

Sara Poggio y María Amelia Viteri
Compiladoras

**Cuerpo, educación y liderazgo político:
una mirada desde el género y los
estudios feministas**

**Bodies, education and political leadership:
a gender and feminist perspective**



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FLACSO, Sede Ecuador
La Pradera E7-174 y Diego de Almagro
Quito-Ecuador
Telf.: (593-2) 323 8888
Fax: (593-2) 323 7960
www.flacso.org.ec

University of Maryland, Baltimore County
1000 Hilltop Circle
Baltimore, MD 21250
Estados Unidos
Telf. : (011-1-410) 455 1000
www.umbc.edu/

Latin American Studies Association
416 Bellefield Hall
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, PA 15260
Telf.: (011-1-412) 648 7929
lasa.international.pitt.edu

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Insurgents and advocates: women's claim-making in El Salvador*

Mneesha Gellman**

Resumen

Este artículo aborda las formas de participación de las mujeres en El Salvador en procesos de reivindicación con el Estado y cómo sus experiencias de violencia han informado las mismas. Utilizo una serie de viñetas basadas en mi trabajo de campo y literatura de testimonios para ejemplificar las razones por las cuales las ex-combatientes escogen diferentes posibilidades de reivindicación tanto durante la guerra civil como después. Al enfocarme en las mujeres que fueron activas durante la guerra y por tanto, estuvieron expuestas a la violencia perpetuada por el Estado (y que continuaron sus luchas después de los Acuerdos de Paz), sitúo la forma a partir de la cual la violencia facilitó una renegociación de demandas entre los y las ciudadanas y el Estado.

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** Mneesha Gellman, Postdoctoral Fellow, Käte Hamburger Kolleg/Centre for Global Cooperation Research (KHK/GCR21), University of Duisburg-Essen, mneesha@gmail.com.

Introduction

Leonor Hernández squints through the fog bank to keep us on the winding trail over the mountains in the department of Morazán, located in the far northeast corner of El Salvador. A co-founder of Prodetur, a community-based tourism association, Leonor leads me on a hike past a former Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) encampment to the village of El Mozote, a remote community where more than 800 people were massacred by the U.S.-supported Salvadoran National Army in 1981, for being suspected FMLN sympathizers.

Leonor was born in 1972, outside of Perquín but spent her adolescence in a refugee camp in Honduras, and as we leave El Mozote, she explains why she joined the insurgency. “I left school in the camp after 6th grade, at age 15, to join the FMLN. I didn’t know what else to do, people were hungry, I was hungry” (personal communication, May 15, 2008, Perquín). Leonor crossed the border back into El Salvador and trained in communications with the FMLN, learned to make radio broadcasts and eventually worked with Radio Venceremos, the clandestine radio program in Morazán that kept civilians in touch with the guerrilla agenda. She believed that the revolution could make things better but is now more skeptical. Leonor just got electricity at her home in 2007, fifteen years after the Peace Accords were signed in 1992, and decades since the guerrillas rose up in protest of the impoverished living conditions many Salvadorans were, and continue to be, subject to. Her one-room cinderblock house and nearby latrine was built with the assistance of an NGO, and she lives there with her mother and two teenage daughters. Despite serving an important role in the community, the benefits of the revolution have not reached people like Leonor the way the FMLN promised.

Yet Leonor continues to make claims on the Salvadoran state as an active citizen and community member, and she persists in believing that her actions can influence people, whether as an FMLN ex-guerrilla, voter, or liaison with the international community. Leonor’s main work consists of repeatedly telling her story about the civil war to people who come to Morazán to visit the war museums and memorials¹, and in doing so, she keeps current the ideal

¹ Since the time of this writing, Leonor left her work as a guide and was appointed to a municipal government position doing natural disaster preparation.

of citizens’ rights to both institutional and extra-institutional claim-making on the state. Like other former combatants, Leonor has risked much to pose her demands to the Salvadoran government. As is the case in many countries, Salvadoran female ex-combatants constitute a more marginalized group than their male counterparts, and thus, I focus on the female experience as a way to assess some of the least resolved challenges facing post-conflict claim-making.

In hopes of better understanding the implications of Leonor’s story for the wider population of female ex-combatants in democratizing countries, I ask the question: how have women in El Salvador participated in claim-making processes with the state at various stages in the state’s political regime, and how has violence informed the claims they make? To understand why former female combatants chose the paths of claim-making that they did, and how these women have transferred their activism to the post-war environment, I share a series of vignettes from the time of the civil war and afterwards.

By specifically focusing on women who were active in claim-making during the civil war, who were exposed to state-perpetrated violence, and who continue to be claim-makers in post-Peace Accords times, I try to situate the environment in which violence was drawn on to reassert the social contract between citizens and their government. The kind of claim-making that took place under the authoritarian regime is distinct from the way claims are made as El Salvador democratizes. With the assumption that negotiations of a social contract are most likely to succeed under democratizing and democratic regimes, rather than authoritarian regimes, I offer a brief theoretical discussion of the claim-making possibilities under different regime types, as well as a basic conceptualization of how violence informs identity and claim-making strategies. I next provide a historical overview of El Salvador and the civil war in order to establish some of the main actors and political arenas in which they were operating, and then move on to examine how women, specifically insurgent women, navigated these arenas to make their claims. By sharing vignettes of individual women’s experiences of mobilization and claim-making, I create a forum where Salvadoran women use their own words to describe how they came to such active citizenship. Finally, I draw on Jocelyn Viterna’s theory of why women

mobilized in El Salvador to provide a theoretical basket in which to situate the narratives and testimonies of former female insurgents.

