



1 Country-Region Context. The Northern Triangle of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala is a term used by the United States and Organization of American States to refer collectively to these three states located between Mexico and Nicaragua. The graphic in figure 1 provides a visual reference of these three countries and their capitals, which are approximately 200 kilometres from each other. The countries share an economic integration and a host of psychosocial, economic, cultural, political, and security challenges that

have driven hundreds of thousands of residents into seeking asylum in North and South America as well as Europe.¹ International observers and interventionists ascribe the causes as a collection of psychosocial-cultural breakdowns that include economic malaise, political corruption, human rights violations, crime, and climate change, amongst other reasons.² While the underlying issues are not unique to these countries, they are most distinctly expressed in a manner that has become an intractable violent social conflict. The USA's Council on Foreign Relations estimates that more than 2,000,000 people have fled the northern triangle since 2014.³ In Honduras and El Salvador, the rates of femicide (killing of women and girls) are among the highest in the world.⁴ Honduras is the deadliest of the three countries with a homicide rate of 38 murders per 100,000 residents annually in 2020. Approximately 95% of murders in these three states go unpunished by dysfunctional systems of justice.⁵ Some of the critical areas of the Northern Triangle, also known as 'red areas', are in effect conflict zones and exhibit high levels of violence and criminality, large numbers of injuries caused by firearms, physical and sexual abuse, torture, extortion, kidnappings, forced recruitment, curfews (unofficial), confinement, invisible borders, a population in fear of violent death or crime, lack of state rule, corruption and impunity, limited access to health and other basic services, and limited access to protection and justice. Significant portions of the population have been forced into displacement to escape threats and violence, moving within the state, requesting asylum, or resorting to irregular immigration.⁶



Figure 1

The USA's Council on Foreign Relations estimates that more than 2,000,000 people have fled the northern triangle since 2014.³ In Honduras and El Salvador, the rates of femicide (killing of women and girls) are among the highest in the world.⁴ Honduras is the deadliest of the three countries with a homicide rate of 38 murders per 100,000 residents annually in 2020. Approximately 95% of murders in these three states go unpunished by dysfunctional systems of justice.⁵ Some of the critical areas of the Northern Triangle, also known as 'red areas', are in effect conflict zones and exhibit high levels of violence and criminality, large numbers of injuries caused by firearms, physical and sexual abuse, torture, extortion, kidnappings, forced recruitment, curfews (unofficial), confinement, invisible borders, a population in fear of violent death or crime, lack of state rule, corruption and impunity, limited access to health and other basic services, and limited access to protection and justice. Significant portions of the population have been forced into displacement to escape threats and violence, moving within the state, requesting asylum, or resorting to irregular immigration.⁶

1.1 United States and Civil Wars in Central America. Beginning in the 1970s, the central American countries of Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras have been in a nearly constant state of social, cultural, and ethnic conflict. The U.S. had significant influence in Latin America, including training some of the most notorious dictators at the infamous School of the Americas, also known as the "School of Coups."⁷ For six decades, some 65,000 soldiers,

¹ [Children and Families Fleeing Violence in Central America - WOLA](#)

² <https://www.wola.org/analysis/people-leaving-central-americas-northern-triangle/>

³ [Central America's Turbulent Northern Triangle | Council on Foreign Relations \(cfr.org\)](#)

⁴ [Femicide or feminicide | Gender Equality Observatory \(cepal.org\)](#)

⁵ <https://www.worldvision.ca/stories/child-protection/northern-triangle>

⁶ [Northern Triangle | Gangs and Migrants | World Vision Canada](#)

⁷ [Northern Triangle violence: 17,422 homicides in 2015 \(ticotimes.net\)](#)

⁷ The school is now called the United States Army's Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC) located at Fort Benning, Georgia.



dictators, assassins, and mass murderers counted themselves alumni of the school that was first created in Panama in 1946 to prevent the spread of communism in the Western hemisphere. The alumnus of this school included Roberto D'Aubuisson, a death squad leader who murdered thousands and gained the sadistic nickname of "Blowtorch Bob" for his methods of torture. Colonel Domingo Monterrosa, the first commander of the ATACATL — an elite paramilitary unit trained and equipped by advisors from the United States — also attended the school and was later fingered for directing the El Mozote Massacre, the bloodiest slaying of guerrilla sympathizers in the entire civil war.⁸ In Nicaragua, the United States supported the 46-year long dictatorship of the Somoza family which finally fell to the followers of a murdered peasant farmer named Augusto Sandina (Sandinistas) in 1979 after decades of civil war.⁹ The United States backed the Salvadoran military government with training, arms, and funding for decades against the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, which killed between 75,000 and 90,000 civilians, mostly rural indigenous farmers.¹⁰ In Guatemala, the US' Central Intelligence agency supported a military coup against President Jacobo Arbenz in the mid-1950s, igniting a 35-year civil war ensued between mostly indigent Mayan peasants and western backed civil-military governments friendly to Wash DC. During the 1980 and 1990s, over 200,000 civilians were killed and the Guatemalan military officer that the US had supported, Rios Montt, was convicted of genocide and sentenced to 80 years in prison.¹¹ The ongoing civil wars spread to Honduras, which led to constant coups and military dictatorships that employed extraordinarily violent suppression of the population.¹² The CIA backed Honduran Army's death squad Battalion 3-16 led the suppression effort though mass murder, torture, and disappearances of anyone accused of dissidence.¹³

1.2 Psychosocial-Cultural Drivers of Conflict and Inhibitors of Resolution.

The population in the interrelated countries of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador consist of segmented societies with vastly different psychological organization and sociological constructions¹⁴. The pre-

Mesoamerica, South & Central America

Figure 2



⁸ This researcher was assigned to the 7th Special Forces Group during this time and has personal experience in the USA's support to civil wars in Central America. As green beret officers, we found our orders coming directly from Washington DC rather than normal chains of command. We were ordered to train and equip these Central American military forces who, in turn, fought guerrilla factions. However, they also operated on their own at times and controlled the civilian populace through brutal violence no matter the cost or human atrocities they committed. All our complaints and objections were overruled, and internal USG investigations into those decisions and actions continues to this day.

