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Ignacio Ellacuría and the Salvadorean Revolution

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Abstract. This article focuses on the political thought and practice of the martyred Jesuit intellectual during the late 1970s. It employs the concept of *desencuentros*, probing the relationship between linguistic misunderstandings and political division. The article highlights Ignacio Ellacuría's novel analyses of the relationship between the ecclesial and the popular organisations, led by the radical Left. It discusses his political thought in relationship to the author's research on the base communities of northern Morazán. The article also discusses the Jesuit scholar's critical support for the Junta Revolucionario de Gobierno (15 October 1979–2 January 1980). The concluding section discusses Ellacuría's relevance for contemporary Latin American politics.

Keywords: desencuentros, Ignacio Ellacuría, popular organisations, ecclesial base communities

Just before dawn on 16 November 1989, members of an elite army battalion entered the Jesuit residence in the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA) in San Salvador and executed six priests, a cook, and her 15-year-old daughter. Ignacio Ellacuría, a Jesuit philosopher, theologian and university rector was among the dead. In the days preceding his assassination, the vice-president of the republic had accused Ellacuría of having 'poisoned the minds of the

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nation's youth' and a high-ranking army officer had labelled the university a 'refuge for leaders … who plan terrorist strategy'.[1] Ironically, Ellacuría had devoted much of his adult life to his struggle against the state terrorism that had dominated Salvadorean society for decades while also denouncing all instances of leftist terrorism.

Ellacuría was born in 1930 in the Basque town of Portugalete. In 1947, he entered the Jesuit order. Over the next 20 years, he studied in Ecuador, Spain, and Austria (with Karl Rahner); he also taught for several years at the Jesuit school in El Salvador. At the Universidad Complutense, he completed his doctoral dissertation on the Spanish philosopher Xavier Zubiri, with whom he maintained a close collaboration until the latter's death, in 1983. He returned to El Salvador, in 1967, and began to teach philosophy at the UCA (founded in 1965) and was immediately appointed to the board of directors. Inspired by the currents of Liberation Theology, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, he promoted the idea of 'a different kind of university', devoted to social justice and human rights. Naturalised as a Salvadorean in 1975, he also played a vital role in creating a progressive movement among the Central American Jesuits.[2] In so doing, he transformed *Estudios Centroamericanos* into one of the most important social science journals in the region. In 1976, he criticised the military regime for backing down in its push for land reform in the face of oligarchic resistance. His article, '¡A sus ordenes, mi capital!' earned him national prominence and the enmity of the military and the oligarchy. He became rector of the UCA in 1979 and served until his assassination. Throughout the 1980s, he was a tireless and often lone voice calling for a negotiated end to the civil war.

This article focuses on Ellacuría's political thought and praxis during the late 1970s. He remains one of the rare utopian thinkers who relentlessly applied his ideas to quotidian political, social and economic struggles. I argue that Ellacuría made an important contribution to political theory, namely a highly original conceptualisation of the relationship of popular organisations and politics that adumbrated the work of contemporary theorists. I will also place Ellacuría's analyses in dialogue with the collective memories of some peasants of the north-eastern department of Morazán, in part to offer another perspective on the critical period of Salvadorean history, immediately following the military coup of October 1979, when a reformist solution to prevent civil war seemed possible.[3]

[1] Quoted in Teresa Whitfield, *Paying the Price: Ignacio Ellacuría and the Murdered Jesuits of El Salvador* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995), p. 307 and p. 329.

[2] In addition to Whitfield's foundational text, see Ricardo Falla, 'Subiendo a Jersualén (una semblanza)', in Jon Sobrino and Rolando Alvarado (eds.), *Ignacio Ellacuría: 'Aquella libertad esclarecida'* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1999), pp. 29–42.

[3] The article will not analyse his vast philosophical and theological oeuvre. On northern Morazán, see, Leigh Binford's *El Mozote, Anthropology and Human Rights* (Tucson,

Although the article does not offer a substantially new interpretation of the post-coup period, by highlighting Ellacuría's unique analysis of the correlation of political and social forces during the last months of 1979 and by analysing the previously unexamined split within the progressive wing of the Church, it does offer new insight into the failure of the reformist experiment.

The inability of Ellacuría and the peasants of Morazán and others on the Liberation-Theology inspired Left to form an alliance in the autumn of 1979, despite their shared goals, is an example of what I call a *desencuentro*, a Spanish word with greater reach and resonance than the individual English synonyms: a misunderstanding, a disagreement, a disjuncture, a run in, or a failed encounter. The interplay between failed encounters of social movements and linguistic misunderstandings, rooted in class, ethnic, gender, and geographical differences is a fruitful area for investigation. People in two different groups can have different understandings of the same concept that, in turn, may condition different practices in a given historical moment. Although the linguistic dimension of political and social divisions is significant, material and other ideological factors are also decisive. Moreover, the linguistic misunderstandings should not analytically be divorced from the expectations attached to those shared concepts or goals.[4]

I propose to use desencuentro as a methodological tool that can aid in our understanding of the divisions among oppositional and subaltern forces. I suggest that we can learn more about such political failed encounters if we pay attention to the role of misunderstanding (about the meanings of words and concepts) in producing, reflecting or exacerbating those salient divisions. For example, elsewhere, I noted that, in the 1980s, the Sandinistas and grassroots peasant activists understood 'people's property' differently, with significant political consequences. The peasant notion, rooted in an earlier conceptualisation of 'private property', emphasised individual access with local, collective control of land whereas the emerging revolutionary notion

University of Arizona Press, 1996) and 'Priests, Catechists, and Revolutionaries: Organic Intellectuals in the Salvadoran Revolution', in Leigh Binford and Aldo Lauria-Santiago (eds.), *Community, Politics, and the Nation-State in Twentieth Century El Salvador* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003). See also Fia Rubio and Eduardo Balsebre, *Rompiendo el silencio: desobediencia y lucha en Villa El Rosario* (San Salvador: MUPI, 2009), 68–107. Also see Jeffrey L. Gould and Carlos Henríquez Consalvi, *La palabra en el bosque* (Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 2011).

[4] For other uses of desencuentros see Bruno Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in Latin America, Politics, Psychoanalysis, and Religion in Times of Terror* (London: Verso, 2012); Julio Ramos, *Divergent Modernities: Culture and Politics in Nineteenth Century Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001). For another interesting use of the term related to the notion of a failed encounter, see Álvaro García Linera, 'Indianismo y marxismo: el desencuentro de dos razones revolucionarias', *Barataria*, 1 (2005).

limited the meaning to state ownership and control.[5] At times, I will use the term in a stronger sense, emphasising the linguistic impact on political disagreement (desencuentro I). At other times, the term will refer to the failure of two groups with shared goals to ally, without specifying a linguistic dimension (desencuentro II).

Background to Political Polarisation

From 1932, when government forces massacred some 10,000 mostly indigenous peasants until 1979, the military ruled the nation in a tacit alliance with an immensely wealthy and powerful landed oligarchy. The loosening of authoritarian rule in the 1960s coincided with the growth of a branch of the oligarchy whose wealth was partially rooted in industry. The limited, but significant period of democratisation allowed for the growth of urban unions and tolerated the emergence of the Federación de Campesinos Christianos de El Salvador (Federation of Christian Peasants of El Salvador, FECCAS), originally a creation of Catholic Action activists and the Christian Democratic Party. As Joaquín Chávez has recently shown, the Archdiocese of San Salvador, Catholic Action and Catholic students played key roles in the organisational process in the countryside and cities.[6] In 1972, the opposition alliance won an estimated 55 per cent of the votes in the presidential election, but fraud prevented the Christian Democrat, José Napoleón Duarte, from obtaining the victory.

The electoral fraud convinced many activists that the electoral road held no promise and thus they devoted their energies to grassroots organising. Over the next five years, FECCAS and rural labour organisations grew exponentially. FECCAS became radicalised under the influence of the Jesuits, other progressive Catholics, and lay activists from the *comunidades eclesiales de base* (ecclesial base communities, CEB). Sectors of the Catholic Church, especially following the Medellín conference of Latin American bishops in 1968, supported the CEBs who provided the core activists for the rural protest organisations. In the cities, leftists reinvigorated the labour movement that gained a substantial presence in the burgeoning *maquila* sector of industry, particularly in textile mills. Collectively, the rural and urban unions, peasant, and shantytown organisations became known as the *organizaciones populares* (OP).

[5] Jeffrey L. Gould, *To Lead as Equals: Rural Protest and Political Consciousness in Chinandega, Nicaragua, 1912–1979* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

[6] Joaquín Chávez, 'Catholic Action,The Second Vatican Council, and the Emergence of the New Left in El Salvador (1950–1975)', *The Americas*, 70: 3 (2014), pp. 459–88. Also see, Héctor Lindo-Fuentes and Erik Ching, *Modernizing Minds in El Salvador: Education Reform and the Cold War, 1960–1980* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2010) for a fine synthesis of the reformist period of the 1960s.

On 20 February 1977 the Salvadorean military regime once again engaged in electoral fraud to perpetuate itself in power. Between 40–60,000 protesters gathered in the capital, in the *Plaza la Libertad*; soldiers opened fire on demonstrators leaving over 100 dead.[7] The regime decreed a state of siege, unleashing a wave of repression against the OP throughout the country. When he took office in July, General Romero bowed to international human rights pressure and lifted the state of siege, only to reinstate it in November (responding to pressure from the domestic Right). The repression thus developed in a particular national and international context. As the social scientists Paul Almeida and Charles Brockett have underscored, due in large part to their prior growth, the repression in 1977–9, despite its severity as measured by hundreds of civilian deaths and disappearances, did not seriously weaken the OP.[8] Indeed, even during the state of siege, workers and peasants staged 40 strikes and dozens of land occupations.

