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# Changing the Picture and Music for Hope: Cultural Expressions of Solidarity in the UK with El Salvador at the End of the Cold War

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# Changing the Picture and Music for Hope: Cultural Expressions of Solidarity in the UK with El Salvador at the End of the Cold War

**Abstract**

This paper focuses on UK-based cultural expressions of international solidarity with El Salvador either side of the end of the Cold War and El Salvador's civil war. The article centres on a mural titled Changing the Picture, painted in Greenwich from 1985, which depicts a message of hope for overcoming state repression sponsored by multinational capital and Western powers; and Music for Hope, an ongoing musical education programme beginning in 1996-7 based in the Bajo Lempa, a coastal region of El Salvador, but set up and supported by a British solidarity network. After exploring the political meanings and

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initiatives of solidarity in the UK during the Salvadoran civil war, we analyse Changing the Picture's central message of anti-imperialism, the depiction of collective popular struggle and the artwork's place within the cultural politics of London in the mid-1980s. The paper then examines how the communitarian message of popular democracy present in the mural has been articulated in new cultural forms by Music for Hope, particularly through the latter's pedagogical, horizontal and prefigurative practice of teaching music to children and adolescents and encouraging the formation of musical groups. As such, this paper foregrounds cultural and artistic practice as a central but underexplored dimension of international solidarity. Highlighting the literature on the shift in political culture, produced by the culmination of the Cold War, from a frame foregrounding revolutionary or political struggle to one centred on trauma, we explore how Changing the Picture and Music for Hope reflect different historical conditions. If the solidarity depicted in Changing the Picture reflected the final years of a period in which the revolutionary horizon was considered possible, Music for Hope emerged at a time that forced the initiative to confront the traumatic legacies of the civil war years. Despite these differences, the article argues that there is far more that connects the two examples, especially their emphasis on community agency. In doing so, we show that artistic expression can not only represent a powerful medium through which solidarity politics are communicated, condensing both local and international contexts in a radical vision of hope, but that cultural action can also structure the participatory practice frequently at the heart of international solidarity politics.

**Keywords:** El Salvador, international solidarity, murals, London, art activism, community music, prefigurative politics, Bajo Lempa

## Introduction[4]

Down a quiet street in the Royal Borough of Greenwich, the *Changing the Picture* mural strikes a discordant chord with the triumphalist and tourist-trodden district of the Cutty Sark and the old Royal Naval College, both just five minutes' walk away. The artwork fills the exterior wall of a block of council flats, many of which are now privately owned, but is faded, littered with defunct satellites and faced by communal bins that do not fit inside the brick structure built for them. Although it is now virtually impossible to make out the detail of the mural, the words 'El Salvador' remain clearly visible. *Changing the Picture* was

[4] Our thanks are due to Roland Clark, Dylan Bradbury, Samira Marty, Anna Grimaldi and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful thoughts and suggestions.

designed and painted in 1985 by a team led by the British artist Jane Gifford, commissioned by the London-based El Salvador Solidarity Campaign (ELSSOC) and funded by the Ken Livingstone-led Greater London Council (GLC). It depicts a scene from the civil war in El Salvador, envisioning the popular overcoming of domestic and international forces of repression – among which are included Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan – with symbolism of the Farabundo Martí Liberation Front (FMLN) subtly in the background of the Salvadoran people. Despite its poor present condition, the artwork survives, on the one hand, as testimony to an internationalist politics and remnant of Cold War solidarity with its implicit revolutionary associations at a key moment in El Salvador's history and, on the other hand, an example of the production of an artistic milieu at a conjuncture in the politics of London.

In contrast, the community education programme, Music for Hope, based in the Bajo Lempa in El Salvador but with a support network in both Catalunya and the UK, offers a different iteration of art-based solidarity that materialised after the civil war and in the context of an ongoing 'violence of democracy' (Montoya, 2018). Initially piloted in 1996 and formally established in 1997, it offered a creative outlet for young people suffering from the trauma of civil war. Its aims soon evolved into one of 'generating self-perpetuating, non-violent culture amongst young people in a national and regional context of ever-increasing social violence and criminality' (Music for Hope, no date).[5] Although only eleven years separates them, the apparent temporal and political differences may seem stark between a mural centring on popular anti-imperialism in the twilight of the Cold War and a prefigurative, community-focused and pedagogical music project established in the early years of neoliberal hegemony.[6] Certainly, much has been

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[5] Music for Hope (https://musicforhope.org.uk/) was founded by Katherine Rogers (a British musician) in 1996 – it began initially as a pilot project. After the success of the pilot project, she worked to raise the funds to make music education a more permanent part of Bajo Lempa life. She was helped by the generosity of a UK solidarity network that Katherine was part of, but also by the consistent support of solidarity partners from the community of Igualada in Catalunya. The administration of Music for Hope was carried out locally in the Bajo Lempa, but fundraising was continued in the UK and Catalunya via a small team of volunteers led by Rogers. In 2016 the UK branch of Music for Hope was formally registered as a charity (no: 1167556; https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/5073909). It continues to be small in scope with six volunteer trustees, a UK-based coordinator and two more volunteers. This article will examine the early years of Music for Hope prior to it becoming a more formalised organisation and then registered charity.

[6] By prefigurative politics, we refer to the notion of ideology as immanent in a group or social movement's practice, so that the ideals and principles of the future society toward which a movement strives are enacted in its organisational forms and practice. This is

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made of the transformation of political imaginaries generated by the end of the Cold War, with the collapse of revolutionary and utopian politics and the advent of what Enzo Traverso calls 'left-wing melancholia' (Traverso, 2016). Such a historical break, of course, takes on its own unique dimensions in El Salvador, with the end of the civil war but the continuation of violence in other forms. And we may assume a connection between the historical break that separates these two art-based manifestations of international solidarity and the clear difference in form in which the political message is communicated. Nevertheless, this article will argue that these examples of culture-based solidarity remain linked by the mutual confrontation and resistance to civil war violence and its legacies through a radical vision of participatory politics. International solidarity was not merely memorialised but reactivated and reconfigured by Music for Hope in a way that continued to foreground collective agency through prefigurative practice.

This article foregrounds the notion of arts-based solidarity practices, a subject often left unexplored in the burgeoning academic literature on twentieth century international solidarity with Latin America, despite a widespread interest in political culture and art in the continent. In the case of international solidarity with El Salvador, the literature has a heavy US focus (Todd, 2017; Godfriend, 2018; Power and Charlip, 2009), and is often subsumed into discussions of solidarity with Latin America more broadly (Stites Mor, 2013). Non-US studies are few and far between (Janssens, 2020), and very little research exists on British solidarity with El Salvador (McIndoe, 2023). Certainly, the historiography on Latin America's Cold War has begun to foreground to a much greater extent the ways in which culture and cultural production became a crucial terrain for intense ideological and political struggles (Franco, 2002; Iber, 2015). Moreover, much has been made of the politicisation of 'all aspects of social and cultural life' from the 1960s in Latin America, with the new left's ethos and aesthetic permeating much of the political radicalism through to the 1980s (Gould, 2009).

Art and music have been allocated a privileged role in left-wing and popular political culture more broadly in the continent. The Cuban Revolution and the diffusion of its internationalism through the Tricontinental influenced the aesthetic and cultural forms of anti-imperialism across Latin America and more widely (Randall, 2017; Grimaldi and Gukelberger, 2023). Meanwhile, muralism as a democratic art form that combines aesthetics and social critique has occupied a symbolic place of importance, from the muralist movement in the Mexican

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commonly associated with movements such as the Zapatista Army for National Liberation, the alter-globalisation movement and Occupy. See for example David Graeber (2002) and Marina Sitrin (2006).

revolutionary period c.1921-55, with its three figureheads Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco, to the *brigadas muralistas* that flowered in Chile during the 1960s and 1970s (Rochfort, 1993; Folfarait, 1998; Rolston, 2011). In El Salvador itself, street art has a history as a prominent form of political communication, social critique and memorialisation, as well as 'a legitimate voice of the masses' (Smith, 1994, p. 156). With the diffusion of repressive military regimes in the 1970s and 1980s, art and music also became vectors of resistance and opposition. Notable here, for example, are the coded protests in Argentine *rock nacional* and Brazilian popular music's role as a terrain for contesting the dictatorship and hegemonic ideas (Wilson and Favoretto, 2015; Leu, 2006). At the same time, art and music could take the form of an exiled utopian politics, as in the international resonance of *Inti Illimani* and *Quilapayun*, who personified and communicated Chilean popular struggles, helping to transform Chilean popular culture. Subsequent to Pinochet's 1973 coup this art and music became the mouthpiece 'of a cruel historical defeat' (McSherry, 2017, p. 15). Art could simultaneously assume a testimonial and denunciatory role under authoritarianism, as in the case of Chilean *arpilleras*, many of which were exported through international human rights networks and helped establish a bond between solidarity movements and political prisoners (Adams, 2013; see also Marty, 2024 in this special issue).

