POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION, CONTINGENT NEOLIBERALISM, AND PLACE IN TWO NICARAGUAN LOCALITIES

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This study examines post-conflict reconstruction in the Nicaraguan localities of Jinotega and Boaco since the end of the Contra conflict. Reconstruction has become a formal political project guided by international organizations, Northern donor states, and non-governmental organizations to bind post-war states and societies into a global capitalist-democratic political structure in the past two decades. Critical scholars suggest that reconstruction is a normative international project to promote a blend of liberal and neoliberal reforms as the foundations for a stable post-war peace. From this perspective, reconstruction imposes liberal/neoliberal political-economic norms that do not adequately take into account the needs, interests, and cultural mores of post-conflict populations. For some scholars, reconstruction is part of an effort to maintain Northern hegemony through the introduction of liberal and particularly neoliberal modes of regulation.

Recent research in geography and other disciplines has adopted a relational perspective to see reconstruction as a political process to negotiate the terms of post-conflict peace and its discontents. These works complement notions of reconstruction from above with a post-structural perspective that examines the contested production of post-conflict order within particular places and scales. Reconstruction reflects the unequal structural position that permits international actors considerable influence over the reconstruction process. Yet, reconstruction also takes hybrid, contingent forms through the different articulations of political institutions and relations that come together in time and space.

The current study blends theories on contingent neoliberalism, political economy, and geographic place to examine the mutual relationship between reconstruction and place-specific
political, economic, social, and cultural relations through which reconstruction is defined and put into practice. The study examines three related questions: 1) How reconstruction norms translate into place-specific patterns of transnational governance; 2) How place-based political actors renegotiate international norms to produce contingent neoliberal modes of political economy in place; 3) Whether dominant reconstruction patterns undermine the putative reconstruction goal of building a positive and just peace in war-torn states and societies? I conducted ethnographic field research in two Nicaraguan localities, Jinotega and Boaco, during visits in July-August 2008 and July-September 2009. I further supplemented these field visits with long-distance correspondence with Nicaraguan informants.

The results of this study confirm that international organizations, donor states, and transnational non-governmental organizations maintain a powerful influence over the neoliberal content of reconstruction through their financial and material control. However, the study also demonstrates that reconstruction has taken complicated, place-specific paths in both field sites. Reconstruction outcomes reflect the place-specific articulation of international norms and the grounded institutions, governance patterns, and political practices that define and constitute the political economy of post-conflict peace in time and space. The results of this study call into question the efficacy of both top-down and bottom-up perspectives that fail to recognize that reconstruction forms within particular places through the hybrid connections between actors from across political scales and sites. Finally, the results support the contention that the normative reconstruction of neoliberal peace may be fostering post-conflict political-economic conditions that reinforce a state of dependency on international donors in ways that undermine the putative reconstruction goals of advancing a positive sense of liberal or neoliberal peace in war-torn states and societies.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my father, Larry A. Nicley (1944-2011). Larry embodied the personal qualities that have seen me through the long, winding road towards completion of my graduate education. From my earliest memories of his leaving before sunrise for a hard day in the scorched, dusty industrial factories that defined his professional life to the last words he spoke to me, the life Larry led gave me the force of spirit to pursue and complete my academic education with this study. The respect he showed for the inherent dignity and humanity of the people he encountered gave me a deep interest in the people and the world around me. The adventurous spirit Larry brought to his life granted me a passion for the world around me. The commitment he brought to all his endeavors taught me to work hard to improve the world around me. The dignity he granted to the humble and the meek taught me that I have a responsibility to the world around me. Without knowing it, my dad taught me to be a geographer. The dedication to his family and friends taught me a sense of perspective that has helped me through the challenges of academic life with a reminder that I am more than the sum of my dissertation. His life and his absence remind me that what matters most at the end of the day are the people with whom I share this journey. When I lower my head to receive my doctoral hood, his hands will be resting above the hands holding the cloth.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE ROAD TO RECONSTRUCTION

In 2009, Eduardo Galeano published the latest edition of his seminal book titled *Open Veins of Latin America*. In his account of 500 years of capitalism in Latin America, Galeano offered a moving summary of Latin American political history that speaks to this current study and its focus on post-conflict reconstruction. Galeano wrote:

> Poverty is not written in the stars; underdevelopment is not one of God’s mysterious designs. Redemptive years of revolution pass; the ruling classes wait and meanwhile pronounce hellfire anathema on everybody. In a sense the right wing is correct in identifying itself with tranquility and order: it is an order of daily humiliation for the majority, but an order nonetheless; it is a tranquility in which injustice continues to be unjust and hunger to be hungry. ... [P]erpetuation of the existing order of things is perpetuation of the crime” (Galeano 2009, 17-18).

This study on Nicaraguan post-conflict reconstruction from 1990-present begins with recognition that reconstruction is part of the five centuries-long political struggle to define the terms of political-economic stability and peace in the Latin American region. From a geohistorical perspective, Latin America has occupied a longstanding subordinate position within the global capitalist structure that compels us to question the nature of the capitalist-democratic regime that privileges the few and subordinates the majority (Skidmore and Smith 2001). Too often, Latin American dreams for stability and peace have been defined and controlled from beyond its borders.

The Nicaraguan history of colonial rule, revolutions, counter-revolutions, authoritarianism, war, and peace reflects the political struggles for control of the state and the means to define competing political-economic regimes for the past two centuries – more often
than not involving the United States (Gobat 2005; Pastor 2002; Robinson 1992, 1997).

Nicaraguan reconstruction is a reminder that there is nothing inevitable about the global political-economic structure. Rather, Nicaraguan reconstruction in a political process that both responds to and produces the terms of political economy and post-conflict peace within the broader structure of the global capitalist political economy. Reconstruction provides a window into the transnational connections and international actors driving a globalization of neoliberal political economy and the ways that such macro-level processes have engendered place-specific forms of political accommodation and resistance.

1.2 RECONSTRUCTION AND THE NEOLIBERAL PEACE

The term post-conflict reconstruction broadly refers to a political effort to establish a stable, sovereign state in which conflict and tensions are replaced by a general state of peace and reconciliation (Dahlman 2009). However, a more comprehensive definition reveals reconstruction to be a complex, political, economic, and social process that combines multiple political and economic philosophies, institutions, political relations, and actors (Kirsch and Flint 2011a). Reconstruction processes occur at multiple geographic scales and bring political actors from multiple geographic locations both within and outside post-conflict states together into place-specific (i.e., grounded) reconstruction programs and practices. The multiple themes covered by reconstruction speak to the complex nature of the issue. Reconstruction involves efforts to build (or rebuild) and support state institutions, political, economic, and social institutions, governance systems, civil society, citizen participation, military and security forces, demobilization programs, physical infrastructure in urban and rural landscapes, and social

Given the comprehensive scope of reconstruction, practitioners and scholars have had fertile space to critically reconsider the stated goals, norms, programs, and intended targets of reconstruction. Recent contributions have redefined reconstruction as a social process that renegotiates political power relations and the allocation of resources in post-war societies (Kirsch and Flint 2011a). The production of post-conflict political-economic spaces thus may be conducive to post-war stability, but equally may reinforce or generate new forms of political conflict (Flint 2011). If the putative goal of reconstruction is to build peace, we must raise the question: from whom is reconstruction conceived, for whom is reconstruction enacted, through what institutional and governance mechanisms does reconstruction occur, and what does reconstruction mean in daily life? Despite two decades of formal policy attention to rebuilding war-torn states and societies, practitioners and scholars continue to struggle with these questions.

From the outset, I want to recognize that reconstruction is not a static concept, but rather has developed and continues to change over time and as it operates across space. We can place reconstruction in particular historical and geographic context as a means to understanding what reconstruction means in particular post-conflict settings and also to understand how reconstruction may be received in particular post-conflict contexts. The formal development of reconstruction on an international scale dates to the World War II period from 1944 to 1949. The roots of reconstruction, of course, extend much further back to the French revolution and the rise of classic liberalism (Kirsch and Flint 2011b). Indeed, for most of the past 200 years reconstruction efforts have been shaped by the late 18th century liberal philosophies on constitutional democracy, capitalist political economy, and the rational, bureaucratic state.
However, reconstruction continued to be only a tentative political and poorly defined political concept for most of the century following the French revolution. The formal Reconstruction Era (1863-1877) accompanying and following the U.S. Civil War first established reconstruction as a comprehensive political project to reorganize economic, political, and social conditions in a post-war state (Cox Richardson 2007; Kirsch and Flint 2011b). The U.S. Reconstruction period became a watershed moment that simultaneously transformed the political, economic, and social structure of the entire United States, set the stage for the 20th century rise of U.S. liberalism worldwide, and laid the intellectual foundations for reconstruction as a political concept (Cox Richardson 2007).

The contentious period following World War I provided the political conditions that transformed the U.S. Reconstruction experience into a nascent international framework for rebuilding post-conflict states and societies. The rise of U.S. liberal internationalism and the reaction to the punitive terms of the post-war peace called attention to the need for a more coherent international reconstruction effort to more equitably define and establish the conditions for a just post-war peace that would foster international order, constitutional government, and market economies in Europe and beyond (Keynes 1920). Writing in 1920, John Maynard Keynes presciently brought together liberal internationalism, liberal development theories, and reconstruction as a distinct approach for building conditions of liberal peace through the political-economic and social redevelopment of allies and enemies in the aftermath of conflict. A quarter century after World War I ended, the nascent vision of international reconstruction came to fruition as World War II propelled the U.S. into the globally dominant position to build a liberal international system centered on national welfare states and market-democratic political economy to replace the defunct European imperial and colonial order (Huxley 1942; St. Louis
Reconstruction programs like the European Recovery Program (Marshall Plan) became the first steps of a comprehensive program to project U.S. political-economic and social norms as the global standard for rebuilding post-conflict states and societies (Quinn and Cox 2007; LeFeber, Polenberg, and Woloch 2008).

Nicaraguan reconstruction from 1990 has been a negotiated process to redefine the nature of the post-socialist state, political economy, institutions, and relations in a dynamic, unsettled political climate at the end of the Contra war. The strong connections between reconstruction, neoliberal development, and post-socialist transition have challenged and complicated efforts to build Nicaraguan peace. The post-socialist transition literature casts additional light on the comprehensive nature of the reforms to both the political-economic structure and the regime of subjection that took place in the name of Nicaraguan reconstruction in the past two decades (Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Verdery 1996, 1991; Bunce 1995). The path to neoliberal political-economic reform has required profound changes to the state role in providing financial and material support, the political-economic structure, and a decoupling of the unity of political and civil society with the move away from socialist mass organizations (Verdery 1991).

In particular, three conditions mentioned in the post-socialist transition literature hold direct relevance to the Nicaraguan reconstruction process. First, Nicaraguan reconstruction, as with the contemporary post-socialist transitions in East-Central Europe at the beginning of the 1990s, must be placed in the broader historical context of the global reorganization towards a neoliberal regime of accumulation (Burawoy and Verdery 1999). Second, Nicaraguan reconstruction can be viewed as a comprehensive re-regulation of the Nicaraguan political economy, state and societal institutions, and governance systems as sweeping in scope as the original socialist revolution that brought the FSLN to power in 1979 (Burawoy and Verdery
Third, Nicaraguan reconstruction requires a new set of everyday practices and the construction of new post-socialist political subjects centered on neoliberal modes of discipline in line with post-socialist political-economic reform (Verdery 1991).

Similarly, Nicaraguan reconstruction can draw from the critical development literature to better examine the combined political-economic and social transformation that was set in motion with the 1990 FSLN defeat (Bebbington and Kotahri 2006; Junne and Verkoren 2005; Hart 2004, 2001; Bebbington 2003, 2002; Saldaña-Portilla 2003a; Esteva 1992; Sachs 1992; Cardoso 1972; Frank 1966). Reconstruction and development both may be implicated in the production of new political-economic regimes and ‘modes of subjection’ that construct new political subjects (Saldaña-Portilla 2003a). Development discourses incorporate a normative perspective on liberalism as the intellectual foundation that permits the realization of a rational political, economic, and social order in which individual actors may maximize well-being (Esteva 1992; Saldaña-Portilla 2003a). This normative vision creates a hierarchical view of the world that defines states, regions, and individual actors at different stages of socio-economic and political under-development as compared to an ideal, developed liberal standard (Esteva 1992; Sachs 1992). Liberal development generates the categories of developed and underdeveloped that then

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1 The 20th century history of development theories from the late 1940s to the present demonstrate a complex genealogy from the original concepts of macro-economic development in the post-World War II period. Recent general works by Saldaña-Portilla (2003a), Esteva (1992), and Sachs (1992) and critical geographic works by Bebbington and Kothari (2006), Junne and Verkoren (2005); Hart (2004, 2001); and Bebbington (2003, 2002) provide insightful historical perspectives on the development of development. In particular, Esteva (1992) and Sachs (1992) provide helpful accounts of the historical progression of development discourses from Harry Truman’s 1949 inaugural speech, the 1950s (macro-economic development), 1960s (integrated structural development), 1970s (human needs, endogenous development), 1980s (the ‘lost development decade’ and the 1990s (redevelopment, sustainable development). More theoretically, The Saldaña-Portilla (2003a) argument that development concurrently operates through political-economic reform and human subject construction (‘regimes of subjection’) is particularly useful for my approach to reconstruction.
justify international development policies introduced from above and from within particular states to reproduce the conditions of underdevelopment and dependent development that have been a central part of the critical development critique for the past forty years (Cardoso 1972; Frank 1966).

Recent work examining the complex transnational networks of institutions, relations, practices, and processes that have attempted to normalize neoliberal modes of development provide particular insight into the Nicaraguan reconstruction process (Junne and Verkoren 2005; Bebbington and Kothari 2006; Hart 2004; Bebbington 2003, 2002). These contributions suggest that we may see the reconstruction as a neoliberal development project that regulates and disciplines political-economic conditions and political subjects through diverse spatial patterns no longer confined to classic tropes of national development. In particular, reconstruction can be probed to see how it may reproduce or adapt transnational development discourses in the 1990s and 2000s that appear to shift both the responsibility for development and the blame for continued underdevelopment onto the actions and behaviors of the most vulnerable actors in the global South (Saldaña-Portilla 2003a).

We can approach Nicaraguan reconstruction from 1990 as a normative process to establish a comprehensive political-economic and social regime through the convergence of post-conflict, post-socialist, and development discourses around the production of what scholars recently have called the ‘neoliberal peace’ (Lidén, Mac Ginty, and Richmond 2009; Lipschutz 1998). The reconstruction of neoliberal peace centers on a shift within the traditional liberal commitment to capitalist democracy, rule of law, and civil society development. As Richmond (2010: 667) notes, reconstruction increasingly has become orchestrated by an international elite set of multilateral organizations, Western donor states, and development NGOs as its principal
architects. These international elite actors and their proxy clients within post-war states have centered their attention on producing formal institutions and a governance structure that supports market-based principles as the principal guide for post-war economic, but also political and social development. Reconstruction thus has become a normative effort to promote the formal trappings of a highly liberalized market-democratic state structure designed to bind post-conflict societies into a global capitalist regime (Lipschutz 1998). The resulting reconstruction of neoliberal political economy simultaneously de-centers the state and promotes more inclusive governance practices including private and civil society actors as principal guarantors for social and political development (Brinkerhoff 2007; Caplan 2005; Coyne 2005; Guilhot 2005).

The post-Cold War moment of (neo)liberal triumph during the 1990s provided impetus for efforts to establish a normative model for post-conflict reconstruction that began with the presumption that global peace and neoliberal economic development were mutually reinforcing processes (Barnett 1995, 1997; Jakobsen 2002; Lipschutz 1998). The seminal United Nations reports on peace, development, and security laid the epistemological foundations for a broadly held perspective that sees reconstruction as peacebuilding through neoliberal economic and political globalization (United Nations 1992, 1994, 2004, 2007). The United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions, most Western governments, and Northern-based development NGOs have adhered to this normative commitment to neoliberal political-economic reconstruction throughout the intervening years (see Chapter Two).

Yet, we may continue to ask how the post-war states and societies that are the putative targets of this normative reconstruction effort have been transformed through that reform process (Lipschutz 1998). One prominent line of scholarly critique has centered on the practical limitations and lacunae that accompany the neoliberal best practice standards for reconstruction
These contributions examine the efficacy of institutional and governance reforms (Barakat and Chard 2002; Cousens and Kumar 2001; Coyne 2005; de Zeeuw 2005; Jeong 2005; Orr 2004; Ottaway 2003b, 2003a; Paris 2004; Stanley and Peceny 2001) and the political connections between international donors, transnational development NGOs, and civil society actors in post-war states (Brinkerhoff 2005, 2007; Caplan 2005; Megoran 2005; Mertus and Sajjad 2005; Richmond 2005b, 2005a; Richmond and Carey 2005; Romeo 2002). While these contributions have fruitfully demonstrated the limits of the post-Cold War international reconstruction model, the pragmatic nature of this literature generally leaves aside critical questions about the broader effect of reconstruction in producing the neoliberal conditions of political-economic life in practice in war-torn countries.

A second line of scholarly critique interrogates how the normative reconstruction model introduced from above penetrates into particular places to build neoliberal political-economic structure. The recent critical International Relations literature has taken a macro-scale approach that sees reconstruction as bound into hegemonic processes from above (Jacoby 2007; Robinson 2003). These contributions broadly consider the role of reconstruction in the development of global governance (Barnes and Farish 2006; Barnett 1995, 1997; Jacoby 2007; Jakobsen 2002; Jeong 2005; Paris 1997, 2002a, 2004), the role reconstruction plays in reproducing post-colonial structures of liberal/neoliberal domination by Western states (Barkawi and Laffey 1999; Quinn and Cox 2007; Richmond 2010a; Williams 2007), and the reconstruction role in reproducing

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2 The terms scholars use to describe the critical political economy of reconstruction vary by discipline. Political scientists often phrase their discussion in terms of liberalization of post-conflict political economy. In contrast, geographers, sociologists, and anthropologists often use neoliberalism or neoliberalization to highlight the contemporary variation from classic liberal thought. This study applies the neoliberal perspective on reconstruction, while recognizing that classic liberal and social-progressive discourses do influence the reconstruction process as well (Hindess 2004).
structural and social inequalities conducive to fragile peace and the potential for a return to conflict (de Zeeuw 2005; Ottaway 2002b, 2003b; Sampson 2003).

These recent works have advanced a critical reconstruction perspective that valuably highlights the theoretical foundations and political implications of reconstruction on target post-war states. Nevertheless, most of the contributions ultimately falter with the tired theme that reconstruction is merely the latest form of U.S. and/or Western neo-imperialist domination (e.g., Jacoby 2007; Williams 2007). To understand reconstruction, we must first recognize the transnational elite governance connections that produce post-conflict political economy and the ‘neoliberal peace’. At the same time, we must recognize that reconstruction develops within these overarching conditions as a relational, piecemeal process through the mutual connections between neoliberal discourse, political economy, institutions, governance relations, and practice in particular places.

The attention to reconstruction from geographers has opened new avenues for research on the spatial processes through which neoliberal political-economic reconstruction is produced, adapted, and challenged on the ground. For many geographers, reconstruction is a relational process that binds international, regional, and local actors into complex political power relations that come together as place-specific patterns of political-economic organization (Dahlman and Ó Tuathail 2005b, 2005a; Dahlman and Ó Tuathail 2006; Jeffrey 2006; Junne and Verkoren 2005b; Kirsch and Flint 2011b; Nakaya 2005, 2009). Reconstruction incorporates a combination of global governance, interstate geopolitics, and the more subtle transnational connections that normalize the post-Cold War liberal/neoliberal discourse guiding efforts to rebuild war-torn states (Paris 2002a; Richmond 2010a).
Moreover, recent studies have thrown into question the hard analytical distinction between conflict and post-conflict periods with the suggestion that reconstruction is a continuation of ‘war by other means’ (Dahlman 2009; Kirsch and Flint 2011b). Reconstruction is a political process that often involves the concurrent experiences of conflict, peacebuilding, continuation of political tensions and violence inherited from a period of conflict. We can adopt a comprehensive view of conflict and peace that includes political, economic, and social forms of both phenomena grounded in place. The place-specific patterns of conflict and peace suggest that the persistence of different forms of conflict into the post-conflict period often will define the terms of reconstruction that might be imagined and implemented on the ground (Herb 2005).

This research indicates that post-conflict reconstruction involves an historical and geographic ‘path dependence’ that blurs the discursive lines between conflict and post-conflict periods, with important implications for how we approach reconstruction as both practitioners and scholars. Reconstruction is part of a political continuum that connects pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict periods through a host of institutional and relational conditions specific to particular conflicts and particular places within a post-conflict state.

If reconstruction is foremost a process that produces neoliberal political economy, then the geography of reconstruction reflects a process that produces a complex mosaic of neoliberal political-economic spaces through the contingent, grounded articulations of political power realized in particular places. A one-size-fits-all reconstruction policy model fails to capture the role of historical political-economic conditions, cultural identity politics, and place-specific practices that influence the reconstruction process on the ground.

The geographic concept of place is at the heart of this study (Agnew 1987; Creswell 1996; Johnston 1991; Massey 1994; Merrifield 1993; Pred 1984; Sheppard 2002; Taylor 1999).
These conceptions of place share as a starting point the idea that places are not simply containers for human relations (Agnew 1987). Rather, places are socially produced concentrations of societal institutions, relations, practices, and meanings clustered in time and space (Merrifield 1993; Taylor 1999). In this study I approach place from a post-structural capitalist perspective that sees places as constituent sites within a capitalist political economy (Johnston 1991; Massey 1994; Pred 1984). That is, the historical articulations of political power define what a place is, what makes it distinct, and yet binds place within a global web of interconnected capitalist processes and relations (Johnston 1991; Massey 1994; Pred 1984).

This place ontology calls attention to the contested nature of place as part of the negotiation of capitalist political economy. Recent contributions highlight the globalization of place through the articulation of diverse social relations from multiple sites to establish place-specific relations of domination and resistance mutually bound to broader global processes (Hart 2002; Sheppard 2002). From a capitalist perspective, different modes of capital accumulation produce accompanying spatial patterns of economic, political, and social life (Merrifield 1993). Places here are seen as parts of a structured totality, each distinct, yet part of a global capitalist structure (Hart 2002). These capitalist places are sites of political friction and contestation in a perennial state of motion, heterotopic sites of hybrid meanings, practices, and relations that fleetingly define and condition what places become in time and space (Cairo 2004; Creswell 1996; MacLeod 1998; Routledge 1997).

The recent geographic literature on reconstruction focuses on how international reconstruction efforts are introduced, resisted, and adapted within particular places, where place is understood as a contested, social process (Dahlman and Ó Tuathail 2005a; Waizenegger and Hyndman 2011). Places become simultaneously spaces of domination, accommodation,
subversion, and resistance to the dominant neoliberal discourses through which the contingent terms of neoliberal political-economic reconstruction emerge on the ground (Allen 2003; Sharp et al. 2000). It is the resolution of these tensions between normative neoliberal discourses from above and grounded discourses from below that result in the hybrid, contingent forms of neoliberal political economy, political-economic regulation, and political-economic space that constitute the post-conflict reconstruction process.

This study approaches the reconstruction-place connections from two directions. From one side, reconstruction has produced a predominant pattern of neoliberal political economy that works through place-specific institutions and governance relations. Reconstruction has produced neoliberal modes of regulation and discipline through transnational connections dominated by international reconstruction actors (e.g., multilateral organizations, external donor states, NGOs) and their place-based partners.

International actors’ control over reconstruction finance and policy development have allowed them to maintain considerable influence over the promotion of neoliberal institutions and governance relations, daily practices and political subjectivities developed through the reconstruction process (Richmond 2010a). This spatial reorientation has produced a host of vertical post-conflict institutions that focus the attention of grounded state actors, non-state actors, and the general population towards the political interests of the international reconstruction community, often to the detriment of post-conflict domestic political institutions capable of constructing a state-centered national vision of a post-conflict future (Coyne 2005).

Recent research suggests that the reconstruction of neoliberal peace effectively pushes aside counter-discourses rooted in place, local spaces, and traditional communities (Megoran 2011; Richmond 2010b; Williams and McConnell 2011). From another angle, we can argue that
the normative neoliberal reconstruction model disciplines daily practices and subject self-understandings towards integration into a global neoliberal project guided from above. The mutual reorientation of the social and spatial structure compels people within post-conflict states – and particularly the most marginalized members of society – to orient their actions to meet the demands, political tendencies, and neoliberal discourse being advanced by the international reconstruction community and their place-based allies.

From the other side, the penetration of neoliberal capitalist political economy through reconstruction from above does not sufficiently capture the complex spatiality of the post-conflict reconstruction process. Rather, neoliberal reconstruction takes varied, place-specific forms through the political articulation of international, state, regional, and local institutions, social relations, practices, and actors that come together within particular localities (Dahlman and Ó Tuathail 2005a; Dahlman and Ó Tuathail 2006; Flint and Kirsch 2011; Jeffrey 2006; Pickering 2007).

From this perspective, the international reconstruction framework that is applied to war-torn states necessarily operates through place-based organizations and institutions that also play an influential role in shaping how reconstruction is received and put into practice from below. The focus on reconstruction as a place-specific, relational process opens the door for the development of multiple, contingent reconstructions of neoliberal political-economic peace. Reconstruction has not merely come down onto places as a complete package of political-economic reforms. Rather, reconstruction has involved a range of contingent, place-specific processes and outcomes that both reflect the predominant neoliberal thought, yet also reflect historically and culturally embedded institutions, relations, and practices through which reconstruction from above is received and put into practice (Kirsch and Flint 2011a).
Recent research centered on place-based reconstructions of neoliberal political economy highlight the hybrid reconstruction patterns that may be observed at the reconstruction-place interface (Dahlman 2009; Dahlman and Ó Tuathail 2005b; Dahlman and Ó Tuathail 2006; Flint 2011; Grundy-Warr and Dean 2011; Kirsch and Flint 2011a; Megoran 2011; Richmond 2010b; Waizenegger and Hyndman 2011; Williams and McConnell 2011). These works collectively recognize that reconstruction takes hybrid, contingent forms through the everyday practices of power that take shape in particular places (Flint and Kirsch 2011).

A place-based reconstruction compels us to focus on how political subjects negotiate the meanings and terms of neoliberal reconstruction efforts from above through their daily practices and subjectivities. These place-specific reconstructions of contingent neoliberal structure draw from historical place context and the complicated connections between war and post-war peacebuilding that condition how people receive, interpret and make reconstruction meaningful in their daily lives. This complex geography of reconstruction quickly move us beyond bland descriptions of reconstruction as liberal/neoliberal peace towards an exploration of the place-specific struggles to construct what has alternatively been called ‘post-liberal peace’ (Richmond 2010b: 668), ‘contextualized peace’ (Williams and McConnell 2011: 929), and ‘the spaces of everyday peace’ (Megoran 2011: 178).

The current research on post-conflict reconstruction does not always explicitly address the question of neoliberal political-economic discourse and the theoretical foundations supporting reconstruction policy. However, the greater complexity that these studies grant to our understanding of transnational connections between international and community-level reconstruction processes suggest further opportunities for research into the geographic scales,
grounded political practices and relationships through which neoliberal political-economic reconstruction takes distinct forms in particular localities.

1.3 THE 20TH CENTURY POLITICAL-ECONOMIC HISTORY OF NICARAGUA

One of the principal challenges when discussing reconstruction is the recognition that reconstruction does not take place in a political vacuum. In the case of Nicaraguan reconstruction, the set of post-conflict reforms established in the past two decades have articulated with both the longer-term patterns of political and economic development and the post-socialist transition from FSLN rule in the 1980s. Accordingly, we must place Nicaraguan reconstruction in proper historical context in order to better understand the contingent patterns of international reconstruction from above and from below that have shaped the everyday spaces of post-war peace.

Many historians have written detailed works that provide powerful insights into Nicaraguan political-economic and social history (inter alios, Pastor 1987; Gobat 2005; Walker 2003, 1997, 1991; Robinson 1992; Diederich 1989; Paige 1997; Whisnant 1995; Close 1999; Dodson and O’Shaughnessy 2010; Cabezas 1986; Lacayo Oyanguren 2006; Pérez-Baltodano 2008). I do not attempt in the following pages to recreate these rich historical sources in their entirety. The limited thoughts I pen here attempt to highlight particular historical and geographic aspects that may help guide our understanding of Nicaraguan revolution, war, and reconstruction in the past two decades.

Cultural studies scholar David Whisnant (1995) notes that Nicaragua for the past century has been in a constant state of becoming as contested cultural visions of a Nicaraguan state, political economy, and regime of subjection have struggled to become hegemonic. As Whisnant (1995: 443) describes it, “...Nicaragua has never had an extended period of cultural tranquility or
unity.” Indeed, Nicaraguan history from 1838 independence has been shaped indelibly by two concurrent phenomena. First, Nicaragua has been the imperial playground for U.S. military, political, and economic interests, most notably during the 1860s, 1920s, and 1980s. Second, Nicaragua has been torn throughout its history by political and economic divisions between Conservatives and Liberals, oligarchs and agro-export elites, capitalist elites and the nationalist masses that have divided Nicaraguan state and society.

Reconstruction draws on Nicaraguan political-economic and social history that may be divided into two distinct periods: The U.S. protectorate and Somoza regime (1910-1978), the FSLN Revolutionary Period (1979-1990). This 100-year period has combined U.S. intervention, oligarchic rule, liberal and radical development, agro-export production, and resistance into a complicated Nicaraguan political-economic pattern that still shapes Nicaraguan political conditions.

The U.S. protectorate regime that controlled Nicaragua from 1910-1933 provided a 23-year interregnum characterized by a U.S.-dominated High Commission that controlled the Nicaraguan financial and international trade system as Liberal and Conservative political elites fought for political power at the ballot box and on the battlefield. The U.S. protectorate developed from the initial decision to end its long-time support for Liberal dictator José Santos Zelaya (1893-1909) and his hand-picked successor José Madriz (1910). Two U.S. military invasions in 1912 and 1926 were punctuation marks on a far more robust U.S. political and financial intervention designed to secure U.S. control over trans-isthmus trade routes, protect U.S. financial interests from Nicaraguan debt default, and to ward off European influence in Central American affairs (Gobat 2005; Walker 2003).
U.S. involvement in Nicaragua principally centered on the protection of U.S. political and economic interests with little concern for the domestic Nicaraguan political tensions that divided the country. Thus, the U.S. forged the Dawson Pact (1910) that replaced the longstanding Liberal administration with an oligarchic quartet of mostly traditional Conservative elite (there was one Liberal) whose subordination to U.S. interests included opposition to European and Japanese efforts to build a Nicaraguan trans-isthmus canal and a commitment to the repayment of Nicaraguan sovereign debt held by U.S. banks. Once in place, the Conservative elites approved the Knox-Castrillo Loan Treaty (1911) that granted the U.S. overwhelming control over Nicaraguan political and economic conditions. These resulting Conservative rule proved to be highly regressive in overturning many of the Liberal state and social development from the prior two decades, from the democratization and secularization of state institutions, greater investment in agro-export development, and a social emphasis on women’s rights and the general welfare of the poor (Whisnant 1995).

The 1912 U.S. military occupation became a defining moment for both the U.S. protectorate period and for the entire twentieth century history of Nicaragua. Historian Michel Gobat (2005: 120) describes the 1912 war as both a ‘bourgeois revolution’ and a ‘social war’ by the Nicaraguan masses. First, he notes that the political contests during the 1910s and 1920s went beyond the binary Liberal-Conservative dimension to include a generational political-economic struggle between traditional Conservative elites and an emerging set of Liberal and

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3 The 1911 Knox-Castrillo Loan Treaty was a signed U.S.-Nicaraguan treaty to provide US$15 million to the Nicaraguan government in exchange for U.S. control over the Nicaraguan national bank, customs revenues, and U.S. banks’ being awarded controlling interest in the Nicaraguan national railroad company and national steamship company. The U.S. Senate refused to ratify the treaty in 1911. In response, the U.S. Taft administration secured $1.5 million in direct U.S. bank loans to the Nicaraguan government in exchange for all terms of the original treaty (Gobat 2005; Whisnant 1995).
Conservative agro-export elite centered on the booming cattle, cotton, sugar, and coffee production sectors.

Formally, the U.S. sent 2,300 Marines to Nicaragua to quell a Liberal elite rebellion against U.S. supported Conservative president Adolfo Diaz. However, the U.S. military occupation intruded into and helped consolidate an historical moment of profound political-economic transformation in Nicaragua. On one hand, the U.S. military occupation that permitted the traditional Conservative elites to hold onto their traditional power and maintain a ‘politics of exclusion’ in the face of the growing political-economic power of the agro-export sector. Many Liberals and reform-minded Conservatives saw the U.S. protectorate as an inherently illiberal, clientelistic Conservative regime as a U.S. betrayal of its core liberal market-democratic principles (Gobat 2005: 76; Whisnant 1995).

The Dawson Pact, the U.S. High Commission, and the military occupation pitted traditional Nicaraguan political elites against this emerging agro-export elite from their respective regional centers in the Liberal coffee production regions of the northwestern Nicaraguan mountains and the Conservative cattle production regions of the central Nicaraguan highlands. The resulting period of conflict most notable during the 1912 war, but extending throughout the 1910-1933 U.S. protectorate period, recast the historic Conservative-Liberal split in terms of both Liberal and moderate Conservative nationalist resistance to U.S. intervention and Conservative oligarchic rule (Gobat 2005; Paige 1997). Ultimately, the U.S. occupation and Conservative Dawson Pact regime began to generate considerable animosity among agro-export elites who resented the reduction of Nicaraguan sovereignty and the reversal of liberal state and social reforms realized during the 1893-1909 Liberal administration of José Santos Zelaya (Paige 1997; Walter 1993). As Gobat (2005) and Walter (2003) assert, however, the U.S. protectorate
quite effectively suppressed the nascent development of a broad-based bourgeois development through its control over Nicaraguan sovereignty, finance, and commerce during the period.

Second, the 1912 U.S. military occupation in part became a response to a mass social mobilization that developed partly independent from and perhaps at odds with the agro-export elite rebellion against Conservative oligarchic rule in Nicaragua. The Central American region suffered a severe drought during the early winter months of 2012. Rising food prices, food shortages, and the U.S.-dominated High Commission’s refusal to release funds for food imports proved to be an explosive social mix. While Liberal and Conservative agro-export elites attempted to overthrow the Diaz administration, a savage mass revolution swept through Granada, León, Managua, and major Nicaraguan cities as people rebelled against the U.S. and Conservative domination. When the mass rebellion threatened to spiral out of control and threaten agro-export elite interests, the bourgeois revolutionary leaders turned their backs on popular forces and surrendered. As Gobat (2005) notes, this elite betrayal set in motion an increasing radicalization of the urban and rural poor who came to see themselves as the only defenders of Nicaraguan sovereignty against U.S.-dominated Conservative and Liberal elite interests.

Following the U.S.-Conservative oligarch victory in 1912, the Nicaraguan political economy gradually consolidated around the Conservative and Liberal agro-export elites, despite their initial defeat (Gobat 2005). The U.S. protectorate regime continued alongside continued political tensions between Conservatives and Liberals, traditional elites and agro-export elites, and elites and the popular masses. At the national level, Nicaragua endured repeated constitutional and extra-constitutional alternations in power as Conservatives and Liberals wrestled for political position. Constitutional elections in 1916, 1920, and 1924 suggested that
Nicaraguan politics, if not stable, had at least settled into a predictable pattern. However, a new civil war in 1926 shattered the calm, prompting a U.S. military intervention and a Nicaraguan political crisis that indelibly shaped the next several decades. The 1926 crisis began when Conservative Emiliano Chamorro initiated a coup against Nicaraguan elected president (in 1924) Carlos José Solórzano (Walker 2003). When U.S. military forces demanded that Chamorro relinquish power to rival Conservative Adolfo Diaz and then returned in force to Nicaragua, Liberal generals Juan Bautista Sacasa, José María Moncada, and Augusto César Sandino launched a counter-rebellion that quickly threatened the U.S.-backed Conservative government. Under U.S. military pressure, Liberal and Conservative forces soon negotiated the Tipitapa Accords that ended hostilities and guaranteed U.S.-administered national elections for 1928. The lone holdout, General Augusto César Sandino, moved his forces towards northern Nicaragua and continued to fight for the end of the U.S. protectorate. From this point until Sandino’s final 1933 surrender and retirement to a small region along the northern Río Coco, and his 1934 assassination by the National Guard, the image and idea of Augusto Sandino and his Sandinista rebel army cemented a deep-seated anti-U.S., anti-oligarchic tradition within the popular culture (Walker 2003; Whisnant 1995; Walter 1997).

The U.S. protectorate came to an end in 1933. Nicaragua had come through two decades of U.S. domination and a political-economic transition that had reshaped the political landscape in a profound manner. The U.S.-dominated Conservative regime had left indelible regional political-economic patterns and cultural patterns in both northern and central Nicaragua. For the northern coffee production regions (i.e., Matagalpa, Jinotega, Nueva Segovia, Estelí, and Madriz departments), the terms of the U.S. protectorate did little to mediate the peripheral position and low levels of production that defined the political economy of coffee production. Jeffrey Paige
(1997) notes that Nicaraguan coffee production, contrary to most Central American states, never produced a powerful landed elite capable of wielding power at the national scale. Independent, small-landholding peasant producers dominated in the regional political-economic structure at the start of the twentieth century (Gobat 2005; Saldaña-Portilla 2003b; Paige 1997). For most peasant producers, the lack of modern production technologies and limited U.S. and Conservative financial support for modernization heavily outweighed the limited number of more technologically advanced medium and large-scale producers (Paige 1997). The growing population of itinerant, landless agricultural laborers grew during the period as the export commodity boom pressured smaller producers off their land, but this class remained relatively low in number during the period. For example, rural employment data for the Jinotega department in 1920 indicates that 62.9 per cent of rural employment involved people who owned or rented their own land, while only 29.4 per cent of employment involved landless laborers (Walter 1991: 25).

For the central Nicaraguan highlands region (i.e., Boaco and Chontales departments), the U.S. protectorate had intensified Conservative internecine conflicts between traditional and agro-export elites for control of the state and the financial means necessary to maintain the capital-intensive cattle production political economy (Gobat 2005; Walter 1991). The high concentration of land and wealth in the region reinforced the longstanding Conservative social structure of patriarchal, clientelist relations between wealthy traditional and agro-export elites and the rural proletariat. For example, in the Boaco-Chontales department in 1920 independent landholders and renters comprised only 34.9 per cent of rural employment, while the rural laboring class comprised 53.9 percent of total rural employment (Walter 1993: 25). If northern Nicaragua deepened its Liberal commitment to peasant-driven economic development, the central
Nicaraguan region centered on Boaco and Chontales came to reflect the deeper cultural tensions between the patriarchal, independent cattle production traditions and interest in securing capital from the state.

It is perhaps ironic that the U.S. departure from Nicaragua and the full return of Nicaraguan sovereignty under the Liberal Juan Bautista Sacasa administration in 1933 ultimately deepened the regional political-economic tensions set in motion during the tumultuous decades of Conservative rule, revolution, and occupation. The National Guard created by the departing U.S. administration in 1933 under the hand-picked leadership of Liberal Anastasio Somoza García provided a powerful U.S. foil against the independence-minded Sacasa administration (Walker 2003). When the 1936 Somoza García coup d’etat transformed into three generations of dynastic authoritarian rule with his sons Luis Somoza Debayle and Anastasio Somoza Debayle, the historic Nicaraguan patterns of centralized oligarchic rule extended for another 43 years. The historically dominant political position of the central Nicaraguan agro-export cattle (and cotton and sugar) production sector and the peripheral position of most northern coffee production took on new life under the new veneer of liberal development (Walker 2003; Walter 1991). The central cattle regions benefitted from Somoza-administrations liberal development programs oriented towards large-scale agro-export cattle (and cotton and sugar) production during the 1950s. This regional pattern of political preferences and political-economic development continued well into the late 1960s and the corrupt, profligate administration of Anastasio Somoza Debayle, deepening with each year the collective underdevelopment of northern coffee and agricultural peasant farmers and the swelling number of itinerant rural labor who began to look for homegrown solutions to their political-economic subordination.

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I was present on July 19, 2009 in the central square of León for the 30-year anniversary celebration of the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN) victory over the Somoza regime. President Daniel Ortega inflamed the Sandinista supporters with his excoriating denouncement of Yankee imperialists, elite oligarchs, and dissident leftist ‘traitors to the revolution.’ More than political rhetoric, Ortega’s words drew on the long history of U.S. domination, elite-popular divisions, and national betrayal that has defined Nicaraguan history from the U.S. protectorate period and the pacification of Liberal elites, 43 years of authoritarian Somoza family rule, and the radicalization of resistance during the 1920s and 1960s-1970s. We can briefly turn to the short history of the FSLN revolutionary government that controlled Nicaragua in the 1980s as the second and more direct influence on post-1990 reconstruction.

I do not intend to recount a detailed political and economic history of the 1980s FSLN revolutionary period. Many scholars have written about the 1980s FSLN regime and counter-revolution to examine the broad political, economic, and social transformations of the period (Cuppes et al. 2007; Saldaña-Portilla 2003b; Walker 2003, 1997, 1991; Close 1999; Hoyt 1997; Whisnant 1995; Enriquez 1991; Pastor 1987, Spalding 1987). My purpose rather is to examine how the FSLN period affected the political-economic regime and attendant regime of subjection that conditioned the patterns of reconstruction since 1990.

The FSLN revolution of 1978-1979 was the final victory of a prolonged, escalating political struggle in Nicaragua. The FSLN formed in 1961 among the radical 1950s-1960s Nicaraguan university culture who saw themselves as the critical conscience of the Nicaraguan state and society (Whisnant 1995). As a militant radical social movement, the FSLN developed through the 1960s and 1970s to gradually extend its influence into a broad-based cross-section of Nicaraguan society that had grown increasingly hostile to the debauched Somoza regime. The
FSLN mass insurrection strategy adopted in the 1970s attempted to assemble a mass movement that incorporated not only radical intellectuals, but also urban and rural labor, agro-export bourgeois elites, urban capitalist elites, and peasant farmers into a collective rebellion (Walker 2003). In such a mass movement, a range of political interests came together (Paige 1997). For most elites, FSLN support wanted a greater political voice in Nicaraguan governance. For the urban and rural masses, FSLN support was the path of social justice, popular democracy, and economic opportunity following the long Nicaraguan history of elite oligarchic domination and disparity.

When the FSLN Revolution toppled Somoza Debayle from power in July 1979, Nicaragua embarked on what political scientist William Walker (2003) has called a comprehensive political, economic, and social revolution that transformed the Nicaraguan political-economic and cultural regime. The FSLN period was never a simple socialist system of command economy and mass one-party rule, however. What we can say is that the 1980s revolutionary period brought to the forefront the tensions between competing Nicaraguan visions of liberal capitalist democracy and radical socialist democracy in which the FSLN stood as a vanguard party for radical transformation of the political-economic structure. On one hand, the FSLN-dominated administration after 1984 operated within a liberal constitutional framework of democratic institutions and contested political elections. Following the 1984 FSLN election victory certified by numerous international observer missions as free, fair, clean, and transparent, the FSLN and opposition parties continued even in the midst of the Contra war to develop a new constitution, protect to a large degree civil freedoms of the press, expression, and assembly, and ultimately accept electoral defeat in 1990 (Walker 1997; Pastor 1987). On the other hand, the FSLN role as a vanguard mass political front afforded a different, more radical view of political
democracy and political economy that provoked profound tensions with Liberal and Conservative political opponents and a substantial portion of the general population in different Nicaraguan regions (Hoyt 1997; Paige 1997).

Foremost, the FSLN regime and its political project centered on a radical development discourse that attempted to provide for a distinct form of political-economic transformation to benefit the impoverished and disadvantaged masses as the foundation for the broader political-economic and social development of the Nicaraguan state. Saldaña-Portilla (2003a) suggests that liberal development and radical development theories ultimately draw from the same intellectual commitment that marries faith in modernist notions of political and economic progress with the potential to develop individual human potential. The FSLN period in Nicaragua fits with the broad outlines of Saldaña-Portilla’s argument. The political and economic patterns of reform that took shape during the decade can be seen as an attempt to introduce a radical political-economic and cultural vision from above onto a Nicaraguan population that proved to be far more complicated and in some cases resistant to the FSLN perspectives on radical development than the Frente had expected.

