Political Cultures of Opposition

Exploring Idioms, Ideologies, and Revolutionary Agency in the Case of Nicaragua

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ABSTRACT

Using interview data from Nicaragua, we propose the concept of "political cultures of opposition" for bringing culture and agency into the study of revolutions, and linking the subjective elements of experience and emotion with the social structural ones of organizations and networks. We use evidence from the Nicaraguan uprising of the 1970s to show how a repressive political structure was experienced by ordinary citizens, who turned to two political cultures – liberation theology and Sandinismo. These cultural constructions enabled participants from diverse backgrounds to channel their experiences and emotions into revolutionary actions, most often with and alongside the Sandinistas.

Recent years have witnessed renewed scholarly interest in the question of how human agency is possible (see Emirbayer and Mische 1998 for a guide to this literature).[1] In the sociology of revolutions, this debate has

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come to focus itself around the issue of the roles played by culture in the making of revolutions (Eisenstadt 1992, Moaddel 1993, Colburn 1994, Goldstone 1994a, Foran 1997a, Reed 1999a). In a related development, a new generation of scholars has also worked at the puzzle of who actually makes revolutions, and why (Farhi 1990, Selbin 1993, Colburn 1994, Foran 1996, McAuley 1997, Foran, Klouzal and Rivera 1997). While not fully displacing Theda Skocpol's (1979) agenda-setting emphases on structures and states at the center of the study of revolutions, this work has gradually accumulated a case for the significance of considering agency and culture in fuller models of what causes revolutions (Goldstone 1991, Foran 1997b, Tarrow 1998, Goodwin 2001).

The present essay seeks to further refine our understanding of the precise mechanisms at play in the making of revolutions by social actors. Building on previous conceptual work by one of the authors, and on a unique set of data from Nicaragua gathered by the other, we hope to bring new light to the question of how culture matters in the making of revolutions, by linking it specifically to agency, unlike much of the now famous cultural turn in the social sciences more generally. In contrast to the structural formalism of many recent social science approaches to culture in the U.S. academy, we will suggest ways in which the material of experience and emotions might be connected to organizations and social forces through a complex concept we call "political cultures of opposition." In addition, we will attempt to identify the range of cultural elements – from informal idioms to explicit ideologies – inside this concept, and show how they jointly facilitate revolutionary actions.

Culture and Revolution

It is ironic and yet admirable that the debate over culture took a large step forward with a spirited debate between historian William Sewell (1985) and sociologist Theda Skocpol (1985) – the structuralist par excellence – on the precise role of ideas in the making of the French revolution. Sewell faults Skocpol for failing to recognize "the autonomous power of ideology in the revolutionary process," and denying its importance, only to smuggle ideas back in under the abstract rubric of differing "world-historical contexts" in France and Russia. He calls for a structural, anonymous, and transpersonal analysis of ideology, arguing that such collective human products are capable of transformation (Sewell 1985, citing Althusser 1971, Foucault 1970, 1977, Geertz 1973, and Williams 1977). He understands ideology as structured but not non-voluntarist; that is, ideologies repose not in any individual, but in the collectivity. They are not blueprints, but "the outcome of the often contradictory or antagonistic action of a large number of groups or actors" (1985:61). In her reply, Skocpol makes an important

distinction between long-standing, anonymous, and socially diverse *cultural idioms* drawn upon by popular groups, and the self-consciously elaborated *ideologies* that politically articulate actors fashion – partly out of the former – for specific purposes. She stresses the role of idioms over ideologies, noting that both must operate within the structural constraints described in her earlier work; this move allows her to continue to assign central significance to "struggles over the organization and uses of state power" (Skocpol 1985:96).

These leads have been extended in a positive direction by political scientist Farideh Farhi's work on the Iranian and Nicaraguan revolutions. Drawing on the ideas of Craig Calhoun (1983, 1988), Göran Therborn (1980), and Antonio Gramsci (1987), she argues that "cultural practices, orientations, meaning systems, and social outlooks" play a central role in the making of revolutions (1988:249). For her, ideology is *not* "a system of ideas;" rather it is a "social process" involving "knowledgeable actors" which invokes larger cultural systems rather than "consciously held political beliefs": "successful ideological mobilization always manages to fuse and condense several ideological discourses into a single major theme, usually expressed in a single slogan" (1990:84). Following feminist liberation theology (Welch 1985) she centers the role of "dangerous" memories of conflict and exclusion – whether of past suffering or actual or imagined instances of resistance and change (such as Shi'i imagery in Iran or Sandino's rebellion in 1920s' Nicaragua). Judith Zur (1998) also explores how political action can be crafted through establishing a historical continuity from a remembered past to construct positive self-perceptions in the present. Farhi and Zur thus recognize implicitly that the boundary line between ideology and idiom is not a firm one, a view we will explicitly advance below.

What shapes the articulation of such ideas, and how do they crystallize into revolutionary movements? We believe that popular idioms and ideologies connect with the everyday lives of people through particular experiences that have an emotional dimension. E.P. Thompson famously theorized class in these terms (1966:9). In the same vein, Eric Selbin (1993, 1997) has insisted that revolutions involve indispensable acts of human agency in which revolutionaries make quite explicit and conscious appeals to populations for allegiance to their projects, invoking collective memory and symbolic politics. Teodor Shanin, meanwhile, has noticed the emotional void at the core of the study of revolutions: "At the very centre of revolution lies an emotional upheaval of moral indignation, revulsion and fury with the powers-that-be, such that one cannot demur or remain silent, whatever the cost" (1986:30-1). The sociology of revolution has recently begun to address this gap (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1996, Goodwin 1997,

Selbin 1999:13, Reed 1999a, 2002, Barker 2001, Wood 2001; in the social movement literature, see Moore 1978, Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2000, 2001, and Aminzade et al. 2001). In this essay, we shall insist that the constellation of experience and emotion is indispensable to the elaboration of effective ideas about resistance.

The final dimension to this process lies in the organizational potential of groups in a society. Resource mobilization theory has long stressed the need for would-be revolutionaries to possess assets of various kinds, and in particular, to find organizational embodiments (Tilly 1978). Again, recent developments in the sociology of revolutions have focused attention on networks of activists (Gould 1991, 1995, Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994, Goldstone 1994b, Tarrow 1998, Parsa 2000, Melucci 1980, Snow et al. 1980, Calhoun 1983, and Traugott 1985 saw this even earlier). Our own work on the importance of broad coalitions of actors as key to successful revolutions bears this out (Reed 2000, Foran 1997a, 2001). One of the greatest challenges for today's students of revolution is to bring people back in by way of concretely connecting organizations to ideas in a convincing manner, a task we will undertake empirically for the case of Nicaragua.

