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The Shadow of Violence:
Youth Gangs in El Salvador

By

Chantal Lemire, B.Soc.Sc.

A thesis submitted to
The Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

January 5th, 2001

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the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
acceptance of the thesis

**The Shadow of Violence:
Youth Gangs in El Salvador**

submitted by Chantal Lemire , B.Soc.Sc.

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Given", is written over a horizontal line.

Brian Given, Supervisor

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Given", is written over a horizontal line.

Chair, Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Carleton University
January 25, 2001

The Shadow of Violence:
Youth Gangs in El Salvador

Abstract

This thesis uses youth gangs as an example to illustrate the psycho-cultural dynamics underlying the historically based cycle of violence in El Salvador. The sacrificial nature of this cycle is rooted in a culturally defined dichotomy that has shifted in scope throughout history, wherein one sector of the population is sacrificed for the purpose of maintaining the symbolic unity of a part of the population. Similarities between the youth gang phenomenon and the recent civil war underline the symbiotic relationships that are created within society and maintained by a paradoxical cultural identity.

DEDICATION

**With all my LOVE
FOR
MY SON SEBASTIEN
AND
MY HUSBAND SALOMON CARRILLO**

May all the souls who have and will die from violence rest in peace.

In memory of Sigfredo Rivera Hernandez ‘Ringo’, a Homie who created a path to peace for others to follow, a good friend and invaluable consultant who died at the hands of violence in May 1999.

Also in memory of a beautiful sensitive soul, Marc, my brother and of PapaMon who lived through so much history and was the model of a loving peacemaker and keeper.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my son Sebastien for his patience and wisdom. I also thank him for having accompanied me on this adventure and for having taught me so much about life all along the way.

I want to express my eternal gratitude to my inspiration, my husband Salomon, for his presence, light and so much happiness always.

Many thanks to my supervisors Brian Given and Charles Laughlin. Extra thanks to Brian for his direction, patience, encouragement and especially for his dedication.

Thanks to all my Homies, El Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen, Homies Unidos, Homies en Cristo, everyone at ISPM, Fernando Umana, students of Father Fermin Saenz ,especially Licenciado Carlos Cerna and all my family, friends and colleagues in El Salvador.

Thank you to my SP Summer, to all my **very special friends** and to my family for always being there and for believing in me.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to determine the relationship between the current acute level of gang violence and the historical cycle of war and rebellion in El Salvador. It is based on a research project inquiring into the cultural dynamics underlying the historical cycle of violence in El Salvador.

I will use a diachronic approach to analyze the recurring cultural theme of sacrificial violence in El Salvador. Sacrifice in this case is used as defined by Webster's New World Dictionary as the "act of giving up, permitting injury to, or forgoing something valued for the sake of something having a more pressing claim " (1988 :1180). I will argue that the Salvadoran cycle of violence is based on a culturally defined dichotomy that has shifted in scope throughout history, wherein one sector of the population is sacrificed for the purpose of maintaining the symbolic unity of a part of the population. This type of violence is apparent in El Salvador's history of repressive political violence that has been perpetuated to benefit a small social sector at the expense of the majority of the population. It is also manifested in a more subtle fashion in phenomenon such as gang violence wherein a symbiotic relationship of sacrificial violence is created between society and its youth within what would otherwise appear to be a homogenous population. It is within this context that I will elaborate a symbolic approximation to the phenomenon of youth gangs as a manifestation of a historically based cycle. My final objective is to propose a symbolic perspective of the collective psycho-cultural structure of violence.

I will begin by outlining the history of violence in El Salvador. I will then situate the reader in the social context within which the cycle of violence is currently being perpetuated. Further, I will present observations documented during fieldwork and a theoretical framework to compare the recent civil war to the phenomenon of gang violence in the context of a continuous cycle.

I will demonstrate that the symbolic psycho-dynamic structure of violence has remained constant since the onset of colonization and is embedded in Salvadoran culture and identity. I will then show that the underlying collective symbolic processes are key elements in the transition from a culture of violence to a culture of peace.

EL SALVADOR

“Some Nations are elders, others are children, El Salvador is a teenager.”
(Carrillo:Pers.Com:1998)¹

El Salvador is Central America's smallest and most densely populated country. The population of approximately 5,500,000 people resides within territorial boundaries of 20,742 Km² of mountainous tropical land. Approximately 1.5 million live in the capital city San Salvador (Diario de Hoy:1999). A large proportion of the Salvadoran population is socially and economically marginalized. Statistics compiled by the United Nations Development Program

suggest that more than 50% of the Salvadoran population lives in poverty earning a low or very low income (PNUD:1997). Furthermore, "60% of the economically active population are unemployed or underemployed"(Encyclopaedia Britannica in Canadian Foreign Service Institute 1997:56).

Youth under the age of 30 constitute approximately 50% of the Salvadoran population, with 44% under the age of 18 (Rivera:1998:22). Importantly, as documented by UNICEF/FLACSO, 73% of Salvadoran youth live in poverty while 43% live in absolute poverty (UNICEF:1997). The Pan American Health Organization reports that in El Salvador, "for every 100 persons of working age there are 72 who depend on them", compared to Canada where the dependency ratio is 47.4% (2000:2). The proportion of the population with access to the public water supply is 53% overall; proportionately 86% in urban areas and 17% in rural areas (Ibid.).

The average life expectancy rate for Salvadoran women between 1990 and 1995 was 71 years and 63 years for men. The mortality rate among those 14 and under has been declining while it has been steadily increasing for adults, especially for males between the ages of 21 and 44 (PAHO:2000). The leading causes of mortality in El Salvador, especially among men, are categorized as external causes including homicide, motor vehicle accidents and intentionally inflicted injuries (ibid.). The Pan American Health Organization has ranked El

¹ Translation: "Algunos paises son ancianos, otros son ninos, El Salvador es un adolescente"

Salvador second, after Columbia, in its designation of countries with the “Highest Male Mortality Rate From External Causes” (ibid.). In 1994, of the 46% of mortality in adolescents between the ages of 10 and 14 attributed to external causes, 55% were reported accidental injuries, 22% homicides and 20% suicides (PAHO:2000:4). In contrast, for those aged 15 to 19, 67% of the mortality rate was attributed to external causes with homicide and unintentional injuries ranking as most prominent (ibid.). In the segment of the population between 20 and 59 years of age, 35% of all deaths were caused by external causes, of these 50% were due to homicide (ibid.). Smutt & Miranda also cite a report presented by the InterAmerican Development Bank in 1996 that found that El Salvador ranks first in criminality rate in Latin America with a homicide rate of 140 assassinations per 100 000 inhabitants in comparison to Colombia in second place with a homicide rate of 77 per 100 000 (1998:23). Salvadoran sociologist Jose Miguel Cruz suggests that in El Salvador, a young male under the age of 30 has the highest risk in the world of being murdered (Cruz in ECA:1997:987).

CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

Historically, recurring manifestations of violence in El Salvador can be traced back to the era of colonization. I will argue that the recent civil war as well as the current high level of youth violence are manifestations of a perpetuating cycle of violence. All of these manifestations originate in a past of cultural oppression intertwined with marked socio-economic and political repression. I will

provide a brief historical overview to provide a description of the historical cycle of violence.

THE CONQUEST

Scholars have not reached a consensus as to the Mayan or Aztec origins of El Salvador's native Pipil population (Equipo Maiz:1995:16). They do acknowledge that Salvadoran territory, formerly called Cuscatlan, was inhabited by the Pipils at the time of the Conquest in 1524. By that time, the Pipils had absorbed the last competing group in the region, the Lenca, into their dominant culture (ibid: 17). Author Roberto Cea remarks that in some respects, the merger between Native groups such as the Pipil and the Lenca, although on some level by domination also incorporated cultural practices that reflected its changing population (Cea: 1993).

In contrast, the colonization process or conquest was an imposition of Euro-Catholic culture onto the indigenous population. The belief system on which the conquest was based determined that the New World had to be Christianized and civilized. The violent conflicts of the actual Conquest of El Salvador, led by Pedro Alvarado, lasted 15 years before the Spanish finally subjugated the Pipils. The conquerors massacred large groups of people, destroyed religious temples and forced the native population to work for their benefit. Further, the Spanish invaders appropriated what had been communal land and thus set up a system based on private property and exploitation (Equipo Maiz:1995:31).

During the colonization epoch, there existed 3 social groups: the dominant Spanish who were either from Spain, called Peninsulars or those born from Spanish parents in El Salvador who were called Creoles; Mestizos who were children of Spanish and Indigenous parents, not entitled to private property, who had a role in administration; and finally, the most mistreated and exploited group of Indigenous persons who were assigned to work for the dominant classes (ibid:37).

The Catholic religion was the most influential element in the Conquest as it outlawed native cultural practices and forced religious conversion (ibid.:40). El Salvador under colonial rule was part of the larger reign of Guatemala. After failed attempts at achieving sovereignty through violent uprisings in 1811 and 1814, Central America finally gained official Independence from Spain in 1821. The beneficiaries of the official independence were the Creoles who acquired most of the arable land while the rest of the population worked for them (ibid.:50).

In 1824, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Central America was ratified. At that time, the Creoles and Mestizos of El Salvador were divided politically while the majority of the population, the indigenous, was excluded from political processes. In 1832, an unchanging situation for the majority of the population caused a popular uprising to contest unequal land distribution, high

taxes and general deplorable living conditions. Indigenous leader Anastasio Aquino successfully led the revolt against the government forcing the president to flee the country. Those loyal to the president, who were Creoles and Mestizos, remained in El Salvador and finally defeated and assassinated Aquino. Aquino's head was hung in a public place as an example to deter any other revolutionaries. Shortly after the demise of Aquino, the new president, liberal Gerardo Barrios, was overthrown by conservatives supported by the Church and was also later assassinated (Ibid.).

In 1881, the increasing dependency on coffee crops transformed land distribution as large areas were needed for its successful cultivation. The coffee oligarchy was born and peasants dispossessed of communal land. Once again, the majority of the population was forced to work the land, now in coffee plantations for minimal subsistence (ibid.:69).

The first decades of the Twentieth Century marked the emergence of the United States as world power. President Manuel Enrique Araujo, held office between 1911 and 1913 and was disliked by coffee producers as he put forth reforms to honour workers rights and to abolish practices such as prison sentencing for failure of debt payment to the State. He was also against foreign economic aid. He was assassinated in 1913 while attending a public outdoor concert. He was replaced by an 18 year dynasty of the Melendez-Quinonez family. They led a repressive government, making numerous promises to the

people at election time while committing atrocities such as the massacre of a large group of women during a public rally in support of their political opponent (ibid:76).

One of the most important historical antecedents in El Salvador took place in the year 1932 following the world economic crisis of 1929. Coffee prices on the world market dropped as producers attempted to increase production. Already low wages for the work of the peasantry on the coffee plantations were cut in half. A president elected by the people, Arturo Araujo was not supported by the upper class or coffee producers. His government collapsed under a military Coup D'Etat that replaced him with their own representative, General Hernandez Martinez.(ibid.)

As social unrest increased, in 1932, a general popular uprising took place throughout the country. The uprising was led by Farabundo Marti who was forced into exile only to return to his country to be assassinated February 1st, 1932. Marti led the insurrection and his followers were mostly the indigenous population who were those most affected by the economic crisis. General Martinez repressed the uprising and his troops massacred over 30 000 people (ibid.:85). According to Jorge Caceres et al., the magnitude of the massacre, as a proportion of the total population, was unprecedented in all of Latin American history (1988:76). Following what is commonly referred to as the "Matanza" (the

Slaughter), a succession of military coups marked Salvadoran history and its characteristic political instability.

In 1969, the “Soccer War” broke out between Honduras and El Salvador deterring attention from internal political turmoil. The “One-Hundred Hours War...whose immediate cause was rivalry and riot on the soccer field” was actually caused by “the Honduran fear of rising numbers of illegal Salvadoran immigrants” who were forced into Honduras by demographic pressures in their homeland (Burns:1994:319). El Salvador’s economic supremacy in the Central American Common Market was another element that had strained the relationship between the neighbouring countries. The brief war cost thousands of lives and also destroyed the Central American Common Market that had been established in 1960. Although bloodshed had ended, a peace treaty was not signed between the two nations until 1980 (ibid.).

During the election process of 1972, candidate Napoleon Duarte, former mayor of the capital city San Salvador, was arrested and exiled to Venezuela by the ruling military government. Rule was thus maintained by military government who eventually faced the onset of the imminent civil war shortly after another military coup removed President Romero from office.²

Commencing in 1980, El Salvador suffered a 12 year civil war, ending in 1992 by the ratification of Peace Accords between the revolutionary “guerrillas” of

the FMLN (Frente Farabundo Marti Para La Liberacion Nacional) and the military government.

The onset of the civil war gained international attention as Archbishop Oscar Ranulfo Romero, a popular figure, was assassinated while performing mass in the capital. In the same year, 3 American nuns and another Catholic worker were murdered by military officials(ibid).

In 1984, Napoleon Duarte returned from exile and was elected President. He engaged in unsuccessful negotiations with the revolutionaries. His government was accused of fraud and other misconduct which led to his demise in the following election in 1989 when Alfredo Cristiani came to power (ibid).

Also in 1989, the brutal murder of 7 Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her teenage daughter was highly profiled in international media coverage. It was alleged that the priests, promoters of a theology of liberation, were linked to the revolutionary movement (ibid).

² See Electronic Sources in Bibliography: Social History: El Salvador

DATE	HISTORICAL EVENT
1524	CONQUEST. INVASION OF TERRITORY OF CUSCATLAN BY SPANISH
1539	DEFEAT OF PIPILS BY SPANISH CONQUERORS
1811	FAILED UPRISINGS TO ACHIEVE SOVEREIGNTY
1814	SECOND FAILED ATTEMPT TO ACHIEVE SOVEREIGNTY
1821	CENTRAL AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE FROM SPAIN
1824	FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF CENTRAL AMERICA CONSTITUTION RATIFIED
1832	INDIGENOUS UPRISING LED BY ANASTASIO AQUINO ASSASSINATION OF ANASTASIO AQUINO
1881	ECONOMIC SHIFT TO DEPENDENCY ON COFFEE EXPORTATION CREATION OF COFFEE OLIGARCHY LAND DISTRIBUTION SHIFT TO ACCOMMODATE COFFEE CROPS
1911	PRESIDENT MANUEL ENRIQUE ARAUJO SUPPORTS WORKERS RIGHTS
1913	PRESIDENT ARAUJO IS ASSASSINATED
1913-1931	RULE OF THE MELENDEZ-QUINONES DYNASTY
1929	WORLD ECONOMIC CRISIS
1931	MILITARY COUP GENERAL MAXIMILIANO HERNANDEZ MARTINEZ BECOMES PRESIDENT
1932	INDIGENOUS UPRISING LED BY FARABUNDO MARTI 30 000 INDIGENOUS PEOPLE ARE MASSACRED ASSASSINATION OF FARABUNDO MARTI
1944	UNSUCCESSFUL COUP AGAINST HERNANDEZ MARTINEZ
1948	REVOLT BY YOUNG ARMY OFFICERS INSTALLS JUNTA HEADED BY MAJOR OSCAR OSORIO
1956	LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOSE MARIA LEMUS SUCCEDES OSORIO
1960	MILITARY COUP AGAINST LEMUS
1961	COUP INSTALLS LIEUTENANT COLONEL JULIO ADALBERTO RIVERA AS PRESIDENT
1969	SOCCER WAR BETWEEN HONDURAS AND EL SALVADOR
1972	NAPOLEON DUARTE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE IS ARRESTED AND EXILED TO VENEZUELA
1972-1977	TENURE OF PRESIDENT MOLINA
1975	15 PROTESTERS ARE ASSASSINATED BY GOVERNMENT

	At The University of El Salvador
1977-1979	GENERAL CARLOS HUMBERTO ROMERO SUCCEDES MOLINA
1979	MILITARY COUP REMOVES PRESIDENT ROMERO FROM OFFICE
1980-1992	CIVIL WAR BETWEEN REVOLUTIONARY FMLN AND MILITARY ARMIES
1980	ARCHBISHOP OSCAR ARNULFO ROMERO IS ASSASSINATED 3 AMERICAN NUNS AND 1 ROMAN CATHOLIC WORKER ARE MURDERED BY MILITARY
1984	NAPOLEON DUARTE ELECTED PRESIDENT UNSUCCESSFUL PEACE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND FMLN
1989	ALFREDO CRISTIANI ELECTED PRESIDENT 8 PEOPLE INCLUDING 6 JESUIT PRIESTS ARE MURDERED AT THE UNIVERISTY OF CENTRAL AMERICA JOSE SIMEON CANAS
1992	SIGNING OF PEACE ACCORDS IN CHAPULTEPEC MEXICO BETWEEN SALVADORAN GOVERNMENT AND FMLN LEADERS

The 12 year conflict cost Latin America's tiny nation the lives of over eighty thousand of its citizens, eight thousand reported disappearances and the same proportion of orphaned children. For over a decade, Human Rights violations were rampant throughout the country as torture, large scale massacres and assassinations became daily occurrences (Torres-Rivas,Gonzalez-Suarez:1994:48,Cruz, Henriquez and others, Pers. Comm.:1993).

