

CURRICULUM REFORM AND TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

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Title: Case Study – El Salvador

Section 1: Introduction

Introduction

To conduct this study, a list of people and entities with experience in the subject was created, while existing literature was collected on educational initiatives that in El Salvador have furthered work on the memory of human rights violations, social cohesion and education in children and youth. A systematization of the experience in the field of memory pedagogy developed by the Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen during its 25 years as a citizen initiative was undertaken. At the same time, interviews were conducted with professionals who create pedagogical content, teachers, and members of community historical memory projects. We are grateful for the contributions offered by Georgina Hernández Rivas, cultural anthropologist, historian Héctor Lindo, Anna Theiben and Claudia Anay García, MUPI educators. The coordination of the case study was carried out by Carlos Henríquez-Consalvi. (Santiago).

History

In December 1931, there was a coup d'état headed by General Hernández Martínez, who began decades of military dictatorships in El Salvador. Weeks later, on January 22, 1932, an indigenous and peasant insurrection was provoked by social discontent due to the marginalization and exploitation of these sectors, causing groups armed with machetes and old rifles to take over some towns in the western zone. The government reaction for three months led to the shooting of about ten thousand indigenous people, victims representing 1% of the population at the time.¹ This would constitute one of the most significant social traumas for the population of the western zone of the country, to such a point that it marked more than one generation and its effects impacted the socio-political and cultural tasks of the zone.

For sixty years, military regimes would alternate between electoral frauds and repression of any opposition through imprisonment, torture or exile. Faced with this reality, in the seventies, unions, peasant, student and professional associations strengthen their levels of organization and action in the face of militarism, which responded with more repression. Death squads appear, led by ex-military personnel and financed by some businessmen.

By 1980, explosive attacks against independent media outlets increase, as well as the disappearance and murder of journalists, trade unionists, professionals and students.

¹ Jeffrey Gould and Aldo Lauria-Santiago. *Rebelión en la oscuridad. [Rebellion in the dark.]* El Salvador. Published by Ediciones Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen. 2008.



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The relatives of the disappeared and political prisoners, particularly the mothers and wives, organized themselves and found support in Monsignor Romero, who established a legal support office in the Archbishopric to accompany the search for these people. Subsequently, this office would become the Legal Protection Office of the Archbishopric, which, under the direction of María Julia Hernández, would handle representative cases of human rights violations that occurred before and during the conflict.

In the absence of a state organization to watch over the interests of the population, Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero, denounced the continuous violations of human rights daily from his pulpit. On March 24 of that year, Monsignor was assassinated while officiating a mass in San Salvador, a magnicide that announced the unstoppable war that would take force with the guerrilla offensive of January 10, 1980, promoted by the five guerrilla forces grouped in the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, FMLN.

This internal conflict developed during the cold war and lasted for eleven years. The process was marked by the intervention of the United States, which contributed one million dollars a day in weapons and affairs to the government. Guerrilla attacks on barracks and economic infrastructure are increasing, as well as attacks on municipal authorities in large areas under insurgent control. The army will multiply the massacres against the civilian population, such as the one that occurred in December 1981 in the El Mozote zone, executed by the Atlacatl Battalion and other counterinsurgency units, with a balance of one thousand people killed, including four hundred infantry. During these years of armed conflict, it is estimated that 75,000 civilian victims, and another thousand disappeared.

In 1989, the insurgency launched an offensive that reached the capital and main cities, and fights with a high cost in lives became worse. The Atlacatl battalion penetrates the university premises of the UCA and murders its chancellor and other Jesuit priests. The demonstration of force by the guerrillas established that a political-military balance had been created between the two sides, and a negotiated political solution gained strength.

The Peace Agreements are signed on January 16, 1992, which covered, among other issues, demobilization and the incorporation of insurgency into political life, dissolution of police corps and counterinsurgency battalions, creation of the National Civil Police, creation of the Office of the Attorney General for Human Rights, guarantees of transparent elections, reforms to the judicial body, and the creation of the Commission of Truth that would investigate the most serious human rights violations.

In the context of the post-war period, various groups of victims and human rights organizations began to mobilize to recover the past, claim the recognition of truth and the restoration of justice. Based on victim identification projects, the collection of memorials, the investigation of massacres, the filing of cases with the Inter-American Court of Human Rights or the exhumation of common graves, these citizen groups opened a space that eventually allowed the revocation of the amnesty law in July 2016.