This article builds on the growing literature on art and music in international solidarity by examining two expressions related to El Salvador either side of a distinct historical break. Various authors have examined how the end of the Cold War ushered in the decline of revolutionary imaginaries, transforming political subjectivities and cultural memory and generating new forms of organising. For example, the historical frames of martyrdom and heroism as components in the construction of cultural memory – crucial for the mobilisation of revolutionary and utopian projects – were supplanted after 1989 by apparently depoliticising discourses of trauma and innocent victimhood (Traverso, 2016; Jeffery and Candea, 2006).[7] Of course, local complexities and unique characteristics must be acknowledged, particularly in Latin America where the so-called Pink Tide partially revitalised transformative discourses. In fact, heroic discourses in countries like Nicaragua were never fully displaced, and its complex legacies have fed anti-authoritarian critiques of Daniel Ortega, the old leader of *Sandinismo,* through which many of the transformative hopes were previously channelled (Francis, 2012; Goett and Bran Aragón, 2021; Rocha et al, 2023). In El Salvador, the end of the civil war and the peace accords of 1992, together with the pragmatic metamorphosis of the FMLN into a democratic socialist party, coincided with and

[7] Trauma, for the purposes of this article, is taken to concern both individuals and communities andrelates to painful episodes that mark collective memories and contribute to the formation of identities. (Fassin and Rechtman, 2009).

was closely linked to the historical break of the end of the Cold War (Guardado Torrez and Moodie, 2020).

Analysing *Changing the Picture* and Music for Hope thus allows us to reflect on how this historical break helped shape differing arts-based solidarity responses to violence in El Salvador. This article outlines the former as an example of critical, democratic art that resonated with popular transformative horizons and intervened politically to denounce anti-imperialism and emergent neoliberalism. By highlighting imperialism and multinational capital, the mural connects the contexts of both El Salvador, as the site of transformative struggle against imperialist violence, and London, as one of the world system's economic centres where GLC-funded muralism was also immersed in a local battle against neoliberalism (see also Marty, 2024).

On the other hand, Music for Hope emerged as a community-based project that reflected a different historical moment, one of neoliberal consolidation and Salvadorans processing the trauma of the civil war. In this context of the mid-1990s, revolutionary politics as depicted in the mural was no longer a viable part of a present mobilisation against an ascendent neoliberal globalisation or a future horizon, but – as neoliberalism established itself as the hegemonic model of a unipolar world – represented a failed struggle of the past. Nevertheless, although neoliberal hegemony represented something of a displacement of the political from wider culture, the non-partisan nature of Music for Hope and its response to trauma should not be mistaken for a depoliticising tendency. Instead, the popular, participatory vision depicted in the mural is reassumed and reconfigured by an educational programme, whose politics of solidarity emerges as one of prefigurative, horizontal praxis that foregrounds an ethics of non-violence.

In exploring these two cultural expressions of solidarity either side of El Salvador's civil war and wider Cold War, the article makes two significant contributions. First, on a historiographical level, it begins to address a dearth in the research on El Salvador by building understandings of the international dynamics of the country's recent history, as well as the ways in which questions of violence and trauma were confronted through international solidarity. Such a perspective feeds into a growing body of literature that foregrounds Latin America's global Cold War (Field, Krepp & Pettinà, 2020; Van Ommen, 2023; Harmer, 2014; Booth, 2021). Thus, El Salvador's global dynamics can be situated not only in relation to US dominance – as important as that is – but also in a wider setting of transnational grassroots mobilisation that occurred in various ideological and organisational forms and iterations. The second contribution of this comparative analysis lies in the combination of cultural analysis, transnational history and political memory. The case studies presented demonstrate that artistic

expressions often form integral components of solidarity activism, through shaping communication strategies, memory construction and even community-building. Examining these cultural expressions tells us something deeper about solidarity politics themselves, particularly how they relate to international society, domestic politics and the wider historical moment. And in highlighting the significance of the end of the Cold War and El Salvador's civil war, the article explores how historical ruptures can reshape the political and organisational forms that transnational solidarity assumes.[8]

## A Note on Methodology

This article uses data drawn from three different, yet interrelated, research strands. The first is an ongoing history of Music for Hope and the Bajo Lempa communities in which it operates; the second is a history of aid and solidarity connections between Britain and El Salvador; the third, a much smaller project, relates specifically to the *Changing the Picture* mural. Research data for the history of Music for Hope has been gathered over seven, month-long fieldtrips carried out since 2013. The researcher, Andrew Redden, became a volunteer for Music for Hope in 2013 and then a trustee in 2016 when it converted to a registered charity. This academic work engages Participatory Action Research (PAR), a research methodology common to studies of community-based organisations in Latin America (see particularly Winton, 2007). It draws primarily on both cumulative and longitudinal oral-history interviews with past and present participants of Music for Hope, as well as their family members and associates, and community leaders and elders and these interviews are both cumulative and longitudinal.[9] This article draws from a selection of relevant interviews from these field trips and will be engaging in qualitative analysis of this information.

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[8] It may well be that Nayib Bukele's regime (2019-present), situated as it is alongside closely related regional and global developments, heralds a new historical break. This is for other scholars to draw out once the dust has settled. In this context, this article might offer clues as to how a historical and cultural approach can help us understand the ways in which transnational solidarity continues to reflect, respond to and engage with the everchanging needs and cleavages of local and national communities into the present.

[9] Communities in the Bajo Lempa are highly organised and have a formal and democratic committee-based leadership structure. For the purposes of this article, 'community leaders' refers to those who are currently in leadership positions in the community. 'Community elders' refers to those who were adults and leaders when the Bajo Lempa communities were founded by returning refugees in 1991-2. The author's ongoing work with Music for Hope and his familiar presence in the Bajo Lempa communities has facilitated his access to willing interviewees.

The second investigation, on British-El Salvador aid and solidarity connections, triangulates government and solidarity-based archival sources and interviews with UK-based solidarity activists carried out between 2019-23.[10] Some of these archives were personal collections, others were private institutional archives (such as that of Music for Hope) whilst the remainder were in the public domain. In the process of conducting this research, the author, Emily McIndoe, also began volunteering with Music for Hope and has subsequently become a trustee. Again, following the methodology of PAR has proven mutually beneficial to the research and the charity.

The final strand of research contributing to this article – regarding the mural itself – was drawn from interviews by the authors Pablo Bradbury and Emily McIndoe (carried out in 2023) with the mural artist Jane Gifford, and the person who commissioned *Changing the Picture*, Chris Hudson.[11] These individual research strands were brought together by a public engagement activity – an open workshop held at St Alfege's primary school in November 2023 – involving an encounter between members of the public, representatives from Music for Hope, the mural artist team (Gifford and Hudson) about the mural, Music for Hope and El Salvador (past and present).[12] The connections made during the workshop discussion and in subsequent reflection gave rise to ideas that developed into this article.

## Civil War and International Solidarity

El Salvador's political past has historically been defined by gross inequality, perpetuated by continued repressive military rule between 1932 and 1979 (Stanley, 1996; Williams and Walter, 1997; Negroponte, 2012; McClintock, 1985; Latin America Bureau, 1979; Dunkerley, 1982). State-sponsored repression escalated significantly during the 1970s, countered by the increasing mobilisation

[10] See McIndoe (2023, pp.25-36) for a detailed discussion of the challenges and methodology relating to UK solidarity archives (particularly those that are informal or not curated), and oral history interviews with solidarity activists.

[11] Both Jane Gifford and Chris Hudson are open about their interest and participation in London mural projects and were reached through information gathered from a previous oral history project that Gifford participated in: 'For Walls with Tongues', https://www.forwallswithtongues.org.uk/.

