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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Article Title: Guerrillas and social movements. The supportive environment of the Salvadoran armed left during the seventies

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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes the different relationship patterns established by the Salvadoran guerrillas with social movements throughout the 1970s. Using testimonies from ex-guerrilla commanders, social organizers and internal documents of the Farabundo Martí Popular Liberation Forces (FPL) and the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), this research suggests that the interaction between guerrillas and social movements shaped the organizational structure of both and that the specific patterns of this interaction – secondary milieus or co-constitution – produced specific and differentiated effects. The linkage of guerrillas with pre-existing and initially autonomous social movements resulted in a greater territorial control but also in internal conflicts and less organizational cohesion. Instead, resorting exclusively to the creation of secondary milieus seems to be associated in this case with greater organizational stability and internal cohesion, but with less mobilization capacity. Also, the case of El Salvador shows that the type of relationship established by an armed group with its support environment is conditioned by several key factors, which include the presence, or absence, of a pre-existing social movement infrastructure, or the strategic choices made by the leaders of the armed group itself.

KEYWORDS:
El Salvador, FMLN, guerrillas, insurgency, non-state armed groups, social movements

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1. Introduction

Between 1981 and 1992, the Salvadoran Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), a coalition of five armed leftist groups, which had emerged during the 1970s, was engaged in a protracted struggle for

state power. During the war, the FMLN managed to control large areas in the north, east and centre of the country. In spite of the fact that the armed forces were capable of moving in and out of these guerrilla-controlled territories, they could not settle for long without risking unacceptable casualties. These areas became alternative centres of power – "Guerrilla Governments" as Wickham-Crowley (1987) called them – that claimed exclusive legitimacy, thus creating a situation of multiple sovereignty. This was the case in large areas of the departments of Chalatenango, Morazán, Cabañas, San Vicente and Cuscatlán, where the FMLN had the support of what Malthaner and Waldmann (2014) called a "radical milieu", made up of large networks of peasants and rural workers. Support for the Salvadoran guerrillas was the subject of some ethnographic research carried out in the eighties and nineties (Cabarrús 1983; Pierce 1986; Binford 1999; Wood 2003) that provided valuable empirical evidence on the reasons for peasant support for the guerrillas. These works showed that the guerrillas depended heavily on a highly motivated and disciplined militancy, so in this sense the Salvadoran case was a clear example of the resource-poor movement depicted by Weinstein (2007). In opposition to the findings of the supporters of the "greed approach" in the study of civil wars (Collier and Hoeffler 2004), the thousands of Salvadoran peasants, workers or students who joined the revolutionary movement, did so for moral or emotional reasons as showed by Wood (2003), from an ideological conviction (Hoover Green 2018), or even as a result of a life-threatening event caused by the armed forces or paramilitaries (Viterna 2013). What these works did not analyse, however, were the relationship patterns that the armed groups had previously established with the strong social movement organizational infrastructure that emerged in this country in the 1970s. Yet, it is precisely the connection of the armed groups with this organizational infrastructure which explains the capacity of the former to establish political control of important sectors of the population during the war in the 1980s.

To help fill the gap in our knowledge of the relationships between Salvadoran armed groups and their supportive environments, this paper analyses how these relationships were forged and developed during the 1970s. To do so, I have analysed in depth the relationship patterns developed with different social sectors by the Farabundo Martí Popular Liberation Forces (FPL), the Salvadoran guerrilla organization that achieved greater territorial presence during the 1980s. In addition, evidence from the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP) – the other major Salvadoran guerrilla organization at that time – has been used as a contrasting case in the analysis of the differing effects of the different relationship patterns between the guerrilla and their supportive social environments. This work shows that the interaction between guerrillas and social movements produces important impacts in terms of the organizational structure and internal cohesion of both. It reveals the existence of two predominant relationship patterns between the Salvadoran armed groups and their supportive social environments: the creation of social movement organizations by the guerrilla, and the appropriation of the pre-existing organizational social movement infrastructure. Each of these patterns had different consequences for both the guerrillas and social movements.

The analysis draws on fifty-five in-depth semi-structured interviews carried out during different periods of fieldwork with former guerrilla commanders and members of popular movements. In highly hierarchical clandestine organizations, information on strategy and key decisions is mainly concentrated in the top leadership. Therefore, the sample of informants includes several members of the leadership of the FPL and the ERP and some of them were also founding members. Given the clandestine nature of the organizations, most of this information was never recorded in writing, so survivors' testimonies are the best and usually the only source available. However, the information provided has been triangulated by repeating the same questions and discussing the same topics with different informants or by using internal documents.

2. The guerrilla and supportive environments in El Salvador

Guerrilla organizations formed in El Salvador in the early 1970s in opposition to a military regime established in 1932. Thus, the splinter groups emerging from the Communist Party of El Salvador (PCS) and the radicalization of university student movement activists were: the Farabundo Martí Popular Liberation Forces (FPL) in 1970; the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP) in 1972; the Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN) in 1975, and the Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers (PRTC) in 1976. Added to these organizations in 1980 was the armed wing of the PCS, the Armed Forces of Liberation (FAL). They were all inspired by a Marxist-Leninist ideology and shared the objective of carrying out a revolution through armed struggle. In October 1980, these organizations formed the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), an umbrella organization that operated as the coordinating structure for the five guerrilla groups.

Between 1970 and 1981, these organizations went from being small clandestine groups, established in some cities and made up of a few dozen students and workers, to rural guerrilla groups with several thousand combatants[1] of mainly peasant origin. This transformation was the result of the relationship forged gradually between the guerrilla and the organizational infrastructure of the social movement throughout the 1970s.