The Education System and The School Curriculum before the Reconciliation-Oriented Reforms

During the decades of military dictatorships, what Mneesha Gellman called “silence in the classroom” was maintained in relation to the study of traumatic historical events in Salvadoran society. The extermination of thousands of indigenous people during the events of 1932 was interpreted by the official history, written by the “victors”, based on the concealment of the socioeconomic causes of the insurrectional uprising. Historical archives were hidden to impose the official narrative that established the application of a bloody repression as a triumph over the international communist conspiracy. This issue, as well as others related to the recent history of human rights violations, would remain for decades as a taboo for sectors of society and especially for the Salvadoran education system. In spite of this official restriction, there were teachers or other social actors who personally developed these topics from another approach and tried to give a version opposed to the official version, such as the literary work of Roque Dalton and other writers, who approached the topics and offered the population an alternative version to the one proposed by the official programs.

Pathways and Processes Towards Reconciliation.

One of the most relevant moments in the management of the memory of the armed conflict was the work developed by the Truth Commission, called “*From madness to hope: El Salvador’s twelve-year war.*” The report was released on March 15, 1993, two years after the signing of the Peace Agreements that ended 11 years of internal armed conflict. The Commission received direct testimony in relation to 7,000 victims. From all these complaints, a list of 13,569 cases was drawn up, from which the Commission selected 32, considered exemplary of the patterns of violence of the contending parties, the Armed Forces of El Salvador, the Death Squads and the FMLN guerrillas. Among these cases were the assassination of the Archbishop of San Salvador, Monsignor Óscar Arnulfo Romero in 1980, attributed to the action of death squads; as well as the massacre of peasants known as the El Mozote Massacre and the murders of 6 Jesuit priests in 1989, attributed to the action of Armed Forces units; as well as the extrajudicial executions of mayors and members of the government attributed to FMLN guerrilla militias. Five days after the Commission presented its report, the Legislative Assembly approved the “General Amnesty Law for the Consolidation of Peace”, which established a blanket of impunity that persists to date and against which many civil organizations maintain a constant struggle.

In the absence of public policies that would effectively contribute to the management of the war-peace transition, civil society created organizations to address this “unrecognized need”, which ranged from individual traumas, disintegrated families, missing children, to migration and increased violence. That is why they focus their efforts on the process of “managing healing”: physical or emotional rehabilitation, attending to the trauma generated by the experiences, reconstructing physical spaces (educational and productive projects, medical care, etc.) and documenting or recording these memories, all of these initiatives are based on this “unacknowledged need - individual or collective” by political-economic power players in the post-war period.

From various ideological signs, we have tried to reinterpret history to the best of the political interests of the present. This task is facilitated in part by the aforementioned impunity that

emerged from the amnesty law. The inability of the judicial system to deliver justice has left the historical field of civil war open to a range of interpretations made at convenience.²

The tenacious struggle of the victims' associations achieved that, after 23 years of approval, the Supreme Court of Justice, in July 2016, declared "unconstitutional" the Amnesty Law which had prevented the prosecution of those implicated in war crimes during the 1980-1992 conflict).

Four years later, in February 2020, the Legislative Assembly approved the "Special Law of Transitional Justice, Reparation and National Reconciliation" which was strongly rejected by the associations of victims of the civil war (1980-1992) and criticized by various organizations, international organizations, and the president's veto. By the end of 2021, the law was still frozen.

On August 31, 2021, the Legislative Assembly approved a law that automatically retires judges and prosecutors over 60 years of age. Among the hundreds of suspended judges is Jorge Guzmán, who conducted the trial against 15 military perpetrators of the massacres of El Mozote. The president of the Court of Justice declared that the trial would "start from scratch."

Section 2: Reforms and Innovations

The Role of Teaching History in the School Curriculum in the Post-Conflict Context and Curricular Reforms.

In the first years of the post-war period, the Ministry of Education implemented the "Solutions Program", which according to anthropologist Robin De Luga³ was based on universal values inherited from international projects; but they were far from understanding the recent history of the country by the post-war generation. The author focuses her analysis on the deconstruction initiatives of "cultural identity" and "national identity" included in the central curriculum of El Salvador's educational system. There was a total annulment of the peace and reconciliation process, instead they tried to impose moral values, without any link to the recent period of the armed conflict or the transition stage in which it entered.