Since the end of the armed conflict, El Salvador has faced rapid structural changes. Before the war began in the 1980's, Salvadoran society was largely structured around an agrarian export economy and authoritarian political system. Inherent in this structure was the social exclusion from economic and political

power of the rural sector. The rural population was the most vulnerable and was markedly characterized by economic instability. The marginalized population consisted mostly of peasants dispossessed of land who became labourers earning minimal subsistence wages cultivating for large landowners. Rural dwellers were excluded from participating in the national political processes and were generally itinerant, in search of cultivable land for subsistence growing and/or paid work (Umana in FEPADE:1998:9).

These social and economic inequalities were at the root of the recent bloodshed. Inequitable land distribution was a primary driver of the revolutionary movement led by the FMLN. The lack of land and resources forced the displacement of people throughout the countryside and eventually to urban areas. Another important factor, adding to an already poor quality of life in rural areas, was the pressure of military action taking place in the countryside forcing rural dwellers to flee to urban centres (Smutt & Miranda:1998:20). The Pan American Health Organization documents that in 1996, 56.7% of Salvadorans resided in urban areas and 43.3% in rural areas. It adds that 30.7% of all Salvadorans live in the capital of San Salvador (2000:2).

Internal migration has thus led to rapid urbanization further weighing on a deteriorated war-torn infrastructure. There has since been a shift to a more generalized social exclusion pattern expanded from the rural to the urban population (Smutt & Miranda:1998:20).

Further to internal migration, the war also forced large-scale immigration to North America and other foreign lands as many feared political persecution (Torres-Rivas,Gonzalez-Suarez:1994:48). The influence of Salvadorans residing abroad has impacted society at the economic, social and cultural levels. Salvadorans residing in the United States and Canada contribute approximately \$1 billion US dollars a year to the economy (PAHO:2000).

AFTERMATH OF CIVIL WAR

El Salvador is now characterized by a process of transition from a culture of military violence to one of peace and democracy. There exists, however, a discrepancy between the promises of Peace Accords and the actual socio-economic reality of Salvadoran life. The perpetuation of the same socio-economic inequalities that sparked the armed conflict is still apparent today in the polarization of the society (ISPM:1997:5). Current social unrest is largely due to the high levels of absolute poverty.

The Diario De Hoy³, a Salvadoran national newspaper, on February 5th, 2000, published an interview with Salvador Sanchez Ceren, an FMLN leader who asserted that certain social and economic reforms that were part of the Peace Accords have not been implemented and that the situation has actually gotten worse. Further, he suggested that failure on the part of the government to

³ See Electronic Sources: Diario De Hoy

implement social and economic equity and development could jeopardize the transition to Peace and democracy.

The Peace Accords recognized military involvement in human rights violations against civilians during the armed conflict. The result was the demobilization of military forces as policing agents and their replacement by the National Civilian Police Force (Policia Nacional Civil). However, since its inception the PNC itself has been criticized for human rights violations. Critics recognize the limited training available to officers as well as the legacy of corruption and violence of their predecessors. Notwithstanding, the PNC is consistently criticized for its actions (Escolero in ECA: Vol. 588:1997:1014). In the case of young offenders or gang members, numerous reports of brutality and discrimination at the hands of police have been recorded in recent years (ISPM⁴: Pers. Com.:1998, Homies Unidos: Pers.com.:1998).

The judicial system on the other hand is criticized for granting impunity on the basis of political power and influence (Cruz in ECA:1997: 983). Violations of the penal code committed through organized crime such as money laundering, fraud, political assassinations and kidnappings have on a number of occasions been exempted from the law and in many cases perpetrators continue to enjoy these privileges without clear responses from the judicial system (ibid., Rivera:Pers.Com.:1998).

Interestingly, impunity has also been documented at the highest political level. As documented by the United Nations Truth Commission, the Peace Accords themselves rested on the condition that impunity be granted to members of both sides of the conflict for atrocities committed during the war (UN:1994). Historian Carlos Henriquez-Consalvi argues that the peace process was inherently undermined by the agreement to the conditions of impunity (Pers. Com.: 1997).

Consequently, an important challenge faced by the new police force is the lack of trust instilled upon them and the justice system they attempt to represent. The high number of firearms in the possession of civilians illustrates the lack of trust in the judicial and policing systems to ensure personal security (Cruz in ECA: Vol. 588:1997:984). It is estimated that approximately 1500 firearms are registered by new owners on a monthly basis in the capital of San Salvador. Also noteworthy is that 80% of firearms used in crimes are not legally registered weapons (ibid.). Similarly to those used in warfare, homemade weapons are also quite common. Cruz argues then that civilians are opting to take the law into their own hands rather than to rely on the authorities (in ECA: Vol. 588:1997:981). A striking example of this is a terrorist group by the name of Black Shadow (Sombra Negra), likened to a death squad, that until very recently endeavored towards eradicating youth gangs through systematic assassinations. In fact, 65% of Salvadorans polled about the “Sombra Negra” and social cleansing approved of its activities (Cruz in ECA:Vol.588:1997:981).

⁴ ISPM: Instituto Salvadoreño Para la Protección del Menor (El Salvador’s Child Protection Agency)

Another public information poll suggested that 80% of respondents desired military presence to combat delinquency (IDUOP in ECA:Vol. 588:1997:981). Although it has been suggested that the Sombra Negra is no longer active, unofficial accounts of recent assassinations have since been documented (Rivera: Pers. Comm.:1998).

Hence, the above noted responses to delinquency appear to exemplify the culture of violence defined by Cruz as the institutionalized and internalized norms and values that legitimate violence under any circumstances (ECA:Vol. 588:1997:980). Cruz asserts that Salvadorans quickly accept violent death as a solution to serious problems (ibid.:981). In 1994, the archbishop of El Salvador remarked that Salvadoran youth have been socialized in what he called “a culture of death” (cultura de la muerte)(Anon.:1994). Salvadoran psychologist Jose Luis Henriquez describes the legacy of the civil war as “the militarization of the Salvadoran society, psyche and culture” (ibid.). The armed conflict provided a violent model of conflict resolution and deprived youth of positive role models within their own families and communities. The teenagers of today have grown up surrounded by violence, very often lacking the presence of parents or other family or community members who left their homes to participate in the conflict and often never returned. As a result, families became mostly comprised of women, children and the elderly (S. Rivera:pers.com.:1998). In his study on the cultural change of families in El Salvador, Morales Velado, concludes that one of

the most important changes in the composition of the Salvadoran family has been the increasing absence of male figures in the household. He goes on to say that the family has been transformed into a group of persons united in solidarity in the face of the need for basic survival (in Roggenbuck:1994:252). Looking to their peers, youth have found the gang they respectfully refer to as their family (Smutt & Miranda:1998:15).

Violence has become a routinized phenomenon, an accepted means of conflict resolution not only on the street but also in the home. In their study of youth violence Smutt and Miranda documented the high incidence of domestic violence generally perpetrated against women and children in the homes of their young informants who included gang members (Smutt & Miranda:1998:45). Statistics compiled by government show that approximately 20 000 women reported having been assaulted by their partners during 1996 (Ministerio de Coordinacion:1997). Also, 78.7 % of children surveyed reported physical abuse in the home, 67% suffered emotional abuse and 31% sexual abuse (Ministerio de Coordinacion:1997). These figures do not reflect unreported assaults and abuse. This can be an important factor in view of the mistrust of the policing and judicial system mentioned earlier.

Doris Montenegro representative of a women's organization (CEMUJER) says that domestic violence remains stigmatized and is not talked about openly. She does observe however that women in rural areas tend to find more support

in their social environments than their urban counterparts (Diario de Hoy:1999). Urbanization is an important consideration as it has exacerbated urban poverty and has consequently contributed in part to the present state of violence in the country (Smutt & Miranda:1998, Rivera:1998).

The issue of domestic violence is also an important element that affects social and personal relations. Sneider Rivera suggests that as in many other countries of the western world, the Salvadoran family was traditionally composed of a nuclear unit. However, Rivera documents the increase in what he terms disintegrated families referring to 34.6% of all Salvadoran households in 1996, led by single women and families who care for children of relatives. Another factor related to the disintegrated family as cited by Rivera is the role of the head of the household as provider to families outside of the nuclear family unit (Briones in Rivera:1998:25). As a result, Rivera suggests that the role of the family in the socialization process of children and youth has been greatly diminished to the detriment of the offspring (Rivera:1998:26).

In summary, family disintegration, domestic violence and high levels of poverty create stresses on families and leads to detrimental effects on family relationships and the socialization of children. In short, a ripe climate for the creation of youth gangs exists.

YOUTH GANGS

Gangs are defined by Smutt and Miranda as an intermediary group aggregation situated in its organizational structure between less organized groups of friends and highly structured organized crime associations (1998:27).

It is estimated that in the capital city of San Salvador, approximately 20,000 youth are gang members (IUDOP in ECA: Vol. 585-586:1997:695). Gangs themselves can be categorized into two types; student gangs (mara estudiantil).and street gangs (mara callejera)(Smutt & Miranda:1998, Pers.Com.:Rosales:1998). The student gang is characterized by its affiliation to a private or public educational institution generally at the intermediate and high school level. The gang is identified by the name of the school and its insignia such as distinctive badges, uniforms and belts; these are the symbols members defend. Student gang rivals are those from neighbouring schools. The student gang phenomenon is most prolific in the densely populated capital city San Salvador and its outskirts. Violent confrontations between these groups usually occur in the early morning before classes begin and early afternoon at the end of the school day in areas where students crossover into rival territory when traveling between their homes and respective schools. Members who acquire the most badges and belts from their fallen adversaries gain the respect of their peers and are perceived as having demonstrated their superiority over the enemy. Students not directly involved in the gangs are also at risk of attack because of their distinctive school uniforms. These daily occurrences threaten

civilians who are unfortunate enough to share a bus ride with students who are attacked with rocks and other projectiles or on the busy city streets where students may be victimized by firearms while innocent bystanders get caught in the middle of the conflict (Smutt & Miranda:1998:67). I personally witnessed such an attack between rival groups and was particularly struck by the mob-like character of the event. The force of the confrontation in the midst of busy city streets, rerouted vehicular and pedestrian traffic and caused bystanders to flee the immediate area or to take cover. However, regular activity resumed shortly after with a sense of normalcy as the groups moved out of the area. As I inquired about the frequency of such occurrences and their apparent routinized character, the response from my Salvadoran colleague was “that’s nothing” (Nunez:Pers.Com.:1998).

Street gangs, on the other hand, are characterized by their territoriality. There are two principal street gangs operating in El Salvador both of American influence; Mara Salvatrucha 13 (MS XIII).and 18 Street Barrio (XVIII). The MS XIII traces its origins to the US where the group emerged as a response by Salvadoran immigrant youth who had to compete with other ethnic groups in schools and on the streets (De Cesare in Smutt & Miranda:1998:34). In the US its members are predominantly Salvadorans and a few Guatemalans (ibid.). The M refers to the 13th letter of the alphabet that corresponds to the name of the group that controls the prisons in Southern California, the Mexican Mafia. According to Smutt & Miranda, all gangs that operate in that area are identified

with the number 13 (1998:35). The origin of the name itself “Mara Salvatrucha” is explained in two ways. The first, from the perspective of a Salvadoran gang member, **‘Mara’** refers to a group of friends, its original etymological meaning in the Salvadoran lexicon⁵, **‘Salva’** to Salvadoran ethnicity and **‘trucha’** to its popular meaning, the need to be astute or alert. The second meaning attributed to Mara Salvatrucha originates in Los Angeles; **‘Salva’** refers to saving a life⁶, and **‘trucha’** refers to its true meaning, the trout, who swims against the North current from the South to spawn her young. Similarly Salvadorans have been forced by the civil war to immigrate to the United States to save their lives and their ‘race’ (ibid.34). An important observation made by the authors is that Salvadoran youth generally can not provide a clear explanation of the origin of the name of their gang (ibid.34).

The **‘18 Street’** gang is also known in the US as **‘La Internacional’** (The International). It traces its origin to ‘Chicano’ or Mexican-American roots and, unlike its rival, is made up of members of diverse ethnic origins. It is considered the largest gang in LA consisting of approximately 10,000 members. Salvadorans who joined **‘La XVIII’** in LA did so because they lived in an area controlled by the gang and only as members could be protected (ibid.35).

⁵ The word Mara until recently was used in El Salvador to refer to a group of friends such as a group from the neighbourhood, school, church etc... It has acquired a pejorative meaning as it is presently almost exclusively used to refer to groups of organized youth in the context of violent or delinquent acts (Smutt & Miranda:1998:25-26).

⁶ From the Spanish word **salvar** translated to the verb **to save** in English

In El Salvador, the objective of the group is to defend its 'barrio' from the threat of outside intrusions perpetrated against them and their neighbourhood. The territory becomes a prohibited zone to members of other groups (Smutt & Miranda:1998:33). Consequently, gang members are generally confined to their own territory, their freedom is limited as they feel threatened or unsafe outside of their domain (ibid.:28).

The general population such as street vendors who cross territorial boundaries is sometimes charged a tariff by gang members to enter their 'barrio' at the risk of being killed if they do not pay. Often every block is controlled by a different 'clika' (click) or subgroup (Perez:Pers.Com.:1998).

There exists an interesting relationship between student and street gangs. Smutt and Miranda suggest that adversaries in one context may become allies in another. For example if two youth from the same neighbourhood attend different institutions they may while in their "barrio" be allied to defend the same territory and later become deadly enemies while attending their rival educational institutions (1998:54, Salvador:Pers.Com.:1998).

Gangs get together to 'vacilar' or hang out. They often occupy an abandoned house they call a 'destroyer'. They use the premises to live in or to hang out. In most neighbourhoods, gang members can be seen gathered on street corners. Drug and alcohol use is prevalent. Marijuana was the most

common drug until it was replaced in recent years by cocaine or crack. Assaults and robberies are generally perpetrated to pay for basic necessities and drugs (Martinez:Pers.Com.:1998, Perez:Pers.Com.:1998). The level of organization in gangs varies depending on the leadership. In some groups, each member contributes to a petty cash 'account' that is used to buy food or drugs. It is important to note that some gang members hold jobs and attend school (Lopez: Pers.Com.: 1998, Orellana:Pers.Com.:1997).

