The Political Ecology of the Modern Peasant

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Chapter 1. The Peasant Political Ecology: Politics and Community

1. An argument in favor of the mutually compatible interests of individual and society is also found in the work of well-known anthropologist Ruth Benedict. Although Benedict does not offer a theory of political action, she does write that there is no antagonism between the role of society and the role of the individual. A conviction of such antagonism is one of the most misleading misconceptions of the nineteenth century. Benedict notes the presence of an awareness of interdependence among "primitive" peoples but an absence thereof in modern society. Patterns of Culture (New York: Penguin Books, 1934), 232–35.

2. The same distinction can be made for other theories of decision making. Take, for instance, the rational actor model. The rational actor theory does not maintain that actors consciously think “I am a rational actor. What decision will be most likely to serve my interests from a rational point of view?” Rather, individuals simply think in terms of self-interest and this can be described as the calculation of a rational actor.

3. The word ecology has taken on a variety of connotations associated with the world of nature, only some of which apply here. Yet if we begin with a dictionary definition, the word need not necessarily be confined to the environment or nature. Ecological simply describes the interaction among components within a system.

4. Anna Bramwell defines contemporary ecology similarly. She addresses both the biological aspects of energy flows within a closed system and the normative attentiveness to nonhuman, natural concerns inherent in modern usage of the term. Nonetheless, Bramwell’s definition is still less broad than my own since it does not include interdependence between individuals or the community and the wider society, relationships where interdependence and interactive energy flows are also evident. See Anna Bramwell, Ecology in the Twentieth Century: A History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 4–6.

5. The question of whether people are self-interested individualists or community participants capable of safeguarding the common good is quite old and has not been limited to the field of peasant studies. For example, it surrounded the framing of the United States government and is expressed in the opposing positions of Madison and Hamilton. Opposing positions in this debate over human nature and human action also affected politics in Europe. Protest against the perceived individualist orientation of the British government, such as that launched by the Levellers and Diggers, stressed the human place in society and undertook action that emphasized or supported hu-
man community. Reactions to the French Revolution, both in Britain and on the Continent, fell into camps that roughly correspond to this individualist/communitarian debate. One can even find the individualist/communitarian debate in the tension between church and state in the Middle Ages. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the church stressed the individual place in the community and sought to include social concerns in economic and political decisions. Thus the church denounced individual choices that exploited others, such as usury and extortion, and even established courts to enforce its values, appealing to Bible texts as the source of guidance. Heads of state, on the other hand, argued for individual interests, particularly their own, and the individual right to rule according to personal decisions and preferences. With the rise of commercial capitalism in the eighteenth century, the hand of individual interest was greatly strengthened, and the influence of the church was gradually eliminated from the sphere of politics and governance altogether.


7. Michael Taylor has also done work that considers ways in which individual interest overlaps with community interest instead of being entirely at odds. See, for example, Anarchy and Cooperation (London: John Wiley and Sons, 1976) and Michael Taylor, ed., Rationality and Revolution (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

8. In an impressive cross-national, historical study Victor Magagna also argues that defense of community—and the protection community provides to popular interests—explains peasant political action better than any other theoretical construct, including class. Although Magagna’s study focuses only on rebellion and does not examine the political result of peasant interaction with society and nature, he sees community preservation as central in peasant political motives in each of his historical case studies (Britain, France, Spain, Russia, and Japan). Communities of Grain: Rural Rebellion in Comparative Perspective (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).


13. Jeffery Gould finds that Nicaraguan peasants specifically eschew farming techniques and specific cash crops if they are known to harm other individuals and the community in general. This approach contrasts sharply with that of capitalist farmers who are not peasants and not participants in a peasant community. To Lead As Equals: Rural Protest and Political Consciousness in Chinandega, Nicaragua, 1912–1979 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

14. Individual needs and survival may be threatened by a natural disaster. Because such an event is not caused by human agency, however, it does not violate norms of relative equality. Natural disasters may strike rich and poor alike. Disaster evokes political action only when it is triggered by a human agent (landlord, tax collector, state representative) and thus violates norms of relative egalitarianism and resistance to subordination.