The radical development logic of FSLN political-economic reforms was put into motion through the political mass organizations and the introduction of a revolutionary political-economic model (i.e., the mixed economy) throughout both urban and rural regions. The FSLN economic program introduced at both a macro- and micro-economic level a radical political-economic transformation to address the longstanding dependent position of agro-export elites and the urban and rural masses of peasant poor, itinerant labor, and indigent who struggled for the daily means of survival. The FSLN program favored centralized control over strategic sectors to control both the production of basic material and agricultural needs and the allocation
of basic-needs production (Saldaña-Portilla 2003b). In practice, the FSLN strategies played out at a macro-economic level in the form of state control over key production sectors, industrial and agricultural land expropriations (particularly following the 1986 agrarian reform law) and the import, export, and the distribution of basic food products to guarantee that the human needs of the mass population was being met (Paige 1997; Enriquez 1991). The FSLN-affiliated mass organizations that developed during the same period, such as the Sandinista Defense Committees, the Sandinista Youth, the Luisa Amanda Espinosa Nicaraguan Women’s Movement (AMNLAE), Sandinista Workers’ Union (CST), the Agricultural Workers’ Association (ATR), the Nicaraguan Union of Ranchers and Herders (UNAG), urban and rural production cooperatives, and FSLN-subsidized peasant stores became constituent elements for the realization of the heavily centralized FSLN development model (Reding 1991; Serra 1991).

This FSLN radical development model ultimately, as Josefina Saldaña-Portilla (2003b) suggests, missed the mark by not being able to translate its grand vision for Nicaraguan political-economic and social development into terms that worked with the historical cultural relations inherited from the prior period of twentieth-century development and tensions. Saldaña-Portilla argues that the FSLN radical development logic saw the construction of a revolutionary political-economic structure as a necessary prerequisite within which the Nicaraguan population would naturally adapt and incorporate themselves as radical political subjects. However, the FSLN erred with the assumption that rural workers, itinerant workers, and rural peasants had within them a revolutionary mind-set waiting to be channeled into the state-centered political economic structure, mass organizations, and modes of mass mobilization that developed during the FSLN

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4 Katherine Verdery (1996, 1991) discusses the socialist mode of political-economic control as a concentration of the means of allocation and distribution of production in her works on post-socialist transition in East-Central Europe.
period (Saldaña-Portilla 2003b). Notwithstanding FSLN political supporters, FSLN political and economic programs were equally viewed by many rural elites and peasants, laborers and itinerant workers in both northern and central Nicaragua through a cultural lens rooted in the long 20th century history of Conservative and Liberal control, liberal development discourse, and the chronic intrusions of U.S. and oligarchic state power from prior eras. These actors saw the FSLN program of land confiscations and expropriations, state control over commodity prices, supply imports and product exports, and the mass organizations’ blurred lines between political and civil society as another step in a long historic line of political and economic ‘solutions’ imposed from above that interfered with local actors’ desire for grounded development and what Saldaña-Portilla (2003b) calls their own liberal sense of self-hood (cf. Jonakin 1997; Paige 1997).

The rise of the Contra resistance – beyond being an instrument of U.S. Cold War geopolitics – from 1982 to 1988 is often painted in grandiloquent terms of Liberal and particularly rural peasant resistance to the FSLN vision of mass, participatory democracy and mixed socialist political economy largely directed from above (Walker 2003, 1997, 1991; Pastor 1987; Berman 1986). However, Paige (1997) notes that much of the Contra resistance (at least among northern coffee producers) was a far more practical response to the political and economic crisis provoked by the U.S. trade embargo, rural political violence committed by both FSLN troops and Contra rebels, Nicaraguan state price controls and supply shortages caused by a combination of economic mismanagement and the Contra war, itself. The pervasive political and economic insecurity during the later FSLN period, in particular, generated a widespread unwillingness to invest and improve agro-export production (Saldaña-Portilla 2003b). That the risk of land expropriation actually was quite limited during most of the FSLN period seemingly
did little to quell the collective imagination among many rural elites, peasants, and workers that forced confiscations, collectivization, and other coercive measures were predestined and could only be met with armed resistance (Paige 1997; Walker 1991).5

The February 25, 1990 Nicaraguan general election put an end to the FLSN revolutionary government period. The U.S.-backed National Opposition Union led by Conservative Violeta Barrios de Chamorro won the presidential election with 55 per cent of the vote and the National Assembly with 54 per cent of the vote, or 51 seats (Robinson 1992; Close 1999). FSLN president Daniel Ortega Saavedra on February 26 conceded defeat with the words:

Nicaragua was denied democracy, economic and social development, the right to speak, to organize; peasants were denied the right to own land; the poor were denied the right to aspire to a better life. All that the people had been denied was attained with the Sandinista National Liberation Front triumph in 1979, which created the basis for the development of an independent, dignified, sovereign Nicaragua, with economic and social development, with full democracy (Ortega 1990).

Reconstruction after 1990 must take into account the historical and geographic legacy of FSLN rule and Contra resistance. First, the FSLN administration for many Nicaraguans came to represent one more entry in the prolonged Nicaraguan history of paternal state interference from above that extends from the Spanish colonial period to the present. This view of FSLN rule deepened throughout the decade under the combined political weight of U.S. intervention, Contra resistance, macro-economic collapse, and the FSLN response to these concurrent crises

5 Saldaña-Portilla (2003b) notes implementation of the 1981 Agrarian Reform Law (Decree No. 782-81) actually enacted land redistribution and the generation of production cooperatives quite slowly through 1985. Ortega (1986: 22) notes that from 1981-85, 19% of farm land became state farms (mainly former Somoza family lands) and only 7% of farm land was awarded to cooperatives. Paige (1997) adds that most redistribution of land went to production cooperatives, rather than individual peasant farmers. Saldaña-Portilla attributes the slow pace of reform to FSLN unwillingness to alienate the large agro-export elite and peasant coffee, agriculture, and cattle producers that among key economic engines of the national economy. The 1986 Agrarian Reform Law (Law No. 014-86) briefly accelerated land confiscation measures prior to the 1988 FSLN-private sector economic accord that halted all land confiscations and introduced a series of neoliberal structural adjustment reforms (see also Paige 1997; Reding 1991, Ortega 1986).
(e.g., the 1982 Nicaraguan state of emergency, the 1983 Law on Patriotic Military Service) (Serra 1991). The FSLN moves to curtail constitutional rule of law, freedom of the press, speech, and assembly, the political manipulation of the mass organizations, and the incapacity to address rampant economic crisis – all in the context of the Contra conflict – ultimately undermined the legitimacy of FSLN rule for many Nicaraguan citizens (Walker 2003; Reding 1991, Serra 1991). Second, the FSLN/Contra period nevertheless brought unprecedented hope to the Nicaraguan masses through the combination of radical democracy, political-economic reforms, and the more intangible but powerful sense of social cohesion and mass national vision shared by FSLN militants (Whisnant 2005). The FSLN defeat, the return of Liberal elite rule, and the 2006 FSLN return to power (viewed by many Nicaraguans as a corrupt shadow of its former power) have left a bitter legacy for many Nicaraguans from both the political left and right. This is the political context for reconstruction.

1.4 RESEARCH GOALS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The current study extends the recent post-conflict reconstruction research to reconsider Nicaraguan post-conflict reconstruction following the Contra war (1982-1990) and the political transition from FSLN revolutionary government rule with the 1990 general election. On a conceptual level, Nicaraguan post-conflict reconstruction poses unique research challenges that must be addressed. Unlike the formal peace accords signed in neighboring El Salvador and Guatemala, the Nicaraguan Contra conflict came to a prolonged conclusion through democratic elections and an extended demobilization process that struggled into the mid-1990s (Oliver
Moreover, the FSLN government initiated limited neoliberal austerity reforms as early as 1985 to curb inflation through currency devaluation, government employment reductions, and privatization initiatives (Close 1999). These blurred boundaries between the post-conflict period and neoliberalization measures highlight that reconstruction is not wholly synonymous with neoliberal reform.

What is more clear is that we can approach post-conflict reconstruction in Nicaragua as an international political project from 1990 onwards that introduced a normative and generally neoliberal framework for reforming the Nicaraguan state, society, and political economy (Everingham 1998). The roots of Nicaraguan neoliberal political economy may rest in the late-1980s revolutionary period, but the international attention brought to Nicaraguan post-conflict reconstruction following the 1990 electoral transition from FSLN rule – and subsequent National Opposition Union (UNO) and Constitutionalist Liberal Party (PLC) governments within Nicaragua (1990-2006) introduced a sweeping set of neoliberal societal reforms and accelerated neoliberal economic reforms already in progress (Close 1999; Robinson 1997; Walker 2003). Reconstruction provided the opportunity for the convergence of neoliberal discourse, widespread institutional and governance reform, and transnational reconstruction programs that continue to influence the Nicaraguan political-economic landscape today. The reconstruction period has thus set the stage for the neoliberal reconstruction of the Nicaraguan political economy throughout the 1990s and 2000s, with macro-scale reductions in state sector employment (la compactación), privatization of public sector utilities, the educational system, and health care,

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6 Nicaragua was a signatory to the 1987 Esquipulas II Accords that codified the Central American Esquipulas Process in 1986-1987 to promote the peaceful resolution of armed conflicts in the region. However, the Esquipulas II Accords did not terminate the Contra conflict and was not accepted by the counter-revolutionary armed resistance (Envío 1987; Oliver 1999).
and the growth of micro-credit financial services for development programs (Babb 2001; Lacayo Oyanguren 2006; Walker 2003).

I approach the current study on Nicaraguan reconstruction from a place-based perspective that draws from the recent focus on neoliberal discourse, transnational spatialities, and the recursive relationship between conflict and post-conflict periods. This study takes the arguments on neoliberal political-economic reconstruction one step further by investigating how neoliberal reconstruction has produced transnational connections of institutions and actors that converge to generate contingent, place-specific forms of neoliberal reconstruction.

At its root, this study centers on the central theme of whether Nicaraguan post-conflict reconstruction has achieved its self-evident goal of building a more just, politically stable society in which the root causes of the Nicaraguan revolution and subsequent Contra conflict have been addressed and resolved. The eventual answer to this question compels us to ask whether the normative nature of post-conflict reconstruction could even be generating the very political tensions and instabilities that it nominally has endeavored to reduce and eliminate through the past two decades of post-conflict development.

The study is structured around three research questions to explore distinct facets of Nicaraguan reconstruction that together may provide tentative answers to the issue of whether reconstruction has successfully established a post-conflict state and society. The first research question addresses the transnational governance structure put in place through the reconstruction process. Namely, I ask what role dominant international organizations, capitalist donor state agencies, and transnational NGO networks have played in establishing a neoliberal political-economic structure within distinct Nicaraguan localities. This question brings together the predominant neoliberal discourse that has shaped these actors’ attitudes and policies, how formal
neoliberal reconstruction policies have translated into particular communities, and the mechanisms through which international reconstruction actors have been able to maintain the transnational governance connections at the heart of the post-conflict reconstruction process.

The second research question addresses the place-specific geographic patterns of Nicaraguan post-conflict reconstruction. I ask whether reconstruction has produced distinct, place-specific institutions and governance relations, daily practices, and political subjectivities within particular localities that, in turn, redefine the terms of reconstruction from below. The role of place in the definition and implementation of reconstruction compels us to look closely at the spatiality of reconstruction as a set of processes that take shape among different geographic scales and spaces. This research question thus examines how the place-specific reconstruction of neoliberal political economy is a negotiated process among international, state, and local actors that builds place-specific definitions of what reconstruction means, of how reconstruction functions, and how reconstruction has affected daily life for the Nicaraguan population. As part of this place-based reconstruction process, I also explore the local and regional spatial imaginations through which reconstruction processes are defined, put into practice, and consolidated in post-conflict localities.

The third research question addresses whether and to what extent the place-specific conditions of post-conflict reconstruction reflect the path dependence created through the on-the-ground patterns of wartime political economy, wartime institutions and governance relations, and daily experiences of war that have translated into the post-conflict reconstruction period. This research question draws heavily from recent work by Kirsch and Flint (2011b) questioning the hard lines between conflict and peace that have dominated most of the reconstruction literature. This line of inquiry examines how the place-specific patterns of conflict set in motion the
contingent forms of neoliberal political-economic reconstruction that define the broader reconstruction process.

1.5 THE CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL ECONOMY OF RECONSTRUCTION

To explore these contingent intersections of Nicaraguan reconstruction, neoliberal political economy, I examine reconstruction and neoliberalism as contingent, relational political processes rooted in culture. In recent years, scholars have asserted that capitalist political economy can adopt varied forms through a blend of economic and political-cultural identity politics (Jessop and Oosterlynck 2008; Jessop and Sum 2007; Jones 2008; Sayer 2001; van Heur 2010). The culturally informed political economy perspective that I adopt organizes the political and economic structure around culturally specific identities and relations through an evolutionary process that defines the terms of economic and political organization. These terms subsequently become part of daily practice and are consolidated through the development of political-economic institutions and governance systems. From this perspective, the contingent reconstruction of putatively neoliberal political-economic conditions is always a work in progress that takes distinct forms through the contingent mix of economic and cultural-political relations that go beyond classic categories of economic class.

This perspective provides a cogent theoretical framework for understanding post-conflict reconstruction through the place-specific, hybrid forms of neoliberal political economy (and resistance) that have taken hold in Nicaraguan localities (Cupples, Glynn, and Larios 2007). The transnational structure of reconstruction takes shape through place-specific connections among economic, political, and social institutions and relations. Reconstruction is inherently a process that defines and puts into practice the terms of neoliberal political economy and political-
economic regulation through these grounded, place-specific conditions. In this way, post-conflict reconstruction produces the contingent neoliberal forms of political economy that take hold in particular localities and become part of the broader Nicaraguan political-economic reconstruction process.

Geographic scale is an important consideration. Nicaraguan post-conflict reconstruction cannot be viewed as simply an amalgamation of place-specific processes that become the building blocks for what we call Nicaraguan reconstruction. Rather, the contingent reconstructions of political economy in place equally can be seen as an integral part of the broader spatial reorganization of Nicaraguan the political-economic structure during the post-conflict period (Agnew 2000). Thus, reconstruction, neoliberalism, and place are bound into a single process through which place-specific reconstruction patterns both are a reflection of and become constituent elements within the overarching post-conflict reconstruction of contingent forms of neoliberal capitalist political economy at different geographic scales.

1.6 THE ETHNOGRAPHIC EXTENDED CASE METHOD

The current study adopts an ethnographic extended case method to analyze the place-specific patterns of neoliberal political economy and cultural identity politics that have emerged through post-conflict reconstruction in Nicaraguan localities (Burawoy 2009; Gille 2001). The ethnographic extended case method provides a coherent research approach for studying how individuals live a grounded capitalist political economy on a daily basis (Burawoy et al. 2000; Hart 2002, 2004). The extended case method is place-based field research into the political-economic imaginations and daily practices that shape individual actors’ lives on the ground. This method thus aligns ethnography with mainstream social science practice, in a dual sense,
with its commitment to critical theory (Burawoy 2009; Gille 2001; Hart 2002, 2004; Megoran 2006; Tsing 2004). First, this research recognizes that all field research begins with theoretical assumptions and expectations that guide the development of research in the field (Burawoy 2009; Gille 2001; Hart 2004). Second, the extended case method is committed to situate field research within a broader historical and spatial context (Burawoy et al. 2000). Thus, the extended case method is an *extension* in two senses: From daily life-worlds to the broader structures and processes within which those daily conditions are embedded; and from field research to a refined theoretical perspective that better fits with the observations and analysis realized through the research process (Burawoy et al. 2000).

The ethnographic extended case method complements the dominant transnational institutional and governance perspectives that approach reconstruction as a generally top-down process. The extended case method allows us to better understand how the post-conflict reconstruction of contingent forms of neoliberal political economy and political-economic regulation are connected recursively to the daily practices and reconstruction experiences that have defined and set the terms of post-conflict reconstruction as part of everyday life. This research attention on building direct and sustained relationships within different research field sites ultimately is one of the only ways to comprehend how reconstruction has produced a full-spectrum reorganization of the political-economic structure all the way down to the development of neoliberal political subjectivities on the ground.

Field research for this study occurred in Jinotega, a municipal seat and administrative department in northern Nicaragua and in Boaco, a municipal seat and administrative department in central Nicaragua. As described fully in Chapter 4, Jinotega and Boaco provide a strong comparative framework for studying post-conflict political-economic reconstruction in
Nicaragua since 1990. The daily reconstruction experiences I encountered in Jinotega and Boaco highlight the complicated relationship between transnational governance connections, the place-specific economic, political, and social conditions in each location, and the continuities between conflict and post-conflict periods that have conditioned the daily patterns of neoliberal political-economic reconstruction in both localities.

The principal field research for this study took place from July-August 2008 and July-September 2009. I resided in Jinotega and Boaco throughout most of the research periods, with additional research conducted in Managua in September 2009. Since my 2009 field research, I have maintained contact with many Nicaraguan research informants in both of my field sites. The discussions I have held over the past two years with these Nicaraguan people – business professionals, farmers, NGO representatives, political leaders, and the periodically unemployed – have painted a portrait of Nicaraguan post-conflict life in which the same political and economic tensions that I observed first-hand in 2006, 2008, and 2009 have merely deepened and intensified in the intervening years. With the most recent 2011 elections crisis, it remains to be seen whether the downward spiral in the Nicaraguan post-conflict condition can be halted.

1.7 THE STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The current study is arranged into seven chapters. Taken together, the research included in this project contributes to post-conflict reconstruction as both an international affairs policy project involving policymakers and other practitioners, and an intellectual research project spearheaded by academic professionals. The study provides an important bridge that combines the predominant international reconstruction perspectives ‘from above’ and the place-based reconstruction perspectives ‘from below’ into a transnational perspective portraying
reconstruction as a political-economic reform process that emerges from within particular places to build the contingent patterns of post-conflict reconstruction that exist in daily life.

Chapter 2 reviews the current state of post-conflict reconstruction research, neoliberalism research, and concepts of place and place context in the academic literature. Following an initial review of research on the normative international reconstruction model for establishing capitalist democracy in war-torn states, the chapter examines the critical view that reconstruction is a transnational political project to install neoliberal political economy in post-war states. This critical perspective is married to recent research that urges greater attention to the historical and geographic conditions within which reconstruction has developed. The chapter concludes with a review of recent research that challenges monolithic definitions of neoliberalism as a political concept. The chapter briefly considers the idea of contingent neoliberalism and discusses the implications for post-conflict reconstruction research.

Chapter 3 describes the theoretical framework that I apply to Nicaraguan post-conflict reconstruction. The chapter weaves together recent research on capitalist political-economic regulation, transnational governance, and place to provide a coherent vision of the role post-conflict reconstruction plays in reconstituting new modes of neoliberal political economy in post-conflict states. The chapter blends this political economy perspective with recent research on the nature of place-specific context and place as a heterotopic space of domination and resistance in a way that helps constitute the broader patterns of post-conflict neoliberal political economy on the ground.

Chapter 4 details the ethnographic extended case method that I use to conduct field research on place-based forms of political-economic reconstruction in two Nicaraguan localities. This chapter considers the advantages of using the extended case method as a preferred approach
that combines theoretical positions and ethnographic field research into a single research method. The recognition that field research provides partial, situated knowledge of broader capitalist political-economic processes lays the groundwork for adopting the extended case method in the current study. The chapter continues with a brief discussion of the challenges that accompany the ethnographic extended case method. Finally, the chapter concludes with an overview of the criteria for the selection of two Nicaraguan case studies in the Jinotega and Boaco, two municipal seats and administrative departments in Nicaragua.

Chapter 5 is the first of two chapters describing the results of the analysis. The chapter addresses the transnational governance connections through which international organizations, powerful donor states, and internationally based development NGOs have promoted neoliberal institutional and governance reforms in Jinotega and Boaco from above. The chapter describes how the transnational structure of post-conflict political economy has successfully established the broad neoliberal framework for reconstruction through international actors’ financial and political influence over the reconstruction process. At the same time, the chapter considers the place-specific effects of this transnational structure from the perspective of the grounded political, economic, and civil society ‘reconstruction sector’ actors who have lived the reconstruction process on the ground in Jinotega and Boaco.

Chapter 6 takes a further look at the place-specific forms of neoliberal post-conflict reconstruction in Jinotega and Boaco through the conditioning role of culture on political-economic reconstruction. The chapter examines how individuals in both localities have negotiated the transnational structure of reconstruction through place-specific, culturally grounded institutions, relations, and practices. The lived practices of post-conflict reconstruction have simultaneously adhered to but also have redefined and adapted the dominant strands of
neoliberal thought to meet the place-specific imaginations about what political-economic reconstruction means, how it should be put into practice, and consolidated within the institutional fabric of post-war life. The chapter reveals the contingent terms of neoliberal political economy that have emerged in Jinotega and Boaco. From the regional political economy of coffee production in Jinotega to the localized political economy of cattle production in Boaco, the chapter focuses on the contingent, place-based relationship between institutions, governance, neoliberal practice and subjectivities that has produced the geography of neoliberal post-conflict reconstruction in Nicaragua.

Chapter 7 provides a summary of the current study and what the research suggests about both Nicaraguan post-conflict reconstruction and the international post-conflict reconstruction project, in general. The chapter concludes that Nicaraguan reconstruction has a mixed record of building a more peaceful post-conflict society despite two decades of international attention to post-war development and reconciliation. The post-conflict reconstruction process has not yet created political space for a shared national project that can supersede the Nicaraguan past of conflict and mistrust among political organizations and actors. I suggest that reconstruction is partly responsible for the continued political and economic divisions because of the reorientation of political, economic, and social life towards the international reconstruction community at the expense of horizontal connections among domestic organizations and actors necessary for post-conflict state-building and social reconciliation. However, the place-specific reconstruction experiences in Jinotega and Boaco give room for hope through the ways that some Nicaraguan citizens have redefined reconstruction in their efforts to make reconstruction more responsive to the grounded visions for a more just post-conflict future.
CHAPTER 2

PEACE IN OUR TIME: THEORIES OF POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION

2.1 INTERNATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

This chapter reviews recent research trends on post-conflict reconstruction. The common theme running throughout this chapter questions, in Paris’ (2000) words, whether post-conflict reconstruction is the same thing as post-conflict peace. Multiple scholars have begun to critically examine reconstruction with attention to the normative political foundations and political actors that define the content of reconstruction. In this chapter, I focus on three distinct sets of literature exploring reconstruction as a political process to rebuild capitalist-democratic political economy, institutions, and governance structure in post-conflict states and societies. I grant particular attention to recent works by geographers, critical international relations scholars and anthropologists who have challenged the predominant reconstruction literature based on a state-centered, pragmatic policy perspective. Recent geographic works call particular attention to a place-based research epistemology that can better integrate the normative nature of international reconstruction efforts with the contingent, grounded reconstruction conditions that constitute the daily, lived experience of reconstruction within particular states, regions, and localities.

The chapter organization follows this overarching focus. The first section considers the normative conditions that inform international reconstruction as a framework for rebuilding capitalist-democratic political economy, institutions, and governance in post-war states. The second section critically reexamines how reconstruction efforts have become wedded to the discourse of neoliberal peace in the post-Cold War period. The third section concludes the
chapter with critical reflection on the complex geographies of reconstruction as a contingent process that establishes new political-economic conditions of peace and conflict in the name of neoliberal peace.

Chapter 1 recounted the historical rise of an international post-conflict reconstruction regime in the two decades after the Cold War ended. As I noted, reconstruction has become a central policy focus for the liberal international community (Barnett 1995, 1997; Jakobsen 2002; United Nations 1992, 1994, 2004, 2007). The United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions, Western capitalist states, and transnational development NGOs have all adopted, to varying degrees, a formal, institutional commitment to reconstructing war-torn states. The historic development of this universal focus on reconstruction with the post-Cold War moment of liberal triumph cannot be ignored. The reconstruction program that emerged in the 1990s took aboard the convergent discourses on globalization of a liberal order eighty years in the making (Jakobsen 2002; Latham 1997). Moreover, major international policy centers and Northern donor states intensified their focus on specifically neoliberal political and economic reforms during the post-Cold War 1990s (Barnett 2005; Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Hewitt de Alcántara 1998; Lipschutz 1998; Roy 2010).

Reconstruction studies arose largely in response to international policy attention to post-conflict policies since 1990. The scholarly literature roughly divides into two main camps. First, there is a literature that works ‘within the system’ to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of contemporary reconstruction policy. Second, there is a literature that critically evaluates the normative thought that has guided international reconstruction efforts in recent decades. Both sets of literature have something valuable to offer for the development of geographic perspectives on reconstruction. My principal interest with both of these literatures is to
understand how the normative international reconstruction efforts of the past two decades have become both a foundation for and a reflection of the complex reconstruction patterns that can be observed in practice. Geographers, critical international relations scholars, and anthropologists have provided important insights into the predominant blend of liberal and neoliberal discourses, structures, processes, and relations that have influenced both international and community-based reconstruction efforts from above and from below.

The standard definition of reconstruction portrays it as a formal, technocratic project to establish and/or rebuild a sovereign, capitalist-democratic state that guarantees liberal political, economic, and civil rights, rule of law, and a stable peace for its citizens (Dahlman 2009; Paris 2004). Reconstruction commonly involves a comprehensive program of institutional reforms, governance reforms, infrastructure development, and civil society development as foundations for establishing post-conflict peace. Within this general definition, however, reconstruction scholars have adopted a heterogeneous suite of definitions and concepts under the reconstruction concept.

Many scholars have pursued a practical, policy-centered approach to reconstruction that generally works within these definitions (Bermeo 2003; Brinkerhoff 2005; Brown 2003a; Cahn 2006; Call and Cook 2003; Cousens and Kumar 2001; Fox 2003; Hartzell and Hoddie 2003; ICRW 1998; Jeong 2005; Labonte 2003; Lyons 2004; Mertus and Sajjad 2005; Orr 2004; Samuels 2006). These contributions have focused principally on both policy analysis and recommendations for improving reconstruction ‘best practice’ standards for building capitalist-democratic institutions and governance systems. International reconstruction efforts commonly include programs to strengthen formal state, political, and economic institutions in order to provide a stable structure for capitalist-democratic political economy and governance reforms. Institutions and new governance relations thus set the ‘rules of the game’ for the liberal reconstruction of state and society deemed necessary for effective peacebuilding and social reconciliation.7

Recent institutional research has explored the connections between reconstruction and the various efforts to establish strong state, political, and economic institutions that can provide a stable framework for post-conflict governance. For example, recent studies have centered on reconstruction and constitutional design, citizenship, and rule of law (Richmond 2005b; Samuels 2006), political/electoral systems, political and civil rights regimes (Call and Cook 2003; Carothers 1999, 2002; Jeong 2005; Lyons 2004); international law and democratic entitlement (Barnett 1997; Fox 2003; Orend 2000b), and institutional structures for citizen participation (Hartzell and Hoddie 2003; Mertus and Sajjad 2005). Similarly, governance research has

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7 John Ikenberry (Ikenberry 2001: 16) provides a concise definition of institutions in his book *After Victory*, stating ‘[i]nstitutions are the formal and informal organizations, rules, routines, and practices that are embedded in the wider political order and define the “landscape” in which actors operate.’ Ikenberry adopts a ‘historical institutionalism’ perspective that recognizes institutions as socially constructed structures that both enable and constrain political relations.
explored the connections between reconstruction and the development of a broad-based governance structure that involves multiple private and non-state actors alongside the state apparatus as the foundations for a liberal, accountable capitalist-democratic state. For example, recent studies have centered on reconstruction and governance reforms to promote state legitimacy, security, and effective government (Brinkerhoff 2005, 2007; Caplan 2005; Mertus and Sajjad 2005; Romeo 2002), the limits of international governance and the international/local tensions in the reconstruction process (Barakat and Chard 2002; Cousens and Kumar 2001; de Zeeuw 2005), and the importance of non-state and civil society governance participation in consolidating bottom-up reconstruction processes (Coyne 2005; Jeong 2005; Orr 2004).

This wide-ranging scholarly literature has examined the complex relationships between international organizations, external donor states, non-governmental development organizations, and civil society actors from multiple geographic scales and sites involved in the reconstruction process. To a great extent, these contributions represent a conversation with the reconstruction practitioner community that merely reinforces the normative liberal approach to reconstruction (Richmond 2005b). Nevertheless, these works are not devoid of critical analysis. The insights they provide point us towards more robust critical perspectives that question the goals and effects of reconstruction.

Foremost, these works bring to light the limits of the international reconstruction model and its top-down approach to rebuilding liberal capitalist-democratic states. The international rush to reconstruct has led international actors to adhere to the universal, once-size-fits-all model for liberal and neoliberal reforms with insufficient thought into its appropriateness (de Zeeuw
2005; McGinty 2010; Ottaway 2002a, 2003a; Ottaway and Chung 1999; Paris 2004). In response, recent works have called for reconstruction to grant greater attention to domestic political conditions and political relations in post-conflict states and localities. For example, MacGuinty (2010, 2008) highlights a need for reconstruction to focus on traditional, indigenous, and customary practices as the basis for new modes of reconstruction from below.

Second, the dominant structural position of international reconstruction practitioners further exacerbates the limits of top-down reconstruction efforts. Reconstruction has been criticized for establishing international norms for political and economic reconstruction that are largely unsustainable in post-conflict conditions of economic crisis and political tension (Nakaya 2005, 2009; Ottaway 2002b, 2003a; Ottaway and Chung 1999; Paris 1997, 2002b). For example, Marina Ottaway has argued in several articles that top-down reconstruction has introduced internationally financed democratic and market institutions (e.g., modern election practices, financial regimes) and programs (e.g., educational centers, health clinics) that remain politically and financially impossible to maintain without prolonged international technical and financial support (Ottaway 2002b, 2003b, 2003a; Ottaway and Chung 1999).

These challenges suggest that reconstruction programs initiated by multilateral, donor state, and transnational non-state actors have promoted a series of rapid and costly political and economic liberalization efforts that may actually do harm to the reconstruction process (Carothers 2006; Coyne 2005; de Zeeuw 2005; Paris 2004). For example, Paris (2004) comments on the potential incompatibilities between rapid political and economic liberalization, given the tendency of economic reforms to promote social tensions that may complicate democratic reforms. Moreover, de Zeeuw (2005) and Coyne (2005) have suggested that

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8 I examine recent geographic literature on place-based reconstruction and the need for greater attention to the everyday places of reconstruction and peace-building later in the chapter.
international reconstruction programs have largely failed to produce stable horizontal institutions within post-conflict states that can provide a stable structure for reconstruction in the absence of constant international supervision.

The recognition that the international reconstruction model has limitations produced by its own internal structure of top-down political-economic, institutional, and governance reforms has opened the study of reconstruction to a more robust critical perspective among geographers, critical IR scholars, and anthropologists in recent years.

2.2 CRITICAL THEORIES OF RECONSTRUCTION

The limited success in high-profile reconstruction programs in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Bosnia-Herzegovina in the past twenty years highlights the urgent need for critical scholars to take a fresh look at the close connections between reconstruction, peace, and war. The normative commitment to liberal capitalist democracy among both practitioners and scholars represents an intellectual failure to critically challenge the epistemological and theoretical foundations to what we are doing in the name of reconstruction (Flint and Kirsch 2011; Richmond 2010a). The international reconstruction debate continues to center on technocratic ‘best practice’ standards to be rolled out ‘at war’s end’ (Paris 2004). These pragmatic conversations over the inclusiveness, timing, efficacy, and representativeness of the reconstruction process are necessary, but insufficient, from a scholarly point of view. The deeper concerns over how reconstruction may be implicated in global structures of domination, inequality, and capitalist political economy have largely been met with silence among most practitioners and some scholars.
Recent work by geographers, critical international relations scholars, and anthropologists has directed much needed attention to the theoretical foundations and norms that guide international reconstruction (Dahlman 2009, 2011; Jeffrey 2006; Kirsch and Flint 2011b; Lidén, Mac Ginty, and Richmond 2009; Lipschutz 1998; McGinty 2008, 2010; Megoran 2011; Moodie 2010; Paris 2000; Richmond 2010b, 2010a). This literature recognizes that reconstruction is a complex political process guided by multiple normative concepts, political traditions, and actors (Kirsch and Flint 2011a). For example, Paris (2000) highlights the need for reconstruction research to critically center on the globalization of norms, international governance, and culture supporting reconstruction. Flint (2011) calls for greater attention to the geography of reconstruction as a political process that produces new geopolitical landscapes and political power relations. Together, these works lay the groundwork for critical explorations of reconstruction as a political process mutually bound to the globalization of capitalist discourses, processes, and political-economic structures.

These critical reconstruction studies evoke as many questions as they do answers (Megoran 2011; Paris 2000). Exploring the normative ideas that have shaped international reconstruction begs a series of questions. For example, how is reconstruction defined? What is the relationship between reconstruction and ‘post’-conflict? What is being reconstructed? From where does reconstruction originate? Who has the authority and ability to define the content of reconstruction? Who benefits from reconstruction? How does reconstruction produce new political-geographic patterns of domination, subordination, and resistance in the name of post-conflict peace?

In chapter 1, I asserted that international reconstruction has developed within the post-Cold War normative commitment to building liberal peace on a global scale (McGinty 2008;
McGinty and Richmond 2007; Richmond 2010). The liberal peace is a concept stretching from Kant to a host of contemporary scholars who adopt the constructivist view that a stable interstate system of liberal, democratic republics is a guarantor of peace and stability both internationally and domestically (Doyle 1983; Latham 1997; Risse 1995). The liberal commitments to post-conflict institution building and governance reform thus are seen as key conditions for reconstructing post-conflict states and societies within a global capitalist-democratic order.

The liberal norm has become a guiding principle for reconstruction efforts to rebuild political economy, institutions, and governance in war-torn states (Barkawi and Laffey 1999; Call and Cook 2003; McGinty 2008; Paris 2002a). Liberal reconstruction can be seen as part of the broader international focus on conflict management in recent decades. Conflict management is a broad concept that incorporates peace enforcement, peacekeeping, peace-building, and post-war development within its mandate (Crocker, Osler Hampson, and Aall 2001). Understanding where reconstruction fits within this broad conflict management trajectory highlights the challenges of defining more critically what reconstruction is, what it does, and for whom.

For one set of studies, reconstruction has become a geopolitical tool used by dominant international, state, and transnational actors to maintain their dominant position within the global capitalist political economy (Barkawi and Laffey 1999; Dahlman 2011; Guilhot 2005; Hewitt de Alcántara 1998; Jacoby 2007; Mawdsley 2007; Pugh, Cooper, and Turner 2009; Robinson 1996, 2003; Williams 2007). The reconstruction discourse on promoting liberal peace masks what Williams (Williams 2007) calls ‘occult imperialism’ advanced by global capitalist elites to subordinate post-war states and societies. For example, recent contributions (including Williams) examine the geopolitical motives that guide U.S.-supported reconstruction efforts to promote political-economic reforms in post-conflict states (Dahlman 2011; Jacoby 2007; Kirsch
Paris (2002a) suggests that post-conflict reconstruction represents an occidental *mission civilisatrice* to bring liberal market democracy to conflict-torn states and societies. These works parallel the recent scholarly and popular literature exposing wars and disasters as opportunities to impose capitalist political economy from above onto subordinate states and societies (Hyndman 2009; Klein 2007; Waizenegger and Hyndman 2011).

A second set of studies explores reconstruction through the post-Cold War globalization of liberal discourse, processes, and political economy (McGinty 2008; McGinty and Richmond 2007; Paris 1997, 2002a; Richmond 2004, 2005a, 2010a). These works examine how a liberal discourse has influenced the normative reconstruction policies pursued by international organizations, donor states, non-governmental organizations, and actors within post-conflict states. From this view, reconstruction is mutually bound to the global advance of liberal political economy, institutions, and governance (Lidén, Mac Ginty, and Richmond 2009; Ottaway and Chung 1999; Paris 2002a; Quinn and Cox 2007).

The dominant international actors that promote reconstruction pursue reforms to reproduce a vision of liberal universalism as a global standard for building the structure of liberal peace. International actors’ dominant structural position grants them considerable influence over reconstruction. However, they too are bound within the liberal discourse that conditions their thoughts, actions, and imaginations. Moreover, reconstruction is seen as a technology of rule that translates top-down reforms into liberal modes of regulation and self-discipline over post-

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9 I follow Müller (2008) in defining discourse comprehensively as a mutually connected set of narratives and related practices that constitute the general conditions for political thought and action. For example, a liberal discourse involves a blend of narratives and practices that both reflect preexisting discourse, yet also reproduce material conditions that institutionalize the discourse in time and space.
conflict subjects’ practices, narratives, and self-understandings (McGinty 2010). For example, Richmond (2004: 56) describes the globalization of liberal reconstruction norms as a process of ‘pacification through political and economic liberalization’ and an ‘experiment in social engineering.’ Quinn and Cox (Quinn and Cox 2007: 512) similarly argue that international and U.S. reconstruction policies are mutually bound to the global advance of the liberal universalism discourse in which these actors operate.

Despite the broad focus on reconstruction and liberal peace, scholars have granted relatively little explicit attention to the connections between reconstruction and neo-liberalism despite its prominent position in international affairs for the past three decades. The rise of neoliberal thought and certainly its influence on post-disaster, post-conflict, and development assistance certainly suggests that the reconstruction of liberal peace may be increasingly replaced with a neoliberal peace (Lipschutz 1998). That said, a brief consideration of neoliberalism and reconstruction is needed.

Neoliberalism has become such a broad concept in the past three decades as to render it omnipresent (Barnett 2005). While a full discussion of neoliberalism is beyond the scope of this study, I highlight two aspects relevant to this study. The neoliberal concept captures three decades of political-economic reforms centered on limits on the role for the state, support for relatively free market economic conditions, and the the introduction of market-based political and social development efforts to ensure the ‘rational’ use of resources at all geographic scales (Brenner and Theodore 2002; England and Ward 2007; Harvey 2005; Larner 2000, 2003; Ong 2006; Peck and Tickell 2002). That is, neoliberal political thought uses market rationality as the standard for determining the ‘proper’ political-economic structure and best organization of political and social life in time and space. Watts (2000) defines neoliberalism as:
The overarching claim … that free markets maximize human welfare: economically, markets efficiently distribute knowledge and resources; socially, liberal individualism will maximize moral worth; and politically, liberalism maximizes political freedoms since its rests on the most efficient (pareto-optimal) distribution of resources and wealth (Watts 2000).

Many scholars have discussed neoliberal political economy and the changing nature of the state (Dean 2007; Hewitt de Alcántara 1998; Hindess 2002; Larner 2000; Larner and LeHeron 2003; Larner and Walters 2004a; Staeheli 2010; Thaa 2001; Trouillot 2001). These studies highlight the neoliberal structural, institutional, and governance reforms that redefine the relationship between international organizations, the state apparatus, market actors, and civil society actors. Broadly, this structural change includes a shift from state-centered institutions and governance towards a greater political role for international, sub-state, and non-state actors (both private and civil) in the regulation and conduct of political-economic life. As scholars have suggested, the shift from liberal to neoliberal political conditions has centered on this redefinition of the state and non-state actors and their respective roles in advancing a heavily market-oriented framework for the social and spatial reorganization of the political-economic structure (Gill 1995; Hindess 2004; Mawdsley 2007; Ong 2006; Trouillot 2001; Vercelli 2003).

For example, neoliberal structural reforms have centered on state retrenchment, privatization and contracting of state-owned enterprises, market deregulation and greater market accessibility to international investment as part of the move from state-centered to global and transnational political-economic patterns. This focus on neoliberal structural patterns has often translated into a hierarchical view that combines a top-down notion of neoliberal political economy with a grounded examination of the social and spatial effects of neoliberal reform (i.e., neoliberalization) in particular places – what Hart (2002) has called the ‘neoliberal impact
model’. This approach has reinforced a dichotomous view between global neoliberal structure and place-specific efforts to negotiate the changed conditions of neoliberal political economy.

In recent years, scholars have challenged neoliberalism as a reified concept that masks the complex political conditions that support its definition and implementation (Barnett 2005; England and Ward 2007; Larner 2000). Neoliberalism has been recast as a relational process that develops through a combination of political power relations, political and economic processes and practices, and discourses rooted in time and space. For example, the attention to neoliberal relations has driven some scholars to discursively shift towards the discussion of neoliberal processes as a way to emphasize the political construction of neoliberalism as both concept and praxis (Larner and LeHeron 2003). The flexible content that falls within the neoliberal concept has compelled other scholars to redefine neoliberalism as a contingent concept with varied meanings, practices, and relations (Larner 2003; Wilson 2004). This relational perspective defies efforts to talk of a universal, all-encompassing neoliberal political-economic structure.

The connections between reconstruction and the production of neoliberal political economy from above and from below highlight the heterogeneous, hybrid nature of reconstruction outcomes that fall within the broad framework of neoliberal reform (Coyne 2005; Hewitt de Alcántara 1998; Lidén, Mac Ginty, and Richmond 2009; Lipschutz 1998). From a top-down perspective, the reconstruction of formal state, political, and economic institutions and governance patterns provide the architecture for neoliberal political-economic regulation to take hold (Dahlman 2009; Dahlman and Ó Tuathail 2006; Jacoby 2007; Quinn and Cox 2007; Richmond 2010b, 2010a; Williams 2007). As recent contributions have suggested, the tensions between liberal capitalist-democratic reforms and the more truncated neoliberal drive to limit
state power and advance a transnational political-economic structure have generated contradictions that go far in defining what the reconstruction of a ‘neoliberal peace’ look like (Lipschutz 1998; Richmond 2010b). For example, Richmond (Richmond 2005b) explores the inherent contradictions between liberal pressures to rebuild strong state institutions and neoliberal pressures to limit the role of the state (i.e., state sector retrenchment, privatization, deregulation, and decentralization). Townsend, Porter, and Mawdsley (2004) explore the role of development NGOs in producing relational spaces that are heavily influenced by neoliberal pressures, yet also open the door for counter-movements and alternative development visions.

The neoliberal pressures on reconstruction have produced a transnational political-economic structure that may be at odds with liberal concepts of reconstruction. Recent works have questioned whether neoliberal reconstruction processes may prevent the development of horizontal institutional and governance connections within post-conflict societies capable of building post-conflict consensus – a shared ‘national vision’ of a post-conflict future rooted in peaceful relations (Coyne 2005; de Zeeuw 2005). These critical views center on a new look at the dominant structural position that international reconstruction practitioners occupy in the reconstruction process. As noted above, international reconstruction efforts have been dominated by a closely connected set of international organizations, (neo)liberal donor states, and transnational development NGOs rooted in both liberal and neoliberal political thought (Guilhot 2005). These international actors constitute a top echelon of ‘norms entrepreneurs’ involved in defining, producing, and governing within post-conflict political economies heavily influenced by neoliberal thought (Wallace and Josselin 2001: 253).

However, international actors’ political dominance does not exist in a vacuum. Recent literature calls attention to the transnational structure of neoliberal political economy that binds
international actors into connections with post-conflict actors on the ground (Bebbington and Kotahri 2006; Robinson 2003). Neoliberal reconstruction efforts take shape through transnational connections among international actors, post-conflict state and sub-state actors, private sector, civil society, and grassroots social movements arrayed at different scales and sites, both outside and within post-conflict states.

The decentering of the state through these neoliberal reconstruction pressures grants dominant transnational actors even greater control over the normative content of reconstruction through the governance influence they exercise through these networks (Bebbington and Kotahri 2006; Townsend 1999; Trouillot 2001). For example, Richmond (Richmond 2004: 140) highlights the rise of a ‘multidimensional reconstruction’ discourse that promotes neoliberal reconstruction through a comprehensive set of public, private, and civil society actors at different sites and scales. These transnational connections reveal the complex relationship between neoliberal state actors, international organizations, and transnational NGOs/civil society actors both from above and from below – a relationship that defies simple categorization.

