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Representations of Central Americans in CISPES-sponsored Texts during the Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement

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Dedication

Para mi familia.

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Abstract

Representations of Central Americans in CISPES-sponsored Texts during the Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement

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This study examines the representations of Salvadorans and other Central Americans in film, visual, and written texts used by the Dallas chapter of CISPES during the eighties. Drawing from Susan Sontag's scholarship on the ideological workings of war photography and Elizabeth Barnes's work on sentimental literature, I show that pamphlets created and distributed by CISPES relied on over-saturated images and written descriptions of state-sanctioned physical violence inflicted on Central Americans in order to generate sympathy for the other. While the representations of Central Americans in CISPES pamphlets as feminized and docile subjects were strategic in showing the oppressive conditions that the U.S. helped fund, these images also overlooked the fact that Central Americans played essential roles in their fight against their countries repressions and U.S. foreign policies. As such, I turn to a medium where Salvadorans had the opportunity to speak out about their own experiences during the U.S.-backed civil

war. I analyze the Dutch documentary film *El Salvador: Revolution or Death?* (1980) and argue that individuals showed their subjectivities and agency even when introduced as victims of state-sanctioned violence. This documentary did not solely rely on over-saturated images of violence on the Central American other—it provided peasants with an international platform to represent themselves, albeit still through a mediated form. In-between harrowing scenes showcasing dead and brutalized bodies were also instances where Salvadorans challenged assumptions of their political ineptness and reminded U.S. residents of their own prominence within the Central American solidarity movement.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

This Master's report explores how the Dallas Chapter of the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES) facilitated activism as one of the "largest, most effective nationwide" organizations within the Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement (CAPSM) during the Reagan administration era.[1] As such, the primary aim is to analyze the representations of Central Americans in film, visual, and written texts used in CISPES-sponsored events during the 1980s as they created awareness about the detrimental effects U.S. foreign policy had on the isthmus. I show that although most of the representations of Central Americans strategically highlighted human rights abuses committed by U.S.-backed regimes, they were nonetheless problematic due to their limited portrayal of these subjects as submissive victims who were dependent on international supporters. Despite these unsettling representations, however, there were some spaces where these subjects spoke for themselves. For example, CISPES sponsored lecture tours where Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Nicaraguans provided testimonies of their experiences as community organizers, refugees, and victims of repression and violence. In addition, documentary films featuring short and at times, seemingly unrehearsed interviews with Central Americans

[1] Hector Perla (2013) uses the label "Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement," or (CAPSM), to refer to the collective efforts by secular and religious-based community organizations that opposed Reagan policies on Central America in "Central American Public Mobilization: Transnational Social Movement to Reagan" (p. 169).

who experienced or witnessed human rights violations were screened in CISPES-sponsored events.

I analyze the representation of Central Americans in two pamphlets and one documentary that are part of the CISPES-Dallas chapter papers at the Benson Latin American Collection. Drawing from Elizabeth Barnes's work on the didactical characteristics of sentimental literature and Susan Sontag's writings on war photography, I analyze how visual images and written text work together in CISPES pamphlets to generate emotive responses from readers. In doing so, I argue that the production of pamphlets filled with photocopied images of war photography and written text depicting U.S.-sponsored aggression against poor, submissive, and feminized Salvadorans and other Central American subjects was a key strategy to engender sympathy for the Central American other. The constant and nearly intolerable use of these images in CISPES pamphlets led to what I call oversaturation—a barrage of visual images and written descriptions that depicted physical violence inflicted on the other. When used repeatedly, images depicting violence in a clear and definitive manner reach a point of oversaturation. While CISPES pamphlets included statistical figures to argue that U.S. foreign policy with Central America was a waste of taxpayer money, the power of these pamphlets came from the use of oversaturated images depicting U.S.-sponsored terror. Thus, those who read these pamphlets were greeted with an overflow of heart-wrenching images and written descriptions of dead and mutilated bodies. I contend that these images were not just essential, but a necessary facet of CISPES pamphlets that filled every page with evidence of state-sponsored violence against the Central American other. The

strategy to exhaust readers with compelling evidence of raw, human suffering, certainly invited feelings of disapproval towards U.S. involvement in the isthmus and a sympathetic connection towards the Central American other simultaneously. The concept of saturation I develop here allows me to make sense of the intentional placement of these images on nearly every page of the pamphlets.

In the last section, I turn to *El Salvador: Revolution or Death?* (1980) and argue that despite relying on a saturation of images showcasing brutalized bodies to generate sympathy for the other, this documentary film presents Salvadoran subjects as self-possessed political actors. Michael Chanan's work on Latin American documentary and Victor Casaus's reflections on the influence *testimonio* had on documentary films provide a framework to understand the stylistic elements used in *El Salvador: Revolution or Death?* (1980). Arguably falling within the category of *cine testimonio, El Salvador: Revolution or Death?* (1980) deviates from CISPES pamphlets in that it used visual narratives to publically denounce U.S. intervention in their country. In-between harrowing scenes showcasing people being beaten by the Salvadoran national police and montages of dead and brutalized bodies are segments where Salvadorans used personal narratives to challenge assumptions of their political ineptitude. In addition to presenting themselves as victims of state repression, these subjects spoke of their involvement in a war waged against them. As opposed to written texts, documentaries like *El Salvador: Revolution or Death?* (1980) gave viewers aural and visual access to first-hand accounts of events from the perspective of Salvadoran subjects. While I acknowledge that the narratives of these individuals were still mediated through the documentary form (i.e., a

recording and editing processes along with guidance from an interviewer), I contend that the oral *testimonio* is different in its affective reach. Personal experiences shared in this documentary film reinforced the saturated images of human suffering that sympathetic viewers witnessed from afar. As a result, the juxtaposition of these narratives with images of war produced a heightened sense of urgency for political change.

While an analysis of film, visual, and written texts used by CISPES to openly critique Reagan policies and human rights abuses in certain parts of the isthmus is central to this essay, it is also important to clarify the significance of the term 'Central America' in CISPES-sponsored texts and its usage here. The inclusion of similar yet different issues from 'Central American' countries in an organization with origins specific to El Salvador puts CISPES in what Arturo Arias (2007) would describe as a "risk of homogenizing and grouping what is a very heterogeneous array of cultural experiences" (p. 204). Did CISPES create specific and homogenized representations of Central America? Which countries and struggles were included and excluded in the construction of this Central American community? The dissemination of texts with a monolithic representation of a singular Central American identity might have left North Americans with obscured first impressions about subjects from the isthmus—that is, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Nicaraguans, and Hondurans were unable to hold their repressive governments accountable for human rights abuses and needed the aid of U.S. sympathizers. To refrain from ascribing to nationalistic and homogenizing discourse surrounding Central Americans, this paper focuses on the representations of Salvadorans

with an understanding that other Central American subjects and struggles were also on the periphery of solidarity organizations in the U.S.

FORMATION OF A TRANSNATIONAL CENTRAL AMERICAN PEACE & SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT

The 1980s were marked by a wave of transnational solidarity networks that actively worked to dismantle U.S. foreign policy in Central America. With the fall of the Somoza regime in Nicaragua, U.S. intervention in the isthmus manifested in the form of financing Nicaraguan Contras and providing direct military and financial aid to the governments of Guatemala and El Salvador. The culmination of consequences from civil wars such as economic instability, political repression from U.S.-backed regimes, and human rights abuses were means for a mass exodus of Guatemalans and Salvadorans to the U.S by the late 1970s.[2] Hamilton and Chinchilla (2001), for example, note that thousands of indigenous people were massacred "and hundreds of villages decimated" in Guatemala during early 1980s while "an estimated 68 percent" of people killed in El Salvador between 1980 and 1984 were peasants (pp. 31-32). Despite these alarming numbers, the approval rate of Guatemalan and Salvadoran asylum seekers during this decade was a staggering two percent while Hondurans had an approval rate of one percent (Rodriguez & Urrutia-Rojas, 1992, p. 272). Very telling of the U.S.'s political allegiance to refugees fleeing from what the government considered 'communist' nations, the percentage of political asylums granted to Nicaraguans denouncing the newly

[2] Cardenas (2009) also notes that Nicaragua and Guatemala suffered earthquakes in 1972 and 1976 respectively. These natural disasters "exacerbated" Central American diasporic movements (p. 94).

established Sandinista government rose from fourteen percent in 1983 to over fifty percent by the late 1980s (Rodriguez & Urrutia-Rojas, 1992, p. 272). As Nestor Rodriguez and Ximena Urrutia-Rojas (1992) rightfully contend, the U.S. government did not "recognize Central Americans as a legitimate refugee population. With some exceptions for Nicaraguans, the U.S. government consider[ed] Central American migration to the United States to be motivated by economic reasons" (p. 263). Another reasoning behind not recognizing these immigrants as part of a 'legitimate refugee population,' however, could be the fact that doing so would contradict the federal government's support in Central American civil wars and the Contras. This large and unprecedented migration of Central American refugees and the role of U.S. influence in this region compelled thousands of North Americans to join secular and faith-based organizations so that they could raise awareness of mass human rights abuses committed by U.S.-backed military regimes and Contras in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. The ultimate goal of these consciousness-raising efforts, then, was to push U.S. influence out of Central America.

Perla (2008) describes the web of solidarity efforts taking place during this era as the Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement (CAPSM), "a transnational social movement…in which protagonists in two or more countries cooperate and/or coordinate efforts to achieve a common political goal or purpose" (p. 138). Among the reasons that compelled U.S. citizens to join this movement are religious teachings on peace and justice through the influence of liberation theology in Nicaragua and major events that received international attention in El Salvador. Two particular events stand out in

literature on the Central American solidarity movements as reasons that motivated U.S. churchgoers to become critical of foreign policy in Central America. One such event was the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero, a Salvadoran Catholic bishop who actively spoke out against the repression of the poor. He was killed on March 24, 1980 by a member of a right-wing Salvadoran death squad. Months later, the international community became aware of the murders of four American churchwomen on December 2, 1980. Sr. Ita Ford, Sr. Maura Clarke, Sr. Dorothy Kazel, and Jean Donovan were abducted, beaten, and raped before they were assassinated by members of the Salvadoran national guard (Erickson Nepstad, 2001; Smith, 1996). Consequently, key organizations like Sanctuary, Witness for Peace, and Pledge of Resistance were formed in the early 1980s and saw a substantial growth in membership throughout the decade. Through their varied contributions to the peace and solidarity movement like providing housing and protection for Central American refugees, traveling to Central America so North Americans could witness the effects U.S. policy had on the isthmus, and staging protests, solidarity groups complemented each other in a web of social movements that condemned U.S. intervention in the isthmus.

Throughout the 1980s, an estimated one hundred thousand U.S. citizens "mobilized into some form of Central America peace activism" and "some two thousand local groups" and chapters with national coordinating offices emerged throughout the

U.S. (Smith, 1996, p. 375; Gosse, 1996, p. 318)[3]. In *Resisting Reagan*, Smith (1996) identifies CAPSM activists by characteristic: 98 percent of Sanctuary Activists and 96 percent of Witness for Peace Delegates were Caucasian, 91 percent of Sanctuary Activists and 90 percent of Witness for Peace Delegates completed four or more years of college, and roughly a quarter of the members in each organization identified with the political left in 1979—showing that they were probably critical of U.S. foreign policy in Central America prior to their participation in Central American solidarity groups (p. 171). Although Smith's description does not include an exhaustive list of all organizations that made up CAPSM, he does mention that many solidarity activists participated in more than one organization. Thus, it would not be outlandish to assume that the majority of solidarity organizations included U.S. citizens who held multiple membership affiliations. Other texts on the Central American solidarity movements confirm this assumption, since they conclude that U.S. citizens—whether clergy members, missionaries, or seasoned political activists from the Vietnam anti-intervention movement—fulfilled essential roles in the formation and growth of secular and faith-based solidarity organizations during the 1980s (Gosse, 1988; Hamilton & Chinchilla, 2001; Nepstad, 2004). While it is important to note the solidarity-building process of Central Americans working with and being represented by predominantly white, educated, middle-class North Americans, it is equally important to emphasize that transnational political activism was formed and led by diasporic refugee committees and

[3] Gosse has argued that "it is unlikely…that more than 20,000 people were Central American activists at any one time," meaning that large gatherings like marches in U.S. cities had significantly fewer participants than the norm during the Vietnam anti-war movement (Gosse, 1995, p. 23).

