

## Preface

When Reynaldo Patríz was a young child, his father took him to a small finca at the edge of the cantón. Stretching his hand over the barbed wire fence, he pointed down toward some underbrush and said, “That’s where your uncles are.” A few years went by before his father again spoke of his dead brothers. He explained that the family had been “tricked by ladinos” who had promised all kinds of things like land to farm and new houses. Then the National Guard came in and shot all the males over the age of twelve in all the cantones of Nahuizalco. “The just were killed for the sinners.”<sup>1</sup> These were the same lines that Reynaldo’s elderly neighbors used on those rare occasions when they mentioned “el Comunismo.” That’s what they called the events of January 1932.

When the National Guard had beaten Reynaldo’s cousin, Juan Antonio, in a sugar mill at Izalco in 1978, his father, normally impassive in the face of bad news, became visibly upset. He took Reynaldo aside after dinner: “Look, don’t you ever get involved in any organization. I mean it. Never! Remember what happened with *el Comunismo!*”

Juan Antonio later told him a different story about 1932. For Reynaldo's cousin, the peasants were getting screwed then just as they were now, and then everyone stood up to demand their rights. In response the National Guard murdered thousands of people. The time had come again to make a stand. This time it would be different, because people all over the country and all over Central America were rising up against the dictatorships and the rich. Adolescents and young adults like Reynaldo (then eighteen) looked up to Juan Antonio, but the older folks in el Carrizal gave him the cold shoulder.

These memories came rushing through his mind, as he peered through the brush at the edge of the ravine. It was shortly after dawn on 13 July 1980. He could make out a platoon of army troops advancing from the south toward the center of the village; led by an *encapuchado* (hooded man), the troops were dragging someone through the dirt. Reynaldo heard shots and screams from different points in the village. He waited until he saw yet another platoon march down a path from the north. Machine-gun bursts sounded from the south and then he heard a wailing sound. Harsh shouts, barked like orders, reached his ears, but he could not make out the words. He scurried down the ravine and inched his way along the stream bed at the bottom. Furtively glancing up to make sure he could not be seen, he advanced quickly until he came to a cave.

Patriz was stunned by the military occupation of El Carrizal, a *cantón* of Nahuizalco in western El Salvador.<sup>2</sup> He immediately connected the on-slaught to the group of about twenty-five young folks led by his cousin who had been meeting, usually outside the village. He was on the fringes of the group that was connected to a national organization, called las Fuerzas Populares de Liberación. Thinking about how his father had warned him, Reynaldo thought that “maybe” they had been “asking for trouble.” But this shooting was madness.

Another of his *compañeros* showed up within an hour, and that reassured Reynaldo. They agreed that they were best off staying put in the cave. After a few days of living on roots, plants, fruit from fincas, and the occasional iguana, Reynaldo headed back to El Carrizal. His uncle told him that the troops had killed over forty *muchachos*.

Reynaldo Patriz met one of the authors of this book in January 1998. At first he was an informant eager to make connections for Gould's oral history endeavor: interviewing the survivors of the massacres of 1932 through-

out western El Salvador. After a very short time it became clear that he was more than a lucid informant with a sharp mind. Eventually he became a research assistant and production assistant on an ancillary documentary film project (see Afterword).

Patriz had been working for several years with the Pastoral Indígena, a lay church group that promoted community organizations in Indian communities. As a result, he had acquired a wide range of contacts throughout the cantones of Nahuizalco, and in other areas he demonstrated a marked capacity to communicate empathetically with strangers who shared his condition as a *pobre*.<sup>3</sup> He had also expanded his network through his work on the municipal electoral campaign with the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN). Its victories in the elections in Nahuizalco and many other western municipalities convinced most people that democracy and its associated freedoms had achieved a relatively firm footing, and therefore commentaries about the events of 1932 or 1980 would not result in persecution.

Patriz had his own agenda, notably a strong belief that the survivors of 1932 and 1980 needed to talk publicly for both therapeutic and political reasons about the massacres that had taken place in his village and region. His belief in the therapeutic value of doing so came from his own experience as a survivor of the massacre of 1980 and his observations of older neighbors and their burden of nightmarish, toxic memories. He also saw a political value in constructing a realistic narrative of the events of 1932—the preceding rural labor mobilization, the insurrection against the military regime, and the subsequent massacres—in light of the exceedingly fragmented memories of the period and the power of rightist discourse about both the 1930s and the 1980s (typified by the practice of the governing party ARENA to inaugurate every presidential campaign in Izalco with the slogan “Here we buried communism!”).

