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CONTESTED LIVES, CONTESTED TERRITORIES:
An Ethnography of Polarization, Distress, and Suffering
in Post-Sandinista Nicaragua

by

James Quesada

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

in the

GRADUATE DIVISION

of the

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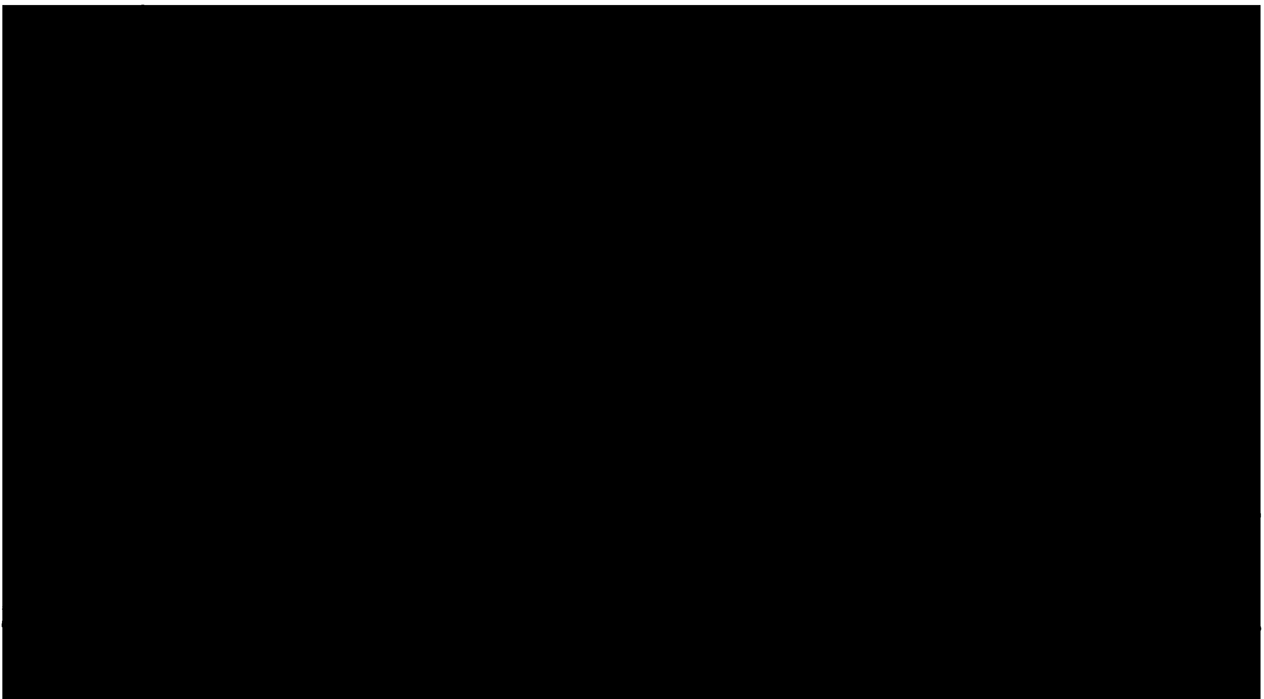
San Francisco



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by

James Quesada

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life in Nicaragua.

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Contested Lives, Contested Territories:

An Ethnography of Polarization, Distress, and Suffering in Post-Sandinista Nicaragua

JAMES QUESADA

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an examination of the hardship of contemporary life in post-Sandinista Nicaragua. Based on ethnographic research conducted in the former war zone of Matagalpa, Nicaragua, over a two year period, this dissertation focuses on the effects of war and its aftermath on Nicaraguan society.

The main assertion of this dissertation is that contemporary Nicaraguan society is productively described and analysed according to a particular cultural complex that interrelates socio-political polarization to patterns of distress and an ethos of suffering. A medical anthropological analysis of the emotional difficulties and material hardships many Nicaraguans experience is grounded on a perspective that views the culture complex of polarization, distress, and suffering as historically and socially constructed.

Preface

This dissertation brings together personal and intellectual concerns with which I have struggled for many years. On a personal level, I have sought to reconnect a tie to my parent's ancestral homeland: Nicaragua. Since I was a child I have traveled to and from that country, although I cannot say that I really know Nicaragua. However, I do have a special relationship with the people and the land, which I look forward to deepening.

Intellectually, I have always been interested in the relationship between the individual and society. This drove me to pursue anthropology as a career, although I consider this pursuit a calling, a vocation. My undergraduate studies were in psychology. For seven years, I worked professionally in community mental health. During that time I realized that the lack of understanding and appreciation for the cultural aspects and differences in being human was a critical deficiency in the practice of community mental health. I began my graduate studies in medical anthropology with a primary interest in exploring this cultural dimension.

The 1979 Sandinista revolutionary triumph in Nicaragua provided me an opportunity to merge personal interests with academic goals, I began to work with Nicaraguan psychologists. As the "Contra War" (1981-1990) intensified, much of this work focused on the ravages war visited upon Nicaraguan society.

My original intent for doctoral dissertation research was to study the socio-psychological effects of war on civilian populations. However, my doctoral research began after the 1990 Nicaraguan presidential elections which not only brought an end to Sandinista rule, but also officially terminated the "Contra War". Although these dramatic developments changed my research objectives, they did not significantly alter my underlying set of issues and questions. Some of these are addressed and explored in my dissertation.

Beginning in 1522, Nicaraguan society has been shaped by socio-cultural and political economic forces that have contributed to a succession of systems of social inequality. Although such systems have been met with active and passive resistance over the years, unfortunately for Nicaragua, order and stability have proved elusive. The Nicaraguan people have been extremely creative and resilient in the face of chronic socio-political instability and economic underdevelopment. These macro-structural problems are the result of the nation's domination by international political and economic interests coupled with the persistent internal rivalries between cliques of ruling elites, political parties and families. For most Nicaraguans, living under conditions of chronic social, political, economic instability has resulted in daily hardships, social disorganization, and difficulties obtaining food and shelter. While there have been extraordinary individual and collective efforts to overcome these conditons,

there is also a toll Nicaraguan society has had to pay.

This dissertation primarily focuses on the harsh realities the Nicaraguan people have had to withstand. This is a culture typified by social structures of power inequalities impervious to social change where many expect to suffer. There is little doubt that such conditions are a breeding ground for distress, anger, rage, malaise, and frustration. My dissertation presents individual and collective stories of life under difficult and uncertain conditions. The task of socio-cultural analysis is to contextualize individual peoples' stories within the larger saga, of national history, culture, and political-economy, in relation to personal agency, social production, heroic struggles, and tangled intersubjectivities.

The dissertaion is broken into three sections: The history of polarization, the patterns of distress, and an ethos of suffering. In section one, I rely upon my fieldwork among Matagalpan Indians to provide the basis for reconstructing a regional history. My primary interpretive framework for such a reconstruction is a retracing of a legacy of power, violence, and resistance in the central highland region of Matagalpa, where I conducted my ethnographic research. I use historical and archaeological texts, along with ethnohistorical and contemporary ethnographic data to provide an extended temporal analysis to understand the persistence of polarized social and political relations among

and between indigenous communities and dominant society that preceded the present era and which typify present indigenous relationships. This reconstruction of indigenous social relationships provides the basis for examining other social sectors.

In my second section, I conduct a medical anthropological review of the interrelationships between stress, war, poverty, and psychological states. I establish a material-social theoretical foundation in order to understand issues of emotional and psychological difficulties and well-being. I ground individual stories of loss and survival, anger and frustration, worries and resilience, in the larger context of socio-historical and politico-economic processes. I articulate the micro-context of individual life stories to the macro-context of impersonal structural and social forces.

Finally, in section three, I present several vignettes of unrealized dreams, pain and anger. These describe the lived-sense of life under chronic conditions of extreme hardships. I suggest that there is a general worldview or ethos that animates Nicaraguan society and acknowledges suffering as a part of life. However, I distinguish suffering from fatalism, and differentiate between a worldview and an intrinsic national character trait. I demonstrate how an ethos of suffeing is the outcome of material conditions and the reliance of cultural survival strategies.

The goal of my dissertation is to communicate the personal and social consequences of living under conditions of chronic stress. The Sandinista revolution in 1979 represented a collective effort in Nicaragua to dramatically alter these conditions. However, this effort ultimately failed primarily because as a victim of geopolitics and the Cold War, the Nicaraguan revolutionary project was not allowed to succeed. My research follows the ouster of the Sandinista party from state power and evaluates the effects of the war and its aftermath, including the impact of radical economic restructuring and the introduction of a neoliberal structural adjustment policies. During the period of my research, (1990 to 1992) life rather that improving has deterioriated. I describe some of these conditions and hope to contribute to the understanding of the individual, social, and political stakes involved in enduring a life of chronic stressful life conditions.

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Section I: HISTORY OF POLARIZATION

Chapter 1. A CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY OF MATAGALPA

INTRODUCTION

Socio-political polarization has rarely been viewed as a subject area in its own right. Rather it has been understood as a product of conflict or competition between varied interests. By definition polarization refers to two opposite or contrasting tendencies within a body and system, although I contend that polarization includes multiple opposition and not simply binary opposition. Polarization reflects the sharp divisions and splits between the various social sectors that comprise a society which are held together more by coercion rather than consensus. Group conflicts are often most apparent in the "polarization of ideology and values or at least to a widely discrepant interpretations of common values" (Van den Berghe 1967: 144; Caulfield 1974). Whether polarization is an outcome of conflict, or conflict the outcome of polarization, the dialectic between the two is clear. It is important to understand polarization in its own context.

Polarization is more than simple dualism but, the multiple fractures, divisions, and interests that separate people. The social fact of polarization has a history of its own, which sometimes becomes manifested in violent conflicts, and sometimes manifested in tenuous homeostasis. To investigate polarization anthropologically means a tacit

acceptance that human societies consists of social structures and power arrangements which produce all sorts of contradictions, social ills, and outright conflicts. Analyzing contemporary Nicaraguan society according to the current historical manifestations of polarization, a very poignant and insightful way of grasping what it is like to live in Nicaragua today emerges. Polarization is manifested in numerous ways: gender divisions, inter-ethnic conflicts, socio-economic class stratification, traditionalist versus modernist tendencies.

Nicaraguan history and contemporary social relations indicate that the long term outcome of prolonged and ever changing polarization is the cultural construction of an ethos or world view of suffering. An ethos of suffering and patterns of distress can be partially accounted for by the effects of long term socio-political polarization. In Matagalpa, polarization has been manifested in socio-political, inter-ethnic, class divisions, disputations over environmental resources and land, and ideological struggles since before the Spanish conquest. In order to locate the current nature of Matagalpan polarization in its proper historical context, I chose to concentrate my ethnographic research among Matagalpan "indigenas" (indigenous natives or Indians) to provide a 'diachronic' description of the facticity and perseverance of polarization as a social process in its own right.

1. MATAGALPAN GEOGRAPHY: An Introduction into the Region

Nicaragua is geographically the largest country in Central America, which encompasses all those nation-states that are bounded geographically from Guatemala to the north, to Panama to the south. It is roughly divided into three distinct geographical regions. A relatively dry Pacific coastal plain, a Central highland region to the east with upland valleys surrounded by mountain ranges, and an extensive humid tropical Caribbean lowland, better known as the Atlantic coastal region. This latter region consists of over 50% of the national territory although only 15% of the population resides there.

The department of Matagalpa is the second largest department in Nicaragua following the Atlantic coastal region and is situated in the north Central highlands. The region is characterized by several mountain ranges and extensive valley systems. These mountain ranges or "sierras", many of which follow an east-west orientation, average an approximate altitude of 1,300 meters elevation. To the southeast of the "Sierra de Apante" ("sierra" means mountain range) lies the city and departmental capital of Matagalpa. Extensions of the Sierra de Apante include such important population settlements as Sebaco and Terrabona (southwest of Matagalpa) and San Dionisio (southeast of Matagalpa). Besides numerous mountain ranges, there are isolated "cerros" (large hills or individual

mountains) where notable communities share the same name as the "cerros" themselves such as, El Chile, San Pablo, Palo Alto, El Corozco, El Ocotillo and others (Helms 1982).

The department is traversed by numerous rivers ("rios"), the principal ones being the Rio Grande de Matagalpa, the Rio Tuma, the Rio de Olama and the Rio Viejo. Guerrero and Soriano (1967: 89) state that the Rio Grande de Mataglapa that traverses the department and the city was initially named "el Rio del Desastre" (River of Disaster) by none other than Christopher Columbus in september of 1502, when he lost several sailors at the mouth of the river. The course of this curvaceous river extends 555 kilometers (approximately 345 miles) which during the dry season is often reduced to a small meandering stream. It extends from the interior of the Matagalpan department to the Atlantic coast. The Rio Tuma serves as a southern border between the departments of Zelaya and Matagalpa. Both rivers have numerous tributaries along which human settlements are found. Other rivers of note are Rio Viejo and Rio Blanco.

The department of Matagalpa contains several important valleys and plains regions which are panoramic and agriculturally rich. In the southeast, the valley of Sebaco is a principal rice and vegetable producing region that borders on the department of Managua to the south, Esteli to the north, and Leon to the west. A smaller valley attached to Sebaco is the valley of Metapa, where Cuidad Dario is

currently located and which served as an important springboard for colonial penetration into the northeast during the period of Spanish colonialism. Another important valley, the Valley of Olama, includes some of the oldest known continuously inhabited communities in the department, Muy Muy and Matiguas. It borders north of the current department of Boaco. The Valley of Guanaguas extends into the tropical Atlantic region to the east from which several rivers enter and has been exploited as prime cattle-raising country.

The Matagalpan region has been divided into two major zones: the Occident and the Orient (Guerrero & Soriano 1967). The Occident refers mainly to the western portion of the department which includes much of the highland areas as well as the departmental capital and other principal towns. The Orient includes the eastward foothills that descend into the tropical Atlantic littoral region. Rain in the Orient is more abundant than in the west, and it is generally hotter and more humid than in the Occident. Owing to the altitudes, the climate in the upland valleys and mountains is considerably cooler although it can also be exceedingly hot, dry and muggy during the dry season (from Oct/Nov to Mar/Apr).

The department of Matagalpa is politically divided into administrative units called "_municipios_", which roughly corresponds to counties. Each _municipio_ consists of a principal administrative town surrounded by villages, hamlets, haciendas, and individual households. Although there is a

paved road that links Matagalpa to the capital city of Managua to the southwest, and the departmental capital of Jinotega to the northwest, the rest of the municipios in the department are reached only by rough dirt roads. These roads are narrow and sometimes impassable during the rainy season due to mud slides and poor road maintenance, not to mention persistent post-war violence and rampant social banditry year round. The harsh topographies found in many municipios, including sharp slopes, narrow valleys and scarce year round water resources has served to limit extensive social and economic intercourse between and even within municipios. This contributes to a patchwork-like ecological entity. This reality typifies the region and has contributed to the relative isolation and remoteness of some of the municipios that fall within the confines of the department. The problem of poor road conditions is not singularly responsible for the uneven development in the department, although, as we shall explore later on, it greatly contributes to the continuing difficulty of effectively administrating the department as a whole.

Since the second half of the 19th century, the department of Matagalpa became one of the most important economic regions in the country. Although it is primarily known and accepted as the principal coffee producing region in the country, it also contains large extensions of cattle-raising lands, some cotton production, as well as a significant amount of such basics as beans, corn, vegetables. In the early part of the 19th

century, the Matagalpan region was exploited for minerals and timber although this diminished significantly by the early part of this century (Guerrero & Soriano 1967:120-125). However, the Matagalpan region became the principal coffee-bean producing region in the country. It produces a high-quality coffee-bean production requires hacienda-plantation systems which entail significant macro and micro changes in such social and economic spheres as land tenure, labor practices, class divisions, modes of production, social relations, and the consequences of the "internalization of the external" (Roseberry 1991: 169; Biderman 1982; Enriquez 1991; Helms 1982: Bourgois 1989). These transformations favored the consolidation of the most productive and arable lands into the hands of a small group of wealthy families and foreigners who had been provided generous incentives to establish large scale agro-export coffee estates or "fincas" in the region (Helms 1982: 248: Enriquez 1991). Monopolization of land by a few resulted in loss of small privately owned and communal lands for the vast majority of natives in the department. The distribution of indigenous lands to wealthy families and individuals produced extraordinary hardship for indigenous natives and small scale peasant families. Unfortunately they are not the only social sectors to have suffered from the extremely mercurial transitions that beset Matagalpa, as the rest of Central America.

2. NICARAGUA IN REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT (Circa 1970 to 1990s)

It is only recently that Central America, from Guatemala to Panama has emerged from the backwaters of scholastic neglect. While southern Mexico and Guatemala, Costa Rica and Panama have accrued an impressive modicum of sustained interest, whether it be in anthropology or rural sociology, development economics or political history, Central America as a whole had not attracted the driving attention in the hemisphere as had its South American brethren or the North American collossus. That is until toward the end of the 1970's when the region was on the verge of exploding and momentous social and political changes were seemingly around the corner.

The fact that the volatility that characterized the region in the seventies and eighties has culminated in an extremely fragile period of relative calm in the early 1990's (Dunkerely 1994), does not alter the potential for the resumption of social disruptions, rebellions, and collective violence on a large scale. The 1994 Chiapas rebellion in southern Mexico certainly underscores the storm beneath the calm. This observation is based on the fact that the basic social, economic, political, and international conditions that have fueled past instability and violence have not changed significantly. I intend to argue that these conditions have

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established a permanent state of social polarization, so that even when there appear to be periods of relative calm or stability, the truth is that numerous sets of unresolved polarized relations persists between groups of people, the State and civil society, international lending institutions and national governments, bilateral and multilateral geopolitical relations, that ensure the periodic resurgence of socio-political crises and violence.

This shift in the attention accorded the region, from invisibility to center stage, attracted the attention of foreign policy analysts and diplomatic missions, Cold War warriors and solidarity workers, academicians, mercenaries, revolutionaries, and international financial institutions. However, it was overshadowed largely by the dominancy of a North American political science international relations paradigmatic orientation that include sphere of influence, sovereignty, imperialism. This is not to assert that this region had been totally ignored by academic and economic specialists and technicians, interested international business and development groups or institutions before the cataclysmic effects of the late seventies and the eighties. It is, rather, that the magnitude, thrust, influence and competition for producing and colluding with national governments and/or popular mass organizations reached a point of overt, real, and openly competitive engagement unheralded in the twentieth century. From a strictly North American cold war perspective,

personified by the arch-conservative administration of Ronald Reagan (1980-1988), the social, economic, political, and military fits and bouts in the region were seen no less than as an attempt by the former Soviet Union to expand its sphere of influence. Such a verdict literally required surgery. Such an affrontery could not be lightly shrugged off.

The U.S. foreign policy toward Central America needs to be understood as being analogous in international status to the former eastern bloc nations who were collectively under the tutelage of the former Soviet Union. These countries could not implement homegrown remedies for their stagnant economies and ossified political processes without some authorization from the Soviet Union. This is no less the case in Central America, where regime after regime does not exercise political or economic sovereign policies unless its aims and policies are somehow complementary to the general foreign policy of the United States. An exception is Costa Rica, which is not unlike the former Yugoslavia in terms of its relative autonomy in relation to the regions superpower. The national security interests of the United States in fact have been frequently invoked on numerous occasions to justify outright U.S. overt military actions or insidious covert destabilization activities in the region. Historically, ever since the Monroe doctrine, Central America was considered to be under the "protection" of the United States and never fully accorded sovereign status except rhetorically.

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It is in this context that Nicaragua, more than any other Central American republic, reaped the scorn and wrath of the United States. The triumph of the Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional (FSLN) on the 19th of July, 1979, was the first instance of a victorious armed insurrection overturning a U.S. made and approved dictatorship on the mainland of the Western Hemisphere. Its only other antecedent, Cuba, an island some ninety miles off the coast of Florida, drew dark comparisons in the corridors of power in the United States. While there have been fuller examinations of U.S.-Sandinista Nicaraguan relations written elsewhere (Walker 1987; Colburn 1986) we will address some of these relations in order to better understand the contemporary dilemmas in which Nicaragua currently finds itself.

While it is true that no real understanding of Nicaragua can be made without understanding the tremendous influence and power the United States has wielded in Nicaragua, I am interested in understanding contemporary Nicaragua from within. The internal history of Nicaragua is rife with so many disputations and rivalries that in the end it appears that to understand the influence the United States continues to exercise in that country, one must have some understanding of Nicaraguan history. This sad but true observation requires that Nicaragua be seen as an "imagined community" (Anderson 1986) where consensus and conflict co-mingle in different proportions and gradations depending on internal power

relations and external pacts with the "devil".

Nicaragua is situated in the middle of Central America. It appears that Meso-American chieftainships and tribes from the northwest were in uneasy contact with South American bands and tribes that had come northward along the Atlantic tropical coast and even a few from the Antilles (Newson 1987; Davila Bolanos 1962; Arellano 1975). The Pre-Columbian period was ethnically complex, with hunting and gathering bands and sedentary agriculturalists. The contact between the western Pacific Indians and the central highland and tropical Atlantic lowland Indians was marked by some trading, but more often by warfare and raiding, so that involuntary servitude and tributary obligations took place. It is in the north-central department of Matagalpa, where this ethnographic research was conducted, that these two cultural groupings co-mingled. A fuller cultural history of the Matagalpan region leading to an analysis of two contending contemporary Indian organizations today will prepare the ground for understanding the polemical aspects of Nicaraguan history.

However, it would be a misreading to attribute to both the pre-Columbian heritage of tension and warfare (especially since the ethnohistorical and archaeological record is meager at best) and to the legacy of Spanish colonialism, as the basis for latter day strife, contestation, and open warfare. If there is a constancy in Nicaraguan history it is that there have been few occasions or periods when the country was not

being pulled apart by centrifugal forces. The power-holders all made use of social divisions to further their interests from the period of Spanish colonialism, during post-Colonial independence and up to the mid-19th century, in the post-Walker Liberal period, and the turn-of-the-century U.S. military occupations and influence, and including the Sandinsita revolution. Whether one uses the measure of national unity or regional autonomy, the politics of divide and conquer seem to have been primary mode of pursuing the goal of nation-state (Diskin 1991). There has resulted a rather heightened sense of intra-regional identities (Pacific-Atlantic; north-south; lowland-highland; cotton producing-coffee producing, etc) that seem to work against a shared national identity. The effects of polarization, whether it be between regions, class and ethnic groups, or gender relationships, political groups, or religious communities, have established and maintained a seemingly permanent climate of active opposition and less than gentlemanly competition to typify Nicaraguan society. In certain respective this is no different than most contemporary nation-states, except that in place of viable political mechanisms and processes to minimize hostilities, negotiate differences, arbitrate settlements and establish meaningful consensus, a permanent state of social and political polarization has ensued. The effects of all this are here examined.

The idiosyncratic nature of Nicaraguan polarization has

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in its own odd way produced a sense of national shared identity, much more than politics and ideology. Although to suggest that these latter two processes have not contributed to this shared sensibility would be irresponsible. What has evolved historically is a shared ethos of suffering. Where politics and warfare have divided, a common experience and a shared fate have culturally united. These latter shared fates and ordeals refer not only to socio-political or even religious common life occurrences, but they have direct experiences with even more basic life considerations. The specific human adaptations to different ecological zones and predominant modes of subsistence and agricultural production, to the uncertainty of erupting volcanoes, earthquakes, and tropical storms, not to mention the fickleness with which State terror can choose to remind a populace that there are indeed limits to civic life. The electoral triumph of Dona Violeta Chamorro, a widow, mother, and matriarch over a divided family, symbolizes best that rare occasion when Nicaraguans seemed to have collectively acted upon this shared ethos.

Today Nicaragua is peopled by wounded souls. Although Nicaragua is currently in a reconstructive phase following a devastating series that includes a dictatorship, a popular insurrection, a revolution, a protracted war, a devastate economy, it is not now necessarily basking in the sunshine of a new dawn. Indeed, far from it. Nicaraguans are individually

and collectively scrambling to catch their breaths and proceed with their lives. Following the 1990 electoral defeat of the Sandinistas, it appeared that Nicaragua, with the magnanimous support of the United States, would rejoin the "world community" and enter into a less divisive, more productive period of growth and renewal. This simply did not happen. Foreign and Latin American analysts and commentators are quick to fix blame for the present horrendous conditions on one of two primary factors: either it is the continuing imperialist intervention and highly influential heavy hand the United States continues to wield in the internal politics of Nicaragua that has complicated reconstruction and reconciliation, or it is simply a continuation of the extremely volatile internal socio-political infighting and rivalry between either the Sandinistas or the far right[1].

But what do I mean by a wounded soul? Is it strictly a spiritual malaise, an automatic oppositional stance to anything smacking of tradition or power, a pragmatic understanding of one's objective conditions and a resultant turgid acceptance of being limited to alter significantly the tremendous weight of what is? As a medical anthropologist, I find it is both easy and seductive to reduce the partial observation of Nicaragua as peopled by 'wounded souls' to a state of social and individual pathologies. It is, of course,

[1] The far right in the early 1990's was symbolized by a troika of UNO politicians who held prominent political offices: Virgilio Godoy, vice-president of the State; Arnoldo Aleman, mayor of the capital city Managua; and Alfredo Cesar, 'speaker' of the National Assembly.

more than that. It is important to understand that the common plight Nicaraguans face and individually embody is rooted in an ethos that is a socio-historical product that reflects a legacy of power, violence, and resistance in the region, and not an intrinsic trait or dynamic peculiar to Nicaraguan "character" or society.

3. METHODOLOGY: A LATTICE ETHNOGRAPHY

I have not carried out a classic ethnography which is often focused and contained by the very subjects studied. This is not a study of a community or social group. It is not an urban ethnography that keys on a district or barrio, a civic association or self help group. It is not a rural ethnography focused on a agricultural cooperative, a village hamlet, or a particular socio-economic class. My study, conducted between 1990 and 1992, under a Fulbright dissertation scholarship, grew to be an ethnography that encompassed a whole department, analogous to a state or province, entailing both an urban and rural focus. While I was based mainly in the city of Matagalpa, my research led me into the countryside. And although this study is decidedly more urban than rural in focus, there is no way one can treat Matagalpa in strictly urban terms alone.

I entered my study expecting to track the social networks and support systems people relied upon. Such a goal required

a flexible research strategy that demanded an openness to engage in cross-sectional studies. However owing to extremely unstable social, political, and economic conditions, attempts to measure the nature and extensiveness of social networks were supplanted by more pressing issues. Rather than trying to understand the strong or weak social ties that bind people, it became clear that although people certainly rely upon extended family members, friends, and colleagues, they were largely left to their own devices to survive the hardships of everyday life. The ties that bind are tenuous at best and while it appears that the groups I selected to study and write about are extremely disparate and unconnected, they are in fact very much connected in a collective sense of having to share the personal deprivations and social misery that attend life in contemporary Nicaragua.

My study is a lattice of ethnographic subjects, connected by living under similar objective conditions of social, political, and economic instability. I am using the metaphor of a lattice to underscore the variety of ties and networks that bind people together, even when many of the subjects I worked with did not know each other themselves. In a small city like Matagalpa the set of kinship ties, occupational and work networks, affiliation with associations, political parties or mass organizations, and other formal and informal connections, friendships and unions, ultimately bind natives in a variety of ways. Many of which are not so readily

apparent. However the metaphor of a lattice also refers to an objective condition of everyone being bonded together by shared circumstances, regardless of how some are in better shape to take advantage or withstand the effects of this shared circumstances. In Nicaragua, the shared circumstances refers to recent history, present economic conditions, and socio-political instability. I am appropriating this notion of a lattice from Adam's description of loyalty ties among the Guatemalan military, but which can be generalized to the subjects of my study when he asserts that, "Politics and personal loyalties are a latticework woven against the framework of the general power structure" (1971: 258-259).

Most of my ethnographic research was conducted as a participant-observer among numerous urban and rural groups. I made contact with numerous social and political groups, like the politically diametrically opposed "Association of Agricultural Workers" (ATC) and the "Association of Coffee Producers" (ASOCAFE). I reached out to organizations and individuals of all political stripes and socio-economic stratas. In the countryside, although I mainly focused on rural medical facilities, I also reached out to ex-Contras, various religious communities, social service agencies, schools, agricultural cooperatives and workers unions, indigenous organizations and communities, and municipal officials and police. I was greatly aided in my forays into the countryside by a Ministry of Health (MINSA) project that

allowed me to accompany a psychologist and use a four-wheel drive vehicle in their systematic attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of all rural elementary school facilities throughout the whole department. I used those opportunities to go off and initiate contact with other social sectors to get a better grasp of Matagalpan rural society. In both my urban and rural ethnographic fieldwork, I selected key subjects from all walks of life to engage in more in-depth life histories in order to gather a more detailed account of how people have differentially experienced and weathered the continuous adversities of everyday life in Nicaragua.

My dissertation will only describe a fraction of my contacts and data, which I have selected for this ethnography. And that is that the chronic conditions of hardships, in all its manifestations, has touched the lives of everyone in a base and mundane way. I am hard pressed to think of anyone who has escaped unscathed the tremendous difficulties Nicaragua has endured and continues to endure. To make my case, I will shortly turn to an extended description of two rival Matagalpan indigenous organizations to highlight the contemporary divisions they were experiencing in 1990-1992. In addition I will use their stories and history to provide a longer time frame to an analysis of the persistence of polarization the region has endured for hundreds of years.

A vital part of my research was the time I spent interviewing mental health patients in the only public mental

health clinic serving the whole Matagalpan department. By the time I arrived on the scene, there were only two Nicaraguan psychologists working in the clinic and after some months in the clinic, I was allowed to be present in some therapeutic sessions between the psychologists and their patients. I had secured permission to conduct research from the Ministry of Health, Region VI officials and I was initially interested in administrating a set of standardized questionnaires that covered a self-report stress test and a psychosocial and war stress inventory. I used these same questionnaires and inventories among non-clinical populations as well. I was greatly assisted in the application of these by the "Movimiento Comunal", a self-help, advocacy, and volunteer labor organization that had committees in every single barrio of Matagalpa. Thus relying on participant-observation and naturalistic observations, hanging out as well as standardized interviews, informal conversations, and selected life histories, I cobbled together an immense amount of data that cross-cuts the urban and rural population of Matagalpa by gender, age, occupation, and political orientation.

4. SKETCHES OF MATAGALPA

Green and lush during the rainy season, golden and parched during the dry season, the city and department of Matagalpa often reminded me of my native northern California.

Even the departmental capital of Matagalpa itself reminded me of my natal city of San Francisco, with its hills and windy streets. However, beyond these casual impressions, comparisons between the two locales could not be more disparate. Matagalpa is a much smaller city in size and population. Surrounded by the hills and mountains of Apante ("Sierra de Apante") seated at about 3,000 feet elevation in the Cordillera de Darien, it is seated in a valley traversed by the river, "el Rio Grande de Matagalpa". The urban lay of the city follows the Spanish tradition of central plazas fronting the principal Catholic churches and surrounded by residences owned by prominent families. There are two central plazas, one main Roman Catholic cathedral, in addition to three other scattered Catholic churches, and by my count at least six other Christian fundamentalist churches or meeting halls throughout the city.

The main city core lies primarily in the southeast quadrant of town. The main street runs one-way south to north and links the "Plaza Dario" in the barrio Carlos Fonseca with the main plaza, "el Parque Central" in the Zona Central. On the east side of the Plaza Dario is the "Templo de San Jose de Laborio", the second largest Catholic church in the city, while immediately north of the Parque Central is the main Cathedral of Matagalpa. Along the eight-block via connecting the two parks are numerous stores and businesses. Parallel to the main street, one block east and running one way in the

opposite direction is the other principal street that hosts numerous banks, businesses, and residences and which passes in front of the Catholic church, "el Templo de Molaguina". It should be noted that the names of the two centrally located churches, Laborio and Molaguina, are indigenous place names directly associated with historical _barrio_ sites.

The rest of the city forms an irregular urban rectangle consisting of barrios that ride up the sides of hills, which are accessible only a few blocks by dirt and gravel streets. Many of these streets quickly rise into high vertical grades which can only be traversed by a four-wheel drive vehicle or are simply only suitable for foot traffic. During the latter part of my fieldwork, a cobble street linking the main southeast quadrant of the city with the significant northeast barrio of "la Guanuca" was constructed. Guanuca, separated from the main portion of the city by a small hill, is an important barrio because it is the only way leading out of the city to the eastern portion of the department and includes the northern marketplace and major transit stop. Additionally, and more importantly, it is historically the barrio with the greatest concentration of indigenous Matagalpinos and the recurrent site of rebellions and fighting that spread throughout the rest of the city and department.

As with the rest of Nicaragua, Matagalpa has its share of infrastructure problems. Water is a scarce resource in spite of the Rio Grande de Matagalpa and the proximity of mountain

source waters and streams. Except in the low-lying Barrio Carlos Fonseca and the Zona Central, tap water is only available for a few hours each day most of the year. The rest of the city barrios, depending on location and immediate local organizations, have only sporadic access to water. Water is piped in every other day for a couple of hours to the barrios of Yaware, Apante, Palo Alto, Liberacion, and in the barrios of el Cementerio, Francisco Moreno, el Tule, Walter Mendoza it is gathered from a collective faucet where mainly women and children line up with buckets and empty plastic containers. There are barrios, such as barrios Linda Vista and Primero de Mayo, from which people must walk long distances to water sources. Usually this entails people fetching water from outside their own barrios. Water to the entire city becomes an especially acute resource during the dry season (Oct/Nov to Mar/Apr) when not only does water become scarce, but is also tainted by coffee residue that colors the water a faint brown as a result of coffee harvests that seasonally occur around the beginning of the dry season.

In addition to the annual dry spell, the late eighties witnessed periodic droughts that not only affected the water supply but, also electricity. Electricity for the department of Matagalpa comes from the hydroelectric plant of Apanas in the Department of Jinotega to the north. Decreased water levels, as well as military assaults and sabotage on power plant facilities and electrical lines have made periodic

blackouts and electrical shortages frequent occurrences. To the consternation of butchers with freezers, hospitals, cinemas and other businesses, not to mention the whole residential population, it was commonplace to have the city of Matagalpa plunge into utter darkness at least two or three times a week. A collective roar of whistles and applause would echo throughout the city and valley when the lights would miraculously return some hours later.

The city of Matagalpa saw throughout the eighties a marked growth of plastic, cardboard, wood and leaf shanty dwellings ringing the city in the higher elevations. Many of these barrios, considered by the current conservative UNO city administration as illegal settlements, have no electricity, water, or adequate roads. The growth of these barrios are directly attributable to the "Contra War" (circa 1981-1990) which precipitated mass internal migration of peasant families from the rural war zones to the city. More recently, many of these barrios have been augmented by individuals and families who have been displaced by the rise of unemployment, lack of land access and housing, and the general deterioration of daily life in the region.

Historically, the Matagalpan region has always been one of the more contentious zones beset by political rivalries, land conflict and popular resistance to the claims of the national government. It was "La Linea de la Frontera" (literally, the borderline or line of the frontier) delineated

by Spanish colonials which represented the geographic line distinguishing the Occident (the West) from the Orient (the East), civilization from the jungle, Christians from savages. "La Linea" cut directly through the middle of the current department of Matagalpa (Guerrero y Guerrero 1967; Newson 1987). Following the end of Spanish colonial rule, Matagalpa continued to be the site of periodic violence and strife (1824, 1827, 1844, 1845-47, 1848, 1881, 1927-33, mid-1945). Its geography and remoteness from the traditional sites of political power and contestation (Leon and Granada) and its lack of communication with the Pacific zone of Nicaragua, allowed the region to remain semi-isolated until the latter part of the 19th century.

It should come as no surprise that throughout the nineteen-eighties the department of Matagalpa became one of the principal military staging grounds during the ten year "Contra War". Its proximity to the Honduran border to the north and the sparsely populated, tropical Atlantic coastal region to the east, where most of the Contras (counterrevolutionary forces) operated, thrusted Matagalpa into the fire. The northern Contra forces (FDN, or Fuerza Democratica Nacional) concentrated in the rural areas north and east and transformed Matagalpa into a military garrison town. Helicopters leaped to and from the constantly shifting war-front taking fresh troops and supplies, and returning with body bags and battle worn soldiers. I was told repeatedly it

was not an uncommon sight to see military trucks laden with pine coffins nor to stumble across slow moving funeral processions. Benjamin Linder, an electrical engineer, clown, solidarity worker, and only North American killed by the United States-backed Contras while surveying for a dam project is buried in Matagalpa.

Matagalpa also served as a safe haven for rural people fleeing the fighting in the valleys and mountains since it was the principal northeastern city and outermost urban center in the central highlands of Nicaragua. Although accurate demographic statistics are difficult to come by, it is estimated that Matagalpa nearly doubled in population from 1979 to 1990, reaching an approximate population of slightly over eighty thousand inhabitants. Its importance as a garrison town and safehaven produced a heightened level of human activity that resulted in paradoxical effects. On the one hand, Matagalpa received all sorts of funding, resources, and technical assistance. The State, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), international Solidarity and Development organizations resulted in a great deal of human traffic and commerce, social services and the availability of hard sought commodities. On the other hand, it was witness to the direct results of the war, military alerts and mobilizations, the dislocated and disabled, dead soldiers and civilians.