This relationship building process, however, has been little investigated so far. The ethnographic research conducted *in situ* throughout the 1980s and 1990s has provided key information on peasant mobilization and its link with the pastoral work of the Catholic Church in areas under guerrilla control (Cabarrús 1983; Binford 1997), and on guerrilla organization in their zones of control (Pierce 1986), or on the reasons for peasant support for the guerrilla (Wood 2003). However, these studies failed to investigate the strategy developed by the guerrilla to build relationships with different social groups, either due to the characteristics of the study itself, or to the time when it was carried out –in conditions in which certain information could not be revealed. More recent works analysed the reasons for combatants to join the FMLN and the differences in political education procedures of FPL and ERP militants (Hoover Green 2018), but they do not address the links between the guerrillas and popular movements. Similarly, research into the construction of relationships between the guerrilla and the unions is scant (Pirker 2017), and practically no work has been done on ties between the guerrilla and student organizations, or with settlers in marginal areas in which different armed organizations forged different types of relationships. The same can be said of the so-called "mass fronts", linked to the guerrilla. At the end of the 1970s, these coordinating structures unleashed an unprecedented wave of mobilization in the country, and their progressive radicalization resulted in the massive transfer of social movement activists to guerrilla militancy.

The foregoing indicates that in El Salvador the link between the guerrilla and what Malthaner and Waldmann (2014) termed the "radical milieu", or supportive social environment, socially and symbolically connected to armed organizations, is essential for understanding the growth of guerrilla organizations and their subsequent transformation into a persistent insurgent movement in rural areas.

This paper aims to demonstrate that this link was produced mainly through two processes described by these same authors. In some cases, it was a co-constitution process (Malthaner and Waldmann 2014, 985). In other words, previously founded social movement organizations were radicalized in the framework of a wave of mobilization resulting from confrontation with security forces, and gradually identified with the guerrilla

[1] At the time of their demobilization in 1992, the FMLN had more than 15.000 militants, of whom about 8,500 were combatants, in a country with around 5.5 million inhabitants.

strategy and forms of action. In these cases, not all the militants of a social movement became members of the guerrilla, but generally their leaders did first. In turn, they helped develop the strategy of their organizations in keeping within guerrilla leadership guidelines. This resulted not only in the gradual loss of autonomy on the part of these social organizations with respect to the leadership of the armed groups, but also in the transformation of the organizational structure, and even the strategy of the latter.

The second process was the creation of social movement organizations by the guerrilla, which Malthaner and Waldmann called *secondary milieus*. In this case, the guerrilla cadres provided organizational channels to existing protest or activist movements and encouraged them to adopt the demands and repertoires of action that highlighted the repressive nature of the authoritarian regime and the need for structural change. In both cases, the social movement organizations also served as recruitment channels for the guerrillas and for the formation of groups of collaborators who provided all kinds of logistical support to them.

This paper shows that co-constitution in the case of El Salvador occurred in cases where the existing social movement's infrastructure had not been previously occupied by any armed organizations, such as the case of the teachers' association or the people's church movement. The creation of secondary milieus was an option when there was no social movement infrastructure for the guerrilla to occupy, either because it had not been created before or, on the contrary, because this infrastructure had been previously appropriated by another armed group.

Thus, the armed group's decision to adopt one form of relationship or another to connect with the social movement depended, on the one hand, on the presence (or absence) of a pre-existing organizational structure within the social organization, and on the other, on strategic options established for ideological/political reasons. As will be seen later, the FPL, influenced by the example of Vietnam, opted from the beginning for a protracted people's war strategy. This led the FPL to favour the appropriation of the pre-existing organizational infrastructure of several social movement organizations, and where this was non-existent, create its own organizations. In contrast, the ERP, influenced by an insurrectionary conception of insurgency in which the guerrilla should only serve as the spark to ignite the uprising, opted for creating small clandestine groups of militants with military training, and only later chose to create open organizations based on these clandestine groups.

The criterion adopted by the armed groups for their territorial expansion was to establish themselves first in those places where there were a significant number of what Weinstein (2007, 48) termed *social endowments*. That is, social spaces and territories where dense interpersonal networks with belief systems compatible with the ideology of the armed group itself existed. Among the most important networks were the university student movement, the teachers' movement and the people's church.

3. Co-constitution and secondary milieus in FPL´s protracted people´s war

The Farabundo Martí Popular Liberation Forces (in Spanish, FPL) was founded on April 1, 1970. Originally a small splinter group, it was formed by trade unionists and university students, all militants of the Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS), including the Secretary General at that time, Salvador Cayetano Carpio. This group of militants was radicalized as a reaction to state repression in response to a wave of strikes that took place in El Salvador between 1967 and 1968 (Almeida 2008, 89-102; Huezo Mixco 2017, 146-179), and in which the Salvadoran Unitary Union Federation (FUSS) – guided by the PCS – played a crucial role. In this case, as in others highlighted in the literature (Bosi, Demetriou, and Malthaner 2014; Zwerman, Steinhoff, and Della Porta 2000; Della Porta 1995), the radicalization of social movement activists as a result of violent interactions

with security forces led the activists to go underground and form an armed group. Strategically, the initial approach established by PCS activists for their new organization was that of a "prolonged people's war", inspired by the strategy developed by the Vietnamese National Liberation Front (NLF).

> *"At that time, when the FPL was being formed, we were already thinking specifically about what was happening in Vietnam… and the idea that in El Salvador the mountains were the people… comes directly from contacts we had and the ever-greater knowledge of what was going on in Vietnam."*[2]

This strategy considered that the guerrillas should promote a deep ideological and political change among the working masses, as a precondition for the development of the armed struggle and this necessarily implied the insertion of the guerrillas in the social movements. The first stages of the new organization included forming armed commandos in the Salvadoran capital, San Salvador, and establishing clandestine groups to support them. These support groups, were not only meant to provide the commandos with logistical support, but also carry out recruitment and territorial expansion[3]. Each member of the support groups had to gain access to different social groups – peasants, students, teachers, workers – in order to identify the most politicized individuals and use them to create the first clandestine militant network. In turn, this primary network had to continue the work of recruiting and building other clandestine networks that were to provide the most radical activists with support in their area of activity. The latter then took on the role of guides or leaders of the unions or social movement organizations that existed in the militants' surroundings, or they helped create new social movement organizations under the control of the FPL. The goal of these organizations was to attract support in their area by fighting for basic sectoral demands – working conditions, wages, etc. – although they were expected to radicalize in their confrontation with the State and scale up their demands to a call for revolutionary changes. From the beginning, therefore, the strategy adopted by the FPL not only considered penetrating social movements by co-opting the leaders of existing organizations, but also creating new social movement organizations where there were none.