Claim-making in the interest arena

After extensive scholarship on electoral arenas, the importance of interest arenas in Latin America as sites of claim-making is now becoming visible. The interest arena is defined as an “informal locus of specific interest articulation and problem-solving” which allows both citizens and the myriad organizations that represent them, to make claims on the state (Collier and Handlin, 2009: 8). Representation of interests inside this arena in no way guarantees that the interests will be addressed, but rather participation, in the promotion of interest representation, “constitutes a step prior to influence and effectiveness” (Collier and Handlin, 2009: 16). I do not try to measure the effectiveness of women's participation in making claims within the interest arena here, but instead attempt to historically situate factors that facilitate or curb women's participation.

Claim-making can be divided into institutional and extra-institutional categories (Garay, 2009: 269), with the former connoting channels of state-legitimized interest representation and the latter as contentious acts that place people's interests outside the acceptable scope of state accommodation. State-targeted, institutional claim-making strategies are one type of problem-solving strategy that take place in the interest arena, and Kapiszewski's examples of what form this strategy might take, include contacting politicians and government agencies, calling on judicial infrastructure, or participating in venues for interest presentation that are state-created (Kapiszewski, 2009: 194). Institutional claim-making has taken place in El Salvador by many interest groups since the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992, and continues to the present day. In contrast, extra-institutional claim-making is when claims are channeled to the state outside of institutional means of delivery, for example, during El Salvador's civil war when insurgents took up arms against the government as a means to communicate demands for opportunities for the poor and working class.

In a democratizing or democratic constitutionally-bound state, claim-making is a mechanism for expression of a need or want in the context of a reasonable expectation that such a claim will be addressed, even if not approved, by the governing regime. When there is the expectation of a social contract, claim-making tends to take place institutionally. If the social contract is minimal or non-existent, as it is the case under authoritarian regimes, claim-making may occur with little likelihood of being addressed; and if the collective action problem can be solved, extra-institutional means of claim-making often takes place. Extra-institutional claim-making is a form of contentious politics and does not require the expectation that claims will be addressed in order to generate collective action, though often actors hope that claims will bear fruit. Since contentious politics includes too many kinds of claim-making for detailed analysis of each micro-process here, in attempt to gain an understanding of the larger process of women's participation in the interest arena, I bring together an array of insurgent behavior and protest mechanisms under the title of extra-institutional claim-making. Rather than produce a typology of claims, this claim aggregation allows me instead to offer a historically situated analysis of how a specific subgroup, former insurgent women, participated in the interest arena in different regime contexts, and how violence informed their choices about interest representation.

Though Collier and Handlin's volume does not draw from Central American experiences in their evaluation of what they term “associational networks” (Collier and Handlin, 2009: 18; see also, Dunning, 2009: 128-129), they propose that women, indigenous peoples, and other marginalized groups make use of the interest arena at high rates in their case studies. Latin American scholars have documented the narratives of women's emancipation within the guerilla movements in El Salvador and Nicaragua. In both countries, post-war years saw a significant use of feminist organizations as a tool for interest expression, particularly in regions where previously the insurgencies were most active. Yet the promise of women's claim-making has not always been successful in the aftermath of war. I look at the narratives of several former women insurgents to give depth and context to how women articulated their interests when subject to a

range of regime types and within different factions of the insurgency. Thus, I attempt to join insights from several literatures to inform an understanding of how women in El Salvador who have been affected by state-perpetrated violence, consider their citizens' rights as tools to make claims on the state within the interest arena.

Democracy and democratization

To reiterate the theoretical outline above, claim-making is only able to take on an institutionalized form when there are, at the very minimum, democratic processes taking root in a country. Absent any democratic tendencies in a ruling regime, citizens may find extra-institutional claim-making is the only path available, with armed conflict being the most dramatic example. Thus, in this sub-section I discuss democratic definitions integral to the process of claim-making.

For some scholars, elections make a democracy. Lipset, for example, limits his definition to "a political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing governing officials, and a social mechanism which permits the largest possible part of the population to influence major decisions by choosing among contenders for political office" (1960: 45). If we accept Lipset's definition, democracy constitutes an inclusive electoral process that encompasses a political culture with distinct notions of legitimacy pertaining to institutions (Lipset, 1960: 45) but devoid of explicit civil liberties. This definition veers rather dangerously near the "electoral fallacy", which Linz and Stepan describe as the necessary condition of elections in a democracy being taken as sufficient criteria to label something as a democracy (1996: 4).

Huntington, a self-proclaimed Schumpeterian in that he defines democracy as elite competition, also takes electoral competition as the key element of democracy, though he also includes Dahl's dimensions of contestation and participation (Huntington, 1991: 7). By contrast, Linz and Stepan define a consolidated democracy as the political situation where "democracy has become 'the only game in town'" (1996: 5). Rueschemeyer sees democ-

racy as entailing free and fair elections through universal suffrage, as well as "responsibility of the state apparatus to the elected parliament [...] and [...] the freedoms of expression and association as well as the protection of individual rights against arbitrary state action" (Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens, 1992: 43). This definition of democracy encompasses competition, inclusion, and some degree of claim-making ability in the interest arena, making it broad in comparison with other definitions.