Gangs in El Salvador, have a specific style of dress similar to that associated with their counterparts in the US. Most recognizable is the use of baggy jeans and loose tee-shirts or muscle shirts. They also sport tattoos, the most common are those that identify their gang while others wear more elaborate designs. Some of my informants had tattoos of tombstones or tears to represent the loss of loved ones.

An important part of gang activity is to attack and kill rivals. The use of knives, firearms and homemade weapons is the most common. Confrontations often take place without provocation. Gang members earn and maintain respect in their respective groups by recruiting new members, looking for a fight and killing rivals. There exists a constant debt to be paid and revenge to be had for fallen homeboys and homegirls (Nunez:pers.com.:1998, also in Smutt & Miranda:1998:31,35, Umana:1998). As one gang member once told me "one

day maybe you don't even have one enemy, the day you join a gang you have thousands and they wanna kill you" (Rivera: Pers. Com.:1998).

Police officers suggest that gang members enjoy impunity by instilling fear into the public consequently impeding criminal investigations. It is the fear of reprisal from gang members, threatening to kill them, that maintains the silence (Nunez:Pers. Com:1999). Civilians have also expressed their concern for personal security by suggesting that in certain areas of 'gang territory' police accept bribes to turn a blind eye (Perez: Pers.com.1998). Additionally, in some instances police officers themselves fear for their lives or those of their families at the hands of gang members, resulting in incomplete investigations and thus impunity (Monje:Pers.Com:1998). Police involvement or the fact that it is suspected suggests a serious concern about the effectiveness of the policing system to enforce the law and counter impunity.

The direct effects of impunity on young offenders within the judicial system however are dissimilar to those of their adult counterparts who actually benefit from it by avoiding entering the system. Sneider Rivera argues that the impunity granted to adults within the judicial system is not shared by young offenders. On the contrary, he contrasts rates of adult and youth offenders who actually go to trial. He argues that youth are more likely to be taken into custody than their adult counterparts largely due to the difference between juvenile and adult court systems (1998:123). Therefore, a comparison at the level of arrests and

conviction rates between adult and young offenders can not be explained as a higher incidence of youth related offenses but must rather be calculated independently and conclusions drawn with consideration given to the discrepancies. Hence, the documented accounts of convicted young offenders far surpasses that of adults. This impunity may contribute to the disproportionate fear reflected in public opinion polls about the threat of youth and gang violence notwithstanding the statistical inferences to the contrary. Although theoretically this may be so, the daily life on Salvadoran streets certainly attests to the visibility of youth gangs and to the real threat posed by them for the general public. Perhaps visibility betrays in some way an untold reality, blaming those who can be seen while ignoring those who have the means to hide from public view behind closed doors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the signing of Peace Accords, the focus of sociological analysis, concurrent with public concern, has shifted from the armed conflict to the problematique of youth gang violence.

As summarized by Smutt & Miranda, some argue that gang members deported from the US are the main cause of gang formation and violence in El Salvador (Smutt & Miranda: 1998: 30). In support of this assertion, it is obvious that Salvadoran gangs are imbued with American influence. Nevertheless, an important element that is not addressed by this simplistic assumption is that

there exists a propensity in Salvadoran youth to aspire to the gang life rather than any other alternative.

Smutt & Miranda also suggest that others believe that gangs are strictly a consequence of war and that others maintain that an already existing phenomenon was recreated and intensified by the media to fill the void of headline news created by the end of the war (Ibid.). I suggest that these are all important factors in the social construction of youth gang violence as a socio-cultural phenomenon as well as elements that generate violence. I would also like to point out that an exploration of the phenomenon from a cultural and symbolic perspective can provide a useful perspective to explore the roots of the socio-cultural dynamics that maintain violence as a viable alternative for youth and Salvadoran society as a whole.

As noted above, scholars generally suggest causal relationships between the recent civil war and the present phenomenon of youth gang violence. Sociologist Jose Miguel Cruz (Universidad Centro Americana Jose Simeon Canas).argues that El Salvador's civil war, in comparison to other conflicts of the region, was characterized by particularities that specifically generate violence in this post-war period. He suggests that the magnitude of the conflict as a full fledged civil war permeated all of Salvadoran society such that El Salvador and its population functioned completely in relation to the conflict. Another factor that he identifies is the prolonged duration of the conflict that transformed social

institutions and intra-personal relationships. According to Cruz the final determining factor specific to El Salvador is that the armed conflict ended with the Peace Accords of Chapultepec in 1992. The Peace Accords ended the conflict in a definitive way without ongoing regional conflicts as often is the case in National conflicts (Cruz in ECA:1997:977-979).

According to Manuel Magana, El Salvador's negotiations of Peace Accords had a unique structure that integrated the participation of the members of the revolutionary movement. Consequently, the concerns of those directly involved in the conflict, including those of the guerilla fighters themselves, were taken into account and negotiated as part of the treaty. The FMLN leaders approached the negotiations as a collective effort and encouraged full participation. In turn, the Peace Accords reached between the FMLN and the Salvadoran Government were consistently accepted at all levels of the revolutionary organization promoting the acceptance of the end of the conflict thus impeding ongoing regional conflicts throughout the country (Pers. Com.:1999).

Cruz goes on to argue that the above mentioned characteristics of the Salvadoran conflict have created 3 specific conditions that generate violence in this post-war era. First, he suggests that the militarization of Salvadoran institutions and its people has exacerbated an already existing culture of violence. He defines culture of violence as the generalized creation and adoption

of social norms and values that favor violent responses under any given circumstances. Second, he adds the failing judicial and policing systems are a legacy of the armed conflict and determining factors in perpetuating violence. A third consequence of the conflict, he argues, is the high number of firearms in the possession of the civilian population (Cruz in ECA:1997:979-991).

Cruz as well as other researchers agree that the current acute level of youth violence or delinquency is a manifestation of social aggression within the context of a historical cycle of violence. Cruz and Sisti both suggest that at this time, according to statistical data, street violence may be the most acute manifestation of violence to date (Cruz in ECA:1997:978, Sisti:1995).

Cruz provides statistical data on the phenomenon of youth violence and delinquency and supports his deductions using comparative data on violence. He also acknowledges the lack of historical statistical information and discrepancies in data collection. Of interest to my analysis is his reference to what he calls “an already existing culture of violence” and its relationship to the current level of youth gang violence.

Cruz, as well as others such as Rivera and Smutt & Miranda propose that there exists a discrepancy between public opinion or perception and statistical data or “actual” youth violence. Field workers who work with youth also suggested that public concern is disproportionate to the actual phenomenon

(Pers.Com: Quinones: 1997, Orellana: 1998). In support of this declaration Jose Miguel Cruz suggests that only 10 to 15% of delinquent acts on a national scale are committed by youth (in ECA: 1997:985). The notion of social construction has also been explored by Sneider Rivera who argues that the discrepancy between the quantitative data and social perception must be further examined in order to elucidate the social dynamic at the root of the misconception (1998:122).

Notwithstanding the important representation of a young Salvadoran population, the needs of youth are seldom reflected in government social and political concerns (ISPM:1996). Consequently, numerous analyses have illustrated the marginalization of youth and have proposed a causal relationship between social exclusion and youth violence, specifically gang formation.

Carlos Umana as principal researcher of a study conducted by the FEPADE (Fundacion Empresarial para el Desarrollo Educativo) foundation suggests that youth are victims of social exclusion. Umana defines social exclusion as:

...a set of dynamics and mechanisms that reject certain groups or individuals from social practices and rights that make up social integration and social identity. These exclusion mechanisms marginalize groups and individuals from access to opportunities of human development and the enjoyment of their human rights" (FEPADE:1998:4)⁷

He proposes 4 different types of social exclusion mechanisms; lack of access to services that can ameliorate the quality of life, exclusion from

⁷ Translation

participation in production and social processes, exclusion from information that could provide increased choices and exclusion from the decision making process that formulate the solution to their problems. He argues that social exclusion is part of a larger social or cultural dynamic that directly affects Salvadoran youth. (FEPADE:1998:9)

The collective psychological effects of the war are represented in the literature specifically in relation to strained social relations in Cruz, Sisti, Smutt & Miranda, Rivera and ISPM (Instituto Para la Proteccion del Menor). Similar psychological consequences of war that affect social relations and inter-personal relations have been identified in numerous populations worldwide, for example emotional numbness, hyper vigilance and distrust in personal relationships (Wilson et al. In Psychoanalytic Review:1988).

Another theory proposed is drawn from psychoanalytic literature. It links the trauma of war in El Salvador and the condition of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder used to diagnosis and treat Vietnam veterans in the US. However, further research revealed that this particular model is not an effective one for the study at hand. To summarize the deficiency of the concept, Becker argues mainly that trauma suffered in war is a cumulative process and can not be reduced to such a concept as PTSD which implies a specific occurrence of trauma conceptualized by time (post).rather than a cumulative experience more suited to a discussion about war or a cycle of violence. Also, the connotation of

disorder, Becker remarks, supposes that victims of war are somehow defective or disordered. He states:

...the North American offer to teach the diagnosis and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder in El Salvador (a country which suffered a 10-year civil war that was sponsored by the United States).produced a negative reaction not only by the guerrilla organizations, but also by the psychologists working with the military. The main problem of the soldiers from both sides in El Salvador today is not to be recognized as "sick", but wish to be socially reintegrated and recognized as valuable members of society." (Becker in Kleber (ed.).et al.:1995:108)

My fieldwork in El Salvador was an exploration of this culture of violence and its relationship to the high incidence of violence currently being manifested by the phenomenon of youth gangs.

II. MY INVOLVEMENT IN EL SALVADOR

My personal involvement with El Salvador began in 1988 when I joined an Ottawa based solidarity movement. Activities in the community further to organizing cultural “get-togethers” emphasized education about the civil war and were aimed at engaging the local community to support cooperatives, labour organizations and non-governmental organizations in El Salvador. Between 1992 and 1996 I was part of a women’s cooperative whose members were generally Salvadoran women living in Canada. I traveled to El Salvador in 1993, a year after peace accords were signed, as part of the Amaneciendo Women’s Collective delegation to the Sixth Latin-American and Caribbean Feminist Encounter. As the Peace process was newly being implemented, the United Nations was on site to monitor the encounter as the conference participants had received death threats. During the 10 day time-span of the conference, 3 political assassinations took place in the country. A public protest set up by the organizers of the conference for its participants was canceled because of serious threats. This reflected the state of unrest still palpable throughout the country. After the conference, I had the opportunity to accompany workers from women’s organizations to the countryside to learn about their health and community development programs.

Upon my return to Canada I participated in providing public education to non-governmental organizations and the general public about El Salvador as well as developing project proposals and providing translation services to support Salvadoran women's organizations and cooperatives.

Throughout my undergraduate studies in sociology my research and writings focused on Salvadoran society and more specifically the origin and effects of the civil war. Of most importance were the effects of war on youth. In 1997, I returned to El Salvador for 3 weeks to meet with local organizations to do a general needs assessment and to investigate the possibility of a partnership in a development project. At that time, incremental youth gang violence was identified as a principal concern by organizations consulted as well as by other Salvadorans.

In 1997, I received approval to develop the Human Rights Education in El Salvador project funded by CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) as part of its Awards for Canadians Program. I conducted fieldwork in El Salvador from February to July 1998.

By the time I left to go to the field, I had numerous contacts in El Salvador. My involvement in the Salvadoran community in Canada, my studies and my prior visits to the country had already emerged me into the culture and consequently lessened my experience of culture shock. Rather, I experienced

what Nordstorm calls “existential shock” in relation to working in the field of violence. I will discuss below what I call the “Field Within”.

FIELDWORK AND CIDA PROJECT

“Experience and interpretation are inseparable for perpetrators, victims and ethnographers alike.”(Nordstrom & Robben:1995:4)

I would like to propose that the nature of this inquiry, specifically as an anthropological quest, has left unclear boundaries between the role of the observer as group participant and observer as academic representative. In contrast to other well-defined roles played by the observer; group facilitator, trainer, student, parent, the role of participant observer/researcher is the most ambiguous and perhaps as such is a dangerous one to play in the field of violence. There exists a tension between my role as member of the group-participant and outsider-observer.

I would like to continue by commenting on the “field” where this research took place. The observation of the field of violence in San Salvador, El Salvador became as much a personal experience as it was an anthropological endeavour. Knowledge gained through my personal experience revealed insights that led to further inquiry resulting in the present text. The knowledge was translated from phenomenological experience into an intellectual interrogation. In fact, through the methodology of participant observation, I gained valuable knowledge as observer from informants’ generous sharing of experience, personal histories and daily life. As a participant, I also learned from my own adaptation to their

environment, to their life, herein (perhaps mistakenly), for academic purposes called the field of violence. I became aware of that which I took with me to the field that has informed my observations and interpretation of my experience.

Nordstrom and Robben discuss the relationship between the ethnographer and the subject of violence as follows:

The tensions experienced by most of us can be ... qualified as existential shock.... It is disorientation about the boundaries between life and death, which appear erratic rather than discrete.... It is the confrontation of the ethnographer's own sense of being with lives constructed on haphazard grounds that provokes the bewilderment and sense of alienation experienced by most of us.... Existential shock is a highly personal and context-specific research phenomenon (1995:13).

Carl Jung, founder of analytical psychology keenly observed his own phenomenology as well as that of his patients to inform his study of the human psyche, parts of which will be explained below. His belief was that human psychic activity was united in a common structural pattern of organization. He also stressed that the work of the psychologist was to be clear, to work out his/her own issues, so as not to infect the patient or be infected with any psychological projections or to be able to recognize them at once (Jung:1989). Similarly, the subjective nature of anthropological discourse is also widely acknowledged and thus as suggested by Devereux "What happens within the observer must be made known if the nature of what has been observed is to be understood." (in Behar 1996:6).

Therefore, the anthropologist as researcher must also be self-aware as his/her research is as much or more a product of the self as it is of the field and its informants. Specifically, the narrative form of anthropological discourse and the boundaries of academic language provide for a narrow framework within which to represent Other realities as they are perceived by the self who is the researcher, observer and analyst. There is no question that the subject of study, the choice of informants and the reported information are a choice made by the researcher through the lens of her or his own personal experience and intellectual process that include an integration of the self and academic training.

The following is intended to convey my personal experience working in the “field of violence” in El Salvador. It is a personal reflection on field work in response to a suggestion by Ian Prattis that the field largely lies within the anthropologist rather than only in the cultural milieu of the other (Prattis:1997:67). Prattis also suggests that current academic discourse omits to communicate valuable information about field work itself and the relationship of the anthropologist to the cultural other due to the limitations inherent in anthropological language (Prattis:1997:74).

I initially experienced difficulty reporting my fieldwork within a result framework as stipulated in my contract with CIDA as well as in academic discourse necessary for evaluation. It was the personal nature of the experience whereby the outer manifestation of violence was integrated into my own

experience that rendered the fieldwork with the other, and the fieldwork within, inseparable. A question leading me in my research was how one would study what the Salvadoran Archbishop once called the “culture of death” and what has often been referred to as the “culture of violence” (Cruz in ECA:1997:980, Anon.: 1994). It appears that the culture of violence has been accepted as a generalized term contrasted in current discourse to the proposed construction of a culture of peace. Therefore the object here is to bring further understanding to the culture of violence.