> *"The idea was to link ourselves to the political struggle and to the people's organizations that already existed and where there was none create them, with the aim of gathering forces based on political and military interaction"*[4]

The key mechanism of this strategy was "double militancy" (Pirker 2017) of FPL members integrated in the social movement organizations. That is, militancy in the armed group resulting in clandestine recruitment work for the support groups and armed commandos, at the same time as militancy in the social movement, promoting the defence of sectoral demands, grassroots mobilization and organizing protests. This double militancy constituted an essential linking mechanism between the armed group and its supportive social environment and was used abundantly by both the FPL and the rest of the armed organizations in El Salvador.

The teachers' movement and the university student movement were two of the first sectors in which the founders of the FPL introduced themselves, and they did so through pre-existing social connections. In the case of the teachers, whose union, ANDES-21, had radicalized considerably as a result of the repression suffered in the protracted strikes of 1967-1968 and 1971 (Ching 2007), the first FPL militants sought to recruit some of the main leaders such as their Secretary-General, Mélida Anaya Montes, and cadres at the regional

[2] Interview with a key informer, founder of the FPL, 7 July, 2015.
[3] CIDAI, San Salvador, Farabundo Martí Popular Liberation Forces documentation, "Basic Materials", 1979, 69
[4] Interview with Atilio Montalvo, former member of the FPL Political Commission. San Salvador, 1 October, 1998.

and local level. Due to their territorial distribution and the high social prestige they enjoyed in their municipalities, where they had multiple social relationships, teachers had a great capacity to contribute to recruitment for different organizations linked to the FPL:

> *"For example, a teacher, as well as belonging to ANDES, recruited for the FPL, for the peasants' organization, the workers' organization, and left the contacts there and handed them over. So, it was really quick…[5]"*

With regard to the university student movement, at the end of 1971, unionists from the initial core of the FPL contacted activists in the university student movement with whom they had been communicating during the 1967-1968 protests. The Executive Council of the General Association of University Students (AGEUS) was controlled by a cohort of students influenced by the 1968 European and Mexican student movements and the actions carried out by Latin American guerrilla organizations. Operating within AGEUS were Marxist study circles in which a few dozen radical student activists participated. In search of new militants for the urban commandos, the FPL leader, Salvador Cayetano Carpio, met with the Executive Council of AGEUS in December 1971 and January 1972:

> *"Cayetano Carpio requested a meeting with AGEUS and went there expressly to ask for support... he met all the AGEUS leadership at the University of El Salvador and asked them to join the armed struggle. He was already known to the students as a union leader[6]".*

This first attempt to recruit students failed. However, the wave of state repression unleashed against the university in July 1972 by the military government, led several members of AGEUS from different faculties to join the guerrilla.

> *"After the closure of the university, the leaders of AGEUS had a meeting with the study groups. There were about fifty of us and most of us joined the FPL"[7].*

Since this group of people went underground, the FPL were temporarily deprived of an organizational infrastructure in the university that could be used to channel the recruitment for the urban commandos. To address this shortcoming, in 1974 they decided to create a student organization, putting student activist in charge who were, at the same time, FPL militants:

> *"Yes, Felipe Peña[8] called me and said: we're going to do something here at the university. So, in 1974 we formed a student front called the July 19 Revolutionary University Students (UR-19)[9]".*

[5] Interview with Medardo González Trejo. Former FPL commander and former member of the Political Commission, San Salvador, 10 October, 1998.
[6] Interview with Atilio Montalvo, former FPL Commander and member of the Political Commission. San Salvador, 25 January, 2011.
[7] Interview with Atilio Montalvo, former FPL commander and member of the Political Commission. San Salvador, 25 January, 2011.
[8] One of the first FPL student militants who in turn had been an activist for the Salvadoran Catholic University Action (ACUS).
[9] Interview with Medardo González Trejo. Former FPL commander and former member of the Political Commission, San Salvador, 10 October, 1998.

The UR-19 were engaged clandestinely in recruiting students for the FPL support groups, but also carried out an open work to defend student interests and mobilization in support of their main demands. This successful work enabled the UR-19 to win the elections to the executive board of AGEUS at the beginning of 1975:

> *"…So, yes, we carried out a quick, accelerated recruitment process and by the end of the year we'd already made contact with all the faculties, and by February or March '75, we'd already taken control of AGEUS"*[10].

The FPL repeated the strategy of creating organizations in other social sectors such as, for example, the inhabitants of marginal communities, secondary school students or factory workers. In the first case, the FPL's penetration plan consisted of drawing in community leaders from the marginal neighbourhoods of San Salvador and its outskirts and creating a clandestine collaboration network. When these networks were strong enough, FPL militants encouraged the creation of an open organization, the Slum Dwellers' Union (UPT), which held its first congress in June 1978:

> *"It was up to me to organize the marginal urban sector here, the slums… We began to organize them at two levels: a secret political level to raise political awareness and this level enabled us to set up certain networks, and from there, I chose a second level of active collaborators for the guerrilla, but leaders of the movement itself… When the network was large enough then I said: you can go out, go to the community centre during the day, make themselves known and then you can set up your platform"*[11].

