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Pilgrimage to Popoyuapa: Catholic Renewal and Ethnic Performance in Neoliberal Nicaragua

This article examines the growth of an eight-day wagon pilgrimage to the festival of Jesus the Rescuer in Rivas, Nicaragua. Pilgrims' nostalgic desire converges with Parish priests' successful marketing of the religious image to create a "renewal" that is consonant with government assertions that Nicaragua is a Catholic nation. Yet the meaning of the event for wagon pilgrims remains rooted in their sense of indigenous difference, and their own practices continue to reflect a commitment to the popular Catholicism of the mayordomía system, upon which their indigenous identity is partly based. The different meanings that organizers, participants, and observers attribute to the pilgrimage demonstrate that such popular enactments are multivocal phenomena, neither inherently conservative nor automatically resistant to the social and cultural establishment.

ON MONDAY, APRIL 1, 2001, about 160 oxen-drawn covered wagons carrying perhaps two thousand pilgrims traveling from different towns and villages in the southern pacific region of Nicaragua meet at Gil Gonzalez bridge on the Pan-American Highway north of Rivas. An equal number of Rivas *padrinos*, or sponsors, are there to greet them with refreshments and baskets of food. On Tuesday morning, the procession of the wagons enters Popoyuapa, a small settlement of less than 4,000¹ just outside of Rivas, which is in the throes of preparing for its annual fiesta. By Friday, tiny Popoyuapa expects more than 30,000 pilgrims and visitors, who arrive by bus, truck, car or on foot to place offerings at the feet of the miraculous Christ image, Jesús del Rescate, take part in his procession, and swim in nearby Lake Nicaragua.

Of the wagon pilgrimage *Nuevo Diario* reporter, Flor de Maria Palma, writes on April 4, 2001: "In this way is commemorated the renewal of that tradition which began over 150 years ago and which twelve years ago was at the point of being lost when only four pilgrim wagons arrived to venerate the famous and miraculous image of Jesus the Rescuer in his sanctuary at Popoyuapa."² In the discourse of the press old and new are coupled in unproblematic ways. But what is being renewed, why, and what does this say about the practice of pilgrimage in Nicaragua? Palma does not mention

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that since the early 1970s overall attendance at the festival in honor of Jesús del Rescate has risen, for her focus is the wagon pilgrimage, which clearly traditionalizes a previously unmarked form of travel (Handler and Linnekin 1984) and can be viewed as a folklorization of the act of pilgrimage itself (Mendoza 2000:48).³ What does this nostalgic turn signify? To determine how the “renewal of tradition” is functioning in any particular instance, we need to understand the form itself and the motivations and intentions of those who produce or perform it as well as the influence of actors and institutions from the larger-than-local arena.⁴

Pilgrimage in Latin America has generally been analyzed by use of structural or semiotic models focused on the normative activities and beliefs of pilgrims.⁵ Pilgrimage, however, cannot be described according to some ideal model, either spiritual or social, for it is a category of human behavior that embraces a variety of beliefs, actions, experiences, and artifacts. In any specific case, form and meaning must be discovered not simply through observation and normative descriptions, but also through attending to the various discourses of participants and even nonparticipants. John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow (1991), in their essays on Christian pilgrimage, challenge us to move beyond the tired argument of whether pilgrimage reinforces or subverts the established order and regard it instead as a realm of competing discourses.⁶ It is a resource that can be drawn upon in different ways, reconceived and revised over time. In the case of the pilgrimage to Popoyuapa, where participation has dramatically increased and new practices are being introduced, the pilgrimage demonstrates a *convergence of interests* among the religious authorities who control the shrine or sanctuary, the pilgrims who make the journey, the visitors who come to watch, and the residents who act as hosts. While each group, and even individuals within each group, may understand the phenomenon differently, they interpret each other's motivations as convergent with or at least tolerant of their own.⁷

Once we acknowledge that the nature of our object is not a given, and once we work to explain pilgrimage growth as a consequence of the felicitous convergence of various actors' motivations, actions, and articulations of a tradition, though, we must still consider the political context within which the practices emerge as a limiting factor on any sense of empowerment we might attribute to participants. Frans J. Shryer has called for greater attention to “the analysis of the operation of contemporary pilgrimages in politically volatile areas both in Mexico and other parts of Mesoamerica” (1991:367).⁸ Nicaragua, of course, experienced a progressive revolution in the 1980s, which was followed by an electoral victory in 1990 of a coalition of parties opposed to Sandinista revolutionaries.⁹ Sandinista cultural policy had supported an incipient folklore revival, but privileged cultural rather than religious aspects of popular tradition.¹⁰ The UNO (Union of National Opposition) and Liberal Party¹¹ governments of the 1990s strongly asserted the nation's Catholic identity. After playing a mediating role between the Somoza dictatorship and Sandinista revolutionaries in the 1970s, Catholic Church leader Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo consistently supported the traditional ruling classes against the Sandinistas throughout the revolutionary and postrevolutionary periods.¹² The growth of popular religious activities of all kinds in Nicaragua takes place against this background. Although popular culture is often identified as a site of resistance to hegemonic forces,¹³ we should recall that collective

popular religious expressions require at least the tolerance of religious authorities, usually local priests, and are sometimes expressly promoted by them.¹⁴

Over the past 30 years, but particularly since 1990, religious authorities have exerted increasing control over popular devotion at Popoyuapa as well as in the home communities of wagon pilgrims. Yet, in spite of Masaya wagon pilgrims' compliance with the Rivas priests' directives, they continue to apply an alternate set of meanings to the pilgrimage based on their specially marked ethnic/local identity.¹⁵ Here, as in many other parts of Latin America, popular religious practice contains an assertion of indigenous identity, and that assertion functions to mark out a psychic space where otherwise dominated individuals exert some authority. At Popoyuapa, then, the interests of different groups converged in a particular historical circumstance to popularize the festival and produce growth, but that convergence cannot be equated with a unified understanding of the meaning of the pilgrimage among all its participants. Eade and Sallnow note that the study of pilgrimage remains in its infancy (1991:26). In fact, very little has been written about any of Nicaragua's pilgrimages.¹⁶ In this article, I trace the growth of the pilgrimage to Popoyuapa and the emergence of the wagon pilgrims, focusing primarily on the perspective of the organizers of the Masaya wagon pilgrimage.¹⁷

Origins

The pilgrimage to Popoyuapa exists within a system of beliefs and practices that constitute a widely shared inheritance from the Latin American colonial period. The system is based on the veneration of the saints, a category that in the Latin American popular understanding includes the Virgin Mary and Christ. In an earlier convergence of interests, evangelizing Spanish missionaries found that, by establishing lay religious organizations that would finance and produce saint's day festivals, they could "christianize" former practices and control native populations. Because these organizations were ethnically segregated (Mestizo, African, Indian), however, they provided a relatively autonomous space within the colonial system where subject people could nurture alternative beliefs and practices. Thus, popular Catholicism in the colonial period constituted both an imposition and a space of resistance to domination.

The saints actively intervene in one's fate and believers can petition their images—statues, prints, or other representations—for favors. In addition, however, the saints require placating, for they may punish the unfaithful. The veneration of the saints constitutes, according to Manuel María Marzal, a "foundational religious experience" in Latin American popular Catholicism (1992:77). In Nicaragua, a believer will typically make a promise to a saint to venerate him or her on condition that the saint provide a favor, usually to cure a sick animal or family member. When the cure occurs, the petitioner is obligated to fulfill the promise by hosting a prayer party on the saint's day, organizing a street performance during a patronal festival, or making a pilgrimage.¹⁸ Although any saint may be petitioned for favors, certain images have developed a reputation for dispensing miracles. Popoyuapa's Jesús del Rescate is one of these "miraculous" images.¹⁹ People customarily petition him for relief from medical or legal difficulties. In response, the thankful *promesantes* pin "miracles," tiny metal images of limbs, children, and jails to a cloth at the base of the image.

In the absence of documentary or archeological evidence, the origin of the pilgrimage to Popoyuapa is a matter of speculation.²⁰ According to local legend the image was found floating on the waves of Lake Nicaragua—hence, the “Rescued” Christ.²¹ Living memory attests that the pilgrimage has existed for at least the last 150 years, but it is likely older.²² Popoyuapan residents recall that a small image of Jesús del Rescate was broken in the earthquake that hit Rivas in 1844 but was restored sometime later by faithful Popoyuapans.²³ Some believe that this small image is the original miraculous image. It is stored at a church in the city of Rivas and brought out only on the first Thursday of Lent, when residents of Popoyuapa hold a candlelight vigil in a little chapel called Sangregrado. At this vigil, a large tree stump is set on fire, because, according to legend, that was the sign that originally led to the discovery of the image. Two contemporary accounts for why this image is not publicly displayed indicate a history of tension between Rivas’s Catholic leaders and Popoyuapans concerning appropriate practices of veneration. A sanctuary employee explained that the “original” image is stored because the authorities fear theft. But an eighty-four-year-old resident of the village alludes to a conflict with an Italian priest who, during an earlier period, refused to let the Popoyuapans have the image, keeping it locked in the church instead.²⁴

Some historical evidence supports at least the possibility of this second claim. In a move to “christianize” indigenous and peasant Catholics during the 1940s and 1950s, priests seized images formerly controlled by communities in many areas of Nicaragua. Jeffrey L. Gould (1998) mentions that a priest took an image away from a rural community in Matagalpa that had been circulating from house to house in the late 1940s, and Richard Adams (1976) mentions similar incidents in the 1950s in the Nicaraguan highlands. We can infer, then, that the removal of the “original” image of Jesús del Rescate from Popoyuapa may have been an attempt to stamp out popular religious practices by a former priest who objected to them.²⁵ Yet, the practice of venerating religious images outside the church continues in Nicaragua today, which indicates that priests in different communities at different times approach popular religious practices differently. In Monimbó, Masaya, for example, several small images belonging to various city churches are kept and venerated by devotees in their homes.²⁶

Father Leonel Navas, the parochial priest at Rivas since 1992, denied that the Catholic authorities were ever antagonistic to popular religious practices. He insisted that the large Christ figure is the only one that has ever been venerated. Rivas, however, owns six smaller images that the priests lend out to communities in order to make the traditional *colecta*, an appeal to the community for donations to underwrite sanctuary and festival costs. Father Navas explained that, several months before the festival, the priests allow community members to carry the small images door to door to solicit funds. He refrained, though, from commenting on the Thursday night vigil at the Sangregrado chapel.²⁷ It appears, then, that two parallel venerations occur in Popoyuapa, one that is promoted by the parochial priests and another popular one that they tolerate but do not endorse. Of course, some religious believers participate in both.

