

**Chapter Three**  
**Representing Liminality of Civil War:**  
**Teenagers in *Innocent Voices***

Luis Mandoki's 2004 film *Innocent Voices* is a Spanish movie. It describes civil war in El Salvador during the 1980s and emphasizes recruitment of child soldiers in the crisis.<sup>1</sup> Based on Oscar Orlando Torres' semi-autography, this film is a *bildungsroman*. Describing the growth of an 11-year-old boy Chava during recruitment in El Salvador, the director reveals brutality of civil war and its ailments to innocent civilians.<sup>2</sup> In the viewpoint of teenagers, civil war is not only a new dilemma but also an awakening power forcing them to change. Chava, who is caught up in the dramatic fighting for his life, experiences growth from childhood to maturity. After losing his friends and experiencing the pain of loss, he learns to face his fate and fights against terror of civil war.

This chapter aims to employ this bildungsroman film to discuss liminality of civil war in its relationships with teenagers. I employ Victor Turner's study of liminality to relate it to civil war in the film because I argue that liminality refers to an in-between situation that corresponds with the situation of warfare.<sup>3</sup> Turner regards liminality as a period of transition in which the individual undergoes a contemporary separation from social rules and waits for a possible return to a new order. In such a space, the individual will experience transformations and changes to require for a new power to leave or to stay. In my viewpoint, El Salvadoran civil war in *Innocent Voices* is represented to be such a liminal space. In civil war, civilians are situated in a

temporary period of transition in which they go through many challenges, dangers, fears, and worries but still keep energy to fight against terror. Investigating liminality of civil war in the film, I advance to connect liminality to roles of teenagers, including the protagonist Chava and his friends. I consider that the adolescence is also a liminal space in which teenagers are placed in an in-between condition. To study the relationships between civil war and teenagers, this chapter aims to discuss how civil war becomes a new dilemma for teenagers and how teenagers will grow up and then find an outlet in the difficult situation by themselves. With discussion of teenagers, I attempt to further examine the cruelty of warfare to contemplate influences of civil war in daily life of civilians.

Contemplating representations of civil war in *Innocent Voices*, this chapter defends for the film which is considered to be a movie “lacks the lyricism and depth of feeling that have characterized the most memorable films about children coming of age in war-ravaged environs” (Foundas 49). Instead of a shallow film, *Innocent Voices* to some extent refreshes our understanding about civil war by showing liminality of civil war and perspectives and situations of teenagers.

This chapter is composed of three sections. The first part is to study liminality of civil war in *Innocent Voices*. Methodologically, I borrow Turner’s study to regard civil war in the film as a liminal space and then examine the experiences and transformations of civilians in their daily life. Comparing experiences of men with women in civil war, this section is to discuss how civil war disintegrates life of

civilians and how women replace the authority of men to become the only protection and hope in crisis.

The second part is to contemplate on teenagers in the film. In civil war in El Salvador, teenagers in adolescence are recruited to be child soldiers and such an identity of child soldier and the adolescence is corresponded with the concept of liminality which refers to a condition that is “neither here nor there” (Turner 95). The child soldier is neither a child nor a real soldier and the teenager is neither a kid nor an adult. In the film, teenagers are therefore undergoing two kinds of transitional period in which they have to face terror of recruitment and try to grow up physically and emotionally. This section will focus on predicaments and daily life of Chava and his friends to examine their dilemmas and transformations. In civil war, teenagers who are situated between the adulthood and the childhood are besieged between the real world and the fantasy. Besides, they are also constrained to values of the adults who address torments and worries of civilians in civil war.

The last part is going to investigate the awakening of teenagers in the film. Giving up the fantasy and then walking into reality, teenagers grow up from innocence to maturity. The ending of film clarifies a sorrowful maturity of the protagonist Chava who survives in warfare but suffers from the loss of imagination and pain of separation. In order to studying the sorrowful awakening of Chava, this section tries to find out the outlet of teenagers in warfare and at the same time regards this bildungsroman story as a tragic representation of the painful life of civilians in

civil war.

