SANDRA BRAMAN

The "Facts" of El Salvador According to Objective and New Journalism

Introduction

Since the 1960s, each side in the debate over new journalism has accused the other of projecting a fictional view of reality. "Objective" journalists attack colleagues they call "new" journalists for distorting facts by refusing to adhere to normative procedure, while the latter accuse all who claim they are objective of inevitably skewing the facts because of biases built into the very procedures objective journalists use.

Both types of narrative, however, clearly fall within a single fact/fiction matrix that has dominated English-language discourse for the past 400 years. Where they have come to differ is in the methods used to discern what is fact, and in the claimed relationship of fact to reality. Objective and new journalism both depend on a notion of "fact" derived from Locke, for whom facts were boundary-defining techniques for loci of consciousness. Since objective and new journalism differ in the nature of the reporting locus of consciousness, they use fact in different ways.

In this comparative analysis of two texts that report on the same subject, reportage of events in El Salvador during June of 1982 by *The New York Times* and

Sandra Braman is teaching mass communication classes in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Minnesota, where she is a doctoral candidate. *An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Annual Convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Gainesville, Florida, August 1984.*

Joan Didion, the characteristics of these different factual techniques may become clarified.

Lockean Loci of Consciousness and Journalism

Locke's influence upon narrative form began with publication of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in 1690 and grew in strength during the following centuries. His powerful theories described the relationship between text and the reality to which text refers. That relationship, Locke decided, turned on fact, a concept that has remained the basis of Western written narrative ever since (Locke, 1964; MacLean, 1936; Moore, 1903; Stephen, 1907; Tuveson, 1900; Watt, 1964).

Locke's philosophy is rooted in a concept of consciousness that is not bound by the human organic unit, but is a way of perceiving and interacting with the world across time. A center, or locus, of consciousness may reside in a single human being, a group of human beings, or it may exist without any physical manifestation at all. Biologically dispersed but perceptually unified corporations or administrative bodies are examples of what are here termed "public" loci of consciousness, while loci embodied in single human beings are termed "individual."

According to Locke, the locus of consciousness is an observer that receives the sensory information of experience in the form of simple ideas. Through reflection, consciousness compares ideas, compounds simple ideas into complex, and moves from complex ideas to abstraction.

Facts are statements of simple ideas expressed in language. Once expressed, facts become aural, visual, or physical elements in a world shared with other loci of consciousness. Locke does not claim that facts are concrete, provable, and indisputable; rather, they are *the linguistic products of the interaction of loci of consciousness with their environments*—loci that are concerned about their own continued survival, well-being, and growth.

Thus, fact is in essence a technique (Ellul, 1964) used by loci of consciousness for boundary definition. Disputes arise when loci of consciousness with shared contexts disagree about a fact or facts that mark their boundary. Consensual realities are formed when such loci negotiate a definition of fact tenable to all involved parties.

Since some types of loci of consciousness manifest themselves in characteristic narrative forms, a study of the interrelationships between genres may reveal relative characteristics of the reporting loci. Lennard Davis (1983) has argued that the lines distinguishing "fact" from "fiction" shift in response to legal pressures. Legal tools, such as fear of libel suits and treason charges, came to have political

utility during the seventeenth century. In that era, "fact" came to be identified with correctness of ideological position, while "false" meant an unacceptable stance.

Over time, such forces first differentiated newspapers and novels out of the fact/fiction matrix, and then further distinguished among types of newspapers. Thus early story-model newspapers and contemporary new journalism were separated out from the information-model newspapers of objective journalism (Davis, 1983; Schudson, 1978). A *public* locus of consciousness dominates the latter. The classic example of objective journalism, *The New York Times*, is linked to the government and multinational corporations; it spreads across the globe and has done so for over a hundred years. *Individual* loci of consciousness, on the other hand, report in the genre of new journalism.

Both types of journalism use fact as a technique to define the boundaries of the locus of consciousness from which each reports. For each, the facts that are deemed critical are those held essential to its own interests; information from the multitudinous data of daily experience that is not deemed pertinent to the survival and well-being of the reporting locus of consciousness is ignored or rejected. But the ways in which the two forms of journalism wield fact are quite disparate.

