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Gendered Revolutionary Bridges

Women in the Salvadoran Resistance Movement (1979-1992)

by
Julia Denise Shayne

If women as a sector of the population . . . 52.9 percent of the population . . . achieve a level of development and capabilities and join the process in a dynamic and active way, all of the processes of social development, the winner is society.

—María Morales, 1993

Is a “liberated nation” an inherently male concept? What happens if women insurgents do not map out a site for gendered demands within the revolutionary movement? If women had been fully encouraged revolutionary actors, could there have been a military triumph for the guerrillas in El Salvador? In other words, are women a strategic sector with the potential to alter revolutionary outcomes? The answers to these questions may expand the current boundaries of sociological theories of revolution and the literature on gender and revolution. By focusing on the case of women revolutionaries in El Salvador, we can move toward unpacking the significance of these issues. I argue that women revolutionaries served the unconscious yet highly strategic role of *gendered revolutionary bridges*. In short, armed and unarmed women revolutionaries were able to bridge gaps between the guerrillas and unincorporated Salvadoran civilians, thus expanding the revolutionary base and movement. Salvadoran women demonstrated a revolutionary capacity that proved eminently effective but was consistently belittled, and this has had both practical and theoretical consequences. This article aims at addressing the latter.

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THEORIES OF REVOLUTION AND GENDER

Revolution is as difficult a terrain to theorize as it is to negotiate. Theda Skocpol's (1979) groundbreaking *States and Social Revolutions* offers a theory of revolution that has been much contested. One fundamental component of Timothy Wickham-Crowley's multifaceted approach is a presumably male "cross-class revolutionary alliance led militarily by rural-based guerrilla organizations" (1991: 89). John Foran departs from a purely structural argument with the concept of "political cultures of opposition" (1992: 9-10), and his analysis implicitly includes women as potential agents of such cultures. Revolutionary theory tends to be structural, thus minimizing contributions of specific actors (see also Goldfrank, 1979; Goldstone, 1991; Walton, 1984). Although these theories move us closer to understanding the complex dynamics of revolution, this article attempts to understand the strategic role of women as a revolutionary entity. To what extent do women participate in revolutionary movements? What specific contributions do women revolutionaries offer? These questions are central for students of gender-and-revolution theory (see, e.g., Randall, 1992; Kruks, Rapp, and Young, 1989; Afshar, 1996; Lobao, 1990; Moghadam, 1997).

Lobao analyzes the structural and social barriers to and factors that encourage the incorporation of women into Latin American guerrilla movements. The major barriers for women lie in "the structural constraint of women's roles in reproductive activities and traditional ideological constraints . . . that define women's roles" (1990: 183). The factors encouraging the incorporation of women include the adoption of a strategy such as prolonged war and the spread of feminism (1990: 185). Middle-class women tend to face fewer barriers to entering political struggle, and they are less vulnerable to the imprisonment and job loss that tend to inhibit activism for working-class or poor women (1990: 188-189).

Moghadam argues that there are two types of revolutions, "the 'woman-in-the-family' or patriarchal model of revolution, and the 'women's emancipation' or modernizing model" (1997: 142). The woman-in-the-family model "excludes or marginalizes women from definitions and constructions of independence, liberation, and liberty. It frequently constructs an ideological linkage between patriarchal values, nationalism, and the religious order" (1997: 143). Among the goals of the revolutionary movement there is no explicit call for the eradication of a male-dominated family unit; this model extols the role of woman as wife and mother both in the revolutionary process and in postrevolutionary society. During the revolution, for example, women would be expected to reproduce and raise children who would eventually become revolutionaries. Child rearing thus becomes compatible with female

revolutionary tasks. According to the women's emancipation model, in contrast, "the emancipation of women is an essential part of the revolution or project of social transformation. It constructs Woman as part of the productive forces and citizenry, to be mobilized for economic and political purposes" (1997: 152).

In developing the strategic role of women revolutionaries as gendered revolutionary bridges, revolutionary theory that departs from the structuralist tradition by highlighting human/cultural agency is highly relevant. Similarly, Wickham-Crowley's (1991) discussion of a multiclass coalition lays the foundation for the conceptualization of the roles of women within that coalition, and a feminist critique significantly enhances these theoretical axes. How do women complement political cultures of opposition? How can women strengthen cross-class coalitions? What do women do to build the alliances between the guerrillas and the masses? Gender-and-revolution theories stop short of fully answering these questions. In both Lobao's (1990) and Moghadam's (1997) analyses, there is a certain reification of the gendered division of labor as justified by the revolutionary project. My hope is to move beyond this.