U.S. Central Americans in major immigrant-receiving cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and New York (Perla, 2008; Zimmerman, 2010, p. 92).

The size and effectiveness of Central American solidarity groups are due in large part to the prominent roles Central Americans had in creating these organizations. However, their efforts held little weight in academic literature covering these social movements. Perla (2008) notes this absence in a critique of two comprehensive studies on the Central American solidarity movement: *Resisting Reagan* by Christian Smith (1996) and *Convictions of the Soul* by Sharon Erickson Nepstad (2004). He argues that both scholars portray sympathetic North American activists as the "sole protagonists" who built and managed national networks to critique the Reagan administration's foreign policy efforts "while neglecting crucial elements of the vital role played by Central American revolutionaries—both in their home and in the diaspora—as purposive actors in the movement's rise and growth" (p. 138). This neglect led Perla to revise the history of CAPSM, arguing that early Nicaraguan and Salvadoran organizing efforts originated from the activism of U.S.-born and Central American exiles. Indeed, U.S.-Nicaraguan solidarity efforts were in place by the mid-seventies in the Mission District of San Francisco, California. Roberto Vargas, a Nicaraguan-born poet and activist during the Chicano movement organized marches and art-based community events with other Nicaraguan exiles and Chicanas/os in the Mission District in order to show support for the Sandinistas (Rodríguez, 2009, p. 142). Vargas met with Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Sandinista National Liberation Front – FSLN) representatives in 1974 and formed a solidarity committee named *El Comité Cívico pro Nicaragua en los*

Estados Unidos soon after (2008, p. 145). In December 1974, this *comité* of young Nicaraguans and Chicanas/os led what may be the first march in the U.S. that showed support for the revolutionary forces in Nicaragua.

Another example is that of a second-generation Salvadoran American, Felix Kury, who founded a Salvadoran-based solidarity organization in the mid 1970s called *El Comité de Salvadoreños Progresistas* (Committee of Progressive Salvadorans). Like the Nicaraguan *comité*, this organization was also formed in San Francisco and supported Salvadoran revolutionary forces that critiqued government repression. Arely Zimmerman (2010) notes that some of the first known Central American committees in Los Angeles were founded mainly by young Salvadoran and Guatemalan exiles and students who fled political persecution and "had acquired political and community organizing skills in their countries of origin" (p. 95). Through these examples, Perla and Zimmerman argue that solidarity organizing was not solely an Anglo American phenomenon, but one that was fueled by Central American exiles who had prior community-organizing experience in their home countries. More importantly, these examples privilege how Central American refugees and Central Americans in the isthmus created solidarity movements that might mistakenly be considered a North or Anglo American phenomenon.

Like most Central American solidarity groups, the origins of CISPES can be traced back to diasporic refugee committees and Salvadoran revolutionaries. Key documents belonging to Shafik Handal,[4] then the Secretary General of the Salvadoran

[4] These documents are referred to as the White Paper. They were captured and released by the U.S. State Department in 1981 (p. 149).

Communist Party, confirmed that Salvadoran revolutionaries actively worked to establish solidarity networks in the U.S. so that North Americans could pressure the Reagan administration to end U.S. aid in El Salvador (Perla Jr., 2008, p. 149). CISPES's national organizing structure emerged out of two conferences organized by Handal and U.S. activists in 1980. Not surprisingly, both conferences were held in cities with emerging Salvadoran immigrant communities: Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles. Just like the early establishments of *comités* in the mid 1970s and early 1980s, CISPES was initially created and organized not only by U.S. sympathizers, but also by Central American exiles, refugees, and U.S. Central Americans. In addition to noting CISPES's origins, it should also be clarified that although CISPES started as an organization in solidarity with El Salvador, its focus quickly expanded to include struggles against repression in Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua in order to show that U.S. interests in El Salvador were part of a larger and ongoing regionalized effort to fend off communism in the western hemisphere. This interest became evident when CISPES's national leaders proposed to merge with "its sister (and much smaller networks)," the National Network in Solidarity with the Nicaraguan People (NNSNP) and Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA), into one large "solidarity alliance for Central America or even the hemisphere" (Gosse, 1996, pp. 327–328). This merger did not take place, however, due to a strong opposition from Guatemalans in committees within NISGUA (Gosse, 1988, p. 328).

Given the limited amount of literature about the merger and its opposition, I can only surmise that racial politics were taken into consideration during the negotiation.

Raising attention about Guatemala as a nation-state sponsoring the racial genocide of indigenous peoples may have easily been trumped by discourses that exclusively focused on class-based issues in El Salvador and Nicaragua. The erasure of racial politics in solidarity movements would have been a detrimental loss to the people of Guatemala since their own struggles would be overlooked. The failure to merge CISPES, NISGUA, and NNSNP into a broader, Central American-focused organization did not affect CISPES's influence in local U.S. communities, however. CISPES's exponential growth through the establishment of over three hundred local chapters in U.S. cities meant that it was influential in the ways Americans would be introduced to similar, yet different Central American struggles (Cunningham, 2005, p. 212). The representation of Central Americans in the local Dallas community is at question in this study.

CENTRAL AMERICAN INVISIBILITY, VULNERABILITY, & CONTESTING CITIZENSHIP ACROSS BORDERS

While I place an emphasis on the participation of Central American and U.S. Central Americans in the formation and growth of CAPSM organizations, there is a sense of vagueness and invisibility that permeates texts covering these historical moments. Perla intervenes because texts like *Resisting Reagan* do not include a single voice from Central American or U.S. Central American activists. Instead, their participation is overlooked by narratives and quantified data that highlight an overwhelming amount of participation by sympathetic white activists. Yet even within Perla's call to re-examine the formation of CAPSM organizations, we do not see much biographical information

about the actual Central American and U.S. Central American activists who held leadership roles in solidarity efforts. For example, he mentions that CISPES's first national coordinator was Angela Sambrano, but not much else is known apart from her role as a CISPES chapter founder in Los Angeles. While I am keen on these silences and acknowledge that providing biographical sketches of key solidarity activists is not within the scope of this paper, decisions to restrict the amount of Central American and U.S. Central American voices from major discussions of these movements also stem from valid concerns regarding the safety of these individuals.

According to Chinchilla, the decision to refrain from placing Central Americans and U.S. Central Americans as main protagonists in solidarity movements is mainly based on the idea of protecting refugees who were (and may still be) vulnerable to physical and political harm despite their spacial distance from the isthmus.[5] This vulnerability is evident in *Seeking Community*, where Hamilton and Chinchilla (2001) share short yet impactful examples of activists from El Salvador and Guatemala who faced political persecution in Los Angeles (p. 148). For example, Yanira Corea, a Salvadoran activist working with CISPES, was kidnapped by three men on July 7, 1987; two of the men spoke with Salvadoran accents while the other one was either Guatemalan or Honduran (Hamilton & Chinchilla, 2001, p. 148). Marta Alicia Rivera, also a Salvadoran activist living in Los Angeles, received a death threat that listed the names of "fifteen other Central American and four non-Central American activists" in Los Angeles

[5] Author's personal notes, graduate student roundtable at the 2014 Lozano Long Conference, "Archiving the Central American Revolutions." February 21, 2014.

(Hamilton & Chinchilla, 2001, p. 148). Lastly, a Guatemalan woman named Ana Maria Lopez was kidnapped and threatened, and a pastor named Father Luis Olivares received a note that was signed "E.M." initials used by death squads (Hamilton & Chinchilla, 2001, p. 148). These acts of violence served as tools of repression targeting exiled Central American activists. While U.S. citizens may have felt distanced from the wars and human rights abuses taking place in the isthmus, these examples indicate that Central American exiles living in the U.S. were still haunted in life-threatening ways. For them, war knew no international boundary. As they continued their political involvement in the U.S., their lives remained in danger. Whether or not Central Americans were granted asylum or refugee status, their continued political persecution in the U.S. serves to highlight their vulnerability and heightened the need for solidarity building. Nonetheless, it would be a disservice to these activists to not give Central American community members credit they deserve when documenting these movements.

Ensuring that Central American refugees and U.S. Central Americans' labor is represented in transnational organizations stems from the fact that they initiated such a vast movement despite their "unique positioning" as subjects who were "not fully documented or undocumented but often straddling both" (Menjívar, 2006; Zimmerman, 2010, p. 101). Since most Central American immigrants in the late 1970s and 1980s were considered economic migrants, they were forced to live in the U.S. as undocumented immigrants until less than half of Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants received amnesty under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) (Menjívar, 2006, p. 1012). Already marked with fear and trauma from wars in the isthmus, Arturo

Arias (1999) argues that U.S. Central Americans are "doubly marginalized and thereby invisibilized…[T]heir invisible status, their non-recognition, generates a sense of non-beingness" that excludes these groups from engaging in minoritarian identity politics (p. 51). Arias (1999) coined a "singular and contradictory trope, 'Central American-American,'" to emphasize that this group of heterogeneous subjects live life "not just on the hyphen, as Gustavo Pérez Firmat put it…[but] on the margins of those marginal hyphenated others (Cuban-Americans, Mexican-Americans)" (p. 48). The positionality of U.S. Central Americans in the seventies and eighties as heterogeneous groups of people with small immigrant populations in the U.S. meant that their political influence would presumably not be as forceful as other dominant Latina/o groups like Cuban-Americans, Mexican-Americans, and Puerto Ricans, who held longer sociopolitical ties with the U.S. Despite this, Central Americans and U.S. Central Americans were able to initiate a vast transnational solidarity movement wherein thousands of Americans grew to have sympathy for them as victims of human rights abuses and U.S. aggression.

Zimmerman (2010) makes sense of how Central American refugees in diasporic communities built networks and organized despite their invisibility and 'liminal legality' through a framework she calls the "transborder associational citizenship." Representative of cross-border contestations of citizenship, Zimmerman's (2010) framework centralizes transnational solidarity organizing by Central American subjects, elucidating how they participated in communities that "construct[ed] a collective identity and an alternative discourse of belonging for Central Americans both in relation to U.S. society and their countries of origin based on the shared experiences of exclusion" (pp. 161-162). The

transborder associational citizenship framework decenters the nation-state from our understanding of national belonging, allowing us to focus on the different ways Latina/o subjects—in this case, Central Americans—claimed membership in multiple communities (Zimmerman, 2010, p. 169). By claiming membership to different communities despite their status as non-citizens, people can take collective action with rights claiming practices. The emergence of *comités* in the 1970s and CISPES in 1980, then, can be seen as sites for collective action where Central Americans and their supporters challenged notions of political invisibility and exclusion by proactively making U.S. residents aware about human rights abuses in Central American countries—the reasons for their arrival to the U.S. in the first place.

THE EMERGENCE OF CISPES IN DALLAS AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

Despite CISPES's categorization as a secular organization, the Dallas chapter had intrinsic ties with the local religious community since its formative years. The formation of a local CISPES chapter in Dallas by Sister Linda Hajek, at the time a Catholic nun, was in response to deaths that caught the attention of an international audience. In a published account of her early organizing efforts, Hajek describes the slaying of American churchwomen in El Salvador as a watershed moment for the Dallas community, one that "brought it all home" for her convent and local church people (Schultz & Schultz, 2001, p. 388). Sister Celine, a nun living in the Bethany House of the Holy Cross Catholic Church, taught the churchwomen in Maryknoll College prior to their trip to Nicaragua and El Salvador (Schultz & Schultz, 2001). Given the magnitude of this news and the personal connection Sister Celine had with the martyred churchwomen, it is

no wonder that the Dallas covenant would want to learn more about human rights abuses taking place in El Salvador. As missionaries, the slain women were part of a movement where thousands of U.S. church-people flew to Latin America to work with poor and refugee communities.