Schmitter and Karl see democracy as offering "a variety of competitive processes and channels for the expression of interests and values –associational as well as partisan, functional as well as territorial, collective as well as individual" (1991: 78). They include, in this definition, an assumption of institutionalized claim-making ability within democracies, and they are right in that citizens can petition for accountability or greater transparency through state-sanctioned channels in the interest arena under democratic regimes. But many excellent theorists of claim-making in democratizing or democratic regimes tend to neglect theorizing extra-institutional claim-making because it is not seen as consisting of democratic behavior. New contentious politics literatures (Tarrow, 2005; Tilly and Tarrow, 2007) actively shift this discourse to some degree, but still do not grapple with extra-institutional claim-making in non-democratic regimes, such as civil war insurgents as claim-makers in authoritarian regimes. While protest may now be more accepted as legitimate, democratic extra-institutional claim-making, armed conflict is certainly not. It remains, however, an important vehicle for claim-making in the absence of democracy.

Democratization in El Salvador

Only in 2009 did El Salvador experience the change in government that brought it, via limited procedural definitions, into the ranks of a consolidated democracy. Prior to this, El Salvador spent nearly two decades in the ambiguous holding pattern of being a "democratizing" country, and by broader definitions of democracy, it should still be considered democratizing today. Linz and Stepan describe democratization as a specifically

political liberalization that mandates an allowance of contestation and competitive elections (1996: 3). However, such a definition emphasizes changes in the electoral arena, as many theories of democratization and democracy do, with the interest arena left under-theorized. While contestation could conceivably play out in the interest arena, it is commonly attributed to electoral challenges or contestation of party interests within electoral arenas.

After decades of authoritarian and competitive authoritarian regimes, it has taken considerable effort merely for El Salvador to develop the electoral arena to meet minimum definitions of democratization. More than two decades ago, after the signing of the Peace Accords, El Salvador began holding elections that could be labeled (using minimal definitions) as free and fair. There is universal suffrage for Salvadorans over the age of 18, and half a dozen political parties compete for seats, including the FMLN, which underwent a major transformation from insurgent group to left-of-center party. The interest arena and the claim-making processes that happen inside it have been expected to reform themselves in proportion to concessions made in the electoral arena. But even as electoral institutions strengthen, such institutions cannot absorb and address all claims, therefore, extra-institutional channels remain active, albeit in less violent form since the Peace Accords.

As of this writing, El Salvador is by minimal definition, a democracy. With the necessary conditions of competition and inclusion present (though not without problems), civil liberties and the right to claim these liberties from the state, persist as problematic daily terrain. Freedom House reports that though freedom of religion and assembly exist, journalists self-censor, elites manipulate the media, and discrimination against some NGOs and labor organizations continues (2007: 4)². Though many people I spoke with during fieldwork in March 2010 were optimistic about

2 While El Salvador was rated "free" by Freedom House in their 2007 report, the country has many characteristics of what has been dubbed "subnational authoritarianism" (Gibson, 2005: 103): with local leaders strong-arming their agendas onto citizens who are also subject to a more democratic (and more monitored) national government. One example of this is with natural resources exploitation, especially in the mining sector, where local activists have challenged both mining companies and co-opted leaders, to defend their communities from mining exploitation, facing harassment and assassination.

FMLN President Mauricio Funes putting the country on a more progressive path, much of the right wing National Republican Alliance (ARENA)-controlled infrastructure and personnel in media and ministries alike, remained unchanged. Interviews with people in a subsequent trip in 2012 revealed increasing frustration with the same claims, ignored under ARENA, being unaddressed under Funes. The degree to which El Salvador's transition has been institutionalized and the expansion of opportunities for claim-making this consolidation implies, are still open for debate.

Civil society-state relations must account for the development of the electoral arena, as seen in democratization³, and as I have tried to show here; but the interest arena is also vital in the initial democratic transition as well as the flourishing of a genuine democracy. To understand women's claim-making both as insurgents and in the post-war environment, it is important to recognize the theoretical limitations of claim-making in the interest arena constrained by characteristics of democratization and electoral democracy. Now turning to the case study, the section below offers historical context and then examines the process in which women struggled to bring their claims into the interest arena both during the war and within democratization processes.

Political tensions in El Salvador

To understand the historical context in which women's extra-institutional claim-making developed, this section recounts major historical and political dynamics in El Salvador. Owing to path-dependent development stemming from colonial times, El Salvador's "radical liberalism" of the 19th century hardly created a framework for a strong democracy (Mahoney, 2001: 3). Land distribution policies embedded intense socioeconomic discrepancies between colonial *criollos*, *ladinos*, and indigenous people. These tensions exploded after fraudulent elections in January 1932, at which point peasants in western El Salvador followed leader Agustín Farabundo

3 Depending on how definitions are crafted and operationalized, "democratizing" may still be the most appropriate label for El Salvador.

Martí, of the Partido Comunista Salvadoreño or Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS), and indigenous Nahua leader Feliciano Ama into a rebellion that then-President Martínez suppressed. *La matanza* left between 10,000 and 30,000 mostly indigenous and campesino people dead. The FMLN invoked the 1930s violent quashing of civil society by state-directed militias to justify their own taking up of arms in the 1980s.

