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Social Defiance and Liberation Won with a Musical Front: The Salvadoran Struggle

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Abstract

This essay examines the production of protest music and its unique role in El Salvador during the Salvadoran Civil War as an outlet for activist inspiration, communal education, and clandestine propaganda. It will discuss how protest music was created and distributed with calculated ambitions in mind, an aspect of the socio-musical and socio-cultural experience little considered in regards to contemporary El Salvador.

Keywords: El Salvador, Protest music, Civil war, Central America, Cultural production

The creative arts are often used as a means to illustrate emotions, wishes and suffering, and to help communicate these sentiments to outsiders who may not be aware of social and political situations besides their own. Paintings or illustrations may depict such things as massacres while poetry and literature may recite the painful stories of familial loss, or the unequivocal joy felt by reaching the end to a war. Artful expression can manifest itself to protest against any number of injustices felt by an individual or a group of people who share a set of principles. Musical composition, performance, and listening are precisely this type of art that was produced during the civil war years in El Salvador¹. Music became the medium through which Salvadorans communicated with one another, mourned together, and condemned the corrupt government and the brutality of the military -- opinions for which they would have been killed if expressed in any other way. This essay explores how the cruelly oppressive climate during the 1980s created a stage for musical composition that provided relief to the Salvadoran citizens during the brutal civil war years².

While conducting research for this project, I discovered a selection of invaluable articles that provided strong evidence in support of ideas postulated here, as well as a handful that contradicted them. One such opposing article, written by R. Serge Denisoff and Mark H. Levine, presents the point of view that there is no substantial proof of a relationship between music, society and politics. I believe its inclusion to be relevant as it offers the opportunity to defend the information presented in this essay, and to confirm that in the case of El Salvador the socio-political conflict endured for decades certainly has had an influence on popular music, particularly during the tense '80s and early '90s. In the essay, *Protest Songs: Those on the Top Forty and Those of the Streets*, Denisoff and Levine's assertion that:

... song is viewed as a potent weapon in the propaganda arsenal. Nevertheless, there is little, if any, concrete or empirical evidence that songs *do* in fact have an independent impact upon attitudes in the political arena. (Denisoff and Levine 807)

is remarkably applicable to the Salvadoran situation. It must be discussed in order to clarify that evidence does exist that socio-political situations do indeed influence popular music creation and distribution, and that in turn such an influence subsequently and relatedly impacts citizen attitudes and behavior.

The subject matter of this essay delves into how music became a direct product of current events, one that was profoundly influenced by socio-political conflict as well as used by the Salvadoran masses to cope with and educate about the brutal realities of civil war. It will explore various popular controversial musical groups, such as *Los Guaraguao* and *Cutumay Camones*, who put their lives on the line to inform the public. Lyrical translations and analyses will be examined to illustrate how the songs were used on a national scale and what they meant to the people. Additionally, one specific community and its experience are examined. This community is Ignacio Ellacuría³, located in the northern province of Chalatenango, bordering Honduras. Selected musical examples specific to this community will be considered as will key events in the community's existence during the war that

inspired songs which members of the community still sing frequently today, demanding that younger community members and outsiders never forget the events that are portrayed in the songs. Salvadoran musicians who were leaders in the dangerous movement for reform discovered how music could serve as a means of instruction, propaganda, inspiration, and communication. Radical musical groups formed, finding loyal followers in the Salvadoran people who were desperate to hear the truth and eager to fight back against the military and the oligarchy who were forcing repression on them. When radio stations began to be bombed, and censorship started to be enforced, musicians and their followers went underground to continue to spread their controversial and rousing songs. In this way, having been influenced directly by the immediate reality, music became one of the largest fronts in the civil war against the military, and one that the dictators in power had not expected and were powerless to stop.

It is my hope that this essay will successfully convey the unique role that the socio-political situation imposed during the Salvadoran civil war had on the protest music created and distributed during that time, and how such music uniquely depicted the Salvadoran struggle in a manner unparalleled with other forms of cultural production. In El Salvador, music as a by product of conflict evoked a method of expression that provided a means for commiseration and education that ultimately empowered the Salvadoran people to, in a sense, achieve a more liberated existence.

I. La música de protesta nacional

The role of music in social crises is a concept that has certainly been well considered (Almeida, Ruben 1999; Blau 1988; Cerulo 1984; Denisoff 1970; Krenek 1944; Labinjon 1982; Morris 1986), but rarely as it influenced Central American conflicts. Themes found in protest and revolution music range from anti-war and anti-government propaganda to explaining how music was manipulated to become informative and instructional. Instructive music compositions told people how to carry out various guerrilla tactics and/or described methods for mobilization. These themes may be found within Salvadoran protest and revolution music, specifically in lyrics that give outsiders insight into their struggle and an appreciation for their intensely conflicted history that has existed despite vast murder, corruption, and human injustice.

Paul Almeida and Rubén Urbizagástegui's 1999 article, "Cutumay Camones: Popular Music in El Salvador's National Liberation Movement," provides substantial evidence to support the theories surrounding music as both a product of and a factor in the outcome of civil war. In their work, they documented over fifty popular musical groups who contributed to the liberation movement through either direct involvement or distant participation between 1975-1991. In a country as small as El Salvador this is a relatively large number of active influential musical groups⁴. These musicians employed certain techniques to ensure their effectiveness, as well as circulation, to the largest audience possible.