Political Cultures of Opposition: Conceptualizing Agency

How then, do culture and agency matter in the causality of revolutions? Our own sense of an answer makes use of the concept of "political cultures of opposition" and how these are interpreted and fashioned by the social forces that actually make revolutions (note that "social forces" in this essay refers to actors).[2] We will argue that prior to revolutions, individuals, groups, and organizations articulate multiple political cultures of opposition to the regime, and that these may draw on diffuse folk beliefs and historical memories of struggle, shared "structures of feeling" (Williams 1960) fashioned out of reactions to common experiences, and eventually, perhaps, explicitly revolutionary manifestos and formally articulated ideologies. By "political culture," we mean not the 1960s' North American political science concept of the same name, with its measures of "tradition" and "modernity" (see Pye and Verba 1965, and Coleman 1968, among many others), but the plurivocal and potentially

[2] The concept of "political cultures of opposition and resistance" originates in the work of Foran 1981, and its first published mentions are in Foran 1992 and 1993; it is developed further in Foran 1997a. It owes much to an idea originally encountered in the work of A. Sivanandan (1980). Keith Michael Baker gives us another useful definition of political culture as "constituted within a field of discourse, and of political language as elaborated in the course of political action" (1982:212). Somers (1993, 1995) provides discussions of the concept as well. For another take on these matters, see Reed 1999b.

radical ways of understanding one's circumstances that various groups within a society sometimes articulate to make sense of the political and economic changes they are living through. Some of the theorists already mentioned invoke much the same idea, notably Sewell, Skocpol, Farhi, and Selbin, as well as Charles Tilly, with his passing but suggestive reference to "cultural repertoires of revolution" (1978:151-9, 224-5), Ann Swidler, with her influential metaphor of a "cultural tool-kit" (1986), James Scott's work on "hidden transcripts" (1990), or even C. Wright Mills's "vocabularies of motives" (1963[1940]:442). The qualifier "political cultures *of opposition*," however, distinguishes this notion from the American sociology of culture tradition. The fact that such cultures tap everything from historical memories of past conflicts to inchoate sentiments about injustice to long-standing religious idioms and practices to more formally elaborated political ideologies moves beyond the polarization of the Sewell-Skocpol debate by embracing all of what they respectively pinpoint as relevant and trying to show how these might articulate with each other. Our insistence that such political cultures are plural and multiple, that they can be secular as well as religious, and that different social groups may embrace different versions, takes us beyond the work of Farhi on Iran and Nicaragua, as well as that of Moaddel (1994; for a critique see Foran 1994). In this we are in agreement with Jon Cruz (1999) that cultural elements (which he calls "tropes") interpenetrate each other in complex and sometimes politically powerful ways. We shall show how this is true both of liberation theology and Sandinismo in Nicaragua, and of their relationship with each other, as well as the more diffuse idioms and sentiments of nationalism, social justice, human dignity, and democracy that underpinned them.

To capture the cultural and ideological dimensions of this intervention of human agents onto the historical stage, then, we propose the notion of "political cultures of opposition and resistance." To move toward revolution from diverse political and economic structural determinants, broad segments of many groups and classes must be able to articulate the experiences they are living so emotionally through into effective and flexible analyses capable of mobilizing their own forces and building coalitions with others. Such political cultures of opposition may draw upon diverse sources: formal ideologies, folk traditions, and popular idioms, ranging from ideas and feelings of nationalism (against control by outsiders), to socialism (or simply rough equality and social justice), democracy (in the form of demands for participation and an end to dictatorship), or emancipatory religious appeals (resistance to evil and suffering). Linked to these ideational elements are subjective-existential factors such as emotions and concrete experience on the one hand, and the organizational capabilities of social

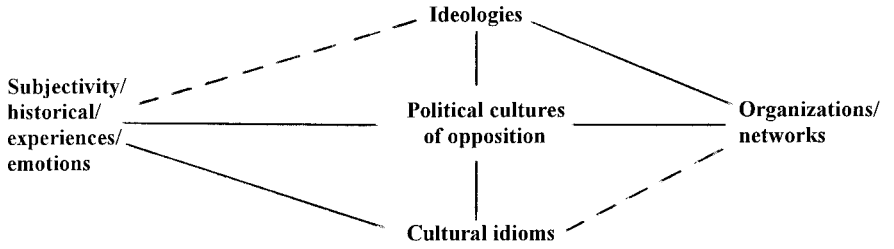


Figure 1. The role of culture in the making of revolutions.

actors joined by particular networks. Figure 1 captures this conceptual complex in a preliminary, schematic fashion.

We propose that organizational capacity, lived experience, emotions, culture, and ideology come together under certain circumstances to produce revolutionary political cultures. This suggests that political cultures of opposition are a product of, and in turn have an impact upon, a range of discursive and material elements: from the historical experiences that shape subjectivity and arouse emotions that E.P. Thompson has identified, to *all* the issues uncovered by Skocpol and Sewell on the spectrum from cultural idioms to formally articulated ideologies, and through the organizations and networks of social actors who make revolutions happen (or not). The dotted lines indicate the more indirect linkages between subjectivity and ideology on the one hand, and cultural idioms and social forces on the other. All of these elements pass through and are held together by our notion of political cultures of opposition and resistance at some point in the chain, and complex two-way relations are not ruled out.

Different groups, classes, and actors will construct intricate combinations of these political cultural elements, sometimes weaving them into critiques of the regime with great mobilizational potential. How capable these multiple political cultures are of bringing together diverse sectors into a broad and unified opposition may spell the difference between success and failure. Often a *range* of specific political cultures and ideologies will be activated and elaborated to mobilize opposition in a society; indeed, this is logical in light of the complexities of Third World social structure and the need for a broad coalition of social forces (usually in the shape of a *populist alliance*) to initiate change (Foran 1993). Such social forces may be the standard ones of class, but this must be handled with particular care, as E.P. Thompson reminds us, and not in isolation from gender and race as two other central principles of social stratification and partial determinants of political identities, as much recent scholarship on revolutions has argued (see Moghadam 1997, McAuley 1997, Foran, Klouzal, and Rivera 1997, Shayne 1999, Kampwirth 2002, Foran 2001).

Our study of Nicaragua identifies two major, and fortuitously complementary, political cultures: liberation theology and Sandinismo. Our emphasis on culture, it should be said, does not propose to elevate "voluntaristic" explanations over structural analysis; rather we seek to re-evaluate the relationship between structural conditions and political action as a way to shed light on the property-making features behind human agency. This requires linking discursive practices with the actors who make a populist alliance plausible, in effect mapping discourses and social forces as best we can.[3] We will attempt to illustrate this with a case study of the processes by which such loose-knit alliances construct and use political cultures of opposition to coalesce.

The Construction of Revolutionary Subjectivity in Nicaragua

The empirical focus of this paper is the period leading up to the taking of power by the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FLSN) in Nicaragua on July 19, 1979. We have rich data in the form of a large number of interviews with a cross-section of the Nicaraguan population about their experiences, feelings, and thoughts in the 1970s.[4] While necessarily retrospective in nature, we believe that theoretically-driven interviews with participants provide invaluable data to illustrate a thesis about agency and culture as causes of revolution.[5] We will first provide

[3] A start has been made in this direction by Mansoor Moaddel (1989) and Robert Wuthnow (1985, 1989, 1989a). For two other statements on this problem, see Spillman (1995) and Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994). The work of Tim Wickham-Crowley (1992, 1997), while clearly structuralist in thrust, likewise makes a place for culture in the analysis of revolution. His aphorism, "while ideology proposes, the peasantry's condition disposes," goes part of the way we feel is required in this direction: culture does not "float free" of social conditions, yet both should be treated as equally important, at least at this stage in our theoretical understanding.

[4] The data on Nicaragua used in this essay were collected on two research trips in 1990 and 1997 by J.-P. Reed (see 1993, 2000). They consist of 57 open-ended interviews with Nicaraguans from varied class, sex, and ethnic backgrounds. We have changed the names of all those quoted in these interviews. Various characteristics of those quoted are given under "Interviews" in the references section. All translations have been done by J.-P. Reed.

We have also consulted published oral histories and other testimonial data, such as Cardenal 1976, Maier 1980, Instituto de Estudio del Sandinismo [hereafter IES] 1982, Cabestrero 1986, and Horton 1998. Other available sources of testimonies include Arias 1980, Nú ez 1980, Alegría and Flakoll 1982, and Kirk 1992. Excellent ethnographies of the Nicaraguan revolution include Dashti 1994, Heyck 1990, Gould 1990, and Ruchwarger 1987.