This latter reality was a fate that most towns and cities throughout Nicaragua escaped given the success the Sandinista

military ("EPS" or Ejercito Popular Sandinista) had in containing the ten-year Contra war and which resulted in the Contras never fully controlling urban centers or securing a permanent land base in the country. However it would be a mistake to consider this measure of military success as indicative of the strength of the revolutionary process. Rather it is more indicative of the weakness of the Contra forces from a strictly conventional ground war perspective. Regardless of the meaning of the relatively successful containment of the war to the northern rural areas near the Honduran border,as well as to the Costa Rican borderlands and portions of the Atlantic coast, there is no doubt as to the significant social and economic toll the war wrought (Martinez-Cuenca 1992; Lancaster 1992).

In this regard, Matagalpa is somewhat unique because although all Nicaraguan people have been directly or indirectly affected by the war, most had been spared the direct experience of daily warfare in their midst. All Nicaraguans suffered the effects of an imposed trade embargo, economic warfare, as well as the mobilization of their youth to fight in the Contra war, Matagalpa experienced the daily ebb and flow of combat in the form of military alerts, mobilizations, curfews, restricted travel, visible displacements and casualties. There was constant traffic of arriving fresh recruits and returning mangled bodies in the back of military trucks. Yet, Matagalpa, like most major

Nicaraguan cities, never felt the brunt of direct attacks. It was never held under siege, bombarded, nor the site of urban warfare during the Contra war. This is remarkable given that it was subject to all of the above during the insurrection against the dictator Anastasio Somoza, which is popularly referred to as "the War" (1978-79). However, in spite of the fact that Matagalpa was spared direct attacks, it was directly threatened in ways which contrast to the majority of cities throughout Nicaragua.

Matagalpa was periodically cut off from the rest of the country when the Contra army would boldly choke off a point along the single route leading from the city to the rest of the country. Although this would invariably last at most a few hours, the effect of knowing that the Contra were within striking distance and that the city was vulnerable had immeasurable effects. And perhaps more significantly, and as I have already mentioned, the rhythm of the Contra war with the spectacle of innumerable uniformed men and women, the constant whir of helicopters, the curfews, restricted mobility, funeral processions, occasional blackouts, periodic shortages of food and goods, mass mobilization of military and support personnel, contributed to an unsettling hyperawareness that one resided in the heart of troubled terrain.

Although most people may deny it, particularly when asked directly about their subjective feelings and moods during those ghastly difficult times, there was a general nervous

apprehension. An apprehension, I might add, that has not dissipated with time. Perhaps in magnitude or degree, but not in kind. My research findings in the region bear this out. Certainly during the Contra war and immediately thereafter, life continued and effort was made to maintain a semblance of order, routine and normalcy. Yet even during the time I engaged in the major portion of my fieldwork which came on the heels of the FSLN electoral defeat and the "official" cessation of the Contra war, there was enough evidence of nervous exhaustion, signs of perturbation, varied manifestations of reproduced violence, and visible spillage of excessive preoccupations to counter the rhetoric of "everything is peaceful" (todo esta tranquilo) so often heard and bantered. For it did not take much effort to get to a safe dialogical space where personal disquiet and agitation reigned.

I am not interested in psychologizing the 'why' and 'how' people take refuge in denial and negation --although I will certainly explore these processes-- as much as I am interested in the fact that once past these first lines of defense, vast stores of anxiety and distress are subjectively felt and socially shared, albeit often in silence and personal isolation. The plethora of individual and social dynamics, whether they be the masking of emotions or bouts of Dionysian abandon, bursts of anger and acts of violence, all constitute poignant commentary on the legacy of polarization and violence

in the region. However before we explore these issues more in depth it would be instructive to gain some greater insights into the socio-political issues and processes in the region in order to better comprehend the current effects of a legacy of strife and conflict on a people who continue to live lives that are marked by hardship, uncertainties, and suffering.

The Sandinista revolution aimed to rectify the legacy of injustices and insults to the body politic of Nicaragua. Particularly in the Matagalpan region, this took the form of directly attacking the ground of peoples existence, in a word, the land. Land in Matagalpa was highly coveted and distributed in such a way prior to 1979, that left many without their own land and subject to the vicissitudes of wage labor and dependence on the largesse of patronage. The revolutionary project of breaking up the monopolization of the most productive lands in the hands of a few privileged families through agrarian reform contrasts with the current UNO government aim to rectify what they consider to be the excesses of redistribution that occurred during the Sandinista period. This has resulted in land becoming the primary, most destabilizing social issue facing Nicaragua today.

5. LAND: SHAKY GROUNDS, SHAKY RELATIONS

The issue is land. In one sense it always has been. In an agricultural-based economy, who owns the land is the issue.

While Nicaragua as the largest country in Central America (57,143 sq. miles or slightly larger than the State of Iowa) is the least densely populated (Berry et al 1986:138). The established pattern of land ownership has ensured that the vast majority of the rural population became dependent upon and subordinate to big land owners (commonly referred to in Nicaragua as "terratenientes"). This had not always been the case. Before the latter part of the 19th century there still appeared to be enough fertile land to go around for patriarchs, local folk (Burns 1991) and indigenous communities. This pattern of land accommodation changed after the mid-19th century and coincided with the emergence of Nicaragua as a modern nation-state (ibid). Central to this change was the massive dispossession of indigenous and small campesino lands by elites who entertained visions of progress, development, and entry onto the world market. As a result, large landlords (Nicaraguan elites and foreign investors) collectively concentrated the largest tracts of arable land while wielding enormous political, economic, and military forces to maintain their position. Meanwhile the majority of the rural population exist as small subsistence farmers or poorly paid agricultural laborers (Helms 1982; Estrada 1992).

The 1979 FSLN revolution attempted to reverse this historical pattern of land robbing, elite land monopolization, and marginalization of the vast majority of the Nicaraguan rural based population (Collins 1986; Vilas 1986; Wheelock

1991). It should come as no surprise then, that the themes of property, land and legal ownership have become the most contentious issues facing the country following the demise of Sandinista rule in 1990. The 1979 revolution ushered in a massive agrarian reform process which entailed land confiscations, the establishment of agrarian cooperatives, and the transfer and subdivisions of properties and estates to individuals and groups (Wheelock 1991).

Immediately following the electoral defeat of the FSLN in 1990 there ensued in the two-month transition period (Feb-Apr 1990) the wholesale transfer of ownership, legal entitleship, goods, and properties, both officially and unofficially. This period has been popularly dubbed as la "Pinata". The pinata serves as an interesting metaphor since it refers to the custom of blindfolded children wildly flailing a big stick to break a papier-mache figurine that contains all sorts of candies and goodies. After a few good well placed blows the figurine breaks to the delight of all children who immediately pounce upon the candies and trinkets. By analogy, the period between the defeat of the FSLN and the assumption of power by the UNO coalition lead by Dona Violeta Chamorro is considered a pinata precisely because of the massive transfer of property (among other things) to FSLN militants, sympathizers, and State employees. While "la Pinata" has been characterized as a wholesale robbing and looting by Sandinistas about to be deprived of power and access to goods enjoyed during their

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reign, it also involved a massive campaign of legalizing titles to goods and properties that had already been granted and distributed, yet had not been officially made legal. The reasons for such shortsightedness range from the State being interested in maintaining ultimate proprietorship to bureaucratic inertia, poor administration, on-going legal wrangling, and low official priority of legal transfers as a consequence of the more immediate pressing demands of waging a continuing war and a deteriorating economy (Martinez-Cuenca 1992). Regardless of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of Sandinista involvement with property and land transfers, in the context of Nicaraguan history it is precisely these concerns that have always been the subject of contention and grounds for open disputes.

The debate on property today is the most divisive issue separating Nicaraguans. Past beneficiaries of Sandinista agrarian reform and property transfers, are currently in fear of losing what they have received by a massive frontal assault coming at them from numerous quarters: the former land and property owners, other social groups like former "Contra" (counter-revolutionary) soldiers who feel entitled to access to parcels of land or roofs over their head, the mixed messages and convulted legal and administrative machinations of the State, as well as the stringent measures of foreign aid and the reluctance of foreign investors. Claims and counterclaims of legitimate ownership are addressed in courts,

in land takeovers, virulent rhetoric in the legislature and on political stumps, and in the unceasing violent confrontations occurring throughout the country, especially in the north. Following the February 25, 1990 election and prior to the transfer of the government from the Sandinistas to UNO, several laws were passed to ensure that there would be no reversal of the achievements of the revolution. Law 88 converted all agrarian reform use titles it had distributed over the years into full ownership titles. Laws 85 and 86 transferred the possession of urban houses and lots that were still considered state property to families occupying them as of February 25 (ENVIO 1993a: 40). Wheelock estimates that Sandinista agrarian reform distributed 6,000 properties for a total of some 5.25 million acres. The majority of these lands were distributed to approximately 80,000 families (Wheelock 1991). Although the Chamorro government promised to respect these laws, her administration set up the Territorial Planning Office (OOT) which was charged to diligently review all land and property transfers with the intent of distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate transfers and establishing the mechanisms for resolving clear ownership and titles once and for all. Failing this, decisions regarding property ownership landed in courts where those able to afford the exorbitant rates of lawyer fees were in the most advantageous position to receive judicial decisions in their favor.

Following the assumption of power by the Chamorro

government, the far right, "which defends the principle of private property-at least their own-to the death, virtually the entire agrarian reform begun by the revolutionary government in 1979 was a _pinata_, including the confiscation of the vast Somoza family holding. For them, then, Laws 85, 86 and 88 are as much a _pinata_ as the post-election assignments and sales" (Larson 1994: 41-42). State lands, haciendas, houses, property lots, collective enterprises, small farms are not completely up for grabs, in the face of a clear, concise mechanism of resolution. This insecurity is furthered by the involvement of the United States, when in 1992 and 1993 the Republican Senator Jesse Helms was able to successfully freeze U.S. financial aid precisely on the issue of property and his mission to see land and property returned to pre-1979 conditions (U.S. Senate Republican Report 1992). So it is land and property, the very grounds of material existence, that are in contention.

Whether it be a house, a mansion, a small plot, a landed estate, an hacienda, a ranch, a plantation, the principal matter of contention has always been land. After independence from Spain in 1821 and during the ensuing factional fighting between the Conservatives and Liberals, land was one of the principal issues. The Conservatives wanted to completely remove constitutional protection of collective ownership which the Liberals wanted to respect (Burns 1991: 29). And this issue is as alive and sharp today as it ever has been in

Nicaraguan history. Across the spectrum of the contemporary Nicaraguan bourgeoisie, regardless of whether they are politically conservatives or liberal, the right to property is often viewed as a fundamental human right, as fundamental as life and liberty.

Land, specifically conceived in terms of 'private property' has been reified as a right inherent to the "transcendental nature of man, which is derived from his psycho-physical relationship to nature" (Centeno-Gomez 1991:10). According to this view, the right to private property is a concept that is central to a liberal democracy, it is a social right maintained by the Catholic church and has been a driving inspiration for human rights around the world for the last two hundred years (ibid). The acquisition of private property is not only a fundamental human right, but indeed as necessary as one's right to liberty to achieve "transcendence" (ibid). Such regard for land is ideologically shared by both Conservatives and Liberals. While substantial differences between the two political tendencies has consistently defined the post-Independence history of Nicaragua, the high regard for land is central to both. Where they differ as regards land is not so much in its abstract or metaphysical worth, but its ultimate use-value. By the mid-1800's, the issue regarding land was whether it should be immediately and completely usurped and exploited, or whether some minimum respect for landowning practices from the

colonial period should be maintained, "which meant [a recognition of] collective ownership of land, an important protection of the folk community" (Burns 1991: 28). Lest one thinks this latter consideration an example of enlightened regard for the rights of communal land holdings, it needs to be pointed out that this Liberal position was simply an instrumental means of trying to limit Conservative power and played into the "institutionalized anarchy" that typified the rivalry between the patriarchal elites (ibid: 140). Such general attitudes are echoed to this day when Mario Alegria, COSEP legal adviser and director of the Institute of Economic and Social Investment of Private Enterprise (INISEP), commenting on workers' and peasants' rights to property, asserts that although a national dialogue is necessary, it can only take place "among those who have political and economic power, and not those of a very low developmental level, since they do not have the capacity to make decisions" (ENVIO 1994a:52).

To return to the historical debate over land, toward the end of the nineteenth century a consensus between the feuding elites crystallized into a policy of restricting access to land, limiting the independence of communal lands, legalizing the selling of vacant lands, establishing laws mandating the enforcement of labor, and setting standards for dividing and alienating communal lands. Toward the end of the nineteenth century in Matagalpa, "the distribution and sale of 'public'

lands meant loss of communal land for natives...[who] were frequently coerced into serving as estate laborers" (Helms 1982: 249). Specific modes of capitalist social relations emerged with the consolidation of private property as a 'transcendental right' and the establishment of large scale agricultural production oriented for external markets and not domestic consumption. As land became concentrated in the hands of a few, the vast majority of people who had exclusively derived their livelihood from small plots and communal lands (indigenas, ladinos and small peasants) had to arrange new means of meeting the basic demands and needs of daily life. The transformation of property relations, in effect, entailed the formation of new social relations and modes of production (Nugent 1993: 340).

The haciendas, plantations and ranches had from the nineteenth century been perennially oriented toward international markets. However, poor transportation systems, lack of capital, unreliable State support, and regional competition from other Central American countries limited the profit landowners could wrest from the land. Indeed, beside ownership of the land itself as the principal source of wealth (Burns 1991), access to a steady supply of cheap labor was from the perspective of landowners the primary way to maximize wealth. The issue of labor scarcity had bedeviled Nicaragua from the time of the Spanish conquest when the country was a major exporter of human slaves. This practice depleted the

native population to an extent that proved detrimental for domestic agrarian production (Newson 1987).

Wage labor, physical dislocations, the primacy of private property, and new modes of production, combined to contribute to the establishment of specific sets of social relationships that precede the relations of production. For indigenas and poor peasants this required involuntary participation as subordinates in an economy that entailed involvement in patronage systems. Furthermore, the impact of having to rearrange subsistence practices forced indigenas and campesinos to spend considerable time away from their domestic households and meager landholdings, and engage in seasonal migratory wage labor, often during crucial times of cultivation and harvest.

Throughout the twentieth century, the introduction of cattle, cotton production, coffee and other plantation agriculture precipitated the growth of landless peasants and increasingly unsustainable small landowning families (Williams 1986; Estrada 1992). The increasing commercialization of agriculture also occurred within a legacy of coercive labor relation systems inherited from colonial times (Estrada 1992; Weeks 1985: Spaulding 1985). In the countryside, both the concentration of land ownership among fewer and fewer people, and the social relations that ensued between peasants, landless laborers, and landlords, ensured that indigenas, small peasants, and landless agricultural workers would remain

impoverished and alienated from economic or political power.

In the Matagalpan region, land was continuously subject to redistribution by the State at its own discretion, regardless of prevailing settlement patterns, historical claims, or demographic consequences. Around the turn of the century, the granting of land concessions, State subsidies, and laws legalizing forced labor contributed to the dismantling of indigenous, communal landholdings, as well as expropriation of peasants unable to prove their land titles hit the central highlands (Biderman 1982; Enriquez 1991). Before the 1979 FSLN revolution, a 1963 census in eastern Matagalpa indicated that 68% of the land was occupied without legal title. Much of this land has always been considered to be indigenous lands by the "Comunidad Indigena de Matagalpa" and land ownership essentially de facto. Also a considerable amount of land was under cultivation by small subsistence peasants who had been forced to move eastward. However between 1963 and 1976 at a time when Nicaraguan beef production significantly rose and pressure for more pasture land spread to eastern Matagalpa, by 1976 only 2.5 percent of the area was occupied by those without legal title (Williams 1986: 131). Those who held title were large producers while 11% of the land grants remained in the Somoza family (ibid). Hence from the time of the liberal regime of Zelaya (1893-1909) which accelerated the rise of coffee production to the latter stages of the Somoza dictatorship (1933-1979) which presided over increased cotton

and cattle production, land was systematically re-distributed to the detriment of indigenous groups and small peasants.

The FSLN revolution was in part an attempt to reverse this historical pattern of land robbing and forced marginalization of the vast majority of the Nicaraguan people. And in fact much of my research examines the efforts made on this score with obvious mixed results. But it is in keeping with the theme of polarization that not only typifies contemporary Nicaragua, but animates Nicaraguan history, that I return to the past. Although I begin with a brief review of pre-Columbian and Spanish colonial inter-ethnic processes and relations, present-day indigenous politics will underscore a thread that has persisted from the time of Spanish penetration into the region. Persistent social, economic and military pressure, resulting in resistance, defeats, and transformations and always crystallized in specific social forms of polarization will provide the storyline for an overview of the Matagalpan region up to present day.

Chapter 2. A CULTURAL HISTORY OF POLARIZATION: The Transformation of Identity by Matagalpan "Indigenas"

1. RIVALS: INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATIONS IN MATAGALPA

Roberto, my research assistant, mentioned to me how the Matagalpan-based theatrical troupe Nixtayolero (Calla 1993; Martin 1992) often performed plays that paid homage to various Nicaraguan personalities (eg; Augusto Sandino, Ruben Dario,

etc). One play, in particular commemorated the cacique, Julian Roque of San Ysidro. According to Roberto,....

> ...When the conservative government in 1879 decreed that all indigenous lands were obligated to pay '5 pesosoros' for each manzana they owned to the State, and that those who did not pay were therefore considered'vagrants' and would be obligated to perform communal work projects. Julian Roque with his small army rose up in arms and in 1881 when he was cornered by enemy soldiers on the mountain of Apante, a priest accompanying the soldiers went to Julian Roque to convert him to Catholicism so he could go to Heaven. The cacique asked where did the "whites" (*los blancos*) go when they died and the priest answered to heaven, at which the cacique responded that if the 'whites' go to heaven, he would rather go to hell and he threw himself off the mountain precipice...

This particular story, or rather this particular motif is quite common and found in numerous cultural and folk stories (Galeano 1987). Yet what I found mainly of interest was mention of relatively recent local Indian resistance in the area. The emphasis of Roberto's story had been on "Indian resistance", which contrasted with what I could only perceive today as the resistance of ladinoized peasants. The idea that in slightly more than one hundred years, Indians organized in active resistance to Spaniards had nevertheless been converted into ladinoized peasants was not in itself mind boggling as it was disconcerting. This was enhanced by the virtual lack of traces and records of such an indigenous past, save for theatrical performances and a couple eroded stone *stelas* in

the Guanuca park. As far as I was able to find out, no one could explain where they came from or what they symbolized.

With Roberto's help he introduced me to the local office of the "Comunidad Indigena de Matagalpa" (CIM, or Matagalpan Indigenous Community) at the beginning of 1991. Previous to the 1990 Nicaraguan Presidential elections, there was only one organization that represented the indigenous community in the department of Matagalpa, "La Comunidad Indigena de Matagalpa" (CIM). The origin of CIM is unclear, although the earliest date cited in reference to the Spanish organizing the Matagalpan Indians into "cabildos indigenas" (indigenous councils) is 1542 (Guiterrez C. 1981: 3). The Spanish colonialists acknowledged the indigenous "alcaldes" (mayors, or members of a council) by organizing them into a council of civil authorities. The three (later four) "alcaldes" represented each of the factions that made up the Matagalpan culture complex. I was not able to determine whether the basis of solidarity for each faction were either kin or geographically based. The "alcaldes" were referred to as the four "varas" (staff, rod, pole) because each maintained a staff symbolizing their status over their respective people and parcels of land. Although initially it appears that the "alcaldes" were "jefes Indios" (literally, Indian chiefs), later they were popularly elected by the Indian council (ibid:5).

I began to visit the comunal house of the CIM routinely.

This round brick and motar building constructed by a Dutch Development and Solidarity organization in 1982, was located on the site of "el Laborio", one of four traditional sites that demarked the barrios of the Matagalpan indigenous community. Each site had been places where members of rural communities gathered for market and trade activities. The current communal house served as the headquarters for the CIM 'popularly' elected directiva (or executive committee), as a meeting place for the Cacique (chief) and Consejo de Ancianos (council of elders), and the office where members of the whole indigenous community came to receive land recepits, negotiate and transfer land titles, and resolve property disputes. It also operated as a low cost hostel (U.S.$.60 a day) for exclusive use of members of the indigenous community to avail themselves when they came to the departmental capital of Matagalpa.

On most days, few people hung around the communal house during the day, although there were always a few people in the office. The office looked out onto the street corner, a block away from the childhood home of the founder and theoretician of the Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional, Carlos Fonseca Amador. It was a small tidy place with two desks, and inoperable telephone, and an old Spanish-made typewriter.

More often than not, the only official person to be found was the secretary of the Directiva, Claribel. She was the only female member of the directiva and her main duties where

essentially clerical. She typed receipts for members to use as proof of land ownership that were necessary for municipal and bank dealings. She also handled money, which amounted to a small sum of voluntarily paid annual dues ("pago de cano") all members of the indigenous community were expected to give. This small fund contributed to the meager salaries of the directiva and the upkeep and activities of the communal house. I later found out that the "pago de cano" applied to everyone, regardless of ones ethnic identity and pertained to all who resided on land considered to be indigenous. In actual fact, I found out that very few large landowners or cooperatives ever paid their annual dues and this contributed to an undercurrent of exasperation on the part of a few directiva members, since they thought much of their financial woes would be over with if everyone, especially the large landowners, would pay their annual dues. Indeed the organization suffered from chronic lack of funds since most members of the indigenous community did not pay their annual dues either (2 cordobas or US$.40 per hectare of land inhabited). The organization lacked sufficient coercive power to enforce regular dues payment.

At the same time, Leonardo, the CIM treasurer and most vocal anti-Sandinista directiva member explained to me in one of our early encounters, it had not always been that way.

> ...Before the Sandinistas robbed our country, the patrons -the Somozitas- had large pieces of land, but they always paid their rentamientos, their 'pago'. The old patrons always paid their part and

even sometimes the pago de cano for their campesinos...

Leonardo's version of past practices of large landowners paying the CIM annual dues prior to the 1979 revolution would have rung true had he remained consistent with his earlier assertion. In later accounts he not contradicted himself, but was contradicted by members of his very own directiva. His rendition of who pays and who does not is part of a larger political condemnation he is interested in making.

> ...Many people received our (indigenous) lands from the Frente illegally. These people are "comuneros" (communalists) and they were given land because they were part of the party (FSLN). These same people say they don't have to pay the Comunidad Indigena because they have land titles...As far as I'm concerned the CI will only respect the old "duenos" (owners) of the land. And if the new owners come to pay their rent, we won't accept it because we don't respect their titles...

however later in the same conversation he retracted his own assertion of not accepting the money of Sandinistas, although hastening to add that to do so would not legitimize their right to the land. Such hotly stated pronouncements and assertions, later contradicted either by the same person or a colleague were quite common. And in fact the common occurrence of such mixed messages only begins to get at the sharp divisions within and without the CIM, as well as the frequent resort to social and historical confabulations to support a particular ethos or viewpoint.

Back in the CIM's office, much of Claribel's work consists of telling people which municipal office to go to or

which proper receipt was necessary to pay one tax or another. Or she operated as a community scribe, reading official letters and assisting many with problems they had with the State. The overwhelming majority of people coming to the office were *campesinos* (peasants) who had spent a considerable amount of time, money and effort to make it to the big city, Matagalpa. The roads, north-east and south-east, immediately upon leaving Matagalpa became rough dirt, sometimes muddy tracks, which required people to arrive on foot or horseback to such places as Pantasma, Waslala, and Muy Muy by four or five in the morning, only to pile in the back of a *camion* (truck) and make the four to six hour trek into the departmental capital. Generally the arriving members of the community appeared as humble poor peasant people, who came to Matagalpa infrequently. Matagalpa was perceived as a big city and many of the *campesinos* I became familiar with had never traveled outside of the department. It was not uncommon for city dwellers to point out to me how the people they were referring to were clearly *Indios*. They usually pointed out to me how the people they were referring to were clearly *Indios* because they tended to walk in a single file, wear sandals or no shoes at all, and be carrying bundles of food and belongings. This was the stereotypic image the city-dwellers used to categorize other people as *Indios*.

However the largest portion of the secretary's time was taken up with arranging *mitins* (meetings) between disputants

over land. Generally the most she could do was arrange for the Presidente of the directiva (CIM elected administration) to be present to arbitrate conflicts. The meetings were usually arranged two to three weeks in advance and she typed a formal-looking letter on organization stationary, embossed with a stamp that supposedly carried sufficient legal weight as to persuade the absent disputant to show up or else. The 'else' was never clear although the chief coercive force that was quite clear in the act, although unstated, was that should a disputant not attend the arranged meeting, the matter would be passed onto the municipio which could be counted on being less sympathetic to individual concerns.

There were other days, though, when more members of the CIM's directiva were present. I would often sit on a bench in the cramped offices with campesinos from outlying areas who were there for numerous reasons, which ranged from the relatively simple acquisition of a property record (if available) to the lodging of complaints against land encroachments. And often, they as I, were constantly subject to political commentaries, sometimes even lengthy and emotional socio-political rants by a couple of the more vocal members of the directiva. And although these vocal directiva members did not hold ultimate executive powers, such as Leonardo the treasurer, their very presence and decibel levels tended to make them the dominant force within the directiva. There was no escaping them, not even in the grimy although

well swept smoky open air kitchen in the back of the hostel where one could get sweetened coffee and fresh tortillas. There was a constant variation of a single theme I heard throughout my initial fieldwork with the CIM: All sorts of anti-Sandinista misdeeds to include murders, tortures, land confiscations, past threats and incarcerations, a panoply of judicial misdeeds, and the theft of official CIM documents.

This latter complaint was the primary excuse and reason evoked for the organizations' (CIM) incapacity to meet individual and popular demands for resolution of property disputes and the securing of scarce State and NGO resources for local needs. This accusation was leveled toward the former directiva who now headed a rival organization, "la Asociacion Indigena de Matagalpa pro Desarrollo Economico, Social, y Cultural" (AIMDESC, or Matagalpan Indigenous Association for the Economic, Social, and Cultural Development). Although most of the directiva of AIMDESC are avowed Sandinistas and are accused by the leadership of the CIM of not only having robbed the organization of money, resources, and important documentation during their tenure, but of having usurped power by co-opting the traditional authority structure of the CIM and leaving in its wake a broken organization and popular distrust of the CIM.

I was fortunate over the duration of my fieldwork to have gained entry into the inner sanctum of both the CIM and the AIMDESC. I had easy access to both directives, and with their

full knowledge that I was dealing with their rivals. The inner sanctum of the CIM literally was a large room behind the small office where Claribel worked. It was a half shell of a room naturally brightened by a louvered glass wall that illuminated on its inner walls a rather large collection of yellowed old photographs that had at one time been framed and protectively covered by plexiglass. I was disappointed by the otherwise impressive display because instead of discovering pictures of their faded indigenous past, it was a turn of the century collection of old creole and immigrant city fathers, scenes of old Matagalpa, the first car here, a steamroller there. It was a tribute to urban growth, coffee capital, and influential non-indigenous land owners and foreign investors. In sum it was a retrospective of the entry of Matagalpa into the modern world with the establishment of paved roads, a movie house, and a tip of the hat to the emergence of Matagalpa as the capital of the principal coffee growing region in the country.

It was in this inner room, where particular members of the CIM directiva took time and care to explain their anti-Sandinista and anti-former CIM directiva sentiments. These members reserved considerable rancor toward the old directiva who had vacated their positions shortly after the 1990 national elections. They charged that the old directiva locked them out of power throughout their reign, of having manipulated rules and people, and in effect transforming the CIM from a legitimate representative body of the whole

Matagalpan indigenous community to a pro-Sandinista mass organization favoring a few over the many. And not only a select few of Matagalpan "indigenas", but non-indigenas and even in some cases, non-Matagalpinos. The favors the former CIM directiva were said to have curried were to support outright land confiscations and distributions, to the allocation of State and development monies and resources to decidedly pro-Sandinista individuals and groups. To many of the current CIM directiva, the former leadership had misrepresented themselves and the indigenous organization.

One of the chief accusations made by CIM leadership at the time of my initial fieldwork, was that the former directiva (current AIMDESC directiva) had broken with the traditional authority structure of the organization and had usurped power for themselves and the Sandinistas. Prior to 1979, the CIM directiva explained, the Cacique and the Consejo de Ancianos chose who they wanted as members of the Directiva. Then the members were voted annually voted annually and ratified by the Reforma (council of forty members, many of whom are in the Consejo de Ancianos). Before I describe this version of the CIM authority structure as told to me by a few members of the CIM directiva, it is important to point out that as far as I can surmise there is no one single definitive description of a traditional CIM authority structure, either written or agreed upon by contemporary indigenous leaders. Even the very description I am about to sketch was contested

by CIM directiva members, suggesting that CIM organizational structure was quite fluid and non-static. This impressed upon me the importance of attending to multiple interpretations I gathered over time, rather than attempting to capture some rendition of structural continuities over time. Continuities that may never have been there to begin with except as convenient fictions[2]. Nevertheless I will sketch the organizational structure of CIM as laid out to me initially by members of CIM directiva.

The CIM organizational structure of authority consists of several offices. In order of most powerful to least,there are:

1) The Cacique (chief):

There are currently two in the CIM and they represent different locales or comarcas.. Although the cacique is referred to as a local hereditary leader,therefore of ascribed status, it appears in practice to be an achieved position.

2) The Consejo de Ancianos (sometimes referred to as la Reforma):

This is a council of forty indigenous leaders, all male, who tend to be in their late thirties and older. This council of elders are the ultimate governing body in that they have the last word in arguments and votes regarding indigenous community decisions. To become a member of the council one learn the rules and customs of the community acquired by participating in a series of official

[2] The problem of trying to describe the past and present organizational structure of the "Comunidad Indigena de Matagalpa" has to do with trying to construct a history that maintains an imaginary structural continuity over time. This brings to mind Roseberry's critique of moral economy theorists, that instead of viewing the transition of the past to the present as the passage of "an ordered past to a disordered present...We instead need to view a movement from disordered past to a disordered present" (Roseberry 1991: 58).

positions over time.It seems that another term for the council, and one that remains confusing, is the designation of the la Reforma. El Consejo de Ancianos and la Reforma were at times referred to synonymously and at other times as distinct councils. In later accounts la Reforma is described to me as a distinct governing body that essentially performs equal functions as the elders 'council. Such descriptions were provided to me by members who stated being members of both groups. And although I have attended a couple meetings of the elders' council, I was never apprised of a meeting of la Reforma.

3) **Alcaldes de Vara**:

The alcaldes are charged with implementing and completing the orders that come from the elders council. To become an alcalde, one must be voted into the office by the elders council and the tenure of an alcalde can vary from a minimum of a year to several years.

4) **Regidores**:

Initially I had described to me seven levels of regidores (aka alderman). A regidor functions at the privildege of everyone above him. One can become a regidor as early as the age of twelve and the position usually begins by performing menial tasks such as cleaning up or running messages. Usually one holds this position for up to a year, before moving up to a Regidor II, then Regidor III, and so on.

By going up the ranks, not only is greater status and prestige accrued but, then one becomes in line for higher offices. Of interest in this organizational scheme is reference to the Junta Directiva, or executive committee. The Directiva consists of eight positions (President, Vice-President, two Treasurers, two "Vocales" [aka, board members], and a Secretary). Supposedly each member of the Junta Directiva is voted into office popularly for a one-year duration. The principal function of the Directiva is to maintain the operation of the CIM, to call for assemblies,

manage community projects, and generally provide for and represent the indigenous community. In my encounters with the CIM, I found the Directiva to exercise extraordinary discretionary power in everything from the allocations of funds to decisions over land disputes. I rarely heard members of the directiva refer to the need to call upon the elders' council or cacique to help make decisions. In effect, there appear to be two parallel authority structures, although I was unable to determine whether the two were equal in political power. Furthermore I recorded how one member of the Junta Directiva was also a regidor and another a member of the elders' council. The positions in the Junta Directiva were essentially political. Political, in terms that everyday activities and functions were administrative and that to become a member of the Junta Directiva, one had to be popularly elected.

There are several reasons why I have laboriously described the organizational structure of CIM. First, is the fact that later descriptions, both from contemporary indigenous informants and ethnohistorical sources (Chammorro 1990; Guerrero y Soriano 1967, 1982; Gould 1991), as well as my own participant-observation, reveals extreme departures from this idealized normative rendition of CIM organizational structure. This point is important since it seems readily apparent that power, in terms of collective decision making, allocation of resources, acknowledgment or negation of the

interests of particular indigenous and non-indigenous parties is completely vested in the Junta Directiva. Secondly, in light of this apparent fact, charges and counter-charges by the rival Matagalpan indigenous organizations (CIM and AIMDESC) in terms of legitimate representation of the whole Matagalpan indigenous community often revolves around this idealized schemata of organizational structure. It appears to be the case that the CIM as I have described it is more an idealized version of how it is actually structured and it appears to have been extremely malleable and mainly as an instrument of social control.

The current CIM <u>directiva</u> claims their goal is to re-establish their "original organization", in contrast to the former directiva who are accused of having deliberately undermined the "dignity" of the CIM. The present CIM <u>directiva</u> acknowledge that they had (like their predecessors before them) canceled annual elections: However, they insisted that this was because the CIM organization they inherited from the former <u>directiva</u> was in such disarray that they needed more time to "re-establish" the organization. The issue of organizational structure and traditional authority to direct and manage the CIM rests on their interpretation of historical precedent. References to past organizational structures and activities as the basis upon which the CIM ought (or should) be run seems to be idealized reconstructions of probable organizational structures and processes evoked purposely to

strengthen their positions and legitimize their authority.

The former CIM *directiva*, who are founders and *directiva* members of AIMDESC (from here on referred to as the current *directiva* of AIMDESC), counter that the charges and accusations of the CIM *directiva* are politically motivated. AIMDESC leaders insist that the CIM *directiva* is returning the CIM into an ineffectual, undemocratic organization "it had always been before the revolution". They insist their rule of the CIM was legitimate because of the extraordinary circumstances of their time in office. They readily admit that annual elections did not occur. The main reason being, they explain, was that not all members of the "Reforma" were able to attend the annual plebiscite because of the war. And that active campaigning throughout the indigenous Matagalpan region was impossible during the war. Furthermore, given the militarized conditions of rural warfare, people would not attend meetings for fear of retribution by other members of the indigenous community.

Their fear, as AIMDESC directiva members readily admit, stems from their active embrace of the Sandinista revolution. Many members of the Matagalpan indigenous community privately supported them but, feared retaliation by anti-Sandinista indigenous members who felt any participation with a pro-Sandinista CIM administration would put them in danger. AIMDESC leader and former CIM *directiva* member, Chico, readily admits that they wanted to make "a break to our Somozita

past". Unfortunately people who were thought of as supporting their administration were considered Sandinistaa and immediately imperiled. During the course of the "Contra war", many supporters were killed or injured, and even more had to migrate. This was commensurate with the thoroughly disturbing destabilization wrought by the campaign of terror by Contra forces operating in the countryside.

The former CIM directiva do not hide the fact they wanted to reform the CIM. They hoped to expand participation in CIM decision-making and activities. Chico, a former member of the CIM direcetiva and current member of AIMDESC during the Sandinista period, explained that it was their general intention to make a break with the past and purposely foster wider popular support and control of the CIM. For him the CIM had long stop being an organization that legitimately represented the community. Rather it had become another way of subordination the Matagalpan indigenous community, indeed another "tool of oppression" that had, by the time of the triumph in July of 1979, become an organization of little relevance or importance in the daily lives of the vast majority of Matagalpan indigenas. As Chico strongly stated: "... ask them [the current directiva of the CIM] about before the revolution. Who was in control then? Did the CIM have annual elections; Did the CIM act autonomously? Ask them about Siriaco Salgado, who was president of the Junta Directiva for thirty years. This guy from Susuli stole land from Don Santos

[current Presidente of the CIM directiva]. He was a Somozita through and through. He was a Capitan in the "Guardia" (Guardia Nacional, former military force of the Somoza dynasty). This guy headed a civil-military structure, like a rural police, and he was the "Capitan General de Canadas" (General capitan of various comarcas or micro-regional seats), who ran the CIM, as well as the "juez de mesta" (rural justices of each comarca). He was brutal, bloodthirsty and greedy. He favored all the fat Patrons and never even thought about the rights of the indigenous. I'm sure that never even entered his head..."[3]

In sharp contrast to the current CIM directiva, the directiva of AIMDESC (former CIM directiva) does not rely on a reconstructed history of the local indigenous organization to legitimize their representation of Matagalpan indigenas. Instead they hold to a much more critical reading of the past, whereby they characterize past CIM directives of being lackeys of local and state powerbrokers, as well as having neglected their historical duty to represent all Matagalpan indigenas. In fact, their reading of the CIM especially after the War of 1881, is of an organization intentionally colluding with non-indigenous social sectors for interests (land, forced labor, votes, etc.) antithetical to the indigenous community. Past CIM directives were either coerced, co-opted, or voluntarily collaborated with local and State power brokers that rendered

[3] Interesting historical reference to Siriaco Salgado can be found in Gould (1991).

the CIM an instrument of social control and subjugation[4].

