



# Gangster in guerilla face

A transnational mirror of production between the USA and El Salvador

Elana Zilberg

*University of California San Diego, USA*

## Abstract

*Doble cara* (double/two-faced) is a key trope in Salvadoran political folklore. It is a folk theory of mimesis, which attempts to ‘master the absent presence of the other’ through a discourse of conspiracy. The term has a history in the US-funded Salvadoran civil war. In this article, I consider how *doble cara* has come to be deployed around a new and pivotal social subject – Salvadoran immigrant gang youth deported from the USA – and how these deported youth emerge as a packed and displaced sign for the trauma of post-civil war violence, the failed promise of peace, and ongoing entanglements between the USA and El Salvador. The article is written in conversation with Begoña Aretxaga, who inspired many of the questions explored here.

## Key Words

democracy • dialectical image • gang and state violence • globalization • mimesis • nationalism • representation politics of memory • terrorism • zero tolerance policies

There are [ghosts] . . . And one must reckon with them. (Derrida, 1994: xx)

Suddenly, a series of pieces which did not have shape before come together in a single picture; one which one both instantly understands and does not comprehend at all . . . There is no answer to these questions, only the fragmented gaze of the camera . . . (Aretxaga, 2005: 128–31)

I want to begin this article with an image that joins two disparate figures of resistance: the transnational street youth gang, La Mara Salvatrucha (MS), and the leftist guerilla group turned political opposition party, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation front (FMLN). The image is drawn from a photograph taken at a political rally held in a small town in eastern El Salvador in 1996. In the photograph, a member of the FMLN

*juventud* (youth) is painting a red star, the insignia of the FMLN, on the cheek of Pajaro, a deported Salvadoran immigrant and MS gang member from Los Angeles. This photograph is foregrounded by the slogan on the back of the *Frente* (Front) youth's T-shirt: *Juntos Somos El Cambio* (Together We Are The Change).

Pajaro, the gang member with the FMLN star on his face, was at the time a 24-year-old Salvadoran (by his own designation). Born in El Salvador, he had lived the better part of his young life, 19 years, in *Los* (as he calls Los Angeles). He returned to his hometown Santa Elena after serving a prison term at the California State Penitentiary for his 'involvement' in an armed robbery. He claims he left voluntarily, but he is in fact a deportee – who consented to sign a 'voluntary' departure form – since US law now mandates the deportation of undocumented (and documented) immigrants at the end of their prison terms. From the time he was 10 years old, Pajaro was involved with MS – a gang founded in Los Angeles primarily by Central American immigrant youth, but which has since taken root in El Salvador amongst marginalized Salvadoran youth, many of whom have never set foot in the USA.

I call this dialectical image<sup>1</sup> of gang members in leftist political drag *La Mara Salvatrucha in FMLN face*. But as Begoña Aretxaga once quizzed me, 'Shouldn't it be the other way around? Isn't it the FMLN in the face of the gang – the legacy, the history of it?' This problem of obscurity, the indefiniteness of reference, surfaced as the underlying issue in the research that I conducted in El Salvador after Aretxaga's untimely death. What follows then is my effort to bring that research into conversation with Begoña Aretxaga's work and the legacy she left us. The questions haunting this text, therefore, are hers: What is being copied? Who is mirroring whom? Who is in whose face?

## THE DIALECTICAL IMAGE

What then are we to make of this dialectical image of the gang (MS or 18th Street) with the guerilla (FMLN) and the transference of the red star, the stain of the FMLN, onto Pajaro's cheek, whose body bears the stain of his gang's insignia in black ink? One is tempted at first to read there Benjamin's vision of the revolutionary power in the mimetic faculty prevalent in children's cognition. It is this capacity to make correspondences by means of spontaneous fantasy that allows children to construct make-believe or possible worlds. This capacity, he suggested, lives on in adult revolutionary consciousness (Benjamin, 1978: 333–6; Buck-Morss, 1993: 263–8). Is *La Mara Salvatrucha in FMLN face* then an image of an incipient solidarity borne of an impulse to find correspondences with, and so recognize themselves in, the revolutionary consciousness of the previous generation and their utopian project?

The photograph certainly appears to offer a vision of inclusiveness – '*juntos somos el cambio*' (*together we are the change*). But merely fusing these elements, MS and the FMLN, into a harmonious perspective would be to work against the principles of the dialectical image. Such a straightforward identification between these elements erases the gap between the sign and referent, fusing them into a deceptive totality. For Benjamin, the principle of construction of the dialectical image was that of montage. Montage interrupts the context into which it is inserted, thereby leaving the image's ideational elements in productive suspension, setting its semiotic content into question (Buck-Morss, 1993: 67–77).

What follows then is a montage of interlocking images and imaginaries which dwell in and beyond the frame of the photograph, and which strain and blur the focus of the camera. In El Salvador, this fragmented gaze has a name – *doble cara* (double/two-faced). *Doble cara* is a key trope in Salvadoran ‘political folklore’ (Aretxaga, 1998: 28). It is a folk theory of mimesis, which attempts to ‘master the absent presence of the other’ (1998: 2) through a discourse of conspiracy.<sup>2</sup> The term has a history in the most recent past of the civil war and its familiar plots of terrorism and counter-terrorism.<sup>3</sup> In the 1980s and during the US-funded Salvadoran civil war, *doble cara* was leveraged to accuse popular or grassroots organizations – many of today’s non-governmental organizations – of operating as fronts for the leftist guerilla forces, the FMLN. That was the most literal deployment of the term, but its structure of suspicion (*desconfianza*) extended to left discourses about the right. Within the logic of *doble cara*, things are never as they appear or as they are presented. The ‘real’ is always masked. In this article, I want to consider how *doble cara* has come to be deployed around a new and pivotal social subject – Salvadoran immigrant gang youth<sup>4</sup> deported from the USA – and how these deported youths emerge as a ‘packed and displaced sign’<sup>5</sup> for the trauma of post-civil war violence, the failed promise of peace, and ongoing entanglements between the USA and El Salvador from the Cold War to the War on Terror.

## A VIOLENT PEACE

Each week, up to three US Marshall airplanes fly into El Salvador’s national airport bearing planeloads of handcuffed deportees. Anywhere from 200 to 600 Salvadorans are forcefully repatriated in this manner each month – among them gang youth.<sup>6</sup> The siphoning off of immigrant gang youth through incarceration followed by deportation has come to serve as a key management strategy for the North. US zero-tolerance gang abatement strategies combined with changes in immigration law as a result of the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IRAIRA)<sup>7</sup> have resulted in the deportation to El Salvador of thousands of Salvadoran immigrant gang youth. They include legal permanent residents, many of whom have lived the better part of their lives in the USA,<sup>8</sup> and some of whom are deported for non-violent crimes.<sup>9</sup> The deportee walks into and contributes to a complex force field of state and gang violence and daunting social discrimination.

El Salvador is ‘a nervous political world’ (Aretxaga, 1998: 2). Despite post-civil war democratic, police and judicial reforms, El Salvador is troubled by the specter of old and new forms of violence (Bourgois, 2004; Cruz, 1997; Haydon, 2004; Moodie, 2002; Ramos, 2000; Zilberg, 2004, 2006). The deportation of gang youth<sup>10</sup> alongside the importation of US zero-tolerance policing strategies combines with the flourishing of organized crime, the incomplete disarmament of a highly militarized society, the re-emergence of extra-legal social cleansing practices of the 1980s, and the uneven progress of police reforms (Call, 2003; Call and Stanley, 2001; Costa, 1999; Stanley, 1996) and changes in the judicial system (Popkin, 2000). Salvadorans may have achieved peace, but it is a peace without security, a violent peace.