Almeida and Urbizagástegui, drawing from Snow and Benford's article "Frame alignment processes, micromobilization, and movement participation" (1988), explain one such method by outlining three tasks that they believe must be employed for a revolutionary movement to be successful. After identifying some aspect of life (i.e., conditions or events) as being problematic, musicians must propose specific solutions and then issue a call to action, which in turn rallies participants to carry out such actions (Almeida and Urbizagástegui 16). Almost all of the music distributed during the 1980-1990 time period uses all three of the tasks mentioned above in an effort to rally pro-liberation Salvadoran support. Again illustrating their perceptiveness as to what were the most effective techniques to spread their messages to the largest audience possible, musicians would utilize the three tasks within the lyrics, accompanying them with popular Salvadoran musical rhythms. The more recognizable, or 'pop' sounding, the tunes were then the more probable it would be that they would appeal to the listener (Almeida and Urbizagástegui 16). The authors explain this phenomenon best by reasoning how:

It was there that music was very important; because a song you remember, you repeat it over and over. Consciously or unconsciously you become involved with it (16).

This is precisely why it is intriguing that music could have even had a role in such a thing as a revolution. That a person can, and will, become involved with a song signifies that a song has an emotional relationship to a person or a society with the power to inspire, console, and explain the events that were often times too difficult to narrate through simple conversation.

In order for the musicians to be successful in distributing their recordings, or to have a stage on which to perform, they needed support. Such support was supplied by revolutionary organizations like the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) and the Catholic Church, perhaps the most significant patron for popular protest music, especially during the late 1970s. It was during this time that the government was making attempts at censoring the

ever-more popular Salvadoran protest music. Censoring efforts included the prohibition of playing the music at all on radio stations; the penalty for doing so would have been imprisonment. The Church escaped total prohibition by owning a private radio station, YSAX, giving them liberty to disregard the ban and play popular protest music on a constant rotation (obviously a controversial and antagonizing move towards the government and military). This in itself would inspire more interest among the people to extend themselves to hear the music since, particularly in popular culture, when something has been forbidden or scandalized it seems to inspire more appeal, and interest to seek it out increases more than if no attention had been paid to the songs at all.

Just because the Church was a religious institution with a privately owned radio station did not mean that those involved in radio transmission avoided controversy and danger brought on by deciding to broadcast liberation-inspired programs and music. A large reason why Oscar Romero was such a notorious and hunted figure in the eyes of the oligarchy and the military was that he would use YSAX as a stage to broadcast his weekly sermons every Sunday at 8 a.m. This program quickly became the most popular and listened to because Romero would passionately decry the abuses being suffered by the Salvadoran people and not shy away from boldly speaking about truths that the government was staunchly trying to conceal (Montgomery 78). Daily commentaries that discussed, argued, and reflected on social and political current events were the second-most listened to programs in the nation, also greatly contributing to YSAX's notoriety (78).

One should not misunderstand that simply because these programs were so popular that listening to them and/or participating in them was any less dangerous. Montgomery comments on such popularity and danger when he relates how:

Philip Lamb, a US priest...[was] given the extraordinary advice not to attend the Mass because the people were too restive and one could never tell what might happen [so] he wandered into San Salvador's central market where he found that almost every stall had a radio- and every radio was turned to YSAX (78).

Despite the fact that the YSAX transmitter was bombed ten times in three years, radio participants and followers continued to listen diligently to their beloved programs since they were some of the few sources that could be relied on to hear truth, inspiration, and condolences.

As principal supporters of the popular music movement, and the liberation movement in general, organizations such as the FMLN and the Church were looked to as information suppliers.

Since meetings were too dangerous an option for communication, and instructional tools such as pamphlets were too easily confiscated, liberation groups turned to music and musicians as an effective means of communication. Considering how the majority of the Salvadoran population was illiterate, music was a much more effective means to reach the masses. Salvadorans who decided to partake in the liberation activity could listen to the information being conveyed to them through music. Almeida and Urbizagástegui elaborate on this by offering the example that "the lyrical content of songs may emphasize the importance of labor strikes or building neighborhood barricades" illustrating the point that "lyrics serve more than framing purposes-they reflect concrete strategic and political needs" (17).

Relaying strategic information is the aspect of musical composition that few dictatorial rulers anticipated. It was an ingenuous communication method utilized by the Salvadoran liberation movement, virtually impossible to ban. Leaders would not, and did not, expect propaganda to take shape through such a medium, and by the time they realized the damage that musical communication was having on the psyche of the Salvadoran masses music had become too large of an expressive genre to fully censor. The military could bomb radio stations like YSAX and kill those involved such as Romero, but the fact was that music was being created and vastly distributed. It was impossible to stop every anti-government, pro-reform song and performance occurring at any given time in the entire country.