Both the current and former CIM directiva mention the War of 1881 as a watershed year in local indigenous history. I remember how I initially kept changing the date of 1881 to 1981 in my head when I first began to hear references to this war. The "Contra war" is often officially noted as having begun in 1981, which I confounded with talk about the war of "1881". Agreement of the significance of the 1881 war ends in a general acknowledgement that it was the defeat of the Indian uprising and that the loss of indigenous land greatly accelerated. Besides this common agreement, both former and current directiva members depart on the meaning and impact of the war on the current status of Matagalpan Indians.

2. WAR OF 1881: INDIAN RESISTANCE OR JESUIT MANIPULATION?

The war of 1881 is cited as the last significant Indian uprising in Nicaragua, if we exclude the mobilization of Atlantic coast Miskitos during the "Contra War". It is called the "War of the Comuneros" (Walker 1991) and has either been

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[4] During the reign of the last two Somozas (Luis & Tachito, interspersed with the brief rule of Rene Schick, a pawn of the dynasty and prominent member of the Somoza-dominated Liberal party), the dominant figure of the CIM was Ciriaco Salgado. I gathered information on him from former and current members of the CIM directiva, a few of whom knew him personally. He is often talked about with a mixture of awe and vengeance. Exact dates of his reign as Presidente of the directiva are difficult to clearly determine. Poorly written records and multiple oral recollections are more often than not at odds with a clear chronological account of his various administrations. One thing is clear though. He was not a Cacique, as he has been referred to (Gould 1991) and is unanimously referred to as having been the Presidente of the CIM junta directiva. He is purported to have been respected in Matagalpan society and part of the Liberal party political machine.

depicted as a rebellion to stop the takeover of ancestral lands by wealthy coffee growers, or the machinations of radical Jesuits inciting the Indians against the State for their own nefarious political ends. The differences in the ways AIMDESC and CIM members refer to the war throw in sharp relief the differences regarding ideas about agency and identity.

Members of CIM refer to the war as a conflict between Jesuits and the liberal president, Zelaya[5]. During the latter part of the 19th century, Nicaragua entered into large-scale coffee production after the other Central American countries had been at it since mid-century. In order to encourage large scale production, land tenure laws that eliminated indigenous communities and communal lands were enacted. The loss of land for natives forced them into debt peonage. Moreover, legislation was passed that coerced natives into forced labor and if they were not tied to coffee producers, they were at the mercy of the State to determine how, when, and where their labor was to be used. The Catholic church also was able to secure a continuous pool of coerced laborers for their various projects. In 1880, the State obliged Indians to work installing telegraph lines from the border where the

[5] In actual fact, Jose Santos Zelaya did not come to power until 1893. Zelaya is an important figure in Nicaraguan post-independence history because he was a powerful Liberal president who is seen as modernizing the country. The introduction of coffee production on a scale that made Nicaragua an agro-exporter, while undermining the basis for indigenous communities, traditional subsistence practices, and identity, clearly preceded Zelaya coming to power. However his image is both so controversial and polemical that it is not surprising to have him associated with past events he had nothing to do with, such as the War of 1881.

departments of Managua and Matagalpa meet. This was happening at the same time as the Jesuits were building a cathedral in Matagalpa with the use of forced labor.

It is the contention of CIM members that it was the competition for scarce labor between the State and the Church that lead to the war. According to them, the Jesuits encouraged the Indians to rebel by inciting them about Zelaya's intent to completely steal their lands and force them into permanent servitude. This was not so farfetched since in 1877, an agrarian law that directly attacked communal and public lands to be sold to coffee growers, forced many Indians who lived on prime coffee land to be dispossessed and resulted in a rebellion of thousands of Indians, which went on for nine months (Brockett 1991). However what galls a couple of the CIM members about the 1881 war is how they feel their ancestors were manipulated by the Jesuits to fight. They liken this to the current situation of the "Iglesia Popular" (the Popular Church, or the liberation theology wing of the Catholic Church) constantly subverting indigenas to their "communist causes". They draw parallels between the Jesuits of 1881 and the liberation theology Catholics of the pre-FSLN triumph days to show how the church has played a role in inciting people to rebel against the State. What gets lost in their analysis are the legitimate grounds for resisting, as well as the assumption that people will passively obey anyone to take up arms simply because they are told to. This ties in with a much

more benign and benevolent historical treatment they offer about big private landowning families in the department and the Somoza dynasty. There appears to be a greater willingness to subordinate their identity as indigenas and respect patrons who "know how to keep order and produce" (Leonardo, CIM treasurer, personal communication). According to CIM members, if there is mutual respect, anything can be worked out between patron and workers.

Another interpretation of the 1881 war by members of AIMDESC is much closer to the written history of the war (Guiterrez 1981; Guerrero y Soriano 1982). For them, the distribution and sale of "public" lands which meant the loss of communal lands for Matagalpan Indians who were then forced into service as estate laborers, debt peonage, or obliged state laborers, was only the precondition for a massive rebellion. For them, the installation of telegraph lines was sort of the last insult that had begun years earlier, when Indian laborers were forced to do road constructions or work on coffee estates without remuneration. Laws that dispossessed Indians of their land and forced them to engage in tributary labor, also included prohibitions to eat meat or make corn liquor without paying taxes and securing permission. The installation of telegraph lines meant Indian laborers were forced far from home and had to carry large spools of wire on their backs. For members of AIMDESC, the laying of telegraph lines was the last straw and theirs was a popular insurrection

that had nothing to do with the Jesuits.

Interestingly, Geraldo (co-chairperson of AIMDESC) believes that the Jesuits actually tried to negotiate a settlement between the rebelling Indians and the State. And as a result were condemned as being instigators and forcibly deported in late 1881. For Gerardo and others of AIMDESC, the war of 1881 was about self-determination, not unlike the more contemporary claims for autonomy the Miskitos made during the Contra war. The war of 1881 was a war of self-determination and the Jesuits, rather than being criticized, should be commended for acknowledging the legitimate claims of Matagalpan Indians. That this interpretation parallels the other side of the story regarding the progressive role of the church today, does not seem so coincidental. If anything, both interpretations of the role of the church in the 1881 affair provides a backdrop to current attitudes regarding the role of the church to the state today.

Let me turn to a literary reconstruction of the war of 1881 to dramatize why this "last Indian rebellion" (Guiterrez 1981) remains an important image and time marker to both Matagalpan indigenous organizations. From 1880, when the installation of the telegraph lines began, injuries and long absences from their families began a slow gathering rage among the Indian workers. The command of the State to lay 130 kilometers of telegraph line was part of a larger set of directives the State had promulgated early in 1881 for Indians

to also construct a road from Leon to Matagalpa (70 to 80 kilometers), construct an official building in Matagalpa (la Casa Consistorial), and serve in the army (Wheelock 1985: 111). The rage culminated into manifest form in March of 1881:

> There were accidents, deaths, injuries and such ill temper that on March 30, 1881, at 11:00 in the morning, a thousand Indians entered the city in columns four deep in the tactic known as 'throwing the loop': This consisted of forming circles that tighten to crush everything in their path like a boa constrictor, like a flash flood, like a wild and solemn bull. The Indians were painted red and black and carried arrows and tapir shields; they also carried chili pastes to apply to the genitals and anal orifices of the mestizos. After several hours of battle they withdrew, taking their dead with them...(Borge 1989: 27).

Throughout the rest of that year there were numerous attacks and actual taking of towns and communities throughout the region. The number of Indian attackers swelled to nearly 7,000 in August of that year. For many Nicaraguan historians and writers, the war of 1881 remains a symbol of Indian resistance, even if in the end they lost the fight (Wheelock 1985; Guerrero Y Soriano 1982; Guiterrez 1981).

Chapter 3. COLONIAL MEMORIES AND MODERN DREAMS:

Identity in Relation to Power and the State among Matagalpan Indians

1. THE POLITICS OF "INDIGENA" IDENTITY IN MATAGALPA

The "Cacique" (big man or chief) simply answered my questions of how he would identify his people by replying, "Indigenas are who we are. That is our name. Indigena means

'Indio' and that is what we are". When I tried to press him further for such details as name of native group or relations with other indigenous groups, he seemed as perplexed by my questions as I was with his answers. Further attempts to glean from him greater contemporary insight or historical understanding were not to be. By his asserting a received label, I was left in a quandary as to how to interpret the significance of his assertion. The very ambiguity attached to the meaning of the term indigena, for those to whom it may or may not apply, in no small way highlights the problematic issues of identity, political representation, and ideology in the Matagalpan region. The use of the term indigena by the Cacique as a self- or group-designation may have been a tactical response to an unknown interlocutor, that is, myself. Diskin (1992) discussing the Nicaraguan Atlantic Coast Miskitu people, a people who live east of the Matagalpan indigenas, asserts that ethnic discourses are indications of social tension and strain. He suggests that:

> ...ethnic discourse [is]...a tool in ongoing social negotiation, [and] therefore eminently situational, with strategic and tactical aspects. For this reason, the ethnic voice may assume a variety ofidentities... the identities chosen may shift depending on the group's allies and adversaries of the moment, the resources they seek, and, of course timing (1992:157)....

Hence the Cacique's resort to such a simple ambiguous self-designation implies more than it denotes.

There is no record indicating whether Indian leadership was ascribed or achieved, and whether the use of popular

elections were introduced by the Spaniards or rooted in pre-Columbian tradition. After serving as an "alcalde", one automatically became a life-long member of the "Reformados", whom exercised significant influence in the community by their vote in the "Consejo de Alcaldes" (council of mayors). This Consejo de Alcaldes served as a grand council of all four Indian councils which represented the four communities that made up Matagalpa (ibid). This organizational structure remained the same until the Indian uprising of 1881, which proved to be a turning point in the destiny of Matagalpan Indians (Guerrero C. 1982), an event I will turn to later. Beyond this there are few extant records of the early structure and function of the CIM.

Shortly after the 1990 elections, a change in the collective leadership (or "directiva") of CIM from a pro-Sandinista to a pro-UNO directiva resulted in a marked difference in the orientation, activities, and goals of the CIM. At the same time, the birth of a rival organization, "La Asociacion Indigena de Matagalpa de Desarrollo Economico, Social y Cultural" (AIMDESC or la 'Asociacion') came about that challenged the hegemonic representation of the Matagalpan indigena community. The "directiva" (executive committee) of the 'Asociacion' consisted of the former "directiva" of the CIM, who had held sway of the organization throughout the revolutionary period (1979-1990). By the time I arrived on the scene the two Matagalpan indigenous organizations held such

markedly different views of their past history and current status that the ways they constructed Matagalpan indigenous identity were quite disparate and favored particular rationales for specific associations and projects they were committed to.

Many rural residents in the department of Matagalpa rarely identified themselves as indigenas (or Indians, natives or aborigines). Indeed traits and practices (eg, native language, rituals and dress, traditional customs, individual and communal subsistence activities) commonly associated with being indigena were not apparent or striking. To the contrary, those rural dwellers in the department were largely ladino campesino families, rural agricultural workers, migrant laborers, members of agricultural cooperatives, rural dwelling urban artisans and proletariat, oriented to the city of Matagalpa rather than oriented toward distinct Indian communities harboring faint traces of a pre-Columbian past. Yet there were some families and communities which deliberately maintained an "indigenous" identity by openly referring to themselves as indigenas and indios.

The minority of rural dwellers who openly avowed their identity as indigenas in many respects symbolized advances made during the Sandinista revolution when people embraced identifications, which in the past would have resulted in patent oppression and social marginalization. The question of identity, whether ethnic, social, or political had become

during the "Contra war" exceedingly volatile and the primary means for distinguishing allies and enemies, friends or foes. As a result, whole communities would come to be popularly defined in ideological and cultural terms resulting in a generally shared consciousness of how specific localities, comarcas, towns, haciendas, and cooperatives were politically identified: a Sandinista cooperative here, a comarca (a bounded geographic community) that was synonymous with a big hacendado (an hacienda or ranch/farm/plantation estate owner) conservative landowning family there. In effect, a mental map of the department could be construed as a patch work quilt of neighbors and campesinos pitted against one another, and which during the "Contra War" had been localities that were the contending social bases for FSLN or former "Contra" forces. A result of this deplorable contention between families and communities was that the open expression of an indigenous identity was bound and associated with larger national political economic processes and entities and relations to the State.

One's self-assertion as indigena (some even refer to themselves as Indio) is a deliberately self-conscious, if not a bold political act. For in many ways it means one is manifestly shaking off the social stigma and challenging the formal and informal practices of ostracism and negative sentiments associated with such identification (Burns 1991). Furthermore, the Matagalpinos who openly identified themselves

as *indigena* were often actively engaged in staking vital grounds and making multiple claims. The claim of a distinctive autonomous political identity was associated with demands for ownership of lands confiscated preceding and following the Triumph of the Sandinista revolution in 1979. Identity was also associated with specific demands upon State and local authorities for social and economic resources that had been historically denied them.

During my exploration into the understandings and meanings Matagalpan indigenas provided themselves and others regarding their historical past, present identity, and future aspirations, I was immediately thrown into a number of contemporary debates regarding the cultural politics of identity. It is like Friedman astutely pointed out, that "If history is largely mythical, it is because the politics of identity consists in anchoring the present in a viable past. The past is, thus, constructed according to the conditions and desires of those who produce history[y]...in the present" (1992:207). This became very apparent in the specific discourses the leadership of the two rival indigenous organizations relied upon and mobilized to legitimate their particular social and political positions. Sometimes such discourses involved unabashed discrediting of their rivals. My sustained contact with the leadership of the two competing organizations was well known and the bulk of the data and analysis presented here deals mainly with members of these two

organizations and does not pretend to describe the full spectrum of identity politics among the Matagalpan indigenous population.

There is a tendency for Matagalpan indigenous leaders of both contending indigenous organizations to talk about the history and present status of the community in political terms. Whereas the leadership of the AIMDESC were openly pro-Sandinista, the leadership of the CIM claimed to be apolitical. However even this latter claim was largely rhetorical for their own claim of political neutrality was time and time again negated by their own admissions of partisanship and open siding with political parties and figures who were anything but neutral. Portraits of the indigenous community put forth by each rival organizations put forth, affirmed not only intense competition for garnering popular support and title as legitimate representor of the whole Matagalpan indigenous community, but starkedly different and often discrepant versions of past history and current affairs. The discrepant versions put forth by the two rival indigenous organizations place in stark relief the positional politics of identity both are engaged.

The leadership of each organization occupies different social positions vis-a-vis each other and in that fact alone the issue of constructed histories and identity, as well as claims of authenticity made by both organizations, serve as a way of denying the legitimacy of the other. The denial of the

other is not so much a denial of the other's claim of being "indigenous" as it is a refusal to accept the other's claim as legitimate community representative with corresponding access to resources, and final arbiters of internal indigenous matters and extra-community issues (e.g.; imposed taxes, State land use, priority of local infrastructure projects, etc). The leadership of the AIMDESC tend to be younger, better educated, having come of age shortly before and following the triumph of the 1979 revolution and come from rural comarcas that are not considered the traditional bastions of power within the Matagalpan indigenous universe (e.g., Pueblo Viejo or Samulali). The leadership of the CIM, tend to be older, less educated, less challenging of the status quo and more dependent upon the traditional modes of subsistence which involve working for large landowners. These differences in themselves do not explain why the leadership of each organization is so different. Nor do their differences appear to be sustained by deep-seated animosities or rancor between members of the contending directives, although there is some "bad blood" or negative sentiments between several individuals. This in spite of the fact that there are distant kin relations among a few of the members of the contending directives which appears not to mitigate the differences between the organizations. Rather it appears that the differences between the two organizations have much more to do with their relations with social and political forces outside

the Matagalpan indigenous community. Here the question of indigenous identity appears to be contained within a social-relational definition that is highly politicized, rather than a cultural-historical definition passed down from previous generations. The question of being "indigenous" is dependent on extra-community definitions and relations. And it is with these extra-community relations that there is a glaring weakness the Matagalpan indigenous organizations have in solidifying their authority and undertaking projects and tasks for the benefit of the whole Matagalpan indigenous community. Also it appears that leadership status is extremely vulnerable and over reliant on supra-indigenous forces (e.g., the State, political parties, local landowning patrons, NGO's, etc) for exercising wider indigenous authority. Given such degrading circumstances it is a wonder that they agree on anything. Fortunately they do.

The primary grounds of mutual agreement pertain directly to the territorial expanse and the general number of inhabitants of the whole Matagalpan indigenous community. According to both organizations, the Matagalpan indigenous community is a geographic expanse that is bound by the principal town-cities of Matagalpa, San Ramon, and Esquipulas. A total of 83,675 manzanas, or 100,920 acres of land that encompasses 73 comarcas[6] and at least 18 haciendas fall under

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The number of comarcas cited were bantered by members of the directives of both indigenous organizations, CIM and AIMDESC. However I was only able to tabulate 45 comarcas some of which are: El

the Matagalpan indigenous domain. At minimum there are over 60,000 rural residents in the Matagalpan countryside who are recognized collectively as Matagalpan indigenas. Even though many rural inhabitants do not primarily identify themselves as indigena, they are still counted as indigenous by virtue of residency and fiscal obligations to the CIM. As one may surmise, this criteria of inclusion as a Matagalpan indigena is rather tenuous and easily exploited. We will discuss the issue of inclusion later.

Another point of convergence for both indigenous organizations is the issue of land. Leonardo, the treasurer of the CIM, ridiculed other indigenous organizations around the country by asserting,

> ...Those other people are always talking about culture. In Masaya, they want to make their artesania and play their music. Whenever we go to these encuentros [national conferences], the people from Leon and Masaya only talk about their art and music and language...
>
> ...We know what's really important and that is land. They can talk about their folklore, but for us that's a waste of time. For us the most important issue is land...

This primary concern for land is shared by the directiva of AIMDESC as well. For AIMDESC, the paramount importance of land has to do with the saga of rape and exploitation of the land by the Spanish colonialists and later hostile State

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Chile, Apante, Samulali, Ocalca, Pueblo Viejo, San Marcos Apatite, San Pablo, El Horno, Yucul, Ocolca, small communities of San Dionisio, El Zapote, Susuli Arriba, Susuli Abajo, El Cobano, Wiwuse, Los Lomones, El Sarsal, Piedra de Agua, Jucuapa Arriba, Jucuapa Abajo, Tijerina, Yaule, El Junquillo, El Castillo, El Vijao, and other communities.

governments and local terratenientes (big landlords). The leadership of AIMDESC values the cultural projects of other indigenous organizations around the country, but concur with the sentiment expressed by Leonardo that the issue of land is of primary importance to the Matagalpan indigenous community which makes them somewhat distinct from the other Nicaraguan indigenous communities[7]. Chico, member of the junta directiva (executive committee or steering committee) of AIMDESC, tends to speak about the problems associated with the land as an issue of neo-colonial domination:

> "...During the revolution, there was an effort to grant real power and authority to the CIM. [We] worked with Agrarian Reform (MIDNIRA) to redress lands that had been stolen, as well provide land and cooperatives for those [indigenas] who were landless or starving. Now since the elections [1990 Presidential elections] we are back once again having to fight for the rights to our land and this directiva [current CIM] is playing into the hands of the Guardia and terratenientes"

Even though members of the directives of CIM and AIMDESC agree that the issue of land is of primary importance, they differ radically in their estimation of the problem.

For both indigenous organizations the issues that swirl around land have to do with such thorny questions as who are the legitimate owners of the land, land tenure practices, what local economic development projects take precedence and who are the ultimate authorities (the State, the Alcaldia,

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[7] There is obviously room for debate as to whether it is the concern for land that makes the Matagalpan indigenous community distinct from other Nicaraguan indigenous communities. In particular, one need only turn to the Miskitu community on the Atlantic coast (Moleri 1986; Dunbar-Ortiz 1984; Hale & Gordon 1987) to gather how vital the issue land is. Nor is this concern restricted merely to the Miskitu or Matagalpans, but obtains for other indigenous communities in Nicaragua as well.

municipios, the CIM, local grassroots associations) to make decisions that directly affect the community. While both indigenous organizations agree on the importance of land, they vastly disagree on the problems associated with the land. It appears to be the unanimous position of the current CIM that all the problems associated with land began with the rise of "Sandinismo". A litany of accusations are easily loosen when talk turns to land: from unjust land confiscations to charges of graft and corruption in the allocation of land to non-indigenas, which only begin to scratch the surface of the acrimony the CIM directiva direct toward the former CIM directiva (current directiva of AIMDESC) and anyone associated with the FSLN. As one might expect, this is not shared by the directiva of AIMDESC and they tend to take a longer view of the problem of land understanding the issue within an historical context.

It is at this juncture that one needs to turn to an examination of the cultural history of the Matagalpan region. However it is mythos to believe that there is a single definitive regional history of Matagalpa. Therefore what follows is a decidedly partial, highly selective interpretive version of the cultural history of the Matagalpan region that strives to underscore particular trends and forces that thread the past with the present, and animate the current socio-cultural and politico-economic conditions of present day Matagalpa.

2. WRITING HISTORY

...man has no nature;
he has only history....
- Ortega y Gasset

What I have in mind is to construct a particular cultural historiography of the Matagalpan region that shows a specific set of continuities over time. These continuities are socio-cultural and political-economic forces and dynamics that have shaped the character of the region. I am specifically referring to the effects of polarization, the uses of violence and the organization of vertical social relationships (various patronage systems; family over community over class interests; social and economic dependencies, etc). Each of these 'continuities' will be described in greater detail, however a more immediate concern must be addressed before a cultural history of the Matagalpa region can be presented. And that is the problem of writing history.

First of all, several disclaimers and obvious shortcomings must be admitted to. My reconstruction of Matagalpan cultural history relies on recollections, stories, and shared memories gathered during my fieldwork. To augment such data I have also turned to extremely limited ethnohistorical data, meager archival records, and a lot of imagination. While many may disagree with the post-modern tendency to take poetic license in presenting a past to fit

the present, this is no less the case in conventional methods of presenting history (Smith 1982) or in the popular production of the remote or recent past as a product of social memory (Fentress & Wickham 1992). There is no denying a deliberate selectivity of historical events, personalities, and processes that is intent upon substantiating a particular interpretation of social reality in present-day Matagalpa, indeed perhaps in the whole of contemporary Nicaraguan society.

There has been a process of perpetual polarization that has remained constant in the region. The magnitude, degree, and types of polarization have certainly varied since pre-conquest Matagalpa. However the 'fact' of sharp divisions within the regional population becoming manifested into opposing factions seems to have been consistently expressed over time. This is no less the case today when one finds an extremely volatile and conflictual situation manifested by roving armed bands (social banditry and the re-armados will be described later) that take towns, rob people along dirt highways, ransack agricultural cooperatives, and resort to murder, pillage, mutilation, kidnaping, burning, and in effect paralyze communities, cease agricultural production and isolate whole swaths of land. This situation has been explained by particularly powerful and extremely biased political interest groups and media sources, both nationally and internationally , as the aftermath of Sandinismo (Colburn

1989; Scott 1989).

However polarization did not begin with the 1979 revolution. Rather, the 1979 Sandinista triumph was a dramatic bubbling to the surface of continuous historical currents which have over the years seen persistent intra-regional competitions, inter-ethnic conflicts, class warfare, civil war, and international meddling as the order of the day. The regional population of Matagalpa have often been divided into opposing factions or feuding political groups that frequently resulted in bloodshed, factionalism and social dislocation. Often such competitions and clashes have been capped, as they were for stretches of time during the Somoza dynasty. At other times open warfare and defiance marked Nicaraguan history. Polarization in all its varied expressions has over the years continuously tested the hold such a nascent nation-state as Nicaragua has striven to maintain. I assert nascent, in spite of the historical fact that Nicaragua, along with the rest of Central America was one of the first countries in the world to throw off the yoke of classical European colonialism in the early 19th century. Nascent because the very mortar and brick that holds a nation together, sovereignty, unity, citizenship, a shared collective identity have been and continue to be put to the test and are still neither firmly erected or even mutually agreed upon. Although some have argued that Nicaragua emerged as a modern nation-state in the mid-19th century (Burns 1991), it is interesting to note that some of the very

social and economic forces that had kept Nicaragua internally divided then, are still in evidence today: the intense bickering between elites, the multiplication of private armies, the vigor with which neo-feudal landlords are able to maintain their dominance over campesinos and peons, the limits of the State over local power.

It is these dynamics which I intend to focus on for the expressed purpose of historically situating the present day instability and extreme conditions of polarization, suffering and distress in the Matagalpan region. By doing so, it is inevitable that new questions and issues arise. Is the Nicaraguan national character so anarchic that the ideals of national political consensus, internal security, a state of law and social justice, even equal economic development beyond collective will? Are such difficulties the result of the irrationality of the State trying to be all things to all people. This irrationality refers to Geertz's (1973: 234-254) analysis of the tension that arises when a new state (here referring to the UNO government of Dona Violeta Chamorro) strives to establish a nationalism based on moving towards modernity (neo-liberal economic policies, the rhetoric of re-joining the world community, etc) and being "morally outraged by its manifestations" (Geertz 1973: 243), as manifest in orthodox Catholic values, the re-building the Orthodox Roman Catholic Cathedral, the legislative/executive passing of the most reactionary anti-homosexual laws in Latin America, the

anti-feminist women-in-the house rhetoric of Dona Violeta, etc.. The continuity of "primordial sentiments" that conflict with civil politics (Geertz 1973: 260-261), the collective repression of being oppressed as a condition of psychological survival (Dowling 1984), the legacy of Spanish colonialism, British and North American imperialism, and the "new world order" are all macro-structural forces that limit the latitude the Nicaraguan state has in putting into practice a political agenda that proportionally represents the spectrum of sectoral interests in society.

Beyond, or perhaps contained within, these issues and questions, is whether a history can be written wherein the "subaltern speaks" (Spivak 1988)? Especially because I intend to 'write history' from the perspective of Matagalpan _indigenas_ , I am interested in establishing a legacy which while focused on the Matagalpan _indigenas_, nonetheless transcend them. By drawing on the history of Matagalpan _indigenas_ I wish to establish how the chronic stress of enduring culturally produced and politically sustained coercive forces, processes and dynamics have shaped social relationships and individual experiences among all contemporary social sectors in present day Matagalpa. As I trace records, events, and chronicles of the past to present-day indigenous affairs, I find myself relying on two sources of history: A National History written by foreigners and privileged Nicaraguans, and history as spoken by members of

rival indigenous groups at the regional and local level[8]. In doing so, ambiguities, contradictions, heterodoxy, and different takes of history and current affairs reign between and within these groups which ultimately do not enhance coherence or clarity. Rather the very distinct 'versions of history' these groups rely on are telling in that their differences amply demonstrate the conscious politicized differences that separate them. I will examine some of these differences mainly they pertain to contemporary social and political relations. At this point however I will impose my own order on Nicaraguan and Matagalpan history as I interpret events and processes that lead to the contemporary divisions between Matagalpan indigenas, and beyond to other local and national social sectors. From such an historical reconstruction I intend to broaden out the theme of polarization to other social groups and actors who find themselves subjects of the same history.

3. A PROVISIONAL HISTORY

> He delivers food and gold and accepts baptism... But he asks Gil Gonzalez de Avila to explain how Jesus can be man and God; and Mary, virgin and mother. He asks where souls go when they leave the body and whether the holy father in Rome is immune to death. He asks who elected the King of Castile. Chief Nicaragua was elected by the elders of the communities, assembled at the foot of a ceiba tree. Was the King elected by the elders of

[8] I am purposely borrowing from Spivak's analysis of Guha's (1982) construction of "the politics of the people" where social products of colonialism are re-produced by several groups who are structurally arranged in a stratified order. Spivak questions whether these groups can speak for the "people or subaltern classes" (1988: 284-285).

his communities?...
The chief also asks the conquistador to tell him for what purpose so few men want so much gold. Will their bodies be big enough for so much adornment? Chief Nicaragua does not ask why no children will be born in these parts. No prophet has told him that within a few years the women will refuse to give birth to slaves
(Galeano 1985: 75)

Leonardo, the treasurer of the CIM, contrast the two great Indian Caciques at the time of Spanish arrival as fierce and shrewd. Each presided over their respective territories and tribes along the Pacific coast and in-land around Lake Nicaragua. Diriangen was the more fierce and readily resorted to armed resistance. He was intransigent to the Spaniards and refused to give up lands or surrender to the Spaniards. For this reason according to Leonardo, Diriangen and his people did not survive the Spanish onslaught. As for Nicarao, he proved shrewd and able. For Nicarao entered into negotiations with the Spaniards, even allowing them to evangelize among his people:

> ...Before the Indians worshiped the gods of the Sun, Moon and Thunder, but with the arrival of colonialism and Christianity, all that changed. But, Nicarao was able to wrangle land title for huge tracts of land. For this reason, since Nicarao was able to secure such large tracts of land for the Indians that Nicaragua was named after him....Nicarao secured un "Titulo Real" [Royal Title] and an official map for his people and these lands could not be touched by the Spaniards. They use to say, 'no se rinde este Nicarao' ['This Nicarao doesn't give up']...(Leonardo, CIM treasurer).

Neglecting the question of veracity of Leonardo's 'big man' interpretation of the Indian/Spanish culture contact and the savvy attributed to Nicarao to secure land, it is perhaps more important to question the use of such a historical interpretation has on present-day ideology and practices within the directiva of the CIM. Leonardo told me his story in the presence of other members of the CIM directiva who for the most part remained quiet, nodding their heads in agreement. Nicarao's negotiative abilities and success in acquiring title to land (which was defacto theirs to begin with) were what set him apart from his contemporary Dirangen (Wheelock 1985).

By contrast, members of the directiva of AIMDESC admit to an incomplete understanding of early Nicaraguan history, before the arrival of the Spainards, the moment of contact, and especially early Matagalpan regional history. Here members of the directiva freely offer varied interpretations and after a while, feeling as if my presence has been forgotten, they end up in a lively debate regarding multiple interpretations of local and regional history. I was surprised when Gerardo of the directiva took leave of the debate and went rummaging in his small cramped office to emerge shortly with a weathered ill-kept book and article (Sanchez 1989; Guerrero y Soriano 1982). He placed the book on the table and handed me the article and proceeded to comment how their history had been written by Spainards and that the source of their problem was that there was no history written by "Indios themselves". This

statement was met with unanimous agreement but did nothing to deter them from continuing a lively vociferous debate that clearly went beyond the theme of early Nicaraguan and Matagalpan history.

In light of such inconclusiveness it is tempting to sketch a cultural history of the Matagalpan region since Spanish conquest as a slow uneven penetration of Spanish colonial society, Christian evangelism, and miscegenation from the Pacific coastal region into the Central Highlands. The chief characteristics being the use of military force, coerced religious conversion, inter-ethnic conflict, land usurpation and the systematic uses of violence and terror to achieve mestizo hegemony in the region. As obvious as this may be to any student of early Spanish colonialism throughout Latin America, the specific outcome of these processes in the Matagalpan region has been if not the complete erasure of a collective historical memory, then a richly contested partial remembrance that accentuates the 'fact' of polarization as a persistent historical factor. Polarization, whether inter-ethnic, socio-political or economic, has been the most persistent outcome over time.

Although I contend that polarization does not always neatly divide between two opposing forces and in fact can (and does) entail multiple opposing forces at the same time, it does appear to be the case that prior to the Spanish conquest of Nicaragua in 1522, the region of Matagalpa appears to have

been occupied by two distinctive cultural traditions and groupings which were occasionally --if not often--antagonistic toward one another (Newson 1987:60, 77-79; Woodward 1985; Guerrero y Soriano 1982:67-73).

Pre-Columbian Central America society consisted of sedentary and nomadic individual Indian communities. These societies were loosely united through trade of goods and foodstuff. Often anthropological and historical reference to pre-Columbian Central America has tended to overly focus on the high culture areas of Mexico and Guatemala, often to the neglect of lower Central America. There is no denying the significant cultural and linguistic influences the state of Teotihucan, the Aztecs and the Maya have had in lower Central America. However it is also clear that pre-Columbian Indian society in Nicaragua was quite diverse with cultural affinities with South America and the Antilles (Newson 1987; Arellano 1975).

The Pacific western lowland region was inhabited by a people whom the Spainards came to call as the Nicarindios and other Indian groups who were organized into settled agricultural communities, located on fertile land and chiefly devoted to maize production. And although it seems that by the time of initial Spanish contact that the largest concentration of Indians were to be found in the Pacific lowlands, there were also considerable indigenous populations in the Central Highlands and the eastern Atlantic coast of Nicaragua. The

eastern region was mainly inhabited by Sumu Indian people of Macro-Chibchan descent. Living in tropical lowland areas of swamp and jungle, subsistence activity revolved mainly around hunting, fishing and gathering, with agriculture only becoming a significant subsistence activity the more in-land one went. It appears that tribal settlements were situated along in-land waterways and tended to be small, semi-permanent settlements consisting of few multifamily dwellings.

Hence it appears that two distinct pre-Columbian cultural traditions, each inhabiting specific geographical and ecological niches and characterized by two dominant cultural modes of social organization not only typified pre-Columbian Nicaragua, but apparently converged in what is today the department of Matagalpa. The Matagalpan region, in a sense, constitutes a border region where Meso-American cultural groups often headed by chiefdoms came into contact with South American cultural groupings that tended to be smaller tribal societies. Although there was some trade between these two distinct cultural groupings, it seems that they engaged in relatively persistent warfare over time (Newson 1987:15-16,77-79; Adams 1957;Guiterrez C. 1982: 3).

As early as 1501, the river, Rio Grande de Matagalpa, that traverses the region and the town of Matagalpa, was christened the river of disaster by Christopher Colombus of that year. Following the initial arrival of the Spaniards

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into Nicaragua in 1522, the Indian populations in the Pacific lowlands were quickly subdued. However the process of pacification, leading to settlements and domination in the Central Highlands took a considerably longer time, and some may legitimately argue that it was never accomplished along the Atlantic coast. The early years of Spanish colonialism largely neglected the Central Highlands which prevented them from actively extending and settling into the central highlands. The Indians of Matagalpa are recorded as having been the only indigenous forces to have engaged the Spaniards in direct battle specifically to prevent their entry onto their territory (Guiterrez C. 1982: 5). Although first mention of what is today the city and municipio of San Pedro de Matagalpa in 1603[9], it is not until 29 years later that Matagalpa is designated as a corregimiento (royal magistrate or jurisdiction). As early as 1612 there was Christian penetration into the region, although by the late 18th century there were few small semi-permanent settlements of Spaniards. Beginning around the year 1643, Guerrero y Soriano write that the region of Matagalpa plunged into an "unfortunate epoch" marked by frequent invasions of "mosquitos, caribes, zambos, ingleses, [when]y...In that year it could be heard with terrible and recurring frequency in the regions of Musun, Matiguas, Muy-Muy, Olama and other [environs], the desperate

[9] And even then it was not called 'Matagalpa' but, "Solingalpa and Molaquina" which today make up two of the four indigenous land parcels that combinely made up the "pueblo de Matagalpa". The other two land parcels are "Laborio or Naborio, and Guanuca".

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yell of 'HERE COME THE CARIBES...' (1982:56-57)."

By the time the Indians of Sebaco (a Matagalpan municipio located to the southwest and a principal crossroad to points north-central and north-east of the country) rebelled against the Spaniards in 1692, there had been already a minimum of fourteen Indian rebellions. One Matagalpan Indian uprising in 1713, compelled the Spanish chief military officier, Luis Diez Navarro to characterize the Matagalpan Indians as "the most disloyal to the Majesty" (Guiterrez 1982: 55). The few Spanish colonialist that lived in Matagalpa are characterized as having lived in a constant state of anguish or anxiety,--not unlike what befell Matagalpan Indians after independence from Spain and especially after 1881.

I have reconstructed a partial regional history underscoring the heterogeneity of indigenous communities and the constancy of warfare. A fuller treatment, particularly following independence from Spain and leading to the beginning of the Somoza dynasty in the late 1920s, would be a sad tale of domination, ladionization, and dispossession of Matagalpan <u>indigenas</u>. My reconstruction provides a historical grounding to the constancy of polarization, sometimes manifested in rigid hierarchies and systems of social stratification, and at other times manifested in outright conflict and violence. Given such a grounding, I turn now to contemporary times to examine the continuity of polarization in its various guises among a more diversified population that currently makes up

Matagalpa. I do not want to suggest that warfare, violence, strife, and anarchy has continued unabated to present times. However I do wish to assert that the dynamic of polarization has been a constant that has taken multiple manifestations and which must be regarded as a socially malleable and historically contingent outcome of conflicting cultural traditions and ways of life.