The roles women played in the Salvadoran resistance movement were strategically significant in their unique ability to foster needed connections with the civilian base. Salvadoran women reduced the anxiety and discomfort of the unincorporated (or uninvolved) bases, broadening the support from the masses and working toward multiclass coalitions. They consciously acted as revolutionaries; rather than allowing the sexist discourse of this counterculture to restrict their positions in the revolutionary movement to that of "support," they challenged it through their strategic actions. They could serve as liaisons with the base communities because they seemed to the newer and unincorporated members of the populace less alien than their male counterparts. The roles that they played individually and together could not be replicated by men. This theory will take on flesh as we look at the organizational work of the 21 de Junio Asociación Nacional de Educadoras Salvadoreñas (June 21st National Association of Salvadoran Educators—ANDES), the Comité de Madres y Familiares de Presos, Desaparecidos y ASESINADOS de El Salvador "Monseñor Romero" (Msgr. Romero Committee of Mothers of the Disappeared—CO-MADRES), the women of the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front—FMLN), and the women's movement during the revolutionary war.

My research is based predominantly on in-depth interviews conducted in El Salvador and the United States. I returned to El Salvador for the fourth time in March 1994 as part of a group of 10 women hosted by the Movimiento

de Mujeres “Mélida Anaya Montes” (Mélida Anaya Montes Women’s Movement, MAM) and organized by the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) that in turn was part of a larger delegation of 150 hosted by the Fuerzas Populares de Liberación-Farabundo Martí (Popular Forces of Liberation, FPL).¹

GENDERED REVOLUTIONARY BRIDGES

THE LABOR MOVEMENT: ANDES

ANDES was founded by Mélida Anaya Montes in 1965. The name 21 de Junio refers to the association’s first demonstration, when 20,000 teachers and other workers marched through the streets of San Salvador, surrounded the Presidential Palace, and forced the government to pay attention to their demands for legal status as a union. Women currently make up approximately 70 percent of the membership of ANDES (Esperanza Ramos, personal communication, February 1995). Marta Alicia Rivera, a former organizer with ANDES, describes the strikes of 1968 and 1971 (New America Press [NAP], 1989: 50):

In 1968, we held a strike that paralyzed the educational system. Participation by the teachers in the strike was almost 100 percent. We occupied the central offices of the Ministry of Education and demonstrated in front of other government buildings and public places. This strike and occupation lasted fifty-eight days; two of our supporters were killed and many others were wounded. Thousands of us were jailed and subjected to physical and psychological torture. In July and August of 1971, we held a second strike to demand raises and educational reforms. Again the government responded with violence.

The strikes of 1967, 1968, and 1971 were led by women. The 1971 event was one of the most massive national strikes ever held against the government (Golden, 1991: 166). These strikes were historically significant to the revolution for the political support they fostered. Women played crucial roles as leaders, organizers, and supporters of militant resistance that predated the declaration of war. Thus, from *before* the beginning, women were building political cultures of opposition that inevitably became foundations for the revolutionary movement.

In a sense, popular organizing was more dangerous than guerrilla warfare because members of the popular movement were unarmed and unable to take immediate defensive action. According to Ramos, however, some members of ANDES were members of the FMLN, concealing their double identity.

(She made it clear that she could discuss these issues now but during the war such frankness had not been an option.) Part of the psychological war waged against the women of ANDES was the ever-present threat of losing one's job. This risk was significant since "in 1978, twenty-six percent of women were reported as heads of households. By 1989, the figure had almost doubled to fifty-one percent" (Stephen, 1994: 197). In addition, more than half of the women in El Salvador are single mothers: "The fathers have either abandoned their children or they have been killed in the war" (1994: 178). These realities required that the women's marginal incomes remain as reliable as possible.