[12] The event was advertised in the local Greenwich estate, in the school and on social media – all were welcome. It took place on 10 November 2023. The participant group was small (12 people) but friendly and open. The informal nature of the discussion opened up a number of useful avenues to explore further.

of popular movements and the establishment of an armed opposition movement (Byrne, 1996, p. 17). In October 1980, the five main revolutionary groups formed a coalition – the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) – which 'accepted the use of arms as a possibility for revolution'; and although the coalition shared a Marxist analytical framework, and encompassed a spectrum of different political perspectives on the left, overall it 'believed it was possible to achieve democracy, social justice and progress for the benefit of the popular sectors within the limits of capitalism' (Allison and Alvarez, 2012, p. 95).[13]

The formation of the FMLN marked El Salvador's descent into a bitter civil war in 1980. This conflict was responsible for over 75,000 deaths and around 1.5 million people (roughly 25% of the entire population) becoming refugees after being forcibly displaced internally and externally (Gammage, 2007; Menjívar and Gómez Cervantes, 2018). By far the majority of, and the most massive, human rights violations were committed by government (and government-sponsored) security forces – a situation which was undoubtedly worsened by US intervention, which began with economic aid in 1957 and continued to increase until the end of the civil war (Landau, 1993, p. 72 and p. 85).[14] In 1979, US aid to El Salvador amounted to around $89 million, but, following the outbreak of civil war, this figure had reached $523 million by 1981, which was also one of the worst years for human rights violations (Crandall, 2016, pp. 216-217). US intervention was heavily criticised by human rights campaigners and solidarity activists for prolonging the war and enabling the Salvadoran government's widespread human rights abuses (Gomez, 2003, p. 112).

In Britain, the outbreak of civil war in El Salvador resulted in the ending of (already minimal) bilateral aid to the Salvadoran government. The violence and disregard for human rights was the focus of a wave of protests and activism from a cross-section of the British public, supported by human rights organisations such as Amnesty International.[15] This peaked in 1984, when, in response to the election of President Duarte – El Salvador's first civilian president in fifty years – British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher announced that her government would be resuming bilateral aid to El Salvador, starting with £100,000 for civilian supplies and, more contentiously, military training scholarships for 'one or two […]

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[14] For one of the most notorious human rights violations committed by the Salvadoran state against its people, but certainly not the only one, see Binford (2016).

[15] Amnesty International published several reports on human rights abuses in El Salvador (Amnesty International, 1975; Amnesty International, 1984). For further reading on Britain's response to the civil war in El Salvador, see McIndoe (2023).

suitably qualified Salvadoran officers'.[16] Despite human rights campaigners vociferously objecting to this announcement, the Thatcher government continued its support of the Salvadoran government for the rest of the decade, although, notably, it did not expand its aid programme beyond the 1984 announcement. British involvement in the Salvadoran conflict was not only limited to bilateral aid and human rights concerns, however; British international aid organisations, including CAFOD (Catholic Agency for Overseas Development), Oxfam, War on Want, and Christian Aid, organised campaigns and appeals to fund their work in Central America to help those displaced and affected by violence (O'Sullivan, 2021; MacDonald, 1990). In addition, the development of the El Salvador Solidarity Movement in Britain was essential in raising awareness of the conflict and rallying public support for the people of El Salvador. The movement consisted of three main organisations – the El Salvador Committee for Human Rights (ESCHR), the El Salvador Solidarity Campaign (ELSSOC) and the El Salvador Network (ESNET). While ESCHR and ELSSOC were both formed in the early 1980s following the outbreak of civil war in El Salvador, ESCHR took a non-partisan approach to campaigning on human rights in order to appeal to a wide cross-section of the British public, whereas ELSSOC was overt in its partisan support for the FMLN and its armed struggle (McIndoe, 2023, pp. 160-164). ESNET, in contrast, was a post-war organisation, formed in the 1990s which took a more personal, friendship-centred approach to solidarity. Despite their difference in approach, all three organisations embraced cultural expressions of solidarity with El Salvador; both ELSSOC and ESCHR utilised cultural events (art exhibitions, music tours, film showings) to emphasise the impact of human rights violations on the Salvadoran people. ELSSOC commissioned the *Changing the Picture* mural in Greenwich, for example, and Music for Hope was one of several ESNET member organisations and initiatives that emphasised cultural links as a means of cultivating solidarity.

## *Changing the Picture*: ELSSOC and the Political Solidarity of Muralism

[16] Although Duarte was a civilian president, the Salvadoran military retained significant influence and power, with the Ministry of Defence, for example, remaining under the direct control of military officers linked to the High Command. Additionally, due to the difficulty of identifying suitable candidates for the scholarships that could be proven to have not been involved with human rights abuses, only one Salvadoran cadet received military training in Britain. Margaret Thatcher, 'Letter to President Duarte' 6th August 1984 pp.1-2. TNA: FCO 99-1936: Military Training for Salvadoran Officers.

ELSSOC was formally established in 1980 as a response to the FMLN-FDR's call for international solidarity.[17] The original aims of the campaign were to 'support the struggle of the Salvadoran people', denounce 'all intervention by foreign powers in the situation in El Salvador' and condemn the 'reformist façade of the Salvadoran government and continuing repression'.[18] ELSSOC was created as the British branch of the FMLN-FDR's international solidarity network, guided by Salvadoran FMLN-FDR representatives, and was a clear expression of partisan political solidarity, entirely transparent in its belief in the necessity of and support for armed struggle in El Salvador.[19] This was in stark contrast to the ESCHR, which existed alongside ELSSOC but remained determinedly non-partisan. Both organisations drew from both the methods and personnel of different branches of the Chile solidarity movement (the Chile Solidarity Campaign and the Chile Committee for Human Rights), established nearly a decade earlier (McIndoe, 2023, pp.156-60). In terms of structure, ELSSOC was based in London, and was supported by a number of local committees around the UK.[20] The campaign was divided into various smaller commissions, some of which were permanent bodies (including the Finance Commission, the Local Committees Commission and the Press Commission), and others were more transient, depending on campaign priorities and volunteer enthusiasm.[21]

The Cultural Commission was one of the more permanent aspects of the campaign, although its work and composition varied throughout the decade. Its overarching aim was to 'raise the profile of what was happening in El Salvador to a British audience' in the hope of reaching people who would not normally attend overtly political events.[22] In 1983, at ELSSOC's Annual General Meeting in

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[17] ELSSOC, 'El Salvador Solidarity Campaign – Objectives' 1980, p.1. U DX185-2-12: El Salvador Solidarity Campaign (ELSSOC) Part II, Hull History Centre Archives.

[18] ELSSOC, 'El Salvador Solidarity Campaign – Objectives' 1980, p.1. U DX185-2-12: El Salvador Solidarity Campaign (ELSSOC) Part II, Hull History Centre Archives.

[19] In September 1982, ELSSOC was requested to double its monthly donation, in order to fund improvements to the FMLN's weapons arsenal. FDR Commission for Finance, 'Letter to El Salvador Solidarity Campaign' 21st September 1982, pp.1-2. U DX185-2-12: El Salvador Solidarity Campaign (ELSSOC) Part II, Hull History Centre Archives. For more detail on the links between and control of ELSSOC by the FMLN-FDR see McIndoe (2023, pp.185-89).

[20] ELSSOC's membership was predominantly made up of British people with a strong interest in Latin America, although its strategy was driven by Salvadoran FMLN-FDR representatives in the UK.

[21] ELSSOC, 'Minutes of a Meeting of Activists' 7th March 1980, p.3. U DX185-2-12: El Salvador Solidarity Campaign (ELSSOC) Part II, Hull History Centre Archives.

[22] Interview with Chris Hudson, 2023; ELSSOC, 'Minutes of El Salvador Annual General Meeting held in Bristol on January 22nd/23rd 1983', 22nd January 1983, p.8. Hull History Centre, UDX185-2-12.

Bristol, the commission's priorities were identified as needing 'to get more English "cultural" people involved in solidarity work', as well as building closer links with ELSSOC's local committees by organising cultural events in their areas.[23] Chris Hudson, who led the Commission in the mid-1980s, recalled that the Commission 'translated Salvadoran rebel poetry, and published about six [poems]' and co-ordinated several British tours for the Salvadoran band *Yolocamba I'ta*, who were hosted by ELSSOC volunteers around the country.[24] Other work included supporting an exhibition of Salvadoran children's drawings in Islington Town Hall, which was opened by cartoonist Ralph Steadman.[25] In the available archival documents for ELSSOC, however, the Cultural Commission goes relatively unseen, with only a few scattered mentions of its activities. At the 1982 annual meeting, the Commission discussed its role in organising a festival in London, with the slogan 'For Self-Determination, Non-Intervention', and its development of the film *Decision to Win ('The First Fruits'),* which they hoped to show at Edinburgh Festival.[26] In 1983, the Commission reported its aspirations to produce a mural in Deptford, an area of South London, noting that it had approached the GLC for funding. After this point, the Cultural Commission's work ceased to be included in ELSSOC's records and the mural itself is notably missing from ELSSOC's subsequent bulletins and campaign updates.[27] This was despite the fact that the mural was produced with the help of GLC funding.

