

FROM SOLIDARITY
TO CLASS STRUGGLE:
Ten Years of Post-Somozan Nicaragua

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AID THAT COUNTS: THE WESTERN CONTRIBUTION TO DEVELOPMENT AND SURVIVAL IN NICARAGUA. By Solon Barraclough, Ariane van Buren, Alicia Gariazzo, Anjali Sundaram, and Peter Utting. (Amsterdam and Managua: Transnational Institute and Coordinadora Regional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales, 1988. U.S. distribution by the Institute for Policy Studies, Washington, D.C. Pp. 157. \$5.95.)

WOMEN AND THE NICARAGUAN REVOLUTION. By Tomás Borge. (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1982. Pp. 30. \$.75.)

NICARAGUA: POLITICS, ECONOMICS, AND SOCIETY. By David Close. (London and New York: Pinter Publishers, 1988. Pp. 221. \$35.00 cloth, \$12.50 paper.)

STREET POWER: CULTURE AND POLITICS IN A NICARAGUAN NEIGHBOURHOOD. By Stener Ekern. (Bergen, Norway: Department of Social Anthropology, University of Bergen, 1987. Pp. 240.)

THANKS TO GOD AND THE REVOLUTION: POPULAR RELIGION AND CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE NEW NICARAGUA. By Roger N. Lancaster. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988. Pp. 244. \$37.50 cloth, \$14.50 paper.)

TRANSICION Y LUCHA DE CLASES EN NICARAGUA, 1979-1986. By Orlando Núñez Soto. (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1987. Pp. 241.)

NICARAGUA, THE LAND OF SANDINO. Second edition, revised and updated. By Thomas W. Walker. (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1986. Pp. 170. \$26.50 cloth, \$13.85 paper.)

July 1989 marked the tenth anniversary of what is widely known in Nicaragua as the *triumfo* of the FSLN-led revolution that overthrew some forty years of Somozan rule. This date also marked ten years of intense scholarly study of the revolution and its antecedents. In fact, by 1987 this journal had already published two review essays on this period: a discussion of Spanish-language sources on the Somoza years, the insurrection,

and the early years of the revolution; and an examination of the literature on policymaking under the Sandinistas.¹

Much early work—and even some done more recently—tended to be ideological in tone, either uncritically singing the praises of the Sandinista Revolution or condemning it wholly as paving the way for a communist beachhead in the backyard of the United States.² The subsequent U.S.-sponsored and U.S.-directed Contra war spawned yet another flood of publications on revolutionary Nicaragua, in this case focusing on U.S. policy and U.S.-Nicaraguan relations.³

Despite the tumult and destructiveness of the war, research emerged and persisted that was less ideological and more analytically balanced, such as the variety of work examining public policy in Nicaragua.⁴ Research on other topics has also continued to make its way into print, including studies on women and the revolution, popular participation in grass-roots organizations, and the role played by churches and religious movements in the revolution.⁵ In short, current research is eclectic in its substantive focus, methodology, and balance between sympathy and hostility for the revolution.

This essay will review seven recent works. While including books that emphasize domestic policymaking, the review will also consider research aimed at providing insights into the lives of the Nicaraguan people. Also discussed will be scholarship focusing on the role played by external assistance to Nicaragua and the dilemmas of the transition to socialism. In general, an effort will be made to place the books under review into the broader context of current research on the Nicaraguan Revolution.

1. See John A. Booth, "Celebrating the Demise of Somocismo: Fifty Recent Spanish Sources on the Nicaraguan Revolution," *LARR* 17, no. 1 (1982):173–89; and Laura J. Enriquez, "Half a Decade of Sandinista Policy-Making: Recent Publications on Revolutionary Policies in Contemporary Nicaragua," *LARR* 22, no. 3 (1987):209–22.

2. Two of the best known anti-Sandinista works in English are Shirley Christian's *Nicaragua: Revolution in the Family* (New York: Random House, 1985), written from the standpoint of complaints lodged by well-to-do Nicaraguans; and David Nolan's *FSLN: The Ideology of the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1984), a cold war "exposé" of the Sandinistas' communist plot.