During the late 1970s, the OP were unique among Latin American radical movements both due to the preponderant influence of Liberation Theology and the degree to which they aligned themselves with guerrilla groups. By 1979, the Bloque Popular Revolucionario (Popular Revolutionary Bloc, BPR, founded in 1975) was the most important group, with an estimated 80,000 members (in this country of 4 million), mostly rural labourers and peasants but with growing numbers of organised workers and *pobladores*. The Bloque emerged primarily out of FECCAS and the Unión de Trabajadores del Campo (Union of Land Workers, UTC). The Frente de Acción Popular (Popular Action Front, FAPU, founded 1974) developed a strong base of support among industrial workers and counted on from anywhere 8,000 to 40,000 activists. Founded in late 1977, Las Ligas Populares 28 de febrero (The Popular Leagues of 28 February, LP-28), with 5,–10,000 members, initially led by militants of middle-class origin, had its strongest base of support among the eastern peasantry, especially northern Morazán but they strove to recruit among coffee plantation workers and the urban poor. Each OP was linked to a separate 'political-military' organisation.

The Church and the Organizaciones Populares

Many members of the Bloque, FAPU and LP-28 had begun their activism within the CEBs; some remained active in the base communities.[9] Although

[7] William Stanley, *The Protection Racket State* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995), p. 110.

[8] Paul Almeida, *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925–2005* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Charles Brockett, *Political Movements and Violence in Central America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[9] Accounts of CEB members who join the OP are numerous. See, for example, Jorge Cáceres, 'Radicalización política y pastoral popular en el Salvador: 1969–1979', *Estudios Sociales*

the pattern of religious and political engagement in the CEBs varied, the common denominator was the personal transformation that accompanied a religious conversion. That process helped curtail the domestic violence and alcoholism that ravaged rural communities. The CEBs engaged in communal practices, including road and school building and farming. These practices reinforced messages of individual dignity and social solidarity, eventually leading members into organising activities for peasant and worker rights.

Ellacuría came to understand the relationship between the CEBs and the OP directly through his experience with the Jesuit mission in Aguilares. His close relationship with the head of the mission, Fr. Rutilio Grande, allowed him to experience the early manifestations of a desencuentro between the OP and the Church. The Jesuits began work in the sugar-cane area north of San Salvador, focused on training Delegates of the Word, who learnt and would teach about religion and social issues through the dialogic methods of Paulo Freire. They soon formed 300 Delegates of the Word. The Jesuit students who participated in the CEBs studied at the UCA's Centre for Theological Reflection, which Ellacuría directed. In 1974, they began to reanimate FECCAS in the area. By the end of its first year in Aguilares (population 30,000), FECCAS had 900 members and collaborators.[10] Grande and Ellacuría both sought to aid the Jesuit students in their endeavours. Ellacuría hosted a meeting of FECCAS activists in the UCA in December 1974. Yet, soon he and Grande began to criticise the students' level of commitment to FECCAS at the expense of the CEBs. Ellacuría and Grande were not only concerned about time commitment but moreover about the lack of boundaries between the Church/CEBs and FECCAS. The frontier area was one of desencuentro between the OP activists and the Jesuits committed to Liberation Theology. They both ascribed to similar goals of social and personal liberation, but the Jesuits understood those goals as in part realisable within the boundaries of a strong Church. Rutilio Grande became increasingly troubled by the expectation that the Church should fully commit its resources and prestige to campesino activism, rural union organisation and agrarian mobilisation. In January 1976, despite his profound commitment to the objectives of the campesino organisation in Aguilares, he tendered his resignation to

Centroamericanas, 33: September–December (1982); Consejo de Mujeres Misioneras por la paz (eds.), *La semilla que cayó en tierra fértil: testimonios de miembros de las comunidades cristianas* (San Salvador, 1996).

[10] Rodolfo Cardenal, *Historia de una esperanza: vida de Rutílio Grande* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1985), p. 439. Also see Carlos Cabarrús. *Génesis de una revolución* (Mexico DF: Ediciones Casa Chata, 1983), p. 173. In a 1977 study of seven cantons in Aguilares he found that of 812 households, 23.3 per cent belonged to FECCAS; Salvador Carranza, 'Una experiencia de evangelización rural parroquial, Aguilares, septiembre de 1972–agosto de 1974', *Estudios Centroamericanos,* 348/349: October–November (1977).

Archbishop Chávez asking for an assignment away from his parish. Neither the archbishop nor his Jesuit superiors deemed it prudent for him to depart at that time.

Grande criticised the Jesuit students and the FECCAS activists for trying to use the Church for specifically partisan activities. At the same time, he decried the loss of the best CEB leaders to the peasant organisation, and argued that the students should not consciously siphon off grassroots activists. He faced what Rodolfo Cardenal called a '*crisis galilea*' (Galilean crisis).[11] Caught between the local FECCAS pressure, growing rightist belligerence and the refusal of his Jesuit superiors to reassign him, he sought the counsel of Ellacuría.

The Jesuit intellectual responded with an analysis of the situation in Aguilares, in which he began to work out his ideas on the relationship between the Church and the OP. His principal recommendation was for Grande to continue to work actively in support of FECCAS, however indirectly. There was no doubt that FECCAS had its own roots and that its radicalism responded to the country's historical reality. Grande had a vital role to perform and that included exercising an ethical influence on the organisation. This advice points to a paradoxical logic of this desencuentro: the need to maintain a proper, but engaged distance rather than a complete unification (or *encuentro*) of the two organisational spaces.[12]

The Salvadorean Right had no interest in such fine distinctions: a death squad executed Rutilio Grande on 12 March 1977, as part of a regime drive against the Jesuits and peasant organisations. Many CEB members were targeted for arrest, torture and execution. In June 1977, a rightist death squad threatened to kill all 47 of the Jesuits in El Salvador, if they did not leave the country within 30 days.[13] General Romero, however, denounced the threat and offered protection to the Jesuits. Since February 1977 Ellacuría had been prohibited from returning from Spain.[14]

In August 1978, upon his return to El Salvador, he intervened in a debate within the Church; his writings became the basis for his contribution to Liberation Theology and political theory.[15] In 1978, four conservative

[11] Cardenal, *Historia de una esperanza*, p. 499. This refers to Jesus's personal crisis in the province of Galilee when he faced repression, the incomprehension of many of his followers, and the abandonment of some of his disciples. In response, he left the area.

[12] Thanks to Gavin Arnall for this suggestion. Ellacuría wrote extensively about the need for the autonomy of the CEB with respect to the OP. See, 'Comentarios a la Carta Pastoral', by Tomás Campos (Ellacuría's pseudonym), in Mgr Oscar Romero *et al.*, *Iglesia de los pobres y organizaciones populares* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1978).

[13] *Washington Post,* 'Salvadoran Terrorists Vow to Kill Jesuits', 22 June 1977.

[14] Whitfield, *Paying the Price*, p. 101.

[15] Ellacuría also had developed a good relationship with the Bloque leader, Apolinario Serrano. Interview with Jon Sobrino, San Salvador 2011; interview with Salvador Samayoa, San Salvador, 2012.

bishops aligned against Archbishop Romero and Bishop Arturo Rivas y Damas in a public debate about the role of the Church in political and social conflicts. Archbishop Romero, following intense discussions with Ellacuría and others, had issued a '*Carta pastoral*' (pastoral letter) that offered critical support to the OP. In response, the conservative bishops denied the right of priests or nuns to have any formal relationship with FECCAS, the UTC or the BPR, citing their Marxist-Leninist orientation.[16]

Ellacuría's principal criticism of the conservative bishops was their fundamental misunderstanding of the contemporary configurations of Marxism. In short, their view of Marxism-Leninism as an antagonist of religion was not only antiquated in that it did not take into account the new currents of Marxism in Western Europe and Latin America, but it undermined the evangelical mission of the Church. Marxism, judiciously applied, was a vital tool for understanding historical reality. More significantly, the popular organisations were potentially contributing to the coming of the Kingdom of God on Earth, regardless of the ideological orientation of some of their leaders. The Church could not realise that goal, alone, and thus needed the popular organisations as fundamental 'mediations': 'In this sense the popular organisations … evangelize the Church, announcing a good news not only to the world but to the Church.'[17]

In the same critique, Ellacuría countered their negative assessment of the popular organisations. He argued that the CEBs had a decisive, supplementary influence on the OP. The CEBs formed the core of the Church, declaring 'Las comunidades de base pueden servir de base a la Iglesia del futuro …' ('the base communities could serve as a base for the Church of the future').[18]

The CEBs had complementary but fundamentally distinct roles, even if many people shared joint memberships. They often created the spiritual conditions for an individual or collective's conversion towards social-economic and political action. Once people joined the popular organisations, the CEBs played an even more important role. They formed, as it were, the critical consciousness of the popular organisations. Their emphasis on personal transformation, inter-personal ethics, equality, and social solidarity allowed the CEBs, primarily through individual joint membership, to ensure that the popular organisations did not degenerate into mere appendages of political-

[16] Ellacuría, 'Comentariosa la carta pastoral', in *Veinte años de historia en El Salvador (1969–1989) Escritos Políticos* vol. 2 (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1991), pp. 679–732.

[17] Tomás Campos, 'La Iglesia y las organizaciones populares en El Salvador', *Estudios Centroamericanos*, 359: septiembre (1978), p. 698.