The interviews often became three-way encounters. This trilateral space did not, however, resolve the problems inherent in the enterprise of oral history. Daniel James has underscored the oral historian’s need to grapple with the issues of positionality, the tendency of the scholar to arrogate the representation of subaltern lives and consciousness. He also stresses the asymmetrical power relations between interviewer and informant that engender the potential for “symbolic violence.”<sup>4</sup> These problems are not resolved in this book. Despite the trilateral nature of many of the conversa-

tions, the asymmetrical power relations between interviewer and informant were never fully redressed. Similarly, Reynaldo did not have the final interpretive word. This is a book produced in the North American academy about Central American subjects, with all the biases that this implies. To the extent that Reynaldo did participate in shaping the conversations and interpreting the testimonies, his presence posed a different problem of representation. Patriz did have a political agenda, as a militant of the FMLN and an indigenous activist. Although neither identity was fixed or necessarily congruent, his interpretations and contributions did involve “representing” subaltern subjects. Patriz’s intervention nonetheless made a significant difference to this project precisely because of his agenda and his life experience, which allowed him to grasp the powerful afterlife of 1932. It shaped the existence of nearly everyone he knew, yet no one possessed more than a fragmentary understanding of what had occurred.

In García Márquez’s famous fictional account of the massacre of striking banana workers in Macondo, a storm after the event swept away the town and all memory of the repression. As Greg Grandin has pointed out, “the novel can be read as an anticipatory truth commission, a revelation of terror to come.”<sup>5</sup> The novelistic account of massacre and storm also had, however, a retrospective quality beyond the Magdalena valley of Colombia. In El Salvador a cyclone but two years after the massacres hit the west with particular fury, killing an estimated fifteen hundred people with nearly a thousand people unaccounted for, in effect “disappeared.”<sup>6</sup> To survivors of the massacre, the cyclone “washed away the blood.”<sup>7</sup> The storm also helped to enshrine the vastly unequal power relations in the region wrought by the massacres. One young man from Reynaldo’s village recounted, “I remember my grandmother telling us that she had great necessities right after a great cyclone hit them. Everything was lost. They had nothing to eat; they were in great need. She went to don Manuel Borges and asked if he could be so kind as to give her some yuca for the sustenance of her children her family. He told her that he would be glad to give her the yuca, but in exchange of the legal papers of ownership of her land. And so for a few pieces of yuca her property passed to his hands.”<sup>8</sup> Whether or not the testimony accurately described the loss of property, it graphically communicated how the community perceived the change in power relations, a change that in turn structured the limits of individual and collective memories.

Although García Marquez’s fictional account inspired some research, the events of 1932 have generated even more scholarly interest than the

Colombian banana workers' strike and the repression of it.<sup>9</sup> Yet that research and analysis has been cut off from the survivors and their children, to the detriment of scholars and subjects alike. In this *diálogo de sordos* scholars and activists have offered a version of what the survivors and their families had done. The survivors have reacted with a blank stare: "We had nothing to do with that [the insurrection]."

Through his growing analytic skills (despite only an eighth-grade education), Reynaldo developed an ability to pose his own questions and analyze responses, both *in situ* and subsequently in conversation with Gould, during the long return trips on foot from remote cantones. Certain themes related to ethnicity and indigenous identities were best approached through Reynaldo's intervention. Indeed, probably the most interesting discussions about ethnicity occurred when Gould managed to keep quiet and let the conversation ensue between Patriz and the informant. On those all-too-rare occasions, when the scholar became less obtrusive if not invisible, a dialogue could develop, characterized by less guarded feelings and memories. Especially when Reynaldo and the informant knew people in common, the informant might comment, for example, that a certain indigenous family sent its children to school "like pure *ladinitos*," opening a window into a world of shame and resentment.

Reynaldo at times picked up on locally specific clues and codes suggesting that the informant had participated in the insurrection (or that an informant's father or brother had done so). A discussion would ensue about why the informant did not admit to his or her family's participation. This intuition about the problem of individual participation and memory led to a broader recognition that in the memories of Salvadoran indigenous people, their agency in the insurrection has been thoroughly suppressed. It was in the individual interviews that this suppression of indigenous agency became poignant, signaling the powerful role of the military in shaping memories.