### **The Civil War as a Liminal Space**

Liminality has referred to a ritual transition concerned with one's process of socialization. In ancient or tribal societies, many ritual ceremonies were composed of a process of "separation, margin, and aggregation" (Turner 94).<sup>4</sup> Separation means one's detachment from social structure or cultural conditions. Margin means an ambiguous situation in which one loses any connections with his past or coming cultural conditions. Aggregation is for one to re-aggregate or re-incorporate with the society that he or she will learn to behave in accordance with customs or laws. In ancient ceremonies, the individual was forced to separate from his family and his life to enter into a detached world, such as the forest or the cave, to contemplate or experience a new life. The separation was contemporary. It helped an individual to develop new understandings about his personality and the world he lives in and then made him able to return to his original life to get used to the social rules and to get along with the others well. In the process of socialization, experiences in separated world are considered to be experiences of liminality which means an in-between situation that is "neither here nor there" (Turner 95).

Liminality indicates a period of transition in which an individual experiences transformations and acquires the ability to return to their original life or enter into a new world. The term of liminality had borrowed from a Latin word "limen," the threshold (Turner 95). Threshold signifies an in-between situation that is not only an

entrance to a new condition but also an exit out of it. Victor Turner relates the idea of liminality to a variety of experiences in one's life. He considers that liminality is also "liken to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon" (95). It is because that these experiences all show the process of a temporary separation, a transition, and an aggregation. More importantly, they indicate the existence of a space in which an individual undergoes changes and struggles to find an outlet out of it. For example, the baby has to stay in the womb for months and undergoes the delivery to enter into new world. From a fertilized egg to a fetus, the baby grows up gradually and then experiences the delivery when he is born. Besides, people who go into a dark room will lose their sight temporarily but will struggle to find the switch to turn on the light and see objects again. In *Innocent Voices*, civil war is such a new liminal space in which civilians are undergoing a variety of transformations including shift in mood or changes in life.

Liminality of civil war is firstly represented by metaphor of rain in the film. The film begins with a raining day when Chava watches his father leaving. Chava and his family are left in a rough house and confined to the endless rains. His mother looks sad and leans against window to listen to sounds of rains on roof. These scenes echo the lyric of song sung by Beto: "How sad the rain sounds on the cardboard roofs. How sad lives my people in the cardboard houses." Rain reflects confinement of civilians who have no place to go but stay at home. Being constrained to raining day,

civilians seem to be trapped in civil war. Civil war is like rain which temporarily detaches people from the outside world and deprives their mobility. Civilians hid from sudden gun battles as if hiding from showers in the afternoon. In the film, Chava and his family stay under their bed and use mattresses to cover themselves when a gun battle start. He also lowers his body and covers his head with his hands when soldiers try to shoot him and his friend on the street. The way he hides himself is much like the way to take shelter from rain. Civil war is therefore allegorized to be a period of transition. Like rain which will stop to welcome the sunshine at last, civil war seems to be able to come to an end as well. As in the film when Chava moves to a new house with his family, it stops to rain. Civilians who are confined to warfare are waiting for an eventual outlet in such a difficult situation.

Song “The Cardboard Houses” which is sung by Beto in the film regards civil war as a liminal space as well. It has been a protest song which describes departure of men and poor life of women and children staying at home.<sup>5</sup> Its lyric skillfully responds to life of Chava whose father departs for the United States and leaves the whole family in El Salvador. More importantly, the lyric points out liminality of civil war in which women and children are the ones experiencing separation and left alone in warfare. Like what the song claims, women and children live in cardboard houses which are a close space as much as the cave or womb is, and they lose connections with the outside world. Chava’s mother and his grandmother also get no messages from men in the outside. “Don’t fool yourself. Those who go North get swept away”

said by Chava's grandmother. Living in war, those who stay are living in a space of no information and connections to the outside. War turns their living surrounding into a liminal space in which they have to go through a life change and various alternations to develop their new understandings about the war disaster.