Section II: PATTERNS OF DISTRESS

PATTERNS OF DISTRESS:
The Social Basis and Expressions of Chronic Stressful Life Conditions

PREFACE

so you think this war is our fault?
you think it's easy for us to build hospitals and schools
to fill the warehouses with corn, beans and rice
to teach our people, to the very last one, to read?
you think just because we don't like the
guardias somocistas we send our sons to the mountains
to hunt and kill them?
That's what you think when you say
"it's you Sandinistas who are shitting up the country."
you think it's easy to see my son go out the door
with his rucksack full of letters from his friends,
from his girl?
his rucksack full of bullets easy to see him leave
with his AK over his shoulder?
I can see from the way he carries it how familiar
it is to him.
you think it's easy after he's been here on
a five-day pass and I was beginning to get used to
the pleasure of having him around, to say,
well, love, take it easy?
and my son turns, profile against the light,
and gives me a sweet kiss that becomes a part of my cheek
because I know where he is going.
He's going to face thousands of trained and fattened
guardias somocistas they've got new military equipment,
blessed and delivered with love and on behalf of love
to save Latin America from communism
but above all else to save the vulnerable frontiers of the
United States of America supplied with love
and on behalf of love - the planes, the helicopters,
the aircraft carriers, the tank transports -
by the leader, impeccable in suit and hair-do on TV,
the movie star, bright, knowing this earth-water globe,
the atmosphere and space, Mister Reagan.
and there come those brothers of yours, the guardias,
and your Marines in blue uniforms,
shiny on our Gulf of Fonseca to burn our stores
of corn, rice and beans, our schools, our day care centers
killing our babies, our teachers, nurses and technicians
destroying houses in the mountains and tractors with
your bombs. You think it's easy to hold my son tight,
so tightly that my skin hurts afterwards
Goodbye my boy, come back soon mi chocoyito
I know that if they him alive
they'll take out his eyes and give them to the dogs,
so the dogs will eat them, or...

they'll cut him into pieces like grandpa Rafael
you remember they said that his blood splattered
on the tyrant's jacket, or...
they'll make him eat his bloody vomit
like they made grandpa Samuel eat before he died.
you think it's easy for me to adjust his
olive green sombrerito
and smile at him when my son climbs into the truck
full of other boys just as brave as my jodidito my son?
all the boys smile and answer my wave
it seems those sons of mine are like geese on the river
when the truck starts off
I cry, I wail, left alone
with my hand
upraised

Christian Santos
May 87, San Francisco
Modern Times Bookstore

CHAPTER 4: GROUNDING DISTRESS: STRESS, WAR, AND POVERTY

1. INTRODUCTION

Nicaragua is often characterized as a country that knows suffering all too well (Cuadra 1981). The damage and instability wrought by the frequency of earthquakes, hurricanes and volcanoes over the years, provides an apt "natural" analogy to the recurrencey of social, political and economic dislocations that have beset Nicaragua since the time of its conquest by Spain in 1522 (Nelson 1987). Independence from Spain in the 19th century ignited a long period of anarchy (Burns 1991) that eventually settled into cycles of dictatorships and revolutions, foreign military occupations and internal armed rivalries. These cycles of political instabilities were largely the result of internal economic rivalries abetted by international financial interests (ibid; Wheelock 1985). The greatest concentration of land in the hands of patriarchs primarily devoted to agro-export production and whose fortunes rise and fall on the vagaries of an international market economy also depends on the maintenance of a subjected population controlled by rigid local and regional systems of patronage. In such a context, it is easy for the Nicaraguans to talk about themselves as subjects to history.

Today, it is common for Nicaraguans to refer to their history as a continuing story of suffering. Indeed, an

embodied history of pain and sacrifice. Besides the currently devastating economic situation, the most recent dramatic episode of pain and suffering the country as a whole endured was the "Contra War" (1981-1990). The war, concomitant with severe economic and socio-political instability, precipitated a national concern and obsession not only for peace and reconciliation, but for social and individual liberation, freedom and security. The war and its aftermath have produced in its wake a general frustration. A frustration born of the thwarting of unrealized dreams and visions. As a result, it is common to hear people complain not only about others and institutions, but about themselves as well. These complaints, specifically those that refer to one's self, are often expressed through the idiom of distress (Nichter 1981). Consequently, the complaints are narratives of political shenanigans, social pressures, somatic complaints, and emotional difficulties. Such stress accounts rarely refer merely to psycho-physiological functioning nor strictly refer to the body or the psyche. Rather they are usually linked to much more elaborate understandings of the self in society.

Hence, a focus on talk about stress is only a starting point, a springboard to a much more penetrating examination of the interrelationship between history and subjectivity, culture and political economy. The problems associated with merely understanding social and personal difficulties as stress accounts has mainly to do with how the context of

people's lives are often minimized and all accounts of stress become equalized on a levelling plane of commensurable distress. In this chapter, I briefly examine a few narratives of distress. I approach these narratives as specific constructions of stress that link subjective experiences of distress with the social forces that precipitate and shape these very experiences. In this respect they become narratives of distress (Nichter 1981) that link psychosocial stress with personal meanings, cultural factors, and specific stressors. A critical dealing with stress will be followed by a discussion of distress in various ethnographic contexts.

2. THE PROBLEMATICS OF CONCEPTUALIZING STRESS UNDER WARTIME CONDITIONS

My original research goal was to examine the socio-psychological effects of war and the "naturally-occurring" social support systems on which people rely to mitigate the negative effects of living under such conditions. Preliminary fieldwork in Nicaragua, as well as an extensive review of public health and mental health literature, lead to the general observation that less psychopathology occurred in Nicaragua during war than one might normally expect (Armenian 1989). Although it appears to be the case that most studies on the impact of war on society have been primarily oriented toward studies of actual combatants and soldiers (Modell & Haggerty 1991), I have remained consistently interested in the

reverberating effects that go beyond its immediate impact on direct casualties and victims of war (Hartigan 1982).

The effects of war on civilians have been measured by an array of indicators. These include the loss of lives, destruction of the environment, economic ruin, population displacement, and social disorganization and disintegration (Hourani et al 1986; Kaffman 1977). These would seem to result logically in an epidemic of psychological and emotional disturbances (Murphy 1977). However a critical review of numerous studies dating from World War II to the present suggests a variety of outcomes that do not always lead to individual psychopathology (Hemphill 1941; Lewis 1942; Wilson 1942; Odegard 1954; Ziv & Israeli 1973; McCubbin et al 1976; Cohen & Doten 1976; Kaffman 1977; Humphries 1978; Patterson 1984; Hourani et al 1986). This should not be particularly surprising since the emphasis on psychopathology as an outcome manifested in individual behavioral functioning often neglects to account for the social context and processes that either contribute to or mitigate against the negative effects of stressful life conditions (Breznitz 1994).

The consistent observation that less psychological distress was found than had been initially expected is often accompanied with passing references to the mediative effects of social and community supports and resources (Elder & Clipp 1988; Hourani et al 1986; Kaffman 1977; Kentsmith 1980; Pattison 1984). Unfortunately there are few studies primarily

focused on the subject of social support[1] for civilians under wartime conditions.

Furthermore the difficulties in specifying the relation of social support to stress and distress (Barrera 1986: 421) are even more difficult to detail under war-time conditions. Whether social supports directly reduce the impact of war stress or alters and modifies the detrimental effects depends initially on the nature of the stress.

War as a stressor can be experienced as a tremendously threatening event to one's life, livelihood, social attachments and networks. Viewed this way, war, like natural disasters is easy to understand as a massive stressful life event (Melick 1978; Oliver-Smith 1986; Solomon et al 1986). Given the plethora of questions regarding the specific etiologic role life events play in subsequent individual

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[1] Reference to "naturally occurring" social support systems is meant to describe systems and networks that people are socially embedded in, rather than deliberately constructed or professionally referred to. Such social support systems refers to the quality and nature of the "healing web" (Pilisuk & Parks 1986) one is a part of and which is composed of such social relations as ones family and extended kin relations, the quality of friendships and community participation, church membership, political party membership, participation in mass organizations, "compadrazgo", "Camaraderia", "Cofradias", cargo systems, etc. (Foster 1967; Wolf 1968, 1957). Although much of the literature describing "naturally occurring social support systems" in Latin America pertains to Indians and ladinos, other studies of social organizations like urban migrant associations, ethnic collectives, Christian base communities, women's survival groups and the like in Central America, ultimately refer to networks of reciprocity and social support systems that thrive by promoting individual and collective security and survival strategies (Lancaster 1988, 1992: Lomnitz 1977). These naturally-occurring social systems and networks can function similarly to self-help groups or therapy groups by providing the emotional, tangible, material, and instrumental types of support associated with the functioning of social support systems (Barrera 1986; Caplan 1974; Gottlieb 1978; Kahn & Antonucci 1980; Jacobsen 1986; Mueller 1982; Thoits 1982; Williams 1981; Wilcox 1981).

physical and psychological health status[2], it is no wonder that as dramatic and disruptive a life event as war would no less raise a whole host of questions. There are numerous problems associated with fully specifying the causal role war plays in the development of psychological disorders. For instance, one of the more critical factors in the development of psychiatric disturbances due to war is the duration of stress (Kentsmith 1980). It is recognition of this factor that led to a conventional military psychiatric practice of returning soldiers who suffer from combat-induced stress as early as possible to their original units. The rationale being that returning soldiers to their original context helped them quickly overcome the more debilitating effects of stress. This example highlights how socio-psychological studies of the effects of war have chiefly focused on soldiers rather than civilians (Keane et al 1985; Helzer et al 1976)[3].

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[2] War, considered as a massive stressful life event, has been measured according to physical health indices such as the prevalence of hypertension (Graham 1945) epidemics of plague (Freid et al 1968), and a vast array of other infectious diseases (Garfield et al 1987; Siegel et al 1985), as well as increases in malnutrition and infant mortality (Paul 1967) for civilians living under war conditions or in war environments are well documented. The relation of stressful life event such as war to psychological disorders is problematic. Although there has been since the early 1980's, more research and clinical work studying the psychological effects of state-sponsored terror, torture, and counter-insurgency warfare in Latin America (Martin-Baro 1976, 1993, 1991, 1988; Lira & Castillo 1991; Aron 1989; Green 1994), the main focus of these studies have been on direct victims of war and less on the totalizing, diffuse, and reverberating effects of such stressors on the whole society (Nordstrom & Martin 1992).

[3] While there are studies of combat-experienced soldiers returned to their families (Solomon et al 1988), as well as studies of wives and families left behind during the war (McCubbin et al 1976), these descriptions accentuate the paucity of studies of wartime stress on civilians caught in war settings. The degree to which widely reported psychological disturbances as an outcome of wartime stress or trauma on soldiers (Thienes-Hontos 1983; Laufer et al 1985; 1989; Solomon et al 1988; Hendlin & Haas 1984; Catherall 1986) can be transposed and made analogous to civilian populations remains problematic (see Young 1993).

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Another important distinction to be made regarding the effects of war on civilians is the near impossibility of characterizing all wars similarly. Certainly all wars share a destructive capacity to horribly alter human abilities to care and nurture, subsist and survive. Yet war can take on levels that seem to have no bounds. One can refer to the "Seven Day" war (1967 Israel) or the dropping of the Atomic Bomb (Hiroshima, World War II), endemic wars (Angola, Cuba, Iran), wars of imperialism (Afghanistan, Mozambique, Kuwait), wars of neo-colonialism (Northern Ireland, Tibet), wars by proxy, or so-called "low-intensity warfare" (Nicaragua, Philippines), national liberation (El Salvador, Guatemala), interethnic strife (Sri Lanka, Rwanda, Bosnia, Kurdistan), interreligious struggle (Algeria, India-Pakistan), or Third World-Fourth World (Peru, Brazil). The unpredictable capacities for wars to escalate and become chronic should make scholars interested in generalizing from them take to pause in how one characterizes societies beset by violent conflicts (for a responsible example, see Nordstrom & Martin 1992). Certainly how individuals and collectives fare under war depends on the

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This is attributable to findings that considerably less psychological distress was found that initially assumed for civilians living under conditions of war (Hourani et al 1986; Murphy 1978), due to the mobilization of social and community supports that function to mediate the ill effects of wartime stress. Explanations range from how war stimulates communal goal-directed organized behavior (Kentsmith 1980:409; Edwards 1976), to how particular modes of social organization provide emotional reinforcement and social solidarity that have beneficial effects upon individuals and serve to minimize the incidence of psychiatric casualties (Kaffman 1977:491; Ziv & Israeli 1973; Hourani et al 1986). And while scholars have argued about whether war temporarily paralyses and distorts basic social organizations people rely on (Malinowski 1964) or brings greater internal solidarity, such debates underscores how difficult it is to generalize for such a manifold phenomenon as war.

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level of war time stress, proximity to hostilities, duration of war, the prospects of various types of losses. It may be asserted that regardless of the nature of war time stress, humans will always find a way to survive and thrive. As a cursory review of social support systems under wartime conditions would suggest, it is premature and even irresponsible to reify the enhancement of social support systems (Williams et al 1981:334) as some sort of remedy to the more horrendous aspects of living under war conditions. Humans over time have shown great resilience, innate capacities, and social propensities for overcoming life challenges to the point of becoming habituated to danger and learning to face adversity in relaxed fashions (Milburn & Watman 1981), and internalizing and routinizing high levels of stress wrought by conditions of terror and war (Green 1994). Nonetheless, there are both individual and social limitations, for this situation to occur.

The situation of Nicaragua over the last fifteen years certainly exemplifies this. The multiple forms war time stress may take or the multiple manifestations of disruptiveness, instability, and pathology war and its aftermath have produced have to be understood as immensely altering processes that modify individuals, societies, and history. Too often such effects produced by war and its aftermath are minimized when conceptualized in terms of stress alone. To generalize about stress that is produced, reproduced, and experienced as a

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result of war, raises the problem of an adequately generalizable description of wartime stress, and more precisely the very problem of stress itself.

3. THE COMPLEXITIES ASSOCIATED WITH ADEQUATELY DEFINING STRESS, WAR TIME STRESS AND THE AFTERMATH OF WAR

Stress has become a widely used term or catch phrase that traverses a range of meanings among popular and academic sectors (Breznitz 1994; Mestrovic 1994). The results of stress in human populations have been difficult to measure with precision (Edgerton 1992: 122). A pioneer in stress research, Hans Selye originally referred to stress as not pathogenic but, "a state manifested by a specific syndrome which consists of all the non=specifically-induced changes within a biologic system" (Selye 1984: 64). Stress was understood then as a condition of living, not something necessarily bad and as something that could not and should not be avoided (Selye 1984). Stress, classically defined, referred to "stereotyped pattern of biochemical, functional, and structural changes" within the body in response to "increased demands" (Selye 1976: 14). Selye distinguished stress as a normal biologic function, which is part of the human adaptive process to everyday life, from stressors which produce the conditions of stress (1984:50-51). For Selye, stress is a factual phenomenon and the result of stressors. And although he distinguished

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negative ("distress") and positive ("eustress") stress reactions, he holds to the notion that the body "undergoes virtually the same nonspecific responses to the various positive or negative stimuli acting upon it" (ibid: 74). Hence stress is conceived as something outside the person. It is not an intrinsic state, but a relational process.

Cannon's (1963) assertion that, "...the homeostasis of the individual human being is largely dependent on social homeostasis" implies a relational process between the personal and the social, the intrapsyche and the outside world. This contrast with the more contemporary treatments of stress which tends toward a "strong cultural bias [of] stress primarily as something to be mastered. The power of the concept is such that one easily forgets that stress is often first and foremost personal suffering. But a suffering individual is too passive and too helpless to fit the currently prevailing Western illusions concerning life, and, consequently, such a formulation is very much out of favor"(Breznitz 1994:174). A formulation, I might add, we will return to in Section III.

The most apparent limitation of a conventional Western biomedical stress discourse is that it employs an operational definition of stress, usually as an event and not a fact[4].

[4] Mestrovic (1991) emphasizes how medicalized notions of stress are reduced to specific events or processes that can be isolated and treated. His critique is that stress is often a part of life that transcend the capacities of individuals to alter. As I have been arguing, war (like disasters, accidents, and chronic diseases) are "facts" which cannot be treated as events. Events are seen as transitory phenomenons that have beginnings, middles and ends, often considered as extraordinary, and simply one event among others. The idea of stress as a "fact", refers to a condition that may be on-going (chronic), which generally effects populations and not simply individuals, and be of a nature

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This assessment of stress glosses psycho-social, political-economic, environmental, and historical and cultural processes in a fashion that emphasizes the individual as the unit of analysis and pathology as its outcome. However, cultural constructions of stress, both lay and professional, do not always conform to a stress-disease framework and they can describe the relationship between mind/body to culture and society. Here the lived experiences of individuals and the broader historical and political-economic settings in which these individuals live their lives can be illuminated and disclosed in their stress narratives.

Stress can be understood as the systematic relationships amongst meanings, legitimacies, and structural arrangements of power in local systems which act upon the body and can combined produce stress (Young 1980). Stress operates within specific cultural contexts (Angels & Thoits 1987) and become embodied. A stress discourse that discloses the embodiment of social reality (Turner 1984) and how social forces, from State policies to practices of social control, organize our life worlds and shape our private experiences (Foucault 1978) returns to the primary interrelationships of individuals in society and society in individuals. Returning to this interrelationship moves some distance from conventional stress discourses which privileged the individual, discrete

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that is not easily amendable by individualized treatment programs.

causality, pathology, prevalency and treatment regimens as the primary objectives in understanding stress.

If a stress discourse is revealing of an embodiment of social reality, what can it say about the reality of living under conditions of war? As noted earlier, both the nature of war and one's personal and social means to endure it are contingent on numerous factors. These include where one is located, if near or far from the actual fighting; near or far from the immediate deprivations that derive from it; the factors of age, sex, and social support systems one is a part of; the ideological allegiances, spiritual beliefs and values that one holds to make sense of the world and his/her place in it; the tabulation of losses, real and anticipated, from bodily injuries to one and one's loved ones to personal possessions and means of livelihood. It is in the task of trying to quantify the sense of losses and insults that people have endured under conditions of war that may contribute to the construction of some scale of wartime stress where one must confront the absurdity of such a task. For amongst people who have endured chronic wartime stress of various magnitudes throughout its course, the tabulation of actual losses and insults are less important than the sense that there is little or no hope, there is little or no escape, there is little or no remedy. In other words, over and above losses and insults is the influential manner, in which individuals and collectives, belligerents and non-belligerents, all have

endured the stress of war and been forced to make sense and meaning of their experiences.

4. STRESS, THE CONTRA WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH

The majority of civilians I observed in my fieldwork were not direct victims of the "Contra War" (1981-1990) in the sense that they were actually physically threatened or harmed. However it is important to note that as early as 1987 an estimated .04% of the country's 3.3 million population had been killed in fighting since 1982. This war-related fatality rate among the general Nicaraguan population is more than 10 times greater than the aggregate rate of .003% experienced by the United States population during the Vietnam war between 1965 and 1973 (Garfield et al 1987). This conservative number (Siegel et al 1986) does not include the estimated 35,000 to 50,000 persons killed in the Nicaraguan revolutionary war of 1978-79 (Booth 1985), nor reflect the war-related injuries and kidnappings that have in effect touched the lives of virtually every Nicaraguan directly or indirectly.

The "Contra war" touched all Nicaraguans in one way or another, but it also signified a new sort of war for not only Nicaragua, but the United States as well. Codes of ethics and behaviors either attributable to the waging of conventional warfare which distinguished non-combatants from belligerents, or "Latin" customs which exempted the Church, women and

children from direct warfare, were suspended. Conflict became general, diffused, and purposely terroristic in nature and freely targeted all people and institutions (Franco 1985; Barry, Castro,& Vergara 1987). The length of the "Contra War" was due to the strategy of proxy warfare engaged in by the United States government, and dubbed "Low Intensity Warfare" or LIW (Klare & Kornbluh 1988), which in fact is only the latest rendition of counterinsurgency warfare that began shortly after the end of World War II (RAND Corporation 1963; Shafer 1988). However, what proved of 'low intensity' for the United States, was certainly not the case for Nicaragua. Precisely because it used a strategy for breaking open the "natural" social fault lines that can be found in all societies, the ready identification of clear enemies, discernible targets and demarcations between safe havens and battlefronts were always concerns people had to determine and deal with. The sometimes clear, sometimes mysterious, sometimes omnipresent, sometimes mythic character of the "Contra War" pushes it into the category of "postmodern war" (Cooke 1993: 177-182).

One defining characteristic of postmodern wars is how violence contributes to a "culture of fear" (ibid; Green 1994). Such an outcome produces an anomie among combatants and non-combatants alike, and breeds a violence "in political and social relations... [that produces] a catastrophe of meaning" (Corradi 1988). The "Contra War" besides being a shooting

war, was a war of tension, of smashed dreams, of lowered expectations, and a war of conflicting symbols and meanings. The threat of ongoing violence and conflict that appears to be undiscriminating, continuous, total, and unabashedly brutal, produces an anomie which while it may "complicate outcomes, however decisive, does ensure some end through exhaustion" (Cooke 1993: 180-181). This exhaustion was not only manifested in the electoral defeat of the FSLN in 1990, but in the continued struggle, both personal and social, to salvage or derive meaning from all that had occurred since the fall of the Somoza regime in 1979. For those who had lived through the War of Insurrection or Revolutionary War (1978-79) and then throughout the Contra War (1981-1990), there is no doubt that the war one fights, --whether as a warrior, bystander, supporter-- is a reflection of the peace one seeks. What peace people seek and the needs they wish to fulfill following the war, are answered in different ways and in toto represent a confusion and tumult of will and direction.

In all the narratives of distress that I have recorded ethnographically, some aspect of exhaustion wrought by war emerges. It reflects Taussig's characterization of reality as a "state of emergency, not as a system but as a nervous system" (1992). Yet this exhaustion is not only felt by those who have endured the direct wages of war, but whole populations, whole countries. The "cultural elaboration of fear" (Taussig 1986:8) contributes to a generalized situation

of insecurity. A situation of "normal abnormality" or "terror as usual"- where "one moves in bursts between somehow accepting the situation as normal, only to be thrown into a panic or shocked into disorientation by an event, a rumor...something said or not said" (Lykes 1994:544), and as a result produces silences, fear, terror, distrust, aggressiveness and polarization.

These are the generally diffused social results of chronic wartime stress. Yet, there are direct and indirect contestations to such affronts. Since the "War of Insurrection" or the revolutionary war (1978-79) in Nicaragua, a tradition of resistance by the country's youth, the "muchachos" has been especially strong and resilient. Women have also given voice and muscle to resisting the grind of war (Randall 1992; Matthews 1993; Belli 1988). Furthermore, new forms of social movements (Escobar & Alvarez 1991; Chinchilla 1989) have emerged. Some of these movements, although aligned with the State and/or political parties, are more often than not intent on forging a new autonomous identity and political agenda that reflect their specific concerns and strive to transcend the polarizing limitations that the conditions of war exacerbate.

While I have focused mainly on the nature of stress and war, in fact the bulk of my research actually occurred following the "official" termination of the Contra war in June of 1990. However since the official cessation, political

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violence, armed conflicts, and re-armed former combatants have continued to plague Nicaragua. In addition, the toll the war exacted on the society as a whole in terms of disruption of social relationships, the upward spiral of unemployment, and the anemic status of the State or political parties to respond to the needs of the people, has continued unabated in the immediate post war period. Nicaragua was brought to its knees economically and is nowhere near becoming reconstructed as many Nicaraguans fervently hoped would occur upon the end of the war. If war is "...a political instrument, a continuation of political relations, a carrying out of the same by other means" (Von Clausewitz 1833), then the current post-war social and economic conditions of Nicaragua is as Churchill once asserted, 'politics is almost as exciting as war, and quite as dangerous. In war you can be killed once, but in politics many times'.

5. THE AFTERMATH OF WAR

The "Contra War" came to an end only when the FSLN was voted out of power in the 1990 Presidential elections. The victory by Dona Violeta Chamorro and the UNO party was unquestionable and as far as popular, fair elections go, legitimate. However, given the conditions under which people voted (Spivak 1988) and the open U.S. threat for continuing the war should the FSLN win (Chomsky 1990), it became apparent

during the course of my fieldwork, that many Nicaraguans who voted (as well as those who did not) were conscious of being under international political duress. Regardless of whether many felt either coerced or ambivalent about voting the way that they did, even the legitimate anti-Sandinista opposition who voted for UNO have become increasingly disenchanted by the social, economic, and political developments in Nicaragua. Following social and economic achievements in such areas as health care, literacy, agrarian reform (Collins 1984; Ruchwarger 1987, 1989: Donahue 1986) in the early years of the revolution, the "Contra War" eventually exacted a high social and economic toll. Poverty, illiteracy, and infant mortality began to rise, and economic production and concomitant employment began to fall precipitously especially after the 1984 Nicaraguan national elections when the FSLN won openly in internationally supervised free elections (LASA 1985). From the latter part of the 1980s up to the 1990 elections, the economic conditions and deteriorating domestic environment increased the limitations of the State to change course and contributed to the production of a "political ethos" (Jenkins 1991) that emphasized the dependence and reliance of the whole society on international forces and benefactors with whom they had limited or no control to negotiate policies less stringent and odious.

Such a public understanding and awareness led to the electoral results of 1990 which was a collective attempt to

reestablish a sense of personal control and social directness. I was repeatedly told that the defeat of the Sandinistas only guaranteed one thing, and that was the end of the war. However, rather than leading to a renewed means of reappropriating a sense of national authority and management, the pre-1990 consciousness of being dependent and powerless became even more firmly ingrained. My contact with Sandinistas and anti-Sandinistas, unemployed laborers and rich landowners, have confirmed to me that many feel that they feel less hopeful now than before. For many Sandinistas the worst has come true and it is clear to them that Nicaragua is now in the hands of a bourgeoisie that has never cared for working people or the impoverished. And that those in power have not only taken care to enrich themselves but also proceeded to make Nicaragua dependent upon international banks and lending institutions that demand draconian measures which directly harms them. Anti-Sandinistas have also been dismayed and tend to criticize the current Chamorro administration on a number of issues.

One issue refers to a renewed awakening of old regional and prominent inter-familial bickering (Stone 1992; Vilas 1992; Christian 1986). The most common example used to represent this friction are charges that State policies and banking practices favor certain families and not others, even when objective criteria for tax breaks and bank credits are met by those who have been denied services and assistance by

the State. Another point of contention for many anti-Sandinistas, is the accusation that the Chamorro government has become too close to the FSLN and not turned the clock back to pre-1979 conditions. Here the most salient issues are that all land and property confiscated under the Sandinistas be returned, that all Sandinistas be purged from government offices, and that all Sandinista unions and organizations be eliminated.

How does one make sense of what it is like to live under macro-economic conditions which officially places Nicaragua onto the United Nations list of poorest countries in the world (UN FAO Report 1993)? Between 1980 and 1992 the national population grew by 51.8% while the Gross Domestic Product in the same period fell 16%. In a country where the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank dictate fiscal policy and the "dollarization" of the economy means that for a population of 4.2 million, nearly 800,000 are under- and unemployed, and the 45,000 young people who join the workforce each year actually contribute to swelling the unemployed to over 60%. Infant mortality was reduced during the Sandinista revolution to 37 of every 1000 births but now has increased to 70. Three-quarters of all Nicaraguans do not have drinking water, and even more, 78.8% do not have sanitary facilities. Two and a half million Nicaraguans do not have adequate housing (Cuadra 1993). This is only a selection of macro-economic indicators.

Since the 1990 elections, national, social, and economic indicators across the board have gone from bad to worse. The policies of Dona Violeta Chamorro, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have not only excerbated these contradictions, but they reflect the fact that national economic policy is no more than the acceptance of an international neo-liberal blueprint (Vilas 1986; ENVIO 1994). One that plainly cares less about Nicaraguan sovereignty and is more interested in disciplining the country into accepting its role as a small agro-exporting nation in the world economic system. Nicaragua's internationally conditioned status in the global market economy rests upon highly unequal income distributions, a lack of human and financial capital, a minuscule and productively questionable private sector economy, a fragmented market, a poor industrial or technological base, and a high level of unemployment. A host of social and economic issues regarding legal property rights, access to State credit and loans, those social sectors entitled to State assistance and protection, are secondary to a structural adjustment logic which promises more pain than gain[5].

The complexities of defining stress, wartime stress, and the aftermath of war has more to do with capturing the "lived

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[5] I am playfully paraphrasing Antonio Lacayo, the Presidential advisor to President Chamorro, who explains the hardships induced by their economic policies as a necessary painful process that will lead to prosperity in the future.

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experiences" of these social realities and less to do with either substantiating their very facticity or tabulating their specific effects. The stresses from war and its aftermath remains to this day, open wounds and sores that are felt, spoken about, and lived. They have become part of one's biography and background. In this respect, the following narratives of distress refer to the multivocal sweep of living such a reality. Certainly, the capacities, resources, and will to withstand and tolerate such conditions are extremely variable and in this respect, these narratives of distress try to capture some of this range.

The ethnographic descriptions and interpretations of stress that follow are commentaries on the way the human body, daily life, and social structure are incorporated (Bourdieu 1977). What individuals consider stressful generally arise out of their daily personal and social life experiences. Stressfullness is primarily determined by the range of life experiences individuals go through and how individuals perceive what is happening to them. This mingling of social experiences and individual perceptions (Merleau Ponty 1964) can be better understood through detailed examinations of social and economic factors which give rise to stress. This type of examination is largely lacking in most of the available stress research. There is a need to consider what Dressler (1991) refers to as the "social organization of stress" or the social arrangements from which stressful

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events, conditions, or circumstances arise, because these very arrangements are meaningful to the individuals in question. This meaningfullness is ultimately a function of culture, where shared meanings and symbols collude with the specific historical processes and material conditions which give rise to the specific social arrangements of stress (ibid).

These narratives of stress are better termed "narratives of distress" for they are tales of human strivings or failings to maintain some continuity, some balance between oneself and the social world and environment. The distinction between distress and stress being that distress focuses on the multiple subjective experiences of stress, where stress is viewed as the multiple forces and conditions that give rise the subjective experience of distress. Stories of distress generally encode "how macro level social processes generate particular types or configurations of stressors and resources, and how the relationships among these factors are modified by the context in which they occur" (Dressler 1991:28; Kleinman 1986).

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CHAPTER 5: RECONSTRUCTION OR RETURN TO THE PAST

> "The war is in the mountains", he said. "For as long as I can remember, they have killed us in the cities with decrees, not with bullets".
>
> Gabriel Garcia Marquez 1988: 73

1. MACRO-ECONOMICS, STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT, & SHOCK THERAPY: THE LIVED SENSE

The issues of money, survival, death, meeting basic needs, fulfilling ones obligations as a parent, child, student, patron, laborer, militante[6], farmer, entrepreneur, a professional, are very much primary concerns and preoccupations that people harbor in their daily lives.

Matagalpa, like the rest of Nicaragua, and for that matter, the rest of Latin America, has suffered from enormous sacrifices. As Petras and Vieux (1992) noted, the amount of wealth that flowed out of the whole Latin American region between 1982 and 1990 solely to service the external debt the national governments had accrued reached over $200 billion dollars. In Nicaragua alone this amount reached $10 billion dollars, the largest in all of Latin America. As wealth flowed out and economic output dropped, "social misery greatly increased" (ibid: 612).

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[6] In Nicaragua, the term militante, doesn't immediately imply an occupation, or a professional terrorist, but a card carrying member of a political party. Some of whom are obviously employed in the offices of their respective political parties. I was only familiar with two official political party offices in Matagalpa (90-91) and am uncertain as to the maintenance of other political party "offices" in the city. Militante is analogous to the way "party hack" is used to describe an active political party member in the United States and it is common to hear Nicaraguans refer to such people as a 'Sandinista militante','a PLI militante', 'a Christian Democrat', or 'a Liberal militante de Leon, jodido!!'.

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In Matagalpa, the local manifestations of these macro-economic regressions were apparent in the most basic of daily life necessities: food, housing, water, health care, employment. Furthermore, the difficulties in being able to satisfactorily realize, let alone sustain, these indispensable needs multiplied following the 1990 elections. The UNO government, besides being favorably disposed toward fully adopting a neoliberal economic plan, was forced to do so by international lending institutions. The acceptance of such a plan entailed measures that opposed organized labor, curtailed social spending, opened the economy to market forces, and reified privatization as the primary strategy to activate economic reconstruction following the destructiveness of the war years (Stahler-Sholk 1992; Martinez-Cuenca 1992). Yet it is rarely the case that in people's daily lives and toil, they are apt to connect their immediate situations with global forces and demands.

It is not that many remain parochial out of choice, as much as that their spontaneous understandings of their current plight is a result of the tumults and confusions of immediate life. This is compounded by the limits imposed on the scope and effectiveness of their actions. When limit-situations are actually felt in an embodied sense, what often results is a desire to identify the source of one's problems. This is often manifested in finger-pointing or blaming, which often is of a local or national character. The difficult life conditions

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Nicaraguans have had to endure, while differentially experienced, nevertheless have been of sufficient magnitude that they continue to produce social polarization and disharmony, scapegoating and violence. Economic and political chaos has been associated with increases in violence toward others or oneself (Staub 1992: 44). In Nicaragua, identifying the source of one's problems has usually resulted in identifying "scapegoats" which have the beneficial psychological effects of making the problems comprehensible. Scapegoating serves numerous functions that may seem to placate those desirous of knowing the cause of their problems for some unspecified amount of time. By affixing a cause or source to others, anxiety that arises out of not knowing may diminish and further serve to allow people a sense of control over their situations. However, scapegoating is often also a "precondition for harm doing" (ibid: 48), particularly when life conditions represent a threat to survival.

2. SCAPEGOATING AND POLARIZATION: TWO CASE STUDIES

For Rolando and Marcos, both in their late forties, it was common to hear them talk, elucidate, mutually reinforce a shared belief that the Sandinistas were international Communists intent upon eradicating small and medium size producers and property owners such as themselves. The two belong to a social sector of urban dwellers in Matagalpa who

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are middle class. I single them out not because they may be representative of their class, but because they represent a particular popular form of scapegoating in Nicaragua: Sandinista-bashing. I do have to add a proviso, that their particular mode of blaming and scapegoating is not as virulent as others in Matagalpa. For them, ruin was wrought by the destructive Sandinista domestic and foreign policies. The country was bankrupted and dragged into an unnecessary war, and that is why, they, Rolando and Marcos, as well as the rest of the country are in the social and economic fix they find themselves in. This was a pretty common analysis and refrain by many middle-class property owners and landlords. Yet, rationales and ready explanations people use to convey their current social and economic woes can be interestingly altered when, as one example, a legitimated hegemonic mode of communication expounds a perspective that cannot be easily contested. The following illustrates this situation.

The anti-Sandinista theme of Rolando and Marcos was somewhat modified and made secondary one day in early January of '91, when the three of us happened to be talking about local economic conditions and Marco stated that it wasn't just Nicaragua that was suffering such horrible economic times but the whole world. Rolando interjected by mentioning how Marcos must had seen the same television news broadcast the night before. They were both referring to a brief lead new pieces showing then-U.S. President Bush on television asserting that

the world was in the midst of a global economic recession. In Matagalpa at the time there were only two television channels that could be received on a relatively consistent basis. Less than six months later I would witness the establishment of a satellite-cable service sweep into Matagalpa.

The news item they saw was on a broadcast channel that aired CNN Spanish-language UNIVISION news broadcast from Miami every evening. Whenever I chanced to tune in I felt like I had never left the United States and that the only differences I noted in the quality of television news broadcasting was the fact that it was conducted in Spanish and clearly covered Latin America more comprehensively than other stateside broadcast counterparts.

Both Rolando and Marcos began to talk about the worldwide recession from poor coffee sales to the difficulty of acquiring credit and loans for necessary investments. The usual Sandinista-bashing that often animated and colored their opinions of personal, local, or national events and conditions was scarely mentioned. Of the greatest interest to me, was when Rolando mentioned that,"...if President Bush says there is a world-wide recession, then there must be one". Obviously to Rolando, it was not enough to hear the same explanations from the current President of the Republic, Dona Violeta Chamorro[7] or Antonio Lacayo, her chief advisor (not to mention

[7] Another critical element that constantly cropped up whenever the three of us conversed was the whole issue of Dona Violeta Chamorro as a "woman". Although I do not intend to analyze at this point the obvious sexism and strained gender relations in Nicaraguan society, for men like Rolando and

the former president of the republic, Daniel Ortega). For, Rolando, as well as Marcos, if the president of the United States said there was a recession, then there was one.
The combination of international authority the United States Presidency symbolized, packaged in a slick broadcast coverage format that projected an ultra-modern, high-tech efficient, and no-nonsense objectivist style, contrasted to local Nicaraguan television news broadcasting which had far fewer resources and modernist savvy to measure up to CNN UNIVISION Spanish-language news broadcasts. The broadcast was sufficiently compelling to dispel Sandinista-bashing for a brief interim. However, the general wearing down process of dashed expectations and continued hardships tends to promote the common resort to scapegoating local or national actors, groups, or processes. Even when an understanding of one's situation can be integrated into a broader context, as when President Bush proclaims a world-wide recession, ultimately it seems people fall back on relying upon their own history and local context to explain their unfavorable state.

For example, Marcos' plight appeared to be due to being economically stuck by conditions he is unable to surmount. He resented not being able to get an import-export business off

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Marcos, men who proudly claim a "macho" status, it is interesting how consistently misogynst they are toward not only women of all ages, from all walks of life, but how much venom they cast toward President Chamorro simply because she is a woman. This fact alone, appears to be sufficient to convince them to withdraw their respect for her and her office as president of the republic. Obviously, however there are other critical elements involved in their disdain for the office of the presidency of the republic that transcend sex roles and gender relations, since the same venom and utter contempt is proportinately heaped upon the former president of the republic, Daniel Ortega. A man.

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the ground because of what he charged as the instability of Nicaraguan currency (*cordobas*) and the corruption of Customs (*aduana*). He resented not being able to send his children to higher education abroad. He resented not being able to get more financial credit for improving production on his land. He liked to talk about his ideas for improving the cultivation of flowers, and especially roses, on his land for exportation. In sum, he felt frustrated in making long-term investments and plans, let alone implementing them.