[5] We are aware of the limitations of interviews aimed at eliciting information about experiences, feelings, and thoughts well after the fact. This approach, however, is required once revolutions have entered history, for the sociological and comparative-historical

a short assessment of how the structural conditions of political repression and exclusion were experienced and emotionally felt in this period, and then move to a presentation of the meanings of the two political cultures that emerged and made revolutionary resistance possible. In so doing, we hope to show how the concept of political cultures of opposition is more adequate to understanding the cultural side of the making of revolutions than those of either popular idioms or ideologies, taken alone. To make this case we believe it is essential to quote Nicaraguans at some length in order to show "culture in action," as one of us has put it (Reed 2002).

Experiences of the Structural

Whether one believes they are humanly made or not, structures are indisputably experienced by people. The power of such structures is often made manifest through the lived experience of contingent events which reveal their existence – J.-P. Reed theorizes these as "revolutionary accelerators" (2000, 2001). Paradoxically, this power also possesses a vulnerable side, as Reed, following Moore (1978), points out, when it acts in such a way as to incite the emotion of anger by breaking the accepted social contract, however unequal, with the population (cf. Scott 1976). This process of living an experience that brings a structure to the consciousness of actors is a vital part of the elaboration of political cultures of resistance and opposition.

In the political reality of Nicaragua, "structure" meant the Somoza dynasty, which ruled from 1936 to the revolution in 1979. Two events crystallized the meaning of dictatorship for many Nicaraguans: the state's response to the earthquake of 1972 and the role the regime played in the assassination of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, the state's most prominent liberal adversary, in early 1978. These events functioned as revolutionary

literature on revolutions has been built almost solely in the absence of individual-level data on the meanings of participants' experiences. The interviews were collected at two moments just after electoral setbacks for the Sandinistas – in 1990 and 1997 – and we reason that the relatively favorable views expressed therein are if anything even more remarkable and meaningful, as they were articulated under a less receptive socio-political environment. Moreover, the internal consistency in the range of views held by individuals at both points in time, and the overall consistency with views found in testimonies collected very shortly after 1979 (see the sources in note 4), speak to the reliability of the recollections recorded here. For discussion of the issues raised by treating memories of historical events as representative of subjective meanings, see Morin 1972, Sahlins 1991, Ellingson 1995, and Zerubavel 1995. For their utility in accessing important cultural and political experiences, see Olick and Levy 1997, Olick and Robbins 1998, and Assmann 1999. On issues of their reliability, see further Fivush 1988, Pennebaker and Banasik 1997, Pennebaker, Paez, and Rimé 1997, and Schuman, Belli, and Bischoping 1997. We conclude that the benefits of this sort of data far outweigh their drawbacks.

accelerators, giving a historically conditioned collective resistance a liberatory momentum from within society; the emotional responses that accompanied these events, moreover, played a significant organizing role in the further development of anti-state mobilization and political action. To borrow Moore's words, they made people's suffering "traceable to the acts of concrete easily identifiable persons" (1978:473). The state's patent misconduct in these cases violated widespread conceptions of how the polity should function, fanning passionate emotions and opening a political path for aggrieved individuals.

The 1972 earthquake devastated Managua, killing 10,000 people and virtually destroying the center of the capital city. Much of the international financial and material donations that came into the country were pocketed by Somoza and those who were close to him. The state's self-serving conduct left the majority of the affected urban citizenry unassisted, compounding pre-existing untenable living conditions. The disaster, in some sense, proved to be much more of a social than a natural catastrophe. A 60 year-old woman relates the desperate position of Managuans at the time:

> After the catastrophe that took place, we witnessed a great number of dead people, children, mothers, the shortage of food and water. There was no protection forthcoming from the authorities, from the Somoza dictatorship. These persons [Somoza, his associates, and members of the National Guard, or Guardia] instead directed their attention to taking all that came in the form of aid to Nicaragua, while we were practically walking around naked, they left us without shelter. They would say that they were building houses for the victims, but it was only promises [as] they would only give houses to persons who were in bed with them. Somoza would feign before the world that he was doing something, but for us he was a brazen and shameless individual... [The Guardia] had a large stock of usable [earthquake-relief] articles while the people were starving to death. One could hear the nation's lament. We lived a terrible situation, moving from place to place without a roof over our heads that lasted for almost a year... We were deceived ... because nothing was ever done. This was a breeding place for cockroaches, for mice, for everything... There was great poverty. (in Maier 1980:31-2)

Ernesto Suárez Espinoso, then a teenaged student, also remembers the desperate situation, marked by the economic crisis, unemployment, and factory closures that followed, and the anger that he felt: "Although I was young in age, I was aware of what was a tragedy and what was natural. Many Nicaraguans died; it was difficult to see so many children without their parents and suffering from the existing hunger. I was very upset by the whole thing" (in IES 1982:32).

These testimonies bear out the scholarly analyses of the revolution that trace the emergence of a broadly-based opposition to the blatantly

manipulative and greedy way in which the Somoza regime responded to the catastrophe (Black 1981:58-61, Booth 1985, Walker 1986:31, Dunkerley 1988:235, Vilas 1986, 1995, Keen 1996:456). While the event made the Somozas even richer, it undermined their fragile hold on consent to their rule, revealing the breach in the social contract, even by the terms of the dictatorship.

The violent face of dictatorship came home to many Nicaraguans with the murder of popular publisher and outspoken critic Pedro Joaquín Chamorro in January 1978. The ensuing mass demonstrations, general strikes, and partial insurrections following the initial civic response showed the emergence of a population that no longer saw Somocismo as a viable governing ideology. The elite ceased to perceive Somoza as "an ally, or an asset, or even tolerable, but rather a distinct and uncontrollable menace, not only to their vested interests but also to their lives" (Booth 1985:220). This manifested itself in the minds of many as a shift from simply living in fear of repression to a "social certainty" with which they had to contend as part of their daily lives. Lázaro García, a thirty-three-year-old fireworks artist, recalls thinking at the time that "If they killed a nationally and internationally known man, that must mean that Somoza is going to begin killing half of all humanity" (IES 1982:85).

These emotions of anger and fear not only encouraged but also consolidated popular resistance, propelling the anti-regime forces forward. Seventy-year-old retired architect Héctor Hernández recalls the dramatic impact of the Chamorro assassination on political mobilization:

> It was the spark that lit the spirit of the citizenry. At that time Sandinismo had not developed to its full extent. The people were always doubtful and afraid. . . . With the death, that is the assassination, of Pedro Joaquín the people took to the streets. And from there on Somoza signed his death sentence. The nation, all of the social classes supported the Sandinista revolutionary movement. There was not a stratum that did not participate in the process. . . . From the death of Pedro Joaquín on . . . Somocismo began to fall. The people had made a decision which culminated with the triumph of July 19. (1990 interview)

Chamorro's assassination clearly "helped people to integrate themselves [into the struggle] and tipped their hatred against the dictatorship . . . it was a medium through which people could bring to light their Sandinista, anti-imperialist, and anti-dictatorial feelings" (Miguel Maldonado, 26 years old, in IES 1982:86). The acceleration of dissent that followed at this stage in the insurrectionary phase, a revolutionary participant of the time observes, was "propelled by a survival instinct given that the dictatorship was already killing everyone who was young whether or not they were Sandinistas" (worker, 30 years old, in IES 1982:158). In an effort to contain state repression or "defend a just cause," people simply "threw themselves

into the struggle" (Suárez Espinoza, Ernesto (CDS (Sandinista Defense Committee) political organizer of Masaya, 19 years old, in IES 1982:308).

These accounts speak to the question of how a repressive dictatorship *felt* to people: the Somoza regime was both greedy to the point that even the business community considered itself oppressed by it, and violent to a degree where no one felt safe in their houses. Nicaraguans' experiences of repression were palpable, and had strong emotional overtones. The arbitrariness of the state's repression not only cut off hope for change through formal channels but also resulted in the emergence of widespread moral indignation and identification of the state as unacceptable. What was needed for the crystallization of resistance into a viable revolutionary force was a framework capable of filtering these experiences and translating them into an analysis of the problems confronting the nation. Two political cultures would emerge in the 1970s to prepare this ground: liberation theology and Sandinismo.

