



Can art represent a country? In search of Salvadoran Cultural and National Identities through 20th century literature, poetry, and art

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Abstract

As a citizen of El Salvador, I believe our cultural and national identities have not been clearly defined. This project considers the literary contributions of Salarrué and Claudia Lars together with the artistic works of Fernando Llorca as integral components of a possible Salvadoran cultural and national identity. Their works exhibit a recognition of Indigenous roots¹ or *lo nuestro* (ours), which I argue is an important missing component needed to create more inclusive and heterogeneous Salvadoran cultural and national identities. A brief recount of the history of El Salvador gives context for their personal and professional stories since politics was a relevant influential component on their works and lives. Two main historical and political events include the 1932 *Indian*² *campesino*³ massacre, known as *la Matanza* or the slaughter, carried out by then President General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez under the pretense of protection against communism, and the 1980 – 1992 civil war. The latter created by the division of social classes generated great discontent due to the abuses suffered by the many *campesino* workers under the powerful few wealthy land owners.

¹ Native Indigenous groups endemic to El Salvador (i.e. Izalcos, Cacahoperas, Lencas, Nonualcos, etc.)

² Indian – “identity created during the first moments of Spanish arrival in the Americas, at the end of the fifteenth century.” (Tilley, Virginia Q. *Seeing Indians. A Study of Race, Nation, and Power in El Salvador.*, 2005)

³ Term used to reference the native Indigenous population who worked in the agricultural fields

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Introduction

What is the definition of personal or cultural identity? Without a doubt, this definition is related to the construction of modern nation-states, due to its relevance in the constitution of ideas of citizenship, nationhood, mother and fatherland (that go beyond those of kingship). In a sense, identity is a modern concept. Some define it as the distinctive characteristic of belonging claimed by an individual, or shared by all members of a particular social category or group; others associate the term with a more fluid experience of being within a context or in relation to a place (belonging), a family, or a collective. It also has psychological connotations related to the healthy development of one's personality along gender, self-determination, and social dimensions. Finally, identity has a biological dimension related to ancestry and ethnicity (Weinreich).

According to sociologist Gilberto Giménez, in *Culture as Identity and Identity as Culture* [translation mine] “identity is defined primarily by its limits and not by the cultural content that mark or sets those limits at a determined period [translation mine]” (La Cultura como Identidad y la Identidad como Cultura 1). Giménez develops his thesis from the scholarship on nationalism.ⁱ He believes in the symbiotic relationship and the indivisibility that exists between identity and culture as “the first one is constructed based on cultural materials” [translation mine] (La Cultura como Identidad y la Identidad como Cultura 2). He also clarifies, “our identity can only consist of the appropriation of certain cultural repertoires that are found in our social surroundings, in our group or in

our society. This is clearer if we considered that the primary function of an identity is to define borders between us and the ‘others’ [translation mine]” (La Cultura como Identidad y la Identidad como Cultura 1) in that by defining our cultural similarities and differences, or the borders he refers to, we are able to distinguish ourselves from the others. Giménez’s conclusions and definitions are important to me, both for the purpose of this work and in the search of my own identity as a citizen of El Salvador.

When I left my native country to study abroad in the United States I was one of a very small group of international students at my college. In fact, I think I was the only Latina⁴ on campus for a while. Moreover, because of my physical appearance, and because international students were ‘a new thing’ back then, my classmates thought I was Puerto Rican, Indian (native of India), or maybe Mexican. I had to provide references to other bigger or more popular countries around El Salvador as most had never hear of my country before. However, it was not until I started a graduate program at Duke University that, when I was asked, “Where are you from?” I began to seriously think about my answer. It was easy to say the name and location of the country in which I was born. However, I also wanted to provide something different from the common negative impressions of El Salvador, and this is where I seemed to hit my own road block every time. For what else are Salvadorans known? Several potential answers came to mind in cultural terms; for example, common Salvadoran foods are available in

⁴ Latino/a denotes a person from Latin America. Hispanic denotes a person who speaks Spanish. There were other Hispanics mainly from Puerto Rico due to the college proximity of the army base.

the U.S. to meet the demand of Salvadorians driven in to exile by historical circumstances.

In my search to find other, more meaningful and positive answers I started to look at Salvadorian literature and art as a source of cultural identity. First, one of my favorite authors, Salvador Salazar Arrue - Salarrué – and recalled how my older sister would read to my middle sister and me from his colorful and funny book *Tales from Children (Cuentos de Cipotes)*, which is considered a corner stone of modern Salvadorian literature. Daily, I feel the support/influence of my mother, a strong woman despite her upbringing in a patriarchal society that limits the accepted roles for women. This led me to look at in a second area: influential women in Salvadoran history. Sadly, I was only able to find enough information about one of them – poet Claudia Lars. Other important women in Salvadoran history such as the first feminist and presidential candidate Prudencia Ayala and teacher, writer, feminist, and social activist Amparo Casamalhuapa, remain in obscurity due to the minimal data available about them. Finally, I bring a little of El Salvador to my house and office by displaying the art of Fernando Llort in the form of hand painted wood decorations and colorful ceramic wall pieces.

While researching their work and El Salvadoran political history, I arrived at an important conclusion: our lack of cultural and national identities lies in the neglect and unawareness of our Indigenous roots or what can be considered *lo nuestro* (ours). In other words, the forces of modernity and the emergence of the modern nation-state

have buried the very things for which we as Salvadorans should be known. I believe I feel so identified with the literature, poetry, and art of the notable fellow Salvadorans I chose for my project precisely because they explore Salvadoran Indigenous roots.

By choosing such subjects, I deliberately took an anthropological route to the definition of identity, one that starts with social constructionist theory and progresses through the examination of common ancestry and common biological characteristics as well as the political driven choices of characteristics. This view of identity as the product of predominately political choices in addition to biological factors challenges the idea that identity is a natural given, characterized by fixed, supposedly objective criteria. Indeed, this hybrid approach makes sense only in its political and historical contexts, and within the debate on issues such as class, race, gender, and ethnicity.

In this order of ideas, Indigenous roots refers to everything related to the history, customs, and traditions of the several native Indigenous groups of the country settled in what is now known as El Salvador, even before it became an independent state.⁵ I now firmly believe that by not acknowledging our Indigenous past, I and many other fellow compatriots have given up a big portion of what defines the cultural identity of El Salvador. Throughout the years, we have allowed the forces of modernity to systematically erase our Indigenous background (Mignolo) through coloniality (the colonial matrix of power), the mixing of races (mestizaje), the 1932 ethnocide, and

⁵ Izalcos, Nonualcos, Lencas, Nahua or Pipils (Tilley, V. *Seeing Indians. A Study of Race, Nation, and Power in El Salvador.*, 2005)

simple failure to preserve the first nations peoples' traditions and integrate them as part of Salvadoran heritage.ⁱⁱ

In addition, the Salvadoran sense of belonging has been compromised by a strong division of social classes, which has separated the Salvadoran population even more. This separation, dating to pre and colonial times, persists in El Salvador to this day. A few rich and powerful families have been controlling much of the economy in a process known as internal colonialism (González-Casanova, 1965) since the early nineteenth century. These families, together with weak national institutions and persistent fluctuations of economic performance that has characterized the country for many years have made it almost impossible for the vast majority of the Salvadoran population to find any opportunity to move up from their poor working class situation.⁶

Equally important as to what defines Salvadorans is the political construction of the nation-state, which has the power to separate peoples or provide them with a sense of belonging and the means to address the question of how Salvadorians see themselves. According to Lloyd Kramer in his *Nationalism in Europe and America: Politics, Cultures, and Identities since 1775*, "[p]eople always have multiple identities. They describe themselves (and are described by others) through references to their family, work, and professional status, wealth, gender and race, education, religious

⁶ Gonzalez Casanova, Pablo (1965). "Internal Colonialism and National Development", *Studies in Comparative International Development*, vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 27–37.

affiliations, and political allegiances – not to mention their other identities such as loyalties to sports teams, club membership, or hometowns.” (Lloyd 13). I do agree with Kramer’s definition; however, I believe his definition is more indicative of an individual’s identity rather than a group’s identity. For instance, in an empirical way and as long as I can remember, Salvadorans have referred to themselves as survivors, as hard workers, as strong spirited, and as people of faith. I do not have to look very far to see these references being true in my family. Nonetheless, very few Salvadorans, myself included, could possibly describe our cultural and national identities more abstractly. Scholars and writers -- mainly foreigners -- have also addressed the question of Salvadoran identity directly or indirectly throughout the history of El Salvador. However, a clear definition of this identity remains elusive due to the many influences and factors that comprise and have shaped this complex issue to this day.

To begin this essay then, it is necessary, to examine some relevant aspects of the history of El Salvador to better understand the development of the notion of national identity vis-à-vis notions of citizenship.

Salvadoran historical background, citizenship, and identity

During the mid-sixteen century – pre-colonial times – the territory of El Salvador was known as Cuscatlán.⁷ According to historical records, Spaniard Captain Pedro de

⁷ **Cuscatlán** comes from the Nahuatl origin "Kozkatlan" (Cozcatlan Spanish form), which is derived from "Kozkatl", meaning "jewel", and "tlan", meaning "next to" or "in between". Kozkatlan means "land of jewels". Possibly this literal translation took conquistadors to the territory expecting great wealth. Possibly, the real

Alvarado first arrived in Cuscatlán on June 6, 1524 to conquer the territory and enslave the natives. (Ministerio de Educacion 77). By 1586, the majority of what is now Salvadoran territory had become part of the Guatemalan jurisdiction under Spanish rule. This year also marked the end of self-determination for the few remaining natives who had survived the conquest battles and European diseases. Under the Spaniard-given name “*Indios*”, the Indigenous people began their service to their new owners and masters. This was the inauguration of three centuries of colonialism under the Spanish empire. (Ministerio de Educacion 84-85).

The main Indigenous group in the territory formerly known as Cuscatlán was the Pipiles. They were concentrated in the western part of the territory. On the eastern part of the territory were the Lencas who are believed to be the original settlers in the entire country. The Lencas were slowly displaced by the Pipiles who had migrated from Mexico into Guatemala and eventually deep into Cuscatlán. Some Mayan groups still lived in the north-central region of Cuscatlán. The Lencas slowly adopted the Nahuatl language spoken by the Pipiles, which was a variation of Nahuatl; however, other languages were spoken -- chorti, cacaopera, ulúa, and mangue (Ministerio de Educacion 38-39).

meaning was referring to was the wealth in relation to the fertility of the land, due to be located in-between volcanos. See **Compendio de la historia de la ciudad de Guatemala, Volumes 1-2**, by Domingo Juarros (cronicles – 1631) pg. 29-36.

In 1822, Mexico annexed the Salvadoran territory until September 14, 1823. On March 11, 1824 the modern state of El Salvador was created with an initial congressionally written constitution. Article 8 under Chapter II of this constitution declares, “All Salvadoran are free men, and are equally considered citizens in it [translation mine]” (1824 Constitution of El Salvador, p. 4). What this document fails to clarify is who is considered a free man or a Salvadoran, particularly considering that three months earlier, on June 12, a decree to free the slaves had been enacted. Then, is it possible that the former slaves/*Indios* were also considered Salvadorans under this new constitution?⁸

In 1841 after El Salvador became independent from the Central American Federation composed of Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Panama, a second constitution for the newly created Republic of El Salvador was enacted. In this constitution, the definition of a Salvadoran citizen was expanded from its original version:

Article 4. Salvadoran are all the natural born children of El Salvador, born in its territory, children born on other neighboring States of the old Union, children of naturalized foreigners; and the children of Salvadorans born abroad...

Article 5. Citizens are all Salvadorans twenty-one or older who are parents, heads of household, or are literate, or have the property designated by the law. [translation mine]

⁸ Slavery was banned in 1823, which made El Salvador the second country to abolish slavery in the Americas after [Haiti](#). See: [África, la otra raíz salvadoreña](#) (in English: Africa, the other Salvadoran root). Opinion page. El Diario, by Marvin Aguilar.

Nonetheless, these two articles seem to have excluded a certain portion of the population. Once again, it is unclear as to whether the Indigenous population is included in the definition of who is a Salvadoran. As stated on Article 5 only those “older than twenty-one years of age who could read and write, were parents or heads of household, or who had the property designated by the law [translation mine]” would be considered citizens. The earliest population census for El Salvador, which can be traced back to May 1, 1930, indicates that of the men and women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two years of age, 115,200 were illiterate compared to 46,018 who could read and write.⁹ This data does not indicate whether the Indigenous population was included in those numbers, but in his book titled *Los Izalcos, Testimonio de un Indigena*, Salvadoran Indigenous writer Julio Leiva Masin cites that as recently as 2002 “41% of the heads of households [in the Indigenous population] were illiterate [translation mine]” (Masin 167). Therefore, it may be safe to assume that the percentage was even higher in 1841 when the constitution was enacted, thereby possibly excluding this group as citizens of the nation. It is therefore difficult to draw from the early Salvadoran constitutions an idea regarding identity.

It is equally challenging to assert exactly when or how the subject of identity disappeared from the consciousness of Salvadorans. The socio-political and economic situation of the country during the 1920's and the later 1932 Indian *campesino* massacre followed by the long years of dictatorship, the return to “democracy”, and the

⁹ 1930 Población de la República de El Salvador, Censo del 1o. de Mayo 1930

civil war of the 1980 to 1992 are all extremely influential factors that problematize the notion of inclusive Salvadoran cultural and national identity(ies) from a historical perspective. Kramer adds additional in his statement, “[m]emory shapes national identities in many of the ways that it shapes individual identities: it gives order and meaning to selected events and people in the past and provides narratives of continuity to establish a coherent identity in the present. Neither nations nor individuals could sustain their identities if they had no memory of the past.” (Lloyd 73)

In the early 1900s (1910s-1920s) when El Salvador was still establishing itself as a recognized independent country in the Americas, agriculture played a major role not only in the country’s economy, but also in making El Salvador known as an agricultural exporter. According to Thomas P. Anderson in his book, *Matanza: El Salvador’s Communist Revolt of 1932*, for the few rich land owning families, the crop of choice was coffee. Coffee was almost as good as gold, and these families’ social standing reached an elite status with the sales of coffee to the U.S. and Germany, a commodity of high value during the years of WWI and its aftermath. The result was a social structure with a very small minority of rich and powerful families who owned most of the land, a small middle class, a large majority of poor people, supported by an economy relying mostly on the production of coffee beans (without the aggregated value of a finished product).

This coffee-centric identity was threatened by forces outside the country. Overreliance on coffee production spelled doom for many when the prices as well as the demand for coffee dropped to record levels in 1930 due to the rippling effect of the

Great Depression in the United States (1929-39), one of only two major consumers of coffee. The depressed economy of the U.S. was certainly in no condition economically to consume the quantities of coffee imported from El Salvador and demand fell, depressing prices. The price crash affected every strata of Salvadoran society, even some of the richest families. “The country became permeated with the sick-sweet smell of rotting coffee fruits. As many of the *fincas*, or coffee plantations, were heavily mortgaged, the owners often lost their land. Some 28 percent of the coffee holdings in the country changed hands during the early years of the depression, the small growers generally suffering more than the large” (T. P. Anderson 9). According to Anderson, during “the depression the value of the colon¹⁰ fell from 2.04 to the dollar in 1929 to 2.54 to the dollar in 1932;” in addition, the wages for *campesinos*, “which had been around fifty centavos a day before the depression, sank to twenty centavos a day, when there was work to be had at all.” (T. P. Anderson 12). This economic situation in turn triggered a social effect: the departure of unemployed field hands for the city in search of work, a migration that disintegrated family ties and increased the number of illegitimate births since most couples lived in “common-law unions and only 18 percent were married.” (T. P. Anderson 13). In this way, coffee played a pivotal role in the negative economic and socio-cultural demographic changes in the population of El Salvador in the twentieth century. Of course, the most important result of the crash in coffee prices was the discontent of the Indian *campesinos* who had little work, low wages, and no chances of

¹⁰ Colon was the official currency in El Salvador until it was replaced by the US Dollar in 2001

upward mobility or better treatment from the landowners. This discontent fueled *campesinos* organizing actions in the months leading to the 1932 massacre, known as the *Matanza*.

The 1932 massacre of the Indigenous and *campesinos*, a population persecuted and forced to assimilate to a rapidly changing, post-colonial Salvadoran society, could be viewed as the tipping point after which the possibility of a common Salvadoran cultural and national identity became more remote. The massacre, one of the most horrific events in the history of El Salvador took place after General (then vice-president) Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez replaced President Arturo Araujo who was ousted in November of 1931 by Salvadoran's military force.

It is difficult to say with certainty how many people were killed during the massacre that, depending on the source, lasted weeks to months. Some estimates conclude that 3,000 to 10,000 Indigenous persons in the western part of El Salvador were killed; others elevate the number to at least 30,000. Since no historical records of the event exist, there is no certainty of how many lives were lost. According to Virginia Q. Tilley's findings, in her book titled *Seeing Indians*, the last census that included the Indigenous population (79,573 *Indios*) was done in 1930, two years before the massacre in. Not only is the accuracy of this census questionable since it only counted the Indigenous population of the western part of the country, the next official census of 1950 did not include this population at all. There is no data within eighteen years of the massacre that could even approximate the lives lost. "Some Salvadorans believe that

the constitution of 1950 actually prohibited the recording of race in the census (a measure seen today as progressive), but the constitution contains no such clause—although it does call more broadly for the abolition of any form of racial discrimination.” (Tilley 173).

The reasons given for the *Matanza* were to protect and defend Salvadoran “citizens” against the threat of communism that, according to recently installed President Martinez, was being made by the Indians/*campesinos*. According to Anderson “[u]ntil 1929, the communist organization in El Salvador had been directed by the Guatemalan communist party council, but in 1929 a Secretariat of the Caribbean was formed, with its headquarters in New York. After the official foundation of the party in El Salvador, the Salvadoran communists took their orders from New York.” Yet, from “the highly organized party structure, one might draw a false picture of tight discipline and careful organization. The reality was much less formidable. The party was never the ‘great sinister organization’ that it was later made out to be by the government of General Martinez. In many places only a paper organization existed.” (Matanza. El Salvador's Communist Revolt of 1932 25) It is possible that some ideas of communism played a role in the Indigenous uprising; nonetheless, the majority of people were simply searching for a better treatment by the few but powerful coffee plantations and landowners, better wages, and a bit of land to grow their own crops to feed their families. Martinez’s troops killed as many racially identified Indigenous as they found on the streets without an investigation or a trial to determine whether they were affiliated

with a communist organization. According to Jeffrey L. Gould and Aldo Lauria-Santiago, in their book titled *To Rise in Darkness. Revolution, Repression, and Memory in El Salvador, 1920-1932*, in “all battles government forces defeated the insurgents in three hours or less of combat. After defeating them, the National Guard pursued the retreating rebels into the countryside. During the hot pursuit the troops often engaged in indiscriminate killing of males over twelve years old.” (*To Rise in Darkness. Revolution, Repression, and Memory in El Salvador 1920-1932* 211) It is because of this that the massacre appears more strongly based on Martinez’s own fascist beliefs¹¹ than on a defense against communism. The very fact that a massacre was perpetrated on the *campesinos* shows that their indigeneity and cultural heritage were already undervalued by the Salvadoran government and its supporters – mainly the elite social class – not worth preservation as part of the country’s possible cultural and national identities.

