Dossier

# En búsqueda de los "archivos rebeldes" e historias comunistas de Centroamérica: Notas de campo

## Searching for Central America's "Rebel Archives" and Communist Histories: Notes from the Field

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Resumen: De acuerdo con mi experiencia en la realización de investigaciones de archivo durante la pandemia de covid-19 sobre los comunistas centroamericanos en Cuba, Rusia, México y El Salvador, argumento que el archivo es un sitio de lucha política donde los académicos e historiadores juegan un papel importante en determinar qué se recuerda y, igualmente importante, qué se olvida, especialmente cuando se trata de historias radicales y comunistas de/desde Centroamérica. Comienzo analizando los trabajos de académicos que informaron y influyeron mi análisis y enfoque transnacional para realizar mi investigación de archivo histórico, incluyendo académicos de Centroamérica, y luego comparto mi experiencia personal navegando archivos durante un clima político particularmente elevado en cuatro países diferentes con relaciones frágiles y controversiales con Estados Unidos.
Palabras clave: comunistas, rebelde, archivos, Centroamérica, lucha política.
Abstract: Building on and from my experience conducting archival research during the covid-19 pandemic on Central American communists in Cuba, Russia, Mexico, and El Salvador, I argue that the archive is a site of political struggle wherein scholars and historians play a significant role in determining what is remembered and, equally important, what is forgotten, especially when it comes to radical and communist histories of/from Central America. I begin by analyzing the works of scholars who informed and shaped my transnational analysis and approach to conducting historical archival research, including scholars of Central America, and then share my personal experience navigating archives during a particularly heightened political climate in four different countries with controversial and fragile US relations.
Keywords: communists, rebel, archives, Central America, political struggle.

## Introduction

> "Records are dangerous when a state is corrupt and authoritarian: they tell truths".
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> Suyapa Portillo,
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> *Roots of Resistance: A Story of Gender, Race, and Labor on the North Coast of Honduras*
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> "... archives are not simply accounts or actions or records of what people thought happened.
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> They are records of uncertainty and doubt of how people imagined they could and might make the rubrics of rule correspond to a changing imperial world".
>
> Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*

To begin unraveling a radical history of Central America's communist movements and parties, I spent roughly three years (2020-2023) conducting archival research in Mexico, Cuba, Russia, El Salvador, Guatemala, and the United States. My transnational approach derived from the fact that Central American communists organized almost entirely clandestinely during the early to mid-twentieth century, meaning they intentionally attempted to leave no trace behind. This was a survival strategy employed to evade the wrath of state-sponsored terror by which communists were often quite literally hunted and persecuted, thus making my archival research experience particularly challenging and complex.

Consequently, I witnessed varied attempts at both the erasure and preservation of Central America's history of transnational resistance and clandestine communist organizing during a heightened political climate—both in the moment and historically. The silences present in what Stoler calls the "colonial archives" (Stoler, 2010, p. 4) were deafening, while the momentary insights exposed in what Hernandez calls the "rebel archives" were like jarring chants of protests—speaking truth when and where you least expected it, but when you most needed it (Hernandez, 2017). Thus, for the sake of precision, in this essay I will recount my experience conducting archival research in Cuba, Mexico, Russia, and El Salvador during the covid-19 pandemic, and argue that the archive is a site of political struggle wherein scholars and historians, like myself, play a significant role in determining what is remembered and, more often, what is forgotten, especially in terms of communist histories of/from Central America.

Given that my work focuses on communist histories in Central America, before embarking on my archival research journey, I consulted the analysis of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the most

well-known and cited communist intellectuals in modern world history, to better understand the transformative, uneven, and often contradictory role of the archive in the preservation and documentation of history, especially communist histories. In Letters on Historical Materialism, they said:

> According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life... the economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure: political forms of the class struggle... the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the participants, political, juristic, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas, also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form (Marx et al., 1978, p. 760).

Herein, Marx and Engel's materialist conception of history reminds us that the development of human history is rooted in changing material conditions over time, as well as the class struggles that emerge in all their political forms. Moreover, they encourage us to consider the importance of the superstructure, or the influence of ideas/ideology, in the making of human history. This means explicitly identifying people (and their ideas) as active agents in the historical process, as well as the institutions created by them, such as political parties, governments, policies, religions, etc.

Similarly, when it comes to identifying people, Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues that "history, as a social process, involves peoples in three distinct capacities: 1) as agents, or occupants of structural positions; 2) as actors in constant interface with a context, and 3) as subjects, that is, as voices aware of their vocality" (Trouillot, 1995, p. 23). This emphasis on the varying roles of individuals or people in the making of history is particularly important when one considers the process of historical production. Herein, Trouillot emphasizes the materiality of the sociohistorical process, or the unequal creation of facts, which he suggests historians often take for granted when interpreting sources and writing historical narratives (Trouillot, 1995, pp. 28-29). Taking this into consideration, my approach to studying and writing a radical history of Central America meant consciously analyzing the ways on-going class struggle—and the people engaged in the process—changed and determined the course of history, including the sources and archive itself. This meant thinking beyond the confounds of the nation-state, particularly for Central America, which is geographically defined by seven distinct states, and considering the ways Central American communists functioned as historical agents, actors, and/or subjects at various stages in their practice of class struggle and international solidarity across borders.

My reasoning for focusing on communist histories in Central America is simple: communism, or the eradication thereof, is how the United States justified its bloody and violent intervention in Central America throughout the course of the entire twentieth century. Despite being a relatively small group of organized working and middle-class intellectuals and workers, the threat of communism in Central America was real enough that the United States spared absolutely nothing in their attempts to abolish any possibility of a communist revolution. My question then is: Why, and how? Were communists as big a threat as they were made out to be? What were Central American communists actively doing that the United States government feared them with such tenacious distain?

In conducting my preliminary research to prepare for my archival research journey, more often than not, I found that histories on modern Central America and its legacies of resistance try to disassociate or distance themselves from "the communists" without clearly explaining why. While this most certainly has to do with the end of the Cold War and academia's affirmative response to The End of History (Fukuyama, 2006), which celebrates the "victory" of Western liberal democracy and capitalism over communism after the 1992 fall of the Soviet Union, the current crisis of global capitalism begs us to not take this premise for granted, but rather to continue insisting: why? It is almost as if the academics who claim to be rescuing Central America's history of organized resistance simultaneously harbor the same distain for communists as the culprits of the violence being perpetuated against them. I cannot count the number of times I have read or heard academics say: But they weren't communists! They were innocent civilians! They were campesinos fighting for their rights! They were indigenous peoples fighting for their lands! They were women fighting the patriarchy! They didn't deserve to die! This discourse implies two things: First, if you are a communist, you do, in fact, deserve to die. Second, that being a civilian, campesino, woman, or indigenous person are all mutually exclusive identities incapable of simultaneously sympathizing with ideological beliefs outside of these defined identities. But what about the civilians, campesinos, women, and indigenous people who were communists? Who did engage in class struggle and fight for their rights collectively because they did, in fact, sympathize with the communist ideas? These were the questions that were racing through my mind as I prepared for my archival research journey. Would I find them? The challenge for me was figuring how to go about uncovering these histories when many, in fact, hid or denied their involvement and activities with communist movements because of the violent repression that came with its association.