To return to the practice of pilgrimage, Adams indicates that for at least the last century and probably longer, Nicaraguan pilgrimages, including those to Popoyuapa,

have represented extensions of the tendency for rural residents who lacked churches to attend city and town festivals and for neighboring towns to visit each others' patronal festivals (1976:211). Throughout Latin America, patronal festivals combine devotional with celebratory practices and usually consist of a series of masses, a procession of the saint's image, costumed ritual dances or dramas, loud music, fireworks, feasting, dancing, festival games, mechanical rides, artisans' fairs, and heavy drinking.²⁸ Of course, individual visitors may participate in different sets of festival behaviors,²⁹ but, in general, the Latin American fiesta and festivals are understood to combine both devotional acts and merrymaking with many participants engaging in some of both kinds of activities. Masayans who recall visiting the Popoyuapa festival in the 1940s and 1950s describe it as a small, merry fiesta with lots of dancing and drinking.³⁰

Marketing Jesús del Rescate

In 1972, when Father Edgardo Santamaría arrived at Rivas Parish, the Popoyuapa sanctuary was much smaller than it is today. According to the priest, wagon pilgrims spent three days drinking and arrived at Popoyuapa inebriated. They brought marimbas inside the church and danced. Such practices are historically associated with indigenous forms of worship in Nicaragua, in which believers marked out an autonomous psychic space in fiesta. Indeed, in 1662 an investigator sent by the Spanish king complained that indigenous Nicaraguan religious brotherhoods danced, feasted, and became inebriated during religious festivals to "recall the memory of their antiquity."³¹ Like his Spanish predecessor, Father Santamaría viewed these practices as serious errors, because the festival occurs during the week prior to Holy Week, that is, at the end of Lent. In the "official" view, in light of the calendar date, the festival should be somber, not merry.

More egregious were the houses of ill repute, dance halls, and liquor stalls set up in the square immediately in front of the church. The atmosphere was more like that of a fair than a sanctuary, and vendors sold their goods even inside the church. With the assistance of the Rivas city government and police, Father Santamaría cleared the square of dance halls and liquor stalls, which were removed to the highway. Moreover, between 1973 and 1983, Father Santamaría initiated an extensive building project to enlarge the sanctuary, enclosing it with stone walls topped by iron gates.

Beside the site he erected a convent where four missionary nuns from the Order of Christ the King now reside. In addition to ministering to the community of devotees, these nuns run a religious concession beside the sanctuary. At the sanctuary itself, Father Santamaría constructed a corridor that runs along the back of the church, where the life-size Christ figure is housed. Now the crowd of promesantes visiting the image are organized in a single line running the length of the corridor. A glass window behind the altar allows a view of the image from within the church. At the same time, if one is inside the church, the line of pilgrims visiting the image remains hidden from view. These physical transformations allowed those responsible for the sanctuary, the Rivas priests and missionary nuns, to control access to and behavior within the sacred space more effectively.

Thus, the 1970s saw both the enlargement of the sanctuary to accommodate greater

numbers of visitors and the removal of certain popular practices that religious authorities considered inappropriate. Although Popoyuapans at first resisted these changes,³² they did not appear to affect visitor attendance at the festival, which began to grow. In fact, Father Navas, who took over in 1992 with Father Alfonso Alvarado Lugo, described their work as marketing the site and its tradition.³³ He commented that the nuns at the sanctuary not only sell statues and prints of various popular saints, they have also developed a brisk market in Jesús del Rescate bumper stickers and ornaments to hang in one's car. And that, he explained, inserts the image into the everyday environment of contemporary Nicaraguans. In addition, Father Navas reported, Cardenal Obando y Bravo has attended the festival regularly, bringing national exposure to their work.

But their aggressive marketing has been accompanied by a marked change in emphasis. Father Navas emphatically stated that he was restoring the festival to its original Christian meaning and form. Obviously, "original" does not refer to a prior historical reality, but rather to an ideal of Catholic practice promoted by these religious leaders. Indeed, published restrictions indicate that many Popoyuapans continue to view the festival primarily as an economic opportunity, even though the priests have monopolized trade at the site itself. For instance, regulations published in 2001 allow Popoyuapans to sell and serve food inside their homes and patios to festival guests, but not to use sidewalks or streets for this purpose.³⁴

Still, the priests' "christianizing" effort requires constant vigilance. The celebratory aspect of the Jesús del Rescate festival has been removed from the immediate site but not eliminated. Pilgrims, who now increasingly arrive by bus and car, have only to return to the highway for merrymaking or head down to the shores of Lake Nicaragua in the adjacent community of San Jorge, which are lined with restaurants and bars. Journalistic discourse supports and even advances the priests' christianizing effort by eliding the history of merrymaking in the central plaza. For instance, in February 2001 reporter Lourdes Vanegas López writes, "Parochial priests Alfonso Alvarado Lugo and Leonel Navas, since they arrived to take charge of the Rivas parish seven [*sic*] years ago, have fought to conserve the religious tradition of the fiestas of Popoyuapa, since they are losing those values with the establishment of public dance halls on the outskirts, which made the place inviting for evildoers and antisocial types."³⁵ Thus, Vanegas López regards secular practices rooted in tradition as recent deviations from an ideal past model. In fact, the 2001 fiesta did not occur without unsettling incidents. One youth suffered a fractured skull, and another drowned in Lake Nicaragua, where he had been drinking heavily with friends.³⁶ Moreover, the candlelight vigil for the small Christ image at Sangregrado has continued uninterrupted by the priests' innovations.

The Promise

Whereas Padre Santamaría was actively cultivating religious observance at the Popoyuapa sanctuary, nearby Masayans were developing their own devotional practices. In 1980,³⁷ Socorro Ortiz de Vivas and her husband, Juan Vivas López, both in

their forties, were living in the rural settlement of El Mojón on the southern outskirts of Masaya. Socorro (Doña Coco, as she is called locally) describes herself as a poor, illiterate *campesina*, a farmer's wife. When her husband fell ill, she made a promise that ultimately resulted in the creation of the wagon pilgrimage. Her narrative of that miracle, which I recorded in the spring of 1991, reveals a notion of pilgrimage that is rooted in popular religious conceptions.

The promise is normatively described as a petition to a saint for a favor. Yet, Socorro's narrative represents a rather more complex set of motivating circumstances. She begins with a promise of sorts, one that her husband made to her. In the beginning, it appears, their motivation for participating in the pilgrimage is essentially nostalgic. Of the two kinds of attractions the fiesta offers, at this initial stage the Vivas couple appears drawn by the merrymaking rather than the devotional opportunities.

Yo empecé ese viaje a Popoyoapa porque mi marido me había invitado.
 Él me decía, "Mira," me dice, "Coco, algún día vamos a ir. Es alegre ir a Popoyoapa," dice, "en carreta."
 "Sí," le digo, "Sí es alegre," porque yo fui," le digo, "de la edad de nueve años, de siete años, de ocho años. A mí me llevaron mis viejos como largo de catorce años."
 "Vamos a ir en carreta," me dice, "algún día."
 "Va púes," le digo yo.
 "Tenemos bueyes," me dice.
 "Sí", le digo, "vamos todos los muchachos, vamos a cuidarlos fuera."

[I began that trip to Popoyuapa because my husband had invited me.
 He said, "Look," he says, "Coco, let's go some day. It's fun to go to Popoyuapa," he says, "in a wagon."
 "Yes," I say. "It is fun, because I went," I tell him, "when I was nine years old, seven, eight. My old people took me for about fourteen years."
 "Let's go in a wagon," he says, "some day."
 "All right," I tell him.
 "We've got oxen," he says.
 "Yes," I say, "let's go with all the kids. Let's camp out with them."]³⁸

Both Socorro and Juan are focused on the pilgrimage as a recreational family activity. The idea of going in a wagon has to do with recreating their childhood experience with their children. Being independent farmers, they have oxen and a wagon, so the pilgrimage does not appear to represent an excessive sacrifice of household resources. But when Socorro tries to take her husband up on his promise, the couple experiences conflict:

Allá, figúrase que a mí me le ocurre un día cómo ver, y gracia en Marzo cuando ya principian—y le digo yo a él, arrimó él, ahorita como va y venga, le digo yo, él viene, y le digo yo, "Ah Vivas," porque yo sólo así le digo Vivas. "Vivas," le digo yo.
 "Ahá," me dice.
 "¿Sabes que te iba a decir?" le digo yo. "Que si vos no pu—¿que porqué no vamos a Rivas ahora?" le digo yo, "que—porque tenemos bueyes, tenemos carreta, y ¿Qué cuesta que vayamos?"
 Entonces, me dice así—"Ahorita," me dice, "no. ¿Cómo va a crearme que—? Sí, fíjate,"³⁹ me dice que, "que mira," me dice, "no tenemos bueyes a quedar para ésta."
 "Eso no freges vos," le digo. "Allí pasan en el camino unos buyecitos," le digo "que hasta que da lástima," le digo, "todo flaquito, feito," le digo.

"No, yo no voy con estos bueyes," me dice. "Quieren bueyes apropiados, quieren bueyes buenos, que."
 "Ah, bueno, púes," le digo así.

[From that point, what do you think? It occurred to me one day how to see and thanks,⁴⁰ in March, when they [the pilgrims] begin to—and I say to him, right now as he's coming and going, I say, he comes, and I say, "Ah Vivas," because I just call him Vivas. "Vivas," I say.

"Yes," he says.

"You know what I was going to say," I said.

"If you don't—why don't we go to Rivas this time?" I say, "because we have oxen, we have a wagon, and what will it cost us to go?"

So he says like that, "Right now," he says, "No. How are you going to believe me that—yes, look," he says, "see," he says, "we don't have oxen to spare for that."