The research inquiry at the basis of this project was initially constructed in a form that I perceived could be of interest to others as I searched for the means to carry out a project that could in some measure contribute to Salvadoran efforts in the area. The CIDA human rights education project I implemented and the participant observation research I conducted were “practical” in nature, defined by a contractual agreement that outlined my role and contribution to beneficiaries of the project as an opportunity to explore culturally appropriate creative techniques to work with youth in the area of alternatives to violence in conflict resolution (See Appendix I).

I would like to share the following brief reflections with the reader. In The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart, Ruth Behar discusses her experience as an ethnographer, she concludes her book by saying “...Anthropology that doesn’t break your heart just isn’t worth doing anymore”

(Behar:1996:177). The research at hand is of the type that breaks your heart, at least from the point of view of this vulnerable observer.

VIOLENCIA

**Darkness conned its way in...Shadow of lost Souls
Drowned my Sorrow...Killed the Pain
Stabbed my Heart...Bliss came gushing out
.Non-existence.
I looked around...Could not see Me
Loving Spirit of my Soul...Gone
Their Journey... My Journey?
I looked again...Stranded
Only Void...
Dead center of the ABYSS**

The preceding 'poem' is my personal reflection about the subtlety of violence I encountered as it became a personally integrated phenomenon. Contrary to the impression I had going into the field that I would constantly encounter violence in the streets of San Salvador, I discovered that coming face to face with the act of violence is only a part of the actual phenomenon. As Green documents in her writings about Guatemala, El Salvador's neighbouring country, there exists an underlying fear, a terror that is insidious in its omnipresence. A fear that is silent yet pervasive (in Nordstorm et al.:1995:105-122). The strongest trigger of existential shock for me, while in San Salvador, was Silence. There was so much more going on than what seemed appropriate to discuss or to acknowledge. It was upon my return to Canada, after months of reflection and research, that I began to suspect what seemed to be normalized occurrences of violence were not only silenced because of normalcy but also on a deeper level, because of the accumulation of fear and violence stored in El

Salvador's collective experience. Carl Jung's work became a guide for this project because of his pioneering work on the collective unconscious, the invisible collective experience. In Analytical Psychology: Its Theory and Practice he says:

You are human, and wherever you are in the world you can defend yourself only by restricting your consciousness and making yourself as empty, as soulless, as possible. Then you lose your soul, because you are only a speck of consciousness floating on a sea of life in which you do not participate. But if you remain yourself you will notice that the collective atmosphere gets under your skin. You cannot live in Africa or any such country without having that country under your skin....In the collective unconscious you are the same as a man of another race, you have the same archetypes, just as you have, like him, eyes, a heart, a liver and so on (1968:50-51)

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The initial concept for this thesis was to provide a descriptive ethnographic account of youth gangs in El Salvador. However, personal experience in the field elucidated the need to situate the phenomenon of gang violence within a larger pre-existing cultural framework. Consequently, this research project has developed into a symbolic inquiry of the cultural dynamics underlying the historical cycle of violence in El Salvador.

There exists a danger in a reductionist analysis of violence, especially in its repercussions on those who have survived it and continue to live with it on a daily basis. It is impossible to rationally conceive the totality and the depth of a historical cycle of violence. It is a socio-economic phenomenon and most importantly a psychological and cultural experience, a reality. Academic

knowledge and discourse can only aspire to further its own understanding and proximity to the truth of those who are perpetrators, victims and survivors of violence and those who are agents of change, peacemakers. Therefore, the complex phenomenon of war and violence can not be reduced to any one perspective or the view of any one academic discipline regardless of the relevance of its analysis. Keen offers an important cautionary reflection:

Half-truths of a political or psychological nature are not apt to advance the cause of peace. We should be as weary of psychologizing political events as we should be of politicizing psychological events. War is a complex problem that is not likely to be solved by any single approach or discipline (Keen:1986:11)

It is important to remember that the pervasive violence of war affects all sectors of society, it is a collective experience that requires a collective healing process. Becker discusses the impact of the social environment on the healing of war trauma. From the perspective of the mental health field he states “the mental health of our patients depends on the willingness of society to deal with their issues” (in Kleber:109). Hence, an examination at the level of culture can be useful to gain understanding about violence within its specific social context.

In Victor Turner’s article Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage, he refers to Van Genepp’s definition of the three phases of rites of passage rituals; separation, margin (limen) and aggregation. Turner emphasizes the liminal period or the part of the process where the subject is in transition between states. Turner proposes that rites of passage “may accompany any change from one state to another” such as change of social status from boyhood

to manhood or in the case of a group, or “as when a whole tribe goes to war.” (Turner in Carus Mahdi & al.: 1987:5). Of primary importance to Turner is the liminal phase of initiation rituals which follows the separation from the group or larger social structure. He proposes that the symbols accorded to the subject in the liminal period “are, in many societies, drawn from the biology of death, decomposition, catabolism, and other physical processes that have a negative tinge...” (in Carus Mahdi (ed.):1987:6). The liminal phase in the initiation ritual is referred to by Turner as a structural death of the individual who is “no longer classified and not yet classified.” (ibid.).

Present day El Salvador, as a nation, can be conceptualized as being in a liminal or -in between- phase as it is embarked in the process of transition from a culture of violence to peace and democracy. Within this context, I will use the concepts of ritual and initiation and specifically the liminal phase of rites of passage to explore the social construction of youth in the Salvadoran post-war context.

The social construction of youth and violence can also be explored from the perspective of cultural or collective identity. The transition phase inherent in the ritual process is also a transformation of identity. I will explore Salvadoran cultural identity and its relationship to intergroup violence. It is particularly important in this context as a damaged, vulnerable or threatened identity has been identified by scholars in the field of psychoanalysis such as Gilligan, Volkan

and Lacan as a causal factor of violence (in JPCS:1998:5-21). I will briefly develop this concept in the subsequent overview of Salvadoran culture and will then contextualize youth gangs within this framework.

I would like to outline here a link between adolescent psychology and ritual or rites of passage. I will begin my analysis by examining the gang structure as the liminal phase of a rite de passage. Researchers such as Sullwood, Bettelheim, Campbell and Frankel have proposed that the need for initiation rituals to demarcate important life transitions is innate to human psyche and more specifically to the adolescent (Sullwood in Carus Mahdi et al (ed): 1987:111-131, Bettelheim in Frankel:1998:55-56, Campbell:1988:81-83, Frankel:1998).

Carl Gustav Jung, founder of analytical psychology developed his concept of archetypes to explore this type of universal psychic phenomena. "Archetypes are, by definition, factors and motifs that arrange psychic elements into certain images, characterized as archetypal, but in a way that they can be recognized only from the effects they produce" (see Jacobi) My analysis is based on the premise that, as Frankel suggests "If the archetype of initiation is a structural component of the psyche, then it's going to occur whether or not a given culture formally invests in such rites" (1998:55).

At the cultural level I will examine the scapegoat ritual, the scapegoat as archetype, to demonstrate that it is an unconscious ritual, a dynamic process taking place in El Salvador without the necessary phase of aggregation to complete its cycle of transition. To examine the dynamics of this archetype I will elaborate Jung's archetype of the shadow and its psychological projection on a collective level. In order to elucidate this I will also use the concept of enmification taken from the field of psychology of war to demonstrate shadow projection and scapegoating through enemy making, the archetype of the Enemy, as a constant pattern within the Salvadoran cycle of violence including between rival gangs and society and gangs.

I will conclude with an examination of grief and modern forms of ritual as a possible key to transform the cycle of violence into a transition from a culture of violence to one of peace. I will present ritual as a cultural process that in the case of the collective experience of violence can enable the mourning process in order to affect identity and thus the cycle of violence.

Hence at the collective level, in the case of the cycle of violence in El Salvador, I propose that understanding the underlying processes of psycho-cultural dynamics, including those of archetypes, can shed light on the perpetuating cycle of violence. It must be kept in mind that Jung's perception of archetypes was that they were unknowable but for their manifestations in the

outerworld. He proposed that “the archetype represents a profound riddle surpassing our rational mind” (Jacobi:1959:31).

Also noteworthy is the problematique of conceptualizing symbolic analysis within existing linguistic structures. Jolande Jacobi proposes that : “... any attempt to formulate psychic phenomena in terms of language is doomed to imperfection, because the means of expression can never be fully adequate to the subject matter.”(Jacobi:1959:4).Therefore, it is within these limitations that I will outline throughout my analysis an interpretation of violence in El Salvador based on Turner’s theory of limen and Jung’s theory of archetypes.

I would like to further explain the concepts of Carl Jung as the primary concepts to be used in the analysis. Archetypes are a collective representation of mythic or symbolic images that interact with the personal unconscious of individuals. Let us then first examine the personal unconscious to explain its relationship to archetypes and to the phenomenon of violence.

Jung draws a distinction between the personal and collective unconscious and regards them both as innate to the human psyche. The personal unconscious is the container of psychic material that was once conscious and for some reason has been relegated to the unconscious. On the other hand, the material of the collective unconscious originates in the universal human experience, is innate and has never been conscious.

Complexes as defined by Jung are psychic material that resides primarily in the personal unconscious in the form of associations that are structured around a particular feeling or emotion. The reader may be familiar with terms such as 'Inferiority', 'Superiority Complex' or even 'Father' and 'Mother Complex'. Complexes are defined by Jacobi as "feeling-toned groups of representations" (Jacobi:1969:6). that function "as specific factors disturbing the normal course of the psychic association process" (ibid:7). The conscious association process was studied thoroughly by Jung as part of the conscious realm of psychic activity while comparing them to complexes that are an "intrapsychic phenomenon" originating in the unconscious and as such are characterized as being "beyond the objective control of the conscious mind" (ibid).

In the Foreword to Jacobi's book, Jung describes his observations about complexes:

The thing that most impressed me was the peculiar autonomy the complexes display as compared with the other contents of consciousness. Whereas the latter are under the control of the will, coming or going at its command, complexes either force themselves on our consciousness by breaking through its inhibiting effect, or else just as suddenly, they obstinately resist our conscious intention to reproduce them.

He goes on to describe some of outward manifestations of the complexes:

... all sorts of annoying, ridiculous, and revealing actions, slips of the tongue, and falsifications of memory and judgment. They cut across the adapted performance of consciousness." (Jung in Jacobi:1959: ix)

The individual who self-identifies with a complex, has an emotionally charged perspective and behaviour concerning the object or image of the

complex. The understanding of the relationship between personal complexes to collective archetypes is at the centre of this explanation to enable further examination of the archetypes at work within the cycle of violence in El Salvador. Further to being linked to a particular emotion, the nature of the complex has a universal component, this is its link to the collective archetype. The roots of complexes are universal archetypes, collective “primordial images”. “The term [archetype] is not meant to denote an inherited idea, but rather an inherited mode of psychic functioning...”(Jung in Jacobi:1959:43).

Jung discovered the archetype as a result of his research as he observed the universal character of the nucleus of the complexes such as the image of Mother, Father etc... Interestingly, Jung proposed that “Everyone knows nowadays that people ‘have complexes’; what is not so well known is that complexes can have us.”(in Jacobi:1959:9). This refers to the importance of the complex for the individual whose self-image and image of the world is viewed through its colored lens.

The complex in itself is a healthy component of the psyche... Material deriving from the collective unconscious is never “pathological”; “it can be pathological only if it comes from the personal unconscious, where it undergoes a specific transformation and coloration by being drawn into an area of individual conflict (Jacobi:1959:25-26).

Of interest to the analysis at hand is the relationship between the complex and archetype.

Mythologizing the complex, an understanding of its universal character is crucial to its integration. For example a father-son relationship wherein the son wishes the father’s death can be understood as the problem of deliverance from the father: a problem that concerns all men and has

been disclosed in the myths and fairy tales as the slaying of the reigning old king and the son's accession to his throne (ibid.).

Jung qualifies complexes as the "royal road to the unconscious"

(Jacobi:1959:6). As mentioned above, myth and their enactment through ritual have a distinct relationship to archetypes. Joseph Campbell draws the following link:

The human psyche is essentially the same all over the world. The psyche is the inward experience of the human body, which is essentially the same in all human beings, with the same organs, the same instincts, the same impulses, the same conflicts, the same fears. Out of this common ground have come what Jung has called archetypes, which are the common ideas of myths (1988:51).

The individual who suffers an overidentification with a complex, for example someone with a mother complex, may recreate the essence of his or her relationship to mother, including the excessive emotional charge, in all other personal relationships. Thus, the individual's actions and perceptions are affected by the disproportionate influence of the complex upon the functioning of his or her psyche.

On the collective level, it is also possible for a group to overidentify with an archetype as a result of collective experience. Thus, as a particular archetype is activated in many individuals at the same time, it acts as a unifying force between them. As a collective phenomenon it is bestowed a collective energetic and emotional charge that is manifested in its outward manifestations by the group. It thus becomes the nucleus of the social group.

On archetypal content Jung writes:

The original structural components of the psyche are of no less surprising a uniformity than are those of the visible body. The archetypes are, so to speak, organs of the prerational psyche. They are eternally inherited forms and ideas which have at first no specific content. Their specific content only appears in the course of the individual's life, when personal experience is taken up in precisely this form (1954: 845)

Since Jung's passing in 1961, much work has been done to further develop the concept of archetypes. The following analysis is based on the recognition of archetypes as universal psychic structures that influence perception and behaviour in human beings.

I wish to place the focus on the Shadow archetype in order to lead to an exploration of its relationship to the archetypes of the Enemy and most importantly the Scapegoat. Collective Shadow projection inherent in scapegoating is a common psycho-cultural phenomenon in post-war societies due to the inevitable difficult period of transition from war to peace (Keen:1986, LeShan:1992, Kleber:1995, Stevens:1989). Consequently, it will be demonstrated that examining the structure of the above mentioned archetypes can lead to a deeper understanding of the adversarial relationship between youth gangs in El Salvador and Salvadoran society in general (Keen:1986:21).

The foundation of Jungian psychology that addresses unconscious processes rests on the definition of the shadow as an unconscious container filled with rejected parts of the self as the ego or persona is developed within a

specific social context. In other words, as the self develops it identifies what is acceptable or not acceptable in the context within which it exists. The principal influences are the family and the social norms and values adhered to by society.

Guggenbuhl-Craig proposes:

We define the shadow as those elements , feelings, emotions, ideas, beliefs with which we cannot identify, which are repressed due to education, culture or value system. The shadow can be primarily individual or primarily collective-the former when we are the ones, personally, repressing particular psychic contents, the latter when an entire culture or sub-culture effects this repression (in Zweig :1991:223).

Edward C. Whitmont argues that “the shadow is projected in two forms: individually, in the shape of the people to whom we ascribe all the evil; and collectively, in its most general form , as the Enemy, the personification of evil.” (Whitmont in Zweig:1991:18).He goes on to say that :

There are of course social and collective implications of the shadow problem. They are staggering, for here lie the roots of social, racial, and national bias and discrimination. Every minority and every dissenting group carries the shadow projection of the majority...” (Zweig:1991:18).

Projection (or blame) is an important part of the analysis of the shadow. It is the process by which shadow material is mirrored back to us by others in our external world. We thus recognize and react to a trait or characteristic in the other that we do not consciously recognize in ourselves. A simple example of this at an individual level can be found in personal relationships when we are intolerant of another. Jungian thought would suggest that by identifying that which irritates us about the other person and looking within, we may discover a characteristic of ourselves that we have, thus far, chosen to deny. We therefore

project out shadow material onto someone outside of ourselves (Miller in Zweig:1991:40).