Few exceptions to this tendency include scholars like Joaquin Chávez (Chávez, 2017), Avi Chomsky, Aldo Lauria-Santiago (Chomsky & Lauria-Santiago, 1998), Jeffrey Gould (Gould y Lauria-

Santiago, 2008), Arturo Taracena (Taracena Arriola, 1989), Ivan Molina (Palmer y Molina Jiménez, 2004), and Cindy Forrester (Forster, 2001), who provide more complexity and nuance to our understanding of Central Americans' various racial, ethnic, and even religious identities whilst not divorcing them completely from potential political sympathies, affiliations, or militancy. More recently, Suyapa Portillo-Villeda's Roots of Resistance: A Story of Gender, Race, and Labor on the North Coast of Honduras (Portillo Villeda, 2021) provides excellent insight into the complexities and existing voids in Honduran labor history. In her book, Portillo highlights the history and legacy of the 1954 labor strike, the largest banana strike in Honduran history, which she suggests led to the formation of several organized resistance groups, including the second manifestation of the Communist Party of Honduras in the 1950s (Portillo-Villeda, 2021, pp. 246-247). What is fascinating about this claim is that she openly, without reservation, discusses the intentional omission of communists from Honduran labor history, and begins to address this mistake:

> The official history of Honduras, primarily that of the official political electoral parties, omits Marxists (and other leftist and even leftist feminists) and their striving for a different vision of democracy and equitable society.... Workers of the earlier period detailed the persecution they faced for being associated with the Liberal Party or for being communists, indeed for seeking change, in the banana camps at the midcentury. Many led clandestine lives full of silence, resulting in gaps in the historical record (Portillo-Villeda, 2021, p. 242).

Herein, Portillo unapologetically makes the link between the Honduran labor movement and its communist party. She goes on to talk about her arduous struggle attempting to find subjects willing to share their experience in the 1954 strike and the forthcoming Communist Party of Honduras. She explains that on many occasions former militants refused to share their testimonies due to the repercussions it could have on them, as well as on her as a Central American scholar. On this, she reflects:

> Perhaps they are right to be fearful of breaking their silence wide open. Perhaps their knowledge and full telling of their history could still be considered dangerous to share and would bring out another round of repression. Silences surround the history of Central Americans, a heritage of clandestine organizing life since 1954—almost all working-class Honduras has been touched by this phenomenon, a result of the Cold War and US-backed state persecution (Portillo-Villeda, 2021, p. 242).

Inspired by Portillo's work and insights, as well as following the lead of other Central American scholars (Alvarado et al., 2017; Rodríguez, 2009), I began to search, build, and deepen my analysis and approach to archival research and labor. This led me to engage with other contemporary black and femme scholars, including Anna

Laura Stoler, Kelly Lytle Hernandez, Viviana Beatriz MacManus, Genevieve Carpio, Michel-Rolph Trouillot and Kirsten Weld (Weld, 2014), who have all pointed out various degrees of existing gaps, voids, and silences present in the archive. Trouillot, for example, emphasizes the necessity and importance of identifying silences in the historical record resulting from the uneven distribution of power in the production of sources, archives, and narratives (Trouillot, 1995, p. 27). According to Trouillot, "Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance)" (Trouillot, 1995, p. 26). This premise was significant in shaping my approach and analysis of sources both in and outside of the archive.

Herein, reflecting on my own archival experience in the field, I found that archives are designed to gatekeep important information while serving the interests of a particular class. This finding is not novel nor surprising, but rather a confirmation of what previous scholars have already alluded to and articulated. Nonetheless, it is important to remember and acknowledge that archives continue to be significantly important historical repositories that determine what society remembers, and—equally important—what society forgets. Moreover, they can contribute to the proliferation of traditional narratives of empire that the colonial archive wishes to preserve, or actively disrupt the narratives of empire, which is what I argue the "rebel archive" seeks to undo. By disrupting narratives of empire, rebel archives enable researchers to think and process outside its parameters. They can be formal, informal, institutional, or untraditional. Additionally, while rebel archives certainly do not depend on state actors, they can, and sometimes do, still play a role. Conversely, while the colonial archive certainly depends on state actors, it does not and cannot always account for rebel dissidents within the state or archive. Does this mean, then, that one can find rebel archival sources within the confounds of a colonial archive? Possibly. More often than not, though, the rebel archive lies outside of the margins of the colonial archive, thus enabling more actors to contribute to both the preservation and making of clandestine histories through their own agency and creativity.

Ann Laura Stoler argues that colonial archives, or official state archives, are—by design—meant to preserve the official history of empire. "It carves into the flesh of race, slices through the legal armature of white privilege, slashes through the history of public welfare, and, not least, cleaves into the conceit that more knowledge secures a more durable empire" (Stoler, 2010, p. 8). Nonetheless, her interest in unpacking a colonial history of native communities in the Netherland Indies led her to engage with the colonial archive wherein

she challenged the narrative of empire by looking beyond the finite boundaries of the state archive and focusing on its "surplus production" (Stoler, 2010, p. 14), or the excess material kept in the depths of the archive that go beyond what the empire necessitates to make its claims.[1]

Conversely, in her book City of Inmates, Kelly Lytle Hernandez focused her archival labor on identifying what she calls the rebel archive, or "the words and deeds of dissidents" (Hernandez, 2017, p. 4) that evaded documentation by state institutions like law enforcement. For Hernandez, this meant tracking down "broken locks, secret codes, handbills, scribbled manifestos, and songs" (Hernandez, 2017, p. 5) hidden in the crevasses of the informal private archives of grassroots organizations, as well as doing archival work outside of Los Angeles to unmask "the largest system of human caging the world has ever known" (Hernandez, 2017, p. 15). Building from Hernandez's innovative scholarship, concept, and approach, Dr. Genevieve Carpio identifies "rebel archives" as sources that are overlooked by mainstream accounts and produced by "those who would be eliminated" but "defied their own erasure" (Carpio, 2020, p. 17). According to Carpio, this can be photo albums, school records, popular and social media, digital humanities projects, and "counter-mapping", all of which can contribute to the making of "subversive histories".

Along this same vein, Vivian Beatriz MacManus's feminist analysis and historical approach argues that "disruptive archives" include "cultural productions and oral histories that challenge dominant, masculinist discourses that have positioned the women political activists on the periphery, and/or have criminalized and erased their agency from this history" (MacManus, 2020, p. 3). MacManus invites scholars of revolutionary movements in Latin American history to depart from traditional archives and explore feminist knowledge articulated through cultural texts and productions, creative outlets, documentary films, and oral histories. This was particularly useful to consider when I began my research on the Communist Party of Costa Rica (PCCR) and came across a plethora of creative publications written by Costa Rican militant communist women, such as Carmen Lyra and Luisa Gonzalez, who are more commonly recognized and celebrated today for their contributions to children's literature than for their communist affiliations, political organizing, and radical militancy (Gonzalez, 1994; Lyra y Horan, 2000).

To this end, inspired by and drawing from the analysis and approach of each of the previously mentioned contemporary black and femme scholars, I concluded that my methodological approach necessitated engaging both the formal colonial archive—including its "surplus production", or what remains of it—and the in/formal rebel and disruptive archives. For me, this meant going beyond state

institutions in Central America, which often labeled revolutionary groups as "terrorist" organizations or outlawed them entirely, and searching archives outside of the Isthmus to track down private (i.e. personal) and rebel archives maintained by non-traditional entities, including, but not limited to, community organizations, individuals, and contemporary political parties. This approach led me to explore archives in Cuba, Mexico, and Russia, wherein I was advised I would find potentially useful sources and collections—and I certainly did. Unfortunately, however, because my fieldwork also coincided with the onset of the covid-19 pandemic, when it came to Central America, I was only able to visit El Salvador and Guatemala.

