

# **Battle of memories in Costa Rica: inventions, testimonies, and violence during the civil war of 1948**

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## **Abstract**

Costa Rica's Civil War of 1948 divided up Costa Ricans for several decades. This division depended a lot on opposite visions of the past that scholars have failed to analyze and document. This essay confronts official narratives of the Costa Rica's Civil War of 1948 with testimonies and memories of participants to see how the real social confrontation has been hidden in scholars and partisans' analyses in a way to invent the past. By doing so, this essay goes deeper into testimonies of combatants to determine hidden actions that challenge official revolutionary leaders' explanations of this conflict.

**Keywords:** memory, invention, Costa Rica, civil war, violence.

## ***Introduction***

**C**osta Rica is well known as a peaceful country. This fame hides a past of tension and some social breakdowns in Costa Rican history, however – the Civil War of 1948 is one of those moments. Costa Rica experienced great social tension from 1940 to 1948. President Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia, who won the 1940 presidential election with almost 85 percent of the votes, organized the first and clearest instance of a populist movement in the history of this country, which mobilized thousands of people. Calderón Guardia’s administration produced a Social Reform which comprised progressive legislation that created a wide social system of health insurance, the University of Costa Rica, a chapter on social guarantees in the Constitution and a Labor Code. During his presidential period, Calderón Guardia tried to transform himself into a populist leader who could combine politics, social reforms, and unionism without losing power. In this effort, Calderón Guardia received the support of the Catholic Church and the Communist Party of Costa Rica (PCCR, founded in 1931). The union organization and the systematic communists’ support allowed Calderón to gain some control of the social forces. But social and political confrontation led the country to a civil war in 1948 (Díaz-Arias, 2015).

Researchers have studied the period from 1940 to 1948 to determine how that society experienced a strong political division that produced a civil war. It is possible to identify five tendencies of historical analysis among those studies. First, one group has understood that period from a class struggle perspective, arguing that the Civil War was a clash between a dominant class composed of national capitalists opposed to any kind of social reform, and a government supported by communists and workers defending political changes to benefit the poor (Aguilar, 1978; Salazar, 1981; Rojas, 1989).

The second tendency consists of political leaders' biographies. The third tendency draws attention to the relationship between the Civil War of 1948, the United States, and the other Central American governments before, during, and after the war (Schifter, 1982; 1986; Lehoucq, 1992; Longley, 1993; 1997; Olander, 1999; Ameringer, 1996). Other studies have focused on the elections and, specifically, on the result of the 1948 ballots that precipitated the war (Lehoucq; Molina, 2002; Molina, 1999; Molina, 2001; Molina, 2002). A fifth group is composed of testimonies, accounts, autobiographies, interviews, and memoirs of 1940s' political leaders. Plurality is the main characteristic of these pieces made up of the memoirs of *Calderonistas* – who controlled power between 1940 and 1948 –, communists, opponents, and of people who were infants at the time of the Civil War of 1948. Sociologist Manuel Solís (2006) has taken into consideration published testimonies as a source to study Costa Ricans' subjectivities in the 1940s. Solís analyzed some testimonies to discover what personal reasons motivated people to act violently.

Scholars have scarcely discussed the atrocities and significant social division that the war represented. That is a result of the policies of memory created to keep the idea of a democratic-peaceful society. Due to the severe rupture in everyday relations among citizens brought about by the violence, rebuilding the social links required that the victors and losers had to find ways to live together and to confront the struggle over memories. Resolving these struggling memories involved a political compromise, which should have evolved into reconciliation which is not different from other countries' experiences (Seraphim, 2008; Confino, 2004; Adelman, 2009).

For decades, Costa Ricans have listened to the historical narratives that appeared after the war, especially that of the winners, as the single and correct way to remember that conflict. The main contribution of this

essay is to confront official narratives of the Civil War of 1948 with testimonies and memories of participants, to see how they represent the past. By doing so, I want to go deeper into testimonies of combatants to determine hidden actions that challenge revolutionary leaders' explanations of this conflict.