The ‘political’ violence of El Salvador’s authoritarian and revolutionary past has, so the local discourse goes, given way to ‘social’ violence. There is a strange nostalgia for the managed violence of the war, its predictability and political logic (Moodie, 2002). This now is ‘a war without sense’, ‘without barracks’, violence without a discernible logic

or form. The country is consumed with anxieties over this new form of violence, which 'escapes [former] rules of political transgression' (Aretxaga, 1998: 11). State and NGO sponsored efforts to identify the source, direction, and subject of violence distinguish the political from the social, and construct the latter as post-political.<sup>11</sup>

But contemporary El Salvador is, in fact, a veritable 'hall of mirrors' where 'the real of violence is subject to deeply contested interpretations' (Aretxaga, 1998: 27). The case of Rosa N., which erupted into and through the Salvadoran media in December 2002, is a case in point. The head of an unknown young woman between the ages of 15 and 17 was discovered in a black backpack in Parque Libertad, a park in the center of San Salvador. Within hours, a thigh was found at a bus terminal, and later that same week part of a human trunk was discovered floating in a river. All these parts belonged to the same unidentified corpse, whose forehead was tattooed with the number 18.

That case was just one in a series of macabre mutilations and decapitations of young women attributed to members of the 18th Street Gang, which like La Mara Salvatrucha has its origins in the Latino immigrant *barrios* of Los Angeles and has since, due in large part to US immigration policy, gone transnational. In response to the case of Rosa N., then-director of the National Civil Police (PNC) Mauricio Sandoval launched a major media campaign around these decapitations and mutilations, conducted mass arrests of gang members, and called for the passage of special anti-gang laws modeled on US legislation.

Most of the gang members originally accused of these beheadings were, it seems, picked up for 'elicit associations' – a vague and all-encompassing infraction based on public nuisance and vagrancy laws – and not for any direct evidential links to the crimes. These alleged ringleaders of the Rosa N. case were released after documentation was produced to corroborate their claims that they had been in PNC custody during the period in which the crime was said to have taken place. *El Viejo Lin*, the purported intellectual author of these crimes, however, remains in custody on other charges. Meanwhile, new cases of decapitations and mutilations continue to surface and more gang members are arrested by the police. The national newspaper *El Diario de Hoy* now refers to MS as *La Mara Satanica* (The Satanic Gang), and further suggests that 18 stands for 666, the sign of the devil.

### THE USUAL SUSPECTS

The media coverage of these monstrous events is infused not only with talk about satanic cults and the killings as sacrificial rituals to build group solidarity, but also with the re-emergence of death squads of the 1980s and of *La Sombra Negra* (the Black Shadow) of the 1990s, and of conspiracy theories. The PNC uncovers a store of grenades, and Chief Sandoval poses in front of the cache accusing *El Viejo Lin*, a member of the 18th Street Gang and deportee from Los Angeles, of plotting to assassinate him. Apart from his alleged status as the national leader of the 18th Street Gang in El Salvador, *El Viejo Lin* is now also said to have been an FMLN guerilla combatant during the civil war. *El Viejo Lin* in turn accuses Sandoval of using him as a scapegoat to gain popularity for his bid as presidential candidate for ARENA in the 2004 elections. And because of the coincidence of the decapitations with mayoral and national legislative electoral campaigns, conspiracy theories abound about the role of police and the right wing in the murders – 'intimidation tactics', as one former FMLN combatant put it: 'What they

want is a timid society'. 'It's a clandestine group pretending to be gang members', proclaimed Lonely, one of the gang members accused in the Rosa N. case, but later released.

Indeed, these accusations become fused with a resurgence of killings of political candidates and activists in the upcoming elections. The head of the FMLN, Shafik Handal, holds a press conference decrying what he sees as the return of the death squads. In the papers, there is a bizarre convergence between the counter-posed, purportedly unrelated opposites of social and political violence. Gang members, said to be political activists for the right or the left, are now picked up as suspects in these murders of political candidates and activists. The PNC attributes these crimes to 'personal vendettas' – which is to say social not political violence – and the election campaigns play on – but not without more bizarre convergences.

In San Salvador, MS youth join the march in the FMLN's campaign-closing ceremonies. A cameraman takes pictures of them, shouting that their presence is proof that there is no difference between gangsters and guerillas. The gang members tackle him, confiscate his film, and are subsequently charged with assault. In Soyapango, a cadre of 18th Street Gang members sporting ARENA T-shirts are sighted at the right-wing ruling party's campaign-closing ceremonies. An ARENA assemblyman accuses the FMLN of sending the gang members to discredit the political right.

After a gang member, El Crazy, escapes from prison with the help of a PNC officer, accusations fly that the police are working in collaboration with the gangs. Some of the police, it is rumored, are tattooed with symbols of the 18th Street Gang.

Reminiscent of the Salvadoran intelligence agency efforts to uncover the guerilla's clandestine operations during the civil war, the PNC now release maps of the supposed command and cell structure of the gangs. These maps together with their *placas* or *noms de guerre* – Zorro, Crazy, Lonely, Baby, Skyny, Slayer, Pato, Vampi and Drimer – alongside their 'Christian' names are printed in national newspapers in a public outing of El Salvador's most wanted. What kind of unveiling is this? In a country where newspapers once published death threats against the political opposition, will such intelligence incite further violence, be it gang or vigilante?

In the foregoing dizzying deployment of *double cara*, representations of gang violence are constantly disrupted by the return of the repressed – political violence in forms that are familiar and yet strange. The left and the gangs suspect the government and police of organizing the killings (be they mutilations of women or murders of political candidates) to look like gang killings. Yet both mutilations and murders also look like something else. They are strangely reminiscent of another production of violence – the elimination of opposition through macabre extra-judicial style killings that took place during the war years. Are the death squads copying a fantasy of gang rape? Could it be that the gangs are acting out a fantasy by copying the death squad-style killings of the civil war period?<sup>12</sup>

This disorganized mimesis<sup>13</sup> generates surplus meaning that eludes representation and demands that we rethink the connection between representation and what is represented. The cultural argument unleashed by the case of Rosa N. is a perfect example of what Aretxaga explored as a 'mirroring paranoid dynamic', where the accusations do not face in one direction. Rather, both state and non-state actors are similarly caught up in a recurrent dynamic of suspicion and fantasy (Aretxaga, 2003: 399–402), which

flourishes by means of rumor woven finely into webs of magical realism (Taussig, 1987: 8). Moreover, while gang violence is presented as a new post-civil war (and therefore post-political) phenomenon, the stories surrounding it are haunted by cultural formations of meaning and modes of feeling attached to that war. Media coverage of, investigations into, and rumors surrounding the violence are all ‘animated by a substrate of fantasy scenes that betray complicated kinds of intimacies’ (Aretxaga, 2003: 402) between the new (gangs) and the usual suspects (guerillas, political parties, death squads, soldiers and police).

### THE PRODUCTION OF A CULPRIT

Reality, as Begoña Aretxaga (drawing on Lacan) reminded us, is a ‘play of surfaces’, and ‘the really real is always somewhere else, always eluding us’ (Aretxaga, 1998: 33). Aretxaga urged us not to settle for representations of reality but rather to look for its emergence in ‘the disturbance of representation, [and in] the eruption of what is repressed by representation’ (1998: 27). *El Viejo Lin*, the ‘poster boy’ for Sandoval’s campaign against gangs, offered me his take on what he invoked as ‘reality’ and his version of what had been repressed by his representation as most savage Other.

