ARHN Working Group on Sexual Behavior Research
Conference on International Prespectives in Sex Research
Rio de Janeiro 22-25 April 1993

Homosexual Stigma in the Making of Manhood and the Breaking of a Revolution in Nicaragua

Roger N. Lancaster

HOMOSEXUAL STIGMA IN THE MAKING OF MANHOOD
AND THE BREAKING OF A REVOLUTION IN NICARAGUA
Roger N. Lancaster

Original aim for Life is Hard: A critical ethnography on gender, family, and personal life in the revolutionary process. A lot of challenging material:

-- The Sandinista revolution included a strong component devoted to women's, even feminist, issues.

-- Women and young people were increasingly active in the political and civic sphere.

-- AMNLAE, the Nicaraguan women's organization, politicized a broad array of gender questions and family issues. Their legal reforms and political efforts attempted to change what they called "the culture of machismo."

* abolished legal discrimination and declared equal rights for women
* overhauled legal definitions of the family
* stipulated that paternity entails responsibility, set up procedures for establishing paternity

-- In short: Family life was a site of multiple personal conflicts, vigorous political contestations, and frequently ambiguous power plays. Private and public.

My original aim was revised by historical developments: Describe conditions leading up to the Sandinista electoral defeat of 1990.

In a broad sense, the Sandinista revolution was undermined by an all-round war of aggression that included the U.S.-sponsored contra war and a U.S. economic embargo in Nicaraguan goods and products.

-- 30,000 dead
-- consumed over 60% of government expenditures
-- wrecked the currency with hyperinflation

The result: Social, economic, and personal discombobulation. I try to document these effects of war and crisis.

In a narrower sense, though, Nicaraguan families, structured by a "culture of machismo" and rent by unresolved gender conflicts, proved the most effective medium of an intimate, low-intensity conflict that ate away at the revolution's base of popular support.

Life is Hard traces the fissures and fault lines that existed within Nicaraguan families before the revolution and gradually widened in postrevolutionary society -- the divides of gender, generation, and sexuality.

My use of the term "culture of machismo" not only quotes my informants, but deliberately echoes Oscar Lewis' phrase, "culture of poverty."

Lewis argued that what he called "the culture of poverty" would not simply go away with a transformation of the economic conditions that create poverty.

To quote Lewis: "Any movement -- be it religious, pacifist, or revolutionary -- that organizes and gives hope to the poor... must effectively destroy the psychological and social core of the culture of poverty."

I would argue that many of the characteristics Lewis attributed to a "culture of poverty" belong not to some special culture of poor people in Latin America, but to an overarching gendered world that might more accurately be called the "culture of machismo."

Whether one even grants the existence of a culture of poverty, and despite the troubled and troubling legacy of this concept, Lewis's basic argument provides us with a reasonable analogy.

A pre-existing pattern of gender and sexuality did not simply wither away after the revolution; it proved more resilient than the revolutionaries.

Many of the conflicts and frustrations that eroded the revolutionary project belong most logically and most directly to the culture of machismo.

And changing it would have required a revolution within the revolution.

THE HOMOSEXUAL DIMENSION

What I want to talk about is a dimension of gender studies that hasn't been much treated in the ethnographic literature.

1) not the role of male-female interaction in generating gender norms, but the role of male-male interaction;

2) specifically, not the role of heterosexual norms in establishing homosexual stigma and a minority status, but the role of homosexual stigma in structuring male sexual and gender norms;

3) and finally, not simply the role of homosexual stigma in thus producing and consolidating masculinity, but also its role as a crucial requirement in the reproduction of gender relations at large.

I did not necessarily set out to consider these questions. Rather, my fieldwork continually drew my attention toward them.

1) On my first visit to Nicaragua, I was invited by an informant to visit his house in another barrio...

Lesson # 1: Nicaraguans are acutely aware of cochones; they gossip about them; and public reaction is most often amused contempt -- and sometimes, not so amused contempt.

2) Miguel.

Lesson # 2: Male power among men is configured around homosexual themes. These incidents also point to a broader pattern:

3) Another day, I was standing with Carlos, a mechanic, in front of his repair shop.