### ***Inventing a past: the victors' official memories of the civil war***

In March-April of 1948 Costa Rica experienced a civil war produced by the social crisis that began in 1940 and the political confrontation created by Calderón Guardia's attempts to preserve power. The Civil War of 1948 confronted the government of Teodoro Picado (a follower of Calderón) and its old allies (the Communist Party) against a plural political Opposition. On March 12th, 1948, a group of rebels (*Figueristas*) led by José Figueres began what they called the "War of National Liberation." This revolt can be divided into four phases. The first stage (March 12th-23rd) involved battles between revolutionaries and pro-government troops. The second stage (March 24th-April 6th) included attempts at peace negotiations during the continuation of hostilities. The third stage (April 7th-13th) was marked by the *Figueristas'* unexpected attempts to take over two important cities: Cartago and Limón. The fourth stage (April 14th-20th) meant the implementation of peace by agreements between revolutionaries and government authorities. Those agreements included President Teodoro Picado's resignation and the installation of a de facto Junta to rule the country for sixteen months (López, 1998; Acuña, 1974, pp. 147-326; Aguilar, 1978, pp. 295-398; Villegas, 1998, pp. 291-525; Bell, 1971, pp. 131-154).

In May of 1948, just some days after the end of the Civil War, the Costa Rican newspaper *La Nación* began publishing a reporting series titled "*Sangre, Sudor y Lágrimas*" (Blood, Sweat, and Tears). This title was not naïve; it referenced the Spanish translation of Winston Churchill's speech, calling allies to fight against the Nazis. In this case, the reports were written

under a pseudonym – Barnaby – and described the Costa Rican Civil War, based on some *Figuerista* soldiers’ testimonies. In his reports, Barnaby provided a way for victors to publicly talk about what he called “The Libertarian Revolution of 1948”. Barnaby (1951) introduced the Civil War as the heroic fight of a “*puñado de muchachos*” (bunch of boys) guided by a “man of faith”: José Figueres. Barnaby described several stages of the war emphasizing the *Figueristas*’ courage and determination. Every plan conceived by the revolutionaries’ leaders is presented as well-planned, coordinated, and successful. Discipline was a norm in Figueres’ troops, according to Barnaby.

Another similar narrative came from Oscar Cordero in 1948. Cordero, a *Figuerista* soldier, published the diary he wrote during his participation in the Civil War. In Cordero’s text, the Civil War is explained as Costa Rica’s pueblo that rose to confront Rafael Calderón Guardia’s tyranny. *Figueristas* are recognized as heroes who defeated the “Devil’s evil forces” (Cordero, 1948, p. 8). By the end of 1948, that reference reappeared in a pamphlet that depicted the war as a struggle between good (revolutionaries) and evil (*Calderocomunistas*). That work claimed that violence was only perpetrated by Calderón Guardia’s followers. According to this perspective, the revolution was the last chance for the Opposition to restore democracy to Costa Rica. With the exception of a small reference to General Miguel Ángel Ramírez (a Dominican who arrived to Costa Rica along with other Caribbean soldiers to support Figueres thanks to an agreement he signed up in Guatemala in December of 1947), there is no mention in the pamphlet of the Guatemala’s aid with weapons and men for Figueres’ uprising. Finally, as in Barnaby’s narrative, each time that the *Figueristas* took a town, this action was presented as “liberation”. To highlight that meaning, this account pointed out that women hugged *Figueristas* when their villages were liberated (Anonymous, 1949, pp. 9-27).

