

PHD STUDENT, ANTHROPOLOGY, NICARAGUA

My proposal concerns the causes and consequences of 20th century revolutions using Nicaragua as a case study. Basing my project in the department of Chontales, I intend to investigate the relationship between economic development and peasant policies from the 1960's to present. My guiding hypothesis is that while agrarian reform remains of central importance in Nicaragua, both the capitalist and socialist models of agrarian reform have failed to satisfy the economic needs and political demands of significant segments of peasantry. A second hypothesis is that the dynamics of both class and gender relations within the peasantry condition peasant commitment to revolutionary change over time. Chontales was affected by both the capitalist and socialist agrarian reforms and thus, provides an opportunity to explore these issues.

Somoza's capitalist model of agrarian reform was designed to ameliorate rural unrest, however it had limited scope and tended to target the better off segments within peasantry (Vilas 1986). The failures of the Somoza agrarian reform created conditions for peasant support of revolution. The Sandinista socialist agrarian reform was designed to redress structures which reproduce rural poverty and unrest and to win the support of rural poor for socialist transition. The early stages of this agrarian reform failed to reach large segments of the rural poor (Kaimowitz 1986) creating conditions for peasant support of the counter-revolution and the sweeping 1990 electoral defeat. Both the Somoza and the Sandinista agrarian reforms intensified social differences within the peasantry which generated strong political opposition to these regimes.

Social differences within the peasantry are inseparable, however, from the dynamics of both class and gender relations over time (Mallom 1987; Walker 1993). The subordination of women, within the household and externally, negatively effects the well being of peasant households, contributing to peasant poverty (Deere 1990). The capitalist model of agrarian reform did not address gender issues. The socialist model attempted to address gender issues by incorporating women into 'productive' activities, i.e., waged work. However, this seems to have increased women's work loads. It also decreased peasant women's political participation in the revolutionary process due to lack of time to attend political meetings and training sessions (CIERA 1989, v.7). More importantly, this approach to rectifying gender inequality does not identify nor improve intra-household relations which permit men to mobilize for war while women try to meet household subsistence needs.

I will conduct a pilot field project in January 1994 to review existing research on Chontales at Nitlapan (University of Central America, Managua) and to finalize field site selection. During the research period, I will employ both anthropological and historical data collection techniques. Participant observation, socio-economic household surveys, and semi-structured interviews with selected household members will allow me to document both current class and gender dynamics within the village and the meanings peasant men and women assign to and derive from these relations. I will pay particular attention to intra-household relations collecting data on family demographics, on farm divisions of labor, off farm income generating strategies by sex, income pooling for household subsistence and decision making. Life histories of selected village members will uncover patterns of peasant political activity in the village, archival and documentary research in UCA Managua and municipal archives in Chontales will allow me to explore changes in land holding patterns over time in their relation to agrarian reform.

These data collection techniques will, therefore, allow me to relate changing land holding patterns that are generated by the agrarian reforms to changes in class status, gender roles, and political beliefs and practices of peasant household members. I intend to use this research as the basis of my dissertation. My initial expectations are that 1) three decades of agrarian reform have unevenly effected different classes within the peasantry exacerbating economic disparities and giving rise to organized, often violent, peasant political movements; 2) these economic and political changes are predicted upon the subordination of women within the household, a process which increases the intensity and duration of women's work while freeing men to organize politically; and 3) economic development and political stability at the national level is dependant upon ameliorating rural poverty and unrest which require policies that address both class and gender inequalities.