Projection is an unconscious identification of the Other with ones own repressed psychic material that is deemed inappropriate for conscious awareness, expression or behaviour. Therefore, the unconscious projects these disallowed elements of the self onto another person or group who can become an Enemy. Jung says that “All activated contents of the unconscious have the tendency to appear in projection” (1968:158).

The identification of an Enemy through projection of the shadow creates a process of scapegoating. Scapegoating occurs as shadow material is repressed in light of social pressure to behave, think and feel a certain way, usually associated with being “good”. That which lies dormant, the shadow material of the “bad” is thus projected onto an enemy to justify ones righteousness and goodness. Scapegoating reduces guilt and anxiety by blaming another for characteristics that one does not want to acknowledge in oneself. In the process, the “enemy” becomes dehumanized to the point where only negative characteristics void of his or her shared humanity are attributed to him or her (Fjerkenstad in Zweig:1991:232).

In order to understand the process of collective shadow projection that leads to scapegoating, it is crucial to outline the integrative role that archetypes can play within a group or Nation.

The scapegoat is created from a vulnerable social sector that in some way does not fit the normative model of society. Characteristically, the scapegoated group also self-identifies with the disproportionate responsibility of the collective shadow that is internalized as excessive guilt and shame. Importantly, the Scapegoat implies the sacrifice of the other to vindicate the majority.

Relevant to this argument is the appreciation of the historical importance of the scapegoat or sacrifice ritual within many societies. Originally intended and used as a cleansing ritual, I will demonstrate that it has become an unconscious practice that has lost this transpersonal dimension. Thus, it sacrifices and victimizes a sector of society without the necessary mechanisms to complete the healing cycle. Consequently, the scapegoat, in limen, is perpetually cast out of society and perceived as a persistent threat to the common good of the collective.

Scapegoating, as it is practiced, means finding the one or ones who can be identified with evil or wrong-doing, blamed for it, and cast out from the community in order to leave the remaining members with a feeling of guiltlessness, atoned (at-one).with the collective standards of behavior (Perera:1986:9).

Thus in this case, the archetypes activated through the commonality of the experience of civil war and a historical legacy of social unrest, repression and

conflict can be identified as a unifying force or common ground. “When the same archetype is active in a number of people it draws them together, as if by magnetic force, and drives them to act in an irrational way” (ibid). The most extreme example of the destructive force of an activated archetype would be that of Hitler and his mass followers wherein otherwise seemingly rational, caring people committed atrocities completely out of character and seemingly beyond the grasp of the imagination (Rank:1977). Jung explains:

As a rule, when the collective unconscious becomes really constellated in larger social groups, the result is a public craze, a mental epidemic that may lead to revolution or war or something of the sort. These movements are exceedingly contagious-almost overwhelmingly contagious because, when the collective unconscious is activated, you are no longer the same person. You are not only *in* the movement-you *are* it (Jung:1968:50).

The archetypes of the Shadow, the Enemy and the Scapegoat are closely intertwined in the phenomenon of war and will be conceptualizing here as psycho-structural elements of historically based cycles of violence demonstrated through the case study of El Salvador.

It will be concluded that the solution lies in Salvadoran culture; the symbolic realm where cultural truths may be expressed and understood by its people without impending threat. It will also be proposed that the relationship between psychology and culture is complementary. Therefore, in conclusion, I will deconstruct these propositions in a discussion of the relationship between the symbolic manifestation of violence and the emerging culture of peace in the context of the Salvadoran cultural identity.

“If Understanding Is Impossible, Knowing Is Imperative.”
Primo Levi (Cited in Kleber et al (ed): 1995:26)

I would also like to draw the reader's attention to the relationship between the cycle of violence and the process of grief. Given El Salvador's history, gang violence at the present time can be conceived as a symptom of a pre-existing cycle of violence, specifically of loss and revenge. Hence, the phenomenon of gang violence is a distinct manifestation of the psycho-cultural pattern of recurring violence.

Loss, as we know, is a natural result of violence in any of its forms. In times of war, the affected populations suffer multiple losses which are cumulative. Loss is suffered repeatedly over time in contrast to the trauma experienced as the result of a single occurrence such as in the event of one important tragedy. This type of traumatization similarly affects the young gang population, as survivors of war and through their cultural heritage, also by the nature of their association and activities clearly marked by multiple losses.

A complete ritual as a healing mechanism to enable the expression of grief, a mourning process for the individual and the collective can be a key element in enabling the transition from a culture of violence to one of peace for youth as well as society as a whole.

When losses are unmourned, they constitute holes in identity, which the group tries to fill by recovering the lost object in some form...In mourning, the group divests itself of its lost identity components and invests in alternative components that are currently available. By thus reconstituting group identity around new objects, mourning obviates the often violent attempt to recover the irretrievably lost objects (JPCS:1998:vol.3:10).

METHODOLOGY

My research methodology included participant observation and formal or informal interviews with youth involved directly or indirectly in gang activities as well as with professionals and others working specifically with gang and youth populations in the areas of violence prevention and rehabilitation. Generally, interviews and interactions were conducted in Spanish and have been translated within the text. I also kept a field journal in which I documented daily observations. I used video recordings, audio recordings and note taking to document interviews and life stories. When appropriate, I would document my observations in my journal while in the field with my informants, otherwise I would write notes afterwards.

From March to the end of July 1998, I participated as an active member of a youth group of gang members, who by self-definition, were no longer active in violence, and were in various stages of the process of leaving the "vida loca". This particular group "Homies en Cristo" had a spiritual, Christian focus. Homies en Cristo was an affiliate of the national organization Homies Unidos, my initial contact, which also provided important information and support to this project.

Homies en Cristo was composed of approximately 8 youth between the ages of 15 and 21. In the core group, all were male with the exception of one member. At times, up to 20 people would attend meetings or get-togethers. At most in one meeting 5 women would partake. I participated in meetings and in community and social activities. As a member of the group I provided my own personal contribution through information sharing, the initiation of a gender based discussion group, some psychodramatic exercises with particular members, English classes with themes of self-esteem and lengthy personal interactions. I shared group facilitation techniques with one member who was also the Education Director of Homies Unidos. I had the opportunity to participate in the inception of the group, which contributed to achieving a certain level of acceptance as one of its members. I also shared some of my own personal experiences like other members. I was challenged to reciprocate the trust that was confided in me. I was always introduced by the youth as a member of the group when questioned by outsiders who seemed most interested in my role within the group.

As an anthropologist working in the field, I faced the expected challenges of acceptance, learning the language, in this case members who had lived in the US spoke Spanglish and all gang members share a specific Spanish vocabulary. Members of one of the largest gangs also use sign language that is derived from American Sign Language. Members of Homies en Cristo and their mother

organization Homies Unidos share the special trait of uniting members of rival gangs to work together for social change. Under different circumstances rival gang members would kill each other. Other governmental and non-governmental organizations provide services to rival gangs separately.

One of the determinant factors in identifying Homies Unidos as a link to the target population and informants for this project was the fact that it is a volunteer peer organization made up of gang members themselves. Within this framework, its members maintain relationships with active gang members on the streets with whom contact would otherwise be problematic. Homies also have insight into the gang life in El Salvador otherwise difficult to penetrate by observers who do not share the personal experience of the “vida loca”.

Also an important source of information was my participation in a project at the Ilobasco Rehabilitation Centre, a detention centre for male young offenders where a pilot project sponsored by the United Nations Development Program and the Fundacion Maria Escalon de Nunez was being implemented using theatre as a tool for rehabilitation. My participation was limited to approximately ten hours of group sessions as program funding caused the suspension of the project. There were approximately 21 male participants in the project.

The program structure was developed based on the previous implementation of a similar project in another detention centre. The setting of the first programming initiative, like most detention centres and prisons, was structured to provide designated areas for inmates grouped together based on the gang they belong to. Exceptionally, in the Ilobasco Rehabilitation Centre, the youth were housed together based on the judge who had convicted them and therefore were forced to co-habitate. Reflections by the director of the project Fernando Umana largely contributed to the development of the following symbolic analysis. My own brief participation in the project and experience using drama as a therapeutic tool abroad and in Canada informed my analysis of the project and of the observations that will also be documented below.

In October 1999, I was invited back to El Salvador by the School of Integral Training and Research in Analytical Psychology in honor of the passing of Professor Father Fermin Saenz PHD, a dedicated Jesuit Jungian Psychologist. I was invited to present the results of my research and more specifically a Jungian perspective on the phenomenon of gang violence in El Salvador within the context of “El Dia Del Psicologo” (The Day of the Psychologist) at the University of Central America Jose Simeon Canas. The conferences were held in three different settings aimed at an audience of psychologists, psychology students and the general public. During my brief stay, I conducted informal follow up sessions with youth from Homies en Cristo as well as members of Homies Unidos. I also documented feedback and reactions to my presentations in order

to represent concerns voiced by the participants, these observations have been integrated or expanded within the text.

III. CULTURAL ANALYSIS

“los hacelotodo, los vendelotodo, los comelotodo, los tristes mas tristes del mundo” Roque Dalton

Roque Dalton, renown Salvadoran poet and revolutionary, himself a victim of war, is quoted here in a depiction of the essence of the Salvadoran mestizo identity. A literal translation would not do this citation justice. Here is an attempt to convey its meaning: they (Salvadorans)do, sell and eat anything and everything, they are sad, the saddest people in the world (cited in Escobar in Roggenbuck: 1994:105, Lara Martinez: 1994:564)

Francisco Andres Escobar in his article Los Turbios Hilos de Sangre: Aproximacion al Problema de la Identidad Cultural, (The Turbid Bloodline: An Approximation to the Problem of Cultural Identity) proposes that Salvadoran history, specifically colonization has endowed Salvadorans with certain culturally determined traits based on collective experience and heritage. He also argues that a specific collective unconscious, certain archetypes and psychic structures originate in the Salvadoran ancestral ethnic origin. He traces this back to the cultural roots of both Spanish conquistadors and the Indigenous Pipil tribe. Escobar argues that the biological and psychological contents of this ancestry is of itself contrasting and conflictual. Something that he suggests Salvadorans carry within their genetic and psychic structures (Escobar in Roggenbuck1994:111).

He draws attention to the emergence of a psychology of domination arising from the contact between Spanish and Pipil peoples. However, he furthers his analysis of Salvadoran identity by exploring the conflicting relations between a population diversified by this contact. Historically, the Salvadoran population has been internally divided along perceived ethnic boundaries based on the relationship of one's mixed group to the dominant elite. However, it is still observable, to this day that the indigenous minority in El Salvador is discriminated against and viewed as an oddity by the general mestizo population (Aguilera:Pers.Com.1998).

Escobar cites Lira to synthesize certain psycho-cultural characteristics of the general Latin American mestizo population. In summary, he suggests that they have adapted to a way of life including working for paid wages and migration as a means for survival. Consequently, he proposes that they have become poverty stricken and have lost their livelihood, quality of life and dignity (in Roggenbuck1994:128).

Escobar proposes three elements to profile the mestizo population; existential ambiguity, perceived inferiority and a multifaceted, often self-conflicting, disposition (Escobar in Roggenbuck:1994:129).He explains that the mestizo doesn't belong anywhere, feeling that he/she is not from here or from there. Hence, he argues that an ambivalent sense of identity, the desire to

belong in the hispanic or creole worlds without ever truly fitting in leads to a degraded self-image, a perceived sense of rejection. He states that the Mestizo longs to forget ancestral Indigenous ties but is incapable of doing so. The resolution then is expressed through excessive attempts at domination through the exercise of power in whatever domain within reach. Escobar argues that he/she basically is excessive in a vengeful, perhaps unconscious way. He concludes that inferiority and insecurity form the definitive parameters of the Salvadoran mestizo collective self-perception (ibid.:129).

Salvadoran dramatist Jose Roberto Cea in his book Teatro en y de una Comarca Centroamericana describes the loss of Salvadoran indigenous cultural practices to colonization. He proposes that before the conquest, indigenous groups in the battle for territory would dominate one another while a dynamic process unfolded within which cultural identity was transformed and cultural practices adapted to reflect merging indigenous groups (Cea:1993:12). Therefore moving through the process of shifting identity from the domination of one group by another, entering a liminal phase to conclude with the aggregation phase of integrating the cultural practices of merging tribes to form a new group identity.

In contrast, the onset of Spanish colonial rule alienated the native population from its practices. Cea describes this process by outlining the prohibition of ritual enactment by the missionaries which forced the indigenous population to abandon their traditional practices (Cea:1993:56). According to him,

the cultural oppression reflected in forbidden rituals and ceremonies resulted in the beginning of the alienation of the native Salvadoran from his/her own indigenous identity (Cea:1993:167). This is exemplified by Escobars observations above.

It can be argued that the process of colonization dominated the indigenous population of El Salvador and created a clear dichotomy between Spaniards and Natives. It, in fact, also gave rise to a population of mixed ethnic origin creating inter-group conflicts within the nascent population that have become inherent in Salvadoran culture. This said, it is interesting to note the recurring socio-cultural dynamics wherein armed conflicts and revolutions have taken place through divisions in society between groups, historically differentiated by social class or social status. Importantly, in today's gang wars, these differences are no longer perceivable between rival gangs as they are composed of youth from similar socio-economic and ethnic origins.

The rejection of indigenous identity stemming from colonization and Christianization was also compounded by the violent massacre of 1832, led by native leader Anastasio Aquino. As documented in the preceding brief historical overview, the legacy of domination had reduced the Salvadoran Native population to land workers for the Spanish elite and landowners. In 1832, a revolt led by the Native leader Anastasio Aquino was met by government with violent oppression of all indigenous people. The revered Aquino was hanged in a public place to serve as a deterrent to further revolutionary activity. Because of Aquino's Native heritage,

all indigenous practices were outlawed and were associated with threatening revolutionary activity. Consequently, any remnants of the Salvadoran Native heritage were destroyed by natives themselves to escape the deadly association to the Aquino revolt. Traditional clothing was burned and the Nahuatl language replaced by Spanish (Henriquez-Consalvi:Pers.Com:1997). To exemplify the extent of rejection of native cultural identity, it can be noted that the term "indian" is commonly used pejoratively in El Salvador to depict negative traits of character. Denial of native ancestry is clear in this paradoxical epithet as it reflects the internalization and perpetuation of the negative attributes initially imposed upon the native population by colonizers and later by the ruling elite.

The notion of a multifaceted disposition of the mestizo as expressed by Escobar is also acknowledged throughout the literature and by other Salvadorans themselves, as an inherent contradiction within Salvadoran culture (Nunez and others, Pers.Com:1998-1999). Humberto Velasquez describes opposing cultural traits of his culture mentioning for example that the Salvadoran is at the same time offensively chauvinist (machista) and extremely religious, a peace seeker and extremely violent, hard and at the same time loving, capable of robbery and assault without consideration for his/her victim and also capable of sacrificing all that he/she has and even what he/she doesn't have for the sake of children (Velasquez:1986:12). Similarly, Escobar illustrates a volatile, multifaceted temperament that he attributes to the multiplicity of motivations, attitudes and goals that make up the mestizo identity. He also provides

comparable examples of incongruent behaviour such as extreme religious dedication contrasted to the capacity to commit atrocious violent acts (Escobar in Roggenbuck:1994:130). Interestingly, the extreme nature of characteristics noted above can be paralleled to the present state of Salvadoran society in the post-war context wherein vitiated values and attitudes permeate every day life.

In El Salvador, as a society in limen - in transition from a culture of violence to one of peace and democracy - the importance of collective identity is apparent as it has been in times of prevalent violence as exemplified throughout El Salvador's history and presently by gang violence. Feldman proposes:

Violence is formative; it shapes people's perceptions of who they are and what they are fighting for across space and time-a continual dynamic that forges as well as affects identities (in Robben and Nordstorm:1995:4).