Marcos was a small property owner, accountant, and possessor of other hidden assets that allowed him a great deal of time to lunch with friends, hang out, travel, and what looked from my vantage point upon comparison to other Matagalpinos as a leisurely paced stable existence. He was staunchly anti-Sandinista and openly blamed his current economic and social problems on the revolution, as well as what they saw as the overt capitulation of Dona Violeta to the FSLN.

I was introduced to Marcos as someone who might help me find a house for my family to live in. I came to establish a cordial relationship with Marcos, although I cannot say I ever got to 'know' him. He was always off on some urgent matter which was why he repeatedly broke interview dates with me. It was always something, a long pending deal had come through that he had to attend to, or an obvious misunderstanding about the time and now just was not opportune, etc.. In sum I was

never able to ensnare him into at least one 'meaningful dialogue' that I could write up and place alongside all my other meaningful field notes. However Marcos was available to take me to his semi-constructed house that was located in a hilly southern barrio of Matagalpa that I could rent cheaply if I would finance the completion of the house. I respectfully declined. And I was able to talk to him at length on a few occasions after running into him on the street and retiring with him to a bar-resturant to talk.

Marcos had initially supported the Sandinista revolution. He returned from Switzerland (I never found out what, why, or how long he had been there) shortly after the triumph of the revolution in July 1979, to participate in what he characterized as his desire to participate in the "glorious rebirth of Nicaragua". It was during his stint in the early years of the revolution as a member of his local CDS (Sandinista defense committees, that were organized on either a block or barrio basis) that he began to sour on the revolution.

His chief complaint about the CDS was his run-in with the head of a CDS household survey with whom he states he had a wonderful relationship before the revolution. One of the results of the survey was to re-number the houses in his barrioo and Marco became incensed when his house was re-numbered a number he did not like. From this, he characterized the concentration of arbitrary preferential treatment of local

power brokers as emblematic of totalitarian Sandinista rule. For him, this act became especially personal and reprehensible when his attempt to rectify the decision to renumber his house failed. He withdrew from his activities as a CDS member, incurred the wrath of a few who thought him a betrayer, and many of his relationships with people in his neighborhood became tense. He commanded his family never to buy food from the proprietor of his street corner store, since the proprietor was the man in charge of renumbering the houses.

Marcos cites this incident in the early eighties as the beginning of his ever-growing anger and mistrust for the Sandinistas. Yet, in spite of his reputation as a well known anti-Sandinista, he admits that neither he nor his immediate family were ever persecuted. On the other hand, he asserts this was because he knew how to maneuver without getting into trouble. For instance, Marcos goes into excruciating detail and intrigue in how he astutely and discreetly helped his young nephews out of the country to avoid the compulsory military draft. Although this was all an open secret, as was his displeasure with Sandinismo and the local CDS, he was never persecuted, although he did make enemies in his community.

The other reason why Marcos was probably left untroubled was that he was part of a large well-known Matagalpan family (he has 14 siblings) that were split in numerous factions around their fervent to tepid support for the FSLN, Contras,

or other political parties. His was a typically split Nicaraguan family. While I am apt to minimize the plight of Marcos, compared to others I spent time getting to know in the city and countryside and in clinics, I think it important to not minimize how people like Marcos view their situation. A strict comparison of individual plights based on either socio-economic, political or socio-medical criteria would detract from the deep roots of the continued tensions that plague Nicaraguan society. For that reason I turn to Marco's friend, Rolando, to convey a sense of his problems which take us into the countryside.

3. THE TRAVAILS OF BEING A PATRON

> No one's going to convince me that I wasn't a good patron. Anyone who saw TRES MADRES in decline and who could see it now, when it's a model estate, would have to agree with me. That's why I can't go along with my granddaughter's story about class struggle. Because when it comes right down to it, those poor peasants are a lot worse off today than they were fifty years ago. I was like a father to them. Agrarian reform ruined things for everyone...(Isabel Allende 1986).

Rolando speaks of himself, according to his standards, as a small farmer ("un finquero pequeno"). Yet by contemporary Nicaraguan standards, he is an independent mid-level producer. His small farm consists of 180 hectares, a good portion of which is tied up in coffee production. Only after some time did I become aware of discordant facts that undermined his

proclaimed self-conception or status as a small finquero. Besides his 180 hectare farm just outside of Matagalpa, he owned and personally administered a rather large parcel of cultivated land in Chinandega along the Pacific coast. He drove every couple of weeks to his Chinadegan farm and spent a day, or overnight, or whatever duration was necessary to maintain his administration of a farm from afar. I also saw after going with him to his coffee plantation in Matagalpa that he also maintained a minimum of three hundred head of cattle and at least ten permanent agricultural workers and their families on his finca (farm).

Rolando is representative of mid-level landowners and producers. He does not come from a prestigious family (Stone 1990; Vilas 1992) nor a wealthy background. Had he been of a different ideological bent he easily could have been a member of the pro-Sandinista National Union of Farmers and Ranchers (UNAG), but he is resolutely anti-Sandinista. Yet his politics are not of the extreme right, an orientation which I came across very often among producers and land owners of similar class stature and higher.

I met Rolando upon delivering a letter from his brother living in the United States. I got to know his immediate and extended family, and ultimately became a friend to his 84 year old mother. I became interested in trying to understand his points of view as possibly representative of the middle to upper land-owning class in Matagalpa who had not abandoned

Nicaragua during the war years, had been resistant to the Sandinistas, but never to the degree that left them subject to confiscations, imprisonments, or persecution. While some of these people were Somozcistas in the classic sense of having benefitted from direct ties with Somoza and/or Somozita-State institutions, the majority benefitted under Somozismo largely because they were neglected and were left some space and resources to exploit land on through their own resources, capacities and wiles alone. Although Rolando says he was not a Somozita he is an avowed anti-Sandinista. He openly proclaims his independence from UNO or any other political party, and to his mind he is positive that his politically independent, indeed separatist, stance had hurt him in securing the credit he needed.

The worries Rolando readily speaks about are day-to-day concerns about getting by and getting ahead. He talks about how the cost of maintaining the land, paying all the workers, maintaining his family, and building his house is quite expensive and getting more and more difficult all the time. He distinguishes between rich landowners and poor landowners and considers himself in the latter group. He feels he has been unfairly discriminated against by the State and the banks in his hapless task of trying to secure sufficient credit to meet the needs for production and payment of wages to his workers. However a good portion of Rolando's talk about his economic woes is often reduced to the lack of discipline among his

workers and the unjust demands that are constantly made upon him as a patron. He is very keen and self-reflective as to his role as a patron. He has his own sensibility about what the fulfillment of his role as a producer and landowner entails, and he struggles to maintain this. For him to be a patron means living up to its significance as a benefactor, protector, "father figure" (pater), master, supporter, advocate.

As such he had a right to complain. Generally he railed about the cost of maintaining so many workers. He currently has 10 laborers that work his land. This number swells even higher during harvest time. Some live on his land, some off, and he says he pays each of his workers C$5 daily (average exchange value, circa 90-91, C$5=$1). He has had to resort to sell cattle to pay off a loan. He told me how because he was unable to rely upon the State or banks for loans he has had to turn to informal arrangements. A loan of $3,000 dollars at 10% monthly interest came to three hundred dollars at which he rolled his eyes. He says he feels robbed by everybody.

Rolando survives by constantly scaling back his goals to "la comida para el dia y el colegio para mi ninas" (daily food goals and private schools for his daughters). He says he knows many people like himself, who are in the same boat, not so much thinking for the future but, simply trying to get by day by day. When asked to contrast his economic situation with his workers', he admits that they have it rough too, but that

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their fate are ultimately bound to his. His explanation is a classic trickle-down rationale which asserts that it is only natural that if he is enduring economic bad times, that so will his workers. And that by the same token as his economic situation improves, so will the lot of his workers.

Rolando defended *patron* by saying they can care better for their employees than the State. "As the *patrones* fortunes rise, so do the trabjadores". He criticized the *colectivas* for being too politicized and militarized. He says the FSLN was mainly interested in making them a fighting force and not training them agronomy or finances. The collectivas were a waste..."Como puedes cultivar 900 manzanas con solo 30 hombres, lo mas que ellos puedan mantaner son 50 manzanas.". He also said how many workers on the cooperatives did not work, did not pull their weight. Or that there were too many chiefs, too many administrators that didn't participate in actual work. The failure of the cooperatives, according to Rolando's analysis, are directly related to perception that people did not work. This was also in keeping with his rationale that private producers were more efficient and effective in ensuring that workers worked and productivity remained high.

Rolando thinks the day of the big bad "patron" is over. He told me a story of a bad *patron* who had crammed about 50 people (workers and their families) into a long hall, that stunk, with chickens and pigs, and people slept on the floor

and a few yards away was a nicely painted barn where there resided an immaculate horse. The horse was constantly groomed and ate better than the people. "Los trabajodores no son tontos, y pueden ver eso, pero no va a hacer nada porque"[8] when the patron comes around he always has a few beefy <u>guardaespaldas</u> (body guards) with him. The <u>patron</u> would stalk around and yell, "whose dog was that over there?", and when no one responded he would pull out his gun and shoot it dead in its tracks. "The lesson was lost on no one". To Rolando, this type of <u>patron</u> is no more. They left when the revolution came in and they will not be back. That is the only good thing he has to say about the Sandinistas. But for Rolando, life won't return to normal until the Sandinistas stops agitating with strikes and all.

Rolando says what is killing landowners like himself is the tight and usually small, insufficient credit the banks lend people like himself. And although he gives high marks to Dona Violeta, he thinks she needs to stand up to the Sandinista unions and some of the few priviledged elite families that, accoding to him, still run the economy. His politics is an interesting admixture of patronizing benevolency, strict capitalist agrarian rationale, and mild populism. He thinks of himself as one of the "small people" and not as a relatively well off independent producer who

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[8] "The workers are stupid and they can see whats going on, but their not about to do anything", because the <u>patron</u> is armed and has his own security system that he will unleash upon anyone who gets out of line.

lives well as compared to the vast majority of Nicaraguans, in spite of the financial hardships he defintely must contend with.

Both Rolando and Marcos see themselves as the backbone to their country and celebrate the their class, private medium sized land-owning agricultural producers, as its savior. They chiefly harmed by the Sandinista revolution, the Contra war, and the United States trade embargo. They remain wary about the capacity of president Chamorro to improve their situation and are constantly fearful of downward economic mobility. Interestingly, one of the the manifestations of their worries is played out in the arena of housing. For Rolando, his problem was that the large comfortable house he had been renting for some seven years, was being asked to be vacated by the owners who were interested in providing the house to returning relatives. At the same time Rolando was building a mammoth sized beautiful house in the same barrio where I lived that was literally being chisled out of the side of a hill. Walking on the grounds and seeing the blueprint, one knew that it would be a very comfortable and spacious home. Yet, his problems of cash fludity, compounded by the inflated costs and scarcity of building materials prompted him to constantly complain about politics and the economy. Marco was also demoralized by similar problems of not being able to construct his dream house as fast as he desired. Both Rolando and Marco could not convert the wealth they had in property and

production into liquid assets to pay for the ever-inflating costs of goods and labor necessary to build their houses. Both men had hired caretakers to live on their unfinished homes. These caretakers doubled as guards, carpenters, rock cutters, and masons. It was in this area of insecure housing that I came to partially share their concerns with mine. I came to appreciate the difficulties of securing viable housing when I first arrived in Matagalpa to which I turn to now.

4. FINDING A HOUSE

I arrived in Nicaragua in 1990 followed by my wife and nearly one year old son three weeks later. I don't really know how our experience compares to that of other families of anthropologists starting out "in the field", but for us, it took about three months to finally find a place to settle in. The wait was particularly difficult, given the fact that we were first time parents and did not know exactly what we were doing. As a young family unfamiliar with the region we knew there would be some difficulties navigating our way around. As it turned out we did not find a suitable habitation in the original place I had intended to conduct my research. I wanted to reside in the city of Jinotega some thirty kilometers north west of Matagalpa.

The principal reason I chose that city was that Jinotega, like Matagalpa and Nueva Segovia, had been a primary war zone

during the "Contra War". In fact, the north historically has been the site of national rebellion. It had been the safehaven and base of operation for Augusto Sandino's "Army for the Defense of National Sovereignty" in the 1920s and 30s when they resisted the national liberal government and U.S. marines. The north provided him and his troops with a relatively reliable social and political base to fight and finally push the U.S. marines out of Nicaragua after seven years. And more recently, the northern departments had been the primary region where the Contra war had taken place.

As a result, housing in Jinotega was virtually impossible to find unless I was willing to pay a very high price for extremely poor habitation. Housing in general was in very short supply throughout the northern region even for someone like myself who had dollars to live on. Housing has always been a problem in Nicaragua, particularly in urban areas and particularly since the Contra war (Williams 1987:259-260; Higgins & Coen 1992:134-137) when there were massive internal displacements of rural people migrating to the relative safety of towns and cities. However, since the official cessation of the war n 1990, housing had become even more scarce in the northern region of the country. One reason is that rampant political conflict and violence (ENVIO 1993b) continued to continued to beset the countryside intensifying competition for scarce resources, as well as receiving a great deal of internal migration to the prinicipal cities in the north. This

is on top of the extent shortage of housing in general.

Additionally the national volatile issues of property and de facto counter-agarian reform process had left people on shaky grounds and thrown the basic goal of establishing permanent stable housing, as well as property, tattered and unresolved. The issue of property is perhaps the most contemporary social issue to beset Nicaragua today since it cross-cuts numerous social issues that range from rolling back Sandinista revolutionary achievements like land redistributions and experiments in new modes of agricultural production to adequate housing and viable State-subsidized "safety nets" (Wheelock 1991; Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate 1992; ENVIO 1993a). Walking into this situation I quickly became familiar with the problem of adequate housing, but an interesting twist.

Since early 1990, the number of international observers, peacekeepers and development specialists from a host of international NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), as well as the United Nations and Organization of American States (OAS, or OEA in Spanish) flooded the region. Although throughout the eighties, the departments of Matagalpa and Jinotega had hosted a steady stream of international solidarity organizations and workers, the infusion of large numbers of international solidarity organizations and workers following the regionally brokered 1989 Esquipulas Peace Accord and the 1990 presidential elections became a local boondoggle.

Demands for office space, residential housing, and employment of locals increased incrementally. Moreover, the wash of dollars that came in had the effect of driving rentals for housing space and vehicles into outer orbit. The demand for office and residential space created a favorable climate for locals to make some money and consequently fueled a rise in costs. Such inflation, not only negatively affected local Nicaraguans who could not afford exorbitant rentals, but proved even difficult for internationalists like myself, who inspite of having a Fulbright scholarship with a dollar stipend[9] still found the asking prices for rentals prohibitive.

I came to find out that there appeared to be greater opportunities for securing adequate housing in Matagalpa. Although I was intent about being situated in an urban setting that had been incorporated into the daily ebb and flow of the Contra War, I was convinced by the numerous Nicaraguans I consulted with that Matagalpa in that respect alone was no less a "hot spot" than Jinotega had been during the war. Hence

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[9] The Fulbright scholarship for Nicaragua in 1990-91 was a set sum paid in three installments over the course of a year. After several months, I officially requested an increase and was granted a small increment that still proved inadequate. I remember explaining to USIS embassy staffers who were responsible for administrating Fulbrights in the field and later in official correspondence with Fulbright adminstrators in New York that their funding calculations for total living and research expenditures were grossly underestimated. Although there was some acknowledgement and sympathy I remember responses that amounted to placing the blame on the country itself for economic disparities and that their calculations had been made at a time (late 1980s) when such an amount was reasonable. This seems to fly in the face of the inescapable economic realities that had been besetting Nicaragua since at least 1987, when harsh economic measures and restrictions were put in place to stem the national inflation rate that had in the 1986-87 period gone over a thousand percent, at the same time that President Reagan was requesting $105 million dollars for the "Contras", of which the U.S. Congress approved $8.1 million in December of that year.

my search for adequate housing came down to two issues: Asking rental prices and suitable accomodations. Yet there was a third element that influenced the first two issues. And that was the fact that my general appearance, not to mention the moment I opened my mouth to speak, gave me away as an "extranjero" (foreigner) or "internacionalista" (internationalist), which automatically placed me in a category of "other" who could afford to pay a high price.

Often this relegation to otherness left me vulnerable to numerous assumptions and, to my mind, outrageous demands. Seen as someone who must obviously have dollars to spend I was asked to pay exorbitant prices. My otherness had, I think, less to do with whether I was a Sandinista sympathizer, an international development specialist, an NGO worker, a hard to figure out Latino government or ministry collaborator (I was often mistaken for Brazilian or Puerto Rican), etc., as I was just another visitor from afar that must have dollars to spend. I came to find out that whenever I initiated contact with owners that the basic asking price was $500.00 or more a month. These same rentals when asked by Nicaraguans were at least two to three hundred dollars less than was quoted to me. I know this because one Matagalpina[10] who was very instrumental in helping me get my research off the ground

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[10] Dra. Marta Cabrera, was at the time the Co-Chair of the Escuela of Psicologia at the Universidad CentraAmericana (UCA) in Managua. The UCA School of Psychology became my official in-country sponosor for my research and Dra. Cabrera, a native of Matagalpa was extremely helpful in getting my family physically and legally established "in the field".

assisted me in finding housing. Either she or others she had recruited inquired, visited, or negotiated for living accomodations for us. When I would come onto the scene there would result some "misunderstanding" or some such difficulty that either rendered the place unavailable or more expensive than originally quoted.

In the end, I found a place on my own. Unbeknownst to me, the house had been advertised in "El Nuevo Diario" and "La Prensa" and described as a suitable place for use by international organizations. I came across the house based on a local tip, unaware of this advertisement, and met the owner who had spent most of the years of the revolution in Miami and was setting up to return to the United States. An international insurance salesman, he realized that Nicaragua had not changed enough to his liking, economic advantage, or personal security following the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in the 1990 elections to stay in-country. He was fond of saying, "no puedo vender seguros en una sociedad tan insegura". This nice play of words encapsulated his dilemma as an international insurance salesman which translates, "I can't sell insurance (seguros) in such an insecure (insegura) society". When he quoted my wife and me his asking price, we must have noticeably blanched and cordially excused ourselves by simply stating it was out of our price range. However, he later sought us out and I came to find out what desperate straits he was in and we eventually negotiated a more

affordable rental. His home made the other places we had been looking at, for the same price, absolute caves. The house was plush by Matagalpan standards, a fact we were not entirely comfortable with but which greatly allayed the fears we had for the safety and health of our baby son and after three months of an extensive search I was eager to get settled in and start working.

This extended explanation of our search for housing is meant to convey the extreme difficulties not so much under-endowed internationalistas faced, but the whole of Nicaraguan society faced in securing adequate housing. Adequate housing for us meant available water, electricity, a non-dirt floor for a crawling baby, a non-leaky roof, and a secure house that could guard against unwanted intrusions and health hazards. My wife and I did not think these basic prerequistes were overly demanding or outlandish. Yet we quickly came to the realization that habitations that met such a criteria were few and far between. Most places we saw were often inadequate in most of those aspects. In fact I am hard put to remember seeing a potential rental that met even half of the "amenities" my wife and I desired. That is what makes the home we eventually rented so amazing because it not only met all that we were looking for but was also furnished and included bedding, refrigerator and stove. These latter amentities were significant since virtually all other places we had looked at lacked them. Obviously I can go on with a litany of issues

and problems we faced in trying to find adequate housing. The final move to this house in Yaguare was from our perspective truly a godsend.

One nevers moves into a neighborhood unnoticed. Our barrio, Yaguare was no different. Although our house externally appeared similar to other houses in the neighborhood, in fact it was a well known fact that the house was plush in comparison to all other homes in the vicinity. This fact alone, as well as our otherness, produced a mixed reception and over time an interesting, if not special relationship with our neighbors.

5. OUR BARRIO, YAGUARE

Yaguare, refers to a stream that runs downhill from the mountains of Apante and empties into the rio Grande de Matagalpa. Incer (1985: 344) records a missionary's translation of Yaguare as "that which runs fast". Although a stream did indeed flow downhill toward the river, our barrio, (neighborhood) like the rest of the city, lacked consistent access to water. The stream, although pretty to look at, was polluted and became a trickle during the dry season. The problem of water in our barrio was fairly typical of the older and longer established barrios that were also situated along slopes, like Bo Palo Alto and Bo German Pomares. Yaguare reportedly is a long-settled barrio although it is only in the

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last twenty years that it became so densely populated. As in the rest of Matagalpa (and for that matter virtually all of Nicaragua) there were no street signs or clear designations to distinguish *barrios* or even streets. Yaguare, in typical Nicaraguan fashion, was reckoned by major landmarks or popularly known place, the Banco Nacional, and then situated either by a direction or topographic referent (abajo, a lago, arriba, montanas, etc.), in this case eastward or toward "Apante" (the mountains of Apante).

I got to know a young Nicaraguan woman whose family used to own the property where my family and I were currently residing, as well as neighboring properties. She remembers when most of the houses in this *barrio* were wooden shacks and the people who lived in them were *muy humilda* (modest). But, in the last ten years, many of the same people had gotten by fairly well and were able to improve their homes from wooden shacks to brick and concrete houses. This was accomplished in spite of the hardship of the war years either by the money that had been sent in from relatives that had left the country or by a few of the municipal projects to improve neighborhoods that were initiated by the Sandinista city government.

This pattern of urban settlement seemed quite common based on other descriptions I received about the evolution and establishment of other *barrios* in Matagalpa. And one had only to pass through Managua, the nation's capital, to see first hand the numerous and dispearsed squatter settlements that

were easily found throughout the city. Prior to 1979 less than forty thousand people lived in the city of Matagalpa. By April of 1987, the estimated population had increased to a conservative count of 63,144 inhabitants (Ministerio de Vivienda y Asentamiento Humanos 1988), although this number is disputed by others and estimated upward to over 80,000. Figures about the number of city inhabitants during the period of time I was conducting fieldwork, circa 1990-1992, ranged from 85,000 to the estiamte of one one city official who cited a clearly exagerrated 125,000 residents. Although the population of Region VI, the departments of Matagalpa and Jinotega which compose region VI, numbered 430,503 inhabitants in 1987 (ibid: 3) by the 1991 rural-urban census population for Region VI it had swelled to 531,898. These numbers reflect the concentration of movement from the countryside to the cities, as well as the amount of military mobilization in the departments.

Historically, the rise in population in the department of Matagalpa is a classic case of capitalist agricultural development based on the expansion of coffee in the early part of this century. This expansion attracted a first major wave of immigrants. From 1906 to 1920, the population of Matagalpa increased from 44,290 to 78,226 inhabitants or from 8.8 to 12.3 percent of the total Nicaraguan population (Foroohar 1990:4). The character of the rural populace was made up of small landowning seasonal agricultural workers, tenant

farmers, or landless agricultural workers who were granted marginal lands by large landowners for subsistent farming. Also Matagalpa became the site for the migration of landless agricultural workers looking for land along the frontier. A large portion of land was used by subsistent farmers with no legal title to the land.

In Matagalpa, municipal administrative officials said that there was at minimum a 6,000 housing unit deficit in the city, at the same time that there were 5,000 requests a month for new housing constructions and business establishment being made. Although it is difficult to get an accurate count of residents today, a walk around the city amply shows how recent migrants to the city live in very poor and inadequate housing. Such settlements are part of a longer established pattern of squatter settlements being converted and incorporated as part of the city over time. However, following the 1990 Presidential elections which included nation-wide municipal elections as well, an UNO mayor, Frank Lanzas, was voted in promising to modernize the city and evacuate and evict people illegally squatting on land.

After spending half a year in Matagalpa and having gotten to know people and barrio organizations throughout Matagalpa (the "*Movimiento Comunal*" and other informal *barrio* associations) I began to understand how many of the *barrios* of the city had begun in a similar fashion, from squatter

settlements, sometimes considered illegal to eventual housing improvements and incorporation into the city.

Yaguare, although lacking paved roads and an inadequate municipal water distribution system, did have electricity. The houses were small but generally sturdy wooden, brick, and concrete buildings. The farther one walked uphill, the poorer the residents and residencies became.

In the higher part of the hills residencies tampered off in the form of isolated shacks along trails leading into the mountains. Although our house was clearly one of the better built in the neigborhood, there was little to distinguish its size and elegance from the outside. But nevertheless it was well known in the barrio that Don Maximo's house was like a mansion. I discovered how well the house was known shortly after moving in. After Don Maximo had left the country we became beseiged by all sorts of requests from water to employment. People came almost daily asking for employment and sometimes even money and food. Later as I became known as someone who worked in the main public clinic and my wife a nurse, we even received requests for medicine and to make home visits to ailing family members.

Apparently, Don Maximo had been a source of employment for some locals, and although he was not necessarily liked, he was a benefactor all the same. Before he left, he obliged me to hire as a baby sitter and housecleaner a young woman that lived next door. Although my wife and I were reluctant to do

so, ultimately we saw in hindsight that this was a good move. First of all it maintained intact a network of vital employment for the next door neighbors. Dona Florida, the household head, was the matriarch of a large three generational household consisting of around seven immediate and extended family members. Of these only two worked, one of them being Aurora, the nineteen year old niece of Dona Florida, who worked for us during the day and went to school at night. The household of Dona Florida was not unusual. Most of the households I became familiar with consisted of multi-generational (more than two) extended family members. Also the toll of unemployment was ever present often resulting in fewer and fewer employed adults.

Two houses up from ours, was the house of Don Leopoldo, who was a white-haired, extremely thin older man who left every morning to walk to his land a few kilometers from town to tend to his cultivation of beans and maize. His household consisted of at least eight members of an extended family, all of whom except for one other adult was without work. Across the street from him lived Paulino, an ex-EPS soldier who lived with his wife's father and mother. Paulino was always looking for work and although a proud man who smiled a lot, I eventually got a sense of how difficult it was and how much pain he suffered to have to live with his father-in-law and how much grief it was for him to be unable to financially help out in the household consistently. That household was quite

large consisting of over ten people, including his wife and two children. They lived in a simple house made of wood, adobe, and dirt floors. His mother-in-law worked as a fruit and vegetable vendor in the southern market and my sense was that if was not for her ready access to food via the market the family situation would have been more difficult.

Our beautiful multilayered house clearly accentuated the cultural, class, and material differences between us and the rest of the barrio residents. Yet we also suffered basic problems like water shortages, electrical black-outs, and spiraling costs for utilities like everyone else. Technically, we were supposed to get water every other day for three hours in the morning, from around nine to noon time. One can imagine how much of a ritual it became for us to ensure all the taps were on, tanks filled, bottles topped off, etc.. Each initial 'swoosh' sound that began as a gurgle and then a mighty flow brought us immediate pleasure.

This was especially true when after less than a couple months we began to grow accustomed to the fact that water distribution was not so regular. The fleeting elation the onset of water brought meant one could get on to other things and not have to worry about water for at least the next two days. If the water did not arrive, we had to switch to a conservation mode. Our living situation reminded me of the

beautiful French film, "Florette de Manon"[11], which forcefully depicts the tremendous necessity to have access to water. The first few weeks we moved in, I joined a neighborhood association water crew. Yaguare, along with four other barrios had the responsibility on a rotational basis to have a volunteer water crew of as many able bodied persons hike a couple of kilometers into the mountains where a small concrete reservoir and water tank had been built some four or five years ago with the help of a Dutch NGO working with neighborhood associations and the then-Sandinista mayor's office. Every Sunday, a barrio water crew was responsible for cleaning the reservoir. The neighborhood association in Yaguare also collected money to purchase sections of 5 centimeter gauge, 12 feet long plastic pipe, that was being laid from the reservoir to the barrio to increase distribution throughout the neighborhood. It was distance of about two kilometers, traversing two deep gullies before arriving in our barrio. There was no assistance of any kind from the city itself and foreign NGOs had not been involved for several years. In effect, the water distribution system and the source of water was owned and operated as a non-municipal, five-barrio water association. In fact, I heard complaints from a number of the barrio water association members from various barrios, of how the alcalde (Mayor) and the city government

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[11] The film shows the dramatic, almost day to day effect the sudden lack of accessible water has on village life and the personal and social frictions its lack produces among villagers.

were trying to get their hands on the water source and tank. There were concerns that they would have to come up with money to hire lawyers if the city tried to actually confiscate their water.

It was interesting to get a clear emic perspective of the barrio by observing who participated in the periodic neighborhood water meetings, who participated in the manual volunteer labor, who paid and who did not. The issue of those who worked and helped in the water project and those who did not was highly politicized. The organizers and participants of the water project tended to be poorer and Sandinista. They had participated in the past, in the local CDS and remained active in barrio work projects. Those who did not participate often confided to me that they did not like dealing with Sandinistas. Some even accused some of the organizers of pocketing the money they collected to purchase water tubing and glue. In meetings I attended the issue of whether water should be shut off to those who did not pay was only a single example of the tensions and divisions between neighbors.

Although I have repeatedly brought up the issue of water there is one more point that ought to be disclosed. In Don Maximo's house, a 250 gallon water tank had been erected that by gravity emptied into an approximately 300 gallon concrete water reservoir. In the event of a sustained drought, our immediate water reserves would keep us in good supply, but only if we were disciplined and miserly and for no more than

several of weeks. As newcomers on the street we came to realize, when invariably those days and weeks came that there was no water, we would be sought out for a bucket or gallon container of water by a family up the street or a neighbor we had never met. Aurora told us this hardly ever happened when Don Maximo was here, for he simply refused to give water unless they were some sort of special relation. Our neighbors' request for water was an index of their need and their openess to engage us. Over time I realized that everyone knew that our house had within its fortress-like confines, untold reserves of water. Throughout the course of my fieldwork having gradually visited and entered most of the surrounding households it was unmistakably clear that no one had great stores of water, save for a barrel or two strategically positioned under drain gutters to gather rain water. This also became readily apparent and visible on those rare occasions during the drought when the city saw fit to send water trucks to the neighborhood to distribute water. On those occasions mainly women and children from throughout the barrio lined up to receive gallons and barrels of water. It was common to see poor women from the humbler homes farther uphill in front of more urbane, middle class women who lived in nicely constructed brick and cement houses who were in line with their maids to collect water. The effect of equally distributed hardship was an essential leveling process that occasionally became visibly manifested.

6. LINDA VISTA

From the back of our house, we could step onto a veranda that looked northward. Immediately to the north-east was a large hill that hosted a small, dispersed settlement of seven or eight wooden and plastic shacks. I often set up my typewriter on our veranda to write and over time began to follow closely the changes occurring on the hill in front of us. We faced north-northeast, which was immediately foregrounded by a hill that was higher than the sloping barrio of Yaguare. "Linda Vista" as it was called was largely an untouched hill, devoid of trees and extensive bushes, and widely dispersed shacks about the hill.

Over the time I spent in Matagalpa, I saw the initial settlement of seven or eight shacks grow to around eighty structures, built of all sorts of materials from plastic and cardboard to brick and zinc houses. I followed closely how one weekend some three months after we relocated to Yaguare, that for two days a bulldozer was carving a road up the hill. I only later found out that the road was carved into the hill by a joint venture of the "Movimiento Comunal" and the ATC, an action which incurred the wrath of the city government which was opposed to any development on the hill. Of interest is that further northeast on a hill behind "Linda Vista", one could see the sole estate of the mayor, Frank Lanzas. The

mayor could not avoid viewing the hill since it was the first thing he saw everytime he stepped outside of his front door.

I became familiar with a few people who lived on the hill. The budding barrio was dubbed by those who lived on the hill as "Linda Vista" (translated as Beautiful View). I became very close with one family in particular who happened to live on the apex of the hill. Belia, lived with her two children Cesar and Sergio, and her occasionally absent, occasionally present husband Luis. Both Belia and Luis became willing subjects to a rather more intensive life history interviews. And as we passed that mystical invisible divide between formal ethnographic relations to friends, I became interested in Belia's boys. Belia's boys were from an earlier marriage and although Luis was not their biological father, they considered Luis their father.

The plight of Belia, Luis and the boys offer perhaps a clearer, if not more common dilemma many city dwelling Matagalpinos have had to face as a result of the dislocations brought about by socio-political and economic transitions. Their uniqueness however, underscores the elevated stakes that have transpired in the years since the 1990 transition from Sandinismo to "low intesity democracy" (Walker 1993, personal communication). They were the first family (or so they had told me and this was corroborated by others) to be forcibly evicted from a house upon return of the old owner following the defeat of the Sandinistas. Frank Lanzas, the mayor of

Matagalpa, who considers himself a true liberal and a member of UNO, politically positions himself somewhere in between Dona Violeta's right of center political position and the far right position personified by Arnulfo Aleman, the mayor of Managua, and Virgilo Godoy, the recalcitrant Vice-President of the republic who sees his duty as pushing the presidency farther to the right. Lanzas is a strong advocate of greater departmental autonomy and the capacity to retain a greater proportion of national taxes commensurate to the needs of the departments over the needs of the State. He took the initiative to massively evict people from properties he believed had been illegally occupied. And unfortunately for Belia and Luis, they became the first casualties of Lanza's policy.

Presently, their house is a very humble affair of wood, plastic, cardboard and zinc. It is a large single room habitation divided by a plastic sheet that seperates a bedroom from a cooking table, a bed, and a dining table. I sometimes scrounged zinc and wood which brought with me when I went up to visit them, fully aware that any such materials were welcomed. They had to build a moat around their "house" to keep water from flowing in when it rained and there were invariably leaks when it did rain. They had no running water, no electricity, no road, and an outdoor pit as a bathroom, and a beautiful view. What was remarkable was that just the prerequiste of having a plot of land, a housing lot, allowed

one to fantasize of what could be. This was consistent with how other barrios had grown and become established. Although considered illegal by the city presence seemed at times enough to dissuade the city from taking more confrontational means of evicting them off their lands. As I grew more familiar with Belia, Luis and the boys, I became increasingly aware of how precarious their lives were. Their poor and squalid living conditons contributed to numerous personal and social difficulties that became manifested in domestic disputes and somatic complaints. Luis and Belia were unemployed and I never quite figured out how they made ends meet. The family as a whole was demoralized and I became witness on several occasions to shouting matches, crying spells, fits of anger, and general neglect. In some ways I became a benefactor and tried in my own way to help them out.

Once upon interviewing the mayor of Matagalpa, we entered into an extended dialogue regarding the difference poverty and misery, with the mayor suggesting that there was a functional difference between the two. After a while, he pointedly asserted." ...look, its true, people are poor, very poor. And that certainly breed dissent. But there is difference between being poor and being miserable like in your country. Here you are poor but you don't have misery. Here you still have family, something to depend on, not like in your country with people that are homeless and have no one...". According to the mayor, this qualitative emic

distinction somehow diminished the intensity of the lived-experience of those Matagalpinos unfortunate enough to be poor. When I pointed out to him that I had gotten to know people who may be characterized as miserable, he dismissed my contention that either I misunderstood what he meant or that there must be something wrong with those people to have fallen so far and that anyway such people were few and far between. When I pointed out to him that such people could be found on a hill facing his palacial home, he retorted that many of them were good-for-nothings and that if indeed they were in misery it was because they had brought it on themselves. I was left wondering how the mayor as well as Belia and her family could enjoy their 'beautiful views' in light of the rancor and pernicious sentiments that animated their feelings about each other and which I suspected altered their capacity to enjoy the sights about them.

CHAPTER 6: OUT OF THE WAR ZONE:

PLURAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF DISTRESS

> El Nicaraguense es el mas incomodo. Nunca esta de acuerdo, satisfecho de la vida actual. Los Nicas son muy impacientes ...nuestra historia indica que incomodos y en desacuerdo somos. Desde 1830,hasta ahora, todos los gobiernos nunca indicaron interes por la gente...y ahora la gente es muy delicada...
>
> The Nicaraguan is the most uncomfortable. They are never accomodating, satisfied with life as it is. Nicas are very impatient...our history shows how uncomfortable and non conforming we are. From 1830, till now, none of the governments have ever cared for the people...and now the people are very fragile...
>
> Jairo, a 30 year old
> Sandinista amputee

One day Mario greeted me on the street. After a while he placed a hand on my shoulder, slowly shook his head and said quietly,"...brother, I'm so tired. Somedays I just want to escape, jump on a plane and go to Cuba, Spain, Brazil, anywhere far from here." Mario is an Association of Agricultural Workers (ATC) union organizer, whose frenzied work pace, virtually non-existent social life, and strong political commitment have left him, when he is not quixotically talking about politics and revolution, talking about physical and psychic exhaustion and the strains of having sacrificed so much for so little. Generally, Mario's presentation of self is a confident, fast talking, always organizing union militant, but he has come to share with me his hopelessness and feelings of demoralization. His concerns

always revolve around issues of social justice and sustaining the 'revolution' even if that is no longer measured by the singular goal of the acquistion of State power.

