

**FEMALE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN EL SALVADOR:  
MODIFICATIONS IN GENDER ROLES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS  
ON THE ELECTION PROCESS**

**Anna-Lena Neld\***

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\* LAIS-University of Stockholm



## I. INTRODUCTION

Until recent years theories on women's participation have focused on a continuous context of study either on the situation of women during revolutionary turmoil or during institutionalized life processes. The proliferation of peace settlements after the end of the Cold War has introduced new inquiries in what concerns the transformation of a social group involved in civil wars into an institutionalized political activity. Yet, the issue conveys with one of the most important aspects of the societal transition towards democracy in many countries around the world in Asia in Eastern Europe, Africa and Latin America.

The paper addresses the changes and forms of manifestation of the female political force in a country: El Salvador, where relevant modifications during the civil war have recently been connected with the peace settlement and a relative successful election process. The idea is to examine whether women managed to preserve the modifications in gender roles after end of the Salvadoran civil war or if they did not succeed in maintaining the alterations; did they use another instrumental outlet for the political mobilization acquired during the war? The first part examines the already mentioned gender alterations during the 1980s until the peace negotiations in 1989. The second part gives an account on women's political activism at the time of the elections, and formulates an hypothesis on the continuous interaction between guerrilla movements and civil organizations.

### *1. Context*

On July 17. 1979. Nicaragua had a revolution which ousted the dictator Somoza. The event had an enormous impact on the Salvadoran people and it exacerbated the already imbalanced relations which existed in Salvadoran society. The classical antagonisms; rich versus poor radical versus reactionary political

factions rural and urban and the white versus the Indian complexity truly fragmented the Salvadoran society. This also applied to some extent to women who also needed a different social framework. In Nicaragua women played an active role in the overthrow of Somoza and they demonstrated the importance of women's participation in the aftermath of the revolution. It legitimized in Salvadoran women's eyes their participation in the revolutionary movement.

Women's participation in the Salvadoran civil war was stimulated by a number of factors. A very important one was the role of the church. The 1962-1965 Vatican II Council called for an acceptance of change towards social justice, and it also took a great interest in theories of modernization and development. Vatican II combined receptiveness to the study and promotion of social change with a commitment to seeing the ministry of God's word promoted throughout the world <sup>1</sup>. One of the most important aspects to come out of the Vatican II Council and the subsequent Bishops meeting in Medellin was the creation of Christian Base Communities and the doctrine of liberation theology <sup>2</sup>. Initially the CBC's were small groups gathered around to discuss the Bible, but consequently they became an instrument of mobilizing the communities into taking affirmative action. For instance the rural development center (CEPROR) held special courses involving such subjects as health nutrition and community organizing, especially catering to women <sup>3</sup>.

Another important aspect was the government's actions. As government repression destroyed many homes and disrupted normal family life the family household composition changed approximately 70 percent of all Salvadoran families were headed by women. In many villages one could only find old people children and women. The demographic change in the family pattern was a major contributing factor in the shift in gender roles. By 1973 approximately 40% of the urban households were run by women. This implied that women's salaries did not have a complimentary role but constituted an essential source of income <sup>4</sup>. As a natural outcome women assumed a public role and many became active in the CBCs since they could offer assistance in such matters as child-care

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1. Tommie Sue Montgomery. *Revolution in El Salvador: Origins and Evolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982): 97-115.
  2. Liberation theology obliged people to rethink their beliefs. It talks about the active believer working to help the poor and the oppressed. This line of reasoning became well-used by most progressive Christians in Latin America.
  3. Marilyn Thomson. *Women of El Salvador. The Price of Freedom* (Great Britain: the Bath Press. Avon. 1986): 50.
  4. T. David Mason. 76-77.

services<sup>5</sup>. Out of these organizational groups a number of women's organizations were formed catering to women's different needs during that particular time. Initially they were seen as source of economic assistance but subsequently they took on a more participatory role. The most prominent ones during this time were the Association of Salvadoran Women (AMES), the National Association of Salvadoran Teachers (ANDES), the Association of Progressive Women of El Salvador (AMPES), and the Association of Market Vendors and Workers (ASUTRAMES) Many of them were in some way affiliated with the *Frente Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front* (FMLN), organized strikes demonstrations, and encouraged women to join trade unions and political organizations. Thus they were viewed as being directly linked to the revolutionary movement prompting the political regime to start pursuing the movements and the leaders as well<sup>6</sup>. As an outcome of increased repression many of these organizations went underground and their members became directly involved in the guerrilla movements.