[18] Ignacio Ellacuría, *'La Iglesia de los pobres: sacramento histórico de liberación', in Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino,* Mysterium Liberationis, vol. I (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 1990), p. 146. Ellacuría had already laid out his analysis of the Iglesia Popular as the base of the church in Ignacio Ellacuría, 'Notas teológicas sobre la religosidad popular', *Revista de Fomento Social*, 127: julio–septiembre (1977).

military organisations or to lose their emancipatory value. The CEBs incarnated the core values of integral liberation and would suffuse the popular organisations with them, in spite of their daily, harsh encounters with the forces of repression. The practice of the CEBs would become 'prophetic' in that they offered a powerful critique of existing society and at the same time a model of the future. Indeed, Ellacuría counselled the OP to nurture their utopian dimension:

> What we would like to propose is not a dogmatic thesis, but rather a utopian ideal. Without diminishing the immediate historical efficacy of the organisations, we desire that they realise their potential through the construction of the new man in the new land. We can formulate the ideal as follows: the popular organisations should sustain themselves as a utopian principle of power, not as an effective principle that leads to the real takeover of state political power … to centre the organisation on the seizure of power will throw off course their potential project of the integral liberation of man.[19]

Ellacuría developed this argument against the politicisation of the OP more forcefully in the early 1980s, as he reflected upon this 'extraordinary' movement, virtually unparalleled in the annals of Latin American history. His theoretical defence of the autonomy of the OP converts him into a precursor to the *autonomistas* who form an important sector of the Latin American intellectual Left today.[20] The originality of his thought lies in the articulations between immediate (reformist) objectives, personal transformation and a notion of 'prolonged struggle'. Critiquing the key strategic concept of the Bloque and its guerrilla allies:

> The strategy of prolonged struggle is not merely an exigency due to the correlation of forces but moreover it responds to the need to transform our being itself and the consciousness of the labouring class; this is the deepest and most valuable principle of liberation.[21]

It is very doubtful that the Bloque or its guerrilla allies could have seriously engaged with his interpretation of 'prolonged struggle', due to their overriding commitment to armed struggle. The prolonged struggle for Ellacuría was intimately tied to his more theological view of the CEB/popular organisation dynamic. In the CEBs, people would 'live the Gospel' while struggling for 'integral liberation … Only if one lets the world of the poor live the fullness of Christianity … will they become a people of Salvation and contribute to the salvation of others. Thus, those who due to political haste do not allow this people to mature in themselves … the Christian seed … are wrong'.[22]

[19] Tomás Campos, 'La Iglesia y las organizaciones populares en El Salvador', pp. 698–9.
[20] For a useful anthology of *autonomista* writings, see *The South Atlantic Quarterly* special issue, 'Autonomy and Emancipation in Latin America', editor Álvaro Reyes, 111: 1, Winter (2012).
[21] Tomás Campos, 'La Iglesia' p. 699.
[22] Ellacuría, 'La Iglesia y las organizaciones de base', typed manuscript, Ellacuría archives (Centro Monseñor Romero, UCA), 1978 p. 12.

The View from Northern Morazán

Ellacuría did not have direct contact with the peasants of Morazán but did assimilate similar experiences from the central part of the country. Let us consider some testimonies from northern Morazán, as they illustrate what Jay Winter calls 'minor utopian' elements of the CEB that the Jesuit intellectual sought to foment.[23]

In El Salvador, during the 1970s levels of social inequality were acute: 1 per cent of landowners owned 63 per cent of the land, in a country that was 60 per cent rural. Life expectancy was 46 years. Within El Salvador, Morazán was the poorest department. Its human development indices ranked below several sub-Saharan countries. In 1970, the area's population (some 55,000) was overwhelmingly made up of peasants on small and poor plots of land who cultivated maize and other basic grains. They also cultivated henequen used for making hammocks and coffee harvesting sacks. By the 1970s many of the smallholders had to migrate seasonally for coffee, sugar or cotton harvests.[24]

Change came to the region when, starting in 1969, the local, conservative priest sent mostly middle peasants to take courses at El Castaño, a peasant training centre near San Miguel. Priests from Cleveland, Ohio originally staffed the centre that had grown out of reformist currents in the Church.[25] When the peasants returned to their villages they began to organise CEBs that within a few years involved more or less one-third of the population. Reflecting on her experience, Altagracia, a middle peasant from a small village, a teenager in the early 1970s:

> We shared the difficulties … Our first thoughts were always, 'What can I do for my neighbour? For us we went along as if we were like a flock; where the catechists went, we all went. And if something happened to someone all of us were ready to help. We protected each other.[26]

Gabriela Hernández, a poor peasant from a village near Torola, who was a teenager in the mid-1970s, discussed the origins of collective farming:

> When someone was unable to tend his or her fields, the organisation helped. That's how it started. Later, they made a collective, a large milpa. And don Hernández who had fertile land … allowed for the people to cultivate there. When the harvest was ready they would divide it up. They divided it up among all those who worked and

[23] On the notion of minor utopia see Jay Winter, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom: Utopian Moments in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 5.

[24] I conducted interviews in northern Morazán, during numerous short visits from 2006–2011 and for that reason I highlight that region in this article. The CEBs's efforts to work communal land were quite unique in the country.

[25] Telephone Interview with Father Denis St Marie, 2011; on peasant centres and CEBs see Anna Peterson, *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997), pp. 151–3.

[26] Interviews with Altagracia, Meanguera, Morazán, 2007–9. Nom de guerre: most of those whom we interviewed used their nom de guerre, such as Caifás, Nolvo, Altagracia, etc.

sometimes to those who didn't work as well. [It was about] improving the quality of life.[27]

Inspired by Acts 4: 32, as Gabriela pointed out, some of the middle peasants donated land to the community. 'The people began to share their goods and properties … our sense of property changed'.[28]

Regino, a poor peasant, from the Torola area, a young adult in the mid-1970s, conjured up the joyful quality of the experience: 'We finished weeding one *milpa* and went to another. We finished the other and continued to the next. We finished all the weeding in the whole valley. We didn't feel the burden of the labor.'[29]

These practices were intimately involved in the process of individual and collective transformation, including to a degree, of gender relations. Although during the early 1970s, only males were chosen to attend the peasant training centre at El Castaño, San Miguel, female participation in the CEBs was extremely high. One salient effect of that participation was a significant decline in domestic violence.[30] Referring to her domestic abuse, Gabriela commented, 'It is a miracle that I am here', ascribing the transformation of her husband to their participation in the CEB.[31]

With the important caveat of continuing gender inequality, a utopian dimension of the movement briefly infused the lives of the peasants. This reflected Ellacuría's vision of the potential of popular organisations (including his relative blindness to women's issues).[32] Although there were vast differences among the CEBs in the rest of Latin America the creation of voluntary communities founded on equality, individual responsibility and a collectivist ethos were shared characteristics.[33] Ellacuría's main thesis was that the Left gained qualitatively with the presence of the CEBs, not only because they reached people with whom it had not connected previously but, moreover, because those people prefigured the new society.

[27] Interview with Gabriela Hernández, San Luis, Morazán, 2009.

[28] Interview with Gabriela Hernández, 2009. Acts 4:32, 'All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own but they shared everything they had.'

[29] Interview with Regino, Agua Zarca, Torola, 2009.

[30] Interview with Miguel Ventura, Morazán 2009; Ventura recognises that for some years he practised gender discrimination in not training female catechists.

[31] Interview with Gabriela Hernández, 2007.

[32] On minor utopian experiences including Morazán, see Jeffrey L. Gould and Charles R. Hale, 'Utopías menores en América Central', *Boletín para el Fomento de Historia Centroamericano,* 53, April–June: 2012.

[33] See John Burdick's for a very different CEB experience, *Looking for God in Brazil The Progressive Catholic Church in Urban Brazil's Religious Arena* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996). Also see, Pablo Richard and Guillermo Meléndez (eds.), *La Iglesia de los pobres en América Central: un análisis socio-político y teológico de la iglesia centroamericana, 1960–1982* (San José: Editorial DEI, 1982).

Ellacuría and the Organizaciones Populares

Throughout the late 1970s, as increasing numbers of CEB members joined peasant and labour organisations, Ellacuría, though still concerned about OP 'manipulation' of CEBs pushed harder for their autonomy; he conceptualised a space between the OP and their guerrilla allies. In so doing he confronted Marxist-Leninists who saw the organisations as essentially front groups for the political-military organisations.[34] Ellacuría recognised that the leadership of the OP acted with a measure of autonomy to adapt to changing circumstances and to meet the needs of their membership. In addition, many members had no connections to the armed struggle. It was that space that Ellacuría sought to expand; he thus came to represent a unique political presence on the Left.

Indeed, Ellacurian 'liberation' is a terrain of convergence and desencuentro with Marxism. For Marxists and for Ellacuría, the concept meant liberation from political and capitalist economic oppression. At the same time, the Jesuit scholar distinguished between historic and integral liberation, with the latter term emphasising personal transformation associated with religious conversion and practice.[35] Although there are coincidences between the two forms of liberation, for the Jesuit, neither can be fulfilled without the other, and 'esa coincidencia difícilmente pasa por la dictadura del proletariado, tal como se ha venido dando históricamente a través de las vanguardias …'[36] ('that coincidence passes with difficulty through the dictatorship of the proletariat just as it has come historically via the vanguards').

Within twentieth-century Marxism, Leninist epistemology dominated understandings of how subalterns could achieve a consciousness that allows them to clearly understand reality and its structures of oppression.[37] Ellacuría offered a novel, if contradictory alternative to the Leninist model of a vanguard party leadership transmitting scientific knowledge to its base. He suggested, as did other Liberation theologians, that external agents could provoke an initial *desbloqueo ideológico* that created the conditions for the

[34] Ellacuría specifically refers to OP 'manipulation', in 'Notas para una valoración de la acción pastoral de la arquidiócesis en los primeros dos años de Monseñor Romero', 1979, *Archivo Ellacuría*, p. 9. He discusses the space between the OP and the guerrilla groups in that document and in 'El papel de las organizaciones populares en la situación actual del país', originally dated 23 November 1979, reprinted in *Veinte años*, vol. 2, p. 741.