Hudson, himself a mural enthusiast, approached the artist Jane Gifford with a proposal to create the artwork. A team consisting of artists and members of the Cultural Commission met several times to discuss the content, while Gifford led the design. The wall on Creek Road was selected not out of any organic link with El Salvador or Latin America, but because one of the Cultural Commission's members knew the area and identified a suitable wall. After pitching the idea to

[23] ELSSOC, 'Minutes of El Salvador Annual General Meeting held in Bristol on January 22nd/23rd 1983', 22 January 1983, p.8. Hull History Centre, UDX185-2-12

[24] *Yolocamba I'ta* was a Salvadoran folk group influenced by the Chilean *Nueva Canción* (New Song) movement. They formed in 1975 and used music to build international solidarity with El Salvador (Fairley, 1985). Interview with Chris Hudson, 2023.

[25] Interview with Chris Hudson, 2023.

[26] Updates about supporter activities were printed in ELSSOC's internal bulletin (*El Guanaco*) as opposed to the external ELSSOC newsletter, which are not available in existing archives but may be held in personal collections unknown to the authors. Consequently, to date it is unclear whether or not *The First Fruits* film was shown at Edinburgh Festival in 1982. ELSSOC, 'Minutes of Meeting of National Co-Ordinating Committee, April 5th, 1982', 5th April 1982, p.3. Hull History centre UDX185-2-12

[27] This is characteristic of ELSOC's archive as a whole. There are significant gaps and inconsistencies in the available documentation.

the Royal Borough of Greenwich, whose Labour council responded positively, the team proceeded to canvas local residents' opinions on the sketch. According to Hudson and Gifford, the colourful design and hopeful imagery were effective in gaining the consent of the building's occupants.[28] The GLC head of arts, meanwhile, agreed to provide modest funding, which would cover the mural's creation using emulsion paint, as well as the costs for a team of four artists.

In addition to the El Salvador solidarity context, *Changing the Picture* can be understood as emerging at the tail end of a broader exterior-wall art scene and wider cultural politics in London, beginning in the mid-1960s and ending with Thatcher's closure of the GLC (Wiedel-Kaufmann, 2020). Community arts projects began to flourish in the 1960s and 1970s, closely linked to the constellation of new left politics and aesthetics. Initially, much of the content of such initiatives confronted questions of class and the dynamics of inner-city community marginalisation. London murals were firmly embedded in this community arts milieu, and although Gifford had not previously created any overtly political work, she was no exception: 'I guess it was sort of like my tribe. It was like people working in that area were all pretty left and it was all combined with working in community groups, community arts, you know, there's community theatre going on'.[29]

Sam Wetherell (2013) claims that community arts underwent a process of institutionalisation through Arts Council and, from 1981, GLC funding. This institutionalisation included the gradual replacement of class-centred politics by an emphasis on ethnic, racial, gender and sexual community identity. Owen Hatherley (2020) alternatively situates the socially engaged mural scene and politicised arts in the first half of the 1980s, as intertwined with a novel iteration of municipal socialist politics. Ken Livingstone's GLC (1981-1986), 'the new left in power', foregrounded anti-racism and cultural praxis alongside class struggle, opening up the creative industries and institutional spaces to ethnic minorities and subcultural identities (Hatherley, 2020). Thus, by the 1980s, the new left had coalesced in an arts scene channelled both from above and below, from institutional networks with significant resources and from grassroots, community-based networks. Culture was a major vector of radicalism embedded firmly within anti-racist and anti-neoliberal politics.

*Changing the Picture*, therefore, was painted at a time when murals represented a democratic art form, deliberately public and outside the confines of enclosed galleries and private collections. Its form lent particularly well to social or critical themes, and the London mural scene at this time was 'engaged in a cultural revolution in an entirely changed world' (Kenna and Lobb, 2019, p. 6). Yet the

[28] Interview with Chris Hudson, 2023; Interview with Jane Gifford, 2023.
[29] Interview with Jane Gifford, 2023.

changing world they had to engage with was not necessarily positive. Various murals at the turn of the 1980s, most notably the *Cable Street Mural* (painted 1979-1983) that depicted the famous local anti-fascist resistance against Oswald Mosley, appeared to respond to a renewed far-right presence and the racist narratives of Enoch Powell repackaged and assimilated into Thatcherism. Meanwhile, from the 1980s, and especially following significant GLC arts funding in 1983 designated for their ‘Peace Year’ campaign, London’s murals featured recurring motifs of anti-war sentiments and, reflecting the mass mobilisations led by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, anxieties over nuclear apocalypse (Wiedel-Kaufmann, 2020; for the ‘Peace Year’, see Atashroo, 2019). This was especially the case with Brian Barnes’ striking and ominous *Nuclear Dawn* (1981) in Brixton and *Riders of the Apocalypse* (1983) in New Cross, the latter of which featured haggard depictions of Ronald Reagan, Thatcher, Michael Heseltine and Yuri Andropov circling the planet on cruise missiles.

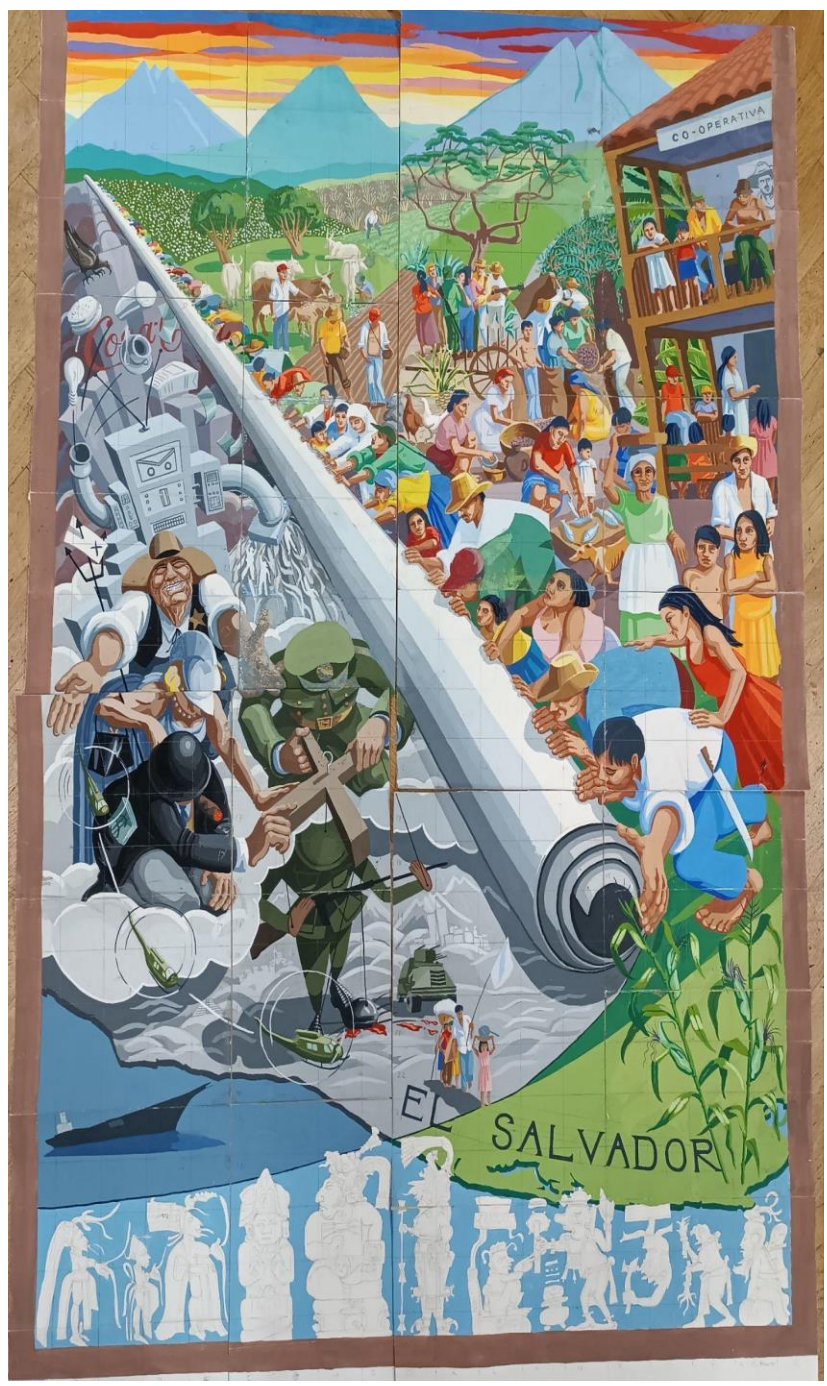


Figure 1. *Changing the Picture*, original design.