⁹ (MacAulay, 1967)

¹⁰ (S. Christian, 1985)

¹¹ (Jonas, 2018)

¹² (Ching, 2016)

¹³ (Fratus, 2020)

¹⁴ Psychological organization refers to the sociocentric versus egocentric individual and collective identity. Sociological construction refers to the assembly and ordering of families, clans, and tribes versus constructed, often urbanized-industrialized societies. The former is inherited over thousands of generations and the latter is artificially constructed by modern humans to replace lost or abandoned inherited structures.

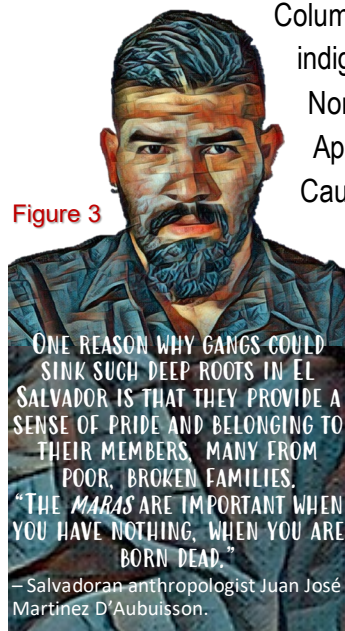


Figure 3

Columbian indigenous peoples are the Maya, a Mongoloid ethnolinguistic people who are indigenous to Mesoamerica.¹⁵ Between 90% and upwards to 99% of all residents in the Northern Triangle identify as all or partially indigenous mestizo, or 'mixed blood'.¹⁶ Approximately 12% of Salvadoreans, 5% of Guatemalans, and 1% of Hondurans identify as Caucasoid-European of Spanish descent from the original colonial settlements.¹⁷

1.2.1 Most of the internationally recognized political-military power, economic control, and national cultural expression rests with the small percentage of those who identify as Caucasoid-European. There are very few 'criollos' or pure Caucasian-European descendants left in these countries. Race, therefore, is subjective and based on claimed lineage and family wealth which is preserved at all costs to ensure the family does not slide downward into indigenous categorization and out from European privilege. The darker one's skin and the more one's facial features reflect one of the indigenous typologies of indigenous phenotypes as shown in Figure 2,¹⁸ the more likely one is to be excluded from consideration as belonging to the power-holding Spanish culture. This racial-cultural dynamic presents itself in a social, political, and economic

practice of *Blanqueamiento* (whitening) to *mejorar la raza* (improve the race) achieve a supposed ideal of biological and symbolic 'whiteness' or Europeanness.¹⁹ such as parents sending their children to the United States or Europe to find a marriage partner. While the practice of *Blanqueamiento* works to affirmatively change racial identity of the dominant segment of Honduran society, other practices work to defend against subconscious threats of racial identity disintegration such as demonizing darker-skinned segments of society. The president of Guatemala from 2016 to 2021, for instance, was Jimmy Morales, a stand-up comedian who came to local fame portraying a blackface character²⁰ that denigrated Afro-Latinos, which account for around .02% of the population.²¹ The most popular heroes and heroines in film and literature are blond haired,

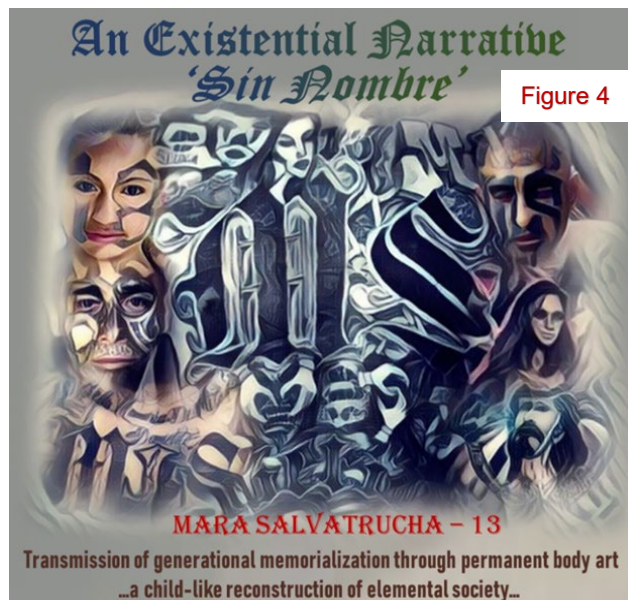


Figure 4

¹⁵ Mesoamerica is a historical and important region and cultural area in southern North America and most of Central America. It extends from approximately central Mexico through Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and northern Costa Rica. Within this region pre-Columbian societies flourished for more than 1,000 years before the Spanish colonization of the Americas.

¹⁶ (Birx, n.d.)

¹⁷ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/>

¹⁸ Andid, Brasilid, Legid, Istmid, Patagonid, Huarpid, and Fuegid.

¹⁹ (Rahier, 1999)

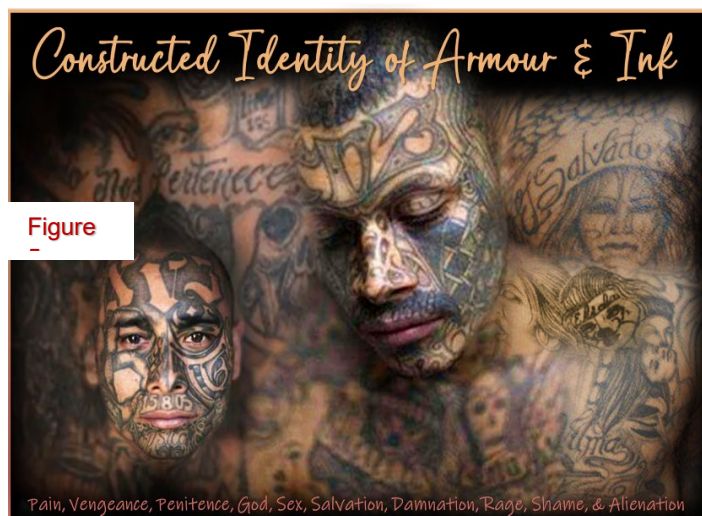
²⁰ Called 'Black-Pitaya' or 'Black-Dragonfruit'

²¹ [Guatemala prosecutors pursue ex-president Jimmy Morales \(yahoo.com\)](https://www.yahoo.com/news/guatemala-prosecutors-pursue-ex-president-jimmy-morales-1200000000.html)



blue/green-eyed light-skinned European looking actors, even though those phenotypes have not been present in this region for decades. During interviews with members of Mara Salvatrucha-13 and Barrio-18, interviewees claimed to be neither Caucasoid-Europeans nor Mongoloid-Mayans. Their extensive body art (tattoos) is a principal symbol of their identity and that identity's expression in physical form.

