From Collectivism to Capitalism: Neoliberalism and Rural Mobilization in Nicaragua

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ABSTRACT

This article draws on longitudinal, ethnographic data gathered in rural Nicaragua over a two-decade period to examine the ideological and political implications of neoliberalism in the prefigurative, grassroots stages of social mobilization. It contrasts divergent path-dependent processes of accommodation and resistance to neoliberalism as Nicaraguan peasants have moved from collectivism to individual farming, with an emphasis on interpretive processes. This study explores how market processes both serve as an external grievance and operate internally in rural communities to reconfigure rural social relations and individual and collective identities. It also seeks to develop concepts and interpretations that may be applied more broadly to analyze links between deepening market processes and the forms and content of social movement responses to deteriorating economic conditions.

Neoliberal policies and deeper integration into global market processes have profoundly influenced Latin America over the past three decades.[1] The economic impact of market reforms on the region's poor majority—cuts in state services and subsidies, rising un- and underemployment, deepening inequality, and increasingly precarious and insecure livelihoods—have been widely documented (Burdick et al. 2009; Weyland 2004; Robinson 2003; Veltmeyer and O'Malley 2001). This article focuses on the less well explored micro-level sociopolitical processes that influence the willingness and capacity of Latin America's popular classes to engage in collective resistance against the advance of free market policies.

Proponents have often presented market reforms as technocratic, apolitical policy measures designed to facilitate beneficial processes of global economic integration (World Bank 2004; Boas and McNeill 2004; Abrahamsen 2000). In contrast, this study approaches neoliberal reforms as a political and ideological project in several key aspects. Free market policies in ascendancy in Latin America encompass much more than just economic restructuring. Free market policies reconfigure class structures, as well as state and society relations (Eckstein and Wickham-Crowley 2002). They incorporate specific practices, values, norms, and beliefs associated with a deepening capitalist orientation—notably individualism, competition, and consumption.

Market ideologies and practices increasingly advance beyond economic spheres into noneconomic spheres of individual and social life, such as commu-

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nities and households, which serve as important prefigurative spaces in facilitating collective mobilization (Harvey 2007; Oxhorn 2006; Alvarez et al. 1998). Largely because of these normative and distributional implications, neoliberal policies have been advanced by specific politically embedded institutions and diverse constituencies (notably international financial institutions, state elites, and political parties) and resisted by other such groups.

Scholarship on popular sector social and political responses to free market policies in Latin America, however, has identified complex, even seemingly contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, the intensified economic insecurity associated with market reforms has served as a powerful grievance, creating a sense of outrage among broader sectors of the population and motivating collective action and resistance (Silva 2009; Almeida and Johnston 2006; Robinson 2003; Veltmeyer and O'Malley 2001). However, scholars also link neoliberal reforms to popular sector fragmentation and demobilization (Posner 2008; Holzner 2007; Oxhorn 2006; Weyland 2004). These policies are seen to weaken the voice and capacity of popular sectors for nonelectoral political participation in particular and the overall quality of democracy in general.

These two scenarios—increased class-linked solidarity and oppositional mobilization, and disempowerment and political demobilization—highlight a need to explore in greater depth the factors that contribute to this range of popular responses. To this end, this study examines patterns of collective mobilization and demobilization in a rural Nicaraguan community over three periods of market advances and retreats between 1965 and 2005. It employs longitudinal, ethnographic data to trace pathways along which the rural poor may opt for individual accommodation to, or collective mobilization and resistance against, free market advances.

Scholars have long noted the importance of resource availability and political opportunity structures in explaining rural mobilization in Central America (Brockett 2005). This study contributes to our understanding of processes of rural socialization, interpretation, and interaction at the local level that underlie and mediate broader trends of popular sector mobilization and demobilization. The sections that follow explore the various impacts of market processes on campesino willingness and capacity to engage in collective mobilization. They highlight three areas for examination: the material and distributional impact of market advances, peasant ideological accommodation or resistance to market-based values and beliefs, and rural horizontal solidarity.

METHODS

In contemporary Nicaraguan history, geography and the forms and content of political mobilization have been closely linked. From the 1960s to the 1990s, specific regional histories of land conflict, FSLN wartime relocation policies, and selective repression by the Contra guerrillas led many Nicaraguan rural communities to self-segregate along political or ideological lines (Horton 2007). Particularly in many of Nicaragua's mountainous interior zones, campesinos opposed the revolution in high numbers and made up the majority of counterrevolutionary Contra guerrillas during the civil war (Horton 1999; Bendaña 1991).

In contrast, this case study community, which I call Miraflores, is located in the Tonalá zone, where many campesinos carried out land invasions in the 1960s

and supported the FSLN guerrillas in the 1970s. Miraflores itself was a Sandinista Agricultural Cooperative (CAS) during the 1980s, a self-selected community that strongly supported the revolution and has continued to vote in high numbers for the Sandinistas since 1990.

This case study provides an ideal opportunity to explore in depth the impact of market advances and retreats on a relatively mobilized rural community that has engaged extensively with revolutionary, alternative belief systems and practices, most notably collective agriculture. Miraflores is the type of "free space" community that has been identified as a critical space for social change in Latin America, potentially nurturing values, beliefs, discourses, practices, and political identities that contest neoliberal hegemony (Alvarez et al. 1998).

I first came in contact with Miraflores during a six-month stay as a volunteer in the community. I returned to the community many times over the following years, and during these stays, I attended and observed many key events of community life. In addition, I carried out formal, semistructured interviews with community members on six different occasions between 1989 and 2006. Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to several hours and were generally conducted in participants' houses and tape-recorded. Thirty-two community members were included in these interviews, 19 of whom were interviewed on multiple occasions, from three to five times each.[2] In 1989, 2000, and 2006, I also carried out a basic economic survey of households.

Campesino Class and Cultural Characteristics

Small farmers, or *campesinos*, as they are known in Central America, share a subordinate economic status and a degree of relative and often absolute poverty (Horton 1999). In addition to this broad shared class status, scholars suggest that peasant collective identities have historically incorporated a distinct rural subculture characterized by precapitalist, communitarian cultural norms and values that are reinforced through dense horizontal ties, daily interactions, and mutual interdependence (Scott 1976).