Warfare drives women and children into a difficult life. Endless battles ruin houses, streets, and school. Chava carries broken roof shingles with his mother to throw them away after one night battle in village. His school is also almost ruined after a serious street fighting and it is closed at the next day. Conflicts make poor civilians become more impoverished because warfare endlessly destroys the living surrounding and turn everything into raggedness. Women have difficulty of making a living. Chava's mother was a career woman who worked as a waitress in town. She quits her job and stays at home to protect children from battles and tries to earn money by sewing. But the clothes she made are hard to be sold out and it is necessary for Chava to earn more money for his family. In addition to poverty, women and children are haunted by kidnap and recruitment. Chava witnesses kidnap of two women who are forcibly taken away by soldiers on the street and encounters military recruitment of boys at school.

The absence of fathers turns mothers into the only protection in war. Chava's youngest brother Ricardito mistakes every male guest for his father and makes many jokes at home. His desire for father does not only express the lack of a sense of security but also point out absence of fathers in family life. Indeed, men are either

leaving for a new place or unable to protect anyone. Chava's father leaves his mother alone to support the family and face war crisis. Chava's uncle Beto who comes to have a dinner one day gives Chava a radio and departs again. Radio symbolizes the absence of protection of men who do not stay with boys together but leave them something to remind their existence. "This might help you to know what's going on...It's the voice of our people. It's not always on, so you have to keep looking" said by Beto. Men are like voices of the radio which will help boys to recognize war brutality but never physically protects them. Instead of physical protection, men can only provide boys with a temporary solace. Beto plays his guitar and sings for Chava and his family. Like the music, solace from men is brief and fragile. It temporarily comforts the loneliness of those who stay but never helps to find any outlets in warfare.

Compared with men, mothers are the ones who will physically stand up to keep their children from danger and find the solution to their crisis. Men are impotent to protect children. In the film, a priest fails to stop recruitment at school or prevents girls from kidnap. A bus driver lets Chava drink the petrol accidentally and pretends that nothing had happened. Compared with the impotence of men, women are more courageous and more responsible. At the beginning of the film, a woman holds her kid in her arms immediately when she sees soldiers. Indeed, during recruitment, it is mothers who are dare to fight against soldiers for their boys and use their bodies to delay actions of soldiers. Women replace men to be the only protection in warfare.

When Chava's mother is depressed by war, Chava's grandmother sponsors her to buy weapon for self-defense. And Chava can leave for the United States because his mother sells her sewing machine to pay for the trip.

In addition to absence and impotence, men present a deficient protecting power in comparison with women. Such incompleteness is represented by Chava's close friend Ancha, a man who will never grow up. Ancha has strength of an adult but mind of a teenager. He is the one who transgresses the boundary between adulthood and childhood, but he is also the one who reveals the deficiency of protection from men. He helps to move a heavy table when Chava moves to his new house. And he climbs to the top of a mango tree to pluck mangoes for children. He also throws stones to soldiers to draw their attentions to help Chava run away. Ancha to some extent supplements the disappearance of father with his strength. But his death indicates that men are still unable to protect children in war. Compared with women, the protecting power of men is incomplete, deficient, and sorrowful.

Indeed, women represent the protection, authority, rules, and a hope. Chava's mother refuses advice of Beto who asks to take Chava away, and she sends Chava to the United States by herself. She confiscates Chava's radio to prevent him from listening to music in public and punishes him when he comes home late. Mother is the protection, authority, and rules to children who deeply depend on her physically and emotionally. "When mom started working at home, the war didn't seem so big" said by Chava. In the film, the sewing machine represents such a physical and mental hope

that mother symbolizes. Instead to buy any weapons, Chava's mother buys a sewing machine to make a living. Rattling sounds of sewing machine are much like the strafe of a machine gun. But a sewing machine composes a contrast to a machine gun because the former shows hope of production and the latter expresses terror of destruction. After Chava's mother works at home, sounds of sewing machine replace sounds of gun battle to be heard at night. Sewing machine does not only bring an emotional solace for children but also help to produce the clothes to sell. It indicates a mental solace and a physical supply of food and warmth that a machine gun will not have. And it also shows that mother is the only one who can bring hope in life.

Though women are the protection and emotional connection in daily life, they are unwilling to be conscious of the condition of war. Chava's grandmother persuades Chava's mother to fight, "Those who go North get swept away. Lift your head up, Kella. Those who leave suffer more than those who stay. And those who stay, fight." However, women can not really come against warfare because they refuse to face the reality of war. Beto tells Chava's mother Kella about danger of war and persuades her to move, "This is the only place left between the capital and the guerrillas. It's going to get dangers. It's going to get worse." But Kella does not listen to his advice.