If those narratives that came out in the immediate months following the Civil War created the foundations – the metanarrative – of the official victors’ explanation on the conflict, Figueres’ figure received more attention in the 1950s. This happened as a consequence of the creation of *Partido Liberación Nacional* (PLN), a political party established in 1951 by the leaders of the revolution (Araya, 1982, pp. 13-65). Figueres won the presidential elections of 1953 as the PLN candidate and governed the country from 1953 to 1958. This period contributed to the consolidation of Figueres’ image as a hero of the nation. Indeed, in 1953 the PLN published a comic-book pamphlet to introduce Figueres as the liberator of Costa Rica (PLN, 1953). In that year, Hugo Navarro-Bolandi (1953) – another *Figuerista* – published a book in Mexico that collected numerous articles he had written for the pro-Figueres newspaper *La República*. Essentially, Navarro Bolandi’s book presented *Don Pepe* (the way Figueres was called) as a major instigator of the historical transformation of Costa Rica; thus, he introduced Figueres’ philosophy on state, affirmed Figueres as an intellectual, self-made man, a combination of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, and attempted to match Don Pepe’s candidacy with Costa Rica’s welfare. From that viewpoint, Figueres led the revolution of 1948 to renovate the country and build a purified democracy.

This cult of Figueres’ importance was strengthened with three books published in the 1950s that explored the 1940s and constructed the idea that Figueres was a “*campesino desconocido*” (unknown farmer) who was forced by “Calderón Guardia’s tyranny” to rise up in arms. On different levels, those publications insisted on describing the Civil War as a necessary, desperate action against Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia’s ambition of power. Therefore, Figueres’ friends confirmed him as the savior of Costa Rica while the Civil War is recalled as the epic battle that liberated the country (Cañas, 1955; Castro, 1955; Navarro-Bolandi, 1957). To complement this process, *Figueristas* tried to transform their vision of the 1940s into monuments and

commemorations. In 1952 a large monument to remember former President León Cortés (who was the main leader of the Opposition to Calderón Guardia and passed away in 1946) was built in Paseo Colón, the avenue that connected the Sabana airport to the capital city, to venerate Cortés as a martyr (Solís, 2006, p. 210).

Figueres himself contributed to the PLN partisan discourse about the 1940-1948 period. In 1951 he evaluated the first three years after the Civil War to identify that time as a period of crisis and the progressist policies of Calderón Guardia just as a political instrument that gave power to the Communist Party. Figueres explained that the Civil War was headed by a group of “*ciudadanos estudiosos*” (intellectuals) who were planning a social and technological transformation for their nation. He defended the uprising as a planned movement and not as “a series of unplanned operations that resulted in victory only because of God’s intervention” (Figueres, 1951, pp. 2 and 9). In his presidential address of 1958, Figueres (1958) examined the period between 1948 and 1958 and affirmed that progress was a constant during that time, in contrast with the period of 1940-1948.

Figueres was able to reaffirm his version in the 1980s when he published his memoirs under the title *El Espíritu del 48*. Figueres interpreted his life as that of a chosen one whose destiny was revealed by his mother when he was ten years old (Figueres, 1987, p. 51). He refers to himself as somebody elected by destiny – or God – to renovate Costa Rica. With regard to the Civil War, Figueres presented himself controlling every aspect of each stage of the revolt: for himself, he was the single organizer, director, chief commander, mastermind, and thinker of the uprising (Figueres, 1987, pp. 148-298).

Figueres’ interpretation of the past became the PLN official version to explain the 1940s and the period’s place within the history of Costa Rica. As this political party gained electoral power and defeated its opponents – it won 7 of 11 presidential elections between 1953 and 1998 – its adherents

continued defending it as an ideological party founded on the basis of free elections and against corruption. Ideologically, the PLN members (*Liberacionistas*) recognized themselves as social democrats and anticommunists. Indeed, in 1952, when Figueres addressed the Mid-Winter Convocation of Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, he held that Costa Rica had been the first Latin American battleground against communism and that his forces had eliminated the communist threat in the Civil War of 1948 (Ameringer, 1978, p. 98). *Liberacionistas* claimed they had opposed an oligarchy that wanted to make Costa Rica a dictatorship, using this historical interpretation of the 1940s as a useful tool to face political opponents and win elections.