An ideological shift within the Catholic Church during the 1968 Medellin Conference became a transformative moment for many members of the church in the U.S. and Latin America as they began to support the poor in their struggle against sociopolitical and economic injustice. Through the ideological movement called liberation theology, churchgoers became agents of change and their new consciousness was formalized through missionary trips to Central America. As Gosse (1988) aptly observed, missionaries traveled to Latin America from the early 1960s and "met head-on the facts of U.S.-sponsored repression" (p. 16). Throughout the seventies and eighties, NGOs like Witness for Peace and Sister Cities funded trips for North Americans to become witnesses of oppression raging in countries like Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua (Gosse, 1988, p. 16). Of importance here is the fact that Dallas CISPES worked closely with faith-based organizations. A prime example of the strong connection between this particular CISPES chapter and faith-based groups is "Central American Week," wherein Dallas CISPES and the Inter-Religious task Force on Central America hosted a series of educational events on the anniversary of Archbishop Oscar Romero's assassination. A flyer in the CISPES papers promoting the 1987 "Central American Week" shows that the Dallas chapter co-sponsored educational events and protests along with local Catholic, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches (CISPES Dallas Chapter,

1987). These events show that the Dallas chapter's ties with local faith-based communities extended past its Holy Cross Catholic Church headquarters and into a broader, citywide effort.

Another characteristic of the Dallas chapter that sets it apart from ones in other major U.S. cities is that even with diverse groups of people who overlooked their ideological and religious differences in order to work together, Central American voices are noticeably absent in CISPES flyers and published accounts on the chapter's formation. The Dallas chapter was led by predominantly white, middle-class, "professional persons such as lawyers, teachers, university professors, [and] church persons…who [were] concerned about the present U.S. policy in Central America" (Hajek, 1983).[6] The absence of Central American and U.S. Central American activists during CISPES's formative years in Dallas brings to light questions about the representation of Central American subjects in CISPES-related texts. In situations where community members might have known little about Central America until the assassination of the American churchwomen or their encounter with these solidarity organizations, CISPES-sponsored texts become an important site of intervention that introduced U.S. residents to the effects of U.S. foreign policy.

An early letter from the Dallas CISPES leadership to general members provides a glimpse of organizing methods used by this chapter. Dated September 24, 1982, Dallas organizers provided updates on upcoming events, including an "international day of

[6] An exception to this description is Jose Rinaldi-Jovet, a Latino and longtime activist for the independence of Puerto Rico who also had a lead role in the chapter and donated his papers to the Benson Latin American collection (Schultz & Schultz, 2001).

protest" against U.S. intervention in Central America and a speaking engagement by Eldon Kenworthy, a government professor from Cornell University, at Texas Christian University (TCU) (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1982). Academic scholarship that critically analyzed U.S. hegemony in Latin America worked hand-in-hand with the goals of activists who stood in solidarity with revolutionary movements in Central America. Kenworthy (1983) was one such professor who actively critiqued U.S. interests in Central America. He frequently critiqued Reagan and Kirkpatrick in his own work, stating that the Reagan administration formulated brutal foreign policies for the sake of their own credibility and not for the general welfare of nation-states in the isthmus. Overall, hosting educational events like Kenworthy's talk at Christian universities provided a space where students, academics, and churchgoers could congregate and use their multidisciplinary perspectives to better understand the social conditions in Latin America.

Since part of the solidarity-building process included the establishment of local chapters within national organizations like CISPES, learning more about how different chapters introduced Central American issues to their communities is a worthwhile task. In the following section, I explore two pamphlets produced by CISPES offices in New York and distributed in Dallas in order to analyze the tactics used to draw attention to U.S.-backed wars in El Salvador. Prior to analyzing the limited representation of Salvadoran and other Central American subjects in CISPES pamphlets, I examine the rhetorical strategies used in both documents that foreshadow the consequences of growing U.S. aid in El Salvador.

Chapter 2: "Another Vietnam": Visual and Written Representations of Salvadorans by CISPES

Here, I analyze the representation of Salvadorans in two informational pamphlets distributed by CISPES in 1983 and 1984. The first pamphlet warns readers of escalating financial and military aid in El Salvador by the U.S. government while showcasing large photographs of state-sanctioned violence. Similarly, the second pamphlet condemns the amount of aid sent to El Salvador, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Honduras, though it also gives a short historical overview on U.S. political and economic control over Latin America. The interplay between visual and written dimensions in both pamphlets is telling of the decade's continued anxiety over the U.S. government's participation and defeat in the Vietnam War. This attitude is most popularly referred to as the 'Vietnam Syndrome,' an anti-intervention sentiment that was continually felt in the eighties and "undergirded" the Central American solidarity movement (Gosse, 1995, p. 24). Thus, one of the main purposes of these pamphlets was to evoke fear and anxiety for the reader about increased U.S. involvement in El Salvador and other Central American countries through their constant use of graphic imagery depicting state-sanctioned violence. Once the reader was aware of the potential chaos such involvement could cause, they were encouraged to openly critique U.S. foreign policy in Central America.

In addition to making use of Vietnam-oriented rhetorical strategies to encourage action, visual and written representation of Salvadoran subjects do not include Salvadorans speaking for themselves—or any other Central American subject, for that

matter. This omission limited depictions of popular social movements taking place in El Salvador and other Central American countries at the time. In addition, these documents do not mention the organizing efforts of Central American refugees in the U.S. Rather, they include visual and written elements that described the violence most Salvadorans were subjected to under U.S.-backed regimes. While the inclusion of images in CISPES information pamphlets showing brutalized and dead bodies functioned as a tactical and persuasive call to action, perhaps as part of an effort to produce guilt and a sense of responsibility from U.S. citizens, these same images, whether intentionally or unintentionally, portray Salvadoran peasants as feminized, mute, and submissive subjects who depended on the intervention of U.S. sympathizers. To this end, I draw from Elizabeth Barnes (1997) to show how sympathy works in these particular CISPES documents for the purpose of mobilizing political action. While Barnes focuses on nineteenth century sentimental literature, the theme of sympathetic identification with others is also evident in these pamphlets through descriptions of state-sponsored aggression against the other. Furthermore, I draw from Susan Sontag's (2001) work on the ideological workings of war photography in order to understand their affective qualities and placement in pamphlets meant to raise awareness of U.S. foreign policy in the isthmus.

Taken together, these theories emphasize how images in CISPES pamphlets engender an emotive response from readers. The constant and nearly intolerable use of these images is oversaturation—a barrage of visual images and written descriptions that depicted physical violence inflicted on the other. When used repeatedly, images depicting

violence in a clear and definitive manner reach a point where they become oversaturated. The quantitative aspect of this tactic is important because these images served as abundant evidence to convince readers of the atrocities in Central America. More importantly, however, the almost exhaustive yet compelling evidence of raw, human suffering, invited readers to feel sympathy for the other. CISPES members felt it necessary to design introductory pamphlets on El Salvador with a barrage of visual images and written descriptions showcasing U.S.-sponsored aggression towards poor, submissive, and feminized subjects, showing the extent to which this organization sought sympathy for the Central American other.

SIMILARITY BETWEEN CENTRAL AMERICA AND VIETNAM

In *States of Sympathy*, Barnes (1997) analyzes nineteenth century sentimental literature in order to show how American authors used emotions as "the building block of a democratic nation" (p. *x*).[7] The labor used to generate sympathy for the other was strongly evident in nineteenth century abolitionist and twentieth century Central American solidarity cases. According to Barnes:

> Sympathy—the act of imagining oneself in another's position—is contingent upon familiarity. In order for the reader to engage in sympathetic identification, others must be shown to be *like* the reader. In other words, sympathy is both the expression of familiarity and the vehicle through which familiarity is created (p. 2).

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7 Of course, a historical and genre disjuncture exists between the fictional text Barnes analyzes and the Central American solidarity movement examined here. The Central American wars were not related to the abolitionist movement in the U.S., nor were they fictionalized. This does not take away the fact that sympathy is a central output in both cases, however.

To Barnes, sentimentality has the pedagogical function of "convert[ing] the foreign into the familiar by exploiting feelings and associations to which readers can easily relate" (1997, p. 97). Barnes analyzes a chapter from Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to show how Mr. Bird, a U.S. Senator who supported legislation for his state to pass harsh laws against run-away slaves, becomes emotionally connected to their struggle once he is "faced with [the] living image of human suffering" (Barnes, 1997, p. 94). Since the narrator explained the emotional change Mr. Bird's experienced, the (mainly white) readers were also expected to become sympathetic to the abolitionist cause within the fictional text and in the real world. Similar to how Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* utilized sentimental logic to encourage readers to sympathize for the racialized other, these CISPES pamphlets encourage readers to see themselves in the pamphlets through familiarity with human suffering caused by war. The Central American solidarity movement was made familiar through a strong focus on events in the eighties that were oddly similar with the Vietnam War. Constant parallels between the war in Vietnam and ongoing military mobilization in Central America provided a framework of familiarity required for these pamphlets to be so effective.

Published in 1984, the pamphlet titled "The Choice in El Salvador: **WAR OR PEACE**" features three large photocopied war photographs saturated with state-sponsored aggression and human suffering in Central America. Put together, these images work to engender sympathy for the Central American other. CISPES used the war in Vietnam as a rhetorical trope for the U.S. government's encroachment upon El Salvador, making it the most obvious formalistic element shared between the two

pamphlets. One only needs to glance at the cover of each document to notice that their visual and textual elements rehash anti-intervention sentiments associated with the Vietnam Syndrome. For example, the front page of "The Choice in El Salvador: **WAR OR PEACE**" uses images and written text to argue that "President Reagan [was] dragging America into another Vietnam War in El Salvador" (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1984, p. 1). Below the title of this pamphlet are two symmetrical panels that split a black and white photocopied image of military troops running away from two Blackhawk helicopters. Soldiers are shown holding rifles close to their chest as they appear to run towards the edge of each panel. This large illustration takes up a little less than half of the page and, perhaps as a result of the photocopying process, the images are saturated with excess black ink that diminish the nuanced aspect of the original photograph. All that remains are grainy silhouettes of two helicopters and military personnel against a white background. This detachment and de-contextualization from the original image presents a form of saturation that focuses on the act of military intervention instead of the specific context of the original image.[8] Furthermore, the process of de-contextualization in this illustration made the panels transferable and thus, representative of the Vietnam War *and* U.S. involvement in Central America. This transferability is emphasized through two captions that provide a specific context for each image. The left panel is described as "Vietnam 1964" and the panel on the right is "El Salvador 1984?"

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[8] To stress this point, the original photograph of soldiers exiting helicopters was removed from its original context (if it was published in a magazine or newspaper) and any original caption that came with the photograph was omitted along with the name of the photographer.