1.2.2 My research suggests that the community that MS13 is drawn from and is sustained by, have (or are trying to) melded the two competing identities (Euro-Indigenous) in a violent form of social reconstruction. Data suggests that it is a mistake to consider Mara Salvatrucha 13 and Barrio 18 to be mere criminal gangs. In fact, they have long since evolved into complex "criminal-economic-military-political power[s] that poses an existential threat to the states of El Salvador and Honduras."²² The rival gangs MS-13 and La 18 control or influence every facet of



Figure

life in El Salvador, making the small Central American nation the world's most dangerous place outside a war zone²³ The genesis of this force that has challenged the political state to a standstill emerged beginning in 1992, in the aftermath of a brutal 12-year-long civil war. El Salvador's defence minister estimates that as many as 8% of Salvadorians are involved with and under the control of, MS13 and Barrio18, in a country of six and a half million residents. Salvadorians are recruited through violent coercion and extortion of family. The tens of thousands of murders and disappearances are all associated with a three-way gang civil war that involves MS13, Barrio18, and the El Salvadorian Government. During

individual in-depth interviews with members of these groups, I found that their competition with each other and with the established socio-political-economic power base is not so much about physical gain.²⁴ Rather, it is about psychological affirmation and distinction of their large group identities (Figure 5) and the creation of an existential narrative not based on colonial or indigenous histories (Figure 4).²⁵ It is ultimately a self-destructive collective identity and existential narrative that serves as an outlet for a psychosocially-emotionally malformed community that is at war with itself (fight), in full flight (mass emigration) from itself, or in denial of itself (governing elite). And neither the state nor international community seems to be able to respond to this slow-motion disintegration of these three states. This underlying psychosocial-emotional driver of social disintegration and participation in violent conflict suggest that the dangers that asylum returnees face cannot be calculated using western, rational logic. These three sections (6, 6-1, 6-2) establish that the psychosocial-cultural structures of the Northern Triangle countries are in the

²³ (Farah & Babineau, 2017)

²³

²⁴ During coding of in-depth qualitative interviews, issues of respect, honour, collective agency versus alienation, shame, and rage predominated, while financial gain was hardly mentioned.

²⁵ My research and findings are published in USA, UK, CAN Army Special Operations Textbooks that have limited availability to the public based on security classifications. Figure 2 is an assembly of MS-13 gang body art that my research collects and works to translate into a psychosocial-emotional profile for non-lethal targeting by US and UK special operations forces.

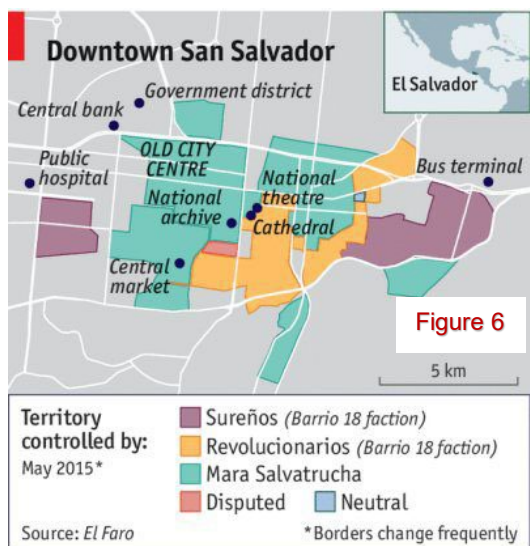


process of disintegration and that this disintegration has been increased by great-power interference and a failure to ameliorate the effects of post-colonial social ordering based on racial and cultural preference. My professional assessment to the USA and UK foreign offices has been that these countries are in what may be thought of as a ‘free-fall’ into increasing levels of violence and disorder, that will continue until the underlying dissonance is finally resolved by those who survive.

2 Information on the current situation in El Salvador relative to security and governance.

2.1 Response. My research and experience suggest that most of San Salvador Metropolis and many of the larger population areas are in an open conflict that the government is unable to comprehend, much less control-secure or ameliorate. Figure 6 illustrates the degree that MS13 and other such organizations permeate even the central capital of San Salvador which are in open combat between government forces and the violent social-criminal organizations contesting control over the city and its population.²⁶

2.2 Reasoning. The various levels of government (city and federal) marginally possess enough combat power to protect the Caucasian Spanish-cultural population segments that maintain the government, and its security services. Government security services also serve as a support backup to the privatized security that protects the national commerce structure. The majority remainder of the civil population are divided between those segments that identify and live as closed indigenous (as well as religious) communities and the remainder who identify as neither Euro-Spanish nor Mayan-Indigenous. The latter are often armed as well as government and private security services, from the flood of weaponry infused into the region by the United States and other countries during its decades of civil war.²⁷ As a consequence, the civilian population that is unable to obtain government or private security or are not under the protection of indigenous or religious communities living in closed societies, are left to survive on their own. This takes the form of *fight* (join a government or private security service, or one of the armed criminal gangs), *flight* (join caravans out of the Northern Triangle headed north to the United States), or *hide in place*, hoping that they will not be killed, abducted, forced into recruitment, or fed on by the conflict parties (rape, robbery, etc).