15. Jean Jacques Rousseau writes that “it is against the law of nature . . . that a hand-
ful should gorge themselves with superfluities, while the starving masses lack the barest necessities of life.” While his terminology is perhaps unnecessarily inflammatory, his argument is essentially that of the peasants, . . . and visa versa. See *Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality among Mankind*, 1754 (New York: Washington Square Press, 1967), 246. Tolstoy recognized the rule of custom and shared social values with respect to human needs and the unnatural possession of more than is needed. “Things really produced by a man’s own labour, and that he needs, are always defended by custom, by public opinion, by feelings of justice and reciprocity, and they do not need to be protected by violence.” But vast holdings of land or productive goods that are needed by the people are so contrary to the people’s natural sense of justice that they must be defended by laws, police, courts, prisons, and other instruments of governmental violence. Leo Tolstoy, *The Slavery of Our Times* (New York: N.p., 1900), 124, quoted in T. Anderson *Russian Political Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 241.

16. Moore, *Injustice*, 38; Moore’s emphasis.

17. Scott, *Moral Economy*, 1976. In a quite unrelated context reciprocity such as that which Scott describes is also called “reciprocal altruism.” There also the implication is that of a bilateral relationship, whereas political economy describes a more complex, multilateral system of exchange. See Christopher Jenks, “Varieties of Altruism” in Jane Mansbridge, ed., *Beyond Self Interest* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 61.

18. Reciprocity, as described by Scott in *Weapons of the Weak*, overemphasizes the role of coercion in village exchange. While coercion is certainly one tool that landed and landless both employ, coercion is most effective in two-way exchange relationships. Any exchange patterns that are more diffuse and complex than two-way relationships must also rely upon a sense of how each individual depends upon the community as a whole. As Figure 1.1 suggests, without a sense of ecological community free ridership is too easy and too tempting.

19. In the Amazon jungle of Brazil the Kayapó Indians have organized to protect nature not only against their own trespasses but also against developmental interests from the main cities. This effort has brought the Indians into contact with environmentalist movements abroad as well as domestically. Studies of Kayapó cultivation have found that these Indians have developed a diversified system of agriculture and other land use which is well suited to the tropical ecosystem and minimizes the potential for environment degradation. See Marianne Schmink and Charles H. Wood, “The Political Ecology of Amazonia,” in Peter D. Little, Michael M. Horowitz, and A. Endre Nyerges, eds., *Lands at Risk in the Third World: Local Level Perspectives* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987).

20. Even where external groups and factors do not play a role, peasants may organize for conservation and just distribution of natural resources. Such organization may, in fact, be easier when peasants are left to their own devices, free of external factors. For example, in harsh Andean areas where the water supply is critical, peasants have organized for wise use of that supply and for overseeing its equitable distribution. Similar mechanisms of control are used for scarce land supplies. In these systems, while individuals clearly depend upon the community, the latter also depends upon individual maintenance and involvement in order to keep going. For details on these systems see César Fonseca, “El Control Comunal del Agua en la cuenca del rio Canete” and Enrique Mayer, “Tenencia y control comunal de la tierra: caso de Larasos,” both essays in Comunidad y Producción en la Agricultura Andina,” ed. César Fonseca and Enrique Mayer (Lima: Fomciencias, 1988).

21. Joan Martinez Alier also argues that social movements of the poor always include an environmental component because of the extent to which the poor perceive their

22. Any informed student of developing countries can think of examples where peasants are destroying some part of their environment. Critics of the position I am offering here have been eager to point out these examples to me. However, the investigator who finds such examples and points a finger of blame solely at the peasantry is in serious danger of drawing fast conclusions based on limited knowledge. In cases where peasants are degrading their environment, that degradation is usually part of a long process in which many factors (development, capitalist farming, new methods of cultivation, political decisions, mechanization) have preceded such peasant action and have pushed peasants to a point where they have no choice. In such cases a minimal historical investigation will reveal that prior to the intervention of such factors the peasants who are now degrading their environment did once live in a more ecological and sustaining relationship with the ecosystem.