From this foundation, scholars have begun to reconceptualize reconstruction as a heterogeneous blend of liberal and neoliberal discourse, transnational connections, and material practices that come together on the ground to craft contingent, place-specific reconstruction outcomes. Multiple scholars have studied neoliberal reconstruction through the lived experiences of political-economic reform in the everyday spaces of post-conflict life (Babb 2001; Hays-Mitchell 2005; Moodie 2002, 2006, 2010; Oglesby 2007; Oglesby and Ross 2009; Pickering 2007). These studies examine the social consequences of reconstruction, with a focus on post-1990 neoliberal reforms and the renegotiation of political power relations between political winners and losers in post-conflict societies. Collectively, these works contribute richly
to our understanding of how top-down reconstruction efforts have been negotiated, resisted, and 
given meaning in particular post-conflict settings. The ethnographies, case studies, and 
empirical accounts share a common thread of recounting the post-war encounters with power 
that produce the everyday spaces and political subjects of reconstruction (Moodie 2006, 2010; 
Oglesby 2007). These place-specific reconstruction experiences take shape through a complex 
blend of class, gender, race, and other identity politics that become inherent parts of what 
reconstruction means and how it is lived on the ground. The recent focus on gender dimensions 
of reconstruction, for example, bring to light the heterogeneous political relations that both 
influence and are themselves shaped through post-conflict reconstruction processes (Alldén 
2007; Cahn 2006; Dowler 2011; Sørensen 1998).

The key advance in the critical reconstruction literature is the recognition that 
reconstruction is a project that involves multiple actors bound together through transnational 
connections both outside and within post-conflict states. The transnational connections shaping 
reconstruction still reflect uneven political relations that require us to pay particular attention to 
the international set of actors that guide reconstruction processes from above. It is through these 
actors that reconstruction promotes what McGinty and Richmond (2007: 491-492) calls the 
‘heavily engineered governance institutions and frameworks’ that shape what reconstruction is 
and what it does on the ground. However, we also must consider the capacity post-conflict 
actors have to experience, accommodate, adapt, and resist the internationally sanctioned 
liberal/neoliberal reconstruction efforts from above (McGinty 2010).

2.3 RECONSTRUCTION AS A RELATIONAL POLITICAL PROCESS
This chapter has emphasized the power that liberal/neoliberal norms have held over reconstruction through the structural power exercised by transnational private and NGO elites, international organizations, and capitalist donor states. These reconstruction elites obviously control in great measure the definition and content of reconstruction (Call and Cook 2003; Caplan 2005). They control the discourse, the material and financial resources, the dominant institutions, and the governance capacity to roll out reconstruction within the normative framework of neoliberal political economy and neoliberal regulation (Kirsch and Flint 2011a).

However, geographers recently have challenged the dominant reconstruction discourse and its Manichean divisions between war and peace to study how destruction and reconstruction are mutually implicated in the transformation of ‘post-conflict’ states and societies (Dahlman 2009, 2011; Dahlman and Ó Tuathail 2005b, 2005a; Dahlman and Ó Tuathail 2006; Flint 2011; Herb 2005; Hyndman 2009; Jeffrey 2006; Kirsch and Flint 2011b; Megoran 2011; Soennecken 2005; Waizenegger and Hyndman 2011; Williams and McConnell 2011). From this view, reconstruction is a negotiated, relational process that connects diverse political actors within a struggle to define what reconstruction means and the socio-spatial structure of the post-war peace – in other words, reconstruction is ‘war by other means’ (Dahlman 2011; Kirsch and Flint 2011b).

These recent works have made clear that conflict and peace are both political processes that reorganize social order in ways that reallocate political power through the simultaneous acts of deconstruction and reconstruction (Dahlman 2011; Flint 2011). War may lead to reconstruction, but reconstruction inherits and is influenced by political conditions carried over from war. The reconstruction process may generate new socio-spatial inequalities that generate
new forms of conflict. Moreover, reconstruction and war often operate in tandem, with war being part of the reconstruction process: what Dahlman (2011) calls ‘reconstruction as war’.

This reconstruction view centers on a relational view of political power (Allen 2003; Pile and Keith 1997; Sharp et al. 2000). Reconstruction is a political process that both draws from and produces complex socio-spatial patterns of domination and subordination that Sharp et al. (2000) describes as ‘entanglements of power’. These geographic landscapes of reconstruction reflect the many modalities of political power (domination, coercion, seduction, consensus, etc.) that come together to define the contingent patterns of reconstruction in space and time (Allen 2003; Flint 2011; Waizenegger and Hyndman 2011). From this perspective, understanding reconstruction requires that we grant attention to the connections between institutions, actors, and practices that produce the everyday spaces of reconstruction.

The relational view of power opens new avenues to explore reconstruction through the hybrid patterns of domination, resistance, and other forms of political power that are manifest through the formal and informal connections between actors and processes that come together in place. I draw inspiration from recent work Oliver Richmond. Richmond (2010b; 2010a) talks of reconstruction and the production of a post-liberal peace. For Richmond, the post-Cold War reconstruction model has been modestly successful at state-building (i.e., liberal state institutions), but generally has failed at peacebuilding (i.e., positive peace addressing the root causes of conflict). Richmond points to an inherent gap between international norms and the specific cultural contexts of reconstruction (cf., Sampson 2003). The problematic translation from these international norms to contingent reconstruction processes has produced post-colonial modes of resistance to the dominant liberal/neoliberal reconstruction discourse. These Northern discourses have been met with counter-discourses that attempt to adapt international
reconstruction norms to the hybrid cultural spaces of actually lived reconstruction (Lidén, Mac Ginty, and Richmond 2009; McGinty 2008, 2010; Richmond 2010b).

These hybrid reconstructions of peace and non-peace make clear that reconstruction rests in particular places. The edited Kirsch and Flint (Kirsch and Flint 2011b) volume *Reconstructing Conflict: Integrating War and Post-War Geographies* arguably has provided the most coherent critical geographic perspective on reconstruction to date (e.g., Dahlman 2011; Flint 2011; Flint and Kirsch 2011; Grundy-Warr and Dean 2011; Kirsch and Flint 2011a; Waizenegger and Hyndman 2011). The book complements a broader set of studies that adopts a place-based view of reconstruction as a process that comes together through contingent intersections of norms, narratives, practices, processes, and relations from both above and below to produce place-specific reconstructions of peace (Cupples, Glynn, and Larios 2007; Dahlman 2009; Dahlman and Ó Tuathail 2005a; Dahlman and Ó Tuathail 2006; Hyndman 2009; Jeffrey 2006; McGinty 2008, 2010; Megoran 2011; Pickering 2007; Williams and McConnell 2011).

For example, Waizenegger and Hyndman (2011) and Hyndman (2009) explore post-conflict / post-disaster reconstruction in Indonesia demonstrating the place-specific relations that came together to define what themes, issues, and subjects were objects for reconstruction and which were excluded from that process. Dahlman and Ó Tuathail (2005b; 2005a; 2006) have produced a series of works that consider how international reconstruction norms have been adopted, adapted, and resisted on the ground to produce place-specific geographies of reconstruction in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Jeffrey (2006) similarly examined the contingent relationships between formal international juridical structures and place-based, informal institutions that have led to the hybrid reconstruction outcomes observed in the Brcko district of
Bosnia-Herzegovina. In a more normative direction, Megoran (2011: 178) argues for greater attention to the ‘spaces of everyday peace’.

These hybrid reconstructions of peace and its discontents set the tone for the current study. I draw from the diverse literature discussed above on the normative blend of liberal and neoliberal reconstruction programs to consider how political subjects negotiate the terms and content of reconstruction in particular places. This reconstruction approach adopts the global, progressive, relational sense of place that I described in Chapter 1 (Massey 1994; Sharp et al. 2000). Reconstruction redefines the political-economic structure, institutions, and governance patterns of a place through the political connections among actors both near and far that come together in particular places. At the same time, reconstruction always reflects the place-specific historical conditions of peace and war that condition how international reconstruction norms are transmitted, received, and made meaningful in place.

2.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The varied literature reviewed here point towards a common conclusion. The reconstruction of liberal/neoliberal peace is a malleable, contested process whose political and spatial outcomes are never set in stone. Reconstruction involves complex entanglements of political power that are made visible through the daily practices and political subjectivities that comprise the everyday spaces of post-conflict life. From this perspective, the reconstruction of political economy discussed above becomes a contested political process to negotiate the terms of post-conflict peace: the winners and losers, the people and places who benefit from post-conflict norms, and those precluded from the benefits of the normative peace.
The reconstruction literature equally is clear in stating that maintaining post-conflict peace is hard (Doyle and Sambanis 2000). The policy-centered and critical reconstruction literature discussed above share a common concern with better understanding the organization of political power that supports the international reconstruction efforts that have developed in the past two decades. The attention to international and state actors in many of these works has provided important information about how normative reconstruction efforts penetrate into post-conflict states and societies. However, this chapter makes clear that a more robust geographic perspective is essential to better understand how reconstruction develops through relational, political processes. Reconstruction forms within particular places that simultaneously are distinct yet bound together within complex webs of political, economic, and social relations on a global scale. With this geographic mandate in hand, the following chapter details how I approach reconstruction in the current study as a contested political process to renegotiate the hybrid forms of political economy and political-economic regulation through particular places in post-conflict Nicaragua.
CHAPTER 3
RECONSTRUCTION GEOGRAPHIES: NEOLIBERAL REGULATION AND PLACE IN POST-CONFLICT NICARAGUA

3.1 THE GEOGRAPHIES OF RECONSTRUCTION

The preceding review of post-conflict reconstruction research reveals increasingly complex lines of thought about the origins and practices of reconstruction. The critical reconstruction literature discussed in Chapter 2 cogently argues that reconstruction has blended political discourse and political economy to advance an international neoliberal norm as the standard for rebuilding post-conflict states and societies. Nevertheless, the rush to condemn reconstruction as the immutable handmaiden to neoliberal globalization has limited our collective ability to explore the multiple, contingent forms that reconstruction may take. The generalized portrayal of reconstruction as imperialist engineering in war-torn states ultimately limits our intellectual gaze to the top-down policy efforts handed down from the international community. The range of actors, practices, and relations involved in this transformation and integration of post-war societies into the global capitalist regime – while not ignored – is largely reduced to the status of bearers of international policy projects.

Many international practitioners and even scholars have addressed Nicaraguan reconstruction within a discourse that sees reconstruction as a beginning, a distinct break from the protracted Nicaraguan history of foreign occupation, authoritarian rule, war, revolution, and counter-revolution. All too often, reconstruction has become an act of forgetting that silences the deep Nicaraguan history of dependency at the point of a sword. The Nicaraguan history of subjugation, collaboration, and resistance to international intervention, military occupation, and political interference for the past century become historical footnotes confined to the early
chapters of Nicaraguan history books and rarely enter into international reconstruction policy discussions at all. Yet, this complicated Nicaraguan history – at once cultural, social, political, and economic – has powerfully shaped the complicated geographies of conflict and peace that inform the reconstruction process.

This chapter sets out a distinct approach to reconsider reconstruction and its role in advancing patterns of neoliberal regulation in Nicaragua. Foremost, I break from the dominant view that reconstruction is a coherent international effort introduced from above onto post-conflict states and societies. We can more carefully unpack reconstruction to examine who and what are the subjects and objects of reconstruction. The Nicaraguan case suggests that reconstruction is a contingent, relational process that develops through complex political negotiation processes at multiple sites and across scales. As scholars, we must take into account the distinct set of historical/spatial conditions, institutional patterns, political relations, actors, and daily practices through which reconstruction acquires contingent meaning and is brought to life in time and space.

The Nicaraguan reconstruction stories that I tell reflect the deeper global and Nicaraguan histories of political power, economic development, and conflict that inform the reconstruction process. The international attention to reconstruction as a means to address the global proliferation of civil conflicts during the 1990s, the global dissemination of a neoliberal discourse at the end of the Cold War, and the 1990 Nicaraguan election and subsequent shift towards a post-socialist, post-conflict regime undoubtedly reflected a distinct historical moment of convergence that cannot be discounted. Yet, the diverse reconstruction patterns I encountered can be firmly grounded in the deeper historical and geographic conditions of authoritarian rule, conflict, and post-conflict and post-socialist transformation that have defined the Nicaraguan
experience for 100 years. Nicaraguan reconstruction can be seen as part of a deeper political process shaped by the historic Nicaraguan patterns of political economy, prolonged political struggle, and contested culture that develop on the ground. In this light, the labeling of Nicaraguan reconstruction as a post-Contra conflict process must be recognized as simultaneously a political discourse and an acknowledgement of the distinct political-economic conditions that characterize Nicaraguan state and society before and after the 1990 transition from FSLN rule and the end of the Contra conflict.

3.2 RECONSTRUCTION, NEOLIBERAL POLITICAL ECONOMY, AND REGULATION

To begin, I return to the connections between reconstruction, political economy, and neoliberal regulation that I discussed in the previous chapter. Reconstruction from 1990-2006 has produced a counter-revolution as profound in scope as the 1979 revolution and FSLN-dominated reconstruction period that preceded it during the 1980s. For the most part, Nicaraguan reconstruction adhered closely after 1990 to the dominant neoliberal regulation discourse at the heart of the Washington Consensus. From its inception, however, reconstruction has been both an international and domestic effort to establish the broad contours of a neoliberal political-economic regime and attendant mode of regulation. This counter-revolution has extended far beyond political-economic, institutional, and governance reforms to reorder the daily practices and political subjectivities of the Nicaraguan population in profound ways.

At first glance, the Nicaraguan case indicates that international reconstruction efforts for the past two decades have been successful at promoting reconstruction as a reified, rational, and inevitable path from conflict to neoliberal post-conflict peace. The reconstruction regime that took hold among major international organizations, donor states, and transnational development
NGOs undoubtedly has played a powerful role in advancing broad patterns of neoliberal political-economic structure in post-conflict Nicaragua (and elsewhere). This international constellation of actors has effectively used its unparalleled financial, material, and ideological resources to extend a neoliberal political-economic structure that reorients the Nicaraguan state, political society, and civil society ever more towards the interests of this same international community.

The recent critical perspectives that see reconstruction and neoliberalism as political concepts grounded in particular historical and geographic conditions have begun to tear down this hegemonic vision of international reconstruction as an unwavering path to neoliberal peace. The chapters above made clear that geographers in recent years have challenged the black-box visions of neoliberal thought that have dogged the social sciences for the past three decades (Craig and Cotterell 2007; England and Ward 2007; Gill 1995; Larner 2000, 2003; Larner and LeHeron 2003). For these scholars, neoliberalism has been extended to such a vast set of social conditions that the concept has been rendered ineffectual and lacking a clearly bounded definition to guide social research (Barnett 2005). Many geographic works in the past decade have attempted to recognize the specific historical and geographic conditions of neoliberalism. The efforts to explain the varied historical, spatial, and thus political conditions of neoliberalism are reflected in scholars’ qualified definitions, including roll-back/roll-out neoliberalism, contingent neoliberalism, neoliberalizing processes, and the perhaps under-theorized post-neoliberalism (Macdonald and Ruckert 2009; England and Ward 2007; Larner and LeHeron 2003). For example, Peck and Tickell (2002) highlight the transformation from a regressive ‘roll-back’ neoliberalism during the 1980s and early 1990s to a progressive ‘roll-out’ neoliberalism during the past 15 years. More recent consideration of the Bangladesh Consensus
and other alternate neoliberal development models that challenge the Washington Consensus has drawn attention to the political negotiation of what neoliberalism means and can become in practice (e.g., Roy 2010).

In order to narrow the conversation, I examine reconstruction as a process that attempts to establish a new mode of capitalist regulation. The mode of regulation concept refers to the complex of institutions, relations, and political subject positions that sustain and normalize the social and spatial structure of capital accumulation within capitalist society (Aglietta 2000; Jessop 1995). The early regulation approaches in the 1970s and 1980s provided a truncated economic vision of regulation focused on how formal and informal economic institutions like banking practices, labor relations, and monetary policy had anchored different forms of capital accumulation. From these beginnings, capitalist regulation has morphed along multiple schools of thought that examine inter-regime transitions, governance structures, global regulation, and an expanded societal mode of regulation that take neoliberal regulation in many directions (Jessop and Sum 2007; MacLeod 1997; Roberts 2002; Tickell and Peck 1995).

This recent attention to societal modes of regulation is a welcome advance that brings regulation approaches together with critical and post-structural theories on cultural economy (Thrift and Whatmore 2004; Cosgrove and Jackson 2004). From this perspective, capitalist regulation extends beyond the traditional focus on economic institutions, norms, and practices to

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10 The regulation concept has been misunderstood by some critics who think about regulation only as a formal set of rules, institutions, and principles that structure political-economic conditions. As Jessop (2007) notes, the confusion comes in part from mistranslating the French regulation as ‘regulation’ rather than ‘regularization’ – i.e., the normalization of a particular political-economic regime through the institutional and social organization of a society. In this vein, we can think about a societal mode of neoliberal regulation as a broad-based organization of economic, political, and social life around dominant notions of capitalist accumulation (Brown 2003b; Dean 2007; Low 1997; Rose 1996).
examine the varied economic, political, and social conditions that reproduce and sustain capitalist political economy. Societal regulation operates through a comprehensive regime of formal and informal institutions, relations, and practices that collectively normalize the capitalist political-economic structure and secure continued capital accumulation (Jessop and Sum 2007). That is, a neoliberal political-economic regime is made natural through the organization of multiple institutions, governance conditions, and spaces seemingly far removed from the macro-economic structure of capitalist accumulation. Regulation operates through rules and norms that discipline the state and political society, economic organization, civil society organization, and the complex blend of economic and extra-economic practices and identities in ways that directly or indirectly consolidate the political-economic regime. For example, recent work has discussed how neoliberal regimes are mutually bound to the reorganization of democratic institutions and practices that normalize tropes of individual responsibility for well-being and attempt to decouple politics from neoliberal formations of the state (Brown 2003b; Fraser 2003; Hindess 2002; Thaa 2001; Rose 1996).

This study of Nicaraguan reconstruction can draw from a societal regulation approach to examine how reconstruction efforts have produced broad patterns of neoliberal political-economic structure in recent years. Reconstruction is a comprehensive political process that permeates many aspects of post-conflict states and societies. In Nicaragua, reconstruction has involved a host of institutional and governance reforms that address economic, political, and social conditions and the fabric of daily life for Nicaraguan citizens. We can see neoliberal processes becoming normalized through diverse conditions and practices. The danger that comes with viewing reconstruction as societal regulation is that we begin to see neoliberalization everywhere we look. The international reconstruction regime may appear hegemonic in its
capacity to establish neoliberal political-economic norms that extend into the darkest corners of Nicaraguan post-conflict society at the expense of alternative reconstruction visions.

However, the dominant reconstruction discourse promoting a mainstream neoliberal political-economic structure only tells part of the reconstruction story in Nicaragua and other post-conflict states. With notable exceptions among some international financial institutions and donor states, international and domestic reconstruction policy stakeholders do not intentionally set out to establish a neoliberal political-economic structure. The connection between reconstruction and neoliberal regulation is better understood (at least in part) as a political effect. For most actors, reconstruction involves a good-faith effort to address the immediate and longer-term needs of post-conflict states and societies in the areas of institutional reform, economic development, and citizen security. Reconstruction actors put into effect policies and practices based more on financial and resource limitations – based on the art of the possible – than on any grand designs for transforming the political-economic structure.

This real-world perspective indicates that reconstruction is not a coherent project, but rather develops through a broad array of political relations fraught with limited knowledge, limited capacities, and limited visions for how to approach the post-conflict goals of just peace and stability. In this cloud of uncertainty, we can approach the categories we use to explain post-war life – terms like reconstruction, neoliberalism, peace, and place – as heterogeneous, relational political processes grounded in the distinct cultural histories and geographies of place. Reconstruction and neoliberal reform do not constitute an a priori policy package, but rather are constituted through the contingent articulations of political actors that generate distinct reconstructions of political-economic structure in time and space. Destabilizing the discourse of reconstruction requires that we examine more carefully what reconstruction and neoliberalism
mean in practice, and how the reconstruction of neoliberal political-economic peace and non-
peace take shape in the spaces of everyday life.

3.3 RECONSTRUCTION AND NEOLIBERALISM AS CONTINGENT, RELATIONAL
PROCESSES

One of the key themes in the current study is the argument that the international
reconstruction regime efforts to establish a neoliberal political-economic structure in post-
conflict states are neither inevitable nor natural. This assertion is based on the recognition that
reconstruction and neoliberalism are contingent political processes. The normative vision of
neoliberal reconstruction from above masks the contingent articulation of institutions and actors
that actually establishes distinct modes of reconstruction and neoliberal political economy in
time and space. If we remove that mask, we can see that the reconstruction of neoliberal
political economy is a heterogeneous process that incorporates multiple international
organizations, financial institutions, donor state actors, transnational development NGOs, private
sector actors, civil society organizations, grassroots social movements, and individuals at many
different geographic scales. How different actors define and approach reconstruction and
neoliberalism is indelibly shaped by the distinct political-economic position, grounded relations,
and limited perspectives that influence their distinct visions for addressing post-conflict
conditions in war-torn states and societies.

Recognizing the contingent nature of reconstruction and neoliberalism allows us to move
beyond the normative, hegemonic models for establishing neoliberal political economy and
regulation from above in post-conflict states. In its place, we can imagine, quite literally, a world
of possible reconstruction outcomes through the contingent forms that reconstruction and
neoliberal political-economic structure take in particular post-conflict settings. Reconstruction in
Nicaragua, El Salvador, Kosovo, or Iraq takes particular forms through the particular web of connections between multiple institutions, organizations, and actors involved in the process. The socio-spatial reconstruction policies that these varied political actors adopt from their particular localities both outside and inside post-conflict states take shape through a combination of strategic interests and the varied structural position that privileges some actors more than others. We cannot forget the privileged structural position that international organizations, donor state agencies, and transnational development NGOs occupy that grants these actors considerable influence over the reconstruction process. Yet, we should not overstate the power that these international actors exercise by ignoring that they do not speak in one voice any more than does the general population in post-conflict states.

This view of reconstruction and neoliberal political-economic structure offers cautious optimism that post-conflict paths to peace are not set in stone in the mold of neoliberal regulation at a global scale. If we see reconstruction and neoliberalism as effects of political power relations that come together on the ground, we can begin to imagine complex patterns of domination and subordination, but also of adaptation, negotiation, and resistance as fundamental parts of the reconstruction process. We should not overstate the space for variation from the international reconstruction model described in Chapter Two. However, what passes for the reconstruction of neoliberal peace becomes a product of a negotiated and at times highly contentious process to define and establish the everyday conditions of post-conflict economic, political, and social order.

We can approach Nicaraguan reconstruction from this contingent, relational point of view through attention to the mutual connections between culture and neoliberalism that come
together in time and space. Nicaraguan reconstruction during the past two decades has operated within a complex historical and geographic context that weaves together the early 20th century political-economic history of U.S. intervention in the longstanding conflict between Liberals and Conservatives, the long years of authoritarian Somoza family rule and the 1979 revolution, the 1980s FSLN period and Contra conflict, and the post-1990 turn towards neoliberal integration into a global capitalist system. The reconstruction of a neoliberal political-economic structure (as the prefix re- suggests) has developed within these complicated cultural patterns of political economy, institutions, political power relations, daily practices, and subject self-understandings that provide the context for rebuilding Nicaraguan societal order.

From one perspective, reconstruction has been mediated by the existing cultural patterns of political, economic, and social life that provide the context for post-conflict reforms both from above and from within the Nicaraguan state. This view of culture brings to light the role that Nicaraguan history plays in shaping the reconstruction process. That is reconstruction operates through the distinct cultural milieu provided by historical patterns of political-economic

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This research field increasingly has incorporated a cultural political economy perspective in the past decade (Von Heur 2010; Jessop and Oosterlynck 2008; Jessop and Sum 2007; Jessop and Sum 2001; Sayer 2001; Jones 2008). This rapidly evolving cross-disciplinary perspective centers on the concept that political economy takes contingent, culturally mediated forms that cannot be reduced to a limited set of class relations. Capitalist political economy continues to be the central object of analysis. However, the cultural political economy perspective recognizes that the reproduction and regulation of capitalism is negotiated through a tangled set of societal institutions and relations whose contingent articulations determines the particular ways that capitalist accumulation is established, resisted, and adapted in particular time-space settings. More recent cultural political economy works have emphasized the affective dimensions of capitalism as simultaneously a cultural, economic, and political performance of political power relations that constitute capitalist order as an emergent effect (Von Heur 2010; Jones 2008; Amin and Thrift 2003). Cultural political economy concepts inform this study on Nicaraguan reconstruction. However, I provide a narrower analysis of how the reconstruction of capitalist political economy is negotiated and mediated by the deeper cultural institutions, relations, and practices that constitute particular places. Future research will expand on the connections between reconstruction and cultural political economy production.
organization, institutions, and social relations that filter how reconstruction has been defined and negotiated in ways that fit within the existing cultural context of Nicaraguan society at different scales. To come at it from another angle, reconstruction to a large extent is delimited by historically and geographically informed notions of what constitutes appropriate patterns for the nominally neoliberal transformation of the Nicaraguan state and economy, political society, and civil society.

From another perspective, reconstruction involves a two-way process that combines political-economic reforms and cultural reforms to produce the contingent patterns of neoliberal political-economic structure that exist in Nicaragua and many other post-conflict states. Reconstruction not only is mediated by cultural patterns, but equally is a productive process that modifies cultural conditions in ways that support the social reproduction of a new post-conflict capitalist regime. That is, reconstruction is powerfully influenced by cultural conditions that contribute to the contingent patterns of neoliberal political economy. However, the reconstruction of political economy simultaneously acts upon and in part renegotiates the meaning and organization of that culture through the changed institutional conditions, political relations, daily practices, and political subjectivities that comprise the reconstruction process. Reconstruction reorganizes the contingent neoliberal structure of post-conflict life only imperfectly, however. Reconstruction thus establishes new sets of political power relations that both maintain dominant neoliberal modes of regulation and open the door to new forms of resistance and adaptation that can be observed at varied geographic scales and in particular places both within and outside of post-conflict states.

This is a perspective that compels us to view reconstruction through the mutual interactions between political economy and daily practice as dual processes bound into the
historical and geographic preconditions, evolution, and transformation of culture.

Reconstruction in Nicaragua simultaneously reflects both the international and domestic efforts to reform political-economic structures, institutions, and governance relations in the name of building neoliberal peace and the ways that everyday Nicaraguans have carried on their daily lives within and have negotiated the transformed conditions of post-conflict life. In both cases, we can view the deeper cultural patterns of societal organization as a central part of the explanation for the contingent patterns of neoliberal reconstruction that have developed from place to place in Nicaragua in the past two decades.

Specifically, we can adopt a grounded, embodied perspective to view the contingent reconstruction of neoliberal regulation not from a global-local binary, but through the grounded articulations of political power relations among a host of international and domestic actors who come together in place (Gibson-Graham 2003). Taking a more grounded perspective grants us a different vantage point from which to observe the mutual transformation of political-economic structure, institutional and governance reforms, and daily practices of post-conflict reconstruction. For example, recent work by geographer Matthew Sparke (2006) discusses how neoliberal political economy develops through the concurrent political reorganizations of governance and governmentality. For Sparke, the global advance of neoliberal political-economic structure in recent decades has established new modes of neoliberal regulation through institutionalized governance systems. At the same time, Sparke directs attention to what he calls the ‘congeries of calculative practices’ (i.e., neoliberal governmentality) that reproduce and embody the broad conditions of neoliberal regulation through the conduct of daily life (Sparke 2006: 8-10).
Post-conflict reforms are experienced in particular places in ways that meaningfully draw upon the historical and geographic cultural context to guide the political-economic conditions that will emerge. These place-specific articulations of political power among international actors, post-conflict state agencies, transnational NGOs, micro-finance institutions, political organizations, civil society actors, grassroots social movements, and the general population give us a distinct perspective for understanding how reconstruction actually works in everyday practice. The contingent ways that these grounded actors – at once local and bound into broader configurations of political power – come together in particular places ultimately define the direction that the reconstruction of neoliberal peace and non-peace will take internationally, within post-conflict states like Nicaragua, and in the spaces of everyday life (Hewitt de Alcántara 1998; Mertus and Sajjad 2005; Romeo 2002).

3.4 TRANSNATIONAL POLITICAL ECONOMY AND THE RECONSTRUCTION SECTOR

Reconstruction after conflict is an exceptional period in which established societal norms, political-economic structures, state and non-state institutions, established social relations, everyday practices, and subjectivities frequently are contested and in flux. The blurred lines between conflict and post-conflict pose unique challenges for reconstruction actors attempting to establish a way forward in the middle of such transitional settings (Dahlman 2009, 2011). The indeterminate distinctions between war and peace require complicated efforts to begin post-conflict operations even as conflict may continue within parts of a war-torn state and difficult choices over how best to pursue peace enforcement, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and longer-term reconstruction (Kirsch and Flint 2011b). Reconstruction often perpetuates long-standing
conditions of political-economic inequality, contested and illegitimate societal institutions, and deep political cleavages that carry over from conflict to the post-conflict period.

From the prior section, it should be clear that reconstruction, political economy, and culture have come together in varied ways to produce the contingent patterns of neoliberal peace, resistance, and conflict that define the Nicaraguan post-war experience. In the following pages, I expand on the relationship between the international and domestic actors that put these contingent reconstruction patterns into motion through their daily practices. This relational view of reconstruction recognizes that the post-conflict period has brought together actors from multiple international and domestic locations to negotiate the meaning and conditions of neoliberal political-economic reconstruction within the broader cultural traditions and relations that inform the reconstruction process. Seeing reconstruction relationally does not confine analysis to the local scale, to place, or to conditions on the ground. However, the political actors that come together on the ground provide multiple, partial snapshots of how Nicaraguan reconstruction has developed through the contingent intersections of neoliberal political economy and culture that produce place-specific experiences of post-war peace.

Nicaraguan reconstruction undeniably reflects the powerful position that international reconstruction stakeholders occupy over the reconstruction process, notwithstanding the multifaceted and at times contrasting political perspectives and post-conflict development goals that guide their actions (Bebbington 2004; Sheppard 2002; Guilhot 2005). These actors have adopted the mantle of responsibility for rebuilding post-conflict states to compensate for the common political vacuum and lack of a shared national vision among domestic stakeholders for how to pursue reconstruction (Labonte 2003; de Zeeuw 2005; Junne and Verkoren 2005a). For example, Guilhot (2005) has examined the increased collaboration among international
organizations, Western capitalist democracies, and transnational NGOs in the past two decades
to promote a shared normative commitment to neoliberal capitalist democracy and human rights.
This transnational set of international organizations, donor state agencies, and development
NGOs are both a product of and causal factor in the neoliberal patterns of political-economic
reconstruction through their control over reconstruction finance and programs.

However, the Nicaraguan case demonstrates well that the international reconstruction
elite operates through transnational networks of financial, political, material, and intellectual
capital that combine international actors with a host of elite post-conflict state agencies, domestic
NGOs, microfinance institutions, private sector and civil society organizations, and the general
population within post-conflict states. These transnational networks are the principal social
formation for understanding how reconstruction is able to establish contingent patterns of
neoliberal political economy (and resistance) on the ground. The transnational conditions also
suggest how reconstruction may be bound to broader patterns of neoliberalization and
transnational elite dominance on a global scale (Robinson 2003).

I adopt the concept of reconstruction sector governance in order to formally examine the
structural position that these elite reconstruction actors occupy within Nicaraguan localities as
the visible ‘face’ of the transnational reconstruction networks that dominate the political-
economic reform process. The reconstruction sector refers specifically to the set of on-the-
ground political actors that have become the principal conduit connecting international donors
and the Nicaraguan general population through a range of short- and long-term reconstruction
development programs. This sector includes a range of different actors, from state and sub-state
agencies, regional development organizations, community-based NGOs, microfinance
institutions, private organizations, smaller civil society organizations, and individual actors.
Reconstruction sector actors are a heterogeneous set of organizations with different agendas and ideological commitments that often, but do not always, mesh with the dominant neoliberal reconstruction discourse of the past two decades.

We can focus on the reconstruction sector and their tangled international and domestic connections to better understand the contingent patterns of neoliberal reconstruction while managing to avoid black-box explanations centered on tired tropes of neoliberalism, imperialism, or globalization. These connections grant the elite reconstruction sector actors considerable power to define and shape the contingent patterns of post-conflict political economy, regulation, and the ‘neoliberal peace’ (Paris 2000; Richmond 2010b). The organizations that constitute the reconstruction sector generally do play an important role in promoting neoliberal political-economic conditions. However, the reconstruction sector does not act as a simple bearer of neoliberal regulatory and disciplinary reforms any more than do the international stakeholders to whom they are so closely connected.

Rather, the reconstruction sector needs to be understood within the historic cultural conditions that inform Nicaraguan reconstruction both nationally and within particular places. Reconstruction sector actors find themselves pulled in multiple directions by the heterogeneous interests of the donor community and the culturally grounded interests of the communities and general populations in which they are embedded. Place-based NGOs and microfinance organizations, for example, must meet international donor conditionalities for the receipt of financial aid, but also must use those funds in a manner that addresses the cultural mores, historical patterns of political economy, and social relations that constitute the everyday conditions for reconstruction. This tangled web of interconnections is key to the contingent patterns of culturally embedded, ‘actually experienced’ neoliberal political-economic
reconstruction, adaptation, and resistance that come together in Nicaragua (Brenner and Theodore 2002, quoted in Craig and Cotterell 2007).

The distinct conditions of governance reconstruction relate back to the aforementioned interest in the connection between post-conflict reconstruction and neoliberal modes of societal regulation. The reconstruction sector governance patterns that we observe reflect the contingent articulations of political power that come together in the context of rebuilding war-torn states. We can view reconstruction sector governance as a contingent, contentious process that adopts, adapts, and challenges the neoliberal traditions that guide the Washington Consensus and the Chicago school of political economy. How the reconstruction sector translates into contingent reconstruction patterns of neoliberal regulation is an interesting question. To find a tentative answer, we can turn towards a specific aspect of reconstruction – the political efforts to promote post-conflict democratic institutions, relations, practices, and subjects.

As noted above, recent contributions have theorized how the rise of a neoliberal rationality extends beyond economic regulation and discipline to condition a broader societal reorganization grounded in contingent patterns of neoliberal thought and practice (Brown 2003b; Dean 2007; Low 1997; Rose 1996). Reconstruction in the past two decades, in particular, has emphasized the production of contingent neoliberal forms of democratization and democratic citizenship as central aspects of societal regulation (Brown 2003b). Several prominent works point to the neoliberal discourse on citizenship that promotes personal responsibility for individual well-being in ways that place the ability to enjoy the substantive benefits of citizenship (e.g., greater democratic access) at the feet of individual actors rather than viewing democratic access as a collective, and thus political, issue (Hindess 2002; Rose 1996; Thaa 2001). These contingent forms of neoliberal governance and governmentality have had a
transformative effect on all manner of institutions, political, social, cultural, and economic practice, social relations, and political subjectivities (Fraser 2003).

Reconstruction and democratization mutually influence one another through the reconstruction programs that promote a democratic structure, the contentious political struggles that define the development of democracy on the ground, and the way that these contingent democratic conditions shape reconstruction from within. This mutual relationship between reconstruction and democratic representation is bound to dominant political-economic patterns, institutional norms, and governance systems that define the terms of popular participation in the reconstruction process.

The transnational reconstruction networks, and particularly the reconstruction sector actors on the ground, maintain a powerful influence over the form of democratic institutions and practices in post-conflict states (Sampson 2003). From one direction, the dominant position of international finance, NGOs, and international states in reconstruction shapes a project-driven set of narratives and engagements with local actors that Sampson (2003) calls “the project society”. The reconstruction regime that emerges among these networks sets it apart as a distinct political community of workshops, capacity-building workshops, and short-term development agendas among local NGOs, micro-finance lenders, and development organizations within the larger post-conflict society. The formal democratic institutions established through reconstruction policy, when seen in operation, are often dominated by these reconstruction sector networks with little active participation from the more broadly defined civil society or general population (de Zeeuw 2005).

The reconstruction sector plays a key role in regulating and disciplining the political struggles to secure democratic representation and influence over the reconstruction process. The
democratic institutions, practices, and relations that emerge from these struggles give shape and a degree of permanence to the contingent neoliberal patterns of reconstruction policy and praxis that we see in particular places. The composition of the reconstruction sector can be approached as a democratic question of balance between illiberal democracy and the substantive participation of the ‘disorderly public’ in the democratic life of the post-conflict state (Staeheli 2010). The nature of democratic representation is central to this question of reconstruction sector governance and its influence on reconstruction. Who is this disorderly public and how do the democratic institutions, practices, and relations formed through these struggles for representation play into the consolidation of particular forms of reconstruction as ‘societal regulation’?

The Nicaraguan case suggests that the dominant role reconstruction sector governance actors play has shifted democratic representation away from the substantive voice of the general population onto the host of place-based NGOs, development organizations, private sector and civil society organizations bound to the international donor community and its interests. These grounded reconstruction sector actors work within the local community to conduct reconstruction projects focused on rural and urban development, healthcare, education, governance, and a range of social issues. However, these actors are bound closely into the political, financial, and ideological orbit of – and are accountable to – the largely unaccountable body of international donors and financiers who sit outside the structure of the liberal democratic state. The wedge that forms between domestic actors bound into the reconstruction sector and those left largely outside the transnational networks shaping reconstruction practice have a withering effect on democratic representation that further drives the move towards illiberal democracy (Sampson 2003).
Illiberal democracy describes a distinct democratic pattern common to post-conflict states (O'Donnell 1996; Zakaria 1997). Illiberal democratic states involve a blend of formal democratic institutions such as multiparty elections alongside a marked lack of more substantive, inclusive democratic institutions that foster greater democratic participation (Young 2002). The project society nature of reconstruction governance both reflects and reinforces the trend towards illiberal democracy on the ground. The disorganization or outright lack of civil society, grassroots social movements, or formal popular engagement in the political process cedes further political power to the cadre of place-based NGO, state, and market actors for the definition and establishment of the institutions, practices, and political economy of post-conflict reconstruction.

The contradictions between post-conflict reconstruction discourses promoting representative democracy and the general weakness of more horizontal patterns of democratic inclusion raise thorny questions about the consequences of reconstruction sector governance. The general set of neoliberal norms within which reconstruction takes shape suggest that post-conflict governance reforms cannot fully escape the powerful influence of at least some neoliberal thought and practice even if it is not the only game in town. The grounded struggles to define and establish democratic institutions, practices, and relations reflect these limited conditions for autonomous political thought and action. Perhaps the distinct conditions of illiberal democracy, project society, and weak popular democratic representation that frequently emerge through reconstruction are less an aberration and more a fundamental part of post-neoliberal modes of societal regulation (Carothers 2002; Linz and Stepan 1996; O'Donnell 1996). This state of affairs has profound implications for the ability to establish a more democratic post-conflict society through inclusive forms of civil society development and horizontal political relations (Buček and Smith 2000; Ross 2006; Young 2002)
The hierarchical nature of reconstruction sector governance shaping democratic institutions, practices, and norms is not set in stone. The grounded struggles that take place in distinct localities among different organizations and social groups – however fleeting and shaped by the uneven political position of the different actors involved – continue to produce a range of contingent neoliberal reconstruction outcomes that defy easy categorization using terms like illiberal democracy or project society. Formal modes of representative democracy may be weak. Substantive democratic participation in the reconstruction process may be tepid. However, we can look at how distinct democratic institutions, practices, and social norms take shape through the grounded, everyday experiences of reconstruction to define and establish post-neoliberal modes of societal regulation.

3.5 RECONSTRUCTION FROM A PLACE PERSPECTIVE

Places are the proving grounds for reconstruction. Reconstruction discourses produced by international and domestic actors, alike, ultimately have been articulated through culturally influenced, place-specific institutions, political relations, and practices that take shape in particular places. Adopting a contingent perspective on Nicaraguan reconstruction empowers us to better understand that reconstruction comes from particular places and actors, and develops in particular places through the diverse ways that actors negotiate the meaning of reconstruction and neoliberalism in their daily lives. In this section, I argue that reconstruction must be approached through a place perspective. Reconstruction involves the territorial reorganization of political power among a diverse range of international, state, and non-state interests. However, a limited focus on the international reconstruction regime of the past two decades fails to account for the distinct governance patterns that we witness in particular post-conflict settings. Further,
we come away with a limited understanding of just how reconstruction is bound to the spread of neoliberal structure in post-conflict states. A place-based focus can get us past the challenges of these top-heavy models of reconstruction to see the complex, contingent patterns of reconstruction as lived experience.

Post-conflict reconstruction can draw upon a place-based perspective to complement the top-down neoliberal theories of reconstruction and capitalist political economy. Neoliberal impact models focus on the top-down effects of reconstruction policy through localized case studies of neoliberalization through reconstruction (see chapter two). These ‘neoliberal impact models’ limit our view of reconstruction to policy outcomes derived from the powerful international community actors and their affiliates who rest above the fray to impose reconstruction from the geographic centers of power (Hart 2002). This limited perspective fails to capture the distinct interplay of reconstruction policy with the grounded institutions and political relations found in place.

The particular geographic concept of place that I use highlights place as a socially produced convergence of people and institutions within the structural framework of the global political economy (Agnew 1987; Appadurai 1995; Massey 1994). Drawing from Lefebvre (1991), we can assert that different capitalist eras have an attendant spatiality as the geographic structure that makes capital accumulation, production, and consumption possible. The production of particular places is one form of the spatiality of capitalism, endowing particular geographic spaces with meaning and practices grounded within the broader capitalist system (Merrifield 1993). The role of places within the broader capitalist system is a recursive one, as the unfolding, lived experiences in place reproduce and transform – i.e., reconstitute – the
conditions of the capitalist political economy from which such places have gained their meaning and relevance.

For this study, I focus particularly on the recursive nature of the grounded political struggles that unfold within and reproduce places within the broader capitalist system. Massey (1994a) highlights the global nature of place as a fluid pattern of relations that stretch both near and far, but come to rest fleetingly in the place-specific articulation of those relations. In other words, place represents the grounded ways in which global entanglements of political and economic power play out through place-specific relationships. There is no global vs. local framework here. Rather, place is simultaneously shaped by political forces, institutions, and relations that spread through countless networks. Places become complex sites of domination, authority, and resistance through the distinct ways that these conditions simultaneously unfold within (and create) particular places as key nodes in the creation and reproduction of the capitalist political economy (Creswell 1996; Pile and Keith 1997; Sharp et al. 2000).

This place-based perspective highlights the geographic patterns of reconstruction that develop through the contingent articulations of international, reconstruction sector, and general population actors on the ground. The geography of reconstruction may be approached through examination of the grounded institutions, political relations, and lived experiences of reconstruction. The outcome illustrates the range of post-conflict outcomes that are realized on the ground. We can get beyond a top-down geographic analysis that reflects the impact of an overarching reconstruction policy to demonstrate how the overall experience of reconstruction – its successes, its failures, its role in societal regulation – emerges through the particular conditions of reconstruction found in specific places.
The historical place context within which reconstruction takes root compels us to consider the effects of longer-term, culturally mediated histories of conflict and social tension on the place-specific patterns of post-war institutions, discursive practices, and narratives of both war and peace. The material conditions surrounding reconstruction – i.e., demands for land and housing, micro-credit financing, employment opportunities, social welfare, democratic rights exercised -- play an important role in shaping the nature of the institutional and governance relations in that place. These material conditions emerge from the historical place context shaped by history and war to condition how people respond to reconstruction and establish political and economic relations on the ground.

In Chapter 2, I considered how international reconstruction efforts introduced from above influence the place-based conditions of reconstruction. International actors’ reconstruction programs commonly target particular regions and communities through a host of technical efforts, financial assistance, and advisory services. It must be recognized that these international efforts often serve both the strategic interests of the external donor community and the immediate post-war needs of particular localities for reconstruction assistance. As Junne and Verkoren (2005b) comment, reconstruction efforts that grant attention to the geographic patterns of conflict may advance post-conflict peace through place-specific development assistance to those localities most affected by periods of conflict.

However, attention to the geography of reconstruction requires that we go beyond the dominant hierarchical view that examines how international programs have varied from place to place. The reconstruction of neoliberal political economy in post-conflict states develops within particular places through the tangled, hybrid connections between reconstruction efforts both from above and from below (Richmond 2010b). The contingent neoliberal patterns of post-
conflict political economy that are encountered in different places are not mere artifacts of international reconstruction policies, but rather cast light on the constitutive role that place plays in producing the broader post-conflict patterns of neoliberal peace.