This book confronts the tension between testimonial memories and historical interpretation while depending on those testimonies, however fragmented, to help formulate an analytical narrative. The enterprise avoids crossing the line over to *bad faith*, in part because of the shared commitment of the authors, Patriz, and others to at once respect the memories of *los ancianos* and to better understand the events of 1932 and their long-term political and cultural ramifications.

Ultimately the book attempts to weave into a coherent narrative individ-

ual memories, as described in over two hundred interviews, and a myriad of documentary sources from archives in El Salvador, Washington, London, and Moscow. Our hope is utilitarian, namely that the narrative provides greater understanding of the events of 1932 for a greater number of people than previous ones have been able to provide. Yet there are severe limitations to a narrative history written against the grain not only of counterinsurgent and insurgent documents but of memories recreated in a society that suppressed the events with particularly noxious forms of amnesia and distortion. We inevitably fall short of creating a definitive narrative of events.

This book intervenes on a terrain of conflicting narratives about events that have shaped the lives of people who simultaneously provide crucial material for its interpretation. They are, in Michel-Rolf Trouillot's terms, embodiments of these twin aspects of historicity: the ability to make or act in history and the ability to narrate the past.<sup>10</sup> This project's reliance on oral history to provide historiographic detail or even access to historical consciousness is also somewhat problematic. As James writes, "We might say that if oral testimony is indeed a window on the subjective in history—the cultural, social and ideological universe of historical actors—then the view it affords is not a transparent one that simply reflects thoughts and feelings as they really were. At the very least the image is bent, the glass of the window unclear."<sup>11</sup> These caveats are crucially important for the practice of oral history. However, when confronted by the paucity of documentary materials that would allow us to reconstruct ethnographically thick descriptions or to infer elements of consciousness, testimonies can be employed to approximate sociological and ethnographic realities in the past. That is, if certain codes of understanding are established (and here the role of Patríz was critical), it is possible to approximate ethnic and class ideologies and relations as they existed in the past. We employ a methodology based on a mutual interrogation of oral and written sources and a continuous cross-referencing between the two, moving from the micro and regional level to the national level of analysis.<sup>12</sup> This methodology permits us to make a contribution to the literature through the identification of the sociological and ethnic makeup of those involved in the mobilization and the insurrection.

The ethno-historical dimension of the book dialogues with the historical and ethnographic literature on *mestizaje* in Latin America. Since the early twentieth century *mestizaje*, understood as a nation-building myth of race mixture and a cultural process of “deindianization,” has contributed substantially to Central American and Latin American nationalist ideologies and played a key role in shaping contemporary political culture. Gould has argued elsewhere that in El Salvador during the 1920s the development of *mestizaje*, as both discourse and process of cultural transformation, was not significantly different from parallel developments in Nicaragua or Honduras. In all three countries by the 1920s the emergence of *mestizaje* as a dominant national discourse interacted dialectically with the simultaneous disarticulation of the indigenous communities.<sup>13</sup> In all three countries state policies favoring ladino élites and the growth of agrarian capitalism led variously to cultural *mestizaje*, thicker identifications outside the communities, and a questioning of inherited traditional forms and markers of communal life. In western Honduras and western Nicaragua, for example, virtually all inhabitants had ceased to speak indigenous languages by the turn of the century. Similarly, by 1930 the majority of indigenous Salvadorans no longer spoke Nahuatl as their principal language.

Despite some similarities, the indigenous communities of western El Salvador were distinct from their Central American neighbors, primarily because of their geographical contiguity and their level of communal cohesion. Unlike in the other countries, where *mestizaje* formed a key element in a hegemonic project, in El Salvador the very intense and contradictory subaltern response, at least initially, thwarted the project.

The development of cultural processes of *mestizaje* placed severe strains on the indigenous communities and tended to isolate “traditionalists” from others. In El Salvador, unlike in Honduras or Nicaragua, some Indians responded to the ideology and practice of *mestizaje* with a discourse of ethnic militancy and revitalization. A contrary process developed in the Salvadoran departments of La Libertad, Santa Ana, and Ahuachapán. In those departments during the first decades of the twentieth century the advance of agrarian capitalism devastated the material basis of indigenous communities and contributed to a widespread rejection of the indigenous ethnic markers, such as language and dress. Yet thousands of rural workers

and peasants who had no notion of indigenous identity participated in the mobilization from 1929 to 1931. It is this contradictory response to mestizaje that distinguished El Salvador from its neighbors, and the ability of the left to engage with both groups that guaranteed its stunning organizational success in the countryside.