After several decades of competitive authoritarian rule and ensuing right-wing elections fraud, which stole the presidency from Christian Democratic Party (PDC) candidate José Napoleón Duarte in 1972, guerilla organizations sought out alliances with peasant and labor organizations to foment an armed rebellion (De Zeeuw, 2008: 35). The March 24th, 1980 assassination of human rights advocate Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, officially ignited the movement with fifty thousand people attending his funeral. The civil war took place over the next 12 years, and a conservative estimate of the death toll is 75,000 people (Boutros-Ghali, 1995: 3). Few people have ever been held accountable for any of these killings, and the memories of violence the war generated have influenced a generation of women in their claim-making choices.

FMLN factionalism and claim-making approaches

The FMLN is commonly thought of as one homogenous group, but by analyzing the make-up of its five component factions, differences in approaches to claim-making in the interest arena become apparent. Particularly visible is the crux of the interest-arena divide between those who preferred institutional means and those who saw extra-institutional means as the only viable strategy when faced with an authoritarian regime. This section discusses the factions and contextualizes why they chose the claim-making strategies that they did.

Five main guerilla groups joined together in October 1980 to form the FMLN⁴. First, the Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farabundo Martí, or

⁴ For an example of factional descriptions by the US government see "Communist Interference in El Salvador" (United States Department of State, 1981).

Popular Forces of Liberation "Farabundo Martí" (FPL-FM), generally referred to as the FPL, declared in 1970 that prolonged rural warfare was the path to revolution (Moroni Bracamonte and Spencer, 1995: 2)⁵. The FPL started out as a radical splinter wing in 1970, led by Salvador Cayetano Carpio of the Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS), which had established itself in 1930 with the mission of fighting US intervention and addressing the living standards of urban and rural workers (Alegría, 1987: 11). The PCS was banned by the Salvadoran government in 1932 but was intermittently legalized and began to support armed resistance in 1980 (Tula and Stephen, 1994: 203). Speaking in 1974, FPL-FM member Javier describes how institutional claim-making no longer seemed like a viable strategy for his group:

Our experience was that the most elementary demands of the peasants would always be met by the military dictatorship's usual response of repression and bloodshed [...] Each legally acceptable channel was only another weapon in the oppressor's hands, reinforcing our theory that the people had no other option but the armed struggle. (Cited in Alegría, 1987: 61)

Thus, contentious, non-institutional processes of claim-making asserted themselves in this faction's strategy.

Second, the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo or Revolutionary Army of the People (ERP), predominantly created by dissident Christian democrats (Tula and Stephen, 1994: 203), broke off from the FPL in 1972 because they wanted to focus on gaining urban, rather than rural power. Soon after the ERP's breakaway, internal debates about the merits of military versus political action turned violent in an attempt to repress the debate and maintain organizational cohesiveness. This led to the murder of poet Roque Dalton and the subsequent break from the ERP of the third group, Resistencia Nacional or National Resistance (RN), as a group that favored political action (Moroni Bracamonte and Spencer, 1995: 2). The RN, which tried to win over the urban working class, especially through

⁵ Though I find Moroni Bracamonte and Spencer's analysis of the civil war highly problematic overall, there is so little written about the five factions of the FMLN that I felt compelled to use some pieces of their descriptions which do document the military relationships between factions more closely than other authors.

electrical and port workers' unions, also created a fourth armed unit, the Fuerzas Armadas de Resistencia Nacional or Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN), in 1975, which had peasant support in the Suchitoto region (Pearce, 1986: 133). The remaining ERP, led by Joaquin Vilalobos and Guadalupe Martinez, turned the organization into an effective military presence, though one critic says that "the ERP's strategy allowed no time for the politicization that transforms rebellion into revolution" (Pearce, 1986: 133).

Another breakaway group from the PCS, and the final in this exposition, the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación or Armed Forces of Liberation (FAL), was led by Shafik and Farid Handal, two brothers that decided to adopt violent tactics; and though they broke away from Soviet guidelines to do this, their Communist militia brought in much of the international support that kept the FMLN lucrative (Moroni Bracamonte and Spencer, 1995: 3; US Department of State, 1981: 4). In 1979, the Partido Revolucionario de Trabajadores Centroamericanos, or Revolutionary Party of Central American workers (PRTC), was created. The PRTC took a more regional as opposed to nationalist approach, which had a distinctly laborer and student base, as well as some initial members of the ERP (De Zeeuw, 2008: 35). By expanding the interest arena beyond one particular regime, this faction sought to make claims that would generate regional change rather than isolated domestic actions. Overall, each faction grew in members and strength after the 1972 elections, even as the national government began to send paramilitary units to exterminate them under the pretense of routing out communists (De Zeeuw, 2008: 35).

Tula describes three guerilla groups (FPL-FM, ERP, and FARN) as having been formed for the purpose of achieving deep socio-economic and political change (Tula and Stephen, 1994: 203), though arguably all five factions saw their actions as being directed toward this purpose. It seems that women participated in each of the factions though some factions offered more opportunities than others. Split on the question of tactics to achieve their goals, with some factions drawn more to institutionalized petitioning and voting, and other factions urging the taking up of arms, the missions of these groups were nonetheless similar enough that they joined

together to form the FMLN, a specifically armed and militant organization in 1980. Clearly the extra-institutional claim-makers dominated this decision-making process, pushing their more institutional counterparts to see that claims made under the existing regime would not be adequately addressed. Though now commonly lumped together in the historical record as the FMLN, the five composite factions did serve different roles in the insurrection and though minimal documentation exists about this, they appear to have provided different opportunities for women's participation and claim-making.

