Chapter 2

Ethnographic Research in the Shadow of Civil War

We feel a great patience. If we forget what we have suffered, it will come again. We want to pressure for change, we can’t forget all we’ve suffered.

Campesina, Tenancingo, 1987

To explore why some campesinos rebelled in contested areas of El Salvador before and during the civil war, my principal research strategy was to ask participants in the insurgency why they supported it, and to ask others why they did not. For revolutionary social movements, this is not usually done: the scholarly analysis of peasant rebellions, revolutions, civil wars, and even some social movements often relies on official or elite sources. In particular, as Nancy Bermeo (1986) and Nora Kriger (1992) argue, the study of peasant insurgency often relies not on the accounts of peasants themselves, but on the memoirs of elite revolutionary leaders who are usually from a different class, or on macro-level data. One reason of course is that peasant actors are often illiterate or semi-literate and leave few written accounts of their actions, although oral sources in the form of stories and songs may be very rich. Participant accounts, be they elite memoirs, the few biographies of peasant participants available (which were often dictated to journalists or other literate interlocutors), or other accounts based on oral histories, rarely address social science concerns of how representative the narrator is or whether alternative accounts better explain available evidence.

In the absence of participant accounts, one alternative in studying historical instances is to infer the logic of insurgency from the “prose of counterinsurgency” (Guha 1983a): the records of judicial, colonial, and other
governmental authorities are read for insight into subaltern motives and beliefs. Not all states engaged in counterinsurgency produce the kind of records that facilitate such a rereading of official sources, however. Before and during El Salvador’s civil war, those suspected of subversion by government agents were only in extraordinary circumstances processed by courts or other judicial bodies. Police and other security forces left few records of detentions, torture, or disappearances. (Nor were records of the Salvadoran military detailing particular operations public at the time of the writing of this book.) Of the few such records that existed, many were destroyed in order to render postwar investigation of human rights violations and other abuses of power more difficult. While human rights organizations kept records of violations as best they could, their records of rural events are very incomplete. Given conditions in the countryside, records exist only for those events that occurred where witnesses willing to report abuses resided. Such witnesses (often local priests or nuns) would have to run the risk of reporting an abuse by telephone and then meeting a human rights investigator locally, or of traveling to human rights offices in San Salvador. As a result, most violent events in the case-study areas went unrecorded.²

Nor does survey data provide much help in analyzing the course of the civil war. While a few surveys of households in contested areas were done by government agencies or other researchers for various reasons toward the end of the war, they usually gathered data on the composition of households, whether homes had access to potable water and schools, and the sources of income. In any case, residents’ willingness to respond to questions concerning the history of the war in their own community and their own participation or not in political violence depended on a relationship with the researcher that was more personal than is possible in survey research.

The recent rebellion in El Salvador offers the opportunity to analyze grassroots accounts of revolutionary participation using methods similar to those frequently used in the study of ordinary social movements. This book draws principally on open-ended interviews with rural residents, both participants and non-participants in the insurgency, in the Tenancingo and Usulután case-study areas. (I defer detailed discussion of the criteria for their selection to the following chapter.) In this chapter I discuss the challenges of ethnographic research in areas of political violence and the strategies I pursued to meet them as well as possible.
For this book, I asked campesinos, participants and nonparticipants alike, landlords, and military officers questions concerning local conditions before the war, the local history of the war, including violence by both sides, and the emergence of new local organizations. That this analysis relies principally on open-ended interviews of course raises difficult issues of interpretation. The responses to my questions were shaped by three factors: the accuracy and intensity of the respondent’s initial memories, the subsequent shaping of those memories through social and cultural processes, and the respondents’ objectives in the ethnographic setting of the interview itself. I discuss each in turn.

First, recent laboratory studies that test for accuracy of recall of images and events that vary in intensity (“arousal” in the language of this literature) and pleasantness or unpleasantness (“valence”) have found that images and events that rank as highly intense (in a variety of cognitive and biological measures) tend to be better remembered both in the short and long term than less intense images and events. This appears to be true whether or not the stimuli are pleasant or unpleasant; there is some additional but still debated evidence that unpleasant stimuli are better remembered than pleasant stimuli of the same intensity. What these laboratory studies suggest (but of course do not show, given the many differences between the laboratory and actual settings) is that the violent events frequently witnessed or participated in during civil war are the type -- highly intense and most often very unpleasant -- that are most likely to be well-remembered. For example, in one experiment, two groups of subjects were shown films that were identical except that one version contained a violent event midway through, while the other contained a parallel but nonviolent event (Bornstein, Liebel and Scarberry 1998). The subjects shown the violent version had better recall of the middle scene than subjects shown the non-violent version,
but had less recall of what came before and after. This is not of course surprising: those who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder are haunted by intrusive memories and nightmares -- they remember too much of their past experience, not too little.