"Don't screw that up," I say. "There are some little oxen that go by on the road," I say, "that move one to grief," I say, "so skinny and ugly," I say.

"No, I'm not going with these oxen," he says. "They want appropriate oxen, good oxen," he says.

"Ah, all right then," I say like that.]

Whether the oxen are good enough to use/display on the pilgrimage becomes the salient point for discussion, partly because Juan needs a compelling excuse to delay an intended act of devotion. At the same time, the decision to go on the pilgrimage rests with Juan, and, when he refuses, Socorro must accept. Nicaraguan society generally has been described as having a particularly recalcitrant form of male-dominance in spite of the Sandinista-period rhetoric of the "new man."⁴¹ Socorro's desire to participate in the pilgrimage is not sufficient to overcome Juan's concerns about the family's insufficient resources, because, essentially, it represents an optional life activity, a peasant's vacation of sorts.⁴²

On the other hand, a promise had been made. In Masaya, the proverb "jugar con el santo, menos con la limosna" (it is better to fool with the saint than the offering) is commonly employed to emphasize the importance of following through with an intended act of veneration. If, after having said that one would go to the festival of Jesús del Rescate, one does not follow through, bad luck is sure to follow:

Pero mire, ¿quién va a creermela? Pero las cosas las hacen para que uno crea y tenga fé. Bueno! Pasó. Eso creo que fue lunes o martes, pero como a los dos días de haberle dicho yo así, mire ese buey aparece renco. Y el buey tiesa sus dos maletas. Y así. Se estiraba para poderse enderezar, y allí más jodido. Que plun! vuelve a caer.

Él viene asustado como a las dos de la tarde. Me dice, "Fijate," me dice, "que el buey anda renco," me dice, "como tiesa las canillas," me dice, "como parálisis," me dice, "como no sé qué."

"Ála," le digo yo, "sobalo," le digo yo, "con gas, con esto que limpio yo. Sobale las patitas." Ah púes, martes fue. Miércoles, figurese que él se va para Masaya. Él estaba recién pasado de una enfermedad llamada la quebradura. Bueno! Él se fue, el anda bueno como ahorita. Regresó como a las seis. Andó un dolor aquí fuerte en la garganta.

"Ese es el aire que te fuiste y sos un gran necio." Pero yo comencé así, a comprarle medicamentos.

"Sí, pero es que sos un gran necio. Acordáte que el doctor te dijo que es prohibido."

Mire, el hombre el día jueves se estaba muriendo. El hombre está grave. Pa! Cerrado él la tapita, la garganta. El hombre ya no puede hablar. Porque él está, él no decía, en las señas él me decía que se iba a morir, que vendiera todos los animales, que se quedaban solos. Bueno.

Yo me voy donde la hija y le digo, "Tu papa está grave." Andaba la muchachita, esa, la que está casada ahorita, ve. Le digo, "Mira, andate," le digo yo, "a buscarte las inyecciones. Tal vez la inyección en la farmacia Milagrosa la hallas, porque es la única que yo no fui. Y tal vez allí hay. Primeramente Dios."

[But look. Who's going to believe it! But things happen so that one believes and has faith. Well! It happened. I think that was Monday or Tuesday, but about two days after I had said that, look, that ox went lame. And the ox with his two shins stiff. He stretched himself to straighten up and it made it worse. And plunk! He falls down again.

He (Juan) comes back frightened about two in the afternoon. He says, "Look," he says, "the ox is lame," he says, "like stiff shins, like a paralysis," he says, "like I don't know."

"Oh my," I say, "massage it," I say, "with gas, with this (rag) I clean with, massage his legs."

So, that was Tuesday. Wednesday, look, he goes to Masaya. He had recently recovered from an illness they call "the breaker." Well! He went, he was walking well, just as he is now. He came back about six. He had a strong pain here in his throat.

"That's the air, because you went and you're so troublesome!" (He became ill because he went out before he was fully recovered and was therefore susceptible to the folk illness of bad airs.) But I started like that, to buy him medicine.

"Yes, but it's that you are very troublesome. Remember that the doctor told you that you are forbidden to do that."

Look, the man was dying on Thursday. He was really ill. Pa! His mouth, his throat was completely closed. By then he couldn't talk. Because he's, he didn't say it, with gestures he said he was dying. He told me to sell the animals, that they should be left alone. Well.

I go to my daughter and say, "Your father is very ill." The little one was around, the one who is married now, see, I say, "Look, go," I tell her, "find some injections. Maybe you'll find injections in the Milagrosa pharmacy because it's the only one I haven't been to. And maybe they have it. God First."]

Confronted with her husband's sudden and serious illness, Socorro resorts first to modern medicine, but in Nicaragua, where medicine is often in short supply, an element of chance remains and has to be dealt with.⁴³ Suddenly, Socorro makes the connection between her earlier discussion with her husband and the onset of illness:

Pero como que alguien me dijo, acordate que lo que dijo él. Y por eso está así. Pero Tas! me acuerdo yo. Me voy para donde la hija. La Lila, esa, le digo yo, "Lila pero yo creo que tu papa, él está enfermo porque tu papa dijo que no pudo ir a Rivas porque no tenía bueyes buenos y que no sé qué. Y esto es Jesús de Rescate le está castigandolo," le digo "porque eso que dijo."

Ay Jesús de Rescate, mi lindo, arregate a mi buey y mejórame a mi marido. Arregatame a mi marido Señor. Condolete a mí, porque tengo un poco de hijas que de darle de comer. No hagas eso Señor, perdonáselo por su, por su, humildad. Por humilde Señor. No lo digo por ofenderte, y empiezo yo, mire, a pedir: Ay Jesusito has que hayen las inyecciones para que este hombre sane.

[But it was as if someone told me, remember what he said. And that's why he's this way. But wham! I remember. I go to my daughter. Lila, that one.

I say, "Lila, but I think your father, he's ill because your father said that he couldn't go to Rivas because he didn't have good oxen and because I don't know. And this is that Jesús de Rescate is punishing him," I say, "because of what he said."

Ay Jesús de Rescate, my beauty, fix my ox and cure my husband. Fix my husband, Lord. Take pity on me, because I have a number of daughters to feed. Don't do that, Lord, forgive him for his, for his humility. Because he is poor Lord, I don't say it to offend you, and I begin, look, to beg: Ay, Jesusito let there be injections to cure this man.]

Socorro's "breakthrough" into prayer and supplication is provoked not by the normative view of saints as sources of supernatural assistance. Instead, the prayer is intended to counteract the Lord of Popoyuapa's perceived punishment of his noncompliant devotee, Juan Vivas. Miraculously, her supplication is answered quickly and dramatically:

Inmediatamente a las once, mi hijita venía volada con las inyecciones, y le ponen la primera. Cuando eran como a la una del día, ya él estaba hablando y empezaba a pasar cosas líquidas. Cuando fue como a las cinco de la tarde, ya él estaba hablando. Y el buey estire la canilla, y él se para.

[Immediately at eleven o'clock, my little daughter came flying back with the injections, and they give him the first one. When it was about one in the afternoon, he was already talking, and he began to take liquids. When it was five in the evening, he was talking. And the ox stretched his calf and stood up.]

The fates of Juan and his ox are effectively linked in the narrative presentation. One sees that their parallel illnesses and cures stem from Juan's initial insistence that his ox was not good enough to use on the pilgrimage. Now Socorro can add the force of devotion to her desire to attend the fiesta at Popoyuapa, and, because of the role that the ox has played, pilgrimage in a wagon becomes a necessity.

Entonces, ve, vengo yo y le digo, "Mira, allí sí vos te fregastes. Yo voy a ir a Popoyoapa. Durante ese buey allí exista."

Ya cuando ese buey sí se muera, entonces allí me perdonas la promesa que te hice. No te llevo dinero, no te llevo nada. Simplemente voy a visitarte con la fé que te tengo pero curame mi buey. Entonces, por esa que yo le prometí al Señor, y si el buey se mejora y mejora mi marido yo es que voy al viaje de Popoyoapa.

[So, look, I come and say, "Look, that's where you screwed yourself. I'm going to Popoyuapa. As long as that ox lives."

Then when that ox dies, then you [Jesus the Rescuer] can forgive me that promise I made you. I'm not bringing you money, I'm not bringing anything. I'm just coming to visit you, which is what I promised the Lord, and if the ox gets better and my husband gets better, I will travel to Popoyuapa.]

Socorro's discourse contains the power to make things happen, at least within her own sphere of influence.⁴⁴ By the end of the tale, decision-making authority in the Vivas household has moved from the husband to the wife, for she has transformed a simple invitation of husband to wife into a much more serious promise of a suppliant to Christ. In the process she has enabled the family to do what they have desired all along, which is to go to the fiesta and camp out along the way, reliving a fondly remembered childhood experience. And yet, although Socorro has challenged her husband's authority and relied on the discourse of miracles to sanction her desire, we must be careful not to inflate her autonomy. Rather, we might see her as temporarily gaining advantage by recognizing an opportunity to thwart the larger system of gender relations that constrains her actions. In Michel de Certeau's terminology she has exercised a *tactic*, but she has not ultimately transformed her reality (1988:xix).⁴⁵

It is clear that negotiations with the divinity are flexible. For instance, Socorro limited her act of supplication temporally, indicating that, although the saint cannot be denied his devotion, the faithful can and do negotiate the terms. For the Vivas family, at least in 1991, when Socorro recalls her promise, the pilgrimage will continue as long as the ox lives, that is, ideally for several years. Other pilgrims condition their promises in similar ways. In 1991, Bosco Canales attended for the first time. He had made a promise years earlier but, because his grandmother, whom he cared for, had been ill, he had delayed fulfilling it until that year.⁴⁶ In an even more pointed case of

the flexible nature of a religious promise, Rosita Castillo, born in Matagalpa and now living in the United States, first attended the fiesta in 1999 when she was in her seventies, fulfilling a promise that her mother had made when Rosita was a child, the obligation passing from mother to daughter when the mother died in 1998.⁴⁷

In her 1991 narrative of a previous momentous event, Socorro's initial journey in a wagon is clearly motivated both by nostalgia *and* devotion. And during the 1980s the event appears to have fulfilled both devotional and recreational purposes. She explains that she and her family decided to travel with a few other people from Masaya and nearby San Juan de Oriente who still made the trip in wagons. After a few years, en route to the festival, this nucleus of pilgrims decided to formally establish themselves as a group. The act of veneration took on additional form when the group availed itself of an existing traditional resource, the *mayordomía*, in order to organize and elaborate their journey.