The above discussion suggests that the use of the term “Indian” in the context of El Salvador during the 1920s and 1930s is quite problematic. Rather than a unitary category, we confront a continuum of indigenous identities and communal practices across the region. Typically these ranged from monolingual Nahuatl speakers in Santo Domingo de Guzmán to people ten miles away in Sónzacate who bore no identifiable ethnic markers yet were considered *indígenas* by their ladino neighbors. Those ethnic markers were of extraordinary importance, as Indians and ladinos of all political tendencies conflated them (and still do) with indigenous identity itself. As noted above, many people whose parents or grandparents would have identified as indigenous, especially in La Libertad and Ahuachapán, had no sense of indigenous identity. To the present-day observer this enormous variation complicates analysis; in the 1930s it greatly facilitated the advance of mestizaje as discourse and practice, holding an example of “civilization” both to more traditional indigenous populations and to ideologues of mestizaje and anthropologists.

Although it problematizes this wide variation of identities, this book employs the term “indigenous” to refer to people and communities who at the time referred to themselves as *indígena* or *natural*, as distinguished from ladinos (or non-Indians). In other words, by focusing on ethnic ideologies and relations as they were lived and understood at the time, this book questions the historiographical current that opposes “communists” to “Indians,” without analyzing local forms of identity formation in their historical specificity.

### El Salvador in Comparative Perspective

We explain why the Salvadoran elite and its religious and political allies had such a difficult time establishing minimal forms of hegemony or instituting significant social reforms that might have prevented the tragedy of 1932. Recent work in Latin American agrarian history and Lauria-Santiago’s *An Agrarian Republic* have revised our understanding of the Salvadoran experience, situating it closer to the experience of the coffee regions of Venezuela,



Colombia, and Costa Rica.<sup>14</sup> In El Salvador land in coffee was only somewhat more concentrated than in the other countries, and labor was not based on a full-time proletarianized labor force or on coerced labor, unlike in Guatemala. As suggested by Jeffrey Paige, it was unique among Latin American coffee economies owing to the efficiency of its larger estates and the higher levels of concentration of its finance, export, and processing sectors.<sup>15</sup> The lack of state coercion in labor relations, the persistence of a landed peasantry, and the presence of an important layer of rural farmers and rich peasants challenge the traditional historiographical bipolar portrait of El Salvador. The recognition that the emergence of coffee growing did not result in the late-nineteenth-century dispossession of the peasantry has implications for this study.

The 1920s represented a period of intensive capital accumulation in the western part of the country that affected many rural people who experienced varying degrees of proletarianization and dispossession. This book dialogues in this sense with studies of agrarian revolt in Guatemala, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Bolivia, and Cuba, which have all found that this complex middle ground of peasants resisting proletarianization can be the cauldron of rural rebellion.

Our study of the Salvadoran rural mobilization from 1929 to 1932 contributes to the historiography on twentieth-century revolutions. In broad strokes, it confirms the usefulness of Timothy Wickham-Crowley's multi-tiered analysis of social conditions as opposed to a strict structural analysis of revolutionary causes.<sup>16</sup> It traces the origins of two social groups, *colonos* (resident laborers) and "semi-proletarians" or "peasant laborers," and shows how they became open to radical organization. Scholars have rarely identified the *colonos* as a potential revolutionary subject. Our book suggests that to fruitfully study the radical or revolutionary potential of a particular group, we must root it and its relations in a historically specific context.<sup>17</sup> Rather than analyze the "revolutionary" potential of particular classes, we suggest that the struggles over their creation and their concomitant resistance to being proletarianized provide the key to understanding radical mobilization.