Second, memories of political events, however well they are initially remembered, may be later reshaped by social and cultural processes that affect which memories were retained, which emphasized, and which forgotten. An example of the shaping of memory by subsequent experience is Leigh Binford’s finding that witnesses in northern Morazán a decade later blamed the government’s Atlacatl Battalion -- notorious in the area for having killed more than a thousand people in 1981 at El Mozote -- for several killings of campesinos which occurred before the battalion was even founded (1996: 105). Another example comes from Italy. Alessandro Portelli (1991) compared oral history accounts of the death of the worker Luigi Trastulli at the hands of a special police force in Terni, an industrial town in central Italy, with other sources. Workers he interviewed decades later remembered that during a protest against layoffs in 1953, Trastulli had been shot high against a stone wall with arms outstretched in a Christ-like position. The militant labor movement, they recalled, had fought all the harder after his death. According to contemporary judicial and journalistic accounts, however, Trastulli was shot in 1949 at street level with no memorable pose and there was little labor mobilization in response. Portelli argues that the labor movement’s quiescent response to Trastulli’s death was not consonant with the movement’s culture, requiring the translation of the event in memory to circumstances in which the movement was more militant. Cultural norms may thus result in the suppression of some memories or expressions as unacceptable. In Sultanpuri, a neighborhood of Delhi, Veena Das (1990 : 390) found distinct patterns of mourning by surviving relatives of communal violence -- younger widows were not allowed to mourn at all. She suggests that social structures intervene in the way that emotions such as guilt and sorrow are formed, “the way in which the world can be reformulated,” and therefore how narratives can be told. In particular, memories of wartime events may be shaped by postwar outcomes, for example, by disappointment in the failure of a postwar government to deliver on redistributive goals promised in negotiated peace settlements.

Third, the telling of personal and community histories in an ethnographic setting is also shaped by the respondent’s personal and family trajectories through the war, by his present political loyalties, by his beliefs concerning the likely
consequences of participating in the interview and of expressing particular views, and by his present personal objectives -- all as informed by his understanding of the purpose of the interview. Political opinions may be systematically misrepresented out of security considerations, particularly in the context of civil war. Narratives may reflect self-aggrandizing motives as respondents tell stories in which their role is exaggerated or indeed entirely recast. Claimed motivations may be reconstructions that attribute a post hoc coherence to events by placing them in relation to a presumed goal (Markoff 1996: 603). Portelli (1997) points out that while oral history interviews are a personal exchange between the interviewer and interviewee, they are also testimonies intended as public statements and thus involve interpreting and legitimizing past actions and perceptions.

Moreover, because the telling of stories of past injustice and resistance shapes present propensities for mobilization and political identities, they may be told for precisely that purpose, rather than to convey accurate accounts of events as remembered. One result may be erroneous stories of origin, as in the case of Rigoberta Menchú, whose life history recounted in her I, Rigoberta Menchú to a Venezuelan anthropologist was not literally true although certainly representative of the violence during that period in the Guatemalan highlands (Stoll 1999). Another example comes from the US civil rights movement, whose stories of origin (Polletta 1998a, 1998b) often overlooked the previous activism and training in civil disobedience of Rosa Parks before she initiated the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott of 1955 by refusing to move to the back of the bus. Those stories also frequently claimed that the occupation of luncheon counters to protest segregation were spontaneous rather than organized activities.

Divergent memories of events of the Salvadoran civil war, I found, sometimes reflected such processes of memory formation. The bombing of Tenancingo in September, 1983, provides a dramatic example. The FMLN attacked the municipal center despite the presence there of the well-trained and heavily armed Jaguar Battalion, commanded by a Captain Calvo. After his troops were trapped in the town, the town was bombed for several hours by government aircraft, an action that Americas Watch (1986: 157) at the time described as the "war's single most devastating attack" which left at least 75 civilians dead. In interviews four years later, all respondents recalled the event with horror -- and profound fear that the same thing might happen again -- but the particular tale told appeared to reflect the political loyalties of the teller.
Survivors supportive of the FMLN report that, when faced with imminent defeat, Calvo locked himself and approximately forty soldiers into the Church. He called in the Air Force, saying that he was lost and that all those moving around the church were guerrillas. But they weren't just guerrillas, but civilians running crazy through the streets. The Green Cross [the domestic equivalent of the Red Cross] wanted to take the civilian population from the town, but a guerrilla stopped them, warning them that they would be bombed. They didn't try it, but another group of civilians did, fleeing down the road. A plane bombed them -- children, women, and men. They bombed houses, streets, everything. All this didn't stop the FMLN - they captured Calvo and the forty soldiers from the church and spent the night in the town... We later learned that the soldiers were freed some months later. (Interview with resident, Tenancingo, 1987).

Several Tenancingo residents told similar versions with varying degrees of apparent trauma.