In 1993, the Ministry of Education introduced a reform in the curriculum and published two volumes of National History⁴. This reform opened a space to address recent history by including in the curriculum the dictatorial periods of the 20th century, and events such as the indigenous insurrection of 1932, the bloody massacres and successive repression, the women's suffrage movement, the military regimes and the emergence of the popular movement in the 1970s, the prelude to the war. It also includes the peace process and the first period of democratic elections. This reform encourages civil society initiatives to generate publications and audiovisuals, as complementary material for the development of these themes in the

² Popkin, Margaret. (2000). *Peace without Justice. Obstacles to Building the Rule of Law in El Salvador*. University Park

³ De Luga, Robin, (2012). *Museos, Memoria Social y Nación Justa*. Revista Identidades [Identities Magazine] #3. El Salvador.

⁴ *Historia de El Salvador [History of El Salvador]*, 2 vols. (San Salvador: Ministry of Education, 1994). Authors: Knut Walter Patricia Alvarenga, Paul Amaroli, Jorge Cáceres. Cristina Eguizábal, José Antonio Fernández, William Fowler, Aldo Lauria, Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, Oscar Edgardo Melhado, Rebeca Panameño.

classrooms. This textbook can be accessed at:
https://www.mined.gob.sv/descarga/cipotes/historia_ESA_Tomol_0_.pdf

When the FMLN, the former guerrillas, came to power in 2009, some sectors hosted the hope that the state body CONCULTURA would become a Ministry, elevating the culture to a greater dimension. But instead, CONCULTURA was transformed into the Secretariat of Culture of the Presidency, that is to say, its autonomy was put at risk by depending directly on the president of the republic, with the risks that any critical approach entails. In this period, in terms of public policies, dispersed and unplanned initiatives were developed. For example, through Decree 204, sites where human rights violations took place, such as the El Mozote Massacre (Morazán) and Las Aradas (Chalatenango) are declared “Cultural Heritage Sites” under the so-called *Program for the Reparation of Victims of Serious Human Rights Violations Occurring in the Context of the Internal Armed Conflict*. (Presidency of El Salvador. 2013). However, a formally defined memory policy continued to be lacking.⁵

Informal Educational Initiatives Aimed at Promoting Narratives of Truth, Non-Repetition, Peace and Reconciliation

The peasant communities that lived in exile in refugee camps during the war, and later repopulated their former territories, are providing a significant contribution to the task of passing on to new generations the memories of past atrocities. The repopulated communities base their cultural practices on commemorations, rituals and pilgrimages, which take the form of museums and memorials, such as the museums of San José Las Flores, Perquin or Arcatao. Intangible elements have been generated: a network of local cultural practices that, in addition to its employer festivities or national commemorations, has incorporated new festivities linked to places of memory. The celebrations *in situ* in the places of massacres include rituals and pilgrimages to their memory. These communities turn the field of the memorable into a space with a symbolic richness that debates between the sacred and the profane; from complex performative acts that dislocate the “time and space” in which the participants in a commemorative act, become an active part of a staging of the past in the present, through acts called “teatrillos”. This act of performance temporarily opens the experienced field of trauma by incorporating “others” (especially young people in the community), generating a “we” testimonial and experienced with a future perspective, as a strategy of transmission and inter-generational incorporation. These communities hold periodic workshops involving workshops on historical memory in which primary and secondary schoolchildren from these towns participate. They have also been headquarters of the transitional justice days.

Equipo Maíz [Corn Team]

One of the initiatives that with perseverance and coherence has made great contributions to popular education, particularly by accompanying communities in their commemorations of

⁵ Hernández Rivas, Georgina (2015). Cartografía de la memoria: actores, lugares, prácticas en El Salvador de posguerra (1992-2015) [Cartography of memory: actors, places, practices in post-war El Salvador (1992-2015)]. Doctoral Thesis. Autonomous University of Madrid.