As suggested above, the contradictory responses to *mestizaje* in the context of struggles over class formation provide an analytical tool for understanding the success of the Salvadoran mobilization. This may well provide an interesting research path for analyses of other social movements. The successful Salvadoran mobilization of 1929–32 involved highly

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uneven cultural homogenizing processes in the context of a new phase of intense capital accumulation. In this sense the Cuban Revolution of 1933 offers the most promising terrain for such a culturally informed comparison. In Cuba communist union activists organized effectively among both field and mill workers in the sugar industry. They forged alliances between white and black Cuban workers, including many immigrants from other Caribbean islands.<sup>18</sup>

In both El Salvador and Cuba international politics played a role in the revolutionary movements. The strategic line of the Comintern pitted “class versus class,” combated all forms of reformism as objectively aligned with fascism, and promoted an anti-imperialist agrarian revolution. Although the Comintern had little direct involvement in Cuba and virtually none in El Salvador, the acceptance of the line did limit the strategic and tactical options available while doing nothing to limit the revolutionary utopian dreams that circulated among the actors.<sup>19</sup>

The massacre of some ten thousand people that followed the revolt of January 1932 also lends itself to comparison. In the Dominican Republic (1937) and Cuba (1912), as in El Salvador, state repression had complex cultural and political motivations that went beyond the need to militarily suppress an insurgent movement.<sup>20</sup> Like the killings of thousands of Afro-Cubans in eastern Cuba in 1912 and the massacre of Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent by Trujillo’s government in 1937, mass killings were pursued by the Salvadoran state for moral, political, and ideological purposes in specific geographical regions. In each case the targets of state repression were singled out in regionally specific ways; repressive forces spared other people of the same ethnic background in areas not affected by the insurgency.<sup>21</sup> In Cuba, Haiti, and El Salvador we would suggest, following Greg Grandin and the Comisión de Esclarecimiento Histórico of Guatemala, that the states did not have a strictly genocidal motive like Hitler, but did have the “intention” to liquidate blacks and Indians to accomplish their counterinsurgent goals (see chapter 7).

#### A Usable Past: Interpretations of Revolt and Massacre

During the past seventy years four themes have dominated interpretations of the revolt of 1932 and the massacre of some ten thousand people: political crisis, economic collapse, communist agency, and indigenous participa-

tion. Despite the richness of decades of discussion around these four axes, the question of how to characterize the revolt and its agents has remained unresolved.

Journalists, military officers, and professional anticommunists wrote the earliest accounts of the revolt. However tainted, writings by Joaquín Méndez and Jorge Schlesinger are still among the most important sources for study of the movement. Although the authors framed their narratives around the idea of the movement as a communist conspiracy which gained strength through the reformist opening created by President Arturo Araujo (March–December 1931), the empirical detail based on interviews and insurgent and counterinsurgent documents is of fundamental importance to any reconstruction of events.<sup>22</sup>

During the three decades following the massacres a singular, coherent mythology emerged that fomented commonsense notions about the danger of reformism and foreign communist manipulation of peasants.<sup>23</sup> By the 1960s a new generation of politically committed intellectuals began to question both the official anticommunist views and the largely dismissive interpretation by the Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS) that the revolt had been provoked by the regime and fatally flawed by the party's ideological deviations.<sup>24</sup> These writers, most notably Jorge Arias Gómez and Roque Dalton, sought to dialogue with the PCS and the distortions created by the official narrative of the revolt.<sup>25</sup> Although limited by their lack of sources and professional training, they did tap into collective memories and participants' stories, especially from within the PCS. Arias Gomez, who set out to produce an alternative history of the country's working classes, ended up more absorbed by his work as a political activist but did publish a biography of Farabundo Martí (1972).<sup>26</sup> Dalton, his political protégé, became the most important writer and poet to emerge from this period and contributed perhaps the most important piece: Miguel Mármol's narration of his life and participation in the revolt (compiled while he and Dalton were in exile and during a visit to Prague in 1966).<sup>27</sup> Published in 1972, *Miguel Mármol: Los sucesos de 1932 en El Salvador* quickly became a classic of Central American literature.<sup>28</sup> Recently Rafael Lara Martínez has criticized Dalton for consciously suppressing in Mármol's narrative the specifically indigenous role in the mobilization and insurrection. His critique is important in that it explains to some extent how the revolutionary left failed to understand the role of ethnic relations in the events of 1932. Yet like *I Rigoberta Menchú*,

despite its constructedness and distortions, *Miguel Mármol* remains a fascinating and invaluable source for understanding the period.<sup>29</sup>