In the 1970s, when some critical studies like those of Aguilar (1978) and Bell (1981) were released, *Liberacionistas* rejected them as non-objective or defined them like faked history (Salguero, 1981, p. 189). Also, in the 1970s, Guillermo Villegas – a *Figuerista* journalist – began a series of reports on the Civil War because he considered other analysis of the conflict to be guided by political passion instead of historical knowledge (Villegas, 1990, p. 11). Because of that vision, in 1998 Villegas published his book *La Guerra de Figueres* (Figueres' War) in which he did not quote any other interpretation of the Civil War. Alberto Cañas – known writer and *Liberacionista* – wrote the prologue to Villegas's book affirming he distrusted historians' interpretations of the Civil War (Villegas, 1998, p. ix). It was the *Figuerista* priest Benjamín Núñez who constructed a more elaborated rejection of what historians wrote about the 1940s. In his prologue to Figueres' memoirs, Núñez accused Marxist and *Calderonista* researchers of ideological bias when writing the history of the *ocho años*. Núñez stated that Figueres guided “el pueblo” against the *calderocomunismo* because Calderón Guardia and his followers had violently repressed Costa Ricans, had conducted electoral fraud, had killed people, had kept themselves in power, and had annulled the elections of 1948. From that point of view, Figueres only followed the pueblo's wish when he declared war on *calderocomunismo* (Figueres, 1987, pp. 11-19).



In summary, after 1951 the PLN members defended Figueres' original interpretation of his uprising as a neutral fact that could only be questioned by their political enemies. For *Liberacionistas*, the Civil War was an epic, well-organized and guided fight brought about by peaceful men who loved their nation. Put in Steve J. Stern's terms, PLN members were struggling with the truth of how to remember the Civil War in order to gain moral, cultural, and political legitimacy (Stern, 2006, pp. 2 and 382). However, since 1948, testimonies of Figueres' soldiers had depicted a different event.

### ***Struggling memories***

In 1977, Alberto Cañas and José María Penabad, then editors of the Costa Rican newspaper *El Excelsior*, contacted Guillermo Villegas to assign him a job: to search for and interview veterans of the 1948 Civil War. Initially, Villegas published the interviews in *El Excelsior* and later in the newspaper *La Prensa Libre*. By the end of the 20th century, the University of Costa Rica Press published Villegas' interviews as a series called *Testimonios del 48* – a collection composed of six volumes that collected 62 testimonies, mostly from *Figueristas* but also from *Calderocomunistas*, their enemies. Those volumes were complemented with 33 testimonies of veterans of both sides collected by Cuban writer Nicolás Pérez (1998). Also, at the beginning of the 1990s, the National Archives of Costa Rica (ANCR) and the Department of History of the University of Costa Rica conducted about 130 interviews with ex-combatants, participants, and political leaders who fought in the Civil War of 1948 – the tapes are available at the ANCR. In addition, Costa Rican historian Patricia Badilla (1994) conducted 60 interviews with Civil War participants. Based on all of these testimonies, conversations, and interviews I will explore dimensions of the Civil War that Figueres and his close friends never revealed because they would have challenged the official PLN interpretation. Moreover, I will use *Calderocomunistas'* versions of the 1940s to revisit some important events of the Civil War.

Although *Figueristas'* testimonies usually repeated Figueres' claim that they revolted to defend democracy, the presence of other motivations confirms that many people went to war for personal reasons. Political leaders such as Otilio Ulate and José Figueres took advantage of newspapers and political demonstrations to stoke hate against the *Calderocomunistas*. In those publications and events, political enemies were depicted as outsiders – the Others – and evil personified. During the Civil War, those representations matured and allowed *Figueristas* to battle and kill mercilessly. Consider the case of Oscar Cordero. On April 7, 1948, Cordero described in his diary how he addressed the population using a clandestine radio station. Cordero said: “From the bottom of my heart, I affirm that Costa Rica will be redeemed, it will be saved, and it will be liberated from the dark swamp in which those diabolical monsters Manuel Mora, Teodoro Picado, Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia and a long list of toads have it” (Cordero, 1948, p. 30). Cordero's reference to leaders of *Calderocomunismo* as “diabolical monsters” and “toads,” revealed how Figueres' soldiers saw their enemies: as evil forces and animals. This perspective appears in other testimonies. José Rafael Cordero held in his memoirs that they (Calderón Guardia's opponents) were fighting against “non-human beings” and because of that they “did not have to treat them as human beings” (Solís, 2006, p. 291). Dominican General Miguel Ángel Ramírez portrayed *Calderocomunistas* as “wolves that wanted blood” (Villegas, 2002, p. 30).