However, I believe the indigenous roots is the key missing piece in order to compose a more comprehensive and accurate national identity even though the acceptance of this heritage is still something that Salvadorans do not fully embrace. I recall in middle school and in high school, one of the worst insults we could say to one another was to call somebody an ‘Indio’ or ‘India’. Feeling obligated to defend ourselves

¹¹ In 1938, Salvadoran Consul in Geneva during WWII, “Col. José Arturo Castellanos’ disapproval of both his country’s dictatorship and of the current wave of fascism sweeping through Europe, moves him to disobey his government’s orders. He begins to issue Salvadoran visas and nationality papers to those wishing to escape the unbearable situation in Germany.” <http://www.castellanosmovie.com/the-story/>. “On July 30, 1939, President Martinez barred the entry of fifty Jewish refugees bound for El Salvador on the German ship, *Portland*.” <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/ElSalvador.html>.

from that insult not only allowed us to disconnect ourselves from our heritage but also caused us to publicly negate it. As Kramer indicates “nations, like individuals, also protect their identities by forgetting or repressing the most painful conflicts of the past” (Nationalism in Europe & America. Politics, Cultures, and Identities since 1775. 73). Could this then be a possible reason why El Salvador decided to omit the *Matanza* from the memory of its population? I also remember studying colonization, the religious enforcement of Catholicism on the Indians, their enslavement by the Spanish conquistadors, and learning about *mestizaje* -- miscegenation. However, these topics were taught as if all of them had happened in a foreign country outside of El Salvador. I do not recall being taught that I was the product of that *mestizaje* or that I was possibly a descendant of one of our Indigenous groups. In her book titled *Reimagining National Belonging: Post-civil war El Salvador in a Global Context*, Robin M. DeLugan explains, “[In] the interest of representing a common national identity, [El Salvadoran] state projects promoted an ethnically and racially homogenous national society based on the ideology of *mestizaje*, which emphasized the historical blending of Indigenous and Spanish biological and cultural roots.” However, the well meaning projects failed as “historical and ongoing exclusions, in particular those based on race and ethnicity” (DeLugan 5) still exist. How can then we as a nation, as a group, as individuals know what identifies us if we negate where we come from, and have done so for many years?

One important aspect regarding *mestizaje* in El Salvador is the use of the word itself on birth records. Tilley notes, “Over time...the notation ‘*mestizo*’ took over the

records entirely, and by the 1950 census its universal use had rendered the category of race itself obsolete. Indian and *ladino* alike were now, officially, *mestizo*.¹² (Seeing Indians. A Study of Race, Nation, and Power in El Salvador. 189-90). The 1930 census listed 79,573 *Indios* and 1,323,830 *Mestizos*.¹³ The topic of *mestizaje* is vast and complicated in all Latin America, and El Salvador is not an exception. Tilley explains, “the project of imagining *mestizaje* was being pursued as a new racial-nationalist and geostrategic idea among nationalist intellectuals...[who] were concerned with Indians, but were much more concerned about what race meant for their nation’s economic growth, international trade, and their ability to fend off European and North American imperialism.” (Seeing Indians. A Study of Race, Nation, and Power in El Salvador. 190). According to Tilley, Indians represented poverty and ignorance, which is the opposite of the perception that the intellectuals wanted for their nations. As such, it was known as the “Indian problem”.

As a nation, as Salvadorans, we did limit our identity as Giménez explained in his definition of identity, not only by eliminating the ethnic Indigenous population physically through the *Matanza*, but also by erasing any Indigenous representations on paper. Whether the “Indian problem” was framed within race or identity, the negative connotation associated with this particular group was equally detrimental for their

¹² Ladino is use to reference Indians who do no longer dress in their native attire

¹³ 1930 Población de la República de El Salvador, Censo del 1o. de Mayo 1930

physical existence and their recognition as an essential cultural component of Salvadoran society, mainly Salvadoran cultural identity.

A second influential historical event impeding the construction of a common Salvadoran cultural and national identities is the 1980 – 1992 civil war. For twelve years, this war held the country and its population. During this period, survival was the only focus among the population. In brief, the civil war can be seen as the product of an ongoing discontent among some of the *campesinos* who, with the help of a few educated leaders, began to organize into guerrilla style militias (supported by friendly governments such as Cuba and neighboring Nicaragua) and plot against the landowners and the unfair government-sponsored agrarian reform. Sadly, the trauma and destruction suffered in El Salvador during this period is still palpable, despite the fact that a political settlement has recognized a political party, the Frente Farabundo Marti para Liberación Nacional (FMLN), and that a member of that party, a former guerrilla fighter, has recently come into power. As a young adult living through that difficult period, I could not fully understand the reasons behind the war -- possibly, because most of our dark history has been missing from the Salvadoran education curricula below the college level and the country's mainstream narrative. At the time college students were attracted by the potential ideals ennobling the war effort and were fed by their curiosity, the propaganda, and the guerilla recruitment efforts. Looking back, I believe the fear in me was greater than my curiosity to learn more about the circumstances that led to the war, so I went on living as much of a normal life as I

possibly could under the circumstances, much like most of the Salvadorans who stayed behind since that attitude made life more bearable. However, there was another side of this war story, and that is the story of the ones that left the country, thereby escaping the war.

The civil war caused one of the largest migrations in Salvadoran history. Life in El Salvador had become very difficult due to the fighting between the military and the guerilla forces moving from the rural areas into the cities and ultimately to the capital - San Salvador. Car bomb explosions, bus burnings, protest demonstrations, or many other terror-inflicting activities disrupted daily life. Therefore, the solution most Salvadorans found to escape the daily dangers and the potential recruitment from the guerilla or the official military was to migrate. Unfortunately, not all who left found peace and success in the countries – mainly the U.S. - to which they fled. This migration gave rise to another important phenomenon that continued to destabilize the country: the emergence of a transnational criminal organization known as the *maras* (urban gangs) that aggravate the weak institutions of law and justice in El Salvador. The lack of common core cultural and national identities in El Salvador has allowed the influx of migrants deported from the U.S. back to El Salvador to entice or cajole the younger Salvadoran generation into a way of life and set of behaviors not only foreign but also mainly negative. Some of those behaviors –acquired in another urban-warfare (the war on drugs) and its highly problematic “prison-system” – are the use of tattoos, baggy pants, oversized shirts, and the display of multiple gold chains, the baseball caps and

sunglasses to express toughness and being cool. These manners and characteristics originated from another marginalized community during the aftermath of the civil rights movement and the war on drugs: the African American community in the United States. This culture is now part of Salvadoran gang culture. I strongly believe that our weak sense of identity, compounded with a weak political state and a fragile economy still not fully recovered from the civil war, have created the perfect environment for criminal organizations (such as gangs) to gain strength and thrive. Although this phenomenon is currently being studied, its proximity in time and space and its fluidity make it very difficult to assess and understand. I will not explore this aspect in the present work due to its specificity and complexity in this essay. Nonetheless, the connection to the question of national and cultural identity is clear.

Identity expressed in Art

In spite of these historical events so corrosive to a common identity, there are potential representations of what Salvadoran cultural and national identities might be. The search for these potential identities, driven by my own experience (starting with my childhood memories,) has led me to a more academic investigation of Salarrué, Claudia Lars and Fernando Llorca. In fact, both writers – Salarrué and Lars –developed their professional careers under the Martinez regime, which made their work more appealing due to the ban on anything referencing the Salvadoran Indigeneity under the Martinez's presidency. I chose Llorca mainly for his aesthetically pleasant (and apparently neutral) depictions of El Salvador. The images he creates in his art are continual reminders of 'lo

nuestro', and transport me to the land of my childhood. Most importantly, they paint a peaceful El Salvador which fills my heart not only with nostalgia but also with hope for a better future. Overall, these three characters cheerfully complement the dark history of El Salvador regarding the constitution of a modern nation that has marginalized and suppressed its Indigenous population, isolating it from its mainstream, its history and its social life.

Salarrué (1899 - 1975) and Claudia Lars (1899 - 1974) lived, experienced, and in their own way documented important historical events during the Martínez Presidency while embracing and presenting perspectives that could serve as important components of Salvadoran cultural and national identities. Their writing covered the Salvadoran way of living for a cross section of classes -- the poor, the Indigenous, and the mid-upper classes -- during the early to mid-1900s. More importantly, their writing is a great example of what is known as “regionalismo Salvadoreño”. Sonia P. Ticas in her dissertation titled “Historia, feminismo y literatura: escritoras Salvadoreñas 1920-1960” indicates that the goal of this movement “was the tireless search for a national identity through literature; [and]...local writers were becoming more aware that such identity was not complete unless it included the entire community, although imagined, of Salvadoran citizens, including the voice and presence of the Indian that had been systematically excluded from the construction of a national identity [translation mine]” (Historia, feminismo y literatura: escritoras salvadoreñas 1920-1960 22) .

Aside from supporting my conclusion, Ticas raises a very important key point of an *imagined* community, an idea originated by Benedict Anderson that is very applicable to the work not only of Salarrué and Lars, but also of Llord. In his book *Imagined Communities*, Anderson indicates that communities or nations are imagined “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” (Imagined Communities 6). In other words, although these three individuals came from the upper middle class, their work is able to provide us with an important and insightful image and perspective of the Indigenous population of El Salvador – although possibly imagined - through which we could envision a more inclusive society. Anderson also raises the theory of print-capitalism, which he uses to trace the beginnings of nationalist consciousness.

As El Salvador struggled to become a modern nation, the printed word – books, journals, magazines, etc. – turned into the medium of choice used by the local Salvadoran intelligentsia for both communicating the message of nationalism and “re-presenting’ the kind of imagined community that is the nation” (Anderson B., 2006, p. 25). However, this notion went against the message that the modern Salvadoran nationalist intellectuals wanted to convey particularly when we refer to the literature of Salarrué and Lars. Their work placed the idea of the modern nation and its cultural and nationalistic identities back in the middle of the “Indian problem” because it gave voice to and painted the image of the Salvadoran Indian that, according to the nationalist

intellectual, was not the right image for a modern, progressive nation to project.

Likewise, the imagery in Llord's art sends a message that challenges a more modern denial of the Indigenous population in 21st century El Salvador. According to the book titled *Ciclos y Charlas Identidad y Cultura* published in El Salvador in 2009, such a denial is couched in a report that the Salvadoran government submitted to the United Nations Committee that oversees racial discrimination citing the following:

The government manifests that the Salvadoran population is not composed of groups with different racial characteristics and consequently, racial discrimination is unfounded in the country. It is important to mention that *mestizaje* is prevalent in El Salvador and a well-defined difference between whites (*ladinos*) and Indians does not exist. We recognize that in El Salvador a homogenous *mestizaje* has developed and that traditions, stories and customs which reminds us of the Indigenous settlers, as well as the crafts and dances are still alive [translation mine]. (Identidad y Cultura: ciclo de charlas 6)

The Salvadoran government concluded that racial discrimination is not a problem because the country has developed a homogenous *mestizo* race; thereby, denying completely the existence of the Indigenous peoples.

The following chapters dedicated to Salarrué, Lars and Llord offer different perspectives on the socio-political circumstances that affected them and influenced their writing. Lars also provided particular insights into the difficulties forced by women due to the gender restrictions imposed by a patriarchal society. The visual artist Fernando Llord (1949 -) has produced art, which has become a globally recognized symbol of Salvadoran art and identity. Llord enjoyed a less restrictive government than that experienced by Salarrué and Lars; however, during his time the socio-political situation

in El Salvador was escalating to a new level of civilian discontent ending the 1980 – 1992 civil war.

In my opinion, the work of these three individuals provides relevant pieces to the Salvadoran identity puzzle that offer clues to what cultural and national identities might mean in the Salvadoran context. Their love for the land, their acknowledgement of the Salvadoran Indigenous population, their culture, and their countryside is expressed in their work as representations not only of this heritage but also of a missing component to a robust homogeneous Salvadoran identity. The following chapters explore their personal and professional lives as well as their work within the historical, social, and political contexts, which I believe are so relevant for my own search for a cultural identity.

Salvador Efrain Salazar Arrué – Salarrué: The Last Nahual of Cuscatlán

Salarrué's Pen

Without discussion, it is made out of gold. The type of gold that is not visible, that cannot be touched, that does not exist on earth, because it is in Apollo's castles and in Minerva's eyes. Therefore it is a real pen. [Translation mine]
(Roger Mendieta Alfaro – Nicaraguan writer)

I believe that to speak of Salarrué (1899-1975) is to speak in great part of El Salvador. Mostly known by his books, which form part of the Salvadoran literary canon (1919-1974), Salarrué is considered one of the best writers of his time and a vanguard of the regional style. His literary legacy includes fourteen books ranging from folklore and mystery to theosophy and philosophy. Many scholars, in and outside of El Salvador, value and continue to regard and analyze three of his most popular books -- *Cuentos de Barro* (Tales of Clay) first published in 1934, *Trasmallo* (Fishing Net) published in 1954, and *Cuentos de Cipotes* (Tales from Children) published between 1946-61 -- as examples not only of Salvadoran culture but also of regional story telling. Salarrué lived for many years in the countryside where his blond hair, blue eyes and tall stature – most likely inherited from his maternal grandfather, a Basque Spaniard named

Alejandro de Arrué y Jiménez - stood out. Although his physical appearance was not typical of Salvadorans, his love and appreciation for the Salvadoran countryside and its Indigenous population is a common thread in articles, books, and interviews written by friends and colleagues as well as in some of his own books. Another remarkable aspect of Salarrué's three most popular books is the manner in which he has captured the particular regional Salvadoran speech of the native *campesinos* and children.

The author

Salvador Efraín Salazar Arrué, mostly known by his pen name as Salarrué, was born in El Salvador in 1899. Salarrué spent much of his younger years and married life in the countryside of El Salvador where he was born. It is there where he felt most at home and developed a particular love for the land and the Indigenous population. After his parents' separation when Salarrué was approximately eight years old, his mother, who was well educated and came from a well to do family, mostly raised him. However, declining social fortunes forced Salarrué and his mother to continually move in an attempt to escape poverty. All they had left was the reputation of her good last name and some rich relatives who provided a home and helped them financially. Despite their economic situation, Salarrué's education remained a priority. At age eleven, he demonstrated artistic talents when his first story was published in a local newspaper. His talents developed and were stimulated and influenced by local intellectuals who visited his parents' home frequently. With the help of influential relatives, he obtained a

government scholarship and traveled to the U.S. at the age of seventeen to study Art in Baltimore, MD and later in Danville, VA.

He returned to El Salvador in 1919 where his painting and writing career began. Soon after his return, he married and years later he fathered three daughters. Salarrué sought to instill in his daughters his love for the simple, country life. According to his close friend, Ricardo Aguilar Humano, in an article for the Salvadoran journal *Trasmallo* titled “The Last Nahual of Cuscatlán [translation mine]” published in 2009, Salarrué would take his daughters – Olga Teresa (1924), Maria Teresa (1925-1994) and Aida Estela (1926-1995) - to the creek by his home to swim and spend time with the locals who washed their clothes and bathed there. Humano recalls Salarrué and his family as loving, caring people, and considered Salarrué an older brother (Aguilar Humano).

Amidst the political turmoil of the late 1920's that preceded one of the worst massacres in Salvadoran history, he began to write his now famous tales. His early appreciation for the simplicity of the country life stayed with him throughout his writing career, and it is reflected mainly by three of his books: *Cuentos de Barro* (Tales of Clay), *Cuentos de Cipotes* (Tales from Children), and *Trasmallo* (Fishing Net). Prior to the publication of these books, he worked as a contributor for the newspaper *Patria* (Fatherland) founded by his friend and fellow intellectual Alberto Masferrer. Salarrué used the newspaper as a medium to serially publish his tales. Although he did identify with the purpose of the newspaper, which was to disseminate and condemn government injustices towards the poor, he kept on the margins of the political

movement headed by fellow intellectuals Masferrer and Guerra Trigueros to help the Labor party candidate Arturo Araujo win the presidency of El Salvador in 1931.

Political Letters of Salarrué

Araujo's presidency was very short (March, 1931 – December, 1931) due to the economic situation of the country. Araujo's decision to not pay the military forces over the foreign debt created a large discontent which ended in a military coup d'état that ousted him and forced him to exile in neighboring Guatemala. Araujo's vice president and Minister of War – General Hernandez Martinez – was elected President of El Salvador. General Martinez, as he was mostly known, ruled El Salvador for thirteen years in three different terms: 1931-1934, 1935-1939 and 1939-1944. It is difficult to assert with certainty the mood of the country in such unstable times, but the political stand of Salarrué seemed very clear.