The methods of objective journalism have been well explored (Carey, 1969; Fishman, 1980; Flippen, 1974; Gans, 1979; Roshco, 1975; Schudson, 1978; Tuchman, 1972, 1978a). Explanations of new journalism are not as consensual. They may be grouped into four perspectives:

(1) New journalism is the appropriate genre to describe a reality that won't hold its shape. The concept that reality itself has become discontinuous, fragmented, chaotic, and fiction-like was particularly popular during the 1960s, but has continued to have proponents (Eason, 1977; Hollowell, 1977; Krim, 1974; Mailer in Schumacher, 1983; Molitch & Lester, 1974; Zavarzadeh, 1976).

(2) The rise of new journalism is due to class-based motives. Class arguments for the appearance of this new literary form range from Marxist (Hollowell, 1977; Podhoretz, 1974; Solotaroff, 1974; Wolfe, 1973), to simpler status-oriented approaches (Arlen, 1974; Dorfman, 1974; Schudson, 1978; Tuchman, 1978b), to disputes among literary classes (Schudson, 1978; Wolfe, 1973; Talese, 1974), to economic struggles among writers (Gold, 1974). Kaul (1982) describes the formation of journalists into a new class that plays the charismatic religious role in American society; from this point of view, new journalism would be confessional literature.

(3) New journalism is a response to new mass communication technologies. Proponents of this view include those who see a battle between the printed word and film and video media (Enzensberger, 1974; Krim, 1974; Newfield, 1974; Poirier, 1982; Pool, 1982; Podhoretz, 1974; Roth in Hollowell, 1977; Zavarzadeh,

1976), as well as those who see journalism itself as part of the technological crisis (Eason, 1977; Talese, 1974).

(4) New journalism is just a way of grouping together a lot of good writers who happened to come along at the same time (Hayes, 1974; Hellmann, 1981; Johnson, 1971; Kaul, 1982; Newfield, 1974; Weber, 1974).

Each of these explanations places new journalism in the limited time frame of the second half of the twentieth century. Returning the narrative form to its larger context, however, allows a comparison between new and objective journalism that contrasts the ways in which individual and public loci of consciousness use fact as a technique.

Procedures, methods for defining public occurrences, transform "mere happenings into publicly discussable events" (Tuchman, 1978a). Happenings become events when they are useful to a locus of consciousness; once communicated, such facts become objects (aural, visual, or tactile) in the environments of other loci of consciousness. Procedures both define the cyclical routines through which facts are gathered and identified, and reveal the categories through which the reporting locus of consciousness perceives the world.

Selection of *sources of information* deemed worthy of attention determines which of the myriad details of daily sensory input are to be considered facts. A locus of consciousness will attend to those sources of consciousness that are determinative of the conditions of the locus's environment. Dependence upon different sources of information will yield disparate versions of facts from the same spatial and temporal environment.

Space bounds the environmental dimensions of what is interpreted by a locus of consciousness as fact, determining the shape and size of the material reference. Spatial boundaries mark the limits of the cognizable consequences of any action. Generalized facts assume that this place is like that place, this situation like that situation, and thus are metaphoric in nature.

Time also bounds individual facts by their cognizable temporal projection. Facts that are a part of history describe *faits accompli,* whereas the events that news facts describe are still subject to effective intervention.

Context describes the shape of the environment in which facts are found. It is the context that connects one fact to another. Facts are communicated only across shared contextual boundaries.

The Use of Fact by Public Loci of Consciousness

The twentieth century public locus of consciousness in general believes that the notion of objectivity is valid. From this perspective, facts are "out there," independent of the observing locus of consciousness. Schudson (1978) points out

that this viewpoint defines ethical responsibility as separating facts from values, where by "values" Schudson means preferences for how the world should be. For Flippen, the newsman is a "neutral observer," whose "impact on the outcomes of political controversy, it assumes, is nonexistent" (1974, p. 25).