Building on a concept first developed by E. P. Thompson (1971), Scott argues that under moral economy, peasant communities are deeply communitarian, sharing a common subsistence ethic. Scott's later work on everyday resistance (1992) also highlights the bounded nature of peasant communities, culturally and socially differentiated from elites, that facilitates a more autonomous peasant consciousness. Given their lack of resources and power, Scott suggests, peasants are unlikely to overtly or collectively challenge elites. Instead, they generally engage in individual, everyday practices of resistance.

This portrait of peasants as strongly communitarian and guided by shared moral economy and forms of consciousness has been challenged by scholars who view peasants as primarily autonomous rational actors. This latter perspective emphasizes the openness of rural communities characterized by individualistic, utility-maximizing behavior by peasants who perceive themselves in competition with other community members as they strive for individual advancement (Popkin 1979).

Evidence from contemporary rural Latin America, however, suggests that peasant communitarian or individualistic orientation is not a straightforward or fixed dichotomy. Anderson's research (1994) demonstrates that peasant commu-

nitarian norms and values and individual interests may be mutually reinforcing. Under what she terms political ecology, pragmatic and flexible campesinos recognize their relative isolation and vulnerability. They perceive that interdependence and mutual aid among community members also promote individual well-being. Kurtz (2000) also argues that communitarian moral economy or individualist orientations are not innate or fixed characteristics of peasants, but may shift over time in response to external, macro-level shifts in the economy and policy regimes.

This leads to the question, under what historical, cultural, and structural conditions are campesinos more willing and able to engage in ties of horizontal solidarity, mutual support, and collective action? What factors increase intracommunity tensions and weaken or fracture horizontal solidarity among peasants? In particular, how might market processes intensify tensions between communitarian orientations and perceived individual well-being in rural communities?

In the traditional moral economy peasant community, relative geographic, structural, and cultural isolation from the penetration of market processes and agricultural modernization is seen to foster communitarian orientations. There, persistent precapitalist norms and values reinforce intracommunity horizontal solidarity. In contemporary rural Central America, however, the opposite has also occurred, as the advance of market forces has facilitated new forms of critical consciousness and rural class solidarity.

Agroexport expansion in much of Central America's Pacific coast region in the post–World War II period had two effects: it undermined campesino access to land and economic security and it disrupted traditional patron-client ties (Brockett 1990; Gould 1990; Williams 1986). Pressures from global market processes, combined with state repression, threatened campesino material subsistence and physical security and violated cultural norms. These threats, in turn, facilitated new forms of campesino horizontal solidarity (Brockett 2005, Wood 2003; Williams 1986).

Community-level, face-to-face interactions reinforced a sense of shared grievances, and influenced some campesinos to address them through collective action (Brockett 1990; Wood 2003). Studies emphasize the importance of such reconfigured community ties and horizontal solidarity in facilitating rural collective mobilization in support of leftist insurgencies in the 1970s and 1980s (Wood 2003; Horton 1999; Kincaid 1987). More recently, scholars have identified neoliberal reforms as bringing negative economic impacts to small farmers in the region (Enríquez 2010; Robinson 2003; Veltmeyer and O'Malley 2001). The social and political implications of neoliberal reforms, however, present several distinct tendencies.

On the one hand, the implementation of neoliberal reforms is linked to collective mobilization and resistance among Latin America's popular sectors (Silva 2009; Almeida and Johnston 2006; Eckstein and Wickham-Crowley 2002; Alvarez et al. 1998). Similar to the way agroexport expansion was perceived in previous decades, campesinos have perceived neoliberal reforms as an externally imposed grievance (Eckstein and Wickham-Crowley 2002). Quantitative studies have also shown a positive correlation between implementation of neoliberal reforms and levels of protest activity in Latin America.

On the other hand, scholars identify a seemingly contrary scenario in which neoliberal reforms are linked to popular sector fragmentation, disempowerment, and demobilization (Posner 2008; Holzner 2007; Oxhorn 2006; Weyland 2004). In

Table 1. Overview of Market Stages and Mobilization Patterns

Market Stage	Mobilization Patterns
Market advances Agroexport expansion (1965–79)	Both increased collective mobilization and individual accommodation
Market retreat Collective agriculture (1979–90)	High levels of political mobilization
Market advances Counteragrarian reform (1990–2005)	Fragmentation and demobilization

particular, neoliberal reforms may fracture previous forms of class-based solidarity through several structural and ideological mechanisms. First, counteragrarian reform land privatization programs bring structural fragmentation, as administration and cultivation of land shifts from collective groups to individual households.[3] Second, deepening economic and social stratification linked to counteragrarian reform policies may augment tensions in previously unified communities. More generally, neoliberal reforms incorporate an ideological project, beliefs, and values centered on competition and individualism, which potentially weaken horizontal solidarity.

A key concern is that such fragmentation contributes to a broader disempowerment and demobilization of popular sectors, particularly in nonelectoral forms of political participation. Popular sectors such as campesinos may lose capacity to articulate transgressive demands and effectively make claims to the state (Postero 2006).

As table 1 summarizes, this case compares three phases of market advances and retreats over a 40-year period. Key periods from 1965 to 2005 include Nicaragua's post–World War II expansion of agricultural exports, revolutionary agrarian reform and collective farming, and contemporary counteragrarian reforms and market policies.

Prerevolutionary Agroexport Expansion

In the first half of the twentieth century, patron-client ties and the types of subsistence norms associated with precapitalist moral economy prevailed in the province of Chinandega.[4] Miraflores residents during this era did not hold the type of autonomous consciousness detailed in Scott's 1992 work on everyday resistance. Instead, they report that their economic dependence, lack of formal education, and relative isolation reinforced their material and ideological dependence on their patrons. Older community members frequently described themselves as "asleep" in this era; that is, unaware, in a childlike state of "ignorance," and trustful of local elites. Like many other Nicaraguan campesinos, they viewed their subordination as natural, inevitable, and a product of God's will, and perceived the interests of the wealthy and poor as complimentary, rather than in conflict (Horton 2004; Bendaña 1991).

These clientelistic, dependent relationships that prevailed informally at the local level also extended to formal politics. Miraflores campesinos' political knowledge, interpretations, and activities were highly mediated through local patrons, and they generally voted for the Somoza family's Liberal Party at patrons' behest.