Unlike the marginal urban dwellers, where the FPL found unspoiled organizing terrain, the labour movement became a space of dispute with other organizations, particularly with the PCS, which had traditionally maintained a constant presence among the more politicized workers. In order to work within this sector, the FPL set up the Workers' Committee for Revolutionary Orientation (COOR) in 1975 (Pearce 1986: 174), which from the beginning promoted a strategy of direct action outside the channels established by the regime and that came to have a certain presence in the textile, steel, construction, printing and typography sectors[12]. Despite these efforts, the organization was unable to permeate the most important unions where other armed organizations or the PCS itself had ties.

The fact that the armed group promoted the creation of social movement organizations did not mean that all their activists collaborated actively with the FPL, but that this collaboration – in reality, double militancy – was usually limited to the social organization's leaders and to the more politicized activists. So, although the leaders of the social movement organization belonged to the guerrilla, they were not allowed to impose their decisions – or the decisions of the FPL – unilaterally on the movement's activists. They were not linked to them by any hierarchical relationship (such as that which existed within the guerrilla's military structure), but by the construction of a legitimacy based mainly on their ability to interpret, express and channel the needs of the movement.

It should also be noted that, from the mid-1970s onwards, FPL militants often relied on the previous groundwork done by progressive priests in order to build social connections in marginal neighbourhoods.

[10] Interview with Medardo González Trejo. Former FPL commander and former member of the Political Commission, San Salvador, 10 October, 1998.
[11] Interview with Lorena Peña Mendoza, former FPL commander and former member of the Political Commission. San Salvador, 31 January, 2011.
[12] COOR later gave rise to the Coordinating Committee of Trade Unions "José Guillermo Rivas" (CCS).

3.1 Ties with the peasantry: the foundations for future territorial control

The strategic objective of the FPL was to build a worker-peasant alliance and for an organization born in the capital city, this implied building links in rural areas. Recruitment by the FPL of student militants who in turn, had come from Catholic student organizations. - Salvadoran Catholic University Action (ACUS) or Catholic Student Youth (JEC)[13]-, provided the guerrillas with direct links to the organizational infrastructure of the progressive Catholic Church in rural areas. Through ACUS and the JEC, these militants became engaged in activities with marginal urban community residents and peasants from rural parishes where progressive priests worked, helping create the Christian Base Communities (CBCs), study groups, literacy work activities, or setting up cooperatives, which, together, represented a real social movement: the "people's church". A fundamental result of the work carried out by the people's church was the selection of young peasants with leadership skills, who were converted into true "peasant intellectuals", as Chávez (2017) called them, thanks to the training and politicization they received from the priests. In turn, these young leaders led the organization and mobilization process aimed at improving the peasants' deplorable living and working conditions.

In addition to these contacts, FPL militants from a Catholic background built frameworks and narratives that established analogies between the struggle for justice and equality of progressive priests and the struggle of the FPL for liberation from exploitation and misery. In this way, they built bridges between two related but different collective action frames: the liberationist Catholic frame focused on peaceful social organizing and the revolutionary (Marxist – Leninist) frame emphasizing the centrality of armed struggle. This "frame bridging" (Benford and Snow 2000, 624) work made easier the rapprochement between the FPL and progressive priests and seminarians as will be seen later.

It should be mentioned that this link with the church's organization network was not exclusive to the FPL, and there was even a certain competition among the armed groups for entry into the CBCs attached to the Catholic Church[14]. However, it was the FPL that established the strongest and most widespread territorial ties by recruiting a large number of young priests and seminarians who were working with peasant communities in the departments of San Vicente, Usulután, Chalatenango and San Salvador. In these areas the FPL played with the advantage of being the first armed organization to emerge and therefore the first to be linked with the organizational structure of the people's church. This is why other guerrilla groups that emerged a few years later – mainly the ERP – found that this infrastructure had already been occupied. As described by one ERP organizer who tried to set up a clandestine network in Chalatenango in 1973:

> *"So, a mission was opened in Chalatenango, but the people from the FPL were already working there. It was very difficult to work there because there were already other people there …*[15]*"*

On the other hand, the territorial expansion strategy deployed by the FPL in rural areas was adapted to the presence, or absence, of any pre-existing social movement organizations. Since 1974 the work of the Catholic Church and peasant leaders from agricultural cooperatives in the area of Aguilares had led to revitalizing an existing peasant organization, the Christian Federation of Salvadoran Peasants (FECCAS). The FPL worked to recruit the Jesuit Seminarians who were working with the FECCAS and created a kind of social movement,

[13] These organizations had promoted practices of commitment to the poorest people since the end of the 1960s.
[14] The ERP built these links in the departments of San Miguel and Morazán, while the FARN did so in Cuscatlán.
[15] Interview with Rafael Velásquez former Secretary-General of the LP-28 and militant of the ERP, 4 February, 2010.

which they called the "*Movi*", made up of peasants and students from the Jesuit university (UCA). The growing state repression against the mobilizations organized by the FECCAS gradually radicalized the seminarians, making it easier for the FPL to approach them in late 1974 and early 1975:

> *"in parallel, the repression was also increasing because the first mobilizations by the FECCAS took place and we were with them in the streets of San Salvador and then we received reports that our house was being watched… and that's when our meetings began to be held in secret… and we began to read lots of the FPL and ERP publications that were circulating clandestinely and the idea of political-military action as a possible option was growing[16]".*

For their part, the leaders of FECCAS concluded that it was best to join an armed organization. It was at this point that the seminarians facilitated contact with the FPL, which they had just joined:

> *"So, what we also did with the leaders was ask them: "If you want – we didn't tell them we had already joined – if you want, we're in contact with the FPL[17]".*

What also appears to have played an important role in the organization's capacity to connect with the progressive clergy was the ability of the FPL militants, who had already been activists in Catholic student groups, to frame their message through common symbolic and intellectual references:

