benefit of having participated in addressing issues that trouble them. (San Salvador, 1987)

He concluded, “The experience should not be idealized, but we all learned that even given all the loss, troubles, and fears; it is possible to coexist.”

In contrast, with only very minimal funding (until about mid-1990) and very little international presence, insurgents founded cooperatives and built overarching organizations in the contested areas of Usulután. The organizations proved capable of sustained collective action in defense of the interests of its members. The emergence of CONFRAS and the insurgent cooperatives is puzzling, as neither state support nor outside funding accounts for the pattern observed in the case-study areas: the failure of the agrarian reform to quell rural insurgency even among members of reform cooperatives, the demise of the Community Council in Tenancingo, and the emergence of dozens of insurgent cooperatives in Usulután, where access to land was not contingent on participation until the very end of the war.

Wood, Elisabeth Jean. 2003
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Cambridge : Cambridge UP.

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What our history has been! We have come to know what a movement is, we have won a cease-fire. We, as a cooperative, now we know what it is to be free.
Land Defense Committee, Las Marias, 1992

Why did campesinos in Tenancingo and Usulután support the FMLN and join insurgent organizations, despite the high costs of doing so? The Salvadoran insurgency was about land. Perhaps access to land, a key material interest of campesinos, accounts for why so many campesinos participated in the insurgency, thereby resolving the puzzle of collective action posed in the opening pages of this book. However, at the time the insurgent cooperatives were formed, residents of the case-study areas had access to land whether or not they participated, as long as they refrained from informing on insurgent activities and made occasional material contributions (which they also had to make to passing government forces). Thus during the middle and later years of the civil war, it was possible for those who did not support the rebels to reside in the case-study areas as “free riders” on the benefits of the insurgency. The benefits included improved working conditions in some areas and unprecedented access to land and freedom from the often capricious authority of landlords and security forces in others. But none of these benefits required participating in the insurgency beyond the coerced minimum contribution. In short, the material benefits of the insurgency took the form of a public good that was available to all residents. Moreover, many members of agrarian reform cooperatives, who had gained access to land through government-sponsored reform, also supported the insurgents.
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Perhaps campesinos supported the insurgent cooperatives in order to secure legal claim to land in the long run, perhaps believing that participation would lead to the legalization of claims to occupied land. The pattern of participation certainly supports this reasoning in one respect: after peace negotiations signaled the likely end to the war and the possibility of land transfer to FMLN supporters occupying land, participation in land occupations greatly increased. Approximately half of those who took over land did so only toward the end of the war. A survey carried out in 1993 found that the average length of land occupation, as reported by those occupying properties, was three and a half years (Seligson, Thiesenhusen, Childress, and Vidales 1993: 2–16). Even then the risks were significant: violent evictions and attempted evictions of occupied properties were commonplace in late 1991 and in 1992, and were usually accompanied by severe injuries.

On the other hand, half of those occupying land did so before peace negotiations began in 1990 and well before April 1991, when the first serious fruits of the peace negotiations were evident. For access to land in the long run to have been the principal motivation for founding or joining an insurgent cooperative, a potential participant would have to have believed (1) that the founding of the cooperative was necessary for long-run access to land, (2) that his participation was necessary to its success, and (3) that the judicious anticipation – access to land in the long run – outweighed the anticipated costs, including possible retaliation by local landowners or state authorities as well as the everyday costs of attending meetings. Even militant campesinos who otherwise supported the FMLN judged the risks too high until 1986 and 1987. Yet from 1987 to approximately 1990, dozens of cooperatives were founded, although the risks were still high (though declining), the selective benefits very few (a bit of credit to a few members of a few cooperatives), and the prospects for the legalization of land claims vanishingly small. It is improbable that potential participants would judge these negligible material benefits worth the risks. Indeed, more than half of the residents of the case-study areas did not join insurgent cooperatives even in 1991 and 1992.

So the puzzle of revolutionary collective action remains. I first explore whether we can garner insight into why some campesinos rebelled by systematically examining which type of campesinos (tenant, landless laborer, and so on) participated. Because some insight to the puzzle may be gleaned from the accounts that participants themselves provide, I then analyze the accounts given by campesinos who joined the insurgency and those by campesinos who did not. I also analyze the maps drawn by insurgent campesinos. Drawing

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on this ethnographic evidence as well as a postwar survey of political attitudes, I conclude that a new insurgent political culture emerged in the case-study areas during the civil war.

Agrarian Class and Mobilization before the Civil War

Inadequate access to land was a key grievance before the civil war, and many insurgent campesinos dreamed of owning their own land. Yet the findings reported here suggest that such aspirations per se did not motivate insurgency, as access to land was not a likely outcome contingent on participation. If it had been, we should find that landless and land-poor campesinos participated in political mobilization at a significantly higher rate than other poor rural residents.

Ideally, we would test the importance of agrarian class position as a contributor to political participation with data from a representative sample of rural people indicating their levels of political participation and affiliation at various points during the conflict. But even in peacetime, surveys of the sophistication are rare, and one casualty of war is the continuity of the social order that would make the gathering of such data feasible. In the Salvadoran case, the census of 1981 was canceled and no representative surveys were conducted in the contested areas during the war. And war-driven migration from the case-study areas makes impossible a precise quantitative ex post facto reconstruction of the wartime “paths” of a representative prewar population.

However, a very detailed study just prior to the war provides a wealth of valuable information. Based on observations of households in seven cantones of central El Salvador from 1974 to 1977, anthropologist Carlos Rafael Cabarrús (1983) analyzed patterns of political affiliation. He classified households into better off (but still poor) middle peasants, land-poor peasants ("proletarian peasants") who earned a substantial part of their income in wages, and landless day laborers. He recorded the political affiliation of each household at the time, whether with the paramilitary ORDEN, the opposition group Federación Cristiana de Campesinos Salvadoreños (Christian Federation of Salvadoran Campesinos, or FECCAS), or two other smaller opposition groups.1 Campesino political affiliations as a percent

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1 In addition to FECCAS, there were two small opposition groups, present only in one or two cantones. One was affiliated with the Communist Party; the other was not affiliated with any insurgent faction (Cabarrús 1983: 160–2).
of each class are shown in Figure 7.1. In all classes, campesinos were more likely to join some opposition group other than ORDEN. However, neither access to land nor its absence appears to explain propensity to mobilize. The order of increasing access to land (landless, land-poor, and middle peasant) is not the order of increasing participation in opposition groups (landless, middle peasant, and land-poor). Nor does the order of decreasing access to land match the order of increasing participation. Although the landless were less likely than the middle campesinos or the land-poor to be affiliated with any group, they affiliated equally with both FECCAS and ORDEN (and were more likely to affiliate with some opposition group than with ORDEN, 25 vs. 20 percent).² And while the better off middle campesinos

² "Apolitical" households, those with no affiliation, comprised 47 percent of the middle peasant households, 39 percent of land-poor households, and 54 percent of landless households (calculated from Cabarrús 1983: 173).

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were more likely to support ORDEN than FECCAS, when the other opposition groups are included, they were more likely to join the opposition than ORDEN. Proletarian campesinos were more likely to join FECCAS than ORDEN (31 vs. 25 percent) and were still more likely to join some opposition group than ORDEN (37 vs. 25 percent).

Overall, however, the differences in political affiliation between groups are rather small.³ Within the group I have called campesinos, class position appears to provide little insight in differentiating political affiliation before the war (see Fig. 7.2). In El Paraíso, 52 percent of the households joined ORDEN and only 19 percent joined opposition organizations. In

³ Ideally, one should test for the statistical significance of the relationships between the different categories and political affiliation. However, the individual-level data do not appear in Cabarrús's book. Jeffrey Paige interprets this data differently, emphasizing the study's finding that the land-poor were more likely to participate in opposition groups than either middle peasants or the landless (1996: 134–5). Even if the finding were statistically significant, the effect is still quite small.
La Mirandilla, in sharp contrast, 89 percent of the households joined opposition organizations; none joined ORDEN. Yet these two cantones were the most similar of all the cantones, with roughly a third of households falling in each social category. La Flor and Matazano, the next most similar pair with roughly half of the households land-poor, exhibit a similar contrast.

Cabarrús drew maps of each cantón indicating membership of each household in the appropriate extended family. The maps show that political affiliations were often familial: extended families tended to affiliate with either FECCAS or ORDEN. However, many families were sharply divided. In El Jicarón, five of the households of the Meléndez family were affiliated with FECCAS, while four aligned with ORDEN; all three of the multi-household families there had households affiliated with both (ibid.: 207). In El Tronador, the Anzora family was deeply divided, as shown in Figure 7.3.4 In some of the maps, affiliation sometimes fell along neighborhood lines (as in the map drawn for me by members of the Cooperativa San Pedro Los Arenales, Fig. 2.5), but not in all, as this map shows.

Overall, these data indicate an extraordinarily high level of political involvement in these communities in the mid-1970s. Cabarrús’s study also suggests that – setting aside elite households – the political affiliations of rural households before the war were related at best only weakly to their economic position. Locality appears to be at least as strong a predictor of affiliation as economic differences. To my knowledge, there has not been a study of the civil war in these cantones, so we do not know how political affiliations there subsequently evolved. However, the weak relationship between political affiliation and economic differences among campesinos is echoed in the findings of a survey of political attitudes in the immediate postwar period (reported in detail below), which similarly found remarkably few differences between the political opinions of renters and owners of small parcels of land.

These findings are also consistent with my findings for the case-study areas based on less adequate data gathered during and after the war. Sustained insurgent participation took place in areas that varied greatly in their patterns of residence, labor relations, and class structures. The small-holding cantones of northern Tenancingo, the big commercial estates of the coastal plain of Usulután, and the medium coffee estates of the Las Marias...
of prewar class positions was present among the campesinos interviewed who did not participate in the insurgency.

These observations appear to contrast with other scholarly interpretations of insurgent participation in El Salvador’s civil war. Some emphasize that the FMLN strongholds of Chalatenango and northern Morazán were located in areas where smallholding was predominant and peasant communities were less disrupted by the expansion of export agriculture than elsewhere. But other reasons may also account for the FMLN’s strength there. The terrain was more suitable for guerrilla warfare (though still far from ideal); there was little of economic value and thus government forces focused defense on other areas; and their remoteness led to the concentration of guerrilla forces there after the failure of the FMLN’s offensive in 1981 (Goodwin 1994a: 744). And before the war, agrarian class structure was more complex than this image of smallholding communities conveys. While many campesino households had access to some land, for most the size of the parcel was too small to produce the family’s livelihood. As a result, these areas were also the homes of migrant laborers who left to harvest export crops every year (Harnecker 1993; Binford 1997: 57).

Certainly, grievances concerning the distribution of resources, particularly of land, played a role in the Salvadoran insurgency, as did emergent insurgent networks, political opportunity, and revolutionary leadership. But as we saw in the opening chapter, if each was necessary to the emergence and continuation of the insurgency, neither alone sufficed to explain both. What accounts for the willingness of poor campesinos to mobilize despite the punishment inflicted by security forces and landlords? What accounts for the deepening of insurgency when the risk of rebellion was at its highest? What accounts for the widening of insurgency in the form of cooperative formation and land occupation when there were no apparent benefits to doing so? The accounts of campesinos themselves as to why they supported the insurgency—or did not—may help illuminate these questions. I first analyze the accounts of insurgent campesinos before turning to those of nonparticipants.

**Campesinos’ Accounts of Insurgency**

Aspiration for land and resentment at its unjust distribution were frequent themes in interviews with insurgent campesinos. Participants interviewed in Usulután and Tenancingo recalled with evident emotion—ranging from sadness to indignation to rage—the miserable poverty (la miseria) that circumscribed their lives and the lives of their families. Those interviewed perceived two causes of their poverty: low wages and inadequate access to land. The cooperative leader who made the statement with which the chapter begins continued, “From such poverty emerged this mobilization: the great need for land in order to have, year by year, our daily bread.” When asked to describe local conditions before the war, interviewees typically responded with detailed statements describing wages and working conditions as well as their resentment toward those conditions. One FENACOA activist stated:

How did I become a militant of the popular movement? It was born out of social resentment, that’s how to understand it. I am an unskilled farm worker, my father never gave me anything. I worked for the rich, it was heavy labor. I felt rage, resentment. It was a hard life, sometimes I would cry with resentment when I couldn’t finish the assigned task. (Interview, Tierra Blanca, 1992)

Older campesinos occasionally listed the wages paid their entire working lives from when they began working as children to the eve of the civil war. What was striking was how short a recitation it was: nominal wages rarely increased.

Many of those interviewed, before describing the repression, violence, and fear of the early years of the war, reiterated their belief that the war arose from a situation of injustice. A member of an insurgent cooperative stated: “Here, we lived in great poverty, with miserable wages. We had to live in conditions of such scarcity, we had no access to land. It was from that lack that the activities of the war developed, the living of such injustices” (Cooperativa Loma Alegre, 1992). Some characterized their situation before the war as one of slavery, a frequently recurring theme: “We legalized the cooperative as a way toward a better future for our children, that they have the possibility of no longer living in slavery.” As recalled by those interviewed, the difficulties of prewar social conditions included ongoing social deprecation as well as poverty:

Before the war, we were despised by the rich. We were seen as animals, working all day and still without even enough to put the kids in school. This is the origin of the war: There was no alternative. The only alternative was the madness of desperation. (Cooperative Los Ensayos, March 1992)

Many expressed particular resentment toward their inability to cultivate corn, a resentment that symbolized their lack of autonomy, their dependence on sporadic wage labor, and their subordination.
Being exposed to disrespectful treatment and constant humiliation still rankled older campesinos despite the years that had passed since most had worked consistently as laborers on commercial farms. Particularly resented was the arbitrariness with which authority was exercised before the war, as stated by an insurgent cooperative leader:

We colonos had to behave with such obedience – we couldn’t even disagree with what the authorities said. The only refuge when they kicked you out was to go live alongside the national roads. The human person was just one more farming implement. (Cooperativa El Carrizal, 1992)

Another emphasized the coercion that informed rural labor relations: “We didn’t even know about rights, it was a matter of the rifle enforcing their orders – that was how it was when it began” (Cooperativa Trece de Junio, 1992). Some of those interviewed identified the close local collaboration between landlords and state authorities as central to the problems that led to the war, as in this graphic interview:

Before 1980, we didn’t know anything about anything, it was prohibited. We weren’t allowed to meet, and anyone who spoke out suffered great harm, sometimes death or torture and would be forced to write out the names of others using his own blood. They wanted to denil the social forces. The authorities were at the disposition of the rich – they had all the guarantees as the National Guard acted as their personal bodyguard. (Cooperativa Trece de Junio, 1992)

One campesino, when asked what it had been like before the war and how it was different now, performed an elaborate pantomime of exaggerated deference to the landlord (hands together, head humbly bent, chest and head bowing without eye contact), a sharp contrast to his subsequent pantomime of the wartime attitude (shoulders back, head proudly up, fist beating the air). This could of course be mere bravado, but the successful defeat of landlord efforts to repossess several properties in his area testifies instead to a significant transformation of local political capacity and attitudes toward erstwhile patrons.