In the 1960s and 1970s, market processes deepened on Nicaragua's Pacific coast. In the Chinandega/León region, exports of sugar, beef, and above all, cotton increased sharply during these decades. Miraflores families characterize the agroexport boom as a time of disruption and hardship that threatened their subsistence. As large landowners and middle-scale farmers expanded their land holdings to grow cotton, poor families found it more difficult to purchase land and lost access to natural resources that had helped sustain them. To survive, they rented small plots of land to farm and worked temporary jobs in the cotton and sugarcane harvests. Overall, while Miraflores families widely interpreted agroexport expansion as an economic grievance that undermined their subsistence security, their strategies to deal with these macro-level transformations were more diverse. They ranged from individualist strategies of accommodation to the development of rural class consciousness and collective resistance.

One group of families, primarily the Meza extended family, strategically sought out opportunities within the boundaries of markets and authoritarian governance to ensure their survival through land ownership. Ignacio Meza explains,

> I earned 40 *córdobas* daily working in different haciendas [in the Tonalá zone]. I always rented land when I could and was able to save money. Only a few others did this. Others liked to drink. I wanted to be free. I had sufficient [funds] to live on, but for me it wasn't enough. With my savings I bought 5 *manzanas* [8 hectares] of land to grow corn, wheat, sorghum. In Somotillo [in northern Chinandega], it was possible to buy land. Here in Tonalá, no. The rich bought it all up to grow cotton.

As the comment suggests, these families identified themselves as the rural poor, distinguishing themselves in class and cultural terms from the "rich," who grew cotton. They chose not to challenge deepening social class inequalities openly, however. Instead, they accommodated, and even adopted to some degree, market ideologies that emphasized individual skills, a strong work ethic, frugality, and entrepreneurial initiative as key to upward mobility. These families used their savings from harvest work in the agroexport zone to purchase parcels of land along the agricultural frontier of northern Chinandega.

By the 1979 revolution, the Mezas had achieved a degree of economic autonomy and security, but they reported that this did not necessarily transform their dependent consciousness. They continued to maintain patron-client ties with elites and were mistrustful and fearful of the FSLN, particularly its revolutionary discourse of class conflict and perceived communism.

A second group of Miraflores families, dominated by the extended Santana family, chose to remain in the Tonalá zone as agroexport production deepened. The Santana households' experiences of market-driven agricultural modernization, state repression, and later, contacts with leftist FSLN guerrillas facilitated the development of a more autonomous consciousness and a distinct "poor" collective identity in conflict with the rich. This shift took place in multiple arenas: in

households and communities, as well as through more direct mobilization in agrarian struggles.

The narratives of Miraflores community members suggest that agroexport expansion and linked threats to subsistence unmasked the often exploitative content of their relationships with elites. As Edgardo Murillo recalls of the 1970s: “We would see the *patrones* in their cars with dark windows pass along the road, but we could never speak with them. The campesino then was common, stupid, uneducated.” Celso Santana, who participated in FSLN-led uprisings in nearby urban centers, explains,

> You’ll hear a lot of people around here say that their patron was a good patron. There were a lot like that. But others gave their workers no incentive, no bonus at Christmas. They wouldn’t lend money. They would run a *mozo* [day laborer] off their property like a dog. The *mozo* then had hatred in his heart and wouldn’t forget. Until one day the people of Nicaragua exploded. It would have been better if the *patrones* had been good, given a little more. So many people wouldn’t have died.

During this period, campesinos increasingly viewed themselves as in conflict not only with the “rich” landowners (*terratenientes*), but also with the state. When the Somoza regime failed to meet their claims for land redistribution and actively repressed campesinos, moral outrage grew at this perceived indiscriminate state violence. Ricardo Santana remembers,

> In the time of Somoza it was a mess. They [the National Guard] beat people, threw them in jail for no reason, killed young men, did terrible things. The *Guardia* had their spies [*orejas*] and if you worked with the Sandinistas they put you in jail to kill you. They killed a lot of people. They wouldn’t let us live in peace.

In practical terms, by the mid-1970s in the Tonalá zone, past campesino strategies of vertical dependency on elites and individual accommodation were increasingly less viable. Under these conditions, most of the adult men from the Santana extended family moved to collective, active resistance. They joined thousands of campesinos who participated in land takeovers, which were often violently repressed by Somoza’s National Guard, and collaborated with FSLN guerrillas in nearby cities.

Thus market advances, combined with increased state repression, served as a powerful external grievance. Market pressures weakened campesino vertical ties with patrons, helping to forge new linkages of rural class-based solidarity, which, in turn, primed collective resistance. This prerevolutionary experience also suggests, however, that we should not take for granted a common autonomous consciousness, even among campesinos in shared structural locations facing similar market disruptions. Even when market processes appear to undermine economic security, peasants must interpret exactly what is occurring, how widespread it is, who is affected, who or what is responsible, and the moral acceptability of what is occurring. In this instance, some campesinos identified in the uneven geographic advance of market processes an opportunity for upward mobility in peripheral zones that was not possible in the heart of the agroexport zones.

REVOLUTIONARY MOBILIZATION

During the revolutionary years of the 1980s, the FSLN shifted Nicaragua's rural sector away from markets, in both structural and ideological terms. The impact of these state policies on Miraflores campesinos was to strengthen horizontal class solidarity, promote high levels of collective mobilization, and facilitate alternative belief systems that challenged key precepts of market systems. The creation of Miraflores as a community in 1982 was in fact a largely top-down project of the FSLN's agrarian reform program. FSLN agrarian policies in the 1980s included a major land reform, creation of state farms and cooperatives, state controls over the marketing of agricultural products, and a revolutionary ideology that signified an important shift away from earlier market development models (CIERA 1989).

The FSLN conditioned access to expropriated land in the early 1980s on membership in state farms and cooperatives, which it viewed as a more "advanced" form of agricultural production that would inculcate campesinos with collectivist and socialist values.[5] Both the Santanas and the Mezas (who had returned to the Tonalá zone to escape the growing war violence along the Nicaragua-Honduras border) reported that they would not have taken the initiative to work collectively on their own.[6] FSLN selective incentives—above all else, access to land—convinced these families to form a CAS on 132 *manzanas* of expropriated hacienda land.