One person, whom I came to consider one of my most informed and reliable respondents in Tenancingo, told me that he had later heard over the radio an audio-tape of a pilot circling over Tenancingo calling his base for instructions, stating that those he saw on the streets looked like civilians. The response of his commander was to bomb whomever he saw moving. As the likely source for the airing of such a transcript was one of the FMLN radio stations, I was skeptical. (I did not ask whether that was in fact the case, as it would implicate him politically in a way inappropriate at that time. I later came to believe that was indeed the source). However, Jesuit scholar Ignacio Martín-Baró reported much the same thing:

I remember hearing a recording of a conversation between the pilot of a Salvadoran bomber and his commanding officer at the base. The pilot, who was flying over the town of Tenancingo, saw a group of people in a state of panic seeking cover in the local church and transmitted to the officer that they were civilians so he could not bomb them. But, from the command post, the officer insisted that “anything that moves is the enemy,” that they were nothing but “subversives” and, therefore, that the
pilot must bomb.” (Martín-Baró 1988: 338)

A Belgian journalist who worked with the ERP for three years in Usulután states explicitly that she heard the tape on Radio Venceremos (Lievens 1988: 87-8). Whether the tape was in fact a recording of radio transmissions between the pilot and the base (which I judge likely as Martín-Baró would have been skeptical), the conversation is etched in the memory of some Salvadorans, among them some Tenancingo residents.

Some interpretations emphasized the heroism of guerrilla forces in Tenancingo; one bordered on the mythical. According to a written, apparently eye-witness, account that circulated soon after the bombing and which was shown to me in 1987, the members of the Green Cross did retreat with the group and

with megaphones called to the pilot to stop the bombing, but he didn't and dropped a bomb on them, killing eighteen persons there alone. My aunt, my cousin, and their sons died there; another cousin [would have died] inside [her pregnant mother], who fell dead from the shrapnel. But a passing female guerrilla that might have been a nurse said she had to save the life of the baby. She took out a knife and opened my cousin’s side and took out the daughter. She cut the umbilical cord and gave her to another aunt to take to Cojutepeque where she was cared for. And by a miracle of God she is safe and well.8

In this account, not only did the Air Force overlook the presence of civilians in the town but a guerrilla fighter literally produced life out of the suffering endured. Another Tenancingo resident reported in a 1989 interview that an entire family was killed except for a fetus who was saved. His repeating this story was particularly interesting as he was not an insurgent supporter. Perhaps he had read this account and believed it; in any case he reported it as something he knew to be true. Still another resident stated in a 1989 interview that an entire family, including a pregnant woman, had been killed, but did not mention the saving of a fetus.

“Memories” held by members of the Tenancingo elite – none were in fact present at the time of the bombing – tend to be very different. For example, one wealthier resident claimed -- and seemed to sincerely believe -- that guerrilla
combatants captured Calvo and forced him to call in the Air Force to bomb the
town, thus attributing moral responsibility to the FMLN while admitting the Air
Force had bombed the town (the FMLN did not have planes or helicopters). Such
beliefs persisted despite the long-standing acceptance of responsibility for the
bombing on the part of the military itself. Colonel Domingo Monterrosa, the
commander of the Atlacatl Battalion which moved into the area soon after the
attack, was reported to have said to the surviving residents of Tenancingo, "Here
we all lost, we lost and you lost, but you must understand that it was an exception
and that the bombing occurred because the lives of the soldiers were in danger." General Adolfo Blandón, Armed Forces Chief of Staff at the time, reiterated to
me the military’s responsibility in a 1987 interview:

> It was my fate to be commander of the army when the worse that
could happen to a town happened...[After the first attack] we were
able to arrange things a bit...and things were going forward when
there was another confrontation. There was also an aerial action.
It was an error.

Thus both government and insurgent supporters told narratives consonant with
their political beliefs and loyalties.

As evident in these varied memories of the bombing of Tenancingo,
processes of the social construction of memory are very salient in war narratives,
particularly when storytellers participated in or supported political violence:
statements of past motivation may also reflect present ambivalence concerning the
supporters of the insurgency concerning motivation for actions carried out some
years earlier may be particularly subject to interim processes of both individual
and social selection as ongoing dialogue within families, organizations, and
communities reshapes initial impressions into social memories. Motivations
claimed in interviews may be ex-post rationales for participation, whose real
reasons lie elsewhere.

Moreover, silences in interviews may be as significant as the events
related. When Kay Warren returned to the village in highland Guatemala where
she had done ethnographic research before the civil war, she was struck by the
“strategic ambiguities” in narratives concerning the local history of violence (for
example, “they burned, they killed...” with the identity of “they” left unrevealed,
1998: 110). Those who could not understand the implication of such ambiguities were “by definition strangers with whom it was not wise to share information” (ibid: 94). Villagers were reluctant to discuss the violence in any detail, offering generalizations in response to questions. The violence of the civil war had riven families and communities, with the result that her respondents lived in a world of betrayal and existential dilemmas captured in phrases such as “we don’t know who is listening” and “one did not know who was who” (ibid: 107-8). Such silences may be particularly important for the ethnographer, as when villagers in the northern highlands of Peru proudly told how a group of purported thieves had been beaten and stabbed to death but neglected to say that one had been a teenager (Starn 1999: 82-85), or when Chinese villagers displaced by a hydroelectric dam in central China were silent about traumatic village events during the Cultural Revolution (Jing 1996: 56). Moreover, silences in narratives may evoke corresponding silences by ethnographers. Linda Green did not feel free to pursue certain topics with the Maya war widows she interviewed; in particular she could not ask widows whose husbands were killed by the army about the photograph on the wall of a son in an army uniform: “I would give them the opportunity to say something, but I felt morally unable to pursue the topic” (Green 1995: 112-3). Thus the usual tension in the interpretation of oral history interviews -- between the need to reconstruct events and the need to understand respondents’ representation of those events -- is sharpened in the aftermath of conflict and violence (Portelli 1997: 146).