In a 1931 letter, before the *Matanza*, Salarrué had already expressed his apolitical stand. It is unknown whether this initial letter was made public, but it was directed to Alberto Masferrer who was part of the intelligentsia group of the time, creator of the *Minimum Vitale*, and founder of the newspaper *Patria* where Salarrué was a contributing writer. The *Minimum Vitale* was a doctrine that sought to “abate the effects of capitalism among the least favored sectors through social programs [translation mine]” (Salazar Arrue viii), and it later became a political movement known as the *Vitalismo*. In Salarrué's message to Masferrer, he indicated that he was “an introvert man, [his] nature as an artist made [him] separate himself from everything that was

considered a group, cult, sect, party. ... Through this letter," he continued, "I am moving towards you, ... but I want to do it freely, without obligations to the party, reserving the right to remain at the margin of everything that is regulations, canon or condition; my position as an artist gives me that right [translation mine]" (Salazar Arrue ix). He reiterated this message more stridently in his open letter to the patriots (see Appendix A) published after the *Matanza* in 1932 in a Costa Rican journal titled *Repertorio Americano*. This publication was popular not only in Costa Rica but also in El Salvador as well as in most of Latin America. Published from 1919 to 1958, the journal was one of the longest running publications in Latin American. In his article titled *Historia de Repertorio Americano (1919-1958)*, Mario Oliva Medina explains that due to the magazine contents, which allowed publications against dictators, many countries even as far as Europe censored the magazine:

Its struggle against dictatorships moved the sensibility of Pedro Andino who in 1944 wrote from Alajuela these seven final verses of a poem titled *Semblanza de un hombre* "In the fight against so many tyrant presidents/With the tireless spear, his ready horse./Island over the cold waters of indifference:/salvation port./Citizen of our irredentist America,/the one that withstands the lashings from generals/since the arrival of Christopher Columbus"[translation mine]. *Repertorio Americano*, 20 January: 185

Its conflict reached dictatorships in Europe, raised its voice against Mussolini, Hitler, and Franco; also there was not a dictator who did not know of its accusations in America; Ubico in Guatemala, Martínez Osmin Aguilar in El Salvador, Somoza in Nicaragua, Carias in Honduras, Trujillo in Santo Domingo, Gomez in Venezuela, Vargas in Brazil, Moniñingo in Paragua y Leguia in Peru, Ibanez in Chiles just to cite a few [translation mine]. (Oliva Medina 37)

Despite the steps taken by countries to censor the magazine, Oliva Medina indicates that clever “circumstantial travelers”, introduced clandestine copies to El Salvador hidden in their luggage.

Salarrué’s open letter appeared in the February 27, 1932 bi-weekly journal right after the *Matanza* took place. In this letter, titled “My response to the patriots [translation mine]” (Salarrué; Salarrué), he publicly expressed his reasons for remaining on the margins when it came to local politics. It is unknown who the patriots are or why Salarrué chose that particular journal to voice his decision to remain on the margins politically. Nonetheless, it might be safe to assume that his logic was to be able to make public his thoughts while at the same time remaining somehow protected, since no Salvadoran publication would have published such critical view.

When the patriots demanded of Salarrué, “You must give your opinion in these moments when our fatherland is faced with indecision [translation mine]” (Salarrué), he responded, “I don’t have a fatherland. I don’t know what a fatherland is....I have a homeland (a soil that can be touched)...I don’t have El Salvador (fourteen sections on a glossy piece of paper); I have Cuscatlán¹⁴, a region of the world and not a nation (something that is vague) [translation mine]” (Salarrué). Although Salarrué did not recognize El Salvador as a "nation" in his statement, I believe he was rather referencing the political idea of what a nation means and not the sentiments one’s homeland

¹⁴ Most of El Salvador was known as Cuscatlán before the country and its fourteen states became a recognized nation state, and most Indian *campesinos* referred to it by its native name.

inspires. In other words, his response was based on his feelings towards his homeland and not on the modern political notion of what El Salvador meant to his contemporaries. In addition, the terms used by Salarrué, *patria* (Fatherland) vs. *terruño* (Homeland) are important as they establish the difference between the imposed idea of the nation/territory by both Spanish conquistadors and the republican project on one hand and on the other the love, life, and freedom Salarrué – and the *Indios* - experienced while the territory was still known as Cuscatlán.

Salarrué continued his response by reproaching the patriots for their lack of loyalty and pointing out their true interest - money. He also directed his anger and disapproval toward the elite social class in El Salvador who owned most of the land and exploited the Indian/*campesinos* in the plantations:

Most of you use your patriotism to fight whether you have the right or not, whether it is constitutional or not, whether it will be him or her, whether this or that is convenient for the prosperity of the nation. ... The coffee plantation owner is a smug who only talks about the market, the downs and ups, counts his money at the table...but has never lain down on a coffee field. ...The sugar plantation owner has never heard the whisper of sugar cane fields. ...All of them revolve around only one thing: money [translation mine] (Salarrué).

He then proceeded to defend the Indian/*campesinos* and to speak of the 'others' as foreigners:

The Indian makes of the field his working backdrop under the scorching sun; he is satisfied to earn a living with his rough and blackened hands, hands of God. ... This Indian who lives the land is the land and never speaks of patriotism. He is

not afraid of the foreigner who cannot take anything from him, unless he takes his life [translation mine] (Salarrué).

He finished the letter by reminding his contemporaries again that the letter was a forced response, a reaction they were finally able to provoke from him. “Understand, once and for all, that I don’t have a fatherland, nor do I recognize the fatherland of others [translation mine]” (Salarrué). Humano gives some insight, “during that time, to criticize the rightist economic power which comprised the rich coffee producers, to criticize the emergent leftist power of the Communist Party, and to criticize all the intellectuals of the time, was to sign an isolation sentence and Salarrué chooses extreme isolation to identify solely with the Izalcos¹⁵ [translation mine]” (Aguilar Humano). It is not clear what Humano means in terms of isolation; but it might be safe to conclude that the isolation Salarrué was seeking was from politics, or from the expectations to be involved or voice opinions against the *Martinato*¹⁶ and the *Matanza*.

While the letter makes his political stand and affiliations clear, Salarrué’s strong statement could be misinterpreted. It would not only cause the readers of the journal, who most likely were other intellectuals, contemporaries of Salarrué or educated subscribers, to question Salarrué’s loyalty to his own country but also to question his literary contribution, in that he so strongly criticizes the country where he lived and

¹⁵ Izalcos is the predominant ethnic race of the Salvadoran Indian campesinos who were killed in the massacre.

¹⁶ Term use to refer to General Martinez’s years in power (1931 - 1944).

about which he wrote so passionately. However, in a close reading of the letter, he also makes it clear where his love lies: “my homeland is bigger than that little sliver of nonsense you want to give me [translation mine]” (Salarrué). What Salarrué wants the reader of the letter to understand is that for a compatriot like himself, nature and everything in it are enough. His loyalty and love are for the countryside, the mountains, the blue sky above it, the soil under his bare feet and not for a political party, or group. The land and the rural way of life are far better than anything politicians can offer to him, and what they can offer is not worth fighting for in his opinion.

Surprisingly, a year after the massacre and the publishing of his letter, his book *Tales of Clay* was published -- even more astounding as the book seemed to have bypassed all restrictions enforced under President Martinez regarding anything Indian. Aguilar Humano adds that publishing *Tales of Clay* “was an extremely daring act, particularly when nobody spoke of the Indians, because speaking of the Indians meant that one was considered a communist, dumb, and ignorant [translation mine]” (El Ultimo Nahual de Cuscatlan).

The Controversy

Well before the *Matanza*, Salarrué's first four books had established him as a member of the Salvadoran intelligentsia of the same caliber as several other writers and poets of his time such as Claudia Lars, Alberto Masferrer, Alberto Guerra Trigueros, Jose Mejia Vides, Amparo Casamahuapa, and Francisco Gavidia. Salarrué's letters make it clear that he considered himself above and separate from politics.

Yet scholars in the years following have argued whether or not the Salvadoran intelligentsia as a whole and Salarrué in particular were complicit in the 1932 massacre. The main critic, professor and anthropologist Rafael Lara-Martinez, raises controversial findings implicating the intelligentsia. *“On the Annals of a History of Silence: Fragments of '32 from 1932”* a book written by Lara-Martinez and McCallister states, “the Salvadoran intelligentsia skirted any reference to this violent outburst, instead becoming engrossed in implementing a state-sponsored nation-building project based on *indigenismo*.” (309-310). “Arms and literature – are reunited in a common project to reinvent the nation on artistic grounds: *indigenismo*, regionalism, theosophy, etc.” (Lara-Martinez, *Politica de la Cultura* 71). In his latest book titled *“Del Silencio y del Olvido: O los Espectros del Patriarca – Cinco Seis Ocho Ensayos Salarruéricos”* published in 2013, Lara-Martinez adds that during the presidency of General Martínez (1931 – 1944), “a tight intimacy between the intelligentsia and the political power existed [translation mine]” (73). Furthermore, he compares the silence of the Salvadoran intelligentsia concerning the *Matanza* to the silence of local intelligentsia witnessing other world events such as the ‘Indian Wars,’ the suppression of the Paris Commune, the Brazilian slaughter at Canudos, the Armenian genocide, the Mexican suppression of the Cristeros, etc.” (Lara-Martinez and McCallister 310). This indictment is at odds with Lara-Martinez’s earlier work.

A decade earlier Lara-Martinez had complimented Saluerré with respect to the Indigenous people. In *Salarrué o el Mito de Creación de la Sociedad Mestiza*

Salvadoreña (published in 1991,) Lara-Martinez notes that Saluerré's regional literary work, which he calls "escritura Salarruériana", was detailed, "almost anthropologic", sought to "rescue national values", depicted a "world that was in the brink of disappearance", and "became the main voice" for the Indigenous population. In addition, he states that after 1932 when

"(the) State was annihilating every cultural element whose content was related to the Indigenous....Salarrué proceeded against the current. While the official politics began to destroy the last Indigenous contingent, first by the use of violence, and later by prohibiting the use of their native dress, ethnic musical instruments, and all symbolic means of their identity, Salarrué seeks to elevate him to the rank of a hero and social actor. If in 1932 the Izalco died and were forbidden all access to an ethnic consolidation or power, in "Tales of Clay", edited a year later, similar characters achieve a voice [translation mine] (Salarrue, o, El Mito de Creacion de la Sociedad Mestiza Salvadorena 9).

Lara-Martinez concludes, "Salarrué's work delicately opposed the government's purposes... and offers the vision of the 'other', the Indigenous, and his writing offers an image of the difference [translation mine]" (Salarrue, o, El Mito de Creacion de la Sociedad Mestiza Salvadorena 10). Lara-Martinez praises Salarrué and calls him the "the greatest Salvadoran writer [translation mine]", but more importantly, he adds that his intentions are to "give value to [Salarrué's] work by restoring it to its rightful place in the Latin American and world literature [translation mine]" (Salarrue, o, El Mito de Creacion de la Sociedad Mestiza Salvadorena 10-11). It is difficult to say with certainty why Lara-Martinez later feels so differently regarding Salarrué.

Was the Salvadoran intelligentsia as culpable as Lara-Martinez now alleges?
There were at least two major connections between President Martinez and some

members of the Salvadoran intelligentsia – Salarrué included. These connections were their affiliation with the *Ateneo* of El Salvador and their theosophical beliefs. The *Ateneo* is a “non-profit Salvadoran cultural institution without any political or religious ties ...with a mission to rescue, promote, and maintain national, regional, and universal cultural values [translation mine]”. Founded in 1912, it is still active today. Martinez became an active member in 1926 and was the president of the *Ateneo* of El Salvador during 1929. Several of the cultural magazines and papers of the time (i.e. *Cypatly*, *Patria*, *Revista del Ateneo*, etc.) as well as the National University of El Salvador, according to Lara-Martinez, supported and praised the general's efforts to create a ‘politics of culture’ that seemed to be supportive of the Indigenous population of El Salvador.

Lara-Martinez adds, “Amongst the greatest paradoxes of Salvadoran historiography we find the line that blends the political rejection of Martinez with the praise of all productions regarding Indigenous culture during his presidency [translation mine]” (Lara-Martinez, *Politica de la Cultura* 82). As a Salvadoran, I find this conflicting dichotomy between the secretive and the acceptable very difficult to understand and accept. Nevertheless, I strongly believe that accusing our writers and poets of complicity during the *Martinato* is unfair; taking advantage of a paradox in the *Martinato* is not the same as being an accomplice. Furthermore, the general was not the only source of ideas in El Salvador's writing circles. For instance, Alvaro Rivera Larios, a Salvadoran writer and academician, concludes that many Latin American writers were

influenced by the cultural philosophy of Johann Gottfried von Herder, whose philosophy “valued the cultural differences of towns against the universal vision that pretended to control them, subordinate them and suppress them [translation mine]” (Rivera Larios). Rivera Larios argues that Salarrué’s prose reflects von Herder’s influence rather the influence of President Martinez’s politics of culture as Lara-Martinez asserts. “The anthropological sensibility of Herder paved the way for the arrival of the cultural nationalism and the idea of national literatures [translation mine]” (Rivera Larios). Moreover, he adds, “Salarrué’s stories published in the newspaper *Patria* at the end of the twentieth century, were influenced by a popular Latin American proto-nationalism”, and “*Tales of Clay* was created in a time when the *Martinato* did not exist [translation mine]”¹⁷. Rivera Larios’ argument is well taken because there is evidence that *Tales of Clay* were first published separately beginning in 1927 (Salazar Arrue 237), though the final compilation of all the tales was not officially published until after the massacre in 1934, almost two years after President Martinez had been named president, while *Fishing Net* was published in 1954, a decade after Martinez fell from power. Salarrué published material with similar themes before, during and after the Martinez presidency.

In my opinion, Lara-Martinez’s recent accusation of Salarrué and the others underestimates the value of their literary and artistic contributions to Salvadoran culture. Furthermore, his denunciation seems to question not only their nationalism, but also --

¹⁷ Response to Miguel Huezo Mixco’s challenging question regarding the historic role of Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez *Should we forgive the General?* Published in the online Salvadoran newspaper El Faro on March 5, 2012.

and more importantly in the case of Salarrué -- their true love for their country and its native population. I differ with Lara-Martinez's view of Salarrué, as I believe he laudably preserved small pieces of evidence of what was lost during the *Matanza* and the cruel assimilation process the Indigenous population experienced in its aftermath in *Tales of Clay* and *Trasmallo*. As a Salvadoran, Salarrué used his tales to capture the essence of an otherwise nearly unrecorded group. Even Lara-Martinez admits that the *Martinato* was not a well-documented historical period; in this dearth of documentation, the descriptions in Salarrué's tales as well as his talent as writer deserve to be cherished and valued regardless of his political stand.

Cuentos de Barro

Cuentos de Barro (*Tales of Clay*) is a compilation of thirty-four stories about Salvadoran Indian *campesinos*. Some are serious, others funny and colorful. Salarrué goes deeper than describing the characters and the country setting of the stories; he vividly paints the daily life of the Salvadoran Indian *campesino* by describing in detail their struggles, their beliefs and traditions, their way of life, and their love for the land. Salarrué describes himself and the characters in the stories:

As the potter of Ilobasco¹⁸ sculpts his figures of clay: his old people with shaky heads, his little pitchers, his women going to the mill, his rooster-whistles, his goats crafted with legs of nails, his figures of Indigenous people carrying

¹⁸ Famous town in El Salvador known for his pottery.

*cacxtes*¹⁹ on their backs. ... I have molded my Tales of Clay with crude touches here, and rhythmic touches there. ... Nevertheless, these tales are made from the soul of the clay (Arrue 17).

With this description, Salarrué lets the readers know that though stories are not delicate, they have been crafted with the details and precision of a well-designed sculpture.

Scholars have categorized the tales as “regional tales” [translation mine] (Lara-Martinez, Salarrue, o, *El Mito de Creacion de la Sociedad Mestiza Salvadorena* 8).

Up to this point in Latin America’s literary history, most books that referenced the countryside did so in a very different way. Most highlighted the barbarism of the forest, of the countryside and its inhabitants in the style of *La Voragine* (The Vortex) written by Colombian author José E. Rivera in 1924. This story recorded the life of a young, ambitious, newlywed man, as he travels and experiences difficulties in the rubber tree jungles of Colombia, and the enslaved Indians who worked and died there to pay their release debt. Highlighting a less savage aspect of an Indigenous group as Salarrué did in *Tales of Clay* was new. In an article published in 1976 titled “Esbozo Introdutorio a Salarrué,” Miguel Huevo Mixco states, Salarrué “offer[ed] a new vision for the Salvadoran agro with real human characteristics which transcend and deepen the knowledge regarding the Salvadoran man, *mestizo*, a product not defined by two half faces, but with a new face in which different ethno-cultural characteristics get fused, mixed, and manifested [translation mine]” (Huevo Mixco).

¹⁹ “A wooden frame worn on someone’s back to carry goods.” (Arrue, *Tales of Clay*, a bilingual annotated translation of *Cuentos de Barro* 17)

According to Lara-Martinez, in *Tales of Clay*, Salarrué sought to ‘rescue’ and to ‘capture’ a world that was in the brink of disappearing. Lara-Martinez is referring to the Izalcos, the predominant ethnic race of the Salvadoran Indian *campesinos*, who were killed in the massacre and who suffered the acculturation process that arose after the massacre. Lara-Martinez describes the Izalcos as Salarrué’s Indians to distinguish them from the communist, revolutionary Indians who participated in the 1932 revolt, which led to the *Matanza*. “In the limitless passivity, the ‘indio’ from Salarrue is far apart from the revolutionary indian of 1932. But, internalizing the figure of the author as the pinnacle of the national indigenous art, the literary history omits critical anti-communist judgment, and the vision of the radical pacifist indian, originary from Atlantis, in spite of the artist [translation mine]” (Lara-Martinez 47). Just by the fact that Salarrué gives voice to the Izalco, a political subjectivity arises; nonetheless, but if Lara-Martinez is implying that Salarrué is painting a different or a deceitful representation of the Salvadoran Indian, I again disagree with him. As Rivera Larios indicates, Salarrué wrote the tales pre-massacre and with the evident and well-attested love and sympathy that Salarrué felt towards this population. It is difficult to believe that he had any motive other than to record “those without a voice since colonial times, the Indigenous of Cuscatlán, and to accomplish a record of those uncivilized voices, long before the genocide of 1932 [translation mine]” (Aguilar Humano).

To further support the point of an accurate record, there are tales in the collection that speak of the bad nature this group was also capable of. Let us consider the story

titled “We’re evil”²⁰. The story focuses on a man named Goyo Cuestas and his son who are traveling to neighboring Honduras to find a better life. Their only prized possession is a phonograph, which they hope to use to make money. The trip through the country is difficult and dangerous. “The priest of Santa Rosa had warned Goyo not to sleep in abandoned huts because gangs of thieves were always around hunting for travelers” (Arrue 33). Salarrué implies that Goyo and his son did not survive the attack, and the thieves began to play songs after assembling the phonograph. “The guitar bass hummed, sighing a wish; and, desperate, the guitar lamented an injustice. When the phonograph stopped playing, the four bandits gazed at each other....The oldest starred down at the clay soil, where his shadow was his seat, and after thinking deeply, he said: ‘We’re evil’”. (Arrue 37). This story shows that Salarrué was not oblivious of the Indian’s wild side but rather wanted to also document this aspect; therefore, implying that he was painting a misleading portrait seems almost dishonest. However, it would take twenty-one years for Salarrué to publish *Trasmallo*.

