

LYNN HORTON: *Peasants in Arms: War and Peace in the Mountains of Nicaragua, 1979-1994*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1998.

*Peasants in Arms* is the study of the rural, mountainous Nicaraguan municipality of Quilalí. Located in the north-central province or *departamento* of Nueva Segovia, Quilalí, along with many other towns near the Honduras-Nicaragua frontier, experienced intense armed conflict in the 1980s. From bases inside Honduras, armed guerrillas (known as *contras*) opposing the Sandinista regime would target and attack populations and productive centers inside Nicaragua, later retreating back into Honduras. Beginning in the early eighties, thousands of rural residents supported the contra cause by joining the rebels or providing them with supplies.

As a group, peasants who supported the *contras* have been traditionally thought of as politically naïve or reactionary—why else would they support the counter-revolution? It is this assessment of peasant political behavior that Horton sets out to explore. Rather than assuming peasant passiveness in the face of social and political change, Horton asks an old question in the literature: What are the circumstances that motivate peasants to take up arms?

The answer to this question is a complex one. In the case of Nicaragua, no analysis can proceed without considering the events leading to the Sandinista revolution of 1979. Since 1937, Nicaraguan politics and the economy had been in the hands of a literal few, the Somoza family and elite groups. The Sandinista overthrow of the Somoza dynasty in 1979 brought political and economic changes to the country, including agrarian reform and universal education. But elite and U.S. opposition to the new regime soon materialized, with the U.S. providing the funds needed to stop the spread of "communism" in Central America. A weakened economy and the ongoing civil war contributed greatly to the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas by the early 1990s. This event led to a shaky peace that has not yet solved the country's social and economic problems.

Horton's discussion of peasant political activity focuses on the experiences of Quilalí residents in the context of these national and international developments.

In her analysis, she emphasizes local developments—in particular, partial market integration in the 1950s and '60s, and the persistence of social customs—the importance of social networks and enduring paternalistic relations between patrons and poor peasants. By looking closely at these factors, she contends, we arrive at an understanding of the population's eventual negative response to change from the outside. The book's argument,

and her answer to the question about peasant political mobilization, maintains that peasants are not motivated by abstract ideals. What was at stake for Quilalí peasants was not the creation of a new society, but the articulation of change through time-honored institutions and values. The peasants, in short, took up arms against the Sandinistas to defend their shared sense of community.

When the elite-led counter-revolutionary movement arose in the early eighties, Quilalí landowners tapped this sense of a shared history in order to obtain the support of poor peasants. The Sandinistas, on the other hand, did not care to indulge such cultural and social peculiarities and would alienate Quilalí peasants in the process. A clear example of this would be the officials sent to govern the town. They would often be urban residents unconcerned about, or quite mocking of, local customs and issues. Sandinista arrogance cost Nicaragua dearly: with Washington's deep pockets, contra leaders would build on such examples to raise and supply a guerrilla army.

But the mechanism that brought converts, intelligence and supplies to the contras owed little to U.S. foreign policy. As Horton points out, Quilalí residents became involved in politics through their participation in clientele, kinship and social networks. A shared sense of identity, family and friends, rather than ideology or national politics, would enlarge the contras' constituency in the years to come.

To understand the validity of such an assessment, Horton interviewed over 100 pro and anti-Sandinista residents. This data provides the book with the protagonists' voices. In order to place this information in context, the first two chapters detail the origin and growth of the municipality. From the material in these pages emerges the nature of the Quilalí peasant experience. Essentially, it was one of destitution but not of extreme poverty. That is to say, in comparison to countries such as El Salvador, where few rich families owned much of the land, or Guatemala, where Indian farmers have seen their lands stolen because of their ethnic background, or even other regions of Nicaragua itself, one sees missing from the mountainous interior of Nicaragua the unbearable social and economic conditions that would later spark revolutions throughout the isthmus.

As tantalizing as is Horton's discussion of the role of kinship and fictive networks in influencing peasant political action, I cannot but wonder how this greatly differs from more structural or politically-biased (i.e. pro-Sandinista) analyses she says her study wishes to avoid (7-12). One could argue the book is about how local elites organized peasants in anti-Sandinista uprisings. In fact, the author comes close to saying this herself: "If the experience of Quilalí demonstrates that local elites may wield political and economic power beyond their limited numbers, it also suggests that even

revolutionary governments that come to power with the support of a broad multiclass coalition may have a difficult time maintaining the support of this sector" (301). It seems to me that the author is suggesting that had the Sandinistas not alienated the Quilalí elite, there would have been no unrest in the municipality.

In my mind, then, the question persists: Why did so many Nicaraguan peasants take up arms? If Horton merely wanted to demonstrate that change from above will be resisted from below, she has succeeded. It is clear, once again, that Latin American societies consist of little *patrias* which refuse to come together in order to form nations. But Latin American history is filled with events and movements meant to safeguard localized perceptions of "home" or "nation." How different is the case of the Nicaraguan peasant?

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JUAN PEDRO VIQUEIRA ALBÁN: *Propriety and Permissiveness in Bourbon Mexico*, translated by Sonya Lipsett-Rivera and Sergio Rivera Ayala. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1999.

How did Mexican popular culture change during the Bourbon rule of Spain and its overseas empire? The accepted wisdom echoed the writings of multiple Enlightened authors who decried a breakdown in morals and a perversion of customs, in other words, what contemporaries saw as a "decline of propriety." In this path-breaking study, Juan Pedro Viqueira argues that rather than any decline or degeneration, what most marked Mexican culture from the middle of the eighteenth century on, through the Independence War, was a wide-ranging cultural shift. In essence, according to Viqueira, the Spanish state moved from being a guardian of tradition in the seventeenth century to a promoter of modernization in the eighteenth. The beginnings of this about-face are traced to the 1692 Mexico City riots, seen by Viqueira as the moment in which government authorities first became aware of the danger of subversion and began to view the masses as potential enemies.

From a culture in which ceremony and diversion reflected the hierarchical nature of society, the new Bourbon cultural vision worked to separate the elites from the masses. Instead of Baroque inclusiveness, the Bourbons gallicized the culture of the elite and denigrated that of the masses. Against a backdrop of the growth of Enlightened despotism and Enlightened intolerance, government officials, purveyors of elitist ideas of rationalism, order and the new decorum, showed themselves committed to stamping out traditional social practices. The reaction of the masses was to defend their