Women in the FMLN

The fluidity of the factions and how their members chose to make their claims, come to light in the individual stories of young women who served in the FMLN. Through four vignettes I illustrate the context in which insurgent identity was navigated to produce claim-making capacity and also highlight how memories of earlier violence compelled the claim-making.

Daniela's story

During an anonymous interview with me in San Salvador in March 2010, a leader of one of El Salvador's feminist organizations, whom I call Daniela (not her real name), recounted her experience as a militant with the FPL. Seated together at a round table as workshops happened alongside of us, she told me, "It was a class war, and we believed in the ideal of changing the social structure" (personal communication, March 26, 2010, San Salvador). Through political education classes, she learned about Marxism, "but we didn't know anything about gender or sexism", and in describing her own relationships with men in her guerilla cell, she makes evident the repression of women's leadership. Daniela and her micro-cell resisted the demobilization process, initially, because there weren't safety provisions for former combatants to do so without persecution, and also because the values of

justice and equality for which she had picked up arms remained elusive. The extra-institutional claim-making had not worked for her. Moreover, throughout our conversation, Daniela invoked violence done to her both directly and indirectly as justification for why she chose to take up arms and continue fighting. From oppression in her community witnessed at a young age, to watching fellow FMLN soldiers be killed, the intensity of her participation in the struggle came back to her experiences of violence and the sense of injustice they produced in her. She claimed the right to a governing regime free of systematic discrimination and oppression, but used violence in the form of taking up arms to insist upon that right.

Daniela did eventually demobilize and even ran for municipal office in 2009. From armed militant to political candidate, she demonstrates the spectrum of options available for active citizens to demand representation within the interest arena that opens up with regime change. As a woman and as an activist, she has consistently used the means available to her to make her claims known, from extra-institutional guerilla insurgency under an authoritarian regime and institutional claims, to electoral power under a democratizing regime. Reflecting on her transition, Daniela observed, "then [during the war] we didn't know anything about patriarchy, we were just living it. Learning our rights as women has transformed everything else. Now I am not a militant but I am a feminist, and I am of the left" (personal communication, March 26, 2010, San Salvador). In this way, Daniela describes her own transformation from extra-institutional claim-maker to institutional claim-maker, even as she maintains her political identity and values. Empowered outside of institutions, she has brought that power with her into her new post-conflict role as an NGO leader and political candidate.

Julia's story

Ana Julia Claros is president of the Asociación Comunal de Mujeres de Morazán, or Communal Association of the Women of Morazán, and she began doing clandestine work in 1980, bringing food to guerillas based

near her home. Throughout the war she worked as a schoolteacher for the Frente but without officially incorporating herself to the group. She cites her involvement with the Frente as life-changing: "I was married by the time the war started. My husband would hit me and the war gave me a chance to leave him. I became empowered during the war and have never stopped being an activist since. Though many think of war as bullets and bombs, for me, it was empowerment" (personal communication, March 16, 2010, Perquín). Julia's story shows the interaction between personal and communal experiences of violence, as identity-affecting mechanisms that changed her ability to make claims. At the personal level, the domestic violence she was experiencing was out of alignment with the rights discourse she was exposed to, at the community level, within the militant left. Previously silenced in her marriage, Julia adapted war as a route to claim-making in her personal life even as her assistance to the guerillas brought her into the role of collective leftist claim-maker against the state.

Julia has continued to expand the scope of her claim-making in the post-war period through deep commitment to women's empowerment in Morazán. She sees women trapped in the same cycles of violence she herself had been in and says that the most effective route to facilitating these women's participation is through tiny steps that often begin with economic development. By gaining livelihood skills, women gain a bigger voice in the family as they bring in money, and their spouses will either adjust to this new roll or leave them (personal communication, March 16, 2010, Perquín). Julia's own domestic abuse and the abuses against poor, indigenous, and leftist communities during the war, shaped her activism for human rights, which is the language she uses to describe her claim-making activities. She founded her organization in 1990 and initially focused on addressing women's trauma from the war, which expanded to address the problem of conflict in broken or non-conventional families resulting from the war.

The scope of the problem of family and gender roles during and after the war was also emphasized during an interview with Miriam Rodríguez, the FMLN Mayor of Perquín:

During the war, women had major leadership roles in communication, health, education, leadership –they had very well-developed roles–, but after the signing of the peace accords, women went back to traditional roles because they had to remake their lives with broken families. This was a critical situation that required women to go back to traditional roles to recreate stability in family life. There are some women who have kept their power and the ability to make decisions, but others have not. Women from both these groups might participate in the community but at different levels. (Personal communication, March 17, 2010)

Rodríguez's insight here is something that was mirrored in many of my interviews with women who had been involved with the FMLN during the war but were frustrated to find their claim-making power curtailed in the post-conflict environment. While war is often thought of as a pattern-disrupter that can make space for new domestic actors, the yearning for post-war stability appears to have curtailed the effectiveness of women's liberation within the insurgency. However, the growing feminist network in El Salvador is working to counter this backlash by the proponents of traditional gender roles.

Julia's organization encompasses more than 500 women working on an array of economic development and self-improvement projects. Just as Julia sees men as being afraid of giving up their power to make space for women, she assesses the political right as being afraid of giving up power by acceding to demands of the left. "They are all worried we are going to take away their power, and in reality, yes, the structure is going to change. But this is important to have stronger democracy in our country" (personal communication, March 16, 2010, Perquín). In addition to local initiatives, Julia continues to expand the scope of her claims by participating in regional and national women's empowerment networks designed to force gender mainstreaming into the rights discourse. She represents a success story of a violence-survivor-turned-advocate, a woman once making extra-institutional claims who now focuses on institutional strengthening.

