

## Grave Reflections

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It was 23 years ago today that four churchwomen were found in a shallow grave in a farmer's field, some raped, all dead-- each with a single bullet to their head.

The description of such violence was not at all uncommon in 1980 in El Salvador- a countryside desecrated by civil war, a people not at all defeated by the horrors they lived daily. A resurrection people, fed by the blood of the martyrs and the bread of daily struggle for a better life created the peace filled scene I witnessed today--a lovely pasture populated with a smart brick chapel, a beautiful white stone monument complete with a memorial plaque and a tree that is planted in the center of an area outlined with small white rocks. A lovely space- now filled with local folks and their living memory of war and peace accords; Latin American religious sisters revisiting the core of their passion, commitment and witness; and people from the North – standing in solidarity.

Aiding and abetting the enemy, the 'subversive acts' of the nuns and one lay missionary were caring for victims of war and war- orphaned children. Addressing the social, political and economic disparity between the rich and the poor, teaching methods of self-empowerment, and community development were direct threats to the power structure of the ruling class. In those times threats were eliminated.

What was not eliminated 23 years ago is the continued struggle for parity among social classes by those who are economically poor. Even as we gathered at this grave site, determined justice seeking Salvadoran citizens from the Bajo Lempa were walking five days to the President's Mansion where they planned to demand the completion of a levee—apparently the levee was only constructed along side the land of the rich; to demand the titles to their land acquired for use for the levee, and to voice their opposition to the CAFTA – the Central American Free Trade Agreement.

Although I did not witness the violence of 23 years ago, I am witnessing a violence as deadly, now with global partners, committing economic warfare. While in El Salvador, SHARE introduced me to many community groups -women and men - struggling to gain access to water, electricity, education, real jobs (not sweat shop slavery) or fair trade prices for their coffee. I am once more deeply resolved to work to eliminate the death threat of free trade, and towards replacing the present global economic priorities with fair trade, food self-sufficiency, and community development so all may live- and live well.

December 2, 2003, I couldn't help but be honored and grateful to be standing in solidarity with the people of El Salvador to commemorate the memory and lives of these women and the hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans martyred in the struggle for equality. I couldn't help but be encouraged, deeply acknowledging the effect their living spirits have had on my own Catholic Christian convictions. I am indebted to them for introducing me, by their flesh and blood, to both liberation theology and catholic social teaching incarnate! I couldn't help but pray that someday I, too, would be so 'subversive' – that is so compassionate, so just, so Christian.