In the eight years that Miraflores operated as a cooperative, residents' collective identities, expectations of the state, and ideologies underwent important shifts, reshaping the earlier individualistic, clientelistic tendencies of the agricultural frontier families and reinforcing the class solidarity of the Tonalá families. In addition, residents became highly mobilized on social and political issues. Their activities included advocacy on rural issues through the National Union of Farmers and Ranchers (*Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos*, UNAG), high levels of collective participation in political rallies and events, engagement with NGO workshops and development projects, extensive social networking, voluntary military service, and electoral activities in favor of the FSLN. During the height of community mobilization in the mid-to-late 1980s, cooperative meetings were held at least three to four times a week.

Underlying this high level of social and political mobilization was a strong commitment to class solidarity among the rural poor and the popular sectors more broadly. Miraflores residents also shared, and articulated in a range of forums, beliefs, values, and practices that challenged key aspects of free market development policies, notably a strong commitment to participatory democracy, egalitarianism, and an active redistributive role for the state.

As discussed earlier, communitarian orientations and horizontal solidarity may emerge or strengthen both in relatively isolated, precapitalist rural communities and in recreated rural communities that are partly the product of the disruption of market forces. The experiences of Miraflores in the 1980s illustrate an additional process through which horizontal class solidarity is reinforced: state policies of selective incentives and promotion of alternatives to market-based practices and values.

For that subsector of campesinos who chose to join a CAS, the revolutionary state offered material incentives in favor of a class-based, collectivist campesino consciousness and identity. These included good-quality agricultural land, subsi-

dies for agricultural equipment and inputs, and loans at negative real interest rates. Sandinista authorities also employed ongoing moral suasion in formal and informal political events in which cooperative members participated.

Here, peasant interpretations of and responses to market advances were a product of shared subordinate economic status and were reinforced through practices and interactions in daily life and informal political arenas. During the 1980s, community members engaged in collective agriculture and cooperative administration with an emphasis on substantive democratic participation, cooperation, and equality. The cooperative served as a place in which members learned organizational skills and nurtured horizontal relationships of trust.[7]

Community members also appropriated the Sandinista discourse of that era that the state had a normative, ethical responsibility toward Nicaragua's poor majority. Community leaders made claims that the government should provide access to land, intervene in the economy, and provide subsidies to benefit the poor. This collectivist, revolutionary consciousness also contested key precepts of market processes in such areas as private property, individualism, hierarchy, and competition.

Similar to the campesino supporters of the leftist FMLN guerrillas in Wood's 2003 research in El Salvador, Miraflores residents link their collective activism in this period to a conscious sense of agency. Decades later, they continue to take pride in their participation in a historical project of national liberation. Celso Santana explains, "Revolution is hard. It's not soft or sweet. It's a product of rebellion that has many enemies. But it also has meaning, importance."

The importance of these localized experiences becomes further apparent in comparing the Miraflores experience with that of other rural zones in Nicaragua. Only 12 percent of Nicaraguan campesinos participated in such processes of revolutionary socialization in agricultural cooperatives (CIERA 1989). Enríquez (1997) found that Nicaraguan campesinos who farmed individually in credit cooperatives generally did not experience the same type of political and ideological transformation as detailed in some of the CAS's like Miraflores.

Likewise, outside of Chinandega and other specific rural zones of revolutionary activism, many campesinos were strongly anti-Sandinista, actively collaborating with the counterrevolutionary Contra rebels (Horton 2004; Bendaña 1991). These campesinos mobilized partly against collectivist and state-oriented policies of the FSLN, notably the initial requirement to farm collectively to receive access to land, and state interventions in market processes (Horton 2007). In these zones, vertical patron-client ties and dependent consciousness also continued to predominate through the 1980s (Horton 1999).

Counteragrarian Reforms and Demobilization

The FSLN's electoral defeat in 1990 ushered in a new phase of counteragrarian reform in Nicaragua that moved away from socialist state-centered and collectivist models of rural development. President Violeta Chamorro (1990–96) initiated a major shift in the reigning political economy that continued under the Arnoldo Alemán (1996–2002) and Enrique Bolaños (2002–8) governments. While there were differences in the pace and manner in which economic transformations were carried out under these three governments, the overall trend was an advance of counteragrarian reforms and neoliberal economic reforms more broadly (Enríquez 2010).

While the promotion of secure individual private property rights has been at the center of counteragrarian reforms, in practice, Nicaragua's land privatization process has been complex and conflictive well into the 2000s (Broegaard 2009). In comparison to other former CAS's, Miraflores entered the counterreform era in a relatively favorable legal position. During the 1980s, cooperative leaders' persistent lobbying persuaded regional agrarian reform officials to formalize their collective land title. In the early 1990s, the community united successfully to halt an effort by the ex-owner's family to reclaim the land. Soon after the FSLN's 1990 electoral defeat and the withdrawal of state support for collectively farmed cooperatives, Miraflores decided, by a close vote, to divide up its collective land among its members.

More broadly, in the 1990s, Nicaragua's agricultural sector expanded, largely as a result of the growth of agricultural production in former conflict zones and along the agricultural frontier (Enríquez 2010; World Bank 2004). Despite this aggregate rural economic growth, however, the rural poverty rate increased under the Chamorro government, recovering only from the mid-1990s on. Studies in countries such as Vietnam and Chile have linked counteragrarian reform to increased rural stratification and an overall weakening of small farmer sectors (Kay 2006; Akram-Lodh 2005). In Nicaragua, neoliberal reforms more generally have exacerbated the precarious conditions of vulnerable sectors, such as women and the rural poor (Enríquez 2010; Ruben and Masset 2008; Baumeister 2004).

Specific aspects of Nicaragua's post-1990 market reforms that have affected the rural poor include restricted agricultural credit, low market prices for agricultural products, and withdrawal of state support and subsidies for cooperatives and small farmers. Since 1990, under more stringent market criteria, small farmers have lost access to state credit and have been largely excluded from commercial bank credit (Enríquez 2010).

In Latin America, neoliberal reforms have reinforced a sense of broad class solidarity among popular sectors and have increased collective mobilization (Silva 2009; Eckstein and Wickham-Crowley 2002). Waves of popular resistance to neoliberalism in Latin America are linked to its negative material and distributional impact on the poor. Shared conditions of impoverishment, particularly when subsistence is threatened, may facilitate, in turn, cognitive and emotional connections and may bring forth a broad common class consciousness that is critical of global capitalism. This process is further facilitated by the growth of transnational advocacy networks and the global diffusion of antiglobalization master frames (Almeida and Johnston 2006).