As repression intensified, participants faced difficult choices. One campesina, a member of a cooperative near San Francisco Javier, told me:

I had never seen a guerrilla when a man visited me. He only had a pistol; he was a member of ERP. He asked if I wanted to join. I had my husband, son, daughter. I said no; I was fearful and very young. I did not know what it was for. Then three came, asking for food. They clarified the issue: They were forming a group and wanted me to act as a messenger. I was tempted, but scared, and said no. Then seven people came, I felt more confident, I served coffee. But someone fingered

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[denounced] me to the authorities. I was surrounded by soldiers and they accused me. They told me they were going to take me, that they considered me a guerrilla. (San Francisco Javier, 1992)

The campesina declined to elaborate on what followed; some campesinas in similar circumstances were raped or otherwise brutalized.

The violent, uncompromising opposition to a more just distribution of land on the part of landlords and security forces recurred in interviews as a justification for insurgent violence. In speaking of repression, campesinos often drew on Christian imagery, making parallels between their suffering and that of Jesus Christ, as in this quote from an insurgent cooperativist evoking the image of the Crucifixion:

Quite a few people didn’t want to do the cooperative, they were still terrified – they had experienced it [violence, the war] in their own body. I used to say, look, this struggle and the effort of the FMLN, have cost blood. For us, this bloody body is always present. (Cooperativa Loma Alegre, 1992)

Campesinos drew as well on traditional agrarian practices and symbols: “I was born here, my umbilical cord is buried here. Blood has run, many have died, but the harvest is at hand” (Cooperativa La Maroma, 1992). The burying of a umbilical cord at a particular spot is a powerful ritual in rural culture throughout Mexico and Central America; the “harvest is at hand” is a common biblical allusion to a parable of Jesus.

As these quotes suggest, blood was a recurrent image in the interviews, symbolizing both violence and commitment to land claimed (and implicitly, the insurgency), as in this statement with which a leader of the Cooperativa Nancuchiname began his story: “So many family members have fallen, leaving their blood in the land.” The reiteration of images of violence may reflect not only trauma suffered but also the speakers’ ongoing reinterpretation of that trauma as martyrdom. According to Anna Peterson, religious Salvadorans who were active participants in the insurgency developed narratives of violence that interpret suffering while working for the reign of God as redemptive sacrifice rather than arbitrary tragedy (1997: 85–6).

Thus insurgent campesinos drew on cultural strands rooted in traditional rural culture and new liberationist religion in reconstructing and interpreting their memories of violence. Many articulated their continuing choice to support the insurgency as one so clear on moral grounds that they did not entertain alternatives. Rather, they saw their participation in each stage as a continuation of their insurgent identity, “naturally” arising out of earlier choices and experiences, as we saw in the previous chapter.
The desire for revenge was occasionally expressed in interviews. A typical expression came from an older member of an insurgent cooperative, referring to young men of the community who were combatants with the FMLN. He cited repression as a cause of their joining but traced their motives to vengeance: “When you keep hearing battles all around, in place of being killed yourself, you pick up arms instead. That is why it [the insurgency] grew: to carry out vengeance for the death of a brother” (Cooperativa Trece de Junio, 1992). Most remarkable, however -- given the clear motivation for vengeance provided by campesino experience in El Salvador -- was just how rarely such sentiments were expressed in interviews. This absence may be due to the fact that the FMLN discouraged personal vengeance as a motive, and instead attempted to mold grievances (including desires for vengeance) into more general motivations that could sustain an insurgent army for years to come (Gibb 2000: 169). The key point here is that the dominant tone with which incidents of severe government repression were recounted was one of moral indignation subsumed into a general belief in the justice of the struggle.

In contrast to the descriptions of poverty and humiliation endured before the war, campesino leaders’ descriptions of their wartime activities were characterized by reiterated assertions of pride and achievement: “There were so many deaths of cooperative promoters – half a battalion of dead for the simple crime of lending help to the cooperatives. But I would say that this ‘crime’ has been, simply, my accomplishment” (Cooperativa Candelaria un Nuevo Amanecer, 1992). Older people were particularly apt to stress the achievements of the insurgency, often with great emotion contrasting current conditions with those before the war. One leader was uncharacteristically demonstrative when asked what the insurgency had wrought:

Now we have more joyful lives. I feel happy to be able to meet like this with other compañeros. We have won so much! I never thought to be able to meet like this – the changes that have been made! Before we worked for such low wages and ate only hard tortillas. Now we ourselves set our hours. I tell you that I have suffered, it has been hard, and I am happy.

This statement stresses both the autonomy made possible by access to land but also pride in the achievements of the insurgency itself. Similarly, one very old man who occasionally attended meetings of the Land Defense Committee in Las Marias stated very firmly, “[T]he peace agreement was not granted voluntarily but only resulted from the fight of us, the campesinos.”

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That many campesinos compare their lives at the close of the war favorably with their memories of past conditions is particularly remarkable given the decline in rural wages during the course of the war. Agricultural wages declined by 65 percent between 1980 and 1992, according to one analysis. Access to land was all the more highly valued in this context of declining income from other sources.

Many insurgent campesinos reported with pride the tenaciousness that had enabled them to remain on their land, whether acquired legally or by occupation, despite frequent military conflict in the area:

Here, there is perhaps no one who has not collaborated. The truth is that it has been a deeply suffered war. We have suffered hunger, sometimes eating only bombs [artillery shells, mortars]. It is God who has made us still be here. Here, the bombs have rained like water. (Comunidad La Peña, 1992)

For some, persisting and enduring was itself an achievement, as for this insurgent cooperativist:

There was no opportunity to work your own land, only to work as a laborer. In 1979, the conflict began, and it began with a wave of violence. We suffered in all aspects, it became very difficult. They killed a brother of mine. But here we are, living here still. (Cooperativa San Judas Escoberes, 1992, as emphasized by speaker)

An elderly man, one of the most dedicated and outspoken members of the Land Defense Committee of Las Marias, reflected, “To live through this war was something very hard, but also a source of great pride: to have stood up to it all. We have achieved quite a lot even though we lost family members.” One of the most experienced campesino leaders on the Jiquilisco coast reflected ironically, “What an admirable country, admirable! Here we are in war, but working!”

Essential to these assertions of pride is an undercurrent of political and social equality, in sharp contrast to their bitter memories of landlords’ expressed contempt. This emphatic leveling of social status marks a conscious shift in perceived relations, and was sometimes very explicit, as stated by this cooperative member:

My opinion is this: God the Father made the land for everyone. He didn’t make the land for the rich – we are all sons of Mother Earth. We are in this struggle so that the land would belong to those who work it. The rich man is also the son of Mother

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5 Paus (1996: table 12.4). The table reports average daily real minimum wages, but agricultural workers rarely made more than the minimum wage.
Earth, and he has the right to land – but only to the same size of parcel, we don’t want any haciendas. (Member, Comunidad El Palmo, 1992)

This leveling of status draws on both Christian and indigenous cosmologies to justify the struggle for land. Similarly, the following simple affirmation by a cooperative leader resounds with pride and the assertion of equality: “We are capable of managing these properties” (Cooperativa San Judas Escobar, 1992).

This assertion of equality was closely associated with both access to land and pride in the achievements of activists and their organizations. Militants consistently claimed membership of the changes that they identified as their work, as did this leader of one of the earliest insurgent cooperatives: “I woke up during the process of the war and I collaborated in the midst of the war. We have already seen a new dawn – we created it despite the great pressure brought to bear by the army” (Cooperativa La Conciencia, 1992). In many interviews, the litany of achievements on the part of the insurgency was intermingled with a recitation of injustices of prewar social relations to retrospectively justify insurgent participation in the war itself. The language is frequently one of freedom and political equality, and, less frequently, also of rights, set against the context of repression and difficulty: “We work the land to be able to survive. The right to live is one we all share” (Cooperative San Judas Escobares, 1992).

Some leaders and activists made more nuanced assessments of the achievements of the war, while similarly emphasizing the justice of its aims and accomplishments to date, as in the opening quote of this book. A similarly measured reflection on the achievements of the war came from a member of an insurgent cooperative in the Las Marias area:

We passed these years with great suffering, it was difficult for us. In eleven years of war, we were never tranquil. But now, we feel a bit free, and not oppressed. Before we didn’t have a single freedom; now we have begun to taste freedom. (Cooperative San Pedro Arenales, 1992)

The benefits realized during the war were sometimes explicitly weighed against the costs, as done by this female cooperativist: “The war has given us land. After this war, well, those of us who haven’t died, we’re living on a bigger piece” (Cooperativa Loma Alegre, 1992). In an interview with several women residents of La Noria (1992), one campesina commented with mingled pride and outrage: “We now work in a cooperative, we grow our food, and the kids are studying in school. We’re no longer dominated

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by the landlord. What a shame that so many had to die to achieve these changes!”

Others emphasized the limits to the insurgency’s achievements. One young COMUS organizer, who often struck me as more a sociologist than a militant activist, stated, “We are both the beneficiaries and the victims of the war: a bit of fertilizer and a bit of suffering,” echoing ironically the “beneficiary” language of agrarian reform agencies. He continued,

Even after eleven years of war, some still do not have land. In truth, what was fought for – that everyone have land and credit – was not won. A lot is still lacking – this man here [gesturing] has no place to live! What has been achieved is still too little. The armed force [of the FMLN] has done its part, now we the campesinos have to act.

This last theme of goals still unmet and therefore the need for campesinos to continue to organize was reiterated by many cooperative leaders. One experienced Jiquilisco organizer put it: “It’s not everything, we have to keep fighting, although now without arms. We know from where we have come, and where we want to go” (Leader, Cooperativa La Maroma, January 1992).

That campesinos considered their organizations capable of continuing the struggle for land is a measure of their pride in their achievements to date.

Land was a recurring theme in the interviews. Access to land was fundamental to the insurgent vision of a more just world, and greater access to land was judged an achievement of the insurgency. Land and its closely associated values of family and self-sufficiency were central strands of the insurgent political culture. But it does not follow that individual participation in collective action was directly motivated by the desire for land per se, given ongoing de facto access to abandoned land and the ongoing risks of joining cooperatives.

As these excerpts from my interviews indicate, memories of fear and violence, evident in the reiterated images of blood and bodies as well as in explicit statements, remained troubling to many, even years later in the relative security of the cease-fire. Violence and terror leave behind a legacy of silence, fear, and uncertainty that can be deeply corrosive of self-confidence, trust, and hope (Green 1995). Yet remarkably, given this level of violence, activists in the case-study areas had continued to organize during the war. According to Juan Corradi’s analysis of repression in Argentina and other Latin American countries, the clue to overcoming the “culture of fear” lies in breaking the sense of inevitability and inertia experienced during periods of extreme repression (Corradi 1992). The achievements of
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campesinos organizations in these contested areas are a direct indication of the campesinos' having overcome the demobilizing effects of the repression that swept through their communities.

Accounts of Nonparticipants and Patterns of Nonparticipation

In contrast, the themes of pride and achievement are nearly absent in interviews with campesinos who did not support the insurgency. Echoes of these themes are confined to the interviews of the few who tenaciously remained on the land in the face of violence. Those interviewed told similar stories of suffering and violence during the war, with the important difference that the FMLN figures more often (though not predominantly) as the purveyors of both. A recurrent theme was the responsibility of both militarizes for the violence, and a consequent rejection of political involvement in favor of political neutrality.

It is difficult to analyze patterns of nonparticipation in insurgent activity across the case-study areas during the war for two reasons: contemporary sources on local patterns are extremely scarce, and many residents (particularly, nonparticipants) had left the areas. Nonetheless, some patterns of nonparticipation in the case-study areas emerged in interviews, particularly those carried out in Tenancingo. To supplement these sources and because interviewing nonparticipants was difficult in some of the Usulutan case-study areas, I also traveled to places where noninsurgent campesinos were likely to be: government repopulation sites in Suchitoto in the outskirts of the Guazapa volcano and reform cooperatives in western El Salvador.

Some individuals and families did not support the insurgents because they were immersed in alternative networks. If close family members living in urban areas could offer shelter, other things being equal, insurgency appeared to be less likely. Some were favored clients of powerful local patrons. Such ties meant access to work, health care, and perhaps schooling for one's family, opportunities unavailable otherwise. Some (including many such clients) were members of paramilitary networks such as ORDIN and were therefore accountable to the local commander of the National Guard. Thus some campesinos did not participate in the initial political mobilization because these valued ties would be jeopardized were they to do so.

Agrarian reform beneficiaries in western El Salvador reported little history or interest in the FMLN (a silence in sharp contrast to that of many members of reform cooperatives in Jiquilisco). Their experience of the war typically centered not on violence but on the reform itself. A member

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of an agrarian reform cooperative in western El Salvador told me: "Before, we worked only for the patron. We had nothing, only a miserable daily wage. But now things are different, now we decide for ourselves" (El Socorro, 1991). The salient networks for these cooperative members were the cooperative and the federation to which it belonged.

Some families were or became members of evangelical sects. Evangelical churches proliferated in the case-study areas (as in all of El Salvador) through the years of the war. With few exceptions, these groups advised members to avoid participation in politics. In the mid-1980s, there were eleven evangelical churches in Tierra Blanca; few activists belonged. According to a perceptive if unschooled local observer (La Peña, 1992), residents of La Peña, a cantón southeast of San Francisco Javier, lived during the war under one of three "rubrics." Sixteen families participated in what he termed "the organized community," meaning that they actively supported the ERP. Thirty families were members of a local evangelical church, whose members "didn't get involved in anything, they're independent of everything." Some of the church members had small holdings; others rented land. Only one old man participated in both the church and the organized community. Finally, there were a few families who owned larger small holdings and were therefore a bit better off than the rest of the residents still in the hamlet ("adineraditos," roughly, "a little bit moneyed") who participated in neither.