Many of ANDES's organizers experienced severe repression. Both Esperanza Ramos and Alicia de Astorga (the current secretary general) were captured and tortured. Ramos explained that detention, abuse, and exile served to deepen their commitment to the struggle (personal communication, 1995):

In 1982 we were a team of collaborators and at this time the executive council was [coordinating] support for our work . . . in secretive ways because in that year there was intensive repression against the teachers. They had already assassinated 300 or 400 teachers. . . . People were disappeared or forced into exile. By the 14th of August we already had three unions, and on that day they captured us. First men came in civilian clothes, heavily armed, but when they realized our numbers . . . [there] were uniformed soldiers as well. They took us in a huge truck and they stepped on us, and pinned us down, they tied our hands and then they took us to the Hacienda Police. They took pictures of us in all sorts of positions, they interrogated us . . . and they separated us, the men in one room the women in another. And then four of them they took to another place, and Alicia was one of them. On the four they used the *capucha*,² etc. They tortured us . . . in all sorts of ways. . . . They gave us electric shocks, they put us in rooms with bright reflective lights, they wouldn't give us water or any food, they kept us standing up. . . . In total we spent nineteen days. But after seventeen days they stopped torturing and interrogating us because they said they couldn't rip out our tongues and we wouldn't talk.

Ramos and Astorga lived to recall these horrific injustices. They were eventually escorted by the International Red Cross to Mexico, where they remained in exile for 11 months. Then they returned to El Salvador, vindicated and with a renewed commitment to militancy, and joined the FPL.

As is evidenced by the above testimonies, women did not opt for union organizing because it was safe. Women workers are not expected to resist so forcefully, and in doing so en masse the women of ANDES not only shattered stereotypes but acted as gendered revolutionary bridges by providing a model for other disenfranchised sectors of society. Their activities dated back 15 years; they were one of the first and most revolutionary unions in Salvadoran history. According to Rivera (NAP, 1989: 50),

When ANDES was first organized, teachers joined because of the union's stand on labor issues, such as pensions and raises. But within a couple of years, we began to realize that injustice was a reality for everyone—not just teachers. We began to redefine ourselves, and we came to understand that ANDES faced two struggles: one for our immediate goals as teachers, and one to achieve peace and self-determination for our country in the long run. . . . So in 1975 . . . we joined the Popular Revolutionary Bloc [Bloque Popular Revolucionario—BPR].

Rivera highlights the tendency for people to organize within their own sectors but at the same time reach out to others through such organizations as the BPR. This emphasizes the interdependency of the resistance movement and the fluidity of popular organizing. Similarly, she points to the inability to sequester one sector's struggle (teachers) from the revolutionary movement as a whole. Thus we can see the women of ANDES working through the BPR to build what eventually became multiclass coalitions in support of the revolution. In this respect, women acted as gendered revolutionary bridges between organizations.

The impact of militant women on one another was very significant. In effect, ANDES women demonstrated to their counterparts in other sectors, both organized and unorganized, that there was both a need and a place for them in the resistance movement. Working with one's sector in coalition with other sectors strengthened the popular movement.

The Salvadoran government, military, and death squads abducted, tortured, and killed those they perceived as subversive. Because of this there was a fear of getting involved or even showing sympathy with any dissenting group. Practice was perhaps the only way for organizers to perfect their tactics and remain out of jail or alive. Given the constant threats that the resistance movement faced, people outside it had to overcome their fears and trust the work of the organized sectors. The development of this trust was greatly due to the work of the women members of ANDES; women were able to build the needed bridges. What I am suggesting is that women demonstrating in the city streets put human faces on what the media and government termed "Cuban-backed terrorists." It was important for men and women to see that some members of the opposition were not only unarmed but in fact women.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT: CO-MADRES

The human rights sector, also dominated by women, had a strong effect on the masses. The war produced 8,000 disappearances and 80,000 mostly civilian casualties (Stephen, 1994: 196), and CO-MADRES confronted the tortured, raped, and maimed bodies of their own and others' loved ones found on

train tracks and in clandestine cemeteries. Its work was fundamental to the resistance movement because it was confronting the Salvadoran and U.S. governments regarding heinous human rights violations that were supposedly not happening.