Lesson # 3: Who gets labelled what, and how, is differently conceived than in Anglo-American culture.

LITERAL READINGS AND EVERYDAY OCCURRENCES

In the context of such interactions, consider the following.

> Jaime: "A man helping his wife out around the house was unthinkable before the revolution. No man would be caught dead washing dishes or cooking or ironing. If his wife asked him to

give her a hand, he would just say, 'Yo no soy cochon' (I'm not queer) and that would be the end of it..."

Now what happens to our analysis of gender relations if we take this statement literally?

(In an age of increasingly subtle reading strategies, it might be interesting to try the novel approach of listening with a literal ear to such remarks.)

Consider an event I observed during a neighborly visit:

Guto, a teenage boy, was holding Esperanza's and Pedro's daughter, Auxiliadora. Guto's sister Aida was holding her son, Ervin. Guto decided to have the children, both of them two, "fight" a mock battle. He manipulated the smaller girl's hands into lightly hitting Ervin. The boy began to cry.

"Veni, cochon!" ("Come on, cochon [queer])," Guto cajoled, mimicking the voice of a small girl, "Come on, cochon!" The baby in his arms seemed confused by the goings-on around her.

Embarrassed by such antics, but responding nonetheless, Aida pushed her son Ervin forward and began manipulating his hands in mock battle. The four of them played this way for a few seconds until Ervin began to cry again.

"Cochon, Cochon!" Guto chastised, while Aida soothed her son.

Only a couple of days before, in the rowdy and drunken aftermath of a holiday, there had been a collective outbreak of domestic violence in the neighborhood. Several couples fought; several women were beaten by their husbands. With those events still no doubt very much on her mind, Esperanza said to me: "Now just look at that. They're teaching him how to beat women." And so they were.

Again, what happens to our analysis of gender if we give such an event the literal reading it was given by Esperanza? Esperanza was commenting narrowly on the lesson Guto was teaching Aida's son; more generally and most tellingly, she might have been commenting on a whole structure of child socialization.

By many means over many years, a boy's training actively solicits the hallmark traits of machismo.

But how is such a routine concretely maintained? What sanctions are invoked? What disciplinary measures force compliance? (Answer simple.) Boys are constantly disciplined by their elders -- by parents and siblings alike -- with the humiliating phrase, "No sea cochon!" (Don't be a queer!) when their demeanor falls short of the assertive, aggressive, masculine ideal. Sensitivity,

weakness, reticence -- these character traits are swiftly identified and ridiculed.

By adolescence, boys enter a competitive arena, where the signs of masculinity are actively struggled for, and can only be won by wresting them away from other boys around them. (Miguel.)

Yet a final literal reading of the situation:

Even while the Sandinistas devoted themselves to combatting machismo in some arenas, the logic of this sexual construct, and its disciplinary force, were ultimately reinforced by conditions of war.

In 1986, I asked Charlie what he was going to do in another year or so, when he would reach the age of mandatory military service. What he said, and how he said it, were both indicative. "When it's my time, I'm not going to run. I'd rather stay in school and study, but when I have to, I'll go into the service, and do my time. Only the cochones run."

Charlie (reluctantly) strikes the machista pose: Only a queer would run. His sentiments were almost stereotypical of my conversations with young men. It is clear that most young men would have preferred not to serve. Most said as much.

The Sandinistas were aware of this. So in addition to the usual appeals to patriotism and revolutionary ardor, the government occasionally manipulated prevailing conceptions of masculinity as an additional measure to discourage draft evasion.

This graffiti is typical of its genre and carries the same force: "Solo las maricas son evasores," Only sissies are evaders.

GENDER AND SEXUALITY: THEORETICAL APPROACHES AND IMPASSES

Previous theoretical approaches to the production of masculinity have generally failed to explore the dimension that I have been sketching.

The classical research on patterns of machismo in Central America (and similarly situated geographies) views it, effectively, as a cultural and ideological superstructure, resting atop an economic base. This model has the advantage of a certain materiality, but the disadvantage of reducing gender relations to an ideological gloss on economic relations. It never makes inquiries into the materiality of the body in the production of gender, sexuality, and other cultural values.