[35] Ignacio Ellacuría, 'Notas teológicas sobre la religosidad popular', p. 257.

[36] Ellacuría, *Veinte años de historia en El Salvador (1969–1989), Escritos Políticos, I* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1991), pp. 323. Although this text was published in 1987, his writings from the late 1970s reflect a similar position.

[37] The works of non-Leninist Marxists, such as Karl Korsch and Anton Pannekoek, had very little readership in Latin America, and thus, there were few non-Leninist left epistemological alternatives available to the radical left. Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, translated by Fred Halliday (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008); Anton Pannekoek, *Workers' Councils* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2012).

subsequent endogenous transformation of consciousness.[38] There is a personal component of that transformation in which the individual commits him or herself to a community and to a class, part of the struggle for an integral liberation that would lead to the creation of the 'new man' (presumably he would have meant *person*), shorn of bourgeois individualism and egotism.

His analysis also led him to question the influence of the radicalised students and schoolteachers in the OP. He considered that non-peasant activists did not necessarily share the same interests as those whom they claimed to represent and that by inculcating a particular understanding of truth and representation they were harming the OP. In 1979, he wrote:

> El problema de la relación entre las elites y las masas siempre es grave y difícil, pero la dificultad es mayor cuando las elites no pertenecen real y materialmente a las masas. Tal situación puede llevar – y es lo más probable que en nuestro caso se haya dado – a una hegemonización ideológica con imposición de contenidos, marcos teóricos, y dogmas.[39]
>
> (The problem of the relationship between the elite and the masses is always serious and difficult, but the difficulty is great when the elite do not belong truly and materially to the masses. Such a situation could lead (and it is most likely that it has already happened in our situation) to an ideological hegemonisation with the imposition of contents, theoretical frameworks and dogmas.)

Ellacuría, himself a member of a rigid hierarchy, did not necessarily understand the problematic positioning of his own analysis. For he decried the threat of elitism in the OP from a particular social-economic and cultural position that could easily be dismissed as the embodiment of an equally remote elite. Yet, he argued for the possibility and the necessity for the endogenous development of subaltern consciousness linked to an external, cognitive framework of the Bible and Marxism. He believed that once a lengthy process of de-ideologisation had taken place, then workers and peasants, on their own, would recognise material reality, existing power relations, and the means to achieve social and political change that would directly serve their interests. Exogenous forces, especially vanguards, however well intentioned, would derail that process, either by substituting their own political interests or by artificially accelerating the process.

Yet the rate of popular protest did accelerate during the first months of 1979, as industrial workers engaged in an unprecedented wave of strikes and factory occupations. The OP often spearheaded these movements. Such success for the Left is all the more remarkable considering that it was still mired in intensely debilitating, sectarian conflict. For Ellacuría, their organisational commitment to conquer state power enabled an intrinsic sectarianism, explaining both the ideological intolerance that reigned on the Left and the

[38] Cabarrús, 'Génesis de una revolución', pp. 141–63.
[39] Ellacuría, 'El papel de las organizaciones populares', p. 740.

repression in the Soviet Bloc. In El Salvador, the Left divided along various axes. There was a sharp division between the revolutionary popular organisations and the reformist political parties (the Communist Party, the Social Democrats, and the Christian Democrats). Within organised labour, despite the conflict between the Communists and FAPU, there was occasional tactical cooperation within FENASTRAS, the principal leftist labour federation. That degree of cooperation with 'revisionists', opened up the FAPU to bitter ideological attacks from the Bloque, who also battled hard for a space within the increasingly radicalised labour movement. They believed that their organisation was tied to the vanguard of the Salvadorean socialist revolution and that other leftist organisations suffered from such ideological deviations (usually of the reformist variety) that they were, in effect, enemies of the people. Ironically, Ellacuría, an arch critic of leftist sectarianism, had his closest contacts and friendships with Bloque activists.[40]

The ERP, the parent group of the LP-28 had underscored their sectarianism in blood, executing one of their own, the poet and intellectual, Roque Dalton, in 1975, for putative ideological deviations and possible CIA connections (subsequently they recognised that they were wrong about the CIA link). The Resistencia Nacional (National Resistance, RN) broke with the ERP over the assassination but also because of the latter's fixation on armed struggle as opposed to popular organisation (which Dalton had promoted). Thus the RN's mass organisation, FAPU, otherwise the chief proponent of leftist unity, refused any collaboration with the LP-28 until 1980.

Despite this morass of sectarian strife, the Left exerted significant influence over the rapidly growing labour movement that was spurred by the growth of industry related to the Central American Common Market (especially US owned maquilas), notoriously ineffective enforcement of labour laws and rampant inflation. FAPU and to a lesser extent the Bloque gained strong footholds in FENASTRAS, the most militant and rapidly growing labour federation. FENASTRAS-affiliated workers engaged in 46 factory occupations in 1979. In Latin America, only in Chile (1971–3) and Argentina (1973–4) had workers eclipsed that number of occupations. Localised largely in the San Salvador metropolitan area, trade union demands over wages, working conditions and union recognition/anti-union repression informed the struggles.[41] The occupations often involved taking employers hostage as a means of negotiation and to avoid

[40] Interviews with Salvador Samayoa (San Salvador, 2012) and Hector Samour (San Salvador, 2012).

[41] On the labour movement, see 'El movimiento obrero organizado en el marco de la crisis nacional', San Salvador FENASTRAS, 10 January 1980; Salvador Samayoa and Guillermo Galván, 'El movimiento obrero en El Salvador: resurgimiento o agitación'; *Estudios Centroamericanos 369/370*: July–August 1979 and 'El cierre patronal de los empresarios: prueba de fuego para el sindicalismo revolucionario', *Estudios Centroamericanos*, 371: September 1979.

violent repression. For the Bloque and the FAPU, factory occupations were primarily a pre-emptive response to the threat of violent repression, in turn justified by the illegality of virtually all strikes. The *tomas* also impeded the deployment of potential strikebreakers drawn from the massive ranks of the unemployed or underemployed (an estimated 30 per cent of the urban population). The tomas came to signify the revolutionary Left's increasingly powerful presence within the labour movement and the latter's ascendance.

Ellacuría, the OP and the October Coup

From 15 October 1979 until 3 January 1980 a Junta Revolucionaria de Gobierno (Revolutionary Junta of Government, JRG) committed to profound political and economic structural reforms governed the country. Its failure signalled a rapid descent towards a civil war that cost some 75,000 lives. Most analysts and scholars have considered the project doomed from its inception. The late Rafael Menjívar Lara, the author of the most thorough account of the period, argued that the junior officers' goals of structural reform and the maintenance of the armed forces' institutional integrity were incompatible. US policy analysts and some scholars blamed, in different measure, both the extreme Right and Left for sabotaging the reformist project. Others blamed US policy for impeding any meaningful transformation of the military.[42] Ellacuría's analyses of the period stand out for their sophistication and acuity, allowing us to probe the Left's descencuentros that conditioned the failure of the JRG.

By the autumn of 1979, the labour and peasant struggles had reached a crescendo, in a conjuncture characterised by rising inflation and by unemployment above 30 per cent (due to structural causes and capital flight). Some 250,000 people aligned themselves with the OP. The Christian Democratic Party was larger, but also contained a strong left sector. A substantial minority of the population supported the regime and the Right. Finally, with the triumph of the Sandinista revolution in July 1979, the United States somewhat erratically pushed the Romero regime to modify its repressive policies.[43]

Since the beginning of 1979, junior officers had been discussing the possibility of a reformist coup in large part to defuse the revolutionary threat. They engaged in dialogue with different sectors of the Left including Ellacuría and Archbishop Romero. Many junior officers involved in the plot were committed democrats who were ready to purge the military and to remake it as a non-repressive force. Yet, shortly before the coup, Colonel

[42] Rafael Menjívar Ochoa, *Tiempos de locura: El Salvador, 1979–1981* (San Salvador: FLACSO, 2006), p. 135. For a discussion of the significant conservative US influence on JRG, see William Leo Grande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977–1992* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p. 41.

[43] For a useful summary of US policy during this period, see Stanley, *The Protection Racket State* pp. 128–30.

Jaime Abdul Gutiérrez, an institutional loyalist, managed somewhat fortuitously to gain a key position within the movement.[44] On 15 October junior officers carried out a bloodless coup, issuing a proclamation that promised structural (including agrarian) reforms, an end to human rights abuses, the abolition of the paramilitary group ORDEN, freedom for political prisoners, and the democratisation of society. As Menjívar states: 'La importancia de la Proclama era obvia para el tiempo y para la historia; no hay en el país una declaración de principios tan avanzada en términos de sensibilidad social y beneficios a las mayorías, al menos no una que hubiera estado en manos de unos gobernantes dispuestos a cumplirla.'[45] ('The importance of the proclamation was obvious for the time and for history; there has not been in the country such an advanced declaration of principles in terms of social sensitivity and benefits for the majorities, at least not one that has been in the hands of rulers willing to fulfil it.)

The *Proclama* at once signalled a full-scale assault on oligarchic power and the possible removal of the military from political life. There is little doubt that Ellacuría played, at the very least, an advisory role in its writing. He and Mgr. Romero offered support for the new government, conditioned on meeting major human rights objectives and bringing military criminals to justice. Ramón Mayorga, a member of the left wing of the PDC and the rector of the UCA, was chosen as a civilian member of the Junta Revolucionaria de Gobierno along with Guillermo Ungo, a UCA professor and social democratic leader.