Lin begins his testimony, offered to me as ‘the truth and nothing but the truth’, by situating himself in history – a short and fantastic<sup>14</sup> history of El Salvador’s recent past imbricated as it is with the USA. His narrative is filled with political intrigue, ghostly plots, and conspiratorial twists, which might, to quote Lin, ‘seem unimaginable to you but not to me’. Set as it is between El Salvador and Los Angeles from the late 1970s to the present, Viejo Lin’s narrative is embedded in a transnational geography peopled by a full theater of ghosts.<sup>15</sup> I want here to consider how Lin directs our gaze through the looking glass, or is it at the mirror of *doble cara*, in what Aretxaga might have seen as a fascinating ‘play of masking and disclosure’, which works to unsettle the ‘tenants of appearance and reality’ (1998: 11).

Not unlike the Basque radicals in Aretxaga’s essays, Lin leverages that ‘well-worn plot of the left’s political imaginary where the state is the obscure hand behind these killings’. He does so in order to deconstruct his ‘production as culprit’ (Aretxaga, 1998: 28–32). According to Lin, the new structure of the post-war formation, the National Civil Police, is governed by the same forces behind the old structure and the same intelligence apparatus of El Salvador’s dirty war. His case has been ‘simulated’ by DECCO, the Elite Division to Combat Organized Crime. He has been isolated from those who could help him, his brother, his only alibi, ‘assassinated’, and his wife arrested. He likens himself to Oswald in the JFK assassination case, a scapegoat for larger state affairs: Sandoval’s bid for the presidency and the need to deflect international attention away from a contentious and violent strike over the privatization of healthcare.

Then Lin turns *doble cara* upon himself, reworking his own identity into what James Fernandez might call ‘reflexive image(s) of incongruity’ (1986: 291). Pico Union, the Latino immigrant *barrio* where Lin grew up in downtown Los Angeles, was territory to two social formations based on quite different modes or relations of social solidarity: gangs and guerillas. While Viejo Lin joined the 18th Street Gang, his sister followed in the footsteps of their activist parents – both members of the Salvadoran teachers union, ANDES 21 de Junio<sup>16</sup> – and became involved with refugee assistance organizations and the solidarity movement. Lin says he came back to El Salvador during the war with his

sister's husband, a journalist, to film documentaries in the mountains of Guazapa and on other guerilla fronts across the country. These documentaries, of a 'cultural political character', were to be shown to solidarity committees in the USA. As he explained:

In those days . . . we went where we were ordered [by the guerillas] . . . and I stayed for a year in the mountains . . . took up my weapon and was caught with a cassette, a video cassette that we had filmed in the guerilla camps there. I was a political prisoner for two years, you understand . . . After that I returned from where I had come [Los Angeles and the 18th Street Gang].

I am an ex political prisoner . . . Whatever you may make of my appearance . . . (gesturing towards his facial tattoos and shaved head). Don't believe that things are as they seem.

I press him on this. How is it he was gang member *and* guerilla, criminal *and* political prisoner? He looks at me: 'One assumes, perhaps, people of principle [that is], that one thing can't combine with another . . . but this is how it is.' Lin's challenge to me, a so-called person of principle, takes me full circle to the dialectical image with which I began this article with this twist: El Viejo Lin refashions himself as *18th Street Gang in FMLN face*. Or is it, as Aretxaga pressed me, the other way around? Is it the FMLN, its history, its legacy, in the face of the gang?

Let's return then to that FMLN political rally where I first saw, and captured on film, an assimilation of those contraries – gang and guerilla – in Pajaro's face. I have another photograph of Pajaro taken the day before. In it he and his *homeboys* Perol, also from MS in LA, and Marcus from the Tooner youth gang, a lesser-known Chicano gang in Glendale, California, are posing, showing off their tattoos and gesticulating in gang sign language. All three have had their encounters with the US criminal justice system. Perol and Marcos have taken off their shirts to show off their tattoos. Pajaro keeps his long-sleeved, over-sized athletic shirt on. Shortly after his deportation, he was attacked and stabbed in the chest 17 times. He'd rather not expose his wounds to the camera, he explains. It is not clear whether these are the signifying scars of gang or death squad violence – of retribution or social cleansing.<sup>17</sup>

The next day, Pajaro – with red star on his cheek and a red bandana around his head – joined the crowd gathered by the stage. He nodded to me from a crowd of people adorned with red face paint, clapping and swaying to the classics of *La Nueva Canción* (the new song) – the quintessential musical form of the Latin American revolutionary struggles of the 1970s and 1980s. Those lyrics – for many associated with a painful nostalgia of a failed promise of *la nueva patria* (the new country) and the elusive promised land of the revolution – mixed strangely with the memories in my head of the sounds of hardcore South Central LA rappers, background music to the photo shoot of the day before.

I was surprised to see Pajaro at the rally. He had never expressed any formal political leanings to me or any memory of the Salvadoran civil war. Did he know of the brutal massacre of university students and teachers for their presumed association with the guerillas, which took place in this very square? In these photographs, Pajaro, deported gang member, appears as a packed and displaced sign, which refuses easy representation. Just as he will not show his scars and cannot or will not say what they represent, he could not or would not articulate the reasons for his presence at the rally.

## THE CRIMES OF DEMOCRACY

The association of these images of *doble cara* with the machinery of democracy – political campaigns and elections – is not mere coincidence. Rather, the appearance of the deported gang member as a ‘new criminal type’ (Siegel, 1998) in the post-civil war period has a particular relationship to the emergence of democracy in El Salvador as ‘the form and discourse of political legitimacy’ (Aretxaga, 2003: 405) as it combines with the political concessions exacted from the right-wing government by the leftist guerrillas in the 1992 Salvadoran Peace Accords.<sup>18</sup> As Girard has noted, a scapegoat is always necessary to the beginning of a system (1977). In El Salvador, this criminal type emerges with the signing of a new social contract with the people.<sup>19</sup>

With the shock of post-civil war violence, these hard-won constitutional and institutional reforms came to be maligned and attacked by the right and even elements within the left as ‘laws for the Swiss’. Laws such as those protecting the freedom of association, the identity of juvenile offenders, and those requiring higher standards of evidence for prosecution of cases and the barring of forced confessions are, it is argued, designed for countries with a history and culture of democracy, and not for those just emerging into democracy like El Salvador (Villalobos, 2001). Gang youth has become the repository of fears over and criticisms of the ‘liberal excesses’ of democracy and anxieties attached to the new political inclusions and constitutional rights imposed by the Peace Accords.

Interestingly, the reforms of the reforms deemed more suitable to this ‘weak’ and ‘immature’ democracy are derived from the laws that have purportedly worked for the *gringos* (Americans). One month after my interview with El Viejo Lin, then-President Paco Flores stood in front of television cameras at night in the neighborhood of La Dina. Posing in front of a wall graffitied with the insignia of the 18th Street Gang, wearing a black leather jacket and flanked by the new chief of police and the head of the Salvadoran armed forces, Flores declared a state of emergency and unleashed a police campaign, *El Plan Mano Dura* (the Firm/Iron Fist Plan) and legislative proposal, *La Ley Anti-Mara* (the Anti-Gang Law). Both became central to the ruling right wing’s political platform in the ensuing presidential elections, and together they represent the successful globalization of Bratton’s and Giuliani’s Broken Windows philosophy combined with US anti-gang and terrorist legislation.<sup>20</sup>

## FROM COMMUNIST TO CRIMINAL

This is hardly the first time that the USA and Salvadoran states have shared discourses of illegality. The mirroring, paranoid dynamic between the two states has a longer history and, I would argue, is a fundamental structure underlying their ongoing relations. During the Cold War the US and Salvadoran governments collaborated closely on security issues through the School of the Americas and the Mil Group (a core of US military advisors in El Salvador) (Gil, 2004; Huggins, 1998; Menjívar and Rodríguez, 2005). While those technologies of war and policing were animated by a substrate of fantasies about communists, their contemporary shared fantasies are triggered by the menace of criminals and terrorists. Nor is *El Plan Mano Dura* the first attempt to introduce US zero-tolerance gang abatement strategies in El Salvador. In 1998, FMLN candidate Facundo Guardado made crime his key campaign issue with his *Tarjeta Roja* (Red Card) proposal. The resonance between *La Tarjeta Roja* and California’s *Three Strikes* initiative is also telling of this transnational mimesis between the USA and El