*Changing the Picture*, painted rather late on in this generation of mural artwork, thus occupies a place within an existing, politicised cultural movement.[30] However, the London murals tended to directly confront local cleavages of class, race and community, and its internationalism came through as one linked to Thatcher and other belligerent world leaders posing global threats. *Changing the Picture* distinguishes itself in two key ways. First, the mural highlighted British involvement in a specific conflict abroad – the Salvadoran civil war – locating this denunciation alongside its opposition to the forces of multinational capital that feature as economic agents of imperialist violence. And second, such a depiction of direct Thatcherite complicity in a conflict in Central America challenged the political subjectivity of London's politicised mural scene, much of which tended to foreground local community or history and anti-racism, or opposition to nuclear weapons as a global threat. *Changing the Picture*, in contrast, connects the London mural movement with a distinct form of transnational solidarity politics, which centred on the transformative mobilisation of people far away from the UK. Here, the Salvadoran people acted as a collective agent of liberation, in direct confrontation with capitalism and imperialism.

The mural is partitioned into two parts. In grey monochrome, a smaller section of the scene on the left hand side depicts the forces of imperialism and oppression. As a Salvadoran general operates an anonymous soldier as a marionette, three further figures reach out to control the puppet's cross brace: big business, represented by a man with a bowler hat, a cigar and dollar bills overflowing from his pocket; Thatcher, dressed up as Britannia, but holding a handbag and wearing a pearl necklace, a nod to imperialist nostalgia decorated with contemporary elite style; and Reagan, a sheriff with his sleeves rolled up, head cocked back and with a wrinkled grimace. Behind the latter line up symbols of multinational capital and the power of the metropolis: a robot, the Coca Cola logo and a skyscraper resembling the Chrysler building.

The larger portion of the mural is taken up by a colourful, idyllic rural community, and the backdrop is filled with El Salvador's volcanic mountains, a warm sky and fertile land. The community features people with modest clothes, sowing the fields alongside grazing brahman cattle, preparing food and working together. Some

[30] The painted mural can be seen here: https://www.forwallswithtongues.org.uk/projects/changing-the-picture-exterior-mural-for-the-el-salvador-solidarity-campaign-1985/. The mural's current state can be seen here: https://alondoninheritance.com/london-photography/the-sad-fate-of-two-greenwich-murals/ (accessed 24/06/2024).

people overlook the scene from the top floor of the wooden structure of a cooperative, called 'Vida Nueva' (meaning 'New Life'), alluding to an optimistic, egalitarian political horizon. At the back of the cooperative can be made out a poster of Farabundo Martí, the hero of the FMLN, indicating the community's affinity with the revolutionaries. On the ground floor, a class is in progress in the community school, foregrounding the role of education in transformative politics that has been central to projects like Music for Hope. Most of the community members form a line that stretches out into the distance, collectively rolling up the grey map beneath the forces of repression and literally turning the page of history. This section of the mural therefore represents the people as a political subject.

Just as the style is figurative and explicit, the mural's politics are visible and simplified, with the clear message of Salvadoran masses working for peace against reactionary forces of oppression. The dualisms appear unambiguous: violence set against cooperation, ostentatious wealth against humble simplicity, multinational corporations against worker cooperativism, the agro-industrial complex against small-scale traditional farming and the metropolis against the rural community. By including Thatcher alongside Reagan in creating war, the design highlights the artwork's relevance to its audience and reasserts the formula of belligerent alliance featured in other London murals – but this time in a Central American context rather than either the UK or a global context. Thus, despite thematic links and broadly sharing the cultural and political space of a wider London mural constellation, *Changing the Picture* is somewhat unusual in bearing relatively little relation to the communal self-identity and heritage of its location, reflecting more closely that of Latin American transnational solidarity networks.

The mural's most striking and radical feature may lie in the designation of historical or political agency, which is clearly assigned to the Salvadoran people as a collective political subject. If Jacques Rancière (2013) is sceptical of critical art that seeks to mobilise an apparently passive audience, he also affirms that the aesthetic act is related to a political act, through which it disrupts the 'distribution of the sensible'. True politics, in this view, involves an act of 'dissensus' that consists in the excluded standing up for themselves, allowing a confrontation against an unequal order or consensus. *Changing the Picture* can be viewed within this conception of political aesthetics, partly as an intervention against Thatcherism and neoliberalism; locally, as part of a wider left-wing cultural movement in London and, internationally, in protest against the global economic model. However, at the same time, and more crucially, the ordinary distribution of political agency is inverted. The forces of imperialism and neoliberal globalisation, including the capital city in which the mural is painted, are overturned and rolled up by a poor population whose decisive weapon is popular, communal mobilisation. Thus, despite the context of an ascendant neoliberal globalisation, and the fact that the Salvadoran revolutionary struggle would only

a decade later become a memory of a faded past, transformative politics and an optimistic horizon remain central to the mural. Ultimately, however, it is the Salvadoran people who are the historical actors, and here they represent hope for the future.

## Music for Hope: Trauma and the Reactivation of Solidarity in a Post-War Context

After the 1992 Peace Accords, which marked the end of the conflict in El Salvador, the El Salvador Solidarity Movement experienced something of an identity crisis. Soon after the Accords were signed, the FMLN suffered ideological divisions over its future direction, and those divisions were passed down to ELSSOC – which had always been staunch in its support for the movement – resulting in the campaign struggling to agree on how best to continue its work and, ultimately, splitting in two. ELSSOC continued after the split in a much smaller capacity, run by a handful of volunteers who remained committed to supporting the FMLN politically during its transition. The second group wanted to support the peace process in El Salvador more generally, focusing less on allegiance with the FMLN, and instead on standing in solidarity with communities and the Salvadoran people more directly – an initiative that quickly became known as ESNET. In contrast to ELSSOC, which had a clearly defined structure and hierarchy, ESNET was designed to be a network of organisations and individuals who supported the concept of solidarity based on personal friendships and mutual respect.[31] One of these organisations was Music for Hope, formed in 1996 as a collaboration between Katherine Rogers and young musicians from the Bajo Lempa, a tropical coastal region of El Salvador.

The majority of Bajo Lempa communities were founded towards the end of the civil war by returning refugees who had been forcibly displaced and living in exile in Honduras, Panama and Nicaragua.[32] The camps in Honduras (Mesa Grande and Colomoncagua) were established early in the war as ordinary people fled massacres carried out by state security forces (Cagan and Cagan, 1991; Todd, 2010). For the duration of the war, they were effectively kept under siege by the Honduran military. Although they attempted to grow enough agricultural produce to subsist on the tiny pockets of land they were allowed to access in and around

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[31] ESNET, 'El Salvador Network' *ESNET Bulletin*, June 1997, p.1. Liverpool Latin America Solidarity Archive (LLASA).