Women who were not directly involved in any organizational activity were still involuntarily drawn into the conflict. They became injured or killed in the contexts of generalized violence massacres and the burning of villages<sup>7</sup>. In many instances women were made to suffer for the actions of their husbands. If a husband was actively involved in the FMLN, the wife would most likely be under a constant threat of being killed or tortured in prison. As a matter of fact many women who had been in prison returned to their homes only to find that it was no longer there. They then decided to join the revolutionary movement.

Thus the teachings of the Christians Base Communities and the subsequent formation of women's organizations provided some women with certain organizational skills which in some instances was an advantage when entering the FMLN as a combatant. As has been stated the Nicaraguan revolution and the participation of women in the revolutionary movement served as a role model form many Salvadoran women. In combination with the above-mentioned factors many women joined for personal reasons: their husband or brother were already in the revolutionary movement.

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5. David T. Mason. "Women's Political Participation in Central American Revolutions. A Theoretical Perspective". In *Comparative Political Studies* (Vol. 25, N° 1, April 1992): 79.

6. Ibid. 175-198.

7. Ximena Bunster-Burotto. "Surviving Beyond Fear: Women and Torture in Latin America", in June Nash and Helen I Safa contributors. *Women and Change in Latin America*. (Massachusetts: Bergen and Garvey Publishers. 1980): 297.

## II. MODIFICATIONS

The changes in gender roles could be observed at several levels within the FMLN, and in the surrounding society as well. When the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) was formed in 1980 it was comprised of more than twenty organizations, political parties, labor federations and mass fronts. The popular organizations had a female representation of fifty percent <sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, it encouraged the creation of internal organizations conducive to women's participation. Many of these organizations were bound by close ties to the Catholic Church and the doctrine of liberation theology.

Within the FMLN controlled zones, women became active in the Association of Salvadoran Women (AMES), affiliated with the FMLN. The organization worked on promoting several women's issues and encouraging female mobilization. Women were also found in the cooperatives and in the Popular Power Councils, which in some villages had a woman's wing. In Chalatenango, for example AMES, was fully represented at the executive level <sup>9</sup>.

Given the encouragement and acquired organizational skills many women sought to enter the FMLN as combatants participating at all levels. Women were found in the militias, the production cooperatives and in security patrols. Approximately 30 percent of the FMLN membership consisted of women. The Democratic Revolutionary Front also embodied a high percentage of women 40 percent; the same applied to the People's Revolutionary Army. Other guerrilla organizations such as the Popular Revolutionary Bloc and the Popular Forces of Liberation also had women in their respective organization <sup>10</sup>. Many of the combat fronts had two or three women *comandantes* <sup>11</sup>.

Some women obtained high posts within the guerrilla command; Ana Guadalupe Martinez became a member of the FDR-Political-Diplomatic Commission and the late Ana Maria was the second-in-command of the Popular Forces of Liberation (FPL). Others worked in a variety of fields, affiliated to the Salvadoran armed opposition: Norma Guervara was a member of the FDR-FMLN Commission on Information; Marianella Garcia Villas, president of the Commission on Human Rights in El Salvador; Nidia Diaz, high commander of the FMLN; Lorena Peña, member of the Political-Diplomatic Commission and

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8. Tommie Sue Montgomery, 151.

9. Marilyn Thomson, 123-125.

10. T. David Mason, 64-65.

11. Brenda Carter et. al. *A Dream Compels Us. Voices of Salvadoran Women* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989): 89, 147. See also Marilyn Thomson. 127.

former commander, and Illena, the leader of a female squadron <sup>12</sup>. It is interesting to note the dispersion of women's activities within the FDR-FMLN, women were found practically at all levels in most organizations.

In December 1981, the ail-women Silvia Battalion was created in the mountains of San Pedro in the San Vicente region. Most of its members came from other battalions, but some came directly from the civilian population. The battalion was composed of three squadrons, each one with its proper female commander. According to them the reason for its creation was not to reflect prejudice against the male battalions, but to demonstrate women's multifaceted abilities. However it should be noted that the battalion managed to use some of the classical prejudice against women taking up arms:

The enemy became particularly demoralized when they realized that it was a unit of women behind the line of fire making them retreat <sup>13</sup>.