There is an additional danger in relying on what Charles Tilly calls “standard stories,” those frequently told by participants in a social movement (Tilly 1999). Such reliance may result in the analyst’s neglect of causal mechanisms such as structural and demographic factors that may not be well captured in the personal narratives of histories of individuals and communities. Nonetheless, the choice to participate in a movement or not to do so both rest on the perceptions and interpretation of structures and processes by individuals (shaped to be sure by their participation in organizations).

**Research Method**

My interviews occurred during the Salvadoran civil war and the subsequent, initially precarious, cease-fire in politically polarized areas that suffered severe political violence. The interviews addressed the very issues of
political opinion and participation that generated and reinforced that violence. The interviews and associated fieldwork thus required “certain precautions and incredible delicacy” (Adler 1992: 229). Among other things, such fieldwork raises challenging issues of personal security (for those interviewed but also for the researcher) and the confidentiality of interview records. As Linda Green (1995 and 1999) explores in her work on war-torn areas of Guatemala, violence and terror often leave behind a legacy of silence, fear, and uncertainty that can be deeply corrosive of self-confidence, trust, and hope. These field conditions made necessary research procedures -- in particular, for informed consent to participation in the research -- that emphasized the voluntary nature of participation in interviews and the confidentiality of informant identities. These concerns are not unusual in ethnographic research, of course, but their importance is much deepened in the context of research on civil war and political violence. For example, I informed all respondents that I was interviewing people across the political spectrum. I did so because I judged that knowledge important for their informed consent as well as their decisions about what to say and what not to say. Moreover, respondents’ understanding that I was doing so would protect me from misunderstanding should participants with one side see me interviewing adherents of the other. Of course my interviews with both sides were undoubtably shaped by this knowledge.

Despite these difficulties, over two hundred campesinos were interviewed at length, many repeatedly over a period of four or five years in a variety of settings both individual and collective. Initial interviews with insurgent supporters in a particular area usually occurred with a small group of leaders of the principal local organization (a federation of cooperatives, a land defense committee, or the Community Council of Tenancingo); they usually started with an introduction by a person known to them (typically a representative of a non-governmental organization with longstanding contacts in the area). This initial interview, usually a long discussion of the purpose of the project and of issues of security and confidentiality, was essentially a vetting of my research project by these local leaders. In all cases, these local representatives agreed that their organizations would participate in the research project, and arrangements for subsequent interviews with members were made.

Subsequent interviews were usually extended conversations with small groups of activists concerning the history of their community during the civil war, the founding of the organization, and their perceptions of contemporary political
issues. Local leaders preferred that initial encounters be group rather than individual interviews, a process I understood both as a further vetting of me and the project, a further assessment of its likely consequences, and an assertion of their control over the process. I later interviewed many members individually (and a few repeatedly) in private settings; no obstacles or conditions were imposed on these interviews by anyone to my knowledge. Given the substantial degree of violence, political tension, and uncertainty around the themes of this study in the recent past I promised I would not reveal the identity of those with whom I spoke (except in the case of a few political elites). While from the present vantage point this may seem an unnecessary precaution, it is a pledge which I have honored. For this reason, I characterize interviews only by the role of the interviewee (campesino, landlord, ERP commander, and so on) and the year and location it occurred.

However, one disadvantage of my reliance on local opposition organizations for initial contacts with insurgent campesinos was that I interviewed fewer women than men: while many women participated in the organizations, they tended to be less active than their male counterparts and few were leaders. In group interviews I did my best to ensure their speaking but they were often interrupted repeatedly. I also interviewed at length a dozen women in private settings about their experiences during the war, but because I particularly sought to know the history of the emergence of insurgent organizations, I inevitably rely more on men.