Additionally, the pandemic heightened global political tensions, which escalated crises in countries with fragile US relations and led to a new wave of twenty-first century imperialist wars and territorial conflicts in the very countries where I was conducting research. For example, during my 8-month stay in Cuba, I witnessed the debilitating effects of the 60+ year US embargo, which literally deprived people of essential access to resources, including life-saving medicine and vaccine syringes, during the pandemic.[2] The people called it "El bloqueo genocida," (or the "genocidal blockade"). These conditions were further exacerbated by the Trump administration's wave of sanctions against Cuba, including unjustly adding Cuba to the list of "terrorist" states (Pompeo, 2021), which continue in effect under the Biden administration. In Russia, I was in Moscow when the Russo-Ukrainian conflict broke out, the product of a geopolitical war dating back to 2014, although some might argue that it dates back to WWII (Lopatonok, 2017), which resulted in a tsunami of US sanctions on Russia and an exodus of Ukrainian refugees who were openly welcomed into neighboring Europe and the United States (Ainsley, 2023; Keith, 2022). In Mexico, I witnessed the on-going refugee crisis at the Mexican border where Haitian and Central American migrants continued to be harassed by Mexican authorities as well as denied asylum in the US. In El Salvador, the self-proclaimed "coolest dictator" Nayib Bukele extended his 30-day "state of exception" wherein all civil liberties were suspended, and the military, police, and national guard were all given license to arrest, incarcerate, and kill without due process or justification (Abrego y Osuna, 2022; Cristosal, 2023).

In Guatemala, nationwide protests erupted in the streets when Thelma Cabrera, the first woman of Mayan descent to run for presidency, was denied candidacy to participate in the upcoming presidential elections (Batz, 2023). Instead, the electoral tribunal accepted the candidacy of Zury Rios, the daughter of the notorious dictator Efrain Rios Mont, who was convicted of crimes against humanity for the genocide of Guatemala's Maya Ixil community (Miller, 2023). It was in this context and in these countries that I

spent the last three years conducting archival research for my dissertation.

The historical parallels I witnessed throughout my journey made my archival fieldwork feel strangely surreal: Walking out of the archive in Moscow and hearing the media announce the growing possibility of World War III made me wonder: Is this what it must have felt during the onset of WWII? Moreover, listening to the media's keen focus on the historic rivalry between Russia and the United States—two world powers using a proxy war in Eastern Europe to fight for and maintain their regional and global hegemony —meanwhile completely overlooking the military dictatorship rampaging through El Salvador, all had a tinge of Cold War era politics to it. In many ways, living the current moment repeatedly reminded me why my research continues to be relevant and important to understanding how we got here in the first place. Ultimately, it was a reminder of the historical precedents that led to our biggest crisis yet: the crisis of global capitalism, which has been further exacerbated by the rise of neofascist governments and the ongoing war on revolutionary movements rooted in radical leftist politics. Indeed, my research, which looks at the rise of communist parties and movements in Central America from 1920-1960 as a response to the onset of agrarian capitalism and fascism in the region, is an early manifestation of the current moment—a warning, one could say, of what was yet to come.

## Notes from the field

### CUBA

I began my archival fieldwork in Havana, Cuba in early 2020, just months before the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic. It was in Cuba where I first heard about covid as mentions of it began trickling in and making news on the island well before the US began to take it seriously. I was lucky that during that first trip I was still in time to access and visit the Instituto de Historia de Cuba (IHC) before everything shutdown. The IHC, founded in 1987, houses three collaborative research centers, including the Instituto de Historia del Movimiento Comunista y de la Revolución Socialista de Cuba (IHMCRS), which is where I spent most of my time. The IHC is Cuba's primary research institution dedicated to scientific historical investigations, an initiative of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba. In this archive, I found sources that reveal the important and overlooked relationship between the Communist Party of Cuba and Central American communist parties from 1920-1960. The archive organized its documents by country, which made it easy for me to find primary sources on six out of the seven countries that make up the Central American Isthmus: Guatemala,

Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. The only exception was Belize (formerly British Honduras), which did not gain its independence until 1981 (Pérez Brignoli, 1989, p. 26). To this day, these sources remain largely unexamined by researchers and scholars of Central America's communist parties and movements.

As a result, this archive proved to be an excellent starting point for my research. I found everything from letters between the Communist Party of Cuba to the communist parties of Central America debating strategy and party lines, to reports written by communist militants addressing the fundamental economic and social problems facing their respective countries at the time. I also found newsletters, organizational bylaws, memos, and secondary sources, such books and reports written by Cuba's international relations bureau on Central America. In 2021, I returned to Cuba to continue my archival research at Casa de las Americas where I found correspondence from revolutionary Roque Dalton, one of El Salvador's most famous communist literary writers and poets. I was also given access to the Casa de las Americas library, which has an extensive collection of literary texts produced by Central American leftist organizations and individuals, such as Otto Rene Castillo and Manuel Galich. In 2022, I returned a third time to conduct research at the Ministry of Exterior Relations (MINREX, by its Spanish acronym).

Herein, I would like to briefly focus on what I consider to be my most important finding from my archival work in Cuba: a collection of primary source documents that highlight the radical history of the founding of the communist party and movement of Costa Rica in the 1930s and 1940s. Of all the country documents archived in the Instituto de Historia, Costa Rica proved to be by and large the most abundant, which came to me as a surprise considering that Costa Rica is often portrayed as the most politically neutral of all the Central American countries in the Isthmus— that is, the "Switzerland of Central America" (Palmer y Molina Jiménez, 2004, p. 1). This finding clashes with the myth of Costa Rican exceptionalism, which has generated a plethora of arguments regarding Costa Rican history on just about everything from race, labor, politics, and class—a history that few scholars have contested (Palmer y Molina Jiménez, 2004, pp. 2-3). While Palmer and Molina actively challenge Costa Rican exceptionalism in The Costa Rica Reader, they only briefly acknowledge the contributions of some of Costa Rica's most prominent communist intellectuals, such as Manuel Mora, Carlos Luis Fallas, Carmen Lyra, and Luisa Gonzalez (Palmer y Molina Jiménez, 2004, pp. 99-108). Between the two authors, Molina has by far the longest and most extensive trajectory of research on Costa Rica's communist parties and organizers primarily based on sources from Costa Rica and the Russian state archives (Molina Jiménez, 2004, 2008; Molina Jiménez et al., 2000). Thus, my finding of primary sources at the Instituto de Historia that discuss relations

between the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) and the Communist Party of Costa Rica in detail and length provides evidence to not only prove that Costa Rica did, in fact, have an active, lively, and robust communist movement and party, but also serves as evidence that Costa Rican communists worked closely in solidarity with other Latin American communist parties, specifically Cuba.

For example, in a letter dated December 26, 1935, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Costa Rica (PCCR) by the name of Barrontes addressed the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) asking for advice on how to approach the upcoming presidential elections of February 1936, which they perceived to be of extreme importance in the fight against fascism in Costa Rica (Barrontes, 1935). The right-wing candidate up for election that year was León Cortés Castro, a Nazi sympathizer and strong advocate of the banana industry, particularly the United Fruit Company, in Central America. His campaign depended heavily on anti-communist propaganda flaunting slogans like "Cortesism or communism, the extreme right or the extreme left, fascism or sovietism" (García, 2004, p. 87). Thus, even though the general election of 1936 was the first election where the PCCR, legally registered as the Bloque de Obreros y Campesinos (BOC), was allowed to participate, the party feared it did not yet have the popular support to win the presidential elections. The PCC, thus, advised the BOC to join forces with the Socialist Party of Costa Rica to back Octavio Jiménez Alpízar, who was not a communist, but who the PCCR considered to be anti-imperialist. The effort, unfortunately, was futile—Cortés won with a 25-point margin (García, 2004, p. 90).