Trasmallo

In 1954, Salarrué published another collection of regional tales called *Trasmallo*. This was ten years after the overthrow of President Martínez’s government. In this group of twenty stories, one story in particular ties into the history of la *Matanza*: “The

²⁰ Official translation of “Semos Malos” (Arrue, *Tales of Clay*, a bilingual annotated translation of *Cuentos de Barro* 32)

Scarecrow” [translation mine] (Salazar Arrue 473-476). The story tells the tale of Lalo, an eighteen-year-old youth who was left behind with the women and the older men because of his goofiness while the men were battling the army. Tule, one of women, enters the hut where Lalo is hiding with others and screams, “They are approaching and killing all men they find older than fifteen...They line them up and kill them: Pow! Pow!” [translation mine] (Salazar Arrue 475). Like these lines, the whole story’s descriptive tone is not only sad, but also conveys the sense of panic and fear that the characters experienced while trying to run from the killer army. To save his life, Lalo runs into the vegetable garden behind the hut and poses as the scarecrow. The officer does cut him with his ballonet, but Lalo manages to remain as quiet and still as possible. When the army men finally leave, all the survivors come out to look for Lalo, fearing the worst. However, once they find him and hear his survival story, they compare the post that he used to prop himself up to the Holly Cross, possibly implying how blessed are all the survivors symbolized by Lalo in the story. This is the only story that references the massacre in any way. Lara-Martinez’s opinion is that Salarrué broke his silence with this story too late and that Salarrué along with the other intellectuals should have used their work more to denounce and refute President Martinez’s actions.

The language

Cuentos de Barro, and *Trasmallo* are known for the colloquial use of the Salvadoran Spanish and Nahuatl (informally, Aztec) words used throughout. According to Lara-Martinez “the refined speech, that seeks to impress the listener with the use of

the right word, is omitted [translation mine]" (Salarrue, o, El Mito de Creacion de la Sociedad Mestiza Salvadorena 9). In other words, Salarrué's intentions are not to describe in those stories his characters, their lives, their customs, and their environment in a way that is polished as they are not stories set up in a civilized, and educated environment. A specific example of this is described by the Nicaraguan writer Nadia Palacios Vivas in her book titled *Estudios de Literatura Hispanoamericana y Nicaraguense* in which she speaks of the popular use of the 'voceo' or the informal 'you'. The *voceo* is extremely popular in El Salvador and in the chapter titled "Lenguaje y recursos estilisticos y morfosintacticos En Cuentos de Barro de Salarrué," Palacios Vivas analyses Salarrué's use of the *voceo*; from "the classist perspective, Salarrué elevates with the low use of the *voceo* to its highest expression, breaking with the academic canon that imposes 'the good taste' in the written language. This transgression responds to the ideology of the author and his identification with the oppressed [translation mine]" (Vivas 77), thereby making the stories appealing and easy to understand to the average Salvadoran.

Lara-Martinez observes that throughout Salarrué's stories "the rural linguistic habits acquire the stature of the national language [translation mine]" (Salarrue, o, El Mito de Creacion de la Sociedad Mestiza Salvadorena 9), thus elevating the Indian *campesinos* to a higher social, cultural and nationally acceptable plane. Unfortunately, the creation of this new language is not as easily accepted as one would imagine. To this, Lara-Martinez poses the following question, "Is it not the case that the literary

expression of the rural way of speaking and its capacity to develop a written language enough proof of its hierarchical identity against the national language [translation mine]" (Salarrue, o, *El Mito de Creacion de la Sociedad Mestiza Salvadorena* 9). One would be inclined to give a positive response to Lara-Martinez's question; nonetheless, given that the Nahuatl was not a recognized language in El Salvador and neither was the way the Indian *campesinos* spoke, the answer is not as simple. In addition, this combination of Spanish and Nahuatl created by Salarrué can also be viewed as the language resulting from the post-colonial population of uneducated *mestizos* — half Spaniard, half Indian. This new *mestizo* race gained attention and support from Masferrer who initially supported the *Indios* or what he called "*la raza*", but in 1927 he began to change his rhetoric and focus on the *mestizos* instead. In her book *Seeing Indians*, Virginia Tilley notes that Masferrer's "conversion to *mestizaje* reflects a larger strategic shift in the state's racial-nationalistic doctrine, which the sudden switch to *mestizo* in the birth records also reflected. The Indigenous presence was being erased from records, state doctrine, and the nationalistic ideology" (Tilley, *Being Mestizo* 208-209).

After the 1932 massacre, anything that resembled or related to the Indian *campesinos* in El Salvador was hidden or simply eliminated. "[T]he killings directly produced the annihilation of Indigenous culture by repressing the Nahuatl-Pipil language and Indigenous dress" (Gould and Lauria-Santiago 241). Nevertheless, Lara-Martinez reminds us that Salarrué's efforts to assign value to the "popular culture, and thereby forge an embryonic national identity, would become an even greater effort

[translation mine]” (Salarrue, o, El Mito de Creacion de la Sociedad Mestiza Salvadorena 9) after the events of 1932.

Conclusion

As part of the intelligentsia during the *Martinato* period, which was marked by an intention to annihilate the Indigenous population of El Salvador through the 1932 *Matanza* under false communist pretenses, Salarrué managed to publish his popular *Tales of Clay*. This compilation of stories not only gave voice and presence to this fragile population in the brink of disappearance, but it also provided us with the opportunity to learn more about this group through the narrative. Salarrué also fought to remain on the margins politically as his love for his homeland – Cuscatlán – prevailed over the idea of a nationalistic fatherland conceived by the conquistadors and the republican project. His support for the Indigenous group – the Izalcos - has been criticized by Salvadoran anthropologist Professor Rafael Lara-Martinez. However, as Lara-Martinez indicates, the *Martinato* was a period of oblivion and silences; and because most historical facts were not recorded, it is difficult to judge why the intellectuals decided to support President Martinez’s cultural policy without a public denunciation of the *Matanza*. A possible answer could be that by supporting him, they were also supporting, promoting, and most importantly preserving what little could be saved of the Salvadoran Indigenous roots.

The *Matanza* of 1932 was not something my family ever discussed. This silence possibly comes from many generations before my parents and it has become an

inherited fear to admit their Indigenous heritage. Both sides of my family were born and raised in the countryside. My parents are the first generation to live in the city - San Salvador. Nonetheless, as young child I do remember my family gathering to watch and be so impacted by a mini series titled “Holocaust” on the tele every Sunday. It is difficult to understand why we ignored a similar horrific event that happened to our own people on our own soil. Although Salarrué’s *Trasmallo* does not explain the whole story of our own ethnocide, I believe it and *Tales of Clay*, are integral components to understand and learn about the Salvadoran group that was annihilated during the *Matanza*. I did read *Tales of Clay* when I was young since it was part of our family library; however, it was not part of the school curriculum then or now, nor could I then have understood the importance of the stories in our historical context. Sadly, the book is now part of a three volume complete narrative of Salarrué’s literary work that I believe makes it inaccessible to those who cannot purchase the entire series.

The Museo de la Palabra e Imagen (MUPI) in El Salvador has created an electronic animated version of some of the *Tales of Children*²¹ stories that are available on-line through their webpage. During my last visit home in 2013, there were at least forty to fifty students at the museum learning about Salarrué’s legacy. In addition, a collaborative video between MUPI and Gould of the 1932 massacre²² is also available

²¹ <http://museo.com.sv/archivo-de-video/dibujos-animados/>

²² <http://museo.com.sv/2010/10/1932-cicatriz-de-la-memoria/>

in the museum's website. For all the modern media, one of the most important collections the museum holds is the files donated by Salarrué's family.

I am delighted to see that the artistic and literary legacy of Salarrué is being preserved and made available to all Salvadorans as part of our history at the MUPI. However, I strongly believe future generations must study in school about the *Martinato* period of our history in order to learn from the past and move forward fully knowing that the *Matanza* occurred, and that authors like Salarrué stood by his beliefs to paint with his stories that side of our Indigenous background. Salarrué's contribution to our cultural and national identities is invaluable as it embraces our long neglected Indigenous roots, which I believe are a key component to create a much needed and inclusive identity. As a Salvadoran, I feel proud to have his literary and artistic legacy as part of our canon. Moreover, his legacy must be given the rightful place it deserves in our history, as Lara Martinez once believed.

Claudia Lars

¡Cuscatlán...tierra pequeña,
siempre, por fuerza, sangrando!...
Claudia Lars
¡Cuscatlán...small land,
always, by force, bleeding!...
Claudia Lars [translation mine]

The author

Margarita del Carmen Brannon Vega, better known by her pen name Claudia Lars, was born in El Salvador in 1899. Unlike her fellow intellectual and contemporary Salarrué, Claudia Lars grew up in a close-knit household in her grandfather's farmhouse in Armenia, Sonsonate – west of the capital, San Salvador. She had a privileged upbringing under the influence of her Irish-American father, Peter Patrick Brannon. Patrick Brannon, an engineer, arrived in El Salvador by train after several travels to South and Central America and soon married the youngest of the Vega daughters.

“Don Patricio” as the locals called Brannon, recognized his oldest daughter's talent early. He introduced Claudia to many of the classics of the time and encouraged her writing from a young age. According to her memoir titled *Tierra de Infancia* (Land of Childhood) published in Spanish in 1958, her education began at home with her father and a young woman named Mercedes Mendoza whom she addressed as Niña Meches. (The title *niña* is still given to most single young women of a higher social or economic status as a title of respect equivalent to *miss* in the U.S.) Mercedes Mendoza came to the town of Armenia to become assistant principal at the local school. The Brannon Vega family fell in love with Mercedes' charm and knowledge and decided to help the

young teacher by providing free room and board at the farmhouse in exchange for private classes for Claudia and her younger sister:

“Seated in front of her two pupils, strict but never stern, Niña Meches guided us with great affection through the first scholastics disciplines. ... Books, blackboards, globes, and abacuses became attractive objects in our hands, and our country’s heroes, as well as the prophets and patriarchs of the Holy Bible – which my father insisted we learn at a very young age – acquired in her narratives a marked resemblance to fantastic storybook characters” (Lars, Land of Childhood).

Attending school was an option for most privileged children, but having a tutor at home marked the poet's family as one holding a particular position of entitlement. Despite the Vega's Indigenous lineage, three generations of land ownership had allowed her grandfather, Felipe Vega, to build an attractive estate called Las Tres Ceibas employing several Indians. The Indians called him “*patron*” (boss) in recognition of his distinct social status among them, and Izalco Indians traveling through the town selling their goods knew Felipe Vega would provide them shelter along their way.

In the story titled “The House,” Lars remembers that her grandfather “would observe [the Indians] from a balcony. ... His Indian blood made him feel like one of them. Like his conquered ancestors, he had a simple heart, an intense love for the land, and a superstitious mind that feared the black butterfly and the fleeting hoot of the night owl.” (Lars, Land of Childhood 3).²³ Based on the story, Felipe Vega appears to be

²³ My own parents still believe in the same superstitions as most country folk in El Salvador despite the differences in social classes.

in a somewhat conflicted position. Socially speaking, he had an image to project in order to command respect among his own servants, with the town's citizens and friends, and especially with the Indians. Furthermore, since previous Vega generations had been involved politically, he needed to preserve that heritage intact. More practically, a good name and social status would also guarantee good suitors for his daughters and any future generations.

In her book, Lars does speak of the grandfather's conflicted feelings towards what his son-in-law represented and his criticism of the railroad for introducing many foreign forces into Salvadoran way of life and society, "I wonder who invented that iron monster...' he would ask himself bitterly. ...To his simple mind and suspicious heart, the arrival of the railroad had produced a notorious change ... [a] change which tied him to the to the rest of the world and which put him in contact with men of different races and nations" (Lars, *Land of Childhood* 8). Much as sailing ships brought Spaniards to the coasts of Cuscatlán to conquer his ancestors, the train was bringing a different type of threat in Felipe Vega's eyes. While she does not mention what type of relationship existed between the grandfather and father, it might be safe to assume it was amicable as they lived under the same roof for many years. Young Claudia benefited from her hybrid Irish-American landowning heritage and social status.

This social status also afforded young Claudia a boarding school education. At age twelve, she attended an all-girl Catholic school in Santa Ana (1911-1917) – northwest of the capital of San Salvador. Unlike her convent-educated mother and

grandmother who learned how to act as the lady of the house and behave as devoted Catholics, Claudia had the opportunity to study more broadly, mainly in the humanities. And although in the 1800s educated women in Salvadoran society were restricted to becoming housewives or nuns, by the time Lars reached school age in the early 1900s her choices had expanded to include a career as a teacher although not yet a writer. Despite a change in the times and her education, the poet had to overcome the stereotypical limitations imposed on women by the Salvadoran patriarchal society.

Challenges of a Woman Writer

The literary work of many women writers in El Salvador remains unknown, even to Salvadorans, mainly due to the lack of documentation kept on women in literature. Luckily, this is not the case for Claudia Lars who continues to enjoy high regard as one of the best Salvadoran poets. Nonetheless, Lars enjoyed advantages which some of her professional contemporaries and fellow women writers did not. Importantly, she possessed high socio-economic status; that is not the case for Lars's forerunner Prudencia Ayala (1885?-1936) of Indigenous descent or Lars's contemporary Amparo Casamalhuapa (1910 - 1971) who, because of their low social status, are not well known.

Ayala and Casamalhuapa tried to carve a niche in the patriarchal society for Salvadoran women in general. Both Ayala and Casamalhuapa are considered feminists as much as writers due to their defiant attitude toward the Salvadoran societal status

quo for women. They were political activists, and political matters influenced their writing.

The local newspapers began to call Ayala "the Sibyl of Santa Ana"²⁴ when some of her predictions of the future came true, e.g. in 1914 she predicted the collapse of the Kaiser of Germany. However, they did not take her writing seriously precisely because of the prophetic content. Some even went so far as to label her crazy. Ayala ran for president of El Salvador in the first democratic elections of 1931. However, the press ridiculed her, and the legislature ruled that the 1886 Salvadoran constitution excluded women from "exercising any political rights [translation mine]" (Ticas 61).

Casamalhupa, on the other hand, was persecuted and forced into exile after a public speech denouncing the government of President Martinez in 1939: "*Porque todos sabemos, que hoy más que en ningún tiempo, estamos pasando por un periodo de verdadera tiranía y corrupción social, en que decir la verdad y defender la ley es un crimen que se paga con cárcel y con destierro.*"²⁵ In one of only two books known by the author *El Angosto Sendero*, Casamalhupa documents her forced exile.

Lars was not the first Salvadoran woman with writing talent. However, Lars benefited from a young age from key family relations, social status, and wealth. Despite those advantages, it was difficult for a woman writer to gain professional respect. The

²⁴ https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prudencia_Ayala

²⁵ <http://www.ecumenico.org/article/discurso-de-amparo-casamalhuapa-29-de-agosto-de-19/>

absence of social role models plays a big role in disadvantaging women according to Sonia P. Ticas. Ticas concludes that the lack of visible role models arose mainly because women were simply not considered integral members of the nation “and their struggles were not documented in the great hegemonic narratives [translation mine].” (Ticas iv). Another important factor that Ticas raises is the silence imposed socially on women as a desirable trait²⁶. Silence and submissiveness are feminine virtues passed from one generation of women to the next from time immemorial. The expectation that young girls will be docile, obedient, and respectful towards men has been and remains part of women’s upbringing, particularly in the countryside of El Salvador. Of course, to write is to break the virtue of silence.

The socially approved role models available to Lars revolved around care giving: housewife, nun, teacher. Few women had careers; writer simply broke the mold, even for an educated woman. It was her professional ‘godfather,’ Joaquin Garcia Monje, director of the Costa Rican journal *Repertorio Americano*, who helped her publish her first collection of poems titled *Tristes Mijares* in 1919 at age seventeen. The *Repertorio Americano* was widely distributed not only in El Salvador but also internationally.

Her fiancé, Nicaraguan poet Salomon de la Selva, offered support and encouragement. However, her family did not approve the match. Patrick Brannon wanted his daughter to marry an Irishman. When her father sent her to the U.S. after

²⁶ Culturally, I can relate to this observation as I still hesitate to voice my opinion, refrain from questioning male figures or feel disrespectful when I do, even if it is to defend a point I have raised.

forcing her to break her marriage engagement to de la Selva in El Salvador, her writing career would be put on hold for a decade. During a trip to New York in 1924 she married LeRoy Beers, an American diplomat. Three years later, she and her husband, who had been appointed U.S. consul in El Salvador -- with the help of her father -- returned to El Salvador where her only son Leroy Beers Brannon was born.

During this period of her life (1924-1934), the poet did not produce much, a dearth which is attributed to the restrictions imposed by society on her married status. However, the poet broke the log jam by adopting a pen name in 1933 in order to have more freedom of expression and less social judgment of her work. Her pseudonym of Claudia Lars “provides her a new identity, independent from the married woman....and allows her certain anonymity which permits her to write more freely without her reputation being compromised [translation mine]” (Ticas). In her dissertation, Ticas included a direct quote from the poet:

“When I began to write, many years ago, I was moving in a very conservative arena. It was almost a sin for a young educated woman to find a husband and live the comfortable life of a bourgeois lady to express her ideas regarding love, beauty, and the established morality in public. My personal name was a limitation to my freedom of expression and I had to find a name to hide future risks. I was even silent for a few years.” (Celestino Herrera Frimont, “Claudia Lars en la poesia de America” Diario del mediodia, 3 de noviembre, 1964). [translation mine] (Ticas 8)

From 1930 through 1934, the poet lived in Costa Rica because her husband's new employer, a shipping company, transferred him there. However, after a ten year

marriage and upon her return to El Salvador with only her son, she published her book *Estrellas en el pozo* in 1934. Then she began to establish herself as a recognized literary figure always with the support of Garcia Monje and the economic means to write full time. Unfortunately, the *Martinato* restricted the career of Lars as well as that of other intellectuals of the time.