Both as a unit and individually, the members of CO-MADRES, with the support of the Archdiocese of the Catholic Church, were moved to action because of their own pain. María Teresa Tula initially became involved after her husband, a union activist, was detained and tortured by the National Guard (Stephen, 1994: 97, 51). During 1978-1979, the sites of CO-MADRES actions ranged from the United Nations (UN) to the Red Cross to Catholic churches, depending on the goal. To receive international attention and put pressure on the Salvadoran government, CO-MADRES conducted a peaceful occupation of the office of the UN in El Salvador. They insisted that their demands for the release of the disappeared and political prisoners be forwarded to Geneva and refused to leave until this had been done. This and similar confrontations drew international attention to human rights violations in El Salvador and forced those at various levels of leadership to acknowledge that women were aware of and resisting the atrocities. This inevitably brought attention and thus risk to themselves and their families. As with ANDES, all of this took place before the declaration of war.

María Teresa Tula explained that in 1979 the government felt threatened by the truth that CO-MADRES exposed regarding the disappeared because it contradicted the fabricated image of democracy and respect for human rights (Stephen, 1994: 83-84):

Every day we would dig up about 25-30 bodies that would be sent in plastic bags to the central cemetery. We found a lot of clandestine cemeteries that became famous as body dumps. . . . We did this all over El Salvador. . . . Many people found their disappeared relatives this way. Sometimes they identified them because of their belt buckle . . . or something they were wearing. Often, the bodies were decapitated or mutilated so badly that you couldn't tell who it was. . . . The media was paying a lot more attention to us. . . . When the government saw that we were turning up lots of bodies, they tried to stop us by increasing the repression against us. They started to watch us and we had to be more careful.

In 1980 the CO-MADRES office was bombed (Stephen, 1994: 103). In the same year Archbishop Romero was assassinated. As María Teresa Tula put it, "They took his life because he was telling the truth. Telling the truth was his death sentence" (1994: 87). The members of CO-MADRES knew who their enemies were, but they refused to stop organizing.

The work that CO-MADRES did as gendered revolutionary bridges was somewhat different from that of ANDES. As a human rights organization, it did not carry the same stigma as a labor union, and in addition, it worked through and with the support of the church. Clearly, this did not reduce government hostility toward its members. Human rights organizations are often positioned as apolitical; when one thinks of a revolutionary organization, CO-MADRES is not generally the first group to come to mind. This is not to imply that the work that it did was not itself revolutionary. It peacefully called on the state to end the war with justice—a demand that was operationalized without weapons but resulted in severe repression. Because of its members' innocent demeanor as a group of mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and wives, CO-MADRES not only served as a bridge to legitimate the popular movement in the eyes of the unorganized but also provided a small amount of security (Stephen, 1994: 106):

We participated in celebrations for international workers' day. . . . We were always invited to participate in the marches on this day. We would dress up in black and mingle with the workers and students in the march. The authorities usually respected us a little more than the young people and our presence could help keep them from being harassed. Often the police would grab people participating in the march and we would intervene. Also, whenever we saw someone taking pictures of the demonstrators, and we recognized that person as being from the police, we would take away their camera, remove the film, and destroy it.

As the war escalated and CO-MADRES continued to carry out confrontational actions, the repression increased. In 1982 the first member of CO-MADRES was abducted and jailed (Stephen, 1994: 111):

She was left on the railroad tracks with her hands tied behind her back and a gag in her mouth so that she couldn't scream for help. . . . Her face was completely swollen and her teeth were broken where they had smashed her mouth in with the butt of a rifle. . . . They had burned her body with cigarette butts. . . . They rammed their rifle butts into her breasts and burned her. They took off all of her clothes and she was raped by seven men.

In the mid-1980s CO-MADRES reconfirmed their indispensability to the popular movement by revitalizing it. Public protests had become less frequent during 1983 and 1984, but in 1984 CO-MADRES went to the U.S. embassy to demand an end to U.S. military aid and intervention. The bold action of these women again mobilized other sectors to march in solidarity with them. "This was how the silence of public protest from a wide range of

sectors was broken. No one had been in the streets for years [—just] tanks and the military” (Stephen, 1994: 119).

Both the leadership that CO-MADRES provided and the pain they endured were clearly effective and even necessary to the national resistance movement in El Salvador. The government and military would not have followed, abducted, and brutalized a relatively small group of “mothers” had they been of no threat to their hold on power. The arena of CO-MADRES’ struggle was human rights, a vision of social justice that explicitly included women. The urgency and brutality of the war led it to join the broader struggle. Consciously or not, the women of CO-MADRES strategically projected their femininity as mothers and wives; the less threatening they appeared, the more inviting they were to unincorporated masses. As trustworthy mothers, they bridged gaps between the bases, the popular movement, and the guerrillas as no other group of women could.