Living in civil war, women and children are as if living in a liminal space. In such a space, women have to take place of men to come against terror and protect the family. Children also undergo absence of fathers to rely themselves on their mothers. Instead of an internal conflict between guerrillas and governmental army, civil war is

more like a wrestling between men and women. The authority of men are replaced by women who display a more concrete and emotional protection. But women are unable to be aware of war condition as men are. Under this wrestling, teenagers are driven into a new dilemma. Teenagers who are located between childhood and adulthood are not only threatened by warfare but also challenged by values in adult world.

### **Teenagers in Civil War**

Teenagers are the ones who suffer most in civil war. First of all, they are the “asset” to rebels and governmental armies in civil war because they are old enough to carry weapons as an adult is and are able to work for the troops (Jacobson 356).<sup>6</sup> Engagement of teenagers is caused by production of small arms which are mainly supplied by the foreign countries.<sup>7</sup> In the film, several American soldiers tease students after school. “Who wants some gum?” they ask students. The director plays a trick of homonym by two words, gum and gun, to imply the relation between small arms and teenagers, and the connection between weaponry supplies and the United States.<sup>8</sup> When teenagers gladly receive gum from American soldiers, they also get gun from them.<sup>9</sup> Chava’s friend Antonio, who is recruited to be a child soldier, mentions the training and help from the United States: “I was the youngest, but I learned fast because this gringo taught us, who had been in Vietnam. He showed us how to shoot and ambush.” Then he proudly plays with his rifle in front of his friends. From timidity to arrogance, Antonio’s transformation explains why teenagers are regarded as the asset to armies. Teenagers are quick learners who are able to carry a

rifle easily and learn military tricks quickly. Their adaptability turns them into a valuable target that both rebels and armies want to recruit.

If teenagers bear an external threat from recruitment, they also undergo an internal transformation in their life. In adolescence, they are experiencing an ambiguous transitional period physically and emotionally. Chava is in such a period of transition at the age of eleven. He is irritated by bus driver who uses his belt to measure Chava's height and makes fun of Chava: "How old are you? 11 months?" Chava's anger reveals his self-awareness about his physical looking. Compared with his brother Ricardito who enjoys the game of make up and dresses like a girl, Chava shows more care about his looking. Besides, by kissing his girlfriend, he experiences the excitement of being an adult physically for the first time. But when he witnesses kidnap of two girls on the street, he completely has no idea about rape and considers that girls are recruited as well. Chava's experiences show the ambiguous situation of teenagers who "attempt to distance themselves from the world of the child but retain some links with childhood at the same time" (Sibley 34). To Chava, he is unable to tolerate any fooling about his body like his youngest brother is. But he still keeps his innocence about what sex is. In such an ambiguous transition, Chava represents internal transformations in the thinking of teenagers who are not only threatened by warfare but are also experiencing the process to grow up.

Teenagers who are in between adulthood and childhood are situated in an ambiguous zone between reality and fantasy. They are "lost in between, belonging

nowhere, being no one” (James 155). They are isolated from the reality of adult world but are eager to be part of it in their own way. In the film, Chava uses fantasy to fulfill his understanding about adult world and he also employs the reality to be hotbed of his fantasy. When his father leaves home, he regards himself to be man of the house and tries to play role of his father by earning money as a bus conductor. Fantasizing himself to be man of the house, he gradually develops his understanding about adulthood. In addition to approach the reality by fantasy, Chava also acquires more fantasy from the reality. He has a great favor for job of a bus driver and loves to imitate the driving action in games. To him, bus driver is not only an occupation that can “go to lots of places and cruise the streets and make lots of money.” More importantly, it is a reality that can inspire his imagination and fantasy. With driving games, he can easily restore his mood and become more energetic and active. And his imitation is influential to the other boys who plays game on the street and warns the others of the news about recruitment.