Facts for public loci of consciousness are determined by *procedures* that depend upon organizational descriptions of reality—a fact is so because someone (bureaucratically reliable) has said it is so. These facts are sharply limned, categorizable, and easily processed. They are valid because they are based on the bureaucratic manifestations of dominant policy decisions (Fishman, 1980; Flippen, 1974; Tuchman, 1978a).

Fact is a powerful boundary-defining technique for public loci of consciousness, for its own narrative expression, objective journalism, plays several key roles in sustenance of those bureaucracies themselves. These procedures are at the same time protective—Tuchman notes that newspapers "invoke" objectivity the way peasants use garlic to ward off evil spirits (Tuchman, 1972, p. 660)—and nutritive. The procedures of objectivity are believed to steer a newspaper clear of libel while meeting its metabolic needs for consumption and digestion of set quantities of material regularly, continuously, and in a timely manner.

The *sources of information* for a public locus of consciousness are as a consequence almost exclusively bureaucratic. The result is a moral division of labor: Reporters aren't allowed to know what their sources will not or do not tell them (Fishman, 1980; Flippen, 1974; Gans, 1979; Sigal, 1973; Tuchman, 1978a).

The *space* boundaries of facts as used by public loci of consciousness are delineated by the rounds of bureaucracies and the geographic limits thus defined—what is commonly described as the beat system. These news sources tend to view capital cities as the center of the universe from which all action flows, and assume that bureaucratic mechanisms are the only possible sources of effective action. As the bureaucratic network is geographically dispersed, particular physical environments are not of high interest.

The *time* boundaries of fact as determined by the public locus of consciousness are also bureaucratically defined. Thus events are predictable and yield a limited, predetermined set of outcomes; movement of an event from one phase to another signals a news peg (Fishman, 1980; Flippen, 1974).

Reports from a public locus of consciousness claim to be *context*-free. The implicit context, however, derives from the bureaucratic reification of prevailing political, economic, and social thought.

The Use of Fact by Individual Loci of Consciousness

Individual loci of consciousness of this era also insist that the facts they report are true. But for individual loci of consciousness, ethical responsibility is defined as explicit recognition of the reporter's role in the shaping of reported facts, both as an actor in the reality being described, and as selector and framer of what is being communicated.

The *procedures* used by new journalists are idiosyncratic in detail from person to person, based on a method described well by Sontag: "To understand *is* to interpret. And to interpret is to restate the phenomenon, in effect to find an equivalent for it" (1966, p. 7). Procedures are used to record and interpret the daily sensory experience of the writer. Events become newsworthy when they have an impact upon the reporting locus of consciousness (Hellmann, 1981; Jensen, 1974; Newfield, 1974; Watt, 1964; Wolfe, 1973).

New journalists work out of the human need to make sense out of the rush of experience, and to describe a world to which as a writer he or she can testify (Eason, 1977; Kaul, 1982; Zavarzadeh, 1976). As a boundary-defining technique, fact for an individual locus of consciousness thus demands coherence and places a high value upon the specific. It is concerned about the survival of a single personality. The very act of reporting becomes in and of itself sustenance for the personality. "We tell stories in order to live," says Joan Didion (1979, p. 11).

Facts may come from any direction, and *source of information*, at any time, and whatever one is doing. They are considered valid because of their ground in personal experience (Didion, 1979, 1982; Dunne in Schaefer, 1982; Murphy, 1974; Newfield, 1974; Talese, 1970a; Zavarzadeh, 1976).

The individual locus of consciousness reports facts in the terms by which they come—scene. Thus the immediate environment defines *space* boundaries. That environment, however, includes memory and imagination.

The boundaries of fact in *time* for new journalists have the same characteristics. While the present is of primary concern, memory and imagination apply here too.

Everything is *context* for the individual locus of consciousness; context is so important it may be said to be the point altogether. The news lies not in the facts, but in how they relate to each other. As Hellmann says, "Ultimately, the news is of the efficacy and necessity of patterning itself" (1981, p. 140).