THE WOMEN OF THE FMLN

Perhaps the clearest example of women working as gendered revolutionary bridges was within the guerrilla movement. Living amid poverty and injustice drew some women to the FMLN for its political stands. As Elsy, one excombatant with the FPL, put it, “We realized that the Frente was there to protect us, so for many of us, our aspiration was to join the Frente” (personal communication, 1994). Salvadoran women drew strength and inspiration from each other to overcome internal and social battles against those who claimed that the inclusion of women was inappropriate. A handful of revered women revolutionaries, including Mélida Anaya Montes (Comandante “Ana María”), Nidia Díaz, Eugenia, and Ana Guadalupe Martínez, had been active members of the FMLN since its inception, and they served as role models, challenging the stereotype of women as unfit for military tasks. In this sense, women guerrillas served as gendered revolutionary bridges through their mere existence.

Ana Guadalupe Martínez gained her initial consciousness through a Christian family upbringing. She went on to the University of El Salvador and became active in student politics regarding the university budget and its restrictions on working-class students who could not afford tuition. Eventually, she joined the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (People’s Revolutionary Army—ERP) and attained one of the highest positions in the FMLN held by a woman. She explained in an interview in 1986 how the participation of women in the FMLN affected other women (NAP, 1989: 158):

The women saw me and talked with me and realized that we weren't exceptional people, we were just like them, with the same fears and hopes and faith. Well, in a little while they were so identified with us and with their husbands and their brothers that the ideological barriers between women and men diminished. . . . *The women are immediately more confident when they see a compañera* [emphasis added].

Many of these women eventually supported the FMLN by hiding weapons, cooking, or obtaining cloth for flags. The trust that Martínez refers to is another result of women's work as gendered revolutionary bridges in the Salvadoran revolution.

Women played many different roles within the FMLN: logistics, radio and communication, food distribution, health and first-aid services, the rear guard, the frontlines, and political-diplomatic work. Guerrilla organizing is a highly interdependent project. An area of work such as "logistics" may sound insignificant, but if the woman in charge of transporting weapons failed to make a connection, the military action would not happen, causing a chain reaction of failed guerrilla encounters. Female ex-combatants repeatedly said that they knew they had contributed significantly to the struggle even if their work has since been ignored by their male compañeros. Some are now struggling to call attention to their contributions. Other women ex-combatants felt that because they did the same tasks as men they were clearly as competent and needed no "official" recognition from men.

María Morales joined the revolutionary struggle when she was 11 years old, and by the time she was 15 she was the head of a platoon composed of older men. She had this to say about the role of women in the FPL (personal communication, 1993):

During the military actions, women for the most part took "secondary" roles, for example, taking care of the rear guard, communication, logistics, health—work that was very important and put their lives in danger but was not [recognized]. And when a woman would go to the front lines into battle, that would be a very new kind of thing that had a great impact upon the populace as well as the men in the fighting force.

The participation that Morales describes helped to pave the way for a reconceptualization of the role and status of women in Salvadoran society. This recalls Lobao's (1990) suggestion that feminism encouraged the incorporation of women into guerrilla movements, but Morales indicates that it was the result of women's demonstrating their capabilities as opposed to engaging with male comrades about the virtues of feminism.

Nidia Díaz became active in the political struggle in El Salvador in 1971, and by 1975 she was part of the leadership of the revolutionary movement. During this time she completed four years of advanced study in psychology. She is a member of the Partido Revolucionario de Trabajadores Centroamericanos (Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers—PRTC), and her work with the PRTC and the FMLN eventually placed her at the UN-sponsored negotiation table in Geneva in 1991. She was captured by a U.S. military adviser in April 1985 and held for seven months in jail, eventually to be released in a prisoner exchange with Inés Duarte, the then president's daughter (Díaz, 1992). This was an extremely risky operation, given that it occurred in the capital of San Salvador, which had about 25,000 soldiers in readiness for its defense, and its implementation underlines the importance of Nidia Díaz to the FMLN's leadership.