In these circumstances of recent political violence and enduring political polarization, I did not attempt to construct representative samples of local respondents. I did, however, interview the members of a wide range of organizations. Of the ten cooperatives established by the government as part of the 1980 counterinsurgency agrarian reform in the Usulután case-study areas, members of six were interviewed; of more than forty insurgent (as opposed to agrarian reform) cooperatives in the those areas, members of thirty-two were interviewed. Representatives of nearly all other campesino political organizations active in the Usulután case-study areas, including those founded by the government in the aftermath of the agrarian reform, were interviewed. In Tenancingo, leaders and members of a variety of organizations were interviewed, both in group and in individual settings. Dozens of meetings of organizations in both Usulután and Tenancingo were also observed.
Nor did I attempt to conduct field research in an area of uniform non-participation (which would have been the ideal research design as it would have added a clearly contrasting case). Ethnographic research on such politically sensitive questions during the civil war in areas of uncontested government and landlord control would have been dangerous for those interviewed. That I could carry out such research in contested areas was an achievement of the insurgency: rebellion had carved out a political “space” of relative autonomy (Adler 1992). In the case-study areas, I interviewed nonparticipants in the insurgency where and when I could. As nonparticipants generally did not belong to organizations (except small evangelical sects in some cases), it was more difficult to obtain introductions that they would trust. As a result, most of my interviews with 24 nonparticipants took place in small towns such as Tierra Blanca, Tenancingo, and Santiago de María, where I stayed with individuals trusted by many nonparticipants (in two cases local Catholic nuns, in one case a European development expert). These interviews usually took place in private, one-on-one settings in the case of campesinos, in official, sometimes group, settings in the case of mayors and other officials, and in private homes and offices in San Salvador and other cities in the case of landlords. I also interviewed residents of two types of sites of likely non-participation, government-sponsored repopulated towns in Suchitoto and agrarian reform cooperatives in western El Salvador.

Interviews across this range of political allegiances during a bitter civil war proved possible for various reasons. International attention on the reconstruction of Tenancingo, which included significant European funding and press coverage, may have raised the costs to both the FMLN and the government of hostility to an academic researcher. That the researcher conducting it was not from El Salvador but from the United States may also have contributed to its feasibility, particularly given the importance of US funding to the government and the attention given to harassment (by either side) of US and European citizens. That the cease-fire was in place during much of the Usulután research made travel to those areas less precarious than it would have been earlier. Finally, with a few minor exceptions, I had excellent luck: I was never caught in the wrong place at a wrong time. Such luck is a not-to-be-underappreciated aspect of fieldwork in settings of political violence (Sluka 1995).

I believe my research in contested areas was possible for a more profound reason. My inquiries met with the enthusiastic collaboration of many residents of contested zones (and of nearly all those approached in San Salvador as well),
irrespective of class, occupation, or political affiliation. Residents acted on a willingness (perhaps even a need in some sense) to discuss with an outside researcher their own history and that of their families and communities. Perhaps this willingness is a measure of the trauma and change brought by the war: those interviewed frequently expressed a desire for their story to be told, that some account (or accounting) be made of the local history of the civil war. For example, one Tenancingo resident not allied with any political faction told me in 1987, “The people here are suffocating from the cries and shouts that we cannot speak. It suffocates. It does me good to talk to someone -- I can't speak to people here about these things.” One leader of the Land Defense Committee of Las Marias, a long-time insurgent activist whose involvement began with his training as a catechist in the mid-1970s, remarked

Just a comment on your project: I understand that you are asking us to consider participating in the construction of what we might call a history of the war in the conflicted zones. [pause] There are no more hidden things. We have suffered so; it would be right that there be such a history. What a period we have lived through! The campesino does not have the capacity to do it; you engage with such things more there [in the U.S.; in U.S. universities]. But it is something we have lived and we are still living. I don’t know where to start...

This willingness of many resident of contested areas to talk about their personal and community histories at length with a researcher is common to many other ethnographies of civil wars. Green found that many of the Maya war widows she interviewed, including some she came to know very well, would tell her their stories over and over (1995: 115). In her analysis of the civil war in Mozambique after independence, Carolyn Nordstrom suggests that because the experience of violence is profoundly personal and linked to processes of self-identity and personhood, narratives of political violence are also attempts to find a meaningful way to deal with experience, to organize experience after the fact, and thus respondents exhibit what appears to be a “need to talk and talk” (1997: 3-4, 21-22, 79). Das (1990: 395) suggests that survivors of communal violence in Sultanpuri agreed to interviews because “All this signified the fact that their lives held a meaning, and that their suffering would not go untold”. Marcelo Suárez-Orozco argues that narratives of political violence, known in Latin American literature as testimonios (testimonies) are rituals “of both healing and a condemnation of injustice – the concept of testimony contains both connotations
of something subjective and private and something objective, judicial, and political” (1992: 367).

Yet the statements that Salvadoran insurgent campesinos made in interviews were not concerned only with violence. While most stories they told began as histories of injustice, violence, suffering, and loss, many continued as proudly told stories of the achievements of opposition organizations during the conflict -- of land occupied and defended, of new organizations founded, and of new identities asserted. The campesinos recounted these achievements with enthusiasm, interrupting each other to cap the last story with the next. With groups I interviewed repeatedly over months and sometimes years, support for this project was particularly evident on my return after an absence. I would often be met with shouted greetings such as “Well, Elisabeth, do we have something to tell you!” or (to each other), “What did we say we should remember to tell Elisabeth?” These assertions of pride contrast sharply with those gathered in many ethnographies of civil war and political violence.