Sometimes even the best of intentions, including efforts to decrease peasant poverty, have evolved into situations where some peasants are trapped and have no option but to degrade their environment. Cognizant of peasant abilities to develop practices that are not environmentally destructive, some developers have advocated creating development strategies that incorporate the advice and knowledge of the local peasants. See, for example, Donald Messerschmidt, “Conservation and Society in Nepal: Traditional Forest Management and Innovative Development,” in Little, et al., *Lands at Risk.*

23. My thinking with regard to peasants and their relationship to nature has been clarified as the result of several discussions of the peasant political ecology during a conference on “the dimensions of peasant power” at the University of Colorado in April 1992. In particular I am grateful for the input and constructive criticism of several participants in that conference, most notably Ronald Herring, Teodor Shanin, James Scott, and William Kelly.

24. The Kayapó Indian struggle is one well-known example of the latter.


**Chapter 2. The Broader Context: Contrasting Political Traditions**

1. Most of Latin America shares a similar culture, ethnicity, religion, and geopolitical position. Another study or an extension of this study that sought to include these characteristics as independent variables rather than constants, as I do here, would have to include cases from outside Latin America.


5. Ibid., 119.
7. See, for example, the history of Costa Rican labor in Vladimir de la Cruz, *Las Luchas Sociales en Costa Rica* (San José: Editorial Universidad de Costa Rica, 1983), particularly chapters 1–3.
8. One debate in the literature on Costa Rica revolves around the prevalence or lack thereof of smallholders in rural areas. These peasants have suffered financial crisis in recent decades and their numbers are increasing beyond the land base available to support them. Nonetheless, their numbers and their political power are substantial relative to their counterparts elsewhere in Central America, and they have had an important influence on the course of political development in Costa Rica.
10. Ibid., 31–32.
15. The word *precarismo* is Costa Rican Spanish for the phenomenon of land invasion while *precarista* means land invader. The terms derive from the word *precario*, “precarious” in English, which indicates the insecurity of land tenure under which these peasants operated.
17. Francisco Rojas Aravaria has argued that in the present crisis in Central America Costa Rica is reaping the rewards for greater independence from foreign interests. The country has more control over its own fate than, for example, Honduras, which was never able to exercise as much control over the foreign banana industry as was Costa Rica. See Rojas, “Costa Rica y Honduras: A Similares Problemas Soluciones Distintas,” *Estudios Sociales Centroamericanos*, 43 (1987).
18. Ibid., 21.
21. Ibid., 94–95.
22. Seligson argues that land invasion may be the most important strategy peasants have for surviving the future. He offers some other interesting examples of land invasion as a common political tactic among the Costa Rican peasantry. *The Peasants of Costa Rica*, ch. 5.
23. Whereas displacement from the land frequently results in migration to cities in search of factory employment, this trend is less prevalent in Costa Rica because of the extremely small industrial base and the relatively few industrial jobs.
25. Ibid., 43.
26. Ibid., 53–54.
27. Ibid., 75–79.
28. The William Walker affair was symptomatic of unbridled party rivalry and a feeble state. In the hopes of attaining military supremacy over the Conservatives, the Liberal party invited in a U.S. citizen named William Walker. Walker agreed to come but retained an independent agenda and purpose. Caught up in the pre–Civil War struggle for control of the United States legislature, Walker intended to annex Central America onto the southern United States, thus greatly extending southern slave territory. In the 1850s he attempted to take personal control of Central America. He failed only because the political and military resistance he encountered extended far beyond the borders of Nicaragua.
30. In Spanish, “Nicaragua es mi finca.”
32. López Pérez was executed for the assassination and assumed a place in Nicaraguan heroic folklore as a result.
33. Nicaraguans frequently refer to Sandino’s army as “El Pequeño Ejército Loco de Sandino.”
34. See also Thomas Walker, Nicaragua: The Land of Sandino (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1986) pp 100–101. Unlike the peasants and other Nicaraguans, the United States government continued to believe that Somoza held popular support which was confirmed by electoral victories. Walker argues that Somoza deliberately maintained an elaborate democratic facade for the purpose of winning United States support. The use of an electoral front to conceal a nondemocratic hold upon political power was certainly a tradition that enjoyed a long history in Nicaragua.
35. For a thorough study and discussion of the development of agrarian capitalism and the agro-export sector in Nicaragua prior to 1979, see also Laura Enriquez, Social Transformation in Latin America: Tensions between Agro-Export Production and Agrarian Reform in Revolutionary Nicaragua (Ph.D. diss. University of California, Santa Cruz, 1985). For a summary of laws affecting peasant labor, see particularly 74 and 82. For a discussion of the impact of agro-export development on landlessness and poverty, see 83 and 101–5.
36. See also Booth, The End and the Beginning, 93–95, for a description of human rights violations, torture, and the growing resolve of the population in response to the repression. The Nicaraguan revolution is estimated to have cost approximately 50,000 lives. In a country of three million this represents 1.6 percent of the population. Walker points out that in the United States this would have been equivalent to the loss of roughly 4.5 million people, more than seventy-five times the U.S. death toll in Vietnam. See Walker, T., Nicaraguan in Revolution, (New York: Praeger, 1982) 20.
37. The FSLN divided its military struggle into four separate fronts converging on Managua from the four directions, north, south, east, and west. Of the four fronts the eastern front was the weakest.