Reporting by Public and Individual Loci of Consciousness about El Salvador

The appearance of Joan Didion's (1982) report on her visit to El Salvador during June of 1982 offered an unusual opportunity for a study that would

compare reports by both individual and public loci of consciousness about the same events. While Didion may be classified as a new journalist, the archetypal objective newspaper, *The New York Times,* also covered El Salvador during the same period via Raymond Bonner.

El Salvador has come to play an increasingly significant role on the news agenda over the past few years, highlighting longstanding questions about the paucity and inappropriateness of U.S. media coverage of that country (Berle, 1962; Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, 1962; Chaplin, 1955; Cline, 1982; Geyer, 1969; Hamilton, 1977; Hester, 1974; Markham, 1961; Maslow & Arana, 1981; Massing, 1983; Nichols, 1981; Olaciregui, 1981; O'Mara, 1975; Shipman, 1983; Young, 1983). In this era, El Salvador's complaints join the chorus of demands for a New World Information Order (Masmoudi, 1981).

While throughout history libel law has enabled individuals to challenge the facticity of narrative discourse of which they are the subject, today entire societies and cultures similarly dispute the facticity of narrative discourse of which they are the subject, and seek legal redress. As part of that process, UNESCO's MacBride Commission (1981) listed several types of typical distortions of fact in the news media, including silence on issues not considered important by the reporting consciousness while emphasizing events deemed unimportant to the subject, preconditioning facts by the way in which they are framed, and creating an illusionary context. These characteristic distortions could be relabelled in the terms of objective journalism as dependence upon bureaucratic news sources, administrative news beats, and reliance upon conceptual categories established by administrative processes. That there is discomfort with the consequences of the application of these procedures in other cultures should not be surprising, for as Geyer has noted:

> most breaking news in Latin America is of little real significance. This is because in this area the forms—the elections, the drawing up of constitutions, family life, the words used in political doctrine—are highly observed and cherished but often do not mirror the substantive life of the society. (1969, p. 50).

The period reported upon by Didion and Bonner was within nine months of the decision by the U.S. government to "draw the line against communism" in El Salvador, and followed by 2½ years of civil war in that country. The results of March, 1982, elections were still being widely disputed. There was international concern about abuses of human rights by governmental forces and U.S. interest in unsolved murders of four North American religious workers. Recent land reforms seemed to be slowing despite continued widespread poverty and starvation.

The Facts About El Salvador as Reported by *The New York Times*

The unit of analysis for *The New York Times* was the individual article. During the period under study, 33 pieces about El Salvador appeared in the paper. Raymond Bonner, a reporter with only two years of experience, had begun stringing for *The New York Times* just a few months earlier. His reports of health and educational activities in guerrilla-held territory and details of massacres and torture by the Salvadoran government received a public rebuke by officials of the U.S. government. To smooth the water, the newspaper's managing editor had visited El Salvador. Shortly after June of 1982, Bonner was removed from the Salvadoran beat altogether (Bonner, 1984).

During June, Bonner's byline was on 13 stories. There were nine news briefs datelined El Salvador, two news briefs from the State Department in Washington, DC, four other writers received a single byline, and there were three editorial page pieces and two letters to the editor.

Procedure. According to the text, Bonner collected facts by attending public ceremonies and press conferences, reading newspapers and magazines, listening to the radio (or reading CIA-supplied transcripts of broadcasts, per a description of the process provided by Didion), and then making phone calls or seeking personal interviews with officials to get their responses to statements made by other officials through these public fora. His news beat occasionally reached to guerrilla activities once they had become officially acknowledged, and to the Catholic Church. Nonofficial statements by participant observers, most often government employees, were solicited about 50% of the time.

Information sources. Three types of sources of information were cited in *The New York Times* stories. The Salvadoran government and the U.S. government each accounted for 40-50% of the cites, while other information sources, including the guerrillas and representatives of the Catholic Church, totalled only about 10%. (Most stories cited more than one source, for a total of 105 cites.)