The effects of inter-group violence can precipitate a shift in one's group identification framework, likened to the transition phase of rites de passage wherein one is "betwixt and between". A lack of proper reintegration mechanisms to establish a renewed identity, can be conceptualized as rendering identity vulnerable in its liminal phase of construction.

I would like to briefly examine certain causes associated with a vulnerable or damaged identity as they have been identified as causal factors of violence (in JPCS:1998:5-21). Salvadorans have, since colonization, lived through a cycle of repression that has shamed their native identity through domination and also shamed their Spanish identity as perpetrators of domination. As documented

above, certain scholars suggest that the traumatic birth of the Salvadoran mestizo identity from the paradoxical conflict and union between colonizers and the native population has yielded unconscious internal divisions within the population as well as an inherent need to recreate and ultimately resolve the original conflict (1998:Umana:6, Roggenbuck:1994)

In his book Violence: Our Deadly Epidemic and Its Causes, James Gilligan explains that damage to identity is manifested as shame and is “the primary and ultimate cause of all violence.” He defines shame as “the absence or deficiency of self-love,...its opposite is pride...a healthy sense of self-esteem, self-respect, and self-love.” He adds: The experience of feeling shamed and humiliated, disrespected and ridiculed...is experienced subjectively as the death of the self. People will sacrifice anything to prevent the death and disintegration of their individual or group identity (1996:46).

One of the consequences El Salvador's history of repression is a socio-economic structure wherein the majority of the population lives in poverty. Poverty is regarded by Gilligan as a “form of structural violence, which stimulates its victims to commits acts of interpersonal violence.” Poverty he adds is “a form of psychological deprivation, of dignity, self-respect, and pride...Relative poverty-poverty for some groups coexisting with wealth for others- is much more effective in stimulating shame, hence violence, than is a level of poverty that is higher in absolute terms but is universally shared (in JCPS:1998:vol.3:9).The case of

Salvadoran history of political and socio-economic repression of the majority consecutively by colonizers, repressive governments, the coffee oligarchy and finally by a social structure based on social exclusion and marginalization is a clear example of a cycle of relative poverty. Consequently, in the Salvadoran context, poverty and its relationship to cultural identity can be linked to Escobar's concept of the perceived inferiority of the mestizo.

Furthermore, in the context of war, disillusionment and aspirations to a distant Utopia cause a shift in consciousness from what LeShan calls sensorial perception to mythic thinking. Sensorial perception here refers to a belief system that reflects more closely the reality of diversity and challenges within society. Mythic thinking means that a belief system is dichotomized into absolute thinking, us and them, good and bad, with an end goal of reaching an imagined Utopia. The latter supposes that once the bad is eradicated all will be well and wonderful. Of course, in the post war era, Utopia through warfare can not be conceived because of the very real experience of war and loss (LeShan:1992)

The transition to mythic thinking in times of war must therefore be transformed into sensorial thinking in times of peace. However, as the causes of conflict and war remained unresolved, I suggest that mythical thinking remains intact enabling the perpetuation of the cycle.

The Salvadoran population in its precarious socio-economic state has faced a history of violent conflicts and repressive governments that have also rendered it powerless. As stated by Escobar, trauma is dealt with either through mechanisms of force and domination or helplessness and powerlessness (in Konrad:1994). Also of interest is the consistent acknowledgment of unexplained prevalent cultural patterns of social chaos and disorder coupled with the proposed characteristic incongruity inherent in Salvadoran cultural identity. These mechanisms are extremes on the continuum of domination and violence. Herein we find evidence of extreme thought processes linked to LeShan's concept of mythic thinking.

Notably, the literature provides numerous examples of the propensity to forget the past, possibly since the colonization process, that could also be interpreted both as a collective coping mechanism and perhaps as a regulatory function of a repressive social organization. The lack of retrospection can be linked to an ongoing cycle within which the manifestation of mythic thinking and violence are never resolved, thus, symbolically trapped in a liminal phase.

Author Carlos Henriquez-Consalvi notes the importance of reflecting on the past, within the post-war context to prevent similar tragedies from being repeated (1996:141). In his analysis of contemporary Salvadoran society, he points out the tendency to bury and forget the past while denying its significance to change (ibid:144). The historically volatile level of violence in Salvadoran society has been

openly acknowledged as a socio-economic and political problem. However, Henriquez-Consalvi proposes that the rediscovery of the Salvadoran identity must complement all other efforts to create a culture of peace (ibid:145).

CASE STUDY: HOMIES

I would like to provide here some observations and experiences of the field. At a first meeting with Homies Unidos, I was told that the organization was run by volunteer gang members who shared a personal conviction to work with youth. I was asked why I was there and what I could contribute to their work. Luckily I was able to express both a sincere personal concern for youth affected by violence and professional skills in group facilitation that could be beneficial to the group. I learned that numerous researchers have consulted Homies Unidos and used their resources without contributing to or supporting the organization.

At the root of efforts at violence prevention in El Salvador, like the exemplary work of Homies Unidos, is heart. In other words, an emotional identification with the cause. Sigfredo Rivera, Ringo, once told me that things could change with dedication, hard work and heart. Homies Unidos is a voluntary organization made up of gang members who have chosen a life beyond violence. The success of this organization in the face of harsh economic constraints and little support from government is in the dedication to a vision of a changed world and in a commitment to the community and their people. The

Homies, united by their steadfastness to make a difference, conserve the values learned from the *vida loca* such as cooperation, trust, loyalty and self-sacrifice for the well-being of the group. These values are required in the street life to ensure survival. They also serve to create a strong structure for the work of their organization that has gained international recognition.

Members of Homies Unidos are free to keep their gang style appearance. Rap has also been used by gang members to express a positive message through this popular medium. Bullet and Gordo rap a song that they wrote called *Frutas de la Guerra* (Fruits of War). Deeply moving lyrics tell of the tale of refugees of war in a foreign land without any opportunities and family support. They explain the plight of deported gang members and their encounter with Salvadoran reality. Finally, the rhyme pleads for peace, not for political reasons, but for purely humanitarian ones.

Sadly, as this is being written, the same Homies praised here for bringing rival gang members together, are being threatened for this same reason by those still on the streets. The word is that because they meet with "The Other Side" they are mobilizing the enemy against "The Barrio". I capitalize these terms because it is clear that both sides, both gangs, and all barrios share the same perception. Unfortunately, members and leaders of Homies Unidos have been killed while working for peace. In this context, threats can not be taken lightly. In July 1999, after months of receiving anonymous threats, the organization members were shot at outside their offices. Fortunately, all

survived, although, one of our young collaborators was shot in the leg and was left in a wheelchair. Her 18 years of life have been marked by repeated attacks and gunshots, the latest having been while hanging out peacefully and playing cards outside of the Homies Unidos office.

Homies En Cristo

I became a member of Homies en Cristo, a smaller group, established through the example of Homies Unidos. Every core member of the group took on a role such as treasurer and secretary. The planning of activities such as public speaking engagements, workshops to be taken, fundraising and community outreach were done cooperatively. One of the members who was the educational director of Homies Unidos provided a strong example based on his experience. We would meet in one of the member's homes formally once a week to discuss what activities would be undertaken during the week. Different members would get together at different times to perform their scheduled tasks. Friday mornings the group would meet at the Homies Unidos office where everyone would provide an update of the work they were doing in their respective communities.

I quickly became aware of the discrimination and danger faced by Homies. To provide one example, one day driving out of the community we were confronted by young gang members who walked right by our car. The tension was palpable. The Homies I was with stopped breathing as the gang

members glared at us. Once they were out of sight there was a collective sigh of relief. It is important to understand the context within which these youth live. Most gang members bear tattoos that identify their home barrio. Although they may chose not to participate in gang activity, others still perceive them as rivals and are a threat to their lives on a daily basis.

New members who would come to 'check out' the group also faced threats when they returned to their barrio. One young man told me that he was threatened because he was seen by his homeboys in the car with myself and a young woman who had been part of their rival gang. Although he and I shared a lot of time together and talked about everything from gang organization to his life story, he never came back to the group. Usually, it was in the face of tragedy that homies would respond to the outreach activities of Homies en Cristo in the community. For instance, one young man came who had been shot the previous day. He was on someone's death list because he was suspected of having killed a rival gang member. When I did a follow-up in October 1999, I learned that he was back on the streets killing and that people were after him. "His days are numbered" I was told (Nunez: Pers. Com.). This was a young man with a young son, who along with his tattooed body bore a contrasting childish grin.

I took one of the group members to be admitted to the hospital for treatment of ongoing effects of a gunshot she had suffered a year prior when she was 16. She was confronted by rival gang members in the 'waiting room'. She

recounted numerous similar experiences during her lengthy stays in the hospital. One specific incident was when she was threatened by a rival gang member while hospitalized for a gunshot wound that has left her scarred for life. Her doctor defended her then and told the other patient that if anything happened to her he would not operate on him. She also recounted with humour another incident when someone defended her by saying that she now belonged to the “Gang of God”.

A common denominator of gang members who have renounced violence is having had a brush with death. Ana, mentioned earlier, was shot when she was 16, on orders from her then boyfriend, whose name is tattooed on her forearm. Both Feo (Ugly Boy) and Shadow were told that they never would walk again after being shot. Feo now has prosthesis on both feet and is able to walk, he suffers extreme pain in his legs on a regular basis and often can't afford the medicine that he needs. Shadow seems to have recovered although he also suffers recurring back pain.

The others had similar experiences which led them to question life and ultimately to search for a spiritual meaning to it all. This is something that united them in Homies en Cristo. Also, as recounted by some, when they were on the streets they knew their friends were always there to look out for them, to watch their backs. However, when they found themselves injured, in the hospital months at a time, alone, they realized that their Homies were no longer there for

them. This isolation and disillusionment in the pseudo-family has brought many youth to search for alternatives. Many have also tried to bridge the distance with their families of origin with varying degrees of success. The families of youth who have left violence remain suspicious of their children's activities and friends.

The dynamic within the group of young men and women was at times strained. Romantic advances were not welcomed by the young women who were looking for a safe place to be, a non-threatening environment, perhaps like a family. I suggested that the women meet to discuss their own issues together so that they could share later with the rest of the group in a way that they felt appropriate. Although the word feminism was noticeably not an acceptable term of reference, the young women did want to create their own space.

A Dichotomy of Paths

One of the Homies from the group is now part of a Christian Ministry (De las Tinieblas a la Luz). He has found his path through spirituality and faith. For

others, the strict demands of a Christian path can be alienating. It is important to realize the marked contrasts and parallels between street life and Christian life. Being Christian serves to provide an experience of life based on hope, faith and service to others. Strict guidelines based on beliefs of sin and redemption can be a difficult path to follow. However, gang culture shared by its members reflect similar values; cooperation, honor, unconditional 'service' and loyalty to the gang and its leaders. The rigid code of conduct also provides a structure that clearly defines acceptable beliefs and conduct, similarly to the Christian doctrine.

However contrasting the Christian and gang life may appear, in the case of the groups I was in contact with, there exist some parallels in their essence and structure. For example, in both cases, leadership is revered and accepted without question. As gang members fear punishment if they do not adhere to the strict rules of their group, so does the Christian youth fear God's wrath if he or she waivers in his/her faith. In my observations of active gang members and former gang members who have become Christians, I very often perceived inherent contradictions and conflicts between the individuals and their respective groups and way of life.

Remarkably, in the Salvadoran gang culture, taking the path of God is seen as a way to save your life. It is recognized generally by gang members as one of the only legitimate ways to leave the "vida loca" behind. Being a gang member is generally a lifetime commitment. Leaving the gang is not acceptable

and is punishable by death. I was told this was to prevent homeboys from betraying the group and joining rivals. Starting a family has sometimes been an acceptable reason to leave the gang although this assertion was contested by some. To follow the path of God, I was told, is respected as long as they can see a change in you. "If the Homie walks around with a bible doing crazy stuff then forget it, he's done for." (Salvador: Pers.Com: 1998). Hence, gang life, and its characteristic brutal violence is also the product of a belief system that affirms Christianity as the only viable alternative to itself.

I witnessed the duality of my informants' lives when I did a follow up with them in 1999. I learned that Spider, the former treasurer of Homies en Cristo had left the group to go back to the streets and was now struggling "to find God again" (Pers.Com.:1999). He had been shot on two separate occasions since I had left a year prior. The other Homies who were accompanying me asked who had shot him. The question was emotionally charged and clearly an automatic response to a hurt homeboy. Spider replied that his assailant had become a Christian. This diffused the high emotions that could have otherwise led to vengeance. As mentioned earlier, most of the youth I worked with had become Christians after a brush with death. However, I discovered that some who were perpetrating violence were also motivated to become Christians either as a means of protection from their vengeful rivals or as a means to moral redemption.

GANGS vs. WAR

What is clear is that when I came face to face with soldiers, with their “campesino”⁸ faces just like our own warriors, it convinced me that in our country, the term “enemy” has to disappear forever. Santiago⁹ (Henriquez-Consalvi: 1992:270).

The patterns that best illustrate the relationship between gangs and the cycle of violence can be exemplified by linking them to Salvadoran identity and previous manifestations of violence as already outlined. For this purpose, I will draw upon the archetypes of the enemy, the shadow and the scapegoat to explain the underlying dynamics of gang violence that are comparable to those of warfare. I will demonstrate that Salvadoran cultural identity is reflected by youth gangs as it was by their warring predecessors. Furthermore, I will elucidate the process that forces youth into limen without the necessary mechanisms for reintegration into the social structure.

As noted earlier, mythic thinking, as discussed by Le Shan is one of the elements that facilitates the enmification of the other in the form of extreme dichotomized thought patterns that center around good and bad or right and wrong, during war (1992). A correlation can be drawn between mythic thinking and the activation of archetypes as they are exemplified by a feeling-toned unconscious identification, that is not rational in nature, with an image composed of inherent traits that influence behavior.

⁸ Campesino refers to peasant

I would like to propose an interpretation of war through the concept of archetypes to understand the dynamics that underlie the perpetuating manifestations of violence previously described. The three archetypes that I will use as tools for my analysis are, as stated earlier, the enemy the shadow and the scapegoat. First I will demonstrate how these have been manifested during the civil war and then I will compare these observations with gang violence. I will determine that the similarities between warfare and gang violence are more numerous than their differences. Specifically, I will outline the relationship between identity and the manifestations of violence through archetypes.

The liminal phase of rites of passage or transition, as defined by Turner, can include an individual moving from adolescence to adulthood as in gang members or a nation, such as El Salvador, from peace to war and the reverse, from war to peace.

Rivera suggests that at the political level the recreation of previous patterns of enemy making are taking place by projecting the persistent ills of society onto the youth population. He compares this process to negative projections onto the leftist guerrillas during the armed conflict and onto drug traffickers before that (Rivera:1998:21).Cruz also supports the notion of a socially constructed perception and adds that El Salvador has experienced a

⁹ Translation of Carlos Henriquez Consalvi 'Santiago' is the founder of the rebel clandestine Radio Venceremos that accompanied the FMLN combatants throughout the armed conflict. He is also the founder

recurring pattern of violence that has historically taken on different forms. He identifies levels of violence that have been the stage for manifestations of inherent unresolved cultural conflicts. He argues that historically they have taken on the form of social, political violence and warfare replaced today by high levels of delinquency (Cruz in ECA:1997:981). Most of the literature reviewed acknowledges in some form the social construction of the phenomenon of the acute level of gang violence. Also eluded to is the recurring pattern of violence in El Salvador. The pattern may be attributed to the historical activation of the war related archetypes that have been incarnated in various manifestations since colonization.