In this context, we can see geographic places as distinct ‘theaters’ for reconstruction in which the struggles to define the political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions of place within the global capitalist economy give rise to new modes of societal regulation almost accidentally. The grounded institutional and governance systems that emerge through and reproduce reconstruction in place – transnational, regional and place-based NGOs, microfinance institutions, new political organizations, development alliances, new state agencies, social and market institutions, religious mission groups, and more – come together to establish the place-specific terms for post-conflict democratization and capitalist inclusion. These place-specific experiences of reconstruction reflect back onto the institutions, practices, political relations and political subject positions that are being transformed in a mutual relationship between governance, reconstruction, and societal regulation that perpetuates the distinct nature of places as simultaneously global and local.

The geography of post-conflict reconstruction does not only center on places as the grounded historical, institutional and social conditions of political struggle through which reconstruction is defined and established as lived experience. Moving in another direction, we can examine how places emerge as socially constructed, meaningful geographic spaces through which the institutions, practices, and relations that define post-conflict reconstruction take shape. Geographers have written extensively on the discursive construction of geographic places, regions, territories, and states (Murphy 1991; Paasi 2003; Sparke 2005). The construction of place draws upon semiotic, narrative and material practices to establish the institutional and
relational conditions through which these new places become sites through which the policy goals of post-conflict reconstruction governance actors can be realized and resistance can develop.

The construction of post-conflict places centers on the mutual relationship between the policy intentions of reconstruction governance actors and the diffuse relationships and practices that can lead to the discursive construction of place. First, reconstruction governance actors bring reconstruction policies, narratives, and material practices to bear in ways that can create new places in the popular imagination as distinct frameworks for the realization of policy goals (Junne and Verkoren 2005b). This policy community actively promotes policies and projects to construct new places as territorial focal points for the consolidation of particular post-neoliberal political and economic goals through reconstruction (Junne and Verkoren 2005a). For example, the construction of place can be a powerful tool that grounded reconstruction sector actors like economic development agencies and agricultural market actors can use to create a political identity in order to secure a powerful political-economic position within broader scales of state and international politics and economics.

Second, the intentions of governance policy are paralleled with the production of place as an emergent effect. Places, in other words, can come into existence gradually through the daily intersections of policy, institutions, narratives, and material practices on the ground that shape lived experience and popular imagination towards a discursive recognition that a ‘place’ exists. The political tensions that we can see within these constructed places of reconstruction reflect the balance between the policy intentions of particular reconstruction governance actors and the grounded relations through which these places are being defined and reproduced.
The intersection of these two aspects of place – as the grounded context for reconstruction and as a socially constructed, emergent effect of reconstruction – highlight the need to take stock of the constitutive power of places to establish the nature of post-conflict reconstruction and related governance systems from the ground up. The power of reconstruction governance to define and guide post-conflict reconstruction is rendered legible only through the contingent articulation of institutions and social relations within place (Massey 1994). Abstract concepts of transnational governance must be filled out by examining the distinct ways that governance actors’ projects not only operate through place-specific institutions, but how the contentious, place-based governance relations that take shape among place-specific institutional and relational contexts actively constitute the broader ideas and practices of reconstruction.

Finally, approaching post-conflict reconstruction through place brings home the importance of acknowledging the patterns of contingent neoliberal praxis that have influenced reconstruction policy in the past twenty years (Larner 2003; Leitner, Peck, and Sheppard 2006). The contingent patterns of reconstruction and neoliberal reform permit us to recognize the hybrid blend of incorporation, adaptation, and resistance that defines the actual policies and experiences of reconstruction. These reconstruction experiments come about through the grounded efforts to make reconstruction policy meaningful within the distinct context of place. It is these place-based encounters between power and the people that ultimately transform reconstruction from technocratic policy into a societal mode of regulation creating post-conflict institutions, practices and common sense norms that support the contingent post-neoliberal conditions introduced through reconstruction.

3.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS: A NEW APPROACH TO RECONSTRUCTION?
The relationship between reconstruction and neoliberal political-economic reforms cannot be reduced to the intellectual tenets of orthodox neoliberal thought. The reasons for this are clear. Neither reconstruction nor neoliberalism exist as homogenous, simple concepts. The recognition of the contingent nature of neoliberalism challenges us to reconsider the nature of the international reconstruction regime that dominates post-war policy formulation. First, reconstruction develops through the historical and geographic patterns of political economy and culture that come together to shape how reconstruction is imagined, put into practice, and adapted on the ground. Second, reconstruction takes shape through the contingent connections among transnational reconstruction networks of international donors and grounded reconstruction sector organizations, the general population, and individual actors rooted in the historical cultural conditions of country, region, and place. Far from a hegemonic regime, the powerful transnational network actors at the forefront of reconstruction policy reflect a fragmented set of international, state, and local interests whose incoherent post-conflict development programs are central to the varied, contingent paths that reconstruction may follow even within the general framework of neoliberal reforms.

We can begin to unpack these complex geographies of reconstruction with a focus on the geographic concept of place. The contingent direction that reconstruction and neoliberalism may take within different geographic places is critically important for our understanding of the broader effects of reconstruction. The tangled political-economic, institutional, and governance relations that operate within post-conflict states reflect a complex and contingent mix of political power and contradictions. Greater understanding of how these contingent articulations of political power take hold within, actively constitute, and emerge from particular post-conflict
places can help us to better understand the nature of reconstruction policy and to realize prospects for more democratic and just peace for the war-weary peoples of the world.
CHAPTER 4
THE ETHNOGRAPHIC EXTENDED CASE METHOD AS A MEANS TO STUDY PLACE-BASED RECONSTRUCTION IN NICARAGUA

4.1 THE ETHNOGRAPHIC EXTENDED CASE METHOD

This dissertation sets out to understand the micro-scale experiences of the transition from conflict to post-conflict in Nicaragua and how reconstruction has advanced a normative, hegemonic political program around post-neoliberal modes of capitalist regulation since the end of the Contra War. In this chapter, I elaborate a place-based research design that adopts a comparative ethnographic methodology as an appropriate framework for understanding the connections between capitalist processes of global scope and the grounded experiences of post-conflict reconstruction in Nicaragua. The central theme of this study is to critically explore the geography of post-conflict reconstruction as a normative, hegemony-building political project.

As suggested in the previous chapter, reconstruction has become in the past two decades a loosely coordinated, well-intentioned, discursive political project to integrate war-torn states into a capitalist-democratic interstate order. However, from a critical perspective reconstruction can be seen as an inherently geographic political process that reorganizes the governance structure of post-conflict societies towards the globally dominant conditions of post-neoliberal thought and practice.

An ethnographic, place-based perspective will allow us to explore the post-conflict reconstruction practices and relations that are producing the hegemonic conditions of post-neoliberal organization within post-war states. The powerful position held by international, transnational, and donor state actors – many of whom support market-democratic reforms –
grants them considerable influence over the definition and implementation of reconstruction policy. The ‘roll-out’ of political and economic reform packages among this privileged set of reconstruction practitioners often targets particular places that are perceived to be most in need of- or most amenable to reconstruction. However, the production of hegemonic consensus to reconstruction policy norms does not result naturally from the efforts of the reconstruction practitioner community. Rather, reconstruction involves a complex, negotiated set of meanings, practices, and institutions that come together in particular places. Dominant reconstruction practitioners’ influence over reconstruction is always mediated by the ways in which reconstruction is experienced and transformed among the institutions and relations that come together in particular places. The real story of post-conflict reconstruction requires that we look more closely at the contingent articulation of such complex governance conditions on the ground. That is, we need an ethnographic, place-based perspective that asks what reconstruction means, how it is experienced, and how it is produced relationally among the grounded conditions of everyday life.

This study employs an “extended case method” ethnography of post-conflict reconstruction in two Nicaraguan municipalities – Jinotega and Boaco – to explore the global political-economic conditions that have influenced post-conflict Nicaraguan life. Sociologist Michael Burawoy (2009) – the intellectual founder of modern extended case method ethnography – describes the method as a reflexive mode of scientific inquiry that connects the micro-scale field work of participant observation with the macro-processes of global political and economic change. The individual “case study” – the work of the ethnographer in the field – is redefined as a prism that permits greater understanding of historical political and economic structures, forces, and processes that are the context for daily life (Burawoy et al. 2000; Gupta
and Ferguson 1997). In this manner, the ethnographic ‘present’ can be situated (i.e., extended) within a broader set of historical conditions, geographic patterns, and social relationships that move beyond the field site in both time and space.

The extended case method draws from twentieth century critical social theory traditions among social science departments at the University of Chicago, the University of Manchester, and most recently the University of California – Berkeley (Burawoy 2009). With strong origins in Marxist political economy, the body of critical theory holds that theoretical commitments necessarily precedes and informs political practice, including research. That is, theory is a necessary precondition for social explanation – theories held by the researcher, theories held by informants, theories held within the wider society. Research within this tradition does not distinguish theory from practice, but rather puts research in the service of the theoretical and ideological interests of the researcher. The extended case method reflects the theoretical pluralism that has come to define the body of critical theory in recent years, including a range of foundational and post-foundational political projects (i.e., Marxism, feminism, post-structuralism) that guide case study field observation (Bohman 1999).

The key aim of the extended case method is a commitment to improve upon existing social theory in response to the inconsistencies and lacunae that ethnographic field observations reveal about the prior theoretical frameworks that guide research and praxis, alike (Burawoy 2009). The study of daily practices in particular field sites does not reveal an unadulterated ‘reality’ waiting to be discovered by the researcher. As Burawoy (2009) notes, the theoretical lens through which we approach ethnographic analysis is always an imperfect measure of how large-scale social forces operate. The failings of theory in the face of ethnographic observation do not invalidate a theory, but rather provide an opportunity to redefine and explore new
dimensions of our social theories on the world. The extended case method permits us to bridge
the false divide between social theory and social practice with the recognition that theory and
observation move together to guide the research questions asked, the manner in which
observation is conducted, and the interpretation of field results into new theoretical points of
view.

In the last few decades, many ethnographic studies have used elements of the extended
case method to examine the post-neoliberal transformations and globalization projects that have
influenced contemporary political and economic life (Burawoy 2009; Burawoy et al. 2000;
Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Ferguson 2002; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Gille 2001; Marcus
1998). Research studies such as geographer Gillian Hart’s grounded analyses of labor and
neoliberalization in South Africa (Hart 2002), sociologist Aiwa Ong’s work on transnational
labor networks (Ong 1999), and anthropologist Anna Tsing’s research on social movements in
the Indonesian rainforests (Tsing 2004) have deployed the extended case method to study the
articulation of global political and economic processes in particular places. The central
ethnographic concept of the ‘field’ has been extended through these global ethnographic
projects. The extended case method approaches the field – be it a place, a social group, an
institution, or a network – as a point of entry for understanding the global political-economic
transformations shaping our contemporary world.

For example, in her recent work Gillian Hart (2002; 2004) critiques what she calls
neoliberal impact models that reproduce the global/abstract – local/concrete divisions so heavily
criticized within geographic theories of place. Hart argues that seemingly global processes like
neoliberalization cannot be viewed as an inevitable movement from the global to the local scale,
where external forces act upon the relatively powerless, place-based actors who are the subject of
ethnographic study. Rather, the extended case method more accurately collapses global-local dichotomies into an awareness of the global within the local. The political and economic experiences observed within distinct ethnographic field sites – from geographic places like cities and rural districts, to international organization offices, to factory floors – reflect a geographically complex web of institutions and actors connected across time and space. This “global sense of place” debunks the argument that micro-scale practices are distinct from larger political and economic forces (Massey 1994). Rather, it is the distinct conditions in particular places that collectively constitute and reproduce the macro-scale political and economic conditions of the global political economy.

In the early 1990s, anthropologist Martyn Hammersley famously asked “What’s wrong with ethnography?” (Hammersley 1992). The question came at a watershed moment in the development of the social sciences and ethnography, in particular. The latter decades of the twentieth century were a period of redefinition across the social sciences. An epistemological revolution swept through the qualitative social sciences, destabilizing fundamental concepts like power, knowledge, theory, and practice through the recognition that political power and ideology informed all aspects of social research and social life (Bohman 1999; Rabinow and Rose 1994). The development of critical geography, critical ethnography, post-structuralism, post-Marxism, and heightened interest in both Foucault and Gramsci during the past two decades reflects the depth of the transformation that has occurred. Ethnographic research incorporated critical theory through a heterogeneous blend of Marxist, feminist, and post-structural political commitments brought into the research process (Burawoy et al. 2000; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Gille 2001; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Marcus 1998; Tsing 2004; Wolcott 1999). The debates over the nature of ethnography during this period challenged researchers to recognize the partiality of
their own research as a social product (Burawoy et al. 1991; Hall 1991; Hammersley 1992; Marcus 1998). The production of knowledge, itself, reflected the broader structure of political relations, political ideology, and situated perspectives that influenced both researchers and informants (Clifford 1986).

The rational, hermeneutic, and critical ethnographic traditions that have developed in the past three decades reflect this on-going struggle to accommodate a new model for ethnography that can adequately address the relationship between theory construction and empirical observation (Burawoy 2009; Schwandt 2000). The extended case method is based on a reflexive social science model that recognizes the inherent theoretical influences that extend throughout the ethnographic research process to filter the research questions asked and the conduct of field observation. These diverse perspectives all recognize that research cannot produce objective explanations of social conditions untouched by the theoretical perspectives that shape the research process (Hammersley 1992).

However, the extended case method stands apart as a theory-driven research program that embraces the political nature of social research as a source of strength. Theoretically influenced field observation provides the basis for reconstructing existing social theory rather than rejecting it in the wake of anomalous observation (Burawoy 2009). The constant interplay of theory and observation permits researchers not only to rebuild political theory but also to influence more effectively social conditions on the ground. Thus, critical extended case method ethnography bridges the divide between rational and hermeneutic traditions in qualitative research (Burawoy 2009). The extended case method offers a research model that maintains a rational focus on theory-laden, empirical examination of a macro-level reality (through micro-scale observation)
alongside a recognition of the critical role of theoretically informed research in the social construction shared meaning and practice forged among human subjects.

Anthropologist Mark Peterson (2010) has cautiously suggested that ethnography has an affinity to journalism with their shared story-telling and hermeneutic traditions. Interestingly, it is the biased, political nature of critical ethnographic approaches like the extended case method that has been criticized for reducing ethnography to the production of political journalism incommensurate with objective social science (Hammersley 1992). To its critics, the extended case method does not meet orthodox scientific standards of researcher objectivity and study design deemed necessary to produce qualitative research that is appropriate to the needs of policy makers and practitioners beyond the academy. To my mind, this criticism unfairly condemns critical ethnography on standards not necessarily shared by extended case method practitioners. The goal of the extended case method is to balance the theoretical voice of the researcher with that of the informants, both to understand informants’ life-worlds and to situate those experiences within a broader political-economic context. Finding the appropriate relationship between a predefined, theoretical research model that specifies key informants and research questions, and a reflexive research model open to the ambiguity, multiple viewpoints, and fluidity of field research is a constant challenge for ethnographers (Burawoy et al. 2000; Marcus 1998). The risk that research lapses into ‘unscientific’ political journalism is always present. Nevertheless, the political commitments that guide critical ethnographies do not translate automatically into a failure of responsible scholarship simply because researcher subjectivity is acknowledged and embraced in the research. These dangers must be avoided through vigilant scholarship by the researcher to remain aware of the inherent biases that influence how
informants are selected and how their partial, fragmented experiences are reported and evaluated throughout the research process.

The comparative benefit that the extended case method offers – at least in the study of global political and economic forces – comes directly from its theoretically informed, explicitly political mode of social inquiry (Burawoy 2009). The multiple theoretical perspectives that researchers adopt expose the extended case method (and other critical methods) to critique that the knowledge produced lacks a central core from which competing claims might be compared (Hammersley 1992). Bohman (1999), speaking on critical theory in general, offers a strong support for the theoretical pluralism that defines the extended case method. This critical ethnography does not pretend to offer comprehensive explanations or holistic claims to “truth” through the fragmented, partial accounts generated through place-based ethnographic research (Haraway 1991). Rather, the diverse theoretical traditions — from Marxism, to feminism, to various post-structuralisms — that guide ethnographic research are approached as an opportunity to bring together complementary perspectives on a research topic in order to better understand the complex synergies and contradictions that define both the macro-scale and micro-scale conditions of the social world.

The extended case method connects the micro-processes of daily life to the historically and geographically distinct macro-forces that bind places together. The goal of demonstrating the connections between the macro and the micro through study of the life-worlds of informants drives research towards place-based ethnographic field sites. The various critical ethnographic approaches that adopt the extended case method approach every case study field site (and the different informant experiences observable within the site) as a partial, fragmented part of the macro-scale whole. The contingent social relations that come together in particular places are
distinct parts of the global capitalism system, with each place having distinct relations, social conditions, and experiences that result from and partially constitute the macro-scale forces under discussion (Hart 2004).

The persistence of this place-based ethnographic field site approach can be a limitation of the current method. Though not without its own faults, the “multi-sited” ethnographic framework put forth by anthropologist George Marcus does address the need to break free from the static geographic fields of ethnographic space that continue to inform the extended case method (Marcus 1998). The spatial reorganization of political and economic life into transnational networks is just one new conception of the field site that reflects the mobility of informants and relationships under global capitalism. Insofar as the extended case method succeeds at contextualizing its observations in time and space, but fails to incorporate new historical and spatial paradigms into the actual conduct of field observation, these criticisms have some purchase (Marcus 1998: 13). Nevertheless, the recognition that global processes operate within distinct global and transnational geographies not wholly confined to “place” is not ignored within the extended case method (Gille 2001). However, the practical realities of conducting ethnographic fieldwork complicate efforts to follow the informants through these new geographic landscapes. A place-based extended case method addresses this issue through a focus on how such transnational, multi-sited processes come to rest – if fleetingly – within the geographic places that constitute empirically observable spaces of everyday life (Massey 1994).

With specific reference to this dissertation, I adopt the extended case method as a fruitful perspective for understanding the connections between post-conflict reconstruction and capitalist political economy that have shaped everyday life in post-conflict Nicaragua. In doing so, I hope to explore the tangled political relationships that come together in particular places to define and
constitute reconstruction in ways that address not only the localized experiences of post-conflict life, but also become part of the broader social fabric of the global capitalist political economy. As noted in the previous chapter, post-conflict reconstruction policy in the past two decades has operated in conjunction with the range of post-neoliberal political and economic transformations that continue to reshape the global capitalist system. The place-based governance framework that I have adopted to study post-conflict reconstruction draws on the same global sense of place that is the centerpiece of the extended case method. Ethnographic field observation of the lived conditions of post-conflict reconstruction within particular field sites can cast a distinct light on the relationship between reconstruction and the production of post-neoliberal forms of political and economic hegemony in war-torn states. Understanding the complex reconstruction experience on the ground – the political and economic pressures, the contradictions, the actors involved – will open our view to the contingent and uncertain nature of reconstruction as both policy and practice that takes root not from above or from below, but from within.

The practical results of producing an extended case method ethnography of post-conflict reconstruction in Nicaragua are two-fold. First, the ethnographic knowledge gained through intensive field observation will establish new insights into the lived ‘mechanisms’ of post-conflict reconstruction. These insights into reconstruction as a grounded experience will permit a reevaluation of post-conflict reconstruction theories to better reflect the new understandings gained through the particular cases under study. Second, field studies that examine how the hegemonic production of post-neoliberal forms of societal regulation (see chapter three) has been experienced in post-conflict settings will cast new light onto the broader theories of neoliberalism and globalization. The complex and relatively distinct institutional and governance conditions that accompany post-conflict reconstruction challenge us to consider how
reconstruction may play a distinct role among the broader patterns of structural adjustment, market-democratic institutional and governance reforms, and reterritorializations of political power that have accompanied global capitalism.

4.2 CASE STUDIES: RECONSTRUCTION IN TWO NICARAGUAN LOCALITIES

The central decision to begin an extended case method ethnography is field site selection. This study draws from Ragin’s comparative case method framework to select two Nicaraguan field sites (Ragin 1987). Ragin approaches case study methods from a rational-scientific perspective that approximates the controlled conditions of laboratory settings within the more fluid fieldwork environment. For Ragin, the key to comparative case selection is to let theory inform the selection of case sites: The research question being asked leads to a set of expected causal variables that must vary between case sites. Beyond these expected causal variables, cases must be selected to control for extraneous structural and contextual variables that may undermine efforts to make causal connections between particular factors and the particular observed outcomes in each case. This solution points to what Ragin calls a “multiple, conjunctural causal analysis” that bounds the selection of cases around a shared set of general patterns, but does not require conclusive identification of a single dependent variable or establishment of direct, one-to-one causal connections. It is the complex articulation of multiple, interacting variables that may lead to particular outcomes in each case.

The use of comparative case method to select the particular field cases for this study raises immediate challenges for the use of the extended case method. The extended case method is based on the structural totality concept that individual cases represent distinct, fragmented parts of the whole (Gille 2001). The selection of cases based on principles of comparison –
limited independent variables, controlled incidental variables, causal connections – seems to superficially contradict the more open-ended approach favored by the extended case method. This tension has confounded otherwise strong ethnographic scholars like Marcus (1998), whose *a priori* framework for selecting key informants and sites contradicts the principles of the extended case method.

However, we can resolve this apparent tension if we recognize the shared aspects of both the comparative case method and extended case method. In both instances, theory is the foundation for the decision to observe particular cases and to value particular information as relevant to the research question. The initial use of a theoretical framework for case selection does not interfere with the conduct of ethnographic research, as long as care is taken throughout both case selection and field work to avoid allowing initial assumptions to crowd out contradictory evidence and alternate paths of investigation in response to continued observation (Burawoy et al. 2000). Indeed, careful selection of cases in response to research questions and expected causal relationships can enhance the ability to engage informants effectively in the field. Furthermore, the extended case method does not preclude the possibility of ethnographic case study comparisons both between field sites and longitudinally at a single field site. Michael Burawoy describes the concept of the ‘revisit’ as an effective way to demonstrate the geographically and historically distinct nature of change in macro-scale forces among and within place-based field sites (Burawoy 2009).

With these precautionary notes in mind, this study sets out to produce a comparative, extended case method ethnography of post-conflict reconstruction in two Nicaraguan departments and their related capital cities. The first field site is the city of Jinotega in the northern Nicaraguan highlands. The second field site is the city of Boaco in the central
Nicaraguan highlands [Figure 4.1]. The choice to conduct research in Jinotega and Boaco departments reflects the case-selection principles to limit the range of structural and contextual variables to those necessary for explanation.


A central question in the investigation of post-conflict reconstruction is the role of the effects of conflict on the subsequent post-conflict reconstruction experience. In this regard, Jinotega and Boaco have had distinctly different experiences. Situated in the northern highlands, Jinotega department (and to a lesser extent the city) was a central front during the 1980s Contra conflict. The directly experienced violence, collapsed infrastructure, failed institutions,
collapsed agricultural production, and violent trauma inflicted on both combatants and non-
combatants throughout the region has been definitive in shaping post-war conditions in the
department. In contrast, the low levels of direct violence experienced in most of the Boaco
department cast a different wartime experience upon the Boaqueño population. The indirect
experiences of war – sons killed, rationed food supplies, military conscription, international
economic isolation – were far more influential in shaping the post-conflict conditions
experienced at war’s end.

In addition, the structural position that Jinotega and Boaco occupy within Nicaragua set
the stage for their selection as case study field sites [Table 4.1]. The Jinotega and Boaco
departments both occupy a remote geographic position on the northern and central frontiers of
Nicaragua that until recently has been reinforced by deteriorated and non-existent transportation
and communications infrastructure. The similar urban structure of both capital cities as mid-
sized market towns surrounded by a large, impoverished rural population dedicated to coffee and
horticulture production in Jinotega and dairy and beef cattle ranching in Boaco further deepens
the similar structural position of both sites. Compared to the 20,000 residents of the city of
Boaco, the city of Jinotega has 41,000 inhabitants – many of whom were displaced from rural
farms during the war (INEC 2006). The political climate of both departments reflects the
clientelistic patronage traditions that divide the population roughly between Liberal and Frente
Sandinista political forces often regardless of economic and social class (IPADE 2008).

The central questions shaping the selection of these two field sites are two-fold: First, my
interest rests in how the post-conflict reconstruction of governance institutions and relations has
taken distinct forms in each location in ways that reflect the different political-economic
conditions that extend from the conflict into the post-conflict period. Second, my interest also
rests in how reconstruction has facilitated the hegemonic conditions of capitalist regulation in both locations, despite the distinct political-economic patterns of conflict and post-conflict governance reform.

Table 4.1. Comparison of Nicaraguan Field Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nicaraguan Municipality</th>
<th>Boaco</th>
<th>Jinotega</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Experience</td>
<td>No direct conflict</td>
<td>Direct conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal Population</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>49,839</td>
<td>99,382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>20,405</td>
<td>41,134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Active</td>
<td>16,847</td>
<td>32,849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Structure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quaternary</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant Land Tenure</td>
<td>medium- and large-scale dairy/cattle ranching</td>
<td>mini-fundidía coffee and horticulture cooperatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Tendency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSLN</td>
<td>31-38%</td>
<td>39-46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal (AL/PLC/ALN)</td>
<td>55-62%</td>
<td>40-53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Therefore, the political economy of war and post-conflict are central factors guiding the decision to conduct case study fieldwork in Jinotega and Boaco. The distinct governance patterns found both at war’s end and now twenty years into the post-conflict period become a key variable for understanding the complex experience of post-conflict reconstruction in Jinotega and Boaco. The contingent, place-based articulation of social forces among global and
international organizations, transnational NGOs, state agencies, micro-credit lenders, place-based
civil society organizations, and grassroots social movements define the distinct-yet-parallel
political economies of post-conflict reconstruction in both ethnographic field sites.

Further, the field-based post-conflict reconstruction conditions that were observed among
the streets and farms of Jinotega and Boaco permitted the refinement of the theoretical lens
through which social science can explain the reproduction of the hegemonic power relations of
post-neoliberal capitalism(s) (Gibson-Graham 1996). Drawing from diverse works by scholars
including sociologists Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore (2002) and geographer Matthew Sparke
(2006), the reterritorialization of political authority can be examined among new forms of global
and transnational governance that take root through post-conflict reconstruction processes in
places like Jinotega and Boaco. These reterritorializations inexorably reinforce the connections
between macro-scale forces and micro-scale processes that this study reveals through the
extended case method.

The selection of Jinotega and Boaco as ethnographic study field sites offers a welcome
addition to existing research on post-conflict reconstruction. Most reconstruction studies that
draw upon ethnographic methods focus predominantly on top-down accounts that highlight the
local reconstruction experience (Babb 2001; Hays-Mitchell 2005; Lancaster 1992; Oglesby
2007). In contrast, limited attention has been given to the mutual relationship between macro
and micro-level processes and the transformed transnational governance conditions that collapse
the macro and macro into the place-based reconstruction experiences that are the object of this
study. Recent ethnographic studies on post-conflict institutions, governance, and daily life in
Bosnia-Herzegovina (Dahlman and Ó Tuathail 2005b, 2005a), South Africa (Hart 2002), and El
Salvador (Moodie 2010) stand out as notable exceptions.
This complements existing work on Nicaragua that examines the connections between post-conflict reconstruction and hegemonic modes of capitalist regulation. Recent ethnographic research has supported post-neoliberal impact models that look at the effects of post-conflict reforms in Managua-based working-class neighborhoods, rural agricultural regions, and Nicaraguan rainforest communities (Babb 2001; Cupples, Glynn, and Larios 2007; Lancaster 1992; Larson 2004). The post-conflict reconstruction experience is less understood in mid-sized Nicaraguan communities whose political-economic position rests somewhere between Managua and the rural periphery. This study of two mid-sized Nicaraguan municipalities challenges the received wisdom about Nicaraguan post-conflict reconstruction and hegemonic regulation through a grounded look at the distinct governance structures that take hold far beyond the activist civil society communities of the capital city. As such, knowledge of the post-conflict reconstruction experience in Jinotega and Boaco deepens our understanding of post-conflict reconstruction and the consolidation of global capitalist hegemony in post-conflict Nicaragua in the past two decades.

4.3 RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The selection of Jinotega and Boaco as principal case study field sites resulted from an initial country visit in July 2008. In total, I conducted three months of fieldwork in the two Nicaraguan municipalities in July 2008 and July-September 2009. I completed most of the research within the principal cities of Jinotega and Boaco, although research did extend into the rural countryside, neighboring municipalities within the larger Jinotega and Boaco departments (i.e., first-order territorial divisions of the Nicaraguan state), and two weeks in Managua as the network of informants expanded during my time in the field.
The research detailed in the following chapters foremost reflects the daily experience of living and conducting field observation throughout the two municipalities. The compact size of both Jinotega and Boaco as mid-sized cities with a limited number of NGOs, civil society organizations, and government offices was a practical benefit of conducting ethnographic field observation here. Life in the field was informal. Transportation involved a flexible mix of walking, taxis, inter-urban buses and word-of-mouth bartering for rides with neighbors and acquaintances. Observing the daily rhythms of the cities became a way of life, from the female street vendors loudly announcing their wares in every doorway, to the queues outside microfinance lending offices, development NGO centers, and the readily visible signage announcing the latest donor state-sponsored development projects.

The collection of archival material provided additional research information. The material collected within the field sites – books, newspapers, NGO publications, municipal government documents, religious literature, political propaganda literature – has supplemented the research considerably. The absence of local print media in Jinotega and Boaco proved to be a challenge, since reporting of local news and events was limited to occasional reports in the Nicaraguan daily newspaper, *La Prensa*. News, events, and analysis were relayed in the cities mainly through word-of-mouth and by loudspeakers mounted to vehicles that passed through the streets of Jinotega and Boaco.

Finally, a series of informant interviews provided crucial insights into the lived experiences of post-conflict reconstruction in the two field sites. I conducted approximately 100 unstructured informant interviews among the Jinotega and Boaco field sites, Managua, and other locations. The majority of interviews occurred in formal office settings, although some interviews reflected the variable settings of everyday life: personal residences, restaurants,
vehicles, nature parks, coffee plantations, agricultural communes, and idle conversation on street corners. The informants provided a rich cross-section of post-conflict life in Jinotega and Boaco.

The theoretical foundations of the study on post-conflict reconstruction and hegemonic modes of post-neoliberal regulation drove the initial selection of informants. The recent scholarly literature has suggested that post-conflict reconstruction has developed into a global political regime in the past twenty years (Brinkerhoff 2005; Caplan 2005; Jakobsen 2002). The presence of these global and transnational architects of reconstruction policy within Jinotega and Boaco provided a logical starting point upon entering the field. The transnational networks of development NGOs, municipal and state government offices, and grounded microfinance lending institutions were an institutional point of reference as I began conducting informant interviews.

This initial set of interlocutors expanded throughout the field research to include an array of informants as new theoretical insights and empirical observations took me in different directions to understand better the contingent conditions of post-conflict governance reconstruction within both Jinotega and Boaco. Ultimately, I spoke with senior municipal government officials, local representatives of Nicaraguan central government institutes and ministries, and political party representatives; former Sandinista and Contra soldiers; foreign and domestic NGO officials, human rights organizations, and formal civil society organizations; microfinance lenders, private business owners, international religious charity organizations, and local religious leaders and practitioners; coffee farmers, cattle ranchers, dairy producers, and agriculturalists; print media representatives, labor union organizers, grassroots social movement activists, taxi drivers, and itinerant street vendors.

The informant interviews were digitally recorded with the formal consent of all parties present. To capture the full experience of informant interviews, including verbal and non-verbal
cues and my thoughts throughout the interview, I supplemented digital audio recordings with extensive personal notes written both during and immediately following each interview. I conducted follow-up interviews as needed for clarification of particular points raised during the initial informant interview. In less formal interview settings (e.g., conversations with street vendors and neighbors), digital recordings often begin several minutes into a conversation. In those instances, I have supplemented verbatim transcripts with paraphrased accounts of earlier conversations. Finally, I transcribed and coded the digital audio recordings following my return from Nicaragua.

The result of three months’ fieldwork has provided new insights into the conditions of post-conflict reconstruction and capitalist regulation as these have been experienced in Jinotega and Boaco. As the next two chapters discuss more fully, the tangled governance structures that exist in both field sites reflect the distinct conditions left over from war, the geographically uneven presence of the broadly defined ‘international community’ in reconstruction processes, and the creative, adaptive lived experiences of post-conflict reforms on the ground.

4.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE EVERYDAY SPACES OF RECONSTRUCTION

Given the promise and pitfalls of using extended case method ethnography, we must ask what is gained and lost through using the method for the study of post-conflict reconstruction. The benefits of examining the lived experience of post-conflict reconstruction are hopefully clear. Ethnographies of post-conflict reconstruction provide an intimate window into the often-contradictory processes, practices, and lived experiences that define the nature of reconstruction and in a very real sense determine its success of failure on the ground. The particular benefit of the extended case method comes through the mutual connections that can be made between the
experiences of post-conflict reconstruction and broader political and economic forces that both influence and respond to the uncertain course of reconstruction processes in time and space.

There are few objective modes of defense against the critics of extended case method ethnography. The method readily embraces theoretical bias and ideological taint as part of ethnographic research (and, in truth, all forms of social science, acknowledged or not). Moreover, the extended case method makes theoretical bias a friend and traveling companion along the two-way path of theory reconstruction and field observation. In part, the validity of ethnographic research is in the eye of the beholder. It is the responsibility of the researcher to acknowledge his or her positionality and subjectivity and to use these as part of the knowledge-building process.

As for the shortcomings of extended case method ethnographies of post-conflict reconstruction, the usual suspects come to the fore: the anecdotal policy-irrelevance of research, the partiality of informants and lack of an objective standard for validity, the researcher’s self-qualifications about positionality and theoretical bias, the incommensurability of cases. In contrast, post-conflict reconstruction is a complex political process, a wholesale transformation of societal institutions, social relations, and political subjectivities taking place in the challenging context of an uncertain transition from war to peace. The knowledge generated through ethnographic studies represents a complementary set of data that can serve the interests of policy makers, practitioners, and those being ‘reconstructed’ in war-torn states. The information uncovered through ethnographies of reconstruction will have its greatest importance when it contradicts knowledge generated through alternate forms of knowledge generation about post-conflict reconstruction processes. The current ethnographic study of Nicaraguan post-conflict reconstruction moves in this direction. The following chapters take up this challenge through
analysis of post-conflict reconstruction and the hegemonic conditions of post-neoliberal governance reform in Jinotega and Boaco.
CHAPTER 5
RECONSTRUCTING NEOLIBERAL POLITICAL-ECONOMIC PEACE FROM ABOVE IN JINOTEGA AND BOACO

5.1 NEOLIBERAL POLITICAL ECONOMY FROM ABOVE

The following two chapters examine the place-based connections between post-conflict reconstruction and capitalist regulation of the Nicaraguan political economy two decades after the formal conclusion of the Contra war. Foremost, Nicaraguan reconstruction has provided a vehicle for the development of a capitalist political economy as the dominant framework for reorganizing the everyday spaces of Nicaraguan society. The formal reconstruction programs and professionals at work in Nicaragua since 1990 have generated new institutions, governance reforms, and political space for citizen participation that support the emergence of a particular form of capitalism: neo-liberal regulation.

Throughout Central America in the 1990s, post-conflict reconstruction has permitted the penetration of transnational governance as a guiding force behind the move towards neoliberal capitalist political economy, including in Nicaragua (Moodie 2010). However, post-conflict capitalist regulation arises through the contingent articulation of political-economic relations, governance, institutions, and what Sparke (2006, 8) calls the ‘congeries of calculative practices’ that occur in the micro-spaces of everyday life rooted in place.

In chapter three, I suggested that reconstruction privileged the transnational connections binding a ‘reconstruction sector’ of place-based NGOs, microfinance credit institutions, and development organizations with international donor institutions, states, and non-state professionals. This reconstruction sector served as the bridge to unite international and transnational actors, post-conflict state and sub-state apparatuses, political forces, private sector
actors, non-state organizations, civil society actors, and grassroots social movements within the post-conflict reorganization of neoliberal capitalist political economy.

The case studies in this chapter examine the post-war articulation of these reconstruction sector, political forces, and civil society actors in the Nicaraguan municipalities of Jinotega and Boaco. Chapter five emphasizes the reorganization of post-conflict political economy, institutions, and governance through the micro-practices that constitute post-conflict reconstruction and neoliberal regulation on the ground (Jones 2008). Chapter six focuses on the contingent intersections of neoliberal political economy and culture that are made visible in the place-specific efforts to negotiate reconstruction and its discontents from the ground up.

5.2 BUILDING NEOLIBERAL STRUCTURE IN JINOTEGA

Driving the Jinotega-Guayacán Highway north into mountainous Jinotega, travelers encounter multiple signposts promoting the latest internationally financed development projects. The rural and urban landscapes surrounding Jinotega reveal the depth of international financial connection to small-town Nicaragua. The Inter-American Development Bank, USAID, the EU, Governments of Japan, South Korea, Norway, and Sweden, and NGOs like Catholic Relief Services are a few of the international donors whose support for both large- and small-scale infrastructure and social development projects appears on the Jinotega landscape. In most cases, international donor community material and financial support for post-conflict development programs passes through a place-based community of ‘reconstruction sector’ NGOs, microfinance credit institutions, and other organizations that emerged in the 1990s to provide development, governance, and social infrastructure assistance to the Jinotega region.
The constellation of place-based reconstruction sector organizations in Jinotega reflects a varied set of organizations and actors. The most striking aspect of this reconstruction sector in Jinotega is the large number of small, entrepreneurial organizations that exist on the ground. These organizations include multiple small Nicaraguan and Jinotega-based NGOs, microfinance credit institutions, faith-based development organizations, coffee and agricultural production and technical services cooperatives, private business organizations, and public-private interest groups. Collectively, the organizations that make up this sector have become the principal conduit for interstate organizations, foreign donor state agencies, international NGOs, international faith-based development organizations, and private sector actors to provide material and financial support during the post-conflict period.

We can turn to the historical patterns of liberal political economy and culture to grasp the particular position that these place-based reconstruction and development organizations occupy in the region. Paige (1997) describes the historically peripheral political-economic position that Jinotega and northern coffee-producing regions of Nicaragua have held since independence in 1838. The historical account in chapter one suggested that the history of northern Nicaragua reflected a mix of isolation from the centers of power alternating with spasmodic moments of political violence and conflict that too often has concentrated in northern departments like Jinotega. The resulting cultural mores that have developed particularly since the 1920s have produced a liberal regime of subjection among Jinotega peasant farmers and the proletariat centered on finding endogenous solutions to the development challenges that the region has faced. This historical trope can help explain how the Jinotega region has adapted to the transnational penetration of donor assistance and homegrown development programs during the reconstruction period.
Foremost, reconstruction in Jinotega has entered into a complex set of transnational connections between international donors and place-based development organizations. These transnational reconstruction networks have gravitated towards the dominant neoliberal models for reconstruction and development. However, the composition of the reconstruction sector in Jinotega reflects the broad range of political commitments and social needs that have accompanied the historic social structure in the Jinotega region. For example, Saldaña-Portilla (2003b) described the complex political economy of northern coffee production as a blend of liberal elites, mostly liberal-oriented peasant producers, and a politically mixed set of rural proletariat and itinerant rural proletariat. This complex social structure has helped to permit the proliferation of reconstruction sector organizations and transnational connections to meet the diverse needs of the regional population.

The practices performed among place-based reconstruction sector actors reflect the political contradictions between neoliberal capitalist penetration and the presence of entrenched poverty operating side by side in the region. In the past twenty years, these development organizations have adopted a market-centered reconstruction assistance strategy that simultaneously binds local entrepreneurs and the masses into the transnational political economy through a host of financial connections and has shown neoliberal tendencies to provide support preferentially towards the poor, but not the indigent as part of an effort to promote responsible, profitable use of reconstruction support.

These deep historical conditions of peripheral political-economic position and liberal-minded development efforts come through in conversations with reconstruction sector personnel. Their views demonstrate a strong neoliberal capitalist orientation and their self-aware interest in advancing a neoliberal regional program through their normative efforts to combine
reconstruction programs as a path to neoliberal subject formation in aid recipients. The regional office of the Nicaraguan Association for Opportunity and Economic Development (ASODENIC) offers one example. Founded in 1994, ASODENIC provides low-interest loans for female-centered, multi-partner micro-enterprise development. Concurrently, ASODENIC administers to the financial, social, and religious needs of its financial beneficiaries. Julia, an ASODENIC director in Jinotega, embodies the ASODENIC mission. Educated at the Nicaraguan Universidad Centroamericana in the 1990s, Julia returned to northern Nicaragua to manage post-conflict NGO programs in the region. Julia explained:

ASODENIC is a business based on Christian principles...on coming closer to God. That is the foundation, because when we encounter those clients that have – that live in places with great poverty, extreme poverty and they have gone through abuse, divorces, mistreating their children, alcoholism and drugs – we try very subtly to find ways to talk with them about God, about the plan God has for their lives. ... These lessons are distributed along three dimensions: the economic, the social, and the spiritual. So we try little by little not to appear like a church, but to get the clients to change, you know? – an attitude of improving themselves. .... It is very difficult, because a comfortable and tranquil attitude is very ingrained in them to say give me, I need it.’ But our idea is to develop in them a mentality that says ‘give me, I am going to work, and I am going to repay you.

In another instance, I spoke with officials at the Association of Volunteers for Community Development (AVODEC), a community-based NGO founded in the late 1990s to coordinate international donor support, Nicaraguan state funds, and private donations to realize social infrastructure programs in impoverished urban and rural districts of Jinotega. AVODEC works with governments, religious groups, transnational NGOs and foundations to build homes, composting latrines, potable water wells, and other micro-scale projects throughout the region. In the past decade, AVODEC has responded to shifting mechanisms of transnational donor support with a move from grants-based to loan-based program assistance for the impoverished Jinotega beneficiaries. AVODEC administrator Carlos explained:
[Since 2000], we too have improved our best practice, as we say, to match the limited resources. We also have created an exclusive credit-based fund. We have in our organizational structure a part that gives credit and a part that gives out donations. Generally, the technical assistance that we give is free, but if we give seeds or inputs, those are given on credit. For construction and housing, we pay for the labor or part of the materials, but people also have to pay their share. This was established from 2004 onwards. Before 2004, we contributed various homes and they were completely donated, given away. But one the problems we identified was that in that moment, we gave away homes, but the people did not live in the homes—they would sell them. So, they showed no interest in the home because it had been given to them. They believed that it was nothing. ... Many people that had a little more money would buy the house from the people for the precio de un Guatemalan (laughs) [Note: ‘el precio de un Guatemalan’, or ‘price of a wet Guatemalan’ is a Nicaraguan colloquial term meaning ‘cheap’ or ‘inexpensive’].

Carlos continued later in our conversation:

As a beneficiary of a program, you have an obligation to be productive. Once you produce, you have to buy your clothing. It is a way to get the people involved. There was a common condition before that the people waited for you to give things to them, nothing more—‘give me, give me, give me a little gift’ but they did not want to work. So, we as an organization, like many organizations, have reoriented with a new focus on not giving things away and placing conditions that require people to work in some way.

While some informants like Julia and Carlos demonstrated a deep-seated commitment to neoliberal modes of reconstruction as a path to regional prosperity, I also encountered a strong sense of ambivalence among many informants towards the overarching transnational political-economic structure of reconstruction. These informants seem to reinforce the uncertain view that the Jinotega region and its residents historically have had in their intersections with power directed from above. In practice, these concerns seem to manifest as reconstruction sector organizations struggle to balance transnational donor pressures for capitalist reform with place-based political and social needs illustrates the contingent nature of the formation of neo-liberal practices. Founded in 1998, The Education and Communication Association ‘La Cuculmeca’ operates in the Jinotega department to promote citizen participation, good governance, gender equity, and sustainable agriculture programs to impoverished rural communities. One La
Cuculmeca senior director, José, reflected on the balanced path that his organization has navigated in the past thirteen years:

International donors come here with beautiful visions for what they want to accomplish. The problem is that the plans often do not work as planned. They do not take into account our history, the particular context here in Jinotega. Cuculmeca has rejected many international plans because they do not meet the needs for citizen development here in Jinotega. They are learning – the international community is beginning to bring in more local participation to develop programs, for planning, for implementation of projects. ... And it is not just international aid that is getting it wrong. The national government is getting in the way of aid, too. For example, OXFAM has left Nicaragua. They protested to the Foreign Ministry about mistreatment of two OXFAM partners here. What happened next? Local organizations working with OXFAM have been shut out by the Sandinista government, including Cuculmeca.