At the same time, it is important to hear how differently some other women of the FMLN felt about their placement, treatment, and roles. There is a certain anonymity and even loss of gender (Gladis Sibrián, personal communication, October 1994) that is characteristic of guerrilla organizing, but this does not, however, account for the skewed ratio of women in high positions. The general command of the FMLN has been all-male since its inception. Leaders such as Melida Anaya Montes, Ana Guadalupe Martínez, and Nidia Díaz were exceptions, and many women felt a lack of encouragement and support for their efforts. Camila, an ex-combatant with the Resistencia Nacional (National Resistance—RN) who participated in the 1989 final offensive, observes (Ueltzen, 1993: 104):

The combatant's life has been similar for men and women. . . . Women have participated in all aspects of the war, but in a very limited way in the area of decision making. Women were incorporated into the areas of communications, service, health, etc. This is a reflection of the culture and society, where machismo has always existed—in that sense there is a differentiation between what it means to be a male combatant and a female combatant. During combat you didn't notice differences.

María Morales and Gladis Sibrián expressed similar sentiments in reflecting on the roles of women in the FMLN. Both women felt that not only did women have to work two or three times as hard to prove themselves but because of their domestic and child-rearing tasks they often failed to receive the training to rise above levels of support combat (María Morales, personal communication, 1993):

At the opportunity of receiving military or any sort of training, those who would go were the men because they had the space and the time and so women had to take care of the house, and if you were young, you had to take care of your brothers and sisters. So the logical result was that men keep having more opportunities to advance . . . and because of these capabilities they are in commanding posts; they decide how a strategy is going to be defined and we are not there. . . . They don't take us into account.

Gladis Sibrián has a double perspective regarding the position of women within the FMLN and FPL because in addition to fighting in El Salvador she was one of three women to represent the FMLN in the United States (personal communication, October 1995). She told me that she had felt a lack of encouragement for her work abroad, and this was significant because she had agreed to serve as representative even though she wanted to return home to join the struggle there.

Ileana, a combatant with the guerrilla army of the Partido Comunista Salvadoreño (Salvadoran Communist party—PC) who became commander of an all-woman platoon and was killed in combat in 1984, reported (NAP, 1989: 162-163):

At first I performed a variety of tasks, but I eventually was given greater responsibilities as I developed and acquired skill. Eventually I became the commander of a squadron with seven women under my command. My leadership experience plus valid complaints that the women were being stationed only to cover and hold our combat positions led to the command's decision to form an all-woman platoon.

Ana Matilde Rodar, who fought in San Salvador with the FPL and is now very active with the Mélida Anaya Montes Women's Movement, recalls her own and other women's roles within the FMLN (personal communication, 1994):

Women had the role of cooks, as radio operators, working hospitals, doing a lot of work with the population, and doing a lot of running from one place to another. . . . I fought here in the metropolitan area [San Salvador], and my job was as a nurse. I passed as a student of medicine, so when the *compañeros*, the combatants, would come down from the mountains wounded, I would also arrange for them to be entered into the hospital. I also had the job of hiding arms in houses, also to arrange the arms so that they were hidden in cars so that they could be carried up to the mountains. It was logistical work, as they say.

Again we see that women were working with the population, serving as bridges. Without their political work with the civilian population, the military

struggle would have been impossible. There was a clear need for civilians to understand, support, and not feel frightened by the struggle of the FMLN. Their support was essential if they were to be willing to risk their own lives protecting the lives of FMLN combatants. This organizational link is the result of predominantly women's working with the population—serving as bridges.

María (Serrano) Chichilco, an elected member of the FPL's Political Commission, joined the struggle in 1974 as a member of a popular peasant organization. Throughout the war, she too worked with base communities including peasants and internal refugees and also served as a combatant. She believes that participating in the war was an opportunity to prove by action that women have the same ability to perform revolutionary tasks as do men. She acknowledged that only 30 percent of all revolutionary contingents were women but believes that the reason for this is that "women are not incorporated into society itself. We women, since birth, have unfortunately a 'disadvantage,' that is the 'disadvantage' of being a woman" (Ueltzen, 1993: 231).

