

The peasant revolution in 1932 -- led by Farabundo Martí, one of the first Communists in Central America -- was a turning point in the use of government-sponsored terror and military rule⁵ (Christian, 1986:94). The catastrophic drop in coffee prices caused by the global depression motivated the uprising. At first, 4,000 unarmed peasants and farm workers were killed during a peaceful demonstration. Then, as a lesson, the army brutally killed more than 30,000 people, which was later known as "La Matanza" massacre. By the end of the mass murders, 4 percent of the population was killed, the opposing Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS) was annihilated, and the indigenous population was forced to abandon their native dress, language and cultural activities. (Gettleman, 1986: 52)

After the massacre, social exclusion became implemented through violence, and was supported by the state and through the legitimating force of tradition. The backwardness of the peasants and the 'invisibleness' of the masses, the lack of any form of organization, and the passiveness of the terrorized population supported this condition. 'Guardias blancas' (white guards deployed by the *terratenientes* [landowners]) and the Salvadoran Army were jointly responsible for the repressive activities. (Torres-Rivas, 1994:13)

In addition, a series of military dictatorships began in the 1930's, and lasted for about fifty years; the longest military rule in Latin America. (Fish, 1988:9) The army had made an informal agreement with the "landed rich" (often referred to as coffee oligarchy), in which an "unwritten pact to use and abuse each other for mutual benefit." (Christian, 1986:96) The elite would exchange 'donations' to the army (such as in the form of percentages of harvests) for the ability to influence the political decision making process.

During the late 1940's, the Army organized a formal party through which it governed the country. Social exclusion was guaranteed by growing political violence and a reign of state terror, which was enforced wherever the population found opportunities for overcoming social exclusion. (Torres-Rivas, 1994:13)

Progressive sectors of the Salvadoran military and opposition political leadership united to organize a civil-military junta, which began to develop in the rapid growth years of the 1950s and 1960s. In 1950, elite groups formed the Party of National Conciliation. (North, 1990:73) The system relied upon senior army officials for leadership and presidential candidates. Officially, competing parties were not prohibited, elections were called every five years, and a national assembly was established. However, if the National Coalition party did not win the

⁵ Most military school cadets came from lower-middle-class families; many of which struggled to put their sons through high school in hope that they would pass the entrance exam. The school provided four years of free post-secondary education and living expenses. For lower-class families, it provided an opportunity for their children to rise socially. (Christian, 1986:92) In fact, most of the leaders that decided the country's future during the civil war had strong alliances created in the late 1950's and early 1960's during military school. Christian asserts, "no one forgets his classmates." (Christian, 1986:93) This statement implies that the experiences that determined foes and allies began early in the (legal) average thirty-year military career.