Finally, FSLN functionaries created the Jinotega Foundation for Sustainable Development (FUNJIDES) in 1996 following the post-war Nicaraguan state retrenchment of employment, spending, and services under both UNO and PLC administrations (i.e., la compañoación). FUNJIDES provides citizen participation capacity-building programs and social infrastructure projects to impoverished urban and rural districts throughout Jinotega. As Anna, one FUNJIDES office director, noted:

There are many people with limited vision who obstruct civil society and international help. Why? Not all international forces agree with what the [FSLN] government is trying to do. But lots of money comes directly to organizations like this one, bigger ones, even smaller ones. So the government, through the Ministry of Governance, is trying to pass an NGO law where every little thing would have to be declared – and that is fine. We agree completely that the source of our funds should be transparent, because there are many institutions that take advantage of what they do to enrich certain people – but there should not be restrictions on our work. For example, right now [the government is] telling us ‘if you get involved in executing programs about citizen participation, we will close your organization.’ Or send INSS. That young man [motioning to a young man seated at a nearby desk. Her voice notably drops in volume] is from INSS. He is reviewing if we have everything in order, that we have declared all our workers, they are all covered. It is fine that they do so, but they are doing it with a lot of pressure, as if to say ‘if you complain, we are going to bring La Renta, the INSS, the Ministry of Labor – that is not correct.
These portraits of reconstruction sector actors in Jinotega demonstrate well the connections between the regional political-economic history and liberal traditions that inform contemporary reconstruction processes. First, the transnational reconstruction networks that grant such a prominent position to reconstruction sector organizations in Jinotega certainly have helped to promote neoliberal modes of political-economic reform and subject formation. The transnational connections that support reconstruction sector programs have successfully bound the population into a neoliberal mode of regulation. This reconstruction sector dominance may be embedded within a broader neoliberal logic that guides the international donor community, reconstruction sector, political forces, and the general population towards adopting/accepting a market-centered calculus for allocating post-conflict development assistance to those entrepreneurial-minded actors most capable of benefiting from such support (Bebbington 2004).

Second, the reconstruction sector effort to promote neoliberal political-economic reform has been met with a generally receptive population whose willingness to adopt the conditions and practices introduced by this reconstruction sector reflects deeper cultural traditions of self-empowerment and market-oriented praxis that carry into the post-war period. This historic pattern comes through within the reconstruction sector, which has readily accepted the social responsibilities to provide governance, social well-being and development assistance to the general population in the relative absence of a robust state (Painter 2006).

While the political-economic conditions for reconstruction seem to enjoy a broad consensus among the Jinotega population, the fact remains that most political institutions and practices continue to be deeply divided by the persistent class-based and identity-based allegiances among FSLN, Liberal, and other political actors. Moreover, these divisions have intruded into the political space occupied by the reconstruction sector, as the FUNJIDES and La
Cuculmeca examples demonstrate. These entrenched political tensions reinforce the overwhelming influence of neoliberal transnational organizations over the social and economic character of Jinotega. The contingent form of neoliberal capitalist democracy that has developed in Jinotega is a product of these tensions between transnational, Nicaraguan, and place-based governance forces within the reconstruction sector, political society, and civil society. The next section discusses these legacies of war and their role in forming the current political landscape.

5.3 GHOSTS OF WAR: POLITICAL RELATIONS IN JINOTEGA

Twenty years into reconstruction, the ‘ghosts of war and revolution’ still haunt Jinotega and the northern regions.\textsuperscript{12} As I recounted in chapter one, the history of Nicaragua for over a century has been the struggle to define and construct a hegemonic sense of statehood and nationhood (Whisnant 2005). Close (1999) limits his view to the post-1990 reconstruction period that equally has failed to produce a hegemonic national project that can overcome the entrenched political divisions that fueled the Contra war. From an historical perspective, the complex Nicaraguan political climate, from the FSLN-PLC power-sharing agreement known as the ‘dirty pact’ to the widespread and credible allegations of FSLN election fraud in the November 2008 municipal elections in Jinotega and thirty-nine other Nicaraguan cities, is merely the latest in a long political tradition of political brinksmanship and relative dysfunction (Envío 2008; Ética y Transparencia 2009). The prolonged historical tensions among elites and the masses, Liberals and radicals have continued into the post-conflict milieu in Jinotega. Partisan political, economic, and social institutions, governance patterns that exclude political

\textsuperscript{12} A Rainforest Alliance official I met informally in Managua offered the phrase ‘the ghosts of war and revolution’ (las fantasmas de la guerra y de la revolución) as she described the political tensions that persist in northern Nicaragua, including Jinotega.
opponents, and concerns over official disregard for the rule of law have shaped a Jinotega population who waits with growing concern for the future after two decades of peace.

When I returned to Jinotega in July 2009 – nearly a year after the fraudulent FSLN election victory – signs of political unrest appeared throughout the landscape. FSLN propaganda decorated the municipal hall, from the red and black FSLN flag displayed above the doors to propaganda posters celebrating President Daniel Ortega, revolutionary icon Augusto Sandino, and the latest FSLN programs for the poor. Recently repainted murals of armed FSLN militants in the northern coffee farms competed with graffiti-covered walls defaming the FSLN and Ortega, as well as announcing the resurgence of the Partido Resistencia Nicaragüense (Nicaraguan Resistance Party) among disgruntled Jinotega residents (Figure 5.1).

These political / politicized landscapes connect 100 years of contentious political history in the Jinotega region. For over a century, Jinotega and the mountains of northern Nicaragua have witnessed the worst of conflict and warfare as U.S. marines, Liberal and Conservative forces, Augusto Sandino’s men, FSLN revolutionaries and Contra resistance fighters have

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**Figure 5.1.** Anti-FSLN graffiti on a residential wall in northern Jinotega. Text reads ‘Leonidas corrupt thief. FSLN corrupt thief’ (photo by author)
passed throughout the region (Figure 5.2). In the 1980s, the liberal peasant coffee producers from Jinotega and neighboring rural departments filled the Contra ranks (Paige 1997). Displaced peasant farmers and rural proletariat who fled the countryside violence by warring FSLN troops and Contra resistance units often took refuge in Jinotega and other population centers to escape the conflict. These historic patterns of destruction, death, and dislocation have shaped the political tensions that persisted into the post-conflict period.

![Graffiti](image)

**Figure 5.2.** Recently repainted graffiti for the Nicaraguan Resistance Party, the political force formed in 1993 by former Contra members (photo by author)

In part, the persistent political tensions in the region reflect a more fundamental ideological discord over the meaning and role of the state at both the national and municipal scale. Saldaña-Portila (2003a) argued (see chapter one) that a fundamental disconnect existed in the 1980s between the FSLN radical development vision of the state and a grassroots peasant producer vision of the state rooted in liberalism. The informant conversations I held in Jinotega suggest that the situation is more complicated. Political tensions certainly do continue between Liberal and FSLN militants, suggesting that the alternate visions of the state and society still
have not been bridged. However, the historical traditions of a distant central state, politicized state institutions, and the directly experienced horrors of the Contra conflict seems to have produced for many informants a profound weariness in the political process and a lack of faith in state institutions as a neutral and legitimate political space democratic engagement (Walter 1993).

This cultural reading of the state seems to echo among many of the informants I met in the region. The consistent themes that the informants expressed, of skepticism towards the state and a general fatigue with the political tensions, conflicts, and political process, support the general sense that the direct effects of war on the Jinotega region had a role in moderating political tensions between Liberal and FSLN rank-and-file.

This sense of weariness became apparent in my conversations with political elites, former military and Contra soldiers, and party faithful. Humberto, a member of the Jinotega FSLN delegation, reflected the common political divisions I encountered among political elites:

Here [Jinotega] the war has converted to a war between the rich and the poor. It is an ideological struggle between the rich and the poor. The wealthy want to exterminate the poor. And logically the poor are defending themselves so that they are not exterminated. That is what has happened in the past 16 years. And still – remember that [the FSLN] is now in the government – we do not have the majority in the National Assembly and logically they do not vote for any project designed for the poor. So it is still a war against the rich. The only thing we want is that the rich distribute fairly what they earn and not exploit the poor. That is the only struggle that we have.

Humberto and the FSLN delegation pored over consent forms and thoroughly interrogated my research purpose before agreeing to talk to me. In contrast, Former Contra commander (El Enano), head of the local Contra veterans’ association, and recent PLC mayoral candidate Germán Zeledón greeted me at his door. Zeledón welcomed me into his modest home to drink

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13 I quote Germán Zeledón using his actual name (with his stated permission) in a break from the pseudonym conventions adopted throughout the study. Zeledon’s views on the current
coffee and reflect over personal stories of Contra life, a shoebox of grainy, historic photos, and a faded 1984 *Time* magazine clip of him on the Northern Front. Zeledón a man shaped by his past, warned of deteriorating political conditions in Jinotega:

My father – on May 20, 1979, when the Sandinista war came to Jinotega, I was 12 years old. Tragically, at 7:30 in the morning, the Sandinistas came to my house and killed my father. We have suffered since I was very little. I had to find room behind the wall of my house. Two bullets – one in his chest, one in his back. We buried him in the yard. ...

After the [November 2008 municipal] elections, everyone is susceptible, they are – they are a time bomb. The people who were in the war, and moreover the fraud, moreover the governing style of the FSLN, the bad economy – the people are fed up. What I am saying is that the places where there was war are now a time bomb. The totalitarian tendencies of the government, the bad politics, the insecurity – with all those conditions, the people just need a push. They are susceptible in any given moment. What we have to do as political leaders is to maintain a better social order. Because if I had gone in the middle of the elections and had acted violently, we would have had war in Jinotega. That fervor is distinct. Jinotega is burning with anger over the election fraud. ... The calm situation is not what it appears to be - it is a volcano.

Zeledón, who announced in January 2011 that he intended to run for a seat in the National Assembly, has been careful to denounce violence and express hope for reason to prevail against the more aggressive mood allegedly forming among the Jinotega Liberal community (González 2011). Despite such protestations, Zeledón recently stated in the Costa Rica-based *Tico Times* newspaper that Nicaraguan “[p]olitics has failed. If there is no rule of law, there comes a time when the only way to express yourself is through other forms. ... There is a group that is organizing in Jinotega called the FDN [Nicaraguan Democratic Force], which was the original part of the Contra. The FDN are the true Contras” (Rogers 2009).

In large measure, the deep political divisions among political elites like Humberto and Germán have not been adopted among the general population. For many and perhaps most of my informants, three decades of warfare and post-conflict reconstruction have moderated class-
based political divisions and replaced hostility with a contradictory mix of hope and
disempowerment in the face of entrenched political divisions, economic stagnation, and eroded
civil institutions. Former Sandinista Popular Army and Contra paramilitary soldiers frequently
expressed a shared ‘post-partisan’ vision for capitalist democracy in Nicaragua. One such case
was Eduardo, an Association of Ex-Military Combatants representative:

The history of Jinotega practically has been a conservative city. Very conservative
in its customs, you understand? But, the [political] thought of the majority of
\textit{Jinotegano}s is Liberal. ... So it seems to me that Jinotega transitioned positively
towards democracy. I believe that the most important thing is that Jinotega, being a
theater of war, after the war they put it behind and assimilated. Today there is a tendency
in the countryside to have less conflict, confrontations. There, Sandinistas and Contras
come together in the countryside. There have been marriages between them. ... That
episode of the war, I believe that more than anything it has been left as a history to be
told. Despite the fact that it lasted several years. Despite the fact that lots of blood ran.
Despite that there were dead on both sides. ... The most important thing now is how to
educate the new generation, so that the new generation does not think about war and
resolving conflicts through arms. .... That is the challenge.

The history of war and reconstruction has taken a toll on many former soldiers, dissident political
activists and even current political leaders in Jinotega. As former Contra soldier Paulo ironically
stated over coffee in a small Jinotega cafe, ‘the war was better.’ For Paulo, as with many
Jinotega residents, reconstruction has brought political and economic stagnation, and frustration
with the pace of change after three decades of conflict and peace. Former Sandinista military
officer Luis expressed the despair generated through the reconstruction years:

For me, I thought I \textit{was} a Sandinista. I was like a machine. They always told us
‘Sandinismo – good, good, good’ and I believed it. And whatever the revolution asked
for, we were right there. ... when they called for military service, I went voluntarily to a
base to fight against those who disagreed with the government. ... I was a Sandinista who
would have died for the revolution. For me, it was natural. ... I came to a point where –
\textit{hombre}, it is not too heroic – but I realized that the government had no sense. The war, so
many deaths, conflicts, even school friends one on this side, one on the other. Brothers. ...
We practically kidnapped women who supported the Contras. We kidnapped them to
interrogate them. And at the end of the day what happened? Nothing. A national vision
... It does not exist here. Only politics of self-interest exists here. \textit{Yo-ismo} (self-
interest). Power makes people sick. All power sickens. In the 1980s I heard Daniel
Ortega speak, it made me all ‘gaga’, you could say (me puse chocho). He had a good National Plan. But it went on changing, changing, changing. When Don Enrique Bolaños was president [2001-2006], for me he was a good man. He fought against corruption. He had a vision. But, who was in the opposition? Daniel Ortega.

I received a similar story from Gustavo, a former Contra soldier on the northern front. After the war, Gustavo returned to the fog-shrouded slopes north of Jinotega municipality, earning a meager living as a seasonal coffee farm laborer, where he lived in temporary quarters provided by the coffee farm during the brief coffee bean-picking season. Gustavo was proud of his paramilitary service, raising his shirt to point out the three bullet hole scars that marred his middle-aged chest:

All of the world, both military and those who demobilized, offered their hand and they are friends. We have gone on living, them and us. We have moved forward because in reality it was a war that ended without a solution. More, there is a sense that we were blind, fools.

Senior FSLN municipal government official Antonio best reflected the political contradictions that define post-conflict reconstruction in Jinotega. Antonio invited me to his dusty bookshelf-lined living room where, under the watchful, framed portrait of Augusto César Sandino on the wall opposite, he reflected on the revolution, the war, and the tumultuous reconstruction period:

‘The 1990s period up to now has been a time of poverty, but I have endured it because I don’t know what is more expensive. Being free – feeling oneself free – has a price. You cannot be hungry. But if you have that notion that you are free, you feel better, I would say. The problem is that our leaders attack us. Someone with the best job, the best salary still does not feel good, he does not feel happy. That’s the thing – freedom is expensive, it has a price. And feeling free is very important. The people do not feel free. They feel threatened.’

The political forces that dominate the post-conflict reconstruction experience, with all their contradictions, have contributed to the reconstruction of a capitalist political economy oriented foremost towards the transnational governance realized through the reconstruction sector. The political tensions have undermined the role of the local state within the
reconstruction process. Where people feel the state to be politically biased and unreliable, the reconstruction sector has been the sole recourse for meeting the social needs of the community.

5.4 NEOLIBERAL GOVERNANCE AND RESISTANCE IN JINOTEGA

The decline of FSLN-based mass organizations in Jinotega, like everywhere in Nicaragua, opened a politically independent institutional space for citizen participation and civil society development. At a national level, the Law on Citizen Participation (Law No. 475-03) established in 2003 a formal institutional structure for citizen participation in municipal and departmental governance. The creation of Departmental Development Councils and Municipal Development Committees provided a financially and legally supported political space for civil society organizations collectively to consult and advise municipal government on the interests and needs of the municipal and departmental communities. The legislative foundations provided by these laws established an institutional framework through which we can examine the ongoing interaction between reconstruction sector institutions and entrenched partisan political divisions. The outcome has established the place-based conditions for citizen participation and civil society development that have evolved through, and continue to define, the reconstruction period.

14 The Law on Citizen Participation (Law No. 475-03) created extensive political space for citizen participation at the national, departmental and municipal levels, including the Departmental Development Councils and Municipal Development Committees (i.e., art. 50, art. 97). These institutions were designed to consult and advise both the mayors and municipal councils “in the management and planning of social and economic development in their respective territory” (art. 50). Under the Law, the consultative committees are to be non-partisan, open to all NGO, civil society organizations, and interest groups, and have legal standing as the state-financed, politically independent institution for citizen consultation with municipal government.
In *After Revolution: Mapping Gender and Cultural Politics in Neoliberal Nicaragua* (2001), anthropologist Florence Babb examined citizen participation in Managua in the early 1990s and found that the FSLN defeat had generated a wave of citizen participation among militants left in the cold when the FSLN mass organizations went into decline. My field research in Jinotega suggests that there is a notable difference between the robust patterns of citizen participation and civil society mobilization in larger Nicaraguan cities like Managua and León compared to the far more limited, NGO-dominated forms of citizen participation that I encountered in Jinotega (see Babb 2001). While the differences undoubtedly rest in part on the limited nature of small-town civic participation, the historical political-economic structure that has guided Jinotega for the past century seems to offer additional explanation of the limited participation and elite-driven nature of civil society organization in Jinotega. Foremost, we can draw from Bebbington and Kotahri (2006) and Guilhot (2005) to recognize the appropriation of civil society in the last two decades by the transnational networks of professional organizations, international donors, development organizations, and reconstruction professionals that operate in the political space commonly set aside for civil society. This combination of institutions has become the dominant ‘civil society’ actors involved in contemporary political and economic development (cf. Guilhot 2005). Second, the lack of robust mass participation in civil society organizations or grassroots social movements (with notable exceptions discussed below) is perhaps an historical result of the historical orientation of everyday life towards rural production under conditions of small-scale coffee and agricultural production that precludes the time, interest, or utility of ‘getting involved’ at the local level.

Post-conflict reconstruction in Jinotega has followed this pattern via the lead role that reconstruction sector NGOs and other organizations have adopted among the key governance
institutions established during the post-conflict reconstruction period. For example, the Municipal Development Council (CDM) in Jinotega has included members *La Cuculmeca*, the José Nieborowski Foundation, the Council of Protestant Churches of Nicaragua (CEPAD), and AVODEC as key actors alongside civil society organizations like *Movimiento Comunal Nicaragüense*, the Association of Jinotega Municipalities (AMUJIN), and private sector interest groups like the *SOPPEXXCA* coffee cooperative federation and the National Agricultural and Ranchers Union.\(^1^5\)

The reconstruction sector governance role within civil society spaces like the CDD and CDM institutions is not inherently problematic, to be clear. These organizations bring substantial organizational skills and financial resources to bear on the complex problems of citizen participation, regional, and local planning addressed by the CDD and CDM. Rather, the transnational connections that bind reconstruction sector NGOs and development organizations to the international donor community have become political fodder for the divisive political forces that intrude into civil institutions and efforts to promote political participation among the general population. As José Nieborowski Foundation representative Miguel noted (in apparent self-criticism):

> Perhaps, in quotes, we can say that there is a Nicaraguan government interested in developing a neutral civil society – that’s why I say ‘in quotes’ – Well, if the resources come from the North Americans, then they create a structure to serve their interests. If the resources come from Europe, then they create a structure that serves their political interests. And if the resources come from the Left, then they also create a structure for civil society organization that responds to their political needs.

The political divisions that dominate the post-conflict reconstruction process in Jinotega have produced a political ‘barrier’ that penetrates throughout civil society in Jinotega to produce a

\(^{15}\) The important role of producer and technical-services cooperatives among coffee and agricultural producers in Jinotega since the late 1990s is a key feature of post-conflict reconstruction that will be addressed fully in chapter six.
highly politicized political space for reconstruction. In 2007, the national FSLN administration established the Councils for Citizen Participation (CPC) as an institutional alternative to the governance structure created under the Law on Citizen Participation. For CPC supporters, this alternate space for citizen participation offers a neighborhood-based remedy to the elite-dominated NGO and organized civil society interests more commonly represented in the CDD and CDM (Cuadra and Ruiz 2008; McKinley Jr. 2008). To political critics, the CPC councils offer a direct institutional connection between the FLSN-dominated Nicaraguan state and community-based FSLN partisans designed to circumvent the neoliberal reconstruction model and the democratic space for civil society governance enacted through the Law on Citizen Participation. The contentious relationship between CDD/CDM and CPC participants in Jinotega has fractured citizen participation in recent years into competing sets of political actors struggling to become the dominant civil society institution involved in municipal governance. A FSLN political party member explained:

The problem with the Municipal Development Committees is that they are elitist. They invite ‘you, you, you and you’ and they stop there. The masses, the people who really need development do not have access. They are made up of the elite levels. ‘That guy, that guy, that guy’, no? They are representatives of organizations, representatives of the mayor’s office – do you see what I mean? They are representatives, but they are not the people – [the people] were too far down, they did not exist. The CDM was hegemonic, there was no democracy. There was not true citizen participation. ... Representative democracy is not the best model. I can represent you, but ‘why are you representing me? Why can’t I represent myself?’ Participatory democracy [is a better system] because I participate in making decisions saying ‘look, friend, I want you to build a bridge.’ That is what the gabinetes [CPC] do.

The complex connection between reconstruction sector dominance and entrenched political divisions has eroded a coherent political space for citizen participation that can be perceived as non-partisan and open to all members of the community. From mutual recriminations between CDD/CDM and CPC supporters, a broader pattern has emerged where
political opponents refuse to cooperate, consult, or provide the (legally required) institutional and financial support to implement the reconstruction vision of providing a political space for heterogeneous citizen participation in the governance process. Vladimiro, a senior CDM spokesperson, frequently recounted the mounting political tensions in the city, as during one 2009 visit:

I can tell you that the relationship between political institutions and civil society organizations is very precarious. Precarious in the sense that organized civil society, whose only objective is coming together and working for municipal development, is being truncated right now by the [FSLN] government. The current government is proclaiming the creation within the government structure of what they call the Councils of Citizen Power. For the government, there is no other organization exists aside from that. The whole world knows that they are organizations of the state and the party [the FSLN]. ... The political system of the 1980s appears to be repeating itself. Everything is polarized and politicized by both parties. ... International cooperation is now afraid, to put it that way, to continue supporting a government that does not meet its requirements, that is not walking hand-in-hand with democracy. So, organized civil society continues struggling so that donor organizations still have confidence like before in Nicaragua.

Since my last research trip to Jinotega, the political tensions have intensified the divisions that undermine citizen participation through an organized civil society. In late 2009, the FSLN-controlled municipal government de-financed the CDD and CDM, effectively (and illegally, per Law 475-03) debilitating both institutions. In 2010, the FSLN municipal council orchestrated a partisan 6-5 vote to exclude the Municipal Development Committee from the consultation process in favor of the Jinotega CPC (Rivera Méndez 2010). By 2011, and as an example of the place-specific consequences of such politics, CDM official Vladimiro had left Nicaragua and his family to find alternate work in Costa Rica, citing a mix of political intimidation and financial destitution following the political attacks on the CDM in Jinotega.16

This deeply political status of civil society and citizen participation has reinforced the transnational governance power over the direction of post-conflict reconstruction in Jinotega.

16 Personal communication with author, February 22, 2011.
The place-based reconstruction sector organizations increasingly have been left without organized civil society interlocutors capable of forging a coherent position within the post-conflict capitalist political economy. The result has been a sense of civil disempowerment and fatalism towards capitalism, democracy, and the reconstruction process. FUNJIDES official Anna aptly noted that “people are reticent to get involved because they do not feel that anyone is listening. ... Organizations and groups are more involved in making demands. But for individuals, for the general population, there is not much participation, because the perception is that their protests do not have any effect.” The remaining civil society organizations generally are small interest groups or regional affiliates of Nicaraguan political networks who look to the reconstruction sector, given their own organizational lack of resources to mobilize the general population effectively (Serra Vázquez 2010). As Movimiento Comunal Nicaragüense representative Rafael noted during our conversation in an abandoned conference room of the CDM headquarters, “What was all the effort for? What did you fight for? ... We have arrived at a moment of great discouragement (desanimo).”

Recent scholarship involving scholars at the Nicaraguan Network for Democracy and Local Development supports the argument that leading municipal governance institutions have become politicized in ways that undermine citizen participation (Howard and Serra Vasquez 2011; Serra Vázquez 2010). The research suggests that the both the Liberal CDD/CDM institutional structure and the FSLN CPC institutional structure are imperfect institutions that fail to adequately represent popular interests beyond the leadership of member NGOs, social movements, and neighborhood committees. Moreover, the FSLN Nicaraguan government has been criticized for repeated cases where municipal CPC organizations have limited citizens’ access to national community development programs (e.g., Hambre Cero, Usura Cero) and
citizen rights (e.g. voter registration cards, commercial licenses) in favor of FSLN party members (Serra Vázquez 2010). Equally, I encountered these concerns throughout my interviews, such as one meeting with former FSLN military veteran Roberto:

There is no more revolutionary consensus. And if I say that to our leaders, I am an enemy of the government. ... [the CPC] have looked for me. Given my job, they all know me and they are looking out for who is talking badly about the revolution and - they interfere with you. They tell me they are going to impose a tax because I sell this or that. Maybe we say we are going to solicit a health permit or something – they are going to get in your way to pressure you. When the elections come, they already know how to find you. You have to be very careful. There is no freedom of expression.

These post-conflict reconstruction stories spotlight the central feature of the reconstruction experience in Jinotega. The transnational dominance over post-conflict reconstruction has both superseded and reinforced political divisions that undermine governance institutions and the ability to forge an endogenous, homegrown vision for post-conflict reconstruction from below. The persistent political battles among FSLN and Liberal militants that have so dramatically defined the reconstruction process in Jinotega within the overarching post-war shadow of neoliberal regulation contain tragic ironies not lost on more reflective Jinoteğanos I encountered. Senior FSLN municipal government official Antonio poignantly concluded as I prepared to depart his house into a rain-soaked Jinotega evening:

Democracy is who knows where? ... Arnoldo Alemán made a big impression with his government. There were many schools and many roads. The people in the countryside remember that. They wanted a new Arnoldo Alemán in power. On the other side are the Daniel Ortega supporters. But if you look in a community, [both groups] have the same conditions. That is incredible. Over there is a PLC banner on a house that has no electricity and is made of plastic. And next door is a Sandinista flag on a house with the same conditions. They are neighbors.

5.5 BUILDING NEOLIBERAL STRUCTURE IN BOACO

The week following the November 2008 municipal elections in Boaco has become the stuff of legend. Boaqueño Liberal Constitutionalist Party (PLC) supporters tell stories of mass
demonstrations, crowds allegedly brandishing machetes, streets clogged outside polling stations, the Supreme Electoral Council regional offices, and the Municipal Hall to forecast election fraud and defend the PLC election victory for mayoral candidate Dr. Hugo Barquero. As one local Catholic priest recounted to me ten months later, “I have never seen anything like it in Boaco.”

My prior visit had suggested Boaco to be a rather bucolic, reserved place. A gentle commotion of small stores, microfinance banks, NGOs, pharmacies, Internet cafes, pulperías, a labyrinthine central market, a tree-filled central square crossed by office professionals, informal sector produce vendors, and dusty cattle ranchers by day, Boaco went to bed with the sun on most evenings. Fresh from Jinotega where the 2008 election fraud had been met with only a whimper of rocks and protests, I began to wonder what this unprecedented outburst told about the broader conditions of post-conflict reconstruction in Boaco. The answer rests in the place-based political-economic history of Conservative (and later Liberal) cattle production that has dominated the region for over a century. While the Conservative party is largely defunct, we still may recognize a pervasive small-C conservatism in operation in Boaco that draws upon historic tropes of rural oligarchic privilege, patriarchal/clientelistic social relations between wealthy elite landowners and a large rural proletariat, and a cultural tradition in which the urban and rural elite have a strong historical memory of long being at the top of the political and economic pyramid. This hierarchical political-economic and cultural structure is manifest in the everyday spaces of reconstruction, elite political dominance, and precluded modes of resistance.

17 One leading Nicaraguan daily newspaper regional correspondent assured me that ‘that were no machetes.’ True or not, the consistent narrative I encountered in Boaco speaks to the bravado that consumes PLC political supporters in Boaco. The violent confrontations in 2008 were a scene that would be repeated in June 2010 under alternate circumstances (reported in the following pages).
The broad contours of post-conflict political economy in Boaco closely mirror the neoliberal orientation witnessed in Jinotega and throughout Nicaragua. The penetration of transnational governance has positioned a dominant reconstruction sector to have powerful control over the production of a capitalist mode of regulation. The general Nicaraguan pattern of FSLN-Liberal political tensions runs deep in Boaco, dividing societal institutions, political elites, and the general population. Moreover, the limited civil society and citizen participation in Boaco struggles with partisan fragmentation and tense relations with political forces on the ground.

However, post-conflict reconstruction in Boaco has developed through a closer relationship between the transnational reconstruction sector and the place-based Liberal political forces than exists in Jinotega. The deep-seated conservative political tradition in Boaco has carried through both the Contra war and the reconstruction period to reinforce the dominant neoliberal patterns of institutional reform and governance in Boaco. This close relationship has helped override alternative reconstruction visions from the Left, deepening the entrenched political antagonisms between FSLN and Liberal militants among both elites and large portions of the general population. The convergence of transnational forces and political tensions has left a very limited, albeit functioning, political space for civil society and citizen participation in municipal governance. At the same time, the deepening Nicaraguan political tensions in recent years are eroding this political space in ways that are redirecting the reconstruction experience in Boaco more closely towards the political-economic pattern of transnational governance, fractured politics, and a disempowered civil society already seen in Jinotega.

Foremost, four reconstruction sector organizations dominate the post-war capitalist political economy in Boaco: The Boaco-headquartered José Nieborowski Foundation, the Spanish development NGO Ayuda en Acción (Help in Action, AEA), the Boaco-based
Association for Integrated Community Promotion and Development (ASPRODIC), and the Boaco-based Association for Municipal Development all established operations in 1993-1994 (ADM formed in 2003). In conjunction these organizations promote a wide-ranging program of microfinance lending, economic development, civil society promotion, and good governance. While Maria Luisa, a non-finance programs officer at the national Fundación José Nieborowski headquarters (in Boaco) may be self-serving in her view that “the internationally funded NGOs are the only non-partisan organizations that have advanced democratization and democratic practices in Boaco”, these powerful NGO and microfinance actors have achieved nearly hegemonic influence to set the ‘best practice’ conditions for how to advance political, economic, and social development during the reconstruction period.

The complexity of the Boaco reconstruction sector makes general assertions problematic. Notably, the four dominant organizations, by all accounts, have worked closely with both FSLN and PLC Boaco municipal governments, consultative institutions like the Departmental Development Council (CODEBO) and the Municipal Development Committee (CDM), and other municipal leaders to construct a shared political program for reconstructing Boaco society. I observed this cooperation first-hand during a participatory budgeting forum I attended at the invitation of the City Manager. During this two-hour forum, the major reconstruction organizations joined a host of municipal officials, political party representatives, and civil society actors to discuss the annual municipal budget allocation process, assessing priorities and possibilities for cooperation, and coordinating a radio campaign and on-site visit schedule to hold budget consultations in smaller communities of the Boaco municipality.

However, transnational connections give the dominant reconstruction sector organizations unparalleled influence over the political, economic, and social programs and
practices initiated by this broader governance community operating in Boaco. The financial and material contributions that these organizations provide (e.g., the iconic blue-and-yellow José Nieborowski Foundation colors are visible throughout Boaco) grant the reconstruction sector organizations a privileged position to advance their particular ideological perspectives for reconstructing Boaco society.

The José Nieborowski Foundation provides a key example. For the Foundation, its hybrid role as microfinance institution and non-financial development NGO has been guided by a neoliberal logic of market-based development assistance and commercial viability as the principal metric for the allocation of its financial and material resources to beneficiaries. The Foundation consistently has received transnational donor support as they maintain a patriarchal control over reconstruction programs administered on behalf of the Boaco population. Non-Financial Programs Officer Maria Luisa readily produced for me notebooks of annual accounting reports and program details to highlight the Foundation commitment to international ‘best practice’ financial reporting standards, noting:

In the beginning, the people needed everything and every project was welcomed, as they say – (la gente necesitaba de todo y todo proyecto ¡que gaba!). Also, many projects brought money to the people. So the more a project brought money to the people, the more they welcomed it. But later we decided that those kinds of projects were not sustainable – projects that paid out money, welfare, nothing more – so we began to devalue that strategy and shifted to look for new programs through consultations with regional leaders asking what projects were needed and looking at the plans that the [Departmental Development Council] developed for the entire department and municipalities, identifying common needs, specific needs for the regions. ... The Foundation always tries to respond to concrete problems. We do not want to invent what we want. We try to talk with the people, although it is at times difficult to meet other peoples’ schedules, their perspectives when suddenly they say ‘no’ to what we want.

In a similar vein, the Association for Municipal Development has pursued an independent strategy for its civil society and citizen participation capacity-building programs in urban and rural Boaco districts. As ADM representative Julia noted of her organization:
We are not representatives of anyone. We are not the voice, nor the throat of the people, and we do not pretend to be that. It would be disrespectful to represent ourselves that way to the people if that is not ADM’s role. Our role is to provide the capacity for the people to manage and take care of things themselves. ... The other NGOs or institutions see us [as not in touch with the people] because we are not an organization that gives things out. We do not give anyone gifts. We do not like the idea of handouts [asistencialismo], nor are we an institution that gives credit to people. We want to be friends with the people. ... The world knows what our philosophy is. We do not give a man a fish, we teach a man to fish.”

The predominant narratives among these reconstruction sector informants reflect the deep-seated conservative, hierarchical regime of subjection that has dominated Boaco historically. It is a regime that constructs conservative, liberal, and now ‘neo-liberal’ political subjects who are committed to the core idea that people are responsible for their own success. In contrast, I observed in Boaco a broad-based and at times quite robust hostility to alternate forms of cooperation and assistance perceived as being aligned with the ideological left. Informants were very quick to condemn different organization as being ‘Sandinista’ because of particular social policies or issue advocacy in which the organization may be involved (even when follow-up questions to the accused organizations usually revealed a robust mixture of FSLN, Liberal, and Conservative political militants).

For example, the dominant transnational governance position over the reconstruction sector has provided only limited political space for reconstruction organizations like ASPRODIC and Ayuda en Acción to develop alternative programs and practices responsive to community-based social development needs. For example, ASPRODIC operates exclusively with non-refundable international donor support (e.g., grants, in-kind repayment options) to promote micro-assistance programs for potable water provision, community health clinics, sustainable agriculture training, and gender-based cooperatives development in mutual consultation with impoverished rural communities. As Dolores, one ASPRODIC director, explained, “We try to not invent another organization. Rather, we work with the existing leadership in the community,
the committees, the people who are leaders in the community, be it teachers, or minister, or a leading producer working at a basic level to organize and support the community.”

The main reconstruction sector organizations, despite different strategies, remain firmly bound into the transnational governance framework that has reoriented the Boaco political economy during the reconstruction period. The general lack of coordination, cooperation, or even mutual understanding that I encountered among the principal reconstruction sector organizations suggests that the transnational connections between international donors and place-based actors are more influential over the course of reconstruction in Boaco than are the horizontal ties between organizations on the ground. Moreover, the concentration of donor support among so few place-based organizations has had a limiting effect on the production of alternative models to the dominant capitalist mode of post-conflict regulation. Simply put, the disciplining power of neoliberal capitalist democracy had become, for most of my interviewees, the only game in town. Dolores (of ASPRODIC) echoed a common refrain in all my interviews about the paramount need for market-based cooperation over political divisions:

We formed with a perspective towards the individual and to form part of this society, that we could be a group that contributes to the social and economic development of the locality. That is what we try to accomplish – to contribute with our knowledge, with our financial support, and to influence the centers of power. [We want] to have relationships with all of the local, national, and international organizations. We have tried to learn to move within this political space, because we no longer work for the state [laughs]. We are an organization, and we have tried – although with the origins of all the people here, they brand us as Sandinistas – but we have tried to work with all governments, all organizations ... the same with the general population, we help in the communities. We work with everyone, whatever politics they have. We have had very good relations with people that were in the Contra, people dismissed from the military, Catholics, evangelicals, we work with the whole world.

The principal hurdle that the reconstruction sector encounters is the widespread perception that the dominant microfinance institutions (e.g., José Nieborowski Foundation) and development NGOs (e.g., ASPRODIC) are politically allied with Liberal and FSLN political
forces, respectively. While sector representatives freely professed personal political preferences, the documented, robust cooperation with both FSLN and Liberal municipal governments suggests that these organizations maintain institutional non-partisanship at odds with public perception. As Ayuda en Acción director Maripaz told me with notable exasperation:

We have nothing to do with politics – not with the Sandinistas, not with the Liberals. In the prior elections, the Sandinistas won the mayor’s race. In the most recent election, a Liberal won. Even so, whether it is a Sandinista or a Liberal, we always support them, independently of who controls the government. We do not have anything to do with politics. Yes, the people say that. Your commentary is correct. But, really no – look at the state institutions. In any state institution, you find the red-and-black flag. Here we do not have any kind of flag. As you can see, the Nicaraguan flag. But no type of political party flag. We do not have anything of the Sandinistas, nothing of the Liberals.

The reconstruction sector position within the post-war political economy in Boaco comes from its transnational connections, but that influence is realized through the principal organizations’ relationship with the state apparatus and political forces operating in Boaco. In large measure, reconstruction sector organizations’ patriarchal control over financial and material resources is reinforced by the concentration of that power among a small number of Boaco-based NGOs (e.g., the José Nieborowski Foundation) who act as ‘gatekeepers’ over the reconstruction process. In this respect, Boaco and Jinotega have similar patterns of reconstruction sector dominance, albeit in Boaco that influence is exercised more readily through cooperation with local political forces.

Despite the close reconstruction sector relationship with Liberal political forces, I encountered resistance to reconstruction sector organizations’ economic and social development programs among parts of the general population. The political left commonly decried NGOs and microfinance lenders for advancing an unrepresentative, neoliberal policy agenda. The political right decried social development programs as unwarranted, Sandinista-leanling ‘non-state’ welfare. This common political rhetoric suggests that these organizations’ collective role in
advancing neoliberal regulation continues to be tempered by the entrenched political divisions that percolate beneath the surface of Boaco society. These political divisions play an important role in shaping the contingent form of post-conflict neoliberal political economy that has developed in Boaco.

5.6 DEMOCRATS, SOCIALISTS, AND MEMORY: POLITICAL RELATIONS IN BOACO

The longstanding conservative traditions that continue to inform Boaco political-economic and social life also help to organize political life and influence the political tensions that sporadically rise to the surface. In chapter one, I detailed the patriarchal social order that dominated the ancien regime of traditional Conservative elites, while suggesting that echoes of that old older persist among the cattle farms and stratified social structure in Boaco. One Catholic priest I met described the dominant Boaco political culture as an historic divide between ‘ranchers and bureaucrats.’ This fundamental socio-spatial identity it what drives Boaco politics during the reconstruction period, when the traditional labels have been superimposed by a more recent construction of ‘democrats and Sandinistas’ as the principal division and fault-line in Boaco society. Quite distinct from my experiences of post-partisan resignation and cooperation among the masses in Jinotega, my informants in Boaco painted a picture of continued political hostility ‘on people’s shirt sleeves’ and a much more evident conservative cultural milieu. From frequent apologists for the authoritarian Somoza regime(s) (1936-1979), to one Boaco Cattlemen’s Association official who described corrupt Nicaraguan President Arnoldo Alemán as “the best
president Nicaragua has ever had”, I encountered deeply held political commitments not tempered by three decades of war and reconstruction.\(^{18}\)

In *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*, Chris Hedges (2002, 38) writes “The myth of war rarely endures for those who experience combat.” For Boaco, post-conflict reconstruction has done little to temper the class-based political divisions that defined the Contra conflict. Unlike neighboring municipalities (e.g., Camoapa, San José de los Remates), Boaco escaped direct combat operations during the war. While returning military and Contra soldiers provided a direct connection to the war, most Boaco residents’ Contra war experience came at a political distance. Both military and Contra forces confiscated livestock and produce during frequent passage through Boaco. Neighborhoods, families, and friendships collapsed as Sandinista Peoples’ Army conscription under the 1983 Law on Patriotic Military Service and the Contra rebellion pulled young men to the northern and southern fronts. Families were shattered by ideology, injury, and death. But war remained at arm’s length for most *Boaqueños*. Raquel, a Boaco office director for the FSLN-affiliated *Luisa Amanda Espinosa Association of Nicaraguan Women*, offered a cogent perspective on this condition:

> Look, like in all of Nicaragua, fissures remained. Wounds remained because people died from one side or another. I am talking about people that were Sandinista or in the army because of the patriotic military service [the 1983-1990 mandatory military service law]. Yes, the people remained resentful … the people here do not understand that there is military service in all countries. Here, the people say ‘they took my son by force’, but in all countries, even in yours, there is military service. … Here, they took boys without experience to the war, because we were in the middle of a war being initiated from military bases in Honduras into Nicaragua. Everyone became jaded because a soldier would be killed in that war and it created resentment that at times has impeded our progress. The fissures remain, the enmities remain, the quarrels remain because someone wants vengeance on another, and they do not understand the truth. Many mothers are like that because their sons were killed and they remained resentful of the

\(^{18}\) Transparency International in 2004 named former President Alemán among the ten most corrupt world leaders after his 2003 conviction for corruption, money laundering, and embezzlement of US$100 million in state funds (Transparency International 2004).
war. … It seems that people forgive, but they do not forget. I think that there is no amnesty from a mother if they took your son for military service and they got him killed. That mother is not going to forget until she dies, right?

The former military and Contra combatants I encountered came closest to matching the more measured political views I encountered among Contra war veterans throughout my prior research in Jinotega. As cattle rancher and coordinator with the Boaco Association of Contra Military Veterans Luis sporadically commented, “there is no good war. War is very hard. … People only resort to war as an alternative when they do not want what is happening here in Nicaragua. … It is not good. … As long as there are free elections, like we have now, there will not be more war.” For Luis and other former Contra veterans I met, however, the hostility towards the thought of renewed war has not translated into political moderation towards the FSLN. As Luis added:

Political sentiments in Boaco are stronger? Yes. I think that the department of Boaco (I am talking about Boaco, Camoapa, Santa Lucia, Teustepe, various municipalities) is a fairly right-wing, Liberal place. Most of the people do not support the Frente Sandinista. I never see [widespread FSLN support]. It has always been that way in Boaco. I see that as a good thing. We lived through the Frente times and we were beat up economically and we could never surrender our [halts sentence] … for example, the mayor’s office when the Frente won it. [Boaqueños] always work so that the Frente does not win. … I think there are lots of people here who had to go to war. So, those people are all against [the Frente].

Indeed, post-conflict reconstruction in Boaco has become conflated with a dominant political narrative that depicts reconstruction as a battle between democracy and authoritarian FLSN rule. The frequent self-description among Liberal militants as ‘democrats’ (demócratas) leaves scarce middle ground for political compromise with rival Sandinista militants, as both PLC and FSLN forces struggle to control political and civil institutions in Boaco. The depth of the political antagonisms that have gripped many Boaqueños became clear during one three-hour meeting with the elderly Abelardo and Esperanza, an elite Boaco married couple. From the
breeze-filled comforts of their dimly lit living room, Esperanza leaned forward, jabbed her thumb towards my chest, and declared, “I am not a Liberal. I am a democrat!” The couple wove a political narrative that positioned Boaco residents as the conservative defenders of democracy against the FSLN, the revolution, and the resurgent political left. The persistent and deep political hatred of the FSLN came through in their emotional depictions of 1980s revolutionary deprivations – the food rationing cards that gave you rotten beans and moldy rice, state security harassment in the streets – and their views on the reconstruction period.

[When the war ended], there was a tremendous optimism. Nevertheless, with the Liberal leaders [in the immediate post-war period] I felt like that had thrown a bucket of water on me on one occasion. They told me ‘he who wins, does not win everything; and he who loses, does not lose everything’. That is, give some political space to the Sandinistas so that they remain calm. They wanted to impose their political [compromise]. However, at least here in the region that we called Boaco – Chontales, the people and the local authorities rejected it tremendously – No, No and No! Democracy and the democratic process won here and we do not want any Sandinistas! The Sandinistas began to rise up and even killed people during the first five years. In response, there was a movement by the people and the mayors that we called Salvemos Democracia! [We Will Save Democracy!].