Two significant things stand out from this finding: the first, is that — while the BOC did not manage to win the 1936 elections—it did manage to become a legally recognized political party, a feat no other communist party in Central America had achieved at the time (Molina Jiménez, 2008). This put the BOC and its communist movement at a unique advantage relative to its neighboring countries. How and why was this possible? Molina suggests that this was because "en Costa Rica prevaleció, desde el siglo XIX, una tendencia a enfrentar los conflictos sociales por vías que privilegiaban la búsqueda de acuerdos institucionales" (Molina Jiménez, 2008, pp. 175-176). He claims that, following a brief period of electoral exclusion between 1931-1932, the BOC began to gain municipal seats after successfully organizing a rural working-class base of voters in 1934. Seeing the possibility of an electoral victory, this tendency reinforced the BOC's reformist line, thus becoming the main vehicle the Costa Rican communists used to pursue social change (Molina Jiménez, 2008, p. 176). This fascinating discovery, further supported by the scholarship of other Costa Rican scholars, sheds new light on the early formation of the Communist Party of Costa Rica and its relations with other communist parties.

Ultimately, what I came to love and admire about my archival research experience in Cuba is that they are actively preserving the radical history of communist movements and socialist revolutions not just in Central America, but across Latin America and the world at large. Despite working with extremely limited resources and facilities in dire need of renovation, the Instituto de Historia de Cuba, my host institution, proved to be an excellent and uniquely supportive resource for scholars like me. Of course, this is no accident. It is no secret that post 1959 Cuba is a socialist state. This means that there is a vested interest in preserving socialist histories, as well as nurturing and encouraging intellectuals, the "producers" of knowledge, to delve into this history with as much information as possible. Herein, I find that –despite being official archives of the state– Cuban archives are, in fact, "rebel archives" committed to disrupting traditional histories and narratives of capitalist empire on a global level. Cuban scholars, academics, and intellectuals acknowledge that the archive is a site of a political struggle and, as such, represent the interests of the class they are seeking to preserve.

## MEXICO

> "Los archivos iluminan el sendero de la verdad, el instrumento más poderoso para alcanzar la justicia".
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> —Archivo General de la Nación (Mexico, D. F.),
>
> Secretaría de Gobernación

The irony of the above quote, which I captured in the public exhibit displayed during my visit to the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN) de Mexico, considered one of the most important national archives in Latin America (Mañé, 1940, p. 63), is that my experience in the Mexican archives proved to be far more nuanced than I was made to believe. This became evident throughout my time exploring several archives in Mexico, beginning with the AGN. Originally proposed in 1790, the AGN was designed to safeguard official documents pertaining to Nueva España (Mañé, 1940, p. 74), the name given to territories colonized by the Spanish empire in what is now modern-day Latin America, thus fitting neatly into Stoler's definition of the traditional colonial archive. Over the years, however, the AGN has undergone radical transformations under different government administrations and has survived massive political upheavals that changed the course of Mexican history (Mañé, 1940). This includes the 1821 independence movement as well as the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), both of which brought changes to the colonial archive that maintained the collections established while also encouraging the preservation of more nuanced, inclusive, and "subversive histories". Eventually, in 1982, the AGN was relocated to

the Palacio de Lecumberri, which was formerly a Porfirian penitentiary prison, after architects struggled to reclaim the space and honor the lives of those previously excluded from the prison-archive (Draper, 2013, pp. 352-372). This is where I visited the archive for the first time.

Unfortunately, upon my arrival in January 2022, I spent most of my time attempting to navigate the bureaucracy of the state archive, which was (understandably) further complicated by added restrictions implemented as precautionary measures due to the covid pandemic. This meant I was only able to secure three two-hour appointments during my five weeks in Mexico. Once inside, the extent of what was made available to me was one folder of newspaper articles and communist propaganda related the Communist Party of Mexico in the 1920s. I also scavenged to find one additional folder on the collection of Emilio Portes Gil, who apparently had extensive correspondence with Augusto Cesar Sandino during his political exile in Mexico in the late 1920s. Despite being told it might be lost, I was finally able to locate it, and found a significant number of documents written by Sandino to Portes Gil—a wonderful surprise! Additionally, in the fototeca, or archive of photographs, I managed to find some interesting photos of Agustin Farabundo Marti, the founder of the Communist Party of El Salvador, alongside Augusto Cesar Sandino, the leader of the 1927 anti-imperialist revolt in Nicaragua, during their time as exiles in Mexico, in the Colección Augusto Cesar Sandino (Figure 1).

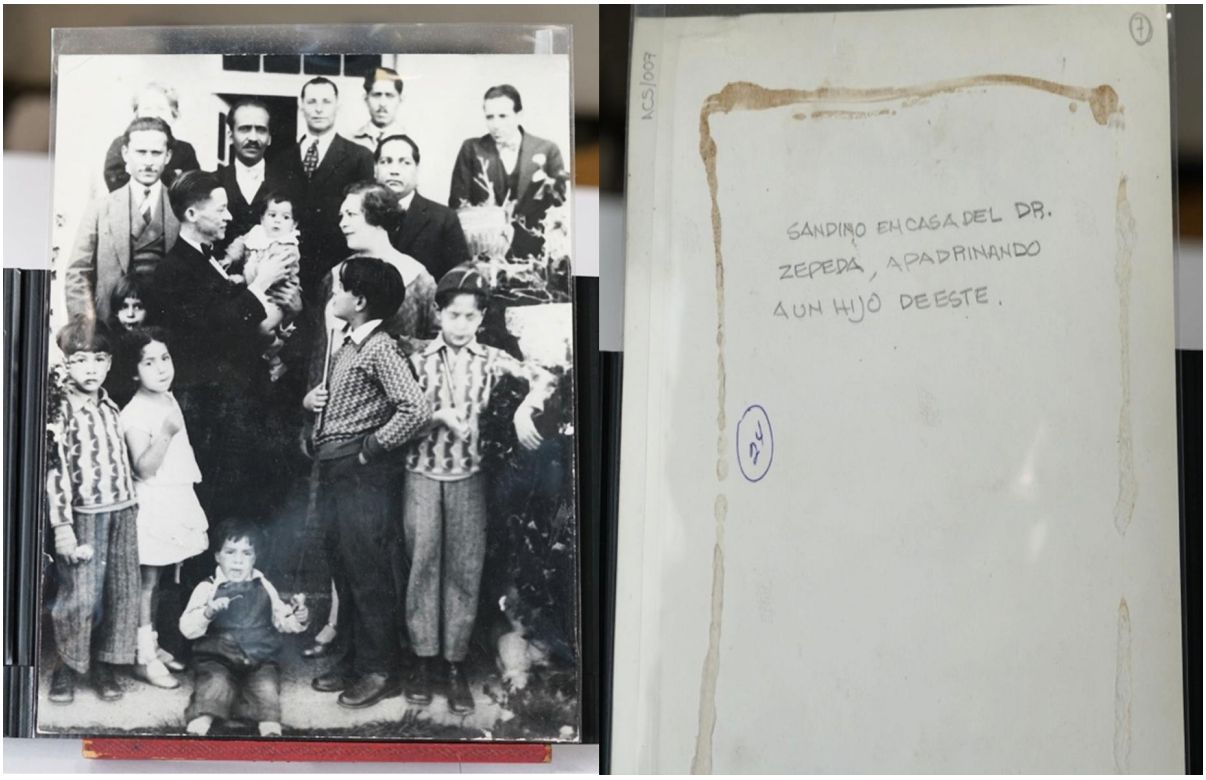


**Figure 1**

Augusto Sandino picture

Note: [Front] Family photo of Augusto Sandino's son's baptism. Farabundo Marti (second to the left of the back row, closet to center) is standing directly behind Augusto Sandino (first adult to the left of the front row), who is holding and looking directly at his infant son, and posing for a group photo. [Back] Written descriptor reading: "Sandino en casa del Dr. Zepeda, apadrinando a un hijo de este" (AGN Fototeca, Colección Augusto Cesar Sandino, Caja 7, ACS/001-ACS/096).