2.2.1 Competing cliques infiltrate into the local tuk-tuk transportation systems trying to establish control over the dirt arteries that snake into rural hamlets like Ciudad Delgado, where Ana Marisol lived with her husband. They monitor residents, tracking families’ financial conditions for potential extraction they call taxation. A new car, a sudden purchase of cattle, could bring a resident and his/her family to the attention of MS13 or B18 clique. New cliques that move into unclaimed hamlets often choose and move into the best homes as respites and hiding places, setting up in people’s living rooms and “helping themselves

²⁶ This map was produced by El Faro Research from local reports, interviews, and open-source information gathering.

²⁷ (Fratu, 2020; Jonas, 2018)



to the contents of their refrigerators.”²⁸ In the metropolis centre of San Salvador, the Ciudad Soyapango, MS13 controls the supply of gasoline, through distribution of fuel to local shops. MS13 owns the taxis and extorts the bus lines in and out of the town. Anyone with a car is charged \$10 per month and \$15 a month for a truck, for parking fees. The three service garages in town are also owned by MS13 members, as are three of the bakeries in town. And MS13 controls the supplies of flour and wheat deliveries to the non-MS13 owned bakeries and provides bottled water in a town where the public supply is marginally potable, at best.

2.2.2 MS13 and B18’s evolution has restructured the social map of San Salvador with invisible borders that continuously shift with the organizational growth of new members, chapters, and splinters. In the neighbourhoods²⁹ that have extensive and mature gang activity with protection rackets organized in hierarchical fashion, emerging leaders and new chapters of the larger organization will penetrate nearby areas that are lesser protected. Depending on support from the more mature organizational segments, MS13/B18 spread like tendrils of criminal-economic-military- political undertakings that spread, thicken, and mutate. Where they encounter rival gangs, to include Salvadorian government forces, violence ignites. Even Nayib Bukele, the current president of El Salvador’s home Neighborhood of Nuevo Cuscatlán, which houses the military academy is fair game. Last February 2022, authorities discovered a clandestine mass grave containing 26 bodies, all apparent victims of MS13. In even the smallest

villages in El Salvador, the MS13 has cliques that “extort everyone from auto repairman to cotton

FAMILY INTERRUPTED: Malformed Childhoods. Deformed Society.

Figure 7

MS13 formed in the dystopian aftermath of El Salvador’s brutal civil war. The USA backed government in San Salvador eventually destroyed the insurgency, but at the cost of the near complete destruction of social tissue.

Gangs formed in the country’s postwar upheaval that remained mired in economic stagnation because of its destroyed commercial infrastructure base. Thousands of adolescents roamed the streets with no jobs and little else to do. The sense of belonging offered by the gangs was too much for many of them to resist. Most MS13 members are around fifteen years old when they join and pass initiation, however recruitment and grooming of potential members begins as early as age twelve. Girls are also targeted at an early age, either to join the gang or to become sex slaves.

The average MS13 member is around 25 years old and lives in either a house in a poor neighbourhood or an overcrowded jail. They have never held a formal job and likely did not finish secondary education. Most gang members are among the poorest people in Salvadoran society, living on less than \$250 a month. Despite the *mareros’* youth, their faces are scarred, and their eyes hollowed by years of dealing out death and taking abuse. making them look much older.



candy sellers.”³⁰

2.2.3 MS13’s evolution from youth groups defending neighbourhood turf to decentralized hierarchical organisations that coerce, threaten, and kill. Many members and sympathisers, particularly from MS-13, become teachers, lawyers, local government officials and even police officers who serve the gang’s interests. Their influence has

²⁸ (Dudley, 2020; Zaidi, 2019)

²⁹ Called colonias, barrios, cantones, ciudades.

³⁰ (Dudley, 2020)



grown so great that every major political party in El Salvador and Honduras has at some point paid gangs during elections. It is nearly impossible to arrest high-ranking gang members, who are protected by layers of government corruption and disfunction. Senior USA and El Salvadorean officials can sense the magnitude of the challenge, but domestic and international pressure inhibit resolutions that are not based on ever increasing amounts of lethal kinetic coercion. Over the last fifteen years, various Salvadoran governments have tried to crush MS13 and others with con mano dura – with an iron fist. They have mounted massive joint military and police operations in the capital and other cities, arresting thousands, and creating massive prison-housing areas for each gang to cohere and deepen their solidarity. The fact that the government leaders of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala have been indicted for public corruption and large scale narco-trafficking, has only placed them into the ongoing war as a competitor in a three-way civil war.

3 In your expert opinion, would Ms. Ana Marisol Montano Perez be credibly at risk on return to El Salvador from MS-13 based on her story (are her experiences described in her asylum claim credible)?

3.1 Response. Based on the facts of the case as presented and on my research and expertise, Ms. Montano Perez’s experiences are all too familiar and her story is unfortunately very credible. She will most certainly be at imminent risk of physical punishment by pandillas of Mara Salvatrucha 13 for betrayal and disobedience.

3.2 Reasoning. Mara Salvatrucha 13 and Barrio 18 cannot be compared to organized crime in the UK, US, or Europe. While these organizations do in fact, illegally extract large sums of financial resources from the communities that they operate in, they are a psychological, sociological, and emotional phenomenon that is reshaping the collective cultural identity into one that creates a malformed version of love and family life and a deformed version of social interaction and personhood. The latter is malformed into pain-as-love and the latter is deformed into compliant helplessness that is anesthetized by drugs, promiscuity, and casual violence. MS13 and Barrio18 are “not about generating revenue as much as [they] are about creating a collective identity that is constructed and reinforced by shared, often criminal experiences, especially acts of violence and expressions of social control.”³¹

3.2.1 *Normal organized crime is parasitic and driven by rational motives.* Such organizations feed off the societal host without attempting to destroy it, as doing so would eliminate its source of sustainment. Its leaders and members operate in a logical, profit-motive pattern of activities that can be mapped and tracked (though not always proven) by criminologists. They may employ violence to protect their own commercial activities from other crime organizations or security services. Such organizations may



Alma’s Story
MS13 gang members had made it clear they wanted her dead. She had broken one of their rules. A gang wannabe had already hit her square in the head with the butt of a handgun, leaving a deep circular bruise in the middle of her temple, right at the hairline. The scar would stay with her for life. Her parents saw the injury and knew the implications. Her mom hustled Alma to a hotel in San Salvador with a backpack and some of her clothes. They would not see each other again for years.