Teenagers employ fantasy and imagination to understand the real world, but civil war becomes a brutal reality that teenagers have difficulty to realize. The unpredictability of recruitment and death in war are the reasons why teenagers are impotent to face warfare. At school, even a ten-year-old boy will be recruited and no one can defend for him. School, which shall be a safe place for students to play and study, loses power of protection by itself. In addition to school, armies also recruit teenagers by taking them away directly from their home. Like school, home becomes

insecure any more. Military recruitment is so unpredictable that it pervades into daily life of civilians, especially life of teenagers, and it transforms the living world. It violently drags teenagers into adult world and leaves them neither time nor space to learn to face it in their own way. Besides, death is another thing that haunts mind of teenagers. Chava sees death of his neighbor, a girl at his age, in a horrible gun battle. It is difficult to comprehend death by fantasy or imagination, because death is an end to everything. When one dies, he or she will not come to life anymore and leaves for an invisible place forever. Fantasy and imagination which helps one to believe in an imagined and hopeful world are challenged seriously by horrible experiences of facing the dead.

Civil war is something difficult for teenagers to comprehend in their own way and such impotence is implied in a street scene of the film. In the film, there are two fighting games are ongoing on the street. One is the fighting between Ancha and two soldiers who take away Ancha's hat and fool him around. And at the same time, two students are fighting next to them and the other students are in an uproar. Ancha's suffering suggests not only torments of civilians who are threatened and robbed arbitrarily by soldiers. His experience also foresees the fate of teenagers in warfare. In opposition to Ancha's fighting with soldiers, teenagers are comparatively ignorant of their situation. For teenagers, fighting is nothing more than a game. They are ignorant of their fate which will transform the game of fighting into reality in their life.

Facing war terror, teenagers respond it by hiding themselves but their

concealment exposes their misery in war. At class, Chava's classmate Chele reads his poem which points out fear of teenagers during recruitment and their solution to the disaster:

None of the kids in my school want to fight.  
 They don't like war because they want to play.  
 They want to recruit us to their side.  
 But when they come, me and my friends will hide.

The strategy of teenagers is to hide during recruitment. In the film, they hide on the rooftops or in the wagon. Hiding themselves, teenagers do not only escape into a temporary shelter but also flee to a dream world. They stay on the rooftops to count stars all night long. Rooftop becomes their new playing ground but such a playing ground has implied a briefness of their happiness. Rooftop had been the covering of a building to keep off rain or wind. Hiding on the rooftops, teenagers place themselves outside power of protection and their happiness in this space therefore become transient and temporary. Stars they are counting can be associated with flying lanterns in the film, because they both reveal how untouchable a peaceful life is. In the film, Chava and his friends play flying lanterns and point at the sky excitedly with fingers. They also count stars with fingers. Stars and flying lanterns on the sky express how far away their happiness is. They are so untouchable that people can only look up at the sky but fail to catch.

Civil war does not only bring teenagers into a difficult situation between reality and fantasy but also drive them into a new dilemma of values. Teenagers are situated between values of women and those of men. In the film, Chava's uncle Beto argues

with Chava's mother Kella about the safety problem. Beto wants to take Chava to safer places, but Kella insists to stay. They stand for two kinds of values in civil war. Beto stands for rational analysis about war, but Kella stands for emotional connection to home. Kella brings protection and security in Chava's life, but she does not help him to recognize brutality of war. Beto teaches Chava the real situation of war crisis and a lesson about life: "What I'm about to tell you is very important. So pay attention. What happened to Angelita is part of life. I won't lie and say things are getting better because they'll get worse before they get better. Understand?" He helps Chava to understand the naked truth of war, but Kella does not. In addition to wrestling between governmental army and guerrillas, teenagers also fall into a wrestling between reason and emotion.<sup>10</sup>