Nationalism was another way to disqualify *Calderocomunistas*; in their testimonies, the *Figueristas* often claimed that they were battling Nicaraguans or Anastasio Somoza's National Guards instead of Costa Ricans (Villegas, 2001, p. 263; Villegas, 2002, pp. 91, 114, 192, and 219; Villegas, 2004, p. 155). By employing the Costa Rican national discourse toward Nicaraguans, it was easy for *Figueristas* to depict their challengers as monsters. For example, a soldier said he and his colleagues caught “unos nicas grandotes, muy feos los bandidos” (“some tall, ugly Nicaraguans”) in combat (Villegas, 2004,

p. 155). Another *Figuerista* reported that he had fought against “*nicas*” who were “*malos, malos*” (Badilla, 1994). Consider what an informant told me about a group of *Calderocomunistas* he saw in the mountains of Aserrí, to the south of the capital city: “Many Nicaraguans came over, the vilest ones, because good Nicaraguans would not come. In Tarbaca, they killed an oldie... in Ojo de Agua they killed another older person... most of them were Nicaraguans.”

In his study of twentieth century atrocities, Jonathan Glover (2001, p. 50) has argued that, in war, the denial of humanity may take the form of viewing opponents as animals. *Figueristas*’ conceptualization of their rivals in 1948 demonstrates they had lost any respect toward *Calderocomunistas* as human beings, transforming them into monsters, animals, or simply as non-humans. A similar thing – though not as dramatic – happened on the other side. In the first days of combat, on 13 March 1948, the newspaper *La Tribuna* identified Figueres’ followers as godless “assassins” guided by foreigners who could not understand Costa Ricans’ peaceful spirit. Thus, both sides denied their enemies’ humanity, which made decisions to attack and kill easier to make.

In addition, liquor helped combatants overcome fear and perform their duties. Guillermo Martí remembered that before the fighting began, two revolutionaries went into a cantina to celebrate victory beforehand. They got drunk and were jailed, and their companions had to wait until they were liberated to begin uprising (Villegas, 2001, p. 55; Villegas, 2004, p. 117). Alderico Aguilar recounted that he joined a group of revolutionaries in Escazú; when they decided to battle, the first act was to make the sign of a cross and take a drink of whisky. In the beginning of the revolution in San Ramón, Rodrigo Herrera reported that he was almost shot by a Figueres supporter because that person was drunk (Villegas, 2003, p. 9). Although Figueres claimed he tried to get his soldiers to avoid drinking *guaro* (alcohol), he did not always succeed. Alfonso Mora commented that a group of officials

held a party in San Marcos de Tarrazú in the midst of military actions. When Figueres heard of the festivities, he got angry, confiscated the alcohol, and scolded everyone (Villegas, 2002, p. 280). But his followers managed to find more liquor. Indeed, *guaro* was everywhere and *Figueristas* often searched for it to keep warm, calm their nerves, and increase their ferocity. Frank Marshall reported that he and three other revolutionaries went to San Isidro del General to get supplies. They got drunk and decided to visit a prisoners' camp where they toyed with the detainees by throwing explosive grenades to them. Also, according to a witness, Marshall shot at prisoners' feet for fun (Pérez, 1998, p. 142). The single reference to sexual abuse in *Figueristas'* testimonies is linked to a group of revolutionaries who were drunk and raped two *campesinas* – one is identified as a “Chiquita” – in Alajuela (Villegas, 2003, p. 34). On the other side, testimonies commonly talk about *Calderocomunistas* who were given alcohol, then sent to fight (Villegas, 2004, p. 140). José Luis Jiménez, a *Calderonista*, remembered that when they recovered San Isidro, they requested new weapons and bullets to defend the town. A plane promptly arrived from San José, but it was full of liquor (Pérez, 1998, p. 156). According to Gonzalo Monge, his father sent him to San Jose to request arms to defend Cartago; yet, military men refused to send weapons but did give him three boxes of Ron to bring to Cartago (Pérez, 1998, p. 190).