3. For a glimpse of the early stages of Reagan policy, see *Nicaragua under Siege*, edited by Marlene Dixon and Susanne Jonas (San Francisco, Calif.: Synthesis, 1984). For a comprehensive examination of Reagan policy toward Nicaragua, see *Reagan versus the Sandinistas: The Undeclared War on Nicaragua*, edited by Thomas W. Walker (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1987).

4. Recent examples of such work beyond what Laura Enriquez examined in her excellent review are *The Political Economy of Revolutionary Nicaragua*, edited by Rose J. Spalding (Boston, Mass.: Allen and Unwin, 1987); and *Nicaragua: Profiles of the Revolutionary Public Sector*, edited by Michael E. Conroy (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1987).

5. See among others, *Nicaraguan Women: Unlearning the Alphabet of Submission* (New York: Women's International Resource Exchange Collective, 1985); Gary Ruchwarger, *People in Power: Forging a Grassroots Democracy in Nicaragua* (South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin and Garvey, 1987); and Phillip Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in the Central American Revolutions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1984).

The first section will examine two books that provide general introductions to pre- and post-revolutionary Nicaragua and stress the political economy of Nicaragua. The second section will review two books concerned with the revolution as seen through the eyes of the common people of the barrios of urban Nicaragua. The final section of the review deals with three works that discuss the concept of revolutionary transition.

General Overviews

Two of the books under review here are general introductions to Nicaragua: David Close's *Nicaragua: Politics, Economics, and Society* and Thomas Walker's *Nicaragua, the Land of Sandino*. Walker's work is a revised and updated version of his 1981 volume. As far as I know, no other U.S. political scientist has studied Nicaraguan political life as long and closely as Walker, who first worked in Nicaragua in 1967 and has made about fifteen trips there since 1979. He surely must be the only gringo academic who hitchhiked to Managua from the Honduran border during the last several days of the revolution. His works have added substantially to understanding of Nicaragua and U.S. policy.⁶

Walker's *Nicaragua* is quite short, its text and notes totaling barely 140 pages. The first edition in 1981 was one of the first books published in the United States in English after the triumph. The present edition has been revised and updated to include more material on Nicaragua under the Sandinistas—and under the gun of the Reagan administration.

Early on, Walker asserts that to comprehend the roots of Nicaragua's "problem," observers must understand its dependency. He defines *dependency* as "a specific situation in which the economy of a weak country is externally oriented and the government is controlled by national and/or international elites or classes that benefit from this economic relationship" (p. 3). Moreover, because the markets of a dependent economy are largely external, the common citizen is important not as a consumer but as "a source of cheap and easily exploitable labor." This situation leads over time to increasing concentration of the means of production and national income in the hands of a few. What "trickles down" to most citizens, then, is not what Adam Smith envisioned as "universal opulence" but pain, suffering, and degradation. Walker claims that prerevolutionary Nicaragua was extremely dependent from the days of the Spanish conquest to the last of the Somozas.

6. Walker's *Nicaragua in Revolution* (New York: Praeger, 1982) and *Nicaragua: The First Five Years* (New York: Praeger, 1985) are both edited works that present various analyses of politics and public policy before and after the revolution. His most recent edited work, *Reagan versus the Sandinistas*, presents the work of fourteen scholars who assess the dimensions of U.S. policy toward revolutionary Nicaragua.

Paralleling Nicaraguan dependency, and often one of its key ingredients, was a history of foreign intervention and control. Walker perceives in the Nicaraguan Revolution the first steps toward breaking the pattern of dependency, early steps "to reverse the centuries-old patterns of elite control and dominance" (p. 7). The remainder of the book presents Walker's analysis of Nicaragua's past and present according to his conceptual schema.

Each of these chapters deals with the past and present, emphasizing the differences between the dependency syndrome of prerevolutionary Nicaragua and efforts by the Sandinistas to transcend dependency. For example, during the Somoza years, "democracy was nonexistent, corruption was elaborately institutionalized, and public policy consistently ignored the well-being of the majority of the population" (p. 100). By contrast, "in six years [since 1979], Nicaragua had come a long way in institutionalizing a governmental system based on the participation and consent of the governed" (p. 120).