Salvador. Unlike *El Plan Mano Dura*, *La Tarjeta Roja*, as it was proposed by Guardado, was not targeted at gang members or deportees per se but rather, like *Three Strikes*, promised to reduce violent crime by putting repeat offenders behind bars for life. Repeat offenders would receive a red card. The symbolism in each case is drawn from sports – baseball in the USA and soccer in El Salvador. The intimate relationship between sports and nationalism resonates in both US and Salvadoran policy initiatives. Following *Three Strikes* as it does by four years, *La Tarjeta Roja* reads like an attempt to translate the same principle into Salvadoran cultural terms.<sup>21</sup>

As Vice-Minister of Citizen Security, Renee Dominguez, put it when I met with him in May 2003, ‘the project [to introduce anti-gang legislation] was already developed but was put on hold because it did not have the necessary resonance in society’.<sup>22</sup> He explained this to me as we leafed through a booklet of US anti-gang abatement legislation (curfews, injunctions, felonization of graffiti, limits on free association, the criminalization of gang membership, the prohibition of cell phone communication between alleged gang members, among other measures) compiled from the US-based National Youth Gang Center’s website.

*El Plan Mano Dura* draws heavily upon California’s Street Terrorism Enforcement Prevention Act (STEP)<sup>23</sup> and anti-loitering laws, which were designed to retake command over the politically marked space of the street and to prohibit all forms of association and communication between two or more so called ‘gang members’ (Zilberg, 2002). The legislation attached to *Mano Dura* makes gang membership illegal, and it has a very liberal interpretation of what constitutes probable cause for detaining alleged gang members. For instance, the plan would outlaw and criminalize the wearing of tattoos that designate gang or criminal affiliation and any tattoos that appear on the face, head, neck or genital region. *Mano Dura* also contains a clause pertaining specifically to deportees. All deportees who enter the country with ‘antecedents’, the ‘appearance’ or ‘conduct’ of a gang member, will be automatically fingerprinted, photographed, checked for tattoos and detained to be presented to a judge.

## CRIMINAL COPS

US zero-tolerance gang abatement strategies have a dubious record, particularly in Los Angeles among immigrant communities. My previous research documented how the notorious elite gang abatement unit, Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums (CRASH) in the Rampart Division, worked actively to criminalize everyday life practices of immigrants (Zilberg, 2002), and to police the boundaries of the nation-state on the streets of the urban barrio (Zilberg, 2004). The Rampart division covers the territories of both Viejo Lin’s and Pajaro’s gangs. LAPD’s Rampart division CRASH officers came under investigation for the use of excessive force and corruption and for framing and forcing hostile immigrant witnesses into the deportation pipeline. The dialectic image of the criminal or gangster cop was at the core of the scandal and arguably of CRASH’s operations.

During the Rampart scandal, much was said about how the LAPD was perhaps ‘the biggest gang of all’.<sup>24</sup> The material archive on how Rampart officers played at being gangsters and interiorized their enemy is a rich one. The testimony of Rafael Perez, gangster-cop turned informant, speaks eloquently to the ways in which CRASH functioned as ‘both the law and its transgression’ (Aretxaga, 2000b: 60). From all accounts,

Rampart's CRASH unit was an 'especially tight-knit group' (Cannon, 2000: 34) – a veritable gang. CRASH officers embraced this gangster identity corporeally. The photograph on the cover of a *New York Times Magazine* is case in point. Officer Rafael Perez – posing as he is in his prison sweats with tattoo exposed and hair shaved close to his head – looks, at least according to the CAL/GANG list's overly broad legal definition, just like any other 'gangster'.<sup>25</sup> His tattoo exposes the insignia of his unit, his clique, his gang: 'a skull with a cowboy hat and a poker hand of a pair of aces and pair of eights, the dead-man's hand that the frontier outlaw Wild Bill Hickock was holding when he was shot to death' (Cannon, 2000: 34). Neighborhood residents complained that CRASH officers would confront them showing off their tattoos 'like [they were saying] "This is my gang. This is where I come from"' (Rivera, 2000: A-1). The CRASH officer used his tattoo to mimic the territorial identification and *barrio* mentality of the gang member, to mark his territory, Rampart, and to signify his gang affiliation, CRASH.

The dialectical image of criminal cop goes well beyond these expressive practices. According to Perez's testimony, he and his cohorts – *homeboys*, if you will – organized and partook in bank robberies, drug dealing, and prostitution rings for officers. They wounded and killed unarmed gang members, planted guns and drugs on their victims, appropriated gang members' pagers, answered incoming calls, took those drug deals in the name of gang members, and resold the drugs they had repossessed from those very same gang members. The Rampart scandal first broke when Perez was caught for checking out repossessed cocaine, ostensibly as exhibit items for pending trials. He failed to return the cocaine because he was dealing in the stuff. These CRASH officers literally took on the drug trade in the Rampart division through, if you will, a 'hostile takeover' of their competitors' market share. The Rampart scandal hinged then on the degree to which Officer Perez's and his cohorts' gang-like practices were structurally embedded within the police department, and to what extent they constituted institutionalized practices and strategies for the 'pacification of the dangerous classes' (Simon, 1987, in O'Malley, 1993: 162).

In Aretxaga's work, which explores how the state plays at being the savage Other, she argues that the interiorization of a fantastic enemy characterizes counterinsurgency and anti-terrorist thinking and is fundamental to the logics of political transgression (Aretxaga, 2000b: 54). We see these logics at work in Perez's tearful public confession. Referring to the slogan over the door of the Rampart CRASH office, 'We will intimidate those who intimidate others', gangster-cop Perez offered these words: 'Whoever chases monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster himself' (Perez quoted in *The New York Times*, 1 October 2000: 66). Perez's confession rests on the idea that police violence is mimetic of, and therefore derivative of, the gang; the *ur* source of violence is not the state but the gang. But mimesis undoes dichotomies of good and evil, and of heroes and villains, by theorizing the dialogical or what Girard terms the reciprocal nature of violence (Girard, 1977: 143) – of the gang and of the police. It is far from easy to say who is the imitator and who is the imitated, which is the copy and which is the original (Taussig, 1993: 78).

The Rampart scandal was a 'public disclosure of things known but negated': 'the state is both the law and its transgression' (Aretxaga, 2000b: 60). State violence – the transgression of the law from within – is simultaneously public and secret. In his essay on violence, Walter Benjamin argues that the police

mark the point at which the state can no longer guarantee, through the legal system, the empirical ends that it desires . . . [T]he police intervenes for ‘security reasons’ in cases where no clear legal situation exists . . . [Unlike law,] the power of the police is formless, nowhere tangible . . . a ghostly presence in the life of civilized states. (Benjamin, 1978: 286–7)

Police or state violence is the most corrupt part of democracy precisely because it places violence in a ghostly space, a space that is hidden, where the law becomes its own transgression. The Rodney King beating and the Rampart scandal are only two instances of defacements of this public secret; these revelations, in the end, work to maintain the public secret – the relationship between democracy and state violence. The state of exception (on which much of gang abatement policing strategies and legislation rests) is a working paradigm of, not an anomaly in, the democratic sovereign state (Agamben, 2003).

The Rampart scandal was unprecedented only in that it had transnational dimensions. These investigations of police corruption in LA ‘fanned out to villages in Central America’ where detectives went in search of deportees who may have been victims of the accused Rampart officers (Boyer, 2001: 71). *El Plan Mano Dura* would reproduce very similar belligerent strategies of abatement, but with this important difference – deportation is not an option for the Salvadoran state. How will such strategies work out when deportation is not a viable arena for state action? Deportation may not be an option for the state, but undocumented migration is still a possibility, albeit a perilous one, for gang-affected and affiliated youth.