Forging an "Idiomatic Ideology": Liberation Theology

Recognition of many Nicaraguans' religious orientation to the world is a starting point for understanding the enlistment of so many people into oppositional activity. Christian principles in one way or another have long played a very important role in their personal and communal lives. Thus the emergence of religious expressions of political opposition came out of a pre-existing popular idiom. Potential or active revolutionaries drew upon a "traditional" cultural trope to fashion new and radical strategic interpretations and sensibilities – transformed by those involved with liberation theology – a means to solve the immediate difficulties of their circumstances, and a way to resist.[6] The filtering of experiences of dictatorship through traditional Christian values "pushed" people toward the oppositional political culture of liberation theology, just as the latter evolved from the encounter of such values with Latin American realities at the highest levels of the Church. As James Jaspers notes of the relationship between individuals and frames, "Potential participants are more likely to accept frames that fit with their existing beliefs, their sense of empirical credibility, their own life experiences, and the narratives that they use to describe their lives" (1997:7, see also Calhoun 1983:895, who cites Polanyi 1958). For many, striving towards an alternative to the institutions the

[6] The literature on liberation theology is by now quite vast. In addition to Berryman 1987, Galilea 1986, and Gutiérrez 1973, 1986, on whom we draw here, see also Boff and Boff 1984, 1986, 1987, Burdick and Hewitt 2000, Lernoux 1982, Míguez Bonino 1975, 1983, Miranda 1974, 1985, 1986, Segundo 1976, and Sobrino 1984, 1992 for additional accounts.

Somoza system had erected, while to a great extent a matter of survival, also represented an affirmation of themselves as genuine and faithful Christians.

The de facto marriage of religion and radical politics in Nicaragua can be traced back to the period following the 1968 CELAM (Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano) conference in Medellín, Colombia, which condemned the existing "institutionalized violence" in Latin America's political, economic, and social structures as a "sinful situation," setting the stage for the emergence of what would come to be known as liberation theology (CELAM 1986). This politicized religious stance was in turn a result of changes in the structure of the Catholic Church prompted by the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), summoned by Pope John XXII in 1962 and called into session for the purpose of reconsidering the role of the church in a secularized modern world (Berryman 1987). Key to the wave of political movements that were to follow, the Medellín conference also endorsed the notion that people were capable of participating in their own liberation, both in an existential and a social sense. Thus the conference acknowledged the vital social and political functions played by CEBs (communidades eclesiales de base, or base communities) throughout Latin America. As lay-led small cooperatives committed to solving local problems collectively, improving neighborhood infrastructures, and working toward the creation of more just and communitarian societies, they represented hopeful models of organization within the context of the continent's growing immiseration and political conflict.

Pope Paul VI's explicit call for liberation in 1975 further legitimated the Medellín conference's appeal for social change. In a drastic turn from past questions on spirituality, social sin was catapulted onto the center stage of theological discussions. The Pope seemingly justified "the effort and struggle to overcome everything which condemns those peoples to remain in the margins of life: famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty, injustices in international relations and especially in commercial exchanges, situations of economic and cultural neo-colonialism sometimes as cruel as old political colonialism" (quoted in Galilea 1986:27). This implied that there was "a relation between faith and human liberation, between the kingdom of God and the up-building of society, between evangelization and temporal human advancement" (Galilea 1986:27). As further articulated at the Puebla, Mexico, conference in the early part of 1979, commitment to liberation meant serving the poor efficaciously. Though in some respects the Church hierarchy at Puebla tried to roll back the more radical aspects of Medellín, it continued to advocate opting for the poor, defining this "as solidarity with the poor and as a rejection of the situation in which most people on this continent live," requiring a believer, moreover, to go

beyond merely acknowledging the corrupted state of the human condition to consider it also an affront to Christian consciousness and to God (Gutiérrez 1986:53). Puebla made it a moral obligation to care for the masses (Gutiérrez 1986:54-5).

In Nicaragua, religious idiom met evolving ideology in a variety of settings, the most powerful of which were the "cursillos" (small courses), popular churches, and seminars organized primarily by lay people and radical priests in rural and urban communities respectively all over the country. In his liberation theology seminary on the island of Solentiname, Father Ernesto Cardenal led discussions which linked liberation from oppression to the FSLN (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional). Reading Biblical passages from John, Luke, and Matthew eased into analyses of questions and issues about revolution, capitalism, imperialism, agrarian reform, and the material and spiritual bases of existence. Seminary members would often focus on how the Sandinistas were a symbolic representation of Jesus the liberator (Cardenal 1976:87-94, 118-34). Although not a seminary member, Gregorio González, a working-class participant in the activities of a progressive Christian group, recalls the significance of such discussions as they applied to Nicaragua's political scene:

> During his age, Christ fought for the poor and was persecuted. When they announced the birth of Christ, child Jesus the liberator was at first rejected, then followed, and finally tortured. The FSLN followed a similar path. It was from Solentiname that the first revolutionary men were forged to liberate Nicaragua … they preached that Christians do not need to be passive when witnessing injustices nor should they avoid confronting the injustices.… We have a right to at least say "stop man, don't torture that being" … as it was with the revolution. (1997 interview)

The story of Father Gaspar García Laviana provides a good example of how radicalization occurred within the Church. A Spanish missionary, he joined the FSLN late in 1977 after having spent several years in the rural areas attending to the needs of the peasantry. His experience in the countryside, where conditions were particularly poor, soon prompted him to denounce the Somoza regime. Failing to improve matters via official channels he came to believe that the only recourse to better the lot of Nicaragua's peasantry and poor was to take up arms as a Christian militant: "When I came to Nicaragua [in 1970], I dedicated myself with a passion to my apostolic work and I soon discovered that the hunger and thirst for justice of this crushed people whom I served as a priest demanded more than the consolation of words" (García Laviana 1981:221). García Laviana explicitly connects Nicaraguan realities with the doctrine of liberation theology:

> In my Christian consciousness this [war] is a good thing because it is just and because it represents a struggle against a state of things which is hateful to the Lord our God. And as the signed Medellín documents by the bishops of Latin America indicate in the chapter on the Latin American situation "revolutionary insurrection is legitimated when palpable and prolonged tyranny seriously violates fundamental personal rights and dangerously harms the common wealth of the nation, whether this comes from a person or existing unjust structures." (1981:222)

Declaring Somocismo a "sin," he vehemently advocated armed conflict: "Somocismo is sin and liberation from oppression is liberation from sin. With gun in hand, filled with faith and love for the Nicaraguan people, I must fight to my last breath for the advent of the reign of justice in our country" (1981:223).