[32] Elisabeth Wood (2003) gives a complex analysis of the rural communities that existed in the Bajo Lempa and wider Usulután for the duration of the civil war and which survived to see the returning refugees augment their numbers.

the camps, they still depended heavily on international aid packages, particularly from the UNHCR, whose hierarchical nature caused tensions with other aid organisations and with the refugee communities themselves. Collective organisation was therefore crucial for survival (Cagan and Cagan, 1991, pp. 95-105).[33] Those in Panama, meanwhile, were extremely isolated and located in dense tropical rainforest – which, while a long way from conflict and military repression, presented serious problems in the event of logistics and medical emergencies.[34] Those in Nicaragua were much better supported by the Sandinista government. There, refugees were allowed to form cooperatives and learn from the Sandinista cooperatives already established. They were also given limited technical support.[35]

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union brought tremendous change for the refugees, as international funding that delivered food and medicines to the camps in Honduras and Panama declined markedly – to the point where those in the camps decided they had to return or risk starvation.[36] Bajo Lempa community members explained, 'there was nothing left for us there. We couldn't have stayed, even if we'd wanted to – which we didn't'.[37] The return to El Salvador of refugees from Honduras in waves over the course of 1989-90, gave encouragement to those in Nicaragua. The defeat of the Sandinista government in the 1990 general elections in Nicaragua, and the country's immediate shift to an IMF-backed neoliberal restructuring programme, gave Salvadoran refugees further incentives to leave, as it signalled that their welcome there was now over (Barba and Martínez, 1997, pp. 87-91; Barba and Martínez, 1999, pp. 77-80).[38] For all the communities in exile, meanwhile, there was an increasing awareness that El Salvador was finally on the brink of significant structural change. It was important, therefore, for them to be present so they could seize the opportunity, if not to rebuild the devastated country themselves, at least to continue to live in the communitarian way that they had been doing for the duration of their exile – this

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[33] Interviews with community elders, 2016. The names and precise communities of all Salvadoran informants interviewed for the purpose of this research have been omitted to protect anonymity. Todd (2010, pp.117-37) analyses the political frictions that existed between different aid agencies and the deftness with which the refugee communities mediated and engaged with these organisations.
[34] Interviews with community elders, Bajo Lempa, 2017.
[35] Interviews with community elders, Bajo Lempa, 2017.
[36] The decision to return was much more complex than we can describe here, with various factors influencing the decisions of the communities in exile, but in essence, the fast-changing international political landscape had profound local effects that accelerated their decisions and actions. See Cagan and Cagan (1991, pp.112-116) and Todd (2010, pp.190-220).
[37] Interviews with community elders, Bajo Lempa 2019.
[38] Interviews with community elders, Bajo Lempa 2019.

time, however, it would be with land that they could call their own and with the ability to sustain themselves.

As a result, the refugees insisted they were going to return together, in the communities they had formed in exile.[39] They had identified fertile and underused lands from large haciendas that they could populate and farm, including in the Bajo Lempa region (Todd, 1991, p.210). This was anathema to the right-wing ARENA government which considered them to be guerrilla supporters and who wanted them to return in small numbers under close military control.[40] As the Salvadoran government prevaricated and raised obstacles, the refugees moved to take direct action despite significant opposition from Salvadoran authorities, the Honduran military and the UNHCR (Todd, 1991, pp.212-216). When the UNHCR (incredibly) and Honduran military threatened to withdraw food and water for the refugees gathered at the border crossing unless they returned to the Mesa Grande camp, for example, they responded by declaring a hunger strike (Todd, 1991, p.215). For those in Nicaragua, this campaign for recognition of their right to return in community led them to occupy the Salvadoran embassy (Barba and Martínez, 1997, pp.96-97).[41] Even after arriving in El Salvador, their struggle was not over. Those from Colomoncagua, Honduras, returned to Morazán, an FMLN-liberated zone, but there was little available land to sustain so many returnees. Those who returned from Nicaragua were reluctantly granted a land-lease in rural Usulután by the Salvadoran government, but there was no water and the land was barren – it was obvious to the returned refugees they could not survive there. After taking collective decisions to move to the fertile and largely abandoned hacienda lands of the lower Lempa river in Usulutan, these recently returned communities broke through military roadblocks, cut down the scrub and founded their cooperatives in a network of communities along the river (Barba and Martínez,

[39] Interviews with community elders, Bajo Lempa, 2017. The reasons why these returning refugees established new communities in the Bajo Lempa rather than returning to their original communities are complex. They are explained in more detail in published testimonies such as Barba and Martínez eds., (1997) translated into English by the Nueva Esperanza Support Group (1999) and Arnaiz Quintana ed., (2012). As stated, the most cited reason is that the communities which had been formed in exile by refugees from diverse parts of El Salvador and overcome many hardships together wanted to stay together in community. Other factors include the fact that the lands that they once held were occupied by others and to go back and reclaim them would provoke conflict. Also, when they returned in 1991, El Salvador was still in a state of civil war. State forces of repression such as the army and state-sponsored death squads still operated in their places of origin.

[40] Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (ARENA).

[41] Interviews with community elders, Bajo Lempa, 2017.

1997, pp.106-116).[42] They supported each other and resisted ongoing military harassment intended to intimidate them and drive them out. They worked hard to self-fund and legalise their possession of the land they inhabited via the government body for land redistribution known as ISTA (the Institute for Salvadoran Agrarian Transformation). Some of the communities opted to keep the cooperative and communitarian model that they had learned and developed while in exile. Community members recall those early years and overcoming all the obstacles deliberately put in their path with emotion and pride.[43]

The returned-refugee communities did not always have a positive experience of working with hierarchical international aid agencies (particularly the UNHCR), however, this encouraged them to develop much more friendship-based horizontal relationships with smaller-scale solidarity groups who were keen to support the communities' needs as defined by the communities themselves (McIndoe, 2023, pp.202-210). In 1996, a young musician from the United Kingdom named Katherine Rogers, became part of a transformation between the UK solidarity network and El Salvador through Music for Hope. She visited the communities on the recommendation of family friends connected with ESNET and, while there, she became friends with a group of young people who had formed a band called *Lluvia de Esperanza* (Rain of Hope). These young musicians played music learned by ear with very limited resources and few instruments and Rogers began to join in their practice sessions. Shortly before she left, they performed together in a concert for the community. Describing the experience, Rogers recalls that 'the atmosphere was electric. I couldn't get it out of my head. I felt it was something really important that I couldn't let go'.[44] She recounted how she continued to turn over in her mind that, 'there's something here that seems really important, that these young people have recently emerged from a civil war [...] They're engaged in an act of resistance really. That's how I saw it'.[45] When asked if she could explain what she meant by this, Rogers continued, 'well it was a kind of act of: "We're here and… we may have been through hell but we're here and we're... we're using this music as a way of saying who we are. We're proud of where we've come from. We're proud of where we are"'.

This sense of music as an 'act of resistance' resonated strongly with Rogers' family background, as she explained how her parents and family friends had formed a political theatre and music company that was particularly active in the

[42] Interviews with community elders, Bajo Lempa, 2017. See also the testimonies in Ángel Arnaiz Quintana (2012).
[43] Interviews with community elders, Bajo Lempa, 2016 and 2017; Community workshop, St Alfege's Primary School, Greenwich, 10 November 2023.
[44] Interview with Katherine Rogers, Manchester, 2020.
[45] Interview with Katherine Rogers, Manchester, 2020.

trade union struggles of the 1970s and 80s. She described how she 'grew up with the sense that music can be something very powerful in struggle, both in terms of motivating people [and as] an active voice in shaping the future and having a role in the future and having a role in decision making. So it seemed to me that it kind of chimed with that'.[46]

This deep-rooted political interpretation of music as a powerful voice that shaped the future inspired Rogers to return to the Bajo Lempa. By the following year, she had raised sufficient funds for a pilot project to teach music to the young people of the Bajo Lempa community in which she stayed.[47] She recalled meeting the community leaders to discuss creating something more permanent as the pilot project drew to a close: 'They were a force to be reckoned with,' she laughed, and explained more seriously that, 'they were really concerned about young people losing their cultural heritage and history. And they were kind of quite forceful in saying to me, 'what can you do about this?'[48] She continued, 'that helped inform the kind of political dimension of the project that cultural political history is important to the communities and the communities wanted that to continue in the beginning with their young people. They didn't want that to be lost'.[49] From its outset, Music for Hope's methodology was one of horizontality and born out of a need expressed by the community leaders themselves. Horizontality, and the way it responds and adapts to local needs and circumstances, has remained central to

[46] Interview with Katherine Rogers, Manchester, 2020.
[47] At the time, the music popular amongst the returned refugee communities was *trova* – from the Latin American political-folk tradition of the Cold War period linked to the *Nueva Canción* movement in Chile, and the revolutionary folk music of Venezuelan artist Ali Primera and Carlos Mejía Godoy from Sandinista Nicaragua. Home-grown political folk groups connected to left-wing social and guerrilla movements included *Los Torogoces de Morazán* and *Yolocamba I'tá* (mentioned above). Cumbia (originally from Colombia but adapted throughout Latin America) was also, and still remains, very popular to this day. In the Bajo Lempa the two genres were frequently merged in the songs of the bands fostered by Music for Hope.
[48] Interview with Katherine Rogers, Manchester, 2020. In the interviews we conducted, 'history' and 'heritage' were often used interchangeably by interviewees. Nevertheless, we can still detect subtle differences in meaning. 'History' appears to refer to the narrative of the past that creates the collective and individual identities of the communities and those who live within them. 'Cultural heritage', however, refers to traditional processes and practices that are shaped by historical identity as well as the tangible objects and experiences produced by these practices. These in turn, inform and construct 'historical identity'. Thus, the relationship between 'history' and 'cultural heritage' is symbiotic and circular. These are the definitions we are using for the purposes of this article.
[49] Interview with Katherine Rogers, Manchester, 2020.

its approach even as it has become part of the cultural heritage of the communities themselves.