A *mayordomía* consists of usually eight members who work together as a team to plan and finance a festival and to care for small religious images in their homes. While these popular religious organizations exist throughout Nicaragua, they have proliferated in Monimbó, Masaya. Socorro and her husband had already served as *mayordomos* for the prestigious Señor de los Milagros, a Christ figure used in Holy Week processions in Masaya, and El Niño Dios, another prestigious image venerated in Monimbó during the Christmas season. In addition, they generously supported other local *mayordomías* with donations of goods and services. As farmers with their own land, they could contribute much-needed supplies, such as corn, wood, and farm animals to festival planning groups in the nearby city. In fact, during the revolutionary decade, Socorro and Juan say they resisted joining the El Mojón cooperative, because it would have made it more difficult for them to donate materials to the *mayordomías* they supported.⁴⁸ Although this may not have been their only complaint about revolutionary forms of production, it shows that religious reasons are persuasive. *Mayordomía* obligations, though they are voluntary, are emotionally compelling.

Monimboseños view the *mayordomías* as an important form of the mutual assistance neighborhood residents provide for one another. This mutual assistance creates a heightened sense of community that, in the absence of a separate language or communally held property, makes their indigenous-identified neighborhood qualitatively different from other communities in Masaya. Although they recognize a strong cultural barrier between their community and the mestizo town center, the boundaries between the neighborhood and adjacent rural areas are porous, making Monimbó a center for practices that radiate out to rural communities and nearby towns. Moreover, Monimboseños are known for their tendency to festivalize community practices whenever possible. As a consequence, Masaya has been named the capital of Nicaraguan folklore. Thus, when the wagon pilgrims decided to form a *mayordomía*, this move represented a self-conscious self-fashioning, as Masaya-area pilgrims turned a visit to another town's festival into a Monimbó tradition.

Socorro explains:

Se formaron como que fueron seis ellos. Varrones. Y dicen que ellos querían, que formara un comité, y que se hiciera una directiva, para que hubiera un *mayordomo* de las carretas. Entonces sale y

nombraron de mayordomo a Concepción Torres de San Juan de Oriente. Entonces fuimos con Concepción Torres, ya.

Bueno se, allí se hacían las reuniones, se hacían aquí, se hacían en Masaya, se hacían allá. Bueno, y bien organizado pués. Recojimos un dinero, matamos una res para el viaje, tuvimos una noche en vela de donde ellos, allí comimos, allí bebimos, y el segundo día salimos como a las cuatro de la tarde. Ya. Eso fue el primer año.

[They formed, since there were six of them. Men. And they said they wanted to form a committee, and that they should have a board, so there could be a mayordomo for the wagons. So they go and name Concepción Torres of San Juan de Oriente as mayordomo. So then we went with Concepción Torres.

Well, so they had meetings. They had them here (in El Mojón). They had them in Masaya. They had them there (in San Juan de Oriente). Well, and very well organized they were. We collected money. We killed a steer for the journey. We spent a night in vigil at their place. We ate, we drank, and the second day, we left at about four in the afternoon. So. That was the first year (1988).]

Socorro describes the formation of the mayordomía of the wagons as both a necessary move in organizing a group that has grown in number and an elaboration of festival practices according to a preestablished model. Before this time, individuals who chose to travel by wagon would simply start out for Rivas in the days preceding the festival. Now the wagon pilgrims visited one another in their respective homes to plan their trip, they collected resources for redistribution in the festive context,⁴⁹ and they marked their departure from Masaya by holding a feast and an all-night vigil. Organizing the event, then, essentially means increasing social interaction and festive elaboration. The mayordomía creates or intensifies the sense of community wagon pilgrims feel. In 1989, however, the year journalists identify as the low point for the tradition, the Masaya mayordomía was weakened by internal conflicts:

El segundo año ya no pudimos porque hubo contrariedad en el marido con la esposa. Se desahunaron y entonces ya ellos no quieren servir. De nada. (Por problemas personales.) Si, por problemas personales. Entonces pués, lo, entonces vinieron y nombraron a nosotros, a mi pués, como quedamos a la orilla de la pasada. Que nosotros fuéramos la mayordoma.

[The second year we couldn't do it, because there was a problem between the husband and wife. They broke up, and so then they didn't want to serve. At nothing. (Personal problems.) Because of personal problems. So, well, then they came and named us, well me, since we are at the edge of the route. That we should be the mayordoma.]⁵⁰

Acknowledging that mayordomía leadership involves the cooperative efforts of a couple, Socorro claims greater leadership authority in this case. It was she, after all, who had made the promise, and her intense emotional attachment to the image is recognized and rewarded by the group who named her mayordoma. At the same time she gives a practical reason for locating the mayordomía at her farm—it is well situated. Therefore, in 1990 and 1991, the Masaya mayordomía of the wagons gathered at the Vivas farm in El Mojón. According to Socorro, numbers vary from year to year—from four in 1986, nine in 1987, eleven in 1988, to nineteen in 1990 and seventeen in 1991—but, overall, the effect of creating the mayordomía was to increase participation.

The mayordoma hosts a meal the night the pilgrims set off, and this attracts nonpilgrim well-wishers, who arrive to celebrate with the pilgrims. Thus, the pilgrims'

leave-taking provides an additional opportunity for networking beyond the participant group. When I accompanied the pilgrims in March of 1991, Socorro prepared stewed chicken and vegetables for the wagon owners, tripe soup for the walkers, and black coffee for everyone. Thus, the Masaya mayordoma recognized and marked the distinction between wagon owners and walkers in her food distribution, just as the festive meal itself distinguished the Monimbó wagon pilgrims from those traveling individually from other settlements.

At dusk, fifteen wagons filed up the road, with people walking before, behind, and beside the great chugging oxen. As the wagons entered the clearing beside the house, we heard someone blow the conch shell, a sound that would be repeated during the journey to announce our arrival in the populated areas. An inebriated musician sat on a bench near the kitchen and played his marimba.⁵¹ While some of those who arrived to see the pilgrims off were drinking heavily, the mayordoma did not distribute alcohol to her guests, and the gathering as a whole remained upbeat, not raucous.⁵²

At eleven in the evening we started. Socorro walked behind the wagon with her adult son, Enrique, and her friend, Bosco Canales. They set a rapid pace, chanting prayers punctuated with hymns. We wound up the road past one small town to another, where, despite the late hour some households served the pilgrims *chicha* (a sweet corn beverage), and others got up to watch us pass. Then we followed a dirt road for several hours to the Cabezas River, where we camped for the day. We spent the next two days camping and swimming first at Cabezas and then at Ochomogo River, about two hours down the road. Some young men, who had been working at the Managua market, came down on the bus to join us. They explained they were accompanying their elderly mother, who had made a promise to attend when her family was affected by illness. The practice of younger relatives accompanying *promesantas* is common. Other pilgrims mentioned that they had come because a friend invited them. Thus, the group of wagon pilgrims consisted of some people who had made a religious promise, some who were devotees of the saint, and many who came in support of another pilgrim. Although everyone was friendly, the family groups tended to stick together. Pilgrims were wary of local people, perhaps in consequence of the factionalism and conflict that had pervaded the country since the 1990 elections. They shared jokes and some indulged in mild drinking, but no communal gatherings or collective performances occurred. After the first night, the event maintained the easy feel of a camping trip.

The mayordoma and her cuadro were responsible for planning the pilgrimage route, finding campsites, and keeping the wagons orderly and safe. On the next leg of the journey, the wagons kept trying to pass each other on the highway, behavior that upset Socorro, because she worried it would cause a traffic accident. After walking from about three in the afternoon to eight in the evening, we arrived at Gil Gonzalez, where we were greeted by a brass band, and a couple, the Rivas padrinos, handed out hot coffee and rolls. After dark the Rivas priest gave a welcoming speech (illuminated by his jeep's headlights) in which he named all the wagon owners and their town. Then, the priest reminded everyone that they should be in Rivas the next morning by eight, when he would be saying a mass for them.



Figure 1. The Monimbó Wagon Pilgrimage, March 1991.

We broke camp at 3:30 the next morning. When the sun came up at six, I saw a landscape peppered with orchards—papaya, pineapple, banana. To Socorro's dismay, some pilgrims ran along the road snatching fruit. She even yelled at one young man, who was a member of the committee, chastising him for setting a bad example. She did, however, allow us to gather fallen fruit from the mango trees along the road.

The Monimbó pilgrims punctuated our entrance to Rivas with fireworks, music, and marimba dancing. Pilgrims gathered flowers from the roadside and made crowns for the oxen. At the head of the procession, four young teenagers dressed in folk costume led the way, accompanied by a new marimba player. We wound through the small settlement very slowly, because pilgrims were setting off firecrackers at the head of the procession and the noise frightened the oxen. As we came up toward the church, someone was blowing a kazoo, and Socorro fretted that he should have used a conch shell. I had the impression we were to meet other wagon groups arriving from different towns, but whether we were the only ones that year or our timing was off, we entered Popoyuapa alone. We had missed the eight o'clock mass, but no one seemed concerned. At the church steps the priest greeted us with another brass band. The wagons were led off to one side, the marimbero played, and the young people danced energetically in front of the church. Then the priest announced that tripe soup and corn pudding had been prepared for the pilgrims, and everyone went off to find bowls. The wagon pilgrims had arrived. The religious procession would take place in a few

days, and already vendors had lined the square facing the church in anticipation of the crowds of visitors.

Clearly, the 1991 Monimbó Wagon Pilgrimage consisted of a number of patterned festival practices centered on a devotional core. The first night's departure provided a time of heightened religious intensity, which would be repeated the following Thursday evening, when pilgrims would participate in a candlelight vigil at the church, and on Friday, the day of Jesús del Rescate's procession through Popoyuapa. In between, the event was characterized by relaxation, recreation, and humor. The mayordomía structured the event—planning the route, determining the campsites, trying to keep the pilgrims orderly and safe, just as Rivas organizers attempted to control a larger, rowdier crowd later in the week.