While Walker is clearly sympathetic with the FSLN-led revolution, his command of the facts is first-rate and his analysis is trenchant and objective. He is particularly effective in reminding the reader to consider U.S. policies and actions toward Nicaragua when assessing the successes and failures of the Nicaraguan government. For example, in discussing the government's difficulty in its ultimately successful attempt to hold fair elections in November 1984, Walker reminds the reader that political manipulation also occurs far north of Nicaragua: "In the United States during most of November, news of the Nicaraguan election had been effectively drowned in intensive media coverage of several Reagan administration [groundless] 'leaks' to the effect that Soviet-built MIG jets might be en route by ship to Nicaragua. . . . Subsequently, Washington unilaterally broke off the bilateral talks. . . . in February 1985, Reagan admitted that it was the objective of his administration to dismantle the Sandinista power structure unless the Sandinistas decided to cry 'uncle'" (p. 52).

Although other general works in English have appeared between the first and second editions, Walker's *Nicaragua, the Land of Sandino* remains the most accessible introduction for a general readership.⁷ Schol-

7. English-language general introductions to the Nicaraguan Revolution include the following titles: George Black, *Triumph of the People* (London: Zed, 1981); John A. Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1982; revised and updated, 1985); Carlos Vilas, *The Sandinista Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1985); and Henri Weber, *Nicaragua: The Sandinista Revolution* (London: Verso, 1981). Like the first edition of *Nicaragua, the Land of Sandino*, the Black, Vilas, and Weber volumes basically analyze the insurrection and the first year of the revolution. Booth's revised version is more detailed and comprehensive than the Walker volume under review here and has become a favorite among scholars in the United States. Finally, an excellent work that appeared recently is Dennis Gilbert's *Sandinistas* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988). Gilbert's

ars searching for more detailed analysis of revolutionary Nicaragua must go beyond Walker's brief overview.

As of this writing, Close's *Nicaragua: Politics, Economics, and Society* is the most recent English-language general introduction to the subject. It is part of a series of volumes analyzing Marxist regimes. Close, however, argues that "those who seek in contemporary Nicaragua a regime that is . . . orthodoxly Marxist . . . search in vain" (p. xi). Similarly, he claims that no one will discover in Nicaragua an orthodox liberal democratic regime. Close proposes instead that one needs to consider the "syncretistic nature of Sandinismo that melds Marxism, radical Christianity in the form of liberation theology, and an anti-imperialist nationalism common in Latin America into a coherent outlook" (p. xi).

Close provides the reader with a useful and readable synthesis of existing literature that covers the early and recent history of the country and its people. Most of the book is devoted to three chapters on the economic system, the political system, and public policies under the Sandinistas. This meaty core and its detailed analysis distinguish the book from Walker's shorter, more general work.

Close analyzes the political economy of Nicaragua under the Sandinistas in considerable detail. He carefully describes and evaluates all phases of the agrarian reform, particularly the issue of to what degree these reforms have adhered to the Sandinista principle of a mixed economy. He points out that in 1985, the FSLN began to reverse its previous five-year agrarian policies, which had encouraged state farms and cooperatives. For several reasons, not the least of them pressure from campesino and farmer organizations, the government began a program of private entitlement (pp. 93–99).

This process was formalized in January 1986 by amending the agrarian reform law to make campesinos the beneficiaries of expropriated lands without their being required to join a cooperative (p. 97). Equally important, whereas only latifundia had been subject to expropriation, the 1986 amendments specified that land of any size would be subject to expropriation if it is "idle, leased out, or underutilized." Close argues that such a shift in agrarian policy underscores the nonideological policymaking of the government that has resulted in a political economy where it appears that "capitalism is only restructured, not abandoned" (p. 86).

Close's otherwise excellent analysis of agrarian policy does not discuss the severe problems encountered by the regime. Current research has begun to scrutinize these agricultural problems. For example, Carlos Vilas focused on the impact of agrarian reform on the agro-exporting bourgeoisie and correctly predicted in 1985: "We have every reason to

work focuses on the tensions between the Sandinistas' Marxism and their pragmatism in policy-making.

expect a growing deceleration in most productive activities, a tendency for global GNP to fall, deterioration in the living conditions of most of the population, and a continuing decline in agroexport income."⁸ While scholars disagree on the proper distribution of blame for the revolution's agro-economic problems, all recognize the irony of campesinos bearing the brunt of the pain of agricultural policies forged according to the "logic of the majority" to benefit the poor agrarian masses.⁹

Close concludes that if the regime were to be judged solely according to the ideology expressed by the FSLN leadership in 1978, one would expect to find a close approximation of a Marxist-Leninist state. He argues instead that the Sandinistas' experiences and their recognition that Nicaragua is a dependent country with a "fragile and exposed agro-export economy which can ill afford radical experiments" (p. 183) suggest that "a political movement with an evident Marxist background can discard political baggage carried within that tradition since the Bolshevik Revolution, yet keep a radically egalitarian society the object of their long-range social and economic policy" (p. 185).