Five days after the coup, Ellacuría (the new UCA rector) offered a preliminary analysis. He warned that 'capital and the forces of the Right were moving feverishly to build a military structure that … can be controlled so that nothing important changes in the country … They cannot yet control the young officers, but they are placing their peons amongst the colonels.'[46] Then, he called on the junta to open up the prisons themselves to find and free the political prisoners. He suggested that if the approximately 300 disappeared prisoners had been executed then the former regime and the executioners had to be brought to trial (at that very moment, the military members of the junta found out that none of the prisoners had survived). Lastly, he addressed the revolutionary Left again urging it to ally with the progressive officers and with the two leftist civilians in the five-man government.

For the Jesuit scholar, the revolutionary Left's critique of the JRG suffered from myopia and ideological rigidity: it was not the creature of imperialism (he believed that the US had nothing to do with the coup) nor was the JRG part of

[44] On the seemingly fortuitous inclusion of Gutiérrez, see Stanley, *The Protection Racket State,* pp. 44–5; Rodrigo Guerra y Guerra, *Un golpe al amanecer: historia y memoria* (San Salvador: Ediciones Indole, 2010), pp. 62–5; Rafael Menjívar Ochoa, *Tiempos de locura*, pp. 136–41.

[45] Menjívar Ochoa, *Tiempos de locura,* p. 157.

[46] 'La semana fue así', 20 October 1979, in *Entre el terror y la esperanza,* p. 581.

a fascist military dictatorship. Their conception was not dialectical: 'reality is dynamic and changing and from the civic-military insurrection the country can transform itself to another order of things'.[47] Leftists were caught off guard politically and conceptually by the successful coup and its progressive orientation. They could only understand it as an imperialist manoeuvre without recognising their own role in creating the conditions for the land and financial reforms that Ellacuría considered to be the heart of what he called *la revolución necesaria*. The Left could not conceive of the success of the junta programme of structural reforms, even though it resembled their own transitional programme. Ellacuría restated his analysis of the problem of representation, that is the Left's perception of itself as the sole representative of the 'people' and their related assessment of themselves as the singular repository of 'correct' analyses. He also reiterated his critique of the fethishisation of popular organisations and their leadership with serious detriment to those whom they putatively represented.

Testimonies from Morazán reveal the tenuousness of Ellacuría's revolución necesaria. In that remote area, as in the departments of San Vicente, Usulután, Cabañas and Chalatenango there was a state of virtual civil war between the peasant militants and the paramilitaries of ORDEN and the Guardia.[48] Throughout rural El Salvador, campesino militants easily adopted the positions of the revolutionary Left given that the military members of the JRG were unwilling or unable to reign in the terrorist Right. Three decades after the coup, the argument was still powerful, as Leandro recalls: 'When they overthrew Romero and set up the Junta Revolucionaria, then the ERP came and wanted us to organise a march to see whether the new government really was revolutionary.'[49] Although this testimony replicated the general line of the ERP and the LP-28, it left open the possibility that the junta was 'revolutionary', or at least points to a desencuentro (I) around the meaning of 'revolution' in the Salvadorean context. Among the Morazán contingent, some questioned the LP-28 tactics without being in a position to vocalise their doubts. Referring to the 29 October massacre, when security forces killed some 30 demonstrators (many from Morazán), Andrés Barrera recalled,

> We went to a demonstration to support the Bloque who had occupied the Ministry of Labour. We went around it twice, shouting slogans, and each time we passed by the National Police. It was like we were looking for something and we were: we were looking for trouble. The third time the police opened fire on us.[50]

[47] 'El nuevo gobierno debe orientarse a los cambios', 23 October 1979 in *Entre el terror y la esperanza,* p. 590.

[48] By mid-November, the JRG announced the dissolution of ORDEN but the official announcement seemed to have little effect.

[49] Interviews with Leandro, Torola, 2007, 2009; interviews with Robertón, Jocaitique, 2009, 2011.

[50] Inteviews with Andrés Barrera, 2007, 2011.

Yet, the OP's structure impeded any expression of Barrera's qualms about LP-28's policy. Moreover, the violent attacks on the demonstrators made retaliation the order of the day.[51]

On 31 October, Ellacuría reproached the Left for its constant, often violent street demonstrations: 'Why couldn't you give the junta a month?'[52] Although it is unclear if his public cry played a significant role in the negotiations, on 6 November, the Bloque signed a one-month truce with the government. The agreement also lowered bus fares and food prices and committed the government to intervene on the side of labour in several strikes. The JRG also promised within the 30-day period to enact significant wage increases in the fields and factories and to institute human rights policies.[53] FAPU and LP-28 also agreed, in effect to a one-month truce. November did register a lower level of arrests and street clashes. The guerrilla groups, however, did not follow suit and continued to attack ORDEN in the countryside and engage in kidnapping and selective terrorism, although with a lower rhythm of intensity.

Ellacuría was the main, if not the only, public figure who focused on the distinction between the increasingly unified OP and guerrilla practices in November as an example of the former's autonomy: 'Para entender este problema de la guerrilla, donde parece haber tanta confusión es menester separar drásticamente los grupos guerrilleros FPL, FARN, ERP de sus frentes políticos de masas el Bloque, FAPU, y las Ligas. Se dan conexiones entre los frentes políticos y los grupos guerrilleros, pero son distintos.'[54] ('To understand this guerrilla problem where there seems to be so much confusion, it is necessary to separate drastically the guerrilla groups FPL, FARN, ERP from their mass political fronts, the Bloque, FAPU and las Ligas. There are connections between the political fronts and the guerrilla groups, but they are different.') For the Jesuit intellectual, the distinction was fundamental for the JRG to understand, so as not to repress the OP, whom he hailed as the key to the 'process of liberation'.[55] Moreover, he hoped that the autonomy (and their unity) would deepen.[56] He proposed that the guerrillas' raison d'être would begin to dissipate when the protection of strikes and demonstrations was no longer necessary. Moreover, as broad sectors of the public accepted some form of socialism, its imposition by force would lose any possible justification.

[51] Tomas Guerra, *El Salvador: octubre sangriento* (San José: Centro Victor Sanabria, 1979) pp. 53–5; *Pueblo: Boletín Informativo del FAPU* 13 November 1979.

[52] Ellacuría 'Las organizaciones populares ante la nueva situación', in *Entre el terror y la esperanza,* p. 614.

[53] *Combate Popular (BPR)* 15 November 1979; Guerra, *El Salvador: octubre sangriento,* pp. 72–3; Stanley, *The Protection Racket State,* pp. 157–8.

[54] 'Las acciones guerrilleras', 12 November 1979, in *Entre el terror y la esperanza,* p. 643.

[55] Ellacuría, 'Las organizaciones populares ante la nueva situación', p. 771.

[56] On OP unity, see *El Salvador: alianzas políticas y proceso revolucionario, Cuadernos de Coyuntura* (Mexico DF: SEPLA 1979).

The guerrilla organisations, to some degree, were responding militarily to the far Right who had no intention of cooperating with the junta programme: death squads tied to the military executed 363 people in November, the highest monthly total of the year. Similarly, due to 'the secret codes of the military', despite the uncovering of 'clandestine jails', and the report of a government commission that documented the disappearances of the 297 political prisoners, the JRG still refused to fully acknowledge their execution, a move that would have necessitated bringing officers to trial.[57]

Ellacuría daily tried to push the JRG to fulfil the programme of structural reform and to refrain from repression against the OP. He argued that if the regime refused to carry out anti-oligarchic structural reforms, it should remove the 'revolutionary' from its name.[58] He also engaged in a critical dialogue with FAPU and the Bloque, who, in turn, privately continued to talk to members of the JRG.[59] He took their positions seriously as he did those of the Communist Party, who had militants in the government and maintained a nuanced position towards the junta. Although he did not speak for the UCA, he was rector of the university in which 19 of its professors and staff actively participated in the government.

Thus, he was surely stung when on 15 November 'a group of priests, members of religious orders and Christians of the CEBs and of parishes throughout the country' issued a communiqué sharply attacking the UCA's negative ideological impact on the popular organisations through its radio broadcasts and its role in supporting the new repressive regime. In addition to criticising the university and indirectly Ellacuría, they attacked the UCA professors and researchers who had joined the government:

> han visto y han vivido la realidad y las necesidades del pueblos desde sus escritorios y desde sus posiciones cómodos … todos ellos pertenecen a la pequeña burguesía y clase media; tienen una posición de clase bien definida y difícilmente favorable, hasta las últimas consecuencias a los intereses de las clase explotada …[60]

('They have seen and lived the reality and the needs of the people from their offices and comfortable positions … they all belong to the petit bourgeoisie and the middle class; they have a well-defined class position and with difficulty favourable to the interests of the exploited class right up to the utlimate consequences.')

[57] 'La grave responsabilidad de encontrar a los presos políticos', 8 November 1979, *Entre el terror y la esperanza,* pp. 630–1.

[58] The JRG took preliminary steps towards a land reform in December.

[59] Salvador Samayoa, minister of education, was a member of the Fuerzas Populares de Liberación, allied to the BPR. That connection facilitated some communication. The FAPU also had contacts with the JRG. The positions of the leftist organisations are laid out in *El Salvador: alianzas políticas y proceso revolucionario*.