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memory, as well as the production of textbooks, profusely illustrated and easy to read, covering topics such as history, memory, gender, environment, migration, inequality. The Corn Team began its work of popular education in El Salvador in 1983, in the midst of civil war. “The main concern of Equipo Maíz was to explain to the communities with which it worked, the roots of the armed conflict, providing information, as well as a method of analysis and transformation of reality, a mission that remains to date and which has been reflected through training processes and popular publications, not only in El Salvador but at the Central American level”. We would like to highlight the work carried out by the Asociación Equipo Maíz, which prepared a meticulous chronological map showing the main massacres committed by the army against civilian villages:

Pro-Búsqueda [Pro-Search].

The Asociación Pro-Búsqueda [Pro-Search Association] arises from the persistent will and effort of the victims to achieve justice and to know the situation of their children who disappeared during the armed conflict. In 1994, it became an association made up of some 860 relatives of missing children, young people reunited in the search process, volunteers and professionals committed to the defense of human rights. Pro-búsqueda has managed to reunite numerous families dismantled after the disappearance of infants during military operations. It has made efforts to clarify the truth, claim rights, access to effective justice, and demand that the Salvadoran State provide a comprehensive reparation for the victims. Across these lines of work, valuable work has been carried out to recover and promote historical memory, from the perspective of the family members and young people who were relocated. However, it deserves to recognize the public impact at a national, local and international level that educational work has had, which takes memory as a tool for the restoration of peace and reconciliation in El Salvador. Pro-Búsqueda considers that the effort to rescue and promote historical memory fulfills a restorative function when the victims find in these processes a social and remembrance space, which is manifested in actions aimed at the defense of human rights, prevention mechanisms and learning for the present and future of society.

Cáritas Chalatenango

Through its line of historical memory, it is conducting intergenerational meetings to address the memory of human rights violations in the context of the massacres committed by the army in the department of Chalatenango. According to Eduardo Maciel, a collaborator of Cáritas, these meetings bring together surviving victims along with local youth. They use the testimony of adults as a memory trigger and generate reflections among young people, with the idea of finding bridges between past memories, comparing them to the experiences of the present, such as the stigmatization of youth, or the militarization of their communities. Another modality is the realization of “intergenerational forums” applying the same methodology. One successful experience was the recent “Commemoration of the Sumpul Massacre,” held in San José Las Flores with numerous participants.

Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas [José Simeón Cañas Central American University].

In March 2009, this institution installed the International Court for the Application of Restoration Justice, organized by the Human Rights Institute (*Instituto de Derechos Humanos de la UCA*,

IDHUCA) and the National Coordinator of Victim Committees for Human Rights Violations in Armed Conflict (*Comités de Víctimas de Violaciones de los Derechos Humanos en el Conflicto Armado*, CONACOVIC).

According to Benjamín Cuéllar (at that time director of IDHUCA), this Tribunal materializes a process of reparation and justice, “as a pedagogical process, since it seeks to make young people aware of recent history in relation to Human Rights”.

This initiative is a restorative justice mechanism that is carried out with the direct participation of victims and communities, discussing the events that affected them, identifying their causes and specifying sanctions. In this process, regret, admission of guilt and reparation of victims by the perpetrators are basic, in order to restore relations between the offended persons and their offenders, as well as those of their communities.

José María Tomás, president of the International Tribunal for the Application of Restorative Justice, said “remembering crimes and human rights violations is useful but not enough; it is necessary to achieve reconciliation through the clarification of the truth and the search for justice regardless of who the accused are”.

The Court decided to judge cases of torture, forced disappearances that occurred during the armed conflict. The first case exposed was that of Francisco Ramírez Avelar, former journalist of the newspaper *Independiente*, who was captured and tortured by the National Police, causing him irreparable physical harm. The people who joined the first Court in 2009 were Paulo Pires Junior, President of the Brazilian Amnesty Commission; Belisario dos Santos, former Secretary of Justice and Defense of the Citizenship of the State of São Paulo (Brazil); José Ramón Juániz, President of the World Attorneys, section Valencia (Spain); José María Tomás, president of the Foundation for Justice (Spain); Ricardo Iglesias, Salvadoran lawyer and Human Rights consultant and Gloria Giralto of García Prieto, victim of impunity in El Salvador.

By 2019, eleven sessions of this International Tribunal for the Application of Restorative Justice had been held, a unique event in El Salvador and Central America that seeks, from civil society, academia and the victims themselves, to address cases of serious human rights violations during the armed conflict.