> *"It was difficult for me to grasp the idea of armed struggle and Felipe Peña began to explain, explain and explain about the holy war; he quoted from Saint Thomas, about the just war… and I gradually got to like that[18]".*

The same occurred in the initial process of establishing the FPL in the territory through the creation of clandestine networks in rural areas. By eliminating social behaviours considered harmful or undesirable for the community, a result of the very discipline imposed by the revolutionary militants, a positive perception of what belonging to the guerrilla really meant was gradually created:

> *"I was learning from experience… I met a comrade who, when he'd been drinking in the village would go to the market and all the ladies would run away… and one day I came across him at a meeting, already signed up (recruited) and free of bad habits. Later, he was to become the Secretary-General of the UTC; in other words, the work carried out by the organization had a real impact[19]".*

Not only did the FPL compete with other emerging armed organizations for the support of the organizational networks of the people's church and the peasantry, but, as Sprenkels (2018, 89) pointed out, they also fought against the anti-communist paramilitary organization, Nationalist Democratic Organization (ORDEN). ORDEN offered their members certain security and status by allowing them, for example, to carry weapons, gain access to land, education and healthcare, or not to pay taxes (Pearce 1986, 148; Wood 2003,95). Yet, and

[16] Interview with Alberto Enríquez, former member of the FPL Political Commission, 19 September, 2015.
[17] Interview with Fernando Áscoli, former commander of the FPL and former member of the Political Commission. Guatemala City, 24 October, 2013.
[18] Interview with David Rodríguez, former priest in the Department of San Vicente and member of the FPL. San Salvador, 3 January, 2011.
[19] Interview with David Rodríguez, former priest in the Department of San Vicente and member of the FPL. San Salvador, 3 January, 2011.

as Wood (2003) demonstrated, collective action was also a reward in itself, since it provided dignity and autonomy to communities that had been subjected for generations to the dominance imposed by landowners and agents of the State. Moreover, in those areas where, by the beginning of the 1970s, the work of the people's church had not led to the organization of peasant communities –Departments of Chalatenango, San Vicente and Usulután – FPL militants channeled the demands of some peasants, already highly politicized as a result of the work of the progressive priests, towards creating a new organization: the Union of Rural Workers (UTC):

> *"This didn't just happen miraculously thanks to the work of these four friends, but the clandestine work already existed and the priests cooperated in it, where there were teachers, where our peasant comrades were already involved, and what we did quite simply was shape it… we just organized what already existed and we gave it more visibility*[20]*".*

From 1976 onwards, the FPL began to form militias from the clandestine networks they had been building in rural areas. The militias represented the first link in the construction of a counter-power structure capable of tackling the repression imposed by security and paramilitary forces. Their first targets included ranch foremen (*caporales*); known for the abusive way they treated their workers. At first, the militia's job was to pressure them into abiding by the established working conditions:

> *"Their job consisted in threatening the foremen. They came at night, hooded, and rebuked the foreman saying "tell your boss he has to pay such and such". Then, frightened, the foreman would go to tell his employer…*[21]*".*

At the end of the 1970s, the militias began to get rid of members and informers of ORDEN in places where they had murdered or denounced members of peasant organizations. By 1978 and 1979, the FPL had already carried out several actions against members of the security forces as well as occupying villages in specific areas of the departments of Chalatenango, Cuscatlán. San Salvador, La Libertad and San Vicente. Some previous organizational presence of the people's church networks and/or the FECCAS and the UTC could be found in almost all these places (Martín Álvarez and Cortina Orero 2017).

The organizational experience acquired first in the CBC's and later in FECCAS or UTC, allowed the peasantry linked to the guerrillas in these areas to develop their own institutions of local government - the so-called local popular powers (PPL), once the FPL were able to eliminate the permanent presence of the armed forces in these places from 1981-1982. Although it was the leadership of the FPL that drove their development, the PPL responded to the need that peasants had to satisfy basic needs related to food production, health or education (Pearce 1986, 245-247). Thousands of peasants decided to stay in those areas, because they could experience that support for the revolutionary movement translated into real changes in their lives, despite the constant threat of war. While, on the other hand, the PPL responded to the FPL's project of making revolution even in the middle of the war, building the foundations of a socialist society.

3.2 Social ties and organizational change

[20] Interview with Medardo González Trejo. Former FPL commander and member of the Political Commission, San Salvador, 10 October, 1998.
[21] Interview with David Rodríguez, former priest in the Department of San Vicente and member of the FPL. San Salvador, 3 January, 2011.

By mid-1975, penetration in the social movement by the FPL had rapidly increased as well as the social movement's capacity for mobilization. State repression also escalated in response to increased peasant and student mobilization. Thus, on July 30 of that year, dozens of students were killed during a student demonstration. To protest against this, various social organizations, whose leaders were linked to the FPL, occupied the Cathedral of San Salvador on 5 August and decided to create a coordination structure that would allow them to mutually support each other's demands and tackle repressive actions together. This is how the People's Revolutionary Bloc (BPR) was formed:

> *"In the context of the 30th of July massacre, we took the Cathedral; that's where we hatched the plan and created the People's Revolutionary Bloc (BPR). We had a meeting there with Mélida Anaya Montes to organize ourselves… we had the FECCAS, there was the MERS[22] , which was attached to the FPL, there was …the UR-19, which belonged to the FPL, the FUR-30[23], which was ours…[24]"*

The BPR was also formed in response to inter-organizational competition in the field of the revolutionary left. The FPL were trying to create their own social movement coordinating body in view of the attempts made by the ERP to take control of a similar platform that had emerged in May 1974, the United Popular Action Front (FAPU), until then, part of the peasant movement's organizational infrastructure in the social movement in which the FPL participated (FECCAS and ANDES-21). This also indicates that, up to that time, both the FECCAS and ANDES-21 maintained considerable autonomy in relation to the FPL.