³¹ (Center for Latin American & Latino Studies, 2018) Page 3
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attract members who display unusual levels of violent hostility but are controlled or eliminated as needed to protect the organization and its goals. Most importantly, organized crime members have psychological identities that are consistent with societal norms, albeit, with moral reasoning structures that allows them to operate criminally sanctioned commercial activities that are socio-culturally disapproved without personality disintegration. They often have families and homes that operate compliantly with social laws and norms. They serve in their communities alongside other community members who are not employed in criminal enterprises. Finally, they seek respect, admiration, and even love from the very society that they are illicitly and violently, feeding on.

3.2.2 *Civil violence in the Northern Triangle is destructive and driven by traumatic psychological and sociological disintegration.* My research into Mara Salvatrucha 13 and Barrio 18, on the other hand, suggests that they operate as a collective pathological cultural-identity group that exhibits traits of identity diffusion present in BPD (borderline personality development).³²

3.2.2.1 Every MS13/B18 member interviewed expressed complex trauma³³ with effects of frantic thoughts of avoidance of real or imagined abandonment. They reported patterns of unstable family relationships that alternated between extremes of idealization³⁴ and devaluation³⁵, often interspersed with domestic violence. The MS13/B18 interviewees recounted their early family lives and reasons for entering the gangs to overcome persistently unstable self-image or sense of self that were marked by self/family-damaging behaviour involving sex, substance abuse, self-harm, or suicidal ideations. Interviewees verbalized feelings of emptiness alternated with inappropriate, intense anger that they found difficult to control and attributed to stress related paranoid ideations of impending violence from (consciously) members of the competing gangs or security services and (subconsciously) from family trauma remembrance and repetition. We found that the membership of MS13 mirrors the membership of Barrio18 in terms of ethnic mix of indigenous-Spanish, and socioeconomic status.³⁶ They are, in most respects identical in terms of phenotype and archetype and require external physical signs (tattoos) to distinguish themselves from each other.

3.2.2.2 The rage and violence perpetrated against each other is a projection of their own self-hatred borne of continuous devaluation and dehumanization by two opposing cultures (indigenous and colonialist) that they are neither part of nor separate from. The individual and collective identity diffusion of MS13/B18 is readily apparent in the gang-membership rituals as new and existing members work to cohere (pull-together) their subconscious-self through recreations of traumatic violence.³⁷ The psychological dynamic at work here is called an Adversary Symbiosis between themselves and their 'Enemy-Other' gang or government security.³⁸ Essentially, MS13 and

³² (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR), 2000b*)

³³ Complex trauma is multiple traumatic events over the course of years, rather than just a single event.

³⁴ Religious, metaphysical imaginations from generational stories amplified by the effects of trauma.

³⁵ Often, racial-ethnic devaluation based on societal stimulus that is culturally pervasive in the urban sprawls of the Northern Triangle capital cities.

³⁶ My research was conducted in concert with my colleagues in Valka-Mir Human Security under contract with the United States Army Special Forces Command at Fort Bragg NC.

³⁷ (P. J. Christian, 2021)

³⁸ (Stein, 1982)



Barrio18 psychologically recruit and use each other to ‘cast-off’ or rid themselves of unwanted and unbearable thoughts and emotions about their own identity devaluation and disintegration.³⁹ Each ingroup casts off unwanted feelings of terror, fear, weakness, and helplessness through projection onto a psychologically-safe ‘other.’⁴⁰ This ‘cast-off’ psychological material is then temporarily destroyed through outplays of violence upon the group that is projected on.

3.2.2.3 The projection of self-loathing traits or attributes onto a an ‘enemy-other’ is a psychologically safe way for one ingroup to dissociate an unbearable reality of existential being.⁴¹ Namely that they are unworthy of being alive. ‘It is not me/us who are weak, dirty, ugly...it is the enemy-other who is these things.’⁴² Psychologically, when this enemy-other is destroyed, so too are the traits that were dissociated and projected onto them.⁴³ This process offers a powerful and needed psychological relief to the large population of marginalized men and women who are disconnected to either of the two identities that make up their genetic heritage – indigenous or colonizer.⁴⁴ The resulting gang identity individually and collectively is in a state of BPD as described above. It is fragile, unstable, and highly volatile, which accounts for the uncontrolled displays of irrational violence and uncontrolled rage.⁴⁵ This explains why the violence and growth of Mara Salvatrucha “defies logic” and “resists destruction.”⁴⁶ This also informs the dangers that appellant, Mr. Rodas-Rivera faces on his involuntary return to Honduras.⁴⁷



Figure 9

INVISIBLE BOUNDARIES
 “Do you see that place across the road? I could never get in there since it’s the 18TH Street gang’s territory. If they see me in there without permission, they might think that I’m a spy or trying to take something from them. For sure, I’d get beaten up, raped, and I would easily get killed.”
 – Maryia Journalist

3.2.3 *Ms. Ana Marisol Montano-Perez’ principal transgression* in the minds of Mara Salvatrucha 13 was the disrespect that she showed those members when they asked her for information. Such disrespect shown towards one member must be avenged by all members of the in-group to not threaten the artificial psychological construct of strength, unity, and collective agency.⁴⁸ The vengeance to be extracted over Ana’s refusal to participate in

³⁹ Also referred to as trait dissociation. (Lensvelt-Mulders et al., 2008; Marmar, 1997)

⁴⁰ This psychological process is discerned through lengthy phenomenological inquiry, or qualitative psychological inquiry interviews, that we can code and compare to other cultural-ethnic groups who are in the same psychosocial conditions. We validate our finding by revisiting our interviewees and introducing stimuli (pictures, phrases, stories) that are designed to test individual identity diffusion through reinforcing preferred identity archetypes and measuring the interviewees reactions on a Likert scale.