The two kinds of values which are represented by Beto and Kella do not only express ambivalence of civilians but also point out terror of warfare. In William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the protagonist Hamlet had confessed his dilemma, "To be or not to be. That's the question." But in *Innocent Voices*, dilemma of civilians shall be rewritten to be, "To leave or not to leave. That's the question." Beto who encourages Chava to run away represents a desire to leave. Kella who insists to wait represents a wish to stay. The two different viewpoints indicate the reasons why civil war will disintegrate everyday life of civilians and result in their fear or dilemma. To those who stay, warfare seems to be a dilemma full of hope that could be tolerated. Staying with the family, the warmth and security can drive uneasiness away and make warfare

less scary. For example, Chava and his sibling play their mother's lipstick to go through gun battle at night. Battle becomes less horrible when they lie together and sleep until the next morning. But compared with those who leave, those who stay have to suffer from pain of loss and death. Chava's neighbor is killed by a stray bullet accidentally and Chava himself is also almost executed by soldiers. To those who leave, they leave for a safer place to save their lives. But they run away with no company and to some extent have to throw away their emotional connection to home. The two kinds of values, to leave or to stay, seriously disintegrate life of civilians because there seems to be no real hope or any solutions to war crisis. Civilians either sacrifice their lives at home or live peacefully but alone in places far away.

Teenagers who are threatened by recruitment and situated in different values of the adults suffer most in civil war. Civil war deprives their fantasy, challenges their way of living, and bewilders them by driving them into the world of adult. If civil war is a liminal space in which civilian have to go through transformations and changes to restore the ability to return to their original life or a new world, teenagers in adolescence also experience similar shifts in their life and wait for aggregation to a new life.

### **The Awakening of Teenagers**

Teenagers, who are forced to give up fantasy and walk into reality, grow up from innocence to maturity. In *Innocent Voices*, the poems of students firstly represent such growth of teenagers by showing how teenagers voice their loss of innocence.

Connection between innocence and voice is shown in the film's title which addresses the director's desire of voicing torments of those innocent in warfare.<sup>11</sup> Innocent voices refer to voices of civilians, especially those of teenagers. In the film, teenagers voice their dream and disillusion by reading their poems at class. Antonio, the first one reading his poem in the film, composes a poem describing a leisurely afternoon.<sup>12</sup> His poem is revealing a pure imagination for a free world, but such purity is replaced by painful awareness of violence in Chele's poem, which depicts an anxiety towards recruitment. Poem-readings voice transformation of teenagers, who gradually lose their imagination for a peaceful world and learn to face reality.

Radio takes a further step to represent growth of teenagers who give up the power to voice and then grow up from innocence to maturity. In the film, Chava gets a radio from Beto who asks him to listen to music and the news of warfare from radio. Radio not simply shows a comforting power with its music but also represents a power to voice. As Beto says in the film, the radio is "the voice of our people" that is used as a medium for guerrillas to deliver messages. Radio is more like a power to voice sorrow of people. After losing information of his girlfriend, Chava sits by the riverside in a daze. The radio is broadcasting a sad love song which corresponds with Chava's sorrow at that moment. To some extent radio speaks for the mood of teenagers and voices their emotions. It also signifies disillusion of childhood fantasy and sentiments which become unreliable and ineffective in front of war violence. By throwing radio into the river, Chava begins to abandon his childhood innocence and

chooses to walk into reality.

Warfare which drives teenagers into painful reality results in the awakening of teenagers. Chava who throws away radio but picks up a rifle experiences power of the awakening in warfare. After he runs away from the riverside execution and rushes into a battle, he picks up a rifle from the ground to target at a soldier. To his surprise, he finds that he is targeting at a boy in military uniform and then he puts down the rifle to flee away. Chava who picks up the rifle but chooses to put it down shows a resistance towards reality which transforms him from the passive to the active. When he returns to his home and faces his mother, he calmly touches her face to say, "Let's go away from here," and then helps her to leave the burned house. Instead to rely his emotions on the protection of adults, Chava changes himself to take care of the others actively.

The awakening of teenagers is also shown at the ending of the film which points out how teenagers redevelop their understandings of the world. The film ends in a dream-like world in which Chava is playing a bus-driving game alone on rooftop. This ending combines Chava's fantasy with his recognition about the reality. This dream reveals Chava's sentimental connection and his nostalgia to his home country after he leaves for the United States. But this dream is no longer a childhood fantasy that believes in an everlasting happiness and shows a happy reunification. Chava is conscious of his loneliness and his loss of the friends who will forever disappear in his dream and leave him alone. In the film, the dream indicates results of the

awakening of teenagers who maintain their fantasy towards the world but still remember the pain in reality.