Vilma's story

Most of Vilma Vasquez's family was killed by paramilitaries in the 1970s and 1980s, and those who survived, joined the FMLN. Vilma has been making rights claims on a non-responsive state for most of her life. She is a co-founder of Las Dignas (or Asociación de Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida), a feminist empowerment organization focused on expanding economic opportunities for poor women; she is also an independent syndicate organizer in San Salvador. After decades of exile in both Mexico and the US, she returned to her country the day after Mauricio Funes of the FMLN was elected, showing her optimism at a time that real space for human rights work could take place in the wake of electoral democracy. In 2000, Vilma was imprisoned in El Salvador for her human rights activism, and when she was released she again fled to the US, where she was granted political asylum. Vilma has seen her claim-making abilities shut down at every turn: "I have fought for the dignity of human beings, but under authoritarian regimes and supposed democracies, I have been jailed for this. To fight for dignity, for rights, for equality in El Salvador is a crime. I've been treated as a criminal for my work" (personal communication, March 24, 2010, San Salvador). Yet these obstacles, and the violence continually perpetrated against her and her family, has only encouraged Vilma to become more vocal and seek new channels to challenge both non-democratic behavior of the state and also non-democratic practices within syndicates and leftist organizations. She recognizes how difficult it is for women, in particular, to become active citizens who are willing to make claims against what has historically been a violent and unforgiving state:

Some people don't want to break with family or their mothering roll. The command we are given is to take care of the family –not every woman is able to leave this role because it is so painful to do. Each person knows what gives them their life force. It takes a big rupture to make these changes, but my life is full. I have sadness, but my wounds make me more sensitive. (Personal communication, March 24, 2010, San Salvador)

In this statement, Vilma also taps into her own experiences of violence to fuel her commitment to active participation. She has made the choice to break from the traditional submissive role, typical not just of Salvadoran women but also of the poor working class and that of indigenous ancestors. Her father's execution by paramilitaries may have been her initial catalyst into activism, but Vilma now overflows with stories about violence done to her and her communities. In discussing her commitment to human rights activism she refers to these incidences continually to show why it would not make sense for her to stop being active when so many injustices continue to be unaddressed.

Vilma, Daniela, Julia, and Leonor are women who draw on experiences of violence in different ways to reinforce their commitments to working for justice through both institutional and extra-institutional claim-making on the state. Through the dispersal of history in Leonor's case or despite more direct lobbying and empowerment projects that challenge the status quo of gender for other women, violence persists as a foundation theme in each of these interviews. Violence done to these women, either directly or indirectly, encouraged each of them to find ways to make claims outside of institutions under the authoritarian regime of the 1980s, and they have transferred their energy to institutional claim-making since the signing of the Peace Accords.

Ileana's story

To complement contemporary interviews with the historic voices of ex-combatants, I now highlight a few cases from Salvadoran testimonial literature⁶. Ileana's story illustrates the struggle for participation within various FMLN factions. Ileana was a campesina incorporated into the insurgency at 15 years old, first with the Unión Democrática Nacionalista,

⁶ Though there are several published testimonials by female ex-combatants and political activists (for titles see Tula and Stephen, 1994: 225), most focus on describing their personal experiences of the war rather than placing their struggles within the larger international context, leaving readers to guess as to how women saw their politicized female roles outside of individual dramas. Thus, my textual interpretations are informed by interviews of former female combatants in 2008 and 2010.

or Democratic Nationalist Union (UDN), which mobilized the masses at the national level and was particularly good at harnessing women's political energy. She later joined the FAL, where she led a women's battalion (De Herrera, 1983: 59). Ileana's fluidity in moving between insurgent groups is indicative of the way how that participation was experienced (De Herrera, 1983: 21), and of the fact that multiple factions operated in the same areas but with ever-changing zones of control. Though there were divergent political platforms at the micro level between rebel groups that made up the FMLN, the broader platform that all were fighting for was similar enough that circumstance—a change in location, a new spouse or family allegiance, or simply meeting someone from another group and deciding to change factions—seemed like a plausible explanation for why the groups had support from the same families or fighters.

Ileana explained that her motivation to join initially was that she wanted to do something about the suffering and exploitation of Salvadoran people, and also to support the principle that the land should be owned by those who work on it, and to achieve women's rights (De Herrera, 1983: 21). Her story is characterized by the mobilization of collective suffering. Ileana called on her awareness of exploitation and violence as a reason that compelled her to make her claims more vocal. Ileana reflected on studying the works of Lenin as part of the voluntary political education that insurgent forces participated in, to increase their understanding of national and international political dynamics (De Herrera, 1983). She also said that while all-female battalions did not exist in her zone, after a successful offensive by Ileana's soldiers in February 1982, the PRTC and ERP followed her example and made a few all-female battalions that proved to be very effective (De Herrera, 1983: 30). While all revolutionary organizations in El Salvador were open to women's participation in different ways (Montgomery, 1995: 123), it is likely that specific personalities and circumstances shaped the possibilities or limitations for individual female insurgents.