⁴¹ (Birtchnell, 1997)

⁴² (P. J. Christian, 2016; Steiner, 1982)

⁴³ (Marmar, 1997)

⁴⁴ (Fonagy et al., 2017; Luyten et al., 2020; Marcia, 1966)

⁴⁵ (Luyten et al., 2020)

⁴⁶ (Center for Latin American & Latino Studies, 2018)

⁴⁷ How this situation came to be is beyond the scope of this research report but can only be understood through the combination of the effects of post-colonial domination and indigenous identity destruction that was compounded – made intractable – through the century long involvement of the United States and its 19th Century predatory capitalism and 20th Century fixation with communism in any form.

⁴⁸ (Center for Latin American & Latino Studies, 2018)



they represent large bases of tax revenue or are international sanctuaries of tourists, business, or diplomatic life. Nor would Ana Marisol be welcomed in areas controlled by Barrio 18. This is because as do most insurgencies, MS13 and Barrio18 emanate from collections of related extended families through and beyond 2nd and 3rd cousins and extended to historical close proximity of differing family clans. The import of this finding is that on her return to San Salvador, Ana Marisol would only be 'recognized' as belonging within the colonias (neighbourhoods) from where she and her family are known and accepted.

3.2.4.3 Within each social segment of El Salvador, there are few secrets. Word of events and peoples' comings and goings travels on the wind of family gossip that acts like an early warning system. MS13 and Barrio18 are extensions of this extended family communication system, and it is not probable that members of MS13 would not immediately learn of her return.⁵⁴ If she is lucky, and has a respected family member perform an intercession, she might be offered her choice of redemption for her earlier disrespect of the collective. Redemption could be anything from choosing her physical punishment to performing a high-risk service to the collective, or other form of psychosocial registration into the collective's embrace.⁵⁵ If she is unlucky; if she returns at a moment in time of a collective spike in identity diffusion, she might be summarily punished with the result publicly displayed to the widest dissemination amongst members and potential future violators of MS13's collective need for respect, admiration, and reinforcement of power and agency.

4 A review and authentication of our client's original police warrant document.

4.1 Response. I have read the original national civil police report prepared and signed by Agent Karen Ivonne Veraliz Garcia-Rosales, ONI 25608 in figure 10, and compared this original to the English translation version by Habibi. Based on my experience working with host nation police and military organizations in the Northern Triangle, the document appears to be genuine. These police reports, like police departments everywhere, are form driven and represent what Walter and Ana allege happened. El Salvador police record and 'investigate' as many as 65,000 murders a year. If each of these murders was preceded by several escalating threats, the amount of police reports would, and does, inundate every segment of the civil police in El Salvador. When MS13 or B18 takes notice of a resident in El Salvador, they have only three options: flee from the gang's reach, attempt to pacify, and submit to the member who is threatening; or do nothing and wait to be punished or executed. Each option comes with a cost and each Salvadorian must make their choice.

5 Comments on the issues raised in the Home-Office refusal letter dated 8 April 2022, including but not limited to the issue raised by the Home Office that they do not find our client to be at risk of persecution or a target by the Mara 18 gangs. The following subsections of this report review and comment on §34 - §41 of the UK Home Office Asylum Rejection Letter, dated 08 April 2022.

5.1 UK Decision Letter §34 & §40. Contains inconsistent conclusions regarding life in a conflict zone and survival under the shadows of MS13/B18. The UK Home Office decision maker who considered Ms. Ana Marisol

⁵⁴ (Center for Latin American & Latino Studies, 2018)

⁵⁵ (P. J. Christian, 2019)



Montano-Perez' asylum claim did not accept her account of threats against her were *"internally consistent"* and that she had not provided *"credible evidence"* that she had been *"personally targeted by the gang or that [she] ...is of any adverse interest to them."* The UK decision maker rejected the claim that Walter's presence brought an MS13 threat to Ana and her family by stating that: *"It is reasonable to expect that if the gang had been persistently pursuing Walter since he left his Colony, and had now found where he was, they would act on this information and seek him out for questioning rather than send messengers to threaten him. It is reasonable to expect the gang would consider Walter someone willing and able to flee from the gang and seek protection in other areas of El Salvador, and so it is not credible they would warn him in advance of their actions against him and risk him fleeing once more."*

5.1.1 **RESPONSE.** Mara Salvatrucha 13 is not a unified organization. It is a violent psychosocial-emotional movement of cliques that operate on an ideology of malformed, borderline personality disorder identity created by complex trauma of generations of violence, oppression, and cultural disintegration as described above. Each clique may exhibit different operating traits based on short term goals and objectives which cannot be generalized across all MS13 or B18 cliques. The basic psychopathology of the movement and its members is stable and generalizable as the pathology deals with the malformation of a collective identity rather than a particular cognitive strategy employed by a clique to obtain a goal. The funding strategies of MS13 and B18 vary by clique and by Neighborhood, competing with government owned or supported criminal enterprises which routinely lead to spasms of episodic violence. There are hierarchies in MS13 and B18 that are based on power, respect, fear, and the means of production, protection, and capacity to extract resources and compliance, and instil loyalty and fulfil psychosocial-physical needs of current and prospective members.

5.1.2 MS13 segment leaders employ a distinctly laissez-faire leadership that employs a franchise type of hands-off approach to managing and growing their enterprise. This approach works to insulate each level from downtrace mistakes, while increasing marketplace competition that drives results. New and emerging clique leaders are allowed to set rules and make decisions in an increasing arc as their demonstrated capacity to produce growth and extract compliance and wealth grows. For intelligence analysts seeking to establish recognized patterns of generalizable activity as a means of targeting this decentralized structure, MS13's approach defies easy categorization because so many different clique leaders are operating in their own ever evolving ways. Their only requirement to maintain and grow their position within the larger organization is to gain results. Poor performing clique leaders are not counselled or rehabilitated. They are eliminated, overthrown, and replaced in a ruthless, almost sociopathic manner that is celebrated as a central tenant of their malformed individual and collective identity.