Before an offensive in February of 1982, there had been no other female battalions in the area. This changed when women from the Revolutionary party of Central American Workers (PRTC) and the Revolutionary Army of the People (ERP) created new women's battalions in the area. Another battalion, the so-called Anti-Yankee Battalion, included about 250 women <sup>14</sup>.

Another interesting outgrowth of these battalions was that military schools were established, especially for women. The Sylvia battalion had a school named *Ernesto Che Guevara* where students studied theory combined with practical exercises. In the province of Chalatenango, another training school opened for women interested in joining the military command. After a six-month course, women trainees were asked to conduct an army ambush as proof of their military capabilities. If they proved successful, there were sent to a different battalion <sup>15</sup>.

In many ways life in the camps differed from life in urban and rural settings; not in terms of political mobilization, but with regards to regulations on human conduct. Life in a battalion followed very strict rules. At 4:45 am all members would get up, followed by 15 minutes of organizational activity and a subsequent political briefing <sup>16</sup>. Thus, the entire day was filled with various activities related to combat life. The fact that life was so minutely organized made it possible for

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12. —, — *Norma. Vida Insurgente y Feminista* (El Salvador: CEMUJER, 1992): 64-65.

13. Marilyn Thomson, 128.

14. CEMUJER, 70. See also T. David Mason, 65.

15. Marilyn Thomson, 127-128. See also T. David Mason, 65.

16. CEMUJER, 101.

men and women to concentrate on their assignments, putting trivial matters aside. This application was further helped by the strict social rules, which the FMLN imposed on its members:

A separation has [had] to be discussed with the commanders and difficulties in the relationship explored...

When sexual relations occur [occurred] outside a recognized couple, normally the man is [was] demoted from whatever position he holds [held].

Rape is [was] a crime which is [was] very severely punished.

The man involved has [had] to go before a tribunal composed of the military units of the man and woman involved, which decides [decided] on the punishments <sup>17</sup>.

Another relevant aspect, related to the previous issue, involved child-care activities. In many camps it was not uncommon to see the elders, or relatively young male combatants, taking care of the children. In some guerrilla grounds day-care centers were established to make full use of women's participation in the revolutionary movement <sup>18</sup>. However, it should be noted that there were contradictions, among them the difficulty some people had in accepting the changes in gender roles:

The first time I came up against a woman commander ... I felt it was wrong.

Wrong to trust a woman with the responsibility of leading a hundred soldiers on a mission. I was convinced she would muck the whole thing up <sup>19</sup>.

Nevertheless, modifications in gender roles occurred. The alterations, such as the establishment of exclusively female battalions, and training schools were novel in El Salvador and had an important impact in shaping the future role of Salvadoran women after the signing of the Peace-Accords.

### III. THE DEMOCRATISATION PROCESS

In reality the first peace negotiations started already in 1981 when the FMLN took the initiative, but was refuted by the government and the United States. It was not until 1984 that negotiations commenced at a more concrete

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17. Marilyn Thomson, 130.

18. Ibid, 127-128.

19. Marilyn Thomson, 127.



level following a proposal by President Duarte, of the Christian Democratic Party, to hold talks in La Palma in Chalatenango <sup>20</sup>.

The final round of negotiations in the pursuit of peace in El Salvador did not start until January 1990, when the five Central American presidents requested the United Nations to become involved and mediate between the two opposing factions. The two sides agreed to meet to discuss a political solution to the conflict and to reintegrate the FMLN into Salvadoran society. On September 25, 1991 the two parties met again in New York to sign the New York City Accord <sup>21</sup>. This accord dealt with the establishment of a new electoral authority; the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (*Tribunal Supremo Electoral*, TSE), the constitution of a the National Commission for Consolidation and Peace (*Comisión Nacional para la Consolidación de la Paz*, COPAZ). The final agreement, the Accords of *Chapultepec* was signed in January 1992. The key provisions of the Peace Accords constituted the following elements: military reform, the establishment of a national civilian police, judicial reforms, and social issues. The military reform is of interest since it discussed the demobilization of the FMLN. By the end of the year most of the FMLN's military equipment was demolished. Synchronously with the demolition of the military structure, the FLMN became a legal political party <sup>22</sup>.