Salvadorans continued to hear the music and feel the impact of the lyrics and the songs despite what the government, the oligarchy, and the death squads wanted. People like to listen to songs, especially ones that were recognizable, upbeat, or poignant. Musicians involved in the liberation efforts knew that the more protest songs were composed in popular styles, the more accepted they would be, thus making their distribution immense, particularly in rural areas where contact was more difficult than urban regions. Without such a widespread distribution, larger numbers of Salvadorans would not have heard the message and responded to the repeated calls to action. This meant that significant numbers of oppressed people were uniting and surrounding themselves with like-minded individuals all fighting and dying for their freedom, a sentiment that became contagious in the right environment, which Salvadoran society was at the time. Almeida and Urbizagástegui agree about music's power

when they observed how “protest music played a critical role in arousing emotions and lifting morale for individual participation in the liberation movement” (16). The people’s demand for recognition and reform simply became too large to ignore during the 1980s, ultimately forcing the government to at least compromise by the beginning of 1990.

Curiously, though Salvadoran protest musicians would use well-known musical styles to draw an audience, popular protest music was still a new genre of music in Latin America. In her article *Canto porque es necesario cantar: The New Song Movement in Chile, 1973-1983*, Nancy Morris explains that this “fusion of traditional musical forms with socially relevant lyrics... voice[d] current reality and social problems in a meaningful style” (117) and was known as *Nueva Canción*, or New Song, in the Latin American world⁵. New Song compositions address social and political problems, often times using the strong lyrical imagery evident in the examples presented in this essay (Morris 117).

Chile was one of the first nations to experience the New Song movement and is a nation that shares a similar social and political history during the 1970s and 1980s with that of El Salvador. For this reason, the musical developments in each nation may be mentioned together since they are both significantly influenced by each nation’s respective period of conflict, and emerged to express social defiance against repressive governmental practices through music. A Chilean man quoted by Morris best relates why New Song (protest song) became so popular and significant in Chilean society. His thoughts are applicable to Salvadoran society as well:

Perhaps popular song is the art that best defines a community. But lately in our country we are experiencing a reality that is not ours...Our purpose here today is to search for an expression that describes our reality...Let our fundamental concern be that our own art be deeply rooted in the Chilean spirit so that when we sing- be it badly or well- we express genuine happiness and pain, happiness and pain that are our own (120).

The songs presented below are of the New Song genre, blending political and social commentary with popular and traditional Latin American styles⁶.

II. Cutumay Camones

Salvadoran protest music produced and distributed during the 1980s correlated to a musical timeline where the lyrics of a large majority of songs mirrored the situations and events occurring during the time when they were recorded. Almeida and Urbizagástegui offer a fascinating depiction of this by electing four specific moments during the 1980s to compare how the lyrics of popular music groups parallel the political and social situations. These time periods of analysis are 1981-1982, 1983-1984, 1985-1987, and 1988-1989, the first two of which will be discussed in this paper. They rely on the compositions of one of the most recognized protest music groups, *Cutumay Camones*, an outspoken group of liberation-minded activists who chose this *Nahuatl* name to commemorate one of the first uprisings of the FMLN in 1981 in which all but four participants were killed by the army (18-19). One of the founding members of the group has been quoted, in reference to their formation, as saying that

Cutumay was formed as another structural unit within the political party. It had an international solidarity strategy as one fundamental element. At the domestic level, the role of the group was to lift moral and motivate party militants. (Fuentes-Salinas)

Having international solidarity as one of its founding strategies implies that the members of Cutumay Camones knew that music could be a medium to relate the reality of their struggles to the international community, thus drawing attention to the massively widespread human rights abuses that the Salvadoran people were suffering. By drawing attention to such crimes, they were spotlighting the wrongdoings and corrupt practices of their government and military leaders, a situation that outside powers would presumably not tolerate⁷. Domestically, they openly acknowledge that their intent was to lift morale and to motivate the masses, indicating that the Cutumay musicians recognized the important social power that they could wield in terms of using their lyrics and songs to affect social psychology towards pro-liberation.

Vamos ganando la paz (We Are Winning the Peace), recorded in 1982, is the first of the albums of the previously mentioned musical social timeline of events that divided the 1980s into four periods. During the two years when the album was being produced, El Salvador was plagued with massive military repression⁸, constant insurgencies, and an unprecedented increase in FMLN leftist guerrilla participation (Almeida and Urbizagástegui 35). Surrounded by such events, Cutumay gave their first album a title to illustrate how the FMLN, and other organizations, were seeking an end to the blood bath while validating their own aggressive counterattacks. Many of the lyrics on this album, according to Almeida and Urbizagástegui, “describe the effort to create democratic

space and dialogue...and the response to it in the form of prison, torture, massacre, and the formation of death squads to eliminate popular resistance" (22). An example of these lyrics can be heard, or in this case read, in the song *Cuando* (When)

When the history of the homeland
is made with the blood of thousands
of massacred brothers and sisters...
The fist of all of the people in arms
is the only alternative
for justice and freedom.

(Almeida and Urbizagástegui 22)

Cuando la historia de la patria
hecha con sangre de miles
de hermanos masacrados...
El puño de todo un pueblo en armas
es la única alternativa
de justicia y libertad.