This sentiment is one echoed by many women. The analysis is implicitly feminist, as it faults societal conditioning rather than men, suggesting that social change is possible and will remedy the situation. Complaints from female ex-combatants regarding machismo, however, are common. Women often confronted machismo directly, again indicating a hope for change. For example, there were male guerrillas who thought it inappropriate for their wives to join. In February 1975 Compañera Eugenia joined the FPL after a long history of work in Christian base communities, concluding that the only road to true social change was through revolutionary armed struggle (NAP, 1989: 139):

Eugenia's assignment to train cadre took her all over the countryside of El Salvador. When speaking to male recruits, she stressed the importance of abolishing *machismo*; she encouraged these men to take on domestic responsibilities and to treat women as equals. She also organized groups of women and energetically promoted the participation of women in all aspects of political work. The fact that women in rural areas were so successfully integrated into the movement in spite of deeply ingrained *machismo* can be attributed to two factors: organizational principles which explicitly promoted equality, and the determined efforts of *compañeras* like Eugenia.

In this case, Eugenia's commitment both to the revolution and to just treatment for women served as a bridge, helping to reduce the impact of machismo and providing access to the movement to other women.

Lorena Peña (Rebeca Palacios) has been a member of the Political Commission of the FPL and the Political-Diplomatic Commission of the FMLN

and now represents the FMLN in the current Legislative Assembly. In 1991, she assessed the role of women in the FPL as follows (Golden, 1991: 173):

The statutes of the organization prohibit discrimination against women. The fact is that the whole culture is sexist, and there is not a single comrade who is not affected by this. If it's true that our organization provides the opportunities for women to develop themselves in daily concrete work, it is also true that the woman herself has to overcome a thousand and one obstacles—with her *compañero*, with her children, with her co-workers, with the organization itself. And above all, she has to overcome the idea that being a party militant requires her to be less of a woman.

Every female FMLN ex-combatant has her own account of sexism in the party and the reasons for it. To some women, it was not an obstacle, while others worked three times as hard and still others were prevented by their *compañeros* from joining. Many of the women who felt “equal” within the FMLN are also now part of the growing movement expressing the urgent need to come together as women, as feminists, and as (predominantly) ex-combatants to expand the revolution of the nation to include the feminist revolution.

From the above testimonies we can see that there were two mechanisms placing women guerrillas in the position of bridges. First, they served as role models for one another; male guerrillas could not be role models for women who were feeling alienated from military politics because of personal or party experiences with machismo. Second, within the context of the larger guerrilla project, women worked with the population, thus fostering the necessary trust between the guerrillas and the masses that facilitated the transport of weapons, the care of the wounded, and the other logistical tasks of guerrilla warfare.

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

The final example of women's role as bridges occurred, quite ironically, under the auspices of a women's movement. Gloria Guzmán, the coordinator of the Women's Program of the Archdiocese of San Salvador and a self-described “woman of the left” (personal communication, 1994), said that the women's movement that was born during the war was a result of the war—that the resistance movement saw a strategic need to incorporate women into the struggle and found that an effective way of accomplishing this was establishing woman-focused organizations. In other words, the parties of the FMLN identified women as potential guerrillas and undertook the creation of women's organizations to recruit them. Each of the parties of the FMLN eventually formed its own women's organization, and these organizations

have become something much more dynamic than women's commissions for these parties. According to Dilcia Maroquín of *Mujeres por La Dignidad y La Vida* (Women for Dignity and Life—Las Dignas), "All of the women's groups came into being for convenience's sake because the men wanted them to, because they could get resources; they weren't formed by women because of their needs" (personal communication, 1994). Again, what we are hearing regarding women's organizing during the war is that the FMLN virtually used women as a sector to recruit new women. Again, we see women serving as bridges. I would suspect, however, that no one in the FMLN expected that women's organizing would not only continue but eventually demand autonomy from leftist parties. Women's organizing during the war, especially that which was initiated by men of the FMLN, is another example of women's receiving training and creative tools while simultaneously being used and treated with disrespect. This all too prevalent theme helps to fuel the Salvadoran contemporary women's movement.