How does the “renewed” pilgrimage differ from that Socorro experienced in her youth? Socorro indicates that in the 1930s and 1940s, the pilgrimage was an individual family activity. Whoever could go, went, but there was no festival organization. Some years she went with her grandparents in a wagon; some years on foot. But, she remarks, there were fewer people on the pilgrimage and fewer at Popoyuapa. It was sadder (*más triste*). From Socorro's perspective in 1991, the renewal was not simply a return to but an improvement over what she remembers from her childhood. The advantage, then, of creating a mayordomía is that social connections are forged, connections that make the trip to a nearby community more pleasant for the individuals within the group.

Harnessing the Pilgrimage

Father Santamaría had enlarged the church and set limits on fiesta activities in the 1970s and 1980s. The Masaya wagon pilgrims had organized themselves and elaborated additional festival activities both at home and to mark their entrance into Popoyuapa. In the 1990s, the Rivas priests responded to this popular movement by harnessing the activity to their own project to christianize the festivities. In 1992, two new priests arrived to advance Father Santamaría's work, and they wholeheartedly embraced the wagon pilgrims. Father Leonel Navas explained that they were motivated to “recover” the tradition, recalling that very few wagons arrived in Popoyuapa and Masaya was the only organized group. The two priests, therefore, went to visit other towns from which wagon pilgrims came and met with individual pilgrims to help them organize themselves into committees. In addition, they named Juan Vivas, of El Mojón, president of the entire group of wagon pilgrims, who soon arrived from six communities: Masaya, Granada, San Juan del Oriente, Nandaime, Santa Teresa—Los Encuentros, and San José de Gracia. The priests also intervened in the practice of the wagon pilgrims, requiring that they take a vow of sobriety for the duration of the pilgrimage.

A little earlier in Rivas, Dr. Ramón Valdéz Jiménez had begun to act as a padrino for the pilgrims, providing them with light refreshments at the Gil Gonzalez bridge and food at the church when they arrived the next day. The priests encouraged Dr. Valdéz to recruit individual padrinos for each wagon, and thus began a custom of providing a basket of basic foods to each pilgrim as a stimulus for their participation.

By 2001, the Rivas padrinos had become quite generous. In addition to the basic foods basket, one padrino prepared three thousand *nacatamales* (steamed corn and pork dish), another provided pasturage for the animals, and a third offered fodder for the oxen. The mayor and his council, the police and fire departments, and bus drivers were recruited to welcome, honor, and provide for the wagon pilgrims.

The padrinos' activities, however, introduced a hierarchical model of class relations into the performance of pilgrimage, because all wagon pilgrims are poor,⁵³ whereas many of the Rivas padrinos are people of means. A padrino is both a festival sponsor and a godfather. In either case, the word implies a relationship that grants the padrino respect and authority, while it requires his generosity.⁵⁴ Here, then, the Rivas *patron* appears to be providing working people with food and drink in order to encourage them to assume and perform a humble, rural identity in honor of the saint.⁵⁵ Although this role allows him to participate in the festival, he does not join with the pilgrims in any real sense. Moreover, though wagon pilgrims are not forced in any way to turn themselves into nostalgic symbols for the Rivas town fathers, one can see in the display of festive cooperation between host and visiting group an enactment of dominance and subordination. Indeed, newspaper coverage of the wagon pilgrimage depicts the padrinos as the party responsible for increasing participation from four to 160 wagons through their largess, and, thus, they receive the credit for renewing the religious tradition,⁵⁶ even while the wagon pilgrims remain the singular performers of the symbolically important cultural-religious act.

Further, the priests and Dr. Valdéz created new activities specifically for the wagon pilgrims. They created flags for each locale, and on Tuesday, when the wagon pilgrims enter Rivas, a parade is held, with each group organized under its particular flag. On Wednesday, the wagon pilgrims congregate at the church to visit El Señor del Rescate and pin their "miracles" to the image's robes. This is the only day that pilgrims actually handle the saint, because the image is usually placed high out of reach. Thus, the priests allow the wagon pilgrims a privileged intimacy with the miraculous Christ figure. Also on Wednesday, the wagon pilgrims travel in procession to the local museum, in an event organized by Dr. Valdéz, where they testify about the miracles the saint has wrought in their lives.

When I asked Father Navas about the church's support for the discourse on miracles, he agreed that it was a motivating force for participation in the festival, but he also located this belief in the biblical story of Christ curing a woman who touched the hem of his robe with *faith*. He says he instructs visitors to the sanctuary with this story, explaining that it is *their faith* in God that produces healing, not any essence in the Jesús del Rescate image. Thus, Father Navas reconciles popular discourse with the authoritative textual tradition and, in this way, "christianizes" popular practice.

On Thursday, the wagon pilgrims travel in procession to nearby San Jorge for a swim. A candlelight vigil at the sanctuary that evening provides another period of heightened religious intensity. By this time, there are so many visitors at the sanctuary that the priests say mass every hour. Joshua Hatton, who attended the vigil in 1999, describes the event in his unpublished report as a happy fiesta. People fill the grounds and the plaza with hammocks and cooking fires. Whereas inside the saint's passage-

way the atmosphere is subdued and serious, outside people are relaxed and having fun. By the time the sun sets, the area is packed with visitors, making movement difficult.

On Friday, the plaza clears and the saint is taken out in procession. Excursion buses continue to arrive with pilgrims, but these latecomers stay only a short time. Zulema Romero Mercado, now a wagon pilgrim from Masaya, recalls the first time she attended the festival by excursion bus:

Y yo miré pues que—que era aquel gentillal, que pero cuando yo entré, el pañuelo, yo salí casi ahogandome, casi ahorcada. Entonces, yo dije, no. El otro año, si él me da, y yo tengo facilidad, yo me vengo un día antes, porque ésto no me vuelve a pasar. Venir en excursión, que no ves al santo bien, ni mi—ni oyes misa, porque ya, cuando se abaja, ya dice el bus, “A tal hora vamos de viaje.” Y entonces, en esas excursiones, dilatan más en el San Jorge, o en San Juan del Sur, bañándose y no dilatan en la iglesia. Ve. Entonces, yo dije, “éste no me vuelve a pasar a mí”. “Yo me voy a ir a pasar la noche allá a Popoyuapa.” Y así. Yo me iba solita. Solita. Y allá con alguien, un conocido, yo me arrimaba, yo ponía mi valijincita allí, allá pasaba la noche, porque la noche es alegre allí en la iglesia, pues aquellas marchas y ya iba, pasaba. Ya donde sentía sueño me iba a acostar donde la amiga.

[And I saw, well, that it was a lot of people, that—but when I entered—my handkerchief—I left almost suffocating, almost strangled. So, I said, no. Next year, if he (Jesús) gives me the means, and I am able, I’m coming a day earlier, because this is not going to happen again. To come in excursion—you don’t see the saint well, or ma—you don’t hear mass, because now, when you get out, the bus says, “At this time we’re on our way.” And so, in those excursions, they spend more time in San Jorge, or in San Juan del Sur, bathing, and they don’t spend time in the church. See. So, I said, “This isn’t happening to me again. I’m going to go spend the night there in Popoyuapa. And so. I would go by myself. By myself. And there with somebody, somebody I knew, I would approach them. I would put my little suitcase there. I’d spend the night there, because the night is fun there at the church, well, the music, and so I went. I’d spend the night. Then where I felt sleepy, I’d go sleep where my friend was.]⁵⁷

As Doña Zulema points out, the quality of the experience changes with the way one chooses to travel. And although it would not be fair to categorize the wagon pilgrims as more religious than those who travel by excursion bus, a distinction has emerged between the two kinds of visitors to the festival. In fact, after a fatal traffic accident, the Rivas priests instructed the wagon pilgrims to leave first thing Friday morning, for safety reasons. Now, Juan Vivas laments, the wagon pilgrims do not accompany Jesús del Rescate on the first part of his procession around the town. The wagon pilgrims and their celebration now overlap with the Popoyuapa festival only for the Thursday night vigil.

In the mid 1990s, at the pilgrims’ request, the Rivas priests began to lend out a smaller image of Jesús del Rescate to the pilgrims in their home communities. Now, each April 20, a group from Granada arrives in Popoyuapa to receive the image. On August 5, a group of about five hundred Masayans travel to Granada to take the image back to their community, where they hold daily masses in his honor at the homes of those who have agreed to host the image. These small prayer meetings are attended by about fifty people (including children) and entail a small distribution of food by the host. The mayordomía then takes the saint in procession with fireworks from one household to the next, where a second prayer is held. Juan explains that these processions call attention to their “attraction,” which is the Monimbo Wagon Pilgrimage.

On December 2, six busloads of Masayans take the image back to Popoyuapa, where they celebrate a mass at the sanctuary, go for a swim, and then return, saddened because they no longer have the saint in their possession.⁵⁸ Although these new activities have increased religious practice and contributed to the church's coffers, they paradoxically represent increased community control of the image and the full establishment of a *mayordomía*.

In 1998, the sanctuary erected two monuments formally recognizing the importance of the wagon pilgrims' contribution to the festival. These statues, one a male pilgrim walking and the other an oxen drawn-wagon, stand on five-foot pedestals in front of the church, but within the gated area.

Thus, the wagon pilgrims have been transformed into model or "good pilgrims," organized under the auspices of the church, who behave properly. They are contrasted with the drunken merrymakers from elsewhere who threaten the "traditional" character of the festival. Of course, not all wagon pilgrims behave perfectly, and not all of those who arrive by bus for Friday's celebration are without faith. The wagon, however, has become more than just an antiquated form of travel; it now symbolizes controlled religious devotion and, with the addition of the *padrinos'* activities, a hierarchical social structure that benefits the poor.