The overwhelmingly conservative political-economic history and the contemporary near-hegemonic control that the conservative narratives about Boaco hold among much of the population have left relatively little political space for the articulation of an alternative, FSLN-centered political narrative about life in Boaco. Nevertheless, FSLN militants have attempted within the highly circumscribed space available to them to counter the dominant conservative and Liberal discourse that attempts to erase the FSLN and the poor underclass from the collective Boaco consciousness. The FSLN political headquarters, prominent FSLN-affiliated mass organizations like AMNLAE and the National Union of Farmers and Ranchers (UNAG), and the FSLN representation on the municipal council have provided limited space for the FSLN to break into Boaco political life. However, the loss of state support since 1990 and the liberal Boaco mistrust of such leftist organizations have debilitated most of these organizations in
Boaco. The FSLN militant and Boaco librarian Rosario reflected the common sense of anger, despair, and defiance that I encountered among FSLN political forces in Boaco. Rosario was quick to forcefully count FSLN achievements in Boaco, from water treatment plants, paved streets, free education, free health care, rural electrification, and the library, before tearing into Liberal political militants in the region:

There was no war [in Boaco] – we did not suffer the consequences. Even when the Frente entered Boaco on July 17 [1979] they just came in and there was no combat. Perhaps there was a skirmish or some small confrontation, but near Camoapa, those places. But there was no war [here]. The majority of the people are ranchers. The ranchers have gone to their employees and they tell them, ‘if you vote in support of a party contrary to mine, you will be cut off. I am going to leave you without work and with no way to support your family.’ So, there has been a subtle pressure, camouflaged, against people’s liberty. .... There is no consciousness [in Boaco] of the suffering that comes with war, the effect produced by setbacks, deaths, and pain. And the people [of Boaco] see scandal everywhere. They do not have a collective vision of improvements for the whole community.

From a small segment of the Boaco population, I encountered a discontent with the national and municipal concentration of power between the FSLN and PLC (the ‘dirty pact’). For these dissident left-leaning and right-leaning Boaco policymakers and residents, the old FSLN and Liberal/democrat political allegiances have yielded to a ‘democracy vs. authoritarianism’ discourse that bridges the traditional class-based political identities (Figure 5.3). The protection of capitalist-democratic institutions, governance, and citizen participation for both the left and right has become the paramount concern. As an example, the Liberal Hugo Barquero municipal government administration (2008-2010), increasingly allied with the dissident national liberal political figure Eduardo Montealegre, actively supported multiple avenues for citizen participation during its brief tenure. The administration prohibited the display in the municipal building of all manner of PLC political party flags or posters, propaganda art, or anti-FSLN material. The municipal hall became an intentional non-partisan
political space for the Liberal administration, the FSLN-dominated municipal council, and several civil society organizations including the reconstituted Municipal Development Committee and Departmental Development Council. As senior PLC municipal government official Armando explained to me:

We are wholly committed to the idea that we have to work with everyone without political distinction. For that reason we have no – we have nothing, nothing, nothing with our own party symbols – there is nothing here in city hall except [the flags] of Nicaragua and the municipality. Here we say that when the mayor and everyone came here, we came to work for the municipality. Not for a political party. And one more thing: we have helped the Sandinistas even more than we have our own Democrats. We have helped the other party more than the ‘democrats’. Because they demand it – give me, give me, give me. That is, we do not sit around trying to guess if you are Sandinista or Liberal because it does not matter. If you need help, whoever you are, if we can do so, we will help you.

Political events in the past year suggest that the modest efforts to change the course of post-conflict reconstruction face powerfully entrenched political forces on both the left and right interested in maintaining the current post-war political economy without change. In June 2010, the Boaco streets once again filled with riot police, tear gas, and violent political demonstrations after FSLN municipal council members (and a lone PLC member) voted to remove the Barquero administration for alleged failure to complete Council duties and misuse of funds (Martínez 2010). The fear that Barquero and other Nicaraguan mayors were removed to purge political supporters for the dissident Vamos con Eduardo and Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS) political organizations has prompted official government investigations and civil unrest. As former FLSN militant, Contra war veteran, and (I suspect) Sandinista Renovation Movement supporter Ramón warned me one evening from his living room:

The Left now is just like the Right. They both desire to control from above. The Sandinistas with Daniel Ortega. The Liberals with Arnoldo Alemán. What happened? ... Political power is divided. No one has made all the decisions for the country unilaterally. Rather, they have been arranged between them. We cannot say there is a Left and a Right. The Left for me no longer exists. That’s my personal opinion. They are all
capitalists. ... What they want it to stay in power and each time become richer. Both sides. It is going to come to a head in the next few years. In the next few years, this government [FSLN-Ortega] is going to make its pact in blood [En los próximos años, va a ir pactando sangre este gobierno].

The longstanding FSLN and PLC political rivalries that have continued from the Contra war and throughout two decades of reconstruction have only intensified since Daniel Ortega and the FSLN returned to power nationally.

Figure 5.3. Movement for Sandinista Renewal (MRS) Headquarters in Boaco. Text on sign reads 'I was born under a dictatorship. I do not want to die under one' (photo by author)

How the concentration of political power among increasingly undemocratic and antagonistic PLC and FSLN militants may affect the heretofore close relationship between reconstruction sector organizations and political forces that has guided neoliberal regulation in Boaco remains to be seen. The recent post-conflict history of civil society development suggests that the limited political space for citizen participation is rapidly eroding under political pressures that have the effect of transferring even greater authority onto the transnational governance forces that have shaped the reconstruction period in Boaco.
5.7 NEOLIBERAL GOVERNANCE AND NGO DOMINANCE IN BOACO

As noted in chapter three, the rise of democratic civil society and citizen participation has been a key feature of capitalist-democratic transitions in Latin America (Shefner 2008). Borrowing from the recent cultural political economy literature (Jessop and Oosterlynck 2008), post-conflict reconstruction represents a transformative political moment where the meanings and practice of citizen participation are open to contestation and redefinition. The mutual relationship between political-economic governance relations, societal institutions, and the micro-practices of daily life provides the framework for reconstruction to build the new forms of political thought, practice, and social connection that collectively constitute the post-conflict reconstruction experience on the ground (Sparke 2006). In this manner, institution-building becomes a key technology of rule for conditioning social behavior and social relations towards the production of a neoliberal mode of capitalist regulation (Foucault 1991).

Boaco elites often demonstrated considerable pride in their efforts to construct institutional space for citizen participation during the post-conflict reconstruction period. Long before the 2003 Law on Citizen Participation (No. 475-03) created a formal institutional framework nationwide, Boaco citizens formed a prototype Municipal Development Committee in the limited political space provided under the 1988 Nicaraguan Municipalities Law (Law No. 40-88; revised in 1997, No. 52-97; revised in 2000, No. 34-00 and No. 48-00). However, how such institutional developments operated on the ground tells us much about the nature of post-war civil society development.

The realities of citizen participation and civil society development do not quite match the elite rhetoric, however. The transnational reconstruction networks that have guided the post-war development of civil society have positioned a small set of well-financed reconstruction sector
NGOs as dominant, market-centered representatives for channeling the interests of the general population – a clientelistic pattern seen in other parts of Latin America (Shefner 2008). The rise of professional NGO actors acting as civil society has reinforced the transnational governance connections among international donors, Nicaraguan and municipal state actors, Liberal political forces, and non-state actors that have advanced neoliberal regulation.

This liberal conception of civil society has not been received well for many Boaco residents on the political left, who argue that NGO domination over civil society has failed to produce a forum for expressing the needs and interests of the general population. José, a senior official at the state-funded Institute for Rural Development, commented:

Yes, civil society organizations operate in this territory – they call themselves civil society. ... The problem is that [the organizations] are not representative. So, if I establish an NGO, and it is how I make a living, I will have to pay an administrator – maybe family or a friend of mine. The secretary is a friend or family from the same political party. As the director, I have to pay myself. That is what the NGOs do. So, what they invest in administration is more than they invest in poverty, as such. It seems that this overwhelms NGOs. It overwhelms them, because it is a way of life. It is a modo vivendi. For those large organizations, for example Ayuda en Acción from Spain, they bring their formal organization with them and attend to the whole world, alone. For example, take the José Nieborowski Foundation. ... [It spends] $2,000-$3,000 for each monthly meeting it holds, because they have branches now in Jinotega, Matagalpa, Managua, Boaco and many places. But the cost is that they have taken poor people’s houses, farms away from many farmers. They take things because interest is not being paid. Because if they take a television from someone who cannot pay for it, they take the television and other things, and that is not just [emphasis added].

The distinct Liberal and FSLN definitions of what democracy means are a key factor here. Constitutional and participatory models of democracy contain stark differences about who constitutes civil society and what constitutes the proper institutional framework for citizen participation. In recent years, these tensions have begun to tear apart the longstanding institutional space for citizen participation that developed early in the reconstruction period in Boaco. The impermanence of a stable institutional framework for civil society underscores the
challenge of building a robust forum for broad-based citizen participation. From 2005-2011, CODEBO and the CDM have struggled under intense political pressures to maintain membership, financial resources, and political access to the governance process (Figure 5.4).

![Municipal Development Committee (CDM) office in Boaco, August 2008.](image)

**Figure 5.4.** Municipal Development Committee (CDM) office in Boaco, August 2008. From November 2008-June 2010, the CDM had offices in the Municipal Hall (photo by author)

The national FSLN resurgence that began in the mid-2000s has placed particular strain on both institutions. The local FSLN administration and council majority under Mayor Vivian Orozco (2004-2008), the PLC administration and FSLN council under Mayor Hugo Barquero (2008-2010), and the June 2010 forced removal of the PLC mayor by the majority FSLN municipal council (and a lone PLC council member) have resulted in a deep politicization of CODEBO and the CDM. The 2007 formation of Councils of Citizen Power by the FSLN has deepened the divisions further, as FSLN-leaning civil society members shift political support from CODEBO and the CDM to the neighborhood-based CPC governance framework. As CDM spokeswoman Aurelia explained:
In the year 2005, with the beginning of a new [municipal] government with a different political leaning [FSLN mayor Vivian Orozco], the CDM hit an impasse throughout the process, throughout the entire period. In terms of bringing together the same people in the CDM within the structure that the new local government assumed in this period, what remained for us in the period was very little. [The city council] created a process to include residents’ associations, neighborhood committees, rural district committees. And the people conformed to this period from 2004-2008. ... It had an impact within the space for citizen participation. Many civil organizations conformed to the municipal direction. Many said “No!” and left. They did not get together, they did not invite each other ... However, the CDM participated whenever it was convenient for the government. [The government] approved the CDM, they convened the CDM, they advised the CDM – there was no independent dynamic from the CDM. They said to the organizations ‘we are going to convene this, do this, do that.’ But they did take [the CDM] into account. The CDM always had activities, but activity with only some organizations. We were not a pluralistic CDM like we had been in 2000.

The political penetration of the dominant civil society institutions has produced palpable *frustration* for many Liberal, FSLN, and non-partisan civil society activists who find themselves excluded from the governance process with every political transition in power. Most recently in March 2011, Aurelia, the CDM spokeswoman, spoke to me despairingly of how the CDM had once again been excluded and ignored by the FSLN municipal council in conjunction with the recently installed PLC mayor and PLC municipal council members following the forced removal of dissident Liberal mayor Hugo Barquero. In similar form, senior CODEBO spokesperson Betilde complained bitterly during a 2009 meeting that she could not marshal participation from among the six municipal CDM representatives of Boaco department for a joint development planning session because CODEBO was “not able to provide food, lodging, or transportation costs” (Boaco department is roughly the size of Rhode Island). I asked Betilde what she envisioned for CODEBO in five years. She resignedly replied, ‘They do not pay me to dream.’

I believe we may explain the general lack of interest in mass citizen participation and the poor state of organized civil society development in Boaco, at least in part, as a legacy of the

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19 Personal communication with author, March 25, 2011.
conservative historical foundations of Boaco society. The top-down clientelism and subordination to top-down, centralized authority that have been key features of the Boaco political economy for centuries have contributed to the current patterns of individualism and autonomy that compel Boaqueños to describe themselves as ‘arrogant’ and not centered on social needs and activism.

The are grassroots civil society organizations that operate within (or outside of) formal institutions like CODEBO, the CDM, and the CPC including both regional affiliates of Nicaraguan organizations and Boaco-based grassroots women’s rights and civil rights organizations, youth organizations, handicapped women’s associations, senior citizen associations, and more. For both national-affiliated and local organizations, membership tends to be limited to a small core groups of 1-5 members often contend with what one organization representative called a “plague of individualism and a lack of interest in grassroots participation” as they attempt to maintain interest among larger numbers of potential participants who rarely take an active role in their respective civil society organizations.

The small set of volunteer-based grassroots civil society organizations struggle to navigate professional NGO dominance and the entrenched political divisions in Boaco. These organizations increasingly have found themselves eclipsed by the conjunction of transnational governance forces and political forces that often preclude their meaningful ability to participate in post-conflict governance. As Jacinta, a local member of the Nicaraguan Human Rights Center (CENIDH), pointedly commented to me, “Political partisanship ruins everything. When

\[20\] A sample of the national and local civil society organizations operating in Boaco include: the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH), the Nicaraguan Network for Democracy and Local Development, the Autonomous Nicaraguan Women’s Movement, the ‘Maria Luisa Espinoza’ Nicaraguan Women’s Association (AMNLAE), the Boaco Women’s Foundation (FUNDEMUBO), the Boaco Association of Handicapped Women, and The League of Water Rights Defenders.
partisanship gets involved, it is like a plague passing through, and it leaves the landscape without grass, without anything. ... We are not a poor country. We have impoverished ourselves.”

Collectively, the grassroots civil society capacity to mobilize financial and human resources has become dependent upon the ability to translate social-democratic development programs (i.e., enhancing citizenship rights or women, the disabled, the impoverished) into economically and politically palatable language of building market-viable communities and human subjects. As Alicia, a spokeswoman for the six-member Boaco Women’s Foundation (FUNDEMUBO), commented, “In Nicaragua, the whole world indirectly, even if they do not know much about politics, has to get involved in it. If you do not, you cannot work. Everything is under the influence.” Notably, FUNDEMUBO does not participate in either CODEBO or the CDM. As FUNDEMUBO co-founder Paula explained, “we do not want any other kind of [political] problems. ... Nobody wants to support us. I do not mean ‘nobody’, but no NGOs or anything. This is only through our own efforts. That makes it very hard. We are at the point of closing down frequently.”

These stories of citizen participation reflect the place-specific political-economic patterns that connect transnational actors, state and sub-state political actors, private sector actors, and non-state actors on the ground in Boaco. The frequent expressions of disempowerment and resignation suggest that reconstruction has reinforced a top-down governance pattern that has failed to establish adequate political space for citizen participation and civil society development. My interviews uncovered frequent accounts of partisan political divisions, apparently not dampened by their Contra war experience, intruding into the spaces of everyday life, from small cafe owner Mónica (who refused to be recorded) who complained about her mother being denied access to the Nicaraguan government Hambre Cero (Zero Hunger) rural nutrition program
because of political hostilities within one local CPC president (Loáisiga López 2007), to small retail store proprietor Julia, who commented that “the Frente – the CPC – have penetrated into the government institutions, the hospital, the INSS [Nicaraguan Social Security Institute]. It is becoming pretty bad. You go to some of these places, they actually ask for your FSLN card or they will not serve you. There are stores here in Boaco where you cannot go.”

The contingent reconstruction experience in Boaco has involved a complex combination of transnational governance and political division that has limited citizen participation. The long-term capacity for reconstruction in Boaco to supercede the root causes of conflict grounded in non-representative institutions, political division, and weakly developed civil society remains to be seen. As Boaco librarian Rosario bitterly complained, “in Boaco, all we do is criticize and destroy, we see the bad in everything. And if you go asking for something, it is because you want to take advantage of people, it is because you want this or that, because you want to rob everyone.” Similarly, a Boaco-based national newspaper correspondent suggested to me during a 2009 meeting that post-conflict reconstruction had failed to mollify the pervasive political divisions that grip the general population in Boaco because “People think that pressure and violence is the only way. ... [It is] the effect of the war, more than anything. There are things that have been lost, our values. Honor. Things you could see before. ... People think that they can only solve their problems with sticks and stones.”

5.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS: DOES PLACE MATTER FOR NEOLIBERAL RECONSTRUCTION?

The stories of post-conflict reconstruction from Jinotega and Boaco reveal the overarching transnational pressures that have reorganized the Nicaraguan political economy around a dominant discourse of neoliberal regulation since the Contra war. However, the
grounded reconstruction conditions in Jinotega and Boaco throughout the past two decades challenge us to examine not only the similitudes, but also the differences in what reconstruction has meant, how it has been practiced, and the institutional forms adopted in each place. In Jinotega, a diffuse NGO and microfinance community has promoted a broadly neoliberal discourse that connects the reconstruction sector directly to the general population with little collaboration from the fractured political elites or the barely existent civil society. In Boaco, this reconstruction sector has been required to operate alongside the entrenched political forces that continue to polarize the reconstruction process. In both cases, political divisions – among elites in Jinotega, more widespread in Boaco – have increasingly fragmented the institutions and organizations of civil society and citizen participation, further deepening the transnational governance influence over political-economic reconstruction.

In the following chapter, I recast the discussion from a focus on transnational governance forces and the political contests over the reconstruction of neoliberal political economy, towards a focus on the grounded production of political economy in Jinotega and Boaco as a central feature of neoliberal regulation. A key lesson learned from spending time in both localities is that Nicaraguan reconstruction has taken multiple forms that simultaneously reflect orthodox neoliberal thought and a variety of place-specific political, economic, and social interpretations of what reconstruction – and indeed neoliberalism – can and should mean in practice. Moreover, the reconstruction process in different places is always in a state of becoming through the recursive relationship that unfolds between structural forces and the grounded actors who perform reconstruction in daily life. These grounded reconstruction ‘outcomes’ reflect the historical experiences of war alluded to above, as well as the distinct historical economic conditions, social relations, and political divisions that have made each place what it is today.
The neoliberal vision for post-conflict reconstruction is built as much ‘from within’ as it is imposed from outside of the post-war society.
CHAPTER 6
RECONSTRUCTING CONTINGENT POLITICAL ECONOMIES FROM BELOW IN JINOTEGA AND BOACO

6.1 PERFORMING RECONSTRUCTION IN PLACE

The previous chapter recounted how Nicaraguan post-conflict reconstruction remains ‘unfinished business’ after twenty years. Reconstruction of the Nicaraguan political economy has advanced a bundle of neoliberal, market-centered reforms intended to foster economic, political, and social development throughout Nicaragua. Transnational governance has taken hold and played a key role in advancing a range of neoliberal institutions, practices, and relations both nationally, regionally, and locally. The guiding influence that these ‘reconstruction sector’ actors maintain through their financial, political, and intellectual capital cannot be denied in either Jinotega or Boaco. Moreover, the reconstruction of a transnational, neoliberal political economy has progressed recursively with the development of domestic political organizations and a disorganized, disenfranchised, and restive general population held captive to the contentious post-conflict political conditions of recent years.

However, post-conflict reconstruction goes beyond the set of neoliberal political-economic institutions, governance reforms, and development programs that have defined reconstruction in Jinotega and Boaco. Reconstruction has extended neoliberal market rationality into the daily practices and political subjectivities that constitute reconstruction from below. The overarching neoliberal political-economic structure examined in Chapter 5 places limits upon, but also is responsive to, the daily, calculative practices through which grounded political actors perform and become neoliberal subjects in contingent, place-specific manners (Sparke 2006).
We can return to a culturally informed political economy perspective to better grasp how political subjects in Jinotega and Boaco have negotiated the socio-spatial conditions of neoliberal reconstruction and their own political identities through their everyday practice. Recall (see Chapter 3) that I approach post-conflict reconstruction as a transformation of the political-economic regime. The recent literature describes the production of culturally informed political economy as an evolutionary process of variation, selection, and retention that recursively connects a narrowly defined political economy and the broader life-world within which it is embedded (Jessop and Sum 2007; van Heur 2010). This blending of critical political economy and the post-structural focus on discourse, semiotics, and identity politics calls our attention to the daily practices and subjectivities through which individuals both respond to and ground the contingent neoliberal modes of capitalist political-economic regulation in time and space (Jessop and Oosterlynck 2008).

The reconstruction of daily practice and political subject formation becomes the ‘anchor’ that sets a particular political-economic structure in place. Political subjects become part of the reconstruction process as they negotiate, contest, and adapt the terms of reconstruction in the conduct of everyday life (Jones 2008; van Heur 2010). That is, political subjects actively perform ‘reconstruction from below’, reproducing through their daily, calculative practices the post-conflict structures, institutions, and relations that simultaneously discipline their individual self-understandings and actions within the broader reconstruction process (Jones 2008; Sparke 2006). This hybrid relationship suggests that the very definition of what reconstruction means is

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21 This literature emphasizes a ‘cultural political economy’ perspective as a relatively recent way of conceptualizing these connections. The cultural political economy perspective continues to draw heavily on a foundation grounded in societal modes of regulation. As noted above, future research will more fully develop the connections between Nicaraguan reconstruction and cultural political economy.
not an *a priori* product, but is being established in space and time through the place-specific, daily negotiation of different political-economic imaginations, practices, and institutions.

Accordingly, we cannot approach reconstruction as a uniform political project across the diversity of Nicaragua. Reconstruction is a political articulation process that brings together institutions and actors from multiple geographic scales into relatively coherent, place-based visions for reconstructing a distinct political-economic regime (Chhatre 2008). This variability compels us to question *how* reconstruction has produced and performed neoliberal political economy by drawing upon the grounded socio-spatial practices and self-understandings that are encountered among political subjects in distinct localities like Jinotega and Boaco. The reconstruction stories encountered in both localities reflect the multiple ways that informants have *made sense of* the political-economic reconstruction process in which they are embedded and through which they have redefined their daily worlds. Their collective voices come together to produce the distinct socio-spatial milieu that defines the contingent reconstructions of political economy in place.

My field research has brought to light the complicated nature of neoliberal political-economic reconstruction within different Nicaraguan localities. Reconstruction has established distinct political-economic regimes that fall within a broadly defined ‘neoliberal’ framework from an emerging Northern regional, progressive market discourse in Jinotega to a highly localized, adversarial market discourse in Boaco. These place-specific reconstruction outcomes share a focus on the everyday negotiation of political identities, practices, social relations, and governance institutions that define the parameters of daily life in Nicaragua. Accordingly, we can understand better how dominant modes of neoliberal political economy and neoliberal
regulation have taken hold but also been reinvented through the place-based, historically guided daily reconstruction processes I encountered on the ground.

6.2 IMAGINATIONS OF A NORTHERN POLITICAL - ECONOMIC SPACE IN JINOTEGA

Reconstruction processes in Jinotega highlight the challenge attendant to rebuilding a political-economic structure grounded in the regional social and cultural conditions encountered in Jinotega both before and after the end of the war. For the first half of the 1990s, the rush of transnational governance actors into the region (Chapter 5) undeniably introduced a range of neoliberal institutional solutions from above to address the humanitarian and development needs of the post-war population. The rise of microfinance credit institutions, international financial support for agricultural commercialization programs, and external donor support for regional tourism promotion, commercial coffee cooperativism, and small enterprise development became a groundswell of neoliberal conditions introduced into Jinotega. However, the political-economic reconstruction process in Jinotega has not merely descended upon the subject population as a fait accompli, to be accepted and implemented by an elite reconstruction sector of organizations on the ground.

The post-conflict connections between post-conflict reconstruction and neoliberal political economy lead us first to question how people on the ground think about the political-economic reconstruction processes on-going since 1990. To answer that, we must begin with the historical conditions of regional peripheral abandonment and disconnect that have marginalized the Jinotega department for decades (Ferguson 2002). As chapter one indicates, the mountainous region of small cities, small peasant farms and independent coffee producers that extends from the capital municipality northwards to the Honduras border region has long been a cradle of war,
revolution, poverty, and hardship. From the 1920s, the Jinotega department has consistently found itself on the wrong side of history. When Nicaraguan General Augusto César Sandino challenged U.S. military occupation from 1927-1933, Jinotega was the main theater of war (Walter 1993: 24). The concentration of political power during the Somoza family regime (1936-1979) produced regional tensions between the pro-Somoza Nationalist Liberals and dissident Independent Liberals who sought to resist authoritarian rule (Walter 1993: 63). Following the 1979 FSLN revolution National Guard and Nationalist Liberal forces made Jinotega a central battleground for Contra resistance to the FSLN revolutionary government. Through these turbulent decades, Jinotega missed out on economic diversification, infrastructural improvements, and political leadership within the Nicaraguan political economy. These historic conditions have established the dominant cultural tropes that guide the reconstruction of political economy in Jinotega.

From a culturally informed political economy perspective, the post-war reconstruction of a neoliberal political-economic regime has drawn from the cultural history and political identities that make up Jinotega daily life. In particular, a Northern economic imagination has become for many Jinotega residents a way to frame the political and economic challenges confronting the region within a culturally distinct set of narratives, practices, and self-understandings that have guided the reconstruction of a post-conflict political economy from below. Foremost, this Northern imagination has envisioned the Jinotega department and northern Nicaragua as a coherent regional space for the reconstruction of political economy. The particular Northern imagination that Jinotega residents have envisioned for themselves since 1990 translates the regional historical geography of domination, abandonment, and dependence into a neoliberal
approach to post-conflict reconstruction that upholds private sector economic development as the rational path towards Northern regional political and social development.

The informants I met in Jinotega commonly viewed post-conflict reconstruction as an opportunity to correct the history of conflict, regional abandonment, and underdevelopment in the Jinotega department. Moreover, the readiness with which informants from all political camps privileged neoliberal economic rhetoric over classic political cleavages (not to say that political tendencies are absent) suggests that reconstruction has been relatively successful at producing a regionally grounded neoliberal political-economic imagination on the ground. For example, my conversation with Nicaraguan Tourism Institute (INTUR) representative Luis revealed a blend of political and geographic perspectives that informed his thoughts on reconstruction. Luis faced me across his desk on another rain-soaked Jinotega afternoon. The FSLN campaign posters, Augusto Sandino portraits, and red-and-black FSLN flags that cluttered the office walls reflected the political tendencies that guided the government-controlled tourism board. Yet, Luis signaled a clear focus on Northern economic development that was frankly uncommon among FSLN officials I had encountered:

Many people have a horror, a fear, when they think of the territories in northern Nicaragua. … Jinotega was always a generally forgotten department, despite the fact that it is a very ‘rich’ department. The war left producers out of the advances after the Contra war. We had a fear of losing our farms, losing our livestock, our coffee production. Many producers had died or found themselves in dangerous situations. This impacted development in the Jinotega department greatly. It was one of the most effected departments in Nicaragua. The war generally ended by 1988 in many Nicaraguan departments with the peace process. But here in the North, the Contras continued into the 1990s.

Private sector informants echoed similar perspectives on reconstruction as a neoliberal market-centered project to renegotiate the structural position Jinotega occupies within the Nicaraguan and global capitalist political economy. Regional identities come through clearly in these
conversations about reconstructing political and economic conditions in Jinotega. In this vein, private sector *Tourism Alliance* representative Juana hyperbolically asserted that the political struggle in Jinotega was not between the left and the right, but rather between the North and the rest of the world. Juana later added:

> Jinotega has to compete [against other departments] in the sense that – well, Matagalpa (the department to the southeast of Jinotega) has always been our excuse. That Matagalpa was better, that Matagalpa has more. However, here in Jinotega there is much more as a department. [People think that] Jinotega perhaps is the poorest department and there nothing here. Then they have all forgotten us and that’s wrong. There is always competition. The North competes with the South.

Without a doubt, international financial support for regional economic development programs and economic institutions has influenced informants’ readiness to adopt and internalize a Northern neoliberal rationality for reconstructing their department. The establishment of transnational governance evident from Chapter 5 suggests that Jinotega actors from all political sides have been bound into common cause through the conditioning power of international money over reconstruction practice. However, reconstruction of neoliberal political economy (and political-economic space) still must develop through the culturally specific daily practices and political identities that establish the particular boundaries of what constitutes and delimits the economic and political aspects of post-war life (i.e., the articulation of political economy).

As the Tourism Alliance quote suggests, reconstruction of neoliberal political economy in Jinotega has married neoliberal market-centered practices focused on competition and efforts to establish a Jinotega economic identity (a brand) within the global capitalist political economy to the culturally specific politics of coffee and agricultural production, the political history of conflict and neglect, and the regional desire to move beyond the partisan politics of the past.

What emerges from this balance of transnational reconstruction from above and culturally grounded reconstruction from below is a ‘dual discourse’ that informs how Jinotega
residents have made sense of post-conflict reconstruction and the development of a place-specific, contingent patterns of neoliberal political economy. The transnational governance influence over the shape of post-conflict political economy has played out for Jinotega residents alongside an internally held sense of regional subordination to the predominantly neoliberal tenets of this reconstruction from above.

Transnational development programs like the *Ruta del Café* (The Coffee Road) and *The Ruta de Sandino* (The Sandino Road) have helped transform the regional economic and political history centered on coffee production and conflict into a powerful engine for Northern regional political identity, economic reconstruction, and social development. For example, the *Ruta de Café* project since 2007 entailed a €10 million collaboration between the Luxembourg Agency for Development Cooperation (*Lux-Development*), the Nicaraguan Tourism Institute (INTUR), and multiple regional public-private organizations to promote regional economic development throughout Jinotega and four additional northern Nicaragua departments (González 2010). The anticipated economic benefit to the region’s network of organic, fair trade coffee plantations, ecotourism centers, and international coffee exporters has been represented by stakeholders as a (neoliberal) response to the political and social needs of the affected rural and community populations (González 2010).

For example, *Lux Development* publications pointedly highlight the neoliberal goals of regional entrepreneurial development being advanced through the Coffee Road project implementation. This international financier focus on entrepreneurial capacity-building, commercialization, and decentralization are building neoliberal practices on the ground:

The *[Ruta del Café]* project aims to encourage and reinforce a municipal political focus on tourism development and entrepreneurial capacity-building through training and technical assistance to develop new tourism products, and to promote and commercialize the *Ruta del Café* nationally and internationally (*Lux-Development* 2011b, p. 11).
When the project launched in 2007 the principal challenge was to strengthen regional identity and to create an endogenous tourist route based on both decentralized management and small and medium-sized enterprises’ ownership of the project (Lux-Development 2011a, p. 83)

The international program funds provided by Luxembourg have translated into Nicaraguan government and Departmental Development Council practices that further promote this neoliberal effort to generate global capitalist economic development that translates into political and social development for the Jinotega population. Official INTUR publications market the Northern label for Jinotega and the *Ruta del Café* through visually appealing brochures that spotlight Jinotega coffee production through a menagerie of colorful pictures depicting coffee farms, rural producers, urban and rural landscapes, international tourists, and maps highlighting Jinotega and its neighboring departments. The written text targets international visitors with a focus on regional export-quality coffee production, sustainable ecology, and the lure of learning about daily life among the coffee farms:

> The coffee farms, cooperatives, communities and plantations present throughout the territory are making efforts to incorporate ecological processes into their crops through environmentally sustainable, organic production or integrating agro-ecotourism activities that allow visitors to learn about the precious biodiversity, natural beauty, and warm hospitality that characterizes Jinoteganos and their socioeconomic realities *(Source: INTUR and CDD de Jinotega 2009).*

These formal Northern regional development programs set the tone for a Northern political-economic imagination that combines neoliberal market practices, political identities, and political subject formation as the homegrown solution to the entrenched poverty and nine decades of perceived neglect that directed against the coffee-producing elites, peasant farmers, and rural proletariat in the Jinotega department stretching back to the end of the authoritarian administration (1893-1909) of Liberal president José Zelaya regime (Paige 1997). The historical focus on Northern coffee production and conflict speak to the deeply ingrained cultural traditions
and relations that make up the Jinotega department. Accordingly, the reconstruction of a culturally informed, contingent neoliberal political economy around this Northern political identity and Northern political space must take into account the distinct ways that the basic structure of capitalist political and economic organization has taken shape through the daily practices and subjectivities through which my informants have made sense of post-conflict life.

Politics is never far from the surface in Jinotega. The political divisions that continue to interfere with coherent governance conditions (Chapter 5) have become more of a social liability for the general population as they carry on everyday life. In this political climate, adherence to neoliberal market subjectivities simultaneously has become a way to supercede (or at least avoid) inter-party political retribution and the longer historical realities of political tension among the different Jinotega social classes. Political subjects seek to avoid political entanglements by shifting their attention to business, market practices, and the quest for economic success. As one coffee cooperative president (who will remain anonymous) told me:

We talk about democracy – democrats who fight for their rights. ... Democrats do not, though. They are very divided. First, it is because they do not want the Sandinistas to see them in a bad light. If they see me at a demonstration, someone is going to make note of it. A taboo, a culture exists where I vote and I do not do anything else.

The neoliberal political-economic structure that has formed around a Northern cultural politics of coffee and agricultural production thus finds, on the whole, a welcoming set of political subjects who are primed to incorporate neoliberal principles into the daily practices and conceptions of self that develop through the reconstruction process. These individuals have developed neoliberal political identities and practices that reflect the neoliberal market-centered approach for developing the full range of economic, political, and social life within the department.
The political relations of coffee and agricultural production have granted this push towards neoliberal political economy a distinct cultural direction that shows up in how coffee producers, business leaders, and the general population have engaged with the ideas about Northern capitalist market relations. The classic neoliberal focus on competition, flexible political subjects and personal economic responsibility has taken hold, but only selectively (Fraser 2003). The more stringent aspects of this neoliberal rationality have been tempered by the Northern political-economic discourse that has bound individual political subjects into a collective geographic project of reconstructing their Jinotega department and the broader northern Nicaragua region.

We see the particular Northern version of neoliberal political-economic rationality take shape through the daily conditions in which coffee production and other activities related to the Jinotega coffee production sector are being performed. From across the social and political spectrum, subjects have taken up the call to promote economic development in the name of post-conflict reconstruction, political participation, and social development that will benefit Jinotega as a region. For example, officials at the Unión de Cooperativas Agropecuarias SOPPEXCCA have combined participation in the Ruta del Café, global market development, and an explicit focus on adopting practices that benefit Jinotega communities, coffee producers, and their families. This coming together of neoliberal practices and regional political identities in the name of economic, political, and social development of the Jinotega department has become a central political feature of the reconstruction process and how individual informants conduct their daily lives. As SOPPEXCCA representative Anna commented:

In terms of cultural politics, of looking for social peace, [Soppexcca includes] producers and entire families that were tied to either side during the war, ex-Contras and ex-military, and a diversity of political opinions and currents. Within our institution, there is respect and liberty. We began with promoting human rights and respect. Everyone
coming to us seeks production and market concerns. But, I feel the most wonderful thing that we have been able to do is establish social peace within our organization. ... We leave politics completely to the side and take up the banner of cooperativism – the banner of SOPPEXCCA. Cooperativism has been a key support for reducing completely the tensions of the war that divided us.

On a broader scale, the reconstruction of a Northern political-economic space has produced large-scale public practices firmly bound into the same neoliberal logic of capitalist ‘brand’ development and regional promotion that stands side-by-side with the Ruta del Café, the Ruta de Sandino and other programs that have attempted to define regional political-economic relations from above. Most notably, the first annual Feria Regional Norteña (Northern Regional Fair) brought northern Nicaragua political leaders, economic development professionals, and Northern Nicaragua coffee producers, craftsmen, and the general population together under the banner ‘Where tourism advances, poverty recedes’ (Figure 6.1) (INTUR 2010). A Nicaraguan government report on the Feria Regional Norteña highlighted the Northern region of Nicaragua as ‘an alternative to the sun-and-sand tourism that the Pacific Coast’ offers visitors to Nicaragua (INTUR 2010).

The political conflicts that define the post-conflict reconstruction process ultimately will determine the nature of the post-conflict political-economic structure in Jinotega. The daily life practices carried out by political actors to construct and advance a neoliberal regional development vision – or provide an alternative vision – are building the contingent conditions of post-war political economy. The daily resolution of these complex political tensions defines the contingent neoliberal conditions that may be observed in Jinotega – patterns at once orthodox and heterodox, universal and intensely local in their content.

The political conditions shaping what political-economic reconstruction looks like come together across multiple geographic scales. Most recently, the U.S. Millennium Challenge
Corporation (MCC) cancelled US$61.5 million and the European Union suspended US$70 million in development funds following allegedly fraudulent 2008 Nicaraguan regional elections and government harassment of international NGOs (European Commission 2010; Marczak 2009; MCC 2011). In this context, the *Ruta de Café* program stagnated briefly in 2011 as the Luxembourg *Lux-Development* agency delayed for four months the release of €6 million for the second phase (Project No. Nic/024) of the *Ruta del Café* project (*Lux-Development* 2011c). As *Alianza Turística* representative Anna told me in during the funding gap in 2011:

> Tourism investment has had little positive impact for [Jinotega department], nor for Nicaragua, because the national elections are coming.... I went to the Nicaraguan Tourism Institute. They told me that the *Ruta del Café* is not currently operating due to a lack of funds. So you can see how we have dropped down a rung instead of climbing.

The contingent neoliberal patterns of post-conflict reconstruction are grounded in the historical conditions of regional cultural politics of coffee production, agriculture, historical conflict, and a prolonged historical condition of peripheral neglect by the Nicaraguan state.
From above, we see reconstruction playing out through a series of programs and related practices that have helped to rebuild the political economy from above around a neoliberal market-centered discourse. Participation in programs like the *Ruta del Café* have cultivated a Northern political-economic imagination that upholds regional economic development, impoverished-community development, and the discursive production of a Northern regional ‘brand’ as the best path for improving the political and social well-being of the population. However, the formal regional development programs that have come together, struggled, and in some cases collapsed reflect the contentiousness of the reconstruction process on the ground. Beyond these formal programs, we can take a closer look at how *Jinoteganos* have actually lived the reconstruction process within the emerging Northern regional political-economic space set in motion around them.

### 6.3 Performing a Northern Post-Conflict Political Economy in Jinotega

Top-down regional development projects like the *Ruta del Café*, the *Feria Regional Norteña*, and other related programs have blended reconstruction and long-term political-economic development within the distinct historical context of the distinct regional regime of accumulation centered on small-scale, peasant coffee and agricultural production in northern Nicaraguan departments including Jinotega. At the same time, however, grassroots mobilizations in Jinotega – though few and far between – also have connected contemporary neoliberal approaches to regional political-economic development with a regional history of finding homegrown solutions to political and economic challenges in the region.

These grassroots mobilizations reflect another side of the reconstruction of a neoliberal political economy in Jinotega. It is a different form of neoliberal practice not defined solely by
participation in formal programs and events, but rather by a recognition and rejection of the longstanding sense of regional subordination that many Jinotega residents feel. Homegrown, grassroots practices and social movements have come together with their own conceptions for economic, political, and social development and political-economic organization in Jinotega.

The memory of the Movement for the Construction of Highways (Movimiento Pro-Construcción de Carreteras) continues to be a touchstone for my informants. Several people told me with pride the stories of post-partisan street mobilizations in 2004-2005 as agricultural and coffee producers, business leaders, NGO representatives, and civil society actors marched to demand roadway infrastructure improvements to facilitate better market access for their goods. As the Jinotega Foundation for Sustainable Development (FUNJIDES) representative Anna explained, ‘here in Jinotega, there have only been a couple things that ever brought the people together – the struggle against water privatization and the construction of the highway to Guayacán.’

These grassroots economic protests have had notable results in recent years with the construction of the El Guayacán-Jinotega highway from Managua (2009) and the reconstruction of the treacherous Matagalpa-Jinotega highway (2010) as two principal conduits for moving agricultural products to Managua and the Pacific Ocean coastal export centers (Rivera Méndez 2009). A conversation with the private sector Tourism Alliance (Alianza Turística de Jinotega) representative Juana succinctly highlighted just what the idea of Northern economic development means to people in Jinotega:

We have always been a forgotten department in all respects. Just recently, the new [Jinotega-Guayacán] highway was built after many years in the making. We struggled and continue to struggle for new highways. That has worn on us socially. The truth is that we want Jinotega to develop, but if we do not have highways, it will not happen. All the governments have forgotten us.
These grassroots movements highlight a basic premise: That post-conflict reconstruction from below in Jinotega remains bound closely to the cultural politics of coffee and agricultural production (and producers) that dominates Jinotega and northern Nicaragua. The place-specific institutions and practices that define daily life in Jinotega speak volumes to how grassroots producers and other actors have negotiated the terms of the transnational, neoliberal market political economy introduced since 1990 and have made it their own as a distinct regional arrangement of political, economic, and social forces.

Foremost, the reconstruction of a Northern regional political economy centers on the multiple dimensions of coffee production in Jinotega and northern Nicaragua. The coffee production sector has been a dynamic political and economic force in the past 15 years. It is rare to encounter someone who is not connected to coffee in some way. Jinotega daily life is bound to the cycles of international donor support and microfinance development directed at coffee producers. Nicaraguan, regional, and municipal government agencies have advanced eco-tourism development projects centered on coffee production landscapes and imagery. Coffee producer organizations (Uniones, Centrales, and cooperatives) have formed to develop a regional market presence for Jinotega coffee, while grassroots social movements periodically arise to call for regional infrastructure development programs that can efficiently deliver coffee (and other agricultural) products to Nicaraguan export centers. This blend of formal and informal governance institutions constitutes a major part of the post-war conditions shaping political, economic, and social life throughout Jinotega (Painter 2006).

More than any other grassroots mobilization, the coffee producer cooperatives movement has become a cornerstone of the Northern regional political economy in the past decade. The coffee cooperatives formed in post-war Jinotega turn the 1980s revolutionary cooperatives model
on its head. Unlike the land redistribution and collective welfare model that characterized revolutionary-period cooperatives, contemporary coffee producer cooperatives are structured around a market-centered, neoliberal reconstruction ethos that guides their actions. Individual producers voluntarily establish cooperatives, pay monthly membership dues, and maintain private ownership of their farms, most agricultural rents, and production decisions. Cooperatives provide technical production support, lower production costs, promote exportation, secure better microfinance terms, and provide human capital development for members and their families. These services commonly include collectively controlled coffee bean processing facilities (beneficios), shared product quality standards and testing (catación), and bulk price negotiation with coffee exporters in Managua.

The widespread development of coffee producer cooperatives underscores the complicated relationship between transnational governance, grounded political practices, and neoliberal political economy in Jinotega. The new cooperatives model in the late 1990s emerged in response to individual coffee producers’ losing struggle to remain competitive within a global coffee production market following Nicaraguan government subsidy cuts and global coffee price drops. The transnational community of financial donors and advisors quickly met the demand for economic solutions through the promotion and support of regional producers’ efforts to form coffee cooperatives focused on individual production and global market development [Figure 6.2].

The close relationship produced and reinforced the broader 1990s discursive shift among coffee producers towards the neoliberal self-discipline that conditioned daily practice and political subjectivities that have guided the reconstruction process in the region. As Unión de
Cooperativas Agropecuarios de Servicios Unidas de Mancotal (UCASUMAN) representative Fernando commented:

Look, it would be great if the state were investing in [the coffee sector] since we pay taxes. But, if we waited for the state to manage this, we would die. So we do it for ourselves. We look for our own solutions without waiting for them. And we are bound to the cooperativist principle of solidarity and mutual support.

The coffee cooperatives movement producers in Jinotega represent the distinct nature of neoliberal political-economic reconstruction in the department. The decision to pursue an internationally financed, entrepreneurial model of cooperates-based coffee production reflects the distinct Jinotega political history of conflict and economic abandonment that coffee producers and other departmental residents desperately want to overcome. Their daily practices reflect a solid commitment to capitalist political economy and a self-conscious effort to

![Image of a street in Jinotega with a sign for Central de Cooperativas CECOSPROCAES]

**Figure 6.2.** Coffee and agricultural cooperatives line the Jinotega streets. The photo shows the Central de Cooperativas CECOSPROCAES, a federation of several coffee producer cooperatives in Jinotega (photo by author)
move beyond the political divisions of the past with a single-minded focus on their coffee product. The contingent neoliberal form adopted among producers has produced a market-oriented, post-political discourse that emphasizes market development, social responsibility, and forward motion.

When you talk with coffee producers about their farms and their coffee cooperatives, their words reflect their underlying vision for how to reconstruct political-economic life in Jinotega and northern Nicaragua. Their language is a technocratic, ‘neoliberal’ language of coffee quality control, international market agreements, promoting Northern brand recognition, of assuming governance responsibility to meet the human capital needs of their fellow coffee producers. Producers talked very little about themselves – and this, too, may be a reflection of the contingent neoliberal patterns of political economy and regulation I encountered in Jinotega. This culturally informed political-economic structure is defined by coffee producers’ commitments to personal development and to Northern regional development, by an entrenched desire to separate the economic and the political as distinct parts of everyday practice in the region.