Beyond Latin American studies, most efforts at theorizing gender have conceived gender relations in terms of relations between men and women. Moreover, since gender studies emerged first and primarily

from feminism, the literature has tended to concentrate analysis on the female side of the question. Women's studies has offered important theoretical contributions and practical correctives to androcentric bias.

But gender is not simply feminine. Contemporary gender studies should seriously theorize masculinity, as well, and it needs to theorize both masculinity and femininity beyond the simple dyadic models that have repeated devolved into essentialist and biologically-grounded arguments.

An exception to the usual pattern of research is Gilmore's cross-cultural study of masculinity. Yet whatever its merits might be in some settings, Gilmore's hypothetically typical construction of masculinity is not at all applicable to machismo in Nicaragua. Gilmore's notion of manhood, like Chodorow's, rightly emphasizes its achieved and competitive orientation. But Gilmore also attributes to it a protective, nurturing effect: as women are to children, so men are to women and children.

None of my female informants invoke such qualities when describing traditional patterns of masculinity in Nicaragua. Nor, for that matter, do men. Both speak of the macho in terms of risk-taking, gambling, self-assertion, and violence. The underlying theme is irresponsibility, not nurture.

Those approaches that have attempted to consider both gender and sexuality as part of a single cultural system have produced mixed results, owing in part to the simplicity of the models proposed. Especially in the work of Dworkin and MacKinnon, crucial distinctions are lost: between gender and sexuality, surely, but also between innumerable other oppositions. In this iron cage of analysis, every sex act becomes indistinguishable from rape and terrorism.

So extreme have been the abuses of this model that even Gayle Rubin, who first popularized the gender/sexuality model, has expressly urged its more rigorous separation into distinct analytical domains. And there is a real danger here, if distinctions are not maintained, if every sex act without exception is taken as nothing other than the simple and direct expression of a pre-existing system. A theory incapable of differentiations is inadequate to any task of cultural criticism.

Since its inception, gay studies has theorized sexuality, especially male-male sexuality. It has frequently done so in connection with the prevailing system of gender norms, and without the indulgences of an anti-sex Puritanism. Gay studies provides a good starting point for the kind of analysis I have been pointing toward.

But in its essentialist and universalist varieties, gay theory too often begins and ends with the experiences of a sexual minority, whose categorization is taken as a given. At its most sophisticated -- that is, in social constructionism -- it marks the historical limits and describes the social conditions of homosexual identity and resistance. In either case, as long as it is motivated primarily by the politics of identity, it retains both a minority and <u>minoritizing</u> perspective.

Poststructuralist theory and postmodern experimentation afford analytical mobility, a turn from the facile temptations of "depth models," a romp of differentiations, and a rigorous challenge to the politics of identity...

However, much of postmodern academic discourse duplicates rather than criticizes the process of abstraction, reification, and fetishization inherent in the commodification process. Even Foucault's work, which properly treats power as a relational realm, also has the effect of virtually severing power relations from the real human beings who produce, maintain, and transform them. In such models, human agency and social practice have been disengaged from our understanding of the world. Little wonder that the system appears all-powerful in the postmodern politics of disengagement.

And in keeping with its commercial nature, much of postmodern theory has lost sight of the mundane conditions of everyday life. Even the invocation of the word "everyday" in these texts has a hollow ring to it, informed as it is primarily by media culture, film, literature, and literary analysis, and uninformed as it is by anything resembling fieldwork or everyday life.

To unfashionably invoke a "return of the repressed," we might today consider the example a currently eclipsed approach. Critical Marxism, especially the work of Marcuse, attempted to articulate Freud's "economy of desire" with Marx's critique of political economy. Marcuse understood "really existing sexuality" to be systematically distorted. But he never viewed pleasure of any kind as inherently exploitative. Rather, he tried to theorize the conditions under which pleasure was either repressed or made to serve the ends of exploitation.

Unfortunately, the limitations of Marcuse's analysis are coterminous with Freud's view of human nature, based on a theory of innate drives. But at its broadest, and read at a novel angle, Marcuse's work wrestled with fundamental questions that need to be re-asked:

Not simply, What are the productive applications of repression? But also, and more enduringly: Can one distinguish, rigorously and a priori, between eros and economics, desire and consumption,

love and political economy? And how might we integrate these elements into a comprehensive yet subtle critical theory?