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During the late 1960s El Salvador caught the attention of a number of foreign scholars who deepened the research on 1932 primarily through a study of national newspapers and interviews with military officers and members of the landowning class. The anticommunist commonsense of their informants to some extent framed their research questions. Moreover, these scholars explicitly investigated the social origins of the revolt despite their limited understanding of Salvadoran agrarian history.<sup>30</sup> Thomas Anderson's *Matanza* was the first serious monographic attempt to counter the official anticommunist hysteria and to provide a rich examination of the revolt and its social and political origins.<sup>31</sup> Anderson made a significant contribution by emphasizing both the class and ethnic dimensions of the movement, but his work remained limited by its narrow conceptual framework and lack of archival sources. Everett Wilson's dissertation was also an important contribution to the literature, providing an analytical framework for the failure of reformism during the 1920s.<sup>32</sup> It remains one of the most empirically sound and sophisticated interpretations of Salvadoran politics during this period.<sup>33</sup> Anderson and Wilson made critical contributions in their use of primary sources (short of archival work) and in their analytical integration of a broader socioeconomic narrative that saw in the economic crisis of 1929 the origins of the political crisis of 1932. But they were not able to fully flesh out the social origins, ideology, subjectivity, and practice of the rural movement.<sup>34</sup>

By the late 1970s a new generation of Salvadoran social scientists began to publish interpretations critical of extant works on the revolt.<sup>35</sup> The regime forced most of these scholars into exile, where they carried out more systematic research with secondary sources. None were able to carry out archival work or oral history work among the peasantry, with the notable exception of the Jesuit martyr Segundo Montes.<sup>36</sup> During the late 1970s and early 1980s the left relied on these analyses (and on Mármol) in their frequent reflections about 1932. As the regime relied ever more on the violent repression of dissent, the rapidly expanding left moved toward a revolutionary strategy. In that context left militants called on their followers to "retomar las banderas de '32,"<sup>37</sup> highlighting the depth of the alliance of the early 1930s between urban workers and campesino. To wit, Ferman Cienfuegos, a guerrilla leader, cited the incorporation of peasant smallholders

into union leadership as an example of the left's creativity.<sup>38</sup> In somewhat paradoxical fashion, revolutionary leftists recognized the negative lessons from 1932. While recognizing the PCS's creativity in forging a multiclass alliance, they criticized their forebears for their petit-bourgeois ideological deviations and confusion, a consequence of the weak development of an industrial proletariat. And even while lauding the role of Farabundo Martí in pushing for a revolutionary strategy, the new left criticized the PCS for its failure to create a political and military vanguard and for its overreliance on Martí's.<sup>39</sup> The FMLN named guerrilla fronts after Feliciano Ama and Francisco Sánchez, the indigenous leaders, but in its narrative of 1932 it tended to subsume the ethnic dimension of the movement within a rigid class framework.

Although the revolutionary left made no scholarly contribution to the understanding of 1932, the newly heightened politics of memory eventually led to intensified research efforts. By the mid-1980s a new wave of publications by foreign scholars began to revisit the revolt, adding significant new sources and placing the revolt in the broader context of social revolution. Authors such as James Dunkerley, Héctor Pérez-Brignoli, and Jeffery Paige provided more complete and fluid conceptions of class, politics, and the state that eschewed singular ideological determinations. Leon Zamosc provided the first significant empirical additions to the narrative of 1932; he conceptualized rural Salvador as following a dependent capitalist path that involved "refeudalization" based on the growth of colonos.

The end of the civil war provided an opening for foreign scholars to bring a deeper level of archival research into discussions of the 1920s and 1930s. The identification and recovery of new regional archives and the reorganization of large portions of the AGN by Lauria Santiago during the late 1980s facilitated this work. Both Erik Ching and Patricia Alvarenga attempted sweeping research and interpretations of many aspects of Salvadoran politics from the nineteenth century to the 1930s. Their highly nuanced discussions of the revolt carefully consider municipal politics (especially indigenous politics), the previous political regimes, and the emergence of the left in the countryside. Alvarenga provided important insight into the popular politics of the 1920s, especially among people of indigenous descent, and into popular resistance to state power in general.