5.1.3 For the UK Home Office decision maker to employ statements such as *"...it is reasonable to expect that ...the gang..."* suggests that this government investigator actually has the phenomenological capacity to understand and apply MS13 cognitive thought and behaviour that is 'ruthless to the point of socio pathologic. Intelligence operations dedicated to tracking these types of non-state organizations that imperil a political government must employ an entirely different set of data collection factors that follow this aberrant organizational behaviour. A useful analogy is the sort of methodology that a law enforcement security organization employs when tracking psychopathic serial murderers, rather than normal murder-for-financial gain cases. The motives and aftereffects of



psychopathic serial killers differs so profoundly from normal criminal justice cases that entirely separate specialized organizations such as Behavioural Analysis Units have had to be created in the last half century. In summary, for the UK Home Office decision maker to have the capacity to know what actions are or are not credible for MS13 to take, is highly unlikely unless he/she were a former member of MS13/B18.

5.2 UK Decision Letter §36. Based on cultural misrepresentation and misunderstanding of home-life in a patriarchal society. The UK Home Office decision maker who considered Ms. Ana Marisol Montano-Perez' asylum claim questioned why Ana's husband would "offer refuge to Walter without discussing the matter with [Ana] in advance" and asserts that Ana Marisol has "failed to provide an adequate explanation for [her] lack of knowledge on why the gang were [sic] in pursuit of Walter." The UK investigator continues in asserting that it is not "credible" that Ana would "not question [her] husband or Walter on this matter prior to Walter's arrival or during his stay" and that she "failed to provide an adequate explanation for your lack of knowledge on why the gang were in pursuit of Walter and for these reasons the overall credibility of the claim that Walter came to live with you in March 2021 has been damaged and not accepted."

5.2.1 RESPONSE. Homelife in most households in Central America generally, and El Salvador specifically is patriarchal as opposed to matriarchal. At the core of this difference is the assignment of roles and responsibilities and the inheritance of family historical narrative. A family with a patriarchal structure does not necessarily equate to male father or husband tyranny, nor even domination. Healthy patriarchal families provide psychologically and emotionally positive roles and outlets for individual human development as do healthy matriarchal families. A short-hand way for you to think about the male-female, mother-father roles in a patriarchal family is within the home: from the wallpaper (or wall paint) inward into the home, the women, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and sisters are responsible for planning, organization, sustainment, and discipline.

5.2.2 This is the sacred inner, or private space that Ana Marisol was charged with maintaining. From the interior walls outward from the home, the men, fathers, grandfathers, uncles, and brothers are responsible for planning, organization, sustainment, and discipline. This is the profane outer, or public space that Ana's husband was charged with managing. Ana's charge of maintaining the sacred inner space, in a patriarchal social order, is necessarily subordinate to her husband's charge of managing the profane outer space as the latter will surely destroy the former if allowed to. The UK Home Office decision maker misrepresents Ana Marisol's sociocentric patriarchal cultural reality in favour of (unintentionally) overwriting his/her own UK based reality on top of that of refugees from a differing phenomenological reality. In the UK Home Office investigator's reality, the 'wife' would be able to demand answers about husband's friend Walter. In the patriarchal world of El Salvador, it would not even occur to her to ask.



Figure 10 The psychology of physical space

5.3 UK Decision Letter §37 & §38. Based on ethnocentric and cultural relativist misrepresentations of El Salvadorian phenomenological realities. The UK Home Office decision maker who considered Ms. Ana Marisol Montano-Perez' asylum claim asserted an inconsistent narrative in that: "Walter did not drive; therefore, you claim he



walked from your home out into the gang-controlled area you lived. This behaviour from Walter has not been considered plausible, as if he had a genuine fear of the “18” gang it is reasonable to expect that he would not risk going to work so often and for such long periods of time and would instead ensure he remained hidden to avoid any adverse interest from the gangs.” The UK decision maker continued by asserting that Anna “failed to provide an adequate explanation for why Walter behaved in this manner, and you have also failed to explain why you were not worried that Walter was drawing attention to himself and your home in Cusca Tasinga.”

5.3.1 **RESPONSE.** The simplest response to §37 & §38 of the UK Decision Letter would be to state that the United Kingdom bears absolutely no relationship to El Salvador generally, and San Salvador specifically. Beginning with the UK Home Office decision maker’s statement that “therefore, you claim he walked from your home out into the gang-controlled area you lived. This behaviour from Walter has not been considered plausible...if he had a genuine fear of the ‘18’ gang...he would not risk going to work...” The satellite photograph in figure 11 shows a recent aerial view of Ana Marisol’s hometown of Ciudad Delgado, a rural hamlet suburb of San Salvador. From the photo, the terrain is exceedingly hilly with multiple dirt roads and pathways in, out, and throughout the neighbourhood. The adults of Delgado would have learned the physical terrain as children and naturally possess an emic or insider’s phenomenological knowledge of their geographical spaces.

5.3.2 Symbolic objects used by the UK decision maker of “danger,” “fear,” “reasonableness,” and “worry” have contexts within phenomenological realities that define and change the meaning of these and other words. In the subsistence communities of San Salvador, there is no public health system. There is no unemployment office doling out money if one loses their job so they can pay rent and buy groceries and medicines. There is no emergency room that is compelled by law to treat life threatening conditions even for indigenous patients. Physical survival in these communities is not, unlike the United Kingdom and Europe, assured by an orderly (relatively orderly) and funded social security safety net. Ana Marisol’s personal exercise of agency as a woman to remain in



school, avoid being murdered, or debilitated is testament to her capacity to survive. Despite her earlier experience with gang members who sexually assaulted her earlier in her life, she remained focused on surviving, accumulated sufficient education to obtain employment at a hospital, and managed to save money which she used to flee MS13. In my experiences in such communities of Central and South America, Ana Marisol’s story is more the exception than



the rule.⁵⁶ This is the phenomenological living experience that the UK Home Office decision maker has failed to grasp when he/she writes that “*you have failed to explain why you were not worried that...*” some event that has not yet occurred should become prioritized over the ever-present danger of being shot, abducted, raped, or otherwise pushed off a sustainable path to personal and familial survival. A summary of my experiences with communities such as Ana’s led me to positively conclude that between her account and the UK Home Office decision maker’s assertions, Ana Marisol’s account is most in line with the psychological, sociological, and emotional phenomenological realities that I have personally experienced as a field researcher.⁵⁷

5.4 UK Decision Letter §39 & §40. Fundamental misunderstanding of the effects of psychosocial trauma on asylum refugees. The UK Home Office decision maker who considered Ms. Ana Marisol Montano-Perez’ asylum claim asserted that Ana’s narrative was not credible because she stated “*at interview ... that the gang members only asked you to get Walter when they arrived and did not in fact speak to you or your husband directly about Walter or his family*” when in actuality Ana and her sister-in-law stood next to the door and listened to the conversation.