[60] *Comunicado a los cristianos de El Salvador y pueblo en general*, 15 November 15 1979, signed by un grupo de sacerdotes, religiosas, y cristianos de CEB y de parroquias de todo el país, reprinted in *El Salvador: un pueblo perseguido, testimonio de cristianos II, de octubre de 1979–junio de 1980* (Lima: Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones, 1980), pp. 213–18.

The UCA functionaries in the government maintained a 'clean record because they never dirtied themselves fighting for the people'. In the radical Christian group's discussion questions, they asked, 'Do you think that the media of the Archdiocese (Radio YSAX and *Orientación*) have completely fulfilled their role, or on the contrary, do you think that they have become spokespeople and defenders of the Junta?'[61] The discussion questions both reproduced the CEB (Freirian) methodology and suggested an answer, in this case, a condemnation of Radio YSAX (and thus of Ellacuría).

The sharp division within the Church of the Poor provided a harsh example of a desencuentro (I) between Ellacuría and Romero who shared profound commitments to the CEBs and those base community activists who believed that the goal of 'integral liberation' was being sacrificed to an anti-Christian counter-insurgent strategy. The desencuentro involved a strategic question with a linguistic dimension: can 'liberation' be achieved incrementally under a hybrid regime, or does the contradictory quality (progressive and repressive) of the government strip the term of its meanings? Curiously, Ellacuría, who responded to most criticism coming from the Left, did not directly react to the communiqué.[62] Yet, he was in constant communication with Mgr. Romero who did take direct issue with the communiqué. In a meeting of the leaders of the CEBs, he stated that the document was one of 'political analysis' and not 'pastoral' and that 'they draw conclusions that are at times offensive and negative for our church'.[63] The next day, Romero met with the *Senado Presbeterial* and the discussion of the document continued. In that meeting, he referred to the group as '… closer to the political lines of the popular organisations than with the Pastoral of our Church'.[64]

The CEB leaders eventually organised themselves into the Coordinardora Nacional de la Iglesia Popular. Although the group remains unstudied, it seems to have gained its most significant support in those regions where

[61] *Comunicado a los cristianos de El Salvador,* in the original version the weekly *Orientación* and Radio YSAX were signalled out in parentheses, but in the reprinted version of 1980, they were not mentioned.

[62] Benito Tobar, 'Origen y peculiaridades de la Iglesia que nace del pueblo en El Salvador', pamphlet published in San Salvador, 1980 (located at Princeton Theological Seminary), p. 9. Tobar's account underscores the gravity of the split between his group and Romero. He also claims that Romero apologised to his group in early 1980 for having lacked confidence in their judgement. Plácido Erdozaín, *in* Archbishop Romero: Martyr of El Salvador (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1981), p. 68, states 'Our base communities were distressed.' There is no doubt that they represented a large group of the remaining CEBs. Although there is no evidence of Ellacuría's direct response, Pablo Richard, in Richard and Meléndez, *La Iglesia de los pobres en América Central,* p. 116, writes that theologians of the Catholic University (UCA) criticised the document for its 'pobreza teórica'.

[63] *Diario de Msr. Romero*, 22 November 1979. http://www.servicioskoinonia.org/romero/varios/RomeroOscar-SuDiario.pdf.

[64] *Diario de Msr. Romero*, 23 November 1979.

FECCAS and the UTC had grown out of the CEBs. Thus, for example, in San Vicente and Usulután, where UTC militants had battled *hacendados* over the previous five years, there existed a nearly seamless connection between the Bloque and the CEBs.[65] Indeed, they resembled the Ellacurían model with the notable difference that the OP maintained the dominant role in the relationship. The group also had significant support in the poor barrios of San Salvador, especially Zacamil.[66]

During this tense conjuncture, Archbishop Romero began to use dichotomous categories, the Church and the OP, quite removed from the Ellacurían analyses about the intimate relationship of the OP and the CEBs. That at least a significant number of CEBs aligned themselves directly with the OP, who in turn, attacked the junta and all those who supported it, provoked a hostile and defensive reaction by the archbishop. Although their personal reactions to the criticism from the radical Left of the Church might have differed, Ellacuría probably shared aspects of Romero's perspective as they met several times a week during this period.[67]

Mgr. Romero was surprised at the depth of support within the Church for the CEB/OP position: 'se descubre que, para muchos sacerdotes y comunidades, interesan más los aspectos politicos …'[68] ('It is evident that many priests and communities have a greater interest in the political aspects …'). The group of priests and nuns allied with the OP continued to attack the Romero/Ellacuría position of critical support for the junta. A sympathiser with the group commented, 'The weeks following the publication of the document were difficult and hard. The hierarchy accused them of being manipulated and of not being ecclesiastical but rather political …'[69] In the words of one of the group's leaders, 'En este momento el diálogo prácticamente no existe …'[70] ('Dialogue practically did not exist at that moment …').

At the same time that Romero (and indirectly Ellacuría) was engaged with the radical Left in the Church, the archbishop was also resisting the Church

[65] The majority of testimonies from the Bajo Lempa region suggest this dynamic. See Carlos Henríquez Consalvi (ed.), *Río de la memoria, historia oral del Bajo Lempa, Zona Tecoluca* (San Salvador: Ediciones MUPI, 2011). Elisabeth Wood's, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) deals in part with the same region.

[66] For the Zacamil CEB reaction, see the testimony of Carmen Elena Hernández in María López Vigil, *Oscar Romero: Memories in Mosaic* (Washington, DC: EPICA, 1993), pp. 334–6. The testimonies of the seminary students recount their arguments with Romero about the JRG, pp. 342–53. Also see Pedro Henríquez, *Iglesia profética y cambio social* (San José: Ediciones DEI, 1988).

[67] In Romero's diary, disagreement is always emphasised and there is no indication of disagreement with Ellacuría. They met several times in late November and early December.

[68] *Diario de Msr. Romero*, 27 November 1979.

[69] Richard and Meléndez (eds.), *La iglesia de los pobres en América Central*, p. 116.

[70] Tobar, 'Origen y peculiaridades de la iglesia que nace del pueblo en El Salvador'; *Diario de Msr. Romero*, 11 December, 1979.

hierarchy that had recently gained complete control of the *Conferencia Episcopal*. From that position, they were attempting to directly subvert Archbishop Romero's policies.[71] Thus, for a brief period, the archbishop seemed to internalise the 'discourse of the two extremes', that is, the notion that both Left and Right shared equal blame for the difficulties of the junta and the country.[72]

On 18 December, the National Guard attacked farmworkers who had occupied the large coffee hacienda, *El Porvenir*, located 50 kilometres north-west of the capital, demanding higher wages, benefits and better work conditions. Troops killed some 25 farmworkers and captured 16 others.[73] According to the official communiqué, militants of the LP-28 fought back for four hours and 16 'guerrillas' were captured. Ellacuría harshly condemned the repression while criticising the LP-28 for its provocative tactics:

> But the irresponsibility of las Ligas does not justify the prepotency of the Armed Forces. They have been deceived, once again, by listening only to the voices of the oligarchy. Neither in Congo nor in Berlin [where the Guardia killed striking workers on a coffee plantation in Usulután] did they face guerrillas … they killed 25 and did not find more than a small number of arms; they have killed, then, unarmed people.[74]

The LP-28, in response to the repression, occupied the Archbishopric as a means of pressuring the Church to intervene with the National Guard and the junta to recover the bodies and to find the prisoners.[75] Fr. Rogelio Poncele, a Belgian priest based in Zacamil and allied with LP-28 went to Romero to try to persuade him to intercede. In the heated discussion with the Archdiocesan Curia, the protesters complained that the Church had turned '180 degrees against the people'. The archbishop tried to check his temper and keep the focus on the technicalities of the occupation.

Throughout the month, it became increasingly clear to Ellacuría (and here he differed with Mgr. Romero) that the political divisions within the government were insurmountable and that junta member Colonel Gutiérrez and the minister of defence, Colonel García remained unwilling to confront the old

[71] *Diario de Msr. Romero*, 14 December 1979.

[72] *Diario de Msr. Romero*, 21 December 1979. Here he paraphrases his discussion with the Minister of Health, about 'la dificultad de dar pasos adelante con tanta oposición de las dos extremas'.

[73] Foreign Broadcast Information Services (FBIS), 19 December 1979, Agence France Presse reported: 'These strike actions coincided with the rural workers' victorious strikes in 17 haciendas and sugar plantations, that had begun on November 27.' See *El Independiente*, 19 December 1979.

[74] 'De nuevo sangre sobre El Salvador', 19 December 1979 in *Entre el Terror y la Esperanza,* p. 744. There is a significant shift in the Radio YSAX commentaries from 4 December when they condemned similar occupations. On 23 December, Romero began a process of rapprochement with CEB activists.

[75] FBIS, AFP report 19 December 1979.

guard.[76] The 30-day truce ended without any significant fulfilment of the JRG promises. Apparently there arose a conspiratorial effort to transform the junta in a progressive direction, in a loose alliance with the OP. Despite one account that implicates the UCA rector, there is little hard evidence that Ellacuría participated in the conspiracy.[77] The operation hinged on support from Colonel Adolfo Majano, the key moderate within the JRG who recognised the need to displace the oligarchy and the military high command. Majano, however, claimed that he refused to join the movement out of a democratic sense of legality.[78] The failure of the conspiracy sealed the fate of the junta. Ellacuría's commentaries in late December refer not to this conspiracy but rather to the heated rightist rhetoric against the junta, Romero and the OP and to rumours of a right-wing coup. On 19 December, he ironically congratulated the Right on its success in placing the military once again under its control. The following day, he stated: 'Han vencido a quienes defendían al pueblo, derecha salvadoreña. Pero celebren rápido, porque la guerra civil está un paso más cerca.'[79] ('Salvadorean Right, you have overcome those who defended the people. But celebrate quickly because civil war is a step nearer.') The tensions exploded at a meeting of the junta and the military on 27 December, where it became clear that the civilians would not accomplish any of their agenda and that the Proclama had become meaningless. Ellacuría fully sympathised with the Left members of the government when they resigned in early January 1980 and recognised the imminent threat of civil war.