The process of becoming a political party with a unified political structure and a consistent platform proved to be difficult. Since the FMLN is composed of five parties; Popular Forces of Liberation (FPL), Revolutionary Popular Army (ERP), National Resistance (RN), Communist Party of El Salvador (PCS), and Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers (PRTC), it was difficult to reach consensus on a variety of subjects. The fundamental cause of disagreement was different orientations on how the future should be formed; more support for a political center or encourage the center left <sup>23</sup>.

### 1. *The Outcome for Women*

Now, given the national political evolution, the demobilisation process, and the transformation of the FMLN into a political structure; how did these changes

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20. Göran Holmqvist, Anders Pedersen & Torgny Svenungsson. *El Salvador: en landstudie* (Stockholm, Sweden: Latinamerika-institutet, 1993): 31-32.

21. United States Department of State. *Background Notes: El Salvador* (Washington, DC. Bureau of Public Affairs. Vol. IV, N° 2): 3.

22. *Ibid*, 5.

23. Tommie Sue Montgomery. "Report on Trip to El Salvador, 3-18 August, 1993". (Atlanta, Georgia: Southern Center for International Studies): 2.

affect the big political capital, i.e. the position of women, at the political level? How could the Salvadoran women succeed in transforming the female mobilization force, created during the war, into a normal political element, i.e. incorporation into the political system? The assumption made in the beginning of this paper, that the modifications in gender roles would have an impact on the future on the future mobilization of women, is a pertinent factor in this examination. The most logical and apparent way to examine the extent to which the transformation process has occurred is to observe how women performed during the elections.

## 2. *The Election Process*

The elections of March 24, 1994 can be seen as the culmination of the Peace Process. The FMLN would for the first time participate as a political party, and be part of the political structure of the country. The elections were important for the country not only because this was the first time the main opposition force participated in a democratic peace-time election, but there was also a good opportunity for the FMLN to prove its civil establishment, since there would be elections at all political levels: the municipal, the legislative and the presidential one.

After reviewing the data available, the outlook reveals some interesting aspects. Primarily, there were some positive inclinations. There were four women candidates for the Supreme Court, which has never occurred previously. One of them, Dra. Anita Calderon de Buitrago, attorney for the Defence of Human Rights, received more votes than any other candidate. However, it should be noted that there were 136 lawyers competing, among them eleven female nominees, which translates into a percentage of 7.5<sup>24</sup>. Another interesting phenomenon was that one of the party leaders was a woman; Rhina Escalante de Rey Prendes of the Authentic Christian Movement (MAC)<sup>25</sup>.

The table below (1) shows how the state powers of the previous (1) government were distributed. There is no doubt that women were underrepresented, even though the Christiani government (1989-1994) had two female ministers; Mirna Lievano de Márquez, Minister of Planning and Cecilia Gallardo de Cano, Minister of Education.

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24. —, —. "La Candidata con más votos para la Corte Suprema de Justicia". *La Prensa Gráfica* (Tuesday, April 12, 1994): 4. See also Aida Ruth R. Macall, "Perspectiva y Presencia Política de las Mujeres en Las Elecciones de El Salvador". Edición Mujeres. Suplemento especial. (March 1994): 11.
25. U.S. Embassy. "Elections '94 El Salvador. Briefing Papers". (Spring, 1994): 1-24.

Table one

State Power	1993		
	Women	Total members	% Women
Executive <sup>1</sup>	2	27	7
Legislative	7	84	8
Assembly	0	14	0

Source: Las Dignas. *Hacer Política Desde las Mujeres* (San Salvador: Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida, 1993); 36.

<sup>1</sup> Includes the position of President, vice-President, Ministers and vice-Ministers.

After the 1994 elections the Legislative Assembly saw a minor increase in female representation; 9 out of 84 legislative deputies were women. There were three from the National Republican Alliance (ARENA); five from the FMLN, and one from the Christian Democratic Party (PDC); As the newly-elected government has yet to form a cabinet of ministers, it is difficult to establish if El Salvador will see any women ministers (see Table 2) <sup>26</sup>. When looking at the municipal plane an approximate 11% of the municipal candidates were women a relatively low figure considering the amount of political involvement at the local level during the war.

Table Two

Parties	Women Deputies	1994	
		Total amount of Deputies	% Women
ARENA	3	39	8
FMLN	5	21	24
PDC	1	18	5,5
PCN <sup>1</sup>	0	4	0
CD <sup>2</sup>	0	1	0
MU <sup>3</sup>	0	1	0
TOTAL	9	84	10,7

See previous table 37.