From 1970 to 1975, the FPL had gone from being a small organization with a few urban commandos to an urban-rural organizational complex linked to the main social movement organizations of the time. Despite this, its command structure remained practically the same as when it was founded with a leadership centred around a charismatic leader, Salvador Cayetano Carpio, who accumulated most of the organizational power resources. Decision-making in the FPL continued to be dominated by the organization's military apparatus, but the political-social apparatus was already quantitatively more important in terms of action and of vital significance in ensuring an ever-widening territory penetration.

Partly to address this issue, but also to coordinate and control the social movement's actions more closely, the FPL created the National Commission of the Masses (CONAMAS) in 1976. Thus, while the BPR leadership was present in the public arena, the CONAMAS was a clandestine body made up of representatives from each of the social movement organizations in which the FPL was involved: the university (UR-19 and FUR-30), the peasantry (FECCAS-UTC), workers (COOR), and secondary school students (MERS). The members of the CONAMAS exercised double militancy. Hence, for example, members included the Secretary-General of the FECCAS, Apolinario Serrano – *Polín* – and Fernando Áscoli, from the people's church movement, while Mélida Anaya Montes was appointed head of this commission. Each organization in the CONAMAS proposed ideas for mobilization, but submitted them for discussion to decide on their appropriateness[25] and coordinate acts of solidarity and support for the rest. It is important to mention that, through this commission, the social organization leaders also gained access to leadership positions within the

[22] The Revolutionary Secondary School Students' Movement (MERS) was founded in early 1975 at the initiative of the FPL.
[23] The United Revolutionary Front of July 30 (FUR-30), a student organization created shortly before in the Jesuit Central American University (UCA). Jesuit seminarians played an important role in its creation.
[24] Interview with Fernando Áscoli, former commander and former member of the Political Commission of the FPL. Guatemala City, 24 October, 2013.
[25] Interview with Alberto Enríquez Villacorta, former commander of the FPL, 19 September, 2015.

FPL. Thus, for example, Mélida Anaya Montes was elected a member of the organization's Central Commando, the highest guerrilla leadership body at that time.

Ultimately, from 1975 to 1976 the guerrilla ceased to be a military organization trying to control a partially autonomous social movement to become a more complex political and military structure where the social movement organizations themselves were involved in the FPL's decision-making and general strategy design.

These internal changes were not without tensions. The presence of social organization leaders in positions of responsibility within the organizational structure of the FPL was viewed with distrust by some members of the guerrilla's strictly military apparatus – the armed commandos:

> *"We had a crisis because, let's say, the militaristic vision of those of us who came from the urban commandos, like, we looked down on those who came from the political part*[26]*".*

This sector considered that the work of the masses made the guerrilla more vulnerable since they were still largely urban groups and could be infiltrated by the police. Those who worked with the masses argued that mobilization – seizing land, embassies, factories, churches, or protests – was costing a number of activists from the peasants' and teachers' organizations their lives and it was necessary to protect them by creating militias. This same sector argued that the different social organizations in which the FPL participated needed to support one another in their fight against repression, and therefore they proposed the creation of the BPR.

On the other hand, there also seems to have been some controversy between the head of the CONAMAS, Mélida Anaya, and the leader of the FPL, Cayetano Carpio. This was due to the latter's refusal to allow the FPL's social movement organizations, or the BPR itself, to collaborate with the FAPU (Sánchez Cerén 2008, 114), which was already under the control of the FARN guerrilla. Initially, these tensions were resolved by gradually expanding the decision-making structure to accommodate the interests and leadership of the social movements. First, at the beginning of 1976, by convening a larger assembly than the Central Command – called the Council – in which both the military and social movements leaders were represented and by creating specialized commissions under the Central Command, including a Militia Sub-Commission. This restructuring culminated some years later with the creation of a broad decision-making body made up of about 20 people – the Political Commission – where social movement leaders, or FPL activists in charge of creating social organizations ended up becoming a majority in relation to members exclusively from the military apparatus[27]. The result of this process was the gradual loss of organizational power by the historical leader, Salvador Cayetano Carpio, and his closest collaborators who, from 1981 onwards, were to have increasingly greater difficulties in imposing their criteria regarding the FPL's strategic decisions:

> *"Up to 1980 Cayetano was strong, yes, he was strong and he wielded considerable influence… but we were a new brood no longer directly recruited by him, but with a broader vision, then the outlook changed… Even at the beginning of 1983 it was clear that he alone no longer had the power to say "we're doing this", but it was a collective decision, and we'd imposed collective decision-making, and he had to abide by collective*

[26] Interview with Atilio Montalvo, former commander and member of the Political Commission of the FPL. San Salvador, October, 1998.
[27] In the 1980s, the Political Commission was made up of, amongst others: Virginia Peña, Lorena Peña (UPT), Mélida Anaya (ANDES-21), Facundo Guardado (UTC), Fernando Áscoli (FUR-30, Movi), Antonio Cardenal (Movi), Salvador Sánchez Cerén (ANDES-21), Milton Méndez (AGEUS and UR-19), Gerson Martínez (MERS), Eduardo Linares, Atilio Montalvo, Nicolás Hernán Solórzano, Alberto Enríquez (Movi), Miguel Castellanos (UR-19), and Mayo Sibrián.

> *decision-making and if he didn't, his days were numbered in the sense that he was going to be thrown out[28]".*

Tensions continued to grow within the organization until mid-1983 when they escalated into a conflict of huge proportions, ending in the death of two of the FLP's main leaders at that time: Cayetano Carpio and Mélida Anaya Montes.