Other campesinos did not participate because they did not undergo the formative experiences of those who became insurgent supporters. Perhaps Bible study groups did not form in their neighborhood (as in southern Tenancingo, where the proximity to the militant Suchitoto parish that led to participation in northern Tenancingo was not a factor). Perhaps campesino organizations such as the BPR did not organize in their neighborhoods.

Yet these patterns were not uniform. Some clients of powerful patrons did support the insurgents, as did some smallholders and evangelicals. In Bajo Jocote Dulce, a dozen kilometers to the east of La Peña, an entire evangelical church joined the insurgency after a church leader was killed by the National Guard. As we saw in Chapter 4, families sometimes divided, often along generational lines, despite having undergone many of the same experiences.

6 However, the interviews in western El Salvador were carried out during one-time visits. Local history and patterns of political loyalty might emerge as a great deal more complicated if sustained research were carried out.
A distinct pattern that accounts for some anomalies in these patterns is
the particular history of local violence. Where insurgent forces had moved
brutally against family members or neighbors, relatives and residents were
not likely to support those forces. A resident of the cantón Ichanqueso,
the most successful of the government repopulation projects in Suchitoto,
stated

We suffered deeply before 1980. Everyone fled however they could, taking whatever
they could, fleeing the violence. This particular town suffered a lot, so many deaths.
The muchuchus ["boys," a reference to the guerrillas] were the ones who killed people;
we didn't have a civil defense here. (1987)

Her statement is typical of many residents of the case-study areas who suf-
fered violence at the hands of the FMLN. One Tenancingo woman reported
that the FMLN killed her husband, a member of the civil defense patrol,
during the first take-over of the Villa in June 1983. She stated with clear
bitterness toward the FMLN that he had been forced by the local mil-
itary commander to participate in the patrol (Tenancingo, 1987). Another
woman said with equal bitterness that a cousin and other relatives had been
killed as members of the civil defense patrol, but that they were "volunteers
who never imagined what things would come to" (Tenancingo, 1988). She
went on to state explicitly (if not very credibly), "If the guerrillas had not
killed people, perhaps all of us would have gone over to them." Yet this pat-
tern had its exceptions. A sixteen-year-old member of the Tenancingo civil
defense patrol was killed in the FMLN's first attack on the Villa in 1983.
During the second attack, his father sheltered members of the National
Guard in his house. Nonetheless, by the late 1980s the father was active in
the Villa on behalf of the FPL (Tenancingo, 1991).

Even where government-allied forces had killed family members or
neighbors, few supported the insurgency if government forces appeared
locally too powerful, as in Santiago de María. Residents reported the abso-
lute cessation of political activity in any form in Santiago by the early 1980s,
whether Christian Democratic Party organizing, mobilization of coffee mill
workers, or Bible study groups. Activists were killed or fled the town. Only
at the very end of the war did opposition organizations reemerge there.

In the context of profound violence and civil war, most individuals pre-
ferred noninvolvement in politics, whatever their wartime experience, ei-
ther because they felt the risks too great or because they found no group
sufficiently appealing. One older farmer from the northern Tenancingo
cantón of El Pepeto stated:

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The story of the war is that of the suffering of places like this. The [insurgent]
movement had no merit. The meetings worried us, we saw that things were getting
worse. In 1979, some fields were burnt, some deaths occurred. The Armed Forces
killed some subversives; some with bullets, some by cutting their heads off. We had
never seen this before. My son was killed in 1980 by the Armed Forces, also my
son-in-law. So we grew all the more worried. (Tenancingo, 1987)

Although two family members had died at the hands of the government
forces, this man did not become an insurgent. A religious and independent
man, he returned to the Villa in 1986. He participated actively in recon-
struction projects and remained avidly neutral. His attitude was typical of
most of those interviewed in the Villa. They had witnessed violence, at-
tributed most of it to government forces, and stated that they supported
neither one side nor the other. A skilled worker in Tenancingo criticized
both parties and the war itself:

There is no organization that directly helps the people; both sides use the people
in their own interest. We're just not interested in the things behind the war. It makes
no sense that the blood keep running because of the ideologies of the great ones. I
am not a partisan of either side; I prefer to denounce both.

One woman, who was sixteen years old at the time of the bombing of
Tenancingo, told her family's history this way:

Before the conflict, my father had a small hat factory employing himself and three
others. My grandparents would not let me walk around with those participating in
marches and demonstrations. There was significant support for the organizations
among the youth; their families all had to leave. The National Guard killed one
woman coming into the area with food, accused her of passing it to the guerrillas.
Some of my relatives were threatened by the army and had to leave. They were
threatened because they were churchgoers. They were people who went to church,
but fearfully, they never spoke of anything happening in church. (Tenancingo, 1988)

She continued,

After the bombing, we left it all behind. My uncle was hurt, his ears, fingers and
part of his nose were blown off in a trench. He had been a member of the army
during the war with Honduras; they had taken him up again. My father came to
bury him a week later. He later suffered a nervous collapse and could not work for
a long time but finally got better. My mother still refuses to return to Tenancingo;
she is too frightened of the army, which earlier had threatened her a lot.

Her experience appears to give her cause for conflicting loyalties. The
FMLN killed her uncle and her father was traumatized and disabled by
this; yet she notes as well the violence and intimidation of the National
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Guard and the army. Another person interviewed, a teenager when the Villa was bombed, succinctly characterized the municipality’s history:

Until 1980, things in the Villa were quiet. The population was still here; the streets were full every market day. In 1981 or 1982, the critical events began. In 1980, those of Rosario Pérez got involved in doctrines against the government. The reaction: massacres were carried out, and Rosario Pérez was abandoned. Some came to the Villa, others went to Coyutepeque, San Miguel, San Salvador. Not a single house was left standing. El Pepeto was also abandoned. Copalchán: another cantón that witnessed a great massacre by both sides. (Tenancingo, 1989)

He then summarized his sense of the war: “One provokes, the other reacts.”

A few nonparticipants endorsed processes of social change on behalf of the poorest Salvadorans and recognized some benefits of the insurgency, but did not agree that violence was justified. A leader of a reform cooperative in Jiquilisco recounted in detail a series of strikes and marches in the area in the 1970s; it was clear that he had been a participant. But he was not an FMLN supporter at the time of the interview: “We have suffered and we continue suffering. We can’t hold either side responsible; it is the system of war that has brought us these loses” (San Marcos Lempa, 1992). Similarly, one of the more educated but not wealthy residents of Tenancingo reflected:

It all began here as “help for the campesinos.” They organized young people, turning them against the rich, leading them from the Christian Federation of Salvadoran Campesinos to the BPR to the FPL. That’s how it began. War never brings anything good. . . . But there are social changes, positive social changes for workers and for campesinos. Now workers can organize, now unions exist. Even here in Tenancingo: Now the rich are outside and one can work for oneself. (Tenancingo, 1991)

From this thoughtful reflection on the changes wrought by the war, one might not guess that the speaker had suffered a great deal during the war. He lost his small hat factory, had been reduced to filling a small plot of corn and beans to support himself, recalled the 1983 bombing with evident trauma, and suffered from alcoholism and a long-standing separation from his wife.

Those who did not support the insurgency were a heterogenous group, yet some patterns are evident. Membership in a valued alternative network or patron-client relationship appears to make insurgent support less likely. The local path of violence also had an effect. Where the FMLN had killed neighbors early on, support was less likely. And proximity to insurgent forces mattered as well. Where there was massive government presence, supportive activities were highly unlikely (whatever residents’ private preferences).

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Insurgent Political Culture

What we hope for is to be equal before the law. We have lost the fear we had before the war, we have lost the fear.

Leader, Cooperativa La Maroma, 1992

The most important themes in interviews with campesinos who supported the insurgency — resentment at the social conditions before the war, aspirations for a more just social and economic order, moral outrage at the repression that followed mobilization, and pride in the achievements of the insurgency — are muted or absent in the interviews with campesinos who did not support the insurgency. This pattern suggests that a new political culture emerged during the civil war among those that supported the insurgents. The testimonies above suggest that their political identities and culture were transformed through the years of the civil war, from a culture in which people frequently submitted to subordination to one in which a new identity as militant activists was openly expressed and supported by opposition organizations (including the FMLN itself).

Supporting evidence for the emergence of this insurgent political culture, particularly its emphasis on pride in the achievements of their collective action, comes from the map-making workshops. It was evident that the insurgent campesinos who participated in the workshops took pleasure and pride in the task, which was seen as an invitation to document the achievements of their cooperatives. The workshops often began amidst much mutual teasing among the campesino participants, particularly at the beginning of the out-of-the-ordinary task. But the map-making also quite regularly elicited explicit expressions of solidarity with fellow participants and of pride in the redrawing of property boundaries during the course of the war and in the drawing of the maps themselves.

The maps drawn by insurgent campesinos are expressions of this insurgent culture. In drawing the maps for this project, the cooperativists had to select what to show and how. In this they are of course no different from other designers of maps. Jeremy Black (1997: 12) argues that for any map,

[ ] the choice of what to depict is linked to, and in a dynamic relationship with, issues of scale and purpose, and the latter issue is crucial. A map is designed to show certain points and relationships, and in doing so, creates space and spaces in the perception of the map-user and thus illustrates themes of power.

Even maps that appear to recreate in miniature purely physical characteristics, such as satellite images or maps of physical geography, undergo a
process of selection by the designer (ibid.: 11-12, 59-60). (Which wave-
lengths from the source data should be included and in what colors? How
exaggerated should differences in altitude be in the map, given that they are
usually trivial compared with the horizontal extent of the area represented?)

All maps are thus cultural representations and vary with the maker and
his or her purpose. In particular, maps of neighborhoods or regions sketched
by individuals vary. For example, neighborhood maps sketched by Polish
teenagers differed not just in what was depicted but in their coherence
(Lynch and Banerjee 1976). Village teenagers drew consistent, detailed
maps of a crowded social landscape; suburban teenagers drew maps that
exhibited little coherence and significant confusion; central city teenagers
drew elaborate maps of detailed street networks crowded with particular
named buildings, shops, and institutions. We cannot conclude from such
evidence that the teenagers’ mental images differed as well as their sketches:
the translation from mental image to map is of course shaped by the form
and tools of the particular sketching process, each drawer’s familiarity with
the process, and so on. Nonetheless, each map-maker chose what and how
to draw.

The maps reproduced here are combinations of the two very common
forms of maps: maps that assert sovereignty, in this case land claims by
insurgent cooperatives, and maps of localities (Black 1997: 12-13). The scale
chosen encloses the properties claimed by the map-makers’ cooperative.
Some are essentially maps of the cooperative properties, while others are
drawn at a scale that includes neighboring cooperatives or a nearby town.\(^7\)
The map-makers knew and took time to show the name of every property
(or the owner), appeared to remember the pattern of land use before the
war, and knew or estimated the size of every property.\(^8\) Most important is
the contrast between the prewar and end-of-war maps, which among other
things traces the assertion of insurgent power. The makers took particular
care to indicate the borders of the properties they were in the process of
claiming. On some maps (e.g., Fig. 3.6), the drawers reiterated the word

\(^7\) One qualification is that the maps are not independent of each other: members of each
cooperative that participated in the workshops spent some time looking over the maps being
drawn by members of other cooperatives, which could explain some similarities. However,
the maps drawn in the three different workshops are similar.

\(^8\) Roger Peterson (2001: 17) suggests that the ability of Lithuanian people to draw detailed
neighborhood maps years later is itself evidence of the sort of “strong community” that
supports collective action. This is not the case in El Salvador: in highly unequal agrarian
communities, deep familiarity with property rights may well come from working on
properties over the course of many years.

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“propiedad” (property) repeatedly, claiming them plot by plot. Each one is
labeled with the slogan “property of the cooperative”; the captions also
reiterate the word and thus the claim.

When checked with topographic maps, the maps appear generally to be
quite accurate locally, but the scale on the periphery (e.g., the indicated
distance to the nearest village or town) is sometimes very distorted. This
is typical of maps sketched by ordinary people, which often exhibit varying
scales and orientations across the map while retaining what Kevin Lynch
termed “topological invariance” similar to that of an “infinitely flexible
rubber sheet: while distances and directions may be distorted, the sequence
is usually correct” (Lynch 1960: 87). Some maps have what we might term
a naive quality; for example, the perspective varies such that three or even
four sides of a house are drawn.

One pair exhibits an extraordinary cartographic projection. Figure 7.4
shows in the foreground the hamlet Loma Pacha, which lies east of San
Francisco Javier, and the nearly conical hill, Mount Taburete, planted
almost entirely in coffee before the war. The hill was owned by three land-
lords, including one colonel. The author of the map, assisted by two other
cooperative members, seem to have imagined standing on the next hill to
the east, looking down at the houses of the workers in the hamlet and up
toward the hill, and then unwrapping the hidden backside of the hill onto
the paper just beyond the triangle of the cone. The author wrote the following
on the map (with the original idiosyncratic spelling): “Así el servn del taurete
propiedades tomadas por personas campesinas,” which means, “Toward Mount
Taburete, properties taken by campesinos persons,” an unprompted assertion
of defiance and achievement. As is clear in the corresponding postwar map,
Figure 7.5, nearly all of the coffee trees on the hill were destroyed during
the war, as the guerrilla encampment there was frequently attacked. The
Cooperativa El Jobalito planted corn in the lower skirts of the hill and
claimed nearly the entire hill at the war’s end. On this map, the author
wrote “Gracias por un recuerdo de mi trabajo,” which means, “Thank you for
a remembrance of my work,” thereby reminding me to return the map as I
had promised and to claim both the redrawing of boundaries through land
occupation and the literal drawing of the map as his work.

Other authors wrote similar affirmations on their maps; for example, the
authors of the companion map (not included) to Figure 3.2 wrote, “It is a
pleasure to participate together with all the compañeros” (Cooperativa Las
Conchas). These notations on the maps suggest that cooperative members
saw the building of cooperatives in the difficult conditions of the war as
a source of pride in the effectiveness of their historical intervention.9 In general, “the map as plan is the map as product and recorder of human agency” (Black 1997: 165). In this case the maps record the human agency of the drawers themselves.