At the same time, however, research from Latin America links neoliberal reforms to popular sector fragmentation and demobilization (Posner 2008; Holzner 2007; Oxhorn 2006; Weyland 2004). It is these processes that prevailed in Miraflores from 1990 to 2005. Instead of sharing a resistance to neoliberalism, community members have interpreted and responded to market reforms in distinct ways, both contesting market practices and values and actively accommodating them.

Exploring the micro-level factors that contributed to this outcome in Miraflores offers insights as to why peasants in similar structural locations may interpret and respond to market forces in distinct ways. The discussion focuses on two key issues: the uneven material impact of market reforms and increased socioeconomic differentiation in campesino communities, and the further penetration into community spaces of individualistic market-based values and beliefs.

Earlier experiences of campesino mobilization in Central America suggest that when groups such as campesinos come under intensified market pressures, their class identities and cultural locations may converge and facilitate both horizontal solidarity and collective action (Brockett 2005; Wood 2003). This study, however, posits several complicating factors that may lead not to mutual reinforcement but to tensions between individual class status and collective cultural identities as campesinos. In particular, patterns of new or deepening inequalities under counteragrarian reform do not necessarily align with other preexisting fissures of class, race and ethnicity, or cultural identities. Instead, market opportunities may create or further elevate local "winners" who have been geographically and culturally integrated into peasant communities. These inequalities, even if small in absolute terms, hold implications for class solidarity, ideologies, and the capacities and willingness of the rural poor to engage in collective action.

Farming collectively in the 1980s, Miraflores experienced an unusually high level of equality in both economic and social terms. The shift to individual farming and market reforms from 1990 on, however, increased intracommunity economic stratification. By 2005, approximately one-third of Miraflores families held roughly the same economic positions as they had in the 1980s.[8] They had neither purchased nor sold land and had kept a small number of cattle. In contrast, the one-third of the families whose economic situation deteriorated generally had sold all or part of their land parcels, owned few cattle or other assets, had limited access even to NGO credit, and at times were unable to meet basic needs.[9] This set of families includes many of the Santana Tonalá families with an agricultural worker background, female-headed households, and the elderly and disabled who have been most negatively affected by the withdrawal of the state support and subsidies of the 1980s.[10]

Another third of the families, including all the Meza households, have improved their economic situation under individual agriculture. The growing inequality between households is a sensitive topic in the community, but it appears that three Meza households in particular have more than doubled their landholdings since the 1990 land division and have substantially expanded their cattle herds. This land has been purchased from other Miraflores families through informal buy-sell letters.

Neoliberal reforms facilitate the extension of market values and practices—competition, individual initiative, and responsibility—into all forms of social relations and the spaces of everyday life (Harvey 2007). Such penetration of market norms and practices may be represented as inevitable, natural, and linked to normatively valued goals, such as "modernization" and "development" (Horton 2007; World Bank 2004).

This case illustrates the advancement of these market ideologies as an uneven and contested process. Approximately one-third of community members, including almost all the families who are now more economically vulnerable, continued ideologically to contest Nicaragua's shift to a free market orientation through the 2000s.[11] In Miraflores, this resistance has been influenced by previous collective activities and forms of consciousness, notably activism in land *toma* movements and revolutionary socialization in the 1980s detailed above. The increased economic vulnerability that these families have experienced since privatization has further reinforced their skepticism of market ideologies. In contrast to the individual entrepreneurship promoted in neoliberalism, these campesinos continue to

support collective land ownership as a means to spread out costs and risks and provide a safety net for poor and vulnerable families.

These community members also strongly value equality and are critical of the economic inequalities that have accompanied neoliberal policies in Nicaragua. Xavier Santana expressed his fears of individual landholdings.

> If you give parcels to everyone, there are some who don't know how to work; others yes. Some will lose their harvests and begin to sell their land to the others. Then the one who works better buys my land and then he buys yours, and he becomes rich. He is going to make himself rich again.

These community members argue that cooperative agriculture utilized both land and human resources more productively than the individual model. Under individual farming, land is often underutilized, as households lack the capital or labor to cultivate their holding. Furthermore, they strongly support redistributive measures by the state as critical to the well-being of Nicaragua's campesino sector. Without such support, they doubt that the rural poor will be able to transform themselves into capitalist farmers and compete in national and global markets.

While these community members continue to contest key components and values of the post-1990 market reforms and express a strong class identity as poor, their grievances have not necessarily translated into collective resistance and action. Instead, neoliberal reforms have contributed to a more general social and political fragmentation and demobilization in Miraflores.

As Holzner (2007) emphasizes, processes of fragmentation and demobilization do not affect all sectors in Latin America equally. In this case, the post-1990 withdrawal of state support and subsidies most strongly affected the most vulnerable and poorest community members. It has undermined not only their subsistence security, but also their capacity to articulate demands and to mobilize and participate in nonelectoral political activities in several ways.

First, Miraflores's poorest families have been increasingly constrained by the material discipline of struggling for survival under free market conditions. They have had to spend more effort trying to meet basic needs, with less time and resources available for political and social activism, such as informing themselves on issues, attending organizational meetings, and engaging in political protest. At times, for example, these individuals are unable to afford missing a day of work or covering small expenses, such as bus fares to attend meetings. In addition, the worry and stress they experience struggling to meet basic needs is often psychologically disempowering.

Market processes have also contributed to increased physical instability and mobility of community members, breaking down the daily cohesion of the 1980s. While almost all of the original land beneficiaries have remained in Miraflores, many of the poorest families now rely on migration to neighboring Central American countries as a livelihood strategy. Absent from the community for months at a time, they are less able to engage in locally based networking and political activities. The structural shift from collective to individual farming has also meant that community members no longer engage in the collective administration and daily group activities that were an important element in reinforcing a sense of class-based solidarity.

Scholars have emphasized popular sector interpretations of neoliberal reforms in Latin America as an externally imposed grievance. This case highlights another, less often discussed aspect of neoliberalism, that free market processes

facilitate not only "losers" but also potential "winners," in a material sense. While the percentage of the poor who achieve upward mobility may be limited, the market ideology of individual initiative and hope expands the sociopolitical impact of market opportunities beyond the number of actual beneficiaries.

This study emphasizes that peasants in similar structural conditions may interpret and respond to market forces along a continuum of adoption, accommodation, and resistance. Market reforms may be perceived as threats to subsistence or potential opportunities. Free market policies operate not only through disciplinary mechanisms, but also through an ideology of hope and processes of co-optation. This case suggests that those individuals who believe that they have the particular combination of individual talent, skills, and work ethic to break out of poverty are more likely to accommodate or even embrace more individualistic market values and practices.