In 2001, the Liberal Party presidential candidate, Enrique Bolaños, attended the festival during his electoral campaign, further linking the devotion to Jesús del Rescate with the political establishment.⁵⁹ Perhaps as a consequence, participation in the Monimbo Wagon Pilgrimage dropped precipitously for the first time, from 39 to 23



Figure 2. Statue depicting the wagon pilgrims, erected in 1998, stands in the courtyard of the Sanctuary at Popoyuapa (photographed June 2002).

wagons.⁶⁰ Pilgrims belong to all political parties, despite the anti-Sandinista bias of Catholic Church leaders, and the drop in participation in 2001 may have been caused by Sandinista pilgrims electing not to attend an event that has obviously been appropriated by the Liberal Party.⁶¹

Putting aside overt political uses of the festival, the response of Masaya wagon organizers to the changes of the 1990s has been generally positive. Juan and Socorro have achieved more status than they ever dreamed of having. Not only does heading a *mayordomía* bring status within one's home community, but important people from outside their community also come to visit them. Juan says he is the most popular president of all the wagon pilgrims and it is a "don," a great honor, to receive such recognition from the church. He continues:

Diós me quiere porque ese, ese me buscó ese, ese lugar, adonde en realidad, pues, nadie lo tiene. Tal vez alguien lo quisiera tener, pero no le llega esa suerte como me la tengo yo. Ve. Y entonces yo miro muchos cambios en eso, en lo espiritual, en mi persona. Bueno, soy muy reconocido de las, de las religiosas, del padre, de Ra-Ramon Valdéz, y no de solo Ramón Valdez, de varias personas. Eso es el cambio de que yo he visto, bueno personal, de que si yo no tuviera pues, este, en mis manos por lo menos ese, esa, esa suerte, yo digo de que ¿Quién me pudiera reconocer a mí?

[God loves me because he looked for that place for me, where in reality, no one else has it. Perhaps someone would want to have it, but they don't have the luck that I have. See. And so I see a lot of changes in that, on the spiritual plane, personally. Well, I'm highly respected by the nuns, the priest, by Ramon Valdéz, by many people. That's the change that I've seen personally, that if I hadn't had, well, this—that luck at least in my hands, I tell you, who would recognize me?]

Socorro reiterates this attitude, saying that she never imagined that she would be working so closely with the nuns and would be so involved with the veneration of the saint and all the activities that go with it.⁶² They view the growth in the number of wagons attending the festival as a very positive development, although Juan mentions that the risk of traffic accidents, always a concern, has also grown.

Moreover, their discourse about the pilgrimage reflects the more "religious" focus the priests have created for the festival. Juan now emphasizes the sacrifice the wagon pilgrimage entails, when compared to traveling to the festival by bus:

Hay una diferencia muy distinta. Porque los que van en bus, me supongo yo de que no van, este, con, con la fé con que llevamos nosotros con el sacrificio que nosotros llevamos [Socorro: la peregrinación]. Nosotros llevamos muy diferente el sacrificio, y me supongo yo de que no es, no, no es igual a lo de nosotros, porque nosotros por lo menos—ellos se van ahora en la mañana, vienen por la tarde. Nosotros no. Nosotros llevamos la diferencia de que salimos sábado, y sábado volvemos a los ocho días. Venimos, como dice el dicho, pagando lo que prometimos. Lo que le pedimos pués a la imagen. Y venimos sano y salvo del viaje. Pero los que vienen en—los que van en bus, me parece de que es un paseo, bueno, paseo, este, cualquier paseo de que ellos—le podemos decir. Porque llegan a la iglesia, lo enfloran, ponen sus flores, y se van a las playas. No es igual. Mientras que nosotros salimos de, de allí, estamos visitandolo, por la tarde, por la mañana. Sí.

[There's a very distinct difference. Because those who go by bus, I suppose they don't go with the kind of faith we bring, with the sacrifice that we bring (Socorro: the pilgrimage). We bring a very different sacrifice. And I believe that it isn't the same as us. Because we at least—they go now in the morning;

they come back in the afternoon. We are different in that we go Saturday and come back Saturday, eight days later. We come, as the saying goes, paying what we promised. Well, what we asked from the image. And we come back safe and sound from the trip. But those who come by—go by bus, it seems to me it's a pleasure trip, well, like any other trip they (might make), we can say. Because they come to the church, they decorate it with flowers, they put their flowers there, and they go to the beach. It isn't the same. While from the time we get there, we're visiting him in the afternoon, in the morning. Yes.]

Juan points to two ways in which the wagon pilgrimage is distinct. One is that the three days of walking constitutes a sacrifice.⁶³ And the other is that the pilgrims spend more time at Popoyuapa, specifically visiting with the image of Jesús del Rescate. Both of these distinctions are in some way built into the mode of travel. Another form of sacrifice, of course, is that pilgrims scrimp and save in order to collect the money necessary to rent an oxen-drawn wagon. Socorro explains that relatively few participants own their own oxen, and drivers charge from 700 to 1,000 cordobas (about 50 to 75 U.S. dollars) plus meals to take a group on the pilgrimage. Indeed, a common miracle attributed to the saint by Masaya pilgrims is his sending money their way (usually through generous family members or neighbors) so they can participate in the pilgrimage.⁶⁴

At the same time, Juan's own motivation for participating in the festival has changed. Whereas in 1980 he had described the pilgrimage as a pleasant outing, he now sees it as a great sacrifice. A few pilgrims even object to the padrinos, because they see their generosity as interfering with that notion of sacrifice.⁶⁵ Socorro's attitude toward the padrinos is neutral. She indicates that her concern is not what they give but that they give with kindness (*con cariño*). For her, what is important about festival largess is not the material gift but the attitude of brotherhood—not patronage—that the giver expresses. Nevertheless, she indicates that no real bonds develop between padrinos and wagoners as the pairs change each year. Of course, there are wagon pilgrims, as Socorro points out, who may be attracted by the padrino's gifts or who just go for the fun:

Pero la mayor parte miro yo de que vamos con fé. Con fé del santo. Hay la menor parte que—poco se acercan a la iglesia, y al llegar unas veces, no llegan más. Me parece que van, no van con la gran fé. Como—yo no te salgo a la—a esas parrandas que hacen, no te salgo a la playa, no te salgo—de mi carreta a la iglesia, y de la iglesia a mi carreta.

[But I see that most of us go with faith. With faith in the saint. There are some who don't come to the church much, and having come a few times, they don't participate anymore. It seems that they go—they don't go with that great faith. Like—I don't go out to the—to those parties they make, I don't go to the beach, I don't go—from my wagon to the church and from the church to my wagon.]

Like her husband, Socorro now clearly prioritizes the religious motivation for the pilgrimage over its recreational function. She also now articulates a notion that the good pilgrim is a constant participant, traveling year after year. Indeed, by 2001 both Socorro and Juan claimed their initial vow to serve the saint extended until each should die. (When I asked about the ox, for whose lifetime Socorro had vowed to walk in 1991, they remarked that he had died several years earlier.) Thus, they have christianized their own practice, and in the process, they see themselves as better pilgrims than some

others who attend the festival. Moreover, when the Masayans host the small image of Jesús del Rescate, Juan, as president, is engaged in daily visits, prayers, and processions at the homes of different devotees.⁶⁶

Despite their closer association with church and civic leaders in Rivas and their stronger religious focus, Juan and Socorro continue to articulate a view of the wagon pilgrimage that is firmly rooted in popular belief and practices. While Juan repeated Padre Navas's explanation that miracles are the product of an individual's faith, he continued thus:

Puedo comprobar y hago mi testimonio de que el viaje mío es un sacrificio, porque yo le pedí, mi esposa le pidió de que se me hiciera ese este milagro y es adonde lo realizó ella con lo que le pidió, bueno, él me salvó la vida. Y es allí donde nosotros creemos que de que haya creencia de que haya ese Jesús de que le rescate la vida a uno.

[I can prove and I testify that my trip is a sacrifice, because I asked him—my wife asked him to perform that, this miracle and it's where she did it, with what she asked him, well, he saved my life. And it's there where we believe that, that there's the belief that there's that Jesus who rescues one's life for one.]

Although Juan begins with the notion that Socorro's faith is what cured him, he ultimately returns to the popular belief in the miraculous powers of Jesús del Rescate.

Moreover, despite his more religious focus, Juan and other Masaya wagon pilgrims frequently refer to the wagon pilgrimage as an "attraction," indicating that the activity continues to provide a space where those involved can perform a particular identity. Socorro focuses more strongly on this aspect of the activity. She points out that Masayans are the only group organized as a *mayordomía*, and that they were the first group, providing a model that Father Navas replicated elsewhere. Moreover, the Masayans continue to elaborate their festive activities. Now there are two *mayordomas*: one in Masaya who welcomes the wagon pilgrims as they assemble, and the other Socorro, who awaits the pilgrims as they leave the city and provides a meal for them before they start on the first leg of their journey. Socorro explains:

En las demas caravanas no hay mayordoma. Ni hay tampoco la organización que tienen ellos aquí, que vienen con música, vienen en pase, vienen en desfile, ese no, no hay. En ninguna de las, de las, de las este directivas hay eso, más que solo en la de Masaya existe eso. La de Masaya creció eso, y la de Masaya fue la que dió este inicio, es este ejemplo de aquí de los Masaya.

[There is no *mayordoma* in the other caravans. Nor is there the organization that they have here, where they come with music, they come in procession, they come in a parade. There isn't any of that. In none of the, of the, of the, eh, committees do they have that. It's only in the Masaya group that this exists. The Masaya group grew that, and the Masaya group was the one that started that, it's that example from here, from the Masayans.]⁶⁷

This emphasis on the proper form of organizing as a group, of displaying oneself to one's own community and to other communities, allows Socorro to retain a sense of her own activities as centrally important. The wagon pilgrims are not only good Catholics, they are Masayans, who are recognized as authorities on popular traditions or folklore. Moreover, Socorro explains, though there are always a few newcomers,

most of the wagon pilgrims are old friends, people who know her and whom she knows very well, because they have participated year after year. Thus, the mayordomía and the pilgrimage promote, facilitate, and cement social relations within the Masaya community, reproducing that quality that distinguishes this indigenous-identified area from other surrounding communities.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this article I suggested that the growth of the wagon pilgrimage to Popoyuapa reflects a convergence of interests between Rivas festival organizers and Masaya pilgrims. Indeed, it seems clear that civic and religious authorities, and eventually also the Liberal Party, successfully harnessed a popular impulse. For the Rivas festival organizers, the wagon pilgrimage provides the benefit of distinguishing (however slippery this may be in practice) between the “good” pilgrim and the rabble and simultaneously asserting the greater traditionality of the former. Their elaboration of welcoming activities, the special privileges they have conferred, and the public monuments they have erected to honor the wagon pilgrims demonstrate a clear preference for this pilgrim group. Yet Masaya wagon pilgrims, who are happy to take on this new identity as model participants, continue to find in their performance a powerful assertion of cultural difference, based on the popular religious organization of the mayordomía and the festivalizing practices it generates, practices that embody community. Moreover, the miracle discourse, which provides a flexible sanction for desire, remains the foundation for devotional practice and is capable of mobilizing large numbers of people, promesantes, and their supporters. Therefore, while Rivas’s religious and civic leaders have harnessed, enlarged, encouraged, and celebrated the Masayan pilgrims’ “attraction,” the wagon pilgrimage retains its own form, leadership, and meaning in its own community. The resulting performance has a distinctive set of meanings for different organizers, participants, and observers.