5.4.1 RESPONSE. Every society possesses a psychosocial reality that informs each member of cause and effect; risk and reward; how they should act, speak, think, and feel at or during the myriad of life events from birth to death. How one should conduct themselves at a wedding in the Punjab of southwest Asia, for example, will of course be different from how one would conduct themselves at a wedding in the Waoroni tribal community of the Amazon River Basin. In a combat zone, a large noise is an initiator of immediate action; diving under a desk if indoors or ducking behind a building or other object if outside. Such automatic actions are consistent with the individual’s wartime reality and can mean the difference between life and death.⁵⁸

5.4.2 When that same person returns from the warzone and tries to reintegrate into life outside of everyday violent conflict, they experience a phenomenon called PTSD.⁵⁹ Their mind is often unable to adjust to a new reality of safety and non-violence and they continue thinking, feeling/emoting, and behaving as if she/he were still in the warzone.⁶⁰ While they were still in the warzone, their mind was not in a state of trauma because their reactions were perfectly normal and kept him or her alive. The trauma of many sufferers of PTSD is that their mind, once adapted successfully to survival in a violent conflict zone, is unable to (easily) adapt to life in a peaceful non-conflict space. What seems to be “consistent” or “credible” or “reasonable” to the traumatized person will likely not seem so to the non-traumatized



⁵⁶ (Christian, 2007b, 2017; Christian & Nestic, 2012)

⁵⁷ (Christian, 2007a)

⁵⁸ (Herman, 1992; Matsakis, 1989; Rousseau & Drapeau, 1998; Sjøreide, 2009)

⁵⁹ (Christian, 2013; Krystal, 1978; Taylor & Erikson, 1995; Teicholz & Kriegman, 2002)

⁶⁰ (Christian & Nestic, 2012)



person. In this case, the UK Home Office decision maker has substituted her ‘non-traumatized’ sense of reality for Ana Marisol’s traumatized sense of life in a violent conflict zone. This fundamental misunderstanding of the effects of psychosocial trauma on asylum refugees results in the UK Home Office decision maker’s inability to understand the inherent “consistency” or “credibility” or “reasonableness” of Ana Marisol’s story.

5.5 UK Decision Letter §52 & 55. A mischaracterization of El Salvador as not in an ‘internal armed conflict’ and an incorrect denial of lawful consideration of humanitarian protection. The UK Home Office decision maker who considered Ms. Ana Marisol Montano-Perez’ asylum claim rejected her claim of humanitarian protection by asserting that “it is not accepted that there is a real risk” of a “serious and individual threat to a civilian’s life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict’ on the basis of the security situation in place (against Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive).”

5.5.1 RESPONSE. A casual read of the major European and American newspapers such as those depicted in figure 11, stands in direct contrast to the Home Office’s claim that the state of El Salvador is in not in the throes of a violent internal armed conflict. Tens of thousands of men, women, and children have been seized by the El Salvadoran Army and Police, far greater than any capacity to hold them. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of Salvadorians have been killed by MS13, B18, and government forces that have been let loose on the population. The government of El Salvador has long proven that it does not understand the violent conflict that is disintegrating its society. Internal corruption within the national and local governments have placed it in direct criminal competition with MS13 and other gangs. Former President Mauricio Funes (2009-2014), who has been living in Nicaragua since 2016, faces criminal charges including corruption, embezzlement, and money laundering.⁶¹ Now, banned from U.S. soil are five more of El Salvadoran President Bukele’s closest confidants, businessmen and former corrupt officials linked to Giammattei, an advisor to Xiomara Castro and two of her party’s top legislators. In February of 2020, Bukele himself led an armed military assault against the country’s legislative parliament.⁶²

5.5.2 Despite massive and continuing crackdowns by El Salvador’s Army and Police, gangs continue to exercise territorial control over some neighbourhoods and extort residents throughout the country.⁶³ They forcibly recruit children and sexually abuse women, girls, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. Gangs kill, disappear, rape, or displace those who resist.⁶⁴ Over the past five years, police alone have committed 179 extrajudicial killings, the Ombudsperson’s Office reported. Yet only twenty-five resulted in convictions.⁶⁵ As President Bukele’s use of Salvadorian Armed Forces against his own citizens continues, oppositional support to the gangs-as-insurgents grows and the violence deepens.⁶⁶ Contrary to the UK Home Office’s letter denying Ana Marisol’s asylum

⁶¹ (Dudley, 2020; Farah & Babineau, 2017; Zaidi, 2019)

⁶² The Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index, El Salvador Country Report 2022. <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/SLV>

⁶³ (Human Rights Watch, 2022)

⁶⁴ (Human Rights Watch, 2022)

⁶⁵ (Farah & Babineau, 2017)

⁶⁶ (Human Rights Watch, 2022)



claim, El Salvador is in the midst of a violent internal armed struggle and the provisions of humanitarian protection should be afforded.

6 Summary: My experience and research with the country-of-origin conditions in El Salvador suggest that it is one of the most dangerous places for men, women, and children of the population as described in above. My expert opinion is that Ana Marisol Montano-Perez' return to El Salvador would not end well. While I can never be absolutely certain of any predictive outcome, I am certain that Ana's return to her native country would create severe psychological and emotional re-traumatization as she waited for members of MS13 to return again and complete her punishment.

I, Patrick James Christian, confirm that I have made clear which facts and matters referred to in this report are within my own knowledge and which are not. Those that are within my own knowledge I confirm to be true. The opinions I have expressed represent my true and complete professional opinions on the matters to which they refer.

July 21, 2022

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