After president Martinez came to power in 1932, his authoritarian regime constrained Lars, who was beginning her professional career as a poet, and forced her to remain in the margins. Lars does not seem to have been involved in a particular political party or movement. Nonetheless, what she wanted to explore --her personal conflict with her racial identity (Irish-American-Indigenous roots) and the current Indigenous /social problems and injustices -- were taboo. Most of that work would not be published or even written until after the *Martinato* ended in 1944. This may have been simply because the *Martinato* discouraged investigations into race or social justice -- even those taking poetic form, or it could be that Lars needed to become more professionally established so that her commentary would weight heavier in minds ingrained in the patriarchal society beliefs. According to Ticas, “[p]art of Lars’ insistence on defining a self sprang in the need to establish herself as the premiere national poet. This position is directly related to a writer's role to represent the community or nation, a role that was traditionally assigned to Latin American writers without questioning their legitimacy to speak on behalf of their people and interpret their reality [translation mine]” (Ticas 242). Lars, nonetheless, found this representation difficult as she “constantly

questioned her legitimacy to speak on behalf of her country [translation mine]" given her "ethnic and economic origins [translation mine]" (Ticas 243).

It was not until after the end of *Martinato* in 1944 that *the poesia Larseana* (the Larsean poetry [translation mine]), as her work is commonly referred to in El Salvador, took off. From the end of the Martinez's presidency until her death, Lars produced the majority of her work, fourteen books of poetry by the time she died of cancer in 1974. Several of her poems were characterized as and therefore titled "Romances" which is "the most common poetic genre, the most constant and the most characteristic of the Spanish literature [translation mine]" (Lars, *Poesia completa* I 98).

Land of Childhood and selected poems

Having explored the challenges Lars faced as a woman writer, we will consider stories from her single prose work, *Land of Childhood* and selected Larsean and Romantic poems which show how she wrestled with her own complex identity and dealt with social injustice.

Published in 1958 in San Salvador, *Land of Childhood* is the only prose work by Claudia Lars. She recalls the memories of her life at her grandfather's estate in twenty-seven stories encompassing a wide range of subject matter including her toys, her friends, life in school, celebrations, the servants in the house, her father, and her grandmother. All the stories are simple narratives full of detailed descriptions of the house and her sheltered, privileged upbringing. Lars was fifty-nine years old when the

book was published; however, she tells the stories from the perspective of her younger self. The honesty with which Lars presents some of the racial and social issues may seem offensive, particularly to somebody of Indigenous descent. For instance, the story titled “Chabela Tacuatzin” tells the story of a porcelain blond-haired blue-eyed doll which young Claudia received from Mister Jenkins, a friend of the family who was the consul in El Salvador. The doll had a mechanism that allowed her to open and close her eyes and say “ma...ma...ma...ma...” (Lars, *Land of Childhood* 29). Because the doll was such a special gift, young Claudia was not allowed to play with her, but one day she sneaked in her mother’s bedroom where the doll was stored. Driven by curiosity the child cracked open the doll’s face to find the hidden mechanism that made the doll speak and move her eyes. After a spanking, the little girl was consoled by a visiting friend of the family who a few months later sent her a handmade rag doll. The rag doll - Chabela Tacuatzin - was almost as tall as young Claudia herself. Chabela had two “black braids tied with colorful ribbons [which] framed her dark, humble features....She was dressed in the native garb of Izalco women, with the design and colors dictated by tradition: her white blouse was adorned with flower garlands; the sash around her waist boasted a luxurious silk fringe.” (Lars, *Land of Childhood* 30). She loved the doll and used to play with it endlessly. The poet recalls, “I was completely speechless when I first embraced her, and for several days I dreamily walked around in a wonderful world of intimacy and conversation with my new little friend” (Lars, *Land of Childhood* 30). Lars re-enacts an imaginary conversation between young Claudia and Chabela as follows:

“Chabela Tacuatzin, would you like to dress the way I do?” I would sometimes ask her. And, pretending to be her, I would reply, “No, *Niña*, because I am an Indian, and your clothes would not become me.”
“And when I go to school, what will you do, Chavelita?”
“I will stay here, cooking, sweeping, and washing, because I am a servant.” (Lars, Land of Childhood 31).

This imaginary dialogue between Lars and her doll serves as an example of the division of classes prevalent in the author’s childhood. The story has a better ending as the writer seems to bring ‘*lo nuestro*’ out and include herself as part of it by using the ‘our’ pronoun: “In her, I embraced the silent proud grandmothers of my native race, luxuriously dressed according to tradition. She was something so accordant with our house, our people, our region, that she might have had these other names: vanilla essence, heart of palm, balsam flower, Pipil maiden...” (Lars, Land of Childhood 31).

A couple more stories reveal the relationship the poet had with her Indigenous roots, the treatment of the Indians on her grandfather’s estate, and the love, appreciation, and respect the poet had towards one character in particular – Cruz. One of those stories, “The Birthday Gift”, speaks of the simple yet thoughtful birthday gift that young Claudia received from Cruz with whom she enjoyed a special relationship and for whom she felt admiration. The poet recalls:

I would always find him sweeping the shed with his old palm broom and, as soon as we saw each other, we would exchange warm greetings and smiles. ...I knew Cruz belonged to the backyard—like the washbasins, the saddles, and cereal troughs—and I somehow guessed that it was there where the poor man sought a little solace and freedom during the evening hours.

Cruz had no age or surname—at least we didn’t know them. Coarse, dark, and sturdy, but with a child’s soul ... (Lars, Land of Childhood 44).

The story also recounts Cruz's dedicated service to the poet's grandfather, his caring nature, and young Claudia's distress when the other servants would call him a "dumb Indian." She adds, "Among the servants, Andrea was the only one who treated him with decency, and for that I believe she would go straight to heaven." (Lars, *Land of Childhood* 45). The story truly conveys the bond that existed between the Indian servant and the young poet, and describes in detail the unexpected yet special gift. That night after the much-awaited celebratory party was over, Cruz presented her with his gift; young Claudia removed the green paper that wrapped the little box:

An ordinary cardboard box that had once contained some medicine was at last uncovered. "Is this a joke?" I asked disappointedly. "Open the box, niña," Cruz insisted timidly. ... I pushed the fragile lid and let out a delighted shriek. There, moving like living emeralds, a handful of fireflies displayed their intermittent, green lights. I hugged Cruz two or three times. ... Time gave the memory of that night its true significance, and Cruz's name was treasured in my heart, purified by its own candor, and forever surrounded by twinkling little lights (Lars, *Land of Childhood* 46-47).

Cruz was so important to the poet that she wrote a poem especially for him. However, her poetry also includes some that deal with her identity struggles, and the social issues that concerned her after the defeat of President Martinez.

Among other Larsean poems that raise awareness for the issues of social differences and identity, two stand out: *Verguenza* (Shame) and *Titeres* (Puppets) [translation mine]. These poems are part of a 1942 collection titled *La Casa de Vidrio*

(The Glass House) [translation mine]. The first poem criticizes the “economic inequalities in social classes that force some to beg while others safeguard even what is left to spare [translation mine]”. In *the second*, the puppets’ names -- *La niña de trapo* (The raggedy girl), *El señoritingo* (The little mister), *Don nada-le-falta* (Mister has-it-all), or *Don nada-tiene* (Mister deprived) [translation mine], -- are, as Ticas points out, a reflection of the “abysmal economic differences among the social sectors” and “criticize the indifference of those who have everything but live their frivolous lives while ignoring the social reality of the ‘others.’ The rich, which [Lars] describes as ‘*muñecos que imitan a los de Europa*’ (dolls who imitate those in Europe) evoke the lack of national identity prevalent in the elite social class [translation mine]” (Ticas 210-211). Once again, the poet demonstrates that her social status does not bind her to the inequalities in the Salvadoran society or silence her voice. No, she points out a characteristic that has tainted our whole population – not only the elite – due to our own lack of identity, which is the influence of outside cultures.

In a series of seven poems titled *Romances de Norte y Sur* published in 1946 but “written between 1936 and 1940, when Claudia Lars was between thirty-seven and forty-one years of age [translation mine]” (Lars, *Poesia completa* I 291), the poet presents a resolution in the first six poems regarding the dichotomy of her cultural identity in which she clearly chose her Salvadoran roots (see Poem 1 partially translated at the end of this chapter): “Now I know you have trails/walked by barefooted men;/volcanoes of blue folds,/hay roofs in the fields,...finally I chose, slowly,/the land of

complete love/that will close my eyes [translation mine] (Lars, Poesia completa I 302). “In this work, Claudia openly addresses one of the recurring themes of her poetry: the duality of her two bloods, or two dueling cultures that constituted her true heritage. Few poets took up the topic of cultural identity with the depth that Claudia did [translation mine]” (Lars, Poesia completa I 43). As Ticas observes, the question that the poet poses, particularly in these poems, is, “Where do I come from and where am I going? And while trying to recover the story of the self, [the poet] adds her voice to the one from a marginalized population that is fighting to be included as a national component [translation mine]” (Ticas 221). The marginalized population is the Salvadoran Indian. And because Lars wanted this book to have a special cover, she wrote a brief letter to another important woman in Salvadoran history to ask for her help.

In a letter written to Salvadoran painter and friend Ana Julia Alvarez, whom she commissioned to create the cover of the book, Lars writes that the book was “taking shape throughout the years, with our landscape, with my Northern heritage, with the pains and struggles of our land [translation mine]” (Lars, Poesia completa I 44). The poet included that detail in the letter in order to give Alvarez an idea of the type of cover she had in mind. Sadly, a copy of the cover is not available.

“Ana Julia querida:

“Te quiero pedir un favor muy grande: Voy a publicar en estos días mi libro *Romances de norte y sur*. Es un libro que se ha ido formando a través de los años, con el paisaje nuestro, con mi herencia nórdica, con los dolores y las luchas de esta tierra. Si no es perfecto lo creo sincero y maduro, y como en él están incluidos mis cinco romances a la revolución lo debo a nuestro pueblo.

“Será un libro sencillo. No quiero más carátula que una especie de símbolo concreto y sutil. En tinta negra y *pequeño*, para ponerlo en el centro, al pie de los títulos.

“He pensado en tu fina comprensión de todo lo mío y en tu talento de dibujante y de pintora.

“Como el primer romance es lo que define todo el libro, te lo mando para que tomes una idea. No te mando los otros porque me los están sacando en limpio. Por supuesto que en la primera página se dirá que tú eres la autora del dibujo.

“Te agradezco de antemano, y te envío un abrazo que compartirás con Refugio.

“A tus padres, mis saludos.

“Siempre tu amiga

Claudia Lars

“P. D. Mando ese libro de versos para que te des idea del dibujo que deseo. Más o menos como éstos.”

La nota no tiene fecha, pero debe de ser de principios de 1945, un año antes de que fuera publicado el libro. Se conservó gracias al cuidado de Refugio, la hermana de Ana Julia, quien fue una extraordinaria mujer que realizó un callado e importante apostolado. A

In the same book, Lars includes Poem 5 “Romance to Indio Cruz” (partially translated at the end of this chapter) which is dedicated to the Indio Cruz, the poet's special childhood friend. In this poem, Lars speaks of Cruz's faithfulness as a servant, his teachings regarding the natural world, and the struggle of his race. Cruz seems to

embody all the Salvadoran Indians and their hardships, together with the hope that one day he might become her equal. “At the end of the poem, Lars lets him speak. Her effort to vindicate takes her to a Utopian projection of a just society in which the Indian speaks to her in his own voice. “Maybe tomorrow, Indio Cruz/you will stand before me to my surprise/and tell me, dignified,/in an unpretentious voice/Niña...the land belongs to all of us/and you and I are equals (‘Romance el Indio Cruz’) [translation mine]” (Ticas 235). According to Ticas, this optimistic version of the social injustices in El Salvador have made the Larsean poetry a target for criticism that it is too naïve and utopian. And although I agree with Ticas’ observation; if poems like this one were more widely discussed at the school and local level in El Salvador, they could serve as learning opportunities to address the important topic of Indigenous roots and social injustices in Salvadoran society.

Other poems such as “Romances de la sangre caída” (dated April 7, 1944), and “Romance de los heroes sin nombre” (not dated) were written and published shortly after Martinez’s defeat in honor of those who fought to end his reign of tyranny. In April of 1944 a failed coup d’état to remove Martinez as president was carried out; however, this marked the beginning of a massive student and labor strike that paralyzed much of El Salvador. Some of the demonstrations were violent, and finally in early May of the same year, the government of the United States advised Martinez to leave his post after the assassination of the son of one the most prominent families in El Salvador, and he surrendered. Martinez left El Salvador and died in exile in 1966.

Conclusion

Claudia Lars, like other women from El Salvador, struggled with some of the same issues as I do: gaining recognition, establishing a professional career, and finding an identity. Nevertheless, her literary work addresses the social and racial issues of El Salvador, although some critics may think it untimely since it was published after the *Martinato*. Much like Salarrué, Lars was accused by Lara-Martinez of cowardly or worse, colluding silence during the *Martinato*. Nevertheless, her poems not only evoke the beautiful imagery of El Salvador, but also of love, children, her identity, the Indigenous' struggles, and her reaction to the political events of her time. In her person and her struggle, many women recognize themselves and are able to find their own path in a patriarchal society. With her literary legacy, personal struggles and victories, Lars has opened the door for other women to gain acceptance not only as professionals, but also, and more importantly, as contributing citizens in the narrative of the nation.

It is unfortunate, that other women writers are still much in obscurity in El Salvador. I think of women such as Amparo Casamalhuapa who publicly denounced Martinez in a speech and was later persecuted and lived in exile for the entire *Martinato*, or Prudencia Ayala the first woman who wanted to run for President of El Salvador, or Ana Julia Alvarez one of the first women painters to name a few. Similar to Lars, they all have been pioneers in their own fields. The Museo de la Palabra e Imagen (MUPI) in El Salvador has been re-introducing some of these characters and has limited information

about them on their website; nonetheless, as a nation and as a society I believe we can give them their rightful place in the history of our country.

The collection of poems produced by Lars is extensive, and even though she had the freedom to write without having economic worry, she did have to deal with social expectations. Perhaps the love, passion and dedication to her craft burns brighter in her work because of the struggle. Sadly, schools in El Salvador no longer teach poetry as a subject. Reintroducing poetry into the school curriculae, I believe, would not only allow future generations to appreciate the beauty of verse, but it would be a valuable opportunity for children to learn about incredible poets like Claudia Lars and possibly inspire a new generation of Salvadoran poets. As previously commented, my mother was unable to finish school, but she remembers fondly how they used to teach kids to recite poetry when she attended school. Unlike Lars' upbringing, my mother's childhood was typical of most of the poor country girls in rural El Salvador. Nonetheless, the superior quality of education my mother received during those few years does not compare to today's lackluster education in El Salvador. According to her, teachers back then took more pride in their career and made sure kids truly learned.

Studying the Larsean poetry more in depth might allow Salvadorans to not only establish possible connections with our potential cultural and national identities. Also and more importantly, it might allow us to discover that although there are well-defined differences in social classes, we Salvadorans might have even more and stronger connections that unite us such as the love for our country, and the search for an identity

as in is my case. In addition, I truly value her extensive and significant contribution to the Salvadoran literary cannon as well as her recognition of the Indigenous population in her work. Similar to Salarrué, Lars pushes the Salvadoran Indian to the forefront and provides him with a voice as seen in the poem dedicated to the *Indio Cruz*. Even though Lars' poetry to some may not be considered as an honest representation of Indigenous or identity issues because of her privilege upbringing, I believe the naysayers must not merely evaluate the topics in question, but more importantly her talent as a poet.

Unfortunately, I never studied in depth the poetry of Claudia Lars when I lived in El Salvador as my talent for interpreting poetry has never been the best. Nonetheless, her name was as popular as the well-known Salvadoran poet Alfredo Espino. Initially, I had chosen Lars for my project as I remember her name from my youth, but mainly because I was searching for work representations from female writers of what a Salvadoran cultural identity might be and she is one of the few known women in Salvadoran literature. I never imagined the broad range and depth of her poetry or her struggle to become a famous poet. Nor did I know her troubled love life or her personal battle with her own identity. However, discovering that as women and compatriots we share commonalities such as our first names – even if hers came later -- a romantic side, and the contours shaped by growing up in a patriarchal society with extended family, has made me admire and appreciate her and her literary contribution more.

Poems

Romances of the North and South

Romances del Norte y del Sur (poema 1)

Poem 1 [translation mine]

I did not know how to chose the land
of my song, for many years.
Two lands of deep presence
were mysteries and a gift.
I carried them in my blood.
I gathered them both in a hug.
A dual love was gathered
in their sceneries;
palm trees on the left
in galloping plumes;
dreary winds on the right
over ships' sails.
Here, sunny beaches...
There, cold rivers...

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I did not know how to choose the land

14

No supe escoger la tierra
de mi canto, en muchos años.
Dos tierras de honda presencia
eran misterio y regalo.
Las dos llevaba en la sangre.
Las dos juntaba mi abrazo.
Un doble amor recogía
sus paisajes encontrados:
a la derecha palmeras
en galope de penachos;
a la izquierda vientos grises
sobre desvelo de barcos.
Aquí, las playas de sol...
Allá, los ríos helados...

Del sur llegaban abejas
siguiendo el polen del nardo;
nostalgias indefinidas
y una inclinación de llanto.
Del norte, choque de espumas
y rosales de relámpagos;
humo de hoguera y de pipa,
islas dulces y sargazos.

Tal belleza no cabía
entera bajo los párpados;
yo la encontraba en las venas⁵
y en los horizontes anchos:
ciervo perdido en las nieves,
pájaro tornasolado,
brújula del corazón
buscando imán y descanso.

No supe escoger la tierra

of my song, for many years.
Today I know it has paths
walked by barefooted men;
volcanoes of blue folds,
thatch roofs in the field,
wallpapered with ivy and nests
in the canyon walls;
deep waters rocking
children of clouds and lizards;
a giant effort in chains
in a lengthy cry...

Swallowed in my own
I finally chose, slowly,
the land of my love
which will close my eyes.

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de mi canto, en muchos años.
Hoy sé que tiene caminos
que cruzan hombres descalzos;
volcanes de azules pliegues,⁶
techos de paja en el llano,
tapiz de yedras y nidos
en la pared del barrancó;
agua profunda meciendo
niños de nube y lagartos;
un gran esfuerzo en cadenas
y un gemido prolongado...

Absorta sobre lo mío
al fin escogí, despacio,
la tierra de amor completo
que ha de cerrarme los párpados.

Pero mi canto del norte
—por los muertos empujado—
sigue rumbos de cometa,
sigue vaivenes de barco.

