

Katherine Borland. **Unmasking Class, Gender, and Sexuality in Nicaraguan Festival**. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006. Pp. 184, notes, references, index. ISBN:0-8165-2511-0, \$45.00 cloth.

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Nicaragua has experienced an incredibly difficult century of supposed independence, a century wherein a variety of internal and external forces to Nicaragua sought and seeks to define and redefine the economic, political, social, and cultural landscape, a situation not unfamiliar to Latin America as a whole. Katherine Borland, in *Unmasking Class, Gender, and Sexuality in Nicaraguan Festival*, has crafted an illuminating and thoughtful ethnographic-historical analysis of Nicaraguan festival as one arena wherein this struggle for power is played out. An Associate Professor of Comparative Studies in the Humanities at The Ohio State University at Newark, Borland illustrates Nicaraguan festival as a complex locus for the construction, assertion, and negotiation of individual, local, and national identities.

Borland examines the interplay of two regions: the political center and capital city of Managua and the city of Masaya, 30 minutes to Managua's south, designated the Capital of Nicaraguan Folklore in 2000. Borland centers her analysis on Masaya's indigenous neighborhood of Monimbo and the enormously popular Saint Jerome festival, a three-month long veneration of Masaya's patron saint during which a multitude of cultural enactments are performed. Masaya holds the largest indigenous population in Nicaragua and has been the most popular ritual center for "at least two centuries" (14). However, it was not until the early Somoza era that Masaya was singled out as the formal representative of Nicaraguan tradition and Masayan indigenous tradition appropriated in service of mestizo nationalism. Since, Masayans and their traditions have been political terrain, a site on which to build and manipulate both alliances and identities. Expressed in Nicaraguan festival is the resultant tension between indigeneity and mestizaje, between the poor and the elite, and between the populace and the power, all further exemplified and magnified in the interplay between Masaya and Managua.

Importantly, Borland highlights the agency of the marginalized Masayans and the oppositional power of popular culture. Masayans, Borland makes clear, refuse to be used in service of a nationalist enterprise. Borland asserts that festivals are a "people's theater" wherein Masayans "negotiate, incorporate, and resist globally circulating ideas,

identities, and material objects" (5). Rather than passive conduits of culture, Borland posits that Masayans have directly and creatively opposed wholesale appropriation of their traditions by actively cultivating cultural revival in response to the repeated threats to their cultural authority. Political turmoil has roused Masayans to "construct a unique identity in and through festival" (6).

Delineating that idea, Borland focuses on cultural enactments from three different political periods: the Somoza era (1936-79), the Sandinista era (1979-90), and the neo-liberal era (1990-2006). Borland uses the small frame of ethnographic analysis on festival enactments, particularly those of the indigenous centered neighborhood of Monimbo, and then widens to the larger frame of historical context and change. Chapters one and two set up Borland's approach to the material and introduce both the embraced and projected role of Masayans as conservators of Nicaragua's cultural heritage. Chapter three examines the carnivalesque torovenado masquerades, their appropriation by political regimes and their subsequent modernization and decontextualization from religious beliefs. Chapter four examines a response to such appropriation and modernization through the Procession of the Ahuizotes—a parallel festival created out of the torovenado specifically by and for indigenous-identified Monimbo, communally located and expressive of the re-investment of religious belief and the supernatural into the community. Chapter five is an examination of the Negras Marimbas dance, originally an indigenous parody of Spanish court dancing and, concurrently, the mestizo, now largely appropriated by the nation—and the mestizo—and reconstituted to undergird the social hierarchy of class and race. Chapter six adds another layer to the Negras dance: it is a close reading of four Negras rehearsals, explicating thoroughly the transvestitism implicit in the dance and processes of redefinition of gender roles and sexuality through performance. Chapter seven explores a new neoliberal, Christian tradition—that of Monimbo's Wagon Pilgrimage to Popoyuapa. Based on the veneration of the saints and the experience of the miraculous, the Pilgrimage is a distinctly religious tradition formed in direct response to the secularization of previously religiously motivated festival enactments.

Borland makes clear that each of these cultural enactments is distinct, yet she likewise proves that Nicaraguan festivals are complex and complicated intersections of cultural politics, religious belief, and the performance of social identities, enactments that comment upon and inform the others. Throughout her analysis, Borland weaves the impact and influence of modernization, folklorization linked to nationalism, religion, and secularization, as well as the issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Borland's incorporation of an historical lens puts festival performance in a larger historical context, thus enabling the reader to see how communities may use cultural enactments as a means of constructing and negotiating identity on individual, local, and national

levels and how these levels are in constant interaction with one another amid additional tensions brought about by global influences such as tourism.

Borland received an Honorable Mention for the Elli Kōngäs Maranda Prize for outstanding work in women's folklore or feminist folkloristics, sponsored by the Women's Section of the American Folklore Society, for her efforts in this book. The book is a collection of interrelated essays, well-linked with a solid grounding in place and context beginning each chapter. The academic or lay reader with little historical knowledge of Nicaragua and its tumultuous past will not only be able to follow along but also to envision Borland's descriptions. Borland provides an extensive analysis, though sometimes repetitive, as can only be expected of a collection of essays rather than a work conceived originally as a book. Borland's strength lies in her specificity and her ability both to perceive and to translate the allegorical nature of human behavior: it is always refreshing to read scholarship that articulates the agency of persons and peoples whom many would prefer to strip of agency, either by placing an obstacle to action or by the refusal to acknowledge that such actions take place. Borland demonstrates wonderfully that Masayans reclaim their culture, their cultural standing, and their social identity by reshaping and redefining tradition in response to individuals and forces which seek to appropriate and use Masayan traditions for their own ends.

With the re-election of one-time radical Sandinista President Daniel Ortega, (now, possibly, a middle of the road leftist) it will be interesting to chart the changes not only in the political, economic, and social organization of Nicaragua but also in the cultural enactments responding to such changes. I, for one, hope Katherine Borland will continue to keep us apprised.