The same day I ran into Mario, I interviewed a rich landowner, Don Horacio. Don Horacio is a 52 year old 'gentleman cattle rancher' who owns property in Florida and Matagalpa. Although he had land confiscated by the Sandinistas, he still retains 1,500 manzanas (3,980 acres) of prized pasture land. His concerns are also about social justice and as a member of COSEP (Superior Council of Private Enterprises) and CDC (Committee of the Confiscated) is obsessed not only with having his land returned to him, but with a national return to civility and order that the "Sandinistas completely subverted and [has resulted] in a generation that doesn't respect work, property, traditional values, and the law". Don Horacio is not only angry but scared for his family and the future of Nicaragua. He confides in me how he can't sleep from worry, has no appetite, has ulcers, and is always restless and ready to explode. He travels frequently between Matagalpa and Florida and is so frustrated and perplexed by contemporary Nicaragua, he is seriously considering leaving for good and making his home in the United States,"...and this is after we won and got our country back from the communists".

These two men, poles apart politically, are bound together more than these exceedingly brief introductions

suggest. In fact, to some degree, they mutually influence each others' fate more than one might expect. For one thing, Mario's ATC office is housed in Don Horacio's confiscated mansion. The two are locked in a legal battle, with Don Horacio trying to recover his former house and the ATC committed to holding on to their offices and property regardless of how the courts may rule. The position of ATC is politically symbolic of protecting the gains of the revolution. As I was told by one of the members of the ATC <u>directiva</u>: "If the R. family succeeds in getting the mansion back from a popular mass organization, a labor organization with all the people we represent and all the struggles and sacrifice we have endured over the years, how easy will it be for the bourgeoise to kick little peasants and workers off their land and out of their homes".

The talk of both Mario and Don Horacio about their personal lives in post-revolutionary Nicaragua is never far from talk about the social, the political, or the historical. The coincidence between their confrontational political stands and desires to escape belies in elemental ways the cause and effects of their distress. They are able to talk about "conditioned lives" (Roseberry 1991: 53-54)[12] as the product

[12] Roseberry, in talking about the determination of individual actions, refers to a historical determinism not only conditioned by prior activity and thought, but also conditioned by situations where real individuals and groups are influenced "by their relationships with other individuals and groups, their jobs or their access to wealth and property, the power of the state, and their ideas-and the ideas of their fellows-about those relationships. Certain actions, and certain consequences of those actions, are possible while most other actions and consequences are impossible" (1991: 54).

of historical and political change, shifting social relations, adverse material conditions and war and revolution. Both men repeatedly locate their current thoughts and feelings, actions and plans in the context of what Fanon (1968:200) called "national existence".

The city of Matagalpa was a front-line military staging and garrison town. In 1991, the department of Matagalpa remains beset by ever escalating political violence. Although on a scale less intense than during the war, the violence caused by endemic robbery and assualt is serious enough to force a renewed wave of internal migration from the countryside to the city as people seek to avoid the destruction and bloodshed. Furthermore, the violence is impeding the coffee harvest and individual agricultural practices upon which people rely to subsist. It has compelled the State to mobilize a special police force throughout the region charged with disarming roving armed bands. Although Nicaragua is often portrayed by the Chamorro administration as being in a period of national reconstruction and reconciliation, there is a counter "re-phenomenon". In Matagalpa the "re" phenomena is often popularly spoken about as a period of time of revanchismo (revenge) and redistribucion (redistribution). This "re" phenomena has also spawned Re-Contras (re-armed ex-Contra soldiers), Re-Compas (re-armed ex-Sandinista [EPS] soldiers, Re-Vueltos (rearmed ex-Contra and ex-EPS soldiers), and Re-Juntos (rearmed Contra

and EPS soldiers who claim to never have given up armed struggle). The movement of re-armed groups have affected everyone by reminding them how vulnerable the city is to be isolated from the rest of the country.

The following three narratives or constructions of distress are drawn from the three primary populations I studied: a clinical population of mental health patients, the urban population of Matagalpa, and rural campesinos.

1. DONA CRISTINA

Dona Cristina is a 59 year old, ex-primary school teacher who has been a patient for the last six years in the only public mental health outpatient clinic in Matagalpa. She is married and had six children, four daughters and two sons. Dona Cristina marks the beginning of her on-going state of distress with the revolution. In 1978 as the insurrection against the Dictator Anastasio Somoza gained force in and around Matagalpa, she discovered that three of her children were collaborating with the FSLN (Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional). This produced a crisis in her family and polarized her family along political and generational lines.

Her household at the time of the FSLN triumph in 1979 consisted of her husband, her husband's brother and his family, her six children, and their spouses. All fourteen people crammed into a small two bedroom house that she portrayed as "inadequate then and inadequate now". Her husband

was an agricultural foreman on a landed estate belonging to the dictator and her brother-in-law was a minor local Somocista politico. Although she avows being apolitical, she talks nostalgically about their life before the revolution, her husband's occupation, and their association with the Somoza's business enterprise.

As she became aware of the depth of her childrens' involvement with the FSLN, which covered the gambit of gun running and demonstrating to actual fighting, she began to suffer from nervios (nerves)[13] and numerous somatic complaints. She experienced difficulty sleeping and constant worry. While her subjective distress was manifested in involuntary tremors, appetite loss, insomnia, and depression, her primary preoccupation was to keep the peace in the family and maintain family stability and harmony which were constantly threatened by acrimonious relations within the household. She cited this latter domestic situation as giving rise to her involutary tremors which compelled her to isolate herself from the rest of the family. Ever increasing hostile and belligerent political debates and dissension between the generations became even more trying when Somoza's National Guard came around to inquire about the children. The elders

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[13] The idiom of "nerves" transcends psychological reductionism to anxiety disorders or clinical depression. Instead the use of the term "nerves" or nervios often encode ideas of causality that are social, which also implies that its remedy is social as well. Furthermore it is important to recognize that the meaning of "nerves" as a subjective state is not merely the consequence of disturbed interpersonal or social relations, but also unsettled political-economic conditions and State-society relations (Lock 1989; Low 1981).

had to lie to protect them from arrest, even though they did not agree with what their offsprings were doing.

Following the triumph of the FSLN, Dona Cristina's husband was jailed for three months, some of their land was confiscated, and her brother-in-law fled the country. Both her two sons, members of the FSLN, intervened on behalf of their father and were able to secure his release from prison. They were also able to retain a portion of the family's land holdings that had been confiscated. During the 1980s, Dona Cristina quit her job as a school teacher because of her "nerves". Her husband became increasingly socially isolated and stayed on his small plot of land outside of Matagalpa cultivating beans and corn for family consumption. Dona Cristina's two sons were killed in the Contra war. Jairo died in 1982 when the agricultural cooperative on which he worked was attacked by 'Contra' forces and Roberto was killed in 1986 in an ambush outside of Matagalpa. His assailants were unknown.

Currently Dona Cristina's extended family household consists of nine people: Her husband, a daughter with her husband and three children, and two teenaged grandchildren, the orphans of one of her deceased sons. Dona Cristina's 27 year old daughter is the only person employed and has a lowly albeit consistent monthly income. Dona Cristina's husband has not worked for years and her son-in-law was laid off from his

State government job in 1991. She is unable to work because of her emotional distress and lack of employment opportunities.

SELECTED VERBATIM EXCERPTS FROM FIELDNOTES:

.......I am left with nothing. Everything became worse after 1979. We never have enough money and now I have no one I feel I can trust. Not even my husband. The economic situation and the environmental situation in my house is 'perjudicarme' (literally, 'harming, impairing, or jeopardizing me')....

...Before the Triumph and following it, I tried to keep peace in the family by staying out of politics. I would try to change the subject from politics to something more 'tranquilo' (tranquil, calm). But now there's politics in everything and I worry about everything...my family, the poverty, my sadness of the situation of not being able to help. My strength is not very great and I feel very burdened...

...Before the Revolution, we were poor but we lived alright. My children listened to their father and me and they were good kids. Although our house was small and inadequate, it was enough to live well...

...but the Revolution changed my children. All of them have their own principles, but I don't have any political principles, although I have my own opinions about justice...each according to their case. Even after they [the Sandinistas] took our land and jailed my husband, we could still live our lives. Actually after my brother-in-law left with his family for Miami, the house became more comfortable...

...But the economic situation became too difficult to 'sobrellevar' (endure, put up with). The Sandinistas kept telling us it was the war, the 'Yanquis' but in the meantime we could buy nothing. My monthly retirement pay is nothing (about $23.00) and buys nothing. Our house is too small and everyone is closed in and to make it worse

my daughter's husband is a Sandinista and you can't talk to him...

...I know these problems are everywhere, in each house and the problems come out in different ways. But, for me, the older I get, the more my two sons' death hurt I consider the blow of mothers who lost their sons, like a piece of their existence was lost...

...I feel desperate. The lack of money and the house situation make me sick, but, my dead kids, the way they died, how useful they were, so fine, so good, so stubborn! The poverty bothers me, my house bothers me, but its the way my kids died that makes me sick...

...As a Catholic I use the rosary to help but when I'm sick I don't know what I'm saying, I can't concentrate. Before I trusted people, even after the revolution although I was suspicious I still trusted people, but now I have no one I feel I can trust...

Although I have abbreviated and highlighted several themes from this edited account of Dona Cristina, I have deliberately underscored several themes Dona Cristina continually refers to: strained family relations along inter-generational lines and political and ideological commitments and affliations; their worsened economic condition that restricts their domestic household; her loss of trust in people (friends and family); her faltering Catholic faith and the death of her two sons, whom she at times castigates for having been Sandinistas and at other times deifies for being the best sons a mother could ever have. In the conclusion I shall return to Dona Cristina's and the other accounts to briefly suggest where these constructions of stress may lead.

2. MAGDA

Magda is a stout and very vocal 33 year old divorced unemployed secretary. She heads a household of nine that consists of her three children, two unmarried brothers, one older and one younger than she, a sister and her two children; and an eight year old nephew (son of a deceased younger

brother) who has Down's Syndrome. Magda lives in a modest two bedroom house, a half block from her parents with whom she maintains an enduring although cooly aloof relationship. Everyone, including herself, in her house is without work. The only consistent income is derived from her sister's 'disability check' which amounts to approximately $40.00 a month. The family lives in fear of losing this benefit now that the post-revolutionary UNO government is threatening to cut back or eliminate all social security benefits. Magda and the other adult members participate in the informal economy by buying used clothes and cheap durable goods from Honduras and selling them in the locally thriving black market[14]

Magda is a "historic combatant", a rather prestigious title in Nicaragua, which refers to Sandinista combatants that fought during the insurrection against Somoza before the 1979 Triumph. She met her ex-husband during the insurrection and they married in 1981. Her parents were extremely angry with her, not only for taking up arms and going to the mountains, but because of her relationship with a man and having his child out of wedlock. But Magda is a woman of strong character and she talks often about her commitment to the revolution. As she likes to say, when she sets her mind to something, she does it no matter what.

Six years ago, her sister, also a Sandinista who worked

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[14] In Matagalpa, those who travel to Honduras to trade and buy goods to be resold in-country are called "Cholteguitas". This refers to the border town of Cholutega, Honduras which is the primary site for "black marketeers".

for the government as an agronomist, was seriously injured in an ambush of 'Contra' forces which left her permanently physically disabled. She has a bullet and shrapnel lodged in her spine and her mobility is somewhat physically impaired and on a deteriorative course. Her poor prognosis suggests that it is simply a matter of time before she becomes paralysed from the waist down. Because of domestic disputes with her parents and the closeness of her relationship with her sister, Magda became her primary care giver. Initially Magda traveled daily to the military hospital where her sister convalesced and after discharge, she brought her sister and her children to her own home.

Magda quit her job as a secretary in a small coffee business to care for her sister. This led to a steady deteoriation in her marriage. Her ex-husband complained that Magda cared more for her sister than her own family, and later as he began to abuse alcohol, he began to physically threaten Magda, her sister, and their children. There were numerous tense dramatic domestic confrontations, which eventually lead Magda to mobilize police and other legal authorities to intervene and finally remove her husband from the house. Because of a "new divorce law" that was passed during the Sandinista administration, she was able to unilaterally divorce her husband. This created a scandal among her her parents and some friends and neighbors. Here are some highlights from her account:

SELECTED VERBATIM EXCERPTS FROM FIELDNOTES:

...I would say I've been 'bien jodida' (fucked up) since my sister fell victim. I left my work to be with her. My own mother didn't much care, her character is very hard, cold...

...I was always the strong one in the family, even stronger than my brothers. I took the initiative to make things work and was not scared to take risks because I believed in the revolution....

...I believed in all the talk about the 'New Man' and the 'New Woman' and the 'New Society' and I knew if everyone struggled enough a better life for everyone would materialize. I didn't worry about the future, because if we struggled hard enough now, the future was secure...

...But my sister's ambush changed everything for me. I know that now. I thought I could take care of it all, but now I see that I was not thinking clearly. Although me and my brothers and sisters are close, we are always fighting about money or how to raise the children. My sister also gets very depressed and can be horrible to the kids. She is not in a lot of pain, but sometimes her body falls asleep and she can't move and I have to rub her to get her blood moving again...

...Sometimes it is hard to be the only one taking care of her. In taking care of her I not only lost a husband, which I don't mind, but my mother. She always sided with him and supported him even when he drank too much or was abusive to the kids. She always said 'he's the father of your children', and she never took my side. She was always pushing that I had my own family to take care of first, but she didn't even take care of her own daughter. When I finally got rid of him (her husband), she (her mother) became more distant...

...When I divorced, I felt very strange. I was relieved to be rid of that man. He was harsh and I felt betrayed because I really believed we would have an equal relationship. I thought he would be the 'New Man', but he was no revolutionary, he was like all men, 'muy macho' and egotistical. He was bad to the children and I think he was jealous of them and my sister. He was a fool...

...Now that he is gone, I have some girlfriends that come over. They are like sisters and we talk and cook. But all of them are either without men or about to kick the 'hijos de puta' (bastards) out...

...But now I feel a real loss. Not for him (her ex -husband), but for my feelings about men in general. Since the elections (the 1990 electorial defeat of the Sandinistas and the rise of Dona Violeta Chamorro, who promised among other things a Reaganesque 'Save the Traditional Family' campaign), I see how many of the gains we struggled for are in jeopardy and how all these conservative men have returned to power and I wonder where all the 'New Men' are. Many of these 'New Men' (Sandinista revolutionaires) have forgotten that the revolution is not just about political power, but responsibility. And responsibility begins in the home...

...I have to yell at my brothers just to get them to pick up their plates and I worry that my sons will grow up to be 'sin verguenzas' (literally, 'without shame' or shameless men) as well. The father of my sister's kids sometimes comes around to bring goodies to the kids, but he won't even spend a minute with my sister...

...I have a hard time accepting other men, even those I am attracted to. I have fears about their intentions. I guess besides our bad economic situation, I feel worse about feeling lonely and that makes me feel horrible. My sister and my girlfriends all feel the same way and although we laugh about those 'cabron' (foolish men), we wish there were some real good men around...

The turning point in Magda's account is the wounding of her sister. Magda left her job, sacrificed her marriage, and became more distant from her parents. These situations along with the 1990 electoral defeat of the Sandinistas and her growing sense of loneliness suggest stress that goes beyond the determinant impact of the war in Magda's life. More on this later.

3. JOSE ALEJANDRO

Jose Alejandro is a short soft-spoken 37 year old campesino (peasant) who lives on his own nine manzanas (14.58 acres) of land where he cultivates beans, corn, yucca, bananas, and sugar cane. By land-tenure standards his plot of land is small and he grows only enough for family consumption. Jose Alejandro is married and has four children, a fourteen year old daughter, and three younger sons. His plot of land is outside the municipio of 'La Dahlia' some 40 kilometers north-east of Matagalpa, an area in the heart of the former war zone. Currently it is the site of continuing political conflict and violence. Jose Alejandro was given the land outright in March 1990, when the Sandinistas accelerated their agrarian reform land distribution program before leaving office in April 1990. However the land he received is of poor quality. Although he says that he is grateful to have his own land, he says it "is full of roots and weeds that don't give space to the plants". He expects it will take only a couple growing cycles before his land proves productive.

Jose Alejandro considers himself 'tranquilo' (calm, tranquil) but, aflijido (afflicted, worried). His use of the term, afflicted refers to a relative constant obsessional state of worry that sometimes leaves him incapacitated. The source of his afflcition is social and comes from without. He gets nervous because he can't stop worrying about the same

things that go on and on in his head: his poor land, his wife's illness and his family's poverty. He worries also about himself and is concerned that should something terrible happen to him like getting sick or being killed, what would happen to his family. Before and after the revolution he stayed out of trouble and did not get involved in politics. He lived with his parents in another rural municipio after he married. However all of them were forced to move to Matagalpa in 1985 when the war began to threaten even their remote valley.

Jose Alejandro worked as an agricultor (a farmer) on land he rented from MIDNIRA (the defunct Ministry of Agrarian Reform) and was able to produce a small surplus of beans to sell to the State. Also he worked as a migrant laborer during coffee and cotton harvest. He was not pressed into the Sandinista military because he was the only son of his elderly parents.

Currently he feels some danger around his land. The rural zone where his land is located is checkerboarded by Sandinista and ex-Contra land owners and dwellers. His farm is near a former hacienda, now a Sandinista cooperative "La Esperanza" which remains in the hands of Sandinista agricultural workers. The ex-hacienda owner has employed ex-Contras to menance the cooperative in hope they will return the land. The situation is tense, everyone is armed, and for Jose Alejandro it is just a matter of time before full scale violence flares again. Although he has not received any threats, he has had armed Re-

Contra groups cross his land. Jose Alejandro fears that they will think that he is a Sandinista because he received land from them. He denies any political affliation and labels himself a "Christian Catholic", nothing more.

SELECTED VERBATIM EXCERPTS FROM FIELDNOTES:

...Everyone is bad off and the economy is hurting everyone. I feel algo perdido (a bit lost) and insecure for the future. The only hope is if there are 'recursos' (resources) from the government...

...My biggest problem is not being able to get bank credit. And I know I have no chance of getting it. No one gets it, the banks don't work like before..(before the 1990 elections)...

...The war changed everything. It made everyone more isolated, more distrustful....

[In referring to the time prior to his family exodus from the countryside in the mid-80's, he recalls]

...I had friends and we would help one another, but now I don't know where they are. I have some friends now, but they are in the same situation I am in and everyone is for themselves...

[His parents were unable to return to their natal land because it is occupied by ex-Contra militia and their families.]

...I feel very alone. When my family went to Matagalpa my wife fell sick and she had an operation on her throat and her womb which left her weakened..

[He talked about how his wife suffers from nervios, susto[15], and insomnia and how his eldest daughter helps his wife. He speaks of his children with great affection].

...I work alone in the fields because I want my sons to go to school. They help carry the water which is a big job [because as you can see] the nearest water is 200

[15] Susto and Nervios are discussed later in this chapter.

meters from the house...

> ...I get nervous because we never have enough to eat. My wife and children don't complain but I know they are hungry and I am always worried. When I get nervous I smoke a lot and drink a lot of coffee. I sleep poorly and every night I have the same nightmare of climbing a high tree and falling from the top. It always wakes me up.
>
> ...Sometimes I buy '<u>diazapan</u>' (valium) when I have the money, and although it sometimes helps, I get angry at myself for spending money we do not have...
>
> ...For me I don't know the future. I want to believe somehow we will get resources someday or credit to make my land more productive...But there are people like me and I think some of them aren't going to take it anymore and there will be another war.

Here impoverishment, social isolation, and family illness mingle with personal and family security threatened by the resumption of violence. The war forced Jose Alejandro and family to Matagalpa in the mid-eighties and it was a period of time when he became estranged from his rural natal home and social network, and his wife became ill and debilitated. Although now he has his own land, the continuing poverty and lack of security and hope for the future leaves him afflicted, nervous and uncertain.

4. PLURAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF STRESS: A SOCIO-CULTURAL READING

These three brief accounts are all specific constructions of distress. Each were outpatients of the only public health mental health clinic in the department of Matagalpa. Each offer a different interpretation of the lived experience of

war. Even with this common theme the specific way war influenced each of my informants' lives resulted in varied interpretations of Nicaraguan history, different relationships to the State as well as to their family and social relations, resulting in variable personal and social consequences. In all three cases a series of life events (violence, losses, separations, threats, re-aligned family constellations and social networks), tested the limits of social support and personal coping strategies, and forced each to re-negotiate their thoughts about themselves and others. I will briefly focus on a few of these issues and some factors in each of these accounts which may be more fruitfully investigated from a socio-cultural rather than a biomedical or psychiatric perspective.

Dona Cristina's narrative is a chronicle of losses (personal and material), conflict (familial, social, ideological and political) and instability (social, economic and emotional). The source of her depression stems from the radical changes the revolution precipitated in her way of life. From a school teacher and family matriarch, to a somewhat ineffectual peacekeeper in her family, to an ailing, aggrieved and emotionally isolated woman. Her role as mother, whether as a guiding force for her children or as a stable provider was undermined during the revolution, exacerbated by the Contra war, and left exhausted in the post-revolutionary period. Her core values were not carried on by her children

and in fact were tacitly at odds with them. Her capacity to maintain the family whole and stable was beyond her control as she resorted to ineffectual means. And in keeping with general Nicaraguan cultural expectations that a mother is the glue and keeper of the family, she was held responsible by her husband for having "failed" the family, when in fact she was doing the best she could under extremely perilous conditions. Her nostalgia for the time of Somoza (whom she thinks is not as bad as he has been portrayed) and her anti-Sandinista, orthodox conservative Catholicism polarized her from her children even when she asserted that she was apolitical. Nor does her Catholicism provide her with the solace she needs for the losses she has endured.

Polarization by exacerbating differing social values and diversified group interest undermines the basis for daily interaction (Martin-Baro 1990). In her attempt to reconcile this polarization, Dona Cristina resorted to the 'lie'. The lie has occurred when she hides her own opinions, when she lied to the National Guard, whenever she holds her tongue from her son-in-law. In hope of creating an imaginary world of harmony, the lie and polarization, as Ignacio Martin-Baro (the murdered Salvadoran Jesuit and noted social psychologist) suggested are among the first impacts of war in altering and shaping social relations.

Rather than judging Dona Cristina's resort to the 'lie' as a moral failing or psychological defect, it is a direct

response to acclerated social and cultural change wrought by revolution and war. Dona Cristina's claim of being apolitical and keeping the peace by diverting political discussions in the family are symptomatic of the social and cultural changes in which she has been enveloped. Because the family frayed and the traditional family authority structure was challenged, she found herself in many ways the scapegoat, an unspoken charge that she had unfortunately internalized. Her diversionary tactics and the repression of her own political beliefs reflect Freud's reasoning (1963) for massive depression as an outcome of having to lie and deceive, behaviors that attend the everyday life of civilians at home during war. Dona Cristina found herself in a paradox where by lying to herself and others in the hope of keeping peace she fed into a central function of war which Scarry (1985) suggests requires the open license of secrets, fictions and lies in order to perpetuate the fiction of peace and diminish or eliminate the constancy of war.

In the case of Magda, her idealism and hope engendered by her commitment participation in the revolution was dashed by a succession of events (her sister's wounding, Magda's divorce, the Sandinista electoral defeat) that left in their wake loneliness and suspicion of men. The application of a Life Events inventory or a Social Support Survey instrument would not necessarily illuminate deep issues that drive and are central to Magda. For instance, her concern for the

interrelationships between gender, political activism, ideology, and revolution are central to her. One example: Her talk about identity, the 'new men, new women, and new society' is not idiosyncratic. This is a common concern among women and men who were highly politicized and steeped in the revolution. Among women particularly, "political action motivated by female consciousness confronted a system of external domination and in doing so led to a confrontation with and ultimately a questioning of internal forms of domination" (Peteet 1991: 73). The cultural continuity of "machismo" tempered Sandinista ideology and often resulted in men who were public revolutionaries yet private chauvinists (Lancaster 1992). Although Magda has established a female social network with whom she feels good, it still does not replace her ambivalent desires for male companionship. But her revolutionary idealism and empowered self identity, her struggle to maintain her family and care for her sister, both offset the crushing defeat of unrealized dreams while maintaining high levels of expectation or standards that may never be realized.

Again this single factor, identity, is but another element in her construction of stress that links ideology and history with social and gender relations. A constructionist perspective allows for a deeper social and cultural reading of her stress account. It does more than merely confirm the

obvious of someone at risk of demoralization or nervios because of a high score on a life event inventory.

Lastly, Jose Alejandro's account reads as one who has been vanquished by war. Collier's rich description of Andalusian socialists who won and lost in the Second Republic and suffered during and after the Spanish Civil War presents a close parallel. Collier says that most of the villagers "...were shocked by the war and were eager to put these events behind them, but the vanquished could not. Rather the vanquished experienced the war and its aftermath as a stigmatized underclass in an enforced servitude" (1987:164). There is no way to read Jose Alejandro's story but through the vision of a war victim. Yet although the war precipitated and exacerbated Jose Alejandro's negative life experiences, the war and Jose Alejandro's experiences are part of larger historical and societal process that in fact has relegated him to be one of the vanquished.

In this sense, there have been no winners in Nicaragua. The life of Jose Alejandro is that of one caught up in the winds of revolution for he was one of the chosen, regardless of whether he wanted to be or not. By virtue of being a poor campesino he was lifted out of his natal valley by war and revolution and now, grounded on a new plot of land, he remains a vulnerable subject to the winds of history.

5. WHY DISTRESS?

There are several ways to analyze distress which is consonant with two major approaches in critical medical anthropology: (1) A phenomenological and humanistic approach, (2) a political-economic materialist emphasis that studies the interrelationship between socio-political formation, economic strategies, and socio-medical indices (Morgan 1985, 1987).

5A. THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF DISTRESS

A phenomenology of distress requires that it first of all be visible or socially acknowledged. On the streets of Matagalpa, to the immediate eye, viewing people in their daily routines, there is often few overt behaviors or activities that immediately suggest consternation, despair, or anger. In addition to these sentiments, other affects or expressed emotions, for example anxiety or moodiness, that can be generally associated with distress, are also not usually readily displayed or discernable in public. A phenomenology that focuses on the in-between (Schutz 1975), the relationship between one and others, is useful in trying to describe the intersubjective dialectic between external social forces and personal experience. For distress, the most apparent or visible behaviors range from actively delusional individuals to mass demonstrations. Short of these it becomes more difficult to readily identify distress, without having in-

depth familiarity with those persons who are distressed or a familarity with the immediate influence of the particular cultural shaping of emotion. Without familarity with individuals or the culture it becomes exceedingly difficult to correctly "diagnose" distress. In part, this may be due to the very popular ideas a society holds about how distress ought to be regarded, displayed, and socially communicated. For instance, emotions considered distressful are often expressed according to social expectations that when overtly displayed, that it be exhibited as a recognizable disagreeable affect or feeling state.

Through work I engaged in during the late eighties, I became familiar with the problems faced by Salvadoran and Guatemalan undocumented refugees in the United States when they were officially permitted to air their political asylum cases (Quesada 1988). During these court cases, it was usually common for refugees appealing for political asylum to testify on their own behalf. Testimonios (testimonies) consisted of conveying personal data that recounted past traumatic events. Here, the performances of the refugees, who testified became problematic for United States judges. Often the testimonies detailing horrible personal experiences were judged to be unconvincing because they were as dispassionate or distant accounts so as to make them incredulous, if not outright fabrications. The testimonies of victims who did not display overt public behaviors of grief or mourning, pain or anger

(thought to be properly displayed by acts of crying, righteous indignation, revenge fantasies, etc.), that in fact conveyed strong control of emotions were suspect. The blunting or flattening of affect accompanied by a monotone retelling and few other expressed emotions were met with skepticism by the legal system. If those who had been terrorized or traumatized remained stoned faced and did not adequately convey emotion according to standards considered appropriate in the United States they were then thought to be lying or exaggerating. The North American cultural expectation (although it is not the same across class, gender and ethnicity) that strong emotions ought be displayed, expressed, "emoted", is neither consistent with other expectations in other cultures nor consistent with the expression of emotions by individuals who have been severely psychologically or physically traumatized.

The difficulty of "seeing" distress is in good measure the consequence of how cultures shape its expression, sanction its display, and provide meaning (Littlewood & Lipsedge 1989: 258-259; Lutz & White 1982). The emotional state of distress as "embodied thoughts" (Rosaldo 1984: 193) is a medium by which people talk about those situations that are "linked to particular emotions which are linked to particular actions" (Lutz 1989: 102). The body which is already united to the world and constituted with a consciousness forms a complex whole, a "contexture" (Zaner 1981: 107). This "contexture" furthermore is imbued with an intentionality or directedness

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(Merleau-Ponty 1962: 106, 137). The lived-body as both an intimate "me" and an object for others (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 194-195), when distressed, like in illness episodes, becomes "other" to the self and the intimate link between being and body is to some extent fractured (Pellegrino & Thomasma 1981: 73-74). And it goes beyond a self acknowledgement of a fracturing, but also produces a new condition of being that extends to relationships which include other people, events, structures and processes (Rawlinson 1983). Hence Dona Cristina's mistrust of others or Magda's lost idealism and acute sense of loneliness significantly touches their personal and social life. Both were mental health outpatients who were in therapy for clinical depression. Their socially produced and personally experienced distress does not affect them solely in an isolated private manner, but glaringly influences their social relations as well.

In distress, as in illness, the lived-body becomes the primary medium expressing concerns of the self: "well-being" self to "sick" self; self to others; self to the world. The expressive actions of the body (i.e.; this being-for-others [Sartre 1966: 461]; habitus [Bourdieu 1977: 72]; the language of the organs [Scheper-Hughes & Lock 1987: 31]) evince the range of human concerns from subjective desires that are individually harbored to the host of social limitations that are confronted in daily life. This range of human concerns are expressed not so much as the external manifestations of an

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"inward impression, but an attunement between oneself and the world" (Stein 1970: 222). The notion of "attunement" by Stein refers to an expression that is intersubjective and which not only refers to one's relations to others and the world, but also an expression that "affects another person or the world in general" (ibid). The lived-body expresses and communicates to others. And when distressed the lived-body experiences limit-situations (Gallager 1986: 148; Jaspers 1963: 88) as in strict gender relations, duties and obligations to family and clan, everyday role expectations, that are not only individually felt, but entail disturbances with others and the world. The "normally" accepted or everyday facticity of limit-situations that all human beings endure prior to becoming distressed when caught up in an emotional experience of distress, requires a reconsideration and renegotiation of one's limit-situations.

The crucial point in emphasizing the embodied expressions of distress, is to convey that emotions are an ongoing and persistent integral flow of human experience which are both "consequences and determinants of interactions, implicated in all human activity" (Clark 1994: 302). Secondly, that emotions are inextricably bound to social bonds (ibid). As such, while it is difficult to perhaps "see" distress, it nevertheless ought be understood as usually implicating (or, generally felt, experienced, shared, produced, induced) more than just the individual who is experiencing it. Hence, those modes of

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"embodied distress" that get displayed lend themselves to being multiply interpreted, often according to the social class and culture of those who are distressed. For instance, in Scheper-Hughes (1992) discussion of _nervos_, she notes the differences in how body praxis and expressions differ according to "one's position and role in the technical and productive order" (ibid: 185). Among the working and popular classes who engage in basic subsistence practices from physical labor, somatic thinking and practices are common. This is distinct from the bourgeoisie and technical classes who tend to express distress psychologically rather than physically or somatically so that "the language of the body is silenced and denied" (ibid). In such a context, the expression of _nervos_ is besides a subjective state, a political statement of social status, limit-situations, cultural worth and regard (Low 1981; Lock 1989). A question that arise from differential modes of expressing or displaying distress, regardless of whether it is conscious or unconscious, is whether distress is mental illness.

Mirowsky and Ross (1989) suggest that while severe distress (see their criteria for severe distress, p.174-176) is often correlated with psychiatric disorders, it is more consistently associated with social factors like environmental stress that precipitates distress and psychological problems:

> "..Distress is conceptually distinct from a number of her mental problems that are sometimes collectively called

'mental illness'. The term distress does not refer to personality disorder such as antisocial or paranoid,thought problems resulting from old age or drug abuse, extreme mood swings,alcoholism, or hallucinations and delusions, although distress may be associated with all of these. Also, there is a wide range of distress, but only the more extreme levels would be considered mental illness...."

If distress is not mental illness, why bother to study it? There are several reasons. The most important is that misery is still miserable, even if it is a normal response to a stressful situation rather than a symptom of a disease. Distress has social costs, some of which are obvious...some [of which] are less obvious.. [Finally] the maps of high and low zones [of distress] reveal a great deal about the nature of life in different social circumstances (Mirowsky & Ross 1989:23-24)..".

Yet, too often distress that is publically displayed and readily visible becomes regarded as aberrant, deviant, or indicative of an underlying psychiatric disturbance (Gilman 1985). Furthermore, not only do the distressed individuals become labelled, stigmaticized, or otherwise marked as ill or diseased, but so do whole societies (Edgerton 1992: 129). Hence the problem of "seeing" or "recognizing" distress,

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particularly in terms of its multiple significations remains problematic.

There is a long history of trying to measure distress in social settings particularly as it relates to psychological or psychiatric disorders (A.Leighton 1959; A.Leighton et al 1963; Naroll 1959; Langer & Michael 1963; Bateson et al 1963; Henry 1963; Hughes et al 1960; D.Leighton et al 1963; Srole et al 1962; Myers et al 1975; Brown & Harris 1978; Kessler & Clery 1980; Eaton & Kessler 1981; Frerichs et al 1981; Dohrenwend et al 1980). However, it may prove more fruitful to consider distress as on a continuum from happy and fullfilled at the well-being end, to depressed and anxious at the distress end. Ultimately neither well-being nor distress are absolute qualities, as they are respective to one or another measure of less distress or well-being (Mirowsky & Ross 1989). Therefore it is important to understand distress, particularly as it is culturally shaped and manifested, as indicative of other states and meanings.

In many societies, the interpretation and manifestations of distress are different. Yet, even ideas of causation which may be anchored in beliefs about microbes or supernatural beings, involve as well social and moral understandings, values, and practices. For instance, in Latin America a common disease syndrome[16] <u>susto</u> (sometimes refered to as <u>perdida de</u>

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[16] In medical anthropological literature such geographical defined and culturally bound illness/disease complexs are generally referred to as "Culture Bound Syndromes".

la somba, pasmo, espanto) is based on a belief in soul loss. The precipitant is usually fright produced by accidents or sudden encounters, and the signs include loss of appetite, listlessness, apathy, restlessness, etc.. Rubel et al (1984) found that there were generally two salient characteristics associated with susto: (1) it occurs when one perceives some situation as stressful, and (2) it results from difficulties in social relations. Nor is this manifestation of distress particular to Latin America. Good and Good (1984) described distress Iranians experienced as emotional upset often associated with malaise, edginess, and quickness to anger. The fright illness and distress are often found in tandem with general social and personal pressures or by specific configurations of stress (Good & Good 1984: 150-151). Similarly, the Ndembu attribute illness to ghost even though they realize illness results from personal failures to fulfill social obligations or from social conflict (Turner 1967). These descriptions are certainly in line with Kleinman (1977:4) who asserts that cross-cultural psychiatric research ought be based on "detailed local phenomenological descriptions".

The variety of ways distress is expressed in any given culture (Nichter 1981: 379), often includes a means to contest or critique the very social conditions that produce it. For instance, Zapotec women suffering from susto are able to withdraw from everyday obligations and relationships (Uzzell

1974) which classically has been considered as a resort to the "sick role" (ibid). However, responses to the conditions that produce distress do not always necessarily require that the afflicted become "sick". In fact the host of conditions that can potentially give rise to distress, such as poverty, produce particular orientations as to how to confront these tangible realities (Ramirez 1983: 54-55) that are not considered sick or pathological.

Among the Toraja the overt expression of anger is strongly disvalued. However, this does not prevent them from engaging in frequent references to suffering which allow people to talk about hardships, social relations, and troubles (Hollan & Wellenkamp 1994). This mode of talking about suffering, is not unlike the "rhetoric of complaint" (Gaines & Farmer 1986) that allows certain Mediterranean peoples to talk about "the micropolitics of social life...[and] a social life of problems or mundane developments which try one's patience" (ibid: 305). Hence the rhetoric or talk of suffering, misfortune, indeed distress, allows people to express their concerns within cultural parameters.

On the other hand, such talk or rhetoric, concomitant with attendant social practices and modes of being are not always so circumscribed as to prevent the more open expression of dissent, anger and resistance. Scheper-Hughes (1979) has shown how ridicule, blaming, and fears of interpersonal intimacy reflect the socio-cultural conditions of strained

gender relationships, rigid family structures, punitive religious beliefs, late marriages, contradictory role expectations, etc., in rural Ireland. In Latin America, suspiciousness and indeed paranoia that constrains inter-ethnic relations and disrupted community relations that are popularly attributed to beliefs in the "evil eye" (Kearny 1976), can lead to accusations, conflict, and violence. On the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, numerous cases of the culture-bound syndrome of "Grisi-Siknis" (Dennis 1978; Bourgois personal communication 1994) although popularly attributed to devil possession, appear to be clear instances of primarily young women acting out their dissent and resistance to patriarchical norms and societal expectations for early marriages.