**Redrawing boundaries: the Mapmaking Workshops**

A place on the map is also a place in history.

--- Adrienne Rich (1986: 212)

At the level of open defiance, the mapping of revolution and riot is a reminder of the contingent nature of sovereign authority and the controverted character of sovereign power. By directing attention to issues of social distribution, mapping can also open the politically charged question of social justice.

--- Jeremy Black (1997: 77)

In analyzing the course of the civil war in the case-study areas, I rely in part on the maps drawn for this study in 1992 by a dozen teams of campesinos from across Usulután in three workshops I convened in 1992. I asked representatives of a dozen cooperatives to draw on large sheets of butcher paper
with marker pens maps of their localities showing property boundaries and land use before and after the civil war. Drawn collaboratively by at least two and usually several members in a process interspersed with much discussion of the history of the area as well as gossip, jokes, and teasing of one another (and of me), the resulting maps document how campesino collective action literally redrew the boundaries of class relationships through their depiction of changes in de facto property rights and patterns of land use in the case study areas during the war.

The accuracy of the claims by these cooperative leaders to occupy extensive areas of land in 1992 was confirmed by my own travel and observation in the case-study areas, and by examination of the archives of landholding and land claims data maintained by the FMLN, the government, and the United Nations during the postwar process of adjusting property titles.

These maps are therefore quite different in origin and purpose from most maps, which are usually the product of efforts on the part of powerful or expanding empires or of consolidating states to centralize power, define frontiers, and regulate property rights (Harley 1988; Black 1997). The security interests of the US Department of Defense in El Salvador, for example, led them to produce a number of maps of El Salvador, including one map of Usulután on which the many hacienda airstrips were carefully marked. In particular, cadastral maps (maps of properties, often linked to a property register for tax purposes) re-emerged in Renaissance Europe as maps of private estates proved useful to asserting land claims or settling property disputes. These were later deployed by states to plan land reclamation (as in the Netherlands), collect taxes, manage state resources such as royal forests, and to distribute land to settlers in colonies (Kain and Baigent 1992). Such maps were of course used to the advantage of some against the interest of others and in “portraying one reality, as in the settlement of the New World or in India,” helped obliterate the old (ibid: 344). Indeed, Michael Biggs argues that the development of modern cartography contributed to the concept of the modern state as a territory over which the state held a monopoly of violence: the development of maps reshaped state lands into territory, a homogenous and uniform space with boundaries (1999: 385). In short, maps are not just strategic but also cultural constructions. Maps not only reflect cultural practices of their producers -- revealed by analyzing what is included and excluded, for example, whether or not places important to dominant but not subordinate social groups are named, how images are presented in relation to one another, and so forth, a theme to which I return in Chapter 7. And their production may also have enduring cultural consequences.
Maps are not always produced in the service of the powerful; sometimes (as here) they are produced by subordinate social actors or by civil society organizations contesting dominant values (as in many environmental maps, Black 1997). Among the Beaver tribe of northeastern British Columbia, for example, some elders draw “dream maps” that indicate not only hunting trails and territories but routes to heaven (Brody 1982). When mapping is a consistent cultural practice, anthropologists sometimes try to account for that fact. Robert Rundstrom (1990) argued that the Inuit of northwestern Canada and Alaska produce accurate and detailed maps, not because they need them for hunting more than other societies that do not produce them, but because mimicry is a prime cultural value that runs throughout their culture. Mapmaking by indigenous or peasant actors often occurs in the course of conflict with state authorities over land or other resources, as in the case of conflict over reed beds in Lake Titicaca (Orlove 1991 and 1993) or over the consequences of the Alaska Highway natural gas pipeline for the traditional hunting territories of the Beaver (Brody 1982).

In this case, the willingness of insurgent campesinos to draw the maps reflected their assertion of contested property rights at the end of the civil war. Drawing such maps involved considerable sacrifice of work time (with no recompense except in some cases, lunch of beans and tortillas) on the part of individuals and foregone opportunities on the part of the campesino organizations: each pair of maps took two full days to draw, given the unfamiliarity of the task. Given this time commitment, cooperative members participated with remarkable enthusiasm; only one of twelve pairs of maps was not completed. Perhaps the process evoked what Dolores Hayden (1995: 9) calls “the power of place,” the power of ordinary landscapes (she was interested in urban landscapes) to “nurture citizens’ public memory.” Moreover, for all participants the process required a willingness to engage in an unfamiliar task of conceptualizing familiar terrain in entirely new terms. For the many semi-literate and illiterate participants, the map-making workshops were also the scene of difficult -- and public -- struggles with unfamiliar tools: one elderly mapmaker, the president of a cooperative in northeastern Usulután unaccustomed to holding a pencil, traced an elaborate tapestry of small and medium holdings with his forefinger; his grandson carefully drew a line in its wake. While I promised that the maps would be returned to the communities, which may have provided some incentive, my impression was that the mapmakers were motivated primarily by their commitment to recounting their history.
Mapmaking was thus not an existing cultural practice but an artifact of my research. A few of the mapmakers were familiar with maps, particularly those who worked closely with local FMLN commanders whom I observed to use fine-scale topographic maps (usually much creased and held together by layers of tape). Most certainly appeared to be natural cartographers; indeed one developed an innovative projection in his maps, see Chapter 7). But mapmaking was not something any of them had previously attempted -- even holding a pen was an unfamiliar task for some.