As discussed earlier, in relatively isolated rural communities with limited resources and state support, communitarian values and mutual support make sense from both a collective and individual perspective. Strong horizontal ties have served as a type of social safety net for both communities and individual families. Likewise, in the 1980s, state policies of land distribution and subsidies provided a strong incentive for individual farmers to shift to collective farming.

In the postrevolutionary period, however, external incentive structures shifted in favor of competition and individual advancement. One impact in Miraflores has been to shift perceptions of collective and individual well-being; instead of complimenting each other, they are in tension, particularly in three areas: efficiency, labor compensation, and economic decisionmaking.

In *post facto* evaluations of the 1980s cooperative, better-off campesinos have concluded that collective farming was less efficient than a private property model.[12] Without the disciplinary controls of market systems, these critics believe that the quantity and quality of agricultural production suffered, lowering the income and wealth of the community as a whole. By 1990, they also felt frustrated with the egalitarian norms of the collective model, specifically the equal distribution of cooperative profits. Lorenzo Meza, for example, commented in the late 1980s, "I work the same whether it's collective or my parcel, but others here don't. They finish work at 10 in the morning and fall asleep on their hammocks."

A third area of growing tension was collective administration of the land. These campesinos felt that their initiatives to improve the economic status of the cooperative were blocked by the *socios* with a day laborer background, who lacked knowledge and experience as agricultural producers. They increasingly perceived community meetings and cooperative administration as conflictive and inefficient, rather than empowering experiences of democracy. For all of these reasons, in 1990 this block of *socios* lobbied strongly, and ultimately successfully, to divide up cooperative land.

As we have seen, there is a strong overlap between those community members who have most strongly adopted market-based values and beliefs and those who have most prospered with land privatization. Their confidence in competing in a globalized market economy, in turn, is linked to their prerevolutionary experiences as more autonomous small farmers on the agricultural frontier and, somewhat ironically, their experiences of revolutionary empowerment in the 1980s.

From the mid-1990s to 2005, as these individuals increased their wealth, tensions increased between their individualistic and collectivist orientations, in two

ways. First, they faced an internal conflict of values and beliefs between their revolutionary, class-based loyalties and their individual economic ambitions. Second, the growing economic inequality has increasingly strained ties of horizontal solidarity in the community.

One way these individuals have managed these tensions between class solidarity and their individual upward mobility is to reshape their earlier systemic, collectivist critiques of capitalism to incorporate a narrative of individual responsibility at the micro level. Whereas Miraflores campesinos during the 1980s analyzed their situation largely in terms of class struggle, by the 2000s, these people still engaged in a class-linked critique of many macro-level market policies, most important the withdrawal of state credit and subsidies for small and medium-scale farmers. At the local level, however, they also attributed the growing community inequality to the individual values and practices of their less-well-off neighbors. They contended, for example, that the poorest families had a weak work ethic, poor business skills, and issues with alcohol abuse.

This group's strategy of upward mobility has centered on many values and beliefs linked to market entrepreneurship: a strong work ethic, limiting consumption to accumulate capital, initiative, social networking, and economic risk taking. Yet this new discourse of individual responsibility also absolves the well-off from potential ethical responsibility in contributing to and addressing the deteriorating circumstances of their neighbors. These narratives deflect attention away from issues of class loyalty and potentially exploitative practices by this emerging capitalist farmer sector. The focus on individual responsibility is, of course, part of broader neoliberal ideology. It also may serve on both the micro and macro levels as a mechanism to depoliticize intracommunity inequality and remove it from the realm of collective concern and potential political and social action.

In addition, this case study suggests that those individuals more likely to accommodate market processes are also more likely to possess the qualities—social capital and initiative—that have been key in facilitating community collective mobilization. In the 1980s, those individuals acted as community leaders, integrating themselves into local and regional social networks to gain access to information, loans, and favors. By the 2000s, however, their leadership role in the community was being challenged both by the more general demobilization of the poorer families and by diminished trust in them by the less-well-off families.

In light of these circumstances, upwardly mobile community members have attempted to reshape the boundaries, forms, and content of their ties to other community members. They continue to self-identify as "poor" campesinos and downplay the increasing wealth and income differences in the community. They emphasize instead shared culture and place-based identity to nurture clientelistic ties with their neighbors. Essentially, they are attempting to expand the class category of "poor" to include middle-scale farmers like them.

The question remains, why, under neoliberalism, do these upwardly mobile farmers still seek to nurture ties with less-well-off community members? Even under the neoliberal model, more limited incentives for continued community organization and collective action have persisted. In the post-1990 era, access to development aid and projects is often conditioned on demonstrating at least minimal forms of community organization. Furthermore, in instrumental terms, maintaining ties of trust with community members—specifically, arguing that Miraflores residents should not sell their land to outside "rich" people—has enabled the

upwardly mobile to purchase land from their neighbors at relatively favorable prices. Likewise, community ties have helped them maintain access to a reliable labor pool.

Moreover, such efforts are not simply instrumental. Well-off community members struggle to reconcile earlier collectivist and communitarian and more recent individualist orientations partly to maintain a sense of coherent, authentic self. These lingering values of solidarity serve as at least a partial constraint on potential intracommunity exploitation and have, in some cases, motivated better-off families to provide material assistance to poorer neighbors.

Overall, community mobilization between 1995 and 2005 was less frequent and more limited in scope, and it often left out the poorest families. In addition to demobilization and fragmentation, scholars also suggest that the content of popular sector demands may be limited under the neoliberal reforms, particularly excluding claims for structural changes and redistributive demands (Postero 2006).

This case illustrates several mechanisms through which this may occur at the local level. First, the limited community mobilization in the 1995–2005 period has centered on NGO development projects. In some but not all instances, this has encouraged community residents to focus on small-scale projects and technical challenges of implementation, with less attention to larger political or structural issues.

The broader national and regional political culture of patron-client relations also plays a role. While community relations before 1990 were relatively egalitarian, these more recent incipient clientelistic ties in Miraflores create a risk of ideological manipulation by leaders. New elites may set mobilization strategies and objectives geared toward their own emergent class interests as capitalist farmers rather than those of the poorer community members. Well-off community leaders thereby are making efforts to reconstitute campesino identities and reshape community social ties in a more clientelistic form.