What makes their behavior particularly provocative is the fact that under possession, women are able to "act out" hostile and aggressive acts against men in the form of wielding machetes and broken bottles, sometimes with violent results. This is not unlike African women who contest male dominance by ridiculing men and being able to successfully gain concessions from them while they are under possession (Harris 1957). This was not unlike the cases where colonial subjects who under possession ridiculed the colonizers. This also occurs during carnivals and fiestas when, for instance, the street play of the Gueguence and Macho Raton in Nicaragua during the colonial period which were able to get away with

criticism that might have been censored or repressed otherwise. This was a satire and parody on prevalent relations of power and authority that safely expressed popular disdain and resistance to the status quo (Cuadra 1966; Hernandez 1986; Brinton 1833; Arellano 1984).

However, one need not restrict oneself to reviewing psychocultural or medical anthropological literature in such areas as culture-bound syndromes or emic definitions of "abnormality" to glean insight in the various ways distress is produced, manifested and responded to. One can also turn to the literature on resistance regarding subtle modes of social behavior which can be interpreted as slothful, irresponsible, or subintelligent. These may include like footdragging, feigning illness, or getting lost (Scott 1986; Colburn 1999; Ong 1984). Such behaviors symbolically express the distress people feel about their situation or circumstances short of overt resistance that can leave them open to retribution by those more powerful. Rather than openly voice anger or resentment, tacit non-compliance or "acts of refusal" (Scheper-Hughes 1991: 63) under the guise of bodily illness, general excuses, feigned ignorance, etc., only begin to suggest the myraid and complicated ways distress gets manifested.

I found in my fieldwork that clearly discernable, overt expressions of distress were by and large uncommon, unless one chooses to interpret all acts of gruffness, unfriendliness,

suspiciousness, brusque behavior, even general stress reactions like anxiousness or depressed mood, and other difficult interpersonal behaviors as indicative of distress. The time I spent in the mental health clinic at "Trinidad Guevara"[17], made it relatively clear that many presenting problems were manifest forms of personal and social stress. While ethnographic fieldwork outside the clinic brought to my attention life experiences that could easily be characterized as stressful, as difficult or harsh as these conditions were, they did not necessarily incline individuals toward behavior that could be easily judged (or determined) to be distressful. Although attention to affective behavior was key in either being aware of, or confirming my interpretations of distress, it was largely through living in the approximate circumstances in which others lived[18], as well as in-depth interviews, naturalistic observations, casual talk, and through outright

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[17] The Hospital "Trinidad Guevara" was the main public health hospital, pharmacy, and clinic for the city and department of Matagalpa. In addition to "Trinidad Guevara" there was on the northern border of the city the primary in-patient hospital which consisted of under twenty-five beds and provided secondary and tertiary health care. Except for a few small primary health care clinics and posts located in various "barrios" (city districts), which were meager facilities at best, often used as sites for periodic appointments by rotating physicians and nurses -often in locales that had been bereft in the past of any acccessible "cosmopolitan medicine" (Leslie 1976)- and used primarily as screening clinics and portals into the health care system, the two hospitals were the primary sites for general medical and dental attention for the department of Matagalpa.

[18] Being male, genetically Nica, although "con dolares", I was not exactly the prototypic "gringo". I had come to Matagalpa at a time of general emigration of expatriate Nicaraguans to the country. Yet, I became distinguished from this return migration as it became known that I spent a portion of my time "working" in the principal mental health clinic in the city. My wife, Nadine who was born in Egypt and raised in Lebanon, speaks several languages and involved herself in local public health activities, also did not look gringa. As people came to know us, I became known as the "Nica-Gringo" and Nadine as an "Arabe". In certain ways I was able to more easily pass as a native or a international health worker, rather than as a rich Nicaraguan returnee (the most popularly disdained returnees were often refered to as "Miami boys") or as a foreigner.

exclamations that I came to witness and understand the pervasive lived-experience of distress.

The particular subjective states of distress -exempting those I directly encountered in the clinic- were by and large accessible intersubjectively. And regardless of the degree to which distress became overtly displayed, readily identified, or generally socially understood, it nevertheless was primarily revealed through bodily practices (O'Neill 1985: 67-68). Whether these bodily practices are somatic complaints or a sense of ill ease, suspiciousness and distrust of others, barely concealed disdain or studied avoidance of others, these and other social clues are suggestive of a disturbance that affects the self as a social being (Bolough 1981: 189). Such social clues localized in the body are sometimes articulated in bodily practices, modes, postures, expressions. Just as they are embodied, these clues are enacted and therefore potentially perceived and refracted in fertile ways. Of interest is not so much how the experience of distress understood as embodied and intersubjective becomes amplified and broadened, as how its disclosure becomes accessible. Whether one suffers from a chronic headache, a hard day at work, exhaustion, worry, fear, or anger, these subjective states indicate distress which in turn indicates the material social worlds through which one navigates.

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5B. THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF LIVING UNDER CONDITIONS OF IMPOSED SCARCITY

On the eve of the third of March 1991, a Sunday, economic shock therapy commenced[19]. The circus was in town and although little Karim, my son was ill he was not sick enough to miss the circus. This night though, was the night. Tonight, literally overnight, a total devaluation and conversion to the newly introduced and minted currency, the new "Cordoba Oro"[20] would take place. The dollar exchange rate on the street was running at around C$25 million to one U.S. dollar (that's right, C$25,000,000 to $1!) at around 4 o'clock in the afternoon would reach over forty million to one before midnight. As astronomical as this rate was, it was only the culmination of something that had been growing for sometime. It was like a snowball, a benign (or not so benign) tumor. I was in the uneasy, but highly advantageous position of picking and choosing how and when I wanted to convert five or ten dollars to Nicaraguan currency.

I am interested in conveying in this section the extreme volatility and consequent instability that the scramble for money produces. I was reminded of images of Germans earlier in this century pushing wheelbarrels of money to purchase bread

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[19] March 3, 1991 was the day of a major devaluation of the Nicaraguan currency, as well as the introduction of a new denomination.

[20] The new Cordoba Oro was introduced as part of the entering Chamorro executive administrative effort to effect economic adjustments in line with the stipulations set forth by international lending institutions. The new official rate was to now be, C$5 (Five Cordoba Oro) to $1 (One U.S. Dollar).

and milk. The obsession with money, which included the everyday tactical manuvers people engaged in to ensure keeping one step ahead of having ones limited monetary resources evaporated by market forces or State policies, in effect produced a habit of need. A habit of need refers to those unselfconscious daily behaviors, like eating and sleeping, that become part of ones everyday routine and are assumed to be "natural". During my fieldwork, I became extremely aware of how nearly everyone I met (in fact I cannot think of an exception) was engaged in some sort of financial activity that amounted to safeguarding what little monetary resources they had. Rather than present several ethnographic examples, I will present my experience as a particular illustration as to the hows and whys people engaged in the sort of 'money games' people employed. Certainly my case is unique in that I was wealthy by Nicaraguan standards, however the following description ought to give some idea of how no one was fully immune to fluctuations in economy.

The circus was lively and colorful that night. It had been set up just northeast of the soccer fields, near the worker's hotel on the road leading north to Jinotega. There was no entrance fee and the grounds were open to everyone. However the festive mood and the din of action did not hide the equally apparent dismal and squalid milieu. The elephants had knee wounds and the camels were scraggily, the grounds were muddy in spots, and the gleaming lights painted the area

with a neon surreality that confounded the senses. Around ticket booths and food concession stands, there were always raggedy barefoot children asking for money, food, and tickets for rides. The fair on the eve of national economic shock therapy was a bargain for us, but for virtually everyone else it was a boondoggle. The Mexican circus people seemed put out since they clearly were not going to make money. The vendors seemed to arbitrarily conjure up prices for corn on the cob or cotton candy, and like moths attracted to light, it felt like the longer one stayed at the circus the more burnt one got. No one knew how extreme the devaluations would be or how to cover themselves, particularly when Nicaraguans had experienced numerous such economic measures over the years (see, Martinez-Cuenca 1992).

Yet the occasion of the circus seemed an apt backdrop to the national social financial engineering project that was to affect everyone. However, I must admit that the whole sad affair was entirely in my favor since the primary "black" market of street money traders or cambistas was in selling dollars. I was in the envious position of not having to purchase greenbacks that the cambista [21] brazenly fanned in flashy wads on the street and along the main park. I was able to pick and choose the best time and cambistas to change small

[21] In actuality, the cambistas were, and are, popularly refered to as "coyotes". It is clearly a derogatory term, which many who actually engage in the "illegal" money exchange trade reject. Rather they tend to refer to themselves as cambistas, hence the term I use here on out.

denominations of dollars into chancera [22] for immediate cash purposes. Everyone wanted U.S. dollars, greenbacks of all sizes, as their stock reserve. it was the tacit currency of choice. Major purchases like airplane tickets or large household commodites were often sold only in U.S. dollars. A hedge aganist the constant erosion of real value of the cordoba, people resorted to religiously buying dollars at prevailing street rates of exchange. Nicaraguan coins had disappeared long ago and change from purchases that included decimal points was often returned in the form of candy. Whether one bought dollars (or in my case, cordobas) in the banks at official rates or held on to their cordobas for any appreciable amount of time (a week or more) meant that one would be holding cash in homegrown Nicaraguan money that was an invitation to being pickpocketed with one's full consent.

Furthermore, being the resident gringo, living in the best house in the barrio, I was always being asked by family, friends, neighbors, strangers, to change dollars at any rate I deemed appropriate. My denials or diversions never deterred anyone from trying to become my trusted money lender. In fact, at times it felt as if I was engaged in ritual gift exchanges, affirming fictive kin ties and social solidarity.

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[22] Chancera, loosely translated is "pig feed" or "shit", and was the popular term Nicaraguans used to refer to their money. Previous to the 1979 revolution, the money of Nicaragua, the cordoba had been stablizied at seven to one U.S. dollar exchange rate since st least the late sixties. As the war economy became more and more entrenched in Nicaragua especially after 1985, the inflation rate of the basic goods and the cordoba grew dramatically. The term Chancera is a term of derision and disdain, often used in jokes or popular sayings that equated it to toilet paper, garbage, worthless pieces of paper.

Early afternoons on the streets near the muncipal market stalls next to the Bank of America were the best times, particularly Tuesdays through Fridays, to exchange money. I got over ethical qualms when I realized that there was no noble way out of avoiding trading in the streets. Although I was not forced to trade in the streets, because of the overall unstable economic situation, like everyone else in Nicaragua I learned to cover myself in whatever creative way seemed appropriate. I turned to the cambistas especially after numerous difficulties exchanging dollars to cordobas [23] in the Matagalpan banks. Often forays into the banks consumed whole mornings or afternoons entailing waits in long lines, arguments over the amounts that could be exchanged at time, and the ridiculous protocols which I suspect consisted of on-the- spot improvisations of procedure. Indeed after a few months I began to act like a privileged client and confidently let myself into the clerical office space and make my presence known to the gerente (manager or chief) who would have someone else go through the laborious protocol of gathering the "required" signatures, official stamps, and numerous receipts, not to mention "approvals" for transfer of real United States dollars to my person. I became really popular. After awhile the process of watching my check wander from desk to desk, followed by apppropriate nods and affirmations to finally approval for exchanging the check to

[23] The official rate following the 3 March 1991, economic shock therapy was C$5.00 to $1.00.

small denominations of U.S. dollars often left me frustrated, agitated, even sometimes angered--and this from someone who with dollars lived, by Matagalpan, indeed by Nicaraguan standards, quite well. I found a couple of cambistas with whom I developed relationships. Out of research interest and financial necessity, I came to rely on them to let me know about some of the financial issues and concerns that they encountered. Although the cambistas had U.S. dollars to fall back on, most of their money was in cordobas which left them extremely vulnerable to loosing great sums if they didn't convert their stock to dollars as well.

For that matter, throughout my stay in Matagalpa pre- and post-economic shock therapy, although uncertain how new economic measures would effect them, everyone was sure it would not be to their benefit. I was privy to the great deal of confusion and preoccupation experienced by many in Matagalpa. It was around this time that I became inundated with personal requests at my home gate by neighbors, many of whom I'd never met before, who came to my house specifically appealing for me to exchange their cordobas for my dollars.

On the Sunday before the devaluation and shock therapy, although this day of the week was usually lazy with few businesses or shops open for odd hours, almost everything - excepting the cambistas concentrated on the southeastern corner of the main plaza- had come to a standstill. This had been coming on for a few days and by Sunday merchants and

stores felt paralysed. No one was sure of prices anymore. Stores closed early or hadn't opened at all. Even the buying public was wary, yet there were necessities people needed to purchase. When I went to buy beer, soda, bread and eggs from our neighborhood family pulperia (little grocery store), the woman who ran the store said she couldn't sell anything until she knew what the price of the goods would be after the annouced devaluations. I convinced her to give me the food and drink on condition that I pay the prevailing rate when I returned, to which she agreed.

Everyone was in a wait-and-see mode. Skepticism and distrust reigned. Even in the bright lights of the circus, it was hard for many to imagine that devaluations would finally come to an end and that inflation might be controlled. The economic measures or shock therpy entailed huge devaluations, the phasing out of the chancera by the end of April, the promise to circulate sufficient quantities of oro for use by everyone. The Cordoba Oro, became the currency of the day, set at the official exchange rate of C$5 to $1).

This latter measure was especially snorted at, since the oro had been rumored to have been in circulation since the turn of the year, and yet because of its conspicuous absence in the market was deservely popularly refered to as el oro invisible (the invisible gold). The few people who received salary checks in oro were only able to cash them in chancera, with the banks always explaining they didn't they hadn't

received enough oro to distribute. However this did not stop people from talking about who actually got paid in oro and who did not. And this constituted another instance of not only the relative advantages of having money in the form of oro over chancera, but more importantly signaled who had the best connections and who received preferential treatment from the banks.

The first day following the conversion there were snake lines of people at the bank and the "alcaldia" (muncipal building and mayor's office). This was a common sight at the beginning of each month and the lines were mainly made up of people who were receipients of state financial aid. Missing were vendors and cambistas who usually worked the lines. Newspaper boys were walking around with bundles of paper they couldn't sell. I found Don Jose, an old jack-of-all-trades I relied on for help around my house, sitting at home. He said that he was reluctant to go to work. Don Jose works as a carpenter, plumber, locksmith, (you name it), and because he was unsure of prices for products and services on which he relied on, he couldn't provide accurate estimates of his work.

In my neighborhood, bread that had cost C$200,000 per bun, was being sold overnight at C$750,000 per piece. Gas stations were closed, as were some stores and markets. To add to the confusion, that Monday, the 4th of March, was the first day of the school year. Parents complained about newly implemented mandatory educational fees that stipulated that

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all parents had to pay C$5.00 oro per pupil per month. Such a fee was quite steep for not only people who were not employed, but those who made a little over 1 U.S. dollar a day, which included most working Matagalpinos. More importantly the fact that most people had from three to five school age children in school at any single time meant that the fee was a real financial hardship. The fact that there was little or no "oro" circulating, in addition to the exorbitant expense of schools (which entailed besides the fees, uniforms and book rentals), many parents began to bemoan the fact that schools were no longer free[24].

Overnight, people who had not heeded the warnings by converting their "chancera" to "oro" or "dolares", found themselves with worthless money. Although not everyone had radios or televisions, talk had been circulating for weeks about the coming economic changes. Yet many Nicas had become inured to talk about change, whether economic, political, social, religious, fantastic, or otherwise. The evening following shock therapy I saw on television the image of Dona Violeta burning shovel-fulls of chancera. In this ritual of rejection, I saw a cavalier act that symbolized the class distinctions between those who have money and think they know how to manage it, and those who don't have any surplus to

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[24] The Minister of Education Belli's position on the imposition and later retraction of the mandatory education fee he tried to decree, as part of a large package of "reforms" which included mandatory bible studies, no sex education, and use of U.S. written Spanished translated elementary textbooks was while partially rescinded, had by 1994 largely adopted.

speak of and are considered clueless as to how to make money, let alone manage what little they have.

These observations reminded me of my first few days in the country when I came the year before. I was at Plaza Espana (a shopping center) in Managua, less than a week after I had returned to Nicaragua after a three year abnsence. I was heading towards an air-conditioned supermarket and must have been walking with my head down. All of a sudden I saw little pieces of green paper, confetti-like floating to the ground. I realized these were torn bits of <u>cordobas</u>. I immediately stooped down to retrieve the pieces and yelled out to the three people immediately ahead of me from whom I was sure these bits of fallen money came. They stopped suddenly and turned around. An attractive older woman flanked by her two towering well-dressed sons, scowled at me with a look that asked, "why are you waisting our time?" Immediately I realized that they not only had deliberately torn up the money and thrown it disdainfully to the ground, but could not care less about my feeble attempt to "save" their money. I merely responded by saying, "O, perdone, es nada, lo siento"!! ("Oh excuse me, its nothing, sorry"). Ah, such humility.

I had noted from then on, from time to time, similar acts of public play that used money as a way of protesting prevailing economic conditions, from the actual collection of torn pieces of cordobas to little things people would say about money. Often I heard people telling others that they

were "palmado"[25] ("totally broke"), or hear such sayings as "el muerto al hoyo, y el vivo al bollo"[26] . Although this saying supposedly talks about how Nicas refer to Death in general by laughing at it, and especially the dearly departed, I had a different reading. The Nica that first explained this to me over a few cold beers was very earnest in making sure I understood what it meant. There is something about humoring the incessant questions coming from an eager beaver anthropologist on a dusty, smoky day in the middle of dry season that gets one very thirsty and to the point. As we drank our Victorias, the best Nicaraguan beer hands down[27], with salt, Alex explained that this is how Nicaraguans really felt about death which for him was obviously a form of humor that blocked the fears they have of death. But that is another matter, one I will take up in Section 3 (III. ETHOS OF SUFFERING) when we turn our attention to a particular worldview or ethos Nicaraguans share that helps place all these tangential sentiments in some mysterious order.

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[25] Palmado, is slang for "totally without money", or as North Americans say, "totally broke". Sometimes "palmado" can also be used to convey feeling bored.

[26] "El muerto al hoyo, y el vivo al bollo", literally translates as "the dead to the hole, and live ones get the bread, or the vagina, or the money". Translations of "bollo", as well as its actual spelling is not uniform. "Bollo" is often slang for "bread" (food), or "vagina" or as one of my informants who knew some english referred to it, "pussy"(genitalia), So while the dead goes to the hole in the ground, the live ones get food or sex. Now another association is "money", and I will use the other spelling which is "boyo". For instance, another way of asking for money in Nicaraguan slang is "dame un boyo para comprar pan" ("give me some money to buy bread"). It is this latter translation that I discuss above.

[27] The only other Nicaraguan produced beer is the less popular "Tona", which I have heard referred to as "bull's piss".

I had another take on, "el muerto al hoyo, y el vivo al bollo". Another Nica told me that I got it all wrong and that in fact it was rather than "...y el vivo al bollo", it actually was "...al boyo". "Boyo" is slang for money. So, rather than "the dead to the hole, and the live one [either gets food or sex]", it is,"...and the live one gets the money". Money, food, sex, death, a hole in the ground, life goes on. While this saying may seem highly irreverent toward the dead, it seems to me to encode just as important mortal concerns that directly address life preoccupations just short of death. The lack of which can perhaps even lead to death. Yet it is also easy to see how some may interpret this as a "valeverga" way to be. "Valeverga" refers to a general attitude toward life commonly heard around in the street, in cantinas, bus stops, and is similar to the way North Americans say, "to give a shit", "to hell with it", "up yours", etc.[28]. Before the advent of the March 3rd shock therapy another common expression regarding money was "se ganan en chancero y pagan en oro" ("we get paid in 'pig feed' and have to pay out in gold"). The imbalance between salaries and cost of living, as well as the barren value of money were conscious facts that

[28] "Vale verga", is a very common, if not an extremely vulgar at least strong Nicaraguan slang expression of disdain, rejection, scorn, derision, etc.. "Verga" itself has multiple referents from a "spar buoy" or "jig boom" used for mooring sails and is a vertical stump or protrusion which leads to the other popular meaning, a penis. To say, "voy a vergiar" means both "I'm going to hit you [with a stick or instrument]", or "I'm going to fuck you bad [rape or one-sided carnal sex]". To say something or somebody is "da a verga", is to say they are marvelous, great, or like an engorged penis. "Verga" is clearly a vulgar expression of exaggeration, whether of emotion, attitude, or status.

were inescapable to virtually all Nicaraguans. Which brings to mind another common Nicaraguan saying, "una vida no se paga con nada", or "you can't live without paying". These common everyday expressions and sentiments reflect common everyday concerns and preoccupations. What is important to recognize is how these sayings, jokes, expressions, all are recurrent themes that deal with money, death, power, and commonly shared life ordeals. This is not unlike other people who in their own daily discourses and idiosyncratic ways convey persistent themes, concerns, or preoccupations (Brandes 1980; Basso 1979) that are generally shared and mutually felt. After all, that is what makes popular cultural expressions so interesting.

Section III: ETHOS OF SUFFERING

CHAPTER 7: POLARIZATION AND SUFFERING

It would be foolhardy to place all the current instabilities and hardships Nicaraguans face today singularly as the result of the pro-insurgency strategy of "Low Intensity Warfare" (Klare 1988). However there are injuries and wounds the covert war was designed to incur that remain open and unhealed. The military insurgency, economic stable and propaganda warfare, did succeed in lowering morale, disrupting the economy, damaging infrastructure, and undermining effective government. But perhaps more poignant, with effects that shape contemporary social relations, is the fact that this was a total war. A war that "meant a conscious campaign of violence against any symbol of the Sandinista revolution...rural health-care facilities, doctors, schools, educators, agricultural cooperatives, agronomists" (Kornbluh 1988:141-142). It was largely an indiscriminate war that freely targeted civilians. And even if one had not directly experienced the immediate effects of violence, one could not remain immune to the reverberating effects of this war that were felt throughout society. This 'total war' in effect victimized everyone regardless of political allegiance.

Hence, the war and its aftermath appear to be the primary cause of the lingering fields of resentment and mistrust, hostilities and uncertainties that animate Nicaragua today. Yet, these emotional and social outcomes, particularly when they become violently manifested, transcend political and

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social contingency and reach another level. They become "tokens of humanity"[1], that make human appeals and demands that derive from having suffered a claim to an acknowledged status of being. A contest of multiple claims of suffering and having suffered underlies the sharp divisions and factions that characterize Nicaragua.

Everyone, it seems, has a story of suffering or sacrifice. Such stories are not merely statements or litanies of insults, losses, exile, injustice, injury, domination and repression. They are in addition, claims of worthiness and value, claims that sometimes demand some mode of redress. Claims of suffering are incorporated into larger cultural discourses of embodied resistance and if necessary, commitment to continued struggle. Yet, this does not ensure a resolution of suffering. In fact, it appears that fractures, fissures, dislocations, separations, with more insult and more injury becomes the common ground of collective suffering. The war and its aftermath exacerbate these processes. And as a Nicaraguan architect pointed out to me, eight fault lines converge under Managua virtually guaranteeing another catastrophic earthquake someday, so also, the fact that all have suffered the effects of war and polarization guarantees that fractures and fissures will persist in tearing and rending the social body of

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[1] I am taking off from Kristeva's analysis of fear as a "token of humanity" or more pointedly "an appeal to love"(1982:142). Fear derived from the abjection one experiences during war is demarked in a boundary-subjectivity that is articulated in a crying-out theme of suffering-horror. Here one is left with only telling, with no explicit hope of resolution.

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Nicaragua for the foreseeable future. The most apparent manifestation of this process is the degree of polarization in Nicaraguan society.

Polarization is easily traced at a macro-national level, where political realignments following the 1990 Presidential elections resulted in decompositions of anti-_Sandinista_ and Sandinista coalitions along class, ideological, and strategic lines (Vickers 1993). However, the everyday fact of polarization, in all its varied manifestations, have spawned a popular consciousness of woundedness, resentment, and wariness. An argument can be made that polarization has been one of the most constant features in Nicaraguan history, regardless of its various modes and expressions. Whether political, social, inter-ethnic, class, or regional, polarization is a primary enduring dynamic. Nor is it simply reduced to binary oppositions such as found between political parties or branches of the government. In fact, such polar oppositions, which are certainly current features of the contemporary socio-political landscape, do not exhaust the permutations of fractures and resentments, rancor and doubt that multiply under conditions of polarization.

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1. POLARIZED SOCIAL RELATIONS IN WASLALA AND MATAGALPA

In a place like Waslala, the dividing lines between people follow not only vertical ideological splits, such as between Sandinistas and anti-Sandinistas, or horizontal class lines, such as between have and have-nots, but a whole combination of opposing forces. Here these splits and factions are extremely visible and palpable, whereas elsewhere such polarization is perhaps less perceptible. This, of course does not mean that it is any less charged and potentially explosive. A hospital setting, like a church or a library, is often popularly associated with being a sanctuary, a place of refuge. However, under conditions of charged polarization, even such spaces are not immune to violence.

Six months before Dr. Martin Condega[2] was brutally tortured and killed by a re-Contra band, he summarized several days of discussion on the problems of health care delivery in and around the municipio of Waslala by saying, "We have the will, but we don't have the resources". Now what is one to make of this pat statement, especially if one can only interpret it out of context, with no prior knowledge of the

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[2] Dr. Martin Condega, was the medical director of the rural hospital "Fidel Ventura" in Waslala, department of Matagalpa. He was instrumental in allowing me to conduct research among the hospital staff and I came to respect his commitment to universal health care. He was tortured, mutilated, and killed by re-Contra forces in January 1992. The re-Contras were purportedly engaged in a kidnap attempt of the only female physician on the grounds of the hospital when Dr.Condega interceded. He was taken some 500 yards from the hospital barracks and brutally maimed and dismembered. Fortunately, the female physician escaped. His brutal death made national and international news, and even prompted outcries by the conservative UNO members of the National Assembly.

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region, or the local function of this small, remote, three physician rural hospital and its relationship with outlying communities, or its articulation with the Ministry of Health (MINSA).

In and around Waslala, the hospital had a variegated reputation. Situated in a corner of northeastern Matagalpa, low on the eastern slopes of the central highlands that level out onto the immense tropics of the Atlantic coast, Waslala is a small town-municipio of nearly five thousand town residents. It is also an Organization of American States' Verification Commission (OEA CIAV) "Development Pole" since a large segment of ex-Contras have settled in the municipio and are eligible for national and international assistance in establishing a home and a livelihood. To many ex-Contras, the hospital stood as a bastion of Sandinismo[3], that had openly discriminated and deliberately withheld care and treatment to all anti-Sandinistas. The regional head of the OEA CIAV mission responsible for assisting demobilized Contras, openly condemned the regional hospital as an inept institution that did not care and which lacked the initiative and creativity to engage in more extensive medical outreach and interventions; especially to ex-Contras. To the pastor of the Asamblia de

[3] It was not until the Sandinista revolution that Nicaragua began to construct a comprehensive urban and rural health care system that was free and accessible to all people. Contra propaganda considered the establishment of health care posts, clinics and hospitals as part of a larger Sandinista strategy to ensnare the populace into their socialist program. For that reason, rural health facilities, like rural public school facilities and other public work projects, became prime targets (Garfield & Williams 1989; Donahue 1986) during the "Contra war".

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Dios church, the hospital was ill administered because it was managed and directed by young, inexperienced and unsophisticated doctor-bureaucrats. Even the Catholic Church, a consistent supporter of the hospital and staff, nevertheless openly condemned the hospital for being poorly run, and indeed perhaps even negligent given the upsurge of mortality among infants and children under the age of a year and a half.

Hospital staff explanations included concern with a resurgent measles epidemic and concern that parents tended to bring their sick children after they had gone past the point of curing, but these fell on deaf ears. The hospital held frequent community meetings, in and out of the hospital, explaining the severe shortcomings they had to contend with, ranging from lack of medicines and personnel to curtailment of MINSA gas allocations, and their call for greater community participation in primary health campaigns, had little or no public effect. Dr. Condega's pat summary about "will, but no resources", must have sounded to some as a worn excuse by a shiftless administrator, or a Sandinista partisan serving those he preferred while hiding behind the national economic crisis, or as a young thirty-three year old doctor and father of two who had "cried wolf" too many times and was in over his head in administrating a rural hospital.

Regardless of the legitimate claims and counterclaims of poor health care, Dr. Condega was killed in large part because he personified all the negativity and ill will that the

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hospital had symbolically accrued. For people who had suffered, whether as a past victim of war, a parent of a recently deceased infant, an outpatient who felt slighted and insulted because he was certain his unfilled drug prescription was an anti-Contra conspiracy, the hospital symbolized all that was wrong, past and present. The culmination of this permutation of charged sentiment, each revolving around a narrative of suffering, did not engender tolerance, but action. Lethal action!

In Waslala, many former Contras are vociferous in their animosity, disdain and total distrust for anything or anybody related to Sandinismo. Yet it would be a mistake to homogenize all ex-Contras living in Waslala. There are rival cliques of ex-Contras, whose displays of suspiciousness are visible in the open exchange of harsh glances and accusatory gestures. It is common to witness outbreaks of arguments and fights, especially at night in the cantinas. Once I participated in an outdoor assembly at the CIAV post where at least two hundred ex-Contras were in attendance. They were for the most part impoverished campesinos, many of whom had arrived by foot or horseback miles and hours from remote homesteads and hamlets. Some arrived expecting that this rare meeting with Managua based ex-Contra commandantes would bring news of forthcoming government credit, land titles, distribution of seeds, machetes, zinc for roofs; others thought there would be news of the Bermudez assasination, the status of the newly forming

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ex-Contra political party, an update on demobilized Contra-State negotiations. It did not help that the ex-Contra commanders swept into town in a convoy of new airconditioned jeeps, or that they tended to cluster among themselves while some underlings served them coffee and tacos while nothing was served to the rest. I heard murmurs such as, "This is just like the war, when they sat away from us and told us to do all the shit work while they never got their hands dirty", or "They still think we are their army and that we will snap to attention". These sentiments escalated into outright anger, when the assembly was told that the reason they were asked to assemble was for them to inform the local CIAV office of comrades who were severely disabled and therefore eligible for free medical care at the newly refurbished hospital for ex-Contras at la Trinidad near Esteli[4]. Murmurs escalated into shouts, as ex-Contras began demanding to know about their credit loans, or unfulfilled promises of wood and zinc. The assembly devolved into an unruly crowd as the men rose to their feet and pressed in on the ex-Commandantes and CIAV

[4] There is a particularly irony to this development, since the hospital in "La Trinidad" had been partially destroyed in a Contra attack in 1985. At the time it was a relatively newly-built civilian hospital and it was purposely targeted by the Contras as part of a larger campaign of terror. In that attack, the facility was damaged and trashed, health care workers were kidnapped, medicines stolen, and vital medical equipment deliberately destroyed. The attack on "la Trinidad" was at the time a shock to the country since it occurred so deep in the interior of the country and along a vital highway, which at the time indicated the relative strength of the Contra forces to attack facilities at will considered relatively safe. Also it became a symbol of the ruthlessness of the Contra and their disregard for distinguishing between military and civilian targets. At the assembly I talked to an ex-Contra who noted with mild amusement how he had participated in that attack and now he could send some buddies there. The attack on "la Trinidad" was even reported in the United States press as a "bold assault" that suggested that the Contras were stronger than they actually were (Newell 1985: 48).

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officials and it was a wonder it did not deteriorate into violence.

In Matagalpa also, beneath a facade of subdued everydayness, there are sharp and ragged divisions that draw lines between workers and employers, renters and owners, men and women. Sometimes the undercurrent of tension and animosities become staged as in pro-UNO/anti-'concertacion'[5] rallies that demand immediate return of confiscated properties, or with the occupation of State buildings by public sector employee unions. At other times, it is spontaneous, as when there is a surge of anger and loud accusations that fall upon fellow workers when they begin an otherwise peaceful discussion on how to improve work conditions. These public displays of strained polarized social relations frame a more prevalent and pervasive discord, that while less immediately apparent, are quite insidious, destabilizing, and insoluble.

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[5] The national concertacion process refers to the talks initiated by the national government to bring together the various political and social parties and organizations in an attempt to foster consensus. Depending on the publically stated objectives, negotiating process and final decision-making, it was not uncommon to have various parties to the negotiations boycott the process in order to modify the negotiating process. Among the most incalcitrant were far right elements (e.g., COSEP and several UNO mayors) who advocated suspension or non-participation in the concertacion talks because they did not want to lend their credibility to a process they suspected was designed to undermine their positions. In Matagalpa, the leaders of the anti-concertacion process tended to be large land owners who wanted no State limitations on how much land they could recover.

2. THE VICIOUS CIRCLE OF POLARIZATION AND SUFFERING

The fact of polarization, in all its varied manifestations, has spawned a popular consciousness of woundedness, resentment, and wariness. A rise of existential frustration and feelings of impotence and isolation (Martin-Baro 1991) are only a few of the more dire consequences that have resulted from the aftermath of war, structural adjustment, and the persistence of polarization. On the other hand, Nicaraguans are generally not a people that easily succumb to malaise and silent suffering. Suffering, is often confused with fatalism, which not only asserts that one's lot in life is pre-destined, unchangeable, "God's will", but resignation over hope, and passivity over resistance are preferable to the consequent narrowing of life options (Martin-Baro 1993; Banfield 1967). However, the suffering of Nicaraguans is often not simply an acceptance of personal loss, but often a movement toward incorporating one's loss into a collective cultural body, whether that be in one's personal narrative or actual participation in a social movement, wherein suffering is made meaningful. However, when suffering is used to mobilize, it often takes the form of polarized actions that often perpetuates more suffering. In Nicaragua when suffering is made meaningful through action, it is often enclosed in a circle of social aggravation, like a dog eating its tail. In part this has to do with the totality

that suffering can easily engender.

Suffering as the experience of disvalued and unwanted subjective states, engulfs one's life. Regardless of whether suffering is senseless and without purpose, cultures profoundly shape how suffering is defined and acted out. The stories of suffering are social in that they are about oneself and others, the core of which are moral, about who suffers and who has caused it. The claims that issue from it are social, which at minimum require explanation. Yet not all suffering issues overt claims, not all suffering summons help or attention, nor is all suffering similarly valued. Society engages in valuing and trading in suffering and sacrifices "by virtue of the simple fact that we choose one act, one victim or one moral story in preference to another" (Amato 1990:20). Even when a socio-political causal ontology of suffering can be established that locates losses, defeat, and social injustices (Schweder 1991) in a legacy of power and violence, war and economic deprivations that engulf everyone, there remains a contest of who has suffered more.

This is the legacy of U.S. waged "low intensity warfare". A primary objective was not so much to physically eliminate the 'enemy', but psychologically conquer them. The systematic use of violence and the capacity to place extreme duress on people and social organizations were efficient in preventing a consolidation of the Sandinista revolution. That, in addition to the fact that no one really won the war,

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regardless of claims to the contrary, meant that violence and deliberate social disruption succeeded in impeding the establishment of a particular social and political order. However, it did not contribute to the establishment of an alternative order, and, instead, the violence and social disruption that 'low intensity warfare' unleashed became reinforced as instruments and rationales which succeeded by their very proliferation.

The legacy of these means, especially as they are reproduced and easily resorted to, are fueled by the social polarization that perpetuates and aggravates individual and collective suffering. Proinsurgency strategy required a construction of the "great enemy" (Martin-Baro 1991:340) in order to ideologically justify the use of violence and social disruption. The "great enemy": Sandinista totalitarianism and Soviet-Cuban expansionism, was actually painted with a rather wide brush whereby whole populations were characterized as 'other' and made to suffer. In Nicaragua, the image and construction of the enemy, a characteristic phenomena of socio-political polarization, in Nicaragua produced in effect a total war, where all social sectors and all aspects of social life were incorporated into a Manichean world of "with US" or "against US". As a consequence, there remains an extreme social and political polarization which perpetuates individual and collective suffering, the end of which is anyone's guess.

3. SNAPSHOTS OF PERVADING WOUNDEDNESS

As I have stated before, Nicaragua today is peopled by wounded souls. A sense of injury pervades. Yet it is not so readily apparent beneath the more visible displays of macho posturing, seeming resignation, electric abandon, quick wit and temper. It is only over time that the memories of personal losses and unjust deeds are pricked and become the touchstone, the basis for individuals and collectivities to speak about their present conditions and current stance.

It is perhaps not appropriate to subject everyone to the same brush stroke. Yet that is exactly what I want to do. This is for the simple reason that nearly everyone is making the same claim, or set of claims, that amounts to a contest of who has suffered more. Certainly not everyone talks about suffering in the same way. Nor is there a common recourse to use the term "suffering" as a way of describing one's plight and series of insults one has endured. But in the end the summary conclusion that is supposed to be drawn from the cacophony of complaints, indictments, and resentments is the unmistakable claim that one has been wronged and is entitled to compensation. The imposition of the category of "suffering" on all these claims, may at first glance appear to be a rather trite and ultimately a disabling way of presenting such discordant life stories. However the use of the idea of suffering is necessary since it ultimately refers to how the very people themselves tell their stories, justify their

claims, and hold fast to their intransigent positions.