This included, for example, a photo of Farabundo attending the baptism of Sandino's son (image above), which is typically considered a very intimate family event and gathering in Latin America. This was an interesting finding because, while many scholars focus on the political rivalry that existed between Marti and Sandino, few have delved into the depths and nuances of their friendship and points of unity. Unfortunately, nothing accompanied the photo other than some handwritten text on the back that said "Sandino en casa del Dr. Zepeda, apadrinando a un hijo de este". Moreover, the absence of Marti's name in the description made me wonder how and why he had been overlooked in this photograph as an important historical figure worthy of being mentioned in the descriptor.

Consequently, I found several more group photos like this one which neglected to acknowledge or mention Farabundo Marti despite being frontally positioned next to Sandino in each photograph. This led me to wonder how many more times Marti had been overlooked by archivists and historians at the AGN—a possibility that would certainly further obfuscate and limit inquiry

into the potential solidarity and/or rivalry between Sandino and Marti, as well as possibly silence or erase Marti's impact in post-revolutionary Mexico during his 1920s exile. Overall, the general indifference, lack of support, and misidentification of potentially useful documents made me deeply question the credibility of the sources housed at the AGN, as it emphasized in its public exhibit. While I do not doubt that there are other aspects of Mexican and Latin American history where the AGN might prove to be incredibly useful, communist histories and their actors/agents are certainly not within its priorities.

My second archival destination in Mexico was the Centro de Estudios del Movimiento Obrero y Socialista (CEMOS), the home of the private archive of the Partido Comunista Mexicano (PCM). Independently funded and staffed by former militants of the PCM and current militants of the PSUM (Partido Socialista Unificado de Mexico), the CEMOS archive is said to be the largest and most important repository of documents regarding communist and socialist movements and organizations in Mexico (Espínola Terán, 2021). You can imagine my dismay then when, upon my first arrival, I discovered that the CEMOS had been indefinitely closed. What I hoped would be my most valuable research haven in Mexico—one of its "rebel archives"—turned into a nogo. I had to wait almost two years before it re-opened to service researchers again. When I was finally able to return in 2023, I learnt that, unlike the AGN, without federal or state resources, funding, or support, the CEMOS was unable to staff and maintain operations during the pandemic, thus making the archive inaccessible to researchers. This was an unfortunate reality of both the pandemic and the state of historical archives in Mexico, as well as an example of how the state intentionally contributes to the preservation and/or erasure of certain historical narratives—by servicing some and neglecting others. This is also another example of how the archive is a site of a political struggle —one where the allocation of resources and priorities of the state can dictate what historical documents researchers have access to and which ones they do not have access to.

Luckily, upon my return in August 2023, when I was finally able to access the CEMOS, I was excited to find significant primary and secondary sources regarding Mexican solidarity with Central America's developing communist movements and parties. This included several interviews with former militants of the Communist Party of El Salvador (PCS), Central America (PCCA), and Guatemala (PCG), published in the Revista Memoria, the official magazine of the CEMOS with issues dating back to 1983. My most interesting finding was a series of first-hand articles about and/or by Jorge Fernandez Anaya, a former militant of the PCM and a significant figure in the original founding of the PCS, PCCA, and PCG. After coming across his name in several primary and secondary

sources, I became increasingly perplexed by who this seemingly random Mexican communist was, and what he was doing in Central America. Through the CEMOS, I learned that this historic figure was deeply committed to practicing international solidarity with Central America, specifically El Salvador and Guatemala. Moreover, through the CEMOS's fototeca, I was also able to put a face to the name. Not only did I find photographs of Anaya during his time in the Federación de la Juventud Comunista (1929), I found group photos of other important identifiable faces, such as Miguel Angel Vasquez and Rosalio Blackwell, who were also fundamental in Central America's early communist movement, thus providing further insight and clues into the lives of significant figures and militants of the PCM, PCS, PCG, and PCCA.

Furthermore, despite having limited background and familiarity on Central America, the CEMOS staff was incredibly friendly, supportive, and knowledgeable about communist and labor history in Latin America more broadly, which was instrumental in helping me navigate the sources, references, and guides they had available. One of the things that I appreciated the most about my time at the CEMOS is that the staff seemed genuinely interested in my research, which caught me a little by surprise after my experience at the AGN, where the staff appeared much more apathetic and unmoved by my inquiries and concerns, thus making me feel more distant, detached, and isolated. In the end, after years of waiting, the CEMOS proved to be by and large the most useful and supportive historical "rebel archive" in Mexico, at least for my purposes and research.

Lastly, while in Mexico, I was also able to visit the archive of the Secretaría de Relaciones Internacionales (SRI) and the library of the Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de las Revoluciones de México (INEHRM) where I was able to find useful primary and secondary sources on Mexican relations with Central America during the early twentieth century. At the SRI, I spent a significant amount of time looking through documents on El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Guatemala during the 1940s, including an extensive collection of newspaper articles and reports written by the Mexican consulate in San Salvador that documented the overthrow of Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez in 1944, as well as the civil war in Costa Rica in 1948. At the library of the INEHRM, I also found secondary sources on the history of the Communist Party of Mexico, which included its affiliations to other Latin American communist parties. My most valuable finding was a two-part dissertation on the origins of the PCM from 1912-1945 that derived most of its primary sources from the CEMOS archives. Lastly, I was able to visit the Hemeroteca Nacional de Mexico (HNM), located at the Universidad Autónoma de México (UNAM), where I found digital copies of El Machete, the official newspaper of the PCM from 1924-1938. Although incomplete, this collection provided some insights into the PCM's

political analysis regarding the larger struggle towards communism across Latin America, including Central America. Thus, despite being archives of the state, the SRI, INEHRM, and HNM, through their surplus production, also housed valuable sources regarding Central America's communist history.

## RUSSIA

In Russia, I focused all my energy on one archive: the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI, by its Russian acronym), also known as the official archive of the Communist International from 1919-1943. Despite being warned by several people that I would have difficulties navigating the archive as a US citizen, I was surprised to experience the opposite. My experience at the RGASPI proved to be, in many ways, like my archival experience in Cuba with the added advantage that the Russian facilities were much more updated and renovated, but the disadvantage of not knowing the Russian language. Luckily, I was afforded a translator by the archive on my very first day, and whenever I needed help thereafter other researchers would kindly volunteer to translate for me.[3] In terms of the collections, I was particularly interested in looking at documents related to Central America's early communist parties, which were all documents safeguarded, organized, and made available to researchers by the RGASPI in the 1990s (Pujals y Vladimirov, 2009, pp. 48-59).