Another experience developed by this University (UCA) was created in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, promoted by the Master’s Degree in Latin American Theology, with the virtual participation of students from all over Latin America. According to its director, Martha Zechmeister, this proposal is made “from a theological perspective, always from the perspective of the victims, as a proposal of inquiry into the living memory of Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero, from below, and as an act of resistance to the realities that afflict the people today”. When we asked Theresa Denger, a member of this Master’s Degree, about some teaching that she gave them the experience, she answered: “It is important to include artistic activities in these processes, to encourage those who participate, to deploy creativity, something that is born from the reflection of historical memory. Let them make podcasts, or small videos, or write poems, songs; apart from writing a classic academic essay, let them



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express themselves through art, because we have seen how really very powerful things are born that are then shared, circulated among other students, which also opens the eyes of us who are in the academy, they are other channels for reflection.”

Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen (MUPI) [*Museum of Words and Images*]

About the experience of this citizen initiative, a member of the Sites of Conscience Coalition, says its co-founder, Georgina Hernández Rivas states:

“The Educational Reform following the Peace Accords, for the first time, includes in the school curriculum topics that were previously invisible. Taking advantage of this opening, MUPI begins the documentary production of audiovisuals, publications and museographic exhibits on these themes, accompanied by didactic guides for teachers to apply in the classroom. These materials fill a gap in the educational system in the absence of pedagogical materials. We took advantage of this opportunity to enter the educational system through “the back door” by offering exhibitions and audiovisuals, through the network of Casas de Cultura and Educational Centers, with which we were beginning to have informal relations, not officially legitimized. We therefore assumed a supplemental role in the classrooms, given the lack of educational, educational and cultural resources.

The themes addressed by MUPI in its memory processes induce critical and ethical reflection on human rights, and are based on aspects of traumatic, but also excluding and discriminatory history. Examples of this are the exhibitions or publications on the El Mozote Massacre, or the repression of indigenous villages in 1932. All these initiatives place human rights and memory at the center as exemplary axes. For example, the exhibition “*Nuestras Voces [Our Voices]*” (2013) was created at a time when youth are being stigmatized. On this occasion, the life story of “Chiyo”⁶, a Salvadoran peasant boy who lived through the violence of the war, was used so that the young people could identify with his experiences. This point of empathy and shared humanity put human rights at the center, this time, to denounce the effects of war on children, and to encourage adolescents and young people to become human rights defenders. The exhibition was accompanied by workshops that allowed the creation of the Central American Network of Youth Human Rights Defenders⁷, a group created by MUPI, which produced reports and audiovisuals, and made use of the web and networks, to denounce cases of stigmatization and violence, which live in the context of the Central American reality. Of these workshops developed with young people aged 14–18, leadership has emerged in the defense of human rights, which represents a valuable generational change.

A successful MUPI proposal in terms of the production of textbooks has been the book *Luciérnagas en el Mozote [Fireflies in el Mozote]*⁸, published in 1996, which establishes the truth in front of the El Mozote Massacre, hidden for years. This book, which has 13 editions, has informally become a textbook in numerous public and private educational centers.

⁷ https://archivomesoamericano.org/media_objects/9019s247x

⁸ <https://es.scribd.com/document/59134893/Aplicacion-del-analisis-narratologico-a-la-muestra-Luciernagas-en-El-Mozote-de-Carlos-Henriquez-Consalvi>

With a gender perspective, MUPI has rescued several women made invisible by official history, such as Prudencia Ayala, who defied patriarchal society by running for president of El Salvador in 1930, despite the fact that the laws denied her that right. Publications and cartoons have been made about this character and other women, to be used in classrooms.

In response to the discrimination and exclusion of indigenous peoples, the Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen (MUPI) has created board games such as “Los Izalcos”, as well as exhibitions and textbooks on the memories of indigenous communities. These have been shared in educational and cultural centers. <https://www.ccesv.org/evento/el-juego-de-los-izalcos/>

With the change of government in 2009, MUPI was able to move from working informally with schools and teachers to establishing agreements with the Ministry of Education, which facilitated the development of guided tours of the Museum for hundreds of school groups and their teachers, especially in rural areas. At the same time, these agreements included holding a day of historical remembrance in schools in the 14 departments of the country, which consisted of the installation of exhibitions, film forums and lectures.