Nevertheless, many of the poorer families increasingly distrust their upwardly mobile neighbors. They question whether their individual interests still converge with collective organization and action. They suspect the better-off community members of manipulating collective activities to bring economic gain to themselves. Some poorer community members also oppose the increasing wealth of their neighbors on normative grounds, as a betrayal of the community's egalitarian principles, and have limited social contact with these families. For all these reasons, the less well off are more reluctant to join in collective action with these neighbors, and now seek more individualized strategies to cope with their poverty, particularly temporary migration and nonfarm employment.

The link between collective mobilization and poverty appears to work in a bicausal manner with these families. The direct and indirect costs of such activities make it more difficult for them to participate. At the same time, their distrust and skepticism about such activities have reinforced their poverty as they have missed opportunities that have economically benefited other more politically active community households.

Table 2. Summary of Campesino Solidarity and Mobilization, 1965–2005

Market Stage	Campesino Solidarity and Mobilization
Market advances Agroexport expansion (1965–78)	New forms of class solidarity and collective resistance to market advances; individual accommodation to market processes
Market retreat Collective agriculture (1979–90)	Strong horizontal solidarity and high levels of collective mobilization; contestation of market values and practices
Market advances Counteragrarian reform (1990–2005)	Individual accommodation to market processes; community fragmentation and demobilization

Conclusions

This study has employed ethnographic case study data to explore peasant interpretations of and responses to the expansion and deepening of market processes over a four-decade period. It has approached free market policies not only in their material, distributional implications but also as a broader ideological project that operates in both formal political spaces and in the informal spaces of social and political formation in daily life.

Earlier discussions of the peasantry centered on characterizing rural communities as primarily communitarian or individualist in orientation. This study has added to the literature that emphasizes that such orientations are not fixed, essentialized characteristics of peasants, but instead are influenced by macro-level processes, in particular the advance of market processes, the focus of this study.

As table 2 summarizes, campesino responses to market forces do not necessarily follow a single collectivist or individualistic linear path. Periods of horizontal solidarity and high levels of community collective mobilization in the 1980s, for example, were followed by demobilization and a shift to more individualistic strategies of accommodation as macro-level conditions changed. This case also illustrates that periods of market advances, in this case agroexport expansion and more recently, neoliberal reforms, are linked to patterns of both popular sector mobilization and demobilization. Peasant responses are not determined by macro-level policy and structural shifts, but instead are complex and mediated.

This study identified three key areas at the micro level that contribute to these distinct outcomes of mobilization and demobilization: material and distributional impacts of market forces, campesino interpretations of market processes as grievances or opportunities, and impacts of market processes on rural horizontal solidarity.

Table 3 outlines how these factors at the local level have facilitated relatively high levels of community mobilization, while table 4 outlines two patterns of demobilization. Ideological contestation of market values and practices and horizontal solidarity are linked to relatively high levels of mobilization. In contrast, peasant interpretation of market advances as opportunities and class fragmentation contribute to community demobilization.

Table 3. Factors Linked to High Levels of Community Mobilization

Market processes	Material impacts	Peasant interpretations	Peasant solidarity	Mobilization outcomes
Market advances Agroexport expansion (1965–78)	Subsistence insecurity; lack of land access	Sense of grievance and moral outrage; developing critical consciousness	Weakened patron-client ties; new forms of horizontal solidarity	High levels of class-based mobilization in land *tomas* and collaboration with FSLN guerrillas
Market retreat Collective agriculture (1979–90)	Agrarian reform; state incentives to cooperatives; limits on individual mobility	Consolidation of values, beliefs, practices that contest market ideologies	Consolidation of class-based solidarity, reinforced in collectivist daily practices	High levels of political and social prorevolutionary union and political activities

Overall, during the agroexport expansion of the 1960s and 1970s and the later implementation of counteragrarian reforms, two patterns of material and distributional impacts stand out. First, echoing the findings of broader regional studies, this study suggests that in the Tonalá zone, free market policies have undermined the subsistence security of a majority of peasants (Enríquez 2010; Burdick et al. 2009; Ruben and Masset 2008). In addition, free market models may increase inequality in popular sectors, creating at least a limited number of "winners" in a material sense. This upward economic mobility from within the campesino sector, in turn, has important sociopolitical implications.

Along with the material and distributional impacts of market processes, this study has emphasized the importance of campesino interpretive processes. It illustrates that even when market processes undermine the security and material well-being of small farmers in a similar structural position, peasants develop a range of interpretations. Campesinos have perceived market advances as a grievance to be collectively resisted and as a potential opportunity to be individually accommodated. This case identifies several factors that influence the degree to which campesinos adopt, accommodate, or contest market ideologies.

First, the material and distributional impacts of free market policies shape peasant interpretations. This case provides evidence that market advances that undermine subsistence security will often be interpreted as a grievance by campesinos and resisted, particularly if combined with state repression. Preexisting forms of rural consciousness also play a role. Historically, peasant collective resistance to free market development policies in Latin America has been closely linked to a more autonomous class- and culturally based critical consciousness rooted in traditional rural communities relatively sheltered from the full impact of agricultural modernization.

Such social relations also influence campesino interpretations of market processes. In this case, historically and culturally rooted ideological and material ties of dependency to local elites served, at least for a time, to naturalize increas-

Table 4: Factors Linked to Demobilization

Market processes	Material impacts	Peasant interpretations	Peasant solidarity	Mobilization outcomes
Market advances Agroexport expansion (1965–78)	Subsistence insecurity weakened; uneven market impacts	Accommodate market ideologies; dependent consciousness	Individual strategies of upward mobility; patron-client ties	Low levels of collective mobilization in agricultural frontier subsector
Market advances Counter-agrarian reforms (1990–2005)	Increased subsistence insecurity; economic upward mobility for a minority	Divided interpretations; neoliberalism as grievance and opportunity for economic advancement	Weakened horizontal solidarity; increased intra-community stratification	Demobilization and fragmentation

ing class inequalities and dampen potential resistance. Following the 1979 revolution, these campesinos developed relationships of trust with the FSLN, and a different type of socialization occurred. Their interactions with state agents reinforced a consciousness critical of market processes that embraced alternative values of equality, participatory democracy, and a redistributive state. In addition, campesino critical consciousness was nurtured in face-to-face interactions and practices of daily life in collective agriculture. The selective material incentives that the revolutionary government provided in the 1980s for cooperatives were another factor.