Like in Cuba, I was able to find an abundance of primary sources from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua. These documents included, but were not limited to, letters directed at the leadership of the Communist International, reports on the political/economic conditions of each country and the state of the communist movement, manifestos, dossiers of party members, pictures, propaganda, and newspaper articles. In many ways, despite being an official state archive, the RGASPI also proved to be an extremely wellpreserved and useful "rebel archive" committed to preserving the communist history not just of Central America, but of the international communist movement of the early twentieth century—a project that, most certainly, disrupts traditional narratives of empire, particularly related to US imperialism and the rise of fascism.

While it is certainly true that previous scholars have already examined these documents and written their own historical analysis based on these sources (Ching y Ramírez, 2017; Ching y Tilley, 1998; Gould y Lauria-Santiago, 2008; Taracena Arriola, 1989, 2010), my interest in reexamining these documents stems from questions about how communists conceptualized and organized against fascism within Central America—an ideological phenomenon that surges precisely during the interwar period around the same time that

Central America's first communist parties begin to form—as well as how these parties worked in solidarity with other Latin American revolutionary movements and communist parties. Both of these topics have seemingly overlooked by previous Central Americanist scholars in their historical analysis of Central American communists.

For example, my most significant finding from the RGASPI thus far was their collection of documents on the first Communist Party of Guatemala (PCG) and the first Communist Party of Central America (PCCA). Although many of the documents were party manifestos and reports, they also included significant correspondence between the PCG, PCCA, and the Communist International from the mid- to late 1920s, right before the 1932 persecution of communists in Guatemala that led to eradication of both parties. This finding is significant because it coincides with the 1932 peasant uprising and massacre in El Salvador, which also sought to eradicate the communists and, simultaneously, the indigenous population. While there has recently been increased research and scholarly interest on 1932 El Salvador (Ching y Tilley, 1998; Gould y Lauria-Santiago, 2008), little is known about what was happening in neighboring Guatemala where a robust and active labor movement—collaborating with the Communist Party of Guatemala and Central America—was active at the same time (Taracena Arriola, 1989, 2010). Moreover, less is known about the origins, goals, and methods of the first and only manifestation of the Communist Party of Central America. These documents shed light on the ideological origins of both parties, as well as their on-going evolution and international solidarity efforts with other revolutionary movements, especially the Communist Party of Mexico (PCM). Herein, it becomes evident that both the PCG and PCCA were in direct communication with the PCM, who played a significant role in founding, formalizing, and organizing both parties. These findings challenge common misconceptions of the "historic" antagonism between Mexicans and Central Americans, which often erase moments of solidarity between both groups. While it is certainly true that Mexican state antagonism against Central Americans exists (and has existed), what my sources show that is also true is that Mexicans and Central Americans have worked hand-in-hand to challenge capitalist discourse and interests in Latin America beyond the confounds of their respective nation-states in the past. This finding is further supported by my previously mentioned experience and findings at the CEMOS, the Centro de Estudios del Movimiento Obrero y Socialista, in Mexico City.

Unfortunately, one week after my arrival to Moscow, the RussoUkrainian conflict broke out, and I was forced to reconsider the length of my stay in Russia.[4] As a US citizen traveling with an American passport, I was advised by many to get out as quickly as

possible as things could become more difficult for me. Sure enough, things did get more complicated, but not for the reasons you would imagine. Being in Moscow, I was far enough away from the Ukrainian border that, had it not been for the media coverage, it is possible I would not have known about the conflict at all—at least not right away. Nonetheless, things got more complicated once US sanctions kicked in. My credit cards stopped working. I could no longer withdraw cash from local banks. Airbnb was no longer allowed to service international tourists or visitors. My flights got cancelled (twice). Without money, flights, or secure housing, my material conditions forced me to cut my stay short. In that moment, the archive literally became yet another site of political struggle—one in which my material well-being was also at stake due to the geopolitical madness surrounding me.

Herein, it bears noting that, although my material conditions were indeed precarious because of the sanctions imposed on Russia by the United States, I was not in any immediate danger. While my family and friends in the US were being bombarded by mainstream media with horrific images of the invasion occurring at the Russian-Ukrainian border, life in Moscow went on. People went to work, took the metro, attended school, and had family game nights at local restaurants. Everything seemed "normal". While US media attempted to portray massive dissent within Russia, especially Moscow, I was seeing none of that. This reality made me deeply question the source of information being shared and reproduced in the US about what has happening in Russia and its relations with neighboring Ukraine.

For example, throughout my stay, I met Russo-Ukrainians (people born in Ukraine who immigrated to Russia or Russians whose families descended from Ukraine) who favored and celebrated the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk from Ukraine, which was supported by the Russian government and military. Not only did they not talk about it in terms of an "invasion", but instead they interpreted it as a step towards liberation and autonomy from Ukraine. You can imagine my confusion then when back home everyone was outraged by the "invasion" to the extent that within weeks Biden announced that the US would welcome up to 100,000 Ukrainian refugees (Keith, 2022). Moreover, I was baffled by how this presumably internal conflict between Russia and Ukraine had suddenly escalated to national and global news (Lopez, 2022). While the United States rivalry with Russia certainly has its historical roots, including neighboring Ukraine (Lopatonok, 2017), it was interesting to witness the US's growing concern with the conflict while simultaneously showing little to no sympathy or interest in territorial conflicts and disputes taking place much closer to home in Latin America, where people continue to risk their lives and seek asylum outside of their home countries, including Central America (Cárcamo y Abrego, 2021). Reflecting on these observations and

questions as I was conducting my own research regarding Soviet era relations with Latin America prior to the Cold War, I could not help but wonder if this was, in fact, another US imperialist war and media campaign meant to secure its hegemony like it had done so successfully throughout the twentieth century. Being in Russia allowed me to question and view the conflict from a different perspective: one that did not center the United States and its capitalist interests as a global hegemonic power. At least, not the only global hegemonic power.

## EL SALVADOR

The irony that my next archival research destination was El Salvador— a place I know well given my family background and previous research—does not escape me. In March 2022, literally the same month that the Russo-Ukrainian conflict broke out, President Nayib Bukele declared the first 30-day "state of exception", or what can almost be interpreted as a literal declaration of war against the general population (Abrego y Osuna, 2022). Under this state of exception, all civil liberties were suspended, and the armed forces were given authority to arrest, incarcerate, and kill, if necessary, without due process (Abrego y Osuna, 2022; Cristosal, 2023). As of April 2023, more than 66,000 people have been arbitrarily arrested and incarcerated, which amounts to roughly 2 percent of the adult population, thus making El Salvador the largest carceral state in the world (Cristosal, 2023). Additionally, there have been more than 150 confirmed deaths of detainees in custody, none of whom were found guilty or convicted of a crime (Cristosal, 2023).

It was in this context and under these conditions that I began my archival research at the Archivo General de la Nación de El Salvador located in the Palacio Nacional. At first, it felt surreal to be conducting research in the Palacio Nacional—a place I considered violent given El Salvador's long history of military dictatorships where several peaceful protests had turned into deadly massacres. This was further reinforced my very first day at the archive when the archivist advised me to leave early because there were rumors that there would be a protest right outside the Palacio, and it could get violent. The archivist recalled several instances in the past where protestors would throw stones, sticks, and sometimes gas bombs through the open windows of the Palacio, thus exposing administrators (and researchers) to toxins and potential injury.

Before closing the archive and departing from the building, I caught the archivist in the corner of her office attempting to remove the embroidered Salvadoran national shield from her work polo with a small knife—an attempt to hide any evidence that she was a government employee, I supposed.