Two Views from Below

Traditional anthropological work had been missing from the current research in revolutionary Nicaragua. The classic anthropological technique of participant-observation in everyday life contexts had not been applied to understanding life under the Sandinistas. This lacuna has now been filled by Stener Ekern's *Street Power* and Roger Lancaster's *Thanks to God and the Revolution*, which are both based on the classic participant-observer technique. According to the preface to *Street Power*, Ekern was the first Norwegian social scientist to undertake fieldwork in Nicaragua. His field experience, however, was limited to one barrio in the city of León from March to December 1984 and again briefly in September 1985.

After a short historical introduction, Ekern presents the heart of his study: a view of Sandinista Nicaragua from the perspective of individuals and families living in a small barrio that he calls San Benito. Ekern's

8. Carlos M. Vilas, "Troubles Everywhere: An Economic Perspective on the Sandinista Revolution," in *The Political Economy of Revolutionary Nicaragua*, 236–37. See also Maria Veronica Frenkel's "The Evolution of Food and Agricultural Policies during Economic Crisis and War," in *Nicaragua: Profiles of the Revolutionary Public Sector*, 201–36; and two essays in Spalding's *Political Economy of Revolutionary Nicaragua*: Peter Utting, "Domestic Supply and Food Shortages," 127–50; and Rose J. Spalding and Laura J. Enriquez, "Banking Systems and Revolutionary Change: The Politics of Agricultural Credit in Nicaragua," 105–26.

9. In this regard, while Vilas and Forrest Colburn approach Nicaragua from widely divergent political perspectives, both note that agricultural workers are comparatively worse off than are workers in other sectors of the Nicaraguan economy. See Vilas, "Troubles Everywhere"; and Colburn, *Post-Revolutionary Nicaragua: State, Class, and the Dilemmas of Agrarian Policy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986).

sensitive observation of the patterns of barrio life in the first six years after the insurrection gives the reader the sense of being there with the people.

The residents of San Benito characterize their barrio as part of "el anillo de pobreza," the poverty belt (p. 27), and as "un barrio humilde" of some eight thousand inhabitants (p. 31). This old barrio is one of eleven traditional barrios in León and is therefore unlike the typical shantytowns found around Managua and most other Latin American cities. San Benito is poor nonetheless.

After providing a general physical description of San Benito, Ekern escorts the reader through the much more complex world of the Beniteños. He portrays barrio life as divided between two main social arenas: the household and the street. The household is preeminently the concern of the women, the street mainly a "man's world" because Beniteño men tend to be constantly on the move from job to job, often abandoning the home to the woman. The street is also a public world for staging political and religious events, whether street "mobilizations" sponsored by the *Comités de Defensa Sandinista* (CDS) or the universal religious procession "La Purísima." Finally, the street involves the sphere of work, where forms of patron-client relationships manifest themselves that include the state as the national patron.

Perhaps the strongest part of Ekern's book is the seventh chapter, where he brings his analytical framework to bear on a richly portrayed examination of the role of the CDS in San Benito and in Nicaragua generally. His analysis of the CDS concludes that they function mainly to mobilize "agitation marches" in a top-down manner, "not much more than the assignation of tasks and the specification of how and when to carry out (nationwide) orientations from above." In that sense, the actions of the CDS "seem to comply with the forms of politics: Street domination and the carrying out of orders of the patron" (pp. 175-76).

Although Ekern asserts that the CDS are clearly linked to the household arena through food distribution, street cleanings, and vaccination campaigns, he fears that falling levels of such assistance as the Contra war progresses have often led the CDS to call for more agitation and more dedication. He describes such a response as "counterproductive as it stresses the political aspect at the cost of the community aspect" (p. 210).