What, then, do we make of the nostalgic impulse? Néstor García-Canclini (1993) has observed that precapitalist cultural formations in Latin America are transformed under capitalism, not eliminated. In Mexico, he notes a marked tendency for rural fiestas to move from being expressions of community sentiments based on shared beliefs toward tourist shows and markets. This perhaps explains the excursion bus phenomenon in Popoyuapa on the final day of the festival, where recreation is emphasized almost to the exclusion of religious devotion.⁶⁸ But it does not fully explain the emergence of the wagon pilgrimage. Indeed, García-Canclini notes, “Precolumbian rituals and dances and some Catholic processions come out of historical experiences when popular identity was shaped and they represent—with a certain degree of ambiguity—that area of culture that resists being turned into a commercial show” (1993:102). The very form of the wagon pilgrimage, which multiplies social interaction and requires an extended stay, reinforces its communal qualities. And yet, in a real sense, the wagon pilgrimage is *simultaneously* a show, in which Masaya pilgrims folklorize themselves, performing a traditional identity for their home community, for Rivas, and for the nation.

Zoila S. Mendoza has described folklorization as a project in which urban, middle-class artists and intellectuals selectively identify, revalue, and recast popular practices of usually dominated groups in their society, making them representative of their national and/or regional culture (2000:48–83). In so doing, they drain the forms of oppositional meaning, erasing or modifying histories of ethnic/racial conflict (Guss 2000). These folklorized forms of popular culture often foster stereotypes about subjugated social groups and reinforce the status quo. Yet, Mendoza suggests that folklorization paradoxically provides performers “new spaces and recognition for their creative efforts, providing them with the means to rework and contest social values and stereotypes promoted by such elites” (48). Moreover, Guss observes that extralocal appropriations are often followed by local reappropriations of valuable cultural forms (2000).

García-Canclini points out, however, that the poor are as influenced by hegemonic ideology as other classes are. Socorro and Juan Vivas are proud of the attention they receive from the Rivas priests and missionary nuns. They respect Dr. Valdéz, the leader of the Rivas padrinos. They have replaced the discourse of personal nostalgia with a discourse of sacrifice and have wholeheartedly accepted their roles as “model pilgrims.” And, yet, they continue to locate the importance of the pilgrimage within their own sphere of activity and control. Although their reaction might not be counterhegemonic, they nevertheless generate alternative meanings, continuing to mark out a space for popular expression, creativity, and action in the festival context.

This description of the pilgrimage to Popoyuapa necessarily remains partial, as I have traced the convergence of meanings between hegemonic social actors and one popular group participating in their fiesta. The perspectives of Popoyuapans themselves, with their fascinating alternative religious image and rituals, offer still another level of meaning that I have only touched upon here. The material I have assembled demonstrates two important aspects of pilgrimage that might be extended to festival studies generally. First, as any cultural performance involving large numbers of people, pilgrimages embrace a wide variety of overlapping meanings that converge, conflict, and change over time. The question of who controls the practice ultimately depends upon where one situates oneself in its unfolding. Second, in addition to their religious, recreational, and market functions, pilgrimages contain a performative dimension, for the way in which one travels counts as much as what one does when one arrives.

Notes

1. Popoyuapa forms part of the municipality of San Jorge, which has a population of 8,000 people, mostly banana workers. The adjacent city of Rivas, population 27,000, historically represented a stronghold of the Conservative Party, which was centered in Granada.

2. See Palma (2001b). The *Nuevo Diario* is a national newspaper that is identified with the opposition party, that is, the Sandinistas.

3. In this case, the show *is* the pilgrimage itself, which is exhibited through the newspaper coverage. The journalist provides a nationalist perspective of the event, for she, like other extralocal observers, remains detached from the actual practice that she celebrates. She does not accompany the pilgrims to Rivas but situates herself with the Rivas padrinos, whose role is to welcome and encourage rather than join the pilgrims.

4. See Stoeltje's (1993) discussion of power and the ritual genres, in which she describes the power of form, production, and discourse in either maintaining or transforming the social order.

5. See, for example, Turner's description of pilgrimage as the quintessential space for the dissolution of social structure and a normative experience of *communitas* (1974) and Crumrine and Morinis's introduction to their edited volume (1991:1–18), which lays out an abstract general structure for pilgrimage and the beliefs that motivate it.

6. Turner's notion that pilgrimage constitutes *antistructure*, or a situation in which roles and hierarchies operating in the secular realm become unimportant, has been repeatedly demonstrated not to pertain in actual reports of pilgrimages from around the world. For a listing of ethnographic critiques of Turner's notion, see Eade and Sallnow (1991:4–5). Kendall's survey of pilgrims at Esquipulas confirms that participants' distinctive routes, interactions, and activities are all strongly determined by overlapping social categories of class, ethnicity, rural/urban, and national/foreign origin (1991).

7. Marzal (1992:73–9) has described the birth of Latin American popular religion in the sixteenth century in just such terms. The interests of Spanish priests in evangelizing the indigenous populations and the ways in which indigenous populations retained a space for their own beliefs and practices converged in the institution of the indigenous *cofradía* (religious brotherhood). Also see Sallnow's discussion of Andean pilgrimage as embodying mutual misunderstandings of different social actors (1991:149–50).

8. Kendall (1991), for instance, argues that the Black Christ of Esquipulas, perhaps the best-known pilgrimage in Central America, symbolizes political and ethnic accommodation rather than resistance. Its association with right wing, reactionary politicians in twentieth-century Guatemala must be factored into our understanding of what the pilgrimage means for people who participate or choose not to participate in it. And yet partisan associations do not fully comprehend the meaning it may have for participants.

9. See the collections of essays edited by Walker (1991, 1997) for an overview of Nicaraguan politics. Whereas many American analysts explained the Sandinista electoral defeat in 1990 as a consequence of national exhaustion in the face of continued U.S.-backed, low-intensity warfare and destabilization, ordinary citizens of Nicaragua articulated quite a different view. I conducted fieldwork in a working-class, indigenous-identified neighborhood in Masaya in 1990 and 1991 and returned for shorter visits in 2001 and again in 2002. Both 1990 and 2001 were periods of electoral transition that polarized the neighborhood. Even in 2001, those who identified with Sandinism remained committed to their ideals, regardless of the many scandals that had rocked the party and the increasing association of party leader Daniel Ortega with authoritarianism. Those who had turned away from Sandinism, on the other hand, were convinced that the Sandinistas were evil, dangerous, and not to be trusted. They supported the Liberal Party, despite widespread corruption under Liberal President Arnaldo Alemán and continuing economic stagnation. About 38 percent of residents remained committed Sandinistas; the rest demonstrated varying degrees of support for right-wing political leaders.

10. For more on the Sandinista folklore revival, see Borland (2002).

11. The Liberal Party in Latin America traditionally supports business interests at the expense of the poor. It should not be confused with the post-New Deal North American liberal tradition, which emphasizes the importance of a social safety net for all citizens. The political picture in Nicaragua is complicated by the fact that numerous individuals who became important in the Sandinista government were related to powerful Conservative Party families that had ruled Nicaragua alternately with the Liberals since independence (Vilas 1992), so class origin did not determine ideology.

12. In fact, during the 1980s the Nicaraguan Catholic Church gradually removed religious workers motivated by liberation theology's preferential option for the poor and sympathetic to the goals of the revolution and replaced them with more conservative religious leaders. See Arnaiz Quintana's report (1992:427–35).

13. The idea of resistance comes from Scott (1985, 1990) who recognizes that the dominated have multiple ways of thwarting the established system of power besides open confrontation. Often peasants appeal to an earlier hegemonic pattern (i.e., tradition) to resist new encroachments on peasant privilege by capitalists. See also Williams's (1977) notion of residual culture.

14. See Shryer's discussion of local priests' influence over participation in a regional pilgrimage in

Huehuetla, Mexico (1991), for comparable data on the important role of religious leaders in shaping popular practice. Also, García-Canclini (1993) describes a priest's invention of a pottery fair in his analytical study of modern festival transformations.

15. The indigenous identity of Nicaragua's Pacific coast peoples is not obvious, but certain groups, including Monimboseños, self-identify as Indians. For a discussion of the indigenous question in this area, see Field (1998) and Gould (1998).

16. There are several other noted pilgrimages in Nicaragua. La Virgen del Hato circulates among a number of towns from December 6 until after Holy Week. Two images of the Black Christ of Esquipulas also attract pilgrims to La Conquista, in Carazo on the third Friday of Lent and to El Sauce on January 14. In another form of pilgrimage, some patron saints are housed in hermitages outside their city or town. Santiago's devotees go into the mountains of Carazo on June 29 and return with the image for his festival in Jinotepe on July 12. Similarly, Santo Domingo remains year-round in a sanctuary outside Managua. Pilgrim devotees accompany the saint on his annual visit to the capital August 1–10 for the festival in his honor.

17. I draw from field notes, participant observation, tape-recorded interviews, newspaper accounts, and an unpublished study of the event for my description.

18. In distinction to these acts of thanksgiving, leadership in a popular religious organization—a *cofradía* or *mayordomía*—does not normally result from a promise. Instead, mayordomos explain that their voluntary acceptance or petitioning for leadership, and its attendant responsibilities, results from their intense devotion or emotional attachment to a particular religious image.