Market advances and retreats imply economic restructuring, an ideological project, and potentially a reshaping of social relations among campesinos in nonmarket spaces. Scholarship on rural resistance and mobilization against free market policies in Central America details cases in which shared rural cultural identities and class interests have converged; that is, in which campesinos perceived that communitarian orientations and collective action also advanced individual interests (Wood 2003; Brockett 1990; Kincaid 1987).

In the 1960s and 1970s in Chinandega Province, new forms of class-based rural solidarity emerged, the product of socioeconomic dislocation and agrarian struggle against landlords and the Somoza state. This horizontal solidarity was further reinforced among that minority of campesinos in cooperatives in the 1980s through selective state material incentives and FSLN moral suasion that emphasized class solidarity.

This study also illustrates a counterexample in which tensions between individualistic and collectivist orientations in rural communities intensified in periods of market advances, contributing to fragmentation and demobilization. The robustness and absorptive capacity of market ideologies and their narrative of hope and opportunity should not be underestimated, for processes of co-optation may operate on multiple levels, including at the core of popular sectors that have led campaigns against neoliberalism in Latin America. While such market opportunities are often sharply constrained in practice, this case suggests that those

individuals who are skilled social entrepreneurs and natural leaders will be most likely both to interpret markets as opportunities and to choose strategies of individual accommodation and advancement. Upwardly mobile grassroots leaders may also appropriate individualistic market discourse (particularly as applied to the micro level) as a means to manage the internal and external tensions linked to their economic success.

Experiences of counteragrarian reform also highlight the importance of considering increased stratification, even if limited in absolute terms, and its impact on popular sector solidarity. As growing economic inequality strains class and cultural convergence in popular sectors such as the peasantry, several outcomes are possible. Increased intracommunity stratification may weaken trust and the sense of shared identity between the rural winners and losers under counteragrarian reforms. In this case, poorer individuals came to view their interests as no longer overlapping with those of their upwardly mobile neighbors, now viewed as self-interested, even exploitative. Fragmentation and demobilization under counteragrarian reform may be further reinforced when the precarious economic circumstances of the poorest peasants deplete them of the basic resources and time needed for nonelectoral political activism.

A second scenario linked to intracommunity stratification is the development of new or reconfigured clientelistic ties within campesino communities. Culturally embedded local elites may work to reshape the content and boundaries of subaltern collective identities such that "peasant" identity is expanded to include emergent capitalist farmers. As the case study illustrates, even under neoliberal hegemony, some incentives persist for communities to engage in at least limited forms of collective mobilization.

New capitalist farmers may seek to maintain their leadership role by building clientelistic ties. Such ties among peasants of increasingly unequal class status run the risk of potentially deemphasizing or silencing more radical class-based structural or redistributive demands in favor of more ambiguous populist discourse. This shift in the focus and content of rural claimsmaking, along with the dynamic of fragmentation and demobilization, potentially weakens more systematic collective challenges to neoliberalism.

A final broad point that emerges from this study is the need to explore further the range of popular responses to neoliberalism as an ideology, and its negative economic impact. The recent global market downturn suggests that the co-optive capacities of market processes described here may weaken, at least in the short term. Yet even if neoliberalism is more widely interpreted as undermining the subsistence of Latin America's poorest sectors, it is not at all obvious what forms and contents popular resistance will take. Portes and Hoffman (2003) note a paradox of increasingly class-polarized societies and ideologically diffuse political parties, while others suggest that the rising exclusion, poverty, and alienation of economic globalization may further augment social decomposition and violence in Latin America. Further research on the complexity and nuances of popular sector responses to free market policies may consider linking shifts in broader political opportunity structures to the local-level mediating processes of socialization, interpretation, and interactions explored here.

NOTES

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1. Neoliberal policies as applied in Latin America favor an outward-oriented export economy and typically have included a diminished role for the state, reduced fiscal deficits, privatization of publicly owned enterprises, deregulation of domestic labor markets, trade and interest rate liberalization, tax reforms, secure property rights, and free capital flows to stimulate long-term economic growth (Chase 2002). This study employs the terms *neoliberal reforms* and *free market development policies* interchangeably.

2. Miraflores comprised 22 households in 1987 and 23 households in the mid-2000s. Three families left the community between 1989 and 2001, while adult children formed three new households and one outside family joined the community. My interviews covered at least one adult member of every household.

3. Counteragrarian reforms in Central America over the past several decades have included privatization of state development banks, extension agencies, and commodities boards; reduction or elimination of government subsidies and tariffs; and, in the case of Nicaragua, privatization of state farms and cooperatives (Enríquez 2010; Edelman 2008).

4. This discussion of the prerevolutionary history of the Chinandega region draws on interviews and informal conversations with Miraflores community members conducted in 1989, 1998, 2000, and 2001.

5. During the 1980s, the FSLN distributed 2.8 million *manzanas* of land to approximately 45,000 beneficiaries (Ruben and Masset 2008, 486).

6. This section draws on interviews conducted in 1989, 2000, and 2001 and participant observation in the community at various periods between 1987 and 1990.

7. This process of ideological transformation and consolidation in the 1980s also had important limitations and tensions. First, Miraflores community members were a largely self-selected group of campesinos who were willing at least to accept, if not completely embrace, a collective revolutionary identity. Another important limitation was the de facto exclusion of women. Only men were formal cooperative members (*socios*). While class solidarity and equality were strongly emphasized in the community, gender inequalities went largely unquestioned.

8. These data are from a household survey I conducted in 2000–2001 with follow-up in 2006. Data were gathered on the amount of land owned by each household, number of cattle, crops cultivated, nonagricultural income sources, and common household consumption items.

9. Case studies from different rural zones of Nicaragua have found mixed impacts, and 2003 census data do not show a clear pattern of agricultural land reconcentration.

10. Since 1990, the FSLN has continued to dominate local municipal elections. Community members cite lack of resources, poor administrative skills, inefficiency, and corruption, however, as limiting the effectiveness and positive impact of their municipal government.

11. This section draws on interviews and participant observation conducted in 2000, 2001, 2003, and 2006.

12. This section draws on interviews conducted in 2001, 2003, and 2006, and informal conversations.

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