Roger Lancaster's *Thanks to God and the Revolution: Popular Religion and Class Consciousness in the New Nicaragua* resembles Ekern's study in being based on anthropological fieldwork and the use of the participant-observer technique. Yet it differs remarkably in focus, texture, style, and mode of analysis. Lancaster, who trained at Berkeley, was conducting fieldwork in Nicaragua at the same time as Ekern and also more recently. Lancaster lived in some of Managua's working-class neighborhoods (*barrios populares*) in December 1984 and January 1985, May through December 1985, and May and June 1986.

Lancaster is most concerned with revolution, religion, and Marxism. How are observers to understand the peculiar syncretism and symbiosis that seem to characterize the revolutionary amalgam of the popular church, Marxism, and the Sandinista movement? What does evangelical Protestantism, which is growing rapidly, add to this mix? In answering these questions, Lancaster enlarges the substantial literature examining the role that the Catholic Church and religion generally have played in the revolution.¹⁰

In dense yet beautifully written prose, Lancaster applies an anthropological perspective in a thoroughgoing critique and inventive reinterpretation of Marxist analysis of revolution, religion, and class struggle. Using the voices of women and men of Managua's barrios populares, Lancaster weaves an intricate story that demonstrates the class conflict inherent in the division between the traditional and popular Catholic churches. This conflict was revealed in the testimony of a woman who had been a Christian base community lay worker for more than twenty years, as she denounced the hierarchy of the traditional church: "The church hierarchy behaved in a reactionary manner. . . . From its offices and pulpits it admonished us not to struggle against the regime . . . and told us that we must love and tolerate the rich. . . . We had learned, however, and we knew from our experience as workers and Christians, that capitalism is the enemy of the people because it engenders hatreds, and that the exploitation of man by man is the most radical sin of all. . ." (p. 64).

But how, Lancaster asks, can liberation theology become fused with Marxism? For "if there is a single thread that unites the entire opus of Marx, it is neither the dialectic, nor materialism, but atheism" (p. 169). Lancaster devotes an entire chapter of *Thanks to God and the Revolution* to attempting to reconcile this apparent contradiction. Scrutinizing original texts and Marxist critical scholarship, he argues that Marx was "constrained" in his analysis of religion as a form of false consciousness and alienation because he was "cut off from real historical and anthropological reasoning" (p. 193). Lancaster admits that some Marxist "purists" may feel that he is "manhandling" Marx's texts (p. 188), and I suspect he is right. Marxists will disagree with him just as they have disagreed with one another over other issues.

Finally, Lancaster presents a useful analysis of evangelical Protestantism in the barrios. While many leftists and other prorevolution sympathizers have maligned the evangelicals as counterrevolutionary, Lan-

10. See in particular, Laura O'Shaughnessy and Luis H. Serra, *The Church and Revolution in Nicaragua* (Athens: Ohio University, 1985); Teófilo Cabestrero, *Ministers of God, Ministers of the People* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Press, 1983); Michael Dodson and Tommie Sue Montgomery, "Churches in the Nicaraguan Revolution," in *Nicaragua in Revolution*, 161-80; and the Rev. Carlos Escorcía, "Las Asambleas de Dios en Nicaragua," *Amanecer: reflexión cristiana en la nueva Nicaragua* nos. 38-39 (Dec. 1985):22-25.

caster finds much in the movement that is politically and sociologically consonant with liberation theology and therefore with the Nicaraguan Revolution. For example, the words of one evangelical express distinct anti-Yankee sentiment and clearly reject capitalism and its ties with exploitation and sin: "Listen, it is because the rich are always enriching themselves that we have so much sin and vice in this city. . . . Why do you think we have so much delinquency in the barrio now? Because the youth went to see movies where they learned the corrupt habits of North American youth" (p. 114).

Lancaster points out that FSLN government policy has suppressed evangelical links to foreign "conservative" organizations. Yet at the same time, FSLN luminaries like Interior Minister Tomás Borge have praised appropriate "revolutionary" evangelical behavior (p. 119). In short, Lancaster concludes that the "affinity of evangelical Protestantism for political conservatism has been overstated" (p. 121).

Lancaster's and Ekern's studies provide two valuable additions to the growing list of anthropological field research on Nicaragua. Lancaster paints a scholar's portrait of life in the barrio, while Ekern brings to the pages of his work an earthier feel for a people less concerned with religious conflicts than with day-to-day survival. Students of Nicaragua will benefit from both visions.