Space. In datelines, the geographic source of news, San Salvador was cited more than twice as often as runner-up Washington, DC. Other cities mentioned at least once were San Marcos Lempa, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Ossining, NY. Within the text, San Salvador was also prominent, though 14 other towns are named at least once. With the exception of the frequently discussed guerrilla stronghold of Morazan, few provinces were mentioned, and only rarely. El Playon, a body dump, is mentioned once, as is the Pan-American Highway and "a guerrilla camp." Fort Bragg and Fort Benning, U.S. military bases where Salvadoran soldiers are trained, were mentioned four times each in the text. Washington, DC, and New York appeared as often. There were single mentions of Hollywood and of several cities

with sizable Salvadoran immigrant populations. Honduras is mentioned four times, Cuba twice, and Nicaragua, Argentina, Mexico, South Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and Spain once each.

Time. Every news article reported on events from "today" or "yesterday," but other key time frames were noted. The March 28 elections were dominant as a news boundary, and the Carter Administration was frequently mentioned as the past from which the present is distinct. Other time markers included the beginning of the war 2½ years earlier, the 1972 elections, Duarte's regime, January 1981 (when two American labor leaders were murdered in San Salvador), and 1932 (when a right-wing coup destroyed a land reform program). References to the future placed it on a schedule leading from current events to an inevitable conclusion: The war would be over in two years or the end of this year, aid will come next year or next month, there will be elections in 1984, etc.

Context. Nineteen of the articles mentioned more than one significant event or issue as the context of the news story, for a total of 73 cites. The war was cited most often (17 times, 11 of which focused on tactical advice or other involvement by the U.S.). Most of the rest of the stories were also war-related. Land redistribution, abrogation of human rights, the election, and military and economic aid to El Salvador from the United States—all war-related issues—were also mentioned at last 10 times and together accounted for over half of the cites. Half of these emphasized U.S. involvement or interests. Other significant elements of the context included the state of the economy and newspaper reporting itself.

Summary. The month's text read as a whole is disjointed. Two kinds of stories appeared: Ray Bonner reported on the violence, and the next day there was an anonymous story repeating a State Department statement that the killing had declined. Bonner reported that the land redistribution program was stymied, and almost immediately there was an anonymous story quoting Ambassador Hinton's denial of significant changes in that program. Bonner reported that the United States was heavily involved militarily in El Salvador, both in providing training to Salvadoran troops and through the activities of military advisers stationed there, and those reports were followed up immediately by anonymous stories detailing guerrilla-inflicted casualties. Bonner reported on growing anti-Americanism in El Salvador, and that piece was followed by an anonymous story denying the illegality of any American actions in that country.

Bonner's writing was produced by collecting and processing aural and written official statements from governmental bureaucracies on a beat with centers in the Salvadoran and American capital cities. But this procedure was applied by a

relatively inexperienced and demonstrably independent mind that had been trained both as an attorney (Bonner had worked for Ralph Nader) and in the Marine Corps (he had also served in Vietnam). Thus, it turns out, the newspaper's coverage of El Salvador during June of 1982 is not a pure example of objective journalism. Instead, the work of an individual locus of consciousness, treading the lines of acceptability, is mixed with the newspaper organization's accommodating responses.

Bonner's twist in the procedures of objective journalism was to describe the stalls and dysfunctions in bureaucratic events as they progress through administrative processes: The governments staged an election, and Bonner found evidence of administrative fraud. The governments put on ceremonies passing land titles to peasants, and Bonner discovered that the Land to the Tiller Law had been suspended, and five times as many peasants were being evicted from their land as were receiving title. The governments claimed a return to normalcy, and Bonner reported details of body dumps, indicating the breakdown of a system of any kind.

The Facts of El Salvador as Reported by Joan Didion

The unit of analysis for Joan Didion's book *Salvador* was the scene. Determination of scene boundaries was subjective, for there were no clear delineations within a text—a scene is shorter than a chapter, but may be longer than a single group of paragraphs. Thirty-eight scenes were defined within *Salvador*.