Yet there are innumerable problems with evoking the idea of suffering as the basis upon which to read, if not judge and proportion the stories of each individual and collective. It seems if not impossible, downright obscene to even attempt the construction of a standard, a measure of suffering. It is by definition "meaningless" (Levinas 1986; Scheper-Hughes 1992) and it seems that generalized attempts to imbue suffering with meaning evoke serious questions about ethics and representation. Yet how else can one refer to what I can only call a 'shared sensibility' of not only having been personally wronged but of 'paying a price' for such transgressions. This national or collective sensibility transcends issues of personal accountability or socio-political affiliations since it truly appears to be a sentiment everyone shares to some degree regardless of the specificity of their story. The current climate of political instability, mounting unrest, and rampant violence only highlight the most glaring manifestations of this shared sense of suffering. Furthermore, the fact that in life people do imbue their suffering with meaning --regardless of how they live it, feel it, or speak about it-- demands some sort of social acknowledgement that becomes tested in its actual depiction and description. One enters a minefield of near impossibility in adequately proportioning and measuring who has suffered more, to the other erroneous extreme of considering all suffering the same

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and merely a question of relativity. Hence I will bypass the ultimately necessary issue of gauging whose suffering is qualitatively "more" than anothers, and simply provide a few snapshots of suffering with the aim of depicting its pervasiveness which has the effect of elevating the stakes of how one ultimately measures and proportions individual and social suffering.

4. SYMBOLISM OF SUFFERING

In Matagalpa, the FSLN had an interesting, if not powerful, way of foregrounding the symbolism of suffering in public ceremonies and events. May Day is around the world celebrated as Workers' Day, a day of recognition of the working class, of laborers of all types. It is also an occasion for organizations, political parties, social movements, and Nation-States to commemorate not only the laboring class, but make some deliberate mindful acknowledgement of the hard conditions of work, the difficult situation of the laboring classes, and the sacrifices and precarious state many live in a political-economic world typified by artificial scarcities, fickle international market trends and minimal private/public support systems to fall back on.

On the May Day I happened to be present and follow closely, I was sensitized to a detail of the march by a field-

assistant. He had mentioned how every May Day parade since the triumph of the revolution had been headed and begun by a group or organization that embodied a message and established a theme. The morning of May Day I awoke to the boom of a cannon and the wafting of far away Mariachi music that often seemed to commemorate holidays regardless of their particular secular or religious significance. I rushed to get out to the gathering place where all those organizations, groups, and individuals were to collect and begin the march. The meeting place was at the entrance to Matagalpa on the road to Managua, at the fork where the road divides into an entrance into the city and a road that skirts the west of the city leading to roads north and west to Jinotega, San Ramon, and La Dahlia.

Since the triumph of the revolution, the heads of FSLN-sponsored marches and processions had been piloted by groups or organizations that symbolized particular values and experiences. In the early years of the revolution, from 1980 to 1983 it was common to have children lead the parades. Scholarships for schools and plaques commemorating dedication and service to the country were made in public displays. Children, food program projects, and the like would be publicly featured and the subjects of speeches about the future, the role of the upcoming generation, and the revolutionary challenges and changes that they faced. As the war intensified and the need for greater national unity and resolve was perceived, the marches were lead by "Historic

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Combatants and Collaborators", people who fought and served the FSLN while it was an insurgent force fighting to topple Somoza, all those who helped the FSLN before the 19th of July, 1979. These groups and individuals represented heroes who had taken personal and social risks without any assurance of victory to serve the revolutionary cause before the triumph. They symbolized the steeliness to withstand, to sacrifice and to persevere in the face of great odds and uncertain outcomes. They symbolized served the message to fight back and hold one's ground. After 1987, the marches and processions were headed by Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs or the Lisiados de Guerra (war disabled). They symbolized the scars that the war had wrought. Their presence was a vivid representation of actual sacrifices people had endured. Their presence was a way of expressing what had been endured and their position at the head of the march, indicated how meaningful their sacrifice was for all people. Each succeeding head of a march or procession over the years symbolized social messages and the dramas of the moment, that represented the concerns and preoccupations of the day as well as the primary issues to be dealt with in the coming year.

On this day, as numerous groups of union members and workers gathered, May Day was less than two months after the beginning of a national economic shock therapy and slightly a few days after the one-year anniversary of Dona Violeta Chamorro's assumption of the national Presidency. The march

began around 10 am. At the head of the approximately 5,000 people were members of the FNT (the National Workers Front, an umbrella organization of numerous national unions). Their presence suggested a reversion back to fundamental worker union militancy. Accompanying the FNT at the head of the march were Mothers of Heros and Martyrs which also symbolized that the social revolutionary sacrifices would not be forgotten. The two groups symbolized past sacrifices and current struggles, which I found interesting in that it depicted in ritualized form a historicized sense of continuing struggle. Here past sacrifices and current struggles converged to represent the current state of everyday suffering people toiled under.

5. SUFFERING CHILD

One day the two sons of an informant of mine came to visit me as they often did on their way to school in the early afternoon. They usually came around shortly after siesta with the excuse of asking for glasses of water, which we always accommodated and usually accompanied by 'gifts' of food or pencils or some such thing.

Their mother had become someone I had recruited as one of my more consistent life history subjects and with whom I devoted considerable time painstakingly taking a more or less

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chronological account of her life history[6]. Her biography interested me because from the porch of my comfortable home (as compared to the majority of Matagalpinos not only in my barrio but throughout Matagalpa), I could see single-room, ramshackle wood and cardboard homes grow from being a part of a small hilltop settlement of eight houses to a full fledged barrio of well over fifty ramshackle homes in the space of three months. I got to know her through a friend who worked at ATC (Association of Agricultural Workers) which she frequented in hope of finding work. I became a visitor to her humble abode. Belia was a rather assertive, loud and quite ebullient individual who was often jocular and quick to laugh, but which this side of her personality with a more somber-grey disposition. She always seemed to teeter on the edge of out-of control hysteria and depression. It would become suddenly manifest in crying spells and an occasionally expressed desire to run away and abandon her husband and children. She often succumbed to horrible headaches and general fatigue and would be unable to get out of bed. She often asked me for aspirin or medicines, when it was apparent to me that what she really needed was an adequate supply of wholesome food.

Belia was an "historic combatant", that is, someone who actually participated in the war of insurrection that led to the defeat of the Dictator Somoza in 1979. She had been a collaborator and later a combatant for the FSLN beginning in

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[6] I introduced Belia and her family earlier in my description of the barrio Linda Vista.

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1976. Her participation in the revolution ultimately alienated her from her parents and siblings and after the triumph of the Sandinistas she became completely independent of her natal family. She married, had two boys, worked on an agricultural collective, eventually became an elementary school teacher and after a messy divorce ended up living modestly in the city of Matagalpa with another man. Her second husband was a _Sandinista_ military officer. They lived in the house of a _confiscado_ (a property owner whose home or land was confiscated during the revolution) and by her account lived well in spite of the war and economic difficulties. Their world literally began to fall apart around the time of the 1990 Nicaraguan presidential elections.

Shortly after the election of UNO and Dona Violeta, she was laid off from her job as a school teacher. In the next two months her husband was discharged from the army as part of a forced military reduction plan, and the old property owner was able to successfully evict them from his house when he won one of the first court rulings allowing former property owners to have their original property returned. This latter outcome was particularly traumatizing because their eviction was one of the first of the forced evictions by police authorities that actually physically forced them out of their home and threw out all of their personal and household belongings. Jobless and homeless, Belia and her family lived with different friends and eventually squatted on the hilltop _barrio_ that was

dubbed Linda Vista (Beautiful View). Her husband took to drink and their relationship became estranged. He took to staying with his mother who lived at the foot of Linda Vista and only occasionally helped her out with money, food or help around the house. She was engaged in a daily, sometimes desperate search for work. I often gave her aspirin and Tylenol when she came by, which she highly coveted to ease the chronic headaches she complained of.

When I met her she received an unemployment check that amounted to C$40 (or US$8.00) a month. However, eventually even this paltry sum was discontinued and she worked spot jobs as a housecleaner, laundress, seamstress-- anything to make ends meet. The house they had built on the hilltop was an improvised dilapidated four-walled cardboard, wood, and plastic structure that was internally divided by plastic sheetings into an adult sleeping area and a general space that was a kitchen, childrens' bedroom and living quarter. The roof was a partially zinc, partially plastic covering that neither kept out the wind nor the rain. My thoughts often went to them on particularly cold and rainy nights and I sometimes arrived at the house with plastic and zinc I had scrounged. They had to dig a ditch around the house to prevent water from coming in and transforming their dirt packed floor to mud. It was in this environment that Cesar, 10, and Sergio, 7, lived. Their jobs during the day were to collect firewood and haul precious water from a communal spigot a half mile from their home.

Cesar was a very responsible young boy and often took the lead in asking for food, water or pencils. He was rather forward and sometimes, I thought, overly aggressive in his general attitude. He had a way of requesting things from me that became more of a demand than a request and I sometimes became irritated with him. He always had his eye out for discards and items that appeared to be in disuse. Once, after changing the oil in my car, he asked me for the empty oil cans and after he carefully cleaned them out, I asked him what he wanted them for, he responded "oh, I can use them for a lot of things. I can keep water in them, I can make flower pots and make our house look nice, or I might ask you", with a wink,"to keep these in your refrigerator so as to make ice". I ended up sharing part of our freezing compartment with Cesar. His younger brother on the other hand, rarely spoke and he followed his brother's lead. He always had a grin on his face, which I came to regard as a mask for disguising what he really felt.

One day, Cesar and Sergio came by my house in the late afternoon after they had finished school and as their usual excuse asked for a glass of water. I offered them a piece of birthday cake which they gladly accepted and, as Cesar accompanied me to the kitchen to get dishes and forks, he mentioned quite matter of factly how he felt like dying. I immediately stopped and turned around and he neither displayed sadness nor alarm. I asked him to repeat what he said and he

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calmly told me that sometimes he feels like dying. I said that was a pretty serious sentiment and asked him why. By this time we were alone in the kitchen and he calmly began to explain that everyone would be better off with him dead:

> ....look at me, I'm all bones anyway, I'm already dying. I'm too small and I've stopped growing and I am another mouth to feed. My mother can't keep taking care of my brother and I, and I can't keep taking care of her. I can't doing anything. So it would be better if I just died since that would help everyone...

His explanation was stated in a calm reasonable fashion, his concerns were legitimate, his thinking relatively clear, and he appeared to have arrived at this conclusion quite logically. I asked him if he had any specific plan for killing himself. He said no but when the time was right, he would find an appropriate way. As one may imagine, I was very distraught yet fought to remain calm. I felt I needed to show some of his same coolness while I figured out a way to convey to him that he was a worthy human being that deserved to live and had much to live for. This latter point was a particularly difficult proposition because I always found myself in a quandary about how I was supposed to talk about hope and the future when so many felt there was little of both.

Cesar began to describe how he regularly rationed his meals. Their daily fare was meager at best. For breakfast they usually had sweetened coffee and tortillas, and the rest of the day usually consisted of gallo pinto (mixed rice and beans) with tortilla, sometimes accompanied with a piece of cuajada (salty dry white cheese). He did not remember the last

time they had beef or chicken although they got to eat eggs maybe once a week or so. Cesar explained how he routinely served himself small portions while generously serving his mother and brother, all along assuring them that he had served equal portions. He explained that sometimes he would hide his food and when his mother would become bedridden, he would take his food to her to eat. Or how he gave his brother a tortilla a day because he thought his younger brother was going to be brother got enough food. He said he was getting physically exhausted from not sleeping so well because he would lay awake trying to think of how to make money, whether it be shoeshining or selling newspapers. He would protect his brother from the leaks from their roof whenever it rained and sometimes he stoically allowed himself to get wet, because he did not want to worry his mother or make her get up and go outside and fix the roof. He engaged in daily sacrifices and improvised rituals to contribute in whatever way he could to keep his family from falling apart. He mentioned how he had thought of running away, but to him that was too cowardly and a betrayal of his mother and brother. So in the end, he thought it was best to die. At this he looked at me squarely and said, "Besides", raising his arm and pinching the skin of his forearm, "I'm already withering away".

Fortunately, part of my fieldwork consisted of working with local mental health professionals and with their help and the help of others I was able to get Cesar and his family some

social work help. Although in the long run I suspect this was more for my sake than theirs because I had already come to understand the shortcomings of the social welfare system. Yet what really became difficult for me was how Cesar's explanation, so matter of fact, so coolly logical, and so honest in terms of his ordeal seemed not to be so outside the realm of daily concerns of most ordinary Matagalpinos. What was so surprising and brought me up short, was the youth of the person expressing such concerns, the straight-forwardness and seeming accurate appraisal of his ordeal, and of course, the extreme conclusion to which he came. Here from the 'mouth of a babe' came an appraisal of life that captured the quality of daily difficulties and its shortcomings. Rare, it seemed to me, to find one so young that could so poignantly articulate the hardships of life.

But perhaps more striking, besides the age and reasoning of Cesar, was his detached modulated mode of expression. This seemed indeed exceptional since my experience with people speaking about suffering and sacrifices, hopelessness and demoralization were either more animated or deadpan. Cesar's talk was matter of fact and not designed to elicit pity or share in wallowing despair. If a difference could be made between this boy's account and those of most adults I recorded, was that the latter consisted of tales and reasoning that often functioned to justify one's plight as the result of someone else's misdeeds or calculations. Whereas with Cesar,

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there was no fingerpointing or blame. Hence in such a context, one could see how he arrived at the conclusion that it was himself who was indeed in the way. Cesar's logical conclusion leads to a justification for his self-annihilation. This is the antithesis of most accounts of suffering I gathered from adults whose accounts often logically led to blame and condemnation of others. Taken cumulatively their accounts contribute to the general climate of polarization in Nicaraguan society.

CHAPTER 8: A CONTEST OF HARDSHIP

I found throughout my fieldwork, as people became familiar with my study and my personal receptivity, how easy it was for people to speak about their daily problems. Moreover, as it became clear publicly that I was engaging people in my study from all walks of life, class status, political orientation, etc., that on its face suggested an openness that did not privilege one's experience over another, I found myself in the precarious situation of listening to accounts that I knew were designed to undermine the stories I had heard of others. It was an interesting, if not uncomfortable, position to be put in.

There were occasion when a contest of sorts, of who suffered more and the limits of sympathy would be tested. This became glaringly apparent, when one day I was hanging around

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the ATC office talking to a number of women union organizers and friends. I knew several of the women quite well and was familiar with their current life situations. Gladis was in hock up to her neck, had no income, three children, been out of work for almost two years, and lived with her mother and brothers just outside of Matagalpa. Her mother was the sole income provider who feed Gladis and her children. Her mother made and sold fresh tortillas. Gladis was in extreme debt to her growingly inpatient brother-in-law who had lent her money to start up a cantina on the outskirts of Matagalpa and was nowhere near ready to open.

As we hung around the entrance of the ATC in the late afternoon, Belia of Linda Vista happened upon the scene. Belia was also out of work and lived with her two sons on the top of a hill that was considered to illegally settled by the UNO mayor and was in constant threat of being bulldozed by the city. Belia was always looking for work and when she began to tell her problems to the assembled group, Gladis hardly let sixty seconds go by until curtly dismissing Belia by telling her to quit complaining, and: "... look, I had a baby in one hand, a baby in the other, one in the oven, and then my husband left me, and I had nowhere to go, and yet I made it. Don't come to me with your problems...at least you have a house..." If one can call the wood, plastic, cardboard shack, Belia and her children and occasional husband a "house". Belia has no job, no income, and perhaps more importantly no social

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support system or reliable social network to fall back on.

By contrast, Gladis living in her mother's house, while being provided a modicum of material, instrumental and, I imagine, emotional support, still does not have a place of her own. Obviously an issue that means so much to her and raises a whole host of concerns about agency and control. More importantly, this dynamic where a lack of empathy for the harsh private life conditions of others is increasingly common generates its own implosion of greater divides between people.

The cumulative effect of this sort of competition for who has suffered more, has been the production of not only a lack of interpersonal and social empathy, but a debilitation in the construction of a national consensus to guide the nation out of the sets of macro-structural and internationally prescribed limitations a nation as Nicaragua is subject to. Rather than a collective understanding and sharing of diffused suffering, a collective competition of suffering has ensued that pits families, neighbors, and social sectors, one against the other. This results are not only in the difficulty of establishing a national consensus in the adoption of State policies that may significantly ameliorate the hardship of daily life, but the continuation of a contest of suffering that minimizes or denies altogether the difficulties and suffering of compatriots.

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1. SUFFERING THE LOSS OF STATUS

I had run into Don Horacio at the oddest times in the most unusual of places. Once I had been at the ATC (Association of Agricultural Workers) union offices where I had been interviewing some workers and union organizers, when Don Horacio had walked in flanked by two big, burly fellows. Given his naivete about the internal disarray of the organization at the time, his rather arrogant request to see the person in charge not only fell on deaf ears but resulted in being told to wait for no one in particular for what could conceivably had been the rest of the day. However, he showed little patience for this Kafkaesque situation and he did not spend much time waiting. He was there, I was told after he left, to demand the return of his mansion which was interestingly enough exactly where we happened to be since it was currently occupied by the ATC. I was told he was a Somocista and had land and homes confiscated for numerous reasons related to past business associations, capital flight, underproduction of his lands, etc..

On another occasion I was interviewing a PSD (Social Democrat Party) official, who had run an unsuccessful mayoral campaign the year before and who was a part-time architect and a full-time bar owner. We were sequestered in the back room of his bar drinking rum and talking politics, when he asked me to wait a minute and excused himself, only to return a few

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minutes later with Don Horacio and his brother. He introduced me to them as an anthropologist conducting interviews and they warily sat down at our table as he continued to motor mouth about what a great interviewer I was, about how I wanted the 'real story' about Nicaragua during the revolution, and how trustworthy I was. Don Horacio maintained a frankly suspicious face and asked me pointedly whether I had any dealings with the ATC. I replied honestly that I did and would continue to because I was interested in the plight of agricultural workers. He launched into an anti-Sandinista diatribe and questioned my political orientation. His brother was less hostile and slightly more conciliatory, but just as suspicious. Nevertheless, I responded to Don Horacio's charges with the explanation that I tried not to exclude anyone from my study and I wanted to be fair and understanding by getting as much information from as many different sources as possible to learn about the recent past and current local situation. After a few less charged exchanges they agreed to be interviewed and left me their address and phone number.

Another couple of weeks went by when I found myself outside the home of a prominent local conservative lawyer who represented a group of big landowners who had their properties confiscated during the revolution. His home had been bombed the night before. I had heard the explosion since it had occurred only a couple blocks from our residence and had startled me awake in the middle of the night. The city was

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abuzz the next morning with rumors, accusations, and speculation. I went by the house with my camera to catch some of the scene. There was a crowd milling about the rather large affluent home. The windows had been blown out, although the explosion had been restricted to the adjacent garage resulting in extensive damage to the family vehicle and a collapsed roof. No one was injured except perhaps for some frayed nerves. As I wandered about taking pictures and listening to the hum of the crowd, I saw Don Horacio coming out of the house of the victim-lawyer and when he espied me, he immediately came over. This time he was very cordial and after an initial exchange of pleasantries and clucking about the unfortunate mishap, he caught me by the elbow and led me aside and in a deliberately conspiratorial manner, hushedly told me this was the doing of the Sandinistas. He motioned for me to accompany him and we ended up walking about town for a half an hour talking about politics. He took me to the ASOCAFE (Association of Coffee Growers) where he introduced me to a few coffee plantation owners as a "Gringo anthropologist" who wanted to get the real story behind the revolution. I do not know when, how or why I had been transformed to a redeemable social scientist from a previously suspected leftist collaborator, but there I was being introduced to a group of very conservative property owners. After these chance encounters, I began to visit him in his spacious, well furnished but rather ordinary home for what turned out to be

a set of routine interviews with him and his brother, which included the administration of standardized Stress and Psycho-Social protocols.

Don Horacio, 43 years old, had left the country shortly after the triumph of the Sandinistas in 1979. He took his wife and children to Miami and thereafter traveled back and forth from Florida to Matagalpa. Although he had considerable land and property confiscated in the early years of the revolution for what he claims were false charges of being a Somoza crony, engaging in de-capitalization (capital flight), and deliberate under-production of his land, he retained what he referred to as, "a little piece of land" between Muy-Muy and Matiguas. It amounted to slightly more than 1,200 manzanas (+2,064 acres) of prized pasture lands for cattle raising. Yet he was interested in getting back other parcels of his land. He was an active member in the "Comite de Confiscados" (Committee of the Confiscated) and was fond of rhetorically asking what those "Sandinista Workers" that occupied his land wanted. He would answer his own question by asserting that he knew that they wanted peace and work. He said that they too were entitled to secure a stable life. But he quickly said that they went about the pursuit of their goals all wrong. That they had been duped and led astray by "communist ideology" and "self-serving Sandinistas". For him, Nicaragua had fallen out of a state of law. "Nicaragua is now outside of current world history [pais fuera de epoca del mundo], out of

step with world progress". For him the solution to Nicaraguan society was:

> To produce, produce, produce. This is a rich country and if we want to compete in the world and give everyone employment we need to return to production. It is only economic production that will fuel us out of this situation. And it is only the producers who can do this. Us, the private sector, have the expertise and knowledge to get this economy going. These workers are uneducated and don't know how to administer the land. Here the problem is the workers themselves. They were happy and well taken care of before but, now they believe that communist garbage that they are able to produce for themselves. Well look at what they have done to my land. They have destroyed it and destroyed themselves and destroyed our country...What do they want.

He often talked passionately about how his father had bought the lands honestly and transformed them to rich, productive lands. He said that his family never had problems with their workers because they received everything they needed. His sense of the revolution is a strong feeling of having been betrayed by ungrateful workers who had harmed him and his family.

It is the injury he feels of having to uproot his immediate family, of having to routinely leave them to come and check on his lands, that he finds personally galling and insulting. His sense of having his lands unjustly confiscated and being betrayed by former workers lays the ground for what for him is the most indignant and damaging of what he has endured -- the breakup of his family that the revolution engendered. He recalls vividly how shortly after the triumph of the revolution on the 19th of July, he was unable to sleep

and kept vigilant for fear that at any time a mob would come and attack his family. He talked about how horrible he felt having to leave behind his widowed mother and younger brother and extended family when he uprooted his immediate family:

> " ... The Sandinistas ruined my family. They broke us up and greedily stole our lands. But what they did was transform our family. We were a strong family that knew what we were doing. What we did was not only for ourselves but for everyone. Everyone that worked for us benefitted. And they destroyed that. They destroyed my family and destroyed this country. And now even though the Sandinistas are out of the Presidency, they still are running this country and destroying the possibility for this country to ever get back up running again ..."

His acute sense of having been injured is not only about having been personally harmed, but socially undermined. His family, his land, his status have all been overturned. He talks about how he never felt satisfied or content, in Miami or Matagalpa. In Miami he always worried about his natal family and the land, and in Matagalpa he worried about his personal safety and whether there was any legal redress to his dilemma. He self-reported feelings of persistent anxiety that were manifested by insomnia and constant worry. He participated in numerous groups: the UNO party, 'Comite de Confiscados', and COSEP [Supreme Council of Private Enterprise], that were made of people who had 'suffered' his same fate and were oriented toward recuperating their land and properties and returning the reign of power to those best able to contribute to progress and economic production. He was not only a foe to the Sandinistas but to Dona Violeta Chamorro who he condemned as being a liberal collaborator with the FSLN.

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Yet, the greatest cause of his personal distress was how much people had changed during the revolutionary period. He constantly lamenting how the revolution had changed Nicaragua forever. That there could be no return. He talked about how workers had changed and no longer wanted to work for a living but simply wanted hand-outs. He had a curious way of lowering his voice after his maid would serve us a cool glass of orange and carrot juice and walk out the room, and say "You never know whose side these people are on".

Don Horacio became so confident of our relationship that he asked me on several occasions to accompany him to one of his confiscated finca (plantation) that had been transformed into a collectiva (collective) and was currently in litigation. The workers were steadfast in their resolve not to return the land to him, regardless of how the courts would rule. He wanted me to help negotiate with the workers because "maybe you can find out what they really want". I was never pinned down (thank goodness) and I moved on to other projects my contact with Don Horacio became more sporadic. Once, after nearly a month of not having visited his home, I dropped by one evening and was met at the door by his brother. His brother told me that Don Horacio was upstairs resting. Apparently he was heavily medicated and had a nervous breakdown ten days before. According to Don Horacio's brother, he had been keyed up and trying to recuperate his house and get back his confiscated lands. He was in a rush to get them

back and begin some construction projects he was anxious to get going. He had become very agitated about money problems and about his family back in the United States. He needed to return to Miami but kept putting it off since he did not want to return until some firm judicial decision had been made on the status of his house and land. Ten days earlier he had gone to church and walked out psychotic. He was staring at lights and continued to mumble mantra-like for God's help. He was taken to a private psychiatrist in Managua and was currently on medication that allowed him to sleep most of the day and night. After hearing this, I asked Don Horacio's brother whether I could still return at some point in the near future just to call on him and his brother seemed genuinely moved by my concern. However when I did return two weeks later, Don Horacio had returned to Miami.

2. ARECHA[7]

One day, an older man and his adult daughter came into the mental health clinic escorting a young man in his early twenties. Although wild-eyed and hyper-vigilant, he seemed somewhat composed and contained as he walked flanked by his father and sister. While his sister guided him to the waiting bench, the father explained to the receptionist and me that his son had not slept in several days and had been

[7] See definition on page 244

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alternatingly crying and striking out at everyone. The night before he had become especially menacing to his wife and child, as well as the rest of his natal family with whom he resided. He threatened to kill everyone and then as suddenly he would break down sobbing. It was clear from his father's description that his son was in the throes of an acute manic-depressive episode. The father answered a few questions that suggested that his son had no previous psychiatric record or history of decompensation. As we continued to query the father, the son abruptly rose to his feet and quickly strode toward a young schizophrenic woman who was pacing the waiting room and pushed her with such force that she fell back and skidded on the floor at least five feet.

This produced an immediate commotion and people cowered back from the young man who flashed a threatening glare at everyone before returning to his original place on the bench next to his sister. Since the other clinicians were with clients, I felt duty-bound to allay the concern of the waiting patients by working with the young man. I had barely begun talking to him when he suddenly jumped at me and although he missed me with his right fist, he landed a nice kick to my left thigh. I retreated telling him to calm down and was able to get out of his way. I immediately went to the hospital laboratory to get Mario, who is an over six foot laboratory technician and got him to accompany me back to the clinic. We came upon the young man about to strike one of the therapists

who had come out of her consultation to see what was the matter. Upon seeing me and Mario, the young man tried to leave the clinic and Mario and I seized him and tried to restrain him. He was tremendously strong for his size and it took the help of another male clinic attendant to finally hold him down and bind his hands and legs with gauze given us by the pharmacy. By now we had become a spectacle, writhing and wrestling in the hallway. After tying him, Mario and I lifted him and carried him to the emergency room where he was injected with a sedative.

The young man's father and sister were clearly distressed and had followed us throughout the ordeal. Once we finally had the young man lying on his stomach on a cot in the emergency room, I proceeded to try and get more precise information. The young man had only three months before been laid off from the military. He had been a member of the EPS (Sandinista Popular Army) and had spent two years fighting in the northern mountains near the Nicaraguan-Honduran border. He was twenty years old and had been in the military since the age of seventeen. Although he had volunteered it was unclear just where his actual political sympathies lay from his father and sister's account. However both family members made a point to say how religious he was and how he had "found God" the year before (sect unknown) and was actively involved in his newly found religion. His father and sister evinced approval of his conversion and seemed to be communicating that he was a "good

boy". Yet, he had become increasingly despondent since being laid off from the military and unable to find work. He was concerned about how he would make a living and raise his child. He became more and more withdrawn and was found awake in the middle of the night mildly sobbing to himself. His father explained: "He is a good boy, he doesn't drink or run around with other women, he helps out whenever he can and he loves his daughter, and I don't understand what brought this out all of a sudden." The young man had only in the last couple days become increasingly restless and menacing. Upon taking leave of the young man and his family in the emergency room, I felt absolutely ineffectual and tainted since I could not bring myself to tell them what I knew-- that there was little the clinic could do for the young man, that there were no medications, no psychiatrists, no social workers, none of the things I had come to associate with what one uses to mobilize aid and assistance. My sense of anger and resignation came not only from past experience but from the shared sense of the futility and utter ineffectualness that most of the clinicians and hospital personnel feel about their situation. I came to understand how many of the clinic practioners arrived at the perception of the clinic as a bare cupboard. The hospital stood for something that could no longer be delivered.

Afterwards Mario, the lab tech and I went out and drank a few beers. We became very animated, if not downright loud

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and obnoxious. I felt this rising anger in me and only after awhile did it dawn upon me that the rage I felt was perhaps when stripped down to its bare emotion little different than what the young man we had earlier subdued must have felt. Mario and I talked about this and he later summed up our talk with how this "goddamn country produces people who are arecha (angered, 'pissed off', in a rage) all the time.

3. NO WAY OUT

After about six months in the field, a cholera epidemic began to sweep throughout Central and South America. The epidemic, although not immediately felt or imminent, produced heightened concern since my wife Nadine and I knew, as others in the health field, that it was just a matter of time before the epidemic would rear its head in Matagalpa. The news of the epidemic happened to coincide with a nationwide epidemic of diarrhea. Concern turned to anxiety as it became increasingly apparent that our young son, Karim was suffering from chronic diarrhea[8]. We took him to a private pediatrician and were instructed to provide him an oral rehydration drink, an anti-parasitic liquid medicine, and as much food as he was willing to consume. For us, although the cost of taking him to a private physician was not exceedingly exorbitant, it was significant enough to raise our eyebrows and wonder how the

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[8] It did not help that we were aware of how diarrhea was perhaps the number one killer of young children in the developing world, and specific to Nicaragua the most common cause of death among infants nationally (Garfield & Williams 1989: 120).

majority of Nicaraguans we knew could afford to take their children to a private-sector physician, not to mention the purchase of necessary medications from a private-sector pharmacy.

After a couple of weeks, anxiety turned into alarm, when it became apparent that Karim was not getting better. By the third week, Karim began to become increasingly listless and weakened, and his body noticeably skinny. We began consulting other private pediatricians after we had enough 'talk' from our original pediatrician, who showed little interest in our son and kept telling us that he was alright and just to keep him on the treatment regimen he had prescribed. My fieldnote for June 2nd, 1991, the beginning of the third week of Karim's illness, is:

> June 2nd
> 1 watery shit/ piss very dark
> 7 tablespoons of <u>savada</u> (an oatmeal drink)
> 3 ounces of <u>suero</u> (oral rehydration mix) with juice
> a little more than 1/2 his medication (.125 mg.)
> 3 forkfuls of spaghetti

As one might well imagined we were beyond being alarmed and getting increasingly desperate.

It was around this time that we began to wonder if it did not make sense to take him to the regional hospital. We were sure he had contracted a parasitic infection. He could have contracted it anywhere, from our favorite local eatery to our home where the water had in the last couple months become coffee-tainted and slightly brown, even after we had boiled it. He was barely a toddler, having learned to walk in

Nicaragua, and it was not inconceivable that he had put something in his mouth when we were not watching. Regardless of how he had contracted diarrhea, we were now reaching a point of alarm. News of the national epidemic of diarrhea and spreading cholera only enhanced our growing desperation. Yet we were not alone.

Locally in our barrio, we had become friends with our neighbors and came to find out that there were numerous children, as well as adults that were suffering from the same ailment. People talked about this as common around this time of year which they blamed largely on aqua mala (bad water) or el mosquitera (the proliferation of flies).

One day early in the third week of Karim's illness, a couple of neighbors of ours, Dona Florida and Paulino began to trade horror stories about diarrhea. Although I am sure their intent was to reassure us, it had the opposite effect. They began to describe in graphic terms horrible cases of diarrhea they had witnessed: parasites in the base of the brain, dry lips and caked blood, system shut down and death moans. Paulino, in particular, had lost a seven month old son the year before, and although the doctors told him they did not know exactly what his son died of, he is now sure that it was parasites. Nadine and I were not sure why they chose to tell us their worst stories--whether as a baseline from which to compare our ordeal or to share their grief and pain from past personal experiences--the effect of their stories turned

Nadine and I into "basket cases", fluctuating in wild mood swings from fear of having fatally harmed our child by bringing to Matagalpa in the first place, to seriously contemplating taking the next jet out of Nicaragua to San Francisco.

The next day, we took Karim to the regional hospital. Nadine and I were familiar with hospitals, or so we thought. Nadine is a registered nurse and I have had clinical experience in hospital settings. I think we were still operating under the assumption that hospitals were sanctuaries. Instead upon entering the emergency ward I knew why people often associated hospitals as places where people go to die. The old regional hospital, were I was conducting my clinical research, the current poli-clinic, was considerably closer and more accessible to Matagalpinos since it was located within city-limits. However it referred all patients requiring acute care or in-patient services to the relatively "new" regional hospital which was on the northern outskirts of Matagalpa. From a distance, the plant facilities appear in good shape and that is about the extent of positive things one can say about it. The regional hospital had clearly seen better days. As remote and ill designed in both distance and setting from the city, so too is the actual physical edifice impractical and difficult to get around.

However, what really disgusted us was the emergency room itself. There was no one at the desk and the waiting room was

full of women with sick babies. There was a "Please Do Not Spit" sign and evidence of disrepair all over the place. There were missing big pane windows and sliding glass doors, a dysfunctional water fountain, broken public seating, and virtually no separation between the outside environment and the waiting room. The lack of a physical separation mitigated against a sterile environment and a visible hygienic problem was immediately apparent. Thousands of flies converged on small puddles of watery baby poop throughout the emergency waiting room which was spread by people walking about.

In the examining room, it was not much better. It was filthy, fly ridden, understaffed, and ugly and we began to become really concerned when we saw babies and toddlers in advanced states of dehydration being tended to by their mothers or fathers as they waited to get a turn on a couple of rehydration I.V. drips. I began to realize that all the talk I had been listening to from health workers regarding the deliberate attempt by the Chamorro administration to eliminate the comprehensive health system that had been established during the revolution by producing artificial shortages, scaling back adequate funding, and appointing administrators whose task were to privatize the hospitals may be closer to the truth after all. For some months I had been tracing the poor morale, low salaries, and general burn out among health workers, many of whom were seriously considering leaving the health field. However in the poli-clinic, there was a palpable

sense of teamwork and purpose among the staff that made up for the lack of resources that plagued the "Trinidad Guevara" poli-clinic. However, looking around the emergency room of the regional hospital, it appeared not only spartan, but downright dysfunctional. It certainly did nothing to produce confidence in the health care system.

As we waited for a doctor, we sat next to a young couple whose less than a year old baby, appeared close to death. The baby girl had an I.V. in its arm and her exhausted parents and a doctor with bags under his eyes spoke quietly as if the baby girl had already died. When we met with our doctor, he assured us that Karim would get better and if we needed extra assurance that we should visit him in his private clinic. We were glad to leave the hospital and indeed, visited the good doctor the next day. Fortunately for us, Karim turned for the better shortly thereafter.

We ended up spending a considerable sum of money for Karim's care over the nearly month long ordeal which only accentuated for us how separated we were from most Nicaraguans. Only after some time had passed, did Nadine and I get in touch with a slight sense of guilt for having taken up a physician's time in the emergency room when we knew of children who were in far worst shape than Karim. On the other hand, it was infuriating to feel so desperate and out of control, to the point of having to take our baby to an

emergency room because the search for adequate acute care was so elusive. When we shared with others the real mortal threat of the demise of a loved one, which I suppose can be seen as an equal leveling field of life and death, in actuality was extremely unequal in the differential capacities of those we met in the emergency room and ourselves to marshall aid and assistance, medicines and attention to care for those we cherish. And although we had become even more sensitized to the precariousness of life in Nicaragua, and in spite of our relative wealth compared to most Nicaraguans, we were not spared the fear that accompanies being out of control.

4. CONCLUSION: NO END IN SIGHT

I have tried to convey how in contemporary Nicaragua, that a complex of polarization, distress, and suffering has produced a general climate of dangerous feelings. The feelings of fear, anxiety, upset, anger, worry, resentment, rage, are only a few of the emotions that lie close to the surface of daily social intercourse and which become manifested in numerous personal and social patterns of behavior. However rather than consider these patterns of behavior as psychological dysfunctions, I have argued that these patterns are socio-cultural constructions which are a dynamic outcome of history, political-economy, and social pressures. I have tried to reveal the actual social relations and processes that

underlie the experience of distress. I have reconstructed a cultural history of polarization as the basis for the rise of an Nicaraguan ethos of suffering from which there occurs a popular understanding or acceptance of a particular order of reality. This reality refers to the recurrent and identifiable patterns of social situations in which Nicaraguans participate, but which also exists apart from them. Although this mode of analysis may appear to some as a playful form of fatalist thinking, that suggests a people lacking in personal resolve or collective will to overcome life challenges; or perhaps more insidiously, a variant of a "culture of poverty" position which places the blame for the difficulties Nicaraguans experience on themselves for socially reproducing the conditions of their own oppression, it is much more than that. The Nicaraguan people have time and time again tried to seize control of their collective fates and purposely engaged in activities to overcome the limit-situations that have been imposed upon them. Unfortunately, my research documents, if not the failure, the miscarriage of mastering their life conditions. Yet, as all things, this present state must be placed in its proper context. And rather than succumb to simple reductionisms or false stereotypes, I have tried to describe the proper context for understanding contemporary Nicaraguan society. By doing so, I hope to contribute to the ongoing Nicaraguan struggle to overcome negative life conditions, as well as impart to others the resilience of a

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people who carry on in spite of the multiple obstacles and limit-situations that they have experienced throughout history and which make them the special people they are.

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