The naming of participant and cooperative names was also a powerful element of the map-making. The map-makers without exception wrote the full title of their cooperative on each map. Many of the names evoked a sense of achievement: “new dawn,” “the guardians,” “joyful bluff,” “light on the horizon,” and “conscience.” Others retained the former name of the property but replaced “hacienda” or “finca” with “cooperative.” Moreover, I did not ask the map-makers to sign the maps, but most chose to do so. Nearly all identified themselves along with their titles as the leaders of the cooperative, a symbolic assertion of authority and ownership of the properties claimed. The map-makers who inscribed their names did so after a discussion among themselves regarding the purpose of the exercise (which I described as the eventual publication of a history of the war in the case-study areas) and, among some of the groups, of the potential risks given the uncertain conditions of the cease-fire at the time. Judging by these conversations, to sign one’s name was an expression of commitment to tell their communal history. The naming of names, particularly for the express purpose of having them published with the maps, thus seemed to be an indication of both a desire to testify to the community’s history and to claim authorship of the cooperative’s achievements. Thus the maps are ideological constructions, acts of remembrance and redemption as well as an assertion of power to claim and hold land.

Maps of course cannot convey all facets of a mental image of a landscape. In particular, some landscapes are laden with religious meaning or are understood as sacred spaces (Downs and Stea 1977: 139; Black 1997: 104). And it is difficult to convey dynamics in maps, particularly the dynamics of guerrilla warfare or modern air campaigns, both of which render front lines of little relevance (Black 1997: 159–61). Yet I suggest that the care with which these maps were drawn conveys an impression of a high degree of meaningfulness of these landscapes to the map-makers, as does of course their willingness to spend two days drawing them. (Recall that on two of

9 Other scholars who have asked ordinary people to sketch maps of their neighborhood have noted that they often seem proud of their sketch maps, and appear to take pleasure in knowing their neighborhoods well and representing them clearly (Downs and Stea 1977; Brody 1982: 12; Lynch 1985: 250). The drawers of these maps appeared to experience that pleasure as well as their pride in cooperative land claims.

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the maps (Figs. 3.4 and 3.7), the makers also marked with crosses the sites of deaths.) And perhaps the depiction of cooperative boundaries and the reiteration of cooperative names – as well as the makers’ willingness to draw not one but two maps – are ways not just to convey land claims, but also to assert a sense of agency in the reshaping of that meaningful landscape.

Thus a central and reiterated theme in the maps and interviews with insurgent campesinos is that of political efficacy. Participants expressed profound pride in their insurgent activities: they had proved capable of transforming social relations, in acting effectively to realize their interests in land and autonomy. Most analyses of collective action would have difficulty accounting for this claim of authorship, a theme that was absent in interviews with nonparticipants. The centrality of this theme for insurgents suggests that acting in the realization of their interests was essential to this transformation of political culture. In the interviews, insurgent supporters acknowledged the difficult choices all residents faced; one source of their pride was having met the challenge despite their fears. And while many of the deeds recounted were local, leaders also stressed their role in building alliances beyond their locale, a broadening of perspective and experience proudly described.

It should be evident that what I mean by political culture includes not just “attitudes” toward different institutions (e.g., distinguishing “civic” from other political cultures, a survey-friendly approach often used by political scientists), but also more anthropological and sociological notions of culture. Political culture also includes norms of group solidarity, other collective norms and practices such as rituals and symbols, and beliefs concerning the feasibility of social change and the potential efficacy of the group’s collective efforts toward such change. It also includes collective identity, by which I mean “an individual’s cognitive, moral and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution... a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly...” (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 285).

Are the values, norms, and beliefs of those insurgent campesinos interviewed representative of campesinos that participated in the insurgency? As many were leaders of insurgent cooperatives, perhaps those interviewed were significantly more militant than insurgent campesinos generally. Ideally, we would compare such testimonies to a group representative of the rural population, or better still, we would have initially chosen candidates for extended interviews in light of the results of a survey of political attitudes of a representative sample of the population (thereby combining the
survey approach with the ethnographic approach). But few political opinion surveys of the population of the conflicted areas were carried out during the civil war. Those surveys that were carried out (such as the study of the COMUS communities discussed in the previous chapter) were rarely based on a representative sample of the local population of those areas.\textsuperscript{10}

However, soon after the war a survey of political attitudes among people in the conflicted zones was carried out as part of a larger project exploring rural living conditions among five groups of farmers. The five categories were: members of sixty reform cooperatives, beneficiaries of the land-to-the-tiller phase of the agrarian reform (“tillers” in the figure below), owners of land they farmed (the average holding was only 2.1 hectares, so most were smallholders, not commercial-scale landlords), renters of land farmed, and the tenedores, that is, campesinos occupying land in the formerly conflicted areas (Seligson et al. 1993).\textsuperscript{11} More specifically, the tenedores occupied land under the aegis of the FMLN (inclusion on the FMLN inventory of occupied properties compiled during the 1992 cease-fire was necessary to be considered a tennedor). Tenedores were usually, and in Usulután exclusively, organized as insurgent cooperatives. The survey allows comparison between these groups, although the interpretation is complicated by the fact that differences among the five categories may be due to differences in the type of land tenure or whether group members resided in conflicted areas.\textsuperscript{12}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure7_6.png}
\caption{Political attitudes of tenedores and others, 1993. The figure shows the percentage of each group responding as indicated. The sample properties are described in the text. Source: Calculated from Seligson et al. (1993: 2-23-2-25).}
\end{figure}

\textbf{Tenedores} gave responses to survey questions that indicate a significantly higher degree of what the authors term political “alienation” from the government compared with owners. For example, 69 percent of the tenedores stated that they trust the army “almost never,” compared with only 19 percent of the owners, 17 percent of the renters, 11 percent of the land-to-the-tiller beneficiaries, and 15 percent of reform cooperative members (Fig. 7.6). What accounts for this greater alienation? According to the survey, tenedores experienced the consequences of civil war to a greater degree than the other groups (as we would expect from this subset of those interviewed, a sample drawn from conflicted areas who occupied land). Three-quarters of the tenedor families had lost a family member during the war, compared with only 34 percent of owners (Seligson et al. 1993: 2-27). Tenedores had to seek refuge from the war at a much higher rate as well: 74 percent sought refuge elsewhere in El Salvador, compared with 21 percent for owners. For 26 percent of the families of tenedores, the war had caused a member to

\begin{footnotesize}
\item[10] The Instituto Universitaria de Opinión Pública (University Institute of Public Opinion) of the Universidad Centroamericana developed strategies for public opinion polling in the midst of the war, but few of their respondents were residents of the conflicted areas. The U.S. Agency for International Development commissioned a few surveys in contested areas, but the results were not made public (personal communication, William Barnes, June 3, 2001).

\item[11] None of the tenedores interviewed in the survey were from Usulután. However, 75 of the 109 interviewed were from the municipality of Tecoluta in San Vicente (Carr, et al. 1993). The history of the war in Tecoluta is similar to that of southwestern Usulután, except that the dominant FMLN faction was the FMLT, not the ERP.

\item[12] The sample of owners and renters was drawn from fifty nonconflicted municipalities, so differences between these groups and the tenedores reflect geographical, historical, and tenure differences. The land-to-the-tiller beneficiaries were drawn from government lists in areas near the other groups of the survey; the report does not say how many were in conflicted areas. The reform cooperative members appear to have been drawn from the subset of reform cooperatives that had completed a government program called “New Options” in which members made decisions concerning the form of tenure the cooperative would have in the future (continued collective title, subdivision into individual small holdings, shareholding in a corporate enterprise, or some combination). Their geographical distribution is not given. See Seligson et al. (1993: 2-4-2-9).
\end{footnotesize}
migrate to another country; in just 10 percent of the families of owners had that occurred. Perhaps those who own land are less likely to flee (only one of the 109 tenedores interviewed held title to land), but it is unlikely that that alone accounts for the difference: violence in the conflict zones where the tenedores lived was much higher than elsewhere. That the tenedores were occupying land under the aegis of the FMLN suggests that their alienation reflected to at least some degree the process of political organizing that occurred in those zones. These findings suggest that the insurgent campesinos interviewed for this book were not atypical of tenedores.

Might factors other than participation in insurgency explain the differences in political attitudes? The tenedores were significantly poorer than the other groups, both in reported household income and in living conditions. The average reported income (combining both farm and other income) for tenedores was 22 percent less than that of renters, 28 percent less than owners, and 45 percent less than reform cooperative members. The greater poverty of the tenedores is probably the combined effect of several factors. Tenedores on average had access to less land (1.1 hectares) than owners (2.1 hectares; ibid.: 2–10). They were probably poorer before the war (the average years of schooling, which for this group of adults in their forties reflects poverty rates much earlier, was only 1.7 for tenedores, compared with 2.2 for owners, 2.4 for reform cooperative members, and 2.6 for land-to-the-tiller beneficiaries; ibid.: 2–29). Their residence in conflicted zones probably depressed their income because employment opportunities were less (even after the end of the war). And their uncertain tenure status probably depressed investment.

But the figure suggests that these differences in political opinion are not accounted for by class (despite the greater poverty of the tenedores). The responses of owners, reform cooperative members, renters, and land-to-the-tiller beneficiaries were very similar. In particular, renters are similar to the three categories of owners, a finding one would not expect if agrarian class position were to explain the differences.

To further explore whether the greater poverty of the tenedores and differences in class position from the other groups, rather than insurgent participation per se, might explain these differences in political opinion,

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13 Calculated from Seligson et al. (1993: tables 2.21 and 2.24), where off-parcel income for cooperative members (not given as such) was estimated from the off-parcel income of agrarian cooperatives that participated in the late 1990s “New Options” program (which is given).

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we should compare the responses of tenedores with those of the landless agricultural population generally. But that group was not polled by this 1993 survey. A 1995 survey did so, however, and found that political attitudes among landless agricultural workers differed little from those of other categories of landholding (Seligson and Córdova Macías 1995). But their attitudes differed significantly from those who had voted for the FMLN candidate in the 1994 elections, a group whose political attitudes are similar to those of tenedores in their alienation. In analyzing geographically distributed data, support for “radical political change” was 6 percent or less among all groups except for those resident in zones governed by the FMLN (23.5 percent). The proportion was even higher for those resident in FMLN zones who were also FMLN voters (32.1 percent; ibid.: 39). (In the United States and Great Britain, support for radical political change expressed in similar surveys is only 5 percent; in Nicaragua, Mexico, and Guatemala, 11 to 12 percent; and in South Africa, 25 percent.) Residents of FMLN zones were also more politically tolerant, attended municipal meetings at a much higher rate, and characterized municipal services much more favorably than other groups, a striking result given the absence of services in most of those areas (ibid.: 57, 95–6, 102).

The results of another survey also suggest that it was participation, rather than other factors, that accounts for insurgent political culture. In a postwar survey of over 400 residents of three regions of the department of San Vicente, which borders Usulután on the west, Vincent McElhinny (n.d.: chapter 6) found that respondents in the region where the FMLN had been most active (the municipality of Tecolutla) tended to be more politically active, expressed a stronger sense of personal political efficacy, participated more in development projects, and remained more committed to revolutionary social change and equity than respondents in the other nearby municipalities dominated by government forces during the civil war.14

Another kind of evidence of the strength of the new political culture comes from landlords of properties in the case-study areas. In interviews in San Salvador, the town of Jiquilisco, and Cojutepeque, several expressed

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14 These findings were found to hold when the interview sample was increased to a regional level, adding municipalities from La Paz and Usulután. McElhinny’s measure of political efficacy may underestimate the sense of political efficacy in areas of insurgent participation. His survey questions focused on whether respondents agreed or disagreed that people did not vote for various reasons, which probed their opinions about the efficacy of voting rather than their sense of efficacy in building insurgent organizations or in occupying land (McElhinny 1999: 39).
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concern that should they return to their properties after the war, they would face assertive and well-organized workers supported by a panoply of new organizations. And they would do so without their traditional command of local security forces. For example, one landlord of coffee estates and a mill in the Las Marías area described how his grandfather and father built the enterprise and continued, “I was born on the property; now it’s a museum of weapons for the FMLN. How could I work it again, with [FMLN] ex-combatants at my shoulder?” (San Salvador, 1992). He went on to describe how he organized a group of approximately sixty landlords of occupied properties in the Usulután coffee highlands to work as a group to expedite the sale of their properties under the terms of the peace agreement. Another landlord, the representative of one of the most powerful families owning land along the Jiuliscó coast, described in an interview why he and his siblings had decided to sell the property:

I am absolutely willing to sell. It’s been a nightmare, trying to work it or to rent it. We are convinced we have to sell, at market prices or not. It’s going to kill us. Why must we sell? First, if we want to work the property, they [the insurgent campesinos occupying the property] are not going to let us. Second, we do want to cooperate with the peace process, we’re conscious of that. Third, we need to pay the bank. With the losses and the strikes, we lost the working capital. So it’s a distress sale. (San Salvador, 1992)

(As his family had extensive investments in urban enterprises, he is here referring narrowly to the finances of the property, not the family.) Despite his family’s traditional influence in the area, he found it difficult to visit the property: “I felt they were so closed – I haven’t visited for months, nobody talks to me when I go.” Thus the unprecedented strength of campesino organization and the new insurgent political culture convinced many landlords to sell their properties (Wood 2000: 64–7).

Conclusion

Many campesinos ran extraordinary risks to support the insurgency over many years. That they did so despite the absence of benefits contingent on their participation raises doubts about the explanation of participation in collective action provided by standard rational actor models. In El Salvador, either participation was not prompted by consequentialist considerations or the “benefits” realized by participants went beyond the conventional material benefits stressed in most rational actor accounts.

Campesino Accounts of Insurgent Participation

The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that an emergent insurgent political culture was key to generating and sustaining the insurgency despite its high costs. Insurgent campesinos came to interpret insurgency as justified by the injustice of existing social relations and state violence, and to interpret its costs, even the highest of them, as meaningful sacrifices. For many, liberation theology had offered a Church-sanctioned condemnation of their poverty, the hope that change was possible as it was God’s will, and a framework in which the costs of change could be interpreted. The early guerrilla networks drew on this change in rural political culture, coordinating protest into rebellion and offering an alternative form of collective action for those outraged by governmental repression.