A similar process also unfolded in the general population, among the popular classes. This understanding often began as a recognition that something had changed in the Church. Gregorio González put it this way:

> We had to resist being tempted by the rewards of heaven (the intangibly unknown) and focus our attention on our socio-political reality. This was a cosa non grata for the traditional church that stood in opposition to this unconventional [undertaking]… The message of the popular church was different … [it] preached the need to struggle forward in life not only in fear of saving one's own soul and of death but also full of spirit fighting towards progress, like getting involved in the community to solve a problem. (1997 interview)

José Soto, another peasant and subsequent rural worker activist, recalls his transformational seminary experience in a similar tone:

> I used to take these cursillos on religious matters and … we used to reflect on how Christ wanted the poor to live, on how Christ wanted people to live, on the rights of a person, on equality.… These things led us to believe that the only alternative was to overthrow the government, that the only available exit was the armed path. This direction required the organization of the people. It was at this moment that we moved from a strictly religious method to taking up arms.… This led to my seminary participation in CEPA [the Evangelistic Committee for Agrarian Promotion] in 1973 for various months where … they talked to us about consciousness, clarity, the standing of capitalistic and socialist powers – how they developed, why they developed, how they marginalized the poor, and how and why one power was stronger than the other. As a result, all these things made it easier to understand why it was necessary to fight against Somoza at that time. (1997 interview)

The same process also affected young urban students, including some who became prominent Sandinistas. Revolutionary leader Luis Carrión Cruz

and the post-revolution commander-in-chief of the armed forces, Joaquín Cuadra, became politicized subjects as they were exposed to "subversive" literature during movement meetings (Randall 1983). Reinaldo Antonio Tefel, Minister-President of the Institute of Social Security and Welfare during the Sandinista decade, recalls: "My schooling and religious formation … *led me into the struggle* … and every step I took in the anti-Somoza struggle was inspired by my sense of democracy and my Christian faith" (Cabestrero 1986:58). Roberto Argüello, President of the Supreme Court during the 1980s, concurs: "It is my search for justice and my Christian principles that have made me revolutionary" (Cabestrero 1986:1). There was, moreover, a Christian tendency within Sandinismo which facilitated collaborative efforts. A former member claims that the Proletarian Tendency (one of three wings of the FSLN, and paradoxically, the most rigidly Marxist) "was born as the MCR (Movimiento Cristiano Revolucionario) which was made up of young people seventeen or eighteen years old who had links with priests, liberally studied theology, and committed themselves to the poor" (Carlos Nú ez, 1997 interview).

The immersion of a young person into Christian movement organizations typically started as a personal spiritual search. His or her gradual involvement, however, sometimes led to participation in demonstrations or other contentious activities such as graffiti writing and the distribution of political propaganda. Participation in such operations often facilitated political radicalization or a sudden realization that they were unsuspectingly part of a larger project, of the growing opposition. Revolutionary consciousness more often than not was gained in the course of informal political action, or through readings of insurgent literature rather than as a result of formal involvement in the FSLN movement. Such was the case for Paolo Alemán, a working-class activist in the early 1970s who remembers how he first joined the struggle through a cursillo group that participated in the propaganda of anti-state slogans and pintas (graffiti). As his involvement grew he came to realize that his activities meant that he was part of the "revolutionary" opposition. Only at this point in time did he decide to become an "official" Sandinista activist. In the cursillo meetings, he recalls:

> We used to discuss how in this country there were poor and rich people. This was a new type of conversation for me to the ones I had in my barrio, in my city, about a God that wanted things to remain the same … it was different because we used to discuss how the rich were rich because the poor were poorer. But how could we then bring about social transformations? [We surmised] that in order to reach power we had to bring down the Somoza dictatorship through armed struggle. This was to my liking, so off I went drawing pintas … to let the dictatorship know that there was a movement known as the FSLN willing to confront it. (1997 interview)

Rural worker José Soto notes: "At the end I managed to understand that the Christian struggle, the struggle of the religious, in other words, the struggle of Christ, meant denouncing the atrocities committed against the public by the government" (1997 interview). Nestor Pérez, another working class revolutionary who became a union organizer, discusses how he was driven to action: "My Christian values 'pushed me' to become a revolutionary, because I was taught to love my fellow man as I would love myself. Seeing my fellow man treated like shit, in poverty, with difficulties, affected me." This led him to "defend the truth, not to take the wrong path, not to be a bad person … not to steal." It was because of his formation as a Christian, cultivated at home as well as in the fellowship he shared with other Christians, that he learned to "love [his] 'fellow man' and to become a revolutionary." Self-interest alone, he concludes, would not have made this possible (1997 interview).

These retrospective accounts suggest that the ideology embodied in liberation theology, as constructed at a series of high-level Church conferences in the 1960s and 1970s, encountered a pre-existing cultural reality, a currency of Christian idioms, in Nicaragua. Familiarity with Christian homilies and the wide currency of popular religious principles in Nicaraguan society contributed to the articulation of new and radical popular claims within the context of changing political realities. The resulting amalgam, which we see as the *political culture* of liberation theology (see Figure 2), allowed Nicaraguans to make sense of the experiences of political repression and social inequality by giving fresh, politicized connotations to long-standing notions of "salvation" and "sin," and coupling them with familiar but newly signified terms such as "exploitation," "the place of the poor," "the rights of a person," "equality," "justice," and "liberation," among others.

It found organizational support in the CEBs and cursillos organized by progressive priests and lay persons, and it led people to participate in acts of resistance from the painting of slogans to informal and formal affiliation with the FSLN and taking up arms in the insurrection of 1978-79. In this sense, one political culture of opposition fed like a stream

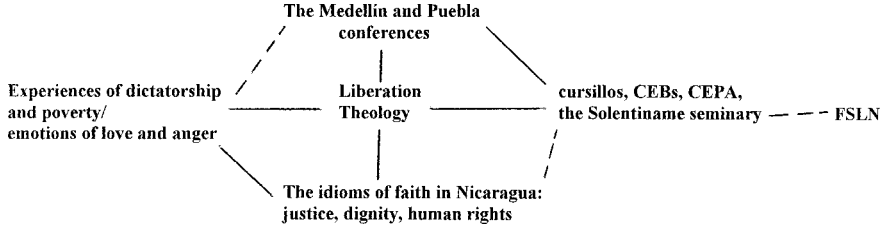


Figure 2. The political culture of liberation theology in Nicaragua.

into another, more overtly revolutionary one, Sandinismo, which without liberation theology would never in its turn have grown into the broad-based multi-class movement it became on the eve of the revolution.

From Idiom to Ideology and Back: Sandinismo

Just as with liberation theology, Sandinismo played an essential part in the revolutionary formation of individuals. Its nationalistic and anti-imperialistic legacies had a strong impact on the self-conception of insurrectionary participants, who came to see their involvement as fighting against a "criminal" dictatorial regime as well as U.S. imperialism. The armed struggle of the 1970s, while distinct in many ways, also mimics Sandino's battle against U.S. occupation half a century earlier. Both carried forceful messages of national, popular self-determination. This was not coincidental, as FSLN leaders consciously connected the two struggles through an astute fashioning of a modern liberatory ideology on the longer-standing popular idioms of democracy, social justice, and nationalism. The mythical and historical figure of Sandino resonated well with the populace. Thus, Sandinismo was the creation of self-identified Marxists such as Carlos Fonseca Amador who artfully elaborated an ideology which tapped deep idiomatic roots.

The Sandinismo of the 1960s was an ideology composed of diverse elements, combining ideas from Sandino's patriotic and nationalistic tendencies with liberation theology, Marxism, and liberalism (Whisnant 1995). This eclectic conglomeration of views gave shape to two dissimilar yet complementary kinds of Sandinismo – a popular and "folkloric" (or idiomatic) type which represented the "projects, attitudes and beliefs, mode of behavior and concrete actions of Sandino" and a programmatic (or ideological) type which grew out of Fonseca's Nicaraguan Marxism (Hodges 1987:186, quoting revolutionary comandante and intellectual José Luis Balcárcel on Sandino). Drawn from Gramsci's (1987) theories of political action, the term folkloric Sandinismo meant, as Hodges notes, "neither an acceptance of communism nor a knowledge of Marxism-Leninism," while programmatic or ideological Sandinismo, in contrast, "signified an acceptance of communism" or an orientation towards socialism. Neither of the two tendencies prevailed fully, but rather complemented each other during the course of insurrectionary events. Individuals imbued both with an idiomatic and/or programmatic consciousness saw participation in the struggle as necessary. The participation of those who were not driven by ideological Sandinismo was as significant as that of those who were impelled to action in its name.