Between 1983-1984, Cutumay recorded their second album, *Por eso luchamos* (This is Why We Fight). The focus of this work was to recount the history of the Salvadoran struggle, detailing events that paved the way for such a masochistic civil war. At the time, the FMLN guerrilla groups managed to take control of much of the rural areas of the nation, making the guerrilla fighters a huge presence within the nation. Peace talks had broken down, augmenting the frustration and disappointment that made many insurgents feel rationalized to take the situation into their own hands, only adding to the already heavy sense of chaos. This album took the time to pay respects to the countless martyrs sacrificed for their liberation ideologies while devoting a large portion of the album to describing the effects that the repressive practices of the government on everyday life (Almeida and Urbizagástegui 23-24). An example from this album is as follows:

We do not forget
the children who die every day
throughout the length
and breadth of our land
We do not forget
the suffering in the burned-out slums
of working-class families
in search of their daily bread
We do not forget
the sadness of our beloved people,
illiterate and barefoot,
thirsty for liberty.

(Almeida and Urbizagástegui 24)

No olvidamos
a los niños que mueren a diario
a lo largo
y ancho del país
No olvidamos
la aflicción por el sustento diario
de las familias obreras
en las zonas marginales
No olvidamos
la tristeza de nuestro pueblo, tan amado
analfabeto, y desclazo
Sediento de libertad.

An interesting observation about the lyrics above is the constant usage of "We," reinforcing the unification of the masses against the government and the military. Essentially, these lyrics assert that "we," the battered Salvadoran citizens, would not accept the reality in which they lived any longer, nor would they ignore all of the death and suffering that had spiraled irrationally out of control. A sense of desperateness is felt with both of the lyrical examples from the two albums. The first album is full of songs expressing how liberation organizations felt that armed aggressive resistance was their only option left to have a chance at achieving the improvements and reforms they so desperately wanted. The second album takes a different approach, though not any less heartfelt, by lyrically relating the history of the struggle and remembering the hundreds of thousands of dead Salvadorans, the majority of whom were viewed as martyrs.

III. Los Guaraguao

Two examples from the first two Cutumay Camones albums illustrate perfectly how popular protest lyrics directly mirrored the political and social environment during 1981-1982 and 1983-1984⁹. Other popular music groups were equally as effective in employing the same lyrical and musical techniques to imitate the psyche of the Salvadoran listeners. Though originally from Venezuela, *Los Guaraguao* was another group that had a particular connection with the Salvadoran people during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Instead of being outspoken political activists like Cutumay Camones, Los Guaraguao composed songs that were directed towards describing realities of everyday life. Probably the most well known song shares the title of their first album, *Las Casas de Cartón*, or The Cardboard Houses.

Que triste se oye la lluvia
en los techos de cartón
Que triste vive mi gente
en las casas de cartón

How sad the rain sounds
on top of the cardboard roofs
How sad my people live
in the cardboard houses

Viene bajando el obrero
casi arrastrando sus pasos
por el peso de sufrir
Mira que mucho ha sufrido
Mira que pesa el sufrir

The laborer is descending
almost dragging his steps
under the weight of his suffering
Look how much he has suffered
Look how much the suffering weighs

It was the experience of the author of this essay while spending time in El Salvador that this song in particular is one that many Salvadorans know by memory and is one that is very indicative of their past and, some will argue, present situation. When driving through cities such as San Salvador or Chalatenango, and equally as much in the rural areas where communities such as Ignacio Ellacuría are located, houses made of cardboard or tin are overwhelming predominant. Well-constructed houses of concrete are generally only inhabited by the wealthy, a distinction that is magnified by their location high up in the mountains at great distances away from the streets and the poverty. This is a reflection of the immense economic dearth in which the Salvadorans lived, as well as the huge unequal distribution of wealth at the hands of the oligarchy. Perhaps *Las Casas de Cartón* strikes a resonant chord among Salvadorans even today because it describes a circumstance that still exists, not just one that was rampant during the civil war years.

One of the most noticeable traits is the melody. It is by no means morose, but rather a sweet and simple tune to which a strong message is set to. According to José Fuentes-Salinas, in his article *Los Guaraguao: 'Ojalá nuestro canto ya no tuviera vigencia,'* he notes an explanation given to him by one of the members of the group in regards to their musical style. The musician explains that their melodies are kept simple because what interests them are their realistic, poetic lyrics above anything else (Fuentes-Salinas, 2001). As the member clarifies, "the most important thing for us is to relate [is] what is happening in society" (Fuentes-Salinas, 2001). This approach illustrates how popular music groups would entice people to listen to their songs by composing melodies that were easy and fun to listen to. In this manner, people would effectively hear, and remember the lyrics because they were recognizable and easy to commit to memory.