Subsequently, it was possible to coordinate with the Ministry of Education, the realization of training workshops for teachers on historical memory, providing basic theory on memory and identity, and facilitating a guide to develop classroom projects for the recording of historical memory or oral tradition with elementary level students, as a complement to the thematic content in the basic level educational programs of the Ministry of Education, mainly in the subjects of Social Sciences and Language.

At the same time, MUPI produced documentaries, textbooks, didactic games and developed photo-forums and workshops, as well as actions to document and accompany the efforts to contribute toward memory made by some communities. With regard to methodological lines, subordinate voices were incorporated to question discrimination and injustice. To this end, oral history was prioritized. Here, testimony is the referential source to bring out silenced stories from the shadows and create spaces for reflection and revision of contemporaneous history linked to rights and situated in a process of transitional justice. In fact, the first publication, *Luciérnagas en El Mozote*, is based on the testimony of the sole survivor of the massacre. This formula of combining testimony, field research and the use of the archive, gave way to the creation of exhibitions, with artistic installations and performances that make the museum tour more attractive and interactive.

Another initiative promoted by MUPI has been Escuelas de Paz [Schools of Peace], which is developed in schools vulnerable to *maras* or youth gangs. A process of conflict transformation and violence prevention, through workshops with a ludo-pedagogical methodology through art and culture. In addition to participation by students aged 12–18, workshops are taught by teachers who multiply these tools in their respective classrooms. This undertaking was awarded the Intercultural Innovation Award by the United Nations Civilizations Alliance, UNAOC, in 2019. <https://tdh-latinoamerica.de/?p=4249>

On the impact of these strategies on the education system, Mneesha Gellman states:

“The Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen (MUPI) shows an example of a way to break the culture of official silence and misinformation that could affect future generations. School-age children, teachers and parents who accompany MUPI visits come into contact with alternative narratives that they may not otherwise encounter. Moreover, during teacher-facilitated discussions, they are given the opportunity to practice and engage in respectful dialogue on topics previously considered sensitive or controversial. High school students visiting MUPI can refer to the alternative history presentation. Those at other school levels can similarly use MUPI’s exhibits to fill in the gaps and compensate for the spaces of silence that permeate the Salvadoran educational system.”⁹

Successes And Challenges In The Search For Truth, Memory And Non-Repetition

A Monument to Memory and Truth

Its design and construction by the civil society, places it as a successful undertaking that overcame the obstacles placed by the lack of interest of the state and political sectors, in addition to achieving the intervention of multiple actors: victims, family members, Human Rights associations, independent museums and universities.

This experience arises from the Commission of Truth, which, among its recommendations to Salvadoran society, stipulated the construction of a National Monument with the names of civil victims of human rights violations. Years went by, and as there was no will from the State or the signatories of the Peace Accords to implement this recommendation, relatives of victims and civil society organizations formed the “Pro-Monument Committee”, which with great effort achieved in 2003 the inauguration of the “Monument to Memory and Truth”, which contains nearly 30,000 names of civilian victims of human rights violations. Located in a popular park in the capital, San Salvador, it has become a site of memory, which generates practices that include the pilgrimage of communities and relatives of disappeared, murdered and massacred victims to pay homage to their murdered or disappeared relatives, configuring a “community of memory” that share “the loss”, but now also “a place to process mourning”. For this reason, every November 2, on the traditional All Souls’ Day, it spontaneously gathers hundreds of people.

One of the purposes included in the Monument Committee’s initiative is the educational component and the establishment of the historical memory of the violation of human rights. This process required the training of experts in memory pedagogy. In this sense, initiatives were created to support the training of trainers who developed participatory workshops with young people for the transmission of memories and the significance of the memorial.

The Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen, and other initiatives have developed talks and guided visits to the Monument, which they have described as “an open-air classroom, so that the new

⁹ Gellman, Mneesha. 2015. “Teaching silence in the schoolroom: whither national history in Sierra Leone and El Salvador?” *Third World Quarterly*.