I left, of course, per her advice, and on my way out I found the military, national guard, and police occupying the entire public square of the Centro Histórico ready to confront the protesters. At least 300 soldiers in decorated uniforms neatly lined up in designated blocks armed, steadfast, eyeing all those who dared get close to the Palacio Nacional. I did not return to the archive until the following week when the archivist said it was safe. Luckily, upon my return, I did manage to find some useful information, including "illicit" documentation of communist activities, organizations, and individuals in the AGN's collection on government and political activities, which I came across with the guidance of Dr. Aldo Lauria-Santiago, who had previously examined these sources (Gould y Lauria-Santiago, 2008). I also found some documented evidence proving the presence and involvement of Nazis who were put into positions of power under the military regime of Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez, a known fascist and Nazi sympathizer.

When I asked if I could access police and military records to further trace the presence of potential Nazis in the Salvadoran armed forces, the archivist literally laughed in my face. Public access to police and military archives had been suspended after the current President Bukele dissolved the institution that guaranteed transparency of state records. The only way to get access to such records was through a special court order, which I was unlikely to be granted under the circumstances. Moreover, the archivist, who I befriended throughout my visit, shared that there had been multiple instances throughout her 15+ years as the official state archivist wherein government officers would enter the national archive without warning or notice and take entire boxes without any explanation. She claims she would never see the box collections again—they were simply "disappeared". The general hostility, violence, voids, and silences pervasive in the Archivo General de la Nación de El Salvador made it feel as if it was, indeed, a traditional colonial archive attempting to protect not only the narrative of empire and fascism that the Salvadoran government has historically been complicit in creating, but also an instrument in the safeguarding of the contemporary fallacies of the current neofascist military dictatorship.

Immediately after the AGN of El Salvador, I was able to visit the Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen (MUPI), a historic independent archive meant to preserve the memoria histórica of El Salvador's armed and social conflicts, including the 1932 uprising and 1980s civil war. Unfortunately, most of the sources available at the MUPI were heavily focused on the late twentieth century (1960-1990) rather than the early twentieth century (1920-1960), which significantly limited the scope of potentially useful sources for my research. From the 1930s, I was only able to find photocopies of documents from the RGASPI archive, which I had already seen during my visit to Moscow. Additionally, the MUPI housed a

collection of documents related to Roque Dalton's rendition of the testimony of legendary communist Miguel Marmol, survivor of the 1932 uprising and peasant massacre who was also a founding member of the Communist Party of El Salvador (PCS), most of which have already examined by previous scholars (Dalton, 1987; Gould y Lauria-Santiago, 2008; Lindo-Fuentes et al., 2007). While the MUPI is still certainly an important "rebel archive" in the larger context of El Salvador's memoria histórica, I was hoping to find something more — anything that had not already been examined by previous scholars.

The most productive part of my archival research experience in El Salvador was in the informal "rebel" archives I was able to access with the support and guidance of long-time activist Miguel Marmol, son of the previously mentioned Miguel Marmol (father/senior). I had the privilege of connecting with Marmol (son) through comrades I met when I was the statewide coordinator of the Unión Salvadoreña de Estudiantes Universitarios (USEU) in Los Angeles from 2010-2012. Herein, it became evident to me that my previous militancy in the Salvadoran student movement is what facilitated my connection and relationship with Marmol who immediately saw me as a "persona de confianza" or companheira, as Scheper-Hughes argues. In "The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology", Nancy Scheper-Hughes argues that there is a difference between the "spectator" and the "witness" (Scheper-Hughes, 1995). She contests that "witnessing, the anthropologist as companheira, is in the active voice, and it positions the anthropologist inside human events as a responsive, reflexive, and morally committed being, one who will "take sides" and make judgments, though this flies in the face of the anthropological nonengagement with either ethics or politics" (Scheper-Hughes, 1995, p. 419). While this argument was written from an anthropologist's standpoint, my experience with Marmol suggests that this also applies to historians working with the descendants of living subjects, as well as actual living subjects. It was because of my previous active militancy in USEU that I was able to gain Marmol's trust not as a spectator—or a graduate student working on a dissertation—but as a companheira, or someone who was a part of the struggle. Marmol enthusiastically mentored me throughout the rest of my time in El Salvador, put me in contact with former communist militants, and facilitated access to the private archives of Schafik Handal, one of El Salvador's most important leftist communist intellectuals of the late twentieth century who aided the 1992 peace accords that ended the civil war. Through this connection, I was able to conduct an exclusive interview with Domingo Santacruz Castro, a former militant of the Communist Party of El Salvador in the 1950s. I plan to use Domingo's interview as an oral history in my chapter about Salvadoran communists prior to 1960.

Despite all his support, there is one important area where Marmol was not able to help me: getting access to the private archives of the Communist Party of El Salvador, which were originally housed in the Casa Farabundo Marti, a political education school founded by the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) Youth located in the Planes de Rendero in San Salvador. Apparently, after the electoral defeat of the FMLN during the 2019 presidential elections that led to the rise of president-dictator Nayib Bukele, lingering internal political disputes within the FMLN heighten, leading factionalized interest groups to form. These groups represented conflicting party interests, which jeopardized their collective decision-making process, including decisions to safeguard important information and documents that were destined to be lost or destroyed if left in the wrong hands. Disagreements and general distrust within the FMLN leadership led one lone party member to commandeer the PCS archive from the Casa Farabundo Marti to a private location inaccessible to the rest of the party militancy, including Marmol, the director of the FMLN's Secretariat of Historical Memory. Shortly afterwards, the Casa Farabundo Marti—a historic meeting location for FMLN youth activities—was closed indefinitely. This reality not only complicated my archival research of the communist history of El Salvador, but, more importantly, spoke to a larger crisis taking place within the Salvadoran revolutionary left, which was struggling and holding on by mere threads during Bukele's unfortunately popular rise to power. Although I understand the increased surveillance and withholding of access to the PCS private archive under the circumstances created by Bukele's punitive and indefinite state of exception, these barriers complicate the work for researchers like me, who are committed to learning and writing about Central America's radical communist history. In this case, my relationship to Marmol as a compañera de confianza was, unfortunately, futile. The nature, condition, and existence of this archive, however, makes it, by definition, a "rebel archive"—one that is safeguarded even from its own active militants who continue to face extreme scrutiny and risk persecution and repression under authoritarian military regimes.

Although my overall experience conducting research in El Salvador was insightful and productive, in the end, I left with a lot of unanswered questions and the knowledge that there is still a significant amount of work to do to uncover El Salvador's twentieth century "rebel archives" and communist history. In a panel organized by the Instituto Schafik Handal for "El Día Internacional del Museo y la Memoria Histórica", I was invited to speak on my journey uncovering Central America's communist histories, and I highlighted how ironic it was that I was able to find more information about this topic outside of Central America than within. The discussion turned into one about the lack of interest, support, and resources available to

safeguard and protect El Salvador's "memoria histórica", as well as the general hostility towards preserving radical histories of Central America, especially when they challenge the interests and perspectives of the current neoliberal capitalist state, which continues to control the government and official historical narrative pervasive in modern society. This conclusion coincides with my argument that the archive is itself a site of political struggle wherein various actors—including myself as a researcher and scholar— contribute to the erasure and/or preservation of Central America's radical history, including its communist histories. Although my goal as a Latin American historian is to, of course, contribute to the preservation rather than erasure of history, particularly communist histories, several obstacles made my journey increasingly difficult and challenging as primary sources and documents continue to quite systemically and intentionally "disappear".