Numerous other popular music groups could be thoroughly discussed and analyzed for their involvement with the liberation movement in El Salvador. Cutumay Camones and Los Guaraguao were chosen because of their vast notoriety and popularity throughout the entire country for composing such politically and socially arousing songs. The new genre of music composed and performed by such groups became known as New Song in the Latin American world and categorizes popular protest music. After analyzing various lyrics and listening to numerous recordings, it is undeniable that the musical content directly communicates what was happening in Salvadoran society. Popular rhythms served as the backdrop to controversial protest lyrics in order to insert the music into the Salvadoran mainstream, becoming a method of communication among resistance movements to the government and military. Music as communication can mean a variety of different things in this context. Serving as an emotional outlet was one such context that was essential to creating the sense of community inspired by the popular liberation music genre, as feelings of desperation, fear, sadness, or anger could be musically related to other citizens who were choking under the same sentiments; the songs enforced the notion that they were not alone in their struggles.

A second communicative technique was that of composing songs infused with historical information to both explain how the tensions mounted to such a degree as they did and to pay homage to the many Salvadorans who disappeared or were murdered. The purpose of both was to permeate the truth into the minds of the working class -- the laborers, the clergy, and the poor -- all of whom were being inhumanely brutalized. Truth would inspire anger, which in turn would inspire action, precisely the response that liberation organizations encouraged through the distribution of popular protest music.

Thirdly, music communicated education. Lyrics related tactical and strategic information to other organizations, serving as a type of underground wartime contact point. Educational songs enlightened the Salvadoran public, the majority of whom were illiterate, to the realities of the pre-war and war-time situations that were spread throughout the entire country, and how they did not, and should not, remain dormant to becoming involved. Music in this way served as an effective form of propaganda as it could not be confiscated or banned in the same way that pamphlets or newspapers could.

It could be suggested that the creation and distribution of popular protest music inspired the imaginations of the Salvadoran public towards the envisioning the possibility for collective improvement and socio-political conflict resolution. The book, *Cultural Expression and Grassroots Development: Cases from Latin America & the Caribbean*, edited by Charles David Kleymeyer (1994) summarizes this conjecture:

Music can counteract pessimism and the effects of cultural rootlessness and alienation, reinforcing a sense of belonging and a positive self-image, both prerequisites for successful social change...A strong sense of shared identity can energize people and inspire them to take collective action to improve their lives. When individuals see themselves as proud members of a culture, they are more likely to organize and work for change.

This type of focused energy is what the Salvadoran people lacked until passionate citizens (i.e., guerrilla leaders/fighters), fanatical for liberation and change, organized themselves and in turn systematized the basis for revolutionary energy to spread. Musicians who shared these political stances provided an additional layer of audacious stimulation that empowered the people to embrace their opinions, commiserate with neighbors, and mourn their emotions.

IV. La música de protesta de la comunidad

Just as Cutumay Camones and Los Guaraguao used popular protest music to relay their political and social commentaries on a national, mass movement level, musicians from small rural communities used music to commemorate specific events most relevant to them and their immediate surroundings. By examining the music produced and distributed on such a small *cotidiano* level, it is apparent that "music is more than just form and redundancy: it is sensitive to its context" (Schechter 1), in this case the context being shared community experience and memory. In other words, the protest music of individual Salvadoran communities "is part and parcel of the place and event from which it springs; it echoes with the sentiment of the people who worked to make it, to compose it, to perform it" (Seeger 1).

Music, society, and culture are undeniably interconnected, a notion that cultural studies scholars prove again and again by looking at the way music fits into culture and social life (Seeger xiii). As Anthony Seeger, author of *Why Suyá Sing*, explains, "rather than studying music *in* culture, an [ethnomusicologist] studies social life as performance" (xiii) realizing that musical performance and composition are "intention as well as realization; it is emotion and value as well as structure and form" (xiv). The study of Latin American music is therefore essential, particularly that which comes out of both smaller communities like Ignacio Ellacuría and the larger populace as a whole because it is within music and its performance where the Latin American, and in this case Salvadoran, story is told and character may be discovered.

To expound on this view, Schechter and other Latin American scholars have determined four themes that are unique to Latin American New Song music: spiritual or ancestral communication, nostalgic or affectionate sentiments, ballads to heroes or leaders, and commentary of current events or outcries against injustices, the last two of which are perhaps the most important when considering Salvadoran popular protest music (Schechter 2). One or more of these themes are present in the songs discussed previously, and will again be evident in the song presented below, composed in and about Ignacio Ellacuría.

According to Schechter, nostalgia within Latin American (and therefore Salvadoran) music is the expression of memories, a remembrance of past times, a love of a location, and "praise for the local" (2). This theme is perhaps best illustrated in songs that detail a migration experience, an event that often provokes sentiments and thoughts of home and a desire for familiarity. This is particularly true when the migration is a fear-induced flee, as was the case when Salvadorans like members of Ignacio Ellacuría sought refuge in Honduras to escape the violent and irrational actions of the military and death squads. Spiritual or ancestral communication refers to a connection with the divine or supernatural through musical means (Schechter 21-26). Ballads to leaders and heroes, the third theme, are particularly important in Salvadoran music. While no examples of this theme are available from Ignacio Ellacuría, one only needs to listen to songs that were popular on a national scale to find countless songs that have been written about innocent martyrs such as Oscar Romero, the murdered Maryknoll nuns, and incalculable other victims.