<sup>1</sup> National Conciliation Party <sup>2</sup> Democratic Convergence <sup>3</sup> Unity Movement.

26. ———, ——— “Diputados de la Asamblea Legislativa”. *La Prensa Gráfica* (Thursday, April 7, 1994): 5-6.

When reviewing the above mentioned data it seems that the assumption made previously is not valid, or that something happened during the election process. One might think that the modifications in gender roles did not constitute a durable trend and vanished during the process. Was the assumption made on the relevance of the female political participation during the civil war an overestimation? In order to answer that question it would be interesting to look closer at these figures and try to open the perspective by introducing some new elements and criteria for defining political activism. This brings the discussion back to what was stated in the introduction; the interaction and interchangeability which exists between the guerrilla groups and the civil organizations; female combatants and female organizations in this particular case.

### 3. *Political Activism and Women's Organizations*

A good example of this interaction was the Sylvia battalion. When AMPES was reconstituted in 1981, its members established this battalion. Thus, all women had previous experience in mobilizing and could therefore make use of this skill. When the war ended, the women returning to civilian life continued their activism by joining women's organizations <sup>26</sup>. Further underlining this reasoning is the lives of two prominent ex-female commanders: Nidia Diaz and Lorena Peña. Both were elected deputies for the FMLN, thus constituting the small group of 9 female deputies. The two are also heads of female organizations. Nidia Diaz leads an organization called *Movimiento Salvadoreño de Mujeres* (MSM), which carries out many projects in the country-side. A special emphasis has been placed on informing entire communities about the goals of the organization <sup>27</sup>. Lorena Peña heads *Movimiento de Mujeres Melida Anaya Montes* (MAM); an organization involved in education, health services, economic development, and diffusion of Salvadoran women's situation by using several means of telecommunications. The organization has more than 3.500 members from different parts of the country and many of them were active during the war <sup>28</sup>. Not surprisingly, the deputies Nidia and Lorena have both stated that they will impel for improvements for Salvadoran women.

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26. T. David Mason, 82. See also Interviews in El Salvador during 26 March to 14 April 1994.

27. Isabel de Guevara, public relations officer. *Movimiento Salvadoreño de Mujeres*, interview by author. April 6 1994. El Salvador, tape recording, MSM headquarters in San Salvador.

28. Lorena Peña of *Movimiento de Mujeres Melida Anaya Montes*, interview by author. April 13, 1994. El Salvador, tape recording, MAM headquarters in San Salvador.

#### 4. *Two Levels of Expression*

The above mentioned instances are illustrations of the fact that the political mobilization did not dissipate, but took on a different form after the war. It can be viewed at two distinct yet interrelated levels. (A) Primarily, many of these organizations acted as a political basis during the March elections, providing women with the necessary support and creating the basis for electoral platforms. One of the most prominent and interesting phenomenon of this election was the *Plataforma 94*. In September of 1993 about forty women's organizations: *Concertación de Mujeres por la Paz, la Dignidad y la Igualdad*, which included approximately 20 organizations: *Coordinación de organismos de Mujeres*, which included five women's organizations, and *Movimiento de Mujeres Melida Anaya Montes* all united with the objective to make the Salvadoran woman's voice heard in the election process. Through debates and numerous discussions they unanimously reached a suitable agenda, constituting 14 important points, including better access to land, equal sexual education at school, incorporation of women in the political process, changes in the laws to ensure equality among sexes, stop incest and domestic violence, create more and better hospitals for women, and 50% of the posts of power should be held by women. The immediate goal for the Platform was to obtain the signatures of the parties in order to oblige them to incorporate the agenda in their own programs<sup>27</sup>. On March 8, 1994 the *Mujeres 94* summoned to a demonstration to divulge the platform. That same day the Coalition's presidential candidate and a woman deputy representing the governing party ARENA signed the protocol of obligations.

Concurrently several meetings, forums, and demonstrations were carried out by a variety of organizations, research institutes, and individuals. On September 20, 1993 the women's studies program at the *Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas* (UCA) held a forum titled "Planned governmental proposals for a more equal society in order to strengthen the democracy". The invited were the presidential candidates of ARENA (Calderón Sol), CD-FMLN (Zamora), and PDC (Rivas)<sup>28</sup>. Another example on vigorous debate was the continuous forums that the *Instituto Mujer Ciudadana* (a woman's organization) held. In February 1994 it organized an event where different female candidates were presented in order to explain their views on pertinent issues related to women. It also summoned

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27. —, —. "Mujeres '94 lanzan Plataforma". *Latinoticias nación* (Wednesday, September 1, 1993): 2. See also —, —, "Mujeres reclaman 50 por ciento del poder político". *El Salvador Día a Día* (Friday, September 3-9, 1993): 5. See also Isabel, Villalta "Mujeres de cara a las Elecciones '94" (San Salvador: IMU, 1993): n.p.