It can be argued that at the collective psychological level, a projection onto an Enemy, a dynamic obvious in times of war, may actually remain in times of peace regulated by political treaties. The fact that war, the most appropriate arena for the manifestation of the Enemy archetype, is not imminent in El Salvador, that it can not take place at this time of disillusionment in armed conflict, may indicate the need for it to be replaced by a substitute. Actually, Stevens proposes that the archetype responsible for aggression against an "enemy" in warfare is the same as in gang violence. About acts of gang violence he remarks that they are "ritualized partial expressions of the archetypes of war" indicating a link between gang violence, warfare and the cycle of violence (Stevens: 1989:53). As conflicts remain unresolved, it can be suggested that the archetypes of war retain their influence on behavior and are continuously

expressed at some level within society. I would like to provide a comparison of war and gang violence to lead into a discussion of the Enemy and further my analysis based on two other main archetypes that best exemplify the process of the post-war transition period, the Shadow and Scapegoat.

The antecedents of the civil war, themselves historically rooted, that have not been redressed and their consequences thus far appear to be the recreation of the cycle of violence. Therefore, mythic thinking which engages the war archetypes remains activated because of unresolved issues in the face of unattained goals and hopes accompanying the end of the armed conflict. The ever-present violent archetypal energy is manifested through gang warriors.

Similarly, in his book Inventing The Public Enemy: the gangster in American culture, 1918-1934, Ruth argues that in the post-war transition period in the U.S., Al Capone, the gangster, was created as the social enemy precisely to face unresolved social issues. He also suggests that this process was a way to deal with unfulfilled expectations or needs that resulted from social change, specifically, rapid urbanization characteristic of the post-war period (Ruth:1995). Similarly, El Salvador is within a historic post-war period of rapid social change.

The discrepancy between promises made by the accords and the harsh reality of Salvadoran life today is clear not only in the obvious manifestations of youth violence, ongoing political debates and other forms of social and political

resistance but also in the social dynamics between different social groups. For example, as elections in the month of March of this year approached, political assassinations occurred and have been referred to as steps backwards in the process of democratization of El Salvador (Diario de Hoy:2000)

Interestingly, Whitmont suggests a link between peace and the manifestation of the shadow. "Since the shadow is the archetype of the enemy, its projection is likely to involve us in the bloodiest of wars precisely in times of the greatest complacency about peace and our own righteousness (Zweig:1991:18). In fact, it has been argued that the magnitude of youth violence has 'come to be' since the signing of Peace Accords (Rivera:1998, Cruz in ECA:1997, Smutt & Miranda:1998). However, in the case of El Salvador, the end of the war has not truly engendered peace and righteousness but rather disillusionment and discontentment. It is clear that Salvadoran society has suffered frustration from unfulfilled expectations of the peace process (Cruz in ECA:1997:982). Perhaps it can be suggested then that the irresolute process has engendered the creation of the enemy in its current form.

Sam Keen in The Enemy Maker argues the following:

We are driven to fabricate an enemy as a scapegoat to bear the burden of our denied enmity. From the unconscious residue of our hostility, we create a target; from our private demons, we conjure a public enemy. And, perhaps, more

than anything else, the wars we engage in are compulsive rituals, shadow dramas in which we continually try to kill those parts of ourselves we deny and despise (Keen in Zweig:1991:198).

Keen's reference to wars is interesting in light of the Salvadoran social context. Perhaps the endless need for a public enemy is magnified in the post-war context as the perpetual cycle must be adapted to a new social order.

I would like to suggest that the social construction of youth in El Salvador can be conceived as youth existing in a liminal phase in their relationship to society. The liminal phase as noted earlier refers to the state of a group or an individual in the in-between phase of a transformation of identity or social status. They are adolescents at the threshold of adulthood as well as scapegoats symbolically exiled from Salvadoran society.

A scapegoat is generally a vulnerable member of a family or group that is sacrificed for the redemption of the larger membership or society. As social exclusion and marginalization renders youth vulnerable within Salvadoran society, the archetype of the Shadow roots itself in a collective psychological projection onto Salvadoran youth gangs. The dynamic is that youth are taking on the blame for the ills of society in a process of self-identification. In turn, they are acting out these ills while being blamed as their cause. Consequently, youth gangs are in fact being sacrificed by the whole as scapegoats. Also of

importance is the effect of this phenomenon on Salvadoran youth in general. Youth are consistently suspected of being part of a gang by society in general and by gangs themselves who seek to identify their rivals. It is important to note that Shadow projection does not imply the innocence of the object of the projection but it does suppose that the person or group who is projecting also has a role to play at least in the conceptualization of the problem (Keen:1986:11).

At the present, in Salvadoran society, that which is associated with bad or unacceptable traits or behaviour is the young tattooed gang member who does not conform to established norms and values. Sigfredo Rivera argued that El Salvador's mentality is comparable to that of the 1930's or 40's. He said El Salvador is not ready for the 1990's and its diversity, even less for the changing society of the post-war context (Pers. Com:1998).

Jung argues that in order for shadow projection to take place, there must exist a hook, thus a characteristic or behavior in the other that is identified with the shadow material (in Philp:1958:94). Clearly, youth gang behavior and attitudes provide sufficient hooks to enable Salvadoran society to target them with collective projections.

The archetype of the Scapegoat, the result of shadow projection, is based on the mythological concept of ritual sacrifice, representing the sector of society

that is required to take on the responsibility for unacknowledged psychological issues. In the case of El Salvador, these could symbolize: social unrest, ongoing socio-economic repression and the feelings of discontentment arising from the blatant discrepancy between the radical socio-economic change promised by Peace Accords and the reality of ongoing hardship for the majority of the population.

Scapegoating is a coping mechanism, it is the practice of ascribing blame.

“... originally the scapegoat was a human or animal victim chosen for sacrifice to the underworld god to propitiate that god’s anger and to heal the community. The scapegoat was a pharmakon or healing agent. In the scapegoat rituals it was dedicated to and identified with the god. It functioned to bring the transpersonal dimension to aid and renew the community, for the community acknowledged that it was embedded in and dependent on transpersonal forces. The scapegoat ritual like others was used “to enrich meaning or call attention to other levels of existence...[It] incorporate[d] evil and death along with life and goodness into a single, grand, unifying pattern” (in Perera:8).

Perera further argues that “In the modern age, however, the scapegoat ritual has gone bad because it has become trivialized. Its deeper meaning is unconscious.” (Ibid.:9). Therefore, scapegoating is an unconscious process through which the collective engages in a cycle of self-sacrifice, sacrificing part of itself, without the healing benefits of the original ritual.

As an unconscious process, the practice of scapegoating a group or individual has lost its healing dimension. The symbolic ritual, it can be argued functioned to bring forth unconscious material that was being manifested

outwardly (the shadow).and as it was symbolically acknowledged it was then assimilated into consciousness. Originally, as mentioned above the scapegoat symbolized a sacrifice that was perceived to restore order to the community. In its modern manifestation, the symbolic cycle is broken as the deeper meaning of the ritual has been relegated to the unconscious. It has thus become a distortion of the original practice that once linked a people to a healing transpersonal or spiritual source.

To complete the ritual process, in some instances, the scapegoat, often an animal was released into the wild and later returned to the community symbolizing the cleansing process. The animal was welcomed back into the community and celebrated as a symbol of transformation. Symbolically, this may represent the key to the reintegration of youth from limen back into society as their role is redefined and recreated.

At the collective level, the shadow projection onto an Enemy also functions to fortify social or group cohesion; by denying the responsibility of its own shadow; a group bonds together against the object of its projection creating a clear dichotomy of us and them while maintaining a denial mechanism against its own unconscious material.

In his exploration of collective identity, Volkan proposes that the most important of seven "markers of group identity" is the "opposition to another group

onto which one projects those parts of oneself that one cannot accept" (in Bracher:JPCS:1998:7).

In this context, a parallel can be drawn here between the link Umana and Escobar have made between the reciprocal cycle of violence, social divisions and cultural identity to Keen's suggestion that scapegoating and enemy making are processes undertaken to fortify social cohesion.

We scapegoat and create absolute enemies, not because we are intrinsically cruel, but because focusing our anger on an outside target, striking at strangers, brings our tribe or nation together... We create surplus evil because we need to belong (Keen in Zweig:1991: 202).

Umana suggests that in El Salvador both youth and society are victims and perpetrators. The argument is not that youth gangs and their violence is to be exonerated because they are victims, it is rather that the dynamic between organized violence and society is symbiotic. Thus responsibility can be attributed first to political institutions and also to society as a whole. However, it is not suggested that blame be attributed in the process of explaining the phenomenon. More useful is an attempt to encourage a sense of responsibility for the collective experience by the members of the collective (Umana:1998:4, Pers Com:1998).

If Escobar's suggestion that the mestizo is characterized by the need to belong, then, the proposition that scapegoating is used to fortify social cohesion is probable, youth as a marginalized part of society is an appropriate target. Also

a reciprocal relationship can be seen as gangs also victimize society to reinforce their own exclusive group membership as they also heavily rely on their large group identity to feel that they belong (Umana:1998).

The concept of “paranoia a deux” will be used to shed light on the reciprocal relationship in the cycle of sacrificial violence. Keen explains:

The enemy system involves a process of two or more enemies dumping their (unconscious).psychological wastes in each others’ back yards. All we despise in ourselves we attribute to them. And vice versa. Since the process of unconscious projection of the shadow is universal, enemies “need” each other to dispose of their accumulated, disowned, psychological toxins. We form a hate bond, an “adversarial symbiosis”, an integrated system that guarantees that neither of us will be faced with our own shadow (Keen in Zweig:1991:200).

Undoubtedly, psychological projection and enmification is also taking place between rival gangs. They are like mirrors of each other trying to destroy their own image. In contrast to their North American counterparts, in El Salvador, all rival gang members are Salvadorans from similar socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. The fact that rivalry is based on self-identification with a group is particularly interesting as a social construction.

The need for mechanisms to strengthen social cohesion can be linked to identity, Bracher explains:

... if an individual's personal identity is fragile or vulnerable, that person may seek compensation in inhabiting his large-group identity and attempting to enhance its stature (Bracher:JPCS:1998:8).

This can be applied both to Salvadoran society as a whole, in view of characteristics of the irresolute mestizo identity and particularly to youth gangs and their “betwixt and between” status as members of society through social exclusion.

Salvadoran youth are in search of a sense of identity and belonging. The impetus to join the gang is closely linked to a lack of economic opportunities and the generalized disintegration of social institutions including the family. Personal identity traditionally linked to these support mechanisms is thus weakened. Youth create a familial identification with their gang and are bound to the group by a rigidly organized structure with explicit values and rules. Loyalty, honour, cooperation, respect and conviction cement their group identity (Rivera: Pers.Com.:1998)

In order explain the dichotomy, the “US and Them” separation of youth and society, it can be suggested that what Fernando Umana calls the cycle of sacrificial violence is being played out in the form of unconscious violence directed towards El Salvador's progeny (Umana:3:1998).

The vida loca represents a clear example of a cycle of loss and revenge.

It can be paralleled to the cycle of violence in the larger Salvadoran society.

Gang violence is a representation of Salvadoran identity and its historical legacy.

Umana observed certain characteristics of Salvadoran Identity reflected in gangs:

...deeply rooted conservatism and religiosity, violence and aggression as a predominant form of interaction, susceptibility to criticism, a localism that can border on chauvinism and a nationalist-patriotic sentiment, exacerbated "machismo", authoritarianism and hierarchy in their organization... deceit as a form of interaction (perhaps as a strategy of resistance)... all of these characteristics are a reflection of insecurities and fears (Umana:1998).

Umana furthers his reflection on Salvadoran identity and gangs:

the only difference between gangs and other organizations or groups is the legitimization of violence as a means and an end (without any apparent objective or explicit political discourse).in the struggle for power (in the "barrio" or drug trade for example).(Umana:1998)¹⁰.

A comparison of the organization of military forces in the recent civil war and of gangs today can help demonstrate the dynamics of violence that are still being perpetuated.

The "barrios" or gangs share characteristics of military organization that remind us of the military or FMLN (revolutionary).forces: predominant male membership, hierarchy, authoritarianism, reverence for weapons, loyalty to the organization, the spirit of sacrifice or self-destruction in the spiral of violence, loyalty to the ideas of the organization, the exaltation of virility and brute force, the rape of women as an institution, the search for and recruitment of new members, the distinction between an active member (militant).and a collaborator, and the "peseo" (a form of war tax).(Umana:1998)¹¹.

¹⁰ Translation

¹¹ Translation

Like participants in war, gangs defend geographical territory and believe in the value of self-sacrifice until death. There is a similar use of pseudonyms to dissimulate identity and graffiti to mark territorial boundaries. The civilian population is victimized just as it was caught between the military and guerilla forces. There is a generalized fear generated throughout the population. As mentioned earlier, gangs also 'enjoy' impunity like their predecessors based on fear of reprisal. Gangs use firearms and have learned from ex-combatants to make homemade weapons. Pride in dehumanizing the enemy and killing rivals in the name of one's people is as fervent as in warfare. Equally important are exclusive group values, language and ritual initiations.

A concrete example of similar practices as mentioned earlier is the tariff gangs charge to cross their territory. Civilians used to pay the military or the guerrillas to cross their respective territories. Also reminiscent of the systematic assassinations rampant during the armed conflict is the reported activity in recent years of a death squad appropriately named The Black Shadow (Sombra Negra).that aims to eradicate the youth gang population.

The strict gang structure and initiation rituals are good examples of substitutions for that which is not provided by the current social structure and the inherent need for ritual in adolescents. Like most initiations, they consist of violent beatings or in the case of some women, they include being forced to have sex with designated members of the group. The bravery of new recruits is often

tested by assignments that force them to kill or violently beat an anonymous victim (Nunez:Pers.Com:1998).

There is no mechanism to guide initiates to the threshold of transformation. They create their own roles on the social periphery which contradicts the ritual process of social reintegration. Interestingly, social programs working with gang youth are called social “re-insertion” and “reintegration” programs in El Salvador. Youth gangs are symbolically trapped in a liminal space.

Therefore, youth violence and gang formation in El Salvador are a manifestation of a deeper search for identity as well as a symbol of a young society that excludes its youth in social processes with undefined roles in the larger social structure. Youth gangs are also a symbol of unresolved conflicts inherent in social organization and cultural identity.

The shared common elements shared by war and gangs can be linked to the activation of a similar archetype. Stevens argues that

War brings out both the best and worst in us, and in so doing, promotes our self realization. It mobilizes our deepest resources of love, compassion, courage, cooperation, and self-sacrifice; it also releases our capacities for xenophobia, hate, brutality, sadism, destruction and revenge (Stevens:1989:3).

Self-identification with the group is deepened through a sense of shared values. The need to belong has already been demonstrated briefly in the context

of the dynamics of youth gangs. Additionally, it can be argued that society as a whole, having been faced with collective trauma, continues to live in a state of social unrest.

An interpretation of their practices can be that youth gangs are explicitly stating that there is still something wrong in their society. This is the reason it is suggested that they are acting out the untold truth. Frankel argues that “Adolescents mirror the culture’s shadow; they embody and live out those places where we as a culture are most unconscious.”(1998:219). In their murals, revelatory of their great creative talent and need for artistic expression, they portray a the reality of the pain of violence, love, loss and life (See appendix II).Gangs also create graffiti memorials of tombstones and even portraits of their fallen Homies, again creating their own rituals and symbols. They are meeting their own needs that are unmet by the chaotic state of their society.