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generations can create a bridge between the memories of the past and the reality they experience in the present, in relation to respect for their human rights".¹⁰

¹⁰ https://archivomesoamericano.org/media_objects/xg94hp54d

Section 3: Lessons, Reflections and Recommendations

Participation of Multiple Actors in Support of Governmental Action in Curricular Reforms or the Educational System

Educational reforms in El Salvador have responded to the demands of teachers and other sectors, requesting the inclusion of content that was not included in the official curriculum prior to the peace accords. During the two terms of the FMLN government (2009-2019), there was an openness to work on the issues of memory, human rights and restorative justice. One of the most significant contributions of this period has been this tool to promote citizenship, which accompanies the development of the subject of Morals, Civility and Civics:

Ciudadanía, memoria y cultura de paz en El Salvador. [Citizenship, memory and culture of peace in El Salvador]. Caja de herramientas para docentes y educadores [Toolbox for teachers and educators] (2018).

This proposal is designed to work preferentially with students in middle school (7th to 9th grade) and high school (10th to 12th grade), and is directly and expressly aligned with the educational policy established by the Ministry of Education. In this sense, if the first module is designed to work on some of the contents of the subject of Morals, Urbanity and Civics of the Social Sciences curriculum, the second module is part of the efforts made by the Ministry of Education to promote coexistence and a culture of peace at school.

The origin of this project dates back to July 2016 when the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman (PDDH), the Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation, and the support of the photographic archive of the Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen, launched an educational project appropriate to the Salvadoran reality that, aimed at children and adolescents, had the purpose of contributing to strengthen democratic values and the culture of Human Rights in El Salvador. The toolbox is intended to work on democratic citizenship, memory and culture of peace in Salvadoran schools and other educational spaces. Using a participatory methodology, a working group was formed from the educational community, civil society and various public institutions in El Salvador. A diagnosis was made of the educational and social situation of young people in El Salvador, on the basis of which parameters were established for a work proposal that would seek, on the one hand, to respond specifically to the needs of the context and, on the other, to consider strategies that would serve to maximize the impact of the project and guarantee its long-term sustainability.

This initiative also came together with a series of efforts promoted by the Ministry of Education (MINED), in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Peace Accords, carrying out a systematic reflection exercise to rethink the role of the educational system in the process of building a culture of peace in the country, strengthened by the implementation of an ambitious teacher training plan, which went hand in hand with the development of the curricula of a new subject on Morals, Urbanity and Civics and the beginning of a process of revision of the national curriculum in the area of Social Sciences.

Considering the affinities and parallels between the objectives of this proposal and the work being promoted by MINED to strengthen citizenship skills and the culture of peace in El Salvador, the Auschwitz Institute and the PDDH consolidated a working agreement with the Ministry of Education through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding which, among other things, provided for coordination between the three institutions in relation to the implementation of the toolkit and additional cooperation in areas of shared interest for the consolidation of this work.

As an educational intervention, the scope of action proposed by this project focuses on an effort to recover the social fabric and the revaluation of public space, from the school and towards the community. In this sense, one of the fundamental objectives of the project is to generate spaces for coexistence that contribute to making schools a safer place, maximizing their transforming potential and their capacity to generate preventive attitudes and behaviors in the social context. The project is thus conceived as a broad proposal for intervention in the school, with the objective of reinforcing its solidity as an educational institution and as a nucleus for the promotion of a culture of peace, democratic participation, prevention of violence and appreciation of respect for human rights.

As a whole, the objective is to strengthen the capacity of teachers, educators and educational managers to work on democratic citizenship in schools and contribute to consolidating a culture of peace in the country. It should also be used by interested civil society organizations outside the context of formal education. The three volumes of this >Toolbox can be downloaded for free at: [: https://www.mined.gob.sv/download/ciudadania-memoria-y-cultura-de-paz-en-el-salvador-memoria-ciudadana](https://www.mined.gob.sv/download/ciudadania-memoria-y-cultura-de-paz-en-el-salvador-memoria-ciudadana)

Informal Initiatives, Challenges and Lessons Learned

In the face of certain government policies that hinder the work of civil society organizations, a relevant lesson is the important role played by informal networks of teachers, organized communities and youth groups, which has made it possible to expand and maintain the work or practices of memory. The specific case of the informal networks of teachers interested in the training processes, which have allowed the continuity of the work despite the obstacles generated by the recurrent political changes in the country.