Solís (2006, p. 315) argues that consumption of liquor was a way for men to get force and confront death. Solís has also identified a strong relationship between consumption of alcohol and killings: when soldiers drank before battle, they were more likely to kill both combatants and civilians or to act mercilessly (Solís, 2006, pp. 305-316).

The two first casualties of war, Rigoberto Pacheco and Carlos Brenes, were killed in cold blood by a man who saw them defenseless. Pacheco was Calderón Guardia's personal bodyguard and Brenes was a well-known *Calderonista* military man in Cartago. Opponents hated both of them. But

not only recognized *Calderonistas* were treated mercilessly. On March 20th, 1948, Célamo Barrientos, along with his wife and children, were caught near the revolutionaries' headquarters in *El Empalme*. Barrientos said mariachis were chasing him and offered his aid to the rebels. Suddenly, somebody suggested that Barrientos was likely a communist spy. Barrientos was scared and ran; a *Figuerista* shot at Barrientos' legs. Then, a group of revolutionaries repeatedly shot at Barrientos as he was lying in the ground. Another soldier poured diesel fuel over Barrientos' body and burned it, while his family watched the whole scene (Acuña, 1974, p. 220). Narrations of such atrocities, occurring beyond actual battles, are frequent in testimonies. In these cases, gunshot and torture promoted the destruction of rivals.

Killing by gunfire became a way to eliminate large groups of defenseless opponents. Although such action appears in both sides' testimonies, it seems to have been more commonly perpetrated by revolutionaries than by pro-government troops. Alberto Lorenzo asserted that Figueres ordered him to eliminate prisoners because they had neither room nor food for them (Pérez, 1998, p. 134). Max Cortés stated that in front of captured spies Frank Marshall's phrase used to be: "*Fusilen a ese cabrón!*" (Kill that son of bitch) (Pérez, 1998, p. 53). When the El Tejar battle was over, a group of eighteen defenseless and tired *Calderocomunistas* took shelter at an abandoned house in Quebradillas, near El Tejar. When they were resting, a group of revolutionaries walked in and machine-gunned them heartlessly, even though the *Calderocomunistas* had surrendered (Acuña, 1974, p. 262). Francisco Rojas, a rebel from Alajuela, recounted that his troop planned to shoot and kill a farmer who refused to collaborate. Rojas also said that his leader ordered them to shoot a prisoner who had recognized two revolutionaries. Rojas believed he was kidding, but other rebels took the prisoner into a sugar cane mill and killed him (Villegas, 2003, pp. 32 and 35). Pro-government troops also killed with gunfire. Aúreo Morales, a *Calderonista* soldier whom the Communists accused in 1941 of

ruling Golfito with an iron fist, committed terrible crimes in the context of the war. In Dominical, *Calderocomunistas* captured a group of revolutionaries. Morales ordered the rebels killed by gunfire on the beach, including a twelve-year-old boy (Pérez, 1998, p. 149). No judgments were mediated in those killings.

Torture was another way to destroy enemies. One victim of torture was the revolutionary Nicolás Marín, caught by government troops on March 13th, 1948. Government representatives falsely accused Marín of having killed Pacheco and Brenes. They took Marín to the presidential house wherein they repeatedly hit him. Aúreo Morales and Juan José Tavío then took him to Police Department in San José and tortured him until he died. Morales and Tavío abandoned Marín's corpse on a solitary path. In Marín's case there was no attempt to get information about Figueres' troops or armament. Instead, he was tortured and slowly killed for no real reason. Tavío and Morales were motivated by what Glover (2001, pp. 33-34) calls a love of cruelty. Their behavior explains why both *Figueristas* and Communists remembered Tavío and Morales as assassins.