The approaches I've touched on, taken individually, are not "wrong," but even taken collectively, they are not quite adequate, either.

We need a theoretical approach faithful to the humane spirit of critical Marxism, steeped in the lessons of gender studies and gay studies, observant of the real contributions of poststructural and postmodern theory -- yet without all the distracting bells and whistles.

We need a model with the theoretical mobility and sophistication of modern cultural studies, but ethnographically attentive to the mundane conditions of everyday life.

To follow the circuitries of power and meaning in cultures, we need an approach that can demonstrate concrete links between gender and sexuality, where those links exist, but without collapsing distinctions between the two or naturalizing their interrelationships.

That is: We need a political economy of the body that neither confuses itself with the more standard political economy of an economic mode of production, nor attempts to duplicate its every move, and is unwilling to say -- before the fact -- where the one ends and

> the other begins, or even whether there is a logical demarcation at all between the two.
>
> This approach is already emerging in an array of critical works, drawing on Marx, Foucault, Bourdieu, Bakhtin... Jeffrey Weeks, Eva Kosofsky Sedgwick, Donna Harraway, Thomas Laqueur, and many others...

A practical theory so conceived might allow us to develop a different kind of politics: a politics of solidarity, not identity, whose purpose is to change systems of practice and meaning rather than to simply carve out new minority rights within a preexisting system.

TOWARD A POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MACHISMO

Thus, to repose questions: What is the effect of (male) homosexual stigma, not simply on those men immediately stigmatized, but on all men, indeed, on all women? What is machismo? What does it mean to be a man in the culture of machismo? And why did a decade of efforts to roll back the culture of machismo achieve so few tangible results?

An easy answer would be that the strain on Nicaragua's economic resources has made social restructuring impossible for the time being. That is indeed a possible answer. But there is more to the

matter than that. The arrangement of interpersonal relationships is dependent on far more than the immediate state of the economy.

The question of machismo cannot be addressed adequately if it is viewed as an ideology in the classical sense of the term. Machismo is not merely a set of erroneous ideas that somehow got lodged in people's heads. Rather, it is an organization of social relations that generates ideas.

Machismo, therefore, is more than an "effect" produced by other material causes. It has its own materiality, its own power to produce effects. The resilience of machismo has nothing to do with the tendency of ideology to "lag" behind changes in the system of economic production, for machismo itself is a real political economy of the body.

To speak of a political economy of the body is not to draw rigorous, one to one analogies with material production but to reiterate that what is produced in any case is not a "good" but a "value." What "economy" means in all cases is a system where value is assigned based not on any "intrinsic" worth of an object but rather on that object's position in the system of production and exchange.

Thus, the value of a commodity is calculated in relation to other commodities and by the comparative social labor that produced it.

> Classes, too, are defined relationally: by their relations to each other in the social production process. And in the political economy of machismo, one's standing as a man is gauged by the execution of certain transactions (drinking, gambling, womanizing) in relation to other men.

As a field of power relations, machismo entails every bit as much force as economic production, and no less influences economic production than it is influenced by it -- otherwise, why would poverty have a feminine face in Nicaragua? Why would women and children be specially disadvantaged? Why else would weakness, failure, and fear be conceived within the logic of the cochon? And why would local understandings of wealth, success, and politics revolve around a blurred constellation of male dreams of omnipotence: el hombre grande, it goes without saying, is un gran macho, who is, naturally, also a caudillo...

We might acknowledge the difficulty in domesticating masculinity under conditions of acute crisis. But there is no particular reason to believe that men could be brought into the fold of the family more readily under conditions of surplus than under conditions of scarcity. Indeed, machismo structures its own surpluses and scarcities. And we cannot even begin to prejudge which activities characterize the political economy of the body and which ones characterize economic relations of production.

Nor can the question of machismo be fully addressed as a matter of relations between men and women. It is that, but it is also more than that. Machismo is not exclusively or even primarily a means of structuring power relations between men and women. It is also a means of structuring power between and among men.