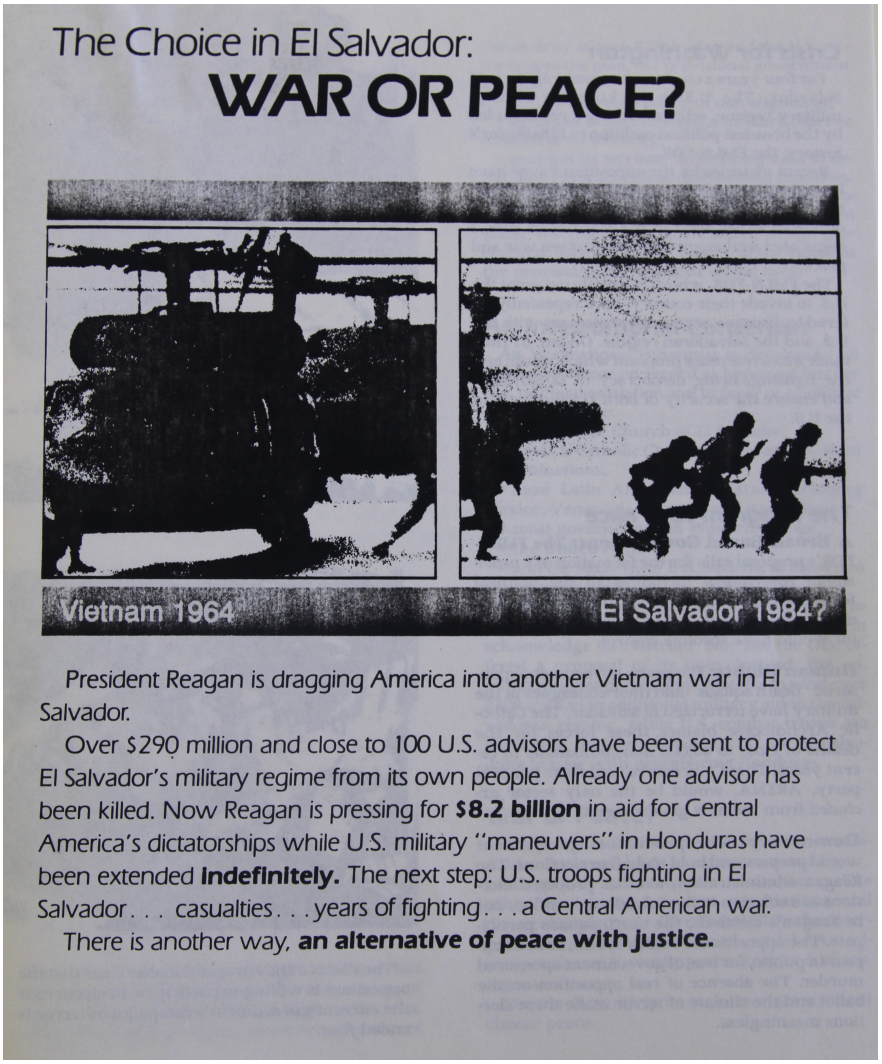

Figure 2.1 "The Choice in El Salvador: WAR OR PEACE?"

While the pamphlet gives no explanation for the use of "Vietnam 1964," it marks a significant year in U.S. military intervention in the Third World. On August 7, 1964, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin resolution "with almost no dissent…giving [President] Johnson *carte blanche* to use military force" in Vietnam without the formal declaration of war (Rossinow, 1998, p. 210). Once the U.S. experienced high casualties

in Vietnam, however, popular opposition grew (as evidenced by a large anti-intervention movement). Nonetheless, the federal government increased the amount of financial and military budget to ward off 'communist' and totalitarian threats in Indochina. By 1968, roughly 500,000 U.S. troops were in Vietnam, $20 billion dollars were spent on the war per year, and an estimated 100 U.S. soldiers died per week (Page & Brody, 1972, p. 980). The U.S. suffered a tremendous defeat, wasting billions of taxpayer dollars and perhaps more importantly, started to lose its sociopolitical influence in the world. With this in mind, the use of barely distinguishable silhouette figures suggests that the exact same military aggression tactics used in Vietnam reappeared in El Salvador. Herein lies an interesting parallel with this saturated split-image and its (new) captions.

Paired with a vivid image of military intervention, the year 1964 invites readers to reflect back to a moment that was not so far off from the historical memory of many Americans who questioned the role of U.S. diplomacy and faced military intervention. That the photocopied image now shares a new pending date and country only meant that CISPES was convinced history would repeat itself in 1984. This reappropriation of an older photograph was an interesting choice by CISPES. In *On Photography,* Sontag (2005) contends that the "moral and emotional weight" of a photograph "depends on where it is inserted. A photograph changes according to the context in which it is seen" (p. 82). Were readers expected to have an emotive response for the *potential* of there being another Vietnam War in El Salvador? CISPES certainly thought so, and this photocopied image was only the first of many parallels showing saturated state-sanctioned violence between the Vietnam War and the Salvadoran civil war. The implied

violence in this illustration—that of armed soldiers sprinting away from combat helicopters with captions pairing Vietnam with El Salvador—is meant to engender an emotive response that critiqued U.S. intervention in the isthmus and favored the Central American other.

The early eighties show a strong continuation of Cold War politics as the Carter and Reagan administrations 'sensed' another spread of communist aggression throughout the Third World. Communist threat in this hemisphere and the decline of U.S. hegemonic control associated with it was, as Secretary of State Alexander Haig put it, "penetrating America's own backyard with frightening speed and success" (quoted in Smith, 1996, p. 239). Following Secretary of State Haig's logic, the U.S. was at risk of a Marxist-Leninist invasion that would spread northward through a "domino effect"—one that was prompted by leftist guerrillas in Nicaragua supported by Cuba and the Soviet Union, and would lead to "the fall" of neighboring nation-states like El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Mexico (Smith, 1996, p. 239). The Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions were not so distant for the Reagan administration, as these movements marked a radical departure from U.S. hegemony in and around the geographical areas making up the Caribbean and Central America. Federal and private enterprises have exercised political and economic hegemony throughout Central America for decades, as evidenced in banana production throughout the isthmus, the construction and control of the Panama Canal, and William Walker's control over Nicaragua that preceded repeated military interventions in the same country (Rodríguez, 2009, p. 7). Central American politicians also gained the support of the U.S., like Nicaragua's dictators from 1937-1979, Anastasio

Somoza and his two sons, Luis and Anastasio (Dunkerley, 1988, p. 105). With this in mind, it is no wonder that the Reagan administration would think of anything south of the U.S. as its own backyard; it is a place that has historically been considered ripe for intervention and exploitation.

The establishment of a new, leftist leadership in Nicaragua led to the Reagan administration's campaign towards not the containment, but the removal of the perceived communist expansion in Nicaragua and Central America more broadly. Kennedy's failure to roll back communism from Cuba drew heavy criticism from Reagan, making Central America an important political site for intervention. By 1981, Reagan's ambassador to the United Nations argued that Central America became "the most important place in the world for the United States" (Jeanne Kirkpatrick, quoted in Smith, 1996, p. 18). For the U.S., 'beating communism' in Central America became a story of redemption for U.S. prominence in international politics. It needed to win at all costs.

The idea of Reagan "dragging" the U.S. into another Vietnam War in El Salvador was a response to developing events in the eighties that were oddly similar to that of the Vietnam era. Much like the U.S.'s pursuit of military action in Indochina despite growing opposition to the war, the Reagan administration was responsible for sending military aid to the Salvadoran government and training soldiers in Honduras despite popular opposition from the American public. Indeed, national polls taken in 1982 showed that two-thirds of Americans were *not* in favor of U.S. intervention in El Salvador (Smith, 1996, p. 162). Nevertheless, a *New York Times* article dated March 25, 1981 shows that early pushback from the American public against U.S. intervention or aid did not halt

Congress from allocating $25 million in military aid and sending fifty-four military advisors to El Salvador (Bonner, 1981). The CISPES pamphlet's front-page provides a snapshot of what U.S. foreign policy with Central America looked like in 1984:

> Over $290 million and close to 100 U.S. advisors have been sent to protect El Salvador's military regime from its own people. Already one advisor has been killed. Now Reagan is pressing for **$8.2 billion** in aid for Central America's dictatorships while U.S. military "maneuvers" into Honduras have been extended **indefinitely.** The next step: U.S. troops fighting in El Salvador . . . casualties . . . years of fighting . . . a Central American war [sic] (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1984, p. 1).

Since this pamphlet does not provide an exact month of its publication, it is difficult to determine whether or not each numerical figure is accurate. However, a *New York Times* article published on July 24, 1983 notes that the Defense Department "recommended to President Reagan that he raise the number of American military advisers to El Salvador to 125" the following year (Taubman, 1983). The U.S. was restricted to sending 55 military advisers in 1981 (Taubman, 1983). In addition, another *New York Times* article dated February 4, 1984 notes that Reagan proposed a "five-year, $8 billion program of aid to Central America…It included $312 million in military aid to El Salvador over the next two years" (Clines, 1984). While it may be feasible to surmise that close to 100 U.S. advisers were in El Salvador throughout 1984, it is difficult to determine which countries the U.S. considered part of Central America and consequently, which ones received a portion of the $8 billion in foreign aid. The adoption of a vague 'Central America' in this CISPES pamphlet is perhaps a testament to the lack of transparency provided by the

Reagan administration and popular news sources. It also contributes to a process of homogenization that it attempted to avoid in the first place.

If harrowing numerical figures did not peak the interest of some readers, then perhaps the aesthetic and rhetorical tactics used in this pamphlet did. From the onset, this pamphlet evokes the reemergence of political and military maneuvers that threatened the Third World (Central America) *and* the U.S. body politic. The extension of military activity in Honduras and the death of a U.S. advisor in El Salvador were surely signs of growing hostility in the isthmus. Honduras's physical proximity to war-torn countries like Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua made it an ideal territory for the U.S. military to occupy in an effort to circumvent the spread of leftist guerrilla movements. Meanwhile, mentioning the death of a U.S. military advisor draws a parallel between El Salvador and Vietnam as it cements Third World aggression towards the U.S. In comparison to this aggression, all it took for the U.S. to intervene in Vietnam was a "murky set of events" wherein a U.S. destroyer claimed to be hit by "an unprovoked attack" (Zinn, 2003, p. 476). Following the logic in this CISPES pamphlet, then, *any* aggressive force shown by Salvadoran guerrillas against the U.S. could be used as means to justify another war. The strategic use of bold font and the separation of key words highlight these parallels between the failed war in Vietnam and the challenges that would unfold in El Salvador with the end goal of gaining sympathy. A different form of saturation, bold and italicized text place an emphasis on words that CISPES thought were critical in order to draw an emotive response from readers. Key words and phrases like "**indefinitely**" and "U.S. fighting in El Salvador…casualties…years of fighting" do not describe acts of physical

violence, but they could easily rehash feelings of fear and anxiety to any reader who critiqued the Vietnam War and did not support future interventions (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1984, p. 1). To use Barnes's terms, this pamphlet exploits feelings and provides familiar information about the emerging Central American wars that readers can identify with from their own experience of the Vietnam War. The tactical use of familiarity through the photographic image of landing helicopters and aesthetic tools emphasize and encouraged a sentiment that can potentially develop into sympathy for the other.

The second pamphlet follows similar tactics parallel to the war in Vietnam, but it also takes a historical approach to show how the civil war in El Salvador was not a threat of 'external' communist invasion. Rather, this pamphlet argues that civil unrest in El Salvador was a large internal movement that threatened U.S. hegemony in the Central American country and in this hemisphere. "Are you willing to pay for another Vietnam War in Central America?" was produced in the later half of 1983 (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1983). Much like the first pamphlet, the primary tactic was using Vietnam as a rhetorical trope to describe U.S. involvement in the isthmus. The front page of this pamphlet is split into four quadrants: The first quadrant (upper-left-hand corner) has its title in large Arial font. The second quadrant (upper-right-hand corner) has a photocopied political cartoon from *The Los Angeles Times* of a grotesque Ronald Reagan facing the viewer and positioned in front of a map of Central America. The map outlines countries in the isthmus, but the countries names are replaced with those of the countries surrounding the Golf of Tonkin: El Salvador is now "South Vietnam," Nicaragua is "North Vietnam," Guatemala is "Laos," Honduras is "Cambodia," and Costa Rica is

"Thailand." Additionally, the Caribbean Sea label was replaced with "Gulf of Tonkin," and a caption on the bottom-right of the drawing is "Now here's my plan…"—perhaps a reference to how the Reagan administration would strategize plans to circumvent the spread of communist aggression coming from Nicaragua (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1983).