Chapter 3. Ecological Harmony and Quiescence: Pedregal, Boaco, Nicaragua

1. One manzana = 1.75 acres.
2. This figure is derived by asking respondents how much land they thought a villager needed to own in order to support a family without having to work other than on his own land.


5. The ability of Pedregal peasants to protect the soil in their area and to keep it relatively productive thus far stands in marked constrast to the extreme soil deterioration found in other parts of Nicaragua where the peasant economy was driven out by agro-export interests. This is most notably true in northern Nicaragua where the cotton industry run by large landlords has nearly destroyed soil productivity in a region that was once much more agriculturally productive than Pedregal’s region of Boaco. Jeffrey Gould, *To Lead as Equals: Rural Protest and Political Consciousness in Chinandega, Nicaragua, 1912–1979* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

6. While Pedregal did not have electric service, the next village out toward the main highway did. Carlos lived at the edge of Pedregal and had illegally run a bare wire between his house and the most outlying electric line in the next village. This long stretch (500 or more yards) of unprotected electric wire posed a danger for both villagers and the surrounding forests, but Carlos was more concerned with the convenience for his own home.

7. For a fuller discussion of the moneylenders, see also Laura Enriquez, *Social Transformation in Latin America: Tensions between Agro-Export Production and Agrarian Reform in Revolutionary Nicaragua* (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Cruz, 1985). The effect of moneylenders on a peasant community and on individual political attitudes will be discussed in Chapter 6.

8. Although all villagers were nominally Catholic, there was no church nearby that they could attend regularly, and no priest visited the village. Active involvement required leaving the village and traveling to Teustepe or to a peasant home between the village and the town.

**Chapter 4. Integration and Accommodation: San Luis, Alajuela, Costa Rica**

1. In recent years the prevalence of yeoman farming in Costa Rica has been a subject of debate. Scholars have argued that land tenure was never as egalitarian as had been imagined. Lowell Gudmunson, *Costa Rica Before Coffee: Society and Economy on the Eve of the Export Boom* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986). Others have pointed out the growing level of landlessness in recent decades, Seligson, Mitchell, *Peasants of Costa Rica and the Development of Agrarian Capitalism*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1980.

2. Women in San Luis knew very little about the subjects of this study: agriculture, political action, unionization. This was unfortunate, since as a result it was unproductive to interview most peasant women. The two women who were exceptions to this rule are interviewed here.

3. One manzana = 1.75 acres. Respondents have an incentive to understate landholdings since taxes are assessed on land. The local municipality, however, keeps records of land ownership that showed the average landholding among all San Luis residents to be 11.5 manzanas.

4. Respondents were asked how much village land an individual needed to support a family. The figure 5.75 is an average of the responses given.