As Music for Hope became embedded in the Bajo Lempa communities, other core values emerged alongside the foundational goal of 'cultural regeneration' through music. In part, this was a result of the traditional and horizontal teaching methodology in which students learned to play various instruments by ear, rather than classically trained to read sheet music. More advanced students would help teach younger, less experienced students, passing on the knowledge that they had learned from their teachers. This horizontality and the passing on of skills and knowledge to younger peers simultaneously reflected the communitarian values of the Bajo Lempa communities themselves. In turn, these values were further developed as Music for Hope became a familiar part of community life. As Rogers explained, 'the [communitarian] values during that period of actually developing the project over a year progressed a lot more because it was [...] also around building young people's capacity, their organisational skills, their leadership skills, their empowerment, their voice'.

Another important part of Music for Hope's approach was to encourage students to form bands that rehearsed and performed together as they progressed. This fostered the formation of social skills and friendships, in addition to musical coordination. Rogers continued: 'the band is much more of a kind of group activity. You have to learn to listen to each other, you have to negotiate, you have to have a discipline of working together on a common goal'.[50] An added bonus, of course, was that the bands could (and did) play at community events, transmitting the support they had been given back into their own communities. This simultaneously reinforced a healthy intergenerational relationship between young people, adults and community leaders. As Rogers elaborated, 'this is not only our young people keeping alive a musical culture. They're more engaged in their communities. They're able to give back to their communities. They're able to have a voice in the communities. They're a source of pride'.[51] This is demonstrative of Music for Hope's prefigurative approach, enacting in its organisational and pedagogical practice its communitarian and anti-authoritarian principles. Paula Serafini has argued that, in art activism, the tensions between aesthetic objectives and political strategy may be reconciled through a prefigurative approach that foregrounds ethics (Serafini, 2018). Music was understood in the Bajo Lempa and by Rogers as a constructive force, with musical teaching and the formation of bands intimately linked to building an egalitarian community.

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[50] Interview with Katherine Rogers, Manchester, 2020.
[51] Interview with Katherine Rogers, Manchester, 2020.

By 2006, less than ten years after the Music for Hope pilot, some of the project's first students had become established community music teachers – initially on a voluntary basis as they underwent more intensive, formal training in the capital city San Salvador, and later as they received a small, regular stipend from the funds Music for Hope raised by way of recompense. When interviewed together in 2013, they described how their perception of the original purpose of Music for Hope differed from that of its founder. Three of the teachers had grown up in the refugee camps, two of them had been born there. Another of the teachers, as a small child, was internally displaced with his family, then in the later years of the civil war, fought as a child soldier. One music teacher described how, 'When we returned to these communities, our only "light", let's say, was music. [...] This was an opportunity for us to forget certain memories of the war and also internal conflicts within our close families. It's helped us to alleviate and cure wounds that the war caused' (Music for Hope 01, 2013). Another added, 'I remember that at the time [the pilot project was set up], a large number of young people came to the community for music classes [...] and the idea was to get the armed conflict and everything they'd lived through during the war out of their heads and to create a different ideology and to try to teach music to these young people so that they could create a different culture from the problems that they'd been living through due to the armed conflict' (Music for Hope 02, 2013). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the language and focus of the music teachers' recollections of Music for Hope's main goal differed markedly from those of its founder as they all agreed on the project's therapeutic value to themselves and their colleagues and friends, all living with the trauma of violent conflict and forced displacement.

The teachers' memories suggested that trauma alleviation was intended from the outset, while Katherine Rogers considered it rather to be a subsequent added bonus. She did not set out with the intention of providing trauma therapy through music – this was beyond her expertise. Nevertheless, it makes sense that the initial benefits experienced by the first students of the project might be recalled as its primary goals years later. What we appear to be seeing is a reframing of Music for Hope by its participants, according to dominant discourses associated with the temporal period and circumstances in which it was created and developed. The foregrounding of trauma and victimhood was, indeed, a broader phenomenon that echoed the passing of the global Cold War. Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman (2007) argue that trauma passed from the confines of professional psychiatry and psychology to become embedded in everyday language, creating 'a new language of the event' (p.6). As such, trauma became a way to testify to and validate suffering. Moreover, the case of Music for Hope's participants confirms their claim that 'social agents are not passive recipients of the label "traumatized"', which is instead more often actively discussed or mobilised by social groups (p.

xi). For the Bajo Lempa community leaders, in dialogue with Music for Hope's founder, the conservation and celebration of cultural traditions that rooted the next generation of young people in their communitarian past was of primary importance – a past that also involved bitter struggle against the odds; yet for the young participants in the project, the principle goal was one of recovery from the traumatic legacy of that struggle so that they could move forwards into the future.

Perhaps the clearest example of the transition between temporal frameworks, from one of political struggle to the healing of trauma, can be seen in the testimony of the teacher who fought as a child soldier, when he told his life history in an individual interview some few years later. He described how, as a very small child, his family were forced to flee from where they lived due to a military counterinsurgency operation that was coming to burn down their village and massacre its inhabitants. Even after relocating to the Bajo Lempa, his family was subjected to repeated and extremely violent forms of intimidation by state security forces. He recalled how, after one episode in which a soldier shot dead his family's calf for no reason other than he had the power to do so, hate and rage became the emotions that motivated him: 'when you're young, your hate starts to build. Because of everything you see, you start to hate, and I said to my friends, when I'm older I'm going to join the guerrilla. And so I grew up in that environment [...] of pure violence. [...] With everything that was going on in my head I was filled with rage'. He joined up to fight aged only 11 or 12 which, given his statement 'when I'm older', provides a clear sense of how young he was when he first experienced being consumed by negative emotions as a result of the violence he had been subjected to.[52]

After he was demobilised towards the end of the war in 1991, he described how difficult it was to adjust to civilian life. If, for example, during the night a mango fell from a tree and crashed onto the tin roof of his house, he would wake up and find himself instinctively diving under the bed for protection, thinking it was the explosion from a mortar attack. His heart would be pounding and it would take him a few moments to regain his composure and realise that he was no longer in a war zone.[53] Conversely, he recalled his excitement, even while he was still grappling with this trauma, at being given the opportunity to learn music. This enthusiasm motivated him to the extent that he and his brothers would walk approximately eight kilometres along the main road from his community to attend classes. He even mentioned how music helped him forget about the fact that he received none of the benefits given to demobilised combatants as part of the 1992 peace accords agreed between the Salvadoran government and the FMLN; 'when

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[52] Interview, Bajo Lempa, 2016. He could not remember his exact age at the time and moved between 11 or 12 at different points in the interview.
[53] Interview, Bajo Lempa, 2016.

you're playing music, the music enters you to such an extent that you practically don't remember it'. He then laughed dismissively and added, 'I don't normally talk about that'.[54] In a more serious vein, in a subsequent interview the following year, he described how learning music, playing in a band and writing songs helped him dissipate the feelings of rage and fear that had built up within him over the years. He commented on how, by teaching music, he now helps the next generation of young people experiencing similar types of emotions.[55] For him, music provided catharsis, just as it did for the other young people who participated in those initial classes in the Bajo Lempa, soothing the traumas caused by the violence and dislocation they had experienced over years of civil conflict.