Didion and her husband, new journalist John Gregory Dunne, were in El Salvador for two weeks in the middle of June. They stayed at the same hotel in which most reporters were billeted and apparently had access to the same sources. Didion had the advantage of hindsight in her writing, for she was able to collect information until shortly before much of the book was first published as a series of articles in *The New York Review of Books* in October of 1982.

Salvador was not Didion's first writing about Latin America. Her 1977 novel *A Book of Common Prayer* is set in a fictional Central American country, and several of her essays reflect an influence by Latin American events, writers, and travels to the region (Didion, 1979a, 1979b).

Procedure. Didion's fact-gathering procedure was polymorphous. She attended to information from her own senses of sight, smell, hearing, and touch. Her written and aural sources were extremely diverse; she worked with an orientation that interpreted any communication as information. She visited a number of sources, participated in informal and formal social gatherings, and absorbed facts during daily transactions such as at the drugstore or in a restaurant. Her "beat" included official American and Salvadoran sites, quasi-official sites such as the morgue, and unofficial sites like a number of neighborhoods in San Salvador, hotels, shopping

centers, and restaurants. She also visited churches, a priests' home, a craft festival in a small town, the closed National University, the Salvadoran Human Rights Commission, two body dumps, and went as close to the war front as she could get.

Didion made a point of debunking the procedures of objective journalism. She described the dependence of the U.S. embassy upon Salvadoran newspapers for the weekly body count by which the State Department makes its policy decisions; the provision to reporters of daily typed CIA translations of broadcasts by the allegedly clandestine rebel radio station, Radio Venceremos; and the concoction of events by the Salvadoran Ministry of Defense for the benefit of reporters, and their dutiful attendance. Didion writes about interviews with representatives of the governments' officials as if they were performances by the officials.

Information sources. Her broad range of information sources include written, aural, and physical. Among written sources, government documents predominate (with twice as many from the U.S. as from the Salvadoran government). There are, however, almost as many cites to North American newspapers and wire services as there are to North American government sources. Other written sources include, in descending order of frequency, periodicals (more Latin American than North American), commercial texts (signs, bumper stickers, advertising, contracts), documents from Salvadoran and international human rights organizations, North American history books, religious texts, and a written phone message.

Didion's aural sources were also dominated by official voices (23 American government sources vs. 7 Salvadoran). Several anonymous Salvadorans are cited once each: a woman who runs a slum grocery store, "a well-off Salvadoran," "a high-placed Salvadoran," a taxi driver, Salvadoran women at an embassy party, an artist, and a group of intellectuals. Representatives of Protestant churches are as evident as those from Catholic churches, surprisingly (three times apiece), while commercial sources, environmental noise, Radio Venceremos, and television play as large an aural role. About 10% of the facts Didion received from aural sources came from other reporters.

Physical sources of facts for Didion came most frequently from the landscape, though cars and architecture also provided significant information. Other recurring physical sources of facts included garbage, roadblocks, household objects, and art. The bodies, disappearances, and photographs of bodies actually witnessed were left uncounted.

Didion monitored her aural and written information sources for the most commonly used words ("reorganization" and *disaparecer*—"to disappear"),

phrases ("let's play ball"), and sentences ("There is no one after us, no young ones").

Space. Locations within San Salvador were most evident for Didion. Only three towns outside of the capital are named, as are three provinces and two body dumps. Other Latin American countries cited include Panama, Honduras, and Mexico several times apiece, and Cuba, Nicaragua, Chile, Belize, Paraguay, and Colombia once or twice. El Salvador and the United States are geographically linked by Didion's reference to the unsuccessful 1821 petition of El Salvador to join the union of the United States. Non-Latin American countries named were Spain (three times), Finland, Iceland, New Zealand, Vietnam, and the Soviet Union. The continents of Africa, South America, and Europe are also named. Within the United States, Didion's home state of California appears most often (three times), but Colorado, Georgia, and Alabama are also cited. Among American cities mentioned were San Francisco, Washington, Los Angeles, and New York (several times apiece), and Miami and San Diego. Fort Benning is mentioned twice and Fort Bragg once. An entire section was devoted to a geological phenomenon, a June earthquake, which was not even mentioned by *The New York Times*.