Following the Cuban revolution of 1959 the FLSN was founded in 1961 by Carlos Fonseca, Silvio Mayorga, and Tomás Borge, all

three members of the PSN (Partido Socialista Nicaragüense), Nicaragua's official Marxist-Leninist party. Alberto Bayo, a refugee from the Spanish Civil War who trained Caribbean revolutionaries – including Fidel Castro and Che Guevara – in the 1940s and 1950s, also helped codify and transmit Sandino's ideas to the new generation. He was familiar with the oral histories of survivors of Sandino's army in the 1950s, and helped train Carlos Fonseca in Cuba in 1959, giving him and other future Sandinistas an "earful" about Sandino (Selbin 1999:212 note 3, and Hodges 1986:167-73). Fonseca would become the central ideological theorist of the movement. It was he who in 1963 added the term "Sandinista" to the movement's name – originally known as the FUN (Frente Unitario Nicaragüense) – after successfully infusing Sandino's intellectual legacy into the group's political platform. He melded Marx and Sandino to develop a radical political interpretation acutely sensitive to Nicaragua's situation. Fonseca "looked to Sandino as a source for understanding Marxian theory in the Nicaraguan context" (Wright 1995:10). In a sense he recovered and reconstructed Sandino to fit the demands of a revolutionary project within his own historical setting. In the words of Victor Tirado López, one of the Commanders of the Revolution, Fonseca was able to find and develop a theory of revolution in "Sandino's opinions, projects, plans, programs, conceptions, and actions" that made for a genuine national revolutionary project (Tirado López 1980:20, quoted in Hodges 1986:165). Forsaking Sandino's theosophical and anarchist elements, Fonseca stressed his patriotic image as a nationalist guerrilla revolutionary and articulated a bond between the two struggles in time, drawing the hopeful conclusion that "Sandino's 'partial victory' in expelling the U.S. marines showed that guerrilla combat and strategy could succeed in Nicaragua even against overwhelming odds" (Wright 1995:63). Targeting Somoza "as a representative of a foreign influence" could therefore "have a resonance similar to that of Sandino's struggle against the U.S. Marines" (Wright 1995:67). Accordingly, Sandino's inclusion in the FSLN's ideology, Fonseca argued, legitimated a nationalism and anti-imperialism that fit Nicaragua's history. In this sense, Marxism was not a vehicle for Sandinismo, but the reverse; the complex amalgam of Sandinismo was a vehicle for Marxism. This specifically Nicaraguan construction undercuts Colburn's (1994) assertion that all Third World Marxisms are similar and derivative from a Soviet model. The constitution of the new Sandinismo shows us individuals attempting to negotiate an original orientation out of the political contingencies of the present from an already embedded past tradition (for a similar study of this process among the neo-Zapatista rebels of Chiapas, see Rabasa 1997).

Let us now attempt to discern what Sandinismo actually meant to people. A range of answers was elicited when the question "What is Sandinismo" was directly posed to interview subjects in Nicaragua:[7]

> It is a people not willing to conform to subjugation, people who raised their heads and gave themselves the necessary esteem to search and fight for a place of dignity; a people willing to die for a future and who were capable of waging war against Somocismo, against U.S. domination in Nicaragua...
>
> Sandinismo means regaining the motherland ... regaining dignity. To regain the right to speak, to organize, to expression, to the land, education, health is [to represent] the motherland. (Nestor Pérez, 1997 interview)
>
> I find in Sandinismo an alternative, an alternative for people to have a dignified life... Something which strengthens the patriotic consciousness – to love one's motherland, one's nation. (Lydia Fernández Echevarría, 1990 interview)

Cristina Echevarría, a 32 year-old social worker, does justice to Sandinismo's dual character when she identifies it as a "discipline," a "program," and as a historical phenomenon: "Sandinismo is a life discipline, a political thought that can be realized in practice ... a thought that has a political identity ... originating in a historical struggle, a political program with party representation, but at the same time going beyond the party" (1997 interview). Isabel Del Valle supports this assertion in her description of Sandinismo: "It means a project, a project about life.... A party can stay or disappear but Sandinismo is values, principles ... a commitment in favor of the poor" (1990 interview).

With these testimonies, we clearly detect a resonance with liberation theology's preferential option for the poor, and of living by a set of moral principles. Intrinsically connected to nationalist ideals, Sandinismo was a vehicle that evoked and spoke to desires of liberation and the search for alternatives, giving focus to anti-Somocista and anti-imperialist sentiments. In this it echoed key themes in Nicaraguan liberation theology while simultaneously reviving a legacy of resistance. As an alternative to an oppressive past, Sandinismo also represented a world of possibilities. This is poetically captured by union organizer Nestor Pérez: "Sandinismo was a dream, it was a new narrative, a new living referent in Nicaragua. When the revolution achieved victory, the world was opened to me; I mean, I

[7] In this section we are not only relying on recollections but on direct answers to the question, "What is Sandinismo?" posed by an academic. Again, while cognizant of the obstacles this poses for directly seeing culture, both in action and in its original context, we believe it is valuable for beginning to identify the threads that made up the cultural fabric of Sandinismo. The observations of those we interviewed mesh well with others quoted here much closer in time to the events of the late 1970s.

began to feel that [things] were possible for me in Nicaragua, that there was 'space"' (1997 interview).

A variety of themes recur in these and other characterizations of Sandinismo. We may group them according to three component categories: nationalism, democracy, and social justice.

Nationalism. The key FSLN slogan, "Patria Libre o Morir" succinctly expresses the nationalist essence of Sandinismo with its assertion that we will free our motherland or die trying. It was appreciation of "one's historical roots" and "love for the motherland" that made "the overthrow of Somoza possible," believes Amalia Padilla, a young professional woman (1997 interview). As already suggested by Nestor Pérez and Lydia Fernández Echevarría, nationalism was frequently invoked by participants in the struggle. A social worker and union activist consultant sees nationalism as "expressed through the insurrectional struggle. [It] was a way of supporting the armed struggle, of effectively defending the citizenry and the nation" (Cristina Echevarría, 1997 interview). Another union activist sees it as "the starting point … defending your history and roots … defending your house" (Paolo Alemán, 1997 interview).

The nationalism of the FSLN is contrasted explicitly with the failure of the government to protect the nation. It is in this sense that the notion of defending the nation was as much about overthrowing a dictatorship as standing up to a foreign power per se. For Tomás Martínez, "the government of Somoza was in bed with the USA" (1997 interview). Or as Carlos Nú ez puts it, "the self-serving exploitation of natural resources by foreign powers is not nationalism" (1997 interview). Most significantly, to many Sandinismo is clearly analogized as a nationalist vehicle intent on delivering freedom and justice to a suffering people.