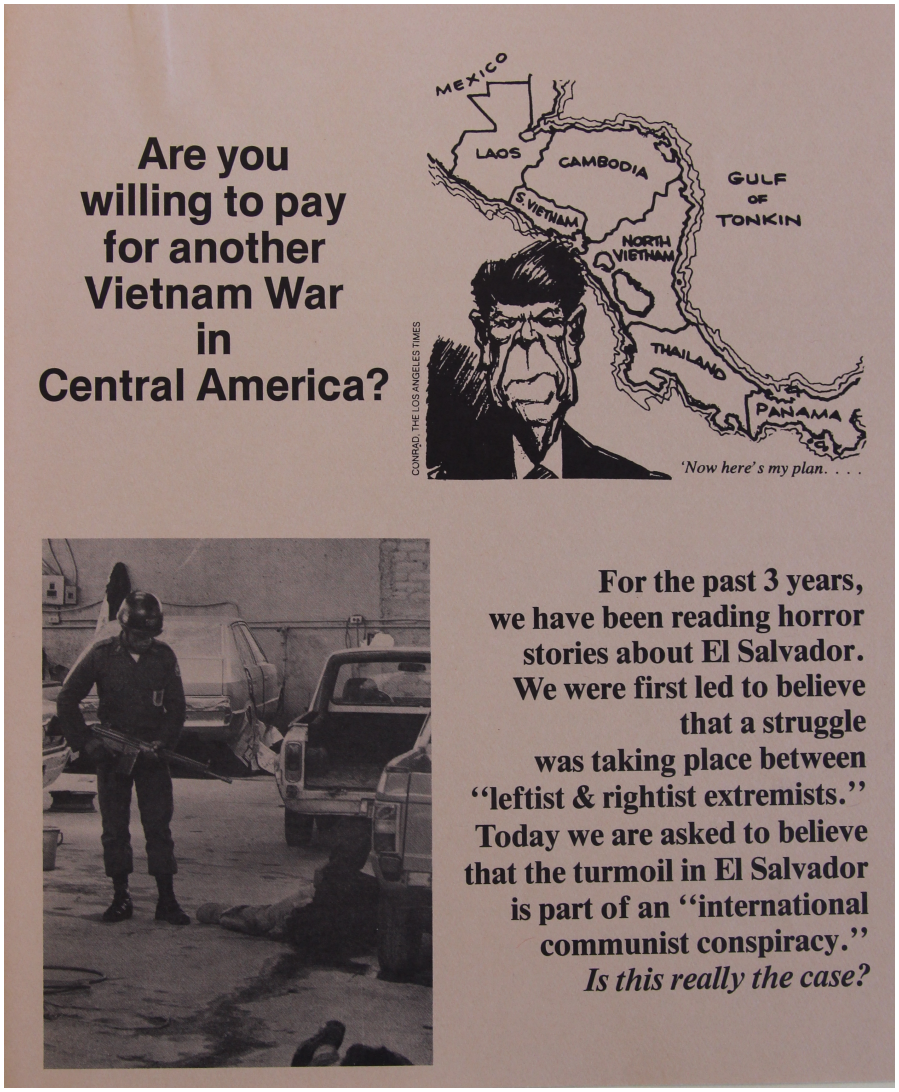

Figure 2.2 "Are you willing to pay for Another Vietnam War in Central America?"

The depiction of El Salvador as South Vietnam and Nicaragua as North Vietnam is a fairly accurate analogy since the Reagan administration viewed Sandinistas as aggressors attempting to spread "soviet- and Cuban-style communism" in "America's own backyard" (Alexander Haig, quoted in Smith, 1996, p. 239). For many Americans who witnessed the effects that the Cuban revolution of 1959 had on that nation-state's relationship with the U.S., evoking Cuba in this context promotes feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. The stable relationship that the U.S. had with Central American countries would soon diminish as it did with the former U.S. colony. By looking towards Cuba and Vietnam as models for revolutions that catered to the poor, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua faced hostility from the Reagan administration. Nowhere is this hostility depicted more clearly in the political cartoon than the grotesque nature of Reagan's face. His decayed and excessively disfigured face made him appear more like a depraved conspiracy leader than a politician who was genuinely concerned about the sociopolitical welfare of nation-states in the isthmus. Additionally, the stark, black shadow behind the president is perhaps a satirical foreshadowing of harmful events to be carried out under his "plan" (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1983). Implied physical violence against the Central American other saturates the image, showing the amount of mistrust the *Los Angeles Times* cartoonist had for Reagan. Pairing a grotesque-looking Reagan with a failed plan of Vietnam-style pacification in the isthmus made this cartoon an apt political satire that critiqued U.S. intervention while providing a window for sentimentality towards those who suffered state-sponsored violence.

On the third quadrant (lower-left-hand side), there is a copy of a black and white photograph. In it, a soldier—presumably Central American, though there is no caption to guide the viewer as to who he is or where and when this photo was taken—is holding a rifle and looking down at a body drenched in blood. A trail of blood flows from the injured person to the bottom edge of the photograph. The picture appears to have been taken outside as the injured person is lying on a concrete ground and next to a car; three other civilian vehicles are in close proximity to each other. Finally, the fourth quadrant has the following quote:

> For the past 3 years, we have been reading horror stories about El Salvador. We were first led to believe that a struggle was taking place between 'leftist & rightist extremists.' Today we are asked to believe that the turmoil in El Salvador is part of an 'international communist conspiracy.' *Is this really the case?* (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1983).

Parallels with Vietnam and El Salvador arise once more, cementing the idea that Central American wars had an emotional and political history with the American public. The title brought attention to Central America as a whole instead of focusing on struggles from a single nation-state. Much like the interplay between visual and written elements from the first pamphlet, the political cartoon is a direct analogy of the idea of a 'Vietnam War in Central America.' The context behind the Reagan administration's 'plan' in Central America was explained once one flips the front page and finds four columns of text, all of which are divided into subsections with the following titles: "Why Revolution," "The two sides in El Salvador," "A Vietnam War in the Making," "International Condemnation of the Junta and U.S. Policy," "Justifying Intervention," "Why?," and "El Salvador Belongs

to its People" (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1983). Thus, this pamphlet provided an analytic and historical approach to understanding the revolutionary struggles in Central America through its various subsections while still relying on images of state violence against the Central American other to engender an emotive response from the reader.

The subsection with the most writing is 'A Vietnam war in the Making,' as it provides a bullet list of information pertinent to U.S. military aid in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Guatemala. The point here (and of the political cartoon in the cover) is to show that the Reagan administration's foreign policies in the isthmus "serve[d] to regionalize conflict and deepen" their level of involvement with Nicaraguan Contra affairs and the war in El Salvador against leftist guerrilla groups (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1983). To CISPES, these regionalized efforts were not new tactics, but direct copies of previously failed military strategies from the Vietnam War. These constant references to a failed war with direct U.S. ties were meant to warn readers of another avoidable war that they, as Americans, were automatically implicated in. This connection—that of a nation-state responsible for wrecking havoc in the Third World, was the type of familiarity Americans needed in order to have sympathetic emotions for the Central American other. CISPES constantly made reference to the connections between these two wars by drawing from outside sources like the *Los Angeles Times* political cartoon, war photographs, and news articles that reported on the physical, state-sanctioned violence that took place in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua.

That CISPES decided to include information on U.S. ties with other Central American countries should not come as a surprise. As I previously mentioned, CISPES

originated with direct ties to El Salvador's revolutionary group, FMLN, and Salvadoran *comités* in the U.S., but its exponential growth rate and increasing public presence led CISPES members to the belief that they should also focus on issues surrounding other Central American countries; mainly, but not exclusively, Guatemala and Nicaragua. This pamphlet follows that line of thinking by showing the rising amount of money the U.S. would spend on military aid in Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and El Salvador by 1984 (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1983). My interest here is not so much to determine the accuracy of each numerical figure, but rather to show that the inclusion of these figures (and the emphasis placed on them) critiqued U.S. dominance and interference in this hemisphere while creating sympathy for the other. In the 'Why?' section, CISPES members write:

> The use of military solutions to resolve the socioeconomic problems of the region is a practice that the United States government has pursued for decades. These practices are based on bullying by armed force rather than developing respect and influence for our country by pursuing justice, human rights and self-determination for the peoples of our hemisphere. After having toppled popular regimes in Guatemala for United Fruit, Chile for Kennecott and Anaconda Cooper, after having militarily invaded the Dominican Republic in 1965 and Granada in 1983, the United States Government is now actively working against a popular movement in El Salvador and undermining one in Nicaragua (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1983).

This critique of U.S. interference in self-governance of the Americas is important because it serves as a counter-narrative that undermines the framing of communist threats stemming from external, 'Soviet- and Cuban-style' intrusions espoused by the Reagan administration. Indeed, following Cold War assumptions and analogies of spreading

communism overlook the fact that El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua were facing *internal* uprisings from a significant portion of peasants and indigenous populations who would no longer tolerate repression from U.S.-backed oligarchies and dictatorships. To this end, the pamphlet argues that the Salvadoran people would have already overcome their oppressive regime were it not for "millions of dollars in outside aid, advisors, and possible troops from an outside power, in this case the United States" (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1983). Thus, what initially started as a visual and written interplay warning readers of another Vietnam War unfurled into a historical overview critiquing U.S. imperialism in much of Latin America. Nonetheless, framing the Salvadoran civil war (and the U.S.'s military strategies taking place in other Central American countries) as the development for 'another Vietnam' brought this war back home for many U.S. citizens who were affected by the U.S.'s previous attempts to 'assist' nation-states in the Third World. The individuals who would potentially face the burden of imperialism would no longer just be peasants in Latin America, but North Americans as well. Taking into account the fact that the purpose of these pamphlets is to incite backlash against the U.S.'s erroneous decisions to intervene in Central America, solidarity activists wanted to circumvent future military and financial aid by referring back to a failed war that was still a fresh wound in the collective memory of many U.S. citizens.

REPRESENTATIONS OF SALVADORANS IN CISPES PAMPHLETS

In addition to drawing on Vietnam and Cold War politics to bring a sense of familiarity to readers, both pamphlets also use graphic images that emphasize gendered

violence and power inequalities existing in El Salvador and surrounding countries. When describing the photographic form, Sontag (2005) argues that photography is a means to interpret reality—"photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it" (p. 3). Such is the case with CISPES pamphlets, as the representation of state-sanctioned violence in the copied photographs became part of the evidence needed by CISPES to counter claims of communist aggression by the Reagan administration. Similar to Barnes's understanding of how sentimental literature works, Sontag (2005) believes that affective responses to photographs are contingent upon some sort of familiar connection with the images: "The quality of feeling, including moral outrage, that people can muster in response to photographs of the oppressed, the exploited, the starving, and the massacred also depends on the degree of their familiarity with these images" (p. 14). Despite noting how photographs can be used for social change, however, she also acknowledges her own concerns on the positionality of photographers. To Sontag, there is something voyeuristic about recording "another person's pain or misfortune" when photographers could opt to help the person (p. 9). Following this valid concern, a reading of images and writings shows the extent to which CISPES relied on examples of masculine states attempting to create docile bodies through physical violence. This overt visual showcasing and written descriptions of disciplined bodies—that is, dead, discomforted, or mutilated bodies, is a strategic function used by these pamphlets to generate sympathy, outrage, and encourage a human connection to the Central American other. By placing copies of photographs that present Salvadoran (and more generally, Central American) subjects as feminized and

submissive victims to aggressive military power, these pamphlets give readers a simplified visual understanding of ongoing events in the isthmus. Unfortunately, these representations leave little room for any type of interpretation that suggests disenfranchised Central American subjects held active roles to push back against their oppression.

Two large photocopied images of war photographs within "The Choice in El Salvador: **WAR OR PEACE**" serve as evidence of state-sanctioned violence and human suffering. Purposely placed together, these saturated images of unequal power and gender dynamics aided CISPES in generating sympathy for the Central American other. Both images are centered between the second and third pages of this pamphlet, causing the crease in the paper to flow straight down the middle of each photograph. Columns of written text are next to the images with the following sections: "Crisis for Washington," "The Program for Peace," "An International Consensus," and "War or Peace?" (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1984, pp. 2-3). The first image (placed directly above the other) is of six young men sitting on the ground and directing their attention to a soldier. The second image shows a group of at least eleven men and women mourning the death of a community member. The photograph appears to have been taken outside, and it is unclear as to whether the deceased person is inside an open casket or being carried by a stretcher.[9] A man next to the dead body has both hands raised with his palms facing the sky as if in prayer.