Note: men are never in a situation of direct competition with women for male honor. The rules of the game effectively exclude women from this male domain. By definition, it is only with other men that a man directly competes. The conquest of women, like other achievements of manhood, is a feat performed with two audiences in mind: first, other men, to whom one must constantly prove one's masculinity and virility; and second, one's self, to whom one must also show all the signs of masculinity.

Machismo, then, is a matter of constantly asserting one's masculinity by way of practices which show the self to be "active," not "passive" (as defined in a given milieu). Every gesture, every posture, every stance, every way of acting in the world, is immediately seen as "masculine" or "feminine," depending on whether it connotes activity or passivity. Every action is governed by a relational system -- a code -- which produces its meanings out of the subject matter of the body, its form, its engagement with other bodies. Every act is, effectively, part of an ongoing exchange-system between men (in which women very often figure as intermediaries, but never directly as transactors).

> To maintain one's masculinity, one must successfully come out on top of these exchanges. To lose in this ongoing exchange system entails a loss a face, which is to say, a loss of status, and a loss of masculinity. The threat, and the fear, is a total loss of status, whereby one descends to the zero point of the game, and either literally or effectively becomes a cochon.

The cochon, itself a product of machismo, thus grounds the system of machismo, holds it in its place, and vice versa.

HOMOSEXUALITY AS MEDIUM OF EXCHANGE

An earlier paper of mine (1988) diagrams the construction of homosexual stigma in Nicaragua. Whatever else a cochon might or might not do, he is tacitly understood as one who assumes the receptive role in anal intercourse. His partner, defined as "active" in the terms of their engagement, is not stigmatized, nor does he acquire a special identity of any sort.

This implies a very different demarcation for the cochon than that which circumscribes the North American homosexual. In the United States, outside of a few well-defined contexts, homosexual intercourse -- indeed, even homosexual desire -- of any sort in any position marks one as a homosexual. But it is not simply a minority status which is differentially produced. What is also produced, in either case, is a majority, "normative" status.

It is heterosexual honor in the United States to never, under any circumstances, feel or express homosexual desire. Masculinity here is constructed atop the repression of homosexuality.

In Nicaragua, however, homosexual activity -- both figuratively and literally -- is the very medium of a masculinity defined most bluntly in terms of use-values (not the value of repression).

Figuratively, the cochon is held to represent the degradation of a "fallen man." At every turn, and in innumerable discourses, the honor of "los machos" is measured against his shame.

Literally, when one "uses" a cochon sexually, one acquires masculinity; when one is "used" as a cochon, one expends it. The same act, then, makes one man an **hombre-hombre**, a manly man, and the other a **cochon**. The machista's "honor," and the cochon's "shame," are opposite sides of the same coin, alternate angles of the same transaction.

A value is produced, circulated, and reproduced in sexual transactions between men, and so is a stigma. To be precise: The **value** of **masculinity** can only be measured against the **stigma** of the **cochon**. Each act of intercourse "produces," moreover, a system of masculinity -- a system that explicitly regulates relations between men, but which no less conditions relations between men and women. Whatever the private sentiments of those involved --

and relations between machistas and cochones are often quite tender -- these terms unambiguously denote winners and losers in the public game of masculinity: a game which structures male actions and interactions.

To expand this and open up the question of homosexual stigma: It is not simply a question of the construction of minority sexual identity through stigma that is at stake. It is the making of manhood, the production of a culture of machismo. The definition of masculinity rides piggy-back, as it were, on the stigma of the cochon.

THE CIRCULATION OF STIGMA

That being said, sex is never so precise, and the real circulation of stigma is never so categorical. The stigma of the cochon applies, in its strictest and most limited sense, to a relatively small minority of men: those who are the "passive" participants in anal intercourse. In its broadest sense, however, the stigma threatens, even taints, all men.