5. The peasant capacity to work longer and longer hours, to pare back living expens-
es more and more, and to tighten the belt one notch and then another is also the capacity that allows peasant family farming to weather economic crisis longer after a large capitalist farm, which must make a profit in order to pay wages, would go under. Chayanov used this argument to assert that, far from being inefficient, the peasant family farm was more efficient and productive than either the capitalist farm or the state-run collective. See A. V. Chayanov, “On the Theory of Non-Capitalist Economic Systems” and “Peasant Farm Organization,” reproduced and translated in Daniel Thorne, Basile Kerblay, and R. E. F. Smith, The Theory of Peasant Economy (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986).


7. In fact, the Costa Rican communist parties do not advocate violence and never have. Yet UPA members know that communism elsewhere has been associated with violence, and they do not want that in Costa Rica.

Chapter 5. Ecological Community: El Hagar and La Lucha, Costa Rica

1. Subsequent to the events described in this chapter Rolf was persecuted by Costa Rican government authorities. He was arrested on false charges and was forced to hire a lawyer before he could clear his name. In the end he was never convicted of any crime, and he was released. However, the experience made him nervous about publicity, and he requested that I change his first name and omit his last name in telling his story.

2. IDA’s guidelines for the redistribution of land specify that land recipients must be peasants who have some knowledge of the agricultural trade and not ex-proletarians. They must also be landless and should never have received land from IDA previously. The problem is that IDA very rarely uses the guidelines because it so seldom redistributes land. The application of these guidelines to peasant land invaders amounts to a contradiction of the official state position that maintains that land invasion is illegal. Nevertheless, this is the practice frequently followed when land invaders have succeeded in forcing IDA to redistribute invaded land.

3. The written media have been the most energetic participants in this campaign, particularly the newspapers, La Nación and La República. The years 1981 and 1982, during the height of the land invasion, are the most fruitful dates to look for examples of this campaign. See La Nación, 7/7/81, 7/8/81, 6/17/82, 6/18/82, 6/23/82, and La República, 7/7/81, 6/22/82, 7/25/82. See also the newspapers’ coverage of the peasant demonstration in San José, September 15, 1986. In early 1989 UPAGRA initiated a suit for slander against the newspaper, La Prensa Libre, and against Sergio Fernández, the director of Costa Rica’s intelligence agency. Fernández and the newspaper alleged that UPAGRA’s leaders received military training in Cuba, were importing arms from abroad, and were training members for a violent overthrow of the state. UPAGRA drew the line, found itself a lawyer, and sued Fernández for fourteen million colones and the newspaper for thirty-five million colones. Over a six-month period the state tried every conceivable tactic to have the suit thrown out of court. It failed and court proceedings began in August, 1989. It remains to be seen what will actually come of the suit. If it is successful, perhaps future contributors to the discrediting campaign will be more prudent about their accusations.

4. This example illustrates one of the ironies of statistical examination of relationships among variables. The methods demand variation in the independent variable if
we are to be able to observe whether or not the relationship is significant. This remains true even if there is no true variation in that variable in the real world. Thus if almost everyone mentions injustice as a reason for political action, the statistical tables present that variable (injustice) as having no significant relationship to variation in the dependent variable. I did, in fact, examine the statistical relationship between the mention of injustice and perceptions about the area of dissonance for each village (land invasion in El Hogar and violence in La Lucha). The relationship was in the expected direction: those who perceived injustice were more likely to find acceptable the tactic located in the area of dissonance. Due to lack of variation in the independent variable, however, the relationship was not statistically significant.

Chapter 6. Peasant Revolution: Quebrada Honda, Nicaragua

1. I have chosen to call these Nicaraguans “peasants” because that is what they call themselves, even though some worked periodically as laborers in local cottage industries or as domestic workers. The fact that they call themselves “peasants,” implying that they work the land, cannot be considered merely force of habit. It also represents an underlying culture of resistance to Somoza’s regime, which prevented them from working the land. Stoler refers briefly to a similar form of cultural resistance among farmers on Sumatra’s east coast. See Laura Ann Stoler, “Plantation Politics and Protest on Sumatra’s East Coast,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 13, no. 2 (January 1986):139.