**Poem 5 – Romance to Indio Cruz
[translation mine]**

Indio Cruz, I know what you hide
in your pained blood.
I know, because I know you
since yesterday and before.
I know because of the silence in your face
with its bitter lines,

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Indio Cruz ¡In my youth
I knew how to speak with you!

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Without useless words
many things you taught me;
with simple gestures you gave me
a hundred lessons about nature;
with you I understood
the mysterious language
of the shade and the canyons,
of lost ages,
of quiet objects
that created the scenery.

Romance del Indio Cruz

Indio Cruz, sé lo que escondes
en el dolor de tu sangre.
Lo sé, porque te conozco
desde ayer y desde antes.
Lo sé por tu cara muda
con sus amargas señales,
por tu pie curtido en lodos,
por tus dos manos tan ásperas,
por tu pulmón de aguardiente
y tus sudores constantes.

Indio Cruz ¡fue en la niñez
cuando yo sabía hablarte!
¡Mi amanecida inocente
en amistad con los ángeles!
Aquellos días sin tiempo
bajo campanas del aire;
aquellos días silvestres
por telones de follaje;
el agua de junio abriendo
lirios en los arenales
y tú, siervo de mis pasos,
atrás, como un perro grande.

Sin decir palabras vanas
muchas cosas me enseñaste;
en simples gestos me diste
cien lecciones naturales;
contigo fui comprendiendo
el misterioso lenguaje
de la sombra y del abismo,
de las perdidas edades,
de las cosas silenciosas
que van formando el paisaje.

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Indio Cruz ¡The load you carry
through endless distances!
¡You began to suffer it
in your mother's womb!
So much pushes you down
and forces you to crawl;
so much has become life
you feel it in your raw flesh
you will find it, even in death,
wrapped in salts.

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. .
.

Puse mi oído en la tierra
así, como tú lo haces,
y de la tierra saqué
todas las savias que arden.

Indio Cruz ¡qué carga llevas
por distancia interminable!
¡Cuando empezaste a sufrirla
no salías de tu madre!
Hay tanto que te doblega
y te condena al arrastre;
tanto que se ha vuelto vida
de sentirlo en viva carne²⁶
y de hallar, hasta en la muerte,
una envoltura de sales.

Los mapas se han dibujado
con el hilo de tu sangre;
en tus muslos y tu cuello
tienen base las ciudades;
de tu corazón el grano
cae al suelo y se reparte:
¡oro patente y rendido
que te mantiene con hambre!

Vuelven lluvias y sequías
sin que las grite tu carne;
mueren los soles punzantes
en tu sueño de *petate*;²⁷
y por caminos eternos
van cien mil indios jadeantes:
todos en rebaño oscuro
como bestias de corrales;
todos mordiendo silencios,
todos sudando vinagre...

.
. .

Maybe tomorrow, Indio Cruz,
you will stand before me to my surprise
and tell me, dignified,
in an unpretentious voice:
“Niña...the land belongs to all of us
and you and I are the two equals”.

Indio Cruz, ¡revientan luces
entre ruinas y cadáveres!
Ya se anuncia lo que esperas
en conocidas señales.
Un tiempo de harinas dulces
bajo las preguntas nace
y se alza, de lo sombrío,
el despertar de los ángeles.

Tal vez mañana, indio Cruz,
frente a mi asombro te pares
y me digas, dignamente,
con esa voz sin alardes:
“Niña... la tierra es de todos
y somos los dos iguales”.

Fernando Llorc

“It is a rarity when one artist’s creations can reflect the spirit of an entire country. Legendary Salvadoran artist Fernando Llorc’s paintings are considered to be so reflective of his native country that he is known as ‘El Salvador’s National Artist.’” (Herring).

Can art really represent an entire nation? There is much debate about the role of the arts in modernity and how they have served nationalistic agendas in the past. Some well known cases are the Mexican muralists connected to the 1910 Mexican Revolution and the cultural policies of its aftermath; the revolutionary art of the soviets before and after the 1918 Bolshevik Revolution; and the art of the Third Reich, among others.ⁱⁱⁱ There is not such a debate in the Salvadorian case. However, there is certain agreement that the art of Fernando Llorc (1949-) captures the essence of El Salvador just as the cases presented before did for their countries. The imagery of Llorc’s art, whether on wood, ceramic, glass, fabric, seeds or in any medium, has become symbolic of El Salvador. This symbolism is important to me as a Salvadoran in my search for our cultural and national identities, and the search for such representations led me to Fernando Llorc.

As a citizen and native Salvadoran, this lack of identity was not really a question until after I left El Salvador. I have lived outside of my native country half of my life, and the art of Fernando Llorc is a reminder of my homeland. Aldo Estrada Quiroz in his thesis titled “Arte y artesanía de La Palma: orígenes y trayectoria de una expresión cultural de El Salvador contemporáneo” concludes that Llorc’s art reached the status

national symbol during the mass exodus created by the civil war during which many of those escaping the war carried with them Llorc's art as a portable symbol of Salvadoran identity thereby turning it into a "cultural contribution at the international level [translation mine]" (Arte y artesanía de La Palma: orígenes y trayectoria de una expresión cultural de El Salvador contemporáneo 3-4). My home as well as my office are decorated with several pieces created in the town of La Palma located north of the capital, San Salvador. This small town became the birthplace for Llorc's art, and the home for an artisanal community, which can be associated with practices of individual artists and art movements in the constitution of ideas of national and cultural identity.^{iv}

There are other talented visual artists in El Salvador; however, I chose Fernando Llorc because he has risen above all of the others by making his art more accessible and affordable to the less affluent population. By creating a co-op and teaching others to replicate his drawings, Llorc has not only guaranteed the continuation of his artistic legacy, but he has also made it affordable for most Salvadorans to own his art. Two of the popular craft markets in San Salvador – *Mercado de Artesanías* and *Mercado Cuartel* – carry the art of La Palma. Local shoppers as well as foreigners visit these markets on a daily basis in search for the perfect, affordable gift. In addition, Llorc's desire to create colorful pieces has possibly become an imagined but hopeful ideal in a population, which has been dogged by negativity. The inclusion of folk traditions and Indigenous aesthetics in his art make every piece an example of what has been hidden for many years. Llorc's art is well known, recognized in the entire country and abroad. Many expats, me included, carry his art as gifts for friends and as mementos of the land

we leave behind after every trip. It is because of the iconography and symbolism engraved in every piece that I consider Fernando Llorc and his art a strong representation of what a robust Salvadoran cultural identity could mean in the realm of the visual.

The artist

Fernando Llorc Choussy was born in El Salvador on April 7, 1949. His parents, originally from Spain (Catalonia) and Southern France, settled in El Salvador in 1897. Llorc's academic career was interrupted many times due to his indecision regarding a career path: architecture, philosophy, art or religion. It is safe to conclude that Llorc's upbringing took place in a well off family; as part of the local bourgeoisie he was able to study in one of the best schools in El Salvador and could afford several trips abroad to pursue different careers at different times. His undergraduate studies began at the National University of El Salvador where he studied to become an architect. While at this university, Llorc attended a spiritual retreat that changed his mind about architecture in favor of the priesthood, and he left for Colombia in 1966 to pursue religious studies. Illness forced a return to El Salvador after which he continued his religious studies at a French seminary; he spent May 1968 in France where his cultural and artistic nature was inspired, drawing him back to El Salvador.

An important revelation came to Llorc in 1968 during his stay in France. The artist recalls his friends questioned him about his native El Salvador, "I couldn't say anything because I had this mental fog, and the uncertainty that, compared with France,

El Salvador wasn't much. I felt the need to have a cultural identity [translation mine]" (Bolivar). Llorca's feelings were understandable to a certain extent since modern France's national identity is formed around the idea of a unified popular culture, rooted in a glorious past, in which art and museums have an important role. Supported by the notion that art should be open and public, the Louvre Museum opened on August 10, 1793 with an exhibition of five hundred thirty-seven paintings, the majority of the works being confiscated from royal and church property during the French Revolution of 1786. It was then increased by Napoleon who confiscated many more works to be exhibited and enjoyed by the French public, until his defeat in 1815.^v In contrast, El Salvador was just beginning to be recognized as an independent state in 1840, with no clear roots into history. The question from his friends, nevertheless, led him to create his first paintings with Mayan similarities. The artist adds, "[the Mayans] were my ancestors...what I admire from them were their simple lines. I had an exposition in Toulouse where I sold all the paintings which depicted the past of our culture, and a new present for me [translation mine]" (Bolivar). It is interesting that the artist chose to paint subjects such as the Mayans regardless of his experience as a white, well educated Salvadorian citizen, with a broad education in the western tradition.

This is particularly puzzling to me because in my youth my friends and I considered it very offensive to call somebody an '*Indio*' or '*India*' because it was an insult associated with a low social class and lack of education. Therefore, why would Indigenous figures interest a man of Spanish ancestry, a well-educated person from a high social class? Again, the 1932 *Matanza* emerged here as a trigger in the

construction of cultural identity. I did not know much about this episode in the history of El Salvador. Neither did I think that I or my friends could be descendants of one of our Indigenous nations. What makes some of us want to distance ourselves from that heritage while others, like Llorca, want to make it the central symbol of his art?

Llorca has a deeper connection with the Indigenous Salvadoran roots than one may at first assume. Estrada Quiroz indicates that Llorca's love for the Indigenous was nourished by the visits to market in Chichicastenango, Guatemala with his paternal grandmother who was an Indigenous woman from neighboring Guatemala (*Arte y artesanía de La Palma: orígenes y trayectoria de una expresión cultural de El Salvador contemporáneo* 47). The artist points out that it is easy for people to assume, "he was influenced by the French surrealist and expressionist artists [translation mine]" (Bolívar) because of the time he spent in France, but if this were the case, the subjects of his first exhibition would not have been the Mayans. He partially answers my last question when he points out, "the most important part was to highlight the legends, the stories, and the figures that shaped my country. My art is creative, I love creating my figures, always searching for my own cultural identity and that of my country's [translation mine]" (Bolívar). The statement from the artist not only affirms my decision to highlight his art as a possible representation of Salvadoran cultural identity, but shows we share a common purpose: with his art he is also attempting to create a general feeling of cultural identity, belonging and nationalism in El Salvador, much like the Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco did after the Mexican revolution in the 1920s.

After his artistic awakening and return from Toulouse, France, however, Llorc's father sent him to the U.S. to continue his architect degree at Louisiana State University. After six months studying art, he began to feel uncomfortable due to the racial events of the sixties and racial comments made by his classmates to people of color, and so he decided to return to El Salvador in 1971 in search of "his own identity and to create an art center [translation mine]" (Fundacion Fernando Llorc 14). Upon his return, Llorc decided to form a music band called "La Banda del Sol" (The Band of the Sun). Other bands were also emerging among the local youth to "set a precedent against the conservative Salvadoran society" and to sing about what they considered important topics such as "religion, love, and unity" which also aligned with the international pop music scene and the "hippie culture" of the sixties. According to Llorc, "[s]ome of the band lyrics were rebellious and very honest when talking about politics and the military government, so honest that one of [their] songs was prohibited from being broadcasted in all Central America." (Fernando Llorc - The person). These type of songs were known as *nueva canción* or *música de protesta* and were popular in the sixties in Latin America. The rejection of any type foreign intervention but mainly North American and European, of social inequalities, and consumerism, together with the highlighting and praising of the workers, the Indigenous and the *campesinos* was the main characteristic of this musical genre. The censored song "*El planeta de los cerdos*," (The planet of the pigs) compares government figures in general to pigs which

shows a bit of the artist's possibly revolutionary or maybe socialist side. An interesting fact published in the digital newspaper *Contrapunto*²⁷ about one of the band members – guitarist Max Martinez – is his connection to former Salvadoran President Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez. Twenty seven years after the end of the *Martinato*, the dictator's grandson was publicly protesting the same type of militaristic government that had made his grandfather one of the most negative figures in the history of El Salvador.

During this period, the early seventies, El Salvador was ruled by another military man, President Arturo Armando Molina. Colonel Molina's presidency was tainted by a violent military intervention ordered against the National University and its students during which several of the buildings were ransacked and destroyed, students beaten, and university personnel fired under the pretext of a communist threat. Students began to organize and protest publicly under the escalating social tensions. When police and protesting students clashed, thirty-seven students were killed and a larger number jailed according to a video produced by the Central American University Jose Simeon Cañas (UCA) audiovisual department titled "Cnel. Arturo Armando Molina. Presidente 1972-1977" first aired in 2004.²⁸ Possibly, events like this one, begin to form Llor's political opinion and his desire to paint messages of peace in his art.

Llor found inspiration for what would become his signature style in the small town of La Palma after moving there in 1972 when he was twenty-three years old. La

²⁷ http://www.archivocp.archivoscp.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1708:el-planeta-de-los-cerdos&catid=63:cultura-anecdota&Itemid=84

²⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sap0sapq8QY>

Palma, the artist says, “offered [me] the conditions to find [myself] as a painter [translation mine]” (Bolivar). Llord remembers he visited La Palma frequently during the first eight years of his life when the family visited a house which they owned. One afternoon during a walk around town, Llord, now an adult, recalls seeing a young kid rubbing a *copinol* seed against the pavement.

Copinol seeds are about an inch in diameter and have a dark brown outer shell with a lighter color inside. The artist was immediately intrigued and thought of the shell

Copinol - Photo Fernando Llord’s website



as a frame and the inner lighter section of the seed as a canvas. “I began to draw on the seeds and understood that God had put that seed in my way to create small things first and then be able to turn them into bigger things [translation mine]” (Bolivar).

From the symbolism of this seed, Llord founded his cooperative/art school called *La Semilla de Dios* (The Seed from God) in 1977. The school, a sort of mystical-utopian project, not only has provided many of the locals a way to earn a living, but has also inspired others to pursue their artistic talents. A recent figure is not available, but in 2013 “[a]pproximately, ten thousand people [were] tied to this activity [translation mine]” (Bolivar) in La Palma. According to Llord, “La Palma has become an artistic community with a cultural identity, dignity, and economic wellbeing [translation mine]” (Bolivar). La

Palma became important for the artist as the place he met his wife Estela. Her father was skeptical of their relationship as Llorca was clearly from a higher social status. However, after their marriage, Estela and her siblings began to work with Llorca in his workshop.

Much like Salarrué and Lars, Llorca was impacted by the long-standing differences in social classes, and the entrenched racism anchored since colonial times and moving forward from the *Martinato* years and the *Matanza*. It is uncertain where the artist stood politically; however, the friction between the rich land owners and the *campesinos* continued to escalate for some the same reasons seen during the *Martinato*. The battle lines remained the same: *campesinos* continue to demand fair wages, better treatment, and some land of their own to grow their own crops and be able to feed their families; landowners fought to keep their lands intact, believing the wages were already reasonable. For example, in 1961 “[after] a minimum wage [was] put into effect, ... the landholders [do] pay slightly more [but] no longer give the customary two free meals of tortillas and beans each day. Thus the worker’s total wages have declined.” (T. P. Anderson, *Matanza. El Salvador's Communist Revolt of 1932* 155). At the time, organized *campesino* groups began to form throughout the country giving rise to the FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front) named after Farabundo Marti who had organized part of the 1932 *campesino* revolt.

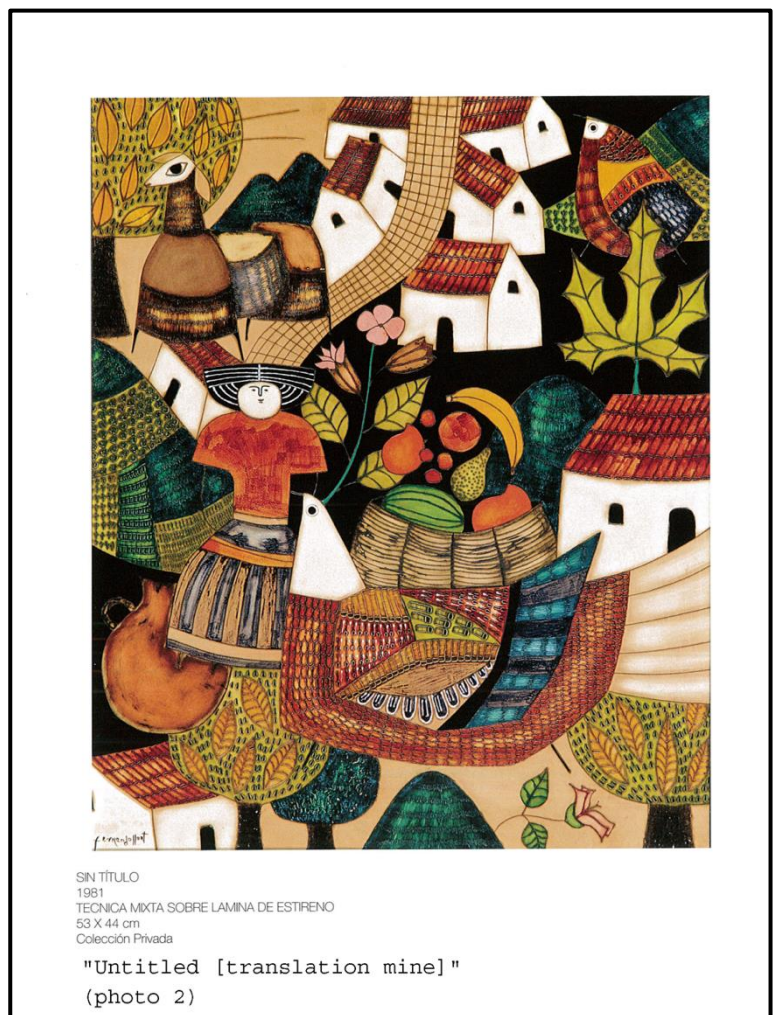
In the face of such a political situation, which escalated throughout the late 70’s, Llorca’s main objective remained the same: “to seek through his paintings and crafts a unification with his roots as a Latin American, and to thereby contribute to a positive

definition of our people as well as their human and spiritual dimension [translation mine]" (Fundacion Fernando Llorc 17).

Despite their Indigenous aesthetic and folk theme, Llorc's designs continued to increase in popularity even among the elite social class who could afford his original prints, which could sell for several thousand *colones* (the former currency of El Salvador). Most of the designs created by artisans of La Palma have been more affordable and accessible to the average Salvadoran. Unfortunately, in 1981, nine years after his arrival at La Palma, Llorc was forced to move back to the city of San Salvador, after the civil unrest threatened the safety of his young family.