Sandinismo as social-justice oriented. A second component thread of Sandinismo was thus social justice. In recalling the conditions that in his opinion gave rise to the revolution, 30 year-old economist Luis Monjíl makes links between the government, economic problems, and foreign control:

> [The Nicaraguan revolution] came about because in this world there exist social injustices. The Nicaraguan revolution came about in our country because there were objections. Because this country was tired of a repressive, hateful, racist dictatorship. Because the people were tired of misery, of hunger. That is to say, of foreign forces. (1990 interview)

Nestor Pérez adamantly defends the Sandinistas' distributionist policies, known in the vernacular as *pi ata*s, defiantly referring to them as part of a socio-political process that made payment of a long overdue social debt possible:

> I don't mind if sometimes I have been called a criminal. I sincerely tell you – and I know you are recording it – it doesn't bother me one bit. I was delighted, for instance, to see groups of peasants seizing parcels of land that wouldn't have belonged to them in their lifetime … to see happy peasant children because for the first time in their lives they were able to plant and grow something they could eat … I wasn't thinking whether the land belonged to this or that person, whether a deed existed or not, whether the land had previously been stolen. I wasn't interested in that. I was interested in the fact that the peasant for the first time in his life had something that belonged to him, that he had something that made him feel like a person, able to support himself, to survive. If that was legal, illegal, or otherwise, that didn't matter to me.… What mattered to me then, as it still does, was insuring that people had a means of survival, whether or not it was done by legal means. When we talk about caring for our natural resources, we should think first of protecting the primary natural resource, human beings, people. (1997 interview)

This concern with social justice brings us to the meanings of socialism and Marxism in the Nicaraguan context. As a start, we may compare the meanings ascribed to socialism by two participants with differing social backgrounds and political outlooks:

> Socialism is a type of government in favor of distributing the wealth of the nation equally.… Although not too many people understand it because it is not well defined and it is considered a taboo, socialism played an important role in our society.… To live equally in a society, to be able to count on my neighbor is to be a socialist. (Juan Criquillion, 1997 interview)

> In the first place, socialism means understanding, peace, tranquility, love, that we know each other, that we serve each other, give each other a hand, and that we come out and succeed united.… We have yet to achieve socialism. (Orlando Serra, 1997 interview)

Juan Criquillion is a working class Sandinista revolutionary who actively participated in the insurrectionary struggles leading to the FSLN's victory, the reconstruction processes in the post-overthrow period, and the Contra war – personal experiences likely corresponding to the "ideological" formation of an individual. This was even more the case because he saw himself not only as an active history-making participant but also as part of the FSLN's revolutionary project. His depiction assumes a more programmatic tone (i.e. "a government in favor of distributing the wealth of the nation equally") than that of Orlando Serra. The latter is a 63 year-old rural worker and traditional conservative turned centrist with an appreciation for the FSLN (in great part due to his awareness that the FSLN favored the popular classes and openly represented a political vehicle through which favorable societal change was brought about). He defines socialism in a more religious vein focusing on values which speak

to a Christian self-conception, noting at the end (and this perhaps is a personal cry referring to the woeful social conditions of 1997 Nicaragua) that Nicaragua has yet to achieve a socialist status. The first may be characterized as a "socialist Sandinista," the second a "Christian socialist." The differences are subtle, and the similarities – both stress solidarity with one's neighbors – important for forging a broad movement. Thus, the social justice thrust of Sandinismo could have idiomatic, common-sense roots, *or* more ideological and Marxist ones. Even when it was embraced, Marxist socialism tended to be filtered through a distinctly Nicaraguan political culture, closely tied to the radical church.

Sandinismo as democratic. Just as Sandinismo came to be seen as a force for social justice that remedied past political and economic patterns, it was also considered responsible for reviving a deadened political life within civil society. As such Sandinismo is often deemed a spiritual and practical way out of darkness, a tool that enabled (and continues to enable) people to transcend politically precarious situations, to practice real democracy. Aléman, as an ex-revolutionary cadre, aptly captures Sandinismo's invigorating political impact on civil society:

> If one would stand up in a corner to hold a meeting or take part in a demonstration [under Somoza], one would always be aware of losing one's life. It was frightening, but we still did it. From '79 to the present things have been very different. During the '80s, the only thing preventing anyone from holding a meeting was their ability to express themselves in public.... The revolution helped instill pride in the poor majority and as a consequence they have awoken to their reality, come to recognize their role as historical actors, and become self-aware actors in social, economic, and political transformations. In this country no governmental decision can be taken without taking into consideration public opinion. These are reasons to be proud and this generation will continue to make history. Before, Somocismo would make the decisions and that was that. Sandinismo ... as a historical legacy ... imparted to the population that they were makers of their own destiny. (1997 interview)

Democracy at home, as opposed to dictatorship, was thus a third crucial component. Pedro Zamora, a Sandinista sympathizer and revolutionary participant, feels that the Sandinistas

> were forging something better for the people. They didn't want to defeat a dictatorship to put another dictatorship in its place. They wanted a real change, a change that would be completely democratic; that we would all participate in democracy; that we would all give our opinions; that everyone would be taken into account ... that we are all one social class. That's what it was like in the environment where I grew up. I liked their ideas. (in Horton 1998:73)

According to Antonio Mendoza, "We [simply] dreamed of having a democracy, not the same as, but better than Costa Rica" (Horton 1998:101). Or, as Vilma Espinosa, reflecting back on the Sandinista decade, noted: "In these eleven years the worker learned how to shout, to demand, to fight for his/her things" (1990 interview). This sense of empowerment is echoed by union organizer Nestor Pérez, for whom Sandinismo "means people who refuse to live as slaves, people that were against being forced to act against their will, people who raised their heads and believed they had self-confidence and thereby were able and willing to look for their place in the world with dignity and fought to attain it" (1997 interview).

Finally, we may look at the radicalization process among Sandinista-identified revolutionary activists, as we did earlier for those who came to the movement out of liberation theology. Ivan González García was an FSLN representative whose feelings of disgust with the regime led him at first to associate with anti-Somoza organizations and only later to become a Sandinista militant:

> I was motivated to participate against the regime in the first place because of a profound anti-Somocista sentiment and secondly because of my personal development. It was my search for solutions which led me to an encounter with revolutionary theories.... I began as a student leader soon after entering the university. I first simply expressed some anti-Somocista attitudes. I then became somewhat involved with Christian Democracy in a stage lacking ideological direction. But starting with my second year and then my third year I slowly began to link myself to what were the structures of the student revolutionary front which was a revolutionary student leftist movement and which to some extent responded to the interests of the Sandinista front. With this link I slowly become part of the student revolutionary front. And in '68 or '69 I become one of the people responsible for the organization in the university area of León. At that moment I began to collaborate with high-ranking leaders of the Sandinista Front. (1990 interview)

This personal trajectory from an anti-Somocista disposition to FSLN collaboration is revealing for several reasons. It distinctly demonstrates that even for an FSLN cadre personal anti-Somocista feelings were not necessarily inherently conjoined to ideological Sandinismo. This testimony may also be indicative of a cultural trajectory from a folkloric to an ideological understanding of social and political conditions as experienced by the individual. His initial folkloric (anti-state) attitudes made him susceptible to ideas that appeared to provide solutions to the nation's ills. In the end, after searching for answers, Sandinismo embodied in the FSLN provided the ideological direction that he so much wanted. The adoption of "ideological" Sandinismo in his case would not have been possible if it was

not for his folkloric disposition to begin with, but his folkloric aspirations would have found no outlet without the FSLN.

Thus Sandinismo represented a path from a consciously formulated ideology to the emotions and ideas of nationalism, social justice, and democracy found in much of the population.

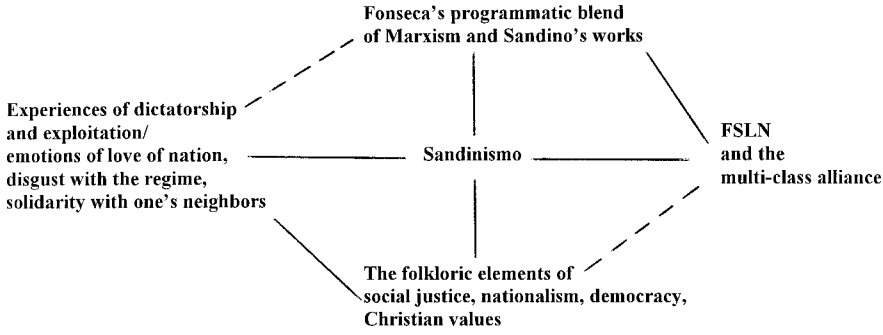


Figure 3. The political culture of Sandinismo in Nicaragua.

It is precisely in this sense that we speak of political cultures of opposition as blurring the boundaries between popular idiom and ideologies, and connecting experience and emotion to the organization of social forces, and of Sandinismo itself as originating in an idiom that became an ideology that succeeded because it resonated with the sentiments of the masses.