The incorporation of extensive archival and newspaper sources by these and other authors has opened new terrain for interpretive and empirical

debates. In particular, new scholarship has emphasized the role of ethnic oppression and the participation of indigenous communities in the revolt. In an otherwise fine piece of scholarship, Pérez-Brignoli portrayed the revolt as resembling an Indian jacquerie, partially inspired by the urban ladino cadre of the PCS but cut off from it. Most recently Ching's work, building to some extent on that of Pérez-Brignoli, has repositioned the role of the PCS, arguing that the party was incapable of organizing the revolt and pointing toward the movement as an indigenous-peasant revolt without a clear communist ideological character.<sup>40</sup> Although Ching and Pérez-Brignoli have added significantly to the discussion, their work lends itself to interpretations that posit two noncommunicative spheres: one communist and the other Indian.<sup>41</sup> Taking that view beyond the authors' intentions, some commentators in effect revert to the classic anticommunist position that Marxist-Leninists manipulated innocent, aggrieved peasants.

As we will show, the portrait of a closed, separate Indian world in the Salvadoran west is partial and problematic; ethnic identity was neither rigid nor castelike. Most fundamentally, the perspective that posits a significant cultural gulf between communists and rural Indians and that stresses the autonomy of the rural Indian movement misses conversations across multiple, murky cultural divides. This book will narrate the remarkable story of how a united movement emerged out of so much cultural difference and conflict. It attempts to make sense of the mobilization and the insurrection by historicizing our analytical categories and recognizing the fluidity of the expressed and ascribed identities of the participants.

This historiographical current has prompted a broader discussion around a central question: "Was it communist?" A negative response implies communist manipulation, ineptitude, or irrelevance. But before even engaging this question, we need to confront an epistemological one: Where do revolutionary ideas and action come from? The classic Leninist response is that correct revolutionary ideas come from Marxist-Leninist science, which reflects and influences social practice but ultimately is the sole province of the Central Committee. Logically, revolutionary action can only derive from revolutionary strategy formulated by the proletarianized intellectuals of the Central Committee. Without accepting other aspects of the ideological tradition, those who ask "Was it communist?" tend to accept this classic Leninist epistemology. We emphatically reject this undialectical view of social consciousness and social action.

Methodologically, the assignment of grades of ideological purity to actors in the past seems at best an uninteresting pursuit. Rather, we reconceptualize the analytical separation between organizer and organized. What interests us is how this powerful movement derived from the active, mutually conditioning relationship between grassroots activists of varied identities and the different levels of leftist leadership. Rank-and-file activists were as “authentically” leftist as the PCS Central Committee and at least as important in shaping the development of the movement.

These historical agents did operate within a variety of organizations, and within them the PCS stood at the apex. Yet as we will argue, although the PCS considered itself the revolutionary vanguard, its self-definition did not necessarily shape reality. Rather, the Socorro Rojo Internacional (which the PCS had created as a front group) acquired an important degree of autonomy and a critical role in creating the emerging revolutionary discourse: a discourse that explained how growing numbers of rural people, Indians, and ladinos came to understand the world and their place in it. That the leaders of the SRI and the labor unions usually were also members of the PCS has intrinsic importance but does not allow us to reduce those movements to mere party appendages. Yet there is no denying that the pro-communist left as a whole was responsible for creating a field of vision in which the revolutionary seizure of power became an option for many subaltern actors.

The denial of a role to the communist left in the insurrection, regardless of scholarly intention, ultimately relegates the hundreds of local-level organizers of the movement to yet another mass grave, this one of historical oblivion. A cadre of ladino and indigenous leaders, with roots in the cantons, haciendas, towns, and workshops, propelled this movement forward. Often communist militants were themselves rural Indians, many of whom had been union activists on the coffee plantations for several years. Others merely shared the movement’s goals: radical agrarian reform and overthrow of the regime and oligarchical rule.

This book shows that the revolt of 1932 derived from the transformation of a radicalized union movement that became revolutionary under the pressure of frustration among peasants and rural workers with the violent abrogation of democratic rights, combined with a rapid increase in rates of exploitation and dispossession. Before December 1931 only a minority of the left favored an insurrectionary strategy. As a result of the events delin-

eated in chapter 5, we will show that the insurrection did result ultimately from the actions, choices, and direction of a coherent and self-conscious movement for social, economic, and political transformation. There is no doubt that the PCS leadership engaged in negotiations with the military regime, and that upon the failure of those negotiations they decided upon a date for the insurrection, eventually postponed to 22 January 1932, when they rose up. The discursive struggle to rescue indigenous agency from decades of trauma and neglect should not lead us to deny communist agency in all its dimensions, all its creative potential, and all of its flaws.