This love of cruelty is also one of the reasons behind the revolutionaries' practice of burning corpses with diesel fuel after the battles were finished. They justified this action by claiming both health motives and a lack of time – they did not want corpses to produce a pandemic illness and they needed to return to battle. Such justifications, however, are problematic because testimonies revealed that not only dead bodies were burnt. Consider Dagoberto Cruz's testimony about the situation after the San Isidro battle:

That day and the next one we lifted cadavers. We burnt them up into a ditch, near the square of the hospital. We doused corpses with diesel and gasoline, lit a match and let the flames do their job. Something tremendous happened: when we threw some corpses into the ditch, we heard somebody terrified crying for help; someone was still alive amidst the dead bodies but we could not do anything to help him. I keep this fact

in my memory the same way I recall how corpses moved when fire touched them. We threw about 80 cadavers, maybe some more, most of them of enemies and civilians (Villegas, 2001, p. 286; Villegas, 2002, p. 141).

When they burned their enemies' corpses, the revolutionaries did not even check whether anyone was alive, even though there were civilians present. Moreover, through this action, revolutionaries erased their enemies' identities, making it impossible for relatives to identify loved ones. Sometimes, revolutionaries forced survivors to bury casualties, as they did after the *El Tejar* battle. In the 1970s, researcher Miguel Acuña interviewed a survivor who narrated how he and his friend were forced to make a mass grave for victims of *El Tejar*. In his testimony, this survivor revealed how traumatized he was; numerous times he refused to talk about the event. Other people from *El Tejar* had similar experiences. Therefore, one day in the 1950s the community exhumed all of the known cadavers and took them to the local cemetery in an attempt to heal that trauma (Acuña, 1974, p. 259).

Religion helped revolutionaries portray these atrocities as necessary. There was a conviction that they were fighting with God's help because they were facing "monsters", "devils", and "evil forces". Guillermo Martí stated that God was helping revolutionaries because they had the proper motives and had justice and legality on their side (Villegas, 2001, p. 64). Claudio Breckenridge argued that God was supporting their actions. As "evidence" of this help, Breckenridge explained that the mechanic who worked on the revolutionaries' cars was doing a job of God and of the *Virgen de Los Ángeles* – the patron of Costa Rica (Villegas, 2001, pp. 149-150 and 152). Another revolutionary conceived the revolution almost as a crusade guided by God's hand, asserting that every revolutionary had Christ's doctrine in his heart (Villegas, 2001, p. 171).

Revolutionaries' testimonies challenge Figueres' portrayal of a well-coordinated, planned war. Several times, rebels talked about indiscipline and confusion on the front and in headquarters. Testimonies describe many revolutionaries who refused to accept orders from their superiors (Villegas, 2002, p. 90). Indiscipline was common among the revolutionaries (Villegas, 2004, pp. 279-280; Villegas, 2002, p. 280). Edgar Cardona argued that confusion and disorganization almost caused the revolutionaries to fight against themselves in El Tejar (Cardona, 1992, p. 38). Claudio Morales told that a revolutionary was killed likely through "friendly fire" in a confused battle in Cartago (Villegas, 2001, p. 138). In the 1970s, Alberto Martén – the third most powerful person in the revolutionary forces – told Acuña (1974, p. 236) that disorder was the common characteristic of Figueres' troops. Therefore, a great deal of Figueres' war was not up to him. On numerous occasions, the future of the Civil War depended more on random events than on strategy or military coordination.

### ***Final Remarks***

The Civil War of 1948 in Costa Rica was a cruel event. Although victors monopolized public memories of the war, many testimonies revealed scenes of hate and terror within battles. It is important to emphasize that neither revolutionaries nor pro-government troops had a clear code of conduct for how to wage war. As a result, the soldiers of both sides committed atrocities like killing defenseless men and civilians. Enemies were symbolically transformed into monsters or animals in order to legitimize violence.

Victors did not take into account the narration of those episodes, involving torturing or killing defenseless men, and burning both living people and corpses, as part of their story of the Civil War. Those were not heroic actions and so did not match the PLN stories about an epic event that freed



the country from a communist dictatorship. Yet, this paper proves those actions were a part of the war and many of them brought about scars in the memories of Costa Ricans.

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