4. The ERP´s strategy: Secondary milieus as insurrectionary foundations

The ERP came to the fore in March 1972 from the convergence of three different militant groups, which in turn, had come from the university student movement, the PCS youth and the social and Christian sectors (Martín Álvarez and Cortina Orero 2014). Until 1975, the organization actually operated as a sort of coordinating structure for these three small core groups of militants with their own leadership and not as a unified organization. This resulted, first, in the early formation of a splinter group from one sector that, in turn, founded the Organization of Revolutionary Workers (ORT). Secondly, it led to growing tensions between a faction in favour of prioritizing the organization's military development above all else – which dominated the leadership structure until 1975 – and another faction convinced of the importance of being linked to social movement organizations, known as "*La Resistencia*" ("the Resistance"). The conflict between these two factions escalated culminating in the assassination of two prominent Resistance activists in May 1975 and the withdrawal of their militants to form a new organization: the Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN).

From that moment on, an organizational restructuring took place in the ERP beginning with the expulsion of the leader of the pro-military faction, Alejandro Rivas Mira, at the end of 1975. Internal conflicts and the previous emphasis on military development seriously weakened the organization's possibilities of territorial expansion, since it had lost a large part of the contacts made in the CBC´s, unions, and university student movement by some of the Resistance militants. As mentioned above, one of the beneficiaries of the inconsistencies in the ERP's organizational structure were the FPL.

However, with a new leadership from the end of 1975, the organization tried to rebuild relationships with the social movement, particularly with the organizational infrastructure of the people's church that had not yet been occupied by the FPL. This was mainly in the eastern part of the country:

> *"From 1975-76, we started to work intensively in the field, especially in Morazán, La Unión and Usulután…through Monsignor Montesinos and Father Miguel Ventura and Father Rogelio Ponseele, when he came from Zacamil…and that's how we established contact with the Christian bases in Morazán, La Unión and Usulután[29]".*

Contacts in Morazán had been initiated years before by one of the organization's first militants, a former Catholic Action activist, Rafael Arce Zablah, who already in 1973 argued that the peasants most likely to become involved in an uprising were the poor small landowners, who were also forced to work several months a year on the coffee farms. This was precisely the type of peasant most commonly found in Morazán and Chalatenango:

[28] Interview with Fernando Áscoli, former commander and former member of the Political Commission of the FPL. Guatemala City, 24 October, 2013.
[29] Interview with Juan Ramón Medrano, former member of the General Command of the ERP. San Salvador, 1 October, 1998.

> *"Rafael Arce Zablah spent months living with the peasants, studying, analysing the situation… and in 1973, he concluded that the vanguard of the revolutionary movement was going to be Morazán and Chalatenango, based on the peasants' way of life… he already had some contacts with Father Miguel Ventura[30].*

However, unlike the strategy developed by the FPL, the ERP first gave priority to forming clandestine peasant cells with military training (military committees) in preparation for an uprising that they considered imminent:

> *"The idea in '77-'78 was to create our own clandestine military structure, the little that we knew militarily speaking, that is, the use of weapons and some explosives and what was essential to defend ourselves from a counter-attack, we went and taught it to the people[31]".*

The ERP did not prioritize penetrating the social movements, first due to their own strategic and political approach. If an uprising was a real possibility in the near future, the objective should be to provide the population with military training to prepare them to defeat the resistance of the armed forces. Hence, activists that were beginning to work in the social movement were ordered to go underground, thus interrupting their organizational work:

> *"It wasn't a very correct analysis when the conditions for an uprising were already considered to be in place; what we did was at the expense of the open (not clandestine) work. When this division took place in 1975, what we did was incorporate people who were in the social movement in the military committees"[32].*

On the other hand, in 1977 - 1978, when the ERP decided to create its own structure to coordinate the social movement, the "28 February" Popular Leagues (LP-28), it was at a time when the other guerrilla groups had already taken control of a large part of the social movement's infrastructure in the northern and central areas of the country. As a result, the ERP was forced to concentrate its efforts for territorial expansion on controlling rural areas in the eastern part of the country. The LP-28 were divided by sector, including peasants (LPC), secondary school students (LPS), workers (LPO) and neighbourhood residents (Neighbourhood Committees). Their strategy at this stage was focused on creating social organizations, starting with militants from the military committees, in a context where there were already a large number of social movement organizations under the control of other guerrilla groups and, therefore, a great part of the social movement infrastructure was no longer available:

> *"We didn't have very strong roots in formal labour organization. For us it was important to create the military wing that would accompany the mass movement, and the truth is we didn't have great workers' leaders in our ranks… our comrades were essentially peasants… on the political side, we were perhaps the last to get to form a mass organization. What we did have was a strong military contingent because it was important for us to create the military wing to accompany the mass movement[33]".*

[30] Interview with Rafael Velásquez, former Secretary-General of the LP-28 and ERP militant, 4 February, 2010.
[31] Interview with Juan Ramón Medrano, former member of the General Command of the ERP. San Salvador, 1 October, 1998.
[32] Interview with Rafael Velásquez, former Secretary-General of the LP-28 and ERP militant, 4 February, 2010.
[33] Interview with Ana Sonia Medina, former member of the General Command of the ERP. January 2010.

ERP´s strategy had several important consequences. On the one hand, because of its emphasis on military organization, the guerrilla lacked a mass political base during the early years of the war. LP-28 never reached the mobilization capacity of the BPR and although the ERP built a very sizable organization, it was never as big as the FPL. Also, the presence in the territory of the ERP was restricted almost entirely to the eastern zone as a consequence of the limited availability of networks of the people´s church in the rural areas, which were already occupied by other armed groups, mainly by the FPL.

On the other hand, it seems that the strategy of creating social movement organizations based exclusively on them being founded by the armed group itself resulted in great stability in leadership positions and strong organizational cohesion. Since its restructuring in 1976[34], the ERP's General Command, the highest decision-making body, remained practically unchanged until the organization disappeared after the end of the war[35]. Its members were founding activists of the organization and originally from the university student movement in their majority. Generally speaking, militants of peasant origin only reached leadership positions at the intermediate level and basically in the guerrilla's military structure. Apparently therefore, in this case, the creation of social movement organizations completely subjected to the armed vanguard, went hand in hand with the concentration of organizational power resources on the part of the latter.