Time. Didion's interpretation of the present in El Salvador was rooted in her understanding of the country's past. Interwoven throughout the text are historical passages describing precolonial times, the colonial period, and nineteenth-century events. Closer to the present, Didion goes into increasing detail; for example, she describes the mass executions of La Matanza in 1932 four times. By the 1970s, events cited are more frequent and specific, and by the 1980s, month and date are mentioned along with year, and several events per year are described. Among events of the previous decade, Didion included the closing of the university in 1972, the execution of a poet in 1975, threats against the Jesuits in 1977, an October 1979 coup, the 1980 murder of four North American religious workers, the 1981 murder of two North American labor leaders, the 1982 murder of four Dutch journalists, and so on.

Didion made little comment about the future in El Salvador, noting that thinking about the future is not in the nature of things there. She described a periodicity in news about Salvadoran events with six-month cycles tied to the human rights certification process that had been required for economic and military aid from the United States, and commented that the American embassy view of the Salvadoran future works with a five-year horizon.

Context. All news in El Salvador is news of the context, "the situation." In Didion's words: "El Salvador is one of those places in the world where there is just one subject, the situation, the *problema,* its various facets presented over and over again, as on a stereopticon" (1982, p. 55). She cited the situation 12 times as the context within which to understand political events such as coups, legal issues such as land reform, the ubiquitous violence, and contorted social forms. Even the war itself is understood to be just a facet of the situation.

The paramount feature of the situation is disappearances. Didion mentioned murder 31 times specifically in her text and makes innumerable links between this phenomenon and other aspects of Salvadoran culture. The inducement of terror is described five times. Over a dozen times she notes the country's lack of a consensual reality and its mutating appearances—what she calls *la noche obscura,* or "heart of darkness," quoting Conrad. All facts, numbers, names, and events in El Salvador seem to sink into *la noche obscura,* and it is within this context that events such as the question of the disputed election or of the amount of money which has left El Salvador must be understood. Within this situation, she comments several times, there are personalities and plots rather than issues, and acquiescence is the operating mode.

Summary. Didion's reportage was very much bound up with her own personality and experience. Collecting facts was a 24-hour job and occurred whether a situation was explicitly reportorial or not. She methodically described relationships between people and the social, political, and economic manifestations of those relationships in arenas as diverse as the tourist industry, intermarriage within the Salvadoran oligarchy, and inter- and intragovernmental maneuvering.

For Didion, events in El Salvador were not either successful or unsuccessful expressions of a process, but occurred in a vacuum of process altogether.

Comparison Between the Two Texts

Though Joan Didion and Raymond Bonner reported from the same small geographic entity, El Salvador, during the same limited time period, June of 1982, the realities to which their writings refer differ significantly. Bonner and *The New York Times* rely almost exclusively upon facts that list numbers—of dead, of disappeared, of land titles, of votes—and names—the Land for the Tillers program, the election, the president. Didion, on the other hand, specifically notes the uselessness of this kind of fact in El Salvador:

> All numbers in El Salvador tended to materialize and vanish and rematerialize in a different form, as if numbers denoted only the "use" of numbers, an intention, a wish, a recognition that someone, somewhere, for whatever reason, needed to hear the ineffable expressed as a number (1982, p. 61).

> Not only numbers but names are understood locally to have only a situational meaning, and the change of a name is meant to be accepted as a change in the nature of the thing named (1982, p. 63).

Procedurally, *The New York Times* generally followed the methods identified with the narrative form of a public locus of consciousness, objective journalism. Bonner's routine beat took him through governmental bureaucracies, collecting official statements for translation for the mass audience of the paper. Almost all information sources cited are formal bureaucratic sources in the capital city. In contrast, Didion embodied the methods of a reporter who writes from an individual locus of consciousness. Her procedure can be summarized as an attempt to put herself into as many different situations as possible; her information sources included facts as received by any of her senses from any direction. Though she did use official information sources, they were not considered the most reliable—comments underbreath at the corner drugstore were considered as valuable as governmental pronouncements, if not more so.