The circulation of stigma implies a complex economy, an ambiguous discourse, and incessant power-struggles. Stigma requires of us a carefully-staged "presentation of self in everyday life." To extend the dramaturgic metaphor, it brings into play many stages, many backstages, and many choruses. Or, to employ a game analogy:

everyone wishes to pass the stigma along; no one wishes to be left holding it. As cunning and artful as are those who dodge it, by that very token must the invocation of stigma be coarse, generalized, and to some degree non-discriminating. While the system of stigma produces certain distinct categories, then, its operation is never entirely categorical. Stigma is necessarily "sticky."

In the culture of machismo, the cochon is narrowly defined as anal-passive, but the concept of anal passivity serves more loosely as a sort of extreme case of "passivity." The term "cochon" thus may be invoked in both a strict and a loose sense. Which aspect of the concept is emphasized will determine whether it encompasses a small minority or a potentially large majority of men. Therein lies the peculiar power of stigma to regulate conduct and generate effects: it ultimately threatens all men who fail to maintain a proper public face.

Thus, the hombre-hombre's exemption from stigma is never entirely secure. He might find his honor tainted under certain circumstances.

If an hombre-hombre's sexual engagement with a cochon comes to light, for example, and if the nature of that relationship is seen as compromising the former's strength and power -- in other words, if he is seen as being emotionally vulnerable to another

man -- his own masculinity would be undermined, irregardless as to his physical role in intercourse, and he might well be enveloped within the cochon's stigma.

Or if the activo's attraction to men is perceived as being so great as to define a clear preference for men, and if this preference is understood to mitigate his social and sexual dominion over women, he would be seen as eschewing his masculine prerogatives and would undoubtedly be stigmatized.

However, the Nicaraguan hombre-hombre retains the tools and strategies to ward off such stigma, both within and even through his sexual relationships with other men, and his arsenal is not much less than that which is available to other men who are not sleeping with cochones.

This is a crucial point. These kinds of circumstances are not perhaps exceptions at all, but simply applications of the rules in their most general sense. Such rules apply not only to those men who engage in sexual intercourse with other men; they apply equally to men who have sex only with women. The noise of stigma is the clatter of malicious gossip.

Thus, if a man fails to maintain the upper hand in his relations with women, his demeanor might well be judged "passive," and he would be stigmatized, by degrees, as a cabron, maricon, and

cochon. Whoever fails to maintain an aggressively masculine front will be teased, ridiculed, and, ultimately, stigmatized.

In this regard, accusations that one is a cochon are bandied about in an almost random manner: as a jest between friends, as an incitement between rivals, as a violent insult between enemies. Cats that fail to catch mice, dogs that fail to bark, boys who fail to fight, and men who fail in their pursuit of a woman: all are reproached with the term. And sometimes, against all this background noise, the charge is leveled as an earnest accusation.

That is the peculiar and extravagant power of the stigmatizing category: like Nietzsche's "prison-house of language," it indeed confines those to whom it is most strictly applied. But ambiguously used, it conjures a terror that rules all men, all actions, all relationships.

CONCLUSION: THE COCHON, MACHISMO, AND THE POLITICS OF GENDER

A rule is best preserved in its infractions. And a structure, a system of practices, is most readily defined, not by what is central to it, but by what is apparently marginal to it.

The cochon occupies the space and defines the nexus of all that is denigrated. His presence allows the construction of another

nexus, where the symbolic capital of masculinity is accumulated. In the cultural code of machismo, a series of couplings deploy themselves and define reality: masculinity/femininity, activity/passivity, violence/abuse, domination/subordination... Decoupling such a chain of associations would have to entail a political program far more radical than anything AMNLAE proposed or the Sandinistas actually tried.

Very much to the point of this talk: I interviewed Nicaraguan men on the New Family Laws and their intention. (These laws stipulated that paternity entail economic responsibility for one's children, those born both inside and outside marriage. These laws intended to minimize irresponsible sex, irresponsible parenting, and familial dislocation.) My informants very frequently took recourse to the same standard constructs. First, the interrogative: "What do the Sandinistas want from us? That we should all become cochones?" And then, the tautological: "A man has to be a man." That is, a man is defined by what he is not (a cochon).