### **GANGSTER REFUGEES**

Many deportees – who have attempted to build new lives for themselves in their strange but native countries – are choosing to illegally re-enter the USA as their best available option even though they risk re-imprisonment if caught. And many youths are fleeing El Salvador for the first time to avoid forced recruitment into gangs. Might these gang members and unaffiliated youths, pushed out of El Salvador by the combined pressures of the gangs and the police, constitute a new class of refugee – many of them the children of civil war refugees? The gangster masquerading as refugee is a most curious emergent social formation and legal subject in California’s immigration courts. Immigration attorneys now file withholding from deportation and, where possible, political asylum claims for their clients on the premise that they have a well-founded fear of persecution from the Salvadoran state and from the gangs. This ironic twist at work in the emergence of deported gang members as a new, albeit unlikely, class of refugee brings us back full circle to the 1980s and to the return of the repressed: the ongoing participation of the USA in the production of violence in El Salvador through the simultaneous deportation of gang youth and exportation of its zero-tolerance policing strategies.

### **MARA SALVATRUCHA IN AL-QAEDA FACE?**

The Rampart scandal led to the dismantling of CRASH, and temporarily put LAPD officers on notice, but the landscape has since shifted on two fronts with the installation of William Bratton, globalizer of zero tolerance, as Chief of the LAPD, and with 9/11. Bratton began his term by conflating the language of the California’s Street Terrorist Enforcement and Protection (STEP) with that of the War on Terror. Calling for ‘an all

out assault' against 'street terrorists', STEP's preferred name for gang members, and 'homeland terrorism', his preferred term for gang violence, Bratton launched his campaign against gangs by drawing implicit links between crime and terrorism.

The association of the criminal with the terrorist has taken on a more threatening specter. Since November 2004 a spate of unsubstantiated articles have been published on the internet, in the Boston, and LA *Times*, insinuating links between La Mara Salvatrucha and al-Qaeda. Take for instance the language of this internet intelligence news source article entitled: 'Criminals, jihadists threaten U.S. border: Unholy alliance of terrorists, gang, revolutionaries pose new security threat.' The article begins thus:

What would happen if criminal gangsters, revolutionaries and Islamic terrorists all got together in a common goal of overthrowing governments of America's neighbors and smuggling operatives into and out of the U.S.? Some senior police and intelligence sources [say] . . . that is just what is happening in Central America today. (Farah, 2005)

A *Boston Herald* article insinuates that the US intelligence recently informed that they had located members of al-Qaeda in MS in El Salvador (McPhee, 2005) and the *Washington Times* published information that a member of al-Qaeda, Adnan G. el Shukrijumah, had met with leaders of the gang in Honduras (Seper, 2004).

Police and intelligence officials here and there have since denied any evidence of such links, but the implicit has been made explicit, if only through rumor and innuendo. The official negation of these rumors did not stop Newt Gingrich from hosting an hour-long special on Fox News channels devoted to exploring these hypothetical links, where he places gang abatement strategies at the center of the War on Terror (Gingrich, 2005).

### **TRANSNATIONAL MIRROR OF PRODUCTION**

The USA and El Salvador appear to be locked in a recurrent dynamic that exceeds the strategic manipulation of foreign policy or the rational technologies of policing strategies. Indeed, the dizzying deployment of *doblo cara* between the nation and the state in El Salvador extends to US–Salvadoran relations. Gang youth are what Aretxaga recognized as the untenable hyphenation between the nation (the people) and the state (Aretxaga, 2003: 396–8). But in this case, the disjunction in the status of citizenship invokes the politics of membership of not one but two states, El Salvador and the USA. El Salvador's post-civil war democracy is deeply marked by the exclusion of those already excluded by US democratic society. Therefore, gang youth mark the doubly untenable hyphenation *within* and *between* nation-states. They also demonstrate how globalization only fuels the desire for sovereignty (2003: 396).

Nationalism and transnationalism, rather than contradictory forces, are here co-productive of each other. Efforts to reassert national sovereignty through zero-tolerance policing strategies only, and most ironically, reproduce transnational flows and formations like La Mara Salvatrucha and the 18th Street Gang. Moreover, the anxieties attached to these state-induced transnational flows also fuel the desire for sovereignty.<sup>26</sup> In the face of their mutual contamination of each other, El Salvador and the USA both need a criminalized alien, a 'contemporary savage' Other (Aretxaga, 2000b: 64) against which to remark the boundaries of their national imaginaries. Transnational youth gangs

are thus a ritual repository par excellence not only for the jarring violence inhabiting the national community,<sup>27</sup> but for the violent history of US and Salvadoran relations.

This politics of simultaneity and the proliferation of interlocking dream-images of terrorists and criminals guide the reproduction of US–Salvadoran relations. Those resonances – mimetic correspondences, not equivalences – read like rearranged particles of US and Salvadoran social and political narratives. Through this deep structure of repetition, the USA and El Salvador emerge as a dense *mise en abyme*, an endlessly refracted and warped space of connection and contact. The contemporary history of US–Salvadoran relations surfaces as ‘endless recurrence’ of the mirroring paranoid dynamic of *doble cara* and its structure of suspicion.<sup>28</sup>

Relations between El Salvador and the USA are structured by a transnational mirror of production – an intensive mimetic interaction across the former border between North and South. Taussig conceives the ‘colonial mirror of production’ as a complicated exchange between colonizer and colonized, where mimesis involves not copy or imitation but, rather, an assimilation into one another, a circulation between selves and anti-selves feeding off each other’s correspondence (1993: 65). While such exchanges associated with the colonial period were by no means unidirectional, Taussig argues that in the ‘second contact’ era of the borderland, the ‘us’ and ‘them’ lose their polarity and swim in and out of focus all the more (1993: 246). Clearly, the border between the USA and El Salvador, albeit structured through an imperialistic and Cold War rather than a colonial relation, has been ‘punctured porous’ (1993: 251) first by war and migration, and now by democratization and neo-liberal trade and security policies. Far from re-enchantment, this transnational mimesis, organized once by the Cold War, is now being reorganized by the War on Terror.<sup>29</sup>

The question of fantasy is critical for understanding this transnational mirror of production. Indeed, fantasy serves as the ‘psychic glue’ between the USA and El Salvador and, as such, fantasy proves a useful heuristic with which to probe the ‘irrational and excessive dimensions of the political’ (Rose, 1996, in Aretxaga, 2005: 141). Take for instance, the previous reference to Newt Gingrich’s role in media construction of the moral panic around the image of La Mara Salvatrucha in al-Qaeda Face. Brandishing what he admits are scanty even facts, Gingrich makes great leaps into discursive fantasy.<sup>30</sup> Despite prior analysis of those ‘facts’, Gingrich persists. He knows what he is doing but he cannot do otherwise.<sup>31</sup> The symptom of suspicion persists, and reorganizes around a new set of enemies. While animated by a substrate of fantasies, his discourse is not opposed to social reality; rather, it creates a forceful intervention into this transnational political field. As Aretxaga notes, a good deal of the expanding state discourse surrounding terrorism bypasses any rational functionality (2005: 263). Fantasy is the political unconscious at work, it is the psychic symptom, the force behind the compulsion to repeat the trauma of US intervention in El Salvador in the name of democracy, and the drive which regenerates the endless recurrence of violence between El Salvador and the USA.

