

Student Name

**Major:** Anthropology

**Concentration:** Ethnic Studies

**Proposal for Honors Thesis Advisor:** Dr. Eriberto Lozada

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**Title:** Effective Models for Mission in the Third World

**Thesis:**

Globalization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century dramatically affects the work of transnational organizations and the local people they seek to serve. Based on fieldwork conducted in Agua Prieta, Mexico (a border town located just south of Douglas, Arizona), I will explore how transnational non-governmental organizations, like Presbyterian Border Ministries, have restructured their development strategies to center on partnership and localization. I will specifically explore how theoretical models from development can serve to explain both the contemporary structure and grass-roots practices of transnational religious organizations. While the particular organization I will review is Christian, the implications of shifting theoretical models for development (in response to globalization) will be useful for understanding the effectiveness of transnational organizations as a whole.

By synthesizing different development theories and models for mission combined with my experience at Frontera de Cristo (one of seven Presbyterian Border Ministries) in the summer of 2003, I will explore where models for mission and development theories overlap and how these theories have developed into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I conducted my fieldwork in Agua Prieta, Mexico, compiling photographs, notes on participation-observations, informal journals, and local mission material over a nine week period from May 30, 2003 to August 11, 2003. I will use four aspects of mission projects from my experience in Agua Prieta, Mexico that reveal tension between Mexican and American approaches to mission (the partnership between a Mexican church and an American church, an 8-year old Presbyterian Mexican church congregation, a coffee cooperative, and relationships between men and women) to illustrate that effective faith-based transnational development efforts require localization that relies on connections between scripture and socioeconomic conditions. Localization implies the specific processes by which a community adapts its culture to understand and include or exclude new systems of meaning. It is precisely this process with which I am concerned and also with the increasing exchange of information that occurs in a globalized world.

I will show in my thesis that when localizing connections are understood, reinterpreted, and invested in by a community, they ease a shift to a new theology and ideology of power because they rely on connections between development and Christianity. I will prove that this process of localization shows that these connections in an analytical sense reveal how faith-based transitional organizations are like economic development organizations or vice versa. As people embrace the connections, they reinforce one another: for some the development aspect of the connection makes Christianity more natural, for others the Christian connection to development makes the latter an obvious concern. I will demonstrate that the final step in this localization

process is the naturalization of these connections made between the scripture and the socioeconomic state to the people of Agua Prieta.

### **Methodology:**

#### *1<sup>st</sup> Phase: Research*

Though my paper will be grounded in my experiences with Presbyterian Border Ministries, my first phase of work is background research. I will sift through a rough history of global development theory, touching on the major phases of modernization theory and dependency theory. This basic historical portrayal of development theory will be coupled with a brief history of missionaries in the global context and mission models. I will take a look at contemporary theory in both fields as well and focus particularly on the rise of international organizations, their interaction with globalization, and their specific interaction with Mexican culture, and their ability to address issues of gender inequality.

#### *2<sup>nd</sup> Phase: Analyze fieldwork*

At this point, I will turn to my experiences in Agua Prieta, Mexico, and Douglas, Arizona, and describe the structure, theology, and ideology of the particular organization, Frontera de Cristo, a Presbyterian Border Ministries site funded by PCUSA, with which I was associated. While at Presbyterian Border Ministries, I participated in the congregations of two churches, First Presbyterian Church of Douglas, Arizona and Lirio de los Valles (Agua Prieta) of the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico. Like many transnational nongovernmental organizations, over the last decade, Frontera de Cristo has adjusted its vision for third world mission to focus on economic development and education. Presbyterian Border Ministries' mission statement reads, "Presbyterian Border Ministry (PBM) is a cooperative endeavor of the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico and the Presbyterian Church (USA). Its mission is to share the Gospel in Mexican cities along the 2,000 mile border with the United States: serving the needs of spirit, body, and mind in 7 Ministries with multiple sites stretching from the Gulf to the Pacific" (May 28, 2003 <http://www.pcusa.org/border/>). The partnership between the two churches in ministry is Frontera de Cristo's attempt to establish a reciprocal relationship between Mexico and the United States, in which the two interact to take ownership of the ministries provided by the Presbyterian Church and meet their needs as a unified community. As such, the leadership in all mission activities is either ideally shared by Mexicans and Americans or completely Mexican; this leadership attempted to be flexible, constantly adjusting its mission to the needs of the community, but like any mission, it was not without conflict. A truly adaptive model of mission allows for the localization of the Christian message and generates a local solution to social, political, and economic issues. Conflict inevitably interrupts this fluid process.