The strongest and most prevalent Latin American music theme in Salvadoran protest music involves the commentary concerning current events and outcries against injustices. These four Latin American music themes may be considered along with Almedia and Urbizagástegui's (1999) three tasks that were previously examined (identify a problem, propose a solution, and assemble), two of which explain the compositional techniques employed by musicians in order to ensure maximum effectiveness and circulation and to achieve success as a revolution movement. Recalling these tasks, one remembers that they entail identifying an aspect of life as problematic, proposing a plan to alter the recognized problem, and then rallying action to carry out the alterations.

Such a trend was not just apparent in nationally recognized New Song music but also within songs that were familiar to a public on a much smaller scale, i.e. among members of Ignacio Ellacuría. The details discussed below

recount an air raid bombing that targeted the Ignacio community in 1990. It demonstrates how at least one, if not all three, of the tasks were used in Salvadoran music also on a small scale to effectively influence the Salvadoran people of individual communities. It is descriptive of one specific event that occurred when the tensions were at their worst and the violence at its most extreme, and highlight how songs that speak about specific events convey a more intimate insight than those songs that describe the generalities of the civil war.

V. Music to Commemorate Attack on Community, 1990

The opportunity to both actively participate in as well as observe a culture is a unique situation that one encounters while doing fieldwork¹⁰. The establishment of a healthy and friendly atmosphere where locals are willing to share stories, explanations, and music is vital to being successful in any attempt to immerse oneself into a different culture. The importance of this relationship was one that the author greatly considered while in Ignacio Ellacuría and is what drove enthusiastic participation in any and all musical sessions with members of the community. I was not a tourist visiting their home who would be satisfied with merely a superficial scraping of the surface into their lives and histories, but rather was in search of stories, facts, and music that could not be found in books or on CDs. To make this obvious, opportunities to sing with them, play guitar with them, and participate in any way without becoming an overly imposing presence were seized. As hoped, a relationship soon developed that could have only come from performing music and sharing a common language.

Margarita, a woman who was enthusiastic about the project, recounted the massacre that occurred in Ignacio Ellacuría on February 11, 1990. She described a song called *Canción de la masacre en la comunidad* (Song of The Massacre in the Community) that offers a portrayal of the day's events while also illustrating how popular protest music sometimes acted more as musical stories. Below is a portion of the song as written by Margarita:

El día 11 de febrero
a la seis de la mañana
fue la masacre
donde vinieron varios aviones
y bombardearon la pequeña casita
donde se refugiaban
varias familias.
Minutos después se avisó
que habían matado
a cinco personas
entre ellos cuatro niños
y un adulto.
En ese momento
salió toda la comunidad
a observar aquella terrible masacre.
La comunidad enojada
les gritaba a los soldados
Y ellos decían que
habían matado a gallinas.

On the 11th of February
at six in the morning
was the massacre
where many planes came
and dropped bombs on the tiny house
where various families
were hiding.
Minutes later they notified
that they had killed
five people
among them four children
and one adult.
In that moment
the entire community came out
to see the terrible massacre.
The angry community
screamed at the soldiers,
And they said that they
had only killed some chickens.

Though simple, the lyrics communicate a great deal about the events of that morning. Complexity is not necessary when the intent is to create a song that documents an experience, because it is through the repeated performance of this and other similar simple songs that community members will never forget the incident. Of particular significance are the final four lines where it is described how the soldiers responded to the community members by blatantly lying. To say that they had only killed some chickens after consciously dropping a bomb onto a house and firing bullets as members sought cover must have ignited an infuriating feeling among members who were there, as such a lie belittles the magnitude of the soldier's actions and consequential loss of five lives, four of whom were children. It is interesting to note that the song does not seem to have rhythm in pronunciation or form, but rather is composed in a conversational manner. Adding to the clear-cut presentation is a lack of a refrain and absence of word repetition in the lyrics. Both stylistic features of this song make the lyrics less poetic, instead offering a straightforward, more sobering narration of the event.

Music's role in Ignacio Ellacuría is one that I had the opportunity to experience first hand each time I stayed with the community. One evening in particular during my first stay, I observed a large gathering of community members singing popular songs to guitar accompaniment provided by Tonito, the community's resident music teacher. The gathering was spontaneous as was the initial selection of songs the group chose to sing, making the inclusion of *Casas de Cartón* that much more striking as an unprompted inclusion. While community members knew of my

motivations to be in the community in a broad sense, only five people knew the specifics of what I was hoping to observe in order to preserve an organic element to the experience. For this reason, it would have been too calculated of a decision on behalf of the gathering and local musicians to offer a selection of purely political songs from the 1980s, leading me to conclude that popular protest songs, and the narratives and histories they preserve, are still commonly performed.

Also interesting to note was an intergenerational component to the performance. Teenagers who were not even alive during the conflict sang the same songs with the same fervor, precision, and reverence as older community members who had indeed lived through the very events and histories they were singing about. Wanting to gauge the authenticity behind the younger community members' knowledge of the songs (i.e., exploring whether it was rote memorization or possessing genuine background knowledge), I spoke with individuals and small groups of teenagers about the events that had inspired the musical arrangements. In these conversations it was evident that the histories of the town, the country, the individuals who were lost, etc. had been recounted in detail to each of them throughout their lives. In this way, the continued performance of popular protest songs ensured the survival of a national and local history while cultivating a deep sense of identity and ownership in a new generation of (younger) individuals.