From one angle, the distinction between men and women might seem enough to keep machismo's dynamics in play. Not so. For men do not "fall" to the status of women when they fail to maintain their pre-defined masculinity; they become something else: not quite men, not quite women. It could be said, then, that they fall both farther and less far than women's station. Less far,

because for some purposes and in some contexts, despite his stigma, a cochon can usually maintain some masculine prerogatives. Farther, because a woman is not stigmatized for being a woman, per se, not even for being a strong woman whose demeanor violates certain gender norms. One is, however, stigmatized for being less than a man.

It might moreover seem tempting to understand the sexual stigma of the cochon as a direct extension of the logic of gender onto the realm of sexuality: as man is to woman, so the hombre-hombre is to the cochon. This equation partly holds, but is not quite adequate. While it is clear that the cochon's denigration is cast in strongly gendered terms, it is also cast in excess of those terms: as failure, inadequacy, weakness, and defeat. Such meanings can scarcely be directly attributed to Nicaragua's traditional conceptions of womanhood, which celebrate a cult of elevated motherhood. I have attempted to demonstrate the connections between gender and sexuality without theoretically collapsing the two. Moreover, I think my approach marks an advance over previous strategies for theorizing masculinity as the simple inverse of femininity.

Did the Sandinista revolution fail because it failed to emancipate cochones? Not per se. Did the revolution decline because it deferred a revolution in gender roles? Again, to put it that way would be an exaggeration. An agenda of legal and social reforms

were already underway. More militancy on such issues, under the circumstances, probably would have been more divisive. While the results of those reforms were ambiguous at best, a decade is scarcely be long enough to break family habits, change the meaning of gender, and overhaul the sexual economy.

The argument that I would construct goes more like this: the war, the embargo, and the crisis were all felt most intimately in Nicaraguan family life: increasing gender conflicts; accelerated male abandonment; the surplus impoverishment of women and children... And how could one speak meaningfully of "working class solidarity" while its families remained defined by an oppressive culture of machismo, and were at war within themselves? The fabric of personal life, already tattered and patched together at best, unravelled. And with it, a revolution.

The structure of family life and the nature of gender cannot be understood -- or altered -- without reference to homosexuality. Homosexual intercourse and homosexual stigma play a clear and major role in the construction of appropriate gender for men. Machismo's ultimate reinforcement is the sanction: that one might be seen as, or become stigmatized as, or become, a cochon, if one fails to maintain one's proper masculinity as defined by machismo.

If the New Family Laws, the project of the New Man, and attempts at rolling back the culture of machismo have largely failed, this is because such attempts at cultural reconstruction left undeconstructed the grounding oppositions of the system, and thus left machismo's driving engine largely untouched.

However, I do not wish to conclude by making that system appear all-powerful. The role of theory should never be to bolt every window and bar every escape hatch from such a prison-house. Like any other system of arbitrary power, privilege, and exploitation, machismo generates innumerable resistances, evasions, and conflicts. Among men, these have not yet been as systematically mobilized as they have been among women. The slow emergence after 1990 of an open gay liberation movement would seem to mark an important turning point in Nicaragua's political culture.

But even in a public world structured by power and cruelty, there are private worlds that turn on love. I have already said that in their personal relations, some couples -- even couples that define themselves as consisting of an hombre-hombre and a cochon -- conduct their affairs in a humane and tender way. These relationships violate the rules of the system, subvert its operation, play with its meanings, and elaborate new possibilities, even to the point of rendering null the opposition

between "hombre-hombre" and "cochon." In private transactions, then, the political economy of machismo is routinely subverted.

Should such private arrangements ever be aired in the open, they would constitute a radical challenge to the stability of the system.

On the public occasion of carnaval, and in other carnivalesque festivities, the official body is travestied and a rebellious libidinal body is liberated. The political economy of machismo is transgressed, and its values are rudely reversed. Queers are not the only ones who enjoy the antics of carnaval; everyone becomes a little bit queer. It might be countered that carnivaltime comes but once a year, and that is true. And carnival is, after all, only play. But play is not a trivial matter. Carnival play is very different from those serious games that make boys into men. Such play models new perceptions, alternative bodies, utopian realities. Such play affords a momentary escape from the strictures of everyday life. This spirit of play has been growing and developing inside carnival for the better part of five centuries.

Should that spirit of play escape carnival, it would remake the world.