CONCLUSION

What would have happened in El Salvador if women had been fully acknowledged actors in the revolutionary process? Clearly, we will never know, but let us speculate for a moment. Wickham-Crowley (1991) identifies cross-class revolutionary alliances led by guerrilla movements as a central factor in successful revolutions. Coupled with Lobao's (1990) analysis that middle-class women are often more likely to join guerrilla movements as a result of fewer economic restrictions, this indicates that had the task of developing cross-class alliances been assigned to women, the Salvadoran revolution could have expanded beyond the working and peasant classes. Similarly, Foran's (1992; 1997a; 1997b) political cultures of opposition, if crafted by rather than simply given the support of women, could have expanded the popular movement. If the revolutionary significance of women had been acknowledged by their male comrades, the popular movement would certainly have been strengthened: women were marginalized at the very least as women, regardless of class position, and often several times over as shantytown dwellers, students, peasants, and so forth. Thus, a coupling of Moghadam's (1997) emancipation model with Foran's (1992) political cultures of opposition could have greatly expanded the revolutionary project. Similarly, I am confident that the guerrilla movement in El Salvador would have been strengthened had women revolutionaries been explicitly recognized for their crucial work with the masses.

We can only speculate about what the U.S. response to a strengthened opposition movement in El Salvador might have been. Similarly, we do not know whether the ruling regime would have responded to this opposition by replacing the democratic facade with an individual dictator—which, according to Foran's (1992) theory of revolution, is another necessary component of a successful revolution. We do know that women did indeed strengthen the revolutionary movement through their action as gendered revolutionary bridges, and it is probable that the outcome would have been different had this role been recognized and extended to other sectors of the population.

ANDES served as a gendered revolutionary bridge in the strictest sense. The women of ANDES worked predominantly in urban areas, using city streets and protests to provide female faces to the so-called guerrilla terrorists of the countryside. Their demonstrations and militancy long predated the declaration of war. Despite their militancy, they were able to reduce obstacles to joining the opposition for newer political actors. ANDES eventually joined the BPR, while individual members simultaneously took up arms with the FMLN. This process of incorporation resulted in previously apolitical individuals becoming at least members of the popular movement if not full members of the FMLN.

The work of CO-MADRES as a gendered revolutionary bridge was very different from but equally as important as that of ANDES. Despite its militancy, it maintained a relatively apolitical demeanor. Superficially, it was a small group of mothers and widows looking for their loved ones, sanctioned by the church. It could be argued that CO-MADRES reinforced the patriarchal (thus counterrevolutionary) divisions of gender by projecting its members' femininity, but this assessment belittles the strategic agency of a nominally nonrevolutionary organization. CO-MADRES capitalized on its normative social positioning and appearance to serve as a bridge for angry and frightened women but also for the greater popular movement.

Women in the FMLN also served as gendered revolutionary bridges. Women guerrillas were responsible for the crucial work with the population; the women fostered the trust of the masses that was eventually transformed into support. Similarly, women guerrillas were often the most important reason that women opted to join the guerrillas; women served as bridges to one another in a context in which female role models were few. The men of the FMLN used women to incorporate other women into the wartime women's movement as potential FMLN combatants, but this strategy had the unexpected consequence of providing the contemporary women's movement with more skills and bitter memories. I have spoken of the sense of betrayal and frustration that many women revolutionaries are currently confronting. In conclusion, it is worth asking: Had the demands, abilities, and revolutionary

significance of women been addressed and the revolution been successful, where would El Salvador and its women be today?

NOTES

1. I mention the hosts and coordinators here because this prearranged dynamic had a tremendous impact on my research. First, it gave me access to many meetings and interviews that I would not have otherwise been privy to. It is not at all uncommon when doing fieldwork and interviews in particular to be confronted by a seemingly impenetrable barrier. Our hosts in El Salvador were very familiar with the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) and its long history of solidarity work in the United States, and this relationship created trust before any interactions with the subjects of the research ever occurred. No one turned down my request for an interview except because of time constraints. While in El Salvador I conducted six semistructured interviews and was a participant observer of ten group discussions with audiences from 10 to 150 persons, always followed by questions and answers. Three interviews were conducted during the International Women's Day March in San Salvador, when I approached strangers who could only assume that my presence was an act of solidarity. Five more semistructured interviews were conducted in El Salvador for me with questions I had written and left with my colleagues Victoria Polanco and Leslie Schuld. I also conducted five semistructured interviews with Salvadoran women and men who were in California for political reasons. In the Bay area I was a participant observer at six public presentations, two addressed to large mixed audiences and four to a small group of women who were familiar with the situation in El Salvador.

2. The *capucha* is a form of torture in which the prisoner's head is covered with a hood (usually the inside of the hood is coated with toxic chemicals). As the prisoner breathes, the hood sticks to his or her face, resulting in suffocation (Stephen, 1994: 237).

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