[9] I must reemphasize that the poor image quality of these copied photographs make it difficult to distinguish details that are normally visible in photographs from the standard 35mm film. I state that

Neither image has captions belonging to the original photographs that direct readers to when or where each event took place. Instead, the written text surrounding these images calls for the support of a proposal for peace by FMLN-FDR, a coalition of guerrilla and political Leftist organizations that were in opposition with the Salvadoran government.[10] This proposal, according to the pamphlet, included a restructured Salvadoran government that excluded politicians from the Right who received direct support from the U.S., "truly free elections" for the Salvadoran people, and the removal of any foreign military base or missiles in Salvadoran territory (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1984, p. 2). The emphasis is not so much on who or what FMLN-FDR was, but on the consequences of military aid and intervention in El Salvador and Honduras. CISPES's focus on the potential for more state-sanctioned violence evokes a sentimental connection to the Central American other by giving a face to the suffering. CISPES does not present readers images of 'terrorists' as the Reagan administration would have it, but of poor community members who were deeply affected by state-sponsored physical violence. Despite not explaining the origins of FMLN-FDR or the people who comprise it, the written texts surrounding the images state that this coalition of people "d[id] not want the U.S. to invade their country"—sentiments that clearly aligned with the majority of U.S. citizens (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1984, p. 2). Furthermore, the section "The Program for Peace" notes that a negotiation for peace was important because the Salvadoran government was engaging in a campaign of terror: "For years, government sponsored

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"at least" eleven men and women are in this photograph because that is the number of distinguishable bodies and faces I could count.

[10] FMLN-FDR: Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) and Frente Democrático Revolucionario (Revolutionary Democratic Front).

'death squads' and their colleagues in the military have terrorized El Salvador. The Catholic Archdiocese blames these forces for the deaths of close to 40,000 non-combatants in recent years" (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1984, p. 2).

Crisis for Washington

For four years a civil war has been raging in El Salvador. The U.S. is backing the corrupt military regime, which is facing a rebellion led by the broadest political coalition in El Salvador's history, the FMLN-FDR.

Recent victories by the opposition forces have brought U.S. policy to a crisis. With their military allies on the run, Washington must soon decide to either send in the Marines or seek a negotiated settlement—decide between war and peace.

The FMLN-FDR, who of course do not want the U.S. to invade their country, have repeatedly offered to discuss a negotiated settlement with the U.S. and the Salvadoran regime. On Jan. 31 they made a *concrete peace proposal* which would end the fighting, bring democracy to El Salvador, and ensure the security of *both* El Salvador *and* the U.S.

The Program for Peace

A Broad-Based Government: The FMLN-FDR's proposal calls for the formation of a *provisional government* including all the political forces of El Salvador willing to participate in a democratic process, but in which no single sector would have absolute control.

Human Rights: For years, government-sponsored "death squads" and their colleagues in the military have terrorized El Salvador. The Catholic Archdiocese blames these forces for the deaths of close to 40,000 non-combatants in recent years. These murderers, and their political party, ARENA, would be the only sector *excluded* from the new government.

Democracy: The provisional government would prepare and hold truly free elections. The Reagan administration, too, has proposed elections as a solution to the Salvadoran conflict. But in Reagan's elections, the death squads participate. The opposition is unable to run, or even appear in public, for fear of government-sponsored murder. The absence of real opposition on the ballot and the climate of terror make these elections meaningless.

The FMLN-FDR's proposal makes clear that the opposition is willing to participate in elections if the current government's campaign of terror is ended *first*.

National Security: Reagan claims that military aid to El Salvador is the only means of guaranteeing U.S. security interests in the area. The FMLN-FDR proposal, however, guarantees the security of *both* El Salvador *and* the U.S. According to the plan, the provisional government would:

- initiate a foreign policy of non alignment;
- agree not to permit foreign military bases or missiles in its territory;
- prohibit its territory from being used to destabilize governments of neighboring countries.

In return, the U.S. would pledge not to promote aggression or destabilizing efforts against either the provisional government or the government formed by the victors in the elections the provisional government would hold.

An International Consensus

An international consensus is developing on this issue. Those on record as opposing further U.S. military escalation and in favor of a political solution include:

- the Catholic Church of El Salvador,
- the U.S. Catholic Church and most Protestant denominations,
- most Latin American countries, including Mexico, Venezuela, Panama and Argentina,
- most governments in Western Europe,
- the United Nations,
- and *the majority of U.S. citizens*, as shown in every major poll.

The Reagan administration has refused to discuss the FMLN-FDR proposal, or even to acknowledge its existence. Nor has the U.S. offered a proposal of its own. Instead, the administration is pressuring Congress to send over $300 million in additional military aid to the Salvadoran regime, while U.S. combat troops are beginning ominous "maneuvers" on El Salvador's border with neighboring Honduras.

War or Peace?

U.S. policy in El Salvador is at an historic crossroads. *One road leads to war*—more money . . . more guns . . . U.S. troops . . . casualties . . . *The other road leads to peace*—negotiations and democratic elections. The FMLN-FDR, the international community, the church, and the American people are choosing peace. *Reagan is choosing war.*

Time is short. Help us make our government choose peace.

Figure 2.3 "The Choice in El Salvador: WAR OR PEACE?," pp. 2-3.

The second photograph is centralized as community members mourn the death of one of their own directly underneath a standing soldier's boots—a symbolic gesture that blames state-sponsored repression as the key factor that inflicted harm on thousands of Salvadorans throughout the eighties. The close-up in both images further implores a more intimate connection to the events taking place and with the people. Furthermore, the physical size of each photograph nearly fills the entire second and third pages of this pamphlet, forcing the reader to visually come to terms with the on-going violence in El

Salvador and militarization in Honduras, whether or not they decide to read the accompanied text. If the readers did decide to read the accompanying descriptions, they would see that the text complemented these images by blaming the high casualty rate on U.S.-backed regimes. In this way, CISPES showed that the images in this pamphlet should not just be seen as snapshots of specific or particular events, but as representative of a broader, institutionalized violence against the Central American other that Americans were implicated in by extension of their government. In fact, it may be more appropriate to view the surrounding written text as the narrative, or caption, that guides readers on the significance of these heavily saturated images. When referring to the use of photographic images by individuals who want to expose inequality and suffering, Sontag (2001) argues that "the caption is the missing voice" that photographs do not have (p. 108). Starting with the image of troops exiting helicopters in the front cover and continuing with the large images of repression inside the pamphlet, CISPES stripped photographs from their original context all the while re-appropriating them for the purpose of showcasing the terror felt by many Central Americans. Taking Sontag's cue, these photographs cannot speak for themselves; the columns of written text describing atrocities in Central America help readers understand these visual images.

The omission of original contexts from each of the photographs inside of "The Choice in El Salvador: **WAR OR PEACE?**" almost makes it seem like whoever designed this pamphlet contributed their own photographs. However, the original photographs were actually taken in El Salvador by prominent war photographers Eugene Richards and Susan Meiselas in 1983 and 1984 respectively. The original caption

belonging to the photograph of military troops, "U.S. Special Forces adviser instructs soldiers in use of M-203 grenade launcher, Ilopango" and the original caption to the photograph of a funeral, "Mother and daughter killed by government bombing, San Francisco Javier," show that each photograph already had their own historical context (Richards, 1983; Meiselas, 1984). Whether intentionally done or not, the omission of original captions and the process of photocopying photographs to the final CISPES pamphlet added an excess amount of black ink that nearly turned people into silhouettes and, to a certain extent, decontextualized the events captured in each photo. Like the image of military troops exiting helicopters, the overbearing distortion of these photocopied images allowed CISPES to present them as broader representations of state-sanctioned physical violence. As a result, sentimentality towards the other did not have to be limited to the individuals in the image mourning at a funeral, but could be extended to all Central American peasants.

"Are you Willing to pay for another Vietnam War in Central America?" follows the logic of sentimentality and saturation through its inclusion of a graphic photograph on the cover and the written description of state-sanctioned violence in the second and third pages. Like the first pamphlet, CISPES forced readers to visually come to terms with violence in the isthmus through a photograph of an injured body. The aggressor is a soldier, with rifle in hand and finger near the trigger as he stands next to the injured person (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1983, p. 1). When paired together, the title "Are *you* willing to pay for another Vietnam War in Central America" and the photographic image actively produce an affective response from the reader—one that would hopefully

question U.S. hegemonic control with an understanding that they, the U.S. citizen, are also implicated in it.[11] Like the previous pamphlet, CISPES strips the photographic image from its original context and re-appropriates it in order to give a face to the ongoing civil wars in the isthmus. The flyer's title and the political cartoon of Reagan focus on Central America as the general location where 'another Vietnam' may occur. Thus, despite CISPES's ultimate concern for the fate of El Salvador, the photographic image may very well be an indication of military repression and state-sanctioned violence occurring *somewhere out there*, in that 'hinge' between North and South (to borrow Arturo Arias's description of Central America) that few Americans knew about. This photograph captures and exploits "another person's pain or misfortune" in order to evoke a realistic scene of military warfare in the Third World (Sontag, 2001, p. 12). Whether readers participated in the anti-intervention movement or not, the familiarity they saw in this image saturated with violence from past warfare in Vietnam could have surely served as a vehicle for moral outrage and, ultimately, sympathy for the other.

The written text inside of the second pamphlet provides a historical account of why a revolution was taking place in El Salvador and critiques U.S. imperialism throughout Latin America. Yet the representation of Salvadorans and other Central Americans still revolved around state-sanctioned violence. For example, the text under 'The Two Sides in El Salvador' introduces U.S. readers to Salvadoran groups who fought against their government's repression as "150 organizations, representing industrial workers, peasants, the Catholic church, small businesspeople, students and teachers,

[11] Italics added for emphasis.

lawyers, and doctors," only to emphasize the amount of state-sanctioned violence enacted on these citizens:

> The real power continues to rest, as it has for over 50 years, with the Salvadoran military, *which carries out a daily campaign of terror and violence of the most extreme kind in order to frighten the people into passivity* (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1983, p. 2).[12]

Actors who were part of the popular revolutionary movement showed that the U.S. was supporting a war waged against a significant portion of the Salvadoran community, not a few Soviet- or Cuban-inspired communists as suggested by the Reagan administration. However, instead of noting the type of work carried out by these groups like labor organizing, staging student and faculty protests, or raising awareness of their own plight in El Salvador and in the diaspora, this pamphlet utilizes most of its space to emphasize the gendered violence these people were subjected to by a state that tried to create docile subjects. In the subsection "A Vietnam War In the Making," for example, CISPES notes that the Reagan administration's foreign policies resulted in the death of 800 Nicaraguans, the training of over 6,000 Honduran soldiers, and increased military aid to Costa Rica, Guatemala, and El Salvador (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1983, p. 2). Additionally, the pamphlet states that from 1980 till 1983, over 80 percent of an estimated 48,000 murders in El Salvador were committed by state-sponsored paramilitary groups (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1983, p. 2). This (re)positioning of subjects (both, Central Americans in the isthmus and in the U.S.) not as activists but as feminized victims of masculinized states provides a reasoning or justification for sympathetic

[12] Italics added for emphasis.

feelings that would lead U.S. readers to act against this terror. The pamphlet quotes articles from the San Francisco *Chronicle* and the London *Times* that reported on Salvadoran and Honduran soldiers killing hundreds of fleeing refugees:

> *Troops with machine guns herded together peasants from La Aranda on May 14, 1980 and gunned them down, while soldiers from both countries, Honduras and El Salvador, shot others fleeing in flocks across the Sampul River. Members of ORDEN, El Salvador's right-wing paramilitary organization, meanwhile threw babies and young children in the air, slashing them with machetes. "**We are killing the children of subversion**," one soldier told a mother.* These horrors have escalated with the recent instigation of the Vietnam-style "pacification" campaign [sic] (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1983, p. 2).