Ellacuría's Post-Junta Reappraisal

Ellacuría initially apportioned some of the blame for the failures of the revolución necesaria on the revolutionary Left who feared that the junta's success involved a zero sum game that would weaken it. Primarily he trained his prose against the oligarchic Right for its high levels of repression in defence of its class interests and its subversion of the political process. In 1980, following the collapse of the JRG, his understanding of the causes of failure began to change. If not a stillbirth, he came to see its founding

[76] *Diario de Msr. Romero* 23 November discusses his meeting with Col. Gutiérrez and 10 December 1979 discusses his meeting with young military officers opposed to Minster of Defence, Col. García.

[77] Rafael Menjívar Ochoa, in *Tiempos de locura,* pp. 202–3, quotes Rubén Zamora as stating that a young military officer came to see him on behalf of Ellacuría, to involve him in the conspiracy to replace Gutiérrez and García. Three of Ellacuría's closest confidantes, Rodolfo Cardenal, SJ, Jon Sobrino, SJ and Hector Samur all deny that Ellacuría was involved.

[78] Menjívar, *Tiempos de locura,* pp. 203–4. The following year Majano and Ellacuría seriously discussed a coup to avert the impending civil war. See Whitfield, *Paying the Price,* p. 141.

[79] 'Rumores de golpe de estado', 20 December 1979 in *Entre el terror y la esperanza,* p. 746.

moment as deeply flawed for two fundamental reasons.[80] First, the JRG and the movement that produced it did not include the OP, as the military faction sought to consciously exclude and marginalise the revolutionary Left.[81] On the contrary, for Ellacuría, the OP had won the right to participate if not lead the process. Therefore it was understandable that they would resist the junta, revealing the fallacy of the original exclusionary plan.[82] The other error, committed by the reformist Left, was not to have exacted serious commitments from the junior officers to thoroughly purge the traditional military leadership as part of any endeavour to deal with the problem of the disappeared and to correct human rights abuses. In his assessments of 15 October, Ellacuría no longer dwelt on the missed opportunity for the OP whose support for the reformist Left in the government might have prevented civil war. He did, however, question whether the fractured Left had been prepared politically for the task of leading such a left-centre coalition. He also continued to lament privately that the revolutionary Left never fully understood the possibilities opened up by 15 October, particularly for the urban and rural labour movements. Fearful of the loss of hard-won influence among the masses, the revolutionaries refused to back the reformist Left. For Ellacuría, that refusal was related to the failure of the leftist political-military organisations to grant the OP the autonomy they needed to grow and mature.[83]

Yet, the Jesuit intellectual's reappraisal of the events had limitations. He did not examine the desencuentros at work during those two and a half months within, as it were, the specifically Christian-inflected Left. Ellacuría and Archbishop Romero, on the one hand and the Morazán peasants and those priests and lay activists associated with the communiqué, on the other, exemplify that desencuentro: despite their shared commitment to the egalitarian and communitarian values of the CEBs, they developed sharply divergent positions with respect to the junta and the possibilities for structural change. Embroiled in a daily, dangerous struggle, grassroots militants had a difficult time accepting the Ellacurían vision of ideological transformation, given their sense that resistance to a terrorist state demands hierarchies of knowledge and chains of command. Another dimension of the desencuentro perhaps derived from an internal contradiction. The UCA rector placed an

[80] Teresa Whitfield, *Paying the Price*, quotes Italo López Valencillos as exclaiming to Ramón Mayorga, that the JRG 'nació muerto', p. 128.

[81] Ellacuría, 'Interpretación Global del Proceso Histórico', in *Veinte Años II*, p. 899 (originally written 1982).

[82] Ibid., p. 915 in 'En busca de un nuevo proyecto nacional', written in 1980.

[83] Personal communication, Rodolfo Cardenal; Ellacuría, 'Los modos sociales de participación social', Undated handwritten manuscript, Archivo Ellacuría. Probably written in 1981, this essay underscores the continuity of his thoughts about the relationship of the OP to political struggle.

extraordinarily high value on strictly scholarly pursuits, such as philosophy, theology, and sociology, as fundamental aids to the liberation struggle. Yet, how could that aid be realised without falling into what Ellacuría opposed: a Leninist epistemology that emphasised, a scientific understanding achieved by experts, who in turn imparted the truth to the grassroots?

Although the desencuentros in El Salvador in 1979 had particularly lethal consequences, they do not stand alone in modern Latin American history. Rather, there were other conjunctures, such as the 1940s, in which different groups with shared programmes of anti-oligarchic structural transformation found themselves on opposite sides of the barricades precisely when victory seemed attainable. In Costa Rica, for example, from 1944–8, Vanguardia Popular (Communist Party) and the social democratic intellectuals in the Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Social shared commitments to socialised medicine, a pro-worker labour code, and unemployment insurance. Yet, they found themselves in bitterly opposed political coalitions, divided by class differences, anti-Communism and by Vanguardia's support for a government that suffered from a degree of corruption and incompetence.[84] In Nicaragua, from 1944–6 urban workers under the influence of leftist labour organisers shared social and economic objectives with radical democratic students, but they failed to come together politically. The Left, rooted in the artisanal working class, distrusted the students both due to their class position and to their recognition that the primary goal of the latter was the overthrow of Somoza regime. In order to accomplish that political goal, the students were willing to ally with the Conservative Right, who would wipe out the gains of the labour movement, if in a position to do so.[85] These desencuentros (II) involved the war-time emergence of a student movement committed to democracy at the same time that labour codes and labour unions had become fundamental social conquests of that period.

Why then, these descencuentros (II) with their devastating political consequences? Perhaps the Salvadorean example can be instructive. We have to pay close attention to the locus of enunciation of the shared concepts and values. Thus, the Communiqué's class criticism of the university professors in government, though simplistic, does underscore their different experiences of fear and violent repression. Those different experiences, in turn, had salient effects on their evaluations of specific conjunctures. During this brief period of the first junta (15 October 1979–4 January 1980), repression affected the Left differentially, striking lethal blows against radicalised peasant and labour groups but

[84] See David Díaz, 'Social crises and struggling memories: populism, popular mobilization, violence and civil war in Costa Rica, 1940–1948', unpubl. PhD diss., Indiana University, 2009.

[85] See Jeffrey L. Gould, 'Nicaragua', in Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough (eds.), in *Latin America between World War II and the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

leaving the 'moderate' Left largely unscathed. Those who were suffering the violence in *carne propia* had a difficult time understanding the nuances of Ellacuría and Romero's critical support for the regime.

The primary importance of radicalised Christians set the Salvadorean case apart from other revolutionary movements. Notwithstanding, it was in the unique relationship between the CEBs and the radical organisations of workers and peasants that the Salvadorean Left suffered one of its more poignant desencuentros, first elucidated by the martyred Rutilio Grande and then by Ellacuría. Grande had agonised over the blurred boundaries between the realm of religious and political activity whereas the radicalised peasant movement gained its remarkable strength precisely from that zone of interaction. As noted above, this symbiotic relationship perhaps reached its apogee among hacienda workers organised in CEBs and the UTC in San Vicente.

Yet, elsewhere the process was different and disturbing to Ellacuría. By 1978, for example, virtually all of the CEB activists in Morazán had joined the revolutionary Left, LP-28 or the ERP, and had come to view their prior participation in the base communities as something good but primitive. Those who joined the guerrillas resigned as catechists and began to view their former *hermanos* with a degree of condescension, using the language of commitment levels to denote their superiority. Nolvo, an LP-28 militant, commented:

> I was more interested in organising to start the struggle; I caught on quickly. But there were others who stayed with religion who believed you had to love your neighbour as you do yourself, work together and all that … so there came a moment in which there were three of us who were the most resolute …[86]

The compression of time induced by revolutionary mobilisation and state violence had dramatic consequences on the Morazán peasantry and others.[87] By late 1977, a cycle of repression commenced that was so intense, brutal and arbitrary that it coloured any reassessment of their earlier experiences or even their initial decision to join the ERP.[88] There was thus a temporal descencuentro within the mobilised peasantry in Morazán: the cold fury directed at the National Guard and paramilitaries by the late 1970s created a willingness to cede the democratic politics and the minor utopian practices they had forged in the Christian Base Communities to a political-military organisation that practised chain of command leadership and had neither time nor interest

[86] Interview with Nolvo, 2007.

[87] See Greg Grandin, 'Living in Revolutionary Time: Coming to Terms with the Violence of Latin America's Long Cold War', in Greg Grandin and Gil Joseph (eds.), *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence During Latin America's Long Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 1–44.

[88] Peasant informants cited repression as the main reason for joining the ERP but in fact the CEBs all agree that violent repression against the CEBs began with the arrest of the priest, Miguel Ventura, on 3 November 1977. See *Orientación* 8 November 1977 for details.

in social experiments.[89] That created another kind of desencuentro as Ellacuría could not converse with the rank and file of the popular organisations despite his widely-diffused voice on the radio. Although some rank-and-file militants were surely persuaded by his analyses, like Barrera's inability to verbally question the provocative tactics of his group, they had neither the volition nor the freedom to debate their own leadership. Notwithstanding, where the CEBs survived, they continued to play something akin to the role Ellacuría had envisioned as a source of ethical reflection on the practices of the OP.[90]

Conclusion

In this article, we have focused on two of the meanings of desencuentro, the failed encounter between different sectors of the Left and the linguistic misunderstandings and disagreements, for example, related to the notion of liberation. Bruno Bosteel's notion of *desencuentro*, as the (inevitable) product of the uneven development of capitalism is useful in that it allows us to focus on the differentiated impacts of time/space on different actors and their understandings of their realities.[91] However, by focusing on the relationship between language and political disagreement our use of the term suggests that when the same concept is shared but inflected by distinct meanings, rooted in different experiences, the possibilities increase for severe misunderstandings with salient political consequences. Indeed, sectarian resentment easily arises with mutual accusations of bad faith and hypocrisy when different groups employ the same idea, such as 'liberation', 'solidarity' or 'revolution'.