Psychoanalytic theory suggests that the mimetic faculty subsists in the neurotic symptom, in perversity, and that its cure involves a transference. But Lacan argued that rather than cure, transference leads us to the logic of repetition. Transference does not reduce the veiled meaning – the drive behind the compulsion to repeat – to the actuality of the situation. The correct concept of repetition must be obtained in the very split that occurs in the subject in relation to its encounter with the object. It is this split that

constitutes the characteristic dimension of analytic discovery (1981: 69). The dialectical image with which I began this article points to a transference that occurs in the subject, MS, in relation to his encounter with the FMLN. Pajaro, the MS gang member, employs the red star, the iconography of the FMLN, as a rendering of the tribute to the historical heroics of political resistance, seeing there perhaps something akin to his own status as a 'soldier' for the gang, and his own alienation as refugee turned deportee. But transference always involves misrecognition (Žižek, 1989: 58), in this case, that the gang's objects and aims are or can be coterminous with those of the guerilla.

What is this split that occurs between Pajaro in relationship to his encounter with the FMLN youth? Is it the split that arises in the Salvadoran national in relationship to his encounter with the USA through refugee flight and migration, followed by his re-encounter with El Salvador through deportation? Might this transference be an effect of the transnational mirror of production between the USA and El Salvador? Is it a foundational alibi that accounts for the historical substitutions taking place in The Real (globalization and its displacements) irrupting into the Symbolic order?

### THE AFTERLIFE

The dialectical image of *La Mara Salvatrucha in FMLN face*, reworked through *doble cara*, asks us to pose another question even before asking the question, 'Who is mirroring whom?' What makes these things appear different and discrete so that they seem to be copying each other and feeding off each other's correspondence? Whatever claims are made in contemporary El Salvador for drawing clear analytic distinctions between political and social violence, derived as they are on the periodization of the civil war – before, during and after – that war refuses historical boundaries and functions as a past ever present; the contestation over the painful Real of violence.

For Benjamin, dialectical images were the concrete, small, particular moments in which the total historical event was to be discovered, the perceptible ur-phenomenon in which the origins of the present could be found, and an act of irreducible observation (Benjamin cited in Buck-Morss, 1993: 71). By blasting the historical object out of the continuum of history's course, this image material makes visible a picture of truth that the fictions of conventional historical writing covered over (Buck-Morss, 1993: 219). Like the Lacanian Real, they produce an irruption within the symbolic system, a tear in the fabric of everyday life. They force us to see a dimension of The Real – the intolerable, inexpressible, and unsymbolizable – on which this historical nexus depends (Aretxaga, 2002: 128).<sup>32</sup>

The FMLN *mitin*, the opening scene to this article, is more than an instrumental political event or political rally. It is rather what Derrida, in his treatment of the history and the politics of memory, might term a 'spectral moment', a 'spiritual moment that is not docile to time' and, I would add, to space. The event 'disjoins the living present from the instituted order of the calendar' (Derrida, 1994: xix–xx), and from its immediate and literal Salvadoran geography. Its scenography is haunted by 'displaced life' (Aretxaga, 2005: 13) and the forces of that displacement: the disappeared, deportees, guerillas, death squads, political prisoners, criminals, refugees, US military advisors and police, international solidarity activists, and the Salvadoran diaspora. These are the ghosts of *doble cara*, and in trying to identify the source, direction, and subject of violence in post-civil war El Salvador, we must reckon with them all.

## Acknowledgements

This article is written in memory of Begoña Aretxaga, whose strong influence on my work belies the brevity of our encounter. This surely is the sign of the truest teacher – an absent but powerful interlocutor. My thanks also go to those who worked with great love and respect in putting together the memorial panel for which this article was first written (Zilberg, 2003), and for giving me the opportunity to extend and deepen my engagement with Aretxaga's work. Special thanks to James Brow, Pauline Turner Strong, Michael Hanchard, Joseba Zulaika, Kay Warren and Yael Navaro-Yashin. Thank you also to my friends and colleagues Roberto Tejada, Nancy Postero, Esra Özyürek, Jeffrey Minson, Jody Blanco, Halide Velioglu, Liz Lilliott and Brandt Pederson, as well as the anonymous reviewer, for your insightful and generous readings of various drafts of this article. I would also like to gratefully acknowledge the support of the Global Security and Cooperation Project of the Social Science Research Council, which funded the second phase of the research conducted for this essay. Finally, my heartfelt thanks go to the transnational gang violence prevention and intervention project, *Homies Unidos*, for the privilege of access to its members and programs since 1998.

## Notes

- 1 For Benjamin the dialectical image was a poetic and politically instructive fragment, an irreducible observation through which to understand the weight and kaleidoscope of human history (see Buck-Morss, 1993: 72–4).
- 2 Broadly speaking, mimesis refers to the act of making oneself similar to another (Cahn, 1984: 34). As such, mimesis is not mere copy or imitation but something that assimilates itself to that something (Adorno, 1984: 163). It is the capacity to make correspondences and analogies (Benjamin, 1978: 333–6).
- 3 Drawing on Zulaika and Douglass (1996), Aretxaga considers how terrorism is constructed through emplotted narratives. These narratives have a fictional character in that they resonate with existing genres and forms of emplotment (2000: 46).
- 4 The term 'youth' here refers to young adults, who entered the US criminal justice system as minors but were deported as adults.
- 5 Aretxaga talks about the *ertzaintza*, the Basque police, as a displaced and packed sign, which contains the traces of something else (1998: 8).
- 6 Most deportees are returned because of their undocumented status in the USA. Thirty-three to 40 percent of deportees have criminal records in the USA, and are deported after serving their prison sentences. There are no actual figures on what percentage of these deportees are or were members of youth gangs.
- 7 The 1996 law consolidated and made automatic a practice that was already occurring. Prior to the 1996 law, individuals in deportation proceedings often waived their right to see an immigration judge and agreed to sign a voluntary departure or expedited removal form under the false understanding that their deportation would not appear on their records. However, while deportation of gang youth precedes the 1996 law (I have met gang members who were deported as early as the mid 1980s), the phenomenon gained greater momentum and statistical significance after the passage of the law, which removed a judge's discretion from the process.
- 8 Most deportees come from metropolitan areas where there are large concentrations of Salvadoran immigrants.

- 9 While I focus on the Salvadoran case, this phenomenon has greater geographic reach and includes Mexico, most Central American countries, the Dominican Republic, and countries in Asia such as South Korea.
- 10 For a discussion of deportation see Coutin (2003a, 2003b). For deportation of gang youth see DeCesare (1998); DeCesare and Montaigne (1999); Zilberg and Lungo (1999); Zilberg (2004, 2006); Yngresson and Coutin (2006). For Salvadoran gangs see Cruz and Portillo Peña (1998); Ramos (1998); Smutt and Miranda (1998).
- 11 For a discussion of political and criminal violence as a continuum see Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004: 1–5).
- 12 Drawing on Zulaika and Douglass (1996), Aretxaga argues that what is copied is not terrorism but a fantasy of terrorism. Like the savage, the terrorist exists in a fantasized form, as the ‘other’ of an imaginary relation, which is to say as a collective representation (2000: 60). Fantasy, in its Freudian sense, is not a purely illusory construction but is a form of reality in its own right, a scene whose structure traverses the boundary between the conscious and the unconscious (Aretxaga, 2005: 106). Fantasy has no ‘owner’ or subject – it is a technique of The Real irrupting into the Symbolic order.
- 13 Adorno and Horkheimer use the term ‘organized mimesis’ to think about the cooption of mimesis as a function of alterity by fascism; that is, not as outright repression but as organized control of mimesis. Building on this notion of ‘organized mimesis’, Aretxaga speaks of the ‘disorganized and fantastic character of organized mimesis’ to discuss ‘the organized copy of terrorism by the state to eliminate terrorism’ (2000: 60).
- 14 Like Anderson’s use of ‘imagined’, in my use of ‘fantastic’ I do not mean ‘unreal’. Aretxaga speaks of the ‘structure of fantasy’ as a reality that transcends a concrete individual to become a social fact to demarcate the space of the real (1998: 12). That said, I am not presenting the details of Viejo Lin’s testimony as fact. Truth or fantasy, what is of interest here are the forms of emplotment by which Lin structures his narrative.
- 15 As Derrida notes, ‘Every age has its scenography’ and its own ‘theatre of ghosts’ (1994: 119).
- 16 ANDES was an important political formation of the left in the period leading up to the civil war.
- 17 The cause of the incident remains shrouded in speculation. It is not clear whether Pajaro was targeted by the more xenophobic forces in the community – reprisals against deported gang youth by *La Sombra Negra*, a death squad reminiscent of those of the 1980s, have been documented in nearby San Miguel – or by rival gang members in the neighboring city of Usulután. When I asked, he insisted that he did not know.
- 18 These post-civil war reforms were restricted to the domains of political, judicial, and police reforms, and with the exception of land reform, did not address economic restructuring.
- 19 The immediate post-war period saw the legalization of the political opposition, the emergence from the underground of previously targeted popular or grassroots organizations as legitimate organs of civil society, the creation of a new civilian police