During my stay, I facilitated mission trips for Americans for five weeks. I also did home visits to congregation members and helped lead local vacation Bible schools. Along with attending worship services, these were the primary activities through which I was able to observe the partnership between the Mexican and the American Presbyterian churches. While inside the Mexican church, I observed the church's opposition to

providing for their local migrant community. They wanted to create a safe environment for their families and grew more and more exclusive.

I also observed that women took many informal leadership roles, while the formal ones were left to men (the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico does not ordain women or allow them to be elders or deacons). Yet, several Mexican women were unsatisfied with this inequality—looking to their northern neighbors, these women pushed for change within the Presbyterian Church of Mexico, yet because they were Presbyterian, their approach was much different than the Catholic association with *marianismo*. While *marianismo* has often been viewed as casting women as uniformly and problematically passive and pure, other scholars have identified it as a vehicle for indigenous women to break out of traditional gender roles. With little association with any such prominent female figure, many women in the Lirio de los Valles church struggled with the traditional men's, women's, and children's societies which constituted the church's only educational opportunities. Other women seemed content to work in this structured area to better the lives of their children and their families. Few of Frontera de Cristo's programs distinguished between men and women or favored women in any way, but workshops given by the staff often drew on Biblical themes and verses to stress the important equality between men and women.

I also assisted in the coffee cooperative begun by Frontera de Cristo called Just Coffee. Because the poorest region of Mexico is currently the southern state of Chiapas where coffee farmers continue to be robbed of a just price for their coffee, Frontera de Cristo is trying to address the immigration crisis along the border and in Agua Prieta through Just Coffee. With thirty-five families currently participating in Just Coffee and one paid employee (also a native of Chiapas), the coffee cooperative tries to provide the people of Chiapas with a fair price for their coffee and allow them to stay on their homeland and farm. Interestingly, in Agua Prieta, the Chiapan people were often treated as outsiders and despised by the local community. Many "Chiapanecos" attended the Mexican church, and because Frontera de Cristo is taking such an active, exclusive role in liberating these people, there was some tension between the leadership inside the church and the mission.

It was through these experiences as well as daily interactions with clergy, laypeople, and community members of the Mexican church that I began to evaluate the effectiveness of the Frontera de Cristo ministry. Though I did not do formal interviews while I was in Agua Prieta, these experiences will serve as the fieldwork for my thesis. If necessary, I will be able to contact any of the necessary participants in my thesis for more detailed information.

### *3<sup>rd</sup> Phase: Combine Fieldwork with Theory and Begin Writing*

I will organize my paper into chapters based on four aspects of the mission work I did and discuss the theoretical implications of actual mission scenarios. The analysis of the partnership between the Mexican and American church will assess what elements of development theory and missionary theory are relevant for Frontera de Cristo's approach to working toward more economic prosperity and social harmony in Agua Prieta. I will attempt to see what "vehicles of evangelism" (Dorr: 2000) the ministry is using to combine their development and mission goals. I will evaluate the effectiveness of this

partnership based on how thoroughly localized its existence is inside the Mexican community.

In looking at the Mexican congregation, I will assess why there has been a shift in progressive ministry to a more exclusive congregation. I will argue that because of a shift in leadership early on in the church's development, the localization process was left incomplete and stagnant. This incomplete localization process left clergy and laypeople insecure as to their goals in the mission of their church and rather insecure as to their partnership with the Frontera de Cristo ministry.

I will employ the globalization literature I review to approach my analysis of the mission's coffee cooperative. I will assess whether this cooperative is more a result of external control and leadership or whether it is truly an internal response to a local crisis.

Finally, I will analyze how transnational organizations have reformed their approaches to address "women's issues" and in turn, build stronger communities. I will analyze male-female relationships on the border to see whether the theology of the Mexican Presbyterian Church finds itself in tension with traditional Mexican cultural norms through the localization of the ministry of Frontera de Cristo. I will also discuss the way in which this power dichotomy parallels the dichotomy that previously persisted in foreign missions, and the likelihood of change within the National Presbyterian Church with regard to women in leadership.

By laying the theoretical framework on top of this practical experience and drawing comparisons between Frontera de Cristo and other organizations, I will assess the effectiveness of this international missions organization and suggest a formula for providing valuable development assistance in the Third World

**Timeline:** 9/1/03 Begin 1<sup>st</sup> Phase

9/16/03 Submit Proposal

9/16/03 Continue 1<sup>st</sup> Phase

12/1/03 Begin 2<sup>nd</sup> Phase and analyzing data as in 3<sup>rd</sup> Phase

1/16/04 Continue 3<sup>rd</sup> Phase (combing theory and fieldwork) and begin writing

2/5/04 Finish first draft

3/2/04 Finish final draft

3/16/04 Submit thesis

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