But what beneficial consequences might be powerful enough to motivate risky actions under circumstances unfavorable (particularly initially) to success? What led some people in the cantones studied by Cabarrús to identify with the government and others with the opposition? The divisions within families and neighborhoods, as well as the local homogeneity of some cantones, would seem to have less to do with the details of economic position than with the process by which class resentment sometimes hardens into a commitment to collective action.

We are thus left with a number of unanswered questions. Under the difficult conditions of these rural communities, what processes facilitated the emergence and consolidation of campesino collective action? What accounts for the channeling of collective action into various forms? Under what conditions does initial protest become revolt, under what further conditions does revolt become sustained rebellion? How do interests and ideology evolve to support sustained revolutionary collective action?

The interviews with insurgent campesinos, the contrast between the accounts and experiences of insurgents and noninsurgents, the campesino maps, and the evidence of a new insurgent political culture among participants suggest that an account of participation in insurgency requires a consideration of the moral and emotional dimensions of participation.
Explaining Insurgent Collective Action

On my first visit to the Cooperativa Candelaria un Nuevo Amanecer and the Cooperativa Montecristo, two groups of insurgent campesinos occupying properties high on the side of a war-ravaged volcano north of San Jorge (recall Figs. 3.5 and 3.6), I arrived a bit late at the meeting place, an isolated peasant home. I had reached there by driving about an hour up a dry river bed (whether it was the right river bed or not was not clear until the very end), a definite challenge for my small pickup truck. As arranged at a regional meeting of the Las María Land Defense Committee the previous week, I expected to meet with cooperative leaders to discuss the history of the difficult emergence of the cooperatives in the midst of the civil war. Rather than three or four people, I found over fifteen people gathered in the farmyard. Another seven soon arrived. The interview took four hours, as almost everyone, men and women alike, wanted to speak, to tell what had happened to a brother or sister, or to tell a story of the time they occupied some property.

At the end of the interview, I asked for the names of a few people for whom I could inquire when I returned to visit again, as I feared that I would not again succeed in finding the place. I reiterated the strict confidence with which I would treat the names, for the political situation was far from settled and violence against those occupying land continued. The meeting broke up, and with their permission I recorded the names of the leaders of the cooperatives in a notebook I kept separate from my notes of the meeting. A few more asked whether their names could also be written down. Then I returned to San Salvador immediately after the interview and did not take either notebook with me again into the case-study areas.

one by one, every person attending the meeting came to recite his or her name and solemnly to watch it be recorded.\(^2\)

As I found my way down the riverbed to the road I reflected on how this apparently simple act of naming and being named becomes an extraordinary testament when set in the context of a war in which tens of thousands of civilians were killed, including loved ones of those present that day, often for nothing more than having participated in just such a cooperative meeting.

Why are people sometimes “brave to the point of foolishness,” bearing risks not explicable on the basis of expected outcomes (Calhoun 1991: 51)? Why did people so similarly situated in terms of their economic circumstances before the war act so differently from one another? Why, as we have seen across the distinct agricultural regions of Usulután, did campesinos with such different holdings of land and relationships to landlords sometimes act so similarly? Why in the face of mounting repression did protest deepen to armed insurgency? And if repression played a role in the emergence of insurgency, moving a small core of committed activists from nonviolent protest to support for the armed guerrillas, why did participation in insurgent activities continue to grow after repression subsided significantly?

Conventional explanations for collective action based on strong communities, political opportunity, class position, and selective incentives, while illuminating some aspects of the Salvadoran insurgency, do not take us far in explaining insurgent collective action in circumstances of such high risk, as we have seen in previous chapters. Preexisting communities and social networks were too weak to provide the social sanctions and ongoing social bonds sufficient to overcome the collective action problem. Networks played important roles, to be sure, but they emerged during mobilization and in part as its consequence. Liberationist networks developed in the mid-1970s, as did covert guerrilla networks. Protest deepened to insurgency as political opportunity narrowed in the late 1970s. After the suppression of those networks during the period of extreme state violence, insurgent networks gradually reemerged as the FMLN forced authorities from some of the case-study areas, and then spread as collective action proved feasible. Aside from the obvious absence of medium and large landlords in insurgent ranks, support for the insurgency once war began was related only weakly

\(^2\) It might be argued that those present gave me their names in the belief that some material benefit would result. However, I had on several occasions made clear to members of the commission that I had no relation to any nongovernmental organization and that my interest was solely in writing a history of the civil war, a purpose I reiterated (as always) at the beginning and end of the interview.
to prewar class position. Broadly speaking, the Salvadoran civil war pitted an insurgency championing the demands of the socially and economically excluded against the traditional alliance of the economic elite and the military, only a very few of whom took the risk entailed by supporting the insurgency. But among the excluded, as we have seen, economic class position did not map local residents neatly into the categories of insurgent and government supporters.

Nor do material selective benefits explain participation. During the period of extreme state violence, some residents retreated with the FMLN and thereby gained some short-run protection from government forces (sometimes a safer course than attempting to remain or to move toward government-held areas), but they did not subsequently support the FMLN. Moreover, the FMLN did not attempt to protect particular households or communities in the case-study areas. During the military stalemate, those who did not support the insurgency had access to the meager material benefits of the insurgency—land—without paying any contribution beyond the coerced minimum whenever supporters did. In this sense, the insurgents provided public goods and most residents were free riders.³ In most of the Usulután case-study areas, all households had access to land for subsistence cultivation as a result of the FMLN's having expelled government forces and landlords from the area. It was the armed presence of the FMLN, not membership in a cooperative, that assured access to land from year to year. So neither protection nor access to land explains participation in insurgent cooperatives. Even more striking, some of those who gained land as a result of the government's agrarian reform also supported the FMLN.

I first summarize the empirical findings from the case-study areas, in light of which I give my interpretation of insurgent collective action in rural El Salvador. (A formal model of this account is in the Appendix.) Because

³ Access to land is not normally understood as a public good. Public goods have two properties: They are nonrival (my use does not lessen your use) and nonexcludable (it is difficult to exclude users). Whether something is a public or a private good is not determined solely by the physical characteristics of the good but by whatever affects rivalry and excludability. Land is of course generally a rival good. However, access to land (in general, not to any particular plot) in these circumstances was a public good. Because land was abundant relative to the population in the contested areas, access to land was effectively nonrival. And the FMLN did attempt to exclude from abandoned land anyone who met the coerced minimum contribution. At the war's end, membership in an insurgent cooperative credibly promised a selective benefit, namely, legal title to occupied land. During the land grab that followed, a land occupation project became a common pool activity (rather than a public goods one), as benefits were at least weakly contingent on participation and access became rival.

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the empirical evidence is inevitably open to a variety of interpretations, I consider two caveats and then offer two additional considerations supporting the plausibility of my account. The first is the accumulating evidence from social science experiments that reasons similar to those I emphasize help explain the responses of subjects in social science experiments exploring the propensity to cooperate in various well-controlled situations. The second is my account's consistency with other cases of collective action on the part of long-subordinate social actors. In conclusion I address the implications of the argument of this book for more general issues in the literature on collective action, social movements, and peasant rebellion.

Patterns of Insurgent Collective Action

An explanation of the puzzle of insurgent collective action in the high-risk circumstances of the Salvadoran civil war should account for the observed patterns of participation—and nonparticipation—across time and space in the case-study areas, briefly summarized as follows.

Approximately a third of the residents of the case-study areas voluntarily participated in the insurgency, some for more than a decade, despite their keen awareness of the risks they thereby ran. Participation took various forms on the part of different people and at different periods of time. In most of the case-study areas, many landless laborers and land-poor peasants, some smallholders, some beneficiaries of the counterinsurgency agrarian reform, and some self-employed skilled laborers supported the insurgents with food, water, and military intelligence. Some of them also served as militia members and leaders of insurgent cooperatives. A very few had also at some time served as full-time members of the guerrilla forces. Some participated in the mobilization of the 1970s and again in the founding of insurgent cooperatives but lay low during the intervening years of extreme violence. Most residents did not participate in the insurgency.

Some communities that appeared very similar before the civil war had very different trajectories through the war. The northern and southern cantones of Tenancingo, for example, were indistinguishable in terms of social structure before the war, yet the northern ones generally supported the insurgents, while the others supported the government. And along the coastal plain, eastern and western Jiquilisco are indistinguishable, yet support for the insurgency emerged in the western part but not the east.

There were some patterns among insurgent supporters. An important correlate of whether a campesino supported the FMLN or not was the history
of violence against family members and neighbors. In neighborhoods or among families where government forces and their allies had carried out significant violence, as in northern Tenancingo and western Jiquilisco, support for the FMLN was more likely (if the area was not entirely dominated by government forces, as was Santiago de María). Where the FMLN had carried out significant initial violence, as in southern Tenancingo, support for the FMLN was much less likely (and some residents participated in civil defense patrols).

The form of insurgent collective action varied over time; new forms emerged from previous ones. In the first period of the insurgency, before the civil war, many campesinos participated in strikes, marches, and demonstrations, some of them as an outgrowth of their involvement in Bible study groups informed by liberation theology. (Some also covertly supported the then-incorrect guerrilla networks also active during this period; a very few, often the teenage younger sons of smallholding families, joined the organizations as full-time recruits.) The subsequent repression together with the 1980 agrarian reform comprised a second period (1979–83) of extreme violence and chaos in the case-study areas, and normal forms of political mobilization disappeared entirely. Those few campesinos who supported the FMLN during this period did so individually and covertly. During the third period of military stalemate (1984–91), some reform cooperatives in Usulután joined new overt opposition organizations, and some of their members covertly supported the insurgents. Insurgent collective action increasingly took the form of participation in insurgent cooperatives that occupied land. The first were founded near guerrilla strongholds; they then spread across most of the case-study areas. The military stalemate also made possible the repopulating of the Villa of Tenancingo and its subsequent defense against attempts by both sides to use the project to their advantage. At the end of the war (after peace negotiations began and through the first months of the cease-fire, 1991–2), the number of insurgent cooperatives and cooperative members rapidly increased. Joining an insurgent cooperative in this last period poses no puzzle, as definite material benefits were credibly contingent — for the first time — on cooperative membership.

There is additional evidence that may help resolve the puzzle, namely, insurgent campesinos’ accounts of their participation, nonparticipants’ accounts of their experiences, and the emergence of an insurgent political culture among FMLN supporters by the end of the civil war. When asked about the history of the war in their community, insurgent campesinos returned time and again to several themes: the injustice of prewar land

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**Explaning Insurgent Collective Action**

distribution and labor relations, their desire for land, the contempt with which they were treated by landlords, the brutality with which government forces responded to nonviolent strikes and demonstrations, the fear with which they lived during the war, and the suffering of their families. The assertion of political and social equality, in sharp contrast to their experiences before the war, also runs through the interviews. Significantly, they also repeatedly asserted their pride in their wartime activities and consistently claimed authorship of the changes that they identified as their work, a claim difficult to account for in most explanations of collective action. In contrast, those who did not support the insurgency emphasized the exercise of violence by both armies, and some particularly emphasized that of the FMLN. While a few noninsurgents claimed their staying on the land as an achievement, there were few expressions of collective pride or defiance or assertions of equality on their part.

**An Interpretation of High-Risk Collective Action**

My interviews with campesinos as well as the patterns of mobilization convince me that there were three reasons that participants supported the mobilization and insurgency, which I will term participation, defiance, and pleasure in agency. In addition, two contingent, path-dependent aspects of the civil war — local past patterns of violence and proximity to insurgent forces — also shaped participation in the insurgency. All concern local processes of the civil war, and all emerged during the course of the civil war and its antecedent mobilization. My account of campesino insurgency also concerns campesinos’ evolving beliefs about local constraints and opportunities, including likely outcomes, and cultural practices.

By **reasons for acting**, I mean values, norms, commitments, emotions, material interests, and aversions. By **beliefs**, I mean understandings of the probable consequences of various courses of action. By **practices**, I mean culturally meaningful activities such as rituals. By **path-dependent outcomes**, I

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4 I use reasons rather than preferences, as people appear to act for a wide variety of reasons, not all of which are well captured by a well-ordered, transitive, complete, and relatively stable preference structure. People act not just on preferences but out of weakness of will, short-sightedness, or on aversions not chosen by themselves (Rowles 2003: chapter 3). Moreover, they often do not calculate risks or trade-offs over time as assumed by conventional economic theory.

5 In the formal model I interpret the general prewar pattern of campesino acquiescence as a "convention" in which acquiescence was the best course to pursue, as almost everyone else
mean persistent outcomes that might have been different if initial events had been different (in the language of economists, there are multiple equilibria); path-dependent processes shape such outcomes.

**Participation**

Many participants appear to have taken part during the 1970s because they had come to value *participation* per se: to struggle for the realization of the reign of God was to live a life valuable to oneself and in the eyes of God despite its poverty, humiliations, and suffering. Resentment of those life conditions was not enough to motivate participation; nearly all *campesinos* interviewed resented the poverty and humiliation they endured before the war. Resentment of the subordinate position of one’s ethnic group in an ethnic status hierarchy has been a frequent motivation for ethnic political violence in Eastern Europe, typically triggered by sudden reversals in group position due to war or the collapse of a multiethnic state (Petersen 2002). In contrast, in El Salvador, it was new beliefs, not a sudden status reversal, that linked resentment to collective action. Under the influence of liberation theology, some *campesinos* came to believe that social justice is the will of God. An immediate implication was the righteousness of participating in the struggle against injustice. The result was a new sense of hope and dignity and a new belief in the possibility of effective political participation. Together these new values and beliefs sustained participation by many, despite the movement’s few victories.

By *participation*, I do not mean participation in any activity but participation in activities that reflect moral commitments. I might value participation in some sporting event, but that would not motivate me to participate if the risks were high. But merely holding a moral commitment is not enough to sustain insurgent collective action. Either I must also value participation in realizing the commitment or I must believe that my contribution is somehow essential to the realization of the commitment. It is unlikely that Salvadoran *campesinos* or other insurgent participants believed the latter. Rather, they acted on their moral commitments because they valued participation in its realization as well.

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**Explaining Insurgent Collective Action**

That participation is valued is not unusual for protest movements. James M. Jasper (1997) observes that “the pleasures of protest” include not only companionship, a sense of community and identity, the euphoria of crowds (what Emile Durkheim called “collective effervescence”), all of which are also available at soccer matches, but also the pleasure of working toward a moral vision and striving for a meaningful life. Sometimes, as in El Salvador, it is religion that provides that vision. Drawing on his comparison of organizing among low-income residents of U.S. cities, Richard L. Wood (2002: 261) shows that “certain forms of religious culture — like certain forms of any culture — enable such participation, while others constrain it.”