The New York Times' identification of news pegs derives from the passage of bureaucratically recognized events through administrative procedures. Thus the paper focused on such formal events as the March 28 elections and changes in land distribution plans. Didion remarks, however, that phrases such as "land reform" and "the initialization of a democratic political process" are "so remote *in situ* as to render them hallucinatory" (1982, p. 38); elsewhere she comments about the importance to everyone of maintaining such symbolic forms for the sake of the United States. For her, attention is focused on the nonexistence of any solid reality and the ubiquitousness of death and terror. What *The New York Times* limned as the important events in El Salvador, Didion describes as illusory symbols.

The paper's time field is restricted to a very limited present, referring only rarely to a past that goes back only as far as 1932. Didion, on the other hand, places present events within the context of a history that goes back to precolonial times. For Didion, present and past are filled with significant events; for the newspaper, not many important events were visible at all.

All events noted by *The New York Times* related to the interests of the United States and were described from that perspective. Didion's references to the United States were more personal, comparisons of her own known culture with that of a new environment. She placed El Salvador on an Ibero-American map that included Mexican and Panamanian power centers, Spanish influence, and a myriad of Latin American countries with which El Salvador interacts. Ibero-America is placed on a map that includes Scandanavia, Europe, and Asia as well as the United States and the Soviet Union. *The New York Times* placed El Salvador on a Latin American

map that tied the country to Cuba and Nicaragua and had a Honduran border; El Salvador was connected to the United States, in a world that contained the United States and the Soviet Union.

In this case study, Raymond Bonner of *The New York Times* displayed a dual allegiance—he wrote from both his own individual locus of consciousness and from the public locus of consciousness of *The New York Times*. He did so by describing the physical horrors and social and political chaos which were the facts of his own experience as well as the procedural viewpoint of his employer and the Salvadoran and the U.S. governments. In the latter case, however, his reporting revealed the failures of normative bureaucratic processes. With the subsequent removal of Bonner from El Salvador, *NYT* reporting from that country has reported those bureaucratic processes as successes, adhering completely to the procedures of objective journalism in reports of administrative events (Massing, 1983).

Joan Didion, on the other hand, wrote solely from her own individual locus of consciousness about a society which wouldn't resolve into a sensible pattern. This report is strengthened by her own history as a new journalist—Didion's reputation was largely built on her ability to clarify the myriad ambiguities of the 1960s (Duffy, 1979; Hulbert, 1979; "Review," 1979). The keynote of her writing about El Salvador is terror and the desperation that results from dissolution of tenable social forms.

Conclusion

The many accusations flung back and forth between objective and new journalists sidetrack and obstruct what should be a reflective and maturing development of narrative form. It cannot be said that creators of narrative within one journalistic genre are telling lies while those within the other are telling the truth. Both are reporting the facts as understood—and needed—by their respective loci of consciousness.

But the public locus is ultimately comprised of distinct human beings; any individual writer may choose from which locus of consciousness to report. The fact-determining methods of public and individual loci of consciousness, and their narrative expressions in objective and new journalism, yield quite different versions of reality. In the texts compared here, the objective journalism of *The New York Times* and Raymond Bonner depicted a society that may be understood by and controlled through normative bureaucratic procedures that appear to be aligned with U.S. interests in El Salvador, even if sometimes those procedures don't work. The new journalism of Joan Didion, on the other hand, described El Salvador as a perpetual frontier where there appears to be no appropriate role for U.S. involvement.

The nature of the reporting locus of consciousness thus has ethical and political dimensions that have rarely been examined and are only vaguely understood. Further studies that examine loci of consciousness and their use of fact in specific situations as a boundary-defining technique are needed to deepen our understanding of individual texts, forms of journalistic narrative, and the ethical dimensions of those forms.

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