28. T, H "Planes de gobierno para una sociedad con mayor equidad entre los géneros: una valoración". *Estudios Centramericanos* (Vol. 540 Octubre. 1993): 1037-1045.

to a forum-debate titled "The Women's Movement and the Presidential Candidates", which was attended by various organizations. The *Asociación de Mujeres Universitarias Salvadoreñas* (AMUS) carried out an event where all the political parties presidential candidates wives were invited <sup>29</sup>.

Apart from these dynamic and progressive displays of activism many women's organizations prepared booklets about the election process, containing information about the parties and how to obtain the necessary documentation in order to vote. Some held workshops to educate women about the electoral process. Another aspect, which is worth mentioning in this context, is the usage of various media. As has been stated, the MAM frequently uses a variety of media to secure a broad audience. The women's studies department at the UCA transmits a program every day, catering to a broad Salvadoran audience. Articles in newspapers openly discuss issues that could be viewed as sensitive, such as violence against women and how difficult it is for women to obtain credits and loans. At times a woman's supplement is added, discussing pertinent topics for women, such as the existence of one sole maternal hospital in San Salvador.

It is quite apparent that women's organizations were deeply involved in the election process. They provided other women with the necessary information on voting procedure and they staged demonstrations and created open forums to unite candidates, leaders and individuals. But above all, the organizations created a unanimous platform, demonstrating their strength in numbers and unity.

(B) The second level is an expansion of the above-mentioned theme, examining the wider implications of these organizations in Salvadoran society. The last couple of years has seen an immense proliferation of women's organizations. Currently, there are 150 registered women's organizations in a country of approximately 6 million inhabitants <sup>30</sup>. This can be juxtaposed with a South American country, Bolivia, which has a similar population of about 7 million, but only 20 registered women's organizations.

The women's organizations in El Salvador are well-structured, with distinct goals and objectives. They have a particular siege and a variety of external contacts. They are composed of collectives institutes, centers, programs, commissions, and governmental institutions; a heterogeneous conglomeration of

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29. IMU, "A woman's Glance at the Electoral Process". (San Salvador: Instituto de Investigación. Capacitación y Desarrollo de la Mujer. March 1994): 2-4.

30. Rebecca Palaccio alias Lorena Pena of *Movimiento de Mujeres Melida Anaya Montes* interview by author. April 13, 1994. El Salvador, tape recording, MAM headquarters in San Salvador.

constructions, but with one specific goal in common: the improvement of the role of women in Salvadoran society.

The organizations can be divided into five main categories: (1) movements concentrating on the survival and the development of women, and access to collective services; (2) movements in favor of human rights, against political repression, and in favor of peace; (3) movements in traditional organizations in social and political life; (4) strictly feminist organizations, and (5) research institutes. It should be noted that most of these constructions are intermingled. One organization may well belong to 2 or 3 categories. Regarding the first division, most movements adhere to the principles stated. The principles include granting monetary assistance to women, since the ambiguity of the decree number 154 and 207 within the Agrarian Reform does not negate women access to the land,<sup>31</sup> but nor does it endorse this right, carrying out literacy programs all over the country, educating women in natural medicine, nutrition, and health, and creating an awareness about their rights in society<sup>32</sup>.

The second category encompasses movements primarily involved in human rights issues, peace resolution, and the elimination of political repression. The organizations in this group are more directly linked to the war in that most of their members are women who lost family during the war or were themselves subject to human rights violations. However, with the signing of the Peace Accords some of these movements lost momentum, but they managed to be extremely useful in helping the Ad-hoc Commission which had been set up to investigate human rights violations committed during the war<sup>33</sup>.

Regarding the distribution within the third division, it should be noted that it encompasses a broader spectrum of organizations, and furthermore it includes governmental organizations as well as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Moreover, it is an open category in that it has no strict boundaries and builds on alliances between organizations, political parties, (UNDP, and the Catholic Church. Within this order one encounters several professional

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31. Irene Romero. "El Dificil Acceso de la Mujer a la Tierra". *Diario Latino* (Saturday, July 24, 1993): n.p.

32. Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida. *Hacer Política desde las Mujeres* (San Salvador: Las Dignas, 1993): 11. See also Secretaría Nacional de la Familia y Fondo de Población de las Naciones Unidas. *Directorio de Organismos que Dirigen Acciones Hacia las Mujeres* (San Salvador: SNF & PNUD, 1993): 16-265. Some examples of organizations in this category would be MAM, MSM, CEMUJER, *Salvadoreña* FUEDEM, and *Organización de Mujeres Salvadoreñas* ORMUSA.

33. Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida, 12.

organizations, among them, the Association of Salvadoran Lawyers (*La Asociación Salvadoreña de Abogados, ASA*)<sup>34</sup>.

Many of the women's organizations previously mentioned are also considered feminist. Although, initially some of these movements were not feminist; the concept of feminism was developed concurrently with the evolution of the organization. The other side of the coin is that a variety of them are only partially feminist, and some are currently attempting to develop the concept. Organizations that have publicly announced their adherence to the notion of feminism are: CONAMUS, *Centro de Estudios Femenistas CEF*, *Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida*, CEMUJER, *Instituto de Investigación, Capacitación y Desarrollo de la Mujer "Norma Virginia Guirola de Herrera"* IMU, and ORMUSA<sup>35</sup>.

The fifth part interrelates with several others; centers of investigation. Again, it should be that the organizations within this category also overlap with other divisions. Apart from providing the public with documentation on women in society, these organization/centers also provide fora of exchanges of information. The women's studies department of the UCA has already been mentioned in connection with the election process, but both CEMUJER and IMU have good documentation centers and they publish their own materials. *The Instituto de Investigaciones, IDI*, supplies the public with research on not only women's issues, but how they relate to other phenomena in society.

It is quite evident that the proliferation of women's organizations has a direct impact on Salvadoran women's lives and the society in general. Regarding the heterogeneous nature of the women's organizations, which can sometimes pose problems, a joint collaboration effort has to a certain extent proved that this phase can be overcome. Currently, the UNDP office is collaborating with several women's organizations and search institutes to create and present a common agenda for the Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995<sup>36</sup>.

Another outcome of this immense proliferation is the alliances created between various groups in society. There are no limits: leftist-oriented movements working with rightist-oriented organization, feminist movements working with fundamentalist groups; again, one common orientation point: the advancement of women in Salvadoran society.

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34. ———, ——— "Presentan Primera Organización de Abogadas". *Latinoticias nacional* (Tuesday, August, 17, 1993): n.p.

35. *Las Dignas*, 14-15.

36. Rebecca Arias of the United Nations Development Program, interview by author. March 29, 1994. El Salvador, tape recording, UNDP headquarters in San Salvador.



Although, it should be stressed that it is a process and since Salvadoran society is known to be highly politicized, some of the women's organizations still have problems reconciling political differences. An additional factor worth mentioning is the growing importance of professional women's organizations, such as the Association of Salvadoran Lawyers or women's entrepreneurial associations, which constitute a potential lobby force in Salvadoran politics.

#### IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The idea has been to give substance to the hypothesis that women's organizations constitute an expression of the previous female activism during the civil war. Several factors of evidence support this supposition. When examining the data closer, it was observed that: i) female battalions originated in female organizations and after their demobilization they reconstituted them; ii) many ex-combatants have participated in the creation of female organizations; iii) a number of newly elected female deputies, in addition to their political affiliation they are also heads of women organizations, which acted as an electoral base during the election process; iv) women organizations have transformed themselves into a veritable lobbying group; a good example of this is the united effort in proclaiming the *Plataforma '94* as a demand for change, and obliging the parties to incorporate the agenda in their party program; other efforts can be seen at the level of media; articles hitherto unheard of discussing domestic violence, incest, and discriminatory policies regarding the distribution of land to women, are published every week.

The phenomenon has even broader implications. It forces the concept of political activism to open its contents to other forms of civil participation. It shows that different forms of organizations are reliable in assessing the diverse political forces of a country. Thus, a general presupposition can be extracted from this connection. Conceptual analysis needs an overt tool in order to cover forms of political activism that are in a constant flux among them. One of these are women's organizations, which has proved to be an outlet for an under-represented political force.

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