The sorrowful ending of the film not only describes the awakening of teenagers but also claims influences of warfare to people. The ending of the film is a quiet and peaceful dream-like world of a blue sky. It seems to pray for an end to civil war but it also implies that survivors have to suffer from the loss in war forever. As Chava speaks aside at the end of the film, “The story could have been told by Fito or Chele or Cristina Maria. But it was left up to me. It’s for them,” survivors take responsibility to speak for the dead but simultaneously bear pain of loss. To people in warfare, they undergo more transformations and challenges than those outside warfare. Even when the world will come to peace one day, the sense of loneliness and sorrow will stay go with them in their thinking and feelings.

## **Conclusion**

*Innocent Voices* shows a concern for sufferings of civilians, who are the target of wars at the end of the twentieth century, and expresses their struggles and transformations in such a war space. Focusing on representations of daily life of civilians, the film particularly regards teenagers as an icon of civil war and situation of local inhabitants. The identity of teenagers who are not only recruited to be child soldiers but also bearing different values show oppressions in civil war and imply a growing process from innocence to maturity. The film which connects liminality of civil war to teenagers in adolescence interprets war problem and its violence in an

insightful and profound way. It enriches our understandings of civil war in terms of teenagers and also helps us to face brutality of war and its destructions to those innocent people.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Innocent Voices* is not the first film based on civil war in El Salvador. Oliver Stone's 1986 film *El Salvador* represents civil war in a more violent way and in the viewpoint of an American journalist. Instead to steer clear of politics as Mandoki does, Stone focuses on political entanglement between the United States and El Salvador and presents a viewpoint and style that completely differ from Mandoki in *Innocent Voices*.

<sup>2</sup> In an interview with Luis Mandoki, the director mentions that he shoots *Innocent Voices* deliberately in the viewpoint of teenagers to look at warfare clearly. He says, "So we made the choice together that we were going to stick to this child's vision of this war, his experience. Sometimes you're tempted, because as an adult, you get angry about certain things and you want to push them. It was not easy, we had to be disciplined to stay in that pure way of looking at things." For more details, see <http://www.themoviechicks.com/fall2005/mctinnocentvoices.html>

<sup>3</sup> Victor Turner is not the only one who proposes theory of liminality, but he is the one who holds a positive viewpoint about concept of liminality. He considers that liminality is a period of transition in which the individual will grow and change. Compared with Turner, sociologist David Sibley and anthropologist Julia Kristeva also investigate the idea of liminality but consider liminal zone as a space of anxiety and uneasiness. Sibley suggests that liminal zone is a zone of abjection which shall be eliminated to reduce the anxiety (Sibley 33) and Kristeva sees such a space "in-between, ambiguous, and the composite" to be a space of abjection (Kristeva 4). To discuss liminality of civil war in *Innocent Voices*, I choose to employ Turner's research rather than Sibley's and Kristeva's because civil war in the film is more like a period of transition full of hope. Turner regards liminality as a contemporary separation in which an individual experiences changes to acquire new strength to come back to his life. Such a concept can be connected to civil war, where civilians undergo similar challenges and experiences, to investigate the relationships between war and people.

<sup>4</sup> The three phases of "separation, margin, and aggregation" had been proposed by anthropologist Van Gennep firstly in his discussion of *rites de passage*. They are borrowed by Victor Turner and connected to idea of liminality.

<sup>5</sup> Lyric of "Casas de Carton" and its English translation "Cardboard Houses" can be found in the following webpage.

[<http://forums.narutofan.com/archive/index.php/t-21946.html>](http://forums.narutofan.com/archive/index.php/t-21946.html)

CASAS DE CARTON

Cardboard Houses

Que triste se oye la lluvia  
en los techos de cartón  
Que triste vive mi gente  
en las casas de cartón.

How sad the rain sounds  
on the cardboard roofs.  
How sad lives my people  
in the cardboard houses.