19. Masaya's Saint Jerome is also believed to have miraculous healing powers, and he is popularly known as "the Doctor who cures without medicine."

20. The Nicaraguan historian Dávila Bolaños associates Jesús del Rescate with the wind god, Hecat, of the precolumbian Nahua, stating that Hecat had a large sanctuary in Popoyuapa, Rivas; but unfortunately, he provides no supporting evidence for this second assertion (1977:17).

21. Nolan describes finding an image in an unusual place as one of seven common explanations for the origin of a pilgrimage shrine (1991:35–8).

22. In a comparative study of Latin American and European shrines, Nolan notes that relatively few shrines in Latin America that can be dated were established in the nineteenth century, whereas the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries and the twentieth century were periods of active shrine formation. We can postulate that, if pilgrims were visiting Popoyuapa in the nineteenth century, the shrine had probably been formed sometime earlier. Moreover, Nolan provides some comparative evidence that Jesús de Rescate may reasonably be assumed to have had an indigenous predecessor. She notes that miraculous Christ figures are relatively rare in Europe and that important Christ-cults in Guatemala and Mexico have identifiable precolumbian antecedents. Moreover, she says, "52 percent of the 73 shrines referred to in the available literature as traditional Indian pilgrimage centers are dedicated to Christ" (1991:31).

23. This information was obtained from a pamphlet distributed at the pilgrimage site. Again, no documentary evidence supports the claim, but it remains part of traditional knowledge about the saint.

24. Reported in Cerda Calero (2001) and Vanegas López (2001b).

25. Similar accounts of priests attempting to extinguish popular practices exist for other areas of Mesoamerica. See, for example, Warren's study of a highland Guatemala community (1978), and, more recently, Nájera-Ramírez's study of the festival in Jocotán, Mexico (1997:125–30).

26. In the 1980s, a new image of the Baby Jesus was "found" in Monimbó, Masaya's Magdalena Church, and the priest allowed a lay worker to care for it in his home and host a festival in its honor.

27. Personal interview with author, Sanctuary of Popoyuapa, June 13, 2002.

28. Smith (1975) provides the classic descriptive account of the Latin American festival, pointing out that they contain overlapping cognitive and affective contours. Stoeltje (1992) provides a good general definition of festival and its usual components. Brandes (1988) describes Mexican festival as a reassertion of the social order despite the surface-level subversiveness of merrymaking and humorous cultural performances.

29. Abrahams (1972) and Bauman and Abrahams (1978) make the point that only certain people participate in rowdy festival behavior and, often, that festival role corresponds to either an age set or a social identity associated with rowdiness.

30. Author's fieldnotes, Masaya (1991, 2001).

31. Quoted in Romero Vargas (1987:104).

32. In an interview with Joshua Hatton in 1999 (unpublished manuscript), Father Santamaría indicated that Popoyuapans forcefully resisted his initial efforts in the 1970s to clear the plaza.

33. Personal interview with author, June 13, 2002.

34. According to Hatton, who attended the festival in 1999, food and craft stalls filled the streets of Popoyuapa on the Thursday and Friday of the festival (unpublished manuscript).

35. See Vanegas López (2001a).

36. See Palma (2001a).

37. There is some confusion about this date. Socorro recalled that it was the year of the war, which was 1979, but then gave 1980 as the date. In any event, what seems important for this analysis is that Socorro's experience occurred at the beginning of the revolutionary period, which was both a time of great confusion and of general popular elation.

38. All translations are by the author. This and all subsequent quotations are taken from an interview conducted on March 23, 1991 at El Mojón. The narrative presented here was a continuous, uninterrupted response to my asking why Socorro started making the pilgrimage to Popoyuapa. I have interspersed my reading of the narrative with Socorro's story here. I have also inserted explanatory contextual information in parentheses as needed.

39. One of the peculiarities of pronunciation in this area is the tendency not to preserve the original stress in words that are conjugated as commands. I have eliminated the standard accent marks to indicate this pronunciation where appropriate.

40. I understand this somewhat confusing phrasing to indicate that Socorro recognized or remembered her desire to go on the pilgrimage one year when the date for the festival approached.

41. See the analyses of the gender order provided by Whisnant (1995:383–433) and Lancaster (1995). In his study of indigenous identity in Nicaragua, Gould makes the point that in the highlands, at least, men would not even let their women speak to him (1998:6). As a non-Nicaraguan woman, I was much less aware of women being silenced by men, because I was easily able to speak with both, and I was often impressed by women's personal authority in their households and communities. Nevertheless, I agree that women's formal authority remains limited in Nicaragua.

42. Several Masaya wagon pilgrims I interviewed in 2001 indicated that they had made no promise to Jesús del Rescate prior to attending the festival. Instead, they had first attended because a friend had invited them or they were simply curious.

43. See García-Canclini (1995), for an analysis of Latin America's incomplete transition to modern capitalism, a situation that supports conflicting belief systems—science and magic—without difficulty.

44. Personal narratives perforce take the perspective of the narrator, and often a narrator will attribute agency to him or herself.

45. De Certeau identifies miracle discourses as a form of consumer poaching on established Catholic religion. Believers are able to use a system not of their own making to escape the fatalism imposed upon them by a hierarchical social order where poverty, rural origin, illiteracy, and indigenous identity all conspire to limit their aspirations. Yet they are neither the creators of this discourse, nor does their temporary escape transform their social reality in any lasting way (de Certeau 1988:17). I would argue that miracle discourse actually reflects a popular, rather than an established Catholic doctrine and, though it remains a tactic, it also constitutes an alternate rather than a hegemonic discourse.

46. Personal communication, March 1991.

47. Personal communication, June 10, 2000.

48. See Colburn (1986), Dore (1990), and Saldana-Portillo (1997), for good analyses of peasant resistance to Sandinista economic programs. All assert that peasants tended to act according to their own self-interest rather than cooperating to meet the production goals of the revolutionary state. A commitment to subsistence farming, combined with low prices for farm produce (set by the state), led peasants to work less rather than produce more when the government offered easy credit. It is interesting to note that one common complaint about popular mayordomías and festivals during the Somoza era was that these activities provided excuses for Monimboseños to absent themselves from work (Peña Hernández, 1986

[1968]:38). In this sense, the mayordomía-sponsored festivals and their proliferation in this neighborhood can be seen as “weapons of the weak” described by Scott (1985).

49. New work on the economics of festival has modified an older view of festival sponsorship as an economic leveler, where the end result was to keep indigenous peasants poor. See, for instance, Chance (1998) and Smith (1977), for an explanation of the cargo system. Monaghan (1990) argues that festivals function to circulate goods because sponsors receive assistance from their neighbors, assistance that is repaid when the neighbors sponsor their own festivals. Nájera-Ramírez (1997:105–16) also points to the important role that volunteers play in helping the main sponsors meet their festival obligations. The same appears to be true in Monimbó, where sponsoring a festival is voluntary. In fact, festivals in Nicaragua appear to rest on a dense network of small and large gifts exchanged among those involved in the system and often, though not always, motivated by smaller or larger promises made to the saint being venerated.

50. It is curious that, by 2001, the collective memory of wagon pilgrims recalls that Concepción Torres died, and that is why Socorro assumed the mayordomía. His marital difficulties have been forgotten.

51. Masaya is home of the marimba del arco, a portable marimba found only in the Southern Pacific area of Nicaragua. The marimba is attached to an arc of wood that the musician sits on while resting the marimba on his knees to play. He can then carry the instrument by slinging the arc across his shoulder. See Scruggs (1994) for more on this indigenous instrument and repertoire.

52. Although inebriation has been described as a characteristic aspect of both indigenous and popular forms of religion in Nicaragua, drinking patterns vary widely by gender, age, and disposition.

53. Interview, El Mojón, 2001. Socorro was emphatic about the common social origins of the wagon pilgrims.

54. Working-class, indigenous-identified residents in Monimbó, for instance, often ask more wealthy, mestizo townspeople to serve as padrinos for their children. In festival groups that venerate a saint, padrinos are understood to assist the mayordomo and the entire cuadro both by performing specific tasks and by providing guidance to the central festival committee.

55. See Borland (1994:302–03), for a comparable example of this practice in the Festival of San Jerónimo earlier in this century.

56. See, for example, Sánchez Ricarte (2001) and Palma (2001b).

57. Personal interview, San Carlos, Masaya, November 2, 2001.

58. Personal interview, El Mojón, November 1, 2001.

59. Meanwhile, his Sandinista opponent, Daniel Ortega, attended an evangelical service. Non-Catholic religious groups had become disaffected by government leaders' overwhelming support for the Catholic Church during the 1990s.

60. Socorro reports that, since 1991, the Masaya wagon pilgrims have steadily grown in number, from seventeen in 1991, to twenty-seven in 1992, twenty-three in 1993, twenty-seven in 1994, twenty-nine in 1995, thirty-one in 1996, thirty-three in 1997, thirty-nine in 1998, forty-one in 1999, and thirty-nine in 2000, but only twenty-three in 2001.

61. The 41 percent drop in participation approximates the percent of voters who opposed the Liberal Party.

62. Personal interview, El Mojón, November 1, 2001. It is interesting to note that the Toribio family of Masaya expressed similar pleasure at being recognized by important people when Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega became mayordomo of their carnivalesque Torovenado in honor of Masaya's Saint Jerome in the mid-1980s. Personal interview, September 20, 2001.

63. In an interesting recognition of the way in which the idea of pilgrimage as sacrifice develops in modernity, Juan mentions that the walk would not be a sacrifice if they had a broad pathway to travel on, but because they must go on the highway, they risk their own physical safety.

64. Personal interviews with wagon pilgrims Josefa Dolores Espinosa Marrenco, Zulema Romero Mercado, and María Justo, San Carlos, Masaya, November 2, 2001.

65. Personal interview, Josefa Dolores Espinosa Marrenco, San Carlos, Masaya, November 2, 2001.

66. Socorro, now in her seventies, has had health problems recently and generally remains on their farm.

67. Personal interview, El Mojón, November 1, 2001.

68. Unlike Mexico, of course, Nicaragua enjoys very little foreign tourism.

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