As a nation, El Salvador was in the dawn of a civil war. Uncertainty and political unrest were once again obstacles for the Salvadoran populace to develop its identity. Possibly, this very insecurity attracts most Salvadorans so strongly to Fernando Llorc's art with its

representation of a peaceable country and a confident people (a time that would not



exist again, since it is already an “imagined community” that had never existed outside Llorc’s artistic oeuvre.) This elusive ideal of Salvadorian identity is symbolized by little white towns with clay shingle roofs, churches, hills, birds, farm animals, farm land, and also an Indigenous face: “[t]he human representations have pre-Columbian influences and other details such as the slanted eyes in the female figures which symbolize the beautiful mix of the races [translation mine]” (Fundacion Fernando Llorc 17). By including Indigenous roots in his designs, Llorc invites us to celebrate what for many years was censored during the *Martinato*.

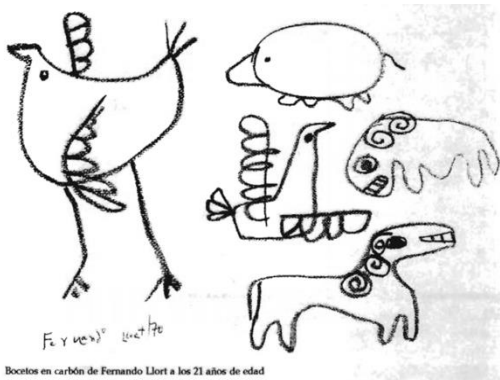
The Art of Fernando Llorc, Salvadoran Cultural Identity

“Fernando Llorc began to develop his body of work during his time in France with his works influenced by his interest in ancestral cultures and his sense of identity [translation mine]” (Fundacion Fernando Llorc 16). Another influential aspect that may have led Llorc to maintain a more traditional style in his art was possibly due to, much like the establishment in France in 1968, his desire to support, remain, and retain a more old-fashioned approach. May 1968 is remembered as one of the most violent periods in French history, a time when students fought for modernization of the university system. According to Chris Reynolds in his book titled *Memories of May '68 France's Convenient Consensus*, the “world was changing at a great rate and yet, the archaic nature of France’s institutions and decision makers (personified by de Gaulle and university ‘mandarins’) were seen to have prevented young people from benefiting fully from such developments.” (Memories of '68 France's Convenient Consensus

France's Convenient Consensus 87). However, the students' protest tapped into a broader popular discontent and triggered a much larger movement in the country resulting in a general strike.

Possibly this early violent experience in addition to the Salvadoran civil war kept Llorca grounded in a less capitalistic, materialistic, and modern style of imagery. As Estrada Quiroz affirms in his thesis, capitalism makes art only accessible to those that can afford it, thereby transforming it into merchandise and converting artists into employees. Subverted by capitalism, art takes on an exclusive style only appreciated by the elite. It is also possible that Llorca did not believe El Salvador was ready for a more contemporary or abstract style, and like the Mexican muralists movement, he also decided to make his message simple for all – even those who were illiterate.

In his work Estrada Quiroz describes the art of La Palma as *art naif* (primitive art – Figure 1, below), and indicates that a *naif* artist “needs to be charismatic, a way to see



Bocetos en carbón de Fernando Llorca a los 21 años de edad

FIGURE 1 CHARCOAL SKETCHES BY LLORCA - AGE 21 (ESTRADA QUIROZ 28)

life in a childlike manner, the naiveness, the spontaneity, the innocence and simplicity are essential, much like the nostalgia for those early years, the freedom, is the expression that pleads for the essence of the human being [translation mine]” (Arte y artesanía de La Palma: orígenes y trayectoria de una expresión cultural de El Salvador contemporáneo 27).

Estrada Quiroz does not indicate whether Llort disagreed with this classification of his art, but it seems to describe Llort's style accurately.

Similar to Salarrué, Fernando Llort found inspiration in rural El Salvador. For him, "La Palma represented more than an escape from the routine; it was a door to many possibilities corresponding to his desires for artistic development, his search for the purpose of his work and the power to free himself from to the ties of traditional (i.e. -pro Western / White) Salvadoran society [translation mine]." (Fundacion Fernando Llort 16). The country seemed less materialistic, less tied to the capital markets of the city. Llort's willingness to leave his father's house and take up bachelor residence in La Palma constitutes a departure from bourgeoisie values. Salvadoran families remain very traditional in the sense that adult children, whether sons or daughters, do not move out until they are married. In the early seventies, for Llort to move out on his own at such young age and without a wife was a rebellious act sparking societal disapproval.

Nevertheless, at La Palma he began to develop his particular style based on his religious vocation and the rustic surroundings punctuated by clay shingled roofs, in other words "a sense of the local [translation mine]" (Fundacion Fernando Llort 17). *Art naif* "captures what is lived, without formal schooling, is the way people perceive their surroundings in their own way without a technique to capture it graphically [translation mine]," (Estrada Quiroz 27) which is exactly what the imagery of Llort's art does. It was in this period, the seventies, when:

This symbolism of cheerful colors and clean lines suddenly appeared in a country that, at this moment -- despite of the militaristic regime, the injustices, and political abuses -- had progressive desires for economic development. Therefore

this new ideographic language came to carry the flag for the idea of a 'progressive' country and was soon adopted as part of the paraphernalia of national symbolism [translation mine] (Fundacion Fernando Llorc 17).

Llorc found his own cultural identity and artistic purpose in La Palma. Even more, he shared his insights by starting a foundation in July 1989 to help Salvadorans in other towns find meaning through art. Salvadorans have only a short list of icons that may identify us as a nation. Therefore, we seemed to have "adopted [Llorc's] symbolism, and made it ours as it points us to an idealized identity, clean and cheerful, and the complete opposite of our reality [translation mine]" (Fundacion Fernando Llorc 16). La Palma and other communities, which the Llorc Foundation has assisted, are emerging with people who feel united and driven by the purpose of becoming educated, creating, and working toward a common goal – the production of artisanal pieces. In a television interview with Salvador Vasquez from the Llorc Foundation, aired on August 2, 2013, Vasquez indicated that the foundation has helped many communities by teaching locals how to utilize raw regional materials to create artworks and by guiding them to find their own cultural identity through art.

These designs, which capture what most Salvadorans consider 'ours,' have been used to represent El Salvador not only throughout the country but also abroad. Among some of Llorc's most important commissions we can cite the outdoor temple (photo not available) created for Pope John Paul II's 1983 visit to El Salvador as well as the papal stole the Pope wore during the outdoor mass; in 1985 the decoration for the chapel dedicated to Monsignor Oscar Romero at Jose Simeon Cañas University (UCA); in 1997 the main façade of the Metropolitan Cathedral in San Salvador which took an

entire year and the help of over a hundred workers to complete (Figure 2 – next page), and in 2013 the “Romero Cross” (above) which was erected at the Saint Georges Catholic Cathedral in Southwark, London. This last piece was commissioned by the Archbishop in London to commemorate Monsignor Romero, who was killed during the civil war. Currently, the chapel holding the cross has been temporarily labeled “Prayer Space”, but it will be renamed “The Romero Chapel” after Romero’s canonization.



Romero Cross

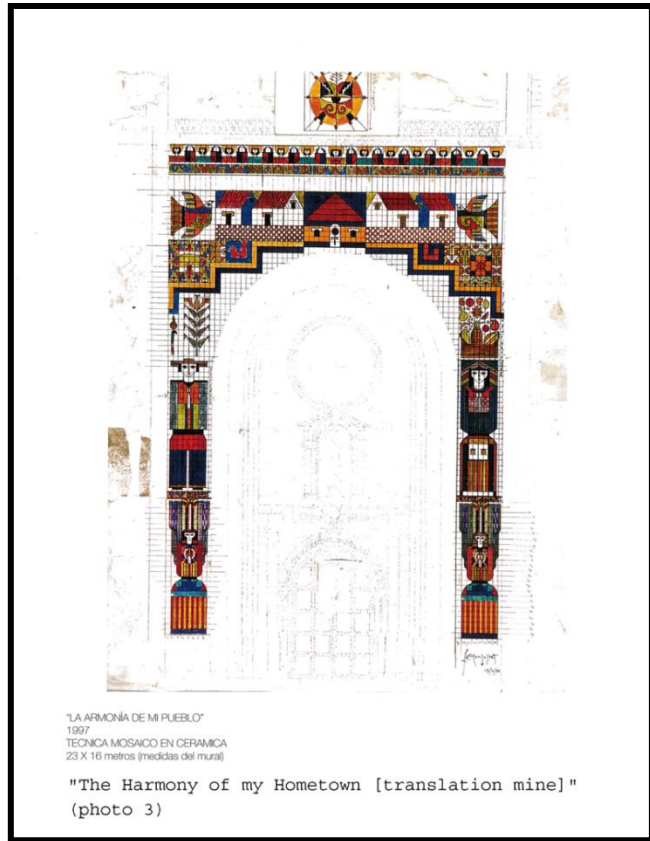
In 2013, Llort was chosen as the recipient of the Cultural National award by El Salvador's then-president Mauricio Funes. Sadly, one commission among those achievements was lost in 2011; Archbishop Jose Luis Escobar Alas destroyed the 1997 façade of the Metropolitan Cathedral in downtown San Salvador without notifying Llort, or giving him the opportunity to appeal or remove the façade for preservation.

Llort created the mural in 1997, five years after the 1992 Peace Accords that brought the country's civil war to a close. Combining folkloric images of *campesinos*, horses, crops and birds of peace, the mural bridged contemporary iconography with traditional Indigenous and Christian imagery—a stark contrast to the European-influenced art that decorates the Cathedral's interior. The mural was designed in Llort's signature brightly colored and stained glass-like style, which has been adopted as the country's unique folk aesthetic. Titled *Harmonia de mi pueblo*, or “Harmony of my people,” the mural was a monument to the everyday Salvadoran who had persevered through the struggle; it was a celebration of peace. (Heidenry)

Bishop Escobar's predecessor had approved of the mural eleven years prior to Escobar Alas's ordination as archbishop.

However, Archbishop Escobar recognized some designs as Masonic symbols, which go against Catholic beliefs. He also objected to the Llorca family having profited from the mural, which was at odds with the spiritual purpose of the mural in a sanctuary. As a Salvadoran, it is difficult to understand and justify this decision. How can a fellow Salvadoran, and more importantly a man of God such as Archbishop Escobar Alas, destroy a piece of art that was created and

FIGURE 2 MURAL – METROPOLITAN CATHEDRAL IN SAN SALVADOR



erected by the most well known national artist to adorn the church of the people?

Heidenry's article speaks for me:

What many Salvadorans are feeling, beyond the loss of a beloved work of art, is a stab at their contemporary cultural identity. "This mural pertained to everyone and was an expression of Salvadoran culture," Llorca said at his press conference. Cultural monuments such as the cathedral embody collective memories, becoming integral in the construction of a shared cultural identity. Thus the cathedral, originally constructed in 1842, but having been restored many times after numerous earthquakes and fires, speaks to the country's struggle to construct and preserve a collective historical memory. (Heidenry)

Escobar Quiroz also adds that Lloré's art is a clear reference to:

de añoranzas de un pueblo de rostro indefinido, de un rostro azotado por la oligarquía nacional, la pobreza, la desesperanza, la marginación, el desempleo, la delincuencia, la deforestación, la migración, la crisis económica y la frustración social de su población dentro y fuera de este país; contraposición de estas artesanías que han ido creando un fenómeno identitario y cultural novedoso e importante por sus singulares características, un producto que nace de un intelectual y es apropiado y desarrollado por el pueblo salvadoreño en sectores diversos, por lo cual se fortalece, y podríamos decir que se declara patrimonio nacional desde el momento en que se decora la fachada de la catedral de San Salvador —con esta expresión artística salvadoreña²⁹

As in most Latin American countries, fifty percent ³⁰ of the population in El Salvador are Catholic, and Lloré seems to be one of them. Lloré's art is known for its beautiful religious depictions of Biblical stories such as the last supper and the crucifixion, and for countless of uniquely decorated crosses. This dwelling on Christian iconography and posing for all public photos wearing a rosary would indicate that religion is still very important for Lloré as well, just as it was when he first wanted to become a priest.

Lloyd Kramer reminds us, "One common account of the links between nationalism and religion emphasizes the importance of religion in defining the essential traits of a national identity." (Nationalism in Europe & America. Politics, Cultures, and Identities since 1775. 82). Moreover, all the religious symbols such "the palms facing up to indicate prayer, hope, gratitude, and love; The bird to symbolize creation; ... the

²⁹ <http://documentacion.cidap.gob.ec:8080/bitstream/cidap/427/1/Artesanias%20La%20Palma-Aldo%20Estrada.pdf>, p.4

³⁰ 2014 Pew Research Center religious affiliation results - <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/11/13/religion-in-latin-america/>

sun and its twelve rays to connote Jesus with his twelve apostles [translation mine]” (Fundacion Fernando Llorca 17) used by Llorca in his art (example below) are key components in a religious identity. Therefore, his art can be seen as a bridge that not only connects the religious and national identities of a country whose faith has been the only constant in times of violence, but also aids in the construction of such identities.



Numero:
2011
TECNICA VERDE FUNDIDO
20X15 X 30 cm
Coleccion Privada

"Nativity [translation mine]"

Conclusion

“[The nation] is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Imagined Communities 6), Benedict Anderson’s explanation of a nation as imagined aligns with Llorca’s art for two reasons. First, as the definition indicates, I do not necessarily know the hands that created the piece of art which I purchased to carry abroad with me, but I feel united and identified

not only with the piece but also with the artist who created it simply because it was made in my county. I know it was made by a Salvadoran, and the pieces of art have not only become evidence of our cultural identity, but also (for some like me) sources of a sense of unity, nostalgia, and nationalistic pride. Second, in spite of the constant violence that has and continues to afflict the country, Fernando Llorca has helped us imagine a colorful and peaceful version of El Salvador in every piece of his art formed from simple materials. His art came into the public eye at a time when El Salvador was beginning to feel the effects of the civil war, and the images of colorful, quaint, peaceful towns allowed us to dream and hope of better days ahead. Those images became a language.

“The language created by Llorca since 1972 has been internalized by Salvadorans and has become part of the visual culture of the republic [translation mine]” (Fundacion Fernando Llorca 20). Whether living in El Salvador or abroad, most Salvadorans know about the art of La Palma. Possibly, most of us fall short by not knowing exactly how it was created or by whom, but we know it represents what is ours, where we come from. Moreover, Llorca’s desire to help other Salvadorans create unique pieces of meaningful art while earning a living should be valued and regarded not only as an example of humanitarianism, but more importantly of nationalism, while providing a sense of cultural identity for his country and fellow Salvadorans.

The representation of Indigenous roots is one of the features of Llorca’s art that I value the most. Nonetheless, Estrada Quiroz clarifies the controversy regarding whether Llorca’s art is an accurate representation of these roots or not:

Some skeptics think [Llort's] art is not a symbol of El Salvador as it does not have ancestral origins or comes directly from the population; nonetheless, it is the population or the inhabitants of the country who adopt symbols and, if it comes without an imposition, meaning the Salvadorans have agreed to adopt it, as it is the case of art from La Palma, then this transforms the art into a national symbol [translation mine]³¹

As Estrada Quiroz indicates, Llort's art is not directly rooted or linked to a particular Indigenous group, and it is sometimes criticized for falling short of a true representation of what is considered *lo nuestro*; however, Estrada Quiroz argues, because it was willingly adopted by the Salvadoran population, it is a genuine "national symbol". His argument is well founded since those who accept a symbol as an icons representing them. Furthermore, symbols evoke a powerful sense of nationalism and identity.

I believe as a nation, we need to learn to embrace and appreciate this Indigenous part of our heritage, which it has not been given the importance and place it deserves by teaching the younger generations the history of our people, their struggles and survival. Furthermore, the strongly defined differences in social classes observed and enforced by the elite society in El Salvador as well as the fearsome *Matanza* during the *Martinato* are mostly to blame for allowing our society to deny the Indigenous roots at the base of the nation. However, Llort's art has given and continues to grant us the opportunity to change this part of our history by providing us a colorful and hopeful representation of our culture to preserve, cherish and value now and in the future. More importantly, Llort's iconography allows us to keep fresh in the collective memory the

³¹ <http://documentacion.cidap.gob.ec:8080/bitstream/cidap/427/1/Artesanias%20La%20Palma-Aldo%20Estrada.pdf>, p.23

images of cultures whose identity was destroyed by the *Matanza*. Unfortunately, cooperative work between Llorca and the few remaining *Indios* does not seem to have been established in order to make this memory stronger.

As an expatriate, I have felt the same sense of vagueness when confronted with the questions Llorca asked during his time in France, questions which have inspired this project. Unfortunately, when the name of El Salvador is mentioned abroad, it is always in a negative context. The New York Times as well as NPR reported that June 2015 was one of the most violent months in El Salvador due to the high number of killings. In past years, the civil war was the headline. It is difficult for me to ascertain why we as Salvadorans are so complacent when it comes to correcting or changing our destiny in terms of safeguarding, embracing and respecting who we are. We have not given enough support to those, like Salarrué and Lars, who fought to preserve our Indigenous heritage, and we sometimes feel ashamed of those roots. Therefore, the answer of what ultimately binds us culturally and nationally continues to be elusive, but in this effort to find it, I believe Llorca's creations are a great example of what the missing common denominator could be.

Conclusion

The concepts of a cultural and a national identity in El Salvador, I have argued, have been overlooked for many years. These concepts are important as they allow individuals and groups to distinguish themselves from others and affirm themselves. As a citizen of El Salvador, I have been confronted and conflicted by the issues of identity. Potential answers elude me whenever I am asked to speak about them in relation to my country, thus the purpose of this investigation. Throughout this research, I have discovered the complexity that surrounds the definition of these identities. In the case of El Salvador, factors such history, politics, economics, education, social status, race, and gender may have contributed to the disappearance of these concepts from the consciousness and the lives of Salvadorans. In addition, as the investigation unfolded, I learned that one key missing component necessary in order to potentially construct more comprehensive cultural and national identities is the inclusion of the Indigenous roots. This discovery, as well as childhood memories, led me to explore Salvadoran literature, poetry, and art in the search for representations of cultural and national identities.