force, which was to function independently of the military and state intelligence, as well as greater constitutional protections of the separations of powers between the government and the judiciary.

- 20 These US models were first implemented in Honduras. The Salvadoran government was simultaneously studying the US model and that model as interpreted by the Hondurans. After their respective terms as New York Police Department's chief of police, and New York City's mayor, William Bratton and Rudolf Guiliani both became private-sector consultants to countries such as Mexico, Venezuela and South Africa, offering technical expertise in their applications of the Broken Windows zero tolerance policing philosophy.
- 21 In El Salvador this relationship between sports and nationalism has a powerful precedent with the infamous Soccer War over border skirmishes between that country and Honduras.
- 22 Guardado's proposal was only one of many draconian measures introduced. The ARENA government had already explored the possibility of instituting a quasi-transnational probation system for criminal deportees and had twice introduced emergency crime legislation – in 1996 and again in 1999 – in the form of the Social Defense Law, which if it had passed, would have jailed Salvadorans deported from the USA for criminal offenses upon their arrival. Under this proposal, these deportees would receive triple punishment for their offense: jail time in the USA, deportation to El Salvador, and reimprisonment in El Salvador.

Certainly there was sufficient 'resonance in society' for such proposals by 1998. That year, the Institute of Public Opinion at the Jesuit-run University of Central America (IUDOP) released a study which revealed that 45 percent of the country supported 'social cleansing' of those elements deemed responsible for the violence – even if that meant the recurrence of paramilitary death squad activity (IDUOP, 1998). In an interview, Miguel Cruz, director of IUDOP, speculated that the mayor of San Miguel, the third largest city in El Salvador, was elected *for* rather than despite his alleged associations with *La Sombra Negra*, the post-civil war death squad, which had targeted gang youth. The study also revealed that 80 percent of the population wanted to see the military step in to suppress delinquency. In a country that had only recently demilitarized its police forces – a hard won post-civil war reform – these sentiments were more than disturbing. As a joint police and military campaign, *El Plan Mano Dura* has taken the first step in reversing the separation between those functions threatening the return to a military police. Since its initial and temporary implementation, *El Plan Mano Dura* has extended under the name *El Plan Súper Mano Dura*. This state of exception has thus been expanded and intensified.

- 23 See California Penal Code Section 186.20–186.33.
- 24 Warren Olney during his daily radio talk show, *This Way LA*, 9 September 1999.
- 25 The CAL/GANG list is a database containing a list of 160,000 individuals meeting the so-called 'gang profile'. That profile includes a list of 'tell-tale' traits or signs of gang membership. An individual need only exhibit three out of around 16 traits to give an officer 'probable cause' to stop him or her.
- 26 In her discussion of the crucial need to reposition 'the question of the state in relation to the meaning of sovereignty . . . after 11 September 2001', Aretxaga stressed that

- '[g]lobalization is not only compatible with statehood, it has actually fueled the desire for it' (2003: 395).
- 27 Drawing upon Girard, Aretxaga speaks of the scapegoat, the outsider, or the outsider-insider (Girard, 1977) as 'a ritual repository of the jarring violence inhabiting the national community' (Aretxaga, 2003: 397).
  - 28 I am drawing here on Benjamin's philosophy of history to account for the repetitive history of security relations between the US and El Salvador. As Buck-Morris notes, Benjamin's philosophy of history debunks the 'phantasmagoria of progress' and constructs a counter discourse which exposes progress as the fetishization of modern temporality, which is an 'endless repetition' of the 'new' as the 'always the same' (Buck-Morris, 1993: 56).
  - 29 While Taussig does acknowledge the instrumental role of the organized control of mimesis in the rise of fascism as discussed by Horkheimer and Adorno (1972), he generally sees in mimesis the promise of re-enchantment (1993).
  - 30 Zulaika and Douglass argue that in much of the literature on terrorism 'the brandishing of stark facts goes hand in hand with great leaps into discursive fantasy' (1996: 4).
  - 31 For a useful discussion of this 'doing in spite of knowing', see Navaro-Yashin's study of the role of cynicism in Turkish politics. As Navaro-Yashin notes, Žižek borrows from Lacan's psychoanalytic symptom to explore 'Why, in spite of its interpretation, does the symptom not dissolve itself; Why does it persist?' (Žižek, 1989: 4; Navaro-Yashin, 2002: 159–60).
  - 32 The Lacanian Real is defined as that realm prior to ideology that makes reality cohesive and bereft of the fantasy that makes it palatable. It is the irruption within the symbolic system. Such a rupture forces us to see a dimension of the real that we do not generally see (Aretxaga, 2005: 128–32; Žižek, 1989: 156–73).

## References

- Adorno, Theodor W. (1984) *Aesthetic Theory* (trans. C. Lenhardt, eds Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Agamben, Giorgio (2003) *State of Exception* (trans. Kevin Attell). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Aretxaga, Begoña (1998) 'Violent Specters, or the Scene of Political Fantasy in a Small Place Along the Pyrenees', paper prepared for *Fantasy Spaces: The Power of Images in a Globalizing World* conference, Amsterdam, 27–29 August.
- Aretxaga, Begoña (2000) 'A Fictional Reality: Paramilitary Death Squads and the Construction of State Terror in Spain', in Jeffrey A. Sluka (ed.) *Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror*, pp. 46–69. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Aretxaga, Begoña (2003) 'Maddening States', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32: 393–410.
- Aretxaga, Begoña (2005) *States of Terror: Begoña Aretxaga's Essays* (ed. Joseba Zulaika). Reno, NV: Center for Basque Studies.
- Bourgeois, Phillipe (2004) 'The Continuum of Violence in War and Peace: Post-Cold War Lessons from El Salvador', in Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Phillipe Bourgeois (eds) *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, pp. 425–34. Oxford: Blackwell.