**Defiance**

Some activists who suffered at the hands of the authorities or saw the suffering of their families or neighbors supported or joined the insurgents because of feelings of moral outrage at the government’s response to what they perceived as their just activities. The second reason is thus *defiance*: supporting the insurgency despite the violence of the government, a refusal to acquiesce. Continued activism expressed defiance and asserted a claim to dignity and personhood. Its value was not contingent on success or even on one’s contributing to the likelihood of success. (The defiant were not, however, suicidal; they did not carry out activities without some regard for their safety.) In that way, defiance is similar to participation, but their affects are quite different. Defiance is negative, someone one does because one must, while participation is pleasurable. Derrick Bell (1992: xvi) noted a similarly high valuation of defiance on the part of some participants in the U.S. civil rights movement, including one elderly woman who, far from believing the movement would win, “recognized that — powerless as she was — she had and intended to use courage and determination as a weapon to, in her words, ‘harass white folks.’ . . . Her goal was defiance, and its harassing effect was likely more potent precisely because she did what she did without expecting to topple her oppressors.”

There appear to be two reasons for the salience of defiance in El Salvador. First, liberation theology provided a consistent and meaningful

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6 Dennis Chong (2001: 227) suggests that moral commitments and other intrinsic motives are rarely acted on unconditionally; strategic considerations shape most collective action when such motives are valued.
interpretation of violence and death. Suffering and even martyrdom were to be expected in the course of realizing God’s reign in an unjust world (Peterson 1997). Second, if family members and fellow activists were not to have died in vain, those remaining must not forsake the struggle for justice, but continue it. Defiance, like participation, depends on a moral commitment that is highly valued: few people would run high risks to stand up to an unjust soccer referee. Thus witnessing state violence may strengthen, not weaken, insurgent support.

Jeff Goodwin (2001) recognizes two ways in which some states “construct” revolutionary mobilization. First, indiscriminate state violence, he states, may have the unintended consequence that some see supporting the insurgents “as the only alternative (other than flight) to violent death” (ibid.: 162). Perhaps a few Salvadorans joined the insurgency seeking protection, a factor David Stoll (1993) emphasizes in his analysis of the Guatemalan insurgency. But flight was almost always a possible choice in the Salvadoran case. Many, perhaps most, campesinos fled the most repressive areas, perhaps after initially retreating from a government advance with guerrilla forces. So this first interpretation does not explain Salvadoran insurgency; there were other ways out.7 Second, state terror reinforces the cognitive plausibility and moral justifiability of a radical political orientation (Goodwin 2001: 39–40, 47). The evidence from the contested areas suggests that the second process had significantly greater weight in the Salvadoran case.

Pleasure in Agency

Other campesinos participated for a third reason. In interviews, insurgent campesinos claimed authorship of the successes of their collective actions,

7 Stoll’s (1993) analysis of survival strategies among the Ixil Maya in the wake of the extreme violence, particularly their construction of ways to rebuild a degree of autonomy despite army occupation, is an enduring contribution. However, he argues beyond his evidence in attributing Ixil support for the guerrillas before 1982 solely to coercion, that is, a forced choice for a civilian population caught between two armies. His interviews took place in a town under control of the military where continued support or sympathy for the insurgents would necessarily be muted. After 1983, the army had an explicit strategy of dividing the populace from the guerrillas; explicit neutrality was not an option (Schirmer 1990: 82–7).

And his interviews suffer from selection bias: approximately a third of the Ixil population was absent from the area at the time of the interviews, the 12,000 hiding from the army in the mountains and the 15,000 killed. Thus those most likely voluntarily to support the rebels were absent, and many were dead.

8 To refer to the “pleasure” of rebellion may evoke Banfield’s “Rioting Mainly for Fun and Profit,” in which he famously argued that the inner-city riots of the mid-1960s were not caused by racial oppression and could not be prevented by addressing the mistreatment of African Americans (Banfield 1968). My argument differs from his in my emphasis on the pleasure subordinate people may take in exercising agency, a human capacity from which they had long been excluded. This is distinct from Banfield’s emphasis on the thrills of pillage due to the temporary suspension of law enforcement.

9 Jon Elster (1996: 1396) states that “certain emotional satisfactions can arise only as by-products of activities that are undertaken for other ends . . . I may feel proud of my achievements, but I will not achieve much if I am moved only by the desire to feel pride.” He might have made a stronger argument. Without valuing some action, he would have no reason to feel pride (or the pleasure in agency) in the action.

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expressing great pride and joy not simply in their participation but in their effectiveness. This suggests that in carrying out insurgent activities, participants experienced a pleasure in agency: they had redrawn the contours of their world. Time and again I saw this pleasure relived as groups of campesinos gathered to tell me the story of their cooperative and its claiming of land or to draw for me the “before” and “after” maps of their locality.

By pleasure in agency, I mean the positive affect associated with self-determination, autonomy, self-esteem, efficacy, and pride that come from the successful assertion of intention.8 But I mean something more specific in two ways. First, by using the abstract term agency rather than the plainer “effectiveness” or the more common “efficacy,” I mean to stress that this increased self-esteem and pride in self-determination and efficacy occur not just in any intentional activity but in the course of making history, and not just any history but a history they perceived as more just.9 For some socially subordinate people of El Salvador, the drawing of what they judged as more just boundaries of class and citizenship through their own agency was profoundly meaningful, a source of pride and pleasure. (Scaling a high mountain or playing soccer well is also a source of pride and pleasure but is not the same thing.) Second, the pleasure in agency is a collective experience, as this redrawing of boundaries and reshaping of history by subordinate people is a collective enterprise.

Thus pleasure in agency is the pleasure in together changing unjust social structures through intentional action. Pleasure in agency differs from participation because the former depends on expectations of success, in achieving valued social change, not simply on participating in a movement claiming to seek social change. Thus pleasure in agency (but not participation or defiance) is a frequency-dependent motivation: it depends on the
likelihood of success, which in turn increases with the numbers participating (Schelling 1978; Hardin 1982). Yet the pleasure in agency is undiminished by the fact that one’s own contribution to the likelihood of victory is vanishingly small.

For insurgent campesinos, the pleasure in agency was a strong motivation to participate partly because of the contrast it posed to the fatalism and subordination that dominated the campesino world view and life experience until the 1970s. These long socially subordinate people who renewed their activism after the second period of widespread violence took profound pride in doing so. To make a public claim in pursuit of one’s own material interests, to occupy land with all its cultural and symbolic meaning in El Salvador, to refute elite perceptions of one’s incapacities, and, perhaps, thereby to undercut lingering feelings of one’s inferiority together created a deeply felt sense of pleasure experienced together by participants, a public assertion of dignity, self-worth, and insurgent collective identity. This public claim appears to have been in part a claim for recognition as persons of full worth, indeed, a claim for recognition as persons capable of agency, as essential aspect of a human being’s sense of self (Taylor 1985). The frequency with which insurgent campesinos stressed the nonhuman treatment they endured before the war and the prideful assertion of authorship of changed boundaries reflects the salience of personhood in this new identity. John Hammond (1998) studied insurgent campesinos who participated in popular education workshops in Morazán: for them, learning to read against the odds of poverty and social denigration was the source of a newly felt power to act.

Thus despite my emphasis on emotional and moral reasons for acting, aspirations for land did play an important role. In particular, pleasure in agency is a powerful motive only when it generates a strong sense of collective efficacy in realizing a highly valued goal. Participants’ pleasure in agency was not in some arbitrary achievement but in their effectively acting to assert their claim to land, although not in a productive or legal sense, as they already farmed as much abandoned land as they could manage without credit and training. So access to land would not by itself motivate participation in the insurgent cooperatives given the high risks. Access to land was a central part of campesinos’ vision of a more just world. Land occupation was a moral and political claim, not a legal one (until the end of the war). Access to abandoned land also gave insurgent campesinos the autonomy to continue their insurgent activities as they no longer had to depend on landlords or local authorities for their (meager) livelihoods.

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These reasons for acting were often mixed together, as the interviews suggest. Pleasure in agency is of course related to defiance, which is in part pride in exercising agency in defiance of unjust authority (but defiance does not depend on expectations of success). An insurgent might act out of pride in acting as an insurgent, thereby expressing his insurgent identity and membership in the insurgent community. He might act on moral principles, to build a more just world or to express outrage, but also to experience pride in having the courage to have done so. He might act to assert his political efficacy, even his capacity to make history, capacities long denied by landlords and state authorities. And for some participants, as we have seen, revenge for violence against loved ones was mixed in as well, to some extent reinterpreted as part of realizing justice.

Path-Dependent Processes

Whether these three reasons led to insurgent mobilization in a locality depended critically on the details of local history. Mobilization in the 1970s was strongest where liberationist or guerrilla networks were present. Defiance was more powerful where campesinos themselves experienced or saw state violence. And a substantial fraction of campesinos, those motivated by pleasure in agency, were moved by the prospect of success in insurgent activity, rather than participation or defiance per se, and this depended on their beliefs about what others would do.

Insurgent collective action was path-dependent: where it emerged depended on the paths of both violence and activism in the local area. After state violence subsided somewhat, in areas where there were enough defiant campesinos, support for the insurgents, if some were nearby, emerged, and in some areas began to take more collective forms. Whatever their feeling of moral outrage and willingness to act on defiance, campesinos with no proximity to insurgent forces rarely acted in support; even the defiant were not suicidal in the Salvadoran context. Thus there were two contingent factors that further shaped who acted: past patterns of local state violence and proximity to insurgent forces. The latter was often a matter of timing: many areas of Usulután that had little insurgent presence in 1980 or 1981 had a

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10 Jane Mansbridge (2001) argues that other-regarding motives of love and duty are usually combined with "self-enhancing" motives of self-esteem, honor, and reputation in oppositional social movements.
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significant insurgent presence by 1983. Thus, we should not conclude that only the visibly active components were the primary drivers of state violence. Instead, the way in which groups formed and joined in the insurgency was a key factor in determining the success of the insurgent movement. The cultivation of insurgent networks and the establishment of local authorities were crucial in this process. The insurgents were able to build support and attract new members through their actions, which included the provision of social services in areas controlled by the state. From this perspective, the insurgency was not just a military uprising but a social movement that sought to create an alternative system of governance. The insurgents were able to build a network of local authorities that provided a sense of order and stability in areas where the state had failed. This allowed the insurgents to attract a broad base of support and create a sense of shared identity.

The success of the insurgents was also due to the way they organized their activities. The insurgents used a decentralized approach, with local leaders making decisions at the grassroots level. This allowed them to adapt quickly to changing circumstances and respond effectively to government actions. The insurgents were also able to control resources and provide security, which helped them to attract new members and maintain their support. The insurgents were able to use a combination of tactics, including guerilla warfare, sabotage, and political agitation, to challenge the state's authority. By employing a variety of tactics, the insurgents were able to maintain their momentum and force the state to react.

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participation (because in that case nonactivists are as likely targets as activ-
ists; Mason and Krane 1989), the opposite occurred. Given the history
of state terror, defiant campesinos saw the opening as a political opportunity
for renewed activism.

The three reasons for participating in insurgency and the path-
dependent processes by which they became effective in rural El Salvador
share little with Olson’s conventional formulation of the collective action
problem. They have a particular common form: they are *intrinsic* to the
process of participation itself, or *process-regarding*; they are *other-regarding*;
and they are *endogenous* to the course of the war.

I discuss each in turn. In contrast to the material benefits of the insur-
gency that participants and nonparticipants alike could share, these reasons
were contingent on participation and thus have the formal structure of
selective or process-regarding benefits. The reason of course is that the
experience depends on the process and not on the consequences of the
action. These *intrinsic*, or *process-regarding*, reasons are thus akin to expressive
motivations; indeed, participation in itself and defiance are well understood
as expressive motivations. (But pleasure in agency is only partly intrinsic,
as it also depends on the expected consequences of one’s action.)

These reasons for participating are *other-regarding* in that they have
meaning (and are thus motives) only in reference to a wider community
of those with whom one acts to make history and those whose suffering
is given meaning through continued activism. Moral commitments were
embedded in the new forms of community that had emerged during the
course of the war. And deaths by unjust authorities legitimized insurgent
agency by those left behind.

But if an interpretation based on process-regarding and other-regarding
motivations is to be persuasive, the emergence of insurgency-supporting
values and beliefs should be accounted for (Taylor 1988: 86–9). In
El Salvador, participation, defiance, and the pleasure in agency were *en-
dogenous* to the processes of the civil war: they emerged as a result of those
processes. Participation in liberationist networks enabled the imagining of
different futures and the positive judgment that change was possible as the
result of one’s own action.13 State terror forged defiance on the part of
some of those who had participated (and even some who had not). And

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the pleasure in agency deepened as defiant campesinos (and gradually other
campesinos as well) strengthened insurgent military and political capacity.

Caveats Considered

The reader may worry that participation per se, defiance, and pleasure
in agency are ex post facto reconstructions reflecting the outcome of in-
surgent collective action, rather than reasons for acting at the time of the
events recounted. Perhaps insurgent political culture changed rapidly at the
end of the war, not through the gradual recursive process described above.
This concern draws on the fact that the clearest evidence for these reasons
as motives comes from material gathered at the end of the war, the subset
of interviews carried out during the cease-fire and the maps drawn for me
during the cease-fire by cooperative leaders.14 While this objection cannot
be laid definitively to rest without having actually observed insurgent activ-
ity such as land occupations earlier in the war (even at war’s end, I was not
privy to such sensitive details beforehand), there are a number of reasons
to think it unpersuasive.