2. The Somoza family itself was the most flagrant example of elite land concentration. At the time of the revolution in 1979 Anastasio Somoza himself owned 20 percent of Nicaragua’s prime farmland. David Kaimowitz, “Nicaraguan Debates on Agrarian Structure and Their Implications for Agricultural Policy and the Rural Poor,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 14, no. 1 (October, 1986):106.

3. Figures here draw upon the official exchange rate during the time in question. According to the International Monetary Fund *International Financial Statistics* the Nicaraguan economy was very stable during the 1960s and 1970s. The exchange rate went from $7.05/$1 in 1958 to $7.03/$1 in 1978. Dollar conversions of these figures are done at the 1968 exchange rate of $7.05/$1.

4. Diseases most often mentioned included gastrointestinal disorders, malaria, pertussis, polio, and malnutrition.

5. Among the Nicaraguan peasants, people who collaborated with the Guard and were paid to spy upon the revolutionary activities of their neighbors were known as “ears” (“orejas”).

6. Laura Enríquez has argued that the system deliberately imposed these conditions on the peasantry. Elites who deprived peasants of support in a land base knew they would thereby be able to count on peasant labor at harvest time.

7. One quintal = 100 kilograms or 200 pounds of cotton.

8. Unfortunately, Ramón’s grandfather had died long before I undertook this study so I was unable to talk with him.

9. This dynamic is not peculiar to Nicaraguans. When operating as a guerrilla in the mountains of Guatemala, Mario Payeras also found the peasant population increased its participation with the guerrillas in response to repression by the Guatemalan army: “Pointing their guns at the women and children, the soldiers would make the adult males come out of the huts. They were never seen again. Terror began to spread... In less than a week we tripled our membership, augmented by the peasants who sought our protection.” Mario Payeras, *The Days of the Jungle* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 79.
10. Universities and high schools were the scene of numerous guerrilla activities and many revolutionaries were also students. Students in Nicaragua usually wear a uniform but many had stopped wearing it for reasons of safety.

11. The reader familiar with the difficulties of fieldwork among peasants will ask whether the respondents actually did what they said they did or whether they were lying about their revolutionary participation. This concern is particularly relevant since I was interviewing at a time when the Sandinista revolution held great social prestige, and those who had fought the Somoza regime had much to be proud of. Even respondents who did actually participate in the revolutionary struggle might be inclined to embellish and exaggerate the importance of their own contribution and the danger they encountered in the process.

Exaggeration and lying, of course, are always a potential problem when dealing with subjective material and when one needs the perception of the respondents themselves. In this case I was able to counteract respondent misrepresentation by cross-checking respondents’ stories with other interviewees. After the revolutionary victory secrecy was no longer necessary, and by the time I got to the community residents had a reliable sense of who had actually done what. Furthermore, I spent enough time with these villagers to myself gain an excellent sense of who was or was not a reliable respondent. If anything, I found that many of the most courageous revolutionaries were quite modest about their own contributions to the struggle. As a result of this in-depth knowledge I am certain that the stories given above are an accurate representation of reality.

12. Jenny Pearce finds that Salvadoran peasants also exhausted nonviolent means of political participation before turning to violence. One Salvadoran peasant told her that “the idea of armed struggle emerged when all peaceful means had been exhausted. One could see that the enemy didn’t care at all for legal and peaceful means.” Jenny Pearce, *The Promised Land* (London: Latin America Bureau, 1986), 183.