Vivid images of war and suffering make these pamphlets very effective; they force the reader to confront the realities of the suffering and of the dead. By identifying those individuals committing heinous acts as right-wing soldiers supported by the U.S., CISPES pushed a direct link with the U.S. body politic. After all, the U.S. was training Salvadoran and Honduran troops with taxpayer money. These acts, then, like the "killing the children of subversion," heighten the idea of a masculinist state attempting to create docile bodies through the execution of others, but it also brought this war back home for many U.S. citizens. The last pages of both pamphlets presents readers with several opportunities to act and "end all aid" to El Salvador (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1984, p. 4). For example, the first pamphlet lists instructions a reader could follow in order to "choose peace:" They could have either encouraged their representatives in congress to end all aid to the Salvadoran government, volunteered or donated money to CISPES, or subscribed to the "El Salvador Alert!," a newsletter that provided subscribers with up-to-date information on "the situation in Central America and the movement here at home to

prevent another Vietnam war" (CISPES Dallas Chapter, 1984). Similarly, the second pamphlet has a small section on the back where a reader could fill out their personal information along with the type of support they were willing to give the local CISPES chapter. The idea here was to not only feel sympathy for the other, but to use that affective response to take action against Reagan's foreign policies in Central America.

What is puzzling about CISPES is the decision to mark Salvadorans with a sense of political ineptitude in visual and written representations of the civil war—effectively making them seem submissive, infantile, and unable to fight against repressive regimes. After all, the pamphlets also tell us that CISPES members were well aware of the popular revolutionary movements taking place in El Salvador. Furthermore, as I outlined earlier, Central American revolutionaries and exiles living in the U.S. made the creation of this transnational solidarity network possible. Images of dead or discomforted bodies can, at best, serve as martyrs for the sake of gaining sympathy from onlookers; sympathy that would hopefully lead to political action against military aid to El Salvador. While CISPES deserves credit for bringing awareness to the unequal power dynamics in El Salvador that were exasperated by U.S. aid, the stories from Salvadorans themselves did not reach these pamphlets—leaving CISPES members to represent Salvadorans, El Salvador, the isthmus, and the U.S. Nonetheless, in certain circumstances where Central Americans were not already represented in texts, they did speak out against their repression. Their personal accounts in the documentary *El Salvador: Revolution or Death?* (1980) is one place where this occurred.

Chapter 3: Hearing and Seeing the other: Correcting Representations of Salvadorans through Testimonials in *El Salvador: Revolution or Death?*

Thus far, I have shown that representations of Central Americans in CISPES pamphlets strategically highlighted human rights abuses committed by U.S.-backed regimes. Despite the omission of Central American voices and their unsettling representations in pamphlets, however, there were other spaces for these subjects to speak for themselves within the Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement. For example, CISPES sponsored national lecture tours so that Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Nicaraguans could provide testimonies of their experiences as witnesses or victims of repression and violence. In addition, documentary films that featured short and at times, seemingly unrehearsed interviews with Central Americans who experienced or witnessed human rights violations were also screened in CISPES-sponsored events. I draw from Michael Chanan's work on Latin American documentaries and Victor Casaus's reflections on *testimonio* and its influence in documentary films in order to analyze the impact that interviews had in *El Salvador: Revolution or Death?* (1980).

I contend that despite relying on saturated of images showcasing brutalized bodies to generate sympathy for the Central American other, this documentary film presents Salvadoran subjects as self-possessed political actors. Interviews with Salvadorans who witnessed or were victims of state-sponsored violence provided filmmakers and viewers alike with a medium where Salvadorans used their own narratives to show that they were actively involved in the push against repressive regimes. As opposed to written texts,

documentaries like *El Salvador: Revolution or Death?* (1980) gave viewers visual and aural access to first-hand accounts of events from the perspective of Salvadoran subjects. While the narratives of these individuals were still mediated through the documentary form (i.e., a recording and editing processes along with guidance from an interviewer) the inclusion of oral *testimonios* in an audiovisual documentary film made this form different in its affective reach. These narratives were recorded and heard at the same time that Reagan was pushing to aid Salvadoran government in the 1980s; heightening the critical element of urgency in *testimonios* that was effective in solidarity organizing. This form of consciousness-raising is undoubtedly a stark contrast to the way Salvadorans were represented in CISPES pamphlets, yet the documentary still functions in such a way that it invites sentiments of sympathy for the other.

DOCUMENTARIES AS TOOLS FOR SOLIDARITY ORGANIZING

As one of the first documentaries on El Salvador's civil war, it served a didactic purpose for English-speakers in the U.S. and Europe who might not have been aware of the developing war in that country. In "Left, Right, Center: El Salvador on Film," Pat Aufderheide (1990) notes that CISPES has been an organization that "regularly use[d] Leftist documentaries in its organizing" efforts during the eighties (p. 164). Indeed, in addition to *El Salvador: Revolution or Death?* (1980), films in the CISPES-Dallas chapter papers include: *El Salvador: Another Vietnam*, *Radio Venceremos: Tiempo de Victoria*, and *American M.D., Working with FMLN*—all of which encouraged sympathetic connections with the Leftist popular movements at the time. I chose to

analyze *El Salvador: Revolution or Death?* (1980) because this documentary has received minimal attention in Central American scholarship, having only been mentioned in passing by Van Gosse. To date, only *Jump Cut*, a magazine on contemporary media, has published a review of this film (Steven, 1981). The lack of literature on this documentary is surprising since it is the only film in the CISPES archives that was not produced by U.S. or Salvadoran filmmakers.

The fact that Dutch filmmakers traveled to El Salvador to make a documentary film about the country's civil war highlights the degree to which this solidarity movement was vast and international in its reach.[13] As *Jump Cut's* reviewer put it, these "filmmakers have achieved a concrete act of solidarity with the people of a Third World country" (Steven, 1981). The filmmakers' decision to record scenes among *campesinos* and union organizers was a departure from the way U.S. citizens would typically watch news. Capturing human suffering and institutionalized violence gave viewers an intimate look at a war that their country was deeply invested in. Furthermore, since the film is narrated in English (and includes English subtitles when Salvadorans were interviewed), it was likely one of many educational films distributed throughout a large national solidarity network by organizations like the New York City-based El Salvador Film and Video Project. As a distributor, this NGO provided "films about El Salvador for educational purposes. The organization also assist[ed] in the processing and subtitling of films" for other groups that wanted to screen documentary films in their local events

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[13] Frank Diamand also traveled to Nicaragua to cover the socioeconomic conditions in that country along with the Sandinista movement against the Somoza dictatorship. The film that resulted from this coverage is titled *Nicaragua, September 1978*.

(CARECEN, 1985, p. 141). Community organizers would only need to consult the *Directory of Central America Organizations*, a book-length directory produced in 1985 by the Austin, Texas-based chapter of Central American Resource Center (CARECEN) that includes contact information for over a thousand NGOs in solidarity with Leftist movements in the isthmus. The existence of this directory and documentaries like *El Salvador: Revolution or Death?* (1980) shows that Central American solidarity activists did not view mainstream news outlets as adequate or reliable sources for the purpose of learning about why revolutionary movements were taking place. As such, CAPSM activists treated documentaries as one of their news sources that would serve a similar purpose as Witness for Peace trips. As opposed to traditional news outlets, these films allowed U.S. citizens to 'witness' human suffering and become sympathetic towards the Central American other wherever they had access to a television set.

Funded by the World Council of Churches and directed by Frank Diamand, *El Salvador: Revolution or Death* (1980) provides a gut-wrenching perspective of the escalating political tensions in El Salvador. As part of what is widely referred to as the New Latin American Cinema movement, new technologies within the film industry like 16mm film provided filmmakers with access to affordable video equipment and the flexibility needed to leave filming studios. The end result was a revolutionary method of recording the world. Instead of creating reenactments of events in studios, documentary filmmakers were able to join communities in urban centers or rural sites and record events as they unfolded without the use of scripts, creating carefully planned scenes, or hiring paid actors (Chanan, 1990, p. 33). The didactic function of documentary films in

Latin America stemmed from an effort to question the depictions of Latin America by commercial cinema and "present[ing] an image of authentic reality as it was and could not in all conscience otherwise be shown" (Chanan, 1990, p. 38). While the idea of showing an 'authentic reality' is certainly problematic, documentary filmmakers in the late seventies and early eighties were actively critiquing and countering state discourses that dismissed social movements as threatening communist invasions. In the case of El Salvador, filmmakers responded to the U.S. and Salvadoran governments by producing documentaries that critiqued the "Salvadoran army's inefficiency and corruption" (Aufderheide, 1990, p. 161). For segments of Diamand's documentary, this critique came at the cost of showcasing dead and injured bodies to the point of oversaturation.

SATURATING THE DOCUMENTARY: RECURRING IMAGES OF SUFFERING

For *El Salvador: Revolution or Death?* (1980), saturated violence and suffering is evident in its own title. Diamand and his film crew were likely influenced to give their documentary the title 'Revolution or Death' after recording a young man writing that slogan onto a wall, in Spanish, with what appeared to be blood. As a succinct slogan, the phrase 'revolution or death' present an ultimatum that many Salvadoran peasants faced. That is, their only options for emancipation from state violence was to join a revolution or to die fighting. The image of this young man's impromptu act was part of a barrage of scenes that showcased state-sanctioned violence inflicted on the people of El Salvador.

The opening sequence of *El Salvador: Revolution or Death?* (1980) juxtaposes political discourse with the state's attempt to create docile bodies through violence. Two

audio clips are played simultaneously—El Salvador's national anthem is playing in the background while a radio announcer's voice is heard in the foreground warning his compatriots of a communist invasion:

> Salvadorans, our country is in jeopardy. Communism threatens our freedom. If we don't act now, tomorrow we will be slaves. Let's fight but without bloodshed…for justice, peace, and work. Remember that it is your civic duty to participate actively and bravely in the fight. Our country is in jeopardy (Diamand, 1980).

This audio gives the opening sequence an ironic tone. While these clips play simultaneously, a camera pans through an empty upper-middle class neighborhood in El Salvador—perhaps a gesture towards the idea that at stake was the political and economic security of the few who could afford to live in these communities. The film quickly cuts to other scenes where men, perhaps military troops wearing civilian clothes and armed with rifles drag men and women into the National Guard headquarters. Other scenes show dead bodies surrounded by mourning mothers and wives. Thus, the viewers' introduction to El Salvador was images of chaos, confusion, and violence, though this violence was mainly coming from state actors and inflicted on civilians. The discourse espoused by the Salvadoran radio announcer was akin to the one constantly used by the Reagan administration (and that appeared in U.S. newspapers), yet their relevance held little weight once this film showed the amount of physical violence enacted by the state. The filmmakers' conscious choice to record events without censorship saturated this documentary with human suffering while openly opposing state-sponsored discourse. While this tactic was similar to the one used by CISPES pamphlets, *El Salvador:*

Revolution or Death? (1980) also included an additional element to gain the attention of viewers and engender stronger sympathy towards the Central American other.

The use of interviews with victims of state-sponsored violence and local organizers made this film a critical didactical tool. By acknowledging Salvadoran subjectivities, it showed the perspectives of people who faced disenfranchisement—people whose voices communities worldwide might not otherwise have heard. Through the use of interviews, a projection of the other's voices equipped documentaries and their supporting solidarity groups with testimonies of human rights violations in the isthmus.