Women played a large but often overlooked role in the FMLN insurgency. Though precise numbers of fighters are not known, we do know that thirty percent of the FMLN's 13,000 members that were officially

demobilized under the 1992 peace accords were women (Viterna, 2006: 6-7). FLP Commander Ana María declared that women's participation in all FMLN factions was high but especially so in the FPL where "their contribution was substantial at all levels, as political militants, within leadership cells at intermediate and superior levels" (cited in Alegría, 1987: 93). FMLN Commander Mercedes stated her feminist platform as one where "women undoubtedly have to play a major part in every aspect of the life of this country –its political, social and economic life" (cited in Alegría, 1987: 95). Alegría describes how women in the FMLN asserted feminist agendas with the story of Eugenia, an FLP commander who was murdered in an ambush while delivering weapons:

Eugenia always fought all traces of the *machismo* she had come across in her comrades, including the women. Eugenia maintained that it was through involving our people in the revolutionary struggle that women would liberate themselves, obtaining their true and fair place [...] She was always very critical of any traces of surviving *machismo*, for example, over the division of labour and what were assumed to be women's chores and what men's. (Alegría, 1987: 88)

Some male comrades were on board with her feminist agenda and Eugenia's husband Javier, interviewed after her death, said, "[w]hen women were included in the agrarian organization, they were accepted on equal terms. This was thanks to the work of the organization as the giver of principles, and also thanks to the women comrades we recruited in the countryside" (cited in Alegría, 1987: 89). Yet other men accused her of "inciting the women" when she would give talks about *machismo* to campesinas (Alegría, 1987: 89), so there were clearly some entrenched beliefs in gender roles that not all insurgents were interested in changing.

The embedded, gendered notions about women's roles played out in relation to international aid in the post-conflict period as well. Though many FMLN factions lobbied for women's rights during the war, in the post-war reconstruction phase, women's organizations within the FMLN gained strength and a host of problems. Luciak documents how these women's organizations were used to solicit funding from donors in the

international community eager to support women's leadership training, but then the male party leaders would manage and spend the funds (Luciak, 1998: 44). Resentment brewed, with women discontent in the role of fundraising tools, and eventually, in 1996, the Movimiento de Mujeres "Mélida Anaya Montes," or the Mélida Anaya Montes Women's Movement, broke away from their founding faction, the FPL (Luciak, 1998: 44). This section has drawn on testimonial literature to show documented claims of female insurgents. The following section examines why women, historically oppressed in El Salvador, decided to become so active in both institutional and extra-institutional claim-making in the first place⁷.

Why women made claims

Myriad cultural, economic, political, and psychological explanations exist as to why people perform certain behaviors. This section explores just a few explanations as to why Salvadoran women became active claim-makers during the civil war. While it may be more understandable that women are now taking advantages of institutional openings in the democratization process to make claims, it is more difficult to appreciate the reasons that compelled them to take risks in the 1970s and 1980s. Though the FMLN provided leadership experience for women, many of them initially developed their skills as leaders through the Catholic Church. Tula describes that a central foundation of organizing and political experience for Salvadoran women was the church philosophy of liberation theology, saying, "[i]t is here that women found their participation was not only welcomed, but encouraged" (Tula and Stephen, 1994: 204). Grassroots church organizations provided

⁷ Sometimes even well-meaning scholarship minimizes the importance of women, as where gender is simply written out of democratization studies. Though Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens (1992) are willing to concede that gender may factor into democracy eventually, they defend their exclusion of women by saying they "were far less important in the known histories of democratization. Vastly less blood was shed in the struggles for women's political inclusion, and their inclusion did not give rise to regime changes designed to re-exclude them" (Rueschemeyer *et al.*, 1992: 48). Rather than dwell on historic power relations and who was and wasn't written into history as a powerful actor, the authors have chosen to render gender silent in their theories of democracy.

women with experience in institutionalized leadership, which came from their participation in rural and urban Christian base communities (Tula and Stephen, 1994: 204). However, some women's groups that were politically active during the war initially through Christian mothers' groups, such as the Asociación de Mujeres Salvadoreñas, or Salvadoran Women's Association of Morazán, San Miguel, San Vicente, and Usulután; eventually broke away from the church "because they felt their demands were limited by biblical interpretations" (Tula and Stephen, 1994: 205).

Female actions associated with the FMLN were often justified through the rubric of maternal responsibility, thus curbing the masculinizing feature that such militancy could otherwise impart (Viterna, 2006: 8). For example, human rights activist María Teresa Tula describes the context of her own political awakening:

In 1978, 1979, and 1980 there were bodies turning up all over [...] Whenever workers asked for a wage increase, they were killed, disappeared, machine-gunned, and assaulted in their factories, schools, and institutes [...] All of this repression encouraged the unification of the FMLN and also pushed a lot of people to join the military forces of the five political organizations. We, as the mothers of the disappeared, also got more involved in a lot of political activity. Every day, more and more people would come to us, telling us about people who were disappeared, assassinated, or imprisoned. They needed our help. (Tula and Stephen, 1994: 84-85)

Tula's justification for claim-making is steeped in her experiences of violence within her community. A personal violence had been committed against the mothers through the murder or disappearance of their children, and claims were made against the state to address this violence. Conventional wisdom on guerilla mobilization of women says that they participate when biographically available, that is, when they are already politicized or have family members already active in the insurgency, or if their families have been fragmented by the war. However, Viterna's study comparing female combatants and non-combatants in the same villages in El Salvador shows that this simplified explanation does not hold (2006: 18-19). Viterna finds that "organizational involvement cited as critical in

all previous studies is central to some women's mobilization but not to most. The importance of family ties to activists is also questioned; nearly all women in war zones, both guerillas and non-guerillas, had close family members serving the FMLN." She also cites the seminal role played by refugee camps as organizational places of mobilization for female guerillas, a space previously overlooked in mobilization discussions (Viterna, 2006: 37). However, refugee camps could serve as an exit strategy from the insurgency as well. Viterna notes that "some of my respondents even suggested that some women purposefully got pregnant when they tired of life in the guerilla camp, as this guaranteed them safe escort to a refugee camp or repopulated community and a legitimate reason for exiting the fight for social justice" (Viterna, 2006: 27, footnote). Thus, refugee camps were arenas to both facilitate and curb insurgent participation.