Nonetheless, the maps reveal much about the history of the case-study areas, particularly the patterns of land occupation and use (Chapter 3), and also the perceptions and values of their makers (Chapter 7). Honoring an often-regretted but ethnographically-correct pledge, I returned the maps to the mapmakers out of respect for their insight, gratitude for their taking the time, and hope that they might prove useful. What are reproduced in black and white here are photographs of the original maps (tacks pinning the maps to the wall are visible on some maps) that were then digitally restored to a quality close to the original maps. Color versions may be seen at the website [www.cup.org..., to be added later].

This willingness to collaborate in interviews and workshops reflected in part the isolation of many of these communities during the war. In interviews with members of organizations in San Salvador that frequently hosted international visitors, there was often a distinctly professional tenor to testimonials offered, as if a script were being played once again. In contrast, Usulután had been little visited by journalists and to my knowledge sustained research concerning the history of the war had not been carried out there. Few of the landlords interviewed had ever been approached for their opinions. Tenancingo, the site of a unique reconstruction project supported by European donors, had been visited by journalists, development specialists, and diplomats in the first few years of the project, but few lingered long enough to interview residents other than a few members of the community council. While my initial interviews with community leaders had the feel of an oft-told story, in subsequent interviews this initial script was abandoned and more complicated stories told (for example, patterns of violence were more convoluted in later narratives).

**Conclusion**
Clearly the interviews and maps that this book is based on must be interpreted carefully, with the possible sources of discrepancy in mind. This is particularly true for interviews concerning the history of the contested areas of Usulután, which is largely constructed from interviews carried out just before and at the end of the war. While some of the salient events had occurred quite recently, others dated back to before the war or its early years. That the intervening years and experiences reshaped perceptions of earlier events is true of Tenancingo as well: although interviews began there in 1987, the earlier history of the war relied on the memory of interviewees (but to a significantly lesser extent, given the greater availability of human rights records for events there). And interviews were inevitably affected by the political context in which the interview occurred. Some interviews that I conducted in the first few months of 1992, for example, clearly reflected the spirit of euphoria and victory prevalent throughout the case-study areas in the first weeks of the cease-fire. Later interviews with the same informants reflected a more sober and considered assessment of the achievements of the insurgency.

A possibly mitigating factor is that many interviewees claimed to have never told the story of their community before, which would suggest that explicitly social processes of memory formation had not been particularly strong in the case-study areas. On the other hand, because many interviews were with groups of campesinos the interview itself was an instance of the process of the social construction of memory and political identity. The map-making workshops were explicit exercises in social memory as participants recalled events of the civil war and discussed and celebrated its legacy as they drew. Indeed the maps, like all maps “act as a form of memory” (Black 1997: 93).

To the extent possible, the oral testimonies gathered were compared to one another and discrepancies explored in subsequent interviews. Because interviews with key respondents in both Tenancingo and Usulután were repeated over several years, it was possible to construct histories of both areas that were less shaped by immediate political processes than histories relying on interviews gathered during a single period would have been, and to later fill in some of what had initially been silences.

I also draw on other sources, including interviews with landlords of properties in the contested areas (11 of them, of which 7 were landlords of large
properties in the case-study areas), pastoral agents of local parishes, FMLN commanders (16 of them, including 12 midlevel ERP commanders in Usulután, 5 of whom I interviewed on several occasions), Salvadoran military officers (3 colones responsible for government forces in the case-study areas and 2 generals), staff of several non governmental organizations, officials of the Salvadoran government and of the U.S. Agency for International Development, and with staff of the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador. Corroboration was also sought in documents produced by human rights organizations (primarily Americas Watch and data compiled by El Rescate, a U.S. solidarity and human rights organization, from Salvadoran human rights organizations, particularly the human rights office of the Archdiocese of San Salvador, and press reports), Salvadoran and foreign non-governmental organizations including the publications of the Universidad Centroamericána José Simeón Cañas, the national press, the United Nations, the Salvadoran government, and the U.S. Agency for International Development. I also analyze a rural household survey carried out at the end of war, the results of postwar elections, and data bases documenting evolving agrarian property rights during and after the war. Finally, I illustrate the central argument of the book with a formal model (Appendix I).