At the same time, greater cohesion, leadership stability and emphasis on military development seem to have played in favour of greater military effectiveness, since the ERP has been recognized by different observers as a very powerful and disciplined guerrilla army throughout the entire war.

The emphasis on military development also explains that a structure similar to the Local Popular Powers that emerged in the areas controlled by the FPL in Chalatenango did not develop in the territories under ERP´s control, at least until the mid-1980s (Binford, 1997, 62). At that point, the extension of the war forced the FMLN to change its strategy by spreading the guerrilla warfare by using small units. This strategy went hand in hand with another strategy of building new social movement organizations not openly allied with the guerrillas with the aim to organize people for a future insurrection. In this context, the ERP started to encourage the formation of semi-autonomous civil organizations in the countryside as a way of responding to the population's health, education or food production problems. At the same time, the ERP sought to extend its influence to areas where significant sectors of the population were not under its political control. Not unlike FPL, ERP´s leadership controlled the election process of authorities within these organizations and designed its strategy according to guerrilla´s needs.

Somehow, the needs of the war effort and the increasing coordination capacity of the FMLN pushed the ERP towards a strategy similar to that of the protracted people's war in rural areas and everything points to the fact that, from the mid-eighties onwards, patterns of relationships between guerrillas and social movements were very similar among FMLN organizations.

5. Conclusions

The case of El Salvador shows that the type of relationship established by an armed group with its support environment is conditioned by several key factors, which include the presence, or absence, of a pre-existing

[34] In this restructuring, the ERP adopted the form of a clandestine party (Party of the Salvadoran Revolution – PRS), endowed with an armed wing: the ERP. In practice, the leadership positions were occupied by the most senior leaders of both the PRS and the ERP at the same time.
[35] This included: Joaquín Villalobos; Jorge Meléndez; Claudio Rabindranath Armijo; Juan Ramón Medrano; Ana Sonia Medina; Mercedes del Carmen Letona and Ana Guadalupe Martínez.

social movement infrastructure, or the strategic choices made by the leaders of the armed group itself. Thus, the protracted people's war strategy adopted by the FPL led the organization to actively seek integration in social movements and enabled them to occupy a large part of the people's church infrastructure as a prime mover. In contrast, the ERP, with their emphasis on building a purely military organization, were mostly deprived access to the people's church infrastructure when they decided to penetrate it. From that moment on, they gave priority to forming secondary milieus as structures to accompany an uprising that they considered imminent.

This paper has also shown that the guerrilla in El Salvador sought to expand in places where there had previously been dense networks of activists mobilized by the popular church; networks to which they were connected through guerrilla militants, who themselves had a previous trajectory of activism in grassroots organizations of the Catholic Church. The symbolic references and discursive strategies used to establish relations with the people's church movement, as well as the time chosen to do so, seem to have been relevant factors in terms of the success that each organization had in its attempt to enter that movement.

This research suggests that the interaction between guerrillas and social movements shaped the organizational structure of both and that the specific patterns of this interaction – secondary milieus or co-constitution – produced specific and differentiated effects. The linkage of guerrillas with pre-existing social movements resulted in a greater territorial control but also in internal conflicts and less organizational cohesion. Instead, resorting exclusively to the creation of secondary milieus, seems to be associated in this case with greater organizational stability and internal cohesion, but with less mobilization capacity.

Thus, in the case of the FPL, the adopted to establish relationships with the social movements based both on creating organizations and co-opting leadership, meant that by the late 1970s, the FPL had a modest military structure, but a strong penetration in the social movement. The importance and weight that social organizers had in the guerrilla led to them being gradually incorporated into the leadership structure, and to specialized structures being created to coordinate and control an increasingly powerful social movement, endowed in part, and at least in its beginnings, with a certain autonomy in relation to the military apparatus. These very same transformations created acute tensions within the FPL between the sectors in favour of prioritizing the military development of the organization and those who put the relationship established between the guerrilla and social organizations first. At the same time, these changes gradually undermined the position of the FLP's charismatic leader, and slowly paved the way for a collective leadership, which in turn, became a new source of tension.

In contrast, once the ERP had got past the initial construction phase – albeit traumatically – it became a guerrilla organization with a considerably cohesive and extremely stable leadership. Their expansion strategy, based on creating military committees and secondary milieus (the LP-28), seems to have played a role in achieving this organizational stability. Although peasant movement activists gained access to positions of responsibility in the military field they did not reach positions of maximum responsibility in the organization, which had continued to be reserved mostly for a small clique of militants of the university student movement since the ERP was founded. Also, the emphasis from the beginning on military development made this organization really effective in military terms.

During the early years of the war, the FPL encouraged the development of local popular powers in the rural areas with the aim of laying the foundations of the new socialist society that would be built after the revolutionary triumph, while the ERP continued to base its military development on pre-existing networks to solve logistical problems. By the mid – eighties however, the needs of the war effort and the increasing coordination capability of the FMLN blurred the differences in the way the different guerrilla groups related to the infrastructure of the social movement. With the aim of creating the social bases for an insurrection, the

FMLN stimulated the creation of links between the guerrillas and social movement organizations. This time both the FPL and ERP seem to have resorted to using semi-autonomous local organizations as a way of maintaining political control of the population in the rural areas and responding, at the same time, to its main needs.

The relationship between armed vanguards and social movements is still unexplored terrain in the case of Latin American guerrillas. This research suggests that this relationship has the potential to shed light on some key aspects of the emergence, development, success or failure of one of the key political movements of the second half of the 20th century in Latin America.

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