



INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR ETHNO-RELIGIOUS MEDIATION

"Fostering a culture of peace among ethnic and religious groups"

11 W. Prospect Avenue, 3rd Floor
Mount Vernon, New York 10550

www.icermediation.org

U.S. 501 (c) (3) tax exempt public charity, nonprofit and non-governmental organization in Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

MEDIATION ACADEMY

Specialized Mediation Training The Mediation of Ethnic and Religious Conflicts

Mediation Project

Mediation Case Study (Developed by Jacqueline Kulaga, Summer 2018)

Proposed Case Study: Transforming a Violent Past into a Hopeful Future

What Happened? Historical Background to the Conflict

The two parties are Guatemalan Christians who now live in America after the civil war. One was a violent gang member and the other was a mother of a victim. Both are involved with the church and seeking the same goal but have different experiences that are making communicating hard. They rely on their faith to get them through past experiences from back in Guatemala and how violence shaped their coming to America.

While Carlos wants to find ways to help the community, he is struggling with knowing that his community may not accept him based on history. Juliana using her faith to get through her past but because of the civil war and the violence she experienced, she is not sure she wants to move forward, but her faith is helping her. It is difficult for her because she is still angry from the war but wants to put her trust in her religious faith.

The creation of violent groups is no new concept in history, but The United States was found to have played a major role in supporting the state regimes in Central America (Northern

Triangle of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala). In the 1970s and 1980s, war plagued the area, sending thousands of Central Americans to the United States for refuge. When arriving to the United States, many of the youth were at a disadvantage due to poverty and a lack of education, resulting in finding ways to survive through criminal activity. In order to survive, they had banded together to form urban gangs. Young men who had come from these war-torn nations created two of the most well-known groups, Mara Salvatruta (MS-13) and the Eighteenth Street Gang (B-18). Some were victims of war, while others played hand in the violence back home. To identify one another, the groups used tattoos, clothes, verbal and non-verbal cues. They engaged in turf wars with other gangs and became involved in small time crimes with drugs.

Gang Violence and the Lack of Law Enforcement

These affiliations of gang violence and femicide began with roots in Los Angeles, mainly by Central Americans escaping civil war. They used the Spanish word *mara* to honor their homeland. Once deported from the United States, the prison gang members spread across Central America, including Guatemala. Children as young as twelve years old are constantly being lured to join these gangs. What makes the situation worse is that unlike Los Angeles, in Guatemala, gang members must commit harsher and more violent crimes in order to gain a better reputation. There is also a belief that the jails are overflowing with members, but it is not difficult to continue with operations as the communities and officials turn a blind eye.

Each Other's Stories – How Each Person Understands the Situation and Why

Carlos' Story

Carlos is a forty-four-year-old former MS-13 member based in Los Angeles. He started a US based chapter of the group called *Hombres Unidos*, a Guatemalan organization that offers

relief services for reforming gang members. Carlos was granted asylum in the United States because of theatres of violence by death squads for the work he was doing.

Back in Guatemala, Carlos' mother had passed away when he was 3, and his father would be away for days while he worked. His older sister, who was struggling to keep him in school and away from the violence, basically raised Carlos. He was initiated into the gang at age 13 by a violent beating that lasted 20 seconds. Members of the gang took turn brutalizing Carlos. The gang supplied him with alcohol and drugs. They would assault young girls and commit crimes of theft and larceny. Carlos states that what was most important to him was a sense of family that the gang provided him as a young boy. During that time, Carlos felt a sense of power and control using violence to send a message to the community. He came to the United States in 1998, where he continued the gang life in LA. He spent years in and out of jail. The death of his nephew was a major turning point for Carlos. He received word while in prison that his nephew was murdered after a refusal to join the gang.

Carlos started his organization while in prison with much success. However, members of rival gangs informed his former affiliates, and this created problems for him. After being released on parole and good behavior, he made his organization official to work with former members find a life after the violence. Part of his personal journey is to connect back to the Guatemalan community. He wants to talk with survivors or the families of victims to see how they can work together to help young kids stay out of gang life. He has reached out to his Pastor at the local community church to see if there was anyone willing to help him in these next steps.

Interests:

Renewal / Positive Change: He knows people may not forgive him but he doesn't want his past to define his future. He just wants to do something positive now.

Emotional and Mental Healing: Currently, Carlos also suffers from PTSD due to the extreme violence he grew up with, but many people do not take this seriously and see him as a criminal and murderer. He isn't sure how to handle it, but he is dedicated to the mission of his organization.

Juliana's Story

Juliana's daughter, María Isabel, had been a victim of gang violence back in Guatemala. Maria had been beaten, raped and bound with barbed wire, only later to be killed. After much grieving, Juliana joined a local activist group through the church to speak out against the violence. Because the group was becoming more vocal and raising awareness, she had a female relative that was kidnapped at gunpoint by an unknown male (later confirmed to be a gang member) while she was leaving her home in Quiché department. The female relative was released, and this forced Juliana to flee the country with her and her family. She resettled in Los Angeles and began a new life, while remaining active in organizations that worked with victims of violence from Central America.

Juliana, still reeling from the death of her daughter, harbors a lot of hatred for gang members and has trouble believing they can change. She is very strong in her Christian faith and asks for guidance through the church. With gang violence being in the mainstream media again, Juliana is feeling triggered by the stories. She still wants to make a difference in honor of her daughter and the countless others who have suffered because of the gangs (and the war / politics). Her pastor mentioned that a man named Carlos, who belonged to the church, was interested in similar work. He suggested mediation with the former gang member who is seeking to find ways to help the community. She is very hesitant and scared to face someone who might have been the murderer of her child.

Interests:

Safety and Security: She is conflicted by her want for change, her desire to make a difference and the emotions of the events of violence that she had to endure.

Strength to Forgive: She puts faith in her pastor and community to help her get through this and is willing to take steps forward, but is mistrusting of Carlos and his motives. She is willing to see how the first meeting will go and take it from there.