The individuals whose work I selected were faced with personal, professional, and political opposition and challenges throughout their careers and private lives while managing to include in their work what I believe is the missing piece for building a more homogeneous Salvadoran identity. Those who have questioned whether these

individuals deserve a place in the history of El Salvador or who have attempted to discredit their work by alleging untimely government opposition or by questioning their credentials to communicate the missing subject matter due their social background are in the minority. The analysis developed on the individual chapters dedicated to the works of Salarrué , Claudia Lars, and Fernando Llorca has, I hope, not only affirmed the value of their literary and artistic contributions to El Salvador's canon, but also presented the invaluable support that they provided and that is still needed to give voice, presence, and recognition to the Indigenous population in El Salvador. By acknowledging this population in their work, they have allowed us to imagine a more unified, inclusive nation.

The literary contributions from Salarrué and Claudia Lars, which seek to include our Indigenous background through the *regionalismo Salvadoreño* in order to construct more comprehensive national and cultural identities are, in my opinion, vital. The art of Fernando Llorca, which has not only inspired communities to develop their artistic talents but has also allowed them to earn a living, is a continuation of the work started by Salarrué and Lars. Each offers a different, but insightful appreciation of our long-neglected Indigenous roots, which I strongly believe are an essential component in defining a possible and more inclusive Salvadoran nation. Sadly, the Indigenous population has been nearly eradicated from El Salvador. Beginning with the Spanish conquest of the Salvadoran territory formerly known as Cuscatlán, and later through the 1932 *Matanza* during which an estimated 30,000 Indian *campesino* lives were lost,

Indigenous peoples have been under pressure. It is only recently (2006) that the Salvadoran government has apologized to the few remaining Indigenous groups for the *Matanza*. Furthermore, the concepts of cultural and national identities continued to be forgotten through the twelve-year civil war (1980-1992). Not only are these events to blame, but also, the fundamental principals on which El Salvador is based have failed to clearly define who are considered Salvadorans. The definitions provided throughout the various versions of the Constitutions have failed to clearly define who are considered Salvadorans. In addition, the government has not fully accepted the Indigenous groups as Salvadorans.

The effect of the 1932 massacre cannot be overstated. The *Matanza* sent a very strong message from the government that not only kept the Indigenous workers from rebelling again but also radically changed this underrepresented population, leaving lasting effects to this day. After the *Matanza*, most Indians abandoned traditions such as their native way of dressing, and speaking as explained by Leiva Masin:

La persecución política y el mote de 'indios comunistas' obligaron a los Tula, a los Pulunto, a los Pashaca, a los Telule y a los Mussun a cambiar la vestimenta del algodón, a ignorar su propia cultura, a olvidar el náhuatl y a no expresar la espiritualidad de los abuelos. Con el genocidio de 30 mil personas, de estos, 8 mil izalqueños, la mayoría indígenas, el dictador Maximiliano Hernández Martínez terminó con la revuelta e hirio de muerte a la cultura indígena precolombina que dejó la colonia. (Los Izalcos Testimonio de un Indígena 167)

As a Salvadoran and as an individual I must ask, what is left in a population that cannot be who they are? How do they move forward in a oppressive society, which does not

value their cultural heritage? Are they not Salvadorans? Are they not human beings? Similar to the Native Americans in the United States, the Salvadoran Indians who survived the massacre were treated without respect and were forced to assimilate in order to become like the 'others' without being accepted by the 'others'.

Some steps have been made in the right direction. The 1983 Constitution – which is still current – includes a couple of important aspects supportive of Indigenous peoples: the native languages or “*lenguas autóctonas*” as well as the Indigenous towns,

Las lenguas autóctonas que se hablan en el territorio nacional forman parte del patrimonio cultural y serán objeto de preservación, difusión y respeto.

Art. 63.- La riqueza artística, histórica y arqueológica del país forma parte del tesoro cultural salvadoreño, el cual queda bajo la salvaguarda del Estado y sujeto a leyes especiales para su conservación.

EL SALVADOR RECONOCE A LOS PUEBLOS INDÍGENAS Y ADOPTARÁ POLÍTICAS A FIN DE MANTENER Y DESARROLLAR SU IDENTIDAD ÉTNICA Y CULTURAL, COSMOVISIÓN, VALORES Y ESPIRITUALIDAD. (25)

The first line of the last paragraph states, “El Salvador recognizes the Indigenous towns [translation mine]”; however, it does not refer to the towns as integral components of El Salvador or makes any claims of the towns being Salvadoran. Another positive step is Salvadoran President Mauricio Funes’ 2010 public apology offered during the first Indigenous Towns Congress to the Indigenous communities for the ethnocide events of 1932. However, more still needs to be done.

In the decade between this apology and the end of the civil war, the government, aided by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO,) launched a program titled Culture of Peace Project. The test pilot began in El Salvador in 1993, and the basis of the program was to “illustrate how projects to promote postwar culture and democracy extended beyond the local state and society actors to include representatives and interest of the international community ... [and] offer[ed] an example of attention to culture and education as tools for nation-building and governance in a neoliberal age” (De Lugan 25). Five years later, in 1998, the Salvadoran Ministry of Education (MINED) “introduced a change in the national curricula that mirrored the Culture of Peace Project’s emphasis on ‘Democratic Citizenship and Human Development.’ The national education reform introduced the Program in Human, Ethical, and Civil Values’to create a culture of peace that contributes to the building of a democratic society” (De Lugan 28). The ‘Values Program,’ as De Lugan refers to it, had cultural identity as its core. Yet although the program said it “offered a positive vision of society and attempted to cultivate shared values, collective identity, and attachment to country..., its primary emphasis on the canonical citizen (as opposed to focusing on the distinctive historical or social context or experience of being from El Salvador) also made the program and its goals transportable from nation to nation...” (De Lugan 29). This emphasis on portability over local sensibility caused it to fail in El Salvador because it did not create in the participants a true connection with the program.

Furthermore, De Lujan concludes that one “reason why the Values Program did not have a bigger impact was that it did not consider complex variables such as the particulars of history, the lack of equality, or the function of power in society” (De Lujan 35). Unfortunately, as a society, I believe that we have not yet fully acknowledged let alone addressed our turbulent socio-political past or many of the fundamental aspects of our history. Until we do, we will not be able to move forward no matter how many well meaning programs are instituted to help.

In another ongoing effort from the MINED to evaluate the Values Program, Salvadoran anthropologist Carlos Lara Martinez was appointed to conduct research to “investigate how various social actors in a range of diverse educational settings were interpreting the value of ‘cultural identity’....Lara Martinez compared six representative schools: public/private, urban/rural, Catholic/Protestant” (De Lujan 36). The result of his study yielded different responses from the teachers/administrators and than from the students. The first group defined cultural identity as “being not only about ‘where we come from,’ but ‘that which is truly our own’ (*lo nuestro*). Educators did not connect the national culture to the abstract universal values promoted throughout the Values Program. Instead they defined cultural identity in terms of symbols and concepts from El Salvador’s past, whether a far-off pre-Hispanic or colonial past or a more recent past.” Students, on the other hand, “saw cultural identity as ‘representing persons from here – where we are born and where we pass the majority of our time; our culture; customs and traditions; and language”” (De Lujan 37). Clearly, generational

differences in how our cultural and national identities should be defined seem to be a new obstacle to feel united.

In addition, the lack of a robust cultural or national identity has made El Salvador vulnerable to foreign influences. Celebrations such as Halloween, fancy shopping malls, and some of the latest American fashion trends are now part of this small Latin American country. Moreover, the mass migration caused by the civil war also created a different negative phenomenon that is now affecting the country greatly. A large number of deportees who have been repatriated – mainly from the United States – to El Salvador due to felony offenses, have formed gangs that daily inflict fear, create violence, and extort money from the population. A poor knowledge of the country's history through the education system compounded with a weak sense of identity have become contributing and detrimental factors that can be blamed for the younger generations of Salvadorans being so easily influenced.

The silences and lack of information that still exist regarding the history of the country, particularly about the *Matanza*, is disappointing. Historical gaps are being filled by oral memories from those who were young during this obscure and violent period of El Salvador. Currently, the Museo de la Palabra e Imagen (MUPI) is making commendable efforts in keeping this memory alive and for disseminating it through videos and expositions. The museum also has available information regarding Salarrué and Claudia Lars. This is a start. Nonetheless, more must be done in order to construct stronger cultural and national identities among the country's population. A useful step

would be to revise the school curriculum to include a more comprehensive national history component and a stronger overall arts program which include the many forgotten individuals who have contributed to the Salvadoran canon. A step promising real progress would be governmental recognition and support of the Indigenous groups still left.

Working on this project has been more than simply personally rewarding, it has allowed me to get to know three amazing fellow Salvadorans as well as their literary and artistic trajectory and contributions. I am ashamed to admit that I should have learned more about them when I was living in my native El Salvador, rather than in my new adopted country and so many years after I had left. Having discovered that all three of them, just like me, believed our Indigenous roots need a stronger presence and recognition, I feel particularly identified with Fernando Llort as we both had to leave our country and be among 'others' in order to become curious about our own cultural identity. In addition, I was surprised and deeply embarrassed to learn about all the aspects surrounding the 1932 massacre, which seems to be a better-known fact outside of El Salvador based on all the foreign authors who have researched and written significantly about it.

I have explored how race, class, and gender inequalities make a unified national identity elusive in El Salvador. Exploring twentieth century history full of terrible violence, civil war, and the mass exodus from the country reveals a small country suffering from great fractures. Artists, in different ways, have attempted to create

literary and visual images that, I have argued, both carry along these divides and seek to heal them.

I am possibly not any closer to a satisfying definition of Salvadoran cultural or national identities, and it is difficult to assert if they will one day exist. Nonetheless, I will continue to imagine, as Benedict Anderson concludes, that my fellow Salvadorans and I feel proudly united and identified through the works of Salarrué, Claudia Lars and Fernando Llort.

Mi respuesta a los patriotas

SALARRUÉ

[Carta publicada originalmente en Costa Rica en *Repertorio Americano*, Semanario de Cultura Hispánica, (tomo XXIV, n.º. 7) n.º. 575, sábado 27 de febrero de 1932.]

Mis amigos me han dicho: "Tú que eres sereno, tú que ves las cosas con los ojos adormilados, tú que estás siempre en la tierra del ensueño, en ese mundo irreal a donde los golpes de la marea aquí abajo no llegan, por lo mismo, por eso, tú debes dar tu opinión en esos momentos en que la patria se encuentra en la indecisión. Apunta tu microscopio y dínos qué ves y cómo lo ves, de algo ha de servirnos, hazlo por patriotismo, dínate a pisar con tus plantas la tierra firme, siquiera por una vez...". Y se han echado a reír. Conozco en su manera, que lo han dicho en parte como burla amistosa, con el cariño que infunden los locos pacíficos, en parte en serio y es por ello que yo me he quedado perplejo y me he sentido luego como incomprendido, tenido como un ser vago e inútil, de un mundo problemático. Y me he indignado en mi dignidad de hombre y he alzado mi grito de protesta como voz en el desierto escribiendo esta respuesta a los patriotas sin nombre...

Yo no tengo patria. Yo no sé qué es patria. ¿A qué llamáis patria vosotros los hombres entendidos por prácticos? Sé que entendéis por patria un conjunto de leyes, una maquinaria de administración, un parche en un mapa de colores chillones. Vosotros los prácticos llamáis a eso patria. Yo el iluso no tengo patria, no tengo patria pero tengo terruño (de tierra, cosa palpable). No tengo El Salvador (catorce secciones en un trozo de papel satinado); tengo Cuscatlán, una región del mundo y no una nación (cosa vaga). Yo amo a Cuscatlán. Mientras vosotros habláis de la Constitución, yo canto a la tierra y la raza: La tierra que se esponja y fructifica, la raza de soñadores creadores que sin discutir labran el suelo, modelan la tinaja, tejen el perraje y abren el camino. Raza de artistas como yo, artista quiere decir hacedor, creador, modelador de formas (cosa práctica) y también comprendedor. La mayor parte de vosotros se dedica en su patriotismo a pelearse por si tienen o no derecho, por si es o no

constitucional, por si será fulano o zutana, por si conviene un ismo y otro a la prosperidad de la nación. La prosperidad es para vosotros tenerlo todo, menos la tierra en su sentido maternal. Capitalistas embrutecidos, perezosos y bribones muestran sus caras abotagadas y crueles a no menos crueles comunistas, pedigüeños, sórdidos y rapaces. Mientras estos dos bandos en todos sus grados de intensidad se gruñen unos a otros, nosotros los soñadores no pedimos nada porque todo lo tenemos. Ellos se arrebatan las cáscaras y nos dejan la pulpa. “El pan es mío, todo mío, dejadme vender el pan” gritan unos; “no” dicen los otros: “Tenemos hambre y el pan es nuestro, porque la tierra es nuestra”... Mientras nosotros los soñadores, sin que nadie se oponga, hacemos crecer la espiga embelleciendo el paisaje, gozamos la música del maizal que sonrío en la brisa, recogemos cantando la mazorca y dejamos el comerla a tarascadas a los puercos. El cafetalero es un pedante que habla del mercado, de la baja, del alza, cuenta pisto agachado sobre las mesas, husmea costales y no ha estado nunca tirado al fondo de un cafetal, en el misterio de las noches de luna; no nota la belleza del grano sangriento cuando resbala entre los dedos de las cortadoras cantarinas, ni conoce el aroma y la leyenda de la flor del cafeto. El azucarero no ha oído nunca el susurro consolador de los cañaverales, ni ha visto meterse el chipuste en marejadas armoniosas. Todos ellos giran alrededor de una sola cosa: el dinero. Unos quieren ganar el quinientos por ciento y otros quieren que se les suban sus salarios. El comunista usa un botón rojo y habla de degollar, llama justicia al buen pan y buen vino bien compartido, y no ha sabido nunca del saber dar a quien todo lo tiene, que es quien nada tiene. El indio del arado y la cuma que hace el paisaje agrario bajo el sol crudo, está satisfecho de hacer vivir con sus manos toscas y renegridas, manos de Dios, a un pueblo entero que se entrega a una locura llamada política, que no sólo es infructuosa sino dañina. Este indio vive la tierra, es la tierra y no habla nunca de patriotismo. Ni teme al extranjero, que nada puede quitarle de lo de él, a menos de quitarle la existencia.

Yo que paso en la tierra del ensueño, según vosotros, yo estoy más en Sí, ¡qué diera yo por traeros a esta mi tierra! (que no es hipotética, como la vuestra): cerros enmontañados, y llanos ondulantes en donde al salir el sol cantan los gallos, en donde no hay artículo número tal,

sino un árbol de grata sombra; en donde no hay inciso cuarto, sino el ojo de agua para la sed; en donde la ley de tal cosa está representada por la lluvia, por la luna o por el viento.

Lírico, sí, es verdad; pero lírico sobre el polvo de la tierra y no prosaico e insípido sobre hediondos conceptos y rancias doctrinas. Lírico bajo el cielo azul, y no sórdido bajo la losa del ismo.

Como me lo pedís, he pisado ya con mis plantas la tierra firme; pero la mía, no la vuestra, que no es firme ni es tierra sino humo (del feo). Lo he hecho porque me habéis obligado, porque al fin habéis conseguido distraerme de mi "éxtasis azul impráctico" y hasta habéis logrado indignarme un segundo. Sabed, de una vez por todas, que no tengo patria ni reconozco patria de nadie. Mi campo es más amplio que esa tajadita de absurdo que queréis darme. Mucho más amplio. Ni siquiera el mundo. Ni siquiera el Cosmos...

San Salvador, 21 de enero de 1932.

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ⁱ Among the authors that inform Gimenez' work we found: Bauman, Zigmunt, 1996, "From pilgrim to tourist – or a short history of identity". En S. Hall et al., eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage Publications. Bauman, Zigmunt, 2000, *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press. Bauman, Zigmunt, 2001. *Community*. Cambridge : Polity Press. Bauman, Zigmunt, 2004. *Identity*. Cambridge: Polity Press. Bourdieu, Pierre, 1982. *Ce que parler veut dire*. París: Fayard. Bourdieu, Pierre, 1985. "Dialogue à propos de l'histoire culturelle". *Actes de la Recherche; De Vos, George y Lola Romanucci Ross, 1982. Ethnic Identity. Cultural Continuity and Change*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Kymlicka, Will, 1996. *Ciudadanía multicultural. Una teoría liberal de los derechos de las minorías*. Barcelona: Ariel. Larraín, Jorge, 2001. *Identidad chilena*. Santiago de Chile: LOM ediciones. Larraín, Jorge, 2000. *Identity and Modernity in Latin America*. Cambridge: Polity Press. Linnekin, J.S., 1983. "Red Yankees: Narragansett conversión in the Great Awakening". *American Ethnologist*, 10, 2, pp. 253-271. Lipiansky, Edmond Marc, 1992. *Identité et communication*. París: Presses Universitaires de France. Melucci, Alberto, 2001. *Challenging codes. Collective action in the information age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Morin, Edgar, 2001. *L'identité humaine*. París: Seuil. 27 Paz, Octavio, 1994 (reimpresión). *El laberinto de la soledad*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

ⁱⁱ **The Darker Side of Western Modernity**: *Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Author(s): Walter D. Mignolo: Duke University Press: 2011

ⁱⁱⁱ "Durante las décadas que siguieron a su aparición -escribió Teresa del Conde-, la pintura muralista mexicana conoció un prestigio, difusión e incidencia en otros países que ningún otro movimiento artístico americana había alcanzado antes. Han corrido ríos de tinta sobre el muralismo mexicano, que produjo una serie de obras maestras estudiadas por especialistas de todo el mundo. Por sus características iconográficas y por sus resoluciones formales, un buen número de esos conjuntos murales quedan inscritos por derecho propio en la historia universal del arte". (Teresa del Conde, México. *Arte latinoamericano del siglo XX*, Ed. Sullivan, 1996, pág. 22). On Soviet art: [Lynn Mally](#) *Culture of the Future: The Proletkult Movement in Revolutionary Russia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992. On the Third Reich: In September 1944 the [Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda](#) prepared a list of 1,041 artists considered crucial to National Socialist culture, and therefore exempt

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^{iv} That is the case of many Russian collectives that before the October revolution established artisan communities that gave tools to people in the impoverished rural areas while underlining folk motives and ways of production. After the revolution new collectives emerged such as the case of the Proletkult "korgavoye no svoye" ("rough and ready but our own"). Proletkult, , did receive NARKOMPROS (ministry of culture) funding for his operation of utopic-communes in which art and culture was at the center of their work, (see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992, pp. 20-22). See also: [Orlando Figes](#), *Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia*. Henry Holt and Company, 2002

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