The strict post-political attention to Northern market development has become a clear focus for coffee producers within the many cooperatives I encountered in Jinotega. The coffee producers’ visions for reconstructing Northern political economy at times echoed the more formal programs discussed above. However, my coffee producer informants reflected a certain ‘groundedness’ or ‘practicality’ in their closer knowledge of real-world conditions that did not always come through in my conversations with tourism and development NGO officials. For example, The Unión de Cooperativas Agropecuarias SOPPEXCCA representative Anna talked
about the disconnect between historical social conditions and her vision for post-conflict political economy:

There is a tendency to maintain the [old] patronage system. I see the tendency when I see many people resigned to the idea that poverty is inescapable, and it takes considerable effort to bring people together. There is an individualism that is hard to break. ... We still lack the concept – we still think we are ‘Jinotega’ [the city] – no, we are a Department and we all have to operate in that mind-set -- whomever we are, be it the mayor, the president – we have to see ourselves as a [collective]. Soppexca has been able to develop well not only with the economic part, but in terms of human capital. Our human capital has been strengthened, because without knowledge capital dries up. It is something we can do even without a single dollar.

Informants’ efforts to build a Northern political economy frequently came together with strong expressions of neoliberal governance that eschewed the Nicaraguan and municipal state as reliable providers for the economic, political, and social needs of the population. In its place, these coffee producers saw the cooperatives as an instrument through which they could generate the particular form of post-conflict political economy that they envisioned for their region. For example, the Unión de Cooperativas Agropecuarios de Servicios Unidas de Mancotal representative Fernando brashly explained:

We have learned to come together. The whole world wants to work, and politics has been set aside. ... We do not have much interference here because we have dedicated ourselves to improving our business as a cooperative, a union of cooperatives, without government support. ... Now, we are going to propose a project to build a new school in our community, because the schoolhouse is falling down. We are going to build it and we are presenting this to the city council to evaluate and, instead of screwing us over, to put it bluntly, charging us taxes, they will know about this project and not charge us taxes. ... Jinotega, really, is a place where everyone takes care of [himself or herself].

In similar fashion, one prominent Nicaraguan political figure, businessman, and coffee farmer, Patricio, brought together a range of different themes highlighting the contingent neoliberal form of political economy that, in his view, would advance the general development of the Jinotega department and its market-oriented population. Don Patricio noted:
If a man lives from raising crops on adequate land to grow cabbage, carrots, or other crops, we have to teach him how to market those products and to form the ‘clusters’ that we talk about. How do cultivate products well, how to conduct business directly in a more dynamic market. Incentivizing and promoting their products, where they organize themselves, everything they produce. ... So there are three basic things that we need: Roads, support for growers, and economic clusters. And I believe we need a map for production in the department. It would say ‘this area is for vegetables. This area is for ranching. This area is dedicated to coffee.’ The people grow in an artesan manner. If someone says ‘these 5 manzanas of land are mine and I am going to grow coffee’, it is just because that is what they know. But there where no agronomers, no specialists, no soil scientists who came to say whether the soil had minerals or not. No one checked if it was good for coffee. They do not do studies. We need these issues to be central to policy.

The focus on getting past the conflicted political relations and chaos of the Contra war also informs coffee cooperatives producers’ daily practices and political subjectivities. This post-political emphasis, perhaps more than any other facet of coffee cooperatives, has been a key aspect in the role that coffee producers are playing in developing the contingent neoliberal form of Northern political economy from below in Jinotega. With notable exceptions, producers have united in their goal to promote a generalized commitment to neoliberal capitalist development through the political practices developed within their cooperatives. The *Cooperativa de Servicios Agropecuarios para Exportadores de Café* (COOPSAEC) member David (an FSLN supporter) commented:

The cooperative has a little of every political tendency. In 7 years, we have never punished someone for their political affiliation. For us, politics and religion do not exist. We are only coffee producers that want to understand coffee well and from there [associates] can be what that want to be independently. There is no politics. Discussions of politics or bias for any one political party would never be acceptable, ever. In the 7 years that we have existed, this has been clearly articulated. I believe it’s very important for the cooperative – no politics, no religion. We are producers and we go ahead as producers. ... That was in the war, all of the political problems. But, for me politics does not exist. I am a coffee producer. That is what I do and I cannot do anything more.

Similarly, the *Cooperativa de Servicios Agropecuarios Humedal Apanas Jinotega* (COSAHAJI) representative Benicio provided a similar perspective as we shared coffee within the dusty, concrete space that was both his personal office and storage room. Founded in 2007,
COSAHAJI combine coffee production with limited agricultural and dairy production programs, regional tourism projects, and cooperation with INTUR. As Benicio commented:

The associates’ politics are Sandinista, Liberal, Contra, everything. When they are here, there is no politics. There is nothing. That has been one of our mottos. You want to come work with our cooperative, leave your politics outside. The associates will not permit it. The cooperative has a free market model. We have a vision entrepreneurial. No one is here because of a beautiful, romantic vision of the cooperative. It is to make more money. Nothing more. Here, what everyone wants is money for the associates. They have to have money. Everyone wants the cooperative to grow, but we want the associates also to grow with it.

The common thread binding most coffee producers is their transformation into neoliberal political subjects dedicated – beyond political lines – to a capitalist political-economic structure centered on competition, market performance, and accumulation. However, the regional cultural identities bound to coffee production and the visceral memories of armed conflict have not disappeared under neoliberal pressures. The contingent nature of neoliberalism as a political-economic model recognizes what we call ‘neoliberalism’ can demonstrate considerable – albeit not unlimited -- variation in its actual content on the ground (Wilson 2004).

This basic premise suggests that the reconstruction of the political-economic structure in Jinotega has been able to maintain a general tendency towards neoliberalization concurrent with the greater emphasis placed on regional identity, human capital development, and social need. As the comment by Benicio suggests, the reconstruction of daily practice in Jinotega towards a neoliberal market rationality has been tempered by a concern for fellow citizens and a sense of social responsibility within the overarching conditions of neoliberal regulationist and disciplinary reforms. The institutionalization of this particular reconstruction of political-economic life has produced the contingently neoliberal political subjectivities that I encountered throughout my field work in northern Nicaragua.
6.4 CONTINGENT RECONSTRUCTIONS OF NEOLIBERAL POLITICAL ECONOMY IN JINOTEGA

During the past decade, belated Nicaraguan government attention has institutionalized the previously grassroots rise of coffee producer cooperatives movement that began in the late 1990s. The 2005 *General Law on Cooperatives* codified the operation of coffee and other cooperatives throughout Nicaragua (Ley General de Cooperativas 2005). Under this law, individual cooperative producers exercise full sovereignty over their production and profits while membership costs are limited to administrative fees that support an administrative council and also provide partial financial support for the government-established Institute for Cooperatives Development, INFOCOOP. The 2005 *General Law on Cooperatives* differentiates between individual-member cooperatives, *Centrales* of five or more member cooperatives involved in the same economic activity (article 96), and *Uniones* of five or more member cooperatives from the same regional Department, regardless of economic activity (article 97). Cooperatives are legally obligated to remain non-partisan (per 2007 enabling legislation, articles 63 and 99), a stricture that appears to be followed in most – albeit not all – cases I observed in Jinotega (Reglamento 2007).

These recent developments have helped to lock in place the grounded political relations, practices, and identities that had come to define the post-conflict reconstruction of neoliberal the political-economic structure in Jinotega. The longstanding cultural identity politics centered on coffee production and Northern identity has continued to provide a very distinct form of reconstruction in Jinotega centered on a balance of economic, political, and social development practices realized through inherently market-oriented organizations like coffee producer cooperatives. The constellation of coffee producer organizations has become a political institution that plays a central role for translating regional economic development into private
sector-led modes of political and social development. In particular, the reconstruction of the Northern political economy has set private sector coffee producer cooperatives as the principal institution for meeting many personal, community, and regional needs for school construction, medical clinics, technical training, and other functions historically reserved for the state (Trouillot 2001).

At first glance, it may surprise readers to learn that coffee cooperatives have become a preferred vehicle for economic development and for political and social development in Jinotega. Paige (1997) notes a deep antipathy to the FSLN-organized producer cooperatives that were a condition for land redistribution during the 1980s. However, the structure of coffee and agricultural cooperativism in the Jinotega region from the late 1990s to the present actually fits well with the historical patterns of cultural politics in the region. Saldaña-Portilla (2003b), for example, makes the cogent argument that northern Nicaragua coffee producers resisted the FSLN radical development program not because of its content, but rather because the implementation of the agricultural reforms in the 1980s was an imposed solution from above. Northern coffee producers did not have the opportunity to find homegrown solutions that met their economic needs, their political and social needs, and their Liberal cultural traditions. With the new species of production cooperatives and technical services cooperatives that arose in the reconstruction period, the core regional values of local ownership, independent production, and non-state intervention are respected. These views come through powerfully in coffee producers’ own voices. For example, the Cooperativa Multiactiva de Productores de Café Orgánico highlights the market-centered, yet balanced vision for reconstructing neoliberal political economy that frames its 2003-present growth from 33 to 180 members. As Cooperativa Multiactiva representative Joaquín commented:
Social development is the objective, the mission of the cooperative. When we sell our coffee through fair trade there is a small fund for social projects – to replace plastic with tile roofs, dig latrines. But that is just from slightly higher prices for fair trade. If the cooperative had more funds, we maintain the idea, the vision to focus considerably on social development. There are very poor people. If you go to the countryside, you will see the reality of poverty out there.

The transnational connections that surround the coffee production sector have had a powerful influence over the way that coffee production institutions have defined and implemented their governance roles for economic, political, and social development. The reconstruction sector, and particularly North American and European donor state agencies and NGOs, have provided extensive financial grants and, particularly since the mid-2000s, low-interest loans to meet the gap between the financial support cooperative members are able to provide and the technical services that cooperatives provide for member producers. This transnational reconstruction sector governance discussed in chapter five has been a source of stability – but also a problem - for the coffee production sector. As COSAHAJI representative Benicio noted:

There was a strong, strong paternalism in the 1990s. We were coming out of a war. ... The international community logically wanted to help Nicaragua and Central America end its wars. Unfortunately, we did not have the vision that we needed in that moment. Those in charge lacked the vision that they had to teach us to fish, not give us fish. They gave us our fish for ten years, throughout the 1990s. It was so over-the-top. I remember millions and millions of dollars entered the country, but everything became – everything was just given to us. There was no process for teaching us to use it better. A lot of money came to Nicaragua, but it has not resulted in – look even now, look what is happening here [laughs]. ... If they had supported us in the 1990s in a way that was not so ‘easy’ – in that period there were such quantities of money from NGOs. ... it was paternalism, these handouts that just gave us money and now we see the results.

The preferential transnational connections that benefit larger coffee producer organizations have become a source of friction within the grassroots coffee production sector during the past two decades. In part, these tensions may be based in a long-term resistance to the historical experiences of patriarchal control from outside the region directed to elite actors at the
expense of the masses – regardless of whether the source of such clientelism was the historic Nicaraguan central state or the contemporary transnational reconstruction and development community (see Bebbington and Kotahri 2006; Ottaway 2002). International donor support provides a financial foundation for nearly every coffee producer organization I encountered. The transnational structure of this regional political economy has preferentially favored those producer organizations that have been able to forge the financial donor connections necessary to attract greater investment, global market presence, and alliances at the expense of small producer organizations, cooperatives, and farms. As Central de Cooperativas de Servicios Multiples Productores de Cafes Especialistas (CECOSPROCAES) representative Xavier commented:

> There are projects that [NGOs/international donors] help subsidize, but always with credit. For example, they say ‘here is the packet, this aid program. Manage it well. Give it life.” ... That is the case with CRS [Catholic Relief Services] funded by USAID that supports 600 coffee producers. Likewise, we receive BID [Inter-American Development Bank] funds passed through IDR [the Nicaraguan Institute for Rural Development] for commercializing the white plantain. There is an OXFAM project to provide backing for subsistence farmers – the organizations always bring their own politics, but they also understand the internal politics within the Cooperatives.

In this vein, the powerful Unión de Cooperativas Agropecuarias SOPPEXCCA (Society of Small Producers for Coffee Export) has been among the premier coffee producer organizations in the Jinotega region since 1997. The organization has constructed a transnational network of government and NGO donors and trade partners from Germany, Italy, Ireland, the Netherlands, and the United States. As their own publications make clear, SOPPEXCCA knowingly portrays its market-centered combination of economic, political, environmental, and social development programs as a full-spectrum benefit to both Unión associates and the regional community (SOPPEXCCA 2011). The SOPPEXCCA administration remains highly focused on maintaining international donor connections through its everyday narratives and practices. On-site quality control and flavor testing laboratories, a retail cafe, cooperative-owned automobiles,
and extensive marketing efforts (e.g., pamphlets, website, logos, richly decorated office space) have set SOPPEXXCA apart among the Jinotega coffee producer organizations. As SOPPEXCCA representative Anna stated:

[International] support has been essential to do what we do. Our producers have been part of this struggle to position themselves in the market. And if the sky falls down, then what? They have to know you, to know the quality of your produce, know about quality tasting, that we have tasters here. In all of Jinotega, we established the first tasting laboratory in the entire territory. In spite of being the #1 coffee producer department. There was never a tasting laboratory before. ... Almost everything we have achieved has been the result of [international] cooperation. ... There are people who say ‘look! Soppexcca has lots of money. The Cooperativa Soppexcca is sure doing well.’ Others say that Soppexcca makes them angry. I ask why, and they say that their cooperative is struggling. Instead of coming to see that we can all be saved together ... it is hard. Even Soppexcca has struggled to maintain good relations, because there is conflict [among cooperatives]. We have a strategy to have good communication with everyone. In spite of all that, we still get flak.

The transnational connections drive many of the tensions encountered within the coffee producer cooperatives community. My Jinotega fieldwork suggests that most coffee producers maintain mixed feelings towards the predominant political and economic power that the international donor community wields over reconstruction, even as cooperatives members seem to have internalized the basic neoliberal political-economic tenets that define the region and everyday practice. The desire to supplant the dominant international financing model (asistencialismo) with their own cooperatives-generated revenue to fund economic, political, and social development programs became a dominant narrative among coffee producers, cooperatives, Uniones, and Centrales I encountered on the ground.

The prominent UCASUMAN coffee producers’ association provides a striking example. The Unión de Cooperativas Agropecuarios de Servicios Unidas de Mancotal (UCASUMAN) has struggled to balance transnational donor connections with plans to provide social
development programs for its members, their families, and the community. Like many coffee producer organizations, UCASUMAN has received international financial support from multiple backers such as the IADB, USAID, and the U.S.-based poverty reduction NGO TechnoServe (TechnoServe 2007). These transnational connections that tie UCASUMAN to international finance play a complicated role in the reconstruction of neoliberal political economy centered on private sector coffee producers in the region. Public protestations of gratitude for international financial support (TechnoServe 2007) come up against the more nuanced views expressed privately by UCASUMAN representative Fernando, whose viewed echoed the same ambivalent perspectives I frequently encountered from coffee producers:

In the 1990s, there was a culture of assistance (asistencialismo) that directed our view of cooperation towards saying “give me this, give me that” and that everything should be given to us. The many millions of dollars invested from everywhere have resulted in organizations that had life only while the executing agency was present. When those projects ended, it all fell apart, disappeared, it was unsustainable. I believe that we have to focus on sustainability.

From an alternate perspective, larger coffee producers have eschewed the dominant ‘trickle-down’ transnational framework that connects international donor support to place-based coffee producer organizations and cooperatives. These larger producers represent a distinct vision for rebuilding a Northern political economy that remains grounded in market-based principles, while simultaneously turning the hierarchical structure of the Northern political economy on its head.

The large El Bosque coffee farm in central Jinotega department demonstrates the multiple paths towards the reconstruction of a Northern political economy in the department. The El

22 Throughout Jinotega, informants consistently called UCASUMAN ‘the Contra cooperative’ in reference to the alleged membership restricted to former Contra militants. This political image stood in stark contrast to the professed apolitical nature of most coffee producer cooperatives I encountered in Jinotega.
Bosque Foundation brings together the large organic coffee plantations scattered on the central Jinotega mountain slopes with a range of social and economic projects, including Ruta de Café ecotourism development and an agro-economic technical school for secondary school-aged coffee producers. Through its private efforts, coupled with very modest international NGO funds, El Bosque has constructed a business model that blends economic and social development for its workers, their families, and surrounding villages. These initiatives include an on-site medical clinic, labor housing and cafeteria access during coffee harvest season (October-March), student lodging year-round, and small development programs in local communities. Katia, one senior representative with the El Bosque coffee foundation, detailed her distinct political-economic vision for Jinotega and Nicaragua.

The Fundación has a vision that is focused on economic development because there are local employees, we use local resources. The farm is constructed with local wood. The employment just goes on growing and growing. We are developing a social project, but at the same time, growing the economy. With tourism, we are going to have – through all these productive activities – we will make the technical school self-sustaining and we are going to improve the economic lives of the community. ... For me as a Nicaraguan, this project is the kind of thing that we need to develop more as a country. This project is not paternalistic. We are not waiting for donors to come support us. We have a broader vision that it is better to give us a hand, but allow us to take our own initiative as a country to develop.

Despite their differences, independent producers like El Bosque and the dominant coffee sector organizations (Uniones, Centrales, and Cooperativas) have in common is a shared vision for reconstructing Northern political economy in the aftermath of the Contra conflict – one that takes shape within a market-centered, neoliberal discourse both introduced from above and grounded in the particular social, political, and economic conditions, needs, and relations that make up Jinotega. The dominant transnational governance structure that has guided

23 The term El Bosque is a pseudonym to protect the professional standing of the coffee plantation.
reconstruction towards neoliberal political economy continues to be contested and redefined through the distinct articulation of these complex political voices and their everyday struggles to define, put into practice, and forge a post-conflict space for economic, political, and social development.

Post-conflict reconstruction has produced a general pattern of transnational reconstruction sector governance from above informed by neoliberal discourse in Jinotega. However, reconstruction has played out through the grounded, everyday conditions through which people conduct their daily lives in the context of the broader move towards a neoliberal, market-centered political economy. The multiple strategies and programs that have defined the reconstruction of a Northern regional political-economic space in Jinotega offer one view for how reconstruction draws from place-specific articulations of institutions, governance relations, and everyday practices to produce the contingent terms of neoliberal market democracy on the ground. Reconstruction in Jinotega has thus taken shape around explicitly geographic tropes of regional development and private sector involvement in the economic, political, and social welfare of the general population centered on the ubiquitous coffee production sector. This general pattern for political-economic reconstruction in Jinotega may be contrasted with the markedly different reconstruction patterns being adopted and adapted in the Boaco department in central Nicaragua.

6.5 IMAGINATIONS OF A LOCAL POST-CONFLICT POLITICAL ECONOMY IN BOACO

Post-conflict reconstruction in the Boaco department has produced distinct conditions of neoliberal political economy around a grounded set of institutions and governance relations in the region. Chapter five recounted how reconstruction has been dominated by a transnational
reconstruction sector that has become the bearer of a generally market-centered framework for reconstruction alongside a fractured political and civil society. This transnational governance provides the context for seeing reconstruction through the everyday, calculative practices that constitute place-specific, historically grounded political-economic conditions on the ground.

For both its apologists and its detractors, Boaco residents quite often direct their conversations to the traditionalism of the Boaco municipal political economy and its relative lack of technological development compared to neighboring municipalities. The roots of this preoccupation rest in the 20th century conservative internecine conflicts between traditional oligarchs and the emerging agro-export elites from the 1910s to the present. These historical political-economic tensions fed into the 1980 FSLN government decision to merge the Boaco department into neighboring Chontales department (the two department separated again in 1990), forming for a brief period a single Boaco-Chontales region. The political, economic, and social effect on Boaco governance institutions and experience has played a notable role in the current political-economic patterns that define Boaco everyday life. The cultural and political effect of the Boaco-Chontales merger on the conservative Boaco elite extended much deeper than merely the hollowing out of institutional strength, loss of political influence, and lack of economic investment that accompanied the geographic shift in power towards the Chontales capital, Juigalpa. The central government interference in Boaco affairs further undermined regional cohesion as conservative elites retreated further into their local milieu in resistance to the FSLN and the Nicaraguan central state. The resulting post-conflict vision for political-economic reconstruction has centered on an intensely local, place-based perspective at odds with the emerging regional discourse and political-economic space witnessed in the Jinotega department.
The reconstruction of a Boaco-centered political-economic space has defined and guided the contingent conditions that constitute neoliberal reconstruction on the ground. My fieldwork provided insight into the reconstruction of this place-specific political-economic space through which distinct neoliberal conditions have taken hold. In short, Boaco (the municipality) has engaged the reconstruction process through a continuation and perhaps an intensification of the conservative, ‘go-it-alone’ social milieu that emerged relatively unscathed from the Contra conflict. Informants’ candidly self-critical narratives portraying Boaco (the municipality) as having an antagonistic relationship with the five neighboring Boaco department municipalities highlight this dominant place-based political-economic imagination in Boaco. One Association for Integrated Sustainable Development (ASPRODIC) representative ticked off a list of ‘characteristics’ of different Boaco municipalities, explaining:

There are different responses [to neoliberal reforms] among different departments. In Boaco, there is no coherent (articulada) response among the different local forces. It does not exist in the Boaco department. Locally, if I go from municipality to municipality, in Camoapa I see a more coherent response from the different organizations and communities in the municipality. ... I do not find a coherent response among the other municipalities. I come up against dispersed forces with respect to the department. I do not see much leadership in the department, anyone capable of bringing different forces together, not from the Frente, not from the Liberals. I have seen this since the 1990s in this region. In the 1990s, all the mayors in the department were Liberals. However, despite all being Liberals, they never were able to forge a connection with the central government – they were divorced from the central government.

These narratives on post-war political economy revealed a deep frustration with how post-conflict reconstruction had unfolded in the region. Boaco, for many informants, had become its own worst enemy, chasing away international investment, regional development, and post-war prosperity through its localist political-economic discourse. As FUNDEMUBO women’s civil rights NGO representative Alicia commented, “Boaco is stingy,” comparing her city unfavorably to neighboring Camoapa as a municipality where industry, innovation, and
cooperation have defined the post-conflict period. Private sector organizations shared similar concerns over the parochial political-economic perspectives they encountered in Boaco. As Boaco Cattlemen’s Association representative Rodrigo complained:

We hope to build a dairy collection center here in Boaco. The truth is we [do not have plans or a construction date yet]. We lack land and no one is supporting it because of the economic situation, no one has money to do it. And people say that they want to help build a collection center for producers. ... If the association at least had a dairy collection center, then the producers would sell their milk to us and we would pay the market price. ... The thing is people [in Boaco] are very jealous of one another. If someone seems like they are getting ahead, people say ‘hey, he is a crook, he is a drug trafficker, he is this, he is that.’ Jealousy keeps the community from advancing. In contrast, Camoapa has their own university. Here, we cannot even get a coffee hall. The people are not progressive in Boaco.

My informants’ comments brought to light their efforts to come to terms with post-war Boaco and its political-economic position alongside neighboring municipalities, departments, and within Nicaragua. On one hand, Boaco clearly was a source of pride for my informants as a ‘democratic’ bastion within Nicaragua. On the other hand, my informants consistently revealed their concerns that Boaco was not moving in a favorable direction for rebuilding political and economic life during the reconstruction period. The tension between these two visions of Boaco life became part of the political-economic discourse taking shape on the ground. My informants wrestled with the national, regional, and local visions influencing the emerging patterns of neoliberal political economy I encountered in Boaco. One senior PLC municipal government official, Armando, demonstrated these complex conditions of Boaco daily life well. First, Armando commented that:

In Boaco municipality, [social] relations are good. Boaco has other municipalities – Camoapa, Teustepe, San Lorenzo, San José, Santa Lucía. There has always been a friendly, good relationship. Currently, although there are two new Sandinista governments, in practice we do not have much communication, but we do not have problems, either. They do their thing, we do not bother with them either. ... With respect to the other Nicaraguan departments in Nicaragua, relations [in Boaco] have been good,
particularly the more limited relationship between democrats and communists. ... we try to take into account the idea that we are all human beings.

However, Armando later contrasted Boaco to neighboring Camoapa in less favorable terms:

“Look, Camoapa is a lot of potential - a municipality with lots of cattle ranching, agriculture, but mostly cattle. It is a municipality where the people are more united. The people of Boaco do not have that – that wherewithal to unite to work together. That is a characteristic in Boaco. It is more individualistic. ... [In Camoapa] there is more progress, in terms of the dairy industry it is doing very well. They have invested with results. They have investment that we could not have because of that same lack of identity. Here producers do not think about industrial development, only in their own development. It becomes like - you earn $20,000 or $50,000 you are going to invest it in more farms, more cattle. You are not going to invest in setting up a small industry, or a hotel, or something tourist-related, or a food processing facility, a factory ... this is the experience.

The frequent comparisons that Boaco residents made between their city and neighboring communities reflects their own prolonged struggles to define and come to terms with the nature of the daily political-economic conditions through which they carry on their everyday lives. These tensions came out frequently informants wavered between expressing hometown pride in Boaco and stating their frustrations with Boaco as a parochial, self-contained locality where reconstruction sector actors hierarchically sat above a fragmented group of individualized, market-centered Boaco residents living their own lives on the ground. In contrast, I heard expressions of a broader, regional narrative about departmental political-economic development far more rarely and then only among organizations where such views may be expected, such as the National Tourism Institute (INTUR) delegation, the Departmental Development Council (CODEBO), and the Unión de Cooperativas de Servicios Agropecuarios Tierra Nueva, a federation of coffee and honey cooperatives operating regionally. Tierra Nueva representative Francisca recounted the challenges of constructing a regional imagination from the parochial visions that dominated Boaco life:

There is no vision of the department as a whole. We were present in an INTUR-sponsored forum where INTUR discussed promoting Boaco [department] as a tourist
destination. We indicated that Boaco’s identity needed to change. Boaco is not only Boaco ‘the city’, but rather Boaco is a department. We do not have anything that characterizes us. For example, Jinotega is the top producer of coffee. That gives Jinotega an identity. It is ‘the North’ – the ‘City of Mists’. We made a proposal to define Boaco as a ‘multiple destination’ that offers diverse options. We proposed that Boaco be marketed as the top honey-producing region in Nicaragua. ... that INTUR develop a Honey Route (Ruta de Miel). We can mix it up. Before we used to say ‘where the rivers are of milk and the rocks of cheese’ (donde los ríos son de leche y las piedras son cuajadas). But now we can say ‘-of milk and honey.’

Similarly, the Nicaraguan National Tourism Institute (INTUR), through a new Boaco delegation established in mid-2009, has established in the Boaco department a Ruta de la Hacienda (Farmstead Route) as part of its regional tourism development program. Like so much else in Boaco, the program has been mired by parochial political conflicts and financial insecurity. The Boaco INTUR representative Fátima commented:

Boaco is characterized as an agricultural and ranching region. There is good potential in those as something we can highlight as specific to the Department of Boaco. ... Tourism is not the property of only a few regions, but rather an important economic activity that can be developed such that all Nicaraguan departments can be highlighted for national and international tourism. ... [INTUR promotes] tourism with a human face. ... The government now thinks that the tourism dividend that comes to Nicaragua should serve as a revolving fund to support projects with a social focus. ...

Later, Fátima added:

What I want is [for INTUR] to be a focal point for coming together so people say ‘look at Boaco, all working together, moving their territory forward – that there are no ‘masters’, that we are all working together. That is a problem that we have to solve in Boaco. I have lived in other municipalities and have heard experiences of colleagues where there is some friction between ideas because they want to say ‘I’. There is a lot of individualism and this does not help. ... They always say ‘that one took the idea from me’ and ‘I am the one that should be over there’, ‘this is my flag, my logo, my organization’ – the lack of concerted effort sets us back.

Despite these limited efforts to establish a broader sense of Boaco regional identity, the dominant pattern I observed in Boaco suggests that most informants carry on their daily lives within a political-economic and mental space centered on the limited cultural milieu provided by small-town life. The historic political economy of cattle production appears to have persisted
throughout the 20th century and the Contra conflict relatively unscathed to maintain deep ideological and political resistance to both the Nicaraguan government and any regional imagination as forms of external interference. These deep-seated cultural intersections with the reconstruction of political-economic life have had important effects on the ways that transnational reconstruction networks and, in particular, grounded reconstruction sector organizations, have operated and guided the reconstruction process in Boaco for the past two decades.

6.6 PERFORMING A LOCAL POST-CONFLICT POLITICAL ECONOMY IN BOACO

The transnational reconstruction sector operating in Boaco operates in a cultural context shaped by the prolonged historical tensions between Conservative, Liberal, and radical FSLN political forces in the past century. The reconstruction of neoliberal political economy on the ground has taken shape through competing imaginaries on the proper role of both state and non-state institutions in post-conflict everyday life. The contingent terms of neoliberal reconstruction observed in Boaco bring to light the challenge of building a coherent political-economic regime through the complicated landscape of daily practices forged in Boaco.

A deeply entrenched mistrust of major political and economic institutions, including Nicaraguan and municipal government, transnational NGOs, grassroots cooperatives, associations, and labor unions came through many informant interviews. This general hostility has focused particularly on a widespread antagonism towards progressive societal institutions and cooperation among the municipal population. The persistent ideological and political divisions recounted in chapter five have played a key role in maintaining hostile social attitudes
towards many political institutions that continue to struggle for influence over the reconstruction
process. As Boaco Cattlemen’s Association representative Rodrigo commented:

[Nicaragua] is a rich country. If the people would be allowed to work, it would be
different. And if there were better support for small business, for people who wanted to
work, this would all be different. The government right now is only looking out for its
own political supporters. As we say colloquially, one mule does not pull another (una
mula no jala otra).

This fiercely independent attitude has been integral to the contingent reconstruction of
neoliberal political economy centered on the beef and dairy cattle production that dominates
Boaco life. The iconic imagination of the independent rancher fighting for economic and
political sovereignty free from government and social institutions certainly came through my
conversations with informants (Figure 6.3). Many informants recounted the visceral reaction
against institutions and practices that countered this dominant political-economic vision of
Boaco’s pastoral life.

Consequently, the reconstruction of a neoliberal political economy from below has failed
to come together around any dominant grassroots institution capable of superceding the
politically charged social attitudes and practices that penetrate throughout Boaco civil society
and shape everyday conduct among my informants. Many informants tended to view any form
of cooperation as left-leanig progressive politics opposed to the market-centered political
economy championed throughout the reconstruction period. In this vein, Boaco Cattlemen’s
Association representative Rodrigo, added:

Cooperatives – how do I say this – the word ‘association’ connotes a group of people
that deal with one another. On the other hand, the word ‘cooperative’ is understood to be
a group that gets together to look for funds, to commercialize their products.
Associations are the same. The only difference is the name. ... Cooperatives are a
Sandinista thing. Look here in Boaco, COCABO is the only coffee cooperative made up
of democrats, Liberals. The Association is democrats. [The cooperatives] San Felipe,
Tierra Nueva, San Isidro are all Sandinistas, they are communist, they are closed.
The right-wing political-economic discourse I encountered among most Boaco’s conservative and liberal ‘democratic’ forces finds its opposite among the debilitated trade unions, producer cooperatives, and small agricultural producers in municipal Boaco. The Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos (UNAG) trade union, from its central offices near the Boaco cathedral, carries out a range of economic evaluation and social development programs for its members, including recent efforts as a secondary implementing agent for the Finnish government FOMEVIDAS financial support detailed below. The formally non-partisan UNAG remains mired by its historic FSLN affiliations and socially progressive politics that have cast an ideological shadow across its work throughout Boaco. The municipal UNAG representative Mateo demonstrated the complex balance that most institutions have struck in their efforts to reconstruct place-specific terms of neoliberal political economy from below. Bound to market
forces, UNAG has sought a middle ground that uses market relations to provide for social well-being in the region.

We fell into the 1990s. We fell into peace. With all the bad that happened in the 1990s, at least we lived in peace. ... Cooperatives and that form of coming together to work transformed into a business. And businesses are there to exploit us. Businesses think with their head, not their heart. Even though they are thinking about improving the quality and quantity of production, they still have established themselves as *una empresa cooperativa*. So, they require a series of legal requirements ... UNAG - one of its principal activities is to organize people in cooperatives so that producers benefit more. ... I am more or less support them because we have to recognize the economic realities since the 1990s is that we have to continue earning money and the best form to do that is through *empresas cooperativas*.

Most Boaco cooperatives have struggled with partisan perceptions that complicate their governance role in reconstructing a market-based political economy in Boaco. The partisan efforts to frame organizations and actors through a Left-Right political lens has weighed heavily on the generally small and financially challenged coffee, dairy and beef cattle ranching, and horticultural producer cooperatives that exist in Boaco. Major financial organizations like *Fundación Prodesa*, regional development NGOs like *ASPRODIC*, and even producer cooperatives themselves recognized their political weakness and public perceptions that painted all cooperatives as tainted, leftist institutions. As *Cooperativa Santiago* dairy cattle rancher Ignacio commented:

This region is dominated by ranching. You could describe us as very extremist, but very individualist. ‘Look at my pig, look at my chicken, look at my wife.’ Also, individuals sometimes break this framework through a form of group production, but even then each producer has his own farm, his pig, his chicken. ... [The cooperative has] had setbacks. We are very small. The cooperative perhaps has not put up with some things. We have a governing board. I am the president and I am accountable. We have an account that takes care of the finances with the foundational view that we do not give anything to anybody. We are a solvent cooperative. We do not give anything to anybody. ... To ranchers here, the behavior that exists among cooperatives and their members is totally contrary to ranching - [ranchers think that cooperatives] do not care about ranching. They are afraid of [cooperatives]. They have a fear of the word ‘cooperative’ – *horror* – I am talking about now. It is that legacy from the 1980s. ...
Most producer cooperatives I encountered, from both the left and right, have had to negotiate the proper balance between the complex neoliberal and progressive political currents always found just below the surface in Boaco daily life. The governance roles that producer organizations have adopted reflect the grounded practices that have built up over recent decades to define political-economic conditions in Boaco through three decades of war and reconstruction. For example, the Liberal-leaning coffee cooperative *Cafeteros de Boaco* (COCABO) representative Lucas explained:

COCABO was born out of necessity, as a response to the challenges that the agricultural sector in the central Nicaragua region [in 1979). Also, there was a need to have an organization supported by the law and controlled by producers before the aggressive advances being shown by the government towards producers. So, there also was a political necessity to bring together our properties as a united group. ... We saw the cooperative as a ‘third way’ between the two large blocs advocating the politics of either capitalism or communism-socialism. We could not avoid the reality in Nicaragua and the world. So, we lived through a ‘third way’. We implemented democracy – one person, one vote – there was equity in how much you produced and how much you received. [We promoted] equality.

In similar fashion, *Tierra Nueva*, the federation of coffee and honey cooperatives mentioned above, bore the harshest critique among informants who called it a Sandinista organization and dismissed its role within the neoliberal political-economic reconstruction process in post-war Boaco. However, *Tierra Nueva* representative Francisca laughed sardonically when I discussed these popular accusations. According to her, the *Tierra Nueva* board of directors was evenly split with four Liberal members and four FSLN members. The *Tierra Nueva* program, in Francisca’s own words, involved:

[The 1990s-era cooperatives] arose from a sentiment that came from within, rather than being imposed. We say here that we are now a cooperative business (*una empresa cooperativa*). Everything we do comes from an entrepreneurial point-of-view to continue developing and growing. ... We are an *empresa cooperativa* with a commitment to social responsibility. We maintain and preserve the values of cooperativism. But we maintain an entrepreneurial vision to move away from the notion that everything is handed out and to guarantee the economic sustainability.
Undoubtedly, some of the commercial associations, producer cooperatives, and related organizations in Boaco do maintain strong political tendencies shaped by the predominantly FSLN membership. The general resistance among liberal social forces to cooperative institutions and progressive politics becomes, in effect, a self-fulfilling prophecy as left-leaning actors gravitate towards the political space provided by trade unions, cooperatives, and other organizations as a coping mechanism among the predominant neoliberal currents that have organized Boaco since the Contra conflict. Nevertheless, the partisan political tendencies among even these organizations struggle to balance liberal and progressive ideologies within the contingently neoliberal political-economic space forged in Boaco. The *Cooperativa San Isidro* representatives Lázaro and Vidal, for example, found my ‘partisanship’ questions openly amusing as Lázaro noted that *San Isidro* remained officially non-partisan, before adding that:24

Cooperatives are businesses with an entrepreneurial vision. ... There are various political tendencies. But what matters to us is the development of the cooperative as such. Our motivating force is work, production, commercialization – it does not matter whether your allegiance is Sandinista, Conservative. We don’t take that into account. The governing board members are Sandinistas, but we do not talk about it.

I asked Lázaro and Vidal their thoughts on why so many Boaco informants forcefully dismiss cooperatives such as theirs as Sandinista organizations. Vidal replied:

The idea is this: In the 1980s, people formed cooperatives. The logic is sound. The [Law on Cooperatives] does not establish that cooperatives are only for people who directly adhere to a particular ideology, religion, or belief. Cooperatives are gender neutral, with no political colors or [other discrimination]. ... [Yet] the people logically maintain that the word ‘cooperative’ is completely political. The people do not look directly now at what we do, they just say ‘eh, eh, eh’. But it is not that way.

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24 Anecdotally, *Cooperativa San Isidro* representatives Lázaro and Vidal noted, after some debate, that 90% of the cooperative members were FSLN supporters, and they both adopted the FSLN tradition of referring to one another as ‘comrade’ (*compañero*) in casual conversation.
These stories of skepticism, cooperation, political tension, and progressive political institutions tell us something about how Boaqueños are performing neoliberal political economy within the predominantly local political-economic space that defines post-conflict Boaco life. The dominant political discourse that paints trade unions, cooperative organizations, and professional associations as politically charged, leftist political forces has fueled the place-based, individualist terms of neoliberal political-economic reconstruction in Boaco municipality. In the final section, we can turn attention to the contingent manifestations of neoliberal political economy that are playing out on the ground as individual Boaqueños negotiate the complicated institutional and governance geographies that have come to define post-conflict political economy in the Boaco municipality, the Boaco department, and beyond.

6.7 CONTINGENT RECONSTRUCTIONS OF NEOLIBERAL POLITICAL ECONOMY IN BOACO

The deep-seated historical patterns of cultural politics that have shaped Boaco and the central Nicaraguan highlands from the U.S. protectorate period to the present day are made manifest among the fractured political institutions and endemic political tensions that frame the mélange of everyday practices among the Boaqueño population. How the Boaco population has negotiated the reconstruction period arrival of transnational reconstruction networks and the at-times heavy-handed presence of the internationally funded, place-based reconstruction sector powerfully reflects the playing out of these historic tensions over the political-economic and cultural identity of the Boaco region.

Boaqueños continue to negotiate a political-economic landscape filled with longstanding unresolved political tensions between the patriarchal, staunchly individualist, place-centered cultural traditions of the cattle-producing region and the late 20th century rise of a more socially
progressive, regional vision for reconstructing political, economic, and social conditions in Boaco. Everyday life becomes a social performance that constitutes the contingent, highly localized reconstruction of neoliberal political economy on the ground. The varied ways that my Boaco informants have made sense of the broader patterns of neoliberal reconstruction during the past two decades reflects the unfinished, actively contested process of building contingent patterns of political-economic regulation and discipline that fit within the distinct cultural milieu of Boaco daily life.

Through the 20th century, the historic internecine Conservative tensions between traditionalists and agro-export elites and the broader Conservative-Liberal tensions slowly resolved themselves in favor of a conservative agro-export culture that incorporated core liberal political and economic values along the way (Walker 2003). This historic evolution of the conservative Boaco culture remains visible in the staunch Boaco support for orthodox market principles and practices that have been developing from the 1920s onward – a commitment to neoliberal political economy before post-conflict reconstruction, before political-economic reform, before neoliberalism became a formal discourse. For these Boaqueños, daily life entails ‘staying the course’ with a focus on place-based economic development, distaste for progressive political and social development programs, and a celebration of the individualism that defines Boaco in so many ways. The prominent conservative Boaco patriarch Abelardo embodies this perspective, commenting:

Do not believe that the countryside is Sandinista – that is pure propaganda. Schools, health, roads – none of that. When the [1990s transition came], farmers thought only about improving themselves. They did not say ‘Ay! This offers us an opportunity. They will give us things.’ No – the countryside realized that it had to work, that every person had to get ahead on his own merits. They were not waiting for handouts from the government, but rather said ‘give me an opportunity to work and get ahead.’ That is the rural mentality, at least for farmers in this department. ... The national problem, that there is no work, no work, no work. That is not a problem in Boaco. One way or another,
people work. There is not employment, but there is work. ... Boaco has a conviction that only Boaco can solve its problems. Here in Boaco, no one has given us anything. The only thing we have been given is the hospital, and that was the Japanese. Beyond that, nothing – not the government – nothing. We have done everything on our own. ... We bought with our own money German motors and we had electric lights, with no government help. Then we decided to get potable water. We rounded up the money, found a company and we had water. We built a park when no government would help us. We decided to build a hospital and we did it. ... We are egotistical, but we are not stingy.

This historical development of Boaco cultural politics, particularly honed by the FSLN/Contra period, has set in stone an ideological commitment within most of the Boaco population to the entrenched, hierarchical capitalist political economy of cattle production and cattle farm relations that dominate both the municipality and the broader department. Informants frequently resorted to descriptions of both FSLN and Liberal deprivations during the Contra conflict to justify maintaining Boaco political-economic sovereignty apart from neighboring communities and from national control in Managua. The local business entrepreneur Julieta exemplifies this dominant trend in political thought on the street:

The population in Boaco are mostly Liberals, and the do not ask for handouts. They want to live off their own means and to be able to say ‘this is mine. I made this, and I took care of myself.’ So people do not mobilize or organize for anything. They see any efforts like that as Sandinista. The notion of going and asking for handouts from other people is ugly.

The strong commitment to a market-based rationality guiding political and social life appears even among many of the economically most precarious Boaco residents I encountered. One micro-enterprise cafe owner, Berta, recounted (but would not permit an audio recording of) her own family’s recent experience of FSLN-inspired political repression involving a local

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25 The left-leaning ASPRODIC representative Dolores also echoed the view that Boaco suffered from a culture of political tension that set it apart from regional cooperation and national Nicaraguan government involvement, even within the same political party. Correspondence from August 2009.

26 This quote is provided from written notes, since Julieta spoke with me during a time in which she could not be digitally recorded.
Sandinista Council of Citizen’s Power (CPC) that had prevented her family farm access to government-managed economic assistance programs to poor farmers due to their Liberal political affiliation. For Berta, Leftist politics were an impediment to the market-based economic progress her poor family sought to develop.

The frequent stories of Boaco’s independent spirit and readiness to stand against all manner of FSLN progressive politics locally, regionally, and nationally gave a voice to the place-based, market-centered political economy readily apparent throughout the Boaco social landscape. From the relative lack of FSLN or Liberal political graffiti on walls, to the lone dairy ranchers scrabbling through the bricked streets on their horses, and the Boaco Cattlemen’s Association representative’s unsympathetic ‘a dollar is a dollar’ when talking about ranchers’ struggles to afford association membership, Boaco reflected a predominant everyday space where a host of daily, calculative practices reproduced a powerfully market-centered neoliberal political economy on the ground (Sparke 2006).

The Boaco commitment to capitalist political economy is not hegemonic, however. The historic subordination that the working classes, FSLN militants, and economically disadvantaged Liberal and Conservative Boaco residents have experienced for decades within the overarching conservative political-economic structure of the region has translated into a far more entrenched ideological and political divide between the dominant elite classes and the urban and rural masses that comprise most of the support for the FSLN and other left-wing political organizations. The FSLN militants in contemporary Boaco – mainly in the lower portion of the city at the foot of the hills – have attempted to perform their counter-hegemonic practices through a range of public acts (frequent parades, periodic rallies, the red-and-black flags placed on walls and street lights) and a very modest effort to promote producer organizations and civil
society organizations that blend bipartisan membership (where possible) with a broader social development agenda.