13. As a variable related to political action, sibling deaths was particularly interesting in Quebrada Honda; the acceptability rose with the number of such deaths experienced. (see Table 6.5)

14. In a study of the average revolutionary participant, Vilas also finds that the certainty of repression and the ineffectiveness of remaining uninvolved as a form of self-protection drove individuals to action. “When becoming a victim of repression ceases being what happens to someone else—because that someone else is a Sandinista, or an agitator, or a subversive, or is sought out for a role in a situation far from one’s own—and starts being what happens to anyone, even when that anyone remains passively at home, then remaining passively at home no longer serves as a defense. Fear of repression as something outside of daily life is transformed into a daily certainty of repression and opens the way for the necessity of an active defense.” C. Vilas, *The Sandinista Revolution, National Liberation, and Social Transformation in Central America* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1986), 121 (author’s italics). In her study of Nicaraguan women, L. Maier finds the same results. As one of her respondents put it, “I told my aunt, ’If they’ll let me fight in this condition [pregnant], I’ll fight,’ because even if I stay home a bullet or a rocket or a bomb’ll get me. So either way I die.” L. Maier, *Nicaragua: La Mujer en la Revolución* (Mexico: Ediciones de Cultura Popular, 1980), 12.

**Chapter 7. From Quiescence to Rebellion: Pikin Guerrero, Masaya, Nicaragua**

1. In the early 1980s coffee became less and less financially viable. The productivity of coffee trees in the area gradually declined due to the combined effects of gas seeping
from a nearby volcano and a disease that affected the coffee leaves. Although the disease could be reduced with large inputs of technology, the financial gain from such inputs would not cover their cost. Coffee profitability in the area would remain low, in part due to the low overall quality of coffee from the area and in part due to the volcano gas. The balance of these factors led the Sandinista government to phase out coffee production in this region by slowly decreasing credit availability for coffee production and gradually increasing credit availability for peasant producers willing to grow fruit trees or vegetables. By the late eighties coffee production had decreased considerably in the area. Today villagers in Pikin Guerrero are producing fruit and vegetables along with coffee or in its stead.


3. For a discussion of similar patterns in Colombia in the 1800s see Catherine LeGrand, Frontier Expansion and Peasant Protest in Colombia, 1830–1936 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986).

4. A morbid tale reached me through several villagers. One particularly cruel landlord was making his way home alone along an isolated mountain trail in the wee hours of a Sunday morning. He never arrived but his body was found hacked to pieces with machetes, a grim reminder of the price that might be paid for flagrant violations of the rules of village mutuality.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

1. The statistical packages for these analyses were SPSS and TSP.

2. For the purpose of these statistical results I am using a confidence level of 90 percent (.90) as the cut-off point for achieving statistical significance. This is below the conventionally acceptable level of 95% (.95) but is quite acceptable given the small size of the data set. (N = 70 in Costa Rica; N = 90 in Nicaragua; N = 160 total)


4. Ibid.

5. The official written philosophy of the Green party in West Germany also includes some attention to social concerns other than the environment.

6. Lawrence Dodd argues that there is a learning process that can occur in national societies. When societies learn, they can, like the peasants, respond differently and more appropriately to new circumstances and thereby weather severe crises. Alternatively, societies may fail to learn and may be destroyed by such crises. See “Political Learning and Political Change: Understanding Development Across Time,” in Lawrence Dodd and Calvin Jillson, The Dynamics of American Politics: Approaches and Interpretations (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).

Appendix: Methodology Combining Depth and Breadth

   2. The well-known social scientist Alfred Schutz specifically advocates this approach in studying social phenomena. He writes that all reality is viewed through human perspectives that are subjective in some ways. Yet it is precisely because of this truth that we need to study the subjective human experience. Moreover, in doing so we will find that human perspectives on the same phenomenon differ somewhat. At the same time, we will find that there is an underlying similarity in all the subjective views that people hold of a given phenomenon. Helmut R. Wagner, ed., Alfred Schutz on Phenomenology and Other Social Relations (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).
   3. Fortunately, as the Contra war has tapered off since 1985, it has become easier to conduct surveys in Nicaragua, although the government continues to maintain that such research is illegal. Surveys were quite common surrounding the 1990 elections.
   4. Land is usually owned by males and passed from father to son. If a woman inherits land it usually passes into the control of her husband upon her marriage.
   5. One manzana = 1.75 acres.
   6. A search for multicollinearity revealed no statistical correlation among the three independent variables. Although peasants see economic problems and injustice as connected to each other and the latter as a manifestation of the former, the method of data collection itself eliminated correlation among variables. The correlation matrices were as follows:

   In Costa Rica

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   In Nicaragua

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