Instruments in the community were sparse, consisting of not much more than Tonito's out-of-tune guitar. Still, the performer and listeners' enthusiasm for the music more than made up for a lack of diverse instrumentation. I observed that each song was sung with a great deal of ardor, demanding that their songs be respected through listening with reverence. Sometimes those present would become excited while singing, often times shouting the words or agreeing to what was being sung in a manner that reminded me of witnessing a spiritual revival. Other times, the crowd would become somber as sad tunes crooned by Tonito and the other singers evoked the painful memories of past decades. I examined the songbook from which Tonito had been playing and singing from. Skimming through the pages, it was striking how every single song was one that described or related to the Salvadoran struggle during the 1980s and 1990s, and even more striking that almost every song in the book was recognized, if not memorized, by the large majority of the community members present at the gathering.

The song above illustrates how learning about specific events that occurred during the civil war, particularly 1980s and 1990s, gives a more intimate understanding to connect the listener to the Salvadoran war experience in a more personal way. Listening to protest music that was popular on a national level offers insight, but to develop a relationship with an actual community and its members by reading their testaments makes such songs that much more affecting. This intimacy would be lost if personal experiences were not related to outsiders, even outsiders who may be fellow countrymen.

VII. Conclusions

When I began to research information and find materials for this essay, I discovered that there are few publications that present information concerning the Salvadoran people as people, instead presenting facts and charts of political, economic, and survival statistics. While this information is useful, it neglects to consider the human side behind the figures. In an attempt to fill this void, I conducted research from an entirely qualitative stance. As qualitative data collection is primarily an exploratory pursuit, I relied heavily on three methods in particular: observation, focus groups, and individual interviews. Each interview and performance (group and individual) was digitally recorded with participants' permission. On one occasion while visiting the UCA campus, I was able to purchase a number of relevant texts such as *Mártires de la UCA, 16 de Noviembre de 1989* by Salvador Carranza and *Veinte Años de Historia en El Salvador 1969-1989* by Ignacio Ellacuría (the priest). While in Ignacio Ellacuría (the community), Tonito and other individuals interviewed who shared songs assisted in the documentation and transcription of relevant texts when written arrangements were unavailable. This was particularly important with many of the songs sung exclusively from memory, such as *Canción de la masacre en la comunidad*, shared by town member Margarita in section V of this essay. Personal stories, background histories, and national or local music fill in the gaps that often times are not discussed, but are necessary to assess when looking at the history of a people.

Skeptics such as Denisoff and Levine, mentioned in the introduction, who claim that there is not substantial evidence to support the argument that music, particularly politically-charged music, can draw an emotional and social response from a society, are not correct. Rather, the qualitative data collected as part of this venture emphasizes how it is indeed possible to study music while incorporating a socio-political perspective, and how such an angle of consideration is able to make an important contribution to the broader understanding of the event. In El Salvador, music accomplished what other forms of propaganda could not by affecting the listener in an almost entirely emotional manner¹¹. Melodies, chords, modes, etc. were chosen with the purpose to arouse a certain mood, which in turn directly affected the thought process, especially when supported by the 'mob mentality' that

exists when individuals organize into powerful groups. Music distributed during the 1980s through the 1990s provided a national awareness of news and shared grievances that facilitated enough mass organization to finally succeed in becoming a reputable threat against the government and the military.

Cutumay Camones, Los Guaraguao, Tonito, and numerous other protest groups and musicians should be recognized for their contributions towards uniting a movement and giving it strength to persist. Uniting the masses towards improving their lives was not easy in El Salvador considering how the conflict that eventually exploded into the civil war was one that had been brewing since the country's inception. The country experienced governmental corruption and power manipulation essentially from the moment it became an independent nation. Powerful groups dominated the economic scene, which in turn gave them political power and an immense amount of influence regarding decisions such as how wealth was distributed within the nation. Early on, the decision was made by leaders to seclude themselves, the wealthy minority, from the rest of the overwhelmingly poor majority, creating a social divide that would never be narrowed. Through the twentieth century, tensions mounted and activists began to organize small groups of like-minded individuals into liberation organizations like the FMLN who felt the desperate urgency to instigate social reformations to improve their living situations. Fearing an uprising, the government and the military used violent force to suppress any attempt of the people towards liberating themselves by using mutiny, rebellion, or defiance. Murder, assassinations, kidnappings, and death squads became the norm in Salvadoran daily life, creating an unbearable atmosphere, but one that was also conducive to expressing poignant emotions through creative outlets such as music.

Fusing strongly opinionated and truthful lyrics on top of traditional and popular rhythms created a new genre of music in the Latin American world known as *New Song*, a politically and socially-charged musical style. New song compositions were those that became powerful communication methods and inspirational tools in the people's fight against the government and the military. Protest musicians and groups used New Song music as propaganda in order to outsmart censorship attempts, effectively manipulating lyrics to become an unforeseen weapon to their advantage. Tactical information, inspiration, condolences, and education could all be communicated to a huge audience through music, reaching further than any other form of propaganda. This was due to the fact that music could not be confiscated like newspapers and pamphlets, and songs could not be silenced like speeches or rallies. Music's spontaneity made it impossible for the military and government to forbid because they could not stop every performance at any given time in the entire nation, making it so the messages that encouraged peasant uprising and strength were heard despite the government's censorship attempts.