The Transition to Socialism, Women and the Revolution, and Foreign Aid

One of the last three books to be reviewed includes another foray into Marxism, this time by political sociologist Orlando Núñez Soto, who directs the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios de la Reforma Agraria (CIERA). His *Transición y lucha de clases en Nicaragua, 1979-1986* was first published in cooperation with Nicaragua's Coordinadora Regional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales (CRIES). A committed Sandinista, Núñez has previously published numerous essays on various aspects of the revolution. *Transición y lucha de clases en Nicaragua*, which was originally presented as his doctoral dissertation in political economy at the University of Paris at the Sorbonne, is basically a brief Marxist history of revolution and class struggle.

First of all, Núñez modifies Marx's concept of the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. He argues that in peripheral Third World countries like Nicaragua, the objective conditions that Marx perceived as prerequisites for political and social revolution did not and do not exist. Instead, the class conflict in those countries should be understood as the struggle between two contradictory *proyectos*. Not readily translatable into English, Núñez's concept of *proyecto* "encompasses diverse interests of the same class and of various classes, short-term and long-term interests, present and future, for classes as presently formed

and for those classes that appear or disappear in the course of the [revolutionary] process" (p. 191).¹¹

In Nicaragua, Núñez continues, "the class struggle appears as a struggle between revolution and counterrevolution, between national liberation and North American imperialism" (p. 191). He argues that what counts most fundamentally in this aligning of interests is the "capacity of the vanguard for unifying the existing classes and forces, independently of the position of the classes themselves, above all in terms of the concerns of the peasants and the urban petit bourgeois, which are the majority forces in this society" (p. 15).

In the early chapters, Núñez works with a wealth of mostly Nicaraguan government statistics to provide an excellent description and analysis of the exhaustion of the agro-export model on which the Somoza dynasty was built. That exhaustion, combined with the loss of political legitimacy (particularly after the 1972 earthquake), paved the way for the FSLN to emerge as vanguard. While Núñez's analysis does not add substantially to what other research has revealed in this regard, his inclusion of recent official data provides a useful addition for scholars.

Núñez continues to apply his concept of class struggle in the final chapters, where he analyzes the various political and economic groups that have aligned themselves around one or another *proyecto*. His description of the internal dilemmas and various responses to them by the government and the masses adds to general understanding of the revolutionary process.

Núñez argues finally that the revolution, directed by the FSLN as vanguard, will move toward creating socialism in Nicaragua. But that socialism will likely be what he refers to as "primitive socialism," a way of escaping from the stranglehold of imperialism. The socialism will be Nicaraguan socialism. But then, is *sandinismo* simply *socialismo*? Núñez appropriately cites slain former revolutionary leader Ricardo Morales Aviles for an answer: "[We must] look at *sandinismo* with socialist eyes and look at socialism with Sandinista eyes; [we must] study our history as Marxists and study Marxism as Nicaraguans" (pp. 216–17).

As David Close points out in *Nicaragua: Politics, Economics, and Society*, thus far capitalism in Nicaragua has been amended but not abolished. In fact, policy decisions to make peasants owners of private property carry with them some risks for the future development of socialism. But Núñez the Sandinista has expressed the hopes of his FSLN *compañeros* as recently reflected by Comandante Luis Carrión. The latter observed that the FSLN has always been pragmatic and has never wanted Nicaragua to be "another Cuba." According to Carrión, the FSLN envisions an ultimately socialist Nicaragua: "But that is in the future. . . . it may take

11. All translations are by the reviewer.

many, many years. . . ."¹² If so, the transition that Núñez describes in *Transición y lucha de clases* may be a long one indeed.

Part of that transitional process has included the Nicaraguan government's heavy reliance on foreign aid. Núñez notes the central role played by foreign donations, lines of credit, and loans to be paid off with products (pp. 143–44). Forrest Colburn has pointed out even more emphatically that "[i]n the post-revolutionary era, the annual value of foreign assistance has actually exceeded the annual value of Nicaragua's exports."¹³

Aid That Counts analyzes and evaluates such foreign assistance. A joint publication of the Netherlands-based Transnational Institute (TNI) and CRIES of Nicaragua, this study particularly scrutinizes the contributions to Nicaraguan development and survival made by Western Europe and Canada. The book is divided into three parts: a brief summary of the study's major findings, longer overviews of statistical data and case studies, and detailed analyses of these materials. Directed by Solon Barraclough (currently Associate Fellow of the TNI), the project also involved four other independent researchers with extensive experience in development assistance: Ariane van Buren, Alicia Gariazzo, Anjali Sundaram, and Peter Utting.