## Conclusion

> "Silences are inherent in history because any single event enters history with some of its constituting parts missing. Something is always left out while something else is recorded. There is no perfect closure of any event, however one chooses to define the boundaries of that event... In other words, the very mechanisms that make any historical recording possible also ensure that historical facts are not created equal".
>
> – Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*

Although my overall archival field research experience searching for Central America's "rebel archives" and communist histories proved to be profoundly revealing and insightful, I continue to consider what gaps, voids, and silences exist in my sources, as well as what truths my sources expose despite the varied attempts at systemic erasure and silencing. The uncomfortable truth that I have come to terms with is that there are some things that I will simply never know with certainty. While my job as a historian continues to be to collect as much information as possible to piece together a historical narrative that has not yet been constructed, I must humbly do so with the sources and evidence that I have while simultaneously continuing to search and ask questions that might, inevitably, lead me to different conclusions later in time. This is the reality and perpetual condition of the Latin American historian, especially those who are seeking to construct narratives that actively challenge and disrupt traditional narratives of empire, US imperialism, and global capitalism through the limited and often underappreciated archival labor of non-traditional "rebel archives". Ultimately, what I hope I have exposed here by sharing the varied nuances of my experience conducting archival research across four different countries is that the

archive is, indeed, a site of political struggle wherein researchers continue to face challenges in their quest to preserve, or in some cases, erase, a radical history of Central America.

In Cuba and Russia, two nation-states that have historically challenged US imperialism and empire throughout the course of the twentieth century, I was fortunate enough to receive the support and access to primary and secondary sources that have proven to be most useful in reconstructing Central America's communist histories. Despite the fact the IHC and RGASPI[5] were both archives of the state, their preservation of documents pertaining to communist parties and movements around the world makes them, by definition, "rebel archives" whose function it is to safeguard documents and sources that are often overlooked by mainstream accounts and produced by those who "defied their own erasure" (Carpio, 2020). It was in these archives that I was able to find significant primary documentation on the existence and evolution of the Communist Party of Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Central America from the 1920s and 1930s, sources that have not yet been thoroughly scrutinized and interrogated by Latin American scholars and historians.

My archival research experiences in Mexico and El Salvador were much more nuanced and complex. In Mexico, at first, I struggled to find useful sources within the state archives, such as the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN). It was not until after almost two years of waiting that I was able to access the Centro de Estudios del Movimiento Obrero y Socialista (CEMOS), where I uncovered useful sources that reveal the historically overlooked relationship between the Communist Party of Mexico and the communist parties of Central America. Ultimately, of all the archives in Mexico, the CEMOS proved to be the most useful and supportive, at least for my research purposes, thus manifesting a spirit of solidarity not just within the sources, but also by actively supporting investigative research like my own. This makes the CEMOS, by all definitions, one of Mexico's "rebel archive" in spirit and practice. In El Salvador, I was afforded the incredible privilege of working with an important mentor, Miguel Marmol, who helped me access the private archives of Schafik Handal as well as facilitated an exclusive interview with Domingo Santa Cruz, one of the original members of the PCS from the 1950s. Unfortunately, due to Bukele's draconian military regime as well as the on-going internal disputes within the Salvadoran revolutionary left, I was unable to access the private archives of Communist Party of El Salvador, which would have been particularly useful for my research.

Lastly, although I did not have an opportunity to discuss my experience conducting archival research in Guatemala, I would like to briefly acknowledge and commend the phenomenal work being done

by Guatemalan archivists in the post-civil war era by individuals and independent organizations using a social justice framework and approach to hold their government accountable for decades of genocide, ethnocide, and human rights violations executed by former right-wing military governments. Kirsten Weld does an excellent job of documenting one example of this in her book Paper Cadavers (Weld, 2014), which discusses the efforts of the Project for the Recovery of the National Police Historical Archives (PRAHPN) that brought to light more than 75 million secret police documents that researchers began using to condemn past—and prevent future—injustices in the country. While these advances have certainly been challenged by the right-wing elite, leading to temporary closures of the state archives, the success of these efforts have been fundamental in post-war Guatemala's struggle for transitional justice. For example, by enabling archivists and researchers to become active agents in the struggle for justice for past war crimes, the Guatemalan people were able to indict former presidentdictator Efrain Rios Mont for genocide and crimes against humanity in 2013. Although my time conducting research in Guatemala was short, I was able to catch a glimpse of this rigorous archival labor at the Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica (CIRMA), a non-profit organization in Antigua, dedicated to safeguarding the "memoria histórica" of Guatemala. Herein, I was able to find significant documentary sources on the first Communist Party of Central America and Guatemala donated by Dr. Arturo Arriola Taracena, as well as Guatemala's October Revolution (1944-1954). Ironically, although my visit took place months before the June 2023 presidential elections, I was able to witness the attack on several progressive candidates, including Bernardo Arévalo, the son of Juan José Arévalo, the first president of Guatemala's October Revolution. While many have begun celebrating Arévalo's victory and calling his presidency the coming of a "segunda primavera democrática", it bears highlighting that it was the Guatemalan people's struggle for truth and justice that made this small victory possible.

In the end, reflecting back on Marx and Engels's Letters on Historical Materialism (Engels, 1978), what became crystal clear to me throughout my journey is that politics and class interests do, in fact, play an incredibly significant role in determining what people have access to and what people do not have access to. The condition of the archive is a direct reflection of the nation-state and its priorities, as well as a reflection of the various class struggles seeking to either challenge or uphold capitalism and empire. This means it is our job as critical scholars to continue looking beyond capitalist state institutions, seek transnational approaches to conducting research, and work directly with the people who—in their own creative and ingenious ways—continue to safeguard the untold radical histories of Central America and, more broadly, Latin America. This means

collectively and actively supporting the archival labor that goes into producing and maintaining "rebel archives", as well as challenging and pushing the limits of the colonial archive by paying attention to its margins and "surplus production". Only then will we be able to reconstruct the radical histories that we have been deprived of for so long.

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## Notas

**1**

Stoler loosely uses an explicitly Marxist concept, "surplus production", which, according to Marx, refers to extra goods produced above what one necessitates to subsist. In this context, it seems fitting to suggest that she is using the concept to refer to the excess archival material safeguarded in the colonial archive.

**2**

Simultaneously, I also witnessed the making and dissemination of Cuba's own covid-19 vaccines—Abala and Soberana—making Cuba the only Latin American country to produce and distribute its own vaccine completely free of charge to the entire general population. As a temporary Cuban resident at the time, I was privileged enough to receive the Abala vaccine in 2021, as well as the Soberana booster in 2022.

**3**

I also downloaded Yandex translator on my phone, which is essentially the Russian version of Google translator. I was surprised to find that Yandex, a Russian-based technology designed specifically to compete with Google, was massively more popular, accurate, and commonly used in Moscow than its competitor.

**4**

In September 2022, I was afforded a travel grant to continue my research in Washington D.C. where the Library of Congress has a partially digitized collection of COMINTERN documents made available through the INCOMKA Project, a comprehensive electronically searchable database made available through collaborative efforts with the RGASPI. The digital archive includes more than 1 million of the 20+ million archival documents housed at the RGASPI. Unfortunately, the database was located on one dusty and extremely

outdated desktop computer running on Windows 95. Moreover, it quickly became clear that the library staff was not familiar with how to use the database and had to reference an old binder with step-by-step instructions. According to the library staff, no one had come in to consult the database in years, which is why it was so poorly maintained and outdated. In the end, I discovered it was much easier to navigate the RGASPI's online version of the INCOMKA database, which was constantly being updated use by international scholars.

**5**

Although this was my experience at the time, I can imagine that accessing the RGASPI now postMarch 2022 has become significantly more difficult for US citizens, especially when it comes to obtaining a tourist or research visa, as a result of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict.

## Información adicional

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