Viene bajando el obrero

Here's coming down the worker

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<p>casi arrastrando sus pasos por el peso del sufrir Mira que es mucho sufrir mira que pesa el sufrir.</p>	<p>almost dragging his steps because the weight of the suffer looks that is much to suffer Look that it weights to suffer.</p>
<p>Arriba deja la mujer preñada abajo esta la ciudad y se tiende en su maraña hoy es lo mismo que ayer es un mundo sin mañana.</p>	<p>Up he lefts the pregnant woman down there's the city, And he lays on his thicket. Today is the same as yesterday. It's a world with no tomorrow.</p>
<p>Que triste se oye la lluvia en los techos de cartón que triste vive mi gente en las casas de cartón.</p>	<p>How sad the rain sounds on the cardboard roofs. How sad lives my people in the cardboard houses.</p>
<p>Niños color de mi tierra con sus mismas cicatrices millonarios de lombrices y por eso que triste viven los niños en las casas de cartón.</p>	<p>Children color of my land with it's same scars millionaires of worms and because of it, how sad the children live in the cardboard houses</p>
<p>Que alegre viven los perros casa del explotador usted no lo va a creer pero hay escuelas de perros que les dan educación pa' que no muerdan los diarios pero el patrón, hace años, muchos años que esta mordiendo al obrero</p>	<p>How glad the dogs live in house of the exploiting one! You won't believe it, But there are dog schools where they give them education for they not bite the newspapers, But the patron, years, years, ago is biting the worker.</p>
<p>Que triste, se oye la lluvia en los techos de cartón que lejos pasa la esperanza en las casas de cartón.</p>	<p>How sad the rain sounds on the cardboard roofs. How sad lives my people in the cardboard houses.</p>

<sup>6</sup> Yehuda Jacobson compares the juveniles in war zones with those in warless countries and suggests that teenagers in warfare are mostly regarded as an asset due to their labor in war. Compared with those in safer countries, teenagers are forced to participate in war and work for armies. See paper “Youth graffiti as an existential coping device: the case of Rabin’s assassination.”

<sup>7</sup> Small arms refer to weapons such as rifles or carbines which are so light in its weight to be carried easily and are enjoying great mobility. *Innocent Voices* seems to hint the importance of small arms to wars at the end of the twentieth century by showing the popularity of rifles, including the M-16 and AK-47, in civil war.

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<sup>8</sup> The United States does intervene in civil war in El Salvador by sponsoring local government weapons and providing financial aid. Its purpose is to control Latin America for the purpose of blocking the Soviet bloc to keep global peace. For details about connection between the United States and El Salvadoran civil war, see Hugh Byrne's *El Salvador's Civil War: A Study of Revolution*.

<sup>9</sup> Rifles used in the film are possibly the M-16 rifles which was designed during the Vietnam War in the 1960s by the United States to come against the Vietnamese. M-16 is no more than 3 kg in its weight and it is appropriate for teenagers to use them. There are at least seven million M-16 rifles in circulation and its market are mostly in Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. For example, there are at least 22,629 M-16 rifles in use in El Salvador. For more information about the M-16 rifles, see Masami Tokoi's *M16: Stoner's Rifle* or Edward Tenner's report "Kalashnikov's Gun: The AK-47 and Russian Engineering"

<sup>10</sup> Both governmental army and guerrilla groups want to recruit teenagers. In the film, Chava's mother blames Beto, "your side also takes boys."

<sup>11</sup> Film critic Joshua Jelly-Schapiro considers that the film's title refers to those innocent people, that is, civilian population in warfare: "The victims of violence in *Innocent Voices* are, as the film's title suggests, rarely the people bearing weapons. We see almost no shooting of actual soldiers or guerillas; instead, we see families separated, children brutalized, innocents lynched. The means of pacifying a popular insurgency here is not the killing of insurgents but rather the decimation and demoralization of the civilian population thought to sustain the insurgency—which is to say, the very people the counterinsurgents are nominally trying to win over." For more details, see

[http://www.motherjones.com/arts/film/2005/10/innocent\\_voices.html](http://www.motherjones.com/arts/film/2005/10/innocent_voices.html)

<sup>12</sup> Two wings to fly.

This afternoon in the mountains

I almost had them and the desire to pre.

These mountains are the kingdom of the bird and it's nest.