If the memories of the teachers and Music for Hope's founder differed with respect to the initial and principal goal of the project – conservation and cultural regeneration versus catharsis and trauma alleviation – their memories did converge when considering the overall cultural impact of Music for Hope in the communities. The teachers described how music had evolved in accordance with the increased musical skills of the young people in the Bajo Lempa communities. This evolution reflected as much the horizontal and adaptable methodology of Music for Hope as it did the greater capacity of those trained within the project to perform to an ever higher standard. With respect to the former, Katherine Rogers explained: 'It's good to know your own traditions [...]. but also to respond to young people's interests because otherwise you'll lose them. It's no good saying, oh you've all got to do a Revolutionary song from the 1970s and 80s. It has no relevance to now, to young people'. She continued, 'When you work with young people you have to respond to their interests [...] For young people to really have a voice, they need to grapple with their own ideas and themes that they're interested in [...] They face different challenges. They've got different aspirations, different dreams, and I think Music for Hope has evolved with those dreams and with those aspirations'.[56]

This evolution of pedagogical methodology that chimed with the evolution of the interests and concerns of young people in the communities dovetailed into the increased musicality of the growing numbers of young people who passed through the project, learned to play musical instruments and performed in bands. The teachers recounted how Music for Hope has 'transformed the lives of the population, of the communities of the Bajo Lempa [...] now, there are many groups which play different types of music and which give another side to the

[54] Interview, Bajo Lempa, 2016.
[55] Interview, Bajo Lempa, 2017.
[56] Interview with Katherine Rogers, Manchester, 2020.

communities and which have contributed to creating a rural cultural identity' (Music for Hope 03, 2013). In this way, the origins of Music for Hope, its early primary goals, and its subsequent achievements come full circle, both rooting themselves in and contributing to the shared culture of the Bajo Lempa communities.[57]

The early years of Music for Hope demonstrate some of the ways in which international solidarity evolved in the context of a distinct historical break – the culmination of the Cold War and the Salvadoran civil war. If the solidarity of ELSSOC and the depiction of collective mobilisation in Changing the Picture reflected the final years of a period in which the revolutionary horizon was considered possible, Music for Hope emerged at a time that forced the initiative to confront the traumatic legacies of the civil war years. Although founded with a sense of continuity of political resistance in a new context, its focus soon became one of processing and healing the tragedy of conflict. Traverso (2016) asserts that after the eclipse of Cold War utopias, the attendant centring of trauma and victimhood brought about a preoccupation with the ghosts of a past and a retrospective view of the twentieth century, as primarily an age of war and tragedy. Nevertheless, as we have seen, Music for Hope was not characterised by a demobilising lamentation of failed revolution but continued to be driven by a constructive future-oriented approach. We might compare this with Traverso's suggestion of a 'fruitful melancholia', of 'rethinking a revolutionary project in a nonrevolutionary age (Ibid., p.15). Far from melancholic, Music for Hope was and continues to be resolutely optimistic; yet engaging with past suffering has been part of its practice. Working through the traumas of the civil war was a core, indeed indispensable, aspect of the community-building and pedagogical principles of Music for Hope, and its prefigurative and horizontal approach helped to unify and implement musical objectives together with its political ideals.

*Changing the Picture* and Music for Hope illustrate how cultural and artistic expressions of British international solidarity with El Salvador evolved in the context of a historical transition, but they are characterised as much by their connections as by their differences. Such connections were partly organisational: as has been highlighted, Music for Hope was established in close connection with ESNET, a post-civil war iteration of ELSSOC, the organisation that commissioned the mural. However, the two are also far closer politically than the

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[57] This further complicates the dynamic and symbiotic relationship between 'history' and 'cultural heritage' mentioned above as, while Music for Hope's initial goal was that of preserving, reinforcing and celebrating cultural traditions of the communities through musical education, its methodological evolution in line with the changing needs and aspirations of the Bajo Lempa youth have meant that over time Music for Hope created new practices and culture in the Bajo Lempa that have themselves become embedded as part of the cultural heritage of the communities.

shift toward a preoccupation with civil war trauma might indicate. While foregrounding trauma and victimhood has occasionally been associated with a certain depoliticising trend following the Cold War, Music for Hope cannot be cast as apolitical – even if ESNET did not retain the partisan politics of ELSSOC. Indeed, the initiative's musical pedagogy went hand-in-hand with its prefigurative politics of everyday community building. Moreover, the communitarian and critical pedagogical focus of Music for Hope was not a novelty in the post-civil war era, but in fact reproduced much of the major themes of *Changing the Picture*. Indeed, the rural community highlighted in the mural, including the cooperative and classroom scene, was the political horizon for which the collective organisation of the people mobilised. In a moving, recent encounter between one of the Bajo Lempa community members living in exile in the UK, the *Changing the Picture* artist Jane Gifford and ELSSOC cultural committee organiser Chris Hudson, the community member pointed at the mural designs and stated that 'this is an almost exact representation of the aspirations of our community when we were living in exile'.[58] Thus, rather than depoliticising, Music for Hope represents a community-rooted and prefigurative reformulation of international solidarity and of the politics depicted in *Changing the Picture*.

## Conclusion

The comparison between *Changing the Picture* and Music for Hope enables us to draw important conclusions about international solidarity, cultural practice and the historical break represented by the end of the Cold War. In the first place, cultural or political art can and has formed a crucial yet under-recognised channel for international solidarity with Latin America. Such practices should be understood not merely as a tool or resource, nor simply a powerful medium through which solidarity politics can be communicated. Like other examples of cultural expression and practices of international solidarity, *Changing the Picture* and Music for Hope emerged closely in line with politicised cultural forms in Latin America itself: art and music. Indeed, as both the mural artist and a key figure in the commissioning of the mural recognised, muralism played an important role in Latin American and Salvadoran political art, while Music for Hope sought to preserve traditional musical practices and mobilise those traditions within a community-building project. At the same time, art activism in international solidarity can be closely related to the political cleavages and artistic forms of the sites from which it originates, especially when the

[58] Community workshop, St. Alfege with St Peter's Church of England Primary School, London, 10 November 2023.

primary audience are the inhabitants of those sites. This was the case for *Changing the Picture*, which was part of a wider artistic movement in London and embedded within the anti-Thatcherite cultural politics of the 1980s.

Secondly, *Changing the Picture* and Music for Hope also help us to understand the ways in which culture-based solidarity can reflect and respond to differing historical moments. We can consider such differences between frames of transformative struggle and those of trauma, as demonstrative of how culture reflect wartime and postwar political environments. However, it is also important to stress the wider significance of a global event alongside specific local conditions. Internationally, the historical break and the decline of a revolutionary frame following the end of the Cold War implied a shift in the relationship between political struggle and memory. With the ushering in of a global neoliberal hegemony, transformative or revolutionary struggle became associated not as part of a present or future political moment, but as evidence of a failed past. In the case of *Changing the Picture*, at the twilight of the twentieth century's revolutionary wave, the political interlocutor was the FMLN and the political aesthetic was the collective – almost heroic – power of a people to overcome the forces of imperialism, a rural community to roll up the metropolis and the global economic model of neoliberalism. With Music for Hope, the interlocutors were post-exilic returned communities reeling from the trauma of civil war. With the 1992 Peace Accords marking the end of the conflict, the postwar environment – as well as the reality of neoliberal hegemony consigning revolutionary subjects largely to a failed past – was crucial. In this context, music became a constructive channel for working through the past, but it also functioned as a prefigurative practice for the everyday politics of community building and for manifesting a more egalitarian and anti-authoritarian vision of the future.[59] Musical pedagogy, in this sense, can structure the participatory practice frequently at the heart of international solidarity politics.

These two examples should not only be understood as reflecting distinct moments and representing different formulations of the relationship between art and politics. Although different in form, the communitarian message of popular democracy in the mural is also articulated in new cultural forms by Music for Hope, particularly through the latter's artistic, pedagogical practice of teaching music to children and adolescents. Moreover, we can also see how participatory cultural practices have been used to confront trauma while also trying to retain

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[59] This article has only focused on Music for Hope's early years, but more recently, together with the people of the Bajo Lempa communities, it has had to respond to and navigate new social and political conditions, including the surging gang violence, the return of widespread paramilitary activities and the growing authoritarianism of the state. These changing conditions and adaptations will be the subject of forthcoming research.

elements of political resistance. With the decline of utopian politics and the shipwreck of failed revolutions at the end of the Cold War, debates about cultural memory have highlighted the foregrounding of victimhood in public discourse on the twentieth century and the prevalence of the frame of trauma in political culture globally. Political struggles of the past, in this sense, ceased to become incorporated into the transformative projects of the present. Nevertheless, Music for Hope is suggestive of how using the arts to simultaneously reinforce community cultural heritage while addressing historical trauma. At a time when the collective transformative politics of the Cold War appeared to have been defeated, projects like Music for Hope avoid merely memorialising the past by contributing to the reactivation and reconfiguration of international solidarity while functioning as a constructive and prefigurative community building project.

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