- Boyer, Peter (2001) 'Bad Cops', *The New Yorker* 21 May: 60–77.
- Buck-Morss, Susan (1993) *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and The Arcades Project*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Cahn, Michael (1984) 'Subversive Mimesis: Theodor W. Adorno and the Modern Impasse of Critique', in Mihai Spariosu (ed.) *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, Vol. I, pp. 27–64. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamin's Publishing Company.
- Call, Charles (2003) 'Democratization, War and State-Building: Constructing the Rule of Law in El Salvador', *Journal of Latin American Studies* 35(4): 827–62.
- Call, Charles and William Stanley (2001) 'Protecting the People: Public Security Choices After Civil Wars', *Global Governance* 7(2): 151–71.
- Cannon, L. (2000) 'LAPD Confidential: America's Most Infamous Police Department is in Trouble Again, Devastated by this Corrupt Cop's Confessions', *The New York Times Magazine*, 1 October: 32–66.
- Costa, Gino (1999) *La Policía Nacional Civil de El Salvador (1990–1997)*. San Salvador: Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas.
- Coutin, Susan (2003a) 'Cultural Logics of Belonging and Movement: Transnationalism, Naturalization, and U.S. Immigration Politics', *American Ethnologist* 30(4): 508–26.
- Coutin, Susan (2003b) 'Suspension of Deportation Hearings: Racialization, Immigration, and "Americanness"', *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 8(2): 58–95.
- Cruz, José Miguel (1997) 'Los Factores Posibilitadores y Las Expresiones de la Violencia en los Noventa', *ECA – Estudios Centroamericanos* 52: 978–92.
- Cruz, José M. and Portillo Peña, N. (1998) *Solidarid y Violencia en las Pandillas del Gran San Salvador: Más allá de la Vida Loca*. San Salvador: UCA.
- DeCesare, Donna (1998) 'The Children of War: Street Gangs in El Salvador', *NACLA Report on the Americas* 32(1): 21–9.
- DeCesare, Donna and Fen Montaigne (1999) 'Deporting America's Gang Culture', *Mother Jones* 1 July: 44–51.
- Derrida, Jacques (1994) *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (trans. Peggy Kamuf). New York: Routledge.
- Farah, Joseph (2005) 'Criminals, Jihadists Threaten U.S. Border: Unholy Alliance of Terrorists, Gangs, Revolutionaries Pose New Security Risk', *Joseph Farah's G2 Bulletin*, *Worldnetnews.com*. Posted 17 January 2005. URL (accessed 1 March 2006): [http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE\\_ID=42398-33k](http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=42398-33k)
- Fernandez, James (1986) *Persuasions and Performances*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Gil, Lesley (2004) *The School of the Americas: Military Training and Political Violence in the Americas*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Gingrich, Newt (2005) 'American Gangs – Ties to Terror?' *Fox News*, 3 July, 2005.
- Girard, Rene (1977) *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Hayden, Tom (2004) 'Fruits of War: Homies Unidos and the Globalization of Gangs', in *Street Wars: Gangs and the Future of Violence*. New York: The New Press.

- Horkheimer, Max and Adorno, Theodor W. (1972) *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (trans. John Cumming). New York: Herder and Herder.
- Huggins, Martha (1998) *Political Policing: The United States and Latin America*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- IUDOP (Instituto Universitario de Opinión de Pública) (1998) 'Delincuencia y Opinión Pública', *ECA – Estudios Centroamericanos* 53: 785–802.
- Lacan, Jacques (1981) *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*. New York: Norton.
- McPhee, Michele (2005) 'Easie Gang Linked to al-Qaeda', *Boston Herald* 5 January: 4.
- Menjívar, Cecilia and Néstor Rodríguez (2005) *When States Kill: Latin America, the US, and Technologies of Terror*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Moodie, Ellen (2002) "'It's Worse than the War": Telling Everyday Danger in Postwar San Salvador'. Dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan.
- Navaro-Yashin, Yael (2002) *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- O'Malley, Patrick (1993) 'Containing Our Excitement: Commodity, Culture and the Crisis of Discipline', *Studies in Law, Politics and Society* 13: 159–86.
- Popkin, Margaret (2000) *Peace without Justice: Obstacles to Building the Rule of Law in El Salvador*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Ramos, Carlos Guillermo, ed. (1998) *América Central en los Noventa: Problemas de Juventud*. San Salvador: FLACSO.
- Ramos, Carlos Guillermo (2000) *Violencia en una Sociedad en Transición: Ensayos*. San Salvador: Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo.
- Rivera, Carla (2000) 'Scandal Stirs a Grim Specter of Emotions', *The Los Angeles Times*, 19 March: A-1.
- Rose, Jacqueline (1996) *States of Fantasy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy and Phillippe Bourgois (2004) *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Seper, Jerry (2004) 'Al Qaeda seeks tie to local gangs', *Washington Times*, 28 September. URL (accessed 1 March 2006): <http://www.washtimes.com/national/20040928-123346-3928r.htm>
- Siegel, James T. (1998) *A New Criminal Type in Jakarta: Counter Revolution Today*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Simon, Jonathan (1987) 'The Emergence of a Risk Society: Insurance, Law, and the State', *Socialist Review* 95: 61–89.
- Smutt, Marcela and Jenny Lisette E. Miranda (1998) *El Fenómeno de las Pandillas de El Salvador*. San Salvador: FLACSO and UNICEF.
- Stanley, William (1996) *Protectors or Perpetrators? The Institutional Crisis of the Salvadoran Civilian Police*. Washington, DC: Office on Latin America and Hemisphere Initiatives.
- Taussig, Michael (1987) *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Taussig, Michael (1993) *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. New York: Routledge.

- Villalobos, Joaquin (2001) *De La Tortura a La Proteccion Ciudadana: La Policia Nacional Civil de El Salvador Como Instrumento de al Pacificacion y Democratizacion*. San Salvador: INELSA.
- Yngvesson, Barbara and Susan Bibler Coutin (2006) 'Backed by Papers: Undoing Persons, Histories, and Return', *American Ethnologist* 33(2): 177–90.
- Zilberg, Elana (2002) 'A Troubled Corner: The Ruined and Rebuilt Environment of a Central American Barrio in post-Rodney King Riot Los Angeles', *City and Society* 14(2): 31–55.
- Zilberg, Elana (2003) 'Gangbangers in Guerilla Face: The Political Folklore of *Doble Cara* in Post-Civil War El-Salvador'. Panel entitled, 'Rethinking Political Violence, Subjectivities and Imaginaries: Papers in Memory of Begoña Aretxaga'. American Anthropological Association annual meetings, Chicago, 19–23 November.
- Zilberg, Elana (2004) 'Fools Banished from the Kingdom: Remapping Geographies of Gang Violence between the Americas (Los Angeles and San Salvador)', *American Quarterly* special issue: *Los Angeles and the Future of Urban Cultures*, Guest Editors: Raúl Homero Villa and George J. Sánchez, 56(3): 759–79.
- Zilberg, Elana (2006) 'Refugee Gang Youth: Zero Tolerance and the Security State in Contemporary US-Salvadoran Relations', in Sudhir Venkatesh (ed.) *Youth, Law and Globalization*, pp. 69–89. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Zilberg, Elana, and Mario Úcles Lungo (1999) '¿Se Han Vuelto Haraganes?' Jóvenes, Migración y Identidades Laborales', in Susan Kandel and Mario Lungo (eds) *Transformando El Salvador Migración Sociedad y Cultura*, pp. 41–93. San Salvador: FUNDE.
- Žižek, Slavoj (1989) *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. New York: Verso.
- Zulaika, Joseba and William Douglass (1996) *Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Fables and Faces of Terrorism*. New York: Routledge.

---

ELANA ZILBERG is an assistant professor in the Communication Department at the University of California San Diego. She received her doctorate from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin in 2002. Her article 'Fools Banished from the Kingdom: Remapping Geographies of Gang Violence between the Americas' received an honorable mention from the Constance Rourke Prize Committee at the American Studies Association 2005 meetings. She is published in *Wide Angle*, *City and Society*, and *American Quarterly* and has book chapters in the following edited volumes: *Los Angeles and the Future of Urban Cultures* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), *Youth Globalization and the Law* (Stanford University Press, 2006), *A Companion to Latino Studies* (Blackwell, forthcoming) and *Human Mobility*. Dr Zilberg is currently completing a book entitled *Transnational Geographies of Violence: An Inter-American Encounter from the Cold War to the War on Terror*. Address: Communication Department, University of California San Diego, 9500 Gilman Drive (0503), La Jolla, CA 92093, USA. [email: ezilberg@ucsd.edu]

---