Organizing Emotions

Political cultures of opposition may therefore constitute a crucial link mediating the power of lived experience and emotion on the one hand, with the organizational capacity, however loosely developed, that a broad-based revolutionary movement needs to succeed. In this sense, it is not too much to speak of this as the art of *organizing emotions*. As James Scott argues, neither resource mobilization theory nor rational choice models can "remotely hope to capture" the "excitement and energy" of subordinate groups in moments of open defiance (1990:203). Or as we would put it, personal experience and the profound emotions it touched off needed channels to connect idiom and ideology with organizations capable of making change.

Liberation theology also provides a good example of a political culture linking with an institution. From the mid-1970s on, religious discussions in the popular parishes and CEBs focused on identifying the cause of their experienced injustices. These para-institutions functioned as social sites where alternative visions to a harsh reality were individually and collectively forged. Unlike the Catholic Church, which was seen as an institution "that manipulated [people] in favor of the rich by preaching

that the kingdom of heaven was to be inherited by the poor … that the poor had to be content being poor because they would become rich when they got to heaven," the popular churches resisted a seemingly natural order with their message "that it was not just to be poor if an individual's situation could be improved and if opportunities were in place for the poor to improve their condition" (Angelica Chavarría, 1997 interview). Paolo Alemán recalls that

> The popular church played a fundamental role in social transformations and served [as a vehicle] for people to participate in social transformations. This was the case because it was a church that preached about the earth rather than the heavens. It would not maintain the "let us pray and ask the willing Lord for help" position, but instead it would affirm a "let us do the things that we desire to be done" stance, which coincided with the FSLN's objective [to overthrow the dictatorship]. (1997 interview)

The careful study of scriptures during seminary sessions facilitated the emergence of Christian praxis which in Nicaragua's case more often than not meant joining the FSLN – in people's minds the FSLN presented itself, especially from 1978 on, as the liberatory vehicle for accomplishing meaningful change in the political scene.

The FSLN, meanwhile, was not a dispassionate, heartless organization, but rather built upon intensely experienced feelings. Transportation worker Israel Ramírez Guevara vividly remembers the October 1977 offensive's emotional impact as leading to his enlistment with the guerrillas:

> The assault on the Masaya garrison in October … motivated me to join the FSLN. When I saw it take place I was filled with joy and emotion, it enraged me. I became convinced that the only way out for the nation was the armed struggle.… The assault … drove me to participate in the struggle.… I was inspired because we could see the muchachos' desire to rid themselves of the dictatorship's repression, to free the people who were subject to an intensified daily repression (in IES 1982:76-77; Ramírez Guevara went on to participate in the famous August 22, 1978 hostage taking at the National Assembly).

An insurrectionary participant at Monimbó in February 1978 remembers that "After February, people began to feel what a revolution was like. They began to understand on their own. People joined the war because of the idea that they needed to free themselves from the Guardia. They hated it.… People *felt* the revolution" (Armengol Mercado Castillo, INRA [land reform] worker, 26 years old, in IES 1982:164, emphasis added). Soon-to-be revolutionary José Mendez recollects that at the time of the August 22, 1978 seizure of hostages at the National Assembly he knew that he was joining the FSLN: "I felt a great sense of happiness and at the same time some sadness because I knew I was leaving my family.

Still, I knew that it was necessary for us to part ways, that I had to do it for everyone's welfare, not only the family's but also the nation's" (in IES 1982:187). By September 1978, people "began to feel the voice of the vanguard," and "came to understand that the only way out, the only way to destroy the dictatorship was the FSLN" (Guillermo Sánchez, "Pancho," EPS [Sandinista army] Lieutenant, 23 years old, in IES 1982:247). Both liberation theology and Sandinismo thus provided organizational outlets for the political cultures of Nicaraguans across a broad spectrum of society, fusing emotions and experiences with a revolutionary movement of great power.

Conclusions

We have now come full circle in the work done by political cultures of opposition, from experience and emotion to affiliation with a revolutionary organization, passing through the complex filters of popular idiom and ideology. It is our contention that the medium of political cultures of opposition better attends to this constellation of experience, culture, and organization than any other term. The Nicaraguan case is a rich one for making this link as its subjects are accessible to us in ways that other revolutionaries are not, separated from researchers by the distance of historical time or geo-politics. What this study helps to show, we hope, is that the perennial dichotomies of structure and agency, political economy and political consciousness, can be partly bridged by careful attention to their interplay, and that political cultures of opposition need to be centered in any comprehensive theory of the causes of revolutions.

Specifically, we have argued that revolutionary participants in Nicaragua made use of two emerging political cultures of opposition, liberation theology and Sandinismo, which shaped their sensibilities and helped them form alternative interpretations to contest their political reality. These political cultures provided a "crucial intervening moment between 'objective' relations of exploitation and oppression, and political actors" (Foran 1993:11). As a framework for collective action, they offered a way out of Nicaragua's impasse. Revolutionary action, in this sense, was more than a matter of survival (though it was importantly that), for it also represented the self-affirmation of ordinary people turned revolutionaries as genuine Christians or as carriers of a nationalistic and patriotic legacy. For many, the revolution was a defense of Christian truth and the promotion of a democratic dream.

Theoretically, political cultures of opposition are central to a sociology of revolution in several important ways: 1) as the cognitive prism through which individuals interpret their subjective experiences and emotions, 2) as the site in which ideologies and idioms interplay with each

other to construct and activate revolutionary vocabularies, 3) as multiple filters which can sometimes come together to connect individuals to organizations, and 4) as the cultural "medium" that allows us to understand how agency is activated in the making of revolution. The concept thus unifies theoretical elements that have till now been kept too far apart in both the literature on social movements and on revolutions, and provides a key to understanding human agency in the process of social change.

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Interviews

Nb. all information (i.e. age, occupation, etc.) as of time of interview; all names have been changed.

1990

Isabel Del Valle, female, researcher and youth counselor, Sandinista, middle class, 26 years old.

Vilma Espinosa, female, human resources production supervisor in a welding factory, Sandinista, middle class, 30 years old.

Lydia Fernández Echevarría, female, human resources production supervisor in a welding factory, Sandinista, working class, 30 years old.

Ivan González García, male, Sandinista revolutionary (political representative), middle class, 42 years old.

Héctor Hernández, male, retired architect and manager of an *hospedaje*, Sandinista, upper class, 70 years old.

Luis Monjíl, male, economist, Sandinista, middle class, 30 years old.

1997

Paolo Alemán, male, union activist, Sandinista revolutionary, working class, 42 years old.

Angelica Chavarría, female, physician, Sandinista (yet very critical of the party), upper-middle class, 38 years old.

Juan Criquillion, male, industrial mechanic/construction worker (currently unemployed), Sandinista, working class, 46 years old.

Cristina Echevarría, female, social worker, Sandinista but with Movimiento Renovador Sandinista tendencies (the MRS is led by dissident Sandinista Sergio Ramírez Mercado), middle class, 32 years old.

Gregorio González, male, industrial mechanic, progressive (Christian revolutionary, also sympathizes with the FSLN), working class, 47 years old.

Tomás Martínez, male, division director in the Ministry of the Economy, centrist, upper-middle class, 53 years old.

Carlos Nú ez, male, civil engineer, Sandinista revolutionary, upper-middle class, 41 years old.

Amalia Padilla, female, director of an internationally funded social service organization, left, middle class, 30 years old.

Nestor Pérez, male, union organizer, Sandinista, working class, 36 years old.
Orlando Serra, male, rural worker, centrist (previously conservative and presently supports the FSLN), lower class, 63 years old.
José Soto, male, rural worker, left, lower class, 50 years old.