While it is not clear from individual testimonies why women chose particular factions of the FMLN when they decided to join the insurgency, all women expressed grievance motives of some sort that resulted in making claims on the state. Many voiced anger at the government and social structures that kept people in poverty, and others became mobilized in direct reaction to a husband, brother, son, or friend being abducted, killed, or disappeared by military or paramilitary forces. The motivation for women to become involved appeared to be more out of a desire to have their complaints heard, and less the need for revenge. Ideology was sometimes infused into reasons for joining an insurgency and other times ideology was conjured up as a retrospective narrative to cover up coercion to participate by members of FMLN factions.

Much work has been done on why people in general participate in insurgencies. For example, Timothy Wickham-Crowley (1992) shows how important family, religious, and political networks were for mobilizing individuals into insurgencies in Latin America, and Roger Gould (1995) argues that the degree of closeness within social networks also plays a role in mobilization (both cited in Viterna, 2006: 4). In a study of Salvadoran villages before the civil war, Kalyvas describes class relations as "a poor predictor of allegiances compared with factors such as kin, conjuncture (who gets to organize peasants first), and micropolitics (the ability of organiza-

tions to manage intracommunity conflicts)” (Kalyvas, 2006: 81). Viterna is one of the very few that takes up this topic explicitly in relation to Salvadoran women, and she explores the factors that explain why some, but not all, members of a group participate in insurgent activities. She argues that there are many causes of mobilization, “even among individuals embedded within similar identity-producing networks and within similar structural contexts. These multiple paths to participation arise from the patterned interaction of individual-level biography, networks, and situational context” (Viterna, 2006: 2). By focusing her attention on the micro-level variation, Viterna is better able to generate explanations for macro-level causes and results of insurgent mobilization, while avoiding the pitfalls of generalizing what “typical” paths to insurgency might be (Viterna, 2006: 10). Psychological theories of identity-based action describe how:

[...] a person's identity as “mother” may compete with a potential movement participation identity, especially if participation in the movement could jeopardize the woman's ability to be a good mother, and therefore her identity as a mother. Both identities may be important to the woman's sense of self, and both identities arise from social networks, but it is the interaction of these network-based identities with each other and with still other competing identities that determines whether the participation identity becomes salient enough to result in action. (Stryker, 2000, cited in Viterna, 2006: 5)

Viterna seeks to explain women's wartime participation in El Salvador, and her independent variables measure networks prior to mobilization by looking at previous organizational involvement, family connections to guerillas, and living in a refugee camp or repopulated community—biographical data is measured through motherhood, completeness of family, and age at mobilization, and the potential relationships of women with the FMLN are divided into guerillas, collaborators, and non-participants (Viterna, 2006: 15). The factors that explain mobilization can also be seen as factors that increase the likelihood of claim-making. Though both mobilization and claim-making can be solitary processes undertaken by individuals, they often involve overcoming the collective action problem in order to make demands or

claims on the state. Experiences of violence help show why women, traditionally a voiceless group in El Salvador, are driven to adopt and perpetuate claim-making behaviors both institutionally and extra-institutionally, depending on the constraints of the political regime in power.

Conclusion

To understand the intersection between violence, claim-making, and democratization, this article has brought together insights from several literatures and fieldwork to explain why women in El Salvador have mobilized for different kinds of claim-making. By situating Salvadoran women in relation to the institutions or factions that purport to represent them, I have attempted to show both structural constraints and individual experiences of violence for Salvadoran ex-combatants, navigating claim-making strategies.

Within a theoretical framework about the interest arena and its availability to women under different regime types, I presented the background context in which women in El Salvador have been able to navigate the claim-making process both during and after the civil war. I argued that experiences of violence have impacted women's claim-making choices in the interest arena. Through exploration of claim-making options, as well as normative problems with definitions of democracy and democratization, I elucidated the larger political contexts that actors must navigate in making their claims. Moreover, I demonstrated how women's roles in a diverse arrays of claim-making activities, both during and after the civil war, can inform an understanding of state-society relations in El Salvador. By weaving together individual women's narratives based on interviews and testimonial literature analysis, I sought to make more palpable the connections women make for themselves between experiences of violence and the call to make claims on their state. Since they are a group traditionally shut out of the democratization process, it is meaningful to hear from ex-combatant women themselves as they describe how they view the process of becoming claim-makers both during the civil war and after the

signing of the Peace Accords. As they describe the way both personal and community-level violence has shaped their choices to engage in the interest arena, these former insurgent women demonstrate the complexity of mobilizing for and sustaining claim-making, both during and after the civil war. Though the choices of how to make claims have expanded under democratizing regimes, female ex-combatants still face challenges in sustaining their claim-making, whether institutionally or extra-institutionally, in the face of poverty, discrimination, and trauma.

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