We can add the following elements as lessons learned from El Salvador's experience:

- The memory management processes (documentation, rescue, dissemination and practice) are an element of intergenerational connection, which can improve social coexistence and contribute to the construction of collective identities.
- The processes of memory training must include theory and experiential activities that allow reflection, so that the participants can make the link between their personal and family lives, historical events and current reality.
- The educational processes for peace education must be experiential and practical, in order for children and youth to be able to assimilate and visualize how abstract elements such as symbolic violence, empathy, solidarity, etc. and all the values related to the subject are manifested.



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- The educational processes for the topic of memory, peace education or violence prevention must be carried out from a popular educational methodology or educational background, which will facilitate conceptual assimilation and understanding.
- Since the signing of the Peace Agreements, the teaching of the practical application of Human Rights and Justice has been deficient, in the daily life of the population, so it is necessary to work on how to visualize the exercise of those rights, and particularly the right to justice that the entire population has.
- While it is important to establish links with state institutions to work on the topic of memory, it is more important to maintain work with other actors involved in educational tasks such as teachers or community promoters, since they are direct links with the population.

Some Recommendations that Could Have Applications in Other Contexts

In societies where impunity persists, a successful model that could be replicated in other latitudes in search of truth, memory and non-repetition, is the experience generated with the International Tribunal for the Application of Restorative Justice, organized by the Human Rights Institute of the UCA (IDHUCA) and the National Coordinator of Committees of Victims of Human Rights Violations (CONACOVIC).

This project is a non-governmental public policy modality, being integrated by experts in justice and human rights from several countries. Since 2009, the Court has been sitting in various localities or communities in the country to examine cases of massacres, summary executions, torture, rape, forced disappearances, many of them still unknown by the country's justice system, issuing respective sentences with the testimonies of all of them, legal grounds based on international criminal law and human rights conventions, petitions from the victims and a review of the position of the Salvadoran State in relation to them. Among its objectives, we can mention:

- Reflect on how to proceed with respect to the more than 80 cases filed with the prosecutor's office that are at a standstill.
- Promote a transitional justice law.
- Reinforce the petition to reopen the case of serious violations of Human Rights.
- Initiate processes for meeting victims and military/polices.

Memory mapping

We highlight as a good practice the participatory mapping exercise developed with communities that, as a result of the armed conflict, experienced displacement, exile and repopulation. Cartography proves to be a highly effective tool for extracting information and places the people participating in these workshops in a new role, that of social cartographers, in that they are capable of capturing information on the territories inhabited and showing their transformations. Apart from the value that participatory mapping brings to recreate past events, there are other fundamental values we would like to highlight. These include therapeutic mapping, in such a way that the revelation of traumatic episodes becomes a healing factor and, on the other hand, the value obtained from the strengthening of the bonds of group cohesion, that is, the collective construction of the story through empathy and synergy with the other



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members. This exercise of mapping memories generates positive lessons learned in the context of the armed conflict and the post-war period. For example, intergenerational spaces are opened to reflect on the value of solidarity and community organization experienced in the refugee camps, and to recognize how these communities have managed to contain the effects of criminality to a large extent during the post-war period thanks to their organizational models. The accompaniment of comparative studies and good practices in community management will serve to strengthen the current social fabric weakened by the violence of the present.

Generational relays

A replicable practice is the work that various Salvadoran civil society organizations are doing with youth, especially in their empowerment, and in the generation of youth collectives that are using new ways of understanding citizen and human rights, and positively using the power of social networks and online. It is important to create spaces that allow young people to become promoters of “peer trainers” in the effort to generate new cadres of human rights defenders. It is essential to be open to generational change in the institutions, which will allow us to honor the work of past generations, and to continue it, linking it to current human rights transgressions that young people who are being stigmatized and persecuted are experiencing firsthand.

Finally, we consider the following elements:

- To generate processes of reparation and memory management, it is necessary to integrate the voices of all the actors involved, and to include an analysis of the needs or motivations that caused their actions, as well as a reflection on how this event continues to affect their current and daily lives.
- The development of curricula for social sciences, history or language and literature should not only lead to the development of national or universal contents, but also connect these contents with the daily life of the population.
- In the case of El Salvador, it is necessary to include the teaching of history (national and universal) as a subject in the curriculum, not only to memorize dates and events, but also to reflect on the past and connect it with the reality of people’s daily lives.