The authors of *Aid That Counts* use aggregate data (obtained mostly from the United Nation's Office of Economic Cooperation and Development) and case studies from five different projects. They describe their study as "an indicator of the role Western aid can play in prompting autonomous development in the Third World" (p. 2). The final and most detailed part of the study characterizes the passage of Nicaraguan policy from one of development to one of survival when "by May 1986 the total economic cost of the [Contra] war due to material losses, lost credit and trade amounted to over \$1 billion—roughly the equivalent of four years' export revenues" (p. 42). At that time, inflation had reached nearly 750 percent and was still rising.

The aggregate data provided basically confirm what has been widely known about foreign assistance to Nicaragua since 1979: assistance from the United States and U.S.-dominated multilateral agencies has virtually dried up; aid from Western Europe, particularly from the European Economic Community, has been relatively stable; and aid from the socialist bloc countries has increased dramatically, especially since 1985. The strongest and most interesting aspect of the study for this reviewer was the case study material, which revealed the strengths and weaknesses of foreign assistance as well as its actual application.¹⁴

12. Interview with Tom Jelton for National Public Radio, aired 1 May 1989.

13. Colburn, *Post-Revolutionary Nicaragua*, 122.

14. *Aid That Counts* makes a good companion piece to the collection edited by Michael

The authors found that despite significant differences between the pluses and minuses of each project, a “fair consensus” existed among donor agency staffs and government and project personnel that the projects were a “relative success—bearing in mind prevailing economic constraints and the war” (p. 127). Barraclough and his coauthors, however, note several areas in need of improvement, including government delays in disbursing funds, distributing materials, and accounting for the use of aid. They also call for greater emphasis on quick-yielding projects rather than long-term undertakings, given the present economic conditions (p. 127).

Finally, the authors of *Aid That Counts* note that the recovery process alone “will take years” and presupposes sustained Western aid. This conclusion reinforces one made three years earlier by Carlos Vilas, who argued that transitional economies like Nicaragua’s need foreign subsidies and that: “[w]ithout them, such economies collapse.”¹⁵ Luis Carrión’s vision of socialism in Nicaragua in the distant future may not be off the mark.

Andrew Reding recently noted the instrumental role played by Nicaraguan women in having offensive sexist language stricken from the 1987 constitution.¹⁶ Perhaps as a prelude to that apparent empowerment of women, Interior Minister Tomás Borge delivered a speech in the city of León on 29 September 1982, at a rally commemorating the fifth anniversary of the Nicaraguan women’s movement. His speech has been translated and published as a booklet entitled *Women and the Nicaraguan Revolution*.

It seems ironic that a man delivered the speech commemorating the fifth anniversary of the establishment of the Asociación de Mujeres ante la Problemática Nacional (AMPRONAC). Yet it is perhaps indicative of the role that women played in prerevolutionary Nicaraguan society. The prerevolutionary formation of AMPRONAC and its postrevolutionary evolution into the Asociación de Mujeres Nicaraguenses “Luisa Amanda Espinosa” (AMNLAE) have spawned several publications on Nicaraguan women in the revolution.¹⁷ Some observers sing the praises of the degree

Conroy on policy-making in the domestic public sector. See *Nicaragua: Profiles of the Revolutionary Public Sector*.

15. Vilas, “Troubles Everywhere,” 244–45.

16. Andrew Reding, “‘By the People’: Constitution Making in Nicaragua,” *Christianity and Crisis* 46, no. 18 (8 Dec. 1986):434–41.