The majority of popular protest Salvadoran music exemplifies how the musicians would use songs to identify a problem, propose a solution, and then rally support in order to enact change- three tasks that are considered vital for a revolution movement to have success. Cutumay Camones and Los Guaraguao are only two out of the hundreds of examples of musical groups whose songs demonstrate these three tasks while mirroring what was happening politically and socially within El Salvador during the most brutal and tense years of the conflict, serving as a musical timeline of events.

It is within popular protest music that outsiders find an authentic and heartfelt narration of the Salvadoran civil war and the Salvadoran people. Analysis of music that was popular on a national level is important to gain such a perspective, but so is consideration of music that was created in small communities such as Ignacio Ellacuría as it is through these compositions that wartime situations become personal. Music played a unique role in the Salvadoran struggle for liberation and reformation by providing a means for defiance that would ultimately empower the Salvadoran people to achieve a freedom and equality that had never before existed. In terms of Salvadoran history, the people now live in an environment that is not necessarily peaceful, and by no means perfect, but improved since the end of the civil war. The musical front created by the popular protest musicians who tirelessly and bravely distributed their compositions to the illiterate and poor masses perhaps contributed to this outcome by providing a place of expression and commiseration.

Notes

1 It is difficult to pinpoint an exact starting date of the Salvadoran civil war, as the conflict was one that had been unfolding since the country gained independence. For the purpose of this essay, the years encompassing the civil war will be roughly 1965-1990.

2 According to statistics 75,000 Salvadorans died between 1979 and 1990, as well as an unknown number of victims who disappeared and kidnapped by militant terrorist groups known as death squads. Around 550,000 forced into homelessness while hundreds of thousands more fled into neighboring countries, such as Honduras.

3 Ignacio Ellacuría is named after a Jesuit priest of the same name who taught philosophy and theology at the *Universidad Centroamericana de José Simeón Cañas* (UCA) in San Salvador. His work placed a particular focus on the "Liberation Philosophy", the notion that by liberating the masses from oppression a new state of fullness may be reached by humanity. He was assassinated at UCA on November 16, 1989 along with five few Jesuit priests and professors.

4 El Salvador is only 8,124 square miles, an area only a little bit smaller than Massachusetts.

5 "Although the terms Canto Nuevo and Nueva Canción are used interchangeably in most of Latin America to describe the movement and both translate to English as "New Song," in Chile, *Nueva Canción* specifically means music made before 1973, while *Canto Nuevo* refers to the movement since the coup d'état." (Morris 118).

6 For a more in-depth description and history of the New Song movement, refer to Nancy Morris' article *Canto porque es necesario cantar: The New Song Movement in Chile, 1973-1983* (1986).

7 This observation is supported by examining the role of the Carter administration and the Reagan administration, two examples of heavy US involvement in demanding an improvement of the Salvadoran situation. Arguing whether or not the US involvement was beneficial to helping the people, or if it ultimately caused more suffering, is not the focus of this essay. What is important to note is that as a result of the protests fueled by popular protest music the US did in fact take notice of the situation, which led to their direct involvement with ultimately developing a resolution

8 "Between 1980-1982, the Salvadoran elite and its closely linked military and paramilitary bodies killed an estimated 500-1,000 persons a month -- nearly 1 percent of the population." (Almeida and Urbizagástegui 22).

9 For lyrical examples and in-depth explanations of the other two albums, Almeida and Urbizagástegui's article, "Cutumay Camones: Popular Music in El Salvador's National Liberation Movement" found in *Latin American Perspectives* (1999) should be referred to. The third album, recorded in 1987, illustrates the time between 1985-1987 and is titled *Patria chiquita mia* (My Sweet Little Homeland) while the fourth album, *Llegó la hora* (The Time Has Arrived), was recorded in 1988.

10 I conducted fieldwork research in the city of San Salvador, the town of Chalatenango, and extensively in the *pueblo* Ignacio Ellacuría in March of 2006 for two weeks. While self-funded, this trip was executed in conjunction with an annual service trip sponsored by Notre Dame Preparatory School (Baltimore, MD), a trip that I participated with in April of 2003. I requested to join the carefully selected eight-person group as a supervisory member of the delegation in order to gain access to a Catholic convent in San Salvador, the library, archives, and campus at UCA, and the governing leaders, local school, town archives, town meetings/gatherings, and community members of Ignacio Ellacuría.

11 Other forms of propaganda, meaning pamphlets, newspapers, banners, speeches and other such traditional techniques used when trying to distribute revolution or anti-government/organization information. Perhaps the fact that music was never previously used as propaganda by Salvadorans is the reason that skepticism exists in considering music to be effective. Nevertheless, the manner in which Salvadorans utilized music to spread information to the masses illustrates how music can be more successful in doing so than any other propaganda type.

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