First, I inferred these reasons for action from my interviews and my
observations of meetings and informal interactions, not from responses to
a bald query about motivations, which indeed might well have elicited an
ex post rationalization. Moreover, there was striking consistency between
public testimonies and what I was told privately by people, many of whom I
came to know quite well over a period of years. Second, there is some direct
evidence that pleasure in agency may have been a reason for participation
early on and is thus not merely a postwar value. Some of those interviewed
recalled early strikes and marches with pride and in extraordinary detail.
There are also some suggestions in the literature along these lines. Accord-
ing to Cabarrús (1983: 135), after workers in Aguilar’s carried out a suc-
cessful strike before the war, “the workers could not forget the triumph that
had emerged from this first solidarity.” And Lungo Ucles (1995: 155) notes
that a series of land occupations by campesino organizations in the late 1970s
broke participants’ fear and passivity: “As a result of the land takeovers, the
Salvadoran countryside was changed forever.” Third, the transformation of

13 Such processes of imagining different futures and judging whether action toward a valued
different future is practical in present circumstances are central to the exercise of agency
(Emirbayer and Mische 1998; see also Sewell 1992 and Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994).

14 The reader may have noted that pleasure in agency was more prevalent in interviews with
insurgent campesinos in Usulután than in Tenancingo. That does not imply support for the
ex post alternative interpretation, however, as residents of Tenancingo did not experience
the recursive process of insurgent activity as strongly.
political culture evident in insurgent interviews and maps is profound. It is unlikely that such a profound change in political culture occurred during a brief time at the end of the war. Fourth, insurgent political culture placed great emphasis on political efficacy, an emphasis difficult to explain without its having played an important role throughout the process: the achievements which insurgents valued were built up over years, not in a single grandly efficacious act at the end of the war. Fifth, while the processes of social construction of memory make problematic any ex post facto interpretation of motivations, social memories may be incorrect but they are not arbitrary. Their evolution occurs for particular cultural reasons, as shown in the work of Alessandro Portelli (1991, 1997). Sixth, those bearing the insurgent political culture are largely those who supported the insurgency, as we saw in the previous chapter, which supports the recursive interpretation emphasizing repeated experience, as it was those who had participated in the insurgency who also expressed insurgent values at war’s end.

For these reasons, it seems reasonably parsimonious to assume that the transformation occurred gradually in the iterated way described above, and, moreover, that it reflected the experience of participation, and thus that those reasons motivated earlier insurgent activity.

A second concern the reader may have is that it might have been merely participants’ beliefs about the feasibility of collective action that evolved, not their values and culture. Perhaps before the 1970s mobilization there existed what James Scott (1990) terms a “hidden transcript” of resistance within campesino political culture that valued participation, defiance, and agency that could not be expressed before the war (except through the “weapons of the weak,” such as stealing small amounts of coffee or firewood; Scott 1985) but that was increasingly expressed as overt rebellion once circumstances allowed. Because I had fewer interviews with those who chose not to participate (and none that took place before the onset of the war in 1980), one may worry that the values and beliefs expressed by the participants were either common to participants and nonparticipants alike or had been held for decades by those who did eventually join in and thus cannot explain the insurgency.

There is no practical way to lay these concerns definitively to rest given the thin ethnographic record of prewar El Salvador. But none of my informants gave any hint that defiance and pride in agency were widespread values before the mobilizations of the 1970s. As we saw in the previous chapter, surveys carried out at the end of the war document considerable heterogeneity of political attitudes among rural Salvadorans, as well as one

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overall pattern: participation in the insurgency was associated with those attitudes consistent with insurgent political culture. Of course a process of self-selection of those who held such values before the year could account for that outcome, but given the profound transformation of expressed political culture, I am inclined to believe that values as well as practices and beliefs concerning the feasibility of collective action evolved during the course of the war.

If participation, defiance, and pleasure in agency can be interpreted as reasons for participation as well as expressions of the new political culture, then my interpretation accounts for high-risk collective action during the Salvadoran civil war where alternative theories appear not to. In particular, my interpretation accounts for the evolving patterns of campesino collective action over time and across space and for the emergence of the insurgent political culture, with its emphasis on making a more just history, authorship, and achievement. It is of course difficult to offer persuasive evidence of motivation for collective action in the high-risk circumstances of civil war. The persuasiveness of my interpretation must rest on the overall plausibility of my account in light of the failure of alternative explanations.

Lessons from Social Science Experiments

An additional reason I find my interpretation plausible comes from recent experiments on human motivations in social psychology, economics, and sociology. Many social scientists base their analysis of collective action on material, self-regarding, and fixed reasons for acting (i.e., preferences) defined over action outcomes. I have departed from this tradition to emphasize process-regarding, other-regarding, endogenous, moral, and emotional reasons for acting. Recent experiments have found such alternative types of motivations, sometimes called social preferences, to be powerful and ubiquitous reasons for cooperation in producing a collective good. In particular, these studies suggest that other-regarding motives such as envy, altruism, spite, reciprocity, and revenge are common.15

The first finding of relevance is that subjects who play public goods, ultimatum, and other kinds of games with one another in experimental settings frequently fail to behave like narrowly self-interested individuals whose actions are explained by maximizing their own material benefits. In short,

15 Ostrom (1998), Bowles (2003), Camerer (2003), and Camerer and Fehr (2003) survey recent findings of these behavioral experiments.
they fail to free-ride. In public goods games, for example, subjects often initially contribute much more than a narrowly self-interested calculation of the benefits accruing under the various alternative strategies would predict. Whether or not in subsequent rounds their behavior tends toward that predicted by self-regarding preferences over material goods (contributing nothing) depends on precisely how the game is structured, such as whether participants are allowed to communicate about who has contributed what. High levels of voluntary contributions occur when participants are allowed at a cost to themselves to punish those who in previous rounds contributed little (Fehr and Gächter 2002; Camerer and Fehr 2003). Of course, punishment of low contributors is itself a public good, so free-riding participants in the game would be expected to neither contribute nor punish. The fact that this public-spirited behavior occurs even during last round of the game among strangers, when it cannot possibly enhance the future material payoff of the punisher, suggests that nonselfish (other-regarding) motives are at work.

The second finding is that participants in ultimatum games are willing to forgo large benefits in order to punish other players whom they perceive as having treated them or someone else unfairly. In such games, one player of two is provisionally given some sum of money and both are told that if he makes an offer of a share of the money to another player, and if that player accepts the offer, the money is given to them, split between them according to the offer. If the offer is rejected, they both get nothing. So if the first player receives $10, it is narrowly self-interested to make the other player the lowest possible offer, namely, $1, as it is for the other player to accept – after all, the responder is better off in dollar terms accepting than if the players fail to agree on an offer. But in experiments, participants typically reject the offer if it is less than about $3, and when asked why, they often say that the offer was unfair. The participants prefer, then, to assume costs (forgoing what they could have had) in order to punish those making unfair offers. Lest it appear that participants are responding to the pettiness of the incentives usually offered in such settings, similar patterns occurred virtually uniformly when the experiments were repeated in over a hundred experiments across a range of world settings, including some where the stakes were as high as a third of the subjects’ average annual expenditures (Fehr and Gächter 2000; Fehr and Fischbacher 2001).

Experiments also suggest that individuals care not only about what they get, but also about how what they get is determined, that is, their preferences are process-based (Bowles 2003: chapter 3). For example, when ultimatum game offers are generated by a computer or a third party, rather than by the proposer who stands to benefit from a low offer, the respondent is much less likely to refuse the offer. Similarly, when proposers are not selected randomly but are assigned on the basis of success on an exam, even one that is transparently trivial, respondents are much less likely to reject low offers.

The third finding of relevance is that the participants are heterogeneous. An analysis of data from many experiments found that 40 to 66 percent of the experimental subjects make choices indicating social preferences, while 20 to 30 percent make selfish choices that maximize their personal earnings (Fehr and Gächter 2000). Individuals were also versatile, sometimes making choices indicating social preferences and at other times making selfish ones (Bowles 2003: chapter 3). Among the relevant experimental evidence (some of it surveyed in Bowles 1998 and 2003) is the fact that merely labeling a game “The Wall Street Game” or “The Exchange Game” leads to significantly more self-regarding behavior than when it is labeled “The Community Game,” despite the fact that the games were otherwise exactly alike. So it appears that people’s behavior is affected by cues about the situation in which they find themselves.

Finally, the proposition that preferences are endogenous – that they evolve under the influence of changing circumstances rather than remaining fixed – has gained empirical support in recent years (Bowles 1998, 2003). Melvin Kohn and his colleagues found that occupation affects personality (Kohn, Naoi, Schoenback, Schooler, and Slomczynski 1990). Occupation also affects how parents raise children. Those who follow orders in the workplace raise their children to respect authority; those whose work involves more autonomy raise their children to be creative (Kohn 1969). Scholars have recently carried out ultimatum and public goods games experiments in hunter-gatherer and other nonindustrial societies (Henrich, Bowles, Boyd, Camerer, Fehr, Gintis, and McElreath 2001). They have found sharp distinctions in how individuals in different societies play such games; the differences appear to correspond to how production in organized in each society. The notion that preferences may be endogenous in some circumstances, which was once anathema in economics where the de gustibus non est disputandum (there is no accounting for tastes) dictum once held sway, is now given serious consideration. (Indeed, one of the authors most responsible for the popularity of the above dictum, Gary Becker, titled his 1996 book Accounting for Tastes.) There is also evidence from this literature about the salience of intrinsic motives. Edward Deci (1975: 23), a leading contributor to the literature
on this subject, defines intrinsically motivated activities as ones “for which there is no apparent reward except the activity itself... The activities are ends in themselves, rather than means to an end.” The salience of intrinsic motives and the manner in which they may be evoked or extinguished by particular situations have been documented in literally hundreds of empirical studies (Deci and Ryan 1985; Lepper and Greene 1978; Ross and Nisbett 1991). Moreover, the psychological mechanisms that appear to underpin intrinsic motivations suggest the importance of the pleasure in agency as well. Deci (1975) concludes that intrinsic motivations reflect a fundamental desire for feelings of competence and self-determination. The reference to competence of course suggests an element of successful assertion of these motives. I have defined participation, defiance, and pleasure in agency with reference to highly valued ends, which render intrinsic motives (the pleasure in realizing those ends) all the more powerful.

I do not wish to exaggerate the relevance of laboratory experiments for the understanding of campesino collective action — or for that matter for any behaviors in nonlaboratory settings. However, it is worth noting that, though in dramatically different settings, the experimental subjects’ explanations of their choices echo many of the themes expressed by campesinos: an affirmation of norms of fairness and justice, a willingness to act on the behalf of those norms, and a positive valuing of nonconventional preferences.

**Comparable Cases**

There is another quite different reason that I have confidence in my account. The reasons for insurgent collective actions stressed here — participation, defiance, and pleasure in agency, as well as closely related reasons, such as self-respect, honor, dignity, recognition, and reputation — appear to have played powerful roles in other, quite diverse, cases of collective action by long subordinate social actors.

Where social subordination is accompanied by expressions of contempt, we should expect to find that these reasons may motivate insurgent collective action. In particular, pleasure in agency is more meaningful, and thus more motivating, in contexts where participants have little experience of political efficacy. Middle-class participants in environmental movements may experience and be motivated by the expression of moral outrage and the various pleasures of protest such as marching, chanting, and singing together, but they are likely to take their agency for granted.
were landless and unemployed workers who seized land as a way to acquire a job. Moreover, the risks of occupying land were much lower in Portugal at that time than in El Salvador. In other aspects, however, rural political mobilization was similar. Successful occupation led to further occupations in adjacent areas, and the pace of occupation accelerated as a regime transition neared (ibid.: 56, 75). And those who participated in the occupations came to hold distinct, more radical, and participatory political attitudes, participating more frequently in demonstrations and asserting a higher sense of political efficacy (ibid.: 136–42).

When Barrington Moore (1978: xiii) began what was to become his historical study of “why people so often put up with being the victims of their societies and why at other times they become very angry and try with passion and forcefulness to do something about their situation,” he initially intended to title the resulting work “a study of moral outrage.” In analyzing the pattern of collective action by German industrial workers from 1848 to 1933, Moore suggests that collective action generally occurred when norms of fairness were violated, and took more revolutionary forms when revolutionary parties were present, findings that are generally similar to the interpretation presented here.

In the Huk Rebellion in the Philippines, defiance was an essential element of the meaning of the movement for participants, according to Benedict J. Kerkvliet. One elderly man reflected, “We showed them [the landlords and government] we weren’t slaves. . . . We didn’t lie down like whimpering dogs when they started to whip us. We stood up to them and fought for what was rightfully ours” (Kerkvliet 1977: 269). However, the extent to which defiance motivated insurgency is not clear from Kerkvliet’s account. The overall trajectory of insurgent collective action in central Luzon was similar to that in El Salvador. In particular, state repression led many to embrace armed rebellion, which suggests that defiance might have played a similarly key role.

Pride, respect, and dignity appeared to play a role in the Vietnamese Revolution, according to David Hunt. Drawing on transcripts of interrogations with defectors from the National Liberation Front in Vietnam, Hunt (1974) explores why other cadres did not defect during the intense aerial bombing of areas controlled by the front that began in 1965. Those

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who did not defect were generally from the poorest strata of the village. Front ideology put the poorest into the local vanguard role as a way to undermine the long-standing ideological justification of their poverty. According to Hunt, this inversion of social position led to feelings of pride and assertions of dignity and respect on the part of these very poor farmers. They stayed with the insurgency even as conditions worsened dramatically, thereby contributing to the eventual overthrow of the regime.

Motivations similar to defiance and the pleasure in agency appeared to have played a role in the emergence and rapid spread of rondas campesinas (nightwatch patrols) in the highlands of northern Peru beginning in the late 1970s. According to Orin Starn, participants were acting in defense of their own interests to protect their animals from theft, but their motivation also involved a search for recognition and respect and pride in the achievement of dignity and order (1999: 28–33). A similar process took place in urban areas. Susan Stokes (1995) reports that popular culture in the shanty towns of Lima bifurcated into distinct forms. One subculture, the radical branch, developed an “ideology of participation” in which the claim of poor citizens to rights before the state was central, in contrast to the clientelist subculture, in which self-help was the dominant ideology (Stokes 1995: 70–6). What distinguished those who embraced the first from those who advocated the second, according to Stokes, was political experience, ranging from participation in Velasco-era corporatist experiments to experience in later organizations based on liberation theology or leftist political ideology. Stokes does not suggest that pleasure in agency became a motivation for collective action, only that participation was seen as valuable in itself.