17. Recent titles include Eileen Haley, “Nicaragua/Women/Revolution,” *Hecate* 9, no. 1 (1983):80–110; Jane Deighton et al., *Sweet Ramparts: Women in Revolutionary Nicaragua* (Rome and Santiago, Chile: Isis International, 1983); Margaret Randall, “Now That We Can Speak Freely: Three Women Tell Their Personal Stories of the Nicaraguan Revolution,” *Mother Jones* 6 (Apr. 1981):39–42; Richard Columbia, “Women in Nicaragua: A Study of the Women’s Movement,” *Crosscurrents* 1 (1987):1–17; Anne Sisson Runyan, “Nicaragua Is to Feminism as the U.S. Is to Patriarchy,” *Atlantis* 13 (1987):148–53; Joanna Passaro, “Conceptualization of Gender: An Example from Nicaragua,” *Feminist Issues* 13 (1987):49–60; Maxine Molyneux, “Mobilization without Emancipation? Women’s Interests, the State, and Revolution in Nicaragua,” *Feminist Studies* 11 (Summer 1985):227–54; and Beth Stephens, “Women in Nicaragua,” *Monthly Review* 40 (Dec. 1988):1–19.

of feminism in revolutionary Nicaragua.¹⁸ Others suggest that Nicaraguan women may have mobilized for a cause (the Revolution) that, in the end, failed to include them fully in reconstructing society.¹⁹

A radical feminist might bristle at the condescending and patronizing comments made by Borge: "Woman is physically weaker than man, but is as intelligent as man. . . , and from the moral viewpoint—in my personal opinion—is better than man" (p. 22); "women . . . are as fertile in their wombs as they are in revolutionary consciousness" (p. 27). At the same time, however, Borge alludes throughout his speech to the equal role women played in the insurrection. The evidence in this regard seems incontrovertible, with women running safe houses, driving vehicles, caring for the wounded, and representing almost a third of the armed combatants.²⁰

At the time he gave this speech, Borge was still unaware of what was to become a problem for women and the CDS. As Ekern reported in *Street Power*, women also played a leading role in organizing and sustaining CDS activities. The problem became what one observer has called the woman's "triple burden."²¹ After the revolution, the responsibilities of community activism, when added to the income-earning and household responsibilities long shouldered by Nicaraguan women, eventually caused many women to withdraw from CDS activity.

Borge wants to claim that the oppression of Nicaraguan women can be blamed on capitalist society (p. 14). That claim may be true, but no consensus exists yet on the ability or willingness of Sandinismo and its adherents to incorporate feminism fully into its ideology. *Women and the Nicaraguan Revolution* is nonetheless important as a public statement about women and politics by an FSLN leader in the early days of the Nicaraguan Revolution.

Conclusion

Although they vary in their aims, approaches, methods, and conclusions, the seven works reviewed above represent important contributions to understanding of the Nicaraguan Revolution. As noted, each work addresses in one way or another issues previously raised by other scholars. Most of them also demonstrate the balanced critical analysis needed in the future to comprehend adequately the Nicaragua that has emerged since the Somoza dynasty and the one that will emerge after the Reagan onslaught, especially following the February 1990 elections in

18. See, for example, Runyon, "Nicaragua Is to Feminism."

19. See Molyneux, "Mobilization without Emancipation?"

20. *Ibid.*, 233.

21. Kathleen Logan, "Women in the Nicaraguan Revolution: Some Implications for Women's Studies," paper presented at the meeting of the Southeastern Council of Latin American Studies, 15 Apr. 1989, Myrtle Beach, S.C.

which the FSLN was cast in the opposition role to Violeta Chamorro's loosely knit anti-Sandinista coalition.

New scholarly directions are still unfolding. One promising area is the recent research on the 1987 Nicaraguan constitution, which was all but ignored during Washington's "low-intensity war."²² As the U.S.-sponsored Contra war winds down and the leaders of Central American countries continue to search for an indigenous peace, the climate for continued research on revolutionary Nicaragua should improve. Perhaps more "normal" and even more productive social science research can take place in Nicaragua once it is free from external aggression and debilitating internal strife.

22. Exceptions include Andrew Reding, "'By the People'"; Jules Lobel, "The Meaning of Democracy: Representative and Participatory Democracy in the New Nicaraguan Constitution," *University of Pittsburgh Law Review* 49, no. 3 (1988):823-89; and Max Azicri, "The 1987 Nicaraguan Constitution: An Analytical Commentary," *Review of Socialist Law* 15, no. 1:5-29. A book-length work is in preparation that will include previously published essays as well as new material on the constitution. See *The 1987 Nicaraguan Constitution*, edited by Kenneth J. Mijeski (Athens: Ohio University Press, forthcoming).