Can projection onto youth gangs be understood through messages they are screaming out? Divested of power over their own lives, in an environment wherein helplessness or excessive domination is the norm, perhaps their violence is an attempt to confront their role in this reality. Is there anything that affirms power any more than taking a life?

They may also provide an example of what is needed in Salvadoran society. In its own grieving and denial process, the Salvadoran collective has

been unable to look at its past and here its progeny is demonstrating what needs to be done in a very painful way, recreating the sacrificial violence of civil war through gang wars. The gangs are however grieving on a certain level and commemorating those that have been sacrificed. Of course, they are also perpetually seeking revenge, continuously expressing hatred and rage. They are recreating the cycle of loss and revenge.

War leads to a deep interrogation of the meaning of life as the collective is faced with death, loss and the challenge of social reconstruction engaging in the natural mourning process.

Mourning has a sequence that is applicable to children of survivors as to others. The five stages are: shock, denial, confrontation, feelings, and search for meaning (Fogelman in *The Psychoanalytic Review*: 541:1998)

As noted earlier, the spiritual dimension of life is also importantly acknowledged by gang members, at the heart of this questioning lies what pertains to the meaning of life. It is interesting that their blatant lack of respect for human life is contrasted with an unparalleled respect for those among them, including rivals, who chose to leave their life to follow the path of God.

Gangs are essentially expressing a collective reality through the only means available to them. "They're doing the best they can with what they have which really isn't very much."(Rivera:Pers.Com.:1998).In a morbid way, youth gangs are giving a distorted example of the healing process required to heal the

cruel past of forgotten wars. By expressing the latent archetypal energies, they are forcing society to face its own violent reality.

IV. CONCLUSION

GRIEF & HEALING

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” (Radin in Jahoda:1982)

The past, as has been demonstrated has been a painful one wherein many psychological coping mechanisms have been utilized and activated to deal with its consequences. Reflecting on the past leads to a discussion of loss. It is an important issue, not only in terms of those killed and disappeared in war but also as it affects social and economic institutions. As social institutions including the family have been marred by violence, damage to the collective sense of identity has resulted and has become embedded in the social and cultural system. The wounding from war is at the deepest level of personal and collective identity, as often is the case in events where humanity is faced with the reality of real or symbolic death (Gilligan:1996).

Proposed solutions from all sectors of society are recognizing the need for a wholistic approach to change. The historically based burden of society carried by youth is also under examination as a critical eye is being turned towards the representation of youth and their activities. A large proportion of gang members themselves have expressed the desire to live a different life, “to leave the crazy life

behind" however, a reintegration process must be created to ensure their inclusion in society (IDUOP in ECA:1997:25).

It has been argued by many that within Salvadoran government, similarly to others in the post-war context, there exists a tendency to bury the past (Henriquez Pers. Com.:1996). This has serious consequences as it essentially denies the collective grieving and healing process.

Victims may better become survivors if some part of the legacy of the past can be addressed: This may be something approaching a universal value, even though we must also acknowledge the pessimistic lessons of history, that there has always been little redemption for those massively wronged and that historical accounts are seldom settled. In recent years, ostensibly democratic civilian governments have replaced brutal military regimes...most recently, El Salvador and yet have been reluctant to allow full investigation into past human right offenses or have given retrospective amnesty to the perpetrators. A government which refuses to own up to atrocious acts committed by agents in its name seems still to insist that the extrajudicially executed, tortured, and "disappeared" are the guilty ones and denies their relatives the recognition and validation they need to make sense of their losses. These decisions need to be highlighted and resisted. Justice even if long delayed, is reparative (Summerfield in Kleber et al.:1995:27).

Several authors have adamantly asserted the need for Salvadoran society to go against the tradition of forgotten memories to remember the past and to seek truth in order to understand where they have come from, what has brought them to where they are. All agree that this is crucial to create a clear direction toward a peaceful future (Escobar in Konrad:1994, Henriquez-Consalvi:1996, Kleber et al.(ed.):1995).

Salvadoran psychologist Martin-Baro (1990) suggested about the impact of war:

...what was left traumatized were not just El Salvadoran individuals but El Salvadoran society. Elsewhere what has been termed *cultural bereavement* (*his italics*).may turn out to be a key determinant of longer-term psychosocial outcomes for whole societies (in Kleber et al (ed.):1995:21).

Cultural bereavement is at the heart of healing from the trauma of war and violence. Specifically, in an examination of the cycle of violence, the grief process is an essential part of breaking the cycle as it symbolically and emotionally releases the past and makes room for a future. When a change in the pattern of violence is to be effected atrocities of war can not be forgotten but their place is not to be projected into the future. By way of example, the relationship between grief and the pattern of sacrificial violence explained earlier in the dynamic of the scapegoat archetype is summarized by Sam Keen as follows:

Every day we are not grieving is a day we will be taking vengeance. When we are unable to confess that our own parents, our own governments, our own styles of life, have disappointed and injured us, we will inevitably create an enemy on whom we heap our anger." (1986:128).

Here we are reminded of the purpose of scapegoating as social cleansing and healing. However, as it is now practiced as an unconscious dynamic, it can no longer fulfill its purpose. This is an important link in the perpetual cycle of violence and its relationship to bereavement. The use of a scapegoat is

ineffective to deal with the depth of collective trauma and grief. Lifton discusses the effects of scapegoating “total concentration on the target for anger in a way that continues to literalize and inhibits assimilation of the experience.” (in Wilson et al.: 1989:28). The danger is that the cycle of violence may continue through scapegoating to eventually be replaced with another type of violence of greater magnitude. Keen explains:

For a time, purging our rage on a scapegoat relieves us of the feeling. But the need for cleansing of the unacceptable feelings builds up, and we must plunge into a new circle of violence. The only certain way out of the blind ritual of war is by learning to substitute grief for anger (Keen : 128).

Furthermore, it has been argued that collective recovery depends largely on the “reconstruction of social and economic networks and of cultural identity”(in Kleber:1995:25). The link between repressed emotions and the deficiencies in these areas of peace building in El Salvador may not seem apparent. However, Bock cites anthropologist Franz Boas’ suggestion:

a “different equilibrium of emotion and reason” is established in each society. Furthermore, emotions are linked to specific events and goals by complex historical processes (in Bock:1988:202).

Fernando Umana asks “How can we expect our youth to make themselves vulnerable when our own society punishes and scorns openness and truth?” (Pers. Com.:1998). In this context, perhaps another layer of existing power relations can be uncovered in cultural patterns of emotional life. In particular the role of war and violence as destructive forces in social and personal relationships.

Sherebrin explains how “juvenile delinquency is an alternative expression of mourning or a substitute for pathological grief... suppressed grief is compounded by guilt eventually surfacing in ‘acted out’ anti-social behaviour (In Bertman (ed.).1999:242).

Gang wars similarly to the civil war foster hatred and anger and provide destructive outlets for these. Generally, studies have depicted youth gang members as wounded young people having suffered various forms of abuse at the hands of family and/or society in general, not to mention the armed conflict (Smutt & Miranda, Umana, Rivera and others). Their inheritance is experienced and re-created in their daily lives just as that of their progenitors and ancestors has been manifested in consistent social unrest and most recently in a horrific war.

In warfare our cruelty is allowed a periodic catharsis. We visit on symbolic objects the frustration and rage we have accumulated from all the wounds and humiliations we have suffered. How strange, haunting, even touching our cruelty is. When we look closely, we find that hatred is a form of tortured love (Keen:1986:127).

Also as noted earlier, an important factor for youth gang membership is the need to belong which is also a feeling-toned motivation. This is also recognized as a factor in the practice of scapegoating as it creates a sense of belonging to the group gathering similarly minded people together in the identification of an adversary. Thus, the adversary group must also be united in order to have the capacity to carry the projection and to function as a scapegoat within society.

If collective memory, including its emotional content, is in fact one of the factors at the basis of the perpetuating cycle of violence, it is important to examine the existing means that can function to enable the collective bereavement process. The role of social and family ties must be acknowledged as determining factors in the healing process of trauma (Kleber et al (ed.):1995:.23). This may partially explain the need for youth, at this time, to create a familial identification and bond with a gang, when faced with a devalued family unit in the home, rendered powerless, by its state of social disintegration.

The effects of war are perceived herein as a collective trauma cutting across the diversity of the Salvadoran population because of their inherent nature as a destructive pervasive and far reaching force. The terror of social and cultural violence incontestably touches the core of every member of the population. Therefore, the healing process must be contextualized within the collective and cultural realms of experience that unite the diverse populace.

It is significant that, in ES, people are worried that they have begun to forget all the names of those murdered by the military in the 1980s. The collated testimonies of survivors could be part of a kind of grass roots history, a counter to the official accounts generated by those with power to abuse and thus a public validation of their suffering (in Kleber et al.:1995:.26).

Fortunately, this concern is being reflected at the present time by an initiative of the Museum of the Word and Image (Museo de La Palabra y Imagen).in cooperation with other organizations to erect a monument to

commemorate the fallen Salvadorans of the armed conflict. Additionally, cultural institutions like the Museum have been working on presenting the past to the Salvadoran people as a reflection of lessons learned. This public concern to deal with the past is essential as one of the possible means for the collective to experience the assimilation of the traumatic experience they have survived.

Turner's cycle of rites of passage, adapted from Van Gennep, concludes with the phase of "reaggregation or reincorporation" following the liminal phase (1989:94). Therefore, El Salvador must emerge from its state of limen, into a phase of reaggregation to complete its cycle of transition from a cycle of violence to one of peace and democracy. Within this context, Salvadoran youth can also emerge from limen to incorporation into a more solid social structure.

In the process of reintegration from liminality, social and cultural change can take place as what has been experienced and produced outside of the limitations of the pre-existing social structure influences and transforms it upon its reintegration. The complete process of separation, limen and re-aggregation is thus a process of cultural transformation (Turner:1969). Consequently, the experience of war can generate significant social change when the lessons learned are integrated into a new social structure; the transition from war to peace and democracy. Similarly, as youth are reintegrated into society, their experience of marginalization can alter the existing social structure and inform their new status and social roles.

In From Ritual To Theater, Turner suggests that experiences of significance must, in order to reach completion, be given expression through creative means.

... an experience is never truly completed until it is “expressed”, that is, until it is communicated in terms intelligible to others, linguistic or otherwise. Culture itself is the ensemble of such expressions-the experience of individuals made available to society and accessible to the sympathetic penetration of other minds (1982:14).

The role of the creative endeavour is the assimilation of the experience, it may become a catalyst for change. Turner further argues:

Such an experience is incomplete, though, unless one of its “moments” is “performance”, an act of creative retrospection in which “meaning” is ascribed to the events and parts of the experience... Thus experience is both “living through” and “thinking back.” It is also “willing or wishing” forward,” i.e., establishing goals and models for future experience in which, hopefully, the errors and perils of past experience will be avoided or eliminated (18).

According to Turner, there are two sources that generate the creative expression that can complete the cycle of experience. The first is on a collective level, when a group emerges from the liminal phase, as in a collective representation of experiences of war for example. The second is through creative expression of individuals, representing the collective experience through their own art. Whether the creative product is produced by the collective or by one of its members, it has the potential to affect the masses (1982).

Turner's emphasis on creative expression can be paralleled by Jung's preoccupation with the creative process that led to his contribution to psychotherapy as "the father" of Art Therapy (Sherebrin in Bertman (ed.):1999:237). Creative expression is a crucial tool in the resolution of the mourning process (Bertman:1999). Similarly, ritual is an important element in the complete grieving process.

At the collective level, artists, musicians, actors and writers deserve support in their efforts to create and share their reflection of the collective experience. Creative expression should be encouraged and integrated in all sectors of society, not for aesthetic purposes but rather as a vehicle for psychological and cultural change.

Fernando Umana, the director of the previously mentioned youth rehabilitation project provided an important example of the use of creativity to work with youth affected by violence. In his work as theatre director, he was challenged to go beyond the traditional theatrical performance and to deal with the psychology of participants. In the post-war context, psychological expression is tightly linked to creativity. Umana discovered, in his experience in a previous pilot project, that the young offenders who demonstrated the most creativity were those who had been convicted of the most violent crimes (Pers.Com:1998). He also concluded that in order to avoid recreating detrimental patterns within their

own practices and institutions, youth workers and others responsible for the rehabilitation and education of the youth also needed to be educated (Ibid.).

The harsh economic constraints of daily life in El Salvador overshadow cultural expression as an agent of social change. The inherent function of the arts and the symbols of culture is to reinforce and recreate collective identity. Therefore cultural and artistic expression must be encouraged as a mechanism of healing and social change. Consequently, it is important to support the integration of cultural institutions and cultural expression into its social reconstruction process.

As part of the education and rehabilitation process, creativity must be encouraged as it is one of the only ways of expanding the limitations of already existing structures (Umana:Pers.Com.:1998). Identity is thus reflected in a society's artistic expression; rituals, music, theatre and visual arts. The creative endeavour can help apprehend the collective experience to break through the 'tradition' of silence. It can provide, in the face of a horrific past; the expression of the wound, of the grief, a recollection of what remains and an aspiration for the future.

In my introduction I proposed that the current level of gang violence in El Salvador is a manifestation of a historical cycle of violence. At the root of this cycle, is a cultural identity forged from a paradoxical conflict and union between colonizers and native Salvadorans. By examining Salvadoran cultural identity

from this perspective, I have conceptualized the phenomenon of youth gangs as a reflection of their progenitors and ancestors.

The reciprocal relationship between the vulnerable cultural identity and the cycle of violence has been constructed in a context of cultural oppression intertwined with marked socio-economic and political repression. These circumstances have created the foundation for succeeding manifestations of violence in different forms throughout history, most recently represented in the 12 year civil war and now in the phenomenon of gang violence.

El Salvador is in a process of transition from a culture of violence to one of peace and democracy. The perpetuation of socio-economic inequalities results in social unrest embedded in what has been called a culture of violence. Violence permeates all aspects of Salvadoran society and has weakened social institutions. Consequently, youth have become one of the most vulnerable sectors of society and concurrently have been exiled into social exclusion.

The comparison of gangs to the military and the recent civil war reveals numerous similarities. Interestingly, gang violence distinguishes itself by its lack of an explicit ideological purpose. However, from a psycho-cultural perspective, as outlined earlier, the role of the gang as bearer of the collective shadow; assuming both the role of victim and perpetrator of violence is reminiscent of times of war.

The process of shadow projection onto youth gangs by society, and their consequent role as scapegoats has been demonstrated as a collective coping mechanism that sustains the current social construction of youth gangs. This process has been likened to a cycle of sacrificial violence within which society rejects and sacrifices part of itself, its youth, in order to deny its own unconscious shadow material. Consequently, the youth gang is perceived as a public enemy while the historical root of social unrest and violence is left irresolute.

El Salvador as a nation in transition from war to peace is in the symbolic 'betwixt and between' liminal phase of a ritual process as defined by Turner. Similarly, socially excluded youth in their role as scapegoats are also in limen. In both instances, the transition must be completed through a process of re-aggregation. Thus, as the nation redefines its cultural identity and assimilates its collective experience of violence, it can also provide a model of re-incorporation for Salvadoran youth.

Unresolved issues are deeply embedded in collective identity and are consequently being manifested through gang warriors. I propose that the mourning process and modern forms of ritual manifested through symbolic products of culture and creative expression are key to the transformation of the culture of violence to one of peace. Mourning is a determining factor in the transformation of the collective experience of violence into a learning process that can re-create cultural identity and thus also provide a model of re-integration

for marginalized youth. One solution may lie in the conscious construction of a support structure to initiate the public and private process of grieving.

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