So whether the reasons for participating in collective action expressed by many insurgent campesinos in interviews (and inferred from interviews by me) comprised an essential part of their reasons for participation at the time of the actions cannot be directly inferred given the intervening processes of social construction of memory. Yet memories do not evolve randomly: the deviation of memory from what was in fact the case illuminates values and beliefs. The retrospective nature of some interviews and the coloring of accounts of the past by the perceptions of the present are not just inevitable complications of my reliance on interviews, but also provide direct evidence of one legacy of the civil war, the reshaping of political culture in the contested areas of El Salvador. According to Luisa Passerini (1980: 10), “...oral sources are to be considered, not as factual narratives, but as forms of culture and testimonies of the changes of these forms over time.” I return in the final chapter to these issues of interpretation and show that the reasons for insurgent collective action evident in retrospective interviews reflected emotional and moral reasons for rebellion earlier in the war.
Notes to Chapter 2

1. This characterization of the literature on peasant rebellion as relying on elite sources loses much of its force if such rebellions are seen as the outgrowth of social movements, many of which have been extensively studied using participant accounts.

2. While the report of the Truth Commission contains much information on certain high-profile human rights cases and lists thousands more in the annexes to the report, the coverage of Usulután is strikingly poor, apparently because the ERP did little to encourage residents to report violations to the Commission.

3. See the reviews by Margaret M. Bradley 1994 and Charlotte van Oyen Witvliet 1997. My attention was first brought to this literature by an analysis of narratives told by Lithuanians of the violence there during and after World War II by Roger Petersen (N.D.).

4. A distinction should be made between memories of past political attitudes and of intense political events. While memories of political attitudes appear to be particularly malleable, those of former political protests are more reliable (Markus 1986: 40-41).


6. Leigh Binford (2002) argues, for example, that some of the disillusionment expressed by some former FMLN guerrillas may reflect such disappointment. Nora Kriger’s finding (1992) that Zimbabwean peasants were coerced into supporting the liberation forces may reflect such disillusionment (her interviews were conducted several years after the Lancaster agreement).

7. Reputable human rights sources disagree about the number killed during the attack and response. Americas Watch (1986: 79) claimed in 1986 that approximately 100 had been killed but later revised that number to 75 killed (1991: 53). In both documents, Americas Watch states that 35 civilians were killed when a plane dropped a bomb on the group retreating with the Green Cross.
Tutela Legal, the human rights organization of the Archdiocese of San Salvador, estimated the number of dead at 175 (cited in Pearce 1986: 201).

8 “Narración sobre los sucesos que pasaron en Tenancingo” (Narration of events that occurred in Tenancingo), an eyewitness testimony signed “un hijo de Tenancingo”, undated but apparently written soon after the bombing, which was given to me in 1987 by a Tenancingo resident.

9 According to a newspaper report published in the Nicaraguan newspaper *Barricada* on September 30, 1983.

10 Research was carried out under protocols approved by the human subjects research review committees of the University of California at Berkeley, Stanford University, and New York University.

11 I usually succeeded in persuading the person who introduced me to leave after doing so. I was the only outsider present at all subsequent interviews. While this entailed my traveling alone through the case-study areas, that was preferable to the uncertainty that the presence of another outsider would introduce into the interview setting. (I became quite expert at repairing flat fires, a recurrent problem due to the horrible state of the roads after a decade of war, after repairing fifteen of them. I was occasionally caught out in the countryside after dark and was fortunate in always reaching safe haven.) **cut?**

12 See Adler 1992 and Sluka 1995 for discussion of vetting processes in the contexts of ethnographic research with trade unionists in South Africa and nationalists in Northern Ireland, respectively.

13 Observing meetings of insurgent organizations took up much more of my time in the case-study areas than the reader would infer from their relative absence from these pages. They were, however, very important for my credibility with insurgent interviewees and for my sense of relations between leaders and members.

14 Some of those interviewed might have been initially motivated by some hope that collaboration with the research might bring some material benefit. I did my best to discount such hopes in the informed-consent procedure that I went through, though of course I cannot know that I succeeded. In any case, no such benefits materialized; those I approached for a subsequent interview nonetheless
appeared ready to participate again.

15 I also attempted to compare the maps to aerial photographs taken before the war by the Ministry of Agriculture. Approximately two dozen of the properties photographed fall in the Usulután case-study areas, of which eight were claimed by cooperatives at the end of the war. Of these eight, two were drawn for me by cooperative members. Unfortunately, due to the poor resolution of the original ministry photographs (or perhaps the quality of copying of those photographs since) only the general shapes of properties were more or less recognizable and detailed comparisons with the mapmakers maps were not possible. The campesino-drawn maps were roughly similar to the aerial photographs for the two areas for which the latter existed.

16 While a form of mapmaking appears to have been practiced in pre-Columbian times in Mesoamerica (Harley 1992: 524-6), I am unaware of any evidence that rural communities retained the practice in the late twentieth century in what is now El Salvador.

17 For example, the history of Tenancingo after 1986 is documented by a wider range of sources thanks to the resettlement project and the resulting attention of non-governmental and international agencies to the district.