization of abortion in all cases in El Salvador. Given the societal context, many of their actions, or lack thereof, are understandable.

This case is unique when compared to domestic violence, child support, and quotas. In the first two cases, there is a certain amount of moral support for women, since most people can agree that women should not be abused by their partners and that men should take responsibility for the financial support of their children. These two issues also treat the notion of motherhood and its importance in society, a concept that the right agrees with and that the left can use to its advantage in the passage of protective and supportive policies. The success of the Law Against Domestic Violence and the Non-Arrears Bill was not assured for these reasons, but they made it so the left-wing politicians, right-wing politicians, and the left-wing women's movement could create a powerful alliance and accomplish the goals of each group. Quotas occupy a different position, as they do not deal with the private issues that are traditionally women's issues. Instead quotas try to institutionalize the insertion of women into the public sphere. Here also, left-wing and right-wing legislators who had experienced the sexism of their own political parties could come together and support this corrective measure. Despite this alliance, their failure to involve the women's movement in educating the public and the female FMLN legislators in office due to quotas and not to their support of women's rights meant the defeat of the bill. In the case of abortion, all alliances were broken down. The right-wing female legislators strongly supported the prohibition of abortion, the FMLN was conflicted due to the involvement of the Catholic

Church, and the women's movement didn't feel sufficient support to launch its own campaign in favor of Article 137. With the lack of cross-ideological support and the immense influence of the Catholic Church, Article 137 failed – a huge blow to the women's movement.

5. Conclusions

The revolutionary women of El Salvador are proof that women are, can be, and want to be important political actors. These impressive women serve to challenge the traditional notions of women in politics and in the democratization process. It becomes clear that the civil war influenced their lives in innumerable ways, but primarily by drawing women out of the private sphere and into the public sphere. After being part of a movement that fought for 12 years and served as a training ground in “man's” work – combat, organizing, leadership, etc. the members felt empowered. Even the women who performed tasks considered feminine, like Morena Herrera, were transformed by their experiences. When the civil war ended, and there were expectations that women would return to their pre-war roles, these women rebelled and refused to go quietly.

With the signing of the peace accords and its lack of attention to women's issues, women who had been active in the FMLN and in women's organizations saw a possible future – one in which the decision making roles went back to the men. Since that time, the women in the FMLN and the organizations have actively worked to re-construct El Salvador in their image, not just the image of the nation's men. They have followed Anne Phillips' suggestion and instituted representative mechanisms in the FMLN and almost succeeded in a government-wide quota. These women have also made the social political by lobbying for legislation that dealt with issues formerly considered to be private. By bring the problems of

domestic violence and child support into the public sphere, men in El Salvador can no longer hide behind closed doors.

While women in the FMLN and in women's organizations have achieved great things in the past 10 years, they have not done it alone. As Molyneux describes, they have encountered a non-monolithic state, which responds to various social and political forces. One important political force is the right-wing, represented most strongly by ARENA. Women's organizations have had to learn to navigate the political currents of El Salvador, and have found areas in which they and the right can join together. These "strategic alliances" emerged victorious on domestic violence and child support legislation, and while quotas did not pass, its cross-party alliance in favor remains. There are women's issues, however, that are not amenable to these alliances, such as abortion. In this case, women's organizations were up against their biggest challenger – the Catholic Church. Navarro and Bourque described the Catholic Church as a constraint on the movement, and the struggle over the legality of abortion proved this to be true.

As women's organizations look back over the decade, there is a return to the idea of autonomy vs. compromise. In the alliances with the right-wing, women's organizations have scored victories and gained a wider audience, yet they are forced to hide many of their views in order for the alliance to survive. Their autonomous activities, mainly education and outreach on the grassroots level, give these organizations their staying power and will continue to transform El Salvador on a societal level. When Anne Phillips speaks of the importance of representative mechanisms and societal change each happening, but preferably at the same time, she is in a sense speaking of this dilemma. Legislation creates a political and institutional legacy, where debate needs to occur in order for it to be overturned. Education and outreach are the roots of a social change. When women's

organizations strive to do both at once, through alliances and autonomy, they have the greatest chance of “engendering democracy” and giving women a permanent place in Salvadoran politics.

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