This article suggests that both Ellacuría and the CEB/OP activists made significant contributions to Left theory and practice during the 1970s. They grappled with issues of agency and representation that Marxists had argued about throughout the twentieth century. In the Salvadorean case, the CEB activists forged certain didactic tools borrowed from Paulo Freire and simultaneously created 'minor utopias', non-hierarchical communities based on strong notions and practices of solidarity. Reflecting on these communities where constant education and self-education took place, Ellacuría began to question models of external transformation of consciousness. Together, the Jesuit intellectual and the radicalised Christian peasants refashioned a key concept and practice from the socialist tradition and adapted it to the convulsed Salvadorean countryside: a relatively autonomous community of equals could adumbrate a future society whose preservation would become a revolutionary goal. Moreover, there were direct connections as both forces nourished each other intellectually. We have seen how the minor utopias of

[89] See Gould and Hale, 'Utopías menores en América Central'.
[90] See *El Río de la Memoria,* edited by Henríquez Consalvi, pp. 59–62.
[91] Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in Latin America,* p. 37.

rural El Salvador loomed in the political thought of Ellacuría. Similarly, Mgr. Romero, who maintained a lengthy dialogue with the Jesuit scholar, was a major political influence on the militant peasantry.

Ellacuría worked in a unique moment of transition between the horrors of the Latin American Cold War and the 'Washington Consensus', the putatively democratic restructuring of the economy and society that fully emerged in the 1990s. Yet, his political analyses exhibit a prescient quality. Today, the Latin American Left once again suffers a major division between those committed to electoral politics and an 'extractavist' economic model and those associated with *autonomismo.* Ranging from the Movimento Sem Terra in Brazil to Mexico's Zapatistas, *autonomista* movements have attained a prominence that has aroused the interest of social scientists, political theorists, and has troubled politicians of all political hues. Along with the Italian political philosopher-activist Antonio Negri and Raúl Zibechi, the writings of John Holloway have gained importance, offering theoretical insights into and support for social movements in their active critique of Left parties and governments. These theorists emphasise a fundamental opposition between emancipation and counter-hegemony, with the latter linked to Left strategies that tend to reproduce forms of oppression and exclusion. The most radical version of this theory is summarised in Holloway's phrase, in part modelled on Zapatista practice and rooted in libertarian Marxism, 'Changing the world, without taking power',[92] In this view, the state is a capitalist creation based on exclusion and hierarchy; it is impossible to transform society in a democratic and egalitarian direction using the state.

In the early 1980s, Ellacuría wrote, 'Esto plantea una grave cuestión teórica y práctica. ¿Deben las organizaciones populares aspirar a la toma del poder?'[93] ('This poses a serious theoretical and practical question. Should popular organisations aspire to the seizure of power?'). His response restated his interventions from 1979, adding a reflection on both the Sandinista and the El Salvadorean experiences. On the one hand, a revolutionary state can carry out structural reforms and defend against foreign intervention. On the other, 'the struggle for power is accompanied by endemic evils that to a large extent nullifies the best qualities of popular participation'. Ellacuría argued that the OP should support political allies while also maintaining sufficient autonomy to guarantee popular participation and the reconversion of national resources in favour of the 'mayorías populares'. This theoretical reflection conditioned his fundamental criticism of the OP in that they 'identified social efficacy with

[92] John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power … Or Take Power to Change the World* (Amsterdam: International Institute for Research and Education, 2002). Also see Raúl Zibechi, *Dispersing Power: Social Movement as Anti-State Forces* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2010).

[93] Ellacuría, 'Los modos sociales de participación social', p. 7.

the seizure of power' and fell prey to a premature and fateful militarisation. On the contrary, a dialectical relationship between the OP, as the 'concrete expression and promotion of its own interests' and a progressive government, 'could and should be the best motor in the creation of new social forms of participation and also of new political forms of truly popular democracy'.[94]

Ellacuría was thus a new social movement theorist *avant la lettre*. He emphasised the transcendental importance of the inter-personal collective realm where social relations are transformed and hierarchies are overturned, thereby adumbrating the concerns of contemporary theorists. However, he never lost sight of this communitarian realm's connections to social-economic struggles.[95] His theoretical and political interventions alert us to the importance of this social and inter-personal dimension of political contestation before the onset of the post-Fordist (or postmodern) regimes of accumulation, marked by the concomitant death of state socialism and the ascent of neoliberalism. Ellacuría therefore represents a political-theoretical bridge between the two eras, compelling the recognition that the 'old' struggles of workers and peasants contained elements often thought of as unique to the 'new' social movements.

Unlike the New Social Movement and *autonomista* theorists, in 1979, Ellacuría had to search for a political response to state sponsored murder. The Jesuit intellectual thus offered critical support to the junta, something the *autonomistas* never would have countenanced. In a sense, Ellacuría suffered his own internal disjuncture between an autonomista and a statist/reformist vision. Although he did not address, let alone resolve, this disjunction in his thought, his support for the JRG was inextricably tied to la revolución necesaria, his programme of structural reforms that collapsed the distinction between reform and revolution. It did so because on the one hand, the reforms would change the balance of power in favour of the popular sectors and, on the other, because the minimal programme of the revolutionary forces embraced the same reforms. For Ellacuría the revolution was necessary both because the reforms were needed to meet the pent-up social demands of workers and peasants and because they necessarily needed to be carried out by what he envisioned as a broad left-centre coalition. Whether or not there was a real chance for such an alliance to push through the bold programme of labour and human rights and land and financial reform is, of course, impossible to answer. Had the radical Left supported the moderate Left within the JRG, however, it is hard to imagine a worse outcome than the civil war that ensued.

Ignacio Ellacuría for all of his passion and brilliance had his own limitations, in part those of most twentieth-century intellectuals who did not submit to the

[94] Ibid., p. 12.
[95] Ignacio Ellacuría, 'Utopía y Profecía', pp. 433.

discipline of a political party. This freedom from party lines allowed him the intellectual space to exercise his political acumen, courage and clairvoyance. Thus, in 1981, while indirectly aligned with the FMLN through his ties to the Frente Democrático Revolucionario, Ellacuría announced that negotiations represented the only solution to the civil war since neither the guerrillas nor the regime could win an outright victory. Yet, that independence also impeded his contact with the organised grassroots that alimented so much of his thought. That limitation was most poignant during the period after the coup. Although he spoke to the masses, he directly engaged with leaders who sought him out due to his unbreakable honesty and his brilliance. Ultimately, this distance contributed to fundamental desencuentros within the Christian Left. By late 1979, peasants in northern Morazán and elsewhere whose experiences reflected Ellacuría's utopian thought could only conceive of political liberation from murderous repression. Similarly, although the radical Catholic Left shared the Ellacurían vision of the CEBs as an ethical force within the OP, they could not accept his expansive vision of the revolutionary process in the midst of so much state violence. In critical moments, Ellacuría's was a lonely voice in a vast political wilderness haunted by terror. Challenging the orthodoxies of the revolutionary Left, Ellacuría proposed the contingency of history and the necessity of psychological and social transformation in the course of struggle. These radical, creative notions foundered under the violent waves of repression and revolt, for nearly a decade before a bullet to the brain silenced his voice forever.

Spanish and Portuguese abstracts

Spanish abstract. Este artículo se centra en el pensamiento y práctica política del intelectual jesuita martirizado durante los años 1970s. Emplea el concepto de *desencuentros*, para analizar la relación entre los malentendidos lingüísticos y la división política. El escrito pone énfasis en el novedoso análisis del intelectual en cuanto a la relación entre lo eclesial y las organizaciones populares, dirigidas por la izquierda radical. El material discute dicho pensamiento político en base a la investigación del autor con las comunidades de base del norte de Morazán. El artículo también discute el apoyo crítico del académico jesuita a la Junta Revolucionaria de Gobierno (15 de octubre de 1979 a 2 de enero de 1980). La sección final discute la relevancia de Ellacuría para la política contemporánea latinoamericana.

Spanish Keywords: desencuentros, Ignacio Ellacuría, organizaciones populares, comunidades de base eclesiales

Portuguese abstract. Este artigo foca no pensamento e prática política do intelectual jesuíta martirizado no final da década de 1970. Emprega-se o conceito de desencuentros para analisar a relação entre mal-entendidos linguísticos e divisões políticas.

O artigo destaca as análises inovadoras do jesuíta no tocante às relações entre as organizações populares e as eclesiais, lideradas pela esquerda radical. Discute-se seu pensamento político em relação à pesquisa desenvolvida por ele em comunidades de base do norte de Morazán. O artigo também debate o fundamental apoio do estudioso jesuíta à Junta Revolucionaria de Gobierno (entre 15 de outubro de 1979 e 2 de janeiro de 1980). Na seção de conclusão, a relevância de Ellacuría para a política latino-americana contemporânea é discutida.

Portuguese Keywords: desencuentros, Ignácio Ellacuría, organizações populares, comunidades eclesiais de base