The closely related claim to dignity or recognition as moral equals appears to be among the reasons for participating in some other insurgent movements. In his analysis of the trajectory of peasant collective action during the French Revolution, John Markoff (1996) argues that an assertion of dignity and the contestation of traditional authority are essential to explain that trajectory. Insurgent violence, almost all of which was directed against property, not people, was, he argues, an assertion about whose definition of value was to matter, thereby an assertion of dignity based on an emerging concept of citizenship and equal moral worth (1996: 108, 225–7). According to Ranjit Guha (1983a: 59, 143–6), the “urge to self-respect” and “prestige” were more important in peasant insurgency in colonial India than were economic demands. A similar assertion of moral dignity underlay the struggle for indigenous rights in the Zapatista uprising, according to Neil Harvey (1998). And of course a claim for citizenship on equal terms

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16 Moore changed the title from A Study of Moral Outrage to Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt, as he decided that “injustice” better captured the tone of popular anger than “moral” (Moore 1978: xiii–xiv).
was a motive for insurgency in South Africa as well as in the United States (Seidman 1994). However, movements that organize around appeals for recognition of moral dignity and equal citizenship may combine those appeals with older political practices, as in the navista movement of San Luis Potosí, Mexico, a civic opposition movement that though more autonomous than its predecessor movements was still dominated by a single powerful figure (Pansters 1996).

Dennis Chong (1991) in his analysis of the U.S. civil rights movement stresses the social and psychological benefits accruing to participants. He argues that unconditional cooperators (akin to the defiant campesinos) built the movement by winning sufficient interim victories demonstrating the possibilities of success, so that conditional cooperation became a rational response. In contrast to the argument here, Chong emphasizes social sanctions and concerns for reputation rather than defiance or the pleasure in agency per se. However, as James Jasper (1997: 27–8) points out in his critique of Chong’s argument, Chong acknowledges that one of the best ways to sustain a reputation for altruism and service is to develop a genuine interest for others. While Chong’s interpretation is consistent, there is little evidence presented that supports his emphasis on acting for a reputation for some value over acting for that value itself.

Honor may appear to be closely related to reputation. Craig Calhoun argues that defending their honor was a principal motivation for Chinese students at Tiananmen Square. However, he shows that for participants, honor was not just a matter of reputation but a particular way of evaluating oneself against culturally valued models. During the weeks leading up to the final confrontation, students suffered a recurrent sense of insult to their honor by government officials, leading to feelings of outrage and anger (Calhoun 1991: 65). As a result of their immersion in intense social networks and the importance of honor, the students ran high risks: “[P]articipation in a course of action over time committed one to an identity that would be irretrievably violated by pulling back from the risk” (ibid.: 51). Such collective action is not self-serving but “self-saving” (ibid.: 69). Thus the cultural processes of the movement sustained collective action to its tragic end.

A similarly powerful collective identity contributed to a lack of caution on the part of urban trade unionists in the extremely dangerous context of Guatemala in 1980, according to Deborah Levenson-Estrada. She traces the emergence of a particular cultural and identity among urban unionists to its roots in Young Catholic Worker circles of the 1950s. The movement emphasized the power of people to transform life, the importance

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of moral self-empowerment, and the rights of workers as human beings and as workers (1994: 85–6). These were key elements of the movement’s social identity: “Activism required that workers perceive themselves, subjectively, in ways that made action possible in the specific situation that was theirs. An important part of this self-identity was the notion that trade unionists should make history” (ibid.: 232). The outcome was a trade union movement strong enough to attempt to organize workplaces in a context of severe repression. But another result of this voluntarist strategy, according to Levenson-Estrada (ibid.: 232–3), was a “disastrous triumphalism” that blinded the movement to the repressive capacity and will of the state that decimated the movement in 1980.

Thus in these various settings, reasons for acting that seem related to participation, defiance, and pleasure in agency appear to have played a role in the mobilization of long subordinate people, sometimes in circumstances of high risk and sometimes to tragic ends. Further research is needed to trace more precisely the role of such reasons for actions and how they emerged in particular social and cultural contexts. If the argument presented here holds more generally, as I believe it may, such tracing would find that participation in insurgent activities has cultural as well as political consequences that may, in some circumstances, reinforce insurgent values and beliefs such that insurgency continues despite high risks.

Implications

The argument presented here thus emphasizes the salience to insurgent participants of reasons for acting that concern others as well as themselves, the process of mobilization itself, the intentions of other actors, the outcome of actions for both themselves and other actors, and the endogeneity of values, beliefs, political culture, political identity, and political opportunity. And key reasons for acting were moral and emotional, not material interests. I hope this argument has not merely traced the existence of the “black boxes” of political mobilization (social networks, political opportunity, organization, insurgent culture, etc.) but analyzed their internal relations and the causal processes that link and constitute them (McAdam et al. 2001).

My account suggests that those who supported the insurgency were often brave and generous. It does not suggest that they were irrational. Like conventional explanations for collective action, my interpretation emphasizes intentional action taken with the purpose of realizing one’s interests or values as the key element of the microfoundations of collective action. Despite
the risks involved, insurgent campesinos had cogent and enduring reasons for participating, which they articulated to me at length and with remarkable consistency. Acting for these reasons was not irrational either in the substantive sense of “unreasonable” or in the formal sense of “inconsistent or incomplete.” These reasons for action thus pose no challenge to the intentional emphasis of rational choice approaches. I do not know whether my respondents acted wisely; some certainly acted heroically and others venally. But I am quite sure that they acted intentionally in the pursuit of their ends, often carefully weighing the benefits and costs.

My interpretation of campesino insurgency thus does not differ from rational choice accounts in its presumption of intention. However, it does differ from most such accounts in three ways.

First, my interpretation suggests the importance of reasons for acting absent from such accounts, namely, emotions. Emotions are often complementary to rationality. They have cognitive antecedents; they are occasioned by beliefs (Elster 1998). They trigger action by changing the relative salience of desires (Petersen 2002). Some are of short duration, triggering an “action tendency” toward an immediate response, such as the impulse to flee on being frightened. Others, more relevant for collective action, are long-standing, such as love or revenge. For example, moments of collective effervescence or euphoria are short-lived emotions that bear a resemblance to pleasure in agency, but pleasure in agency in the Salvadoran setting was profound and long-enduring, as evident in the pride in authorship of long-past actions of defiance.

Some scholars of collective action acknowledge moral and emotional reasons for collective action. Tibor Scitovsky (1976) argued that contributing to a public good may be a “pleasure,” not a cost. Albert Hirschman (1982: 89) emphasized that acting “to change society for the better” and joining together to do so was “pleasurable, in fact, intoxicating, in itself.” Still others have argued that the meaningfulness of participating in the making of history may motivate collective action (Hardin 1982). In contrast to much of the literature on collective action, which when it recognizes such motivations at all does so as a theoretical possibility or based on a brief anecdote, I have shown empirically how pleasure of agency emerged as a powerful motivation over the course of the insurgency.

17 However, Hirschman argued that the impetus to participation was disappointment in private pleasures, a motive unlikely to motivate participation in these high-risk circumstances by socially subordinate people.

Explaining Insurgent Collective Action

Recent scholarship on social movements concurs with the centrality of moral and emotional reasons for collective action. Not only do social networks provide channels for information and the possibility of sanctioning nonparticipants, but the affective bonds between members motivate participation even if the calculation of tangible costs and benefits does not (Jasper 1997; Jasper 1998; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001; Mansbridge 2001). In high-risk settings, part of the cultural work of the movement is to mitigate the fear of reprisals or violence that participants feel through rituals. In the U.S. civil rights movement and in the East Germany democracy movements, rituals such as songs, chants, and welcoming ceremonies generated collective effervescence in mass meetings, thereby evoking emotions that reknit commitment to the movement (Goodwin and Paff 2001). And the causal force of widening political opportunity at the national level has emotional consequences as a symbol of hope that may override the immediate local experience of increased repression, as did the decision in Brown v. the Board of Education (1954), which signaled the possibility of change despite the dramatic increase in repression in the U.S. South that followed on its heels (Goodwin et al. 2001: 7–8).

What my interpretation may contribute to this literature is an emphasis on the importance that long-subordinate social actors grant to the exercise of agency per se. To act in defiance of unjust authority, to claim recognition as equal subjects whose personhood needs be respected, to act effectively for the realization of essential interests, and to publicly assert the power of collective efficacy may be important reasons for the emergence of insurgent collective action elsewhere as well as in El Salvador, as we saw in the previous section. Karl Marx observed in The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte that “[m]en make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please.” The argument presented here suggests that in circumstances of high risk, participants may do so in part because of the value they place on making a more just history.

Second, while the other-regarding aspect of the reasons for action emphasized here are consistent with rational choice approaches, the intrinsic, or process-regarding, aspect is not. Reasons that refer irreducibly to the process itself or to a noninstrumental value and not to the outcomes of action are problematic because they challenge the consequentialist framework of rational choice (Sen 1977; Taylor 1988: 85–90; Chong 2001). In particular, acting out of moral commitment is not well understood in consequentialist terms, unless one infers that what matters is not the commitment but having the reputation for having the commitment, as Dennis Chong (1991)
suggested in his analysis of the U.S. civil rights movement. An alternate way to reconcile normative commitments with the consequentialist framework is to interpret that commitment as a preference for being the kind of person who has that commitment. For example, I may keep a promise to my dead grandmother that no one else knows about or would care about if they knew because I want to be a promise-keeping kind of person.

Both these attempts to reconcile moral commitments with consequentialist approaches understand human behavior by imputing a preference to the actor that is not recognized by the actor herself. The first and, perhaps, also the second attempt do not square with our introspective experience of what it is to have a moral norm or a value. Yet as the behavioral experiments reviewed above show, social preferences are ubiquitous. Taking them seriously should be a more promising line of research on collective action than imputing unrecognized motives.

Third, the values, norms, practices, and beliefs relevant for collective action were not fixed over the course of the civil war but evolved endogenously. Process-regarding and other-regarding motives, whose salience varied among potential participants for reasons of character and history, fueled participation through a spiral (virtuous or vicious, according to one’s lights) of participation reinforcing an emergent collective culture, whose bearers had the confidence to perceive and grasp new political opportunities and whose values of solidarity and participation led to further collective action, which forged new opportunities and again reinforced collective values, perceptions, and identities. This suggests that the common practice in applications of rational choice theory of assuming universalistic and fixed preferences is unwarranted and obscures dynamics essential to understanding collective action. If social scientists are to succeed in the construction of “analytic narratives” (Bates, Greif, Weingast, and Rosenthal 1998) that compellingly recreate the structures of choice and dynamics of historical political processes, the endogeneity of reasons for acting should be explored.

Of course this spiral does not necessarily occur. As Jeff Goodwin (1997) argues in his study of the Huk Rebellion, emotional ties may dampen participation if insurgents find themselves too torn between the claims of family and the organization, or if the guerrilla organization cannot successfully manage tensions among its members, including conflict over sexual and emotional relations. The study of intrinsic, other-regarding, process-based, and endogenous preferences may be as important to explaining quiescence as it apparently is in explaining insurgent collective action.

Explaining Insurgent Collective Action

The interpretation advanced here may help clarify how and when repression fosters mobilization rather than quiescence. The rising spiral of insurgent collective action described above is contingent on the evolving balance of military force. It may turn downward if the costs prove so high that defiance costs too much. In the Guatemalan highlands, after guerilla forces proved too weak to protect participants from the genocidally brutal response of government forces in the wake of the insurgents’ disastrous insurrectionary strategy, most Ixil Maya chose to live under army protection (Stoll 1993). They did so despite the military’s responsibility, according to the Guatemalan truth commission, for more than 90 percent of the violence. But in other circumstances, repression may result in levels of defiance that may help sustain insurgency. It appears that the consequences of government repression depend on whether initial insurgent capacity is sufficiently strong relative to initial government reaction, perhaps because the government’s repressive capacity is constrained for some reason. If so, campesinos may actively choose insurgency as an expression of sustained dissent, not merely as a way of securing protection, a finding at odds with Stoll’s position.

The pattern of insurgent collective action during the Salvadoran civil war shows how political opportunity is produced along the trajectory of protest and how local and national structures of political opportunity interact. Insurgents created their own political opportunities, expelling authorities from areas and initiating the case of insurgent cooperative land claims. Local political opportunity also depended in part on national opposition organizations. National organizations strengthened ties between cooperatives and forged contacts with journalists in San Salvador, which made possible an unprecedented degree of accountability for actions by government forces. The military threat posed by insurgent military forces forced hard-line military groups to tolerate counterinsurgency reforms (lest U.S. assistance be jeopardized), which made possible the reemergence of overt opposition organizations. At the national level, the continuation of the insurgency eventually forced the government and elite to agree to negotiations, which in the newly democratic rules of the game eventually institutionalized a different structure of political opportunity, particularly the holding for the first time of inclusive elections.

Perhaps, in light of these implications, this analysis of a particular case of insurgent collective action will contribute to our understanding of high-risk collective action. I hope so. But if I have merely succeeded in telling well the history of the civil war in the case-study areas, I will be pleased. I close where
I began, on the Cooperative California. One member of the cooperative told me in my last interview with him: “It has been a long twelve years. This Hacienda California, for me it is the whole story in miniature. Here fell my first drop of blood; this land is bathed in blood. For twelve years it has been a laboratory [for change], but twelve years is enough” (Tierra Blanca, 1992).

Epilogue: Legacies of an Agrarian Insurgency

We shed blood all these years in order to buy land at market prices?
Campesino activist, Tierra Blanca, 1992

In the course of El Salvador’s civil war, insurgent campesinos redrew boundaries of class, culture, and citizenship. By the end of the war, insurgent cooperatives occupied about a third of Usulután’s farmland. While desperately poor, insurgent campesinos in most of the case-study areas enjoyed an unprecedented autonomy from landlords and traditional authorities. They participated in a dense network of insurgent organizations that defended land occupations against the return of the landlords. The settlement that ended the civil war between the two parties was a democratic political bargain: in exchange for laying down their arms and abandoning their socialist objectives, the insurgent organization joined the polity, which was to be reformed along liberal democratic lines. Over the next several years, the provisions of the agreement were generally carried out, despite resistance on the part of the government to the implementation of some aspects of the agreement. That positive outcome required an extended process of negotiation and ongoing pressure on government officials (and to a lesser extent on the FMLN) by the United Nations in its role as observer and verifier of the peace agreement and by donor countries in their capacity as funders of reforms. Since 1994, elections have been held regularly and the FMLN has garnered an increasing share of political power, becoming the leading party in the national legislature in the 2000 elections. The required reforms to military, police, judicial, and electoral institutions have been