Chapter 1 of the book offers a detailed analysis of the structural transformation of Salvadoran rural society during the 1920s, marked by the consolidation of two important social groups, colonos (resident laborers) and semi-proletarians. With the multisided economic crisis of 1929, these two groups, “los occidentales,” became the critical social subjects of the mobilization in central and western El Salvador. This chapter also focuses on the limitations of elite hegemony. Chapter 2 examines the emergence of reformist political currents that by the late 1920s challenged oligarchic rule and encouraged the partial democratization of the state. This chapter delineates how the frustration of political and social reform at the national and municipal levels directly contributed to the radicalization of the labor movement.

Chapters 3 and 4 probe the ethnic, political, and cultural dimensions of the rural mobilization. They show that virtually all subaltern and middle groups in central and western Salvador were represented on both sides of the conflict. Most significantly, these chapters attempt to elucidate the discursive expressions of ethnic militancy and populism. Chapter 4 concludes with a discussion of gender relations in the region.

Chapter 5 offers a detailed account and analysis of the highpoint of the mobilization during the latter part of 1931 and January 1932. Highlighting the relations between the grassroots and the national leadership, the chapter offers a portrait of the decision-making process that led to the insurrection. Chapter 6 presents a blow-by-blow account of the insurrection. Building on those produced in the 1930s and 1940s, it also incorporates material from the Comintern and Salvadoran archives. It departs from previous accounts primarily in its deployment of ethnographic and local detail, culled from oral testimonies.

The equally complex pattern of repression is the subject of chapter 7. It recounts the systematic massacres in Nahuizalco, Juayúa, Tacuba, and



Izalco of mostly male Indians. Yet the chapter tempers the view of 1932 as an anti-Indian massacre through its examination of non-Indian killings and the mild forms of repression employed in the heavily indigenous region south of San Salvador. Through an analysis of oral histories, chapter 8 probes the long-term cultural and political impact of the massacres on the region. Here the book shifts gears from an analytical narrative to an analysis of stories about the revolt and repression, as well as about the loss of two key ethnic emblems, indigenous female dress and the Nahuatl-Pipil language. This final chapter also describes the massacre in El Carrizal and another equally unknown massacre in the Department of Sonsonate in 1980. The silencing of the massacres and the brief mobilization that preceded them is due in part to the widespread myth of passivity of the western Salvadoran peasant, a direct consequence of 1932.

We address the larger problem of how local consciousness and national discourse are related. The gulf between them has both reflected and exacerbated the tragedies of modern Central American political cultures. It is our hope that our book will help to illuminate the hidden crevasses that dangerously lie beneath the political cultural landscape of contemporary Central America.

This book is the result of a collaborative effort between the two authors who have long been interested in the causes and consequences of the mobilization, insurrection, and massacre that devastated El Salvador in 1932. The book is also the result of a web of collaborations with Salvadorans and others.

Lauria-Santiago carried out extensive local and national archival research during the early 1990s, in close collaboration with the Archivo General de la Nación and numerous municipal governments throughout the country. Over the next decade, working with local and national scholars, archivists, and authorities, he helped organize and preserve a significant amount of archives that are now available to scholars and students. He worked especially closely with Eugenia López of the AGN. *An Agrarian Republic*, the first fruit of his work in the archives, provoked much dialogue in the Central American academy and challenged decades of received wisdom about the origins of the coffee economy and the class structure in the countryside from 1880 to 1920. Lauria-Santiago stimulated wide-ranging research projects on modern Salvadoran history and maintained a strong interest in the events of 1932 based on extensive archival research that carried into the 1930s.

Over the years the authors conversed about the events of 1932, recognizing the lacunae in their knowledge and the problems with extant analyses. Thus in 2001 they decided to combine their research efforts and expand their focus toward reinterpreting the mobilization that preceded the insurrection as well as the massacre itself and its political and cultural consequences. Gould obtained a John Simon Guggenheim fellowship in 2002 that permitted the drafting of chapters 3 through 8. Lauria-Santiago drafted chapters 1 and 2. A voluminous dialogue shaped the manuscript, involving numerous readings, commentaries, and discussions.

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