These informants frequently contrasted the place-centered conditions in Boaco to neighboring cattle production-dominated municipalities’ experiences of cooperation and progressive politics as an alternative model for reconstructing Boaco through their everyday practices. Many informants I encountered drew inspiration from the robust state of coffee, dairy, and agricultural producer cooperatives and associations in municipalities like Camoapa, Teustepe, and Santa Lucía as a model for charting a middle ground between market-centered practices and the desire to establish a more progressive society focused on social well-being.

The precarious producer cooperatives communities in Boaco have not achieved the same balance of economic, political, and social development practices as their far more developed counterparts in Jinotega. Nevertheless, the larger cooperatives-based organizations like Tierra Nueva, Cooperativa San Isidro, and Cooperativa Miel de Bosque are some of the only organized pathways for individuals to renegotiate the terms of neoliberal political economy through market-based efforts to provide for social welfare and human capital development in Boaco. For example, the Unión de Cooperativas Tierra Nueva has capitalized upon its preeminent position among Boaco-based cooperative organizations to establish extensive political and social development programs for its member cooperatives’ associates and their families. Tierra Nueva representatives’ everyday practices discursively approach political-economic reconstruction through market tropes, describing their business model as ‘a cooperative business’ (‘una empresa cooperativa’) focused on ‘commercialization’ and ‘creative marketing’ for their member cooperatives. At the same time, Tierra Nueva representative Francisca championed the
cooperatives-sector balance of market and social development, highlighting the clinics, schools, scholarships, and other services that *Tierra Nueva* provides to its member cooperatives.

Through these grounded practices, cooperatives-based organizations occupy a key governance niche within the broader transnational structure of the post-conflict political economy taking shape in Boaco. Though few in numbers, *Tierra Nueva* and similar cooperatives-based organizations has provided an opportunity to parlay their modest market presence into a new political role as intermediary between the state (both national and local) and the needs of the Boaco community. As *Tierra Nueva* representative Francisca added:

> There are many aspects that should be subsidized by the government that the cooperatives are handling now. For example, access to credit. The cooperatives are occupying that political space. Technical assistance should be handled by the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry. So, the cooperatives have to meet that demand alongside capacity development in those sectors. It is cooperatives that are providing those services. I think that if the government were intelligent, they would design a strategy to strengthen [cooperatives-based organizations] because we are doing a great deal of the work.

For *Tierra Nueva*, these governance practices have involved a program to provide three public meeting halls in Boaco and neighboring municipalities to foster a democratic, civic space for public use. In a similar vein, the *Cooperativa San Isidro* members have worked to translate their enhanced market presence into multiple social programs for both their members and the broader Boaco community. As *Cooperativa San Isidro* representative Vidal commented, their balanced economic and social development agenda remains firmly grounded to a *visión empresarial*, or entrepreneurial, market-based vision that took hold during the reconstruction period.

Despite this neoliberal market-centered rhetoric, the progressive Boaco coffee, dairy cattle, agricultural, and honey producers (among others) I encountered reflected a commonly tense and uneasy relationship with the post-conflict terms of market-centered political economy in Nicaragua. The ‘middle ground’ between orthodox neoliberalism and a more contingent,
grounded vision for neoliberal political-economic imagination remains hotly contested even as individual Boaco residents from across the political spectrum converge towards a dominant market rationality.

From above, post-conflict reconstruction and development programs that connect international state and non-state donors with regional and municipal actors continue to heavily influence the daily political-economic imaginations and practices that take hold on the ground. Most prominently, the Government of Finland established in 2004 the *Program to Strengthen Rural Development and Reduce Poverty in Boaco and Chontales* (FOMEVIDAS) in cooperation with the Nicaraguan Institute for Rural Development (IDR) to promote Nicaraguan institutional capacity for advancing rural socio-economic development. Through FOMEVIDAS, Finland has required the Nicaraguan government to provide 10% matching funds (Finland has granted US$ 2.5 - 4.5 million annually) for its market-centered rural development efforts (Kääriä et al. 2008; Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland 2004). More direct pressures from international NGO donors further discipline place-based actors towards the contingent forms of neoliberal market political economy that can be observed on the ground. For example, Boaco coffee producer *Cooperativa San Isidro* has adopted Germany-based *Fair Trade Labeling Organizations International* (FLO) standards with a social reinvestment fund program that directs US$10 from every 100-pound bag of coffee sold (i.e., a quintal) towards regional road and infrastructure development, and producer needs including funeral expenses, surviving family benefits, family member education benefits, and athletic development.

Despite these overarching pressures that continue to influence the reconstruction of neoliberal political economies on the ground, individual Boaco informants remain seemingly more ambivalent about how best to reorganize their economic, political, and social life among
the unresolved political tensions that permeate Boaco everyday life. The honey producers’

Cooperativa Miel del Bosque (a member cooperative within Tierra Nueva) representative

Aznaro forcefully expressed this situation, commenting:

The [neoliberal] model is supremely antagonistic. In the 1990s, the inspiration for the model was to socialize everyone to hard struggle, to focus on communism as something diabolical and unethical. To the poor who consume the communications media, they were told they had to leave the [1980s Sandinista] model and that they preferred being a peasant well paid by the patrón instead of being their own patrón. ... When we talk about the 1990s to now, the battle has been hard to change the conception, the spirit and the sentiment among the poor. We are living in a false happiness. ... What good is a nice salary? What good is a free market if we cannot buy the things we need? The basic goods, at least.

The neoliberal political-economic visions that frame the everyday, calculative practices performed by informants like Aznaro spotlight the contingent conditions through which the reconstruction of a neoliberal political economy has been contested and negotiated on the ground in Boaco. Again, Aznaro:

[The neoliberal] model has brought on a loss of ideology and that cooperative spirit. Cooperatives members were conscious of that spirit, they were conscious of their social responsibility. But acting within a neoliberal manner – I am not criticizing neoliberalism, I am not criticizing our economic model, but I am aware of what I consider to have been the biggest effects. ... Now we talk about entrepreneurial visions of cooperativism (una visión empresarial cooperativista). We can no longer talk about a cooperative mission, but instead about being competitive in order to modernize. We cannot stop in the street and say ‘hey, comrade’. Cooperativism is about competition, success, gaining strength – deep in your gut, you have something corrupting you, a cancer. Cooperatives are the antithesis of competition. However, that is all now part of our language – The entrepreneurial focus, competitiveness, all those things you can imagine form part of the toolkit for struggle.

What this means for the contingent neoliberal patterns of post-conflict political economy in Boaco remains uncertain. On one hand, an orthodox neoliberal political economy centered on place and individual market actors holds great influence among the Boaco population. In this imagination, a clear line has been drawn that defines and sets economic life apart from social and political concerns. On the other hand, this orthodox neoliberal imagination rests alongside a
restive counter-imagination that strikes a tenuous balance between market-centered and more progressive development concerns. For some Boaqueños, this tension has taken shape through practices that attempt to negotiate a contingent form of neoliberal political economy in which market rationality blends with social and political welfare concerns to define the nature of reconstruction. For other Boaqueños, the social and spatial reconstruction of political economy wrestles with how to balance these neoliberal and progressive imaginations for reorganizing post-conflict life in Boaco. The complex tangle of narratives, practices, and institutions that arise on the ground reflect these unresolved tensions as Boaco struggles to define the terms of neoliberal political economy and its place within the transnational capitalist political and economic order that arrived on its doorstep when peace came to Nicaragua in 1990.

6.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS: RECONSTRUCTING POLITICAL ECONOMY FROM BELOW

The culturally informed political economy perspective adopted throughout this chapter provides a lens for understanding the grounded intersections of political and economic rhetoric, practices, and institutions that constitute the contingent patterns of post-conflict reconstruction encountered in both Jinotega and Boaco. Jessop and Sum (2007) provide a framework for reconstructing political economy through a process of variation, selection, and retention of particular societal frameworks from within the bounded possibilities afforded by an overarching capitalist structure. The focus on everyday practices in Jinotega and Boaco highlights the argument that the broader transnational structure of post-conflict political economy not only informs how reconstruction has developed in Nicaragua from above. Rather, post-conflict reconstruction simultaneously takes contingent forms as an effect of those same everyday
conditions that define, put into practice, and institutionalize particular articulations of political economy from below.

Nicaraguan post-conflict reconstruction can be seen as a prolonged, negotiated process of defining and consolidating a cultural political-economic order through the geographically distinct institutional and governance relations forged on the ground. Reconstruction policy has taken a generally market-centered, neoliberal approach globally and nationally for twenty years. However, reconstruction remains a contingent process that takes shape through the grounded articulation of transnational forces and daily practices that help define the patterns of post-conflict political economy as part overarching structure and part emergent, relational effect. In this vein, Jinotega show signs of moving towards a progressive, market-centered form of neoliberal political economy (albeit certainly with its own counter-narratives). However, Boaco continues to struggle to define a coherent political-economic imagination that balances orthodox neoliberal thought and grounded, contingent neoliberal forms appropriate to the post-conflict milieu that has taken root in this central Nicaraguan region.
CHAPTER 7
IS RECONSTRUCTION DOING MORE HARM THAN GOOD? SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

7.1 CONFLICT, RECONSTRUCTION, AND ... NOW WHAT?

The future of Nicaraguan post-conflict reconstruction has reached a pivotal moment at the time of writing. In November 2011, Nicaraguans held general elections for the National Assembly and the presidency. These elections returned FSLN head Daniel Ortega Saavedra to the presidential Casa Rosa for a third consecutive presidential administration. Since the FSLN returned to the Presidential Palace in November 2006, critics from across the political spectrum have noted growing concern with the consolidation of political control by President Ortega and his loyal group of Orteguistas over key state institutions, municipal governments, communications media, and the electoral process (Carter Center 2011; Envío 2011). The constitutional legality questions surrounding a third consecutive Ortega administration and widespread election fraud allegations have stoked the fires of partisan animosity throughout Nicaragua (EEAS 2011; OAS 2011).

The inflammatory rhetoric of dictatorship, revolution, and treason has been part of political leaders’ and everyday citizens’ repertoire with alarming frequency in the prolonged political period leading to November 2011. Formally, political leaders, media outlets, and watchdog organizations have ranged from early 2008 warnings that Nicaragua hovered on the edge between ‘dictatorship versus democracy’ (O’Grady 2008) to the latest 2011 warnings in the Nicaraguan political journal Envío that “The identification of state interests with those of the governing party—one of the most criticized characteristics of the Ortega administration both now and in the eighties—is reaching a dangerous climax with this symbiosis” (Envío 2011).
Meanwhile, people in small towns like Jinotega and Boaco, on street corners, in homes, and across electronic social media have fearfully turned their thoughts towards warnings of rearmament, training camps in the mountains, and recent acts of paramilitary political murder by self-styled defenders of a democratic Nicaraguan state (Garth Medina 2011). For many of the informants included in this dissertation, hope for reconstruction has given way to fear for what the future may bring in the coming weeks and months after the 2011 general election.27

The coming pivotal juncture in Nicaraguan post-conflict reconstruction returns us to the question that launched this study: Why have two decades of international and domestic political efforts to rebuild a neoliberal political, economic, and social order in Nicaragua failed to supercede the political divisions and tensions that led to revolution, counter-revolution, and conflict in the 1970s and 1980s? From a normative, international perspective, Nicaraguan post-conflict reconstruction has failed to consolidate a shared national vision rooted in capitalist market democracy in which all major stakeholders adhere to a single set of rules, institutions, and governance relations. The Nicaraguan reconstruction experience seems to support the argument that rapid political and economic liberalization has entrenched the polarized political and economic relations that carried through the Contra conflict and into the post-conflict period (Paris 2002b, 2004). Yet, the question of why Nicaraguan post-conflict reconstruction continues to struggle so intensely with ideological and political divisions carried over from the Contra conflict begs the question of whether the dominant approach to political-economic reconstruction may be part of the problem, rather than a path for superceding Nicaraguan economic, political, and social tensions.

27 Informant email correspondences, October 12, 2011 and October 21, 2011.
7.2 WHY THE GEOGRAPHY OF RECONSTRUCTION MATTERS

This study centered on three closely related research questions to answer the central question of why Nicaraguan post-conflict reconstruction has produced such a mixed political record despite 20 years of global attention to capitalist-democratic reforms. First, I set out to determine what post-conflict transnational governance looked like in Nicaragua and what role this governance has played in reconstructing a political-economic structure grounded in neoliberal discourse. Second, I examined whether post-conflict reconstruction has taken shape through meaningfully different, place-specific forms of transnational governance that are responsive to the contingent blend of economic, political, and social conditions in different localities. Third, I questioned how the place-specific, wartime political-economic conditions, relations, and experiences have carried into the post-conflict reconstruction period, building on recent critical interventions that challenge the hard epistemological divide between conflict and peace (Dahlman 2011; Kirsch and Flint 2011b; Megoran 2011; Moodie 2010; Richmond 2010a; Ross 2011).

The study began from the critical perspective that post-conflict reconstruction is a normative project that transforms the political-economic regime in war-torn states. I borrowed from recent contributions in both geography and critical international relations to consider the role of transnational connections in setting the post-conflict agenda for how best to rebuild institutions and governance in the image of a neoliberal political economy. I have drawn particular inspiration from recent research critically examining both the geography and political power relations that inform reconstructions of peace. These contributions suggest that reconstruction efforts have adopted a universal model for rebuilding post-war states that is heavily influenced by a blend of liberal and neoliberal thought (Caplan 2005; Cousens and
Moreover, recent research highlights the geography of reconstruction as a contested political process that produces hybrid everyday spaces of peace and non-peace (Dahlman 2009; Dahlman and Ó Tuathail 2006; Jeffrey 2006; Kirsch and Flint 2011b; Megoran 2011; Richmond 2005b, 2010b). From this perspective, reconstruction is a relational process that combines economic, political, and cultural institutions and actors from multiple scales into contingent, place-specific patterns of post-war political economy (Flint 2011; Waizenegger and Hyndman 2011). Many of these works cast particular attention on the transnational connections among multilateral organizations, external donor states, development NGOs, and post-conflict state and non-state actors that produce the hybrid, contested spaces of reconstruction and post-war violence as part of daily life (Dahlman and Ó Tuathail 2005b; Richmond 2010b).

The current study has advanced the post-conflict reconstruction literature by providing more detail on how the place-specific reconstructions of political economy involve complicated negotiation of the very definitions and praxis of neoliberalism and post-neoliberal thought. That is, I approached reconstruction as not solely a dominant neoliberal process imposed from above or a resistant anti-neoliberal process crafted from below. Reconstruction emerged within the hybrid relational spaces of dominance/resistance through which the contingent political-economic imaginations and practices that constitute reconstruction on the ground are set in motion (Sharp et al. 2000). The focus I placed on reconstruction practices have set the stage for a more nuanced understanding of reconstruction that helps move us beyond a tendency to view reconstruction through the dichotomous and unidirectional lens of transnational processes and place-based effects. This point of view clearly borrows from the recent geographic literature, but
casts greater focus on reconstruction practices among the grounded actors whose daily experiences and subjectivities constitute the actually lived terms of reconstruction on the ground (cf. Pickering 2007).

To answer these questions, I approached post-conflict reconstruction in the Nicaraguan departments and municipalities of Jinotega and Boaco using a political economy perspective. The recent conceptual work on the contingent intersections of culture, political economy, and societal modes of regulation (and more recent work on cultural political economy) has made a compelling argument that capitalist political economy can adopt varied social forms through a blend of economic and political-cultural relations and identities that draw on culturally grounded patterns of political, economic, and social institutions and relations (Jessop 2007; Jessop and Sum 2007; Jessop and Oosterlynck 2008; Jones 2008; van Heur 2010). We can view political economy and regulation as contingent processes that create culturally specific ideas about economic and political organization, which then are put into practice, and ultimately become part of the institutional fabric of a society.

Post-conflict reconstruction reorganizes the political-economic regime and attendant societal modes of regulation around distinct sets of post-conflict institutions, governance relations, and daily practices that are always filtered through the place-specific, situated actors that can be encountered through field research among particular localities. The political economy perspective has provided a cogent rationale for examining post-conflict reconstruction through the lens of place-specific cultural and economic politics around which contingent forms of neoliberal political economy and regulation have taken hold among Nicaraguan localities particularly since the 1990 transition from FSLN revolutionary rule.
At its roots, political economy deals with the culturally specific origins of political and economic structure. The Nicaraguan case suggests that the intersection of culture and political economy is a recursive process filled with starts, stops, reversals, and setbacks in the effort to reorganize the political-economic structure. The prolonged competition among different political organizations reflects a fluid, place-specific set of political patterns among Nicaraguan localities. The at times contentious political relationships that form around cultural norms, societal institutions, divergent governance patterns, and variable daily practices both between and within particular places defy a simple evolutionary progression from conflict towards a reconstructed neoliberal political economy.

I adopted an extended case method ethnographic research protocol to best capture the ways that neoliberal political economy and cultural politics have come together to define the place-specific forms of post-conflict reconstruction taking shape in Nicaraguan localities. A hallmark of extended case method ethnography, as I discussed in Chapter 4, is the ability to redefine our theoretical concepts through case studies that are simultaneously grounded in and force us to constantly modify our theoretical points of view in light of research findings (Burawoy 2009; Hart 2004). The extended case ethnographic method provides an essential look into reconstruction of neoliberal political economy from a uniquely situated perspective that nicely complements the dominant institutional and governance perspectives.

This ethnographic perspective – what Pickering (2007) calls a view of reconstruction ‘from the ground floor’ – has allowed us to see how post-conflict reconstruction has established contingent forms of neoliberal regulation through the everyday practices and experiences encountered among informants in Jinotega and Boaco. It bears mention that the relationship between reconstruction and political economy is a two-way street. Informants’ daily practices
and subjectivities have formed through their embeddedness within the reconstruction of societal institutions and governance relations. At the same time, these same practices and subjectivities redefine from within what a post-conflict political-economic order look like, how it operates, and what it means.

The results of this study are not complete without a brief consideration of the particular limitations and challenges that come with studying reconstruction from a culturally grounded political economy perspective and using an ethnographic extended case method. This particular ethnographic method has been subject to criticism for its inherent risk of developing unreliable, unverifiable results due to sampling biases, researcher subjectivities, and the inability to wholly overcome the research position as an outsider to the cultural milieu under study (Hammersley 1992). The extended case method ethnographic approach to this study undoubtedly did permit me to make sense of the recursive interplay between political-economic structure and the daily practices and subjectivities that reproduce and transform that structure within the distinct cultural contexts of Jinotega and Boaco. However, the question of whether the Nicaraguan reconstruction story I have told approximates a reliable representation of post-conflict life in my field sites.

I approached this study knowing that studying Nicaraguan post-conflict reconstruction posed unique challenges that are the result of the distinct manner in which Nicaragua transitioned from conflict to post-conflict processes with the 1990 election, rather than through formal peace accords. In Chapter One, I discussed the imperfect fit between the ‘reconstruction’ period initiated in 1990 and the neoliberal reforms initiated in the late 1980s. However, the exceptional nature of Nicaraguan reconstruction is, I believe, a strength of this study. Ethnographic extended case method relies on an ability to find the anomalies within existing theories and then refine
theory based on new research. That being the case, Nicaragua provided a clear reminder that both reconstruction and neoliberalization are political processes only contingently bound together in time and space. The fundamental issues involved – political-economic reforms, persistent political tensions, place-specific institutions and governance relations, transnational connections – continued to be salient elements of the research agenda.

Reconstruction and political economy formation are both prolonged social processes spanning years and even decades (Junne and Verkoren 2005a). The ethnographic research I conducted for two months from early July–early September 2009, along with prior visits for two weeks in 2008, raises a valid question of whether the amount of time I spent in the field provided sufficient contact with research informants and immersion within the daily rhythms of Jinotega and Boaco life to provide a robust understanding of the political-economic reconstruction process. Michael Burawoy offers only vague guidance with his call for ‘extended periods of time following their subjects around, living their lives, learning their ways and wants’ (Burawoy 2000: 27). Ethnographic research is always an historical and geographic cross-section limited in scope. Part of the research process is to extend that ethnographic moment both backwards in time and outwards in space to situate the research within a larger historical and geographic context (Burawoy 2009; Gille 2001). Thus, the not-so-simple answer is that the right amount of time is however long is necessary to confidently gain an understanding on the processes and practices that have conditioned and continue to shape the reconstruction of the political-economic structure in each field site.

With the limited time frame, my research focused heavily on themes of dominance and governance with a large number of informants culled from among NGOs, political organizations, civil society organizations, and community activists. While my research did include some
connection with the subaltern voices of farmers, street vendors, and more disadvantaged sectors of Jinotega and Boaco society, the general silencing of these voices in the current study is a clear limitation and opportunity for future research. Undoubtedly, more research time in Jinotega and Boaco would have permitted me to collect a more robust understanding of both the context for and daily, lived experiences of political-economic reconstruction among a broader set of social positions. These challenges have been mitigated to a large extent by the limited scope of this study with its focus on small Nicaraguan localities rather than major urban centers like Managua or León. The more intimate settings in Jinotega and Boaco enhanced my ability both to gain formal access to particular informants and to develop more personal, informal relationships within the communities within the limited time spent in the field. These connections proved to be essential for the study to develop an understanding of how people have defined and negotiated the neoliberal political-economic reconstruction process through the place-based institutions and governance systems that frame daily life.

The field sites I selected for this study provided both strengths and weaknesses that came to light through the research process. I approached case selection within an epistemological view of the structured totality advocated by ethnographic extended case method advocate Michael Burawoy (Burawoy 2009). I chose to conduct the study in Jinotega and Boaco as two field sites from which I expected to gain two distinct, partial visions of how the macro-scale processes of reconstruction and neoliberal political-economic reform operated together to produce post-conflict space and practices. I intended for the similarities between Jinotega and Boaco to limit the meaningful variations that could complicate my ability to interpret and analyze my research findings (see Chapter Four). Jinotega and Boaco shared similar population size, similar political heterogeneity (in terms of election returns), and a similar peripheral
position within the Nicaraguan political economy accompanied by a large NGO and microfinance institution presence readily visible on the ground. The remaining variation in historical experiences of conflict, production base, and regional political economy provided an intriguing set of conditions through which I could analyze reconstruction.

While the study benefited from the careful field site selection process, the actual research equally challenged me to recognize and work through the place-specific cultural differences and my own researcher biases that formed in the field. The majority of my research results developed from unstructured interviews I conducted with the informants. I relied heavily on a ‘snowball sampling’ technique that took me from one informant to the next through a nebulous process of intuition, social observation, referrals, and, in some cases, serendipity (Atkinson and Flint 2001; Biernacki and Waldorf 1981). This chain referral process opened many doors (literally) and facilitated my access to informants in both field sites. Moreover, I did form more personal relationships with several research informants that permitted more informal conversations both during my time in the field and through extensive electronic correspondence during the intervening period since I returned to my U.S. office.

However, my relationship with research informants in Jinotega and Boaco varied considerably. For example, I generally found the Jinotega-based NGOs, government agencies, private sector organizations, and individuals I encountered to be more willing to engage in prolonged, thoughtful conversation on my research than I experienced in Boaco. The greater rapport I enjoyed with Jinotegano informants translated into friendships and a generally more informal atmosphere for informant conversations that I had difficulty achieving in Boaco. In the latter case, the social distance remained more rigid between my informants and me, complicating my efforts to parse rhetoric from reality. These challenges beg the question of whether these
variable field experiences have in some way undermined the validity of what I have reported in this study. Moreover, the constant risk that I, as the researcher, have imprinted my own subjective biases *too heavily* upon what I encountered in the field further deepens the possibility that the limited perspectives I am reporting are not capturing a central feature of the reconstruction process in my field locations.

The short response to these concerns is that this study provides an informed analysis of the multi-scalar reconstruction processes that benefit from the political economy perspective and ethnographic method adopted. The research findings are unavoidably partial, shaped by the choices I have made as a researcher, the voices heard and the voices unheard, and my interpretation of informants’ words, actions, and settings. Despite the limitations, the study grants new insights into the tangled connections between reconstruction policy and contingent neoliberal political-economic reforms that develop and become the daily norm in particular places (Jones 2008).

Moreover, the place-based Nicaraguan reconstruction processes detailed in this study provide further insights into the international reconstruction project that has developed since 1990. Rather than providing a direct comparative framework for additional studies, the reconstruction findings in this study provide an opportunity for a conversation with the broader body of work on reconstruction in other countries. Reconstruction in Jinotega is distinct from reconstruction in Boaco, other Nicaraguan localities, and certainly reconstruction in locations outside of Nicaragua. Nevertheless, the contingent reconstruction conditions that have come together in my field sites are part of a global reconstruction mosaic. How contingent reconstructions of neoliberal political economy have taken shape in Jinotega and Boaco can be used to generate
new thinking on the broader definition and implications of post-conflict reconstruction as a global political process.

Finally, I want to call attention to one additional limitation of the current study that presents an opportunity for future research on reconstruction in Nicaragua and other post-conflict states. Throughout this study, my contingent, relational approach to Nicaraguan reconstruction was centered on the place-specific patterns of neoliberal reform in Jinotega and Boaco. However, a point I raised in Chapter 3 bears being repeated. The post-Cold War international reconstruction regime cannot be reified as a single, trans-historical force. Reconstruction is a contingent and contested concept at all geographic scales. International reconstruction efforts develop among a host of different organizations, institutions, and agencies whose goals and commitments vary both ideologically and geographically. Future research on Nicaraguan reconstruction will shift attention onto this international reconstruction regime to better examine the contingent construction of reconstruction policies and programs both within particular organizations and across organizations separated both by geographic space and by differential structural positions within the global political economy. This call to study international reconstruction actors from a strategic-relational perspective would provide a more robust view of the historical and geographic conditions for Nicaraguan reconstruction.

### 7.3 RECONSTRUCTION FROM WITHIN: TRANSNATIONALISM, PLACE, AND THE COMPREHENSIVE RECONSTRUCTION OF POST-CONFLICT LIFE

The results of the current study support the critical view that post-conflict reconstruction has reorganized the Nicaraguan political economy through the development of transnational, neoliberal forms of societal regulation (Babb 2001; Everingham 1998; Pastor 2002; Robinson 1996). The predominant transnational governance structure in Jinotega and Boaco has played a
key role in advancing the general neoliberal discourse that has informed many of the societal institutions, practices, and political subjectivities that have emerged during the post-conflict period. At the same time, this study supports my central thesis that reconstruction has forged contingent forms of neoliberal political economy within different Nicaraguan localities that challenge our attempts to portray post-conflict reconstruction as a top-down, hegemonic project.

Transnational financial connections have permitted international donors and NGOs to instill neoliberal market discipline through the penetration of loan-centered financial relationships connecting international, national, and municipal actors on the ground. The neoliberal discourse through which international donor state agencies, transnational NGOs, and internationally financed micro-credit finance lending institutions have gradually shifted from a grants-based to a loans-based political economy in both Jinotega and Boaco has been key to the neoliberal form of reconstruction taking shape in Nicaragua.

The transnational connections that establish what I have called the ‘reconstruction sector’ have supported a small elite of urban professionals who have become the bearers of a neoliberal political-economic imagination in Jinotega and Boaco. These political actors are well positioned within many (though not all) of the place-based NGOs, private sector organizations, and civil society organizations that guide the reconstruction of a broadly neoliberal post-conflict political economy. These actors have become the ‘gatekeepers’ guiding how political-economic reconstruction has taken shape, even as they remain firmly embedded within the same neoliberal discourse they promote. The conversations I had with a range of NGO and civil society organization representatives during my field research demonstrated quite clearly that many of these actors understood their integral role in the gradual transformation towards neoliberal
political practices and political thought based on a discourse of personal responsibility and market-based political and social development in their respective regions.

The sum result of reconstruction has been a spatial reorganization of post-war political and economic life that binds post-conflict states, societies, and communities to the transnational political-economic orientation, financial largesse, and program development efforts of international donors and their proxies on the ground. The research in Jinotega and Boaco suggests that reconstruction processes may reinforce the ‘project society’ conditions that characterize the transnational, neoliberal direction of post-conflict political economy (Sampson 2003: 329). As discussed in Chapter Two, the project society argument suggests that international reconstruction efforts have failed to develop indigenous societal institutions necessary for a secure, stable capitalist-democratic regime (de Zeeuw 2005). At the same time, post-conflict societies are left with an inchoate, internationally supported mix of financial assistance and structural development programs that fail to adequately establish long-term conditions for autochthonous reconstruction and development (Sampson 2003).

The transnational political-economic structure taking shape in Jinotega and Boaco has undermined efforts to produce a shared national vision for economic, political, and social development. The vertical, ‘upwards and outwards’ focus among most reconstruction sector actors and the general population focused on deepening the connections between their localities and the global capitalist political economy as a key to post-conflict development for their communities. This transnational reconstruction shift has occurred at the expense of building a shared horizontal space for political participation and democratic governance that can bridge the ideological divisions inherited from the Contra conflict. As Coyne (2005, 325) suggests:

Without these preconditions to serve as a foundation, reconstructed liberal orders will fail to be self-sustaining over time. It is argued that the viability of a shared ideology and
ethic, and hence success, is directly dependent on the extent of horizontal ties in the post-conflict country. The main conclusion is that societies lacking adequate horizontal ties will require a high level of continual intervention and reconstruction efforts will have a lower probability of success.

The continued political tensions that have disrupted the consolidation of hegemonic economic, political, and social institutions in Jinotega and Boaco are both cause and outcome of this transnational reconstruction of a neoliberal political economy. Societal institutions, governance relations, and daily life in both localities reflect the high degree of ideological and political divisions that characterize political and civil society. The consequent fragmentation of a universal, shared space for citizen participation has left many informants I encountered feeling that they had nowhere else to turn except to the transnational reconstruction sector community for their post-war societal development needs.

At the same time, the transnational orientation of post-conflict life has reinforced a political condition in which there is no real motivation nor need for domestic political organizations to find a common ‘middle ground’ centered on a shared reconstruction vision among the political elites (Hindess 2002; Thaa 2001). The entrenched distributional politics inherited from the Contra conflict has perpetuated a winner-take-all political system in which Liberal and FSLN political organizations and their militant supporters in Jinotega and Boaco prioritize political ideology over cooperation and compromise. Informants’ depictions of post-conflict political life paints a stark picture of reconstruction that remains mired in the politics of the past, from political struggles for control over the legal-institutional space for citizen participation and credible reports of election fraud in Jinotega, to ‘defenders of democracy’ narratives, accusations of partisan allocation of Nicaraguan government social benefits, and the contentious street violence that has erupted in Boaco in recent years.
Notwithstanding these general reconstruction patterns, conceptualizing the Nicaraguan post-conflict reconstruction experience as a universal shift towards a transnational political economy based on dominant modes of neoliberal political thought is insufficient to explain the diverse reconstruction conditions I encountered in Jinotega and Boaco. This study shows that the reconstruction of neoliberal political economy in Jinotega and Boaco has adapted, both in meaning and content, to the place-specific blend of economic, political, and social institutions, relations, and identities through which individuals order their daily lives. The societal regulation approach I have adopted requires that we look beyond top-heavy transnational political-economic institutions and governance relations to examine the more diffuse set of everyday, calculative practices that construct and reproduce place-specific forms of political-economic reconstruction (Sparke 2006).

The findings of this study suggest that reconstruction has established distinct neoliberal forms of political-economic regulation in Jinotega and Boaco that draw from the grounded cultural milieu within which broader capitalist-democratic processes are received. These grounded reconstruction experiences have produced forms of post-conflict political economy that still fall within the broad framework of neoliberal political-economic regulation established since the end of the Contra conflict, yet demonstrate very distinct socio-spatial patterns of daily practice and political subject formation on the ground.

The transnational connections shaping the post-conflict reconstruction of neoliberal political-economic regulation in Jinotega and Boaco operate in subtle ways not entirely captured by current theories on transnational and neoliberal governance (Larner and LeHeron 2003; Larner and Walters 2004, cf. Robinson 1996, 2003). The reconstruction of neoliberal political economy has taken hold in an uncoordinated, at times almost accidental, fashion through a
relatively incoherent, grounded set of actors and political projects. The reconstruction sector in Nicaragua, as elsewhere, consists of countless international donor agencies, NGOs, and domestic organizations with varied inter-connections, different economic perspectives, and variable attention to broader theoretical implications of their long-term reconstruction programs.

The reconstruction of neoliberal political economy is better viewed as a process that translates the generally neoliberal perspectives shared by transnational governance actors into the daily practices and political subjectivities that develop on the ground to perform and reproduce the post-conflict reconstruction process (Larner and LeHeron 2003). To a considerable extent, daily life in Jinotega and Boaco does reflect the neoliberal disciplinary practices put in place, in part, through the transnational reconstruction sector. My informants in Jinotega and Boaco carried on their everyday affairs within a social milieu centered on market-based solutions to the political and social challenges that the Nicaraguan people confront on a daily basis. The brass ring for political and economic success rests in individual connection to international finance, inclusion within NGO projects, and access to micro-credit financial support. It bears mention that these neoliberal boundaries on daily practice shaped many informants’ actions and perspectives both among reconstruction sector actors (e.g., NGO representatives) and among other individuals involved in small business, agriculture, services, and even informal sector activities.

However, reconstruction in Jinotega and Boaco suggests that post-conflict political economy has not come solely from above, nor even from below, but from within through the grounded political articulation of institutions, relations, and actors from a range of geographic locations that make up the social fabric of place. Two decades of global attention to reconstructing neoliberal political economy in Nicaragua has produced a complex mosaic of
political-economic institutions, relations, and daily practices grounded in the contingent articulation of economic and identity politics that constitute and become ‘visible’ in particular places. Jinotega and Boaco have had strikingly distinct Contra conflict experiences, from the direct conditions of war and social dislocation that Jinotega endured to the more indirect ‘war at a distance’ and perceived depravity of the FSLN revolutionary government experienced in Boaco. These political histories have recursively become bound up with the distinct political economy of production and attendant differences in everyday life-worlds that exist in Jinotega and Boaco. The prevalent small-scale coffee production and agricultural farmers that define everyday life in Jinotega are a world apart from the prevalent beef and dairy cattle ranchers that dominate everyday life in Boaco.

The reconstruction of neoliberal political-economic conditions has drawn from these distinct regional and place-specific historical and geographic contexts to develop very distinct perspectives on political rapprochement, capitalist economy, and political and social development in Jinotega and Boaco. This study suggests that the ideological and political divisions that remain strong for militants and political elites in Jinotega have been moderated among much – perhaps even most – of the general population. The post-conflict rise of coffee production cooperatives as a predominant social institution in the region and throughout northern Nicaragua has played a key role in this shift from partisan politics to a neoliberal future focused on capitalist production that transcends political allegiances. My informants were clear in their view that economic success trumps partisanship within the daily practices that occupy most Jinotega residents. This view does not detract from the continued political need for a shared political space for citizen participation, but does suggest that Jinoteganos have swapped political engagement with economic participation in a neoliberal market economy to a remarkable extent.
In contrast, this study suggests that Boaco is a place where ideological and political divisions have continued to run deep within the general population and have conditioned the particular institutional, governance, and daily patterns that constitute the contingent form of neoliberal political-economic reconstruction I encountered. The transnational reconstruction sector in Boaco, dominated by a small set of internationally funded NGOs, has been able to introduce orthodox neoliberal discipline with little resistance or even an institutional counterpart. The partisan divisions that continue to divide the main civil society organizations, labor movements, and poorly developed producer cooperatives in Boaco have supported the emergence of a post-conflict political economy in which daily practices reinforce longstanding class-based political and economic cleavages inherited from the Contra conflict.

These contingent neoliberal forms of political-economic reconstruction in Jinotega and Boaco have developed around distinct socio-spatial imaginations that define the scope of neoliberal institutional, governance, and daily practice reforms in each place, as well. The Northern regional spatial imagination that has taken hold in Jinotega has produced a political-economic space through which the distinct Jinotega brand of neoliberal reconstruction has developed. This regional imagination has supported the neoliberal focus on private sector economic success as the key to political and social development with a regional political identity discourse that connects local coffee producers and the general population into broader regional and global patterns of neoliberal market economy. The reconstruction of a neoliberal political economy has brought forth a comprehensive definition of the economy that blurs the lines between economic, political, and social development within this view of Northern regional development through neoliberal private sector market participation.
By comparison, the contingent neoliberal form of reconstruction that has emerged in Boaco has recursively developed within a highly local spatial imagination that draws a hard line between individual, private sector economic success and the broader political and social development needs of the Boaco municipal and departmental population. This local imagination is both cause and consequence of the distinct cultural milieu in which Boaco-based informants have experienced conflict, post-conflict economic production, and the transnational connections that rest at the heart of the neoliberal reconstruction process on the ground. Reconstruction has reinforced neoliberal market practices and subjects who view individual, private enterprise in the dominant cattle production complex as sacrosanct; and, hence, represent more collaborative forms of economic, political, and social development through producer cooperativism and regional cooperation as anti-democratic and counter to the cultural-political identities that define Boaco.

Ultimately, the contingent neoliberal patterns of post-conflict reconstruction that have played out in Jinotega and Boaco have established in different ways the socio-spatial terms of neoliberal daily practice and political subject formation. This study reminds us that transnational institutions and transnational governance do not always work solely through domination, but also through more subtle processes that develop in the everyday spaces of post-conflict life (Allen 2003). Neoliberal forms of post-conflict reconstruction provide a range of distinct narratives and practices through which individuals come to understand their place in the post-conflict political economy. Scholars’ recent focus on the contingency of neoliberalism – or neoliberalizing processes – should be a warning that attempts to define the normative success of reconstruction through adherence to a single model are destined to fail more often than not (Larner and LeHeron 2003; Wilson 2004)
The distinct reconstruction(s) of neoliberal political subjectivity that I observed in Jinotega and Boaco reflect the broader institutional and governance patterns that have developed both over and through daily practices by the general population. While certainly not the only perspective I encountered, many Jinotegano informants shared a generally neoliberal self-understanding centered on their role in promoting economic development as a vehicle for the broader realization of political and social development for themselves and their community. The commonly heard distaste for partisan politics and the angst-ridden comments about the futility of the Contra conflict revealed a neoliberal sense of self that informed many Jinoteganos’ everyday focus on economic production as a corrective to the violence and confrontation of the past.

In Boaco, the neoliberal reconstruction of political subjects has involved not so much a transformation as an entrenchment of long-standing cultural-political identities centered on Boaqueños’ self-described political-economic position as defenders of democracy through neoliberal market-centered practices and imaginations. For many Boaco informants, the daily economic, political, and social practices reflected a more fundamental plebiscite on their personal, internalized convictions for post-conflict political economy in which neoliberal norms of personal responsibility and private sector economic development provided the foundation for post-conflict life in their community.

For both Jinotega and Boaco, the connection between the reconstruction of political economy and reconstruction of selfhood that came through in this study highlights the contingent, albeit strong, relationship between post-conflict reconstruction, neoliberal discourse, everyday practice, and political subject formation. The multiple possible reconstruction outcomes that fall within the broad category of neoliberal political-economic processes leave the door open for a richly diverse – albeit not unlimited – set of policy experiments and policy
experiences on the ground. Where we draw the line between contingent versus post-neoliberal forms of reconstruction is open for debate (Macdonald and Ruckert 2009). Whatever terminology is adopted, this study demonstrates that reconstruction is a political concept that is both richer and more varied than contemporary policy-oriented scholars have recognized in their recent works.

We can find a moment for cautious optimism within the otherwise rather pessimistic portrait that this study of Nicaraguan post-conflict reconstruction has offered, with the recognition that the political will for getting past three decades of partisan rhetoric and empty political promises does exist and may yet be given expression. The views that one Jinotega-based coffee producer organization representative expressed in 2009 capture this hopeful view of reconstruction not wholly constrained by the weight of transnational, neoliberal political economy from above nor the wedge of ideological divisions from within:

There is a tendency to maintain the [old] patronage system. I see the tendency when I see many people resigned to the idea that poverty is inescapable, and it takes considerable effort to bring people together. There is an individualism that is hard to break. ... We still lack the concept – we still think we are ‘Jinotega’ [the city] – no, we are a Department and we all have to operate in that mind-set -- whomever we are, be it the mayor, the president – we have to see ourselves as a [collective]. Soppexcca has been able to develop well not only with the economic part, but in terms of human capital. Our human capital has been strengthened, because without knowledge capital dries up. It is something we can do even without a single dollar.

7.4 RETHINKING RECONSTRUCTION

To conclude this study, I pose the question of what these research findings on the complex contingencies of post-conflict reconstruction in Nicaragua can tell about the broader efforts to reconstruct war-torn states and societies worldwide. Foremost, this study suggests that the tendency among both policy stakeholders and intellectuals to view post-conflict reconstruction foremost as a set of formal institutional and governance reforms introduced from
above onto the post-conflict population is a partial, limited view of reconstruction. The binary
distinction between international and domestic reconstruction stakeholders unintentionally
reproduces the global structure of political inequality that has so often led to conflict in the first
place. International reconstruction stakeholders’ liberal discourse is portrayed in overly
benevolent, disinterested terms that shift the blame for the failures of reconstruction onto
‘flawed’ domestic post-conflict institutions and actors unable to effectively make the rapid
transition to a post-conflict liberal capitalist-democratic order (Jeong 2005; Junne and Verkoren
2005b; Paris 2004).

This study compels us to ask whether the dominant international post-conflict
reconstruction framework built around neoliberal market-democratic institutions and
governance, may be doing more harm than good for efforts to build substantive post-conflict
peace in war-torn states. The principal challenge for reconstruction is determining how to make
the transition away from the patriarchal terms of transnational governance that drive neoliberal
modes of political-economic reconstruction through donor finance and development assistance
(de Zeeuw 2005). The international donor support for reconstruction projects is often vital to
sustain the transition from wartime political and economic conditions towards a post-conflict
future. However, the Nicaraguan study suggests that post-conflict reconstruction can be a
double-edged sword that simultaneously may help constructed shared opportunities for
reconciliation and development, but also may inhibit development of a shared post-conflict
vision for political cooperation that can supersede the entrenched political tensions inherited
from the past. The transnational connections that guide reconstruction have the potential to
reproduce the patriarchal state model so common to Latin America and other regions (Badie
2000) with the international donor state and NGOs as benefactors driving a clientelistic political-
economic structure at the expense of horizontal connections among civil society and grassroots actors.

This study demonstrated that post-conflict reconstruction may produce multiple, distinct political-economic institutions, relations, practices, and subjects that fall within the rubric of the international reconstruction discourse. The recent recognition that reconstruction produces place-specific societal institutions and practices through a relational process has been a welcome advance in reconstruction studies (Flint 2011). The merger of cultural and political-economic perspectives takes this recent reconstruction work one step further. Seeing reconstruction as culturally informed political economy formation emphasizes more clearly the role of cultural conditions and relations in setting the boundaries for how reconstruction reorganizes the post-conflict political economy within the broad terms of neoliberal thought. In particular, this study suggests that reconstruction studies may benefit from closer attention to the mutual production of culturally grounded neoliberal post-conflict institutions and neoliberal political subject formation that is rendered visible through daily practices.

Post-conflict reconstruction in the final analysis reflects the political ideals and power structure from which it forms. As a starting point, we must critically reconsider the content of the peace that reconstruction seeks to build and ask for whom reconstruction improves or not the positive conditions of a stable, prosperous life. Reconstruction, we may find, requires a new social definition of ‘success’ that grants greater attention to the grounded knowledge and silenced voices that can recognize the challenge of reducing the root causes of conflict. The reconstruction of a more just political-economic peace must begin from within the culturally grounded spaces that offer the best opportunity for getting past the tensions of peace and war to build a more humane post-conflict future.
The tragic irony of Nicaraguan post-conflict reconstruction is that Nicaraguans from the left and the right generally diagnose the same disease – the inability to develop a homegrown vision for a just Nicaraguan future shared by all Nicaraguans to replace the political tensions carried over from a century of war, dictatorship, and revolution. The international community is vitally important to Nicaragua today. Yet, in the end the international community will not decide the future of Nicaraguan political-economic peace. The Nicaraguan people are who must find the shared political space for reconstruction that has eluded them for too many decades. Through this research process, I have come to share in Nicaraguans’ fears, and their friendships as they struggle to build that shared future and avoid falling back into the abyss. It is my hope that the current study may become a step in this long road: That we may begin to listen to what they are telling us about their reconstruction experience, that their hopes for the future may be given a voice.
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