SEEING AND HEARING THE CENTRAL AMERICAN OTHER

John Beverley highlights the essential role that personal narratives, or *testimonios* played in Latin American popular movements. He states that *testimonio* is typically a "novel or novella-length narrative, produced in the form of a printed text, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events she or he recounts. Its unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience" (Beverley, 2000, p. 555). In borrowing René Jara's use of narration, Beverley argues that *testimonio* is a "narración de urgencia'—an 'emergency' narrative—involving a problem of regression, poverty, marginality, exploitation, or simply survival that is implicated in the act of narration itself" (p. 556). While Beverley's work mainly focuses on *testimonio* as a literary and anti-literary genre, Chanan (1990) offers a category of interviews and filming style called *cine testimonio* that can help unpack the stylistic elements specific to documentary films and *El Salvador: Revolution or Death?* (1980). This theory was

developed via the reflections of Victor Casaus, a Cuban documentarian and poet, about the influence that *testimonio* (as a literary/anti-literary genre) had on Cuban films. Casaus notes four distinct characteristics of this theory:

> First, rapid and flexible filming of unfolding reality without subjecting it to a preplanned narrative mise-en-scène; second, choosing themes of broad national importance; third, employing an audacious and intuitive style of montage…and lastly, using directly filmed interviews both for the narrative functions they are able to fulfill and because they provide the means of bringing popular speech to the screen.[14]

According to Casaus's understanding of this filming style, the documentary acts as the audiovisual iteration of *testimonio*. In *El Salvador: Revolution or Death?* (1980), for example, filmmakers captured events in El Salvador without the use of a script or paid actors; cameramen recorded acts of state-sanctioned violence against citizens, urban warfare (including bomb explosions and riots during Monseñor Romero's funeral), revolutionary marches, and press conferences with government officials (Casaus, 1982; Diamand, 1980). Of course, the inclusion of scenes like warfare and the display of dead bodies in public can be problematic and interpreted as sensationalizing violence. However, it is this in fact this strategy, with the inclusion of personal narratives from Salvadoran subjects, which encouraged a sympathetic connection to the Central American other. In sum, by synthesizing the theories of *testimonio* and *cine testimonio,* we can analyze the stylistic elements used in *El Salvador: Revolution or Death?* (1980) like the use of interviews as they relate to engendering sympathy for the Central American other.

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[14] Translated and summarized by Chanan (1990, p. 42).

What interests me about this documentary is the use of short and seemingly unrehearsed interviews with Salvadoran peasants who experienced or witnessed human rights violations. Towards the end of the film, a young farmer shared his personal narrative (or *testimonio*) to filmmakers and, by extension, an international audience (since his personal narrative is fairly long, I included it in the appendix). A brief overview of his testimony follows here: This young man was on his way to fulfill a task for the farmer's cooperative he belonged to in a rural town and met with two of his friends. Military police that were stationed nearby noticed the friends and assumed that they were guerrilla members. They then stopped the three friends and questioned them about their whereabouts. The narrator and his friends were tortured, beaten, and shot in the head. Later, the military police ran their vehicle over each of the bodies. The narrator was assumed to be dead, but miraculously survived the tragedy. As the farmer tells his story, the camera zooms into his face for a tight frame that exposes a large bullet wound near his nose. The cameraman then zooms out and attempts to follow the farmer's hand gestures as he makes subtle reenactments to show how the military police tied his thumbs together, put a gun on his head, and attempted to run him over (Diamand, 1980). At no time does the director ask this person a question; as far as viewers are concerned, the filmmakers simply allowed the farmer to tell his story with no interruption. The editing is seamless to the point where one might be convinced that the farmer's narrative was filmed in one take.

The farmer's narrative is interesting because the filmmakers provided him with an international platform to demonstrate his agency and subjectivity by identifying his status

as a member of a farmer's cooperative. Surely, his membership in a cooperative showed he pushed back against companies that attempted to exploit their employees or that his political beliefs did not align with those that supported the privatization of agriculture. Additionally, he provides background information about the ways in which local military police protected the properties of businessmen, identified the actors who committed violence against him and his friends as members of the local militarized police, and gave a detailed account of how these soldiers murdered his friends and disposed of their bodies (Diamand, 1980). In Casaus's view, the act of interviewing people "represented in principle the rescue of a popular voice, its richness as an instrument of communication and [the filmmaker's] affirmation to authenticity" (p. 100)[15]. Thus, the act of interviewing peasants was key because viewers could grow a sentimental connection to the Central American other. By seeing and hearing the personal narratives of Salvadorans themselves, viewers can put a human face to the social suffering. They can 'witness' from afar the type of state-sponsored terror that the U.S. supported, making their sentimental connection stronger with the Central American other than the nation-states that tried to discipline them.

Two other short narratives from labor union members in a San Salvador refugee camp appear after the young farmer's *testimony* and provide the same emotive effect. This time, a woman and a man were prompted by an interviewer to explain why they were living in refugee camps. Both provided similar answers: as members of labor unions who organized for fair wages, they became targets for murder by the right wing death

[15] Translation is my own.

squads. Despite their relocation to a refugee center, however, both of these *campesinos* identified as active members of their labor unions. As members of organizations that aimed to change the U.S.-backed sociopolitical and economic system in El Salvador, the peasants interviewed in this documentary were representative of a mass group of people who were codified as communist radicals and threats to the autonomy of El Salvador. By openly questioning the status quo of their country, student activists, university professors, labor union members, members of cooperatives, and those who showed support towards FMLN increased their chances of becoming targets of repression by a masculine and militarized government.

The personal narratives provided by campesinos in *El Salvador: Revolution or Death?* (1980) are parallel forms to monograph-length *testimonios*; they carry similar political implications and a sense of urgency. The difference here is that viewers heard the narratives directly from Salvadoran subjects who openly denounced their country's military regime to an international audience. This public act of defiance of hegemonic power—from joining a cooperative to publically testifying about El Salvador's state-sanctioned violence—shows international viewers that Salvadorans were not disciplined and docile bodies. Instead, they were very much in charge of a movement against U.S.-backed violence targeted against them. Personal narratives like the ones in this documentary correct an unsettling consequence of the visual representations of Central American subjects in CISPES pamphlets; that is, the gendered transformation of victims into feminized and mute historical subjects possessing no agency. It is in the act of providing these personal narratives that Central American subjects are able to remind

U.S. residents of their 'political efficacy' in the fight against their own repression. Even if these Salvadoran subjects were relegated to the role of victimized subjects, they could still claim their roles as members of revolutionary movements through their own narratives in the form of *cine testimonios*. Additionally, by putting a face and urgent voice to those who suffered state-sanctioned violence, these *testimonios* garnered a sympathetic connection towards the Central American other.

Conclusion

This study has examined the representations of Salvadorans and other Central Americans in film, visual, and written texts used by the Dallas chapter of CISPES during the eighties. While the representations of Central American subjects in CISPES pamphlets were strategic in showing the oppressive conditions that the U.S. helped fund, these images also overlooked the fact that Central Americans played essential roles in their fight against their countries repressions and U.S. foreign policies. Susan Sontag's scholarship on the ideological workings of war photography and Elizabeth Barnes's work on sentimental literature provide a theoretical framework to analyze the effectiveness of visual and rhetorical tactics used in CISPES pamphlets. CISPES's focus on poor Central Americans as feminized victims of state-sponsored violence meant that similar but different struggles in the isthmus were homogenized and misrepresented. I show that pamphlets created and distributed by CISPES relied on over-saturated images and written descriptions of state-sanctioned physical violence inflicted on Central Americans in order to generate sympathy for the other.

Constant parallels between U.S. involvement in Central America during the eighties with the Vietnam War through tropes like "another Vietnam" were strategic in developing a sense of familiarity for Americans who were critical of U.S. intervention in Indochina and the Third World at large. Furthermore, these saturated images and written texts served as counter-narratives to political discourses espoused by the Reagan administration. As such, photocopied images showcasing masculine combat troops

exiting helicopters and soldiers committing physical harm towards feminized communities were essential to engender emotive responses from readers. Whether the exclusive representation of Central American peasants as feminized victims of state terror was intentional or not, they certainly proved to be effective in serving as counter narratives to the state-sponsored discourse at the time and encouraged disapproval towards U.S. foreign affairs in the isthmus.

My review of the Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement shows that while the Dallas chapter of CISPES created awareness about U.S. foreign affairs to local community members, Central Americans were also active within this movement and their own transnational solidarity efforts. Central Americans in the isthmus and exiles living abroad were not docile and submissive subjects, but self-possessed actors who actively fought against U.S.-backed political repression. The absence of Central Americans' contributions towards forming the base for CAPSM in CISPES pamphlets is discomforting at best, yet this silence is what allowed the saturated images of physical violence to be so effective for the purpose of engendering sympathy for the other. Nonetheless, I contend that sympathy could be garnered without the need to misrepresent Central Americans as docile. It is for this reason that analyzing *El Salvador: Revolution or Death?* (1980) is important.

In my analysis of *El Salvador: Revolution or Death?* (1980), I argued that individuals showed their subjectivities and agency even when introduced as victims of state-sanctioned violence. Michael Chanan's scholarship on Latin American documentary filmmaking, John Beverley's theory of *testimonio,* and Victor Casaus's reflections on the

influence of *testimonio* on Cuban cinema, provided a framework to analyze the effectiveness of stylistic elements of *El Salvador: Revolution or Death?* (1980) as a documentary within the New Latin American Cinema movement. Falling under the category of *cine testimonio,* filmmakers worked under precarious conditions in El Salvador—recording urban warfare, state-sanctioned physical violence on community members, and personal narratives from Salvadorans who identified as members of cooperatives and labor unions. By doing so, this documentary did not solely rely on over-saturated images of violence on the Central American other. It provided peasants with a platform to represent themselves, albeit still through a mediated form. While I acknowledge that the narratives of these individuals were still mediated through the documentary form (i.e., a recording and editing processes along with guidance from an interviewer), I contend that their personal narratives are different in their affective reach. In-between harrowing scenes showcasing dead and brutalized bodies were also instances where Salvadorans challenged assumptions of their political ineptness and reminded U.S. residents of their own prominence within the Central American solidarity movement.

Appendix

Testimony from young farmer:

> I was on my way to the country to fulfill a task for the cooperative. I had to go to the co-op. On the way I met two friends. We went along walking. We passed a *hacienda* which had been taken over. The government has put soldiers in the *haciendas* to take care of them. So we went along and talked. When we had passed the hacienda and the soldiers, I suggested that we should go and drink some water. Then the soldiers noticed us. When we left the store they made us stop. We stopped and they searched us. I had only my papers in my pocket. But one of the others had a small pistol in his pocket. So the soldiers said we were guerrillas, and tied us by our thumbs and they blindfolded us. After we were tied up, we were brought to the *hacienda*. In the *hacienda* they kicked and hit us. From there they took us to the barracks in Zacatecoluca. There they threw us in a sort of room. It wasn't a cell, but a kind of cellar. They just threw us there—the three of us. We were tortured twice a day. After six days they were fed-up as we didn't talk. So the rural police took us away, secretly…at midnight, in a truck. They threw us out in the middle of a deserted road and started to trample on us. Wanting to make it look like a car had run over us. We were sitting there, kneeling and with our hands tied up. They were going to kill me first. They took my handcuffs off and pointed a pistol here (points at head). Then they took my blindfold off. And then they shot me. I screamed and fell, as if I were dead. The other two tried to run away and were killed. I heard all those shots. Then they shot them in the face with their G-3's. And then they ran over their heads. Next they lifted me by hair from the ground. I hung there with my face like this with my hands (covers face with hands). Then they threw me down again. They bounced me up and down to see if I was still alive. I breathed very carefully and didn't make a sound. Then they got into the truck and drove towards me. They accelerated but missed me. The first time, they accelerated but missed me. The second time it brushed my hand and my leg. The third time it brushed my head. So the truck grabbed my forehead. Then they said that I was finished off (picture of his face after the incident appears on the screen). They got the other two bodies together—I heard everything they were saying—they said they would dump the two corpses near La Libertad and then come back for me to dump it somewhere else. As soon as they'd gone off with